SEGMENT YOUR FORCES

THE CONTROLLED-CHAOS STRATEGY

The critical elements in war are speed and adaptability--the ability to move and make decisions faster than the enemy. But speed and adaptability are hard to achieve today. We have more information than ever before at our fingertips, making interpretation and decision making more difficult. We have more people to manage, those people are more widely spread, and we face more uncertainty. Learn from Napoleon, warfare's greatest master: speed and adaptability come from flexible organization. Break your forces into independent groups that can operate and make decisions on their own. Make your forces elusive and unstoppable by infusing them with the spirit of the campaign, giving them a mission to accomplish, and then letting them run.

> *Finally, a most important point to be considered is that the revolutionary system of command employed by Napoleon was the outcome not of any technological advances, as one might expect, but merely of superior organization and doctrine. The technical means at the emperor's disposal were not a whit more sophisticated than those of his opponents; he differed from them in that he possessed the daring and ingenuity needed to transcend the limits that technology had imposed on commanders for thousands of years. Whereas Napoleon's opponents sought to maintain control and minimize uncertainty by keeping their forces closely concentrated, Napoleon chose the opposite way, reorganizing and decentralizing his army in such a way as to enable its parts to operate independently for a limited period of time and consequently tolerate a higher degree of uncertainty. Rather than allowing the technological means at hand to dictate the method of strategy and the functioning of command, Napoleon made profitable use of the very limitations imposed by the technology.*
>
> *COMMAND IN WAR*, MARTIN VAN CREVELD, 1985

CALCULATED DISORDER

In 1800, by defeating Austria in the Battle of Marengo, Napoleon gained control of northern Italy and forced the Austrians to sign a treaty recognizing French territorial gains there and in Belgium. For the next five years, an uneasy peace

held sway--but Napoleon crowned himself emperor of France, and many in Europe began to suspect that this Corsican upstart had limitless ambitions. Karl Mack, the Austrian quartermaster general and an older and influential member of the Austrian military, advocated a preemptive strike against France, with an army large enough to guarantee victory. He told his colleagues, "In war the object is to beat the enemy, not merely to avoid being beaten."

Mack and like-minded officers slowly gained influence, and in April 1805, Austria, England, and Russia signed a treaty of alliance to wage war on France and force her to return to her pre-Napoleonic borders. That summer they formulated their plan: 95,000 Austrian troops would attack the French in northern Italy, redressing the humiliating defeat of 1800. Another 23,000 troops would secure the Tyrol, between Italy and Austria. Mack would then lead a force of 70,000 men west along the Danube into Bavaria, preventing this strategically located country from allying itself with France. Once encamped in Bavaria, Mack and his army would await the arrival a few weeks later of 75,000 troops from Russia; the two armies would link up, and this unstoppable force would march west into France. Meanwhile the English would attack the French at sea. More troops would later be funneled into each war zone, making for an army totaling 500,000 men overall--the largest military force ever assembled in Europe up to that point. Not even Napoleon could withstand an army more than twice the size of his own, moving in on him from all sides.

In the middle of September, Mack began his phase of the campaign by advancing along the Danube to Ulm, in the heart of Bavaria. Having established his camp there, he felt hugely satisfied. Mack loathed disorder and uncertainty. He tried to think of everything in advance, to come up with a clear plan and make sure everyone stuck to it--"clockwork warfare," he called it. He thought his plan was perfect; nothing could go wrong. Napoleon was doomed.

Mack had once been captured and forced to spend three years in France, where he had studied Napoleon's style of war. A key Napoleonic strategy was to make the enemy divide his forces, but now the trick was reversed: with trouble in Italy, Napoleon could not afford to send more than 70,000 French troops across the Rhine into Germany and Bavaria. The moment he crossed the Rhine, the Austrians would know his intentions and would act to slow his march; his army would need at least two months to reach Ulm and the Danube. By then the Austrians would already have linked up with the Russians and swept through the Alsace and France. The strategy was as close to foolproof as any Mack had ever known. He savored the role he would play in destroying Napoleon, for he hated the man and all he represented--undisciplined soldiers, the fomenting of revolution throughout Europe, the constant threat to the status quo. For Mack the

Russians could not arrive in Ulm too soon.

> *We find our attention drawn repeatedly to what one might call "the organizational dimension of strategy." Military organizations, and the states that develop them, periodically assess their own ability to handle military threats. When they do so they tend to look at that which can be quantified: the number of troops, the quantities of ammunition, the readiness rates of key equipment, the amount of transport, and so on. Rarely, however, do they look at the adequacy of their organization as such, and particularly high level organization, to handle these challenges. Yet as Pearl Harbor and other cases suggest, it is in the deficiency of organizations that the embryo of misfortune develops.*
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> *MILITARY MISFORTUNES: THE ANATOMY OF FAILURE IN WAR*, ELIOT A. COHEN AND JOHN GOOCH, 1990

Near the end of September, however, Mack began to sense something wrong. To the west of Ulm lay the Black Forest, between his own position and the French border. Suddenly scouts were telling him that a French army was passing through the forest in his direction. Mack was bewildered: it made the best sense for Napoleon to cross the Rhine into Germany farther to the north, where his passage east would be smoother and harder to stop. But now he was yet again doing the unexpected, funneling an army through a narrow opening in the Black Forest and sending it straight at Mack. Even if this move were just a feint, Mack had to defend his position, so he sent part of his army west into the Black Forest to stem the French advance long enough for the Russians to come to his aid.

A few days later, Mack began to feel horribly confused. The French were proceeding through the Black Forest, and some of their cavalry had come quite far. At the same time, though, word reached Mack of a large French army somewhere to the north of his position. The reports were contradictory: some said this army was at Stuttgart, sixty miles northwest of Ulm; others had it more to the east or even farther to the north or--quite close, near the Danube. Mack could get no hard information, since the French cavalry that had come through the Black Forest blocked access to the north for reconnaissance. The Austrian general now faced what he feared most--uncertainty--and it was clouding his ability to think straight. Finally he ordered all of his troops back to Ulm, where he would concentrate his forces. Perhaps Napoleon intended to do battle at Ulm. At least Mack would have equal numbers.

In early October, Austrian scouts were at last able to find out what was really

going on, and it was a nightmare. A French army had crossed the Danube to the east of Ulm, blocking Mack's way back to Austria and cutting off the Russians. Another army lay to the south, blocking his route to Italy. How could 70,000 French soldiers appear in so many places at once? And move so fast? Gripped by panic, Mack sent probes in every direction. On October 11 his men discovered a weak point: only a small French force barred the way north and east. There he could push through and escape the French encirclement. He began to prepare for the march. But two days later, when he was on the point of ordering the retreat, his scouts reported that a large French force had appeared overnight, blocking the northeastern route as well.

On October 20, finding out that the Russians had decided not to come to his rescue, Mack surrendered. Over 60,000 Austrian soldiers were taken prisoner with hardly a shot fired. It was one of the most splendidly bloodless victories in history.

In the next few months, Napoleon's army turned east to deal with the Russians and remaining Austrians, culminating in his spectacular victory at Austerlitz. Meanwhile Mack languished in an Austrian prison, sentenced to two years for his role in this humiliating defeat. There he racked his brains (losing his sanity in the process, some said): Where had his plan gone wrong? How had an army appeared out of nowhere to his east, so easily swallowing him up? He had never seen anything like it, and he was trying to figure it out to the end of his days.

> *The fact that, historically speaking, those armies have been most successful which did not turn their troops into automatons, did not attempt to control everything from the top, and allowed subordinate commanders considerable latitude has been abundantly demonstrated. The Roman centurions and military tribunes; Napoleon's marshals; Moltke's army commanders; Ludendorff's storm detachments...--all these are examples, each within its own stage of technological development, of the way things were done in some of the most successful military forces ever.*
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> *COMMAND IN WAR*, MARTIN VAN CREVELD, 1985

Interpretation History should not judge General Mack too harshly, for the French armies he faced in the fall of 1805 represented one of the greatest revolutions in military history. For thousands of years, war had been fought in essentially the same way: the commander led his large and unified army into battle against an opponent of roughly equal size. He would never break up his army into smaller units, for that would violate the military principle of keeping

one's forces concentrated; furthermore, scattering his forces would make them harder to monitor, and he would lose control over the battle.

Suddenly Napoleon changed all that. In the years of peace between 1800 and 1805, he reorganized the French military, bringing different forces together to form the Grande Armee, 210,000 men strong. He divided this army into several corps, each with its own cavalry, infantry, artillery, and general staff. Each was led by a marshal general, usually a young officer of proven strength in previous campaigns. Varying in size from 15,000 to 30,000 men, each corps was a miniature army headed by a miniature Napoleon.

Patton's philosophy of command was: "Never tell people how to do things. Tell them what to do and they will surprise you with their ingenuity."

PATTON: A GENIUS FOR WAR, CARLO D'ESTE, 1995

The key to the system was the speed with which the corps could move. Napoleon would give the marshals their mission, then let them accomplish it on their own. Little time was wasted with the passing of orders back and forth, and smaller armies, needing less baggage, could march with greater speed. Instead of a single army moving in a straight line, Napoleon could disperse and concentrate his corps in limitless patterns, which to the enemy seemed chaotic and unreadable.

This was the monster that Napoleon unleashed on Europe in September 1805. While a few corps were dispatched to northern Italy as a holding force against Austria's planned invasion there, seven corps moved east into Germany in a scattered array. A reserve force with much cavalry was sent through the Black Forest, drawing Mack to the west--and so making it harder for him to understand what was happening to the north and easier to entrap. (Napoleon understood Mack's simple psychology and how the appearance of disorder would paralyze him.) Meanwhile, with Stuttgart as a pivot, the seven corps wheeled south to the Danube and cut off Mack's various escape routes. One corps marshal, hearing that the northeastern route was weakly held, did not wait for Napoleon to send orders but simply sped and covered it on his own. Wherever Mack went, he would hit a corps large enough to hold him until the rest of the French army could tighten the circle. It was like a pack of coyotes against a rabbit.

Agamemnon smiled and moved on, Coming next to the two captains Who shared the name Ajax As they were strapping on their helmets. Behind them a cloud of infantry loomed...Agamemnon Was glad to see them, and his words

flew out: "Ajax, both of you, Achaean commanders, I would be out of line if I issued you orders. You push your men to fight hard on your own. By Father Zeus, by Athena and Apollo, If all of my men had your kind of heart, King Priam's city would soon bow her head, Taken and ravaged under our hands."

THE ILIAD, HOMER, CIRCA NINTH CENTURY B.C.

Understand: the future belongs to groups that are fluid, fast, and nonlinear. Your natural tendency as a leader may be to want to control the group, to coordinate its every movement, but that will just tie you to the past and to the slow-moving armies of history. It takes strength of character to allow for a margin of chaos and uncertainty--to let go a little--but by decentralizing your army and segmenting it into teams, you will gain in mobility what you lose in complete control. And mobility is the greatest force multiplier of them all. It allows you to both disperse and concentrate your army, throwing it into patterns instead of advancing in straight lines. These patterns will confuse and paralyze your opponents. Give your different corps clear missions that fit your strategic goals, then let them accomplish them as they see fit. Smaller teams are faster, more creative, more adaptable; their officers and soldiers are more engaged, more motivated. In the end, fluidity will bring you far more power and control than petty domination.

Separate to live, unite to fight.

--Napoleon Bonaparte (1769-1821)

KEYS TO WARFARE

The world is full of people looking for a secret formula for success and power. They do not want to think on their own; they just want a recipe to follow. They are attracted to the idea of strategy for that very reason. In their minds strategy is a series of steps to be followed toward a goal. They want these steps spelled out for them by an expert or a guru. Believing in the power of imitation, they want to know exactly what some great person has done before. Their maneuvers in life are as mechanical as their thinking.

To separate yourself from such a crowd, you need to get rid of a common misconception: the essence of strategy is not to carry out a brilliant plan that proceeds in steps; it is to put yourself in situations where you have more options than the enemy does. Instead of grasping at Option A as the single right answer, true strategy is positioning yourself to be able to do A, B, or C depending on the

circumstances. That is strategic depth of thinking, as opposed to formulaic thinking.

Sun-tzu expressed this idea differently: what you aim for in strategy, he said, is *shih*, a position of potential force--the position of a boulder perched precariously on a hilltop, say, or of a bowstring stretched taut. A tap on the boulder, the release of the bowstring, and potential force is violently unleashed. The boulder or arrow can go in any direction; it is geared to the actions of the enemy. What matters is not following pre-ordained steps but placing yourself in *shih* and giving yourself options.

Napoleon was probably unaware of Sun-tzu's concept of *shih*, yet he had perhaps history's greatest understanding of it. Once he had positioned his seven corps in their seemingly chaotic pattern along the Rhine and his reserve forces in the Black Forest, he was in *shih*. Wherever Mack turned, whatever he did, the Austrians were doomed. Napoleon had endless options while Mack had only a few, and all of them bad.

> *It was during this period of post-war introspection and evaluation that one of the fundamental military concepts of Scharnhorst and Gneisenau coalesced into a clearly defined doctrine understandable to and understood by all officers in the Army. This was the concept of* Auftragstaktik *, or mission tactics. Moltke himself inserted in the draft of a new tactical manual for senior commanders the following lines: "A favorable situation will never be exploited if commanders wait for orders. The highest commander and the youngest soldier must always be conscious of the fact that omission and inactivity are worse than resorting to the wrong expedient."...Nothing epitomized the outlook and performance of the German General Staff, and of the German Army which it coordinated, more than this concept of mission tactics: the responsibility of each German officer and noncommissioned officer...to do without question or doubt whatever the situation required, as he saw it. This meant that he should act without awaiting orders, if action seemed necessary. It also meant that he should act contrary to orders, if these did not seem to be consistent with the situation. To make perfectly clear that action contrary to orders was not considered either as disobedience or lack of discipline, German commanders began to repeat one of Moltke's favorite stories, of an incident observed while visiting the headquarters of Prince Frederick Charles. A major, receiving a tongue-lashing from the Prince for a tactical blunder, offered the excuse that he had been obeying orders, and reminded the Prince that a Prussian officer was taught that an order from a superior was tantamount to an order from the King. Frederick Charles*

promptly responded: "His Majesty made you a major because he believed you would know when not to obey his orders." This simple story became guidance for all following generations of German officers.

A GENIUS FOR WAR: THE GERMAN ARMY AND GENERAL STAFF, 1807-1945, COLONEL T.N. DUPUY, 1977

Napoleon had always aimed at his version of *shih*, and he perfected it in the 1805 campaign. Obsessed with structure and organization, he developed the corps system, building flexibility into the very skeleton of his army. The lesson is simple: a rigid, centralized organization locks you into linear strategies; a fluid, segmented army gives you options, endless possibilities for reaching *shih*. Structure *is* strategy--perhaps the most important strategic choice you will make. Should you inherit a group, analyze its structure and alter it to suit your purposes. Pour your creative energy into its organization, making fluidity your goal. In doing so you will be following in the footsteps not only of Napoleon but of perhaps the greatest war machine in modern times, the Prussian (and later German) army.

Shortly after Napoleon's devastating defeat of the Prussians at the Battle of Jena in 1806 (see chapter 2), the Prussian leaders did some soul-searching. They saw they were stuck in the past; their way of doing things was too rigid. Suddenly the military reformers, including Carl von Clausewitz, were taken seriously and given power. And what they decided to do was unprecedented in history: they would institutionalize success by designing a superior army structure.

At the core of this revolution was the creation of a general staff, a cadre of officers specially trained and educated in strategy, tactics, and leadership. A king, a prime minister, or even a general might be incompetent at war, but a group of brilliant and well-trained officers on the army's staff could compensate for his failures. The structure of this body was unfixed: each new chief of staff could alter its size and function to suit his needs and the times. After each campaign or training exercise, the staff would rigorously examine itself and its performance. A whole section was created for the purpose of these examinations and for the study of military history. The general staff would learn from its mistakes and those of others. It was to be a work permanently in progress.

The most important reform was the development of the *Auftragstaktik* (mission-oriented command system). In German there are two words for "command": *Auftrag* and *Befehl*. A *Befehl* is an order to be obeyed to the letter. An *Auftrag* is much more general: it is a statement of overall mission, a directive to be followed in its spirit, not its letter. The *Auftragstaktik*--inspired by Prussia's

archenemy Napoleon and the leeway he gave his marshals--permeated the general staff. Officers were first inculcated with the philosophy of German warfare: speed, the need to take the offensive, and so on. Then they were put through exercises to help them develop their ability to think on their own, to make decisions that met the overall philosophy but responded to the circumstances of the moment. Leading the equivalent of a corps in battle, officers were given missions to accomplish and then were let loose. They were judged by the results of their actions, not on how those results were achieved.

The general staff (with a few interruptions) was in place from 1808 to the end of World War II. During that period the Germans consistently outfought other armies in the field-including the Allies in World War I, despite the severe limitations of trench warfare. Their success culminated in the most devastating military victory in modern history: the 1940 blitzkrieg invasion of France and the Low Countries, when the German army ran rings around the rigid defenses of the French. It was the structure of their army, and their use of the *Auftragstaktik*, that gave them more options and greater potential force.

The German general staff should serve as the organizational model for any group that aims at mobility and strategic depth. First, the staff's structure was fluid, allowing its leaders to adapt it to their own needs. Second, it examined itself constantly and modified itself according to what it had learned. Third, it replicated its structure through the rest of the army: its officers trained the officers below them, and so on down the line. The smallest team was inculcated with the overall philosophy of the group. Finally, rather than issuing rigid orders, the staff embraced the mission command, the *Auftragstaktik*. By making officers and soldiers feel more creatively engaged, this tactic improved their performance and sped up the decision-making process. Mobility was written into the system.

The key to the *Auftragstaktik* is an overall group philosophy. This can be built around the cause you are fighting for or a belief in the evil of the enemy you face. It can also include the style of warfare--defensive, mobile, ruthlessly aggressive--that best suits it. You must bring the group together around this belief. Then, through training and creative exercises, you must deepen its hold on them, infuse it into their blood. Now, when you unleash your corps on their missions, you can trust their decisions and feel confident in your power to coordinate them.

The Mongol hordes led by Genghis Khan in the first half of the thirteenth century were perhaps the closest precursors to Napoleon's corps. Genghis, who preached a philosophy of Mongol superiority, was a master of mobility in warfare. His segmented forces could disperse and concentrate in complicated patterns; the armies that faced them were shocked at how chaotic they seemed,

so impossible to figure out, yet they maneuvered with amazing coordination. Mongol soldiers knew what to do, and when, without being told. For their victims the only explanation was that they were possessed by the devil.

The sinister coordination of the Mongols, however, was actually the result of rigorous training. Every winter in peacetime, Genghis would run the Great Hunt, a three-month-long operation in which he would scatter the entire Mongol army along an eighty-mile line in the steppes of Central Asia and what is now Mongolia. A flag in the ground hundreds of miles away marked the hunt's endpoint. The line would advance, driving before it all the animals in its path. Slowly, in an intricately choreographed maneuver, the ends of the line would curve to form a circle, trapping the animals within. (The hunt's endpoint would form the center of the circle.) As the circle tightened, the animals were killed; the most dangerous of them, the tigers, were left till last. The Great Hunt exercised the Mongols' ability to communicate through signals at a distance, coordinate their movements with precision, know what to do in different circumstances, and act without waiting for orders. Even bravery became an exercise, when individual soldiers would have to take on a tiger. Through hunting and a form of play, Genghis could instill his philosophy, develop cohesion and trust among his men, and tighten his army's discipline.

> [*Tom*] *Yawkey was thirty years old when he bought the Red Sox, a hopelessly bankrupt team that had won only forty-three games the previous season and averaged only 2,365 paying customers. The ball club became his toy. Because he loved his players, he spoiled them rotten. And because he spoiled them rotten, they praised him to the skies.... There is a well-publicized exchange in which Bobby Doerr asks Tommy Henrich why the Red Sox weren't able to beat the Yankees in big games. "Weren't we good enough?" Doerr asks. It wasn't that they weren't good enough, Henrich answers. "Your owner was too good to you. The Red Sox didn't have to get into the World Series to drive Cadillacs. The Yankees did."... [The Red Sox organization] was an amateur operation...pitted against the toughest, most professional operation of all time.*
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> *HITTER: THE LIFE AND TURMOILS OF TED WILLIAMS*, ED LINN, 1993

In unifying your own hordes, find exercises to increase your troops' knowledge of and trust in each other. This will develop implicit communication skills between them and their intuitive sense of what to do next. Time will not then be wasted in the endless transmission of messages and orders or in constantly monitoring your troops in the field. If you can disguise these

exercises as play, as in the Great Hunt, so much the better.

Throughout the 1940s and '50s, two great baseball organizations did battle: the Boston Red Sox, built around Ted Williams, and the New York Yankees, with their great hitter Joe DiMaggio. The owner of the Red Sox, Tom Yawkey, believed in pampering his players, creating a pleasant environment for them, developing friendships with them. A happy team would play well, he thought. For this purpose he went drinking with his men, played cards with them, checked them in to nice hotels on tour. He also meddled in managerial decisions, always with an eye toward making things better for his players and keeping them happy.

The Yankees' philosophy was very different, emphasizing discipline and victory at all costs. The organization's separate parts stayed out of one another's business--they understood the team ethos and knew they would be judged on results. The manager was left to make his own decisions. Yankee players felt an intense need to live up to the team's winning traditions; they were afraid of losing.

In those two decades, the Red Sox players fought among themselves, fell into factions, whined and complained at any perceived slight, and won just one pennant. The Yankees were cohesive and spirited; they won thirteen pennants and ten World Series. The lesson is simple: do not confuse a chummy, clublike atmosphere with team spirit and cohesion. Coddling your soldiers and acting as if everyone were equal will ruin discipline and promote the creation of factions. Victory will forge stronger bonds than superficial friendliness, and victory comes from discipline, training, and ruthlessly high standards.

Finally, you need to structure your group according to your soldiers' strengths and weaknesses, to their social circumstances. To do that you must be attuned to the human side of your troops; you must understand them, and the spirit of the times, inside and out.

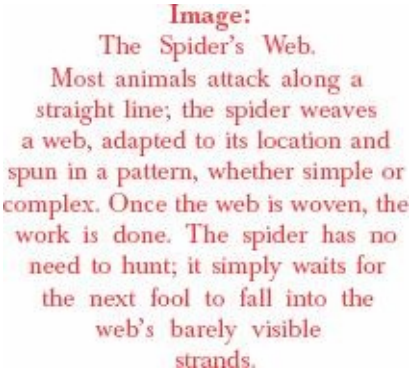
In a real sense, maximum disorder was our equilibrium.

T. E. LAWRENCE, 1885-1935

During the American Civil War, the Union generals struggled with the ragtag nature of their army. Unlike the disciplined, well-trained troops of the Confederacy, many Northern soldiers had been forcibly conscripted at the last minute; they were pioneers, rugged frontiersmen, and they were fiercely independent. Some generals tried desperately to instill discipline, and mostly they failed. Others just paid attention to map strategy, while their armies continued to perform badly.

General William Tecumseh Sherman had a different solution: he changed his organization to suit the personalities of his men. He created a more democratic army, encouraged initiative in his officers, let them dress as they saw fit; he loosened outward discipline to foster morale and group spirit. Like frontiersmen generally, his soldiers were restless and nomadic, so he exploited their mobility and kept his army in perpetual motion, always marching faster than his enemies could. Of all the Union armies, Sherman's were the most feared and performed the best.

Like Sherman, do not struggle with your soldiers' idiosyncrasies, but rather turn them into a virtue, a way to increase your potential force. Be creative with the group's structure, keeping your mind as fluid and adaptable as the army you lead.



Authority: Thus the army...moves for advantage, and changes through segmenting and reuniting. Thus its speed is like the wind, its slowness like the forest; its invasion and plundering like a fire.... It is as difficult to know as the darkness; in movement it is like thunder.

--The Art of War, *Sun-tzu, (fourth century B.C.)*

REVERSAL

Since the structure of your army has to be suited to the people who compose it, the rule of decentralization is flexible: some people respond better to rigid authority. Even if you run a looser organization, there may be times when you will have to tighten it and give your officers less freedom. Wise generals set nothing in stone, always retaining the ability to reorganize their army to fit the times and their changing needs.