STRATEGIC INSIGHTS:
THE BATTLE OF CRECY

BY

LIEUTENANT COLONEL KENNETH ERNEST KOPS
United States Army

USAWC CLASS OF 2011

U.S. Army War College, Carlisle Barracks, PA 17013-5050

REPORT DOCUMENTATION PAGE

1. REPORT DATE *(DD-MM-YYYY)*	2. REPORT TYPE	3. DATES COVERED *(From - To)*
20-03-2011	Strategy Research Project	

4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE	5a. CONTRACT NUMBER
Strategic Insights: The Battle of Crecy	5b. GRANT NUMBER
	5c. PROGRAM ELEMENT NUMBER

6. AUTHOR(S)	5d. PROJECT NUMBER
Lieutenant Colonel Kenneth Ernest Kops	5e. TASK NUMBER
	5f. WORK UNIT NUMBER

7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)	8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER
Dr. Richard Meinhart Department of Command, Leadership and Management	

9. SPONSORING / MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)	10. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S ACRONYM(S)
U.S. Army War College 122 Forbes Avenue Carlisle, PA 17013	11. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S REPORT NUMBER(S)

12. DISTRIBUTION / AVAILABILITY STATEMENT
Distribution A: Unlimited

13. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES

14. ABSTRACT

Using the critical thinking model as a conceptual framework, in conjunction with egocentrism and sociocentrism as the two main cognitive frames of reference, this paper explores and analyzes strategic decision making by Edward III, King of England, and Philip VI, King of France, at the Battle of Crecy in 1346. The key facets of the Battle of Crecy this paper examines include a comparison of the rival forces (strategic situation), the English position (deployment of forces), the French approach (employment of forces), and the fight (use of forces and technology). Targeting today's strategic leaders, this paper provides an analysis of the thoughts and resulting actions of Edward III and Philip VI at the Battle of Crecy to provide relevant critical thinking insights overall and specific insights that illuminate how biases impact mental agility, how they anchor strategic decision making, and the importance of bias mitigation.

15. SUBJECT TERMS

Crisis Decision Making Theory and Practice

16. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF:			17. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT	18. NUMBER OF PAGES	19a. NAME OF RESPONSIBLE PERSON
a. REPORT UNCLASSIFED	b. ABSTRACT UNCLASSIFIED	c. THIS PAGE UNCLASSIFIED	UNLIMITED	34	19b. TELEPHONE NUMBER *(include area code)*

USAWC STRATEGY RESEARCH PROJECT

STRATEGIC INSIGHTS: THE BATTLE OF CRECY

by

Lieutenant Colonel Kenneth Ernest Kops
United States Army

Dr. Richard Meinhart
Project Adviser

U.S. Army War College
CARLISLE BARRACKS, PENNSYLVANIA 17013

ABSTRACT

AUTHOR: Lieutenant Colonel Kenneth Ernest Kops

TITLE: Strategic Insights: The Battle of Crecy

FORMAT: Strategy Research Project

DATE: 20 March 2011   WORD COUNT: 7,006   PAGES: 34

KEY TERMS: Crisis Decision Making Theory and Practice

CLASSIFICATION: Unclassified

Using the critical thinking model as a conceptual framework, in conjunction with egocentrism and sociocentrism as the two main cognitive frames of reference, this paper explores and analyzes strategic decision making by Edward III, King of England, and Philip VI, King of France, at the Battle of Crecy in 1346. The key facets of the Battle of Crecy this paper examines include a comparison of the rival forces (strategic situation), the English position (deployment of forces), the French approach (employment of forces), and the fight (use of forces and technology). Targeting today's strategic leaders, this paper provides an analysis of the thoughts and resulting actions of Edward III and Philip VI at the Battle of Crecy to provide relevant critical thinking insights overall and specific insights that illuminate how biases impact mental agility, how they anchor strategic decision making, and the importance of bias mitigation.

STRATEGIC INSIGHTS: THE BATTLE OF CRECY

Many people think they are thinking when are merely rearranging their prejudices.

–William James[1]

More than a struggle of armies, in the purest sense the Battle of Crecy, fought

between the armies of England and France on 26 August 1346, was either a total

victory or defeat depending on a particular leader's thinking: the French dead totaled

1,500 knights and 10,000 foot-soldiers, while the English lost less than 100 men.

Furthermore, this battle marked the arrival of the English as the preeminent military

power in Europe, it initiated a global revolution in military affairs, and it marked the

beginning of the end of the chivalric way of life.[2] As such, the Battle of Crecy provides a

venue through which the decision processes of the strategic leaders of these two

nations can be examined and reveals insights relevant to today's strategic leaders.

Throughout time, effective strategic thinking has been the hallmark of effectual

decision making by strategic leaders. It continues to be so today. On the other hand,

thinking that is constrained by barriers based on one's ego, culture, or organizational

identification can negatively affect a normally rational mind, both intellectually and

ethically. Such a mind results in impaired thinking and thus cripples the strategic

leader's decision making on complex issues. This is particularly significant in a crisis

when time to reflect upon and make decisions is limited.

For strategic leaders, the critical thinking model as set forth by Richard Paul and

Linda Elder provides a well-defined analytical framework through which decision making

can be observed and analyzed.[3] Within this critical thinking framework, biases are

established as cognitive frames of reference. Through these frames of reference, a

direct cause and effect relationship can be established for irrational judgment and

decision making. Moreover, by examining and drawing relevant insights into how these

biases impact strategic decision making from an historically significant event, today's

strategic leaders can learn how to become more focused, rational, and goal oriented

thinkers.

This paper will explore and analyze strategic decision making by Edward III, King

of England, and Philip VI, King of France, at the Battle of Crecy using the critical

thinking model as a conceptual framework, in conjunction with egocentrism and

sociocentrism as the two main cognitive frames of reference. The key facets of the

Battle of Crecy examined in this paper include a comparison of the rival forces (strategic

situation), the English position (deployment of forces), the French approach

(employment of forces), and the fight (use of forces and technology). Targeting today's

strategic leaders, this paper provides an analysis of the thoughts and resulting actions

of Edward III and Philip VI at the Battle of Crecy to provide specific critical thinking

insights. Furthermore, this paper will provide broader insights that illuminate how biases

influence mental agility, how they anchor strategic decision making, and the importance

of bias mitigation. Before focusing on the battle, an understanding of the germane

thinking framework is warranted.

Thinking Background

Effective strategic thinking challenges assumptions and the status quo, uncovers

and develops opportunities to generate worth, and targets these opportunities by

facilitating dialogue among organizational leaders. J. M. Liedtka posits the existence of

five different thinking competencies necessary for effective strategic thinking. The first,

systems perspective competency, refers to the ability to understand strategic actions

and associated implications. "A strategic thinker has a mental model of the complete system of value creation from beginning to end and understands the interdependencies within the chain."[4] Second, the intent focused competency establishes the value of being more focused and less distractible than are competitors. Liedtka describes this competency as "the focus that allows individuals within an organization to marshal and leverage their energy, to focus attention, to resist distraction, and to concentrate for as long as it takes to achieve a goal." Intelligent opportunism, the third competency, "is the idea of openness to new experience, which allows one to take advantage of alternative strategies that may emerge as more relevant to a rapidly changing business environment."[5] Fourth, thinking in time means being able to simultaneously link and understand past, present and future to facilitate and speed decision making. "Strategic thinking connects the past, present, and future and in this way uses both an institution's memory and its broad historical context as critical inputs into the creation of its future."[6] In their book Thinking in Time, Neustadt and May further define this competency as follows:

> Thinking in time (has) three components. One is recognition that the future has no place to come from but the past, hence the past has predictive value. Another is recognition that what matters for the future in the present is departures from the past, alterations, changes, which prospectively or actually divert familiar flows from accustomed channels . . . A third component is continuous comparison, an almost constant oscillation from the present to future to past and back, heedful of prospective change, concerned to expedite, limit, guide, counter, or accept it as the fruits of such comparison suggest.[7]

Finally, the hypothesis driven competency specifically incorporates the scientific method into strategic thinking, thus ensuring that creative and critical thinking are integrated into the overall strategic thinking framework.[8]

History abounds with examples of people that are successful in certain endeavors while others are not. Certain leaders have had the advantage of *seeing the big picture:* there have been others that have had *luck* continually on their side, and then there are those that have been known to mine – at the exact time and spot – for the untapped potential in circumstances and people. For contemporary leaders, there remains the question as to exactly how to examine and reveal the appropriate historic lessons that are relevant to the contemporary strategic setting. Neustadt and May propose that to use history appropriately a method of systematic and analytical inquiry through which leaders can draw relevant insights from historical figures or actions is necessary. The authors establish the importance of a thorough and methodical examination of history in drawing conclusions by converting and interpreting past events and actions for engagement by contemporary strategic leaders.[9]

From the strategic thinking competencies and meta-competencies described by Liedtka, critical thinking was chosen as the conceptual framework through which to analyze the leaders' decision making at the Battle of Crecy. This was chosen because of its well-defined nature and interrelatedness with strategic thinking, as well as the emphasis placed on it by the United States Army. Simply put, the Association of the United States Army (AUSA) March 2005 National Security Report stated, "The Army's most critical asset will not be technology; it will be critical thinking."[10] Furthermore, this report continued that critical thinking is an integral part in the development of "agile and adaptive leaders" for the Army's future. Critical thinking is also emphasized in the Army War College's curriculum

According to Paul and Elder, the critical thinking model has four key characteristics: (1) is disciplined and self-directed, which typifies flawless thinking suitable to a specific mode or domain; (2) demonstrates mastery of rational abilities and aptitudes; (3) is "the art of thinking about one's thinking while thinking"[11] to expand or make more germane one's thinking; (4) is fully mindful of, and constantly aware against, the normal human affinity of self-deception and to rationalize selfishness. In critical thinking, we cognitively integrate and use the components and competencies of thinking, as well as the general principles of rationality and ethics in order to regulate our thinking to meet the logical demands of a type or mode of thinking and associated environment. In short, effective critical thinking leads to sound reasoning.[12]

Reasoning, according to Paul and Elder, is "the mental process of those who reason; especially the drawing of conclusions or inferences from observations, facts, or hypotheses..."[13] In other words, reasoning is the process of figuring something out or making sense. Additionally, Paul and Elder propose elements of reasoning, which identify biases that are formed from assumptions, experience, inclinations, and partialities. Biases have multi-dimensional characteristics. They can be positive or negative and can be individual or collective. Some biases affect judgment, while some affect decision making. Some biases reflect motivation; others may arise from attention. Within the critical thinking framework, biases are established as cognitive frames of reference through which analysis can be objectively conducted.[14]

In this paper, two critical thinking biases, egocentricity and sociocentricity will serve as the cognitive frames of reference through which strategic decision making is analyzed. Paul and Elder define egocentricity as "a tendency to view everything in

5

relationship to oneself, to confuse immediate perception (how things seem) with reality; tendency to be self-centered, or to consider only oneself and one's own interest; selfishness…few people recognize the sociocentric nature of much of their thought."[15] Furthermore, because an egocentric person tends to value his or her beliefs, values, and desires as superior to others, egocentrism can negatively affect critical thinking and decision making. In short, egocentrism is an instinctive trait and central obstacle to effective critical thinking and the resultant decision making. Paul and Elder describe sociocentrism as "the assumption that one's own social group is inherently and self-evidently superior to all others."[16] A leader of such a group of sociocentric personalities considers him or herself superior to others, his or her actions as justified, rejects and categorizes opposition and doubt as disloyalty, and thinks in a close-minded manner. Consequently, thinking that is constrained by these two biases will negatively impact a rational mind, both intellectually and ethically.

A mind impaired by these two biases gives rise to unsound reasoning and thinking, which cripples the strategic leader's decision making. When someone's thinking is rational and clear, their pattern of decision making is rational and chances of success are maximized. When the pattern of thinking and decision making is impaired by egocentrism and sociocentrism, the resulting decisions minimize chances of successful outcomes. This is particularly significant in a crisis when time to reflect upon and make decisions is limited. Leaders often work through decisions and problems intuitively or by relying on ingrained abbreviated management processes or procedures, they have learned in their professions. The result of this haphazard thinking and decision making approach of first reactions, intuitions, and subconscious conclusions

are decisions that are often made egocentrically or sociocentrically and are thus

flawed.[17]

Figure 1. Europe in 1300[18]

<u>Historical Context</u>

The dawn of the fourteenth century saw the end of hundreds of years of

European affluence, stability, and complacency. The unity and authority of the

predominant institution and power of the era, the Catholic Church, was traumatized by

the Great Schism, which saw the split of the Papacy between Avignon and Rome.[19] The

Great Famine of 1315 to 1317, and later the Black Death from 1348 to 1350, decimated

by almost half the European continental population.[20] Social turmoil and seemingly

endless warfare compounded the problems caused by famines and plague. A few

Western European states such as the Italian city-states, France, England, and the

Hanseatic city-states were beginning to emerge from the feudalistic and religion-

centered Middle Ages. However, feudalism remained the core of social and economic

existence. Central and Eastern Europe remained fully feudal societies. Education

outside the privileged classes was non-existent. The century saw violent reactions to

the repressive feudal social and political system after the Battle of Crecy in the form of

peasant uprisings such as the Jacquerie in 1358 in France and the Peasant's Revolt in

1381 in England.[21]

Extensive military change took place during the fourteenth century. The English

recognized the utility of and introduced the longbow during the Welsh Rebellions

between 1294 and 1318, which ultimately gave them a dominating advantage in the

Battle of Crecy with France. Gunpowder profoundly influenced the conduct of warfare,

although it had limited affect when introduced at the Battle of Crecy in 1346. It was not

until the use of cannons as siege instruments that gunpowder came into its own. These

new weapons and the resulting methods of warfare gave rise to modern artillery and

scientific fortification architecture. Heavy infantry, as revealed at various battles leading

up to the Battle of Crecy such as Courtrai in 1302 and Morgarten in 1315 surmounted

the battlefield dominance of the horse mounted knight. New tactics based on infantry

warfare further battered the role of the knight on the battlefield. The composition and

recruitment of armies also changed. Forever changing the role of the peasant soldiery,

feudalistic levies for the acquisition of troops were replaced by paid, professional armies of citizens or mercenaries, both foreign and domestic. Driven by England's Edward III and some of the city-states in Italy, the new system of professional armies gained primacy.[22]

The fourteenth century also saw the rise of the royalty controlled nations such as the Kingdom of England and the Kingdom of France. Royal control was strengthened and Kings profited from warfare during this time, gaining land and peasants from defeated foes. In her book A Short History of the Middle Ages, Barbara Rosenwein underwrites this growth of royal power through the example of the French king Philip IV's expulsion of French Jews, disbanding of the Knights Templar, persecution of heretics, and confiscation of land and wealth from these targeted groups in the early fourteenth century.[23] Rosenwein further roots the origin of the Great Schism as a conflict between Philip IV and Pope Boniface VIII ending with the murder of Boniface by agents of Philip IV and the installation of a second Papacy, controlled by Philip IV, in Avignon, France. In England, Edward III crushed Wales and Scotland, asserting his right to rule Britain.[24]

As a result of Edward III's and Philip IV's acquisition of power, they were also able to maintain sole authority in their states for imposing taxes, establishing and enforcing laws, and declaring and conducting war. Their kingdoms were truly sovereign. Furthermore, these two kings were actual executives of national government bureaucracies and legislative agencies such as the Parliament in England and the Estates General in France. Kings encouraged loyalty to their rule by appointing barons and lesser royalty to ministerial positions in their government.[25]

England and France had an established competitive relationship dating back to William the Conqueror's successful conquest of England in 1066. In 1337, a conflict between Edward III of England and Philip VI of France arose out of a dispute regarding the line of succession and the throne of France. Both laid claim to the throne of France, but initially Edward III deferred to Philip VI, then changed his mind, and finally decided to take the throne by force.[26]
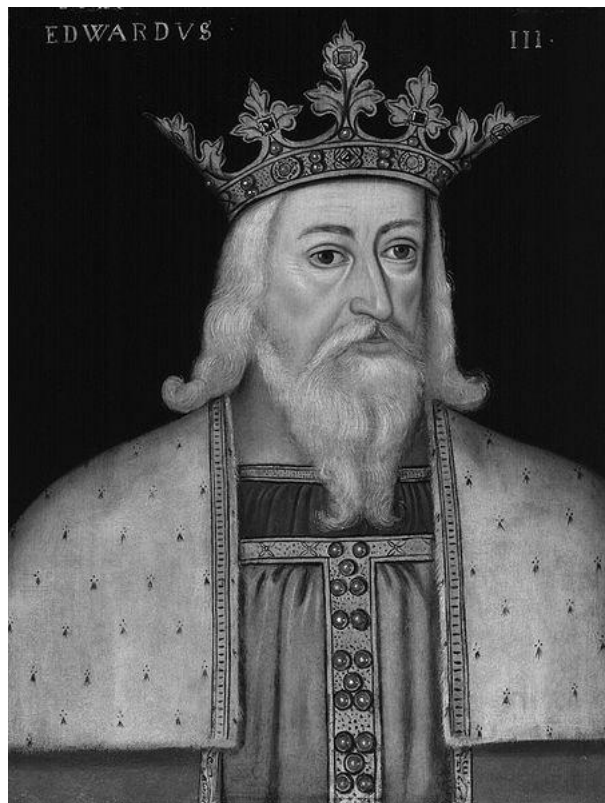

Figure 2. Edward III, King of England[27]

Edward III ruled England for fifty years from 1327 to his death in 1377. During his rule, England was already emerging from feudalism and rapidly progressing toward the English Renaissance, which bloomed in the late fifteenth century. Most notably, Edward III restored the authority of the nobles following the disastrous and corrupt reign of his

father Edward II. Edward III's reign was marked as one of notable efficiency due his reformation of parliament and taxation, emergence of national unity and identity, professionalization of the English military, and transformation of England into the most powerful European nation.[28] The French fourteenth century historian Jean Froissart in his masterwork <u>Chronicles</u>, described Edward III's great power, influence, and stature as follows, "his like had not been seen since the days of King Arthur."[29]

Figure 3. Philip VI, King of France[30]

Philip VI ruled France for twenty two years from 1328 to his death in 1350. Under Philip VI, France was at the height of her medieval power. Philip VI ruled a feudal realm supported and defended by a chivalric military of armored nobility associated with knights. As previously alluded to, he ascended to the throne following Edward III's refutation of his own right to accession. His reign was marked by many crises, including military successes and defeats, the most notably of which was the Battle of Crecy.

Philip VI had an on-and-off-again relationship with Edward III that was irreparably ruptured when he gave refuge to two of Edward III's primary enemies.[31] All of this resulted in the July 1346 English invasion of France to seize the French throne, which climaxed with the Battle of Crecy on 26 August 1346.

Rival Force Characteristics: Strategic Setting

To understand the situation the leaders of England and France faced, it is necessary to understand their military's strengths and capabilities. Generally, throughout this period, circumstances and conditions did not greatly vary. Prior to the period encompassing the Black Death, the population of France generally exceeded ten million and England hovered between three and four million people. Correspondingly, it would follow that the strength of armed forces of France would outnumber the English forces by approximately two or three to one. In fact, the population did not reflect military manpower. First, the English method of recruiting was superior to the French. Second, Welsh and Irish provisional military units served under the English flag while Scottish forces served with the French. Whereas the Welsh and Irish were fully integrated into the English forces as allies to the crown, the Scottish motivation for serving under the French crown was more based on bad blood with the English rather than as French allies. Finally, the well-developed English bureaucracy and resulting record keeping provide for an accurate picture of the strength and composition of the English military, whereas the almost non-existent official records of the French further complicate the calculation of the exact strength and composition of the French armed forces.[32]

On assuming the throne of England, Edward III took command of an army with a split personality. This English army was made up of both the traditional, medieval feudal

levy in which the nobility was required to provide levies of mounted knights at the king's behest, and the uniquely English national militia. The French system of manning their national army was similar to the English feudal levy, with the one exception that under the French system all knights were required to serve the king. However, in actuality the barons were obliged to provide no more than one-tenth of the total number of their vassal knights.[33]

With great clarity of thought and without falling prey to sociocentric bias that dominated the thinking of contemporary royalty concerning social structure and the value of common folk, Edward III recognized the shortfalls and limitations of the feudal levy system in rapidly manning his army with trained soldiers. In line with this recognition, Edward III initiated the decline of the feudal levy system when he began using a system of indenture that produced cohesive units of paid professional soldiers. "The English army…had definitely ceased to be feudal... it was a mercenary force in which the … noble, as well as the yeoman… humbly served at the King's wage."[34] As a result of this new indenture system, Edward III re-formed his army from one composed of masses of untrained peasant and elite mounted men-at-arms, to a more professional armed force composed of skilled and talented soldiers which for England meant longbow archers.

Of interest, Edward III's new national militia was a radical break from the old feudal levy of forced peasant mob-armies. In fact, in more than one way, it resembled the modern draft system, in that local government officials in each shire selected able-bodied men between the ages of sixteen and sixty to serve in the national militia. Men selected for the national militia served as mounted lancers and dismounted foot

soldiers, which were either archers or spearmen. To maintain a trained militia, Edward III required his militiamen to participate in weapons based competitions and conduct military practice monthly. These competitions focused on longbow proficiency, a common weapon used by common English folk, which resulted in the English adoption of the longbow as exclusively their own. In addition to the national militia, Edward engaged mercenaries, both foreign and domestic and spearmen from Wales.[35]

Similar to the pre-Edwardian English army, the French raised and organized their army by the feudal levy system. The core of the army was composed of mounted knights and men-at-arms with levies of peasant mobs as untrained infantry and spearmen. Organization within the French army was extremely *loose and vague*. The French knight, heavily encumbered by sociocentric medieval bias, counted on crushing their enemies through their sheer weight and momentum as heavy cavalry without utilizing the capabilities provided by the levies of common peasants. Perhaps this occurred because the French levies were only required to serve for forty days outside their home regions.[36] The French crown attempted to use pay incentives to encourage the feudal levies to extend their service, but because the French royal treasury was usually near exhaustion, the number of personnel who could be paid was correspondingly small. Nevertheless, the French army was usually larger in numbers than that of their regular medieval adversary, the English. Also, like the English the French used mercenaries, mostly Genoese crossbow archers and Scottish infantry, to supplement their levy.[37]

The two armies were outfitted with arms and other equipment almost uniformly. Men-at-arms and knights were outfitted for the most part in chain mail, a helmet, shield,

and spurs, and they carried lances, swords, daggers, and sometimes heavy battle maces. Knights customarily had two or three armed helpers that were either archers or swordsman. Regardless of whether mounted or dismounted, English longbow archers carried a longbow, sword, and a dagger. In contrast, French archers carried just a crossbow. The rate of fire for a longbow was an impressive six arrows per minute, while in the hands of an expert the crossbow could only be fired one or two times per minute. The maximum effective range of a longbow was 250 meters with a maximum range of 350 meters. While the crossbow had a much greater range than the longbow, it was less accurate.[38] Finally, both the English and the French possessed artillery. While the French used cannon in Tournai's defense in 1340, the first time that artillery was used in the field was at the Battle of Crecy in 1346.[39]

Critical Thinking Insight. Edward III displayed intellectual autonomy,[40] a critical thinking trait, in the raising and development of his army. Edward III's independence of thought and rationality are seen through his rejection of the feudal levy-based army and the development of his professional, militia army. His inclusion of a much broader spectrum of the population resulted in a more egalitarian, trained, and professional army than could be mustered under the old feudal levy system. The participation of the greater English population in the army also promoted the ideal of national identity and allowed service to the nation to be shared by the people, not just the nobility and peasantry. A relevant strategic question from this historical analysis that needs to be answered is: are today's strategic leaders effectively facilitating the full participation and integration of United States (US) citizens in the US military to make the most of its vast pool of talented, skilled, and patriotic citizenry?

The English Position: Deployment of Forces

Following the English landing on France's Normandy coast of France on 13 July

1346 and a number of small battles with the French shortly thereafter, Edward III

settled, rested, and refit his army while establishing defensive positions at Crecy-en-

Ponthieu on 25 August 1346. At Crecy, Edward III positioned his army in a defensive

posture with his northern flank braced against the village of Wadicourt and his southern

flank strongly buttressed against the town of Crecy on the Mave River. In this position,

they restocked their food, wine, and potable water from homesteads and businesses.

Edward III arrayed his forces as follows:

> 4,000 on the right…800 men-at-arms in the center… 2,000 archers on
> either side...knife-wielding skirmishers in the rear; on the left… 500 men-
> at-arms…1,200 archers arrayed on either side of them... a reserve of 700
> men-at-arms, 2,000 archers, and the rest of the skirmishers.[41]

This positioning provided the archers with broad, open fields of fire on the plain across

which the French army would later attack.

Taking note of the composition of the French army and their tendency to favor

heavy cavalry charges, to defend against these charges, Edward III directed the

construction of ditches, pits, and obstacles in front of the longbow archers to channelize,

mar, and topple the charging French knights and men-at-arms. Furthermore, Edward III

dismounted his knights and integrated them into the ranks of the longbow archers to

provide security and support in the event the French broke through the English

defensive positions.

Edward III's decision to have his knights fight dismounted afforded a number of

advantages: it prevented them from starting a premature charge; it ensured protection

for the longbow archers; and dissolved the societal barriers between nobility and

commoner by placing the knights directly among the dismounted soldiers. This furthered

a sense of esprit de corps and solidarity among the longbow archers and supporting

infantry. Edward III mingled among his soldiers, speaking encouragingly and giving

them time to eat, drink, and rest. Edward III then placed himself and his staff in a

windmill that overlooked the battlefield and awaited the enemy.[42] Edward III's actions

with his men gave them great confidence in their leader.

To fully understand the importance of Edward III's force deployment decision

does not require an in depth analysis of the tactical or operational formations he used

during the battle. Rather, the critical point to consider is how Edward III was able to

leverage the professionalism of his army in integrating his knights and archers to

provide both armed and moral support in the face of a numerically superior enemy with

the offensive advantage. The integration of knights as dismounted security was a

breakthrough in medieval social protocol with noble knights supporting peasant longbow

archers that only Edward III could have leveraged from his unique institution, a

seasoned professional army.

Critical Thinking Insight. Intellectual confidence in reason is a critical thinking trait

that enables leaders to have confidence in higher interests using their own rationality.

"Undisciplined thinkers feel threatened by good reasoning."[43] While Edward III exhibited

exceptional clarity of thought in his deployment and integration of his army, his

prioritization of efforts in reconstituting his force reflects his confidence in reason as

seen through his ability to stay grounded during periods of high stress. Edward III knew

that his army would soon be facing battle with the numerically and materially superior

French army. Edward III placed his soldier's needs before his own personal interests.

He ensured they were fed, rested, refit, and he personally took the time to mingle with his soldiers to ensure they were in good stead and ready to fight. A relevant strategic question from this historical analysis that needs to be answered is: considering the on-going reconstitution of the US all-volunteer force after almost a decade of continuous war and stress, are US strategic leaders' efforts to reset and rebalance the force grounded in readiness to meet threats emerging from the complex strategic environment, or are their efforts limited in scope to address only the symptoms resultant from the prolonged stress on the force?

The French Approach: Employment of Forces

The 60,000 French forces resembled a mob with little organization, discipline, or coordination, rather than a professional army. This condition was due to the egocentric mindset with resulting overconfidence and self-importance of the French knights. While conducting movement to contact toward the English positions on 26 August 1346, Philip VI dispatched a few of his most trusted knights to ride ahead of his main body of troops and conduct a reconnaissance of the English positions. On their return to the king, these knights counseled Philip VI that he consolidate and en-camp the French army in front of the English position and spend the night resting and preparing for an attack the next morning. Philip VI accepted this counsel, but most of his nobles strongly differed and made up their minds to continue approaching the English positions as rapidly as possible in defiance of the king's position. The French knights' motives were based on their intense lust for glory, as well as their desire to capture "the highest-ranking English prisoners for themselves."[44] The higher-ranking prisoners would bring more money when ransomed back to their families as prisoner rank equaled wealth and profit. Moreover, the French nobility and knights felt free to disregard orders from the king that

18

were not to their liking, as they did not consider themselves so much as subordinate to the king but more as associates.

Philip VI's thinking, as a member of his country's elite nobility, was firmly rooted in the contemporary mindset of a caste-based society ruled by elites. Furthermore, Philip VI relied on the chivalric nature of his knights to provide his army with the necessary leadership. In this case, he was sorely mistaken. Philip VI's knights counseled him based on their pride and lust for treasure and glory. Contemporary authors noted the French knights' excessive pride and self-importance. The fourteenth century historian Geoffrey le Baker stated that the French nobility were so confident in victory that they individually chose which of the English nobility they would take as prisoners.[45] In <u>Chronicles</u>, Jean Froissart wrote of the French pride and arrogance:

> And thus a great pride and arrogance governed the events, because each wished to surpass his companion…Neither the king nor his marshals were able to stop their troops, for there was such a great number of soldiers and such a large number of great lords, each of whom wished to demonstrate his power. They rode on in this way, without formation and without order, until they approached the enemy and saw that they were in their presence.[46]

The momentum of the uncontrolled and irrational French knights' aggressiveness resulted in immediate and unplanned battle, rather than a night of resting, refitting, and critically planning for an attack the next day. To compound the difficulties arising from starting and conducting a late afternoon attack, at 1800 hours a short, extremely heavy thunderstorm hit and soaked the field making it nearly impassable for the heavy French cavalry.[47]

Critical Thinking Insight. Intellectual integrity is a critical thinking trait that requires a person to admit shortfalls and inconsistencies in their own thought and hold themself to the same standards to which he or she holds others.[48] Philip VI was the product of a

society of elitism and arrogance in which noble's individual desires for glory and wealth took precedence over their understanding of the greater needs of nation: sociocentrism heavily hindered thinking. The unfolding crisis and Philip VI's personal limitations limited his ability to effectively assess, understand, and implement changes as the rapidly unfolding battle warranted. A relevant strategic question from this historical analysis that needs to be answered is: have historical notions of victory and defeat clouded US strategic leaders' thought and thus their ability to effectively establish, work toward, and attain US strategic interests in the present-day strategic setting?
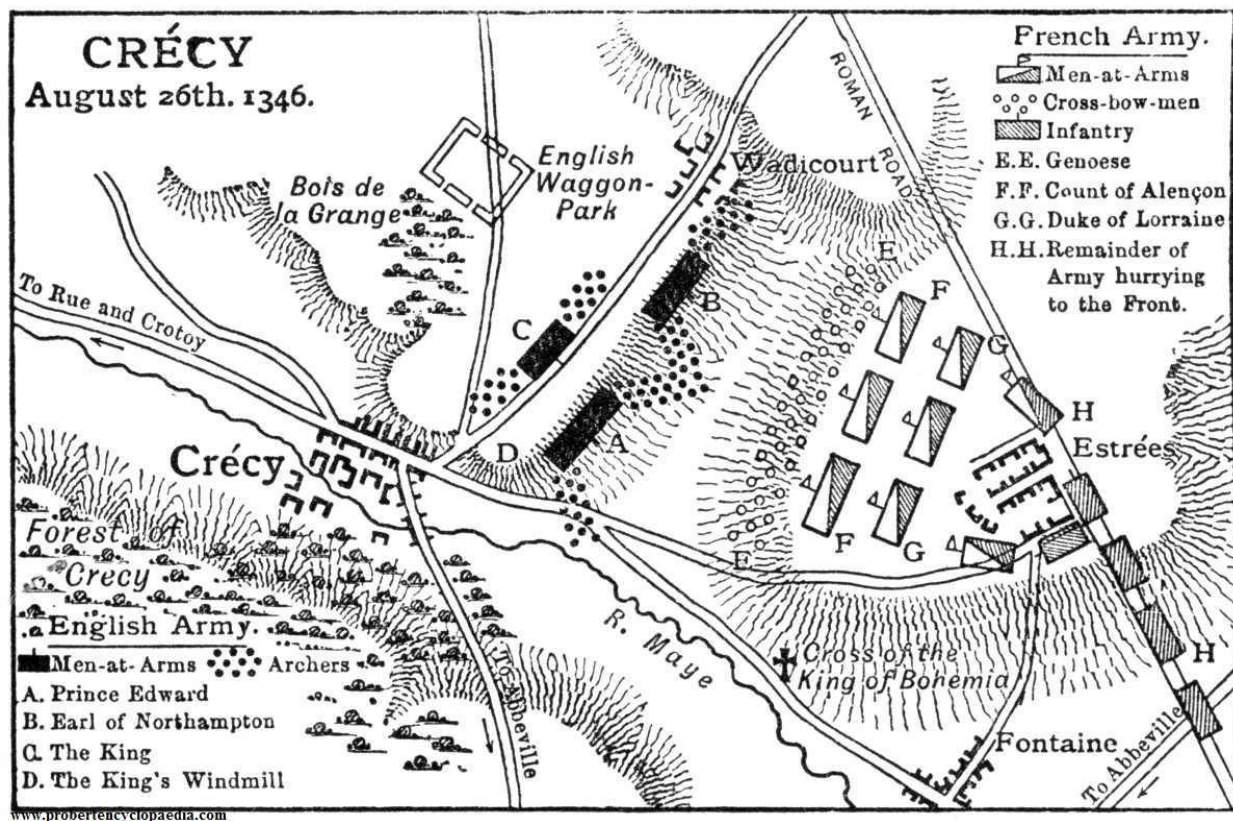

Figure 4. The Crecy Battlefield: English and French Dispositions[49]

The Fight: Use of Forces and Technology

As the French arrived at the field of battle in the mid-afternoon of 26 August 1346, they announced their presence with the blare of trumpets. The English, observing

20

the French approach, on the sound of their own signal trumpets, manned their positions. The French forces continued to arrive and spread out before the English positions for about two hours; the English returned to their defensive positions. By approximately 1600 hours the French having completed their maneuver into attack formations, launched their assault on the English defensive position.[50]

The first troops to assault the English were the 6,000 to 8,000 Genoese mercenary crossbow archers, the only professional troops among the French. Behind the Genoese, the French knights moved to the attack. Philip VI, by this time having lost control of his knights and his army, watched as his knights jockeyed for position and left the masses of French infantry behind. The French historian Jean Froissart in Chronicles provides a clear account: "You must know that these kings, earls, barons, and lords of France did not advance in any regular order..."[51]

The Genovese crossbow archers attacked first. The crossbow archers let loose a series of volleys to disorganize and scatter the English infantry. With the intent of upsetting the English army, the blare of French trumpets and crash of French drums accompanied the crossbow volleys. The crossbow tactics failed miserably, as the one to two rounds per minute rate of fire was no match for the counter longbow volleys of five or six rounds per minute. Additionally, heavy rain from the sudden thunderstorm damaged the Genoese crossbows. The longbows of the English archers were unaffected, as they had unstrung their bows immediately after the storm began and did not restring them until the rain stopped. The Genoese crossbow archers suffered devastating losses from the heavy barrage of English arrows. What is more, the crossbow archers could not close with the English forces to a distance within which the

accuracy of their crossbows would have been effective. In a panic, the Genoese crossbow archers fell back. Their commanders fell dead or wounded attempting to rally their archers. The French knights, on seeing the Genoese mercenaries collapse in disarray, brutally cut them down as they retreated.[52]

While the French knights slaughtered the Genoese, the English longbow archers launched several volleys on the French. Prepared English defensive works and obstacles broke apart the French charge. With each subsequent French charge more men fell, blocking follow-on waves of attacking French knights. The English longbow volleys continued. The slaughter of the French went on as they advanced toward the English lines. As the French knights fell, the English along with the allied Welsh and Irish skirmishers cut their throats.[53]

Jean Froissart conveys that the English artillerymen fired "two or three bombards"[54] at the Genoese. The English artillery fired large, iron arrows and grapeshot at the French army. The Florentine historian Giovanni Villani attested to the destructiveness of the English artillery during the battle: "... [by the end of the battle] the whole plain was covered by men struck down by arrows and cannon balls."[55] After sixteen failed assaults, the French gave up the attack: they never broke the English defensive position. Late in the evening, Philip VI was wounded and he fled the field of battle. The French army followed Philip VI. The English did not pursue the French, as they were too exhausted from the day's battle.[56]

At the Battle of Crecy, the French King Philip VI and his nobles failed in their application of their forces and technology. French decision making was severely hampered by egocentrism, sociocentrism, and irrational thinking. While the French had

22

a significant advantage in numbers of soldiers and experience with the modern artillery weapon, they did not capitalize on this advantage due to their failures in leadership. The French continually reacted to situations based on preconceived ideas, and their thinking was anchored by heuristic biases. Emotion, greed, and egotism ruled the day for the French, which lead to their downfall.

Critical Thinking Insight. Intellectual courage is a critical thinking trait, which can be defined as "facing and fairly addressing ideas, beliefs, or viewpoints even when this is painful."[57] In the midst of the intellectually repressive, feudal society from which he arose, Edward III aggressively took charge of and controlled his strategic environment through sound reasoning, enlightened and unencumbered thinking, and methodical application. His use of the longbow, the integration of social classes and weapon systems on the battlefield, proficient use of the cannon as a new artillery weapon, coordination of arms, and inspiring leadership clearly illustrated his effective critical thinking and superior strategic decision making. A relevant strategic question from this historical analysis that needs to be answered is: are today's US strategic leaders effectively and efficiently integrating and employing the appropriate elements of national power to promote and achieve US national interests in today's increasingly interconnected and complex strategic environment?

Overall Strategic Leader Bias Insights

The impact of biases on mental agility. Mental agility is a key meta-competency for strategic leaders and is critical to effective decision making.[58] Mentally agile strategic leaders are cognitively flexible and adaptable to work effectively within unfamiliar volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous (VUCA)[59] environments. Mental agility stems from rational thought and decision making that is unencumbered by heuristic

biases. Through the bias cognitive frame of reference, the associated mental agility of Edward III and Philip VI are readily apparent. Edward III's decisions clearly illustrate the mind of a man who is able to scan his environment and situation and make situational appropriate decision without being anchored by biases. His integration and deployment of noble knights and peasant archers, remarkable for the medieval world and unique in the history of warfare, contributed to extraordinary results. Conversely, Philip VI was unable to control his army, nor was he able to overcome his biases and adapt and thus lacked the mental agility to successfully work within the VUCA environment in which he found himself at Crecy His results were clear as well. However, the results of these decisions were not just local; in fact, they were long-term and strategic in nature. His thinking failure assisted the advent of the English as the most efficient military in Europe and a change in the conduct of war.

As relevant as mental agility was to Edward III and Philip VI, it is equally as relevant to today's strategic leader. The current operational and strategic environments are VUCA in nature and success in this environment demands strategic leaders that are adaptable and mentally agile. Strategic leadership capabilities must be developed through education, professional experience, self-development, and modeling. United States military officers, whose professional education and career assignments have resided solely within an individual military service may well develop a *service sociocentric* bias and as such may be unable to be mentally agile within the joint force. The same can be said for potential military strategic leaders that have had very limited or no exposure to the challenges that reside within the operational and strategic military or geopolitical environments. As illustrated in the study of Philip VI at the Battle of

Crecy, a strategic leader whose thought is dominated by contemporary and limited

perspectives may lack the necessary mental agility to respond to crises rationally.

The impact of biases as strategic decision making anchors. Anchoring describes

the predisposition to rely on a single preference or characteristic in the decision making

process. Once an anchor is set normally through conscious or unconscious

conditioning, it becomes a bias. The strategic decision maker may anchor on a

preference or trait, but then the leader must be self-aware to modify his or her thinking

to account for other factors within the situational context.[60] To illustrate the importance

of bias caused by inappropriate anchoring, take for example the French knights and

their contempt for the common soldiers. The French knights' disrespect for these

soldiers was a result of their social conditioning that anchored them to believe that

nobles were elite and their disdain for common people was right and just. The resultant

bias caused them to discount the infantry out of the French effort in the Battle of Crecy,

thus reducing the army's power and ability.

Anchors may also cause strategic decision makers to give too much importance

to one aspect or event. This over focus can negatively affect accurately predicting future

outcomes.[61] Case in point is the French knights' obsession with glory and wealth, which

caused them to lose sight of the overall reason why the Battle of Crecy was fought.

These knights focused on their own economic benefits of battle rather than the life and

death consequences from the battle's outcome.

The importance of bias mitigation for contemporary strategic leaders. To

effectively function in a VUCA environment, strategic leaders must possess the ability to

make decisions unencumbered by heuristic biases.[62] Thinking that subscribes to egocentric and/or sociocentric biases is more often than not irrational and ineffective.

As described earlier, Philip VI had a sociocentric bias that caused his army to be feudal in nature. Conversely, Edward III overcame his sociocentric upbringing and created a more diverse army that he inspired through his considerate nature. To overcome egocentric and sociocentric biases it is not enough for strategic decision makers to recognize the existence of their biases as pathological tendencies. In order to mitigate these biases and their impact on one's thinking, the strategic decision maker must aggressively and enduringly take charge of his or her egocentric and/or sociocentric nature and be able to make decisions that are contrary to these biases. Strategic decision makers must take concrete steps to correct these irrationalities. At the same time, it must be remembered that change is a drawn out process of repetition.[63]

Conclusion

> Such as are your habitual thoughts, such also will be the character of your mind; for the soul is dyed by the thoughts.

> –Marcus Aurelius[64]

Utilizing the critical thinking model as a conceptual framework, and two heuristic biases of egocentrism and sociocentrism as cognitive frames of reference, this paper examined the strategic thinking of the two opposing strategic leaders, England's King Edward III and the French King Philip VI, at the Battle of Crecy. While history abounds with strategic leaders who have succeeded or failed, this battle of these two leaders' thinking was chosen because of their great thinking differences and the resultant strategic impact of this battle. Furthermore, through analysis of the thoughts and actions

of these two leaders, this paper offers contemporary strategic leaders insights on the importance of critical thinking, the impact of biases on mental agility and the importance of their mitigation.

As exhibited by Edward III, effective strategic thinkers are able to think for themselves while remaining rational, and they embody intellectual trust, integrity, and courage. Moreover, to make effective decisions, strategic leaders must remain unencumbered by heuristic biases. Clearly, the analysis of Philip VI provides an illustration of how a failure to mitigate heuristic biases can lead to the anchoring of strategic leader decision making, the degrading of mental agility, and the handicapping of the ability to effectively think and act in VUCA environments.

Endnotes

[1] *Brainy Quote Home Page*, http://www.brainyquote.com (accessed December 1, 2010).

[2] Paul K. Davis, *100 Decisive Battles* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 154-159.

[3] Richard Paul and Linda Elder, *Critical Thinking*, 2nd ed. (Columbus: Pearson Prentice Hall, 2006), 208.

[4] Eton Lawrence, "Strategic Thinking: A Discussion Paper," April 27, 1999, 4, linked from HR Bartender Home Page at www.hrbartender.com (accessed 15 November 2010).

[5] Ibid.

[6] Ibid.

[7]Richard E. Neustadt and Ernest R. May*, Thinking in Time* (New York: The Free Press, 1986), 251.

[8] Lawrence, "Strategic Thinking: A Discussion Paper," 8.

[9] Neustadt and May, *Thinking in Time*, *xi-xxii*.

[10] Association of the United States Army, "National Security Report," March 2005, 21, http://www.ausa.org/publications/torchbearercampaign/tnsr/Documents/TB_Modularity.pdf (accessed November 15, 2010).

[11] W. Michael Guillot, "Critical Thinking for the Military Professional," June 17, 2004, http://www.airpower.au.af.mil/airchronicles/cc/guillot.html (accessed November 15, 2010).

[12] Ibid.

[13] Paul and Elder, *Critical Thinking*, 2nd ed., 497.

[14] Ibid., 480.

[15] Ibid., 484.

[16] Ibid., 498.

[17] Foundation for Critical Thinking, "Developing as Rational Persons: Viewing Our Development in Stages," http://www.criticalthinking.org/articles/sts-developing-rational-persons.cfm (accessed November 15, 2010).

[18] Maps of the World, "Europe Map 1300," http://mapsof.net/france/static-maps/jpg/europe-map-1300/xlarge-size (accessed December 1, 2010).

[19] Barbara W. Tuchman, *A Distant Mirror* (New York: The Random House Publishing Group, 1978), 320.

[20] Ibid., 25, 119.

[21] For background on Western European society of the fourteenth century, see Barbara W. Tuchman, *A Distant Mirror* (New York: The Random House Publishing Group, 1978), 155-184..

[22] Philippe Contamine, War in the Middle Ages, trans. Michael Jones (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, Ltd., 1986), 119-172.

[23] Barbara H. Rosenwein, *A Short History of the Middle Ages* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009), 273.

[24] Ibid., 306.

[25] Marilyn Livingstone and Morgen Witzel, *The Road to Crecy* (London: Pearson Education Limited, 2005), 20-26.

[26] Davis, *100 Decisive Battles*, 154.

[27] National Portrait Gallery, "King Edward III," http://www.npg.org.uk/collections/search/portrait.php?search=ap&npgno=4980(7)&eDate=&lDate= (accessed December 1, 2010).

[28] Ibid., 20-23.

[29] Jean Froissart, *Chronicles* (London: Penguin Books, 1978), 196.

[30] Academic, "Philip VI of France," http://en.academic.ru/dic.nsf/enwiki/47258 (accessed December 1, 2010).

[31] Clifford J. Rogers, ed., *The Wars of Edward III* (Suffolk: Boydell Press, 1999), 206.

[32] Alfred H. Burne, *The Crecy War* (Hertfordshire: Eyre & Spotswood, 1999), 26-27.

[33] Andrew Ayton and Philip Preston, *The Battle of Crecy*, 1346 (Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, Ltd, 2005), 265.

[34] Burne, *The Crecy War*, 31.

[35] Rogers, ed., *The Wars of Edward III*, 303-319.

[36] Burne, *The Crecy War.*, 27.

[37] Livingstone and Witzel*, The Road to Crecy*, 51-52.

[38] Livingstone and Witzel, *The Road to Crecy*, 51-58.

[39] Containime, *War in the Middle Ages*, 199.

[40] Paul and Elder, *Critical Thinking*, 19.

[41] Davis, *100 Decisive Battles*, 155.

[42] Ibid.

[43] Paul and Elder, *Critical Thinking*, 17.

[44] Davis, *100 Decisive Battles*, 156.

[45] Kelly DeVries, *Infantry Warfare in the Early Fourteenth Century* (Suffolk: The Boydell Press, 2006) 166.

[46] Ibid.

[47] Ibid., 167.

[48] Paul and Elder, *Critical Thinking*, 13.

[49] Probert Encyclopedia, "Map of the Battle of Crecy 1921," http://www.probertencyclopaedia.com/photolib/maps/Map%20of%20Battle%20of%20Crecy%20 1921.htm (accessed December 1, 2010).

[50] Davis, *100 Decisive Battles*, 156.

[51] Jean Froissart, *Chronicles* (London: Penguin Books, 1978), 86.

[52] Information in this paragraph is taken from DeVries, *Infantry Warfare in the Early Fourteenth Century*, 186.

[53] Ibid.

[54] Jean Froissart, *Chronicles* (London: Penguin Books, 1978), 88.

[55] Ibid., 474.

[56] DeVries, *Infantry Warfare in the Early Fourteenth Century*, 173.

[57] Paul and Elder, Critical Thinking, 9.

[58] U.S. Army War College, *Strategic Leadership Primer*, 3ʳᵈ ed. (Carlisle Barracks: U.S. Army War College, 2010) 62.

[59] Ibid., 1.

[60] Stephen J. Gerras, *Thinking Critically About Critical Thinking*, U.S. Army War College Selected Readings Academic Year 2011 Strategic Thinking (Carlisle Barracks: U.S. Army War College, 2011) 33-60.

[61] Ibid., 12-13.

[62] Ibid., 12.

[63] Paul and Elder, *Critical Thinking*, 212-248.

[64] *Brainy Quote Home Page*, http://brainyquote.com (accessed December 1, 2010).