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**TITLE**  
The human in command. A brief introduction

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## CHAPTER I

# THE HUMAN IN COMMAND

## *A Brief Introduction*

ROSS PIGEAU and CAROL MCCANN

If you know the enemy and know yourself, you need not fear the result of a hundred battles. If you know yourself but not the enemy, for every victory gained you will also suffer a defeat. If you know neither the enemy nor yourself, you will succumb in every battle.

—SUN TZU, *The Art of War* (circa 490 BC/1910, pp. 24–25)

### 1. WHY THIS BOOK?

The impetus for this book is simple: to outline, discuss, and emphasize the uniquely human dimension of military command.

In a world replete with natural disasters, regional conflicts, and geopolitical tensions, modern militaries are tasked to carry out a range of missions that require a broad array of skills. Among these skills, the ability to capitalize on technology is often touted as the most important. The media regularly show pictures of military sensors, warcraft, and impressive computer systems. Indeed, images of precision bombing strikes during the 1991 Gulf War, and during the 1999 conflict in Kosovo, have become the icons of Western military might. But in reality, such operations are not nearly as straightforward and tidy as they first seem. Militaries, after all, are made up of ordinary individuals—individuals with varying strengths, weaknesses, stamina, and frailties—who must deal with extraordinary circumstances. During their careers, military personnel behold the tragic extremes of the human condition: famine, war, death, destruction, and disease. And witnessing such calamities induces feelings of anger, fear, fatigue, and despair. Yet through it all, they are expected to perform. They are expected to carry out the mission.

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*The Human in Command: Exploring the Modern Military Experience*,  
edited by McCann and Pigeau, Kluwer Academic/Plenum Publishers, New York, 2000.

Ironically, the scientific community understands the physics of flight, the chemistry of explosives, and the metallurgy of armour without understanding nearly as well the psychology of leadership, the sociology of group behaviour, or the cognitive basis of decision making. And this knowledge gap prevails despite the fact that human behaviour and conflict have existed for much longer than airplanes, explosives, and tanks. This book, like the workshop on which it is based,<sup>1</sup> attempts to redress that imbalance by bringing together operational commanders and behavioural scientists to identify and explore human command issues.

The book's central assumption is that the world's militaries exist first and foremost to resolve *human* conflict. Since in many cases, human conflict can be resolved only through human intervention, militaries are a nation's instrument of last resort for interceding, for imposing control. Therefore, it is worth delving into the types of human conflict that militaries are tasked to resolve—if only to appreciate the uniquely human dimensions and challenges involved in military command.

## 2. A DRAMATICALLY DIFFERENT MODEL OF HUMAN CONFLICT

When military personnel speak of a “spectrum of conflict” in world affairs, they usually have in mind a unidimensional continuum anchored on one end by less violent operations (for example, humanitarian aid and disaster relief) and on the other by all-out war. Peacekeeping and peace support operations occupy spots somewhere in the middle. While militaries may find this model useful in planning their operations and allocating their resources, it fails to adequately capture the broad range of conflicts that humans—and, by implication, militaries—can become embroiled in.

It might prove more instructive to consider the classifications of human conflict found in drama. Drama, after all, deals almost exclusively with human conflict, as many great historical works of fiction—Tolstoy's *War and Peace*, Hemingway's *The Old Man and the Sea*, Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, and Hugo's *Les Misérables* among them—attest. Drama theory distinguishes three classes of human conflict: person-versus-person, person-versus-Nature, and person-versus-self.

- *Person-versus-person conflicts* are every military's fundamental *raison d'être*. Militaries exist primarily to protect (and sometimes to extend) a nation's sovereignty. Whether doing so entails minor skirmishes or nuclear war, sovereignty is asserted through person-versus-person conflict. Such conflicts are therefore an unavoidable aspect of military life, and they can induce tremendous stress in commanders, despite the purported justness of the cause or the humanitarian validity of the operation. Some contributors to this book discuss the character and nature of those stresses, as well as the

<sup>1</sup> This book is based on the edited proceedings of the NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization) Human in Command Workshop June 8–12, 1998, at the Canadian Land Forces Command and Staff College, Fort Frontenac, Kingston, Ontario

### 3. *Human vs. Nature* (V.P. of the *Human*)

strategies that commanders must use to deal effectively with the military for themselves and for their subordinates.

- *Person-versus-Nature conflicts* encompass not only all instances in which humans are threatened by natural disasters, but also all human attempts to control Nature through clever inventions, through the application of science, or even through sheer physical prowess. In many countries, the military embodies the nation's broadest capability for facing Nature's challenges. Militaries are routinely required to perform in extremes of heat and cold, from the stratosphere to the ocean's depth, while carrying with them both the means for their own survival and the means for imposing their will. In many ways, those militaries that best control (or account for) Nature have an advantage when it comes to achieving operational success—whether success requires being able to predict changes in the weather, travel faster, shoot farther, or communicate more quickly. While person-versus-person conflicts often provide the impetus for military action (and are also one of the most common results of such action), person-versus-Nature conflicts more often occur during the process of military engagement itself. Each combat maneuver, air sortie, or naval campaign requires either explicit or implicit knowledge of the physical terrain, the laws of physics, or the principles of hydrodynamics. Such knowledge can be gained either through experience or through scientific investigation. Command must therefore take account of technological advancements and be prepared to use them effectively. Command must also be prepared to assist when attempts at controlling (or predicting) Nature fail: in disaster relief, search-and-rescue operations, and humanitarian aid.
- *Person-versus-self conflicts* cause the first two types of human conflict—as important as they seem—to pale in comparison. Humans appear unique among animals in spending significant amounts of time engaged in self-reflection. According to Adler (1985), Plato reasoned that consciousness is a state that entails being aware of something—of the world, of others—but more importantly (for humans), it entails being aware of one's self. Self-reflection creates human identity, and identity allows each of us to speculate on our wants, our desires, our strengths, and our weaknesses. When these wants and desires become inconsistent with self-perception, person-versus-self conflicts ensue. Humans experiencing such conflicts question their motives, their place in society, and sometimes even their role in the universe.

Great commanders, we believe, realize that person-versus-self conflict is the single biggest factor in determining a military mission's success or failure. Equipment is useless without personnel who believe in the cause and are motivated to achieve the goals that will further it. Commanders must understand that self-doubt, poor discipline, low morale, and a weak ethos are symptoms of person-versus-self conflicts. Such conflicts surface preeminently during times of adversity—a family member's death, a natural catastrophe, or perhaps a serious social injustice. Such times challenge complacency in both self and society. Person-versus-self conflicts

therefore arise inevitably from the first two types of human conflict, and militaries are particularly susceptible to them. For example, military personnel experience society's worst and most disturbing person-versus-person conflicts (extreme violence, war, genocide). And in providing aid to civil powers during earthquakes, floods, and famines, military personnel also face many of the most severe person-versus-Nature conflicts. No other organization exposes its members to a more varied and more extensive array of human adversity. As a result, no single group of individuals has more occasion to experience profound person-versus-self conflicts. Indeed, under such circumstances it would be unnatural if average armed forces members did *not* suffer from such conflicts. How could they not question their morals, their cultural values, even their humanity? And how does such questioning affect performance, both during and after an operation? Command must acknowledge these issues in order to guard against the pitfalls of person-versus-self conflicts and minimize their negative effects. Much of this book is devoted to describing and discussing the nature of such conflicts in military culture.

### 3. WHAT TO EXPECT FROM THIS BOOK

The following chapters represent some of the most current operational experience and scientific thought regarding military command: personal testimonials from senior officers about leadership; treatises on and descriptions of new concepts related to command theory; and empirical findings from experimental studies in operational settings. Throughout, the contributors challenge both the military and the research communities to reaffirm command's importance by devoting more resources, research, and training to this area.

The book is divided into two parts. Part 1, "The Command Experience," begins with *personal* descriptions of command's difficulties and complexities (Chapters 2 to 7). Senior military officers from four nations share their insights into and their conclusions about their personal command experiences. Part 1 ends with *conceptual* discussions by military officers (and by an Australian Federal Police commander) concerning such key aspects of command as leadership, intent, tempo, and decentralization (Chapters 8 to 11).

Part 2, "The Science of Command," presents scientific attempts to define and study command. It begins by continuing where Part 1 left off, with *conceptual* treatments of command—although here the approach is more scientific (Chapters 12 to 15). These contributors attempt to reconceptualize command and control, to develop practical ways of thinking during command, and to question the generalizability of the mission command philosophy. The next section (Chapters 16 to 18) explores three *methodological* considerations for studying command: dynamic decision making; methods for assessing the effectiveness of multforce command; and event-based performance tools for training. Part 2 ends with contributors offering *empirical* evidence from studies investigating a wide range of command issues: communicating intent; the breakdown of military discipline; assessing morale and cohesion; experiencing and coping with stress; training; and analyzing command behaviour (Chapters 19 to 25).

In the book's closing chapter "Research Challenges for the Human in Command," we synthesize the issues and questions that arose in participants raised during the evening discussion sessions and during the question periods that followed the presentations. This chapter provides guideposts for future research as well as a framework for discussing the entire topic.

#### 4. INTO THE DARKNESS

There is irony in this book. Although command's psychological and social-psychological importance has been recognized since at least 490 BC (as the Sun Tzu quotation that opens this introduction illustrates), very few researchers have investigated the topic scientifically. The axiom "Only humans command" seems to have suffered the fate of many axioms: its self-evident nature conceals its fundamental truth. Few have deduced the organizational, psychological, and technological implications of this essential principle. Although much has been written about the "art of command" and the "science of control," too often the literature pays only cursory attention to command (acknowledging its importance, but using its fuzziness as a justification for virtually ignoring it other wise). "We do not deny that there is much of art in command, just as there is much of art in all well-addressed and well-performed enterprises (including science), but acknowledging this fact in no way diminishes the importance of studying command scientifically. The art in command merely renders it difficult and puzzling as a subject for scientific inquiry—one with complexity and mystery that match most of the human sciences but one that will yield great potential rewards."

The problem brings to mind the old joke about the drunk who loses a set of keys in a dark alley but looks for them under a lamppost "because the light is better there." We maintain that both the military and the research communities have behaved like that drunk. They have devoted too much time and too many resources to the known (applying technology) and the doable (applying standard procedures and established paradigms), while enjoying the relative comfort and safety of bright lampposts (scientific traditions, military rules and regulations). We maintain that the answers to the problems faced by humans in command lie elsewhere—outside that pool of light. They lie in the darkness of the three types of human dramatic conflict—particularly person-versus-self conflict. They lie in the gloom and murkiness of human behaviour.

We offer this book as a lantern for exploring that darkness. Illuminated by the experience of senior military officers and fuelled by the strength of diverse scientific disciplines, let us set out together and search for the lost keys to command.

#### 5. REFERENCES

- Adler, M. J. (1985). *Ten philosophical mistakes*. New York: Macmillan.  
 Sun Tzu. (1910). *Sun Tzu on the art of war: The oldest military treatise in the world* (L. Giles Trans.). London, UK: Luzac. (Original work published circa 490 BC)

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