Readings on Combat Decisionmaking


   “The ability to do this [intuitive decisionmaking] is not some mystical power, it is the product of work—of prolonged study, extensive practice, repeated analysis of...combat situations.”

   “Few Marines take the time or expend the effort to achieve a high level of competence in the art of tactical decisionmaking.”

   “True tactical skill…comes only to those who have invested heavily in their own self-development. Tactics are at the very heart of the Marine profession, and Marines deserve leaders at every level who have made…the investment in tactical expertise.”


   “Providing practice without effective feedback accomplishes little.”


   “Proficient decision makers…use their experience to recognize a situation as familiar, which gives them a sense of what goals are feasible, what cues are important, [and] what to expect next…”

   “Experienced decision makers deliberate more…about the nature of the situation, whereas novices deliberate more…about which response to select…Training can be more productive by focusing on situation assessment.”


   “The necessity for command…of dispersed formations increases reliance on subordinate officers’ and soldiers’ judgement…Organizational change…[benefits] armies with high quality manpower that encourages initiative…”

   “Expanding battlespace increases…uncertainty and ambiguity…This is why greater autonomy at lower levels…is necessary to overcome the fog and friction of future war.”

   “The tasks that ordinary soldiers are being asked to perform now involve decisions which previously would have been made by officers…they will only make the right decision if they are trained, selected, and encouraged to do so.”
“In an environment characterized by sudden, violent, and...unpredictable change, the complexity of...military operations places the skilled, experienced, and educated military professional at the center of events.”


“Battlefield vision is an explainable ability that leaders can develop...warfighting expertise...makes intuition and battlefield vision possible.”

“Producing an expert may not be...selecting someone who has special capabilities, but to create...the motivation needed for long-continued training.”


“There is a fundamental link between training, experience and...competence that provides the knowledge required to make...decisions...Officers should spend as much time as possible with troops and in the teaching and training environment.”


“Effective commanders...do not plan too far ahead...rely on simpler plans...explain their intent...and situation clearly.”

“Effective commanders anticipate...uncertainty...[and] hold a greater portion of their forces in reserve...Effective commanders...exhibit a higher-than-normal tolerance for uncertainty.”

“Effective commanders...realize that the enemy suffers from similar doubts. Effective commanders...exhibit a significant skill for improvisation and adaptation...They...encourage improvisation...and grant subordinates greater latitude.”

“Effective commanders...share situational awareness with others.”


“How can we best develop our commanders’ judgement in order for them to make decisions intuitively? Battle Studies, Decision Games, Simulations, Exercises, and Combat.”


“Many decisions made by experts can occur instantaneously due to abilities to quickly visualize what is happening and courses of action.”


German General Rudolf M. Hoffman, along with generals Halder, Fangohr, and List, re-constructed for U.S. Army interviewers how the Wehrmacht had taught tactics before and during WWII. “As a division commander, I conducted a map exercise every four weeks.”