

The US Army War College Quarterly: Parameters

Volume 51
Number 1 *Parameters* 51(1) Spring 2021

Article 11


Spring 3-2-2021

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Recommended Citation

John S. Kem & James G. Breckenridge, "Managerial Aspects of Command," *Parameters* 51, no. 1 (2021), doi:10.55540/0031-1723.3039.

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Managerial Aspects of Command

John S. Kem and James G. Breckenridge

ABSTRACT: Lieutenant Colonel Harold R. Lamp voiced concerns in 1971 about the inadequacy of the new defense managerial analytic framework, operations research/systems analysis, to assess critical intangibles of military readiness. Fifty years later, Lamp's concerns speak to the necessity of including data and effects from all organizational levels in order to ensure the Army can effectively coordinate complex systems and develop leaders capable of managing the same.

The opening sentence of “Some Managerial Aspects of Command,” “A farseeing Army needs to digress now and then in assessing its performances to make certain it is recording the lessons which have a great impact for the future” still rings true.¹ The US Army and the Joint Force are in a similar position today as each organization works to forecast into the late 2020s and 2030s. What are the key insights from 50 years ago that inform these efforts?

Historical context provides essential clues to Lieutenant Colonel Harold R. Lamp's perspectives from 1971. A class of 1970 Army War College graduate, Lamp was writing as the Army was drawing down force levels, with approximately 250,000 US troops still in Vietnam in June 1971. In Europe the Army, under-resourced and with mixed readiness levels, was down to only 215,000 soldiers from a troop strength of over 277,000 as recently as 1962. The ominous Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia had occurred only a few years prior, and Army leadership was increasingly concerned about Warsaw Pact competition and overall capability relative to NATO.² The Army of Lamp's time had an identity problem, poised as it was at an intellectual crossroads.

The Vietnam War preoccupied military thinking, and as Lamp wrote, “the feedback, critique, and assimilation of other important if less spectacular teachings have been dwarfed.”³ The Army's identity problem and intellectual struggle at the time was twofold. The Army of the 1970s was a constabulary Army deeply enmeshed in a strategic alliance in the heart of Europe, postured defensively and prepared to conduct conventional and nuclear operations. That same Army was also

1. Harold R. Lamp, “Some Managerial Aspects of Command,” *Parameters* 1, no. 1 (Spring 1971): 42, <https://press.armywarcollege.edu/parameters/vol1/iss1/6>.

2. Hubert Zimmerman, “The Improbable Permanence of a Commitment: America's Troop Presence in Europe during the Cold War,” *Journal of Cold War Studies* 11, no. 1 (Winter 2009): 3–27, <https://www.mitpressjournals.org/doi/abs/10.1162/jcws.2009.11.1.3>.

3. Lamp, “Some Managerial Aspects,” 42.

engaged in conventional and irregular combat in Southeast Asia, with few allies and diminishing popular and political support at home.

As 1971 unfolded, it seemed certain the United States would maintain its commitment to NATO defense and withdraw from Vietnam. But it was far from certain how the Army would train, man, equip, and organize in a post-Vietnam environment. Who and what the Army would be and how it would fight remained open, strategic-level questions.

Leadership and management issues flow from any organization with an identity problem. In the case of the early 1970s Army, these issues were exacerbated by the uncertainty and challenges posed by defining the ends, ways, and means needed to balance near-term requirements and long-term investment prioritization. As American involvement in the Vietnam War receded—in August of 1972 the last infantry and artillery units stood down—an ongoing buildup of Soviet conventional forces continued to pose a serious threat to US and NATO forces.

Thus, the transition out of Vietnam and reorientation toward Europe activated critical debates about the proper use of military power. If read through a strictly bureaucratic lens, the pullback from Vietnam, shift to a one-and-a-half war standard, and emphasis on alliances threatened the Army's institutional autonomy and share of budgetary resources. . . . But that misses the negotiation that took place across the Army. Beyond myopic bureaucratic struggles, the leaders of the Army accepted a shift in the international environment and used it as a means of reconceptualizing the role of land forces at the strategic, operational, and tactical levels.⁴

Fifty years on, the struggle for identity resurfaces. The early twenty-first-century US Army, emerging from its long wars in southwest Asia, confronts what is described as a return to great power competition. All the while, the rapidly evolving global strategic environment is further complicated by transnational corporations, climate change, cyber and space operations, pandemics, and extremist ideologies. A new US Army uniform, brown but called green, signals a cosmetic back-to-the-future theme. The uncertainty and identity issues that characterized Lamp's world remind us of the present.

Lamp on Command and Management

Early in the article, Lamp highlighted part of his purpose—the mostly tactical lessons from the crucible of combat operations inevitably “[dominate] military writing,” at the expense of many wider lessons and opportunities for professional discussion, including the role of management at all Army levels.⁵ Lamp emphasized what he saw as a significant change in the Army and the nation's approach to a major conflict. Using the Vietnam buildup to illustrate, he argued the two precedents of “(a) the expansion of forces without any significant call-up of the reserve training base, and (b) the costing of manpower along with

4. Benjamin M. Jensen, *Forging the Sword: Doctrinal Change in the U.S. Army* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2016), 30.

5. Lamp, “Some Managerial Aspects,” 42.

other resources in determining battlefield means” were “now wedded to the military” with significant potential impacts.⁶

In his view the Army’s ability to mobilize for the Vietnam War was miraculous given its limited resources. Nonetheless this mobilization required the Army to barter with unknown long-term trade-offs at all levels, due to the organization’s inability to understand residual effects far “beyond that recorded numerically in unit readiness reports.”⁷ Here Lamp turned to the identity of the Army and proposed key decision areas for the coming decade.

Lamp’s personal experiences and frames of reference provide insight to his perspectives. His service on the Army General Staff, with the 25th Infantry Division in Vietnam, and as a battalion commander in Europe drove his focus. Further the US Army War College Lamp had just graduated from was wrestling with transformative curriculum changes. The college had embraced management practices; as early as 1961, “acknowledgement of the McNamara ideas on strategy and management appeared in the War College curriculum.”⁸ By the late 1960s and early 1970s, the war in Southeast Asia was creating a crisis of confidence. “The questions posed so long ago by Tasker Bliss—what should be taught, to whom, and to how many—fleetinglly believed to have been settled, reappeared in more critical form.”⁹

Reflecting a major focus on business and analytical approaches, the War College by 1967 had added a command and management seminar. “As presented, the course was more concerned with economic analysis, systems analysis, and automatic data processing than it was with “command.”¹⁰ Systems analysis had expanded from post-Second World War through the 1960s. It was an integral part of corporate management and battlefield calculus in the Korean and Vietnam Wars but with mixed results and viewpoints.¹¹

In February 1970, “the War College initiated a formal review of the curriculum” that led to sweeping changes focused on the “intellectual development of the student, specifically the development of his analytical skills.”¹² The 1971–72 resident class program reflected much of the thinking of the curriculum review. Although international relations remained a major area of study, the college eliminated The Search for a National Strategy course and emphasized management skills through the establishment of the Department of Management and its revised course, National Defense Decision-Making and Management.¹³

6. Lamp, “Some Managerial Aspects,” 42–43.

7. Lamp, “Some Managerial Aspects,” 43.

8. Harry P. Ball, *Of Responsible Command: A History of the U.S. Army War College*, rev. ed. (Carlisle Barracks, PA: Alumni Association of the United States Army War College, 1994), 355.

9. Ball, *Responsible Command*, 355.

10. Ball, *Responsible Command*, 377.

11. See also Charles R. Shrader, *History of Operations Research in the United States Army, Volume 1: 1942–62* (Washington, DC: Office of the Deputy Under Secretary of the Army (Operations Research), Headquarters, Department of the Army, 2006), 13.

12. Ball, *Responsible Command*, 399.

13. Ball, *Responsible Command*, 400.

Clearly influenced by this trend in management practice and education, Lamp discusses issues such as “Soldier Intangibles,” “Motivation,” and “Military Professional Judgment.”

“Assaying Soldier Intangibles”

Lamp argued key senior defense officials and policymakers failed to appreciate results achieved by unit-level commanders in Vietnam in the late 1960s and very early 1970s. Importantly, he attributed this failure to the inability of military leaders to think and write professionally. He acknowledged the centralized decision-making characteristic of the military’s “evolved management style” and worried many accompanying decisions were too focused on cost. Further, cost was only part of the picture; in the process of concentrating on the explicitly measurable, “modern defense management style” missed key variables.

Using the then-ongoing debate surrounding the establishment of an all-volunteer force as an example, Lamp argued more measurable factors—economic and political—would ultimately prove the most persuasive in defense management budget decisions, rather than the true costs of training a completely all-volunteer professional force. As a result, decisions on whether to end the draft and related readiness policies would be flawed—a lack of refined analysis prevented accurate assessments of real impacts to the system such as duration, level of soldier training, and what Lamp referred to as “the acquisition-half of quality soldier development.”¹⁴

“Management of Motivation”

Lamp discussed the importance of motivation in combat but also in training, especially experiential event training. He drew lessons from his time in Europe—with leadership and motivation, even an undermanned and underequipped unit could succeed. The individual training elements were less important than leadership and the environment in which the training occurred. The specific examples Lamp used are disjointed and less relevant today, and his discussion of the training arch was especially tactical, nevertheless, his conclusion to this section remains relevant when considering the Army’s current programming and policy with respect to training. Lamp asked if training policy overly emphasized management of instructional resources to the detriment of the motivational aspects of training and answering the important question, “how much training is enough?”

“Military Professional Judgment”

In this final, less-developed section, Lamp addressed his view on the “current differences between command and management even while recognizing the close relationship between the two.”¹⁵ Both elements were essential for future command even though Lamp had a clear bias for commanders who continued to make good command decisions

14. Lamp, “Some Managerial Aspects,” 45.

15. Lamp, “Some Managerial Aspects,” 48.

despite a lack of systems analysis skills. He further noted Army schools were modernizing to help students quickly acquire these early 1970s-era management skills.

Relevance for Today and Tomorrow

Lamp's article did not focus on specific solutions to the Army's identity crisis. The majority of his article identified the training challenges of the early 1970s and provided a diagnosis of the management problem facing Army leaders. But his focus remained far too narrow and tactical.

In 1973, shortly after the publication of Lamp's article, the Army, under General Creighton Abrams Jr., implemented Operation Steadfast. As international relations scholar Benjamin Jensen points out, this massive internal reorganization plan was designed to streamline domestic operations and training. "The origins of Steadfast date back to a series of reviews conducted under chief of staff of the Army William C. Westmoreland (1968–1972). In particular, William Whipple and John V. Foley's 'Pilot Study on the Department of Army Organization' and . . . the follow-up (Charles) Parker Panel outlined the management problems inherent in the U.S. Army in the late 1960s."¹⁶ Jensen further remarks:

The Parker Panel turned to private industries, including IBM and Xerox, to see how they dealt with 'decision making, systems management (horizontal) vs. functional management (vertical), and the growth of ad hoc committees'. . . . The post-Vietnam Army would be a smaller professional force operating in a constrained budgetary environment. More forces would be stationed at home, thus requiring high levels of unit readiness to facilitate rapid deployment.¹⁷

This effort was the early foundation for the Army that developed through the 1980s and fought in Iraq and Afghanistan into at least the early 2000s, a highly capable Army that experienced considerable tactical and operational success. Moreover as eminent scholar Richard Betts notes:

Modern conventional military effectiveness has become clearly more a matter of quality than quantity of forces, and less a matter of pure firepower than the capacity to coordinate complex systems. The essence of American superiority is not advanced weapon technology per se. Rather it lies in the interweaving of capacities in organization, doctrine, training, maintenance, support systems, integration of surveillance, targeting, and weaponry, and overall professionalism.¹⁸

Yet today as in 1971, the need for more deliberate, in-depth thinking remains a challenge. Tactical and operational successes are necessary but insufficient. Like Lamp, senior decisionmakers typically focus too narrowly, over-emphasizing squad- and platoon-level training, both of which are foundational critical components of Army basic formations.

16. Jensen, *Forging the Sword*, 31.

17. Jensen, *Forging the Sword*, 31.

18. Richard K. Betts, *American Force: Dangers, Delusions, and Dilemmas in National Security* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), 174.

Opportunity costs of such company grade-level emphasis by senior leaders include devoting less resources and thinking to the areas Betts highlights: coordinating complex systems and building capability at the strategic-operational nexus. Reinforcing this point, Antulio Echevarria asserts there is a:

lack of emphasis on the end game, specifically, on the need for systematic thinking about the processes and capabilities needed to translate military victories into strategic successes. . . . The new American way of war . . . appears geared to fight wars as if they were battles and thus confuses the winning of campaigns or small-scale actions with the winning of wars.¹⁹

Furthermore, the Army has devoted too little analysis, emphasis, and innovative thinking to the role of Landpower in support of US efforts in global competition.

The “interweaving of capacities” described by Betts points to a series of management challenges Army leaders face. For example, Lamp was both intrigued and frustrated by the burgeoning field of operations research/systems analysis and how this new analytic model would impact the effort to build and train the Army. He highlighted the potential negative impact of analyses that failed to incorporate data and effects at all organizational levels. That tension remains today. Commander and organizational decision dynamics are complex, and too few commanders make the effort to remain literate in the current data environment.

And what would Lamp think of the capability of the current Army programming example—the Program Evaluation Group—to program? Undoubtedly he would want to see the multilevel data and analysis and, from an organizational perspective, examine how the Army measures the accountability of high-priority programs and addresses potential moral hazard. Are high-priority programs held accountable in execution, or is poor management indirectly rewarded with unfunded requirement bailouts because these programs are “top priority?” Does the Army analyze the return on investment of some of the lower priority items relative to highly funded programs in order to ascertain the real implications of such resourcing decisions, or is the Army instead “forced to make quick decisions” on an annual basis?

Lamp provided an insightful warning that echoes into the twenty-first century: “For it is this aspect of defense management that the decisionmaker—the civilian systems analyst—does not now weigh in his centralized measurements of military command effectiveness and requirements.”²⁰

The task ahead for Army leadership mirrors the challenge Lamp attempted to identify in 1971 and what several contemporary authors have asserted as the “Army’s professional center of gravity, its sense

19. Antulio J. Echevarria II, “Transforming the Army’s Way of Battle: Revising Our Abstract Knowledge,” in *The Future of the Army Profession*, ed. Don M. Snider and Lloyd Matthews (Boston: McGraw-Hill, 2005), 371.

20. Lamp, “Some Managerial Aspects,” 49.

of self.”²¹ In his seminal book on leadership, James MacGregor Burns pointed out, “the essence of leadership in any polity is the recognition of real need, the uncovering and exploiting of contradictions among values and between values and practice, the realigning of values, the reorganization of institutions where necessary, and the governance of change.”²² In response to this formidable expectation, the Army must develop effective strategic leaders who can bring personnel together, lead, and serve on teams with expert knowledge, collaborating to develop innovative solutions.

The Army War College takes this challenge seriously. Spurred on by a dynamic strategic environment, fundamental changes in higher education delivery modalities, and a new Joint Chiefs of Staff vision for professional military education, the Army War College is in the midst of an ambitious effort of curricular, organizational, and infrastructure reform. In line with the Joint Chiefs of Staff vision, the War College has placed a renewed emphasis on active and experiential learning with methodologies that “include use of case studies grounded in history to help students develop judgment, analysis, and problem-solving skills, which can then be applied to contemporary challenges, including war, deterrence, and measures short of armed conflict.”²³

Lamp closed with the observation, “at the Army level we must find ways and means of influencing the decisionmakers.”²⁴ He inferred that in his Army, an appreciation of modern management practice was insufficient and underdeveloped. Fast forward to today and much the same could be said of Army leader proficiency in strategic communication informed by knowledge management and data literacy skills.

Importantly, just as in Lamp’s day but at a more strategic level, the Army War College curriculum increasingly emphasizes effective communication and decision making. The key and essential “managerial aspects of command” are bounded by problem solving, asking the right questions, and effectively communicating the results to decisionmakers. These management skills are further augmented by building the individual additive skills, knowledge, and behaviors necessary to enable the development of initiative-oriented and innovation-based organizational cultures grounded in the moral foundations of the military profession.

As historian Barbara Tuchman—incidentally, the first female author featured in *Parameters*—noted, “to a proper understanding of the cause and effect . . . it must be written in terms of what was known and

21. George B. Forsythe et al., “Professional Identity Development for 21st Century Army Officers,” in *The Future of the Army Profession*, ed. Don M. Snider and Lloyd Matthews (Boston: McGraw-Hill, 2005), 189.

22. James MacGregor Burns, *Leadership* (New York: Harper & Row, 1978), 43.

23. Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS), *Developing Today’s Officers for Tomorrow’s Ways of War: The Joint Chiefs of Staff Vision and Guidance for Professional Military Education & Talent Management* (Washington, DC: JCS, 2020), 6.

24. Lamp, “Some Managerial Aspects,” 49.

believed at the time.”²⁵ What will the reader of *Parameters* in 2071 think of the efforts at the Army War College, as part of the Army and the Joint Force, to forecast and prepare for the challenges of the middle half of the twenty-first century?

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25. Barbara W. Tuchman, *Practicing History: Selected Essays* (New York: Random House Trade Paperbacks, 2014), 9.