

On the Subject of War Gaming and Ukraine¹

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

12 March 2022

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Dear Editor,

In conjunction with my companion Game Theory article in this month's Journal, I thought readers might appreciate my '**close encounter of the fourth & fifth kind**' in a **military war-gaming exercise**: where "**I experienced a transformation of my sense of reality during direct bilateral communication with extraterrestrial entities**" – *although in this instance, the ETs were the higher level military NCOs and Officers communicating with me in my lowly 'Other Ranks' status!*

While serving with the RAF as a Senior Aircraftman in the occupied British Zone of Northern Germany in 1952, I was on guard duty **during a tactical exercise** – *decked out in full regalia: battledress, light blue blanco'd belt, webbing and gaiters, blindingly shiny brass and boots, Lee Enfield rifle w/fixed bayonet* – and the **lone sentinel** at the main gate from 6 am to 8 am; the regular work week "rush hour." We had been alerted an attempt would be made by "opposing forces" to infiltrate the base sometime during the week and I was ordered by the **Sergeant of the Guard (SOG)** to **let no-one through** without checking their "Ausweis" (ID card &/or base pass) -- *an awesome responsibility for a 19-year old National Service enlisted man with unimaginable repercussions; not only me, but for the British Army of Occupation of the Rhine (BAOR) and Allied Tactical Air Force (ATAF) if someone slipped in and sabotaged our base.*

In addition to regular "in and out" traffic, the base employed hundreds of German civilian 'GSOs' [*General Service Organization*] in grey-green uniforms. Starting at 6 a.m. they all seemed to show up *en masse*: some by bus, mostly by bicycle and a few on foot. I closed the striped wooden pole barrier across the road and checked each individual – *one-by-one* – as quickly as I could before letting them pass; but it was slow going and the crowd backlog grew by the minute! I also had to give priority to officers and vehicles, as well as check the drivers and their passengers. Nevertheless, despite pushing, shoving, murmurings and even louder complaints from the GSO multitude that they were being made late for work, I persisted with the visual & ID inspections.

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Eventually, the **Officer of the Day (OD)** came to ask what the hell I was doing, as he was getting phone calls from all over the base that people were not reporting for work. I told him about the standing orders from the SOG to check everyone because of the infiltration exercise, but he said “**never mind that**” and **ordered me to let everyone through immediately!** So I promptly complied. At that, the hordes charged through, and after about half an hour traffic subsided to a trickle, and I resumed normal guard duty – walking my post in a military manner, and saluting officers as they went by.

Then the **Officer in Charge (OIC)** of my regular work unit arrived in the back seat of his VW Beetle. I snapped him an extra fancy “*present arms*” to let him recognize me and appreciate I was here instead of at my regular duty station. But instead of driving through, he brought the VW to a screeching halt, rolled down the window, and asked me – sarcastically -- **didn’t I know there was an on-going saboteur infiltration exercise on?** – then demanded to know why I was permitting his vehicle to proceed without checking IDs.

I told him I was aware of the exercise but since I “*recognized*” him, I had permitted him to pass. Nevertheless, he persisted: **I hadn’t recognized his driver, nor checked his driver’s ID, so I was not doing my Guard duties properly!** He then proceeded to lecture me about the consequences of infiltration by saboteurs to the security of the entire British Forces establishment in occupied Germany; **and threatened to put me on a “charge” for dereliction of duty!**

At that, I got my Irish up, and in my defense retorted **I had started** screening everyone when I came on duty; but the **OD had ordered me to cease and desist, so I was just following orders!** Furthermore, I told him in the past hour or so I had already let hordes of unidentified people through. Thus, **base security had already been breached; so if there was a saboteur on base, we had already lost the tactical war game, if not the entire bloody Cold War!**

At that response, he went red-faced and apoplectic, and **threatened he would add insubordination to the charge!**

After his dressing down, I rapidly regained my deferential composure to superior officers and dutifully checked his driver’s ID. Then, somewhat mollified, he curtly told me to “**Carry On!**” I gave him a final snappy salute with the rifle & a couple of foot-stomps, and he went on his way; while I reverted to waving everyone else through – unchallenged – and wondering about the irrationality of it all.

Thankfully, I never heard any more from my OIC about the incident, nor whether the base was infiltrated; and don’t know how the war gamers assessed the exercise to improve future base security procedures. But -- as the American expression has it – “**It was all above my pay grade!**”

Since those days -- and my Monty Pythonesque moment on the front line of freedom - - assuming a stance of **Peace through Strength**, the US has been the bulwark of the Free World, establishing and supplying alliances *vis a vis* totalitarian powers in various

parts of the globe. Weapons have also become ever more powerful, escalating from individual personnel guns, ballistic artillery shells, mobile tanks, aircraft, and gravity bombs, to remotely guided drones, and self-guided intercontinental cruise missiles with nuclear warheads, as well as chemical and biological weapons.

Concurrently, 20th Century **Strategies** evolved from ‘**BFBI**’ (brute force and bloody ignorance) through Mutually Assured Destruction (MAD) stalemate, to Mutual Deterrence (MD); in the face of which Sun Tzu’s **Strategies** and Lawrence of Arabia’s guerilla **Tactics** have predominated – *largely undeterred* -- to thwart and frustrate big battlefield adherents. Now, with the invasion and ravaging of Ukraine, Russia has returned to BFBI while threatening to escalate – even to MAD -- if the US &/or its NATO allies intervene, leaving allied power leaders in a quandary.

However, timidly “**Carrying On**” as usual in the face of threats, hoping the situation will resolve itself -- or even imposing sanctions and exchanging threats -- is guaranteed to **lose the war slowly**; so is not an option! **Appeasement doesn’t work. Weakness only begets more war.** While war gaming and policy making is still above my pay grade and no longer my direct responsibility, the ethic and instinct to help a neighbor confronted by a bully runs strong, so I watch on the sidelines and pray the authorities act decisively soon; and bear in mind “**The hottest places in hell are reserved for those who, in times of moral crisis, remain neutral.**” Dante

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