

LETTERS

To the Editor—Lieutenant Colonel Thomas E. Shrader’s “The End of Surface Warships” in *JFQ* 58 (3^d Quarter, 2010) may have a correct message, and he is doubtless right that a view from outside any establishment can be valuable. But the article might have been improved had it been run by a naval or airpower historian prior to submission. It is wrong in some details, the sample size is not large enough, and the cases selected to “prove” his point are inadequate. Moreover, as with many of us, he seems to make the assumption that history repeats itself.

First, a couple of the minor detail errors: Billy Mitchell was never in the U.S. Army Air Corps because he resigned his commission in January 1926, a few months *before* the Air Corps was established. Second, the Hellcat of World War II was not a jet.

Colonel Shrader argues that the battleship was made obsolete by airpower because of its vulnerability. He accepts the ancient arguments that the bombing tests of 1921, Pearl Harbor, and the sinking of the Japanese battleship *Yamato* prove this. In the 1921 tests, the Air Service bombers were guided to their target by a string of destroyers showing the way; they bombed from the suicidal altitude of 2,000 feet and attacked a stationary and undefended target using 2,000-pound bombs that could not be lifted from a carrier deck until many years afterwards.

Similarly, the battleships at Pearl Harbor were motionless and essentially undefended. The U.S. Navy never lost another battleship from December 8, 1941, though many were attacked even by kamikazes in World War II. On the other hand, the Navy had eight aircraft carriers commissioned before that date. Five went to the bottom in 1942 (USS *Langley*, off Java; USS *Lexington*, Coral Sea; USS *Yorktown*, Midway; and USS *Wasp* and *Hornet*, the South Pacific). USS *Saratoga* did not fight at Midway because it was in the yard on the West Coast with torpedo damage. Arguably, then, the carriers were far more vulnerable than the battleships.

Finally, the *Yamato* was sunk in the spring of 1945, but it left Japan on a suicide mission with insufficient fuel to return. Moreover, the ship was lost to an enemy enjoying nearly complete air supremacy. Its sister ship,

the *Musashi*, went down in the Sibuyan Sea a few months earlier, again only without air support and unable to maneuver. Even then it did not go belly up until hit with more than 30 heavy bombs and torpedoes.

It seems clear, then, that it was *not* the vulnerability of the battleships that made them obsolescent, but rather the limited range of their offensive power as compared to that of carrier aircraft.

Colonel Shrader also seems to make some tacit assumptions that may not hold up. First, unaddressed is the fact that by far the greater part of commerce between continents and along their shores will necessarily be carried by surface vessels for many decades to come. Second, he seems to assume that surface vessels will be defenseless, a thought he shared with the likes of Billy Mitchell. Yet Lieutenant Colonel (later General) Walter Sweeney led the B-17s from Midway in 1942 and claimed many hits on the Japanese ships, but he did not get a single one. In the Southwest Pacific, General George Kenney also discovered the improbability of hitting a moving vessel from altitude and consequently developed low-level attack with positive results at the Battle of the Bismarck Sea.

What could make future surface ships easy to hit with missiles from 1,500 miles away? A modern surface ship with, for instance, 1 minute of warning could move perhaps 3,000 feet away from the coordinates that Colonel Shrader’s operator had punched in. How big a warhead would the missile have to carry to take out a vessel it had missed by 3,000 feet? Would the warhead have to be nuclear? Otherwise, would it not need sophisticated terminal guidance systems (in large numbers)? Could an attacker stake its national existence on the notion that its satellite communications could not be shut down with countermeasures? Billy Mitchell did not anticipate the formidable battleship defenses that protected themselves along with the carriers with them. How much warning would the 21st-century surface commander have? Enough? Many of our current carriers carry more Americans than the number who died in the World Trade Center Towers. Would the missile attacker have to be prepared for a counterattack, perhaps with nuclear weapons?

Is the United States rich enough to move all of its seapower beneath the surface? Is it rich enough to build enough transport submarines to move the Army? Can piracy really be controlled with some combination of submarines and unmanned systems? Will the missile-armed enemy have access to satellite communications and surveillance and the command and control to track all the targets?

It is all too easy for us to look upon our predecessors as being pretty dull, and certainly not as smart as the current generation. But just plain accident or dumb luck can have major effects on the course of events. Dive bombing was not well developed as a tactic until the latter part of the 1930s. Engine power limitations prevented carrier aircraft from getting off the decks with bombs weighing over 500 pounds and then flying out any appreciable distance until 1940. Billy Mitchell died on February 19, 1936. If Pearl Harbor had happened any time before that, then “battleship sailor” would not be a euphemism for an ignorant man.

—David R. Mets
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To the Editor—In *JFQ* 58 (3^d Quarter, 2010), Colonel Gian Gentile attempts to make the case that it is time for a dialogue on counterinsurgency (COIN) doctrine. He opens his argument with a personal story of how he was asked to provide input on the then-draft of Field Manual (FM) 3–24. He failed to provide that feedback and now pleads *mea culpa*.

The real argument in this opener is that Colonel Gentile had an opportunity to impact doctrine and failed to do so. But his illustration is symptomatic of a much wider and deeper root cause of the issues of doctrine and executing that doctrine—and that root cause is a lack of understanding and intellectual intent. What is really troubling is that he fails to understand the doctrine as one who is allegedly a practitioner.

Colonel Gentile, and a lot of officers like him, missed the most important element of COIN doctrine that is in a small paragraph in chapter three of FM 3–24. Paragraph 3–61 on social capital is probably the most critical single element in the entire document.

It is almost a shame that only a couple of paragraphs were devoted to the concept. One wonders if it might have been better just to leave it out as that would have provided us our window of blame on why the doctrine is all wrong.

But the authors did *not* leave it out, and now the blame on why COIN does not work rests with those charged with planning and executing COIN doctrine. I would say that there has been a lack of intellectual rigor in what the doctrine really means and how this translates to a practical utility in execution.

If we, and I use this term loosely, would have approached doctrine with real intellectual rigor, we would understand that social capital is tied to four basic elements that make up this concept and that these elements and concept are linked to the entire doctrinal premise of so-called hearts and minds, carrots and sticks, and transformation. Then perhaps we would not draw these false conclusions or wild inferences that protecting the population is only, or all, about a lot of feel-good, touchy-feely kind of stuff. Social capital and its calculated design and use are how one wields a carrot and stick that in turn reaches out to hearts and minds and then fundamentally, over time, becomes political and cultural transformation.

The problem here is not the doctrine or a debate about the doctrine. The root cause problem is that many still think that simply reading doctrine gives one everything they need to know about counterinsurgency, and that the CliffsNotes of doctrine is sufficient for a deep understanding. The real debate should be about how much intent we are teaching in regard to how COIN doctrine is planned, designed, and implemented. In essence, what is missing is the “how to.” But how does one actually get to the “how to” if he does not even understand what the doctrine means? And we wonder why we have been struggling with this for 9 years now.

What is doctrinaire and dogmatic is the lack of real intellectual rigor by many regarding understanding and intent behind the very keystone of COIN doctrine. Like Rupert Smith said, “There is no such thing as impartial governance or humanitarian assistance. In this environment every time you

help someone, you hurt someone else.” This is the essence of the elements of social capital in which we consciously decide how to wield that carrot and stick in a calculated effort to influence hearts and minds in an attempt to achieve political and cultural transformation.

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To the Editor— I take John Nagl’s side in the debate about the need for and value of counterinsurgency doctrine. But the record needs to be set straight about some of his assertions in “Learning and Adapting to Win” and “Constructing the Legacy of Field Manual 3–24” published in *JFQ* 58 (3^d Quarter, 2010) concerning U.S. Army doctrine development.

My perspective is from helping to develop major joint and Army doctrine publications in the field of operations other than war from 1991 to 1999 and publishing articles on this subject in both *JFQ* and *Army*. My article in the latter refuted the idea that doctrine for so-called unconventional operations was dead since the Vietnam War, but also outlined the problematic nature of such doctrine.

First, Dr. Nagl claims that the manual was developed with an “unusually open internal process.” Clearly, his discussion of this point proves the truth of the open process. However, such an approach to Army and joint doctrine is not unusual. In the case of Field Manual (FM) 100–23, *Peace Operations* (1994), for example, development proceeded with the involvement of all Army major commands, the Joint Staff, other Services, and unified commanders. It involved the United Nations, North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and Partnership for Peace militaries, retired officers and diplomats, academia, think tanks, and even the U.S. Congress and NATO parliamentarians. At least a dozen staff talks and subject matter exchanges with allied militaries and academic conferences and forums addressed the draft doctrine. We also briefed and provided drafts to an Assistant Secretary of Defense for Peacekeeping and Peace Enforcement.

My experience with FM 100–23 and many other doctrinal efforts in the “unconventional” arena involved casting a wide net, all of which belies his comment that “No previous doctrinal manual had undergone such a public review process.” *The New York Times* published two op-eds on the manual.

Second, Nagl is correct to state that “FM 3–24 is far from the Army’s only doctrinal manual, or the only one that shows the influence of a new pattern of thinking. . . . In fact, the publication of FM 3–0, *Operations*, in February 2008 was arguably more important than the publication of FM 3–24.” The current edition of FM 3–0, however, has a distinct provenance, especially in addressing the whole gamut of operations, including counterinsurgency. It is therefore unfair to claim that the preparation of doctrine is “less about traditional practice handed down from past generations and more about constant learning and adaptation based on current experience and collaboration with a broad group of concerned partners.” It is both. We firmly stand on the shoulders of our history and doctrine.

Furthermore, the claim of Nagl and others that FM 3–24 broke a mold in its doctrine development process is inaccurate. If there is a mold that needs to be broken, it is the one that claims only innovation and singular achievement instead of humility and gratitude to a collective past plus innovation, learning, and adaptation that need to be continually used in creating a future for others to build upon.

—LTC Richard J. Rinaldo, USA (Ret.)