MILITARY DECEPTION:

HIDING THE REAL – SHOWING THE FAKE

Major Mark Johnson, USMC
Major Jessica Meyeraan, USAF

Report Documentation Page		*Form Approved* *OMB No. 0704-0188*

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1. REPORT DATE **07 MAR 2003**	2. REPORT TYPE **N/A**	3. DATES COVERED **-**	
4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE **Military Deception: Hiding The Real Showing The Fake**		5a. CONTRACT NUMBER	
		5b. GRANT NUMBER	
		5c. PROGRAM ELEMENT NUMBER	
6. AUTHOR(S) **Major Mark Johnson, USMC; Major Jessica Meyeraan, USAF**		5d. PROJECT NUMBER	
		5e. TASK NUMBER	
		5f. WORK UNIT NUMBER	
7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) **Joint Forces Staff College 7800 Hampton Blvd Norfolk, VA 23511-1701**		8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER	
9. SPONSORING/MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)		10. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S ACRONYM(S)	
		11. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S REPORT NUMBER(S)	
12. DISTRIBUTION/AVAILABILITY STATEMENT **Approved for public release, distribution unlimited**			
13. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES **Takn from the internet.**			
14. ABSTRACT **See report.**			
15. SUBJECT TERMS			

16. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF:			17. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT **UU**	18. NUMBER OF PAGES **17**	19a. NAME OF RESPONSIBLE PERSON
a. REPORT **unclassified**	b. ABSTRACT **unclassified**	c. THIS PAGE **unclassified**			

Standard Form 298 (Rev. 8-98)
Prescribed by ANSI Std Z39-18

Team Biographies

Major Mark Johnson, USMC. Maj Johnson is currently the Department Head for Advanced Intelligence Training at the Navy Marine Intelligence Training Center (NMITC). He was commissioned from the ranks in 1988 after graduating from Purdue University with a BA in Political Science under the Marine Enlisted Commissioning Education Program (MECEP). He has served in tactical, operational and strategic intelligence billets, including a joint tour with the United States European Command (USEUCOM) Director of Intelligence (J-2) Joint Analysis Center (JAC), Molesworth, UK. While assigned to the JAC, he was the Chief of Expeditionary Warfare primarily supporting Special Operations Command, Europe (SOCEUR), and deployed Marine forces. During that tour he deployed to Pristina, Kosovo, and Sarajevo, Bosnia, serving first as the collections officer and then as the deputy commander of the United States National Intelligence Cell (USNIC). During his Fleet Marine Force tours he participated in combat operations in Kuwait, noncombatant evacuation operations in Brazzaville, Congo and Freetown, Sierra Leone, and an embassy reinforcement mission in Tirana, Albania.

Major Jessica Meyeraan, USAF. Maj Meyeraan is currently serving as the Chief, Intelligence Resource Programming Branch, Intelligence Requirements Division, United States Strategic Command (USSTRATCOM). She was commissioned through Air Force Reserve Officer Training Corps (AFROTC) at the University of Iowa in 1988. In 1988, she earned a BA in Political Science, and in 1996 a Master's in Management Science from Troy State University while stationed at MacDill AFB, Florida. Prior to her current assignment, Maj Meyeraan served as an instructor at AFROTC Detachment 470, University of Nebraska in Omaha.

The general enjoyed his breakfast while reading his morning paper and listening to the international news channel. Hearing the Balkans mentioned—his area of responsibility—he looked up as a foreign correspondent began to comment on the aftermath of an Allied bombing mission from the day before. The gruesome details suddenly made the general's scrambled eggs a bit less appealing. The graphic pictures showed what appeared to be the remnants of an orphanage. There in the rubble lay a bloodstained, tattered doll. Those images left him wondering about the carnage that lay beneath the collapsed brick and mortar. Had his staff miscalculated and inadvertently struck an orphanage? A similar misstep had occurred a few weeks ago when another bombing mission resulted in civilian casualties in a marketplace. As the general bemoaned the potential ramifications of accidentally bombing an orphanage, a memory surfaced. Years of flying high-performance aircraft had sharpened his senses, and something about the scene seemed familiar. Could that be the same bloodstained doll he had seen in photographs of the earlier marketplace mishap? The general had been briefed on the enemy's rather low-tech yet successful use of deception. Was he, along with the rest of the world, a target of military deception? As he pondered this, his pager went off.

This fictitious example illustrates both how easy it is to manipulate the media in deception operations and how a thorough understanding of deception can help prevent a military leader from falling victim to it. The U.S. military is transforming itself with technological advancements in warfighting capability. Weapon systems, force structure and training have all improved. The amount and kind of information available to the warfighter is also improving.

But even a technologically advanced nation like the United States is susceptible to deception. Analysis of friendly and enemy deception techniques in Operations DESERT STORM and ALLIED FORCE shows the main U.S.vulnerabilities to include its insatiable

appetite for "news," the lack of deception-detection expertise in the military, and the tendency to believe that technological advancements make a nation deception-proof. Therefore, the key to mitigating the U.S. vulnerabilities to deception lies in educating the media about the military and common deception practices, giving the military intensive deception-detection training, and abandoning the notion that technological advancement inoculates against deception.

Background on Military Deception

"Military deception" is an umbrella term that includes both denial and deception. Denial hides the real and deception shows the fake. Denial and deception are operations; propaganda and disinformation are the products (DOD Background Briefing:3).

Joint doctrine says that military deception, as applied by a joint force commander (JFC), targets an adversary's decision-making process. Ultimately, the intent is to shape the adversary's behavior in the JFC's favor or to cause an adversary to form an inaccurate impression of the battlespace. Consequently, planning for deception operations depends on intelligence and security for success. Obviously, a commander wants to conceal deception efforts from the enemy, but often he'll conceal all or some of his efforts from his own troops to prevent confusion and/or compromise of the plan (JP 3-13:II-4). During the early years of Soviet involvement in World War II, mishandling of information by soldiers and planners resulted in the compromise of many maskirovka (or deception) operations. As a result, the Soviets implemented aggressive security measures to protect their deception plans. Specifically, Soviet commanders restricted the number of planners and documents involved in the deception operations and communicated to subordinates only what they needed to know, when they needed to know it (Latimer:66).

Put another way, deception occurs when someone manipulates perception. It is much easier to manipulate than to change, and it is easier to play on an existing fear or concern than to

create a new fear or concern. Human nature responds to a situation by placing it in the context of a previous experience. The more experiences people have, the more "templates" or contexts they use to respond to new situations. These templates are defined by an individual's education level, cultural norm, social environment, economic status, etc. This is why deception must always be aimed at the mind of the enemy commander, or at the one who makes the decisions. That person can be a head of state, a commanding officer or an ordinary soldier (Latimer:60-62).

To effectively employ the art of deception, the deceiver must know and understand the mind of the enemy. Good intelligence becomes the cornerstone of a successful military deception operation. To understand the value added that intelligence brings to the deception planning process, it is important to understand the difference between information and intelligence.

Information is merely fact. For example, a satellite image may reveal that an enemy has obtained a new weapon system. That information becomes valuable intelligence when it has been vetted through the intelligence process. The intelligence process takes facts or information and analyzes them, corroborates with many other sources of information to avoid bias, and scrutinizes the significance of the fact in order to create intelligence (JP 2-0:II-2). In the example of the enemy's recent acquisition, through analysis, corroboration and scrutiny, intelligence may reveal that the weapon may offer the enemy potential advanced capability, but without requisite support equipment, sufficient infrastructure (supply, maintenance, and logistics) and a robust training program, the weapon system doesn't improve capability in the near term.

This illustrates that the distinction between information and intelligence is important, because deception often manifests itself in the form of false or uncorroborated information. If

decision makers don't vet information through the intelligence process, they may become

dangerously vulnerable to deception (Latimer:39-40).

Deception and Operation DESERT STORM

A helpful way to understand the concepts supporting denial and deception is to study

their use in past conflicts. Operations DESERT STORM and ALLIED FORCE offer many

examples of how the United States effectively employed deception. During DESERT STORM,

U.S. and Coalition forces developed a robust and effective deception campaign that contributed

to the successful outcome of the war. As many know, the "Hail Mary" or "Left Hook" maneuver

used to go around the Iraqi flank was the method chosen to defeat the Iraqis. Successful

deception and the preservation of the carefully combined element of surprise and security

contributed to the resounding success of that maneuver.

Coalition deception efforts depended on three things. First, the Coalition was wary of the

amount of civilian traffic in and around the border area. Of particular concern were the

Bedouins, who were often Iraqi agents. War planners were also concerned about Western

journalists in the border region, even though their movements were carefully controlled. So, for

planning purposes, the Coalition could not assume troop movements and locations were secret

from the Iraqis.

Second, the Coalition had to convince the Iraqis it did not plan a flanking maneuver.

Fortunately, the Iraqis convinced themselves that any Coalition force advancing into the desert

would promptly get lost and pose no threat to Iraqi positions. Interestingly, the Iraqis themselves

had no operational experience in the desert. In fact, they usually resided in the river valleys of

the country and considered the desert a very dangerous place. While aware that the Americans

possessed the global positioning system (GPS), they had no idea of the extent to which GPS

would revolutionize desert navigation. And finally, the Coalition had to be able to move 100,000 troops and 20,000 vehicles from the Gulf hundreds of miles inland for the flanking maneuver. This was the key to making the Hail Mary maneuver work (Dunnigan:319-321).

Another important part of this deception effort involved the Marines afloat in the Gulf. The amphibious deception started shortly after the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in August 1990 when 2,500 Marines sailed for the Mediterranean on the amphibious assault ship USS *Inchon*. By mid-August, a 15,000-member Marine Expeditionary Brigade aboard 13 different ships in the Gulf started receiving a lot of press. By mid-January 1991, the Coalition was engaged in a variety of military operations designed to lead Saddam Hussein to believe that a major amphibious landing in Kuwait was certain. Air strikes against coastal targets, attacks on Iraqi war ships in Kuwait's waters and amphibious exercises were some of the largest since Korea (Latimer:300). As a result, Iraq positioned five troops on the Kuwaiti coast for every Marine afloat. Then to make sure the Iraqis remained on the beach, Coalition forces—in the early hours of the ground war—advanced north from Saudi Arabia and moved in behind the Iraqis. The Iraqi commitment of forces to the beaches to counter an amphibious landing that never occurred proves that the deception operation worked (Dunnigan:322).

One critical deception operation that allowed the Coalition to reposition forces for the Hail Mary maneuver was clandestinely known as Task Force Troy. This 460-member operation created a "ghost" division with five tanks, several wheeled vehicles, and elements of the U.S. Marines, British Army, and 4th Psychological Operations Group (Airborne). Task Force Troy covered an area usually occupied by a division. Its purpose was to make the enemy believe it was a much larger force. It used deceptive decoys, such as armored vehicles, artillery pieces, and helicopters as well as a series of loudspeakers to complete the illusion by broadcasting the

sounds of tanks, trucks and helicopters. Playing these deceptive tapes confused the Iraqi listening posts. Some Iraqi scouts ventured out to investigate and were met by Apache gunships or by A-10 Thunderbolt II aircraft on standby to support the deception effort. It wasn't long before the Iraqis stopped investigating the sounds and accepted that they were faced with a military force of at least division strength. This successful deception locked more Iraqi troops into a disadvantaged position and enabled the other Coalition divisions to reposition themselves in support of the hook maneuver (The Gulf War Loudspeaker Victories:2-3).

Why were coalition deception efforts so successful? Simply put, Saddam's intelligence apparatus was shut down early, making him completely reliant on Cable News Network (CNN) for all his information. Basically, his airborne reconnaissance assets were rendered useless shortly after the Coalition air forces established air superiority. He had no access to satellite imagery, and he lost his ground-based signals intelligence as a result of the six-week air campaign. This situation is actually ironic because Saddam used the presence of CNN in Baghdad for his own deception purposes. Saddam's lessons learned validate the argument that without the value added from multiple-source intelligence analysis, complete reliance on information only makes a decision maker extremely vulnerable to deception (Latimer:302).

Deception and Operation ALLIED FORCE

Operation ALLIED FORCE (OAF) is also rich with examples of how both friendly and enemy forces effectively used deception against each other. The Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (FRY) military used deception against an adversary superior in all aspects of combat power. The Serb successes are a wake-up call to U.S. military forces, who must protect themselves from adversaries' deception in the future.

The Serbs employed a variety of effective deception techniques against the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) effort. The deception operations appeared to focus on reducing Allied success in the air campaign, protecting limited Serb air and ground equipment, humiliating NATO and affecting world opinion (DOD Report to Congress:61). The Serbs' deception efforts ran the gamut from staging media events to employing decoy military targets.

The FRY military deception caused Allied aircraft to engage a variety of decoy targets, which allowed the FRY to conserve its limited tactical capabilities. This success, well documented in the open media, served as a source of embarrassment both for operational military planners and political leaders. In addition to this public affairs crisis, militarily their deception operation caused Allied forces to expend costly smart munitions. The cost of a Tomahawk Land Attack Missile (TLAM), for instance, is around $1 million, and a Conventional Air Launched Cruise Missile (CALCM) costs $1.9 million (Plante:1-2).

The Serb army fooled Coalition aircraft and submarines into attacking plywood and canvas targets actically by using fires to create thermal images on bridges in an effort to lure NATO aircraft into a SAM ambush. These false thermal signatures emulated threat vehicles (tanks) exposed in the open on a bridge—lucrative targets for NATO aircraft. Serb commanders integrated military convoys with convoys of displaced civilians. This both disguised their movement and protected them from NATO aircraft as a result of NATO rules of engagement (ROE). It was also noted that Serb efforts were double edged: in protecting their forces they limited their own ability to employ the protected systems (DOD Report to Congress:62-63).

In addition to protecting their tactical forces, Serbs used deception to influence the media reporting on the conflict. Examples of such manipulation included Serbs escorting reporters to nonmilitary targets hit by NATO aircraft but not to military targets (Information

9

Operations/Information Warfare Reference Handbook:10). In another example intended to cast NATO in an evil light, bloodstained dolls were placed amongst civilian casualties whenever the international media photographed a site controlled by the Serbs (DOD Background Brief).

Did the Serbs successfully use deception against NATO? The answer lies in the objectives of the Serb denial and deception operations as noted in the DOD Report to Congress on the Kosovo/OAF After-Action Report. It listed the following as Serb objectives: degrade effectiveness of NATO air strikes; ensure survival of Serb forces; discredit NATO bombing campaign; retain key foreign support by hiding or discrediting evidence of atrocities; and exert pressure on NATO determination and resolve. Of these five objectives, the reported successes of the Serbs in the open media regarding the first three are well known. However, the Serbs were unsuccessful in degrading the effectiveness of NATO air strikes. NATO aircraft generally neutralized, suppressed or destroyed their targets. The Serb attempts to impede the air effort included limited success with rudimentary, yet imaginative techniques such as the placement of smoke pots around key nodes to decrease the effectiveness of laser-guided weapons.

On the other hand, the Serbs' deception efforts enhanced the survival of Serb forces. Overall, the Serbs appear to have preserved the preponderance of their combat power deployed in Kosovo. The lack of degradation to the Serb army deployed in Kosovo created a bit of controversy regarding the overall success of the OAF air campaign. The allies' battle damage assessment (BDA) of the FRY order of battle is disputed by the large numbers of Serb forces observed returning to Serbia upon conclusion of hostilities. The Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Henry Shelton, reported the following numbers of Serb equipment destroyed: 120 tanks, 220 Armored Personal Carriers (APC), and 450 artillery pieces. However a post-

campaign ground assessment confirmed the following numbers: 20 tanks, 18 APCs, and 20 artillery pieces (Information Operations/Information Warfare Reference Handbook:11).

The significant differences in the numbers can be attributed to the Serbs' success in employing denial and deception techniques. Their techniques included constructing false bridges along the Drina River, fake artillery pieces made of long telephone poles painted black with old truck wheels, antiaircraft missile launchers constructed of old milk cartons, and wooden mock-ups of MIG-29 aircraft (Information Operations/Information Warfare Reference Handbook:11).

The Serbs manipulated the media extensively in an effort to discredit NATO success. Their media campaign was often quite successful, if success is measured by the reporting of many of the Serb claims in the mainstream international media. A good example occurred during the Serb withdrawal from Kosovo back into Serbia proper. The Serbs made an effort to have the media available to watch a large column of 60 to 80 military vehicles forming convoys to head north. From this, the media deduced that the Serbs had not been hit as hard as reported by NATO. A Serb military spokesman enhanced the illusion by reporting significantly smaller losses than those reported by NATO (Grant:2).

Lack of NATO ground forces in Kosovo made deception operations more viable for Serbs. In addition, the coalition forces' overreliance on overhead imagery for BDA coupled with the overtasking of imagery analysts made the analytical effort vulnerable to deception. Finally, the terrain gave the FRY military an additional advantage in employing its denial and deception operations against allied aircraft. The rough, mountainous terrain was ideal for hiding or disguising military activity, as opposed to the open desert terrain experienced in Iraq (Denial and Deception Briefing: p.10).

The Serbs' success in employing the deception techniques detailed here was enhanced to some extent by NATO's self-imposed limitations regarding ROE and bombing altitudes. NATO aircraft were restricted to airspace at or above 15,000 feet (Cook:2). That restriction may have indirectly attributed to some of the success of the decoy targets set out by the Serbs. Pilot debriefings and gun camera video did not furnish the necessary detail that might have been obtained if the missions were flown at lower altitudes, for example, identification of secondary explosions on targets. The inability to determine secondary explosions probably left intelligence analysts guessing until national overhead systems captured BDA information. In the end, it is difficult to determine the full extent of the deception, because NATO didn't put a ground force in the area of operations until after the hostilities had ceased.

Recommendations and Conclusions

As seen in both Operations DESERT STORM and ALLIED FORCE, the United States is clearly capable of both deception and being deceived. In fact, the United States unwittingly aids enemy deception because of three specific vulnerabilities. Separately, they appear manageable; however, combined they degrade U.S. ability to detect and overcome deception.

The first vulnerability is the United States' seemingly insatiable appetite for electronic media. Specifically, this country loves its all-news television networks and Internet access. These media give adversaries direct access to the hearts and minds of U.S. citizens, leaders, and soldiers. The very nature of how international news is reported both on television and online renders the United States susceptible to deception. In the rush to be the first with late-breaking coverage, news networks sometimes skip analysis of newsworthiness and accuracy. Educating the media on deception techniques and their susceptibility to them would tremendously benefit military planners. Savvy reporters would be less likely to fall prey unintentionally to an

adversary's deception campaign and manipulation attempts. The current "media boot camps" run by the Services to educate field reporters and war correspondents is certainly a step in the right direction. More formal education on the military and deception techniques would enhance the value of such training to both the media and the military. Ideally, formalized training should come from a source other than DOD to preserve journalistic objectivity and prevent the appearance of a DOD-sponsored disinformation or propaganda campaign against the media. Perhaps the U.S. Government could coordinate with the nation's college and university journalism programs to develop the necessary curriculum. Maybe the Serbs would have been less successful casting NATO in an evil light had reporters been wise to some fundamental deception techniques. The media might have been less eager to report the information readily offered and more receptive to the notion that the truth lay somewhere else.

The second vulnerability that requires focused attention is the lack of formalized training and deception-detection expertise in the military. Deception is both an art and a science, manifested by clever minds. Military members and their units need focused training designed to detect the tricks of the trade. Otherwise, the military will continue to be duped and manipulated. Such training, geared for both the individual and the unit, needs to incorporate deception scenarios into annual exercises. The Marine Corps' Tactical Decision Games and Ethical Decision Games serve as excellent models of the kind of training needed throughout the military. These games focus on educating Marines and can be adapted to educate other personnel on their susceptibility to various tactical deception techniques. Adapted and applied across the military, such awareness training and understanding would help ensure that all military personnel, of all ranks, from the intelligence analyst reading Battle Damage Assessments in theater to the public affairs officer deployed with a peace-keeping force, would be less vulnerable to an adversary's

deception operations. The United States would have saved a great deal of money if its leadership, military planners, and imagery analysts had been rigorously trained in deception detection. Ideally the proposed training could help prevent sending million-dollar missiles against telephone poles, milk crates, and plywood.

The third vulnerability has to do with the notion that because the United States has the most technologically superior military in the world, it is somehow less susceptible to deception, particularly from a less sophisticated adversary. But the effectiveness of deception is not a function of technology. As demonstrated with examples from Operations ALLIED FORCE and DESERT STORM, low-tech deception techniques from a strategically placed bloody and tattered doll to loudspeaker broadcasts of tank engines can be extremely effective. There is no simple way to mitigate this vulnerability. Its existence is somewhat tied to American hubris.

Perhaps the solutions mentioned will also help the U.S. military abandon the idea that it is more impervious to deception the more advanced it becomes. Without a doubt, the answer lies in studying the past. The Greeks were considered inferior to the Trojans over 3,000 years ago, yet a crafty deception operation involving a fake retreat, an informant, and a big wooden horse turned the tide, allowing the Greeks to realize victory (Dunnigan:32-34).

The Trojan horse should serve as this country's reminder that even the greatest nations can be defeated with deception. A look at Operation DESERT STORM revealed how a war-hardened country like Iraq fell victim to it. Operation ALLIED FORCE showed how the United States was duped by the Serbs' deception efforts. Strengths quickly become weaknesses without critical evaluation of vulnerabilities. The United States has unprecedented access to information, it dedicates billions of dollars to honing its awesome warfighting capability, and it leads the world in technological advancements. It does not adequately focus attention or resources to

defeating the age-old weapon of war: deception. If the nation can teach the media to scrutinize the obvious, understand the military and appreciate the nuances of deception, it may become less vulnerable to deception. The United States could further mitigate its vulnerability to deception if the military's rank and file actively trained to understand, recognize and counter deception efforts. If this country can break the association between technological advancement and invincibility to deception, it has a fighting chance against future deception operations.

As the general got up from his breakfast to respond to his pager, he knew it would not be good news. Thousands of viewers awoke to the pictures of the bloody doll. A crisis was unfolding that demanded his immediate attention. As he walked alone down the long hall to the command center, the general focused like a laser on how he could reduce his command's vulnerability to the enemy's deception tactics. He knew that if he helped educate the reporters and his planners, then maybe he would be less vulnerable to deception—and maybe his pager would go off less frequently.

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