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OPERATIONAL DECEPTION: THE KEY TO VICTORY

by

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The contents of this paper reflect my own personal views and are not necessarily endorsed by the Naval War College, the Department of the Navy or the Department of the Air Force.

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This paper examines operational deception as the key to victory for the operational level commander. With shrinking military resources, commanders must continually use all tools available to shape the battlefield to allow the opportunity for victory by the tactical commanders—operational deception is one of those key force multipliers. The paper discusses what operational deception is and reviews two cases (Fortitude in World War II and Hail Mary in Desert Storm) using maxims developed by the Central Intelligence Agency. A discussion of the planning process follows along with a look at lessons learned for future operational commanders.
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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ABSTRACT</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS</td>
<td>1v</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WHAT IS OPERATIONAL DECEPTION</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DECEPTION MAXIMS</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OPERATION FORTITUDE IN WORLD WAR II</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>THE &quot;HAIL MARY&quot; IN DESERT STORM</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DECEPTION AND THE PLANNING PROCESS</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LESSONS LEARNED FOR FUTURE COMMANDERS</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CONCLUSION</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NOTES</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BIBLIOGRAPHY</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FIGURE</th>
<th>PAGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. WHAT DO YOU SEE?</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. DECEPTION MAXIMS</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. POSITION OF COALITION FORCES PRIOR TO THE FLANKING MOVE</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. POSITION OF COALITION FORCES AFTER &quot;HAIL MARY&quot; MOVE</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. SUMMARY OF TIME SENSITIVE PLANNING PROCESS</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
OPERATIONAL DECEPTION: THE KEY TO VICTORY

The enemy must not know where I intend to give battle. For if he does not know where I intend to give battle he must prepare in a great many places. And if he prepares in a great many places, those I have to fight in any one place will be few...Thus I say that victory can be created. For even if the enemy is numerous, I can prevent him from engaging.

-Sun Tzu

INTRODUCTION

As it was in 500 B.C. when Sun Tzu wrote about it, deception in war remains valid today as a force multiplier for the operational commander. The great military genius Clausewitz argued deception should be used as a measure of last resort due to the expense required to accomplish the deception. Time and resources were better spent on an actual assault vice a diversionary ploy. While these legendary military minds differ on the use of deception, this paper will address the issue of deception in modern times and will show that the operational commander must incorporate deception planning into campaign planning and continually re-look and revise the plans if victory is to be achieved. This is especially true as the defense budget and force structure shrink, while potential enemy states we may fight grows. Deception plans will provide the operational commander the force multiplying effect to obtain favorable force ratios against most enemies.

This paper will address deception at the operational level.
of war and not the strategic or tactical levels. Through the use of maxims developed by the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), the paper will review two deception plans to show how successful deception can be as a force multiplier. The first case is Operation Fortitude used in World War II by the Allies to cover the Normandy Invasion. The second case shows how Coalition forces in Desert Storm deceived Iraq and successfully moved two Army combat corps to flank Iraqi positions in Western Iraq, while two Marine divisions simultaneously moved to flank Iraqi troops in Kuwait. This review will highlight the importance of operational deception plans and show the continued need for such planning.

A discussion of when and how this planning is accomplished will be addressed using the Joint Strategic Planning System, Crisis Action Planning process as a basis. Finally, lesson's learned will be explored to see how future operational commanders can best plan deception operations to shape the battlefield for victory.

WHAT IS OPERATIONAL DECEPTION

Joint Chiefs of Staff Joint Publication 3-58, Doctrine For Joint Operational Deception defines deception as "Those measures designed to mislead the enemy by manipulation, distortion, or falsification of evidence to induce him to react in a manner prejudicial to his interests." What this means is to mix factual and non-factual information and present this.
information in a manner and time to create a false impression in the mind of the enemy of what is about to or is even actually happening. This false impression then causes the enemy to take or delay actions at their detriment and benefit the operational commander. It is important to note the objective of deception plans is to influence the thinking of the enemy commander to the benefit of the commander conducting the deception.

Just as beauty is in the eye of the beholder, the commander conducting the deception operation must persuade the enemy to believe the information being received is looked at or taken in a certain way. Figure 1 provides a good example of how information can create ambiguity in the mind of the viewer.

While the information presented in Figure 1 remains unchanged, different interpretations are possible. Depending on the initial perspective, a young woman may be seen looking toward her right shoulder (your left). Visible is her cheek, nose, and eyelash. She is wearing a necklace and a feather sticks out of her hat which partially covers her hair. On the other hand, looking at the same image, an old woman may be visible. She also is looking to her right but more of her face is visible as she appears to be gazing downward. Her mouth is the young woman's necklace, while her nose is the young woman's chin. She wears the same feathered hat as the young woman. The point of this example is, deception is
normally based on a mixture of facts and half-truths, but altered, mixed, and presented in a certain sequence to support a preconceived notion or belief in the mind of the enemy. If the enemy commander cherishes young women, then a deception plan may highlight the features of a young woman in this figure. Having supported the enemy's belief the figure is that of a young woman is only half the battle; now he must do something (or even do nothing) to disadvantage himself to our benefit. Military speaking, deception operations must be designed to shape the battlefield allowing the tactical commanders to capitalize on the mistakes of the enemy with the appropriate principles of war.  

FIGURE 1

WHAT DO YOU SEE?

Operational deception plans "need to distinguished between Commanders objectives and deception objectives." Successful operational deception plans support and compliment, not supercede and conflict, with commanders objectives. Operational deception plans must be used in concert with all other assets available to the commander and not in isolation. Political and economic channels must also be considered when employing operational deception plans. It doesn't do any good to cover only the military channels if the enemy has access to conflicting information from diplomatic or economic sources.

Operational deception, like the operational level of war, sits astride it's counterparts at the strategic and tactical levels. Strategic level deception encompasses the efforts to alter the beliefs of a nation concerning strategic issues or policies. Deception campaigns at this level normally require extensive resources and time to accomplish successfully. The former Soviet Union attempted to conduct such an operation against the United States in an attempt to alter our beliefs concerning the accuracy of their Intercontinental Ballistic Missile reentry vehicles. The deception plan Fortitude in World War II which successfully masked the Allied invasion at Normandy, is often referred to as strategic deception, however it was actually an operational level plan directed at the European theater of the war.

At the lower end of the spectrum is tactical level deception. Deception at this level, while similar to
operational level in the fact they both attempt to influence the enemy’s perception of the battlefield, differs in the scope and target of the deception. Tactical level deception attempts to target the opposing tactical commander and normally comprises camouflage or dummy weapon systems. It is normally conducted over a shorter period of time and generally consumes less resources.

One final point to cover is the relationship between deception and surprise. Surprise results from deception plans. Case studies have shown when deception plans are used to reinforce existing enemy beliefs then surprise resulted in 96 percent of the cases studied. Even when deception was used but not tied to existing enemy beliefs, surprise resulted in 81 percent of the cases. What this shows is the probability of surprise if deception operations are conducted.

DECEPTION MAXIMS

The Central Intelligence Agency’s Office of Research and Development documented 10 maxims resulting from analysis of numerous case studies. These maxims are shown in Figure 2.

FIGURE 2

DECEPTION MAXIMS

Maxim 1: Magruder’s Principle—The exploitation of Preconception

- It is generally easier to induce an opponent to maintain a pre-existing belief than to present notional evidence to change
that belief.

Maxim 2: *Limitations to Human Information Processing*
- There are several limitations to human information processing that are exploitable in the design of deception schemes--among these, the law of small numbers and susceptibility to conditioning.

Maxim 3: *The Multiple Forms of Surprise*
- Surprise can be achieved in many forms. In military engagements, these forms include location, strength, intention, style, and timing.

Maxim 4: *Jones's Lemma*
- Deception becomes more difficult as the number of channels of information available to the victim increases. However, within limits, the greater the number of controlled channels the greater the likelihood of the deception being believed.

Maxim 5: *A Choice Among Types of Deception*
- Where possible the objective of the deception planner should be to reduce the ambiguity in the mind of the victim, to force him to seize upon a notional world view as being correct--not making him less certain of the truth, but more certain of a particular falsehood.

Maxim 6: *Axelrod's Contribution: The Husbanding of Assets*
- There are circumstances where deception assets should be husbanded despite the costs of maintenance and risk of waste, awaiting a more fruitful use.

Maxim 7: *A Sequencing Rule*
- Deception activities should be sequenced so as to maximize the persistence of the incorrect hypothesis(es) for as long as possible.

Maxim 8: *The Importance of Feedback*
- A scheme to ensure accurate feedback increases the chance of success in deception.
Maxim 9: The Monkey's Paw
- Deception efforts may produce subtle and unwanted side effects.

Maxim 10: Care in the Design of Planned Placement of Deceptive Materials
- Great care must be exercised in the designed of schemes to leak notional plans. Apparent "windfalls" are subject to close scrutiny and often disbelieved. Genuine leaks often occur under circumstances thought improbable.

These maxims will be used to review the deception plans for the Normandy invasion (Fortitude) and the operation against Iraq (Hall Mary) during Desert Storm.

OPERATION FORTITUDE IN WORLD WAR II

Operation Fortitude was actually one of six separate major operations designed to spread the German military forces away from the actual landing site at Normandy and also mislead the Germans as to when the invasion would actually occur. Operation Fortitude South was the component that feinted a Normandy Invasion to cover the subsequent Invasion at Pas de Calais. The Germans, and most especially Hitler, believed the Allies would launch a cross channel invasion by landing in the Pas de Calais area. This belief rested on the fact that this was the shortest distance between England and the continent; it provided the Allies with access to critically needed port facilities; and finally, it was the most expeditious point to launch an attack from towards Berlin.

Using the Maxims in Figure 2, the Allies used Maxims 1,
4, 7, 8 and 10 to feed the Germans the deceptive information. Playing on Hitler’s preconception (Maxim 1) of the attack on Pas de Calais, information was leaked through German secret agents (Maxims 4 and 10) who had been successfully doubled by British Intelligence.1 The information portrayed the landing at Normandy as a feint to cover the “real” landing at Pas de Calais which would occur at a later date. Dummy camps, including decoy landing crafts and equipment, combined with dummy radio traffic (Maxim 10) reinforced the German belief of the Pas de Calais invasion. The icing on the cake was the fictitious First US Army Group commanded by Lieutenant General George S. Patton. The Germans believed Patton was the best Allied general and would naturally lead the invasion. This belief only reinforced the deception plan after the Normandy invasion had begun when the Germans dismissed the actual invasion since Patton was still in England.

The information was presented to Germans piecemeal and from different sources (Maxims 7 and 10) to ensure the Germans would reach their own conclusions as to the impact of the information received. Throughout the whole operation, feedback was required to ensure the German’s were buying into the deception. The breaking of the German High Command’s message traffic, Ultra, provided the Allies with the critical information that the Germans had accepted the deception plan (Maxim 8). In fact, the plan was so completely accepted it was almost two months after the June 1944 invasion that the German Fifteenth Army was totally released to fight the invasion.12
THE "HAIL MARY" IN DESERT STORM

Moving to the most recent war, deception again played a key role ensuring success of Coalition forces against Saddam Hussein's Iraqi forces. Displaying an exemplary mastery of deception as a force multiplier, General H. Norman Schwarzkopf orchestrated his resources to shape the battlefield to his desires. Outnumbered by the Iraqi forces, General Schwarzkopf needed to defeat Iraq without a frontal assault in order to limit casualties. To do this, he devised what was called the "Hail Mary" plan which shifted two Army Corps and two Marine Divisions to the flanks of Iraqi forces in Iraq and Kuwait.

FIGURE 3

POSITION OF COALITION FORCES PRIOR TO THE FLANKING MOVE

To conduct this move in secrecy, General Schwarzkopf needed to deceive Iraq into believing the actual assault would come from the sea.

To accomplish this deception plan, all 10 of the deception maxims were employed. The Iraqi's believed the Coalition would conduct an amphibious assault in Kuwait in conjunction with a frontal assault from Saudi Arabia. To reinforce this belief,
Marine amphibious units conducted a number of amphibious exercises in the region which were well reported in the press (Maxims 2, 4, and 5). The press continually questioned military officials about the purpose and nature of these exercises which undoubtedly reach Saddam Hussein and his military commanders in Baghdad. When a second series of exercises were conducted, information was leaked that the dress rehearsal was complete and it was now time for the real assault (Maxims 3 and 10).

Using the Marine amphibious forces to feint an assault, but actually keep them deployed on their ships created problems for General Schwarzkopf. The Marines were ready and eager to conduct the opposed amphibious landing but their withholding from action soured their morale. If they had been required as a reserve force to subsequently enter the war, efficiency may not have been as good as they looked upon themselves as second line units (Maxims 6 and 9).

As in the Normandy Invasion, information was released to the Iraqi's over a period of time and through selective sources. After the first days of the air offensive, the Iraqi's had lost their eyes and ears of intelligence gathering and were basically limited to information received from the news media. The Hall Mary troops were not moved to their jump off positions until approximately one week before the actual attack began (Maxim 7).

Throughout the whole operation, the Coalition was able
to obtain feedback on the disposition and thinking of Iraqi forces through the use of a variety of sources. Photo reconnaissance, radar reconnaissance and signal intelligence satellites were used to keep on top of the situation (Maxim 8).

The end result of the deception plan allowed Coalition forces to flank the Iraqi's and end the war with only four days of ground fighting.

DECEPTION AND THE PLANNING PROCESS

Having discussed how deception has worked in the past sets the stage on how it can be planned in future operations. The best vehicle to use to discuss this is the Crisis Action Planning process of the Joint Strategic Planning System.

FIGURE 5

SUMMARY OF TIME SENSITIVE PLANNING PROCESS

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>PHASE I</th>
<th>PHASE II</th>
<th>PHASE III</th>
<th>PHASE IV</th>
<th>PHASE V</th>
<th>PHASE VI</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SITUATION DEVELOPMENT</td>
<td>CRISIS ASSESSMENT</td>
<td>COURSE OF ACTION DEVELOPMENT</td>
<td>COURSE OF ACTION SELECTION</td>
<td>EXECUTION PLANNING</td>
<td>EXECUTION</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

EVENT
*EVENT OCCURS WITH POSSIBLE NATIONAL SECURITY IMPLICATIONS*
*JCS REPORT/ASSESMENT RECEIVED*
*CICS PUBLISHES WARNING ORDER*
*CICS PRESENTS RANKED AND PRIORITIZED COA'S TO NCA*
*CINC RECEIVES ALERT ORDER OR PLANNING ORDER*
*NCA DECIDE TO EXECUTE OPORD*

It is during Phase III, Course of Action Development, the operational commander should begin planning deception operations to shape the battlefield to his or her advantage. Specifically, when developing the Commander's Estimate, the selection of deception as a force multiplier can be made. Using the Mission, Enemy, Troops, Time, and Terrain (METT-T) philosophy as a guide, the commander can best determine what the requirements will be.

With a clear understanding of the mission and who the enemy is, the operational commander can weigh the impacts of deception plans on diplomatic and economic elements of power as well as on the tactical level as the Courses of Action (COA) are developed. When a COA is selected, Phase IV - Course of Action Selection, the commander then refines the deception plan during Phase V - Execution Planning. This refinement would include coordination of national assets such as overhead satellites, covert case officers, and working with the State Department and other Cabinet officials to ensure all elements of national power are working together and getting the right spin on the operation. Depending on the time available and the terrain (country involved), deception operations could begin to condition the enemy (Maxim 2) prior to the National Command Authorities decision to execute the Operations Order (OPORD). It must be realized, these type of actions would be non-critical and would not force the US or the potential
adversary into any undesirable actions. Finally, at Phase VI - Execution, the deception plan would then be executed in conjunction with the whole OPORD. As the operation unfolds, continue refinement of the deception plan will be required as the entire operation progresses until the crisis/war is resolved.

LESSONS LEARNED FOR FUTURE COMMANDERS

The Maxims depicted in Figure 2 provides an excellent basis to begin planning any deception operation. While they are based on previous case studies, they are still very relevant when we look to the future. The two most important maxims, and probably the most difficult to control, are Maxim 4--the number of channels of information to control and Maxim 8--feedback.

In today's world it is harder to control the number of channels of information available to the enemy. With overhead satellites, clandestine agents, instant communications (Cable News Network, British Broadcasting Company, etc.), alliances, and multi-national corporations a potential enemy has numerous ways to check information for accuracy and intent. Even in time of war, many of these avenues remain available. During Desert Storm, the United States bought imagery from the French Spot satellite system to plan tactical missions against Iraq.17 If the French wanted to, they could have provided images to Iraq. The former Soviet Union had photo
reconnaissance and electronic intelligence satellites covering the region and could very well have provided this information to Iraq.\textsuperscript{18} The point is, future deception operations will have to account for these capabilities to ensure a successful operation.

Closely related to this maxim is the problem with feedback, or Maxim 8. In numerous cases, a commander knows the capabilities of an enemy but is lacking knowledge of the intent of the enemy. With deception plans it is critical to know if the enemy has received the information directed at them and more importantly, what will be done as a result of it. In Operation Fortitude, the Allies wanted the Germans to keep their reserve forces in the Pas de Calais area. Through Ultra, the Allied commanders were able to verify this was exactly where the Germans were keeping their forces. Similarly, in Desert Storm, General Schwarzkopf wanted to keep the Iraqi's looking for the amphibious assault. Through overhead systems, Keyhole and Magnum satellites\textsuperscript{19}, Schwarzkopf was able to see and know what Iraq was up to. Future conflicts may be tougher if the enemy has similar capabilities as we do, or has access to it from a third country.

To a lesser degree, Maxims 1--exploitation of a preconception and 10--how to leak deception plans remain key issues the operational commander must address. In both cases, this belief was reinforced using a number of sources and media. Future commanders must know their enemy and understand (to some
level) how the enemy thinks and acts. CIA assessments of world leaders and military commanders provides an excellent source for information, however without the feedback mentioned above, changing beliefs may not be detected.

CONCLUSION

Military resources will continue to decline resulting in less people and weapon systems to accomplish the ever increasing military mission. Operational commanders must make use of all existing resources to maximize his attack at the decisive point against the enemy. Force multipliers must be used to gain the advantage and defeat the enemy. Operational deception is one of those force multipliers and just as it was successful in the past, it must be used in the future to shape the battlefield to our advantage.

This paper has shown the use of deception at the operational level of war provides the key to success in a nation's victory against an enemy. In World War II, deception provided the opening allowing the Allies to establish a foothold on the continent. This subsequently led to the defeat of Germany. In Desert Storm, operational deception allowed the Coalition to conclude the war after only four days of ground fighting (and an extensive air campaign).

Future conflicts will require deception plans to ensure objectives are met and casualties are held to a minimum. Because of increases in technology, deception plans may become
more difficult to accomplish, but technology can also help deception plans succeed. Using the Maxims developed by the CIA, the operational commander can better plan the overall campaign and provide the key to victory for the tactical commanders.


4. Principles of war differ for each US military service.


8. Ibid., pp. 5-40.


10. CIA, p. 5.

11. See J.C. Masterman's The Double Cross System In the War of 1939 to 1945 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1972)


15. Ibid., p. 38.


