

1983

In My View

T.L. Gatchel

Bruno Gruenwald

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review>

Recommended Citation

Gatchel, T.L. and Gruenwald, Bruno (1983) "In My View," *Naval War College Review*: Vol. 36 : No. 1 , Article 9.
Available at: <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review/vol36/iss1/9>

This Additional Writing is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at U.S. Naval War College Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Naval War College Review by an authorized editor of U.S. Naval War College Digital Commons. For more information, please contact repository.inquiries@usnwc.edu.

IN MY VIEW . . .



Ian Oliver

CV Battle Groups as Magnets?

Sir,

Some of us talk on occasion about the idea of using carriers as magnets to attract Soviet air strikes. This concept has been employed many times in ground warfare. The English, for example, employed the technique against the French during the Hundred Years' War. They would pick a piece of good defensive terrain, set up their archers behind a row of sharpened stakes, and challenge the French to attack them. Those few French men-at-arms who were able to reach the English position through a rain of arrows were destroyed by their English counterparts in close combat.

The weakness of the system was that it left the initiative in the hands of the enemy. When the French chose to assault the English position, the system worked well. When the French chose not to attack, or attacked under other circumstances—when the English were on the move, for example—the results were quite different. The obvious answer is to create a situation in which the magnet will threaten the enemy's vital interests if allowed to proceed unchallenged. Given the Soviets' concern about the offensive striking power of US carriers, drawing the Soviets into the attack may be no problem.

Even when threatened by the magnet, the enemy cannot be expected to attack until he is confident of destroying or damaging the magnet. This is particularly true of an enemy that uses a correlation of forces concept.

The French learned this lesson the hard way in Indochina where they were constantly faced with the problem of finding an elusive enemy and bringing him to battle. In 1954 at Na San the French discovered—almost by accident—that, if the Viet Minh could be lured into attacking apparently inferior French forces which, in fact, were well prepared for the assault, the Viet Minh could be defeated. In that battle, two Viet Minh divisions were destroyed by a much smaller French force. Dien Bien Phu was planned to be another Na San, but on a larger scale. In deciding whether to take the bait, the Viet Minh commander, General Giap, viewed the situation as a problem in correlation of forces. In his own words, "The importance of Dien Bien Phu could not be regarded as a decisive factor in our decision to attack it. In the relation of forces at that time, could we destroy the fortified entrenched camp of Dien Bien Phu? Could we be certain of victory in attacking it? Our decision had to depend on this consideration alone.*"

General Giap obviously built up his forces until he could be certain of victory. Might not Soviet naval aviation planners think about anticarrier warfare in similar terms? The French, on the other hand, fouled up the correlation of forces equation on both sides. They overestimated their own ability to defend Dien Bien Phu and underestimated the ability of the Viet Minh to take it.

One of the reasons for the bad estimate of Viet Minh capability was the tendency of the French to treat Viet Minh military thinking as a mirror of their own. In this view, "We would not or could not take some particular action" was the same as "The Viet Minh would not or could not take that same action."

One good example involved the Viet Minh employment of artillery. Dien Bien Phu is in the center of a bowl of mountains. The French explained away the obvious weakness of this arrangement by saying that any Viet Minh artillery placed in defilade behind the mountains that formed the bowl (normal Western artillery practice) would be out of range. Artillery placed on the forward slopes of the bowl, on the other hand, would be easily destroyed by French counterbattery fire.

Disregarding conventional Western doctrine and using manpower in a way that the French found hard to believe, the Viet Minh emplaced their artillery on the forward slopes in bunkers dug into the mountains. The bunkers provided only limited fields of direct fire but protected the guns from French artillery and air strikes. Since the French positions were fixed, the limited fields of fire imposed by the bunkers were unimportant. When the senior French artillery officer at Dien Bien Phu, who had approved the French artillery plan, realized the impact of the Viet Minh move and the fact that it could not be countered, he committed suicide.

In a similar fashion, the French reasoned that, given the lack of roads around Dien Bien Phu, the Viet Minh could not resupply a force that would be large enough to overwhelm the well-entrenched defenders. A Western army probably could not have. The Viet Minh, however, supplied themselves over narrow footpaths using bicycles modified to carry cargo. Carrier battle group commanders obviously don't need to worry about coolies pushing cargo bicycles along mountain paths. Perhaps those same commanders should be worried that the Soviets will employ Backfire bombers in a way that is inconceivable to American aviators, however.

Whenever you go spoiling for a fight, you had better be prepared to take a few licks. The French were not. As bad a defeat as Dien Bien Phu was, it did not destroy French military power in Indochina. What it did destroy was any will the French people had to continue the war. In the same vein, loss of a carrier that had been sent out as a magnet would not mean the destruction of US naval power. On the other hand, have most Americans—or even most American naval officers—been educated to understand that, in any future war with the Soviets, US ships—including aircraft carriers—are going to be sunk regardless of how conservatively they are employed? If not, should they be?

Colonel T.L. Gatchel, US Marine Corps
Strategic Studies Group, Naval War College

*Vo Nguyen Giap, *People's War, People's Army* (New York: Bantam Books, 1968), p. 146.

The Catholic Dilemma of Duty

Sir:

The article "Exodus Entrenchment: The Catholic Dilemma of Duty" by LCdr John N. Petrie in the July-August issue of the *Naval War College Review* was most apt. In citing two Jesuits, LCdr Petrie quoted some of those who "shout in the market place." But they are not the "voice" of the Church.

Fr. Murray is speaking for himself and apparently has not heard the pledge of the Holy Name Society, the Catholic Men's Society, that states, in part: "I pledge my support to the Flag of my Country and to the God given principles of freedom, justice and happiness for which it stands" and "I pledge my support to all lawful authority both religious and civil." All Americans have a grave moral obligation to support and defend the United States. I do not understand the reason for quoting, and apparently promoting, a false "doctrine" by implying that we can not be both good Americans and good Catholics. Particularly his presumption that there is a difference between American patriotism and the Catholic Faith.

Fr. Winters is indeed "shouting in the market place" when he states "resignation is the only viable option." Considering the anti-religious activities of the Soviet Union, and its communist "colonies," their almost complete lack of human rights, the arrogant aggression of the U.S.S.R. plus their massive superiority of "conventional" weapons; there is absolutely nothing morally wrong with our nuclear deterrent policy or the use of nuclear weapons in self-defense.

Actually, there is no "Catholic dilemma of duty" as we are Americans of the Catholic Faith. We do not presume dual citizenship, we are not hyphenated Americans; we are Americans, period!

Rear Admiral Clarence E. Coffin, US Navy (Ret.)

Scandinavian Gambit and Cordon Sanitaire

Sir:

General Sir Anthony Farrar-Hockley's article, "The Influence of the Northern Flank upon the Mastery of the Seas" (May-June 1982) was most interesting. However, I contend that the Soviet Union would initiate World War Three by attacking in overwhelming strength Scandinavia not Western Europe. Europe devastated is of little use to the Soviets. They need it essentially intact. Scandinavia, because of its relatively smaller population and fewer industries is of less economic importance. Additionally a battle for Europe would be difficult given the United States commitment to defend Europe. I believe that the absolute key to a Soviet plan demands early control of Norway and Sweden.

Failing to occupy Scandinavia not only limits the Soviet Navy from effectively attacking North Atlantic convoys but exposes the right flank of Soviet movement in Europe. Conversely, occupation by Soviet forces would effectively place Europe in a hostage position.

In another article, "The Cordon Sanitaire," Commander Gilchrist sets forth a remarkable series of arguments. Whereas a "tattletale" within or on the fringes of a Carrier Battle Group must most assuredly be of grave concern to the Task Force Commander, for the innumerable reasons cited, the circumstance, however intolerable, must be tolerated.

Realistically I cannot believe a Task Force Commander wouldn't have made provision for dealing with the intruder whenever it became necessary.

To risk triggering confrontation we cannot back away from at the height of a severe crisis may be just enough to take negotiation options out of the President's hands.

Bruno Gruenwald

Heinl Award in Marine Corps History

The Marine Corps Historical Foundation has announced the criteria for the third annual Colonel Robert D. Heinl, Jr. Memorial Award in Marine Corps History. The award will be \$1000 for the best article pertinent to Marine Corps history published in this or any other similar magazines in 1982.

Colonel Heinl, the distinguished Marine Corps officer, journalist, and historian whom this award memorializes, died in May 1979. Probably the best known of his many published works is his history of the Marine Corps, *Soldiers of the Sea*. He was a founder of the Marine Corps Historical Foundation.

In keeping with Colonel Heinl's great breadth of interest, "Marine Corps history" is very broadly defined for purposes of this award and includes biography and contemporary events.

The key consideration is that the candidate article be *pertinent* to US Marine Corps history.

The 1982 Awards Jury will consist of Brig. Gen. Frederick P. Henderson, Mr. J. Robert Moskin, and Dr. Allan R. Millett. General Henderson, since his retirement in 1959 after almost 24 years active duty in the Marine Corps, has pursued an equally distinguished career as a military operational analyst and writer. Mr. Moskin, a former foreign editor with *Look* magazine and presently senior editor with Aspen Institute, is the author of *The U.S. Marine Corps Story*. Dr. Millett, a professor of history at Ohio State University and a Marine Reserve colonel, is the author of the recently published new history of the Marine Corps, *Semper Fidelis*.

Announcement of the award winner will be made in the spring of 1983. Readers, in addition to editors, are encouraged to nominate articles of their choice. The address is:

Col. Robert D. Heinl, Jr. Award Committee
 Marine Corps Historical Foundation
 Bldg. #58, WNY, Washington, DC 20374

