



Official Newsletter of the Michigan Company of Military Historians & Collectors
May 8, 2017

“We can’t rewrite history. But we can correct some of the evils of history. It may be that you’re not forgetting because you never knew ...but because of a conscious elimination from our memory.” **John Cummings**, founder of the Whitney Plantation Museum, Wallace, Louisiana.

“Every tyrant, every dictator, loves Abraham Lincoln.” **Pastor John Weaver** of the Southern Cross Revival, October 8, 1997.

“However sure you are that you can easily win, that there would not be a war if the other man did not think he also had a chance.” **Winston S. Churchill**

“The crisis in American Foreign Policy lies not in the malevolence of men but in the obsolescence of ideas.” **Arthur M. Schlesinger**, March 8, 1967.

“Airpower unsupported by the forces of the battlefield is a military means without an end.” **S.L.A. Marshall**, MEN Against FIRE, 1947.

“I never did give them hell. I just told the truth, and they thought it was hell.” **Harry S. Truman**

Our May speaker is Machinist Mate Second Class Brett Vess. Presently a Navy Recruiter with prior naval experience.

MEETINGS take place the second Monday of every month at the **Downtown Holiday Inn**, 310 Pearl NW, Grand Rapids, MI 49504 (616) 235-7611. Socializing begins at 6:00 (1800 hrs), dinner at 7:00 (1900 hrs), business meeting 7:15 (1915 hrs), and program at 8:00 (2000 hrs). Ample free parking available

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Company Notes

- Midway was the only battle waged across the International Date Line. Planes took off yesterday, bombed tomorrow, and returned today.
- Ron Kloet may grace our presence Monday night.

The editorial opinions and articles in **The Cannon Report** do not represent any official position of the Michigan Company of Military Historians and Collectors (MCMH&C) only the opinions of the editor. The MCMH&C is a non-partisan, non-ideological association. All members are welcome to submit material, letters, “For the Good of the Company items”, etc. Direct inquiries or comments to kuziaks@me.com

A Line On A Map-continued...

Another line was drawn. This time it was the 17th parallel in the former French colony of Indochina, but that didn't happen till 1953 when it was added to the Korean War Peace Treaty in Geneva, Switzerland. The French had ruled in Indochina—had *owned* Indochina as the colonists like to claim—ever since the capture of Saigon in 1859. As Simon Winchester recounts in *Pacific*: "...the French were as imperially oppressive as any, they are generally...more benign and cultured than such philistine ruffians as the Dutch and the British. Even so, all empires, benign or brutal, inevitably fade, and the drawing down of French influence would get underway swiftly, soon after WWII. The Battle of Dien Bien Phu in far northern Vietnam was seen as the beginning of the end of France's land tenure in the western Pacific. But one other episode, half-forgotten now, marks the ultimate cause of the whole unlovely mess, of which Dien Bien Phu was but one part. It occurred in 1945, and it concerns a much decorated British Indian Army officer named Douglas David Gracey.

Major General Gracey, at the Pacific's War's end, was appointed commander-in-chief, Allied Land Forces French Indochina, and sent to Saigon. He directed his 20,000 soldiers through one of the most bizarre periods in modern Indochinese history—with the specific avowed aim (since restoring the imperial status quo was Winston Churchill's stated policy) of returning the territory to the imperial rule of the French. The Allied politicians in Europe had been blindsided by Japan's unexpectedly swift surrender. Vietnam had long been occupied by Japan and now the Japanese soldiers had to be disarmed and sent home. What Gracey had not expected was the impassioned opposition to his mission by the Viet Minh nationalists in Saigon. Beginning in May 1941, the [Viet Minh](#), led by [Hô Chí Minh](#), began a revolt against the Japanese for they had deposed the reigning Vichy government after Germany's surrender. They now became a nationalistic faction fighting the Japanese and started to receive aid from the United States, China, and the Soviet Union."

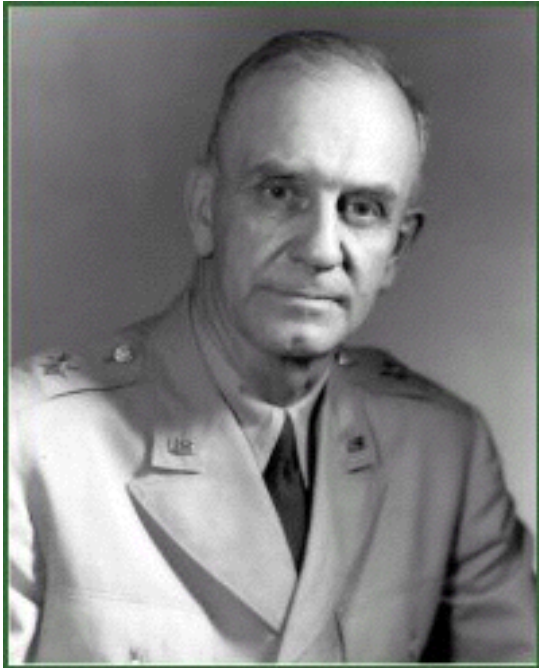
Just two weeks before Gracey's arrival in Saigon, September, 1945, Ho Chi Minh had issued his Vietnamese Declaration of Independence and declared his country free and independent of foreign occupation. It began with the preamble "All men are created equal. They are endowed... Those are undeniable truths...Nevertheless, for more than eighty years, the French imperialists, abusing the standard of Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity, have violated our Fatherland and oppressed our fellow citizens." As Gracey travelled from the airport to Saigon, the road was lined with people waving Viet Minh flags and holding posters welcoming the British but also demanding that the French colonists leave. British policy was the exact opposite (Churchill's policy) and Gracey smelled trouble. At first he refused to cooperate with the Viet Minh. He saw his job as freeing all the Allied POWs, ease the French back into running the country, and sending all the Japanese troops back home.

Winchester continues: "the Viet Minh did not take kindly to the general's insouciantly dismissive attitude. They staged strikes and closed down the Saigon market. Gracey retaliated by shutting down the newspapers; declaring martial law, and freeing a particularly violent group of former Vichy French soldiers, who promptly armed themselves. They then initiated a citywide version of a coup d'état, and embarked on acts of vengeance against everyone who stood in their way—Viet Minh nationalists most especially. Fighting erupted and quickly spread everywhere. Gracey and his kukri-wielding Gurka battalions tore into the fight with gusto. His superiors in Singapore gave him carte blanche to pacify the region. That's when Gracey made one of the most curious of all postwar decisions. He still had thousands of disarmed Japanese troops in the area who knew the city and knew how to fight. He gave them guns and demanded that they stand alongside his British soldiers against the Viet Minh nationalists. Thus began one of the most extraordinary episodes of post WWII. The notion that Japanese troops would be armed by those who had recently vanquished them

and that they would be compelled to fight under a British flag alongside Nepalese soldiers for a French colonial ideal against a Vietnamese force that was demanding its own people's independence is well-nigh incomprehensible.

But it worked. With the help of the Japanese, who did their job with characteristic efficiency, the area was pacified. By October matters had so settled that Churchill ordered the French to return. Early in 1946, the aristocratic French general Philippe Leclerc de Hauteclocque assumed control in Saigon and Gracey returned to India. Unwittingly though, Gracey had so angered the Viet Minh by his disdain, his arrogance, and his brutal battles against them that some insist it was he who case-hardened Ho Chi Minh's opposition to the West, and indeed to all continued Western interest in the region. The Vietnamese path to independence, shedding their submission to a European power, was becoming long and bloody. In fighting against the French, the Vietnamese lost almost 500,000 people and the French lost 90,000. The Vietnamese today speak of the First and the Second Indochina Wars—the first pitting the Viet Minh against the French; the second, pitting Vietnam's North against its South, with the Americans in this case heavily and vainly trying to keep two young countries from becoming dominated by Communists. The fighting in both wars lasted for 30 years. The second resulted in more than 1 million North Vietnamese dead, 200,000 South Vietnamese, more than 58,000 Americans, and an assortment (Australians, Koreans, Thais) of more than 5,000 others—and in the end, the Indochinese were fully back in control of their own affairs.

The way stations of the two conflicts are fading fast along history's conveyor belt. Some of the names and events once so famed have receded with pitiless speed. Does anyone recall General Francis Brink, the Cornell-educated American infantryman who headed the first-ever U.S. Army headquarters in Saigon, established back in August, 1950."



militarycorruption.com writes: "He died, sitting at his desk in the Pentagon, three bullets fired into his chest; that didn't faze the top brass or their public relations "spinmeisters" one bit. The Army general, they claimed, had "committed suicide" because he was "depressed." Yeah, that's the ticket. Brink fired "three times" into his lungs and heart just to make sure he'd done the job right. That this shocking incident took place on June 24, 1952, shows how "murder in the military," disguised as "suicide," has been around a long time. Very little has been published about Gen. Brink's bizarre death. Few Vietnam veterans realize the Brink BOQ, target of a Viet Cong bombing on Christmas Eve 1964 - the Bob Hope USO troupe was running late and failed to be in downtown Saigon on schedule - was named after the "suicided" flag officer. Brink's opinions on Vietnam were unpopular, he felt he knew too much, and that his life might even be in danger because of that knowledge. He believed "the French were

siphoning off weapons and equipment that the United States had specified for use in Indochina, which the French were diverting to Algeria, and other countries, in anticipation of those countries rising up against them, as the Viet Minh had done in Vietnam." It has been suggested that Brink stumbled on some misappropriation of funds or the smuggling of drugs, and was silenced. Brink didn't give any indication to them he was about to kill himself. He certainly didn't leave any note behind, not even a forged one. The general called his daughter Leilani a short time before his death to say he planned on seeing her and her husband soon. It was never disclosed if the general's fingerprints were even on the alleged suicide weapon, a .38 pistol. Also, no records exist of Gen. Brink's death in the Arlington County, Va. Coroner's Office. All records of the shooting were turned over to the Defense

Department. "Francis Brink's personal and medical records, as well as the coroner's report, were destroyed in a fire" at the Military Records Center in St. Louis, Mo. in 1973. But like so much else from Vietnam, much has been discounted and forgotten.

How We Got That Line

For almost 10 years the Viet Minh battled the French (1945-1954). The Battle of Dien Bien Phu was the climactic confrontation of the First Indochina War between the French Union's French Far East Expeditionary Corps and Viet Minh -nationalist revolutionaries. It was, from the French view before the event, a set piece battle to draw out the Vietnamese and destroy them with superior firepower. The battle occurred between March and May 1954 and culminated in a comprehensive French defeat that influenced negotiations underway at Geneva among several nations over the future of Indochina.

By 1953, the First Indochina War was not going well for France. A succession of commanders had proven incapable of suppressing the Viet Minh insurrection. They were fighting for independence. During their 1952–53 campaign, the Viet Minh had overrun vast swathes of Laos, a French ally and Vietnam's western neighbor. The French were unable to slow the Viet Minh advance, who fell back only after outrunning their always-tenuous supply lines. In 1953, the French had begun to strengthen their defenses in the Hanoi delta region to prepare for a series of offensives against Viet Minh staging areas in northwest Vietnam. They set up fortified towns and outposts in the area. In May 1953, French Premier René Mayer appointed Henri Navarre, a trusted colleague, to take command of French Union Forces in Indochina. Mayer had given Navarre a single order—to create military conditions that would lead to an "honorable political solution".

The French began an operation to insert, then support the soldiers at Dien Bien Phủ, deep in the hills of northwestern Vietnam. On November 20, 1953 three battalions of French paratroopers were dropped from squadrons of aircraft and established a new fortress in a long valley on the border with Laos. Within weeks this patch of low-lying land had been transformed into a formidable looking base. There were two long airstrips, scores of gun emplacements, and subsidiary hilltop forts which surrounded the main base. (Note: Dien Bien Phu had long been the center of the opium smuggling region in this area valued at over 5,000,000 French Francs a year. More investigation is warranted to understand if this action was done more to protect French commercial interests or defeat the Viet Minh). By December, the French, under the command of Colonel Christian de Castries, began transforming their anchoring point into a fortress by setting up seven satellite positions. The French had committed 10,800 troops, with more reinforcements totaling nearly 16,000 men, to the defense of a monsoon-affected valley, surrounded by heavily wooded hills that had not yet been secured. Artillery as well as ten M24 Chaffee light tanks and numerous aircraft were committed to the garrison. The garrison included French regular troops (notably elite paratroop units plus artillery), Foreign Legionnaires, Algerian and Moroccan *tirailleurs* (sharpshooters), and locally recruited Indochinese infantry. All told, the Viet Minh had moved 50,000 regular troops into the hills surrounding the valley, totaling five divisions including the 351st Heavy Division, which was made up entirely of heavy artillery. Artillery and antiaircraft guns, which outnumbered the French artillery by about four to one, were moved into positions overlooking the valley.

“Ho Chi Minh had the measure of the giant base almost from the start. His military commander, Vo Nguyen Giap had been preparing for weeks, bringing in artillery pieces bolt by bolt, trunnion by trunnion, barrel by barrel, along a maze of jungle paths. They dug tunnels through the mountains, and placed the artillery pieces overlooking the French encampment. This positioning of

the artillery made it nearly impervious to French counter-battery fire. In total silence his soldiers dug rabbit warrens of trenches to within feet of the French lines. On March 13, 1954, once the howitzers up on the hillsides had been trained and the trench motors readied, one of the greatest, saddest, most heroic, most Orientaly impudent and Asiatically triumphant battles of recent times got under way. After several days the French artillery commander, Charles Piroth, unable to respond with any effective counter-battery fire, committed suicide, killing himself with a grenade for bringing dishonor (as a Frenchman would naturally put it) to his country. The Viet Minh occupied the highlands around Dien Bien Phu and bombarded the French positions for fifty-four days. Tenacious fighting on the ground ensued, reminiscent of the trench warfare of World War I. Day by day the French were pushed into what must have seemed like the unforgiving jaws of a meat grinder. The French repeatedly repulsed Viet Minh assaults on their positions. Discipline held, and there were heroic displays that have never been forgotten in France to this day (much like what would happen 25 years later). But it was hopeless. Their position was entirely surrounded; the odds, overwhelming. Supplies and reinforcements were delivered by air, though as the key French positions were overrun, the French perimeter contracted and the air resupply on which the French had placed their hopes became impossible. As the Viet Minh antiaircraft fire took its toll, fewer and fewer of those supplies reached the French. The garrison was overrun in May after a two-month siege, and most of the French forces surrendered. A few of them escaped to Laos. The French government then resigned, and the new Prime Minister, the left-of-center Pierre Mendès France, supported French military withdrawal from Indochina.”

The garrison had constituted roughly a tenth of the total French Union manpower in Indochina. The defeat seriously weakened the position and prestige of the French as previously planned negotiations over the future of Indochina began. The Geneva Conference opened on May 8, 1954, the day after the surrender of the garrison. Ho Chi Minh entered the conference on the opening day with the news of his troops' victory in the headlines. The resulting agreement temporarily partitioned Vietnam into two zones: divided at the 17th parallel, the North was the Democratic Republic of Vietnam, a brand new state that was now backed by Moscow and Beijing. While the South was administered by the French-supported State of Vietnam. The last units of the French Union forces withdrew from Indochina in 1956. This partition was supposed to be temporary, and the two zones were meant to be reunited through national elections in 1956. After the French military withdrawal, the United States supported the southern government, nominally ruled by Emperor Bao Dai, thus preventing Ho Chi Minh from gaining control of the entire country. The refusal of Ngo Dinh Diem (the US-supported Premier of the first Republic of Vietnam (RVN)) to allow elections in 1956, as had been stipulated by the Geneva Conference, eventually led to the first phase of the Second Indochina War.

Much like their possessions in North Africa, France had politically divested herself from the internal politics of her former possessions, however, the mercantile interests were reluctant to leave from the former French territories, especially in Algeria and Indochina. In the first period of his premiership, Diem did not have much power in the government, he lacked military and police forces and the civil system's key positions were still held by French officials. Also he could not control the Bank of Indochina. Besides, Diem had to face other massive obstacles, the French colonists wanted to remove him to protect France's interest in South Vietnam, general Nguyễn Văn Hinh, a Francophile, the leader of National Army was ready to oust Diem, the leaders of Hòa Hảo and Cao Đài sect armies wanted positions in Diem cabinet and complete administrative control over their own large-following, and the major threat of Bình Xuyên—an organized crime syndicate, controlled the National Police led by Lê Văn Viễn, whose power was focused in Saigon. In summer 1954, the three organizations controlled approximately one-third of the territory and population in South Vietnam. In that situation,

besides his own political skills, Diem had to trust his relatives and the backing of his American supporters to overcome the obstacles and neutralize his opponents.

Diem criticized the French for abandoning North Vietnam to the Communists at Geneva, claiming that the terms did not represent the Vietnamese people's will and refused the French suggestion to include more pro-French officials in his government. His heavy-handed policies toward non-communist Vietnamese nationalists was a key cause of the strain within the military leadership and the Buddhist and Confucian majority. The turning point came in June, 1963 when a Buddhist monk, Thích Quảng Đức, set himself on fire in the middle of a busy Saigon intersection in protest of Diem policies; photos of this event were disseminated around the world, and for many people these pictures came to represent the failure of Diem's government. A number of other monks publicly self-immolated, and the US grew increasingly frustrated with the unpopular leader's public image in both Vietnam and the United States. Diem used his conventional anti-communist argument, identifying the dissenters as communists. As demonstrations against his government continued throughout the summer, the special forces loyal to Diem's brother, Nhu, conducted an August raid of the Xá Lợi pagoda in Saigon. Other pagodas were vandalized, monks beaten, and the cremated remains of Quảng Đức, which included his heart, a religious relic, were confiscated. Simultaneous raids were carried out across the country, with the Từ Đàm pagoda in Huế looted, the statue of Gautama Buddha demolished and a body of a deceased monk confiscated. When the populace came to the defense of the monks, the resulting clashes saw 30 civilians killed and 200 wounded. In all 1,400 monks were arrested, and some thirty were injured across the country. The United States indicated its disapproval of Diem's administration when ambassador Henry Cabot Lodge Jr. visited the pagoda. No further mass Buddhist protests occurred during the remainder of Diem's rule (which would amount to less than five months). Madame Nhu Trần Lệ Xuân, Nhu's wife, inflamed the situation by mockingly applauding the suicides, stating, "If the Buddhists want to have another barbecue, I will be glad to supply the gasoline." The pagoda raids stoked widespread public disquiet in Saigon. Students at Saigon University boycotted classes and rioted, which led to arrests, imprisonments and the closure of the university; this was repeated at Hue University. When high school students demonstrated, Diem arrested them as well; over 1,000 students from Saigon's leading high school, most of them children of Saigon civil servants, were sent to re-education camps, including, reportedly, children as young as five, on charges of anti-government graffiti. Diem's foreign minister Vũ Văn Mẫu resigned, shaving his head like a Buddhist monk in protest. When he attempted to leave the country on a religious pilgrimage to India, he was detained and kept under house arrest.

A coup d'état was designed by a military revolutionary council including ARVN generals with assurances of American non-intervention. On November 1, 1963 the ARVN overthrew the government in a swift coup. With only the palace guard remaining to defend Diem and his younger brother Nhu, the generals called the palace offering Diem exile if he surrendered. That evening, however, Diem and his entourage escaped via an underground passage to Cha Tam Catholic Church in Cholon, where they were captured the following morning. The brothers were assassinated together in the back of an M113 armored personnel carrier. Diem was buried in an unmarked grave in a cemetery next to the house of the US Ambassador. After Diem's death, South Vietnam was unable to establish a stable government and several coups took place. The United States continued to influence South Vietnam's government. The assassination bolstered North Vietnamese attempts to characterize the South Vietnamese as "supporters of colonialism". This arrangement proved tenuous and escalated into the Vietnam War (Second Indochina War), eventually bringing 500,000 American troops into South Vietnam. Thus the desire to divide another country led to more bloodshed, 1 million North Vietnamese, 200,000 South Vietnamese and 58,000 Americans dead. Eventually the Vietnamese prevailed, finally gaining control of their own affairs without any foreign interference since 1859.

Military Simulations

Military simulations, also known informally as war games, are exercises in which theories of warfare can be tested and refined without the need for actual hostilities. The term military simulation can cover a wide spectrum of activities, ranging from full-scale field-exercises, to abstract computerized models that can proceed with little or no human involvement. Manual simulations (no or very little computer involvement) have probably been in use in some form since mankind first went to war. Chess can be regarded as a form of military simulation (although its precise origins are debated). In more recent times, the forerunner of modern simulations was the Prussian game *Kriegsspiel*, which appeared around 1811 and is sometimes credited with the Prussian victory in the Franco-Prussian War.

As a general scientific principle, the most reliable data comes from actual observation and the most reliable theories depend on it. This also holds true in military analysis, where analysts look towards live field-exercises and trials as providing data likely to be realistic (depending on the realism of the exercise) and verifiable (it has been gathered by actual observation). One can readily discover, for example, how long it takes to construct a pontoon bridge under given conditions with given manpower, and this data can then generate norms for expected performance under similar conditions in the future, or serve to refine the bridge-building process. Any form of training can be regarded as a "simulation" in the strictest sense of the word (inasmuch as it simulates an operational environment); however, many if not most exercises take place not to test new ideas or models, but to provide the participants with the skills to operate within existing ones.

Full-scale military exercises, or even smaller-scale ones, are not always feasible or even desirable. Availability of resources, including money, is a significant factor—it costs a lot to release troops and materiel from any standing commitments, to transport them to a suitable location, and then to cover additional expenses such as petroleum, oil and lubricants (POL) usage, equipment maintenance, supplies and consumables replenishment and other items. In addition, certain warfare models do not lend themselves to verification using this realistic method. It might, for example, prove counter-productive to accurately test an attrition scenario by killing one's own troops.

Military simulations can be divided into two broad areas. *Heuristic simulations* are those that are run with the intention of stimulating research and problem solving; they are not necessarily expected to provide empirical solutions. *Stochastic simulations* are those that involve, at least to some extent, an element of chance. Most military simulations fall somewhere in between these two definitions, although manual simulations lend themselves more to the heuristic approach and computerized ones to the stochastic. Manual simulations, as described above, are often run to explore a 'what if?' scenario and take place as much to provide the participants with some insight into decision-making processes and crisis management as to provide concrete conclusions. Indeed, such simulations do not even require a conclusion; once a set number of moves has been made and the time allotted has run out, the scenario will finish regardless of whether the original situation has been resolved or not.

Ideally military simulations should be as realistic as possible—that is, designed in such a way as to provide measurable, repeatable results that can be confirmed by observation of real-world events. This is especially true for simulations that are stochastic in nature, as they are used in a manner that is intended to produce useful, predictive outcomes. Any user of simulations must always bear in mind that they are, however, only an approximation of reality, and hence only as accurate as the model itself. Developing realistic models has proven to be somewhat easier in naval simulations than on land. One of the pioneers of naval simulations, Fletcher Pratt, designed his "Naval War Game" in the

late 1930s, and was able to validate his model almost immediately by applying it to the encounter between the German pocket battleship *Admiral Graf Spee* and three British cruisers in the Battle of the River Plate off Montevideo in 1939. Rated on thickness of armor and gun power, *Graf Spee* should have been more than a match for the lighter cruisers, but Pratt's formula correctly predicted the ensuing British victory.

Historically, there have even been a few rare occasions where a simulation was validated as it was being carried out. One notable such occurrence was just before the famous Ardennes offensive in World War II, when the Germans attacked allied forces during a period of bad weather in the winter of 1944, hoping to reach the port of Antwerp and force the Allies to sue for peace. According to German General Friedrich J Fangor, the staff of Fifth Panzerarmee had met in November to game defensive strategies against a simulated American attack. They had no sooner begun the exercise than reports began arriving of a strong American attack in the Hürtgen area—exactly the area they were gaming on their map table. Generalfeldmarschall Walther Model ordered the participants (apart from those commanders whose units were actually under attack) to continue playing, using the messages they were receiving from the front as game moves. For the next few hours simulation and reality ran hand-in-hand: when the officers at the game table decided that the situation warranted commitment of reserves, the commander of the 116th Panzer Division was able to turn from the table and issue as operational orders those moves they had just been gaming. The division was mobilized in the shortest possible time, and the American attack was repulsed.

Many of the criticisms directed towards military simulations derive from an incorrect application of them as a predictive and analytical tool. The outcome supplied by a model relies to a greater or lesser extent on human interpretation and therefore should not be regarded as providing a 'gospel' truth. However, whilst this is generally understood by most game theorists and analysts, it can be tempting for a layman—for example, a politician who needs to present a 'black and white' situation to his electorate—to settle on an interpretation that supports his preconceived position. Tom Clancy, in his novel Red Storm Rising, illustrated this problem when one of his characters, attempting to persuade the Soviet Politburo that the political risks were acceptable as NATO would not be in a position to react in the face of political uncertainty caused by a division of opinion between the Allies, used a political wargame result as evidence the results of a simulation carried out to model just such an event. It is revealed in the text that there were in fact three sets of results from the simulation; a best-, intermediate- and worst-case outcome. The advocate of war chose to present only the best-case outcome, thus distorting the results to support his case.

Although fictional, the above scenario may however have been based on fact. The Japanese extensively wargamed their planned expansion during World War II, but map exercises conducted before the Pacific War were frequently stopped short of a conclusion where Japan was defeated. One often-cited example prior to Midway had the umpires magically resurrecting a Japanese carrier sunk during a map exercise, although Professor Robert Rubel argues in the Naval War College Review their decision was justified in this case given improbable rolls of the dice. Given the historical outcome, it is evident the dice rolls were not so improbable, after all. There were however equally illustrative fundamental problems with other areas of the simulation, mainly relating to a Japanese unwillingness to consider their position should the element of surprise, on which the operation depended, be lost.

Tweaking simulations to make results conform with current political or military thinking is a recurring and a very dangerous problem. In U.S. Naval exercises in the 1980s, it was informally understood no high-value units such as aircraft carriers were allowed to be sunk, as naval policy at the time concentrated its tactical interest on such units. The outcome of one of the largest ever NATO exercises, Ocean Venture-81, in which around 300 naval vessels, including two carrier battle groups, were adjudged to have successfully traversed the Atlantic and reached the Norwegian Sea despite the

existence of a (real) 380-strong Soviet submarine fleet as well as their (simulated) Red Team opposition, was publicly questioned in Proceedings, the professional journal of the U.S. Naval Institute. The U.S. Navy managed to get the article classified, and it remains secret to this day, but the article's author and chief analyst of Ocean Venture-81, Lieutenant Commander Dean L. Knuth, has since claimed two Blue aircraft carriers were successfully attacked and sunk by Red forces.

There have been many charges over the years of computerized models, too, being unrealistic and slanted towards a particular outcome. Critics point to the case of military contractors, seeking to sell a weapons system. For obvious reasons of cost, weapons systems (such as an air-to-air missile system for use by fighter aircraft) are extensively modeled on computer. Without testing of their own, a potential buyer must rely to a large extent on the manufacturer's own model. This might well indicate a very effective system, with a high kill probability (Pk). However, it may be the model was configured to show the weapons system under ideal conditions, and its actual operational effectiveness will be somewhat less than stated. The U.S. Air Force quoted their AIM-9 Sidewinder missile as having a Pk of 0.98 (it will successfully destroy 98% of targets it is fired at). In operational use during the Falklands War in 1982, the British recorded its actual Pk as 0.78. Another factor that can render a model invalid is human error. One notorious example was the U.S. Air Force's Advanced Penetration Model, which due to a programming error made U.S. bombers invulnerable to enemy air defenses by inadvertently altering their latitude or longitude when checking their location for a missile impact. This had the effect of 'teleporting' the bomber, at the instant of impact, hundreds or even thousands of miles away, causing the missile to miss. Furthermore, this error went unnoticed for a number of years. Other unrealistic models have had battleships consistently steaming at seventy knots (twice their top speed), an entire tank army halted by a border police detachment, and attrition levels 50% higher than the numbers each force began with.

The models of warfare simulation should be taken for no more than they are: a non-prescriptive attempt to inform the decision-making process. The dangers of treating military simulation as gospel are illustrated in an anecdote circulated at the end of the Vietnam War, which was intensively gamed between 1964 and 1969 (with even President Lyndon Johnson being photographed standing over a wargaming sand table at the time of Khe Sanh) in a series of simulations codenamed Sigma. The period was one of great belief in the value of military simulations, riding on the back of the proven success of operations research (or OR) during World War II and the growing power of computers in handling large amounts of data. The story concerned a fictional aide in Richard Nixon's administration, who, when Nixon took over government in 1969, fed all the data held by the US pertaining to both nations into a computer model—population, gross national product, relative military strength, manufacturing capacity, numbers of tanks, aircraft and the like. The aide then asked the question of the model, "When will we win?" Apparently the computer replied, "You won in 1964!"

Unfortunately, little has changed today. In Lessons Not Learned by Roger Thompson, an internationally recognized authority on combat motivation, military sociology, and military bureaucratic politics whose work has drawn praise worldwide, including an Admiral's Medallion from the chief of staff of the Italian navy. His book Brown Shoes, Black Shoes and Felt Slippers: Parochialism and the Evolution of the Post-War U.S. Navy was called "essential reading" by Adm. Elmo R. Zumwalt Jr. and is now considered a classic. Despite its reputation as the most impressive naval force in the world, the U.S. Navy is in trouble, and a systemic weaknesses could be its undoing. Thompson provides a compelling, often scathing, assessment of the U.S. Navy and its learning disabilities and then presents a convincing argument for reform. Thompson points to the U.S. Navy's "up or out" promotion system, massive personnel turnover, inexperienced crews, and drug and alcohol abuse as problems that make it difficult for the Navy to build cohesive, well-trained fighting units. In a review of the Navy's recent history, he finds that its ships, submarines, and aircraft are often

outperformed in competitions and exercises with other navies—and its failures are either denied altogether or perfunctorily excused. Diesel submarines—so quiet that they are rarely detected until it's too late to prevent an attack—routinely surpass expensive U.S. nuclear subs and put U.S. aircraft carriers in danger. American naval pilots, whose weapons are often improperly tested, are frequently bested by military pilots from other countries. Because the U.S. Navy doesn't have enough surface ships to protect its capital ships, American carrier strike groups now use Canadian ships as escorts. Our allies provide most if not all of our Anti-submarine (ASW) and mine detection. Shortcomings like these, Thompson argues, undermine the Navy's potential and should be cause for national concern. In presenting a side of the U.S. Navy that's rarely discussed, he spells out lessons the Navy must learn if it is going to succeed in an era of asymmetrical warfare—of David-versus-Goliath conflicts.

The U.S. Navy is absolutely the biggest and most expensive navy in the world, but one should not make the mistake of confusing size and hypothetical striking force with real operational ability. If one views our navy with emotional detachment and, more importantly, with an intellectually honest perspective, there exists an embarrassing pattern of failure and underachievement. The service's refusal to truly see its own problems means it also refuses to look for ways to improve. We engage in, with our allies, various scripted war games and the outcomes always validate the superiority of our forces. However, when we engage in “free-play” games against diesel-powered attack submarines (SSKs) the results are catastrophic. American naval officers have withheld or have been told to withhold information about exercise defeats, especially those involving our aircraft carriers which have been either sunk or badly damaged during those war games. Our nearly continuous neglect of ASW and how our obsession with super-carriers and nuclear submarines have retarded the combat capability of the surface navy and forced the U.S. Navy to rely on allies for essential services.

Free-play is defined as an exercise designed to test the capabilities of forces under simulated wartime conditions, limited only by restrictions required by peacetime safety regulations. Free-play means winners and losers; it means post exercise critiques. Careerists hate free-play, true combat leaders love them. Foreign navies openly and unashamedly flaunt it when one of their submarines sink an American carrier in an exercise. American nuclear submariners generally do not publicly reveal their own accomplishments against U.S. Navy aircraft carriers. If they do, they do it anonymously, usually after they leave the service, or they provide only the sketchiest of details. Anyone who says something is wrong gets thrown out of the Navy. The naval bureaucracy does not want anyone to know that its carriers have been sunk or even seriously damaged in exercises. Officers are strongly encourage to keep quiet about such incidents. Active duty personnel do not tell reporters the truth if the truth is something their COs will not want them to say. Many service people have ruined or lost their careers but saying that they have sunk a carrier. The Navy's public affairs officers (PAOs) closely monitor interactions between journalists and Navy personnel to ensure that no one complains or says anything that does not tow the company line.

This does not sound very much different than life in the old Soviet Navy with its political officers and GRU agents aboard ship, watching and listening for any sign of free, unstructured thought. Thankfully, in the U.S. Navy, this PAO surveillance only pops up when journalists are aboard ship. Great effort is expended to conceal the truth, that a carrier can be sunk, and by many different methods. It's the old story of intraservice rivalry, the Big Gun Navy (battleships) versus the Carriers now becomes smaller more effective ships versus supercarriers. The nature of combat has changed but the admirals are still fighting the last war with equipment that has skyrocketed in cost and has become more vulnerable to weapons that can be produced in quantity and cheaply. Many nations have sea skimming missiles that travel at 2 1/2 times the speed of sound and can be launched from multiple platforms hundreds of miles away. Our Navy must face reality, soon.