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DEVELOPING OPERATIONAL LEADERSHIP FOR THE FUTURE

by

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A paper submitted to the Faculty of the Naval War College in partial satisfaction of the requirements of the Department of Joint Military Operations.

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

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To overcome these impediments, the services must first develop operational doctrine that clearly reflects the need for operational art. The Joint Staff can assist in this effort through their influence in the military education system. Secondly, the services must carefully select their future operational leaders. This selection process must occur early enough in an officer's career to develop operational leadership skills but not so early as to limit the opportunities for the officer to develop a strong foundation at the tactical level of warfare. Next, the services must improve the academic process by making professional military education a continuous process, developing a curriculum that is specifically focused on developing operational leadership skills, and changing the means of instructing operational art from an analysis- to a synthesis-based process. Finally, the services must carefully manage the careers of those selected future operational leaders so that academic, staff, and command positions complement each other during the operational leadership development process.

By accomplishing these tasks, the services will have a pool of highly qualified and competent operational leaders from which to draw in the future.

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Introduction. The post-Cold War efforts to integrate regional perspectives and priorities into the crafting of US national security and military strategies brought about a renewed focus on the operational level of warfare. [1] The Gulf War, Bosnia, and Somalia validated the need for leadership skilled in the theater employment of forces, coalition warfare, and the manipulation of space, time, and force--in essence, the skills inherent in operational art. However, while the services foresee the need for operational art, they have not taken the steps to effectively develop operational leaders. Even though the services teach the concepts of operational art at their respective staff and war colleges, they do not use all the means available to evolve commanders and staff that are skilled in operational warfare. This treatise will examine operational art and the operational leader, identify impediments that restrict the current development process, and propose methods to effectively evolve operational leaders who can meet the challenges inherent at the operational level of war.

Analyzing Operational Art and the Operational Leader. The basis for any study on the development of operational leadership must begin with an analysis of operational art.

Joint Publication 3-0 defines operational art as, "the employment of military forces to attain strategic and/or operational objectives through the design, organization, integration and conduct of strategies, campaigns, major operations, and battles. Operational art translates the commander's strategy into operational design, and ultimately tactical action, by integrating key activities at all levels of war." [2]

In the simplest form, operational art is the theory and practice of planning and executing military efforts to achieve political aims--it is the activity which links political objectives with military power. [3]

Often confused with the operational level of war, there is a clear delineation between the two. The operational level of war is that level where strategy and tactics are linked--the level at which doctrinal structure and process exist. Operational art is how the leader performs within the operational level of war; it is the level which provides for the use of theory and skill. [4]

Operational art embodies three fundamental elements: space, time, and force. While these elements are found at both the tactical and strategic levels, their complexity is greater at the operational level. This is due to the difficulty of blending the specificity of tactics with the broadness of the national political aims. The challenge for the operational leader is to balance these elements to produce decisive military power and achieve the political goal. Operational art requires great skill in organizing, evaluating, and envisioning the many factors that comprise conflict at the theater-level of war. The operational leader must continually evaluate space, time, and force, and from this evaluation produce outcomes and probabilities for success. To be successful, the operational leader needs a sound foundation balanced in theory, knowledge, and practice experience. Acquiring this foundation is, at best, a compromise of indirect and direct means. While theory and knowledge can be obtained directly through academic education, practical expertise can only be achieved indirectly through formal training, wargaming, and exercises, since there is little opportunity for the operational leader to experience the operational level of war without being engaged in it. [5] Since space, time, and force exist at the tactical level, it would appear that success as a tactician would mean success as an operational leader. This is not necessarily so, since there is no natural transition between the two forms of warfare. For example, Field Marshal Erwin Rommel was a brilliant tactician but failed as an operational leader. Rommel never grasped the extend dimensions of space, time, and force in any framework. [6] Rommel's disdain for studies at the higher levels of war resulted in a high-ranking tactician who could not envision the complexities of warfare at the operational level. He could not see from the battlefield into the halls of the national decision makers. [7]

The objective is to develop a leader who can assimilate national strategic goals and translate them into clearly defined and attainable military actions which the soldier in the field can execute. To realize this objective, the services must provide the student of operational leadership with

doctrine, academic studies, and experiences that reflect the need for operational art. What has kept the services from effectively accomplishing the task of developing operational leaders? The reasons are centered on doctrine, the peacetime environment, and the education process. These factors are impediments to the operational leadership development process.

Impediments To Developing Operational Art Leaders

One has to question why the US armed forces have been so reluctant to develop leaders schooled in operational art. The successes of the Allies during World War II highlighted the need for operational art and leaders capable of performing at the operational level of war. More than 50 years after World War II and a decade after the resurgence of operational warfare and operational art, the services are still not adequately developing operational leaders. One reason for this lack of operational development is the scarcity of doctrine centered on operational warfare.

Doctrine. The reasons for the loss of operational art doctrine are threefold: the rush to demobilize after WW II; technological advances, especially in nuclear weaponry which reduced the need for large-scale operations; and the Cold War geopolitical realities of NATO which dictated a forward defense and Corps-sized formations. [8] All of these issues led to a tactical vice operational level focus in doctrine. In essence, the services belittled theater operations and joint training in favor of tactical training in the Army, fleet exercises in the Navy, and strategic studies in Air Force. [9] Service doctrines no longer reflected the needed for operational art and the service colleges did not address operational level warfare or support professional self-education in operational art. The advent of the 1986 Goldwater-Nichols Department of Defense Reorganization Act forced the services to re-look the need for warfare at the operational-level of war and operational art by making the warfighting CINCs responsible for planning and conducting future wars. [10] Coupled with this political aspect was the end of the Cold War which forced the need for service doctrine to focus on operational art. The end of

bipolarity and the proliferation of Operations Other Than War (OOTW) resulted in the de-emphasis in nuclear war and a renewed interest in regional threats. In this new environment, the services would have to consider the probability of extended operations in regional theaters. However, while the warfighting CINCs pondered operational warfare, service doctrine lagged behind and with it the development of operational leaders.

All the services have been slow to address operational art in their doctrine. The US Army has addressed the operational level of warfare in its doctrine since 1982; however, it was not until the 1998 (draft) version of Field Manual (FM) 100-5 that operational art was adequately described. The US Navy, Marine Corps, and Air Force doctrines are more focused on the tactical and strategic levels than the operational. Navy doctrine professes to fuse the tactical and strategic levels of warfare. However, Naval Doctrine Publication 1 (NDP 1), *Naval Warfare*, and NDP 3, *Naval Operations*, aim at the tactical aspects of naval power as applied at the strategic level. [11] The doctrine is myopic in that it portrays the Navy as an autonomous force. This single-service viewpoint hinders the Navy's ability to develop leaders schooled in operational art. The Marine Corps Doctrine Publication 1 (MCDP 1), *Warfighting*, is relatively broad in scope and while the concepts reflected in MCDP 1 can be applied across all levels of war, operational art is not specifically addressed. On the other hand, MCDP 1-1, *Strategy*, is aimed at the strategic level of warfare. The document explores how political entities integrate military means with other elements of their power in order to attain their political ends. (MCDP1-1, p5) While MCDP 1-1 addresses issues important to the operational leader, it does not address how operational art will be used. So too is the case of Air Force Doctrine Document 1 (AFDD 1) which reflects the use of airpower at the strategic level. The Air Force is aware of this shortfall and is developing AFDD 2 which will address how airpower will be employed at the operational level. However, presently Air Force doctrine does not adequately address operational art.

Environment. The current peacetime environment influences the way we develop operational leaders. In peace the focus of military leaders is on management and not leadership. With shrinking budgets and the need to "do more with less," the focus is on managing the shrinking assets rather than developing future leaders. The current environment impacts operational leadership development in the following ways: little time for operational art leadership development in the field, limited training opportunities to develop operational art skills, an aversion to risk taking, and a career path process focused on "square filling" vice development. The stress of accomplishing the multitude of duties assigned to today's smaller military compresses the time available for operational art development in the field. While commanders and supervisors are providing job-related guidance to subordinates, they are not taking the time to mentor officers and develop operational leadership skills. Part of the problem is that not all services deal with mentorship in the same manner. While the US Army and Marine Corps focus on mentorship as part of their leadership skills at all levels of command, the US Air Force and Navy do not stress this method of leadership development. Compounding the lack of mentorship is the fact that operational art training opportunities are limited. Actual peacekeeping and peace enforcement operations have reduced the number of large-scale wargames and exercises over the last 6 years. Senior leaders have favored either reducing the number of training exercises and/or the scope of the training opportunities in order to decrease the impact on personnel tempo. The outcome is less operational leadership training opportunities. Further, current force reductions tend to produce an officer corps adverse to risk. As the overall force size decreases, the quality of the officer corps increases. Because there are fewer officer billets, the qualifications of the people competing for these slots is higher. Since risk taking involves the possibility for failure and since failure is perceived as a method of distinguishing who will obtain the few leadership slots available, then risk taking becomes passé. The impact of this risk aversion is

a loss in leadership development. Leaders in the corporate world are aware of the need to accept failure as a part of risk taking. Herb Kelleher, CEO of Southwest Airlines, understands the value of risk taking, knowing full well that with risk comes the possibility of failure. Mr. Kelleher has chosen to accept failure as part of the long-term development of people. [12] Few people die due to risk takers in the corporate world; however, this is not always the case with military operations. Still the military can learn from the business world. By accepting risk in non-threatening military environments, the military will develop future operational leaders who are better risk managers during periods of high stress. Finally, a management-centered environment tends to focus on random "square filling" vice developing a career path to operational leadership. Without a well-defined methodology for developing operational leadership, career guidance and administration becomes a random method of providing leadership experiences without thought of how these experiences will reinforce one another. [13] This last issue is reflected not only in how we manage career opportunities for operational leadership development but how we train operational leaders.

Training Operational Leadership. The current process of training operational leaders is based on Learning--the continuous acquisition of knowledge, skills, and values associated with what is generally acknowledged as effective leadership. This approach is primarily concerned with what leaders do, rather than how they define the world around them. [14] The Learning Method is familiar because it is the basis for the current military qualification standard and is employed in executive leadership development courses. The learning process is relatively easy to administer and track since it deals with identifying core leadership competencies, developing specific training objectives, and monitoring completion of these objectives. Although learning is enhanced when experiences are accumulated in a sequential manner; it is not necessary since the acquisition of knowledge and skills can be somewhat random. The ease of administering the process and the random nature by which we

can accumulate knowledge make the Learning Method a perfect fit for the current manner of career management. However, while the Learning Method is acceptable for leadership at the lower organizational levels, it fails to adequately address the qualitatively different ways of doing business at higher operational levels. A more effective method of preparing leaders for command at the operational level is through Development. The Developmental approach is concerned more with who the leader is and how the leader makes sense of the world rather than what the leader does. [15] Development is more than matching acquired knowledge and skills to new experiences--it changes the frame of reference in which the leader views his/her environment. The premise of Development is that in order for operational leadership development to occur, the candidate's frame of reference regarding leadership must be continually altered as he/she adapts to higher organizational levels. The benefit to this adaptive process is providing the operational leader with the ability to empathize with different points of view when faced with novel situations or competing demands, which is a critical feature of [operational] leadership. [16] The current Learning-based leadership process does not directly cultivate this adaptive quality.

What Can the Services Do?

There are a number of ways the services can overcome the impediments and more effectively develop operational leadership talent. Four broad areas will be addressed here: doctrine, selection of operational leaders, academic education, and career management and on-the-job training.

Doctrine. The services must clearly address operational warfare and the use of operational art in their doctrine. The Army and Air Force appear to be on track with documents that focus on the operational employment of their forces. The Navy must break with its single-service focus and develop (and use) operational doctrine. Like the Navy, the Marines must clearly define the use of operational art in their

doctrine. Since MCDP 1 and MCDP 1-1 do not adequately address how the Marines will act at the operational level of war, they should consider revising MCDP 1 to include the operational art.

While the services are ultimately responsible for developing doctrine, the Joint Staff can influence the process. Even though the Joint Staff has made the guidance in their doctrine authoritative, they cannot dictate the type of doctrine a service employs. However, they can influence doctrine development by using their position as administrator of the military education system. First, the J-7 can place greater emphasis on developing operational art skills in the CJCS Officer Professional Military Education Policy (OPMEP) document. The OPMEP provides guidance for all levels of officer education, but currently only addresses instruction in operational art at the intermediate and senior service school-level. [17] The OPMEP should reflect operational art development at all levels of officer education, from officer basic training to the Capstone program. The Joint Staff can use the Process of Accreditation for Joint Education (PAJE), the Joint Faculty Development Conference (JFDC), and the Military Education Coordination Committee (MECC) as venues to guide service development of operational doctrine. [18] The JFDC and MECC are used to synchronize Phases I and II Joint PME curriculum with that of the Armed Forces Staff College. These two gatherings could serve as vehicles for the service schools to cross flow curriculum information and stress the need for operational doctrine. The PAJE accreditation process occurs once every 5 years and ensures the schools are addressing joint operational doctrine in their curriculum. The results of the PAJE can be used to provide a long-term review of how well the service cross flow information on operational art instruction. If the service schools are steeped in operational doctrine, the development of service-specific operational doctrine will follow as graduates of these schools rise to positions of authority.

Selection of Future Operational Leaders. Only the most qualified officers should be selected as future operational leaders. In order to properly prepare the officers, the services must select them

relatively early in their careers. However, the issue is not that the services fail to identify future operational leaders, but the method by which they do--early promotion. Colonel L. D. Holder in his article, *Education and Training For Theater Warfare*, believes the services have to select future operational leaders early in their careers. Holder acknowledges early selection will be based on tactical expertise and that effectiveness at the lower organizational-level is not an infallible indicator of operational leadership potential. However, he accepts the fact that the services cannot wait too long to properly educate the officer in the skills of operational warfare.[19] While Holder's assessment is correct, this does not mean the services have to identify their candidates by early promotion. On the surface, early promotion appears to be an adequate operational leadership development tool. However, when the service is prone to promote its future leaders in excess of 1 year per grade, they are limiting the experiences the officer needs in order to develop operational leadership skills. Instead of using early promotion to identify future leaders, the services should center their decision on the operational leadership potential that the candidate embodies. This can be determined during the period between O-1 and O-4. As is the current practice, efficiency reports and excellence in academic endeavors at the company-grade level will identify future potential. Services should provide these individuals with ample opportunities to practice leadership skills, to include command. The Army and Marines do an excellent job of providing their junior officers with a multitude of leadership opportunities; however, the Navy and Air Force do not. The reason stems from the fact that the Navy and Air Force "fight" with the weapon system and not the soldier, limiting command opportunities until much later in the officer career path. The Navy and Air Force must eliminate this restriction and provide leadership opportunities and staff tours for aspiring young leaders in their formative years. The "breakaway" point for future operational leaders is at the O-4 level. Here is where the academic rigor of intermediate service school and staff tours would clearly identify future

potential. Further, by waiting to this career point the officer would not only have a strong tactical foundation but a thorough understanding of his/her service from which to depart when developing operational leadership skills.

Academic Education. The academic process for developing operational leaders can be improved in three ways: make PME a continuous process throughout the officers career, focus curriculum for those identified as future operational leaders, and restructure the method of instruction in operational art.

The services must make PME a continuous process and be willing to send their future operational leaders to PME more than once in a career. The Army, Marine Corps, and Air Force understand the value of PME and routinely send their officers to school--even if this takes them out of line units. The Navy does not treat PME with the same respect, preferring to keep their future operational leaders in line billets and rarely sending them to PME more than once, if ever, in a career. The result is a lack of operational growth and an officer corps that has limited understanding of operational warfare. The Navy must send its future operational leaders to both intermediate- and senior-level service schools. This would require changing the mindset of Navy senior leadership and modifying the curriculums at both the Naval Command and Staff College and the College of Naval Warfare which are currently the same. Along with service school education is the need for self-study in operational art. After students leave the academic environment, they rarely address the subjects discussed in school. Even those assigned to the Joint Staff do not use the operational art skills learned in the academic environment. Self-study is one method of ensuring future operational leaders stay focused on operational warfare. The services can assist in this process by developing and distributing a reading list regarding operational art topics. Self-education, coupled with mentoring, will keep the officer immersed in the study of operational art and better prepare him/her for the future.

The service schools must provide those selected for operational command with a specific curriculum which addresses the operational-level of war in greater depth. The present general studies proffered by the service schools are too broad to meet the needs of the future operational commander. While the generalist courseware will provide the services with the staff officers to support the operational leader, the curriculum falls short of what is needed to develop competent operational leaders. The service schools must add courses that address, in-depth, items such as theater objective planning, theater-level maneuvers, theater deployment, and coalition warfare. These courses should be offered in place of the general courses in operational art. Service schools could administered a test early in the academic year to determine if students are eligible for the advanced curriculum. An alternative method would be to offer these advanced courses as a form of mandatory elective for those identified as future operational leaders. While making these changes to curriculum would require work for the service schools, the effort would be relatively minor and the payback great. Further the services should consider carefully who is selected to attend sister service schools and how they are employed after graduation. Those officers should be selected with joint or combined assignments in mind and should be expected to develop into the services joint and combined specialists. [20]

In addition to changes in curriculum, the service schools must examine how they teach their senior-level students. The Developmental approach to instruction should be incorporated into PME to produce operational leaders who can adapt to the changing conditions that prevail at the operational-level of war. The service colleges must change from an analysis- to a synthesis-centered curriculum. In education, synthesis is the process of deriving principles from facts/information that may be contradictory and ambiguous. Currently the service colleges focus on the analysis of case studies. While this process helps to add new elements to a student's frame of reference, it does not foster the ability to integrate and reorganize these frames into something new as does the process of

synthesis. [21] The process of deriving new concepts through the synthesis of information is valuable to the operational leader--for this skill will be the one most employed during operational warfare. An adjunct to this method of developing cognitive skills is the freedom to take risks. In order to develop synthesis skills, the student of operational art should be encouraged to take risks. The student should be challenged to perform studies or experiments beyond the realm of current ideas and concepts associated with the operational environment. Should failure occur, the student must be allowed the freedom to reassess and attempt the experiment again without fear of retribution. The outcome of this freedom is twofold: to expand the student's knowledge base in a safe non-life threatening environment and to transition our military from a risk-averse society to one of risk management.

Career Management and On-The-Job Training (OJT). Career management and OJT are as vital to the development of operational leaders as academic education. To ensure effective operational development, the services should focus on three major areas: job placement, practical application of operational skills, and mentorship.

The services must capitalize on the academic process and reinforce it by sending officers to jobs which require knowledge in operational art. Officers sent to concentrated study in operational art must be selected with future operational- or theater-level jobs in mind. The services should regard these officers as specialists and closely monitor their futures. [22] This means the future operational commander will be required to serve time in higher-level staffs as well as positions of command and/or authority in the field. Career monitors must ensure this mix of command and staff experience is afforded to the future operational leader. The German General Staff Officer development process is a good example of a post-academic career path management. The General Staff Officer graduate's career path is closely monitored to ensure he develops a true understanding of his duties and responsibilities to the German military. [23]

Job placement must allow the future operational leader the opportunity to practice the operational art skills. This can be done in one of three ways: actual field experience, wargames, and exercises. As previously mentioned, actual experience is difficult to obtain unless actively involved in operational warfare. However, peacekeeping and peace enforcement operations can provide a level of operational experience not achieved by wargames or exercise activities. OOTW offers opportunities to train operational leaders in the different aspects of operational art. The diplomacy of coalition warfare, theater deployment issues and operational level command and control are several skills which can be developed during OOTW. Supporting commanders must encourage their future leaders to obtain experience by participating in contingency operations. While actual experience is the best teacher it is impractical to use it as a normal method of training. Here wargames can fulfill many of the operational leadership development needs. Commanders must provide selected officers the opportunity to participate in Joint Task Force (JTF) and academic wargames. While the large-scale JTF exercises are aimed at training the warfighting CINC, the supporting staffs receive a great deal of operational level education simply by observing and working in this environment. However, wargames need not be this encompassing or complex; in fact, some should be designed to train at the lower-levels of command. The games can focus on any one portion of the theater campaign planning process such as mobility, logistics, the commander's estimate, or the post-hostilities phase. The student's main objective should be to synthesize information based on past experience and develop a new concept of action which addresses the current scenario.

In the absence of war games, the services can use existing exercises to accomplish operational art training. There are numerous small-scale field training exercises (FTXs) and command post training exercises (CPXs) which could be used to develop operational leadership skills. For example, NATO Partnership for Peace (PFP) and US bilateral In-The-Spirit-Of (ISO) PFP exercises are excellent

operational art training opportunities that often go unused. The US bilateral ISO PFP exercises can be tailored to provide whatever level of training is necessary for the participants. While the structure of the NATO PFP exercises cannot be as easily influenced by the US armed forces, they offer excellent CPX training opportunities for future operational leaders and staff. Careful coordination between the theater CINCs, Joint Staff J-7, and services could is needed to tap this training resource. [24]

Finally, it is imperative the services stress mentorship to their commanders and senior leaders. Mentorship is an often overlooked process of developing operational leaders. Mentors, combined with academic opportunities and a service-approved operational art reading list, are the first line of training for future leadership. The benefit of a mentorship program is that operational art development becomes a continuous process for all involved. While the student is being taught, the mentor must continually re-evaluate his/her operational art concepts and practices; the outcome of which is a more operationally oriented and knowledgeable officer corps. Mentorship is important at all grade levels, and it is essential that our current operational leaders pass on their experiences and knowledge by writing for the many professional military journals in publication today. These seminal works will serve as a baseline for future leaders.

Conclusion. The regional emphasis of the US National Security Strategy has forced the US military to re-examine the need for operational art. While some of the services have advocated the need for operational art and have included it in their doctrine since the mid-1980s, the services still lack an effective method of developing operational leadership. While the services are hampered by a lack of operational doctrine, a peacetime environment that is not focused on developing operational leaders, and a military education system which does not adequately teach operational leadership skills, they have the means to overcome these impediments. The process will require adjustments to doctrine, refining the methods of selecting and educating leaders, and the careful management of these

individuals throughout their careers. By accomplishing these steps the military will have a pool of highly qualified and competent officers from which to select operational leaders in the future.

Recommendations.

To ensure the effective development of operational leaders the services must first focus on developing clear and concise doctrine which reflects the need for operational art. The Joint Staff can encourage the shift to operational doctrine though clear guidance in Joint Publication 3-0 and increased emphasis through the military education system. Secondly, the service schools must provide specific studies for future operational leaders. These courses would take the place of the more general studies and should address specific operational issues such as theater deployment, theater-level maneuver, and theater command and control. Finally, the services must develop a better method of selecting and tracking future operational leaders. The selection process must ensure the candidate has had the opportunity to mature within their service and are given opportunities to develop tactical level skill before moving to the operational level. The method of tracking must clearly define the steps to operational leadership and ensure that academic and actual expertise complement each other during the development process.

These recommendations can be accomplished with a limited amount of effort and will ensure the operational leadership develop process is on the right track.

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