STUDY
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SENIOR MILITARY LEADERSHIP: A
CONTEMPORARY ANALYSIS

BY

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Over the years the subject of leadership, and particularly the disciplined variety practiced by the military, has been of obvious interest to the military community. Much of the research dealing with leadership during periods of conflict has been directed to analyzing the successes and failures of the leaders of World War II and earlier. However, because the technology of the battlefield has changed so significantly, media coverage so rapidly influences public opinion, and warfighting has become so directly influenced by civilian leadership, it was felt that a need existed to study leadership in a more contemporary setting-- the Vietnam era.

This paper attempts to define the attributes of the senior leader by referring to the Clausewitzian "traits of military genius," detail some effects of external influences as senior leaders functioned during the era studied, and through the use of the Military History Institute Oral History products, attempts to obtain first-hand experiences of such senior leaders as Generals Michael Davidson, Bruce Palmer and James Polk. The paper concludes that, while external influences have changed over the years, the qualities inherent in successful leadership have changed little.

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SENIOR MILITARY LEADERSHIP: A CONTEMPORARY ANALYSIS

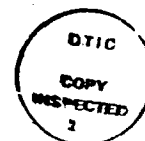AN INDIVIDUAL STUDY PROJECT

by

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ABSTRACT

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Over the years the subject of leadership, and particularly the disciplined variety practiced by the military, has been of obvious interest to the military community. Much of the research dealing with leadership during periods of conflict has been directed to analyzing the successes and failures of the leaders of World War II and earlier. However, because the technology of the battlefield has changed so significantly, media coverage so rapidly influences public opinion, and warfighting has become so directly influenced by civilian leadership, it was felt that a need existed to study leadership in a more contemporary setting-- the Vietnam era.

This paper attempts to define the attributes of the senior leader by referring to the Clausewitzian "traits of military genius," detail some effects of external influences as senior leaders functioned during the era studied, and through the use of the Military History Institute Oral History products, attempts to obtain first-hand experiences of such senior leaders as Generals Michael Davidson, Bruce Palmer and James Polk. The paper concludes that, while external influences have changed over the years, the qualities inherent in successful leadership have changed little. (KF)

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A CONTEMPORARY ANALYSIS

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INTRODUCTION

> Any complex activity, if it is to be carried on with
> any degree of virtuosity, calls for appropriate gifts
> of intellect and temperament. If they are outstand-
> ing and reveal themselves in exceptional achievements,
> their possessor is called a "genius."
>
> Carl von Clausewitz

BACKGROUND

Leadership, and particularly that unique brand of disciplined
leadership practiced in the military community, has long been a
subject of considerable interest to the military community. More
often than not, research efforts regarding senior leaders during
periods of conflict and the methods by which strategies are planned
has been directed to analyzing the successes and failures of the
leaders of World War II and earlier. Because the very environment
in which the senior leader operates has changed so dramatically in
recent years, it is felt that a need exists to look at the senior
leader and leadership in general in more contemporary terms.

As we in the military look to the future battlefield, it is
important to recognize the challenges to be faced by the leader-
ship. Certainly we can generalize regarding the competing demands
of the leader as he fights the battle and reacts simultaneously to
the demands of external influences as he functions as a leader.
This paper will focus on some of the issues at hand. The

methodology will establish a definition of senior leadership and review the requirements and accomplishments of four such leaders in the Vietnam war-era environment. The backdrop will be the model for defining characteristics of military genius as laid out by Carl von Clausewitz and other authorities in the field of military leadership. In an attempt to review the subject of senior leadership from a contemporary perspective, a cross section of Vietnam-era leadership styles was sought. Manuscripts developed as senior leaders were interviewed as a part of the Military History Institute Oral History Program were used extensively to provide "first-hand" information regarding the experiences of several Vietnam-era leaders.

The intent is to ascertain whether or not the requirements for senior leadership have changed as the environment in which he functions changed.

SENIOR LEADERSHIP DEFINED

What, then, is leadership? At the lowest level, military leadership has been defined by the U.S. Army as follows: "Military leadership is a process by which a soldier influences others to accomplish the mission."[1] While this definition may be adequate for the leader with direct contact with subordinates, it does not adequately define the relationship and nature of leadership at the very senior levels. To close this gap, one can refer to U.S. Army Field Manual 22-103, "Leadership and Command at Senior Levels," which defines senior leadership as follows: "The

art of direct and indirect influence and the skill of creating the conditions for sustained organizational success to achieve the desired result."[2] Because leadership is an interactive phenomenon which is largely driven by the personality of the individual, coupled with the degree to which a subordinate responds to the beliefs, standards, and attitudes, perhaps a more detailed definition of senior leadership is as follows:

> The process of transmitting to the subordinate the values, attitudes, and beliefs of the leader in such a way that the subordinate identifies with the leader and subsequently internalizes the leader's standards of performance and goals of mission accomplishment.[3]

While I personally prefer the latter definition, what is relevant in both definitions is the implied interpersonal relationship between the leader and the led and the derivative loyalty. James Stokesbury supports this broad generalization when he says: "It is often preached that loyalty is a two-way street; unhappily, it is less often practiced. The potential leader cannot demand the unswerving loyalty of his followers unless he is willing to return it."[4] The degree that a leader can influence loyalty from his subordinates while simultaneously having them share his beliefs and attitudes is necessarily tied to certain abilities and attributes; the often-discussed "requirements for senior leadership." Having established the definition of leadership, it is now proper to focus on these requirements or characteristics.

ENDNOTES

1. U.S. Department of the Army, <u>Field Manual 22-100</u>,
21 October 1983, p. 4.

2. U.S. Department of the Army, <u>Field Manual 22-103</u>, 21 June
1987, p. 3.

3. Michael M. Zais, <u>Generalship and the Art of Senior
Command: Historical and Scientific Perspectives</u>, p. 21.

4. Robert L. Taylor, <u>et. al.</u>, <u>Military Leadership: In
Pursuit of Excellence</u>, p. 15.

CHAPTER II

THE QUALITIES OF LEADERSHIP

BACKGROUND

During our year of study at the U.S. Army War College, we are challenged to look reflectively across the spectrum of the military and to do so with a critical eye. As we did this with regard to leadership, it became patently clear that while the nature of war has significantly changed, those qualities essential for effective leadership appear to have changed little. At least one contemporary senior leader would agree with this assessment and probably go on to add that the ingredients for effective leadership are actually quite simple.

General Michael Davidson, Commander-in-Chief, U.S. Army Europe (CINCUSAREUR) from 1971-75, defined general officer qualifications as requiring "professional competence, dedication to duty, commitment to the profession and a little luck and timing."[1] While General Davidson's analysis of leadership qualities is certainly not all inclusive, it captures the essence of many military theoreticians. The most enduring of these theorists, Carl von Clausewitz, has perhaps given us the most balanced analysis of the ingredients of military genius.

Because Clausewitz wrote from the perspective of the warrior, his concept of the military genius is perhaps more credible than most scholars. For him, the essence of military leadership was

that to be found in combat where one lives in the realm of danger, and true genius is the blending of all the gifts of mind and temperament. In Chapter Three of his classic, On War, Clausewitz defined these "gifts" as including courage, strength of will, strength of characters, ambition, topographic understanding and statesmanship.[2] Based on experiences in Vietnam and because the next battlefield has the potential of being significantly more intense than previous conflicts, soldiers will require exceptional motivation in order to carry the fight to the enemy. Therefore, I would add to Clausewitz's traits the fact that the senior leader must understand and appreciate the requirement to build morale, motivate subordinates, and build cohesive units. Similarly, a positive edge can be obtained if leaders create an atmosphere which builds cohesive teams with high morale. The senior leader must understand the importance of these "combat multipliers" and create an atmosphere which encourages developing a well motivated soldier with high morale who is a member of a cohesive unit.

With that as a very cursory look at the concept of military genius, it is appropriate to examine these qualities in the context of senior leadership of the Vietnam era.

COURAGE

As was mentioned earlier, war exists in the realm of danger. Therefore, many authors identify this characteristic as a primary requisite for leadership. For Clausewitz, ". . .courage is the soldier's first requirement."[3] J. F. C. Fuller, writing primarily of British leadership deficiencies of the World War I era, would certainly agree. He writes:

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Neither a nation nor an army is a mechanical
contrivance, but a living thing, built of flesh and
blood and not of iron and steel. Courage is its
driving force; for, if human history be consulted,
it will immediately be discovered that in the past
all things worthwhile began their lives by some
one man, or woman, daring to do what others feared
to attempt.[4]

For Fuller, leaders must show courage in the face of danger

and experience the hardships of the soldier as he fights and lives

in the daily face of danger. General Davidson would agree. His

experiences during combat led him to believe that the leader must

demonstrate that element of physical courage in combat. However,

soldiers fail to respond positively to the leader who is reckless

in combat. To them, this "bravado" only increases the changes of

their being killed or wounded.[5]

Perhaps as the military leader progresses in rank and degree

of responsibility to the level of senior leadership, his exposure

to personal danger decreases. However, as this happens, he must

simultaneously become more attuned to the physical dangers sub-

ordinates face in combat. As Major General J. F. C. Fuller

points out, the potential impact of the senior leader losing sight

of the environment in which his men fight is significant:

Should the general consistently live outside the
realm of danger, then, though he may show high
moral courage in making decisions, by his never
being called upon to breathe the atmosphere of
danger his men are breathing, this lens will
become blurred, and he will seldom experience
the moral influences his men are experiencing.[6]

General William C. Westmoreland, Commander, U.S. Military

Assistance Command, Vietnam, from 1964 to 1968, also saw the

need for senior leader presence at the lowest level so that the
leader does not lose his perspective with regard to the combat
environment. He writes:

> Because of the nature of the war in Vietnam, the
> separation of units from each other, the numerous
> small, isolated installations, it was even more
> essential for the over-all commander to get out
> often into the field. . . .If decisions involving
> the field command were to be made, better to decide
> them where the feel of the situation and all the
> facts were at hand.[7]

Equally tied to the aspect of physical courage is that of
moral courage; that is, to accept responsibility for individual
actions and/or decisions as well as the degree of success of sub-
ordinate organizations. While General Westmoreland receives
significant criticism for U.S. Army problems in Vietnam, he cannot
be faulted for lacking the moral courage to accept responsibility
for the method by which the military prosecuted the war in Vietnam.
He well understood that the war in Vietnam was not without outside
influences and his responsibility was to fight the war within
approved parameters. As he states:

> A commander must learn to live with frustration,
> interference, irritation, disappointment, and
> criticism, as long as he can be sure they do not
> contribute to failure. I suffered my problems in
> Vietnam because I believed that success eventually
> would be ours despite them, that they were not to
> be, as Napoleon put it, instruments of my army's
> downfall.[8]

STRENGTH OF WILL

Courage and presence of mind significantly bolster the
qualities of a leader when combined with the fact that the leader

retains his strength of character and remains calm even in the most trying times. This trait Clausewitz defined as "strength of will." To him, strength of will is the force which resists

> the ebbing of moral and physical strength, of the heart-rending spectacle of the dead and wounded, that the commander has to withstand first in himself, and then in all those who, directly or indirectly, have entrusted him with their thoughts and feelings, hopes and fears. As each man's strength gives out, as it no longer responds to his will, the inertia of the whole gradually comes to rest on the commander's will alone. The ardor of his spirit must rekindle the flame of purpose in all others; his inward fire must revive their hope. Only to the extent that he can do this will he retain his hold on his men and keep control. The burdens increase with the number of men in his command, and therefore the higher his position, the greater the strength of character he needs to bear the mounting load.[9]

In war, suffering and danger could well lead to emotions ruling the intellect. Therefore, the great commander must remain calm, sort through the information provided, make a decision, and stick by that decision. By being stable and constant, the commander can set the command climate which will cause others to apply judgment and principle as decisions are made. As noted, for Clausewitz strength of will consisted of both the physical and moral dimensions. In the opinion of this writer, this moral aspect of one's character is singularly important at all levels of leadership and is directly related to the Clausewitzian concept of strength of will.

In the military profession, it is particularly important that the leadership be committed to the development of character so

that moral strength will not ebb; even in the toughest of times. Because of the significance of loyalty and the dynamics of superior to subordinate relationships, it is the leader who must set the standard; when he fails, those under him also fail. Unfortunately, the ethical dimension of character suffered significantly in the Vietnam era. Even the manner by which the senior leadership chose to measure the effectiveness of combat operations contributed to this. Specifically, success was measured by such things as the number of enemy killed, quantity of weapons captured, number of hamlets pacified, etc. This resort to statistics had the obvious results of false reporting and inflated numbers.

Moral issues were also raised as drug use was swept under the table. Richard Gabriel and Paul Savage, in <u>Crisis in Command</u>, make the point that: "The failure of the officer corps to come to grips with the problem of drug use in Vietnam represented a clear failure of moral expectations."[10] Attempts were made to cover up the My Lai incident and general officers became involved in Post Exchange thefts and illegal selling of captured weapons. All of the incidents contributed to the degeneration of basic moral fiber of the military and certainly reduced the faith which civilians placed in their military. In fact, this faith was so badly shaken that only in recent years have we recovered.

AMBITION

Another aspect of the gifted leader is that he must have ambition. As Clausewitz indicates:

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> Other emotions may be more common and more
> venerated--patriotism, idealism, vengance, enthusiasm
> of every kind--but they are no substitute for a
> thirst for fame and honor. They may, indeed, rouse
> the mass to action and inspire it, but they cannot
> give the commander the ambition to strive higher
> than the rest, as he must if he is to distinguish
> himself.[11]

Certainly, without ambition one will not make it to the high-est ranks--nor should he. To be without ambition indicates an acceptance of mediocrity. However, ambition should always be tempered with morality and should not manifest itself in the form of careerism. Unfortunately, the Vietnam era almost made the term a household word. Earlier, the method of statistically evaluating combat effectiveness and its impact on ethics was discussed. It is interesting to note that Richard Betts, author of Soldiers, States-men and Cold War Crises, contributes this same reporting system to the escalation of careerism. He says:

> In the case of Vietnam reporting, both factors--
> fraud and dysfunction--played a mutually rein-
> forcing role. The incentives of bureaucratic
> careerism (ambition, materialism, and the concep-
> tion of being an officer as a job rather than a
> vocation) abetted the organizational dynamics of
> inaccurate reporting and over-optimism and contra-
> dicted the classic standards of military profes-
> sionalism (realism, honor, asceticism, and
> sacrifice).[12]

Obviously contributing to careerism during the Vietnam era were such things as short command tours, the drive to rotate as many young officers into combat as possible, the disintegration of command relationships, and the statistical methods of measuring success. Certainly none of the decisions which created the

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environment for careerism were designed to do so. However, we certainly should have learned from the experience that all leaders must temper the absolute need to succeed with an unbending ethical code.

GRASP OF TOPOGRAPHY

As noted by Clausewtiz, those qualities previously discussed deal with the manner in which the mind and temperament work together. For him, the gifted military leader had one quality which involved only the intellect; that is, the ability to understand the relationship between warfare and terrain. He says:

> This relationship, to begin with, is a permanent factor--so much so that one cannot conceive of a regular army operating except in a definite space. Second, its importance is decisive in the highest degree, for it affects the operation of all forces, and at times entirely alters them.[13]

Certainly, Vietnam validated the primacy terrain plays in combat. Technology also played an important role in overcoming terrain-limiting factors. For instance, the helicopter came to play a singularly important role as leaders sought ways to move over thick jungle terrain. Also, because the jungle provided an excellent hiding ground, defoliants were used to remove the jungle and deny its use to the enemy. Unfortunately, in some cases destruction of the jungle served to drive the local population to further support the enemy.

Similarly, combat tactics such as search-and-destruction missions did little to assure the population that burning their

homes and destroying their crops were in their best interests. As one author notes:

> An effect of the aggressive search-and-destroy tactics was that towns and villages were bombed and burned, and crops and vegetation destroyed by herbicides, sending hordes of refugees into over-crowded cities and thereby corrupting Vietnamese society in hideous fashion.[14]

This aside, Vietnam did serve to validate the absolute need for leadership to diligently study topography and know the area in which he will fight better than his enemy.

STATESMANSHIP

The final quality of military genius as posited by Clausewitz is that of statesmanship. He felt very strongly that the senior military leader must be closely attuned to the desired political results if the military campaign were to be successful. He writes:

> We argue that a commander-in-chief must also be a statesman, but he must not cease to be a general. On the other hand, he is aware of the entire political situation; on the other, he knows exactly how much he can achieve with the means at his disposal.[15]

General Bruce Palmer clearly understood the significance of the relationship between the political and military objectives. Newly selected to command the XVIIIth Airborne Corps as the crisis in the Dominican Republic surfaced in 1965, he was given the mission of bringing and keeping peace in that country. As he approached the operation, he made significant assessments which were to enhance the ultimate success of his mission.

(1) The situation in the Dominican Republic was
as much political as military and the U.S. poli-
tical and military leaders must command together.

(2) In an operation of this type, the commander
must be closely tied with the political leadership
to ensure all elements of national power are closely
integrated to achieve national objectives.

(3) The political leader must be in charge and
define what force is to be used.[16]

Unfortunately, this same degree of cohesion between the mili-

tary objectives and political direction was not realized with

regard to the conflict in Vietnam. Point in fact, there was no

consistent national policy objective in Vietnam. Regarding this,

General Palmer writes: -

> In Vietnam. . .we lacked a clear objective and an
> attainable strategy of a decisive nature, and we
> relinquished the advantages of the strategic offen-
> sive to Hanoi. The best of initiatives, resources,
> exemplary conduct, and fighting spirit cannot make
> up for these deficiencies.[17]

Important, too, is the fact that there was no public consensus for

fighting the war. This has led such leaders as General Michael

Davidson to indicate that the difficulty in fighting the war in

Vietnam rested with the fact that militarily we should never have

been there in the first place.[18]

This is not meant to infer that senior leaders in Vietnam were

not aware of the importance of coupling military actions with poli-

tical direction. What it is intended to indicate is that one

possible contributor to the military failure in Vietnam was the

lack of specific national direction. As Colonel David Twining of

the U.S. Army War College has noted:

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Since U.S. military and political objectives were
never clear--largely because victory in the classi-
cal sense was not sought and the war's relevance to
the national interest was clouded at best--the
enemy retained the initiative.[19]

MORALE, MOTIVATION, AND COHESION

Because of the already discussed and intuitively obvious rela-

tionship between leadership and followership, I have singled out

the ability to build a cohesive unit as a requisite of leadership.

Certainly, we should have learned of the importance of this aspect

of leadership during the Vietnam era. Although a generalization,

the command climate in Vietnam certainly must have contributed to

lowered morale, motivation, and the disintegration of cohesion.

Such policies as one-year combat tours and the rotation of

commanders every six months did little to maintain unit integrity

and contribute to team building. The quality of small unit leader-

ship was also lacking at a time when the strongest leadership was

needed to sustain soldiers in combat. Richard Gabriel and Paul

Savage have noted:

> The lack of effective and professional officers to
> act as catalysts in the process of military social-
> ization probably caused disintegration to be
> accelerated by other factors.[20]

In fairness to the military leadership, it should be pointed out

that some decisions impacting negatively on morale, motivation and

cohesion were driven by politics, especially with regard to the

quality of junior leaders. As Gabriel and Savage point out:

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With regard to Vietnam, for example, such linkages were evident in the adoption of a rotation policy designed to avoid putting the United States on a war footing, the isolating of elites in colleges which served to reduce the high-quality pool of potential officers.[21]

While one might not agree with all of the conclusions Gabriel and Almond arrived at in their book, Crisis in Command, the fact that individual morale and unit cohesion disintegrated should not be contentious. It should also be recognized that the intensity of the next battlefield will require an exceptionally cohesive unit to facilitate. This necessity for close bonding has led General Walter F. Ulmer, Jr., to state, "We may have to spend more of our teaching efforts on the analysis of climate in which we lead than on the individual leadership methods."[22]

Unfortunately, the Vietnam conflict had second order effects in the European theater. In fact, Europe became a filler base for Vietnam with significant personnel shortages and high turnover rates. As articulated by General James H. Polk, CINCUSAREUR from 1967-71, "The shortage of company-grade leadership and high turn-over rate, coupled with drug problems, detracted from unit cohesion."[23] General Polk also recognized senior leader morality and ethical performance in Vietnam had, in some cases, been lacking and thus a contributor to the lowering of morale and disintegration of unit cohesion. Among the methods chosen to combat this problem was his decision to increase the emphasis on senior officer morality and ethics.[24]

When General Davidson replaced General Polk as CINCUSAREUR in 1971, he agreed with the latter's assessment that morale was a

major problem. Perhaps a major contributor to this problem was the impact of the war in Vietnam and the fact that troop and equipment requirements had resulted in the European theater receiving little attention by the national leadership. Nonetheless, leadership failures had certainly contributed to high crime rates, nonexistent training programs, poor appearance, rampant race problems. He also felt that leadership authority had been undermined by the permissiveness of the Volunteer Army Program (VOLAR).

General Davidson's program to restore the warfighting capability of the Army in Europe included the creation of a disciplined environment which entailed the communication of leadership to the lowest level. Additionally, he placed emphasis on an aggressive Equal Opportunity Program which was aimed at diffusing the racial problem. Similarly, he attacked rampant drug abuse on all fronts; An integrated effort by commanders, medical specialists, social workers, chaplains, and law enforcement officials was directed to identification, treatment, and discipline of the drug abuser.[25] The direction of General Davidson's efforts is important because it appropriately illustrates the primacy of morale and cohesion with regard to individual and organizational performance. Without these factors, building and maintaining an effective military unit is virtually impossible.'

ENDNOTES

1. Oral history interview with Michael S. Davidson, General (Retired), 1976, p. 1-12.

2. Carl von Clausewitz, On War, edited and translated by Michael Howard and Peter Paret, pp. 101-111.

3. Ibid., p. 101.

4. J. F. C. Fuller, Generalship: Its Diseases and Their Cures, p. 2.

5. Davidson, p. 1-17.

6. Fuller, p. 10.

7. General William C. Westmoreland, A Soldier Reports, p. 269.

8. Ibid., p. 262.

9. Clausewitz, p. 105-108.

10. Richard A. Gabriel and Paul L. Savage, Crisis in Command, p. 60.

11. Clausewitz, p. 105.

12. Richard K. Betts, Soldiers, Statesmen and Cold War Crises, pp. 184-185.

13. Clausewitz, p. 109.

14. Robert J. Donovan, Nemesis: Truman and Johnson in the Coils of War in Asia, p. 91.

15. Clausewitz, pp. 111-112.

16. Oral history interview with Bruce Palmer, Jr., General (Retired), 1976, pp. 154-170.

17. General Bruce Palmer, Jr., The 25-Year War, p. 193.

18. Davidson, pp. 4-32/34.

19. David Twining, "Vietnam and the Six Criteria for Waging War," in Assessing the Vietnam War, ed., by Lloyd T. Matthews and Dale E. Brown, p. 224.

20. Gabriel and Savage, p. 78.

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21. <u>Ibid.</u>, p. 33.

22. Lieutenant General (Retired) W. F. Ulmer, Jr., "Notes on Leadership for the 1980s," <u>Military Review</u>, July 1980, p. 10.

23. Oral history interview with James H. Polk, General (Retired), 1972, p. 96.

24. <u>Ibid.</u>, p. 53.

25. Davidson, p. 5-12.

CHAPTER III

EXTERNAL INFLUENCES

BACKGROUND

Having simply established some of the characteristics of the
gifted leader is not sufficient to justify a conclusion that
possession of these characteristics will necessarily make one a
talented senior leader. Rather, it could well be argued that these
characteristics must be viewed within the context of the environ-
ment in which the senior leader will exercise his talents. With
regard to environment, we are speaking of those factors which have
a probability of exerting influence on the decision maker. To
illustrate these myriad factors as they influence army management
decisions, the Department of Command, Leadership and Management at
the U.S. Army War College developed the model depicted below.[1]

EXTERNAL INFLUENCES ON
ARMY MANAGEMENT DECISIONS
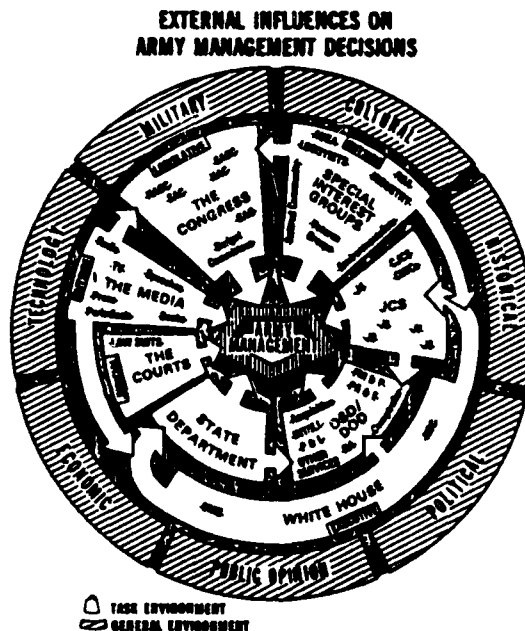
Although the War College model was not intended to describe environmental influences on the senior leader as an individual, I felt it was an excellent vehicle to visually illustrate the leadership environment. Because of this complexity, the scope of this paper precludes an analysis of each of the separate factors. Rather, those considered most influential during the Vietnam era (political, public opinion, and the news media organizations) will be discussed.

POLITICAL

As we moved into the Vietnam era, perhaps more so than ever before, outside influences began to exert tremendous pressure on the military decision maker. In particular, political decisions have increasingly played a part in determining the latitude the military commander has with regard to the tactical mission. A primary political decision that was to have a lasting negative impact on the military was the decision not to press the Vietnam conflict into North Vietnam. Interestingly, from the earliest the military leadership was vocal about the requirements for victory in the conflict. As Allen Betts notes, the members of the Joint Chiefs of Staff:

> . . .criticized the lack of definition in United
> States objectives, claimed their duty was "to
> define a militarily valid objective for Southeast
> Asia and then advocate a desirable military course
> of action to achieve that objective," maintained
> that success required destruction on North Vietnam's
> capabilities to support the Vietcong, and complained
> that "some current thinking appears to dismiss that
> objective in favor of a lesser objective.[2]

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Despite this predicted requirement for success, the military leadership continued to support escalation of United States ground troops; perhaps without really understanding the total implications of fighting a limited war which, by definition, was a defensive one. A war that was run by political decisions which made the act of leadership or prosecution of the conflict impossible. Two of these decisions made by President Johnson were particularly telling. These were: leading the American people to believe they could fight the war and build "The Great Society" simultaneously, and the decision not to mobilize the Reserve and National Guard forces.[3]

The failure to mobilize in support of the Vietnam conflict was significant; not only with regard to Vietnam but the failure also projected the problem into the European theater. Because that theater had become a filler base for Vietnam, personnel shortages and high turnover rates significantly detracted from the previously high state of readiness of the Army in Europe.[4]

These and other political decisions certainly impacted on the ability of the military to achieve desired goals and objectives. However, wars are fought within the realm of politics; the military leader must keep that fact always at the forefront. The political leader must be in charge and define what force is to be used.

The Vietnam conflict is an excellent example of what can happen when political objectives and military actions are not mutually supportive. At the other end of the spectrum--and a success story--was the military mission to restore peace in the

Dominican Republic in 1965. General Palmer well understood the political nature of his mission and the fact that the political representative and the military commander shared joint command.[5] While the Dominican situation in no way shares prominence with the complexities of Vietnam, it does serve to illustrate the increasingly political direction of warfighting. It also appropriately points out that military success is feasible when political ends and military means are complimentary.

PUBLIC OPINION

As was mentioned earlier, the failure to mobilize Reserve and National Guard assets in support of the Vietnam conflict was to have major negative impacts. In addition to force structure problems, it sent a significant signal to the American public that we were not fully committed to the war. Yet, we continued to pour resources into the conflict while the domestic situation and the economy of the United States suffered. The high costs of the war, in lives and materiel, was seen as unnecessary, and by 1967, public support for getting out of Vietnam was gaining momentum. Because the draftee who was to fight this war came from a society where many of the young were resorting to violence to protest the war, the military leadership should have been particularly sensitive to the potential negative impact of public opinion. This was apparently not the case.

Certainly it is the politician who must directly respond to public opinion, but the military leader must be aware of the impact

--or the potential impact--of faltering consensus. Bernard Brodie argues the military leader must consider the need for public support and should have been recommending a reduced presence in the 1968 timeframe. Despite decreasing military morale, he states:

> . . .Generals Maxwell Taylor and Earl Wheeler did everything in their power to induce the President not to moderate the intensity of the American participation in the war. . . .A wiser president would have ignored their advice; more strategically minded generals would have given better advice.[6]

Unfortunately, although senior military leaders recognized the potential failure of the U.S. strategy in Vietnam, they failed to communicate this to the President. As General Palmer points out:

> . . .our military leaders failed to get across the message that the U.S. strategy was not working and over time would probably fail to achieve stated U.S. objectives. Indeed, the JCS apparently did not clearly and unequivocally tell the President and the Secretary of Defense that the strategy was fatally flawed, and the U.S. objectives were not achievable unless the strategy was changed.[7]

The failure to adequately articulate recognized strategical problems no doubt prolonged the conflict and contributed to further fragmentation of public support. While it is not expected that the senior leader will fight any war based on public support, its effect certainly must be weighed as advice is given to the political leadership. Particularly with regard to potentially protracted conflicts, the senior leader would do well to remember the limits

of American support for a drawn-out conflict. We should remember what Alexis de Tocqueville observed of 19th Century America:

> Although war gratifies the army, it embarrasses and
> often exasperates that countless multitude of men
> whose minor passions every day require peace in
> order to be satisfied. Thus there is some risk
> of its causing, under another form, the very
> disturbance it is intended to prevent.
>
> No protracted war can fail to endanger the freedom
> of a democratic country.[9]

MEDIA ORGANIZATIONS

A significant contributor to declining public support for the Vietnam conflict was the tremendous impact of the print media and television coverage. With television, the harshness of combat was brought nightly into homes across the nation. Over the years, much has been said about the constitutional rights of media organizations to report that which they perceive to be news. With technological advances, satellite coverage, etc., the reach of the news reporter has expanded considerably.

Because news coverage which is controversial, exciting, and current increases print media readership or increases television share of audience, it would not appear prudent for the reporter to dwell on the mundane. Unfortunately, that which the reporter wants to cover or the slant of the story as he perceives it may not always be in agreement with the thoughts of the military leader. In fact, General Davidson singled out this point and others as he spoke of things that went wrong in the Vietnam conflict. He noted that there was a press relations failure because

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the press came to the Republic of Vietnam with the opinion that it was the wrong war and wrong place and wrote accordingly. The military leadership then added fuel to the volatile situation by failing to be candid to the news reporters.[32]

Repeatedly throughout the conflict, reporters and the military assumed an adversary relationship. So much so that reporter Drew Middleton indicates:

> There is the abiding conviction among officers who served in Vietnam that the press tended to exaggerate every setback in the field, every instance of troops getting out of hand, every alleged atrocity.[10]

Perceptions like this and the frequently voiced opinion of the military that the press and TV reporters were as much to blame for - "losing the war" as anyone contributed to a split between the military and media that must be mended. Unfortunately for the Army, the mending is slow to come. As a 1982 U.S. Army War College study pointed out, "In any future conflict, the overall attitude of senior Army officers toward the media would be extremely negative."[11]

Civilian business leaders, congressional leaders, and others subject to public scrutiny have long known of "the power of the press." Most have also learned to use it to their advantage. Similarly, guest lecturers at the U.S. Army War College this year have favorably commented with regard to the benefits the Navy realizes from what the speakers perceived as a cordial relationship with media representatives. We in the Army, and especially those in senior leadership positions, must acknowledge the need to work with the media and do so candidly. Equally important is the

need to recognize that various media organizations do report along biased lines. We must recognize these preconceptions and while maintaining our candid approach to business ensure the reporter clearly understands governmental policy and the military intent.

ENDNOTES

1. U.S. Army War College Reference Text, Army Command and Management: Theory and Practice, 1988-1989, p. 4-3.

2. Betts, p. 25.

3. Davidson, pp. 4-35/36.

4. Polk, p. 49.

5. Palmer interview, p. 170.

6. Bernard Brodie, War and Politics, p. 440.

7. Palmer, The 25-Year War, p. 201.

8. Alexis de Tocqueville, Democracy in America, edited and abridged by Richard D. Heffner, p. 278.

9. Davidson, pp. 4-35/37.

10. Drew Middleton, "Vietnam and the Military Mind," New York Times Magazine (January 10, 1982), p. 37.

11. Colonel Eagle Scott and Lieutenant Colonel Thomas C. Taylor, Trust and Confidence in Wartime Between Commanders and the Media: Are They Related to Field Press Censorship?, Carlisle Barracks, PA, USAWC, 1982, p. 18.

CHAPTER IV

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

CONCLUSIONS

As research for completion of this paper was conducted, it became apparent that contemporary leadership requirements have changed little from those discussed by Clausewitz some 200 years ago. That which has changed is the environment in which leadership actions will be accomplished. Technological advances have made combat potential much more deadly, the political direction of warfighting continues, and satellite news feeds capable of reporting to news agencies around the world from both sides of the battlefield continue to proliferate. All of these indicators point to the requirement for a senior leader to be the dynamic well-rounded individual pictured by Clausewitz. Similarly, because the leader/follower relationship is so important, the leader must pay particular attention to "people programs" designed to enhance individual morale and build cohesive units.

Interestingly, as I used the oral histories available in the archives of the Military History Institute, I could find no new and great formula for senior leadership success among those individuals I researched (Generals Davidson, Goodpaster, Palmer, and Polk). What I did find was the fact that successes came from directing efforts to people programs, improved ethical standards,

and improving soldier morale. To repeat examples previously
mentioned (and successful):

1. General Polk concerned himself with improved general offi-
cer morality and improved soldier morale. He attacked a signifi-
cant racial problem by placing emphasis on fairness. He saw this
as the most important quality in an officer but didn't think this
was the total answer to solving the racial problem in Europe.[1]

2. General Davidson continued to defuse the racial problem
in Europe by improving the environment in which the soldier--
particularly the minority soldier--served. He placed particular
emphasis on rehabilitation of barracks and dining facilities.[2] He
also placed emphasis to provide the soldier a disciplined environ-
ment in which to work and play.[3]

3. General Palmer recognized the potential impact of negative
press reports on the morale of subordinates and initiated an
extensive program to ensure everyone was correctly informed of what
was going on.[4] Similarly, he understood the significant political
nature of the military action in the Dominican Republic. He
stressed that he and the political representative (the U.S.
Ambassador) commanded jointly.[5]

While this list is certainly not sufficiently detailed to
provide any conclusions to shake leadership doctrine, it should
underscore my earlier conclusion; there is no great, unknown secret
to successful leadership at the senior level.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR DEVELOPMENT

Having laid out the characteristics of gifted senior leadership and discussed the complexity of the environment in which the senior leader can expect to function, the obvious follow-on question is simple. How do we train and develop this leader? To me, it is really quite easy. Using our existing Army school system-- with some shifting emphasis--we should continue to place emphasis on developing professional competence, human understanding and caring, and ethical conduct. The shifting emphasis must take place to ensure we correct deficiencies such as our ability to deal with the press and our senior leader's knowledge of important team building programs designed to enhance cohesion.

Our relationship with media representatives can improve if Army leadership accepts them for what they are--vendors of news-- and educating our officers, young and old, the methods by which we can best represent our service. Similarly, we must ensure our school system stresses the importence of building a cohesive unit in which soldier morale is placed high on everyone's priority list. Leaders cannot assimilate this knowledge through osmosis-- "How to" classes must be added to course curricula.

Because individual morale, unit cohesion, and loyalty up and down the chain of command are so important to success, we must ensure continued emphasis. Senior leader training must emphasize the necessity for a command climate which:

1. Encourages junior leader development by pushing responsibility to the lowest level.

2. Ensures leaders at all levels are attuned to the needs, aspirations, and concerns of all their subordinates.

3. Demands challenging training which is also realistic and meaningful.

As the senior leader moves along the spectrum of command which takes him increasingly further from the role of direct leadership, it is feasible that the importance of establishing the proper command climate will be forgotten. Yet, it is he who must set the very tone of the organization and provide the parameters of leadership around which subordinates can properly develop. Given a command climate which is open and encourages initiative by pushing authority to the lowest level, the young officer can grow into the role of the senior leader with competence and confidence. By maintaining the emphasis on cohesion, morale, and team building through the use of lectures and work sessions put on by such organizations as the Center for Creative Leadership, we can perpetuate the importance of these factors as they assist the commander to create unit excellence.

Similar to beginning to give added attention to the issue of command climate, we have made steps in the right direction to ensure leaders are aware of the absolute need for a better working relationship between the press and the Army leadership. However, based on the reaction to press representatives who attended the "Media Day" at the War College this year, we still have considerable distance to do. Perhaps we need to begin at the lowest level and continue emphasis through the General Staff and Senior Service colleges.

In summary, however, it is important to iterate our education system in the military is continuing to improve. As we continue to "tweak the system" as we did to compensate for shortfalls in Vietnam era leadership, we cannot help but grow professionally. Couple this military school system with judicious use of civilian colleges and institutions such as the Center for Creative Leadership in Greensboro, North Carolina, and we will, indeed, continue to develop senior leaders such as those highlighted in this paper.

ENDNOTES

1. Polk, p. 92.

2. Davidson, p. 5-3/7.

3. _Ibid._, p. 5-12.

4. Palmer interview, pp. 190-191

5. _Ibid._, p. 170.

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3. U.S. Army Military History Institute. Senior Officer Debriefing Program: General James H. Polk. 1972. Colonel Tausch.

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7. U.S. Department of the Army. Reference Text. Army Command and Management: Theory and Practice, 1988-1989. Carlisle Barracks: 26 August 1988.

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2. Ulmer, Walter F., Jr. "Notes on Leadership for the 1980s." Military Review, July 1980, p. 10.