

LP² STUDY GROUP PROPOSAL FOR FALL 2022

snafu **war gone wrong**

Coordinators: Carolyn Grossner and Maureen Sullivan

Important military campaigns usually start with a well thought out strategy, employment of the newest weapons and appointment of bold leaders. So...“**What Could Possibly Go Wrong?**” When something does—the lowliest soldier recognizes “Situation Normal, All F...cked Up.” In the Syllabus we cover a number of elements of warfare, including strategy, weapons and leadership. In each case we consider why the *snafu* occurred, or conversely, how well-thought-out strategies could have avoided the disaster.

Carolyn and **Maureen** have coordinated over fifty study groups, five of them together.

Type of Study Group: Presentation and discussion

Readings and other Materials/Online Services:

Readings, links to view and other assignments will be emailed by coordinators before each session.

***** **SYLLABUS - A WORK IN PROGRESS** *****

WEEK 1

TOPIC: Strategy

We define the differences between strategy and tactics. We study the major strategic approaches such as annihilation and dislocation, attrition and exhaustion, and deterrence and coercion. Various incidents of war will be analyzed for the success or failure of the strategy. We look specifically at Cannae, Genghis Khan's great general Subotai, and Eisenhower and the Suez Canal.

READINGS (emailed):

"Military Strategy", *Wikipedia*;

excerpt from *The Ghosts of Cannae* by Robert L. O'Connell.

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WEEK 2

TOPIC: Underestimate the enemy, overestimate self

We consider some of the factors that lead us to overestimate a military force: number and training of soldiers, quality and experience of leaders, logistic and intelligence capabilities. Who was initially favored in these three battles; how was defeat explained: Russia invades Ukraine (2022) French Army vs Vietminh Army (1953), British Soldiers vs Zululand Warriors (1879).

READING (emailed)/VIEWING:

The *New York Times* in Mar. 2022: Russia vs Ukraine; The *Guardian* "Depicting the Zulu in War";
View YouTube Dien Bien Phu.

WEEK 3

TOPIC: Tactics

We look at eight classical maneuvers of warfare along with battles that demonstrate the success or failure of each. Battles include the Battle of Hastings, Burnside at Fredericksburg (the Battle of the Crater), the East African campaign in WWI, and Gallipoli. We then review many of the Chinese Thirty-Six Stratagems (ruses) and finally talk about the six blunders by Hitler that caused the loss of WWII.

READINGS (emailed):

Tanga excerpt from *Great Military Blunders* by Geoffrey Regan;

Tanga excerpt from "The Battle of the Bees";

Excerpt from *An Ice-Cream War* by William Boyd.

Why were ships caught in a storm in these battles: a divine wind, poor navigation, no weather instruments, pure luck?

WEEK 4

TOPIC: Perhaps we should re-think this strategy

"No plan survives first contact with the enemy," von Moltke.

Why stay with a strategy that is clearly not working...or, perhaps it is working? What were the assumptions behind these strategies: USN vs German U-boats in NY Harbor (1942); UK Defense of Singapore (1942).

WEEK 5

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TOPIC: Great war theorists

We study the works of Thucydides, SunTzu, Machiavelli, Clausewitz, Jomini, Marx, Mahan, Mitchell and Kennan. Their contributions both led to success in certain battles and to mayhem and mishaps in others and we talk about examples of each.

WEEK 6

TOPIC: Weather a factor

Why were ships caught in a storm in these battles: a divine wind, poor navigation, no weather instruments, pure luck? Who benefited? E.g., Mongols attack Japan (1281); Spanish invasion of England (1588), Battle of Brooklyn Heights (1776).

WEEK 7

TOPIC: War in painting and photography

We look at great works of painting and photography that tell a story of the catastrophes of war. Both the subject of the works of art and the art itself will be analyzed and discussed.

WEEK 8

TOPIC: Personality over Intelligence reports

We consider personality traits commonly found in prominent military leaders: "flattered by attention, vain even pompous, arrogant, single-mindedness." Can these also be strengths? Can these lead to ignoring advice, Intelligence reports? We evaluate personality factors in decisions of three generals: MacArthur at Yalu (1950), Montgomery at Arnhem (1944), McClellan at Antietam (1862).

WEEK 9

TOPIC: Weapons: from prehistory to modern day

We trace the development of weapons of war from the siege tower and catapult to the use of animals, insects and human corpses to the atomic bomb, guided missile, F-35 and killer drones. We also review the worst weapons ever invented and the chaos they created. Battles reviewed include Courtrai (1302), Adwa (1896), Dieppe Raid (1942).

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WEEK 10

TOPIC: Was this journey necessary

We consider two long voyages: on foot (Hannibal), by sea (Russian Fleet): Hannibal crosses the Alps (218 BCE), Russian Baltic Fleet to Port Arthur (1904). What was to be accomplished by each? Was there another way—send envoys, raise a larger army? Was there a better route— if so, why was it not taken? Can we be sure the Hannibal story is true?

WEEK 11

TOPIC: Innovations

We consider how innovations have changed warfare beginning with the domestication of the horse and the invention of the stirrup, continuing to tanks and caterpillar treads and finally looking at cyber warfare in detail. We look at really good and really bad examples of innovations.

WEEK 12

TOPIC: Same objective, different strategies

We look at different approaches to freeing Americans hiding from Iranians after the US Embassy attacked in 1979; six Americans hiding in Canadian Embassy (Argo) and fifty-three Americans held hostage by Iranians (Operation Eagle Claw). We consider the invasion of Russia by Napoleon (1812) and Hitler (1941). How were they similar, different?