



# The Frontenac Times

In memory of *The Wipers Times*, with apologies to Captain F.J. Roberts,  
12<sup>th</sup> Bn, Sherwood Foresters

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## Editorial Comment ("long message, over")

### Tigers Can't Live in a Box

'Military organizations make for military incompetence in two ways — directly, by forcing members to act in a fashion that is not always conducive to military success, and indirectly, by attracting, selecting and promoting a minority of people with particular defects of intellect and personality.' (Norman F. Dixon On the Psychology of Military Incompetence, Futura Publications, ©1976)

We've spent a lot of time talking about **the box**. But the concept of 'the box' is more complex than it first appears. The 'boxes' are multi-layered and concentric, *they* are multi-dimensional. The multi-layering and concentricity of the boxes is like overlapping and interlocking arcs of fire — some people cannot perceive it at all, others can visualize it only while it is being explained, and a few cannot understand why others cannot see it. And the box concept supports an ongoing narrowing of minds and destruction of individuality.

To perceive the multi-layering aspect of these behavioural boxes involves the acknowledgement that the performance of officers is measured in varying degrees on different strata. To be assessed as

'competent' and suitable for advancement, you must have remained within each box as perceived by your superior. These boxes include tactics, technical knowledge, appearance, social behaviour (of yourself and your spouse), and tact (particularly towards your superior and his/her superior, *ad infinitum*). This list should not be considered exclusive.

The importance of recognizing the multi-layered aspect of the boxes is that if you are outside one box, you might as well be outside all of them. Competence in one area does not necessarily allow digression in another.

Concentricity embodies the concept that each level of supervision establishes the virtual bounds of the box that encompasses acceptable performance by their subordinates. This boundary then defines 'the box' for immediate subordinates and each subordinate level of command is then tacitly expected to establish its box within that, and so *ad nauseam*. And it's not sufficient then to just stay within your own superior's box, because if he/she is outside their box, you're all outside the box. At the extreme, each commander defines a box safely within that of his superior, resulting in increasingly restricted boundaries for those at the bottom of the pyramid.

Hierarchical competence does not imply military competence. Commanders cannot allow their

subordinates out of the box because their own superiors then see them as being out of the box. The conformist superior “will probably rate his subordinates in terms of institutional values: he will see competence as the behavior that supports the rules, rituals and forms of the status quo. Promptness, neatness, courtesy to superiors, internal paperwork, will be highly regarded ... internal consistency is valued more highly than efficient service.” (Laurence J. Peter & Raymond Hull, The Peter Principle, 1969)

The shrinking boxes you find as you travel down branches of the command structure allow a glimpse into why behavioural norms (social, tactical, etc.) can be so different in similar organizations at the end of different branches. And that’s why we have three variations of infantry doctrine.

Here at the Fort we’ve focussed on the tactical box – are we or are we not expected to always stay within the alleged acceptable norms for tactics. Attritionist warfare is so well suited to the box: two up, one back, bags of smoke; no surprises for your superiors and no annoying use of initiative that they might have to explain to their superior.

Peacetime soldiering breeds boxes. Compare wartime armies with those maintained during peacetime. The degree of conformity pursued in peacetime breeds a self-destructive petrification of thought. And it’s deeper than merely preparing for the last war. It’s a systematic purging and sweeping aside of non-conformist attitudes that threaten the status quo. Four hundred years ago it saw the relegation of artillerymen to the status of dirty technophiles whom, though necessary and tolerated were certainly not on par with the soldiers of the infantry and cavalry. A superb conformity of mind and disregard of military skill saw a resplendent and parade ready British Army nearly defeat itself logistically in the Crimea.

But the conformist military mind does not win wars. Wars are won by the application of unorthodoxy – the development of the tank, the restructuring of infantry to fight effectively in smaller and smaller tactical groupings, the invention of weapons, equipment and tactics that **do not** fall neatly into an infantry – cavalry – artillery categorization. Significantly, wars are won by soldiers who *can* get out of the box. But it is only during a crisis—the mobilization of wartime, the meeting of a novel threat—that the conformist hierarchy is willing to tolerate the recruiting, presence and contribution of the non-conformists.

We’re talking a lot about getting out of the box these days, but how much of it is rhetoric supporting the ‘flavour-of-the-month.’ Commanders who have

been bred and brought up in the milieu of ‘the box’ cannot readily cast aside its precepts – for they are the enemy of change by virtue of having succeeded by being conformists.

We need to encourage new T.E. Lawrences, S.L.A. Marshalls, and Richard Mienertzhagens – young officers pushing the limits, getting out of the box, being seen and heard. At the least, we need to create a professional atmosphere that permits them to speak out and be heard without punitive response. If we are committed to change, it is no longer tolerable that ‘tactics be the purview of the senior officer present.’ And once we break down that box, the others will fall in their turn.

Take the LAV-COYOTE dilemma. How *are* we going to employ it tactically? This question cannot be answered by senior officers whose experience or knowledge is based on armoured recce in the last war or how it was done in CFE with LYNX. The technological leap forward requires – demands – a renewed approach. It can only be answered by an unofficial, laterally communicating, consortium of infantry and armour junior officers (and perhaps even NCOs) with real and current experience on the vehicle – and the courage and freedom to experiment with its employment. These discussions must take place in open forum, not Corps journals, and submissions cannot be subject to editing by the existing hierarchy before they are open to consideration by the author’s peers.

And we won’t even start to talk about infantry employment of the LAV-ICV.

We haven’t allowed our young officers to speak on controversial issues for many years.

It’s time to open the box, to open all the boxes given their inter-dependencies. Because ‘the box’ contains not the evils of the world, ‘it’ contains our future and our credibility as an Army.

Let’s ask ourselves again:  
“Where *have* all the tigers gone?”

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And how did your Commander Reviewed rate? The above editorial scored as follows: reading ease 41.3, grade level score 12. ➔ Flesch Reading Ease score - 100-point scale; the higher the score, the easier it is to understand the document. For most standard documents, aim for a score of about 60 to 70. Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level score - rates text on a U.S. grade-school level For most standard documents, aim for a score of approximately 7.0 to 8.0.

19 Jan 1899 You must aim at the Staff College, but for the love of God never become a professional Staff Officer. Never lose touch with the troops. Remember that you serve the troops and it is the troops who matter. They are the folk who win victories, take care of your men and they will never let you down. - Colonel R. Meinertzhagen, CBE, DSO, Army Diary 1899 - 1926, 1960

An army in which juniors are methodically “covering up” for fear they will reap criticism for using unorthodox methods in the face of unexpected contingencies is an army which is slow to learn from its own mistakes. - S.L.A. Marshall, MEN against FIRE, 1947



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Leadership is the practical application of character. - Colonel R. Meinertzhagen, CBE, DSO, Army Diary, 1899-1926, 1960



The report that [T.E. Lawrence] produced for us was an amazing document, considering its author was only a second lieutenant. It was a violent criticism of the mental capacity of the draughtsmen and map-makers, of the quality of the stone used in their lithography, of the disposal of the cranes on the quayside, of the system of mooring the barges and of the shunting operations of the railway, of the medical arrangements, particularly of the provisions for the wounded, and even of the tactical dispositions of the commanders in the field and of the general strategical conception of the [Palestine] campaign [1915-18]. We dared not show it to the C-in-C., but had to water it down till it was considered fit for the great man's perusal. I have regretted ever since that I never kept a copy of the original; it was Lawrence at his best. - Lt.-Col. W.F. Stirling, DSO, MC, Safety Last, 1953



In early September [1924] the garrison of Cologne was engaged in brigade training. I was given command of the skeleton enemy comprising four aeroplanes, six tanks, a squadron of cavalry and two skeleton battalions. I had to take up a position on a low ridge. The opposing force comprised an infantry brigade, a field artillery battery and a squadron of cavalry. I hid my cavalry in a thick wood quite close to and on the flank of my position. I was in wireless communication with my aeroplanes, which were some eight miles distant, and my tanks I placed in front of my position but beautifully disguised as haystacks. When the brigade attacked and were about to launch an assault, my cavalry burst out of the wood and took the enemy in the flank, my tanks threw off their haystacks and advanced on the attacking enemy, and my aeroplanes, advised by signal, came up from the rear of the attacking enemy, very low down, and bombarded the enemy's guns, infantry and cavalry with hundreds of tennis-balls which I had collected in Cologne. The result was disastrous, and I witnessed what I had never seen before — panic on peace manouvres. The infantry were terrorised and ran, fixing their bayonets. Two companies of the K.O.Y.L.I. and one company of the 60th bolted and spread panic among the rest. The gunner horses took fright and broke loose and the gunners took refuge under their guns. I never saw such pandemonium.

At the subsequent conference the gunner officers and colonels commanding battalions severely criticised my unorthodox methods, but Bethel, in charge of the exercise, congratulated me on such realistic methods during peace manouvres. Everyone was very angry with me, but I could not help laughing at troops panicking when tennis-balls are dropped on them from aeroplanes. - Colonel R. Meinertzhagen, CBE, DSO, Army Diary, 1899-1926, 1960

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