The 7 Leader Questions

Tactical Questions for Leaders to Ask Before, During, and After Operations

Foreword by Teddy Kleisner, Colonel, U.S. Army

Thomas E. Meyer

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Cover Photo Credit: Soldiers begin the movement phase during a combined arms live-fire exercise at Schofield Barracks, Hawaii, August 9, 2018. The exercise is part of an overall training progression to maintain combat readiness for the 21st Infantry Regiment, 2nd Infantry Brigade Combat Team, 25th Infantry Division, in preparation for a Joint Readiness Training Center rotation later this year. (U.S. Army photo by 1st Lt. Ryan DeBooy)

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This is a publication of The Company Leader. A free digital version of this document is available after subscribing to the website at http://companyleader.themilitaryleader.com.

This project is dedicated to the soldiers, non-commissioned officers, and officers of the 23rd Infantry Regiment–past and present, but specifically circa 2015-2017. All leaders in their own rights, these dedicated pros made coming to work every day a privilege. Their focus on perfecting their craft, competing, winning, and being brilliant deliverers of fire and maneuver was a testament to the legacy they carried. Tomahawks! We Serve!

Table of Contents

Combined arms manewer live fire exercises are just one facet of preparing leaders for the realities of armed combat. The studious reflection of war's tenants and timeless principles is as critical aspect of preparing for the next fight. Photo retrieved from 1st Battalion, 12th Infantry Regiment, August 14, 2019, Fort Carson, Colorado. U.S. Army Photo by Capt. Chelsea Hall.

"Prepare for the unknown by studying how others in the past have coped with the unforeseeable and the unpredictable."
-General George S. Patton

Foreword

Teddy Kleisner, Col., U.S. Army

The 7 Leader Questions extends one of our battalion's favorite leader professional development (LPD) subjects to a much broader audience of military leaders. These questions; and their use as a construct for planning, executing, and evaluating tactical operations; evolved over the course of three years. This evolution is thanks to the toil, reflection, and dialogue among the leaders of 1st Battalion, 23rd Infantry and the members of our Pacific Pathways task force. Originally only five, the use of these questions is an attempt to guide the fundamental calculus of tactical leaders in battle. We added to the questions over time as training events revealed their shortcomings.

Later, we broadened a few of them to make them applicable beyond just tactical problems. We reordered them to better capture their interrelation. It was our pleasure to revisit these questions with our fellow Marines and international partners from India, Thailand, Korea, and the Philippines. Over the course of multiple partnered and allied exercises, the seven questions, as they exist today and in this paper, bear the mark of so many officers and non-commissioned officers (NCOs) that it is

no longer fair to attribute them to any single author. We can only attribute them to a team of pros who'd cared deeply enough about our profession and its obligation to win battles to rigorously explore some of its fundamental truths. It is my honor to join all those who participated in developing this construct, to capture *The 7 Leader Questions* and present them to a broader audience who can continue to debate their merit and refine them. We Serve!!

- TK
Theodore W. Kleisner
Col., U.S. Army

Introduction

Leaders have used questions as tools to encourage critical thought and analysis ever since Plato employed the maieutic method roughly 2,400 years ago, which he developed from the pedagogical approach of his teacher, Socrates. The philosopher would ask his pupils a series of questions to reveal the claims and counter-claims of a particular topic, and in doing so he would "facilitate knowledge acquisition" about the issue at hand.[i] The maieutic method puts into practice the notion that before we can acquire the knowledge to solve problems, we must first ask questions to better understand the context of those problems. The art of asking good questions remains a relevant problem-solving technique.

Albert Einstein, one of the most famous theoreticians of the modern era, articulated the supremacy of asking questions in his own problem-solving strategy when he asserted, "If I had an hour to solve a problem and my life depended on the solution, I would spend the first 55 minutes determining the proper question to ask… for once I know the proper question, I could solve the problem in less than five minutes."[ii] Einstein's emphasis on asking questions illustrates how one must identify and contextualize variables before solving for them. Whether

developing theories in astrophysics or clarifying understanding through philosophy, leaders must first ask questions. This is also the case for how military leaders should approach the challenges they face.

United States military doctrine reinforces the importance of asking questions to better understand the world in which we operate. In Army Design Methodology, for example, we teach planners to inquire about the differences between the current state of the operational environment and the desired end-state. Furthermore, early in the Military Decision Making Process, staff officers must issue a problem statement that interrogates which obstacles are "impeding progress toward the desired end-state."[iii] The art of asking questions does not stop at the organizational-level. At every echelon, the Army teaches its leaders to systematically think through variables before they act. But sometimes it is difficult to determine which questions are the right ones to ask, especially in time and resource constrained environments.

The 7 Leader Questions encourage critical thought and analysis to help leaders contextualize the collective action problems they face. The questions help leaders visualize, describe, direct, and assess conditions throughout the operations process. Leaders can use *The 7 Leader Questions* to clarify current operations, but they

can also use them as a construct to prepare for future operations. Our commanders personally found these questions useful to focus tactical decisions during training exercises and deployments. Leaders across the organization grew in their thinking when applying them to tactical decision games and other leader professional development opportunities.

General Patton once argued that organizations should "prepare for the unknown by studying how others in the past have coped with the unforeseeable and the unpredictable." Here, we employ General Patton's advice and apply *The 7 Leader Questions* as an outline to study how others in the past answered these questions and contextualized the unforeseeable and unpredictable experiences that leaders will inevitably face. In so doing, readers experience stories from across history, literature, and popular culture to answer these seven questions and facilitate knowledge acquisition *before* they are required to answer the questions for themselves in trying crucible of ground combat.

End Notes

[i] Lee, Fiona. "Platonic Dialogue, Maieutic Method and Critical Thinking." *Journal of Philosophy of Education*, Vol. 41, No. 3, 2007.
[ii] Flavell Lab, Massachusetts Institute of Technology. http://flavell.mit.edu/2017/04/26/hour-solve-problem-life-depended-solution-spend-first-55-minutes-determining-proper-question-ask-know-proper-question-coul/
[iii] Department of the Army. (2012). *ADRP 5-0, The Operations Process*. Washington, DC: Army Publishing Directorate.

The Construct and its Creation

The 7 Leader Questions began with the reflections of a Lieutenant Colonel preparing to lead an infantry battalion. The first question started as "Am I dominating terrain?" It evolved into "Am I on good ground?" The other questions followed. In its reorganization, it is meant to flow as linearly as a battle might while also understanding that tactical operations are fluid and iterative.

Question 1: What is my mission/commander's intent?

Question 2: Am I on good ground?

Question 3: Where is the probable line of contact?

Question 4: Are conditions changing, have they already changed, and how will I know when they've changed?

Question 5: Where should I be now? And where should I be next?

Question 6: Who else needs to know what I know now?

Question 7: How many crises/opportunities can I handle at once?

In our unit (1st Battalion, 23rd Infantry Regiment), the development and application of these questions shaped our thinking. Over the course of two years, these questions became a construct for developing tactically-minded and cognitively-agile leaders. We employed them in leader professional development (LPD), taught during tactical exercises without troops (TEWT) and tactical decision games (TDG), evaluated in situational training exercises (STX) and live fire exercises (LFX), and assessed during after-action reviews (AAR).

These questions and their answers became second nature to leaders. During training exercises, it wouldn't be uncommon for a leader to react intuitively to changing circumstances without deliberately considering Question 4. In other cases, a subordinate leader might communicate to higher that he had reached his maximum number of crises and was decisively engaged with the current problem-set. The questions, as an analytical framework, became a common lexicon across the formation. To better understand them here, we tie each to a historical or popular-culture case-study.

Chapter 1
Mission & Intent

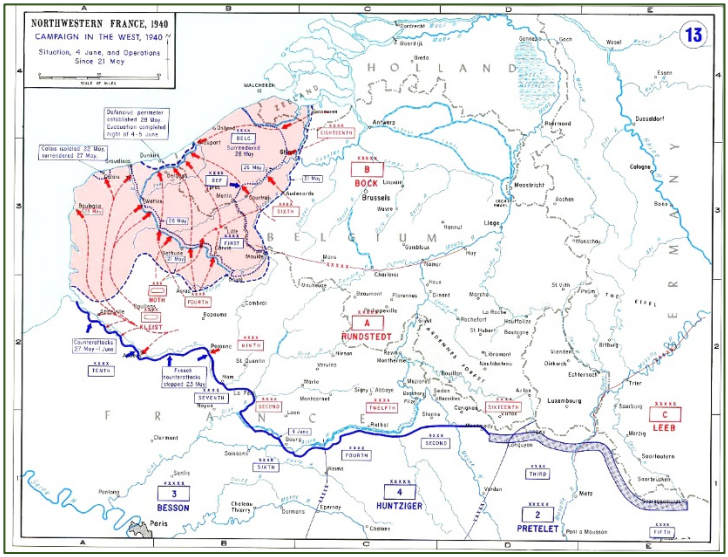
"I suppose dozens of operation orders have gone out in my name, but I never, throughout the war, actually wrote one myself…One part of the order I did, however, draft myself—the intention…It is the one overriding expression of will by which everything in the order and every action by every commander and soldier in the army must be dominated."[i]

- Field Marshal William Slim

Question 1: What is my mission/commander's intent?
(And what is it one and two levels above me?)

The year is 1940 and Europe is engaged in a bloody war–a conflict unlike any other since the Great War–that pits nation against nation and ideal against ideal. Germany and the Third Reich, led by Nazi Party leader Adolph Hitler, are in the midst of executing an invasion plan into the Low Countries along the western coastal region of Europe. The Manstein Plan (*Fall Gelb*) thrust German forces through the Netherlands and Belgium to envelop the Maginot Line–an array of fortifications built by

France in the 1930s to deter a German invasion. While two other German officers, Commander in Chief General Walther von Brauchitsch, and his Chief of Staff General Halder, correctly identified the Schwerpunkt (center of gravity) as the Ardennes, their plan was too conservative for the Fuhrer.[ii]

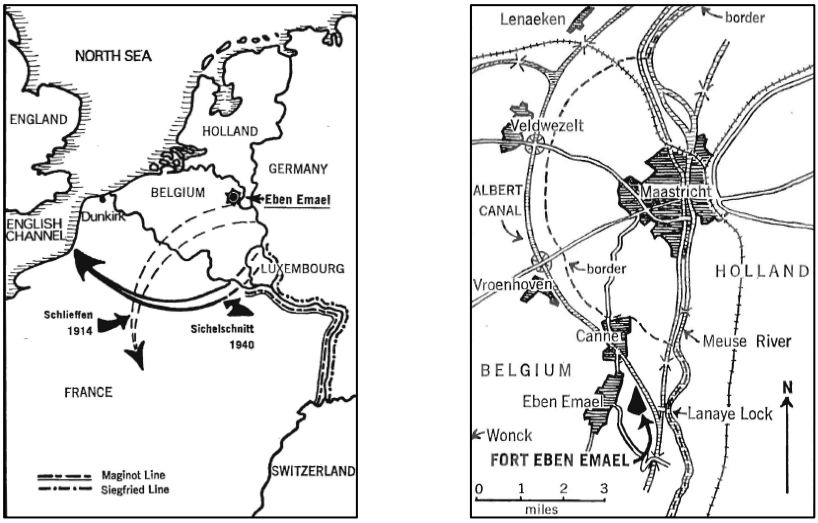


(Figure 1-1–Fall Gelb, 1940)

Generals Eric Von Manstein and Heinz Guderian planned to penetrate the Ardennes, across the Meuse and deep into the heart of France, with three Panzer Corps. Hitler embraced this bold plan that played to German strengths and made use of the element of surprise. By decisively engaging the French and

British in the north and bogging down their forces, the German's could succeed in the Ardennes. Through a series of attacks and bold flanking maneuvers, the German Army outflanked the French principle defenses, moving up through Belgium and northern France.

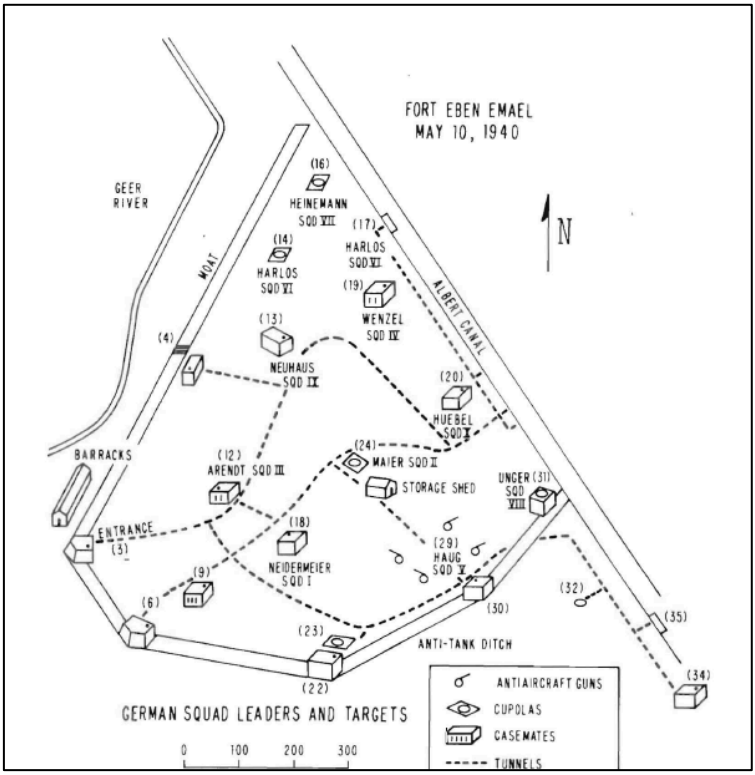
These tactical maneuvers were to serve the strategic purpose of cutting off the French from the British Expeditionary Forces. Without the aide and logistical support necessary to sustain their resistance, the French government would need to surrender.



(Figure 1-2–Fall Gelb's Strategic Importance in Relation of Operations and its Location)[iii]

On May 10, 1940, during the Battle of Belgium, a critical part of *Fall Gelb*, German forces seized a Belgian fort whose position and artillery pieces dominated key terrain and placed them in a strategically advantageous position. Fort Eben Emael, established along the Albert Canal, was centrally located on the northeastern Dutch-Belgian border along key lines of communication (bridges and roads) that led straight into the heart of Belgium. The fort had batteries at each casement to include 60mm anti-aircraft batteries, Mitrailleuse machine guns for anti-infantry defense, and 75mm and 120mm guns that could range out to 12 miles.[iv] An infantry force from the Belgian 7th Infantry Division reinforced the fort and guarded the three bridges (Veldwezelt, Vroenhoven, and Cannes) that spanned the canal.

Captain Walter Koch, a German glider company commander in General Kurt Student's 7th Flieger (Airborne) Division, shouldered the burden of the overall mission to capture the bridges. Student, under direct orders from Hitler to conduct an aerial envelopment, planned to employ his "three-dimensional" warfare concept. Sturmabteilung Koch (Koch Storm Detachment) included one company of glider infantrymen, one platoon of parachute-qualified engineers, a transport group of JU-52 aircraft, and over forty-gliders.



(Figure 1-3–A map of the fort detailing which squad would destroy each position)[v]

Koch tasked the glider infantry company of his storm detachment to seize the three bridges with one platoon assigned to each bridge. Codename "Concrete" Platoon would seize the bridge at Vroenhover, "Steel" Platoon the bridge at Veldwezelt, and "Iron" Platoon the bridge at Cannes. This left codename Granite, the engineer platoon, to seize the fort.

Lieutenant Rudolph Witzig, the Granite Platoon Leader, had approximately eighty-three engineer glidermen whom he task-organized across eleven squads and divided into two chalks. The plan called for them to execute a precision glider-landing on the roof of the fort and initiate a surprise attack.

Granite Platoon's clear understanding of the mission and intent guided their training and preparation: "Capture by surprise the surface of Eben-Emael. To guarantee the transit of the Army over the Meuse-Albert Canal, neutralize the artillery and anti-aircraft casemates and turrets. Break any enemy resistance and hold until relieved."[vi]

The value in this historical example comes not from what went right or wrong during the mission, but from how subordinate leaders responded to the constantly changing circumstances once the mission began. We will discuss changing conditions, specifically, in Chapter 4; here we dial-in on the centering nature of focusing on mission and intent. The simplicity of Captain Koch's intent provided clarity of purpose and allowed subordinates the freedom to choose the best approach to accomplish their mission.

Before the gliders even had the opportunity to infiltrate the airspace above the fort, the plan was already off the rails–or more like "off the tows." Two of the gliders lost their tows and

prematurely landed miles short of their objective in Germany; one of the gliders belonged to the platoon leader, Lieutenant Witzig.

Meanwhile, Captain Koch commanded the other three platoons on their simultaneous operation to secure the three bridges. Because the unit had implemented absolute radio silence, much of Witzig's platoon did not realize they were without their central leadership before they infiltrated the fort. But, instead of being an organization that solely relied on central command and control, the Koch's Storm Detachment of the 7th Flieger Division enabled subordinates to exercise initiative without their senior leaders present. They could only do this because each of the twenty-eight noncommissioned officers (NCOs) understood the unit's mission and the commander's intent. While Lieutenant Witzig moved to the nearest German airfield to commandeer a plane, the rest of the unit continued their mission.

Immediately upon landing on the fort, glider engineers assaulted their predesignated positions and attached explosive charges on the artillery pieces. They used flamethrowers to destroy machinegun positions that defended the western side of the fort. They sealed the exits and entrances to the fort with explosive charges, denying the Belgians the opportunity to

counter-attack. As the battle continued, approximately three to four hours after the initial forces attacked, Lieutenant Witzig and his glider arrived.[vii] Witzig's unit achieved their primary objectives: enabling the river crossing by destroying the artillery pieces and denying a Belgian counter-attack. As a result, the Germans seized two of the three bridges and successfully crossed the canal to continue their invasion into the Low Countries.

Sergeant Wenzel was the senior man on the ground for the initial attack and much of the fighting, while Lieutenant Witzig and one of his squad leaders were doing everything they could to return to the fight. What enabled Sergeant Wenzel to act in the absence of his senior leaders? How did he ensure the overall operation was a success? He clearly understood the mission and intent; destroy the artillery pieces and deny the counter-attack in order to facilitate the seizure of the bridges and the crossing of the canal.

While the rest of the glider infantrymen carried out their tasks for the greater purpose of the mission, Sergeant Wenzel established communications with Captain Koch to inform him of the situation on the ground and to gain an understanding of the larger operation. This act shows an awareness of two other future questions we will discuss in Chapters 4 and 6.

(Figure 1-4–German Glider)

"They didn't need to ask questions. They had their orders, and they did them." Sergeant Wenzel[viii]

Their orders were clear. Lieutenant Witzig, Sergeant Wenzel, and the rest of the men at Fort Eben Emael seized opportunities to accomplish their mission even when their initial plan began to unravel. They instinctively reflected on their mission, their intent, and the overall purpose of the operation. When Lieutenant Witzig's glider came off tow and landed short of the objective, he understood that his mission had not changed, but his course to that mission now required a different

set of actions. Witzig took the initiative to commandeer the aircraft that would eventually tow him back to the fight.

When Sergeant Wenzel realized that neither lieutenant in the unit was present, he understood that he needed to gain and maintain communications with his company headquarters. He knew the mission of his higher headquarters, so he was aware that the seizure of Fort Eben Emael triggered other missions that were critical to the success of higher echelons. His commander depended on him to confirm that they had seized the fort. And, finally, the soldiers understood–regardless of whether their lieutenant was on ground–once they landed, their task was to destroy the artillery pieces and machinegun positions, and seal the fort to repel a counter-attack.

Every soldier and leader, understanding their mission and intent, enabled the success of the attack on Fort Eben Emael. The reason that the officers, NCOs, and soldiers were acutely aware of the mission and intent is because they had been rehearsing the operation for over six months.

Hitler had originally ordered the seizure of Fort Eben Emael in October 1939, but a delay in the *Fall Gelb* allowed for considerable time to train and rehearse–training that had been planned and conducted by the very leaders of the force designated to execute the mission.[ix] Koch's company took

advantage of the extra time to master their plan through exacting repetition, and these exhaustive rehearsals crystallized a shared understanding of the mission and intent down to the lowest level of soldiers.

In addition to the extended time to rehearse, Granite Platoon had served together for over a year before the mission was planned–much less executed–and had participated in previous campaigns together. While Lieutenant Witzig was new, and not initially well-received due to his exacting standards and penchant for discipline, the platoon already had a strong foundation. Witzig's determination through the rigorous training of Storm Detachment Koch won him over to his platoon–trust and shared understanding built through training reps.

The United States Army doctrine of mission command articulates how understanding mission and intent enables leaders to make decisions in the fog of war. Unified Land Operations are a matter of seizing, retaining, and exploiting positions of relative advantage over the enemy. Units win by continuously adapting to changing conditions and by finding gaps in enemy capabilities.

One of the key principles of Mission Command doctrine is providing clear commander's intent. Commander's intent, when built on a foundation of trust and communicated through

mission orders, allows subordinates to seize disciplined initiative. This is exactly what Sergeant Wenzel did by blending the art (trust and understanding) and science (clear and consistent communication) of Mission Command to seize and maintain the initiative. Understanding the intent isn't enough; it needs to be internalized as a sense of purpose. As Admiral McRaven, former Commander of the U.S. Special Operations Command (USSOCOM), wrote in his Naval Post Graduate dissertation:

> [T]here must be a sense of purpose instilled into each soldier. It may never be needed if the operation goes according to plan, but when the frictions of war are at their peak and the enemy is threatening to repel the attack–that's when a sense of purpose is absolutely necessary.[…] Without a sense of purpose it will be difficult to overcome the "stronger form of warfare."

If the operation survives contact, mission and intent–purpose–are simply things you brief in the operations order. But the enemy gets a vote. When the conditions change and the crises start mounting, as we will discuss in later chapters, success or failure–victory or defeat–depends on a shared understanding of mission and intent and a ruthless internalization of purpose.

Other Examples for discussing Question 1:

1. *Saving Private Ryan* (Movie). The scene where the unit discusses whether they should attack or bypass the machinegun position en route to finding Private Ryan. What is our mission and intent? Is the mission to "win the war?" Is it to find Private Ryan? Even if the mission is to win the war, is destroying one machinegun position achieving that mission, or is it putting their specific task at risk?

2. *Band of Brothers* (Episode 2: "Day of Days"). After the jump into Normandy kills the Easy Company Commander, 1LT Dick Winters takes charge of a composite group of scattered paratroopers from differing units and maneuvers them to destroy a machinegun nest.

End Notes

[i] Connelly, Owen (2005). *On War and Leadership: From Frederick the Great to Norman Schwarzkopf*. Princeton University Press. Princeton, NJ. p.162.
[ii] McRaven, William H. (1993). *The Theory of Special Operations*. Monterey, CA: Naval Post Graduate School Press. Accessed from http://hdl.handle.net/10945/14838. p. 44.
[iii] McRaven, William H. (1993). *The Theory of Special Operations*. Monterey, CA: Naval Post Graduate School Press. Accessed from http://hdl.handle.net/10945/14838. p. 42-43.
[iv] McRaven, William H. (1993). *The Theory of Special Operations*. Monterey, CA: Naval Post Graduate School Press. Accessed from http://hdl.handle.net/10945/14838. p. 49.
[v] McRaven, William H. (1993). *The Theory of Special Operations*. Monterey, CA: Naval Post Graduate School Press. Accessed from http://hdl.handle.net/10945/14838. p. 47.
[vi] Murray, N.A. (2013). "Capturing Eben Emael: The Key to the Low Countries." *Sixteen Cases in Mission Command*. Combat Studies Institute Press, U.S. Army Combined Arms Center. Fort Leavenworth, KS. p.143-150.; McRaven, William H. (1993). *The Theory of Special Operations*. Monterey, CA: Naval Post Graduate School Press. Accessed from http://hdl.handle.net/10945/14838. p. 40-45.
[vii] Vliegen, René (1988). *Fort Eben-Emael (1st ed.)*. Fort Eben Emael, Association pour l'étude, la conservation et la protection du fort d'Eben-Emael et de son site
[viii] Murray, N.A. (2013). "Capturing Eben Emael: The Key to the Low Countries." *Sixteen Cases in Mission Command*. Combat Studies Institute Press, U.S. Army Combined Arms Center. Fort Leavenworth, KS. p.147.
[ix] McGrath, J.J. (2013). "A Motorized Infantry Regiment Crosses the Meuse River, May 1940." *Sixteen Cases in Mission Command*. Combat Studies Institute Press, U.S. Army Combined Arms Center. Fort Leavenworth, KS.

Chapter 2
The High Ground!

"You'll have to fight like the devil to hold your own until support arrives. The enemy know the importance of this position and will strain every nerve to secure it.." General John Buford, Army of the Potomac[i]

Question 2: Am I on good ground?

Receive the mission, issue a warning order, make a tentative plan, start necessary movement: these are the first four steps of Troop Leading Procedures. The Army of the Potomac had completed these steps, and, on the morning of June 30, 1863, General John Buford and his reconnaissance party of the 1st Cavalry Division stood overlooking the ground where the bloody Battle of Gettysburg would soon unfold.[ii] The scene, made famous in Michael Shaara's *Killer Angels* and in modern cinematic culture by Sam Elliott's portrayal in the 1993 movie *Gettysburg*, paints Buford and his headquarters riding into the town a day before General Lee's Confederate forces arrive.

Elliott's interpretation, while perhaps over-dramatized, sets the scene well for the more visual observer and is worth watching.[iii] Equally fictional, but steeped in historical research, Shaara's telling develops the vision in Buford's mind:

> The land west of Gettysburg is a series of ridges, like waves in the earth. […] [John Buford] stopped by a stone wall, looked down across flat open ground, lovely clear field of fire. He could see all the way across the town and the ridges to the blue mountains beyond, a darkening sky. […]
>
> "If you want to fight here, sir, this sure is lovely ground. We tuck in here behind this stone wall and I'd be proud to defend it. Best damn ground I've seen all day," [Bill Gamble, the commander of the first blue brigade, said.]
>
> "It is that," [Buford said.] But he had only two brigades. He was only a scout. The big infantry was a long day's march behind him. […]

"You know what's going to happen in the morning? […] The whole damn Reb army's going to be here in the morning. They'll move right through town and occupy those damned hills […] and when our people get here Lee will have the high ground and there'll be the devil to pay." […]

The vision was brutally clear: he had to wonder at the clarity of it. Few things in a soldier's life were so clear as this, so black-line etched that he could actually see the blue troops for one long bloody moment, going up the long slope to the stony top as if it were already done and a memory already, […] as if tomorrow had occurred and there was nothing you could do about it, the way you sometimes feel before a foolish attack, knowing it will fail but you cannot stop it or even run away but must even take part and help it fail. But never this clearly. […]

This is the place to fight.[iv]

Buford and his team understood the terrain and how the enemy would employ their capabilities, composition, and disposition in the fight to come. Buford knew his 2,748 cavalrymen could not defeat over 7,000 Confederate soldiers that were bearing down on Buford's Union troops. He realized his role in the mission was to protect the key terrain by delaying the Confederates from seizing it.[v] He and his headquarters were able to answer the question, "Am I on good ground?"

(Figure 2-1–Buford and his Staff)

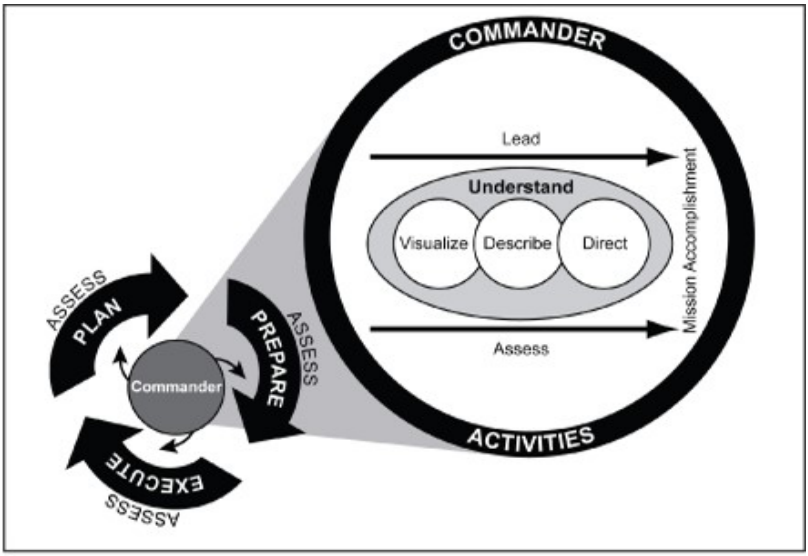
Buford advanced to Gettysburg, moving through the town from east to west, and made visual contact with the rebels before

they arrived. Having arrived first and assessed the terrain, the general had his pick of "good ground." But good ground is sometimes relative to your strengths and your enemy's capabilities. Buford developed a picture of the battle in his mind's eye, seeing hills and ridges that surrounded the little town. He surveyed the road network and assessed that it would lead to the concentration of forces.[vi] With this assessment of the terrain and the enemy, he instinctively referred to question #1 and knew what he had to do.

The original wording of this question read, "am I dominating my terrain?" This was standing guidance from Colonel (now Gen.) Townsend in 3-2 Stryker Brigade Combat Team. No matter what, dominate the terrain, seek to dominate it, and own it. Leaders and soldiers discussed terrain in every after-action review (AAR). We adopted the current wording for two purposes: 1) Dominating terrain is not always the terrain you need to dominate – as seen at Seminary Ridge, Thermopylae, and Chipyong-ni. 2) This wording opened the question up to figurative analyses and applications, which enables leaders to keep it under constant consideration.

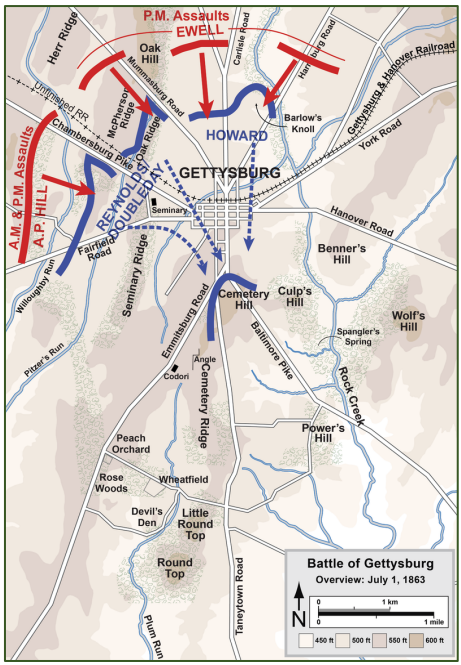
Buford chose to establish a hasty defense on Seminary Ridge, among others, which was advantageous for the moment because the position enabled him to kill enough Rebels in the narrow road enclosed by a fence. It was a lesser ridge, but he could use it to trade space for time, allowing him to eventually occupy the more advantageous Cemetery Ridge.

He sent word back to Major General John Reynolds, who commanded the nearest infantry unit, asking for reinforcement as soon as possible. This decision illustrates two of the other seven leader questions that we will discuss in Chapters 4 and 6. But relevant to this question, Buford's vision of the terrain and anticipation of the fight to ensue led to his decision to fight at Gettysburg and how he would fight.



(Figure 2-2–Commander's Activities, ADRP 5-0)

Buford provides a quintessential example of how the commander can visualize, describe, and direct to garner understanding across the unit.



On July 1, 1863, Buford and his 1st Cavalry Division established their lines along Herr Ridge, Seminary Ridge, and McPherson Ridge, northwest of Gettysburg. Their defensive disposition and use of terrain allowed them to delay a numerically superior Confederate force to protect the high ground directly south of Gettysburg. Confederate Major General Henry Heth led his division, part of Lieutenant General A.P. Hill's III Corps, south from Cashtown, deploying his artillery battalion in the lead, followed by two infantry brigades. Utilizing fence posts and breech-loading carbines, the Union cavalrymen delayed until 1020 hours, when they had to relinquish Herr Ridge to the Confederates and fall back to McPherson Ridge. This provided time for General John Reynolds to arrive, meet with Buford, and reinforce his forces north and west of Gettysburg.

Reynolds deployed his brigades to defend along the hills. Buford's cavalry could not hold the ridgeline, but they provided the necessary time–against a far superior force–to receive reinforcements.[vii] Most of Buford's cavalry fought dismounted, a prevalent tactic due to the invention of rifled muskets to replace smoothbores that rendered mounted attacks against infantry suicidal. Meanwhile, Buford's cavalrymen carried single-shot breechloading carbines, giving them an advantage over single-shot muzzle-loading rifled muskets carried by the infantry. With greater range and double the rate of fire, the cavalry was able to maximize their defensive lines against a far superior force.[viii]

During the battle, Buford went up to the cupola of the Lutheran seminary building, still present today, to see the field.[ix] This decision, referencing yet another one of *The 7 Leader Questions* we will discuss later in Chapter 5, allowed him to survey the changing nature of the battle. The question "am I on good ground?" is not static. Like many of the others, it evolves relative to the situation. Buford positioned himself to continually assess the terrain relative to the changing nature of the fight.

The battle lasted three days, culminating with the Army of the Potomac holding Cemetery Hill. Upon seeing the battlefield, Major General Hancock of the II Corps remarked, "I think this the strongest position by nature upon which to fight a battle that

I ever saw."[x] Lieutenant General Richard Ewell's decision to not attack the Union Army on Cemetery Hill, in light of seemingly contradictory orders from General Lee, punctuated the Confederate loss of the battle.

> "Now there are six guidelines governing the use of terrain. They are the commander's utmost responsibility, and must be thoroughly investigated."
>
> – Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*

The first day of the fight, and the actions of Brigadier General Buford's cavalrymen, provided the critical edge to the Union Army's success. His understanding of terrain allowed him to position his forces in the most effective way possible. Though inferior in number, they employed the advantages of terrain and good ground, relative to their strengths in weaponry, to deny Lee's Army the better terrain–the high ground!

A commander must understand if he or she is on good ground, and not just for the current battle, but for future ones. It is not enough for a commander to practice and conduct terrain analysis on a map when physical reconnaissance is possible. The leader who waits until the day of the battle to understand the ground is the one who is likely to lack the time required to act and seize key terrain.

Leaders must train their eyes to observe and analyze terrain constantly. By regularly surveying terrain–whether in battle,

training, or just the daily commute to work–one becomes accustomed to seeing the micro-terrain and is better able to reconcile a plan with the reality on ground. "Am I on good ground?" is more than a question; it is an obsession of the dedicated leader.

Do not wait to find yourself in a combat environment to train your mind to answer this question. It takes repetition, but you can develop your abilities to analyze terrain during hikes, hunting, skiing, or whatever outdoor hobby you enjoy. The point is simple: get into the wild and get the reps necessary to use terrain to your advantage so you are prepared to answer the question, "Am I on good ground?"

Other Examples for discussing Question 2:

1. *Gettysburg's Peach Orchard: Longstreet, Sickles, and the Bloody Fight for the "Commanding Ground" Along the Emmitsburg Road*, by James A. Hessler. Union Maj. Gen. Daniel Sickles provides another interesting discussion of terrain from the same battle. His decision to abandon his position on Little Roundtop and commit his forces to the Peach Orchard is a great discussion of how the most "dominating" terrain is not necessarily the best terrain. Hessler also examines Sickles, specifically, in his book *Sickles at Gettysburg*.

2. *Thermopylae: The Battle for the West*, by Ernie Bradford. The Spartans' use of the hot gates to maximize their strengths and employ a defense that achieved their end-state is an effective case study in the literal question, "Am I on good ground?"

3. *Leadership in the Crucible: The Korean War Battles of Twin Tunnels and Chipyong-ni*, by Kenneth Hamburger. Colonel Paul Freeman and Task Force Tomahawks had learned their lesson at the Battle of Twin Tunnels. They consolidated their forces on key terrain and built a tight defense that allowed them to achieve first victory in the Korean War.

End Notes

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Chapter 3

A Question of Anatomy

"Ali fought a smart fight. He conserved his energy, turning it off when he had to. He can afford to do it because of his style. It was mainly a question of anatomy; that is all that separates these two men. Ali is now too big, and when you add those long arms, well...Joe has to use constant pressure, and that takes its toll on a man's body and soul."[i] *Eddie Futch (Joe Frazier's manager)*

Question 3: Where is the probable line of contact (PLOC)?

Army doctrine defines the probable line of contact (PLOC) as the expected or assessed "general trace delineating the locations where friendly and enemy forces are engaged."[ii] At the tactical level, the probable line of contact is the expected or assessed point, tied to terrain and based on the enemy's templated positions and weapon systems, where the enemy can effectively observe or engage friendly forces. Or, put another way, the PLOC is that point on the ground where the enemy can see or kill you.

The world of boxing provides a great visualization of the probable line of contact because a boxer must remain aware of how close he can get to his opponent before he, himself, is within striking distance. When "Smokin' Joe" Frazier fought Muhammad "The Greatest" Ali in 1975, for example, his probable line of contact was precisely 80 inches from his opponent–80 inches was the length of Ali's commanding reach.

Ali, who is widely regarded as the greatest heavyweight champion of all time, was six foot, three inches tall and possessed long and muscular arms that could deliver crushing blows. Extremely quick on his feet and having the ability to punch with great force and at considerable distance, Ali had the ability to annihilate his opponents while keeping a gap between him and the opposition. However, even though Frazier's reach was only 73 inches, he was no patsy. As the previous undisputed heavyweight champion of the world, "Smokin' Joe" was known as an intense pressure fighter–a boxer who, once he got inside his opponent's reach, used an extraordinary combination of speed, power, and stamina to land one strike after another. A bob-and-weave to the inside of Ali's reach would give Frazier the upper hand.

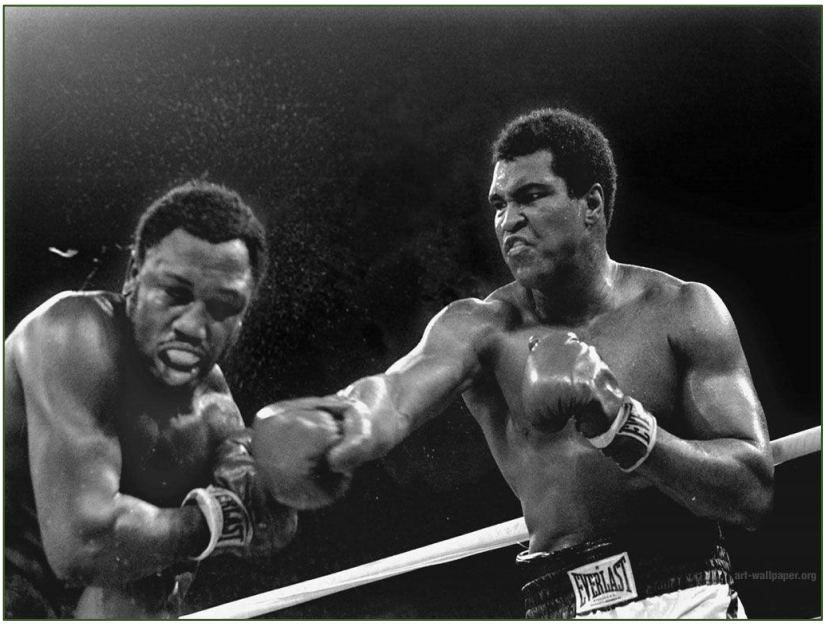
The two men met in Quezon, Philippines for their third and final bout. In 1971, Frazier had defeated Ali, but in the 1974

rematch, Ali took the prize. Their 1975 match–dubbed the "Thrilla in Manila"–was as much a testament to their boxing styles (where and how they would make contact) as a contest of their physical capabilities. Frazier planned to maximize his strengths by landing crushing blows to Ali's core to weaken his body and break his mind. To do this, he knew he had to find a way to sidestep Ali's reach and get inside his opponent's principal defenses.

Instead, Ali is the one who demonstrated more precision, employing an attack-by-fire-like series of strikes: He repeatedly fixed Frazier with a left jab and then peppered him with multiple rights. Frazier used his mobility as protection, bobbing and weaving to get inside Ali's range, but his efforts were to no avail. Ali gained momentum early and maintained the tempo. He concentrated his attacks to Frazier's head, fixing him in the middle of the ring–Ali's "engagement area."

For the first four rounds, Ali used his superior range and strength to chip away at Frazier's strength and energy. Time and time again, Frazier ran into the probable line of contact, attempting to lead with defenses, but at times leading with his nose. Even during those moments when Ali would consolidate and reorganize, using the ropes and his long arms to create a

defensive posture so he could catch his breath, Frazier was unable to commandeer the fight.



(Figure 3-1–Ali v. Frazier)

Frazier's body blows and thunderous right hooks–such as the one at the end of the sixth round–were enough to extend the fight to 14 rounds. In fact, had Frazier been able to get inside Ali's reach earlier and more frequently, the swarmer could have maximized his strengths and changed the outcome of the fight. Unlike Buford at Seminary Ridge–who assessed the strength of his force relative to their single-shot breachloading carbines–

Frazier failed to maximize his strengths. Instead, Ali's attack-by-fire-like posture enabled him to create great standoff, protecting his body while landing over a hundred punches to Frazier's head.

By the time Frazier broke through the distance so he could take aim at Ali's core, the damage had been done, and Smokin' Joe lacked the power necessary to defeat his opponent. Frazier's firepower, range, mobility, and protection were great, but they could not outmatch Ali's reach and power. "The Greatest" controlled the momentum and tempo of the fight. In the final rounds, Ali was the only one who could continue to employ punishing firepower to land crushing blows. Just before the final round, Frazier's corner-man, Eddie Futch, threw in the towel and conceded the fight. Thirty-one years later, while watching the bout, Smokin' Joe still felt the frustration of not being able to maneuver beyond Ali's reach: "Too far away, need to get closer," he said to himself.[iii]

There are many similarities between approaching a foe in the boxing ring and on the battlefield. The boxer never really knows how her opponent will strike, but she constantly studies her rival's movement, body language, and capabilities. Similarly, military leaders should estimate the PLOC during the planning process by determining enemy locations and the capabilities of

enemy weapon systems; they should continue to assess those estimates after they cross the line of departure. What do you do if you are getting close to the PLOC and you want to close with the enemy? Do what a boxer does and start jabbing: deploy your smallest force first. Army doctrine instructs us to employ friendly reconnaissance elements or lead with the smallest force possible (movement to contact) while maximizing friendly direct and indirect capabilities.

The enemy gets a vote in the location of the PLOC, but friendly forces have the means to extend the PLOC as well. Mitigate or push back the PLOC by echeloning fires and forcing the enemy to defend in haste. This technique provides the opportunity to move faster and deploy later, giving the formation an advantage in tempo and momentum. It also enables you to maintain an element of surprise, delaying the deployment and disclosure of the full quantity of forces and capabilities you bring to bear. By deploying later, you give the enemy less opportunity to observe your numbers. Other means of mitigating the enemy's PLOC are through incorporating varying forms of maneuver, such an infiltrating the enemy's principal defenses, moving undetected, enveloping the enemy, or using a deception operation to draw the enemy's attention away from your primary avenue of approach.

Other Examples for discussing Question 3:

1. "Eagle Troop at the Battle of 73 Easting," by H.R. McMaster in *The Strategy Bridge*.

2. *Master and Commander: The Far Side of the World.* Captain Jack Aubrey disguises the HMS Surprise as a whaler to infiltrate inside the range of the Acheron, de-mast, and board it.

End Notes

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Chapter 4

It's a Trap!

"IT'S A TRAP!" –Admiral Ackbar

Question 4: Are conditions changing, have they already changed, and how will I know when they've change?

The enemy, terrain, weather, "Murphy," and myriad other factors affect the conditions of combat. The battle you plan for is rarely the battle you fight, and the organization that adapts more quickly to those changing conditions has a distinct advantage. Think back to Lieutenant Witzig's men at Eben Emael, Buford at Gettysburg, and Frazier against Ali–the battles they fought were drastically different than the ones for which they planned. While Witzig and Buford adapted and won, Frazier never found his grove and lost.

But how do leaders know when to adapt? The battlefield is complex and it requires agility, both physical and mental. Leaders must continuously survey conditions around them, asking themselves, "Are conditions changing? Have they already changed? And how will I know when they've change?"

While numerous historical battles provide examples of how leaders reacted to changing conditions, popular culture–on the movie screen and in books–also provides fun and compelling examples. Science fiction is a particularly rich genre because it proposes new questions in foreign worlds that, after close inspection, are not all that dissimilar from the questions we face.

In *Strategy Strikes Back: How Star Wars Explains Modern Military Conflict*, the various authors prove that history is not the only medium for studying war. General (Ret.) Stanley McChrystal says that dismissing fiction as "frivolous" is a "narrow view;" "wisdom is where you find it. Don't be afraid to look in unexpected places."[i] Whether analyzing the role of the Jedi in the profession of arms or the tactical intricacies of the Battle of Hoth, *Star Wars* and other such mediums provide useful vignettes for developing military leaders.

In Episode VI of *Star Wars* ("Return of the Jedi")[ii], the Rebel Alliance mounted a joint ground and space attack on the Death Star, canonically referred to as The Battle of Endor. The Rebel Alliance destroyed the original Death Star after they discovered and exploited an architectural vulnerability in its exhaust port. The Death Star II, an improved reconstruction of the original galactic battle-station that was the size of a moon and had the

power to destroy entire planets with its massive laser, was the centerpiece of the Empire's tyranny over the galaxy.

(Figure 4-1–Admiral Ackbar)

Admiral Gial Ackbar of the Rebel Alliance helped develop a plan of attack to destroy the Death Star II after receiving intelligence from Rebel spies inside the empire. Rebel intelligence identified the location of the Death Star and revealed that the space station was damaged because the laser weapon system was not operational. This set of conditions was ideal for rebel exploitation. Akbar's plan called for a two-

pronged attack with dismounted fighters infiltrating the operations center on the planet of Endor (the Death Star was using its orbit while it was being repaired) to destroy the generator that was producing a protective shield around the Death Star. With the shields down, an armada of ships would attack the inoperable Death Star to destroy it once and for all.

The original plan was only slightly synchronized between the attack on Endor and the armada's arrival out of hyperspace. Since the Death Star's laser was broken, the armada assumed little risk by arriving slightly before the ground force disabled the shields. When the armada arrived and moved along their direction of attack, Admiral Ackbar quickly realized that something was awry. [iii]

Their forces on Endor had not yet disabled the enemy shields, and he saw no Tie resistance. The absence of enemy soldiers contradicted the Empire's typical behavior. Had the ship truly been vulnerable, they would have immediately dispatched fighters to protect the battle station. Like Buford viewing the situation before the Battle of Gettysburg, Admiral Ackbar now knew that conditions had changed.

With one famous line, Akbar communicated the changing conditions: "It's a trap!" The Empire purposefully leaked the

intelligence to draw the Rebel Alliance to their position–the Death Star was very much operational.

(Figure 4-2–The Battle)

Although he realized the changing conditions later than he would have liked, Ackbar's ability to feel the pulse of the fight gave his formation crucial seconds to react. General Lando Calrissian, Commander of the Assault Force, near-simultaneously realized the change in conditions. Upon their arrival out of hyper-space, Calrissian realized the Death Star was jamming their ability to read the status of their shields. How

could the Empire be jamming the Rebels if they didn't know they were coming? Because they did know…

"Break off the attack! The shield is still up!" –Lando Calrissian

These leaders' vision for the game allowed the rebels to change formations and employ evasive maneuvers to create space and time for the ground force on Endor to disable the shields. Admiral Ackbar's example demonstrates the cognitive agility required to constantly assess the situation for changing conditions so you can posture your forces and synchronize assets to exploit the closing windows of opportunity created by enemy capability gaps.

There are times when a change in conditions results in such significant effects on the mission that it necessitates reflecting on your commander's intent (refer to Question 1). Key changes can include misreading terrain (Question 2) or incorrectly anticipating the location of the PLOC (Question 3). Deviations from the plan are permissible if the audible is true to the original commander's intent. In many ways, this is another example of a Question 3. The change in conditions carried with it a change in the perceived PLOC. They were now fighting in two directions,

facing off against the Death Star and simultaneously fighting the Destroyers and fleet of Tie Fighters that had enveloped them.

The conditions changed further when the Rebels noticed the Destroyers not attacking. Why weren't they attacking? Unbeknownst to the Rebels, the Destroyers' orders were simply to envelop and block the Rebels' withdrawal. This became apparent when the Death Star destroyed a Rebel ship with their fully operational laser. Unlike Frazier who failed to get inside Ali's reach, the Rebels broke inside the PLOC. Ackbar and Calrissian oriented their attack on the Destroyers, getting inside the range of their cannons and simultaneously making it difficult for the Empire to engage them with the Death Star-laser without destroying their own forces. They changed the nature of the battle to that of a pressure fighter.

> "An informed and aligned adaptation of the plan as a response to changing conditions can enable the mission to succeed."

Like a quarterback, you have watched film (studied the enemy and history), prepared your game plan (operations order), and established your formation (deployed your forces), but as you come to the line you see the defense has changed. An audible from the play that is called in the huddle does not negate your preparation, nor does it belie the overarching game plan.

An informed and aligned adaptation to the plan as a response to changing conditions can enable the mission to succeed.

Can conditions change so drastically that they nullify the original intent? The answer largely depends on the level of the organization. The larger the organization, the broader the intent of the operation. At the platoon, company, and even battalion-level, conditions can sometimes invalidate the intent. Consider *Saving Private Ryan*, the 1998 World War II film starring Tom Hanks. Captain John Miller's mission was to find Private Ryan and escort him out of harm's way because he was the last surviving brother of a family of four who had deployed to the war. Conditions changed in the film when the men found Private Ryan, but perhaps not enough to change the intent. But, what if they found Private Ryan dead–those conditions certainly would change the overall mission and intent.

In another scene from the same movie, Miller's Ranger unit comes across a German machinegun nest en route to Ryan. They debate whether to attack it in support of the larger mission/war to defeat Germany–or–bypass the machinegun so as to not jeopardize their mission to find Pvt. Ryan. This calls back to Question 1, but is also a case of changing conditions. Does this change in conditions necessitate a change of mission?

The essential condition leaders must constantly assess is whether they are winning or losing. How can we train leaders to assess conditions? The Army heavily uses live fire training to build confidence in a combat environment. By employing firepower to make leaders competent with operating at the limits of surface danger zones and risk estimated distances, the Army normalizes the expectations of what can happen when units operate at the limits of their capabilities.

Live fire training is where leaders master the tasks necessary to understand how their actions can affect the conditions on the battlefield. To develop vision for the game and the ability to assess changing conditions, leaders should develop situational training exercises (STX) that focus on junior leader decision points. Each lane or mission set should become increasingly more complex, stressing the leader's ability to assess change and the formation's agility to react to those changing conditions.

These STX will teach junior leaders (squads and platoons) how to assume prudent risk and make corrections after recognizing changing conditions. Commanders should seek to train confident leaders who can answer Question 3, and this only happens through repetition. Take in all the information, consider all options, reflect on the commander's intent, and then quarterback the call when conditions are changing.

Other Examples for discussing Question 4:

1. 1LT Speirs's actions in *Band of Brothers* episode 7 ("The Breaking Point")–Bastogne and battles near Foy, Belgium.

2. *Team Yankee: A Novel of World War III*, by Harold Coyle. CPT Bannon and his tank company miss movement due to a failed guard shift. They quickly react to changing conditions to withdraw during daylight hours (Chapter 7). CPT Bannon assumes command of the Battalion when the headquarters is attacked, leaving the battalion commander and executive officer out of communications range (Chapter 11).

3. *Black Hawk Down: A Story of Modern War*, by Mark Bowden. Operation Gothic Serpent, Mogadishu in 1993 is a great example of conditions changing requiring a change in tactics and leadership.

End Notes

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Chapter 5

The Gates of Hougoumont

"The success of the battle turned upon the closing of the gates at Hougoumont." –Duke Wellington[i]

Question 5: Where should I be now? (And where should I be next?)

The next Leader Question brings us back to Belgium, one hundred and twenty-five years earlier than the actions at Eben Emael. Napoleon Bonaparte's return to power in 1815, after defeat and exile at the hands of the Sixth Coalition at the Battle of Leipzig in 1813, incited the formation of the Seventh Coalition–a military alliance formed against Napoleon by Austria, Britain, Prussia, Russia, and the majority of the members of the Congress of Vienna. Napoleon's battle plan was to defeat these nation states individually before they could form an allied invasion of France.

On June 18, 1815, Napoleon's Army of France invaded the United Kingdom of the Netherlands (modern day Belgium),

where he faced the British and Prussian Armies at what we would later call the Battle of Waterloo.

(Figure 5-1–The Battle of Waterloo[ii])

Gebhard Leberecht von Blücher, Prince of Wahlstatt, commanded the Prussian Army, and the Duke of Wellington commanded the British Army. Wellington would later disapprove of the written accounts of Waterloo, wishing that history would "leave the battle as it is," claiming that individual recollections fail to accurately remember the exact order or

moment at which they occurred–"which makes all the difference."[iii]

Under Wellington's command were the Coldstream Guards–a regular Army regiment of foot soldiers, tracing its lineage back to the English Civil War. While Wellington's genius and actions are worth a case study in and of themselves, this question is best suited for two subordinate leaders who demonstrate the strategic impact of tactical decisions. The actions of Corporal James Graham and Lieutenant Colonel James Macdonnell, at Hougoumont Farm during the Battle of Waterloo, are considered one of the regiment's greatest achievements. They are commemorated annually during the "Hanging of the Brick" at the Sergeants' Mess. Not only are their actions of great valor, but they also teach us the importance of correctly answering the question, "Where should I be now?"

The British position was approximately six-kilometers wide with flanks protected by the various farm buildings and cottages of the villages of Papelotte, Frischermont, La Haye, and Braine l'Alleud. At its center were two reinforced farms: La Haye Sainte and Hougoumont. The Coldstream Guards and the Scots Guards established a defense in vicinity of the *Château d'Hougoumont* (Hougoumont château) and the gardens on the

allied right flank. A French frontal assault wasn't ideal, but bypassing without knowledge of the Prussian position was out of the question. Napoleon would attack.[iv]

The French executed a diversionary attack to force Wellington to commit his reserves, but it quickly escalated into a massive engagement that resulted in Napoleon's committal of the French reserves.[v] At eleven-o'clock, Napoleon initiated his attack against the château, which was defended by the Fort Guards. The battle began with dueling artillery barrages, with the French attempting to breach the guards' defenses. While the French attempts at a breach to the south failed, their northern attempts nearly prevailed. As the French escalated from a diversionary attack to an outright attempt to seize the château, Hougoumont became a "battle within a battle."[vi]

Sous-Lieutenant Legros, of the French 1st Legrere, was able to breach the north gate. Here, the battle became–at its very core–close infantry combat. With axe in hand, he led his initial party of approximately thirty men through the gate. Swarms of French soldiers began to exploit the seam, charging toward the château's north gate. At the time of Legros's initial breach, Lieutenant Colonel Macdonnell was in the vicinity of the courtyard and in a position where he could best observe, command, and control his guards. Upon seeing the breach,

Macdonnell recognized that the moment was a decisive one. The French clearly wanted to take the Hougoumont château. With this understanding in mind, he knew where he needed to be next.

"Where do I need to be now?"

Prior to the breach, Macdonnell needed to be in the most advantageous position to visualize, describe, direct, and assess the battle on a macro scale.

"Where do I need to be next?"

(Figure 5-2–Hougoumont, by Robert Gibb)[vii]

As soon as Legros and his party breached the gates, Macdonnell knew he needed to apply his leadership at the point of greatest friction. Like Sergeant Wenzel rushing to a position where he could communicate with Captain Koch, or Buford climbing to the top of the cupola at the Lutheran seminary, Macdonnell knew he had to move. He rushed to the north gate and, joined by Corporal James Graham, used his domineering frame to help close the gate. Once the gates were closed, Sous-Lieutenant Legros and approximately thirty of his French soldiers were trapped inside the château–they were killed, to the man, minus the drummer boy.[viii]

The answer to, "Where should I be now?" is constantly changing based on the shifting momentum, tempo, and actions of the battle. A leader's vision for the game results from his or her physical location, which affects what the leader can see, hear, and communicate. Leaders during the Napoleonic era referred to this as "seeing the battlefield from over the horse's ears." The combination of location and vision is what gives the leader *coup d'oeil*–the rare ability to sense, understand, decide, and direct the battle, rapidly.

Some leaders need to act at the point of friction and others need to plant themselves in a position to observe it from afar, but all leaders gain an advantage by understanding where they

need to be now and where they need to be next. The answer to this question depends on rank and position, as well as the relation to the source of friction. A plan that irrevocably commits its leader risks failing because it might locate a leader outside of position where he or she can react to the changing conditions of the battle. Instead, when possible, leaders should position themselves in places that can inform their perspective of where they need to be in the current moment, as well as the next.

For example, a platoon leader mounted in his vehicle has the benefits of better communications and connectivity with external assets, his higher headquarters, and the technological advantages of his day (e.g., FBCB2, BFT, etc.). But, he lacks the situational awareness of being in the fight and understanding the ground truth. This is one of the tensions of being a junior leader in 21st century combat–mount or dismount, radio "amped" or "manpacked?"

> "When all is said and done, it really is the Commander's coup d'oeil, his ability to see things simply, to identify the whole business of war completely with himself, that is the essence of good generalship. Only if the mind works in this comprehensive fashion can it achieve the freedom it needs to dominate events and not be dominated by them."
>
> – Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*

When two or more subordinate elements are converging on an objective, a leader on the ground can better visualize the areas of risk than the leader who remains mounted. Consider it from the perspective of a football team with a head coach, offensive/defensive coordinators, and a quarterback. The head coach is on the sidelines, with the players, where he can gain a better feel for the life of the game. Sometimes the offensive/defensive coordinator is in the booth, high above the field of play, with a more advantageous position to command the offense/defense. And the quarterback is on the field–in the thick of the fight. He is decisively engaged and laser-focused on the immediacy of the situation. The battlefield is ever changing, and your influence on it will require different positions and perspectives. Is it time for you to be the head coach, the coordinator, or the quarterback?

Other Examples for discussing Question 5:

1. *Thunder Run: The Armored Strike to Capture Baghdad*, by David Zucchino. The actions of 2nd Brigade Combat Team, 3rd Infantry Division and Colonel David Perkins at the Battle of the Karbala Gap during the 2003 invasion of Iraq.

2. "Do Your Job: Bill Belichick & the 2014 Patriots." The actions of New England Patriot's coaching staff and the Malcolm Butler Interception during Super Bowl XLIX.

End Notes

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Chapter 6
Anticipate and Communicate

"[T]he commander must mentally detach himself from the action and objectively think–what is not being done which should be done to influence the situation, and what is being done that should not be going on." –Col. Harold "Hal" Moore; After Action Report, Ia Drang Valley Operation, 14-16 November 1965

Question 6: Who needs to know what I know now?

Question 6 is not just a "Leader Question," it is also a "Soldier Question." The modern battlefield requires every soldier to act as a sensor for changing conditions, priority intelligence requirements, and other factors that can provide limited opportunities to exploit enemy capability gaps. The Vietnam War's Battle of Ia Drang at LZ X-Ray–chronicled in Hal Moore and Joe Galloway's book *We Were Soldiers Once…and Young* and the Hollywood adaptation starring Mel Gibson and Sam Elliott–demonstrates the importance of asking and answering, "Who else needs to know what I know now?"

In the days and weeks leading up to his battalion's deployment to Vietnam, Moore felt the pangs of history

weighing heavily on his mind. He wrestled with the history of the French in Indo-China, American forces on the Asian mainland, and a sinking feeling about the reflagging of his unit to a regiment with a storied but damning history of their own. In 1876, while the US Army was engaged in the Great Sioux War, the 7th Cavalry Regiment, commanded by Lt. Col. George Armstrong Custer, was annihilated by an overwhelming force of Lakota, North Cheyenne, and Arapaho warriors at the Battle of the Little Bighorn, commonly referred to as Custer's Last Stand.

(Figure 6-1–Custer's Last Stand at Little Bighorn)

Nearly a century later, after multiple wars spanning Europe and the Asian Pacific, the tools and tactics of war had evolved. Instead of patrolling on horseback in the American frontier, cavalry troopers found themselves riding by helicopter in Vietnam. The Air Mobile–now defined as Air Assault–was a new concept in warfare that utilized UH-1D "Huey" helicopters

to deliver troops behind enemy principal defenses. Deep in enemy-held territory, organic and non-organic indirect fires supported the troops. Battalion and company mortars, artillery batteries at nearby "fire bases," and close air support (CAS) combined to support the otherwise cutoff soldiers. Even still, the history of the 7th Cavalry Regiment loomed on Lt. Col. Moore's mind in the months leading up to his battalion's deployment.

On November 14, 1965, the regiment seemed to be re-living the past as the 450 soldiers of the 1st Battalion, 7th Cavalry (Air Mobile) fought off over 1,600 Vietcong soldiers in the Drang River Valley (Ia Drang) of Vietnam. When Lieutenant Colonel Moore's troopers infiltrated LZ X-Ray for their search and destroy mission, intelligence did not template the overwhelming enemy force in vicinity of their area of operations. However, Moore would soon realize that conditions were vastly different, running face-first into Question 4 while also having to answer Question 5.

When Former Secretary/ General (Ret.) Mattis was the Commander of U.S. Central Command (USCENTCOM), his mantra was a similar refrain to this question: "What do I know? Who needs to know? Have I told them?"

The first lift, consisting of Lt. Col. Moore's headquarters and two platoons of B Company, arrived at the battle in sixteen Hueys at 1048 hours. While the helicopters returned to pick up

the remainder of B Company and the first two platoons of C Company, the B Company platoons on the ground took an enemy prisoner of war (POW). The enemy POW assessed the Vietcong troop strength at over 1,600 in underground tunnels of the nearby mountain. This information signaled the first massive change in conditions. With changing conditions comes an increased need to communicate operational reality. Lieutenant Colonel Moore reported the information to his higher headquarters and sent the prisoner back to the brigade command post. He also informed the B Company commander, directed increased reconnaissance patrols in the area, and shifted much of the B Company perimeter to A Company.

(Figure 6-2–LZ X-Ray)

As the fighting intensified, Lt. Col. Moore communicated the changing conditions throughout his command and reinforced the perimeter by assigning interlocking sectors of the perimeter to subordinate companies. The situation quickly escalated, with 500 to 600 fighters from the North Vietnamese Army (NVA) maneuvering on and around the 450 American soldiers of 1st Battalion. Lieutenant Colonel Moore relayed this to his brigade commander and requested more soldiers from 2nd Battalion, 7th Cavalry. By 1850 hours, with the 1st Battalion using more ammunition and supplies than they had anticipated, Lt. Col. Moore knew they would need to resupply their rapidly depleting stores, so he requested increased logistical support.

(Figure 6-3–Ia Drang)

At 0745 hours the following day, November 15th, the NVA launched a massive attack that started at the C Company line and the Battalion Headquarters; in the process, enemy fires destroyed Lt. Col. Moore's radio. As their defensive perimeter was on the verge of breaking, Lt. Col. Moore instructed his Air Force Forward Air Controller to make the call that was later made infamous in the movie *We Were Soldiers*: "BROKEN ARROW!"[i] With two words, similar to Ackbar's three words, Moore communicated to higher headquarters, subordinate commands, and fire support assets that his position was compromised, and they were being overrun. Moore's subordinate commanders marked their defensive lines with colored smoke grenades, and then they took defensive measures to protect themselves from incoming friendly fire, F-100s dropping napalm, and increased indirect fire support.

At approximately 0930 hours on the third day, November 16th, the brigade commander ordered Lt. Col. Moore to conduct a relief in place with 2nd Battalion, 7th Cavalry and 2nd Battalion, 5th Cavalry, and move his battalion from LZ Falcon to Camp Holloway by UH-1D. All elements of his command were off the objective by 1830 hours that third day. Throughout the three-day battle, Lt. Col. Moore balanced being in the fight with being above it. Similar to the discussion of Macdonnell at

Hougoumont and Buford in the cupola at Gettysburg, Moore was intuitively answering Question 5. He recognized when conditions were changing, like Ackbar in the orbit of Endor and Wenzel at Eben Emael, and he communicated the changing conditions up and down his chain of command. In his after-action review, Moore recounted:

> The Commander on the battlefield must continually anticipate what the future could bring and take steps to influence the future before it comes about. This applies to the enemy; to fire support; supply of ammo, water, and medical supplied before the requirement arises; to friendly reaction to possible enemy action; and to all other matters having a bearing on a particular situation. Also, periodically throughout the battle, the commander must mentally detach himself from the action and objectively think–what is not being done which should be done to influence the situation, and what is being done that should not be going on.[ii]

Communicating changing conditions and sharing information are not just business practices or a tactic to flatten the organization at an organizational level. Tactical leaders need to

ask, "Who else needs to know what I know now?" to ensure everyone understands the context of the battle. This action synchronizes the core unit, as well as assets, as part of the "define, describe, direct, and assess" operational framework.

Like the other questions, this one builds on and works in conjunction with the rest of the framework. Communication is constant throughout. Sergeant Wenzel fought to communicate changing conditions to Captain Koch. Buford sent a runner back to Reynolds to hasten his force forward to Gettysburg. Admiral Ackbar recognized the need to communicate changing conditions when he found his forces in an Empire-placed trap. Mission and intent drove leaders to victory at Eben Emael, but it also factored into Buford's decision to fight at Seminary Ridge and the studious observer sees it as a central theme in Lt. Col. Moore's decision process at LZ X-ray. While the questions lend themselves to individual study, they are continuous and connected.

For further analysis of this question, one could analyze the Battle of the Little Bighorn and compare it with the Battle of Ia Drang Valley. They pose similar problems that were handled differently, and to different ends. In both cases, a highly mobile 7th Cavalry faced an overwhelming force. In one case, they boldly decentralized and lost. In the other case, they cautiously

consolidated and won. Each battle highlights the importance of communicating changing conditions throughout the organization.

Other Examples for discussing Question 6:

1. *The Last Stand: Custer, Sitting Bull, and the Battle of Little Big Horn*, by Nathaniel Philbrick. This example is two-fold. First, following the Battle of the Rosebud on June 17, 1876–eight days before Little Bighorn–Crook's forces revealed that the Sioux had turned offensive and failed to pass that information forward to Terry's (and subsequently Custer's) forces. Secondly, during the battle, Benteen and Reno's possession of critical information and failure to share it led to failed decision-making. Trumpeter Martini's brief message was the best attempt to communicate key information, but it was incomplete and cryptic. Both Moore's and Custer's 7th Cavalry stumbled into an overwhelming force. While one boldly decentralized and lost, the other cautiously consolidated and won.

2. *Leadership in the Crucible: The Korean War Battles of Twin Tunnels and Chipyong-ni*, by Kenneth Hamburger. Communications and actions between Colonel Paul Freeman and his subordinate/superior commanders at the Battle of Chipyong-ni during the Korean War are another great example of communicating a present reality to a higher or external authority across the battlefield, then allowing the balance of power to shift in their favor.

End Notes

[i] Moore, H.G.; Galloway, J.L. (1992). *We Were Soldiers Once ... and Young — Ia Drang: the battle that changed the war in Vietnam.* New York, NY: Harper Perennial.

[ii] Moore, H.G. (1965). Official: After Action Review, Ia Drang Valley Operations – 14-16 November 1965. Accessed from http://www.lzxray.com/articles/after-action-report. Retrieved 10 November 2017.

Chapter 7
Quicksand

"You're playing and you think everything is going fine. Then one thing goes wrong. And then another. And another. You try to fight back, but the harder you fight, the deeper you sink. Until you can't move... you can't breathe... because you're in over your head. Like quicksand." *The Replacements (2000)*

Question 7: How many crises/opportunities can I handle at once?

Winning in war requires minimizing friendly crises while maximizing the number of crises you impose on the enemy. This means making the enemy fight you in multiple directions, or what General Raymond Odierno explained as "creat[ing] multiple dilemmas" for the enemy.[i] By overwhelming the enemy, GEN Odierno continued, "We can then force them to act in a way that gives us an advantage."[ii] Every echelon has a maximum number of crises it can handle at once. This is informed by leaders, formations, plans of attack, resources, and many other factors.

The Battle of Mogadishu (Operation Gothic Serpent), from October 3-4, 1993, demonstrates how even the most specialized and trained units–75th Ranger Regiment, 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment (SOAR), and elements of U.S. Army Special Operations Command (USASOC)–are subject to crises that overwhelm their capabilities. How many crises can a unit handle at once? This answer is different at every echelon. An infantry rifle platoon can effectively manage to one to two crises (e.g. a firefight and a casualty evacuation). A rifle company can effectively handle two to three crises. The Battle of Mogadishu rapidly devolved into several crises: a raid withdrawal, a casualty evacuation, a downed aircraft recovery, another downed aircraft recovery, mounting casualties, and an American soldier being captured as a prisoner of war. The longer and harder U.S. troops fought, the worse the situation became.

The operation–detailed in Mark Bowden's book, *Black Hawk Down*, and a 2001 movie by the same name–was initially planned to last under an hour. [iii] It was designed as a U.S. Joint Special Operations raid to apprehend two of Mohamed Farrah Aidid's top-lieutenants from the Habr Gidr terrorist group.

(Figure 7-1–TF Ranger, James Dietz Print)

The operation called for a special operations team to be dropped off on the Olympic Hotel by MH-6 helicopters, while four-chalks of Rangers fast roped into isolation positions surrounding the objective. The plan was to capture the enemy and then evacuate all personnel by ground. Within the first minutes, around 1542 hours, the mission began to unravel. One of the MH-6s had to change its drop-off location due to heavy dust, one of the Ranger chalks infiltrated a block north of their intended location and were unable to move to their target due to heavy enemy fire. Private First Class Todd Blackburn of Chalk Four fell from the MH-60L during insertion, sustaining injuries to his back and neck that required evacuation. While evacuating Pfc. Blackburn by ground, one of the vehicle crewmembers,

Sergeant Dominick Pilla, was killed by an enemy gunshot wound to his head.

At 1620 hours the enemy shot down the first Black Hawk, *Super 61*, which was piloted by Chief Warrant Officer 3 (CW3) Cliff Walcott. At 1640 hours, the enemy shot down a second Black Hawk, *Super 64*, which was piloted by CW3 Michael Durant. In the span of twenty minutes, the enemy rendered two helicopters ineffective and left their crews injured or dead and stranded in enemy territory. They fired upon a third MH-60L helicopter, *Super 62,* but the crew was able to return to base in spite of the damage. An armored convoy, consisting of soldiers from 2nd Battalion, 14th Infantry of the 10th Mountain Division arrived to secure the first crash site at 0200 hours on October 4th.

The fighting lasted through the night. While an armored convoy made their way to a nearby United Nations base, a group of Rangers that could not fit in the vehicles ran the "Mogadishu Mile" alongside the convoy. Although the task force accomplished their mission of capturing two high value individuals, the overall operation was hard to call a success. Mounting crises proved to be more than TF Ranger could handle. What was supposed to be a precision raid instead morphed into a prolonged battle with multiple strong point

defenses and a withdrawal operation that lasted through the night. In addition to the nineteen U.S. soldiers killed in action and seventy-three wounded, CW3 Michael Durant was taken as a prisoner of war.

In combat, crisis is always possible and is sometimes likely, so crisis management and contingency planning are critical. Always wargame the most dangerous course of action, before you find yourself in the middle of it. Being able to answer Question 7 (How many crises/opportunities can I handle at once?) requires a parallel ability to answer Question 5 (Where should I be now? Where should I be next?), and this means you must understand whether you can handle an additional crisis by changing a position, or maintaining a position of advantage.

Crises and opportunity can both reveal themselves as windows of relative advantage for exploitation. Just because you can take advantage of an opportunity, does not necessarily mean you should. Consider Question 1 and whether seizing an unexpected opportunity would be damaging to the intent of the operation. Furthermore, ask yourself if you honestly have the capabilities and resources to take on the additional challenge. Refer back to the discussion of Captain Miller (*Saving Private Ryan*) and their decision to attack the machinegun nest. Part of their decision calculus in the moment was the number of crises

they could handle in the moment, determined by their mission(s), enemy, troops, terrain, and time. Every leader/unit has a threshold, and at some point you are just out of Schlitz. Question 7 is just as much a tool for situational awareness as it is a call to assess your unit and mission–a reality check, or even an appetite suppressant, for commanders and leaders who cross every LD prepared to save the world.

Other Examples for discussing Question 7:

1. *Nelson's Trafalgar: The Battle that Changed the World*, by Ray Adkins. Admiral Nelson employed innovative tactics at the Battle of Trafalgar to split the French Naval fleet and cause them to fight in multiple directions.

2. *Undaunted Courage: Meriwether Lewis, Thomas Jefferson, and the Opening of the Northwest Passage*, by Stephen E. Ambrose. Lewis and Clark's entire Corps of Discovery expedition is a master's class in crisis management. Look specifically for the executive decision-making when they came to a fork in the river, where the confluence of the three forks of the Missouri River come together in modern day Montana.

3. *Endurance: Shackleton's Incredible Voyage*, by Alfred Lansing. The story of Ernest Shackleton's Imperial Trans-Antarctic Expedition, one that should have ended in death and abandonment, but instead ended in success and survival.

End Notes

[i] Vergun, D. (2015). "Solarium 2015: Forcing multiple dilemmas on enemy." Accessed from https://www.army.mil/article/143728/solarium_2015_forcing_multiple_dilemmas_on_enemy.

[ii] Vergun, D. (2015). "Solarium 2015: Forcing multiple dilemmas on enemy." Accessed from https://www.army.mil/article/143728/solarium_2015_forcing_multiple_dilemmas_on_enemy.

[iii] Bowden, M. (1999). *Black Hawk Down*. New York, NY: Grove Press.

Afterward
The 7 Leader Questions in Action

Asking pointed questions can facilitate learning. These questions are laid out individually, but are most useful when considered in the context of the whole and in concert with each other. Asking them in war-gaming can help leaders anticipate friction points and opportunities prior to execution. Using *The 7 Leader Questions* as a framework for after-action reviews will help leaders understand how an engagement unfolded. Training your mind to consider them on a regular basis will strengthen your ability to answer them when you're facing the horns of a dilemma. They serve as a tool for learning the art of war at a tactical level and improving your ability to anticipate and react to changing conditions on the battlefield.

Nothing replaces the value of live-fire training, but the use of history, case studies, tactical decision games, and terrain analysis are all resource-friendly means of preparing for war. When you're sitting in the unit area waiting to turn-in your weapons to the arms room, filling time between iterations at the rifle range, or in the motor pool and waiting for release formation–make use of this time. Take a look at the surrounding terrain, create a fictional situation, throw a casualty in the mix, and discuss with

your team. Use these seven questions as a framework to talk through the problem.

The enemy gets a vote, but practice will prepare you; it takes reps, reps, reps! To get the most out of these seven questions, you have to talk about them and employ them regularly. Discussing, analyzing, and evaluating them regularly will make it second nature for you and your leaders. When war comes–lives, strategic ends, and national interests are on the line. The worst time to prepare for war is when you find yourself in the middle of one.

Author's Note

I was far from "the line," sitting in a DRASH tent on a field at Camp Casey, South Korea. Four months earlier I relinquished command of one of the greatest group of soldiers, NCOs, and officers with whom I had ever served. Now, as a speechwriter for a Corps Commander, I reflected on this tactical construct. That is when, one part still clinging to the recent experience of command and the other part looking to the future, I began to type.

As Col. Kleisner stated in the Foreword, *The 7 Leader Questions* transcends any one author. Its development, practice, and even the specific case studies chosen to convey its meaning in practice, are thanks to a dedicated group of pros.

First, I would like to thank Teddy Kleisner for setting the tone and culture in our unit–his passion for the lessons and study of war was infectious. I also need to thank the many field grade officers with whom I worked. Their guidance and mentorship was invaluable–especially Stoney Portis for his help reviewing this project. My brother and sister officers, with whom I worked and taught these questions, brought them to life and inspired me to codify them. I especially need to thank the staff officers, fellow company commanders, and lieutenants from 1st Battalion, 23rd Infantry for their equal share in developing this construct. It

takes a village to write, especially when I am the one writing. So, thank you to my village of friends and colleagues who provided their feedback–especially Col. (Ret.) Steve Leonard, Dr. Steven Sodergren, Abe Payne, Matt Radman, and Evan Roderick. Thanks to them, and many more, this piece is now a reality.

Finally, and most importantly, I want to thank the soldiers and NCOs with whom I have served. I only hope that these few pages are an adequate reflection of the passion for our profession that you all have instilled in me.

To the readers of this document–never stop leading and learning. These two tasks are linked; they are executed both simultaneously and cyclically. Learn, reflect, practice, and repeat. We live in trying and complex times that will challenge our national policies and strategy. But we cannot forget, that at the fighting and dying end of that strategy are soldiers, sailors, airmen, and marines. These dedicated tacticians are bloodied and marred in the gritty and eternal truths of armed combat. They deserve the best leadership. Give it to them.

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"Many leaders get distracted by the day-to-day hustle of current operations, training schedules and business-as-usual approaches, neglecting the need to nourish the minds of their people (and themselves). This book is a perfect start for those wishing to re-engage in this most vital of endeavours."

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