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**DEFEAT THROUGH DECEIT: A STUDY ON
DECEPTION IN SPECIAL OPERATIONS**

by

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June 2020

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**DEFEAT THROUGH DECEIT:
A STUDY ON DECEPTION IN SPECIAL OPERATIONS**

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Lieutenant, United States Navy
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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the
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ABSTRACT

This thesis uncovers how the application of tactical deception to special operations can improve the likelihood of achieving mission completion. By inducing hesitation, confusion, and chaos into the operational environment, special operations forces could potentially influence and manipulate the psyche of an adversary to amplify friendly capabilities on the objective. Three historical case studies are presented where tactical deception was successfully implemented during surgical strike operations, such as direct action or hostage rescue missions, to evaluate how deception affects the assault force's progress during the course of a mission. The author shows that the assault force's advantage over an adversary is highly dependent on the duration and effectiveness of the deception when it is applied at the initial point of vulnerability. Through the use of the special operations deception curve, this thesis illustrates how successful tactical deception in a mission can be used to achieve relative superiority earlier, maintain relative superiority longer, and reduce the area of vulnerability experienced by special operation forces.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

AV	Area of Vulnerability
COA	Course of Action
CONOP	Concept of Operations
DA	Direct Action
EKIA	Enemy Killed in Action
FARC	Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia
FoM	Freedom of Movement
FRELIMO	Mozambique Liberation Front
GMT	Greenwich Mean Time
GOC	Government of Colombia
GSG 9	Grenzschutzgruppe 9
HHQ	Higher Headquarters
HLZ	Helicopter Landing Zone
ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross
MC	Mission Complete
MILDEC	Military Deception
NGO	Non-governmental Organization
OPSEC	Operational Security
OWS	Operation Willing Spirit
PFLP	Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine
PV	Initial Point of Vulnerability
QRF	Quick Reaction Force
RAF	Red Army Faction
RS	Relative Superiority
SAS	British Special Air Service
SIGINT	Signal Intelligence
SOF	Special Operations Forces
TAC-D	Tactical Deception
TNT	Transnational Terrorist
UN	United Nations
USSOF	U.S. Special Operations Forces
VEO	Violent Extremist Organization
ZANLA	Zimbabwe African National Liberation Army

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I. DECEPTION IN SPECIAL OPERATIONS

Throughout the history of warfare, military literature has documented notable and successful deceptions to shed light on its practice. Arguably one of the oldest and most universally accepted instruments of warfare, deception has withstood the test of time. Historical examples of deception have revealed its versatility and effectiveness in pivotal moments during the Napoleonic Wars, the American Revolutionary War, both World Wars, and even enigmatic operations such as the Russian Annexation of Crimea. Theorists have continually emphasized the significance and success of deception in military operations, but an attempt to elaborate on its tactical success in special operations remains uncharted.

Why is deception in special operations important? Irregular warfare requires a shrewd mind to address complex problems and devise innovative alternatives to exploiting uncertainty and mitigating risk. Unlike conventional forces, special operations forces (SOF) function in smaller groups and are typically outnumbered, causing them to rely heavily on innovation to amplify their own strengths while minimizing any weaknesses. Innovation may come in the form of advanced technology or weaponry, but thinking of creative ways to outsmart an opponent can be equally or more effective during conflict. When applied appropriately, deception could amplify the intended friendly impacts on the objective by manipulating or influencing both the thought and decision-making processes of an adversary. Therefore, the use of deception could further mitigate the risk of conducting a special operation and allow special operations forces to become a more effective force.

A. BACKGROUND

While there are a plethora of uncertainties in warfare, one aspect remains certain for conducting a special operation: mission success ultimately depends on SOF's ability to achieve and maintain relative superiority.¹ Admiral (Ret.) William McRaven defines

¹ William McRaven, *Spec Ops: Case Studies in Special Operations Warfare Theory & Practice* (New York: Presidio Press, 1996), 5.

relative superiority as, “A condition that exists when an attacking force, generally smaller, gains a decisive advantage over a larger or well-defended enemy.”² Figure 1, titled McRaven’s Relative Superiority Graph, illustrates the course of a special operation, and the factors that influence special operations forces’ ability to complete the mission. McRaven explains, “The area of vulnerability (AV) is a function of mission completion over time. The longer it takes to gain relative superiority, the larger the area of vulnerability, and hence the greater the impact of the frictions of war.”³ As easy as the condition of relative superiority is to understand, it is as equally difficult to achieve. Although special operations forces are no stranger to adversity, every tool available for conducting a special operation should be considered to ensure its success, including deception.

² McRaven, 4.

³ McRaven, 8.

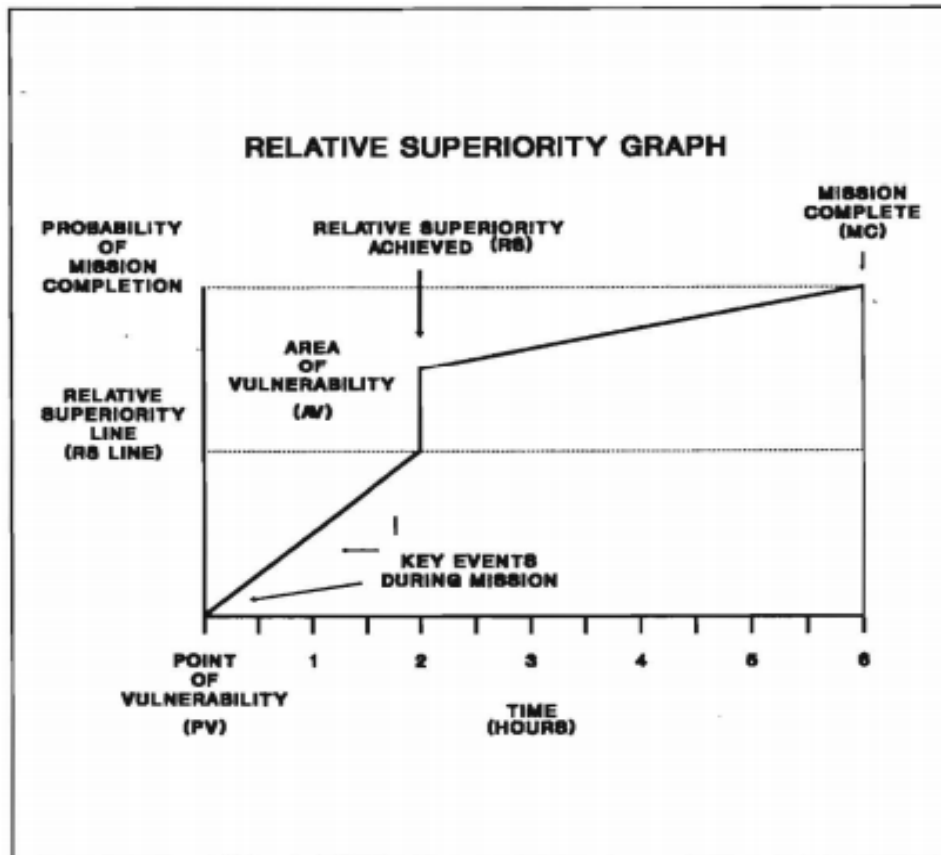


Figure 1. McRaven's Relative Superiority Graph.⁴

Within the realm of special operations literature, there are mixed opinions, from apprehension to conviction, about practicing the dark arts of deception. The appropriate application, utility, anticipated effects, and probability of success during a mission are a few of the concerns that shroud this illusive practice. McRaven describes deception as an unreliable practice for special operations and cautions its practitioners. McRaven explains, "Deception, when it works, either directs the enemy's attention away from the attacking force, or delays his response long enough for surprise to be gained at the crucial moment."⁵ McRaven continues by providing recommendations for its utility, saying, "deception can be a useful tool in gaining surprise, but overreliance on deception should be avoided, and

⁴ Source: William McRaven, "The Theory of Special Operations" (master's thesis, Naval Postgraduate School, 1993), 10, <http://hdl.handle.net/10945/14838>.

⁵ McRaven, *Spec Ops*, 17.

it is usually better to delay the enemy's reaction than to divert his attention.”⁶ In this regard, diversions could potentially subject the assault force to more vulnerability by alerting the enemy if they wanted to remain clandestine. The caution expressed in McRaven's argument conveys that the use of deception is enticing but its practice is difficult, and it should only be used if the most likely outcome is known and meets the overall intent of the ground force commander.

On the contrary, a thesis titled, “Applying Deception to Special Operations Direct Action Missions,” Captain Edward McCleskey noted that from a study on 100 Direct Action (DA) missions, deception increased the success rate of special operations by approximately 12.1 percent.⁷ McCleskey's earlier study on deception notes that out of the 100 operations, only 28 used deception, and of those 28, only one deception failed, thereby proving that its application to special operations yields favorable results.⁸ Moreover, McCleskey identifies that the most commonly used method of deception for direct action missions was a disguise, with cover and diversion tying for second-most-commonly used.⁹ This information confirms that deception is sporadically used in special operations, but the data confirms that it also rarely fails. With this insight, it is interesting why deception is not highly encouraged or used more often to achieve mission success in special operations.

From these previous studies on deception, one major question remains unanswered: how can deception alter the course of a special operation to improve the probability of mission completion? Answering this question entails researching the positive relationship between deception and the course of a special operation, from initial point of vulnerability to mission completion. To further explore this topic and advance the contemporary understanding of deception in special operations, the following hypotheses were formed:

⁶ McRaven, 18.

⁷ Edward R. McCleskey, “Applying Deception to Special Operations Direct Action Missions” (master's thesis, Defense Intelligence College, 1991), 65.

⁸ McCleskey, 66.

⁹ McCleskey, 66.

B. HYPOTHESES

1. Relative superiority can be achieved earlier with deception.
2. Relative superiority can be maintained longer with deception.
3. The timing and effectiveness of deception in a special operation has a direct relationship with the area of vulnerability incurred by special operations forces.

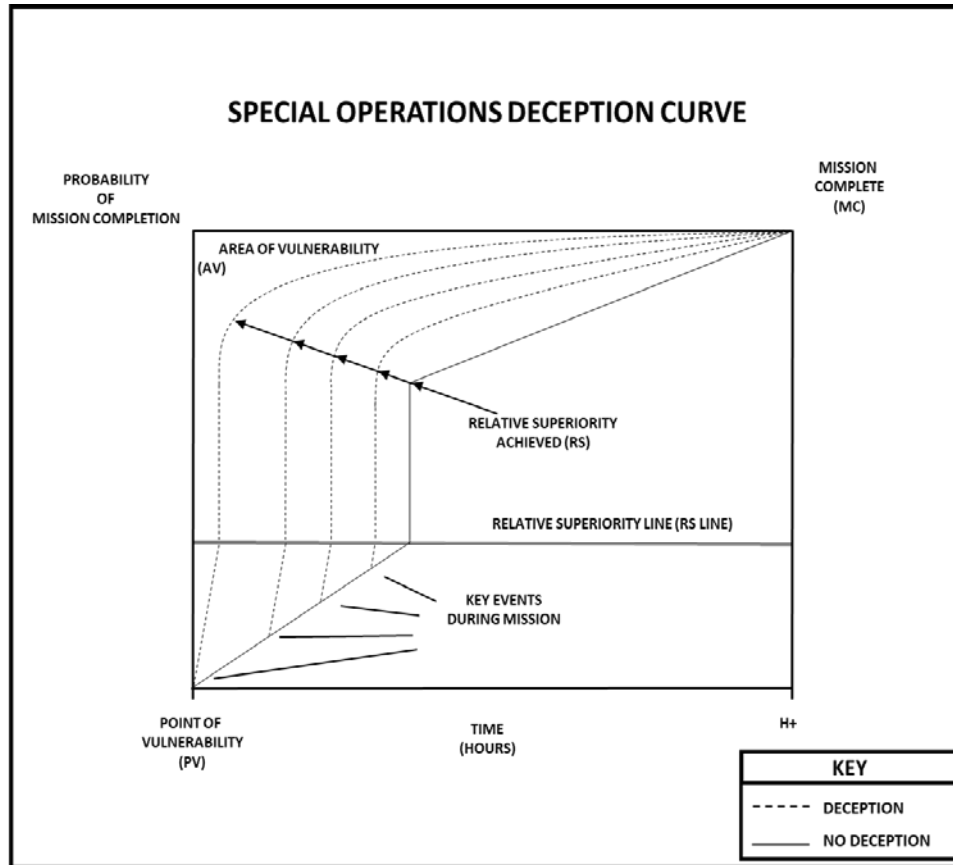


Figure 2. The Special Operations Deception Curve Hypothesis.¹⁰

Figure 2 illustrates each of the three hypotheses regarding the impacts tactical deception has on the course of a special operation mission. In the graph, the normal course of a successful mission without deception is annotated by the rigid solid line, starting at the initial point of vulnerability and ending at mission completion. Conversely, the successful

¹⁰ Adapted from, McRaven, "The Theory of Special Operations," 10.

implementation of tactical deception to a mission is illustrated by the “S-Curve” dotted lines. The dotted lines, called the deception curve, will ultimately increase the probability of mission completion as the overall area of vulnerability decreases over time at a faster rate than the normal course of a mission without deception. Depending on the overall timing and effectiveness, it can be hypothesized that deception will enable an assault force to acquire relative superiority earlier, maintain it longer, and reduce the area of vulnerability during the mission.

C. SCOPE AND SIGNIFICANCE

To uncover how tactical deception in special operations can increase the likelihood of mission completion, the initial approach to this study begins by defining tactical military deception (MILDEC) and understanding its utility in special operations. *The Doctrine for Military Deception* [Joint Pub 3–13.4] describes tactical deception as:

Tactical MILDEC focuses on the ability to affect adversary tactical commanders’ ability to make accurate and timely decisions. The objective of tactical MILDEC is to influence the adversary commander’s capability to make decisions on the conduct of battles and engagements. These deceptions manipulate adversary commanders before and during combat. Tactical MILDEC serves to exploit the immediate tactical situation confronting the commander and should both take advantage of and support operational MILDEC efforts.¹¹

In this regard, SOF have positive control over the method and timing of deception, allowing them to influence the course of a mission. Other levels of deception, such as operational, strategic, or even political deception can influence special operations; however, they were excluded from this study. Tactical deception was the specific field of research for this study because the assault force would independently have greater control over its employment on the objective during the mission.

The other important condition for limiting the scope of this study is the understanding of a special operation. Maintaining consistency with McRaven’s work, “A special operation is conducted by forces specially trained, equipped, and supported for a

¹¹ Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Military Deception*, JP 3-13.4 (Washington, DC: Joint Chiefs of Staff, 2006), https://fas.org/irp/doddir/dod/jp3_13_4.pdf.

specific target whose destruction, elimination, or rescue (in the case of hostages), is a political or military imperative.”¹² This definition describes a specific type of operation, otherwise known as “surgical strikes,” in which the space, time and force is limited during execution as opposed to conventional operations which require larger capacities of all three factors.

With this collective understanding, only historical case studies where tactical deception directly enhanced the efforts of the assault force to accomplish their mission qualified. The case studies which properly met these prerequisites include Operation Aztec, Operation Feuerzauber, and Operation Jaque. Operation Aztec was a direct-action raid in Mozambique where a group of Rhodesian Selous Scouts disguised themselves as the enemy to destroy critical enemy infrastructure. On the other hand, Operation Feuerzauber and Operation Jaque were both hostage rescue missions where German and Colombian commandos used diversion and disguise to rescue innocent civilians in Somalia and Colombia, respectively. The degree in which deception contributes to mission success in each case varies; however, it is important not to further limit this study by degree of influence in order to advance the overall understanding of successful deceptions in special operations.

The overall significance of this work is to advance the study of deception and provide its practitioners within the special operations community with an elevated understanding of its utility. In this study, each of the three hypotheses will be tested to confirm or deny if uncertainty can be viewed as a strength, and if risk, or vulnerability, can be reduced or mitigated by deception. Therefore, through a series of historical examples, this analysis will attempt to illustrate how deception can impact the course of a mission to provide special operations forces with an advantage over an adversary and increase the likelihood of mission completion.

¹² McRaven, *Spec Ops*, 2.

D. METHODOLOGY

In the following chapters, three case studies are presented and qualitatively analyzed to illustrate the effects of successful tactical deception on the course of a mission where the assault force was able to achieve mission completion. In each chapter, special operations forces from different countries performed the operation. Through this multinational approach, this study will reveal different methods and practices of tactical deception, and how it can be used to aid friendly forces' actions on the objective.

In each case study, the operation will be divided into sections to elaborate on the events leading up to the mission and its execution, followed by an objective analysis to highlight the utility of deception. First, a brief introduction of the political setting as well as the political objective for conducting the operation will provide the reader with context at the beginning of each chapter. Next, a synopsis of the operation will detail the actions of the ground force and how they were able to successfully employ tactical deception. During the analysis portion of each chapter, deception will be analyzed through the intellectual framework of The Special Operations Deception Curve to provide a visual illustration of the relationship between deception, relative superiority, and area of vulnerability as a function of deception's timing and effectiveness. After illustrating the impacts of deception on the mission, each chapter will conclude with unique findings about its success to develop better practices for conducting special operation missions in the future.

II. OPERATION AZTEC (MAY 28, 1977–JUNE 02, 1977)

A. BACKGROUND

In the summer of 1977, the Republic of Rhodesia, commonly known as modern-day Zimbabwe, was in the middle of a fifteen-year harrowing civil war called The Bush War. The internal security concerns confronting Rhodesia were compounded by its porous borders, and external influence from the Russian and Chinese communist regimes. Their aid allowed the Mozambique Liberation Front (FRELIMO), an African guerrilla and terrorist force, to advance south across the Zambezi River into northern and south-eastern Rhodesia, undermining local tribal support to the Rhodesian government.¹³ In response, the Rhodesian Security Force, augmented by the Portuguese army, commenced stability operations within Rhodesia's borders to solidify its relationships with tribesmen and suppress terrorist insurrections.¹⁴ Stability operations aimed at suppressing the FRELIMO and other extremist groups, such as the Zimbabwe African National Liberation Army (ZANLA) were met with minimal success. In a state of political extremis, Rhodesia adopted a new strategy with a goal of pushing the fighting out of its territorial boundaries and into neighboring countries.

Rhodesian Security Forces attempted to implement an aggressive security strategy by dividing Rhodesia into five different operational areas. The most volatile was the south-eastern section bordering Mozambique, known as the Repulse. When the Rhodesian Security Forces failed to maintain the Repulse's territorial integrity from ZANLA forces, Rhodesian officials decided that attacking ZANLA and their logistical infrastructure in Mozambique was the only appropriate recourse.¹⁵ Fighting smaller, more agile groups of guerrillas proved to be difficult for Rhodesian Security Forces, and failing to maintain

¹³ Ron Reid Daly and Peter Stiff, *Selous Scouts: Top Secret War*, 2nd ed. (Alberton, Republic of South Africa: Galago Publishing, 1982), 17.

¹⁴ Reid Daly and Stiff, 17.

¹⁵ Reid Daly and Stiff, 274.

regional security within its borders forced the Republic of Rhodesia to recognize that using a conventional response for combating insurgencies was insufficient.

Striking ZANLA's center of gravity required a competent military force that would be able to operate almost autonomously. They would need to travel vast distances with limited supplies and minimal support for an extended period of time. Selous Scouts, a professional guerilla force designed to operate indigenously and combat irregular threats for the Republic of Rhodesia, was the only force capable of accomplishing the mission. To limit their exposure to the mission's hazards, the Scouts devised a unique method of deception by disguising themselves as enemy forces. The Scouts used enemy uniforms and painted their vehicles to resemble a ZANLA convoy. These deceptive measures allowed the Scouts to conduct a series of direct-action raids in Mozambique under the codename of Operation Aztec. In the final stages of the mission, the Scouts disregarded their own political pressures to withdraw from Mozambique, pushing past their limit of advance to conduct a pivotal raid in the town of Mabalane. This raid enabled Rhodesia to claim a significant victory against terrorism and demonstrated how tactical deception can have positive strategic impacts.

B. PRELIMINARY EVENTS

Operation Aztec was intended to inflict a series of setbacks and casualties from a three-pronged attack into Mozambique. The operation integrated the Scouts with the Rhodesian Light Infantry, the 2nd Battalion of the Rhodesian Regiment, and the Rhodesian Air Force. The Scouts were assigned to infiltrate behind Mozambique's lines via a flying column, destroying all of the ZANLA encampments along the Mozambique railway as far as Jorge Do Limpopo.¹⁶ The column itself was designed to be almost entirely self-sufficient for the mission. Led by an American who served during the Vietnam War, Captain (Capt.) John Murphy, the column consisted of one hundred and ten men, split into teams with various tasks, including a supporting element that provided mortar fire.¹⁷ Apart

¹⁶ Reid Daly and Stiff, 274.

¹⁷ Reid Daly and Stiff, 275.

from the other ground units, Capt. Murphy was briefed that external support for the mission was severely limited to two Hawker Hunter bombers, which were only available in extremis.¹⁸ Capt. Murphy and his men understood the risks; conducting a series of raids deep into Mozambique's territory with limited resources and support was a daunting task. To improve their likelihood of completing the mission, the Scouts devised their tactical deception to create confusion in the area of operations that would last for the duration of the mission.



Figure 3. Photograph of Major John Murphy.¹⁹

On May 28, 1977, Capt. Murphy and his Scouts launched Operation Aztec. Crossing over into Mozambique territory during the period of darkness, the Scouts trusted that their disguises would conceal their identities and help them remain clandestine. That same night, the 2nd Battalion Rhodesian Regiment also launched its assault ten kilometers past the border, and the Rhodesian Light Infantry units were inserted into the ZANLA

¹⁸ Reid Daly and Stiff, 274.

¹⁹ Source: Reid Daly and Stiff, 268.

strongholds of Rio and Madulo Pan, respectively.²⁰ Once the Scouts reached the Mozambique railway, the column headed south until it reached the town of Jorge Do Limpopo, destroying segments of railway tracks along its march. After neutralizing ZANLA forces at Jorge Do Limpopo, the Scouts continued to the town of Mapai with the Rhodesian Light Infantry following as the holding force. The Scouts and Rhodesian Light Infantry encountered limited resistance on their march south.

As the Scouts traveled deeper into enemy territory, rendezvousing with other friendly forces became more hazardous. Two days after crossing the border of Mozambique, the column had reached Mapai. Clearing the Mapai airfield was time consuming and entailed seizing a trove of ZANLA equipment, ammunition, and vehicles in the process. Running low on supplies, Capt. Murphy coordinated a Dakota flight to conduct a logistics resupply. The plane delivered the supplies and recovered the captured ZANLA materials. Around 20:00, that evening, the Dakota flight was preparing for takeoff when it began receiving effective enemy RPG-7 and tracer fire which immediately killed the crew's co-pilot, Flight Lieutenant Bruce Collocott, and grounded the airplane.²¹ Still in disguise, the Scouts' presence at the airfield was practically unnoticeable; however, the Dakota flight was still on the runway in plain sight, making it an easy enemy target. The downed Dakota flight forced the Scouts back up north to reconsolidate with friendly forces.

²⁰ Reid Daly and Stiff, 274.

²¹ Reid Daly and Stiff, 277–78.



Figure 4. The Flying Column Crossing the Mozambique Border.²²

When the Scouts drove back to Jorge Do Limpopo to unite with the Rhodesian Light Infantry, the overt presence of Rhodesian military forces had already met several terrorist counterattacks. Tired, hungry, and almost completely out of ammunition, the small contingent of the Rhodesian Light Infantry left behind at Jorge Do Limpopo defended against a series of ambushes from an estimated fifty to sixty ZANLA personnel while the Scouts were away.²³ With limited Freedom of Movement (FoM) and no option for deception, the light infantry units took a heavy beating, but managed to hold their ground.

²² Source: Reid Daly and Stiff, 265.

²³ Alexandre Binda and Chris Cocks, *The Saints: The Rhodesian Light Infantry* (Johannesburg, South Africa: 30° South Publishers, 2007), 224.

News of Rhodesia's military action in Mozambique gained international attention, placing Rhodesian officials in a political predicament. The United Nations (UN) warned Rhodesian officials to withdraw from Mozambique or face UN forces.²⁴ At a difficult decision point, Rhodesia's political will to continue with the operation subsided. A UN response would significantly increase the level of risk to Rhodesian forces operating in Mozambique; therefore, they began to withdraw.

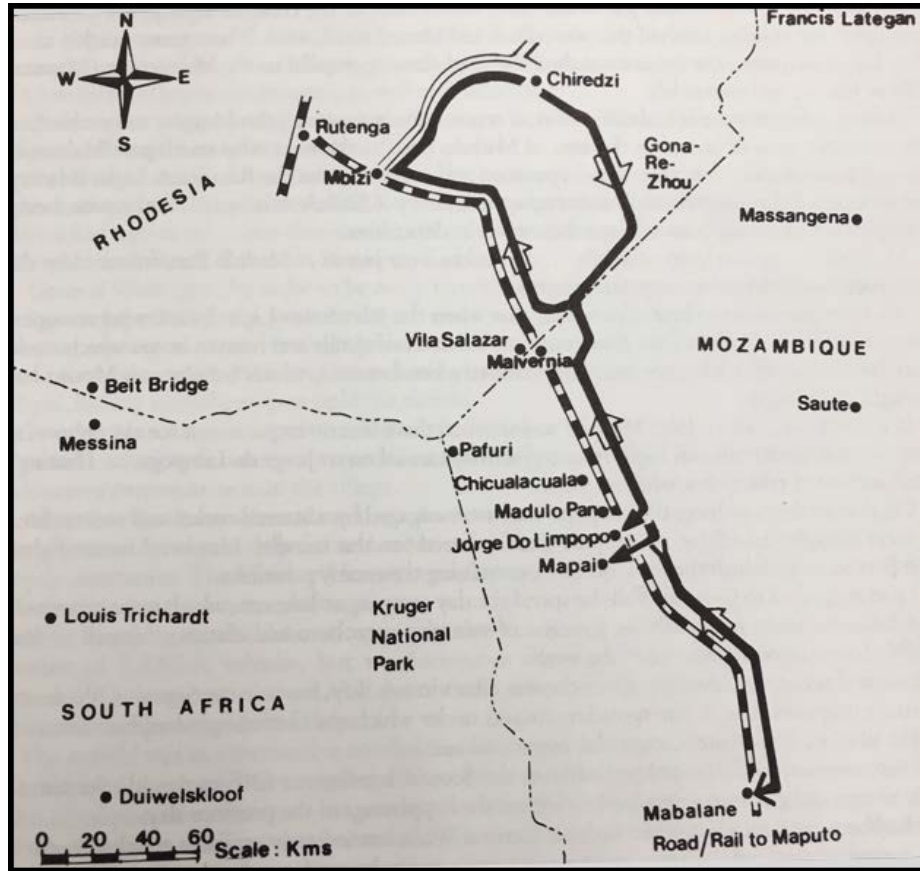


Figure 5. Map of the Column's Route.²⁵

²⁴ Binda and Cocks, 224.

²⁵ Source: Reid Daly and Stiff, 275.

C. THE MABALANE RAID

While collocated with the Rhodesian Light Infantry at Jorge Do Limpopo, Capt. Murphy and his Scouts received a surprising order for one last strike behind enemy lines. Although the order to withdraw Rhodesian forces from Mozambique was inevitable, it had not yet been given by Higher Headquarters (HHQ). In fact, General Peter Walls, Commander of the Rhodesian Forces, authorized the Scouts to push an additional twenty kilometers past Jorge Do Limpopo to conduct small raids in the region before returning home.²⁶ Without hesitation, Capt. Murphy's Scouts headed south for one last push.

The Scouts used their disguise to clandestinely infiltrate deep into enemy territory that inhibited FRELIMO's ability to continue fighting. At 05:00 on June 2, 1977, Capt. Murphy called his superior, Lieutenant Colonel (LtCol.) Ron Reid-Daly, to give him a status update on their progress.²⁷ Surprisingly, the Scouts traveled 180 miles past General Walls' expressed limit of advance to the town of Mabalane. During their reconnaissance in Mabalane, the Scouts identified and destroyed the only steam crane in Mozambique, significantly impeding FRELIMO's logistic operations for several months.²⁸ Upon the Scout's withdrawal, they located and demolished several large concrete culverts that structurally supported the railway, completely severing the main logistics line in Mozambique.²⁹ After the battle damage assessment was relayed to General Walls, he immediately ordered the forces' exfiltration. The Scouts' tactical proficiency and disguise allowed them to deliver a powerful blow to the enemy's center of gravity: critical logistical infrastructure that supported enemy operations. The Scouts' raid at Mabalane degraded enemy operations in Mozambique and ultimately gave the Republic of Rhodesia a strategic advantage for the remainder of the Bush War.

²⁶ Reid Daly and Stiff, 278.

²⁷ Reid Daly and Stiff, 278.

²⁸ Reid Daly and Stiff, 278–279.

²⁹ Reid Daly and Stiff, 279.



Figure 6. A Selous Scout Wearing a FRELIMO Uniform.³⁰

The successful conclusion of Operation Aztec demonstrated how tactical actions during a mission can have strategic and psychological impacts on the course of a war. The Scouts were able to degrade their enemies' center of gravity by attacking their infrastructure, logistics, and ground lines of communication, severely degrading both FRELIMO and ZANLA forces' ability to support their military operations. Summarizing the merit of the mission, Daly said:

The total [enemy killed in action (EKIA)] on the raid was never accurately ascertained, but even the minimum figures were certainly in excess of sixty. The major achievements though, had not been kills . . . it had been the final elimination of the Mozambique railways in the Gaza Province along which the ZANLA terrorists, their equipment and stores had been moving to the Rhodesian border, the destruction or capture of a large number of military vehicles being used for the same purposes and the capture of a vast quantity of terrorist war material.³¹

³⁰ Source: Reid Daly and Stiff, 267.

³¹ Reid Daly and Stiff, 280.



Figure 7. Selous Scouts Enjoying the Title of the Local Paper.³²

D. ANALYSIS

1. Mission-Enhancing Factors

The Scouts' use of tactical deception passively aided them throughout the duration of the mission. Disguised as the enemy, the Scouts were able to either remain clandestine up until the point of contact with the enemy or quickly disappear into the operating environment after an engagement. The Scouts were most vulnerable at the Mapai Airfield, when conducting the logistics run, and at the border of Zimbabwe when returning to base. During both times, the insurgents could have engaged the Scouts, but their disguise prevented the guerrillas from being able to discern friend from foe, costing them their opportunity to stop the Scouts. Had the Scouts used traditional Rhodesian uniforms, and Rhodesian colored vehicles, their presence would have certainly been more apparent, and they potentially could have faced a greater risk of being compromised. Therefore, the Scouts' disguise slowed the adversary's decision-making process, reduced their risk of being detected in enemy territory and aided to their element of surprise.

³² Source: Reid Daly and Stiff, 267.

2. Mission-Inhibiting Factors

The Scouts' method of deception in Operation Aztec raises concerns about the risk accepted, potential fratricide and whether they were able to limit communicating their disguise to the intended audience. Wearing the enemy's uniform can complicate the battlefield, especially working in close proximity with other friendly forces. If the deception is communicated too early, it could jeopardize the mission's operational security; if the deception is communicated too late, it could jeopardize the Scouts' lives. In this operation, the disguise used by the Scouts was intended primarily to deceive ZANLA and FRELIMO forces; however, they relied on other friendly units for support, making battlefield de-confliction both dangerous and difficult. Communicating the deception this way is risky in any military operation because it could introduce an opportunity for a friendly-fire incident. Surprisingly, the number of friendly casualties during the operation were few. Conducting this type of operation requires a large amount of maneuvering and interaction with other units, making the plan extremely complicated or executing it without much self-preservation. As a result, it is surprising the Scouts were not engaged by friendly air assets during the operation. From an aerial perspective, the sight of enemy forces on the ground appears as a legitimate target. Unless this method of tactical deception is augmented by technology where friendly forces can track friendly positions, such as GPS beacons, disguising oneself as the enemy poses a serious threat to life and risks mission failure.

Most importantly, using enemy uniforms and colors as a disguise calls into question the morality of the Scouts, the practice of military ethics, and compliance with international laws. From a legal standpoint, The *Law of War Manual* states, "In general, the use of enemy flags, insignia, and military uniforms is prohibited during combat, but is permissible outside of combat."³³ In this regard, the Scouts may have been able to get away with using their disguise to move in and out of enemy territory, but using it during contact with the

³³ Department of Defense, *Law of War Manual*, DOD Directive 2311.01E, 5145.01, GC DOD and 10 U.S.C. § 140(b) (Washington, DC: Office of General Counsel Department of Defense, 2016), <https://dod.defense.gov/Portals/1/Documents/pubs/DOD%20Law%20of%20War%20Manual%20-%20June%202015%20Updated%20Dec%202016.pdf?ver=2016-12-13-172036-190>.

enemy would have violated the Law of War. Therefore, engaging the enemy under these pretenses is extremely unethical, and warrants serious legal consequences.

3. Mabalane Raid Deception Curve

The Scouts reached their initial point of vulnerability when they arrived at the town of Mabalane. Represented in Figure 8, the Scouts achieved relative superiority at their initial point of vulnerability because they arrived undetected and did not have to overcome any enemy defenses to reach their objective. As the Scouts easily identified and destroyed both the steam crane and the concrete culverts, the slope of the deception curve increases significantly, lowering the area of vulnerability as time on target continues. After their actions on the objective phase, the slope of the deception curve plateaus when the Scouts departed the objective. For the remainder of the mission, the probability of mission completion increases as the area of vulnerability decreases until the Scouts returned to Zimbabwe. Notably, the Scouts' disguise lasted the duration of the mission, shown by the deception curve which remains dashed from their initial point of vulnerability until mission completion.

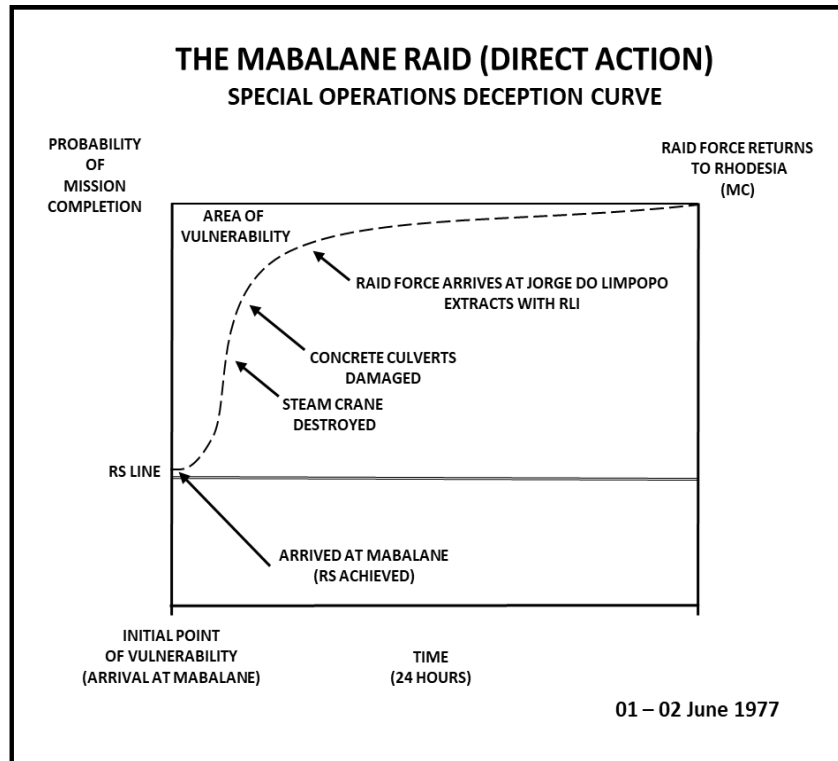


Figure 8. Mabalane Raid Deception Curve.³⁴

4. Findings on Tactical Deception

Operation Aztec revealed one important finding about the use of tactical deception during a long-range surgical strike. When multiple forces operate in the same area, elements that use deception are likely to incur less risk than other elements that do not use deception. During the logistics resupply at the Mapai airfield, the Scouts were in disguise while the enemy concentrated their attention and firepower on the overt presence of the Dakota flight, resulting in a casualty and downed aircraft. In this situation, the Scouts were unharmed, attesting to the fact that using deception reduced risk for operating in enemy territory.

³⁴ Adapted from, McRaven, "The Theory of Special Operations," 10.

III. OPERATION FEUERZAUBER (OCTOBER 18, 1977)

A. BACKGROUND

Beginning in the 1960s, the threat of transnational terrorism from violent extremist organizations (VEOs) became a growing concern for countries in the western world. In 1968, a radical leftist group formed in West Germany called the Red Army Faction (RAF), commonly known as the Baader-Meinhof Gang, escalated from political protests to acts of violence by the mid-1970s.³⁵ Eventually, the RAF formed pacts with larger, more radical organizations, such as the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP). These alliances empowered smaller terrorist groups, providing them the means to convey their narratives through mass shootings, suicide bombings, assassinations, and airliner hijackings.

In response to the emerging threat of terrorism, West Germany sought more capable means to strengthen its national security. In June 1972, the German police tracked and arrested high-ranking members of the RAF network, including the group's founders, Ulrike Meinhof and Andreas Baader.³⁶ West Germany continued to enhance its law enforcement capabilities by forming a new German police force called the Grenzschutzgruppe 9 (GSG 9), specializing in counterterrorism operations. GSG 9 grew to become a reliable and expeditious force, but its operational reach was initially limited to inside Germany's borders.

When a German airliner, Lufthansa Flight LH181, was hijacked by members of the PFLP, the situation quickly gained international attention, placing West German officials into a difficult political position. To save the hostages, the West German Government could either negotiate with the hijackers for the hostages' release or conduct a hostage rescue military operation. Eventually, the opportunity to negotiate was lost when the pilot was

³⁵ *Encyclopedia Britannica*, s.v. "Red Army Faction," accessed March 26, 2019, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Red-Army-Faction>.

³⁶ Chris McNab, *Storming Flight 181: GSG9 and the Mogadishu Hijack 1977* (Oxford, United Kingdom: Osprey Publishing, 2011), 12.

executed, and GSG 9 was tasked with interdicting the aircraft to rescue the hostages under the codename of Operation Feuerzauber. In a critical moment for the West German Government, the newly formed counterterrorism unit relied on their training, military partnerships, and tactical deception to complete their mission.

B. PRELIMINARY EVENTS

On the afternoon of October 13, 1977, Lufthansa Flight LH181, carrying eighty-six passengers and five crew members departed from Palma, Majorca on what initially appeared to be a routine flight to Frankfurt, Germany. Shortly after takeoff, the aircraft was hijacked by four members of the PLFP. Led by a man named Zohair Yousif Akache, a small group of terrorists took the aircraft by force. Among Akache was another man named Wabil Harb, and two women named Suhailah Sayeh and Hind Alameh. The hijackers were armed with two automatic pistols, plastic explosives, and six hand grenades smuggled onboard via an empty cosmetics case and a hollowed-out radio.³⁷ Shortly after takeoff, the hijackers stormed the cockpit and forced the pilot to deviate from his planned route. As Harb held the aircraft's pilot, Captain Jürgen Schumann, at gunpoint, Akache violently corralled the passengers into the aircraft's economy section.³⁸ Fearing for their lives, the passengers and crew onboard Flight LH181 obeyed the hijackers' instructions.

As Flight LH181 flew over the Mediterranean, the hijackers' objectives were slowly revealed, creating an increasingly tense environment onboard for the passengers and crew. Unaware of their final destination, the passengers became confused and disoriented after the aircraft made multiple stops: first in Rome, Italy then again in Larnaca, Cyprus. During this stage of the hijacking, the terrorists publicly announced their demands and it was later published for the public. *The Times*, a British newspaper, revealed that Akache demanded the release of eleven RAF prisoners, two additional Palestinians in

³⁷ McNab, 16–17.

³⁸ Peter Harclerode, *Secret Soldiers: Special Forces in the War Against Terrorism* (London, England: Cassell & Co, 2000), 367.

Turkey, and fifteen million dollars.³⁹ Instead of waiting to negotiate, Akache ordered Captain Jürgen to take off; the aircraft embarked on another long flight until eventually landing in Bahrain with only three minutes of fuel remaining.⁴⁰ As the aircraft came to a complete stop on the runway in Bahrain it was met with heavy military resistance; however, instead of giving up, the hijackers announced a firm deadline of 08:00 Greenwich Mean Time (GMT) on October 16th to meet their demands.⁴¹ The stalemate in Bahrain gave the hijackers a perfect opportunity to refuel the aircraft and take off before a rescue attempt could be made, leaving the West German government in a difficult predicament.

While Flight LH181 was flying over the Middle East, West German officials leveraged every available resource to find a viable solution. GSG 9 was alerted and tasked with developing a hostage rescue plan. After the hostage rescue team departed the Cologne Airport and landed in Cyprus, they encountered a severe breach in operational security (OPSEC). Through a radio broadcast, the hijackers were informed of GSG 9's arrival, forcing the West German Government to construct a cover story with local media outlets so GSG 9 could safely relocate.⁴² Meanwhile, West German officials also reached out to the United Kingdom, seeking assistance and guidance on best practices for conducting hostage rescue operations. Without hesitation, the United Kingdom dispatched two members of the British Special Air Service (SAS), Major (Maj) Alastair Morrison and Staff Sergeant (SSgt) Barry Davies, to Dubai, United Arab Emirates, with a case of stun grenades and fifteen million dollars to support the hostage rescue efforts.⁴³ The initial setbacks to security were manageable, but the international support provided by the United Kingdom significantly enhanced the hostage rescue team's ability to manage the risks of the mission.

³⁹ "Bargaining Begins with Hijackers after Pilot is Murdered," *Times*, October 18, 1977, 1, <https://archive.org/stream/NewsUK1977UKEnglish/Oct%2018%201977%2C%20The%20Times%2C%20%2360137%2C%20UK%20%28en%29#mode/2up>.

⁴⁰ Harclerode, 369.

⁴¹ J. Paul de B. Taillon, *Hijacking and Hostages: Government Responses to Terrorism* (West Port, Connecticut: Praeger Publishers, 2002), 127.

⁴² McNab, 36.

⁴³ Harclerode, 370–371.

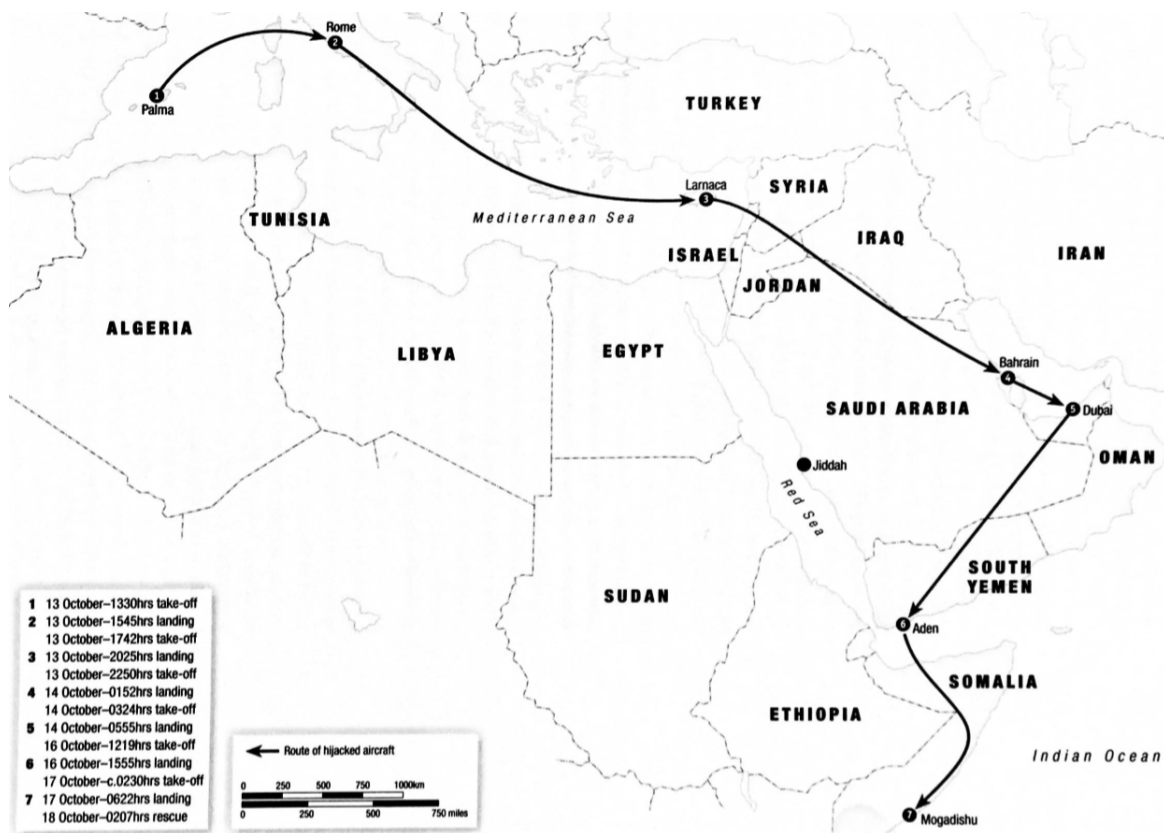


Figure 9. LH181 Flight Path.⁴⁴

The hostage rescue team encountered a series of challenges and missed opportunities at multiple points during Flight LH181's transit. When the aircraft landed on the runway in Dubai, Captain Schumann took another routine smoke break and dropped two broken cigars and two whole cigars outside the aircraft, indicating to the Emirates that there were two male and two female hijackers onboard.⁴⁵ The aircraft remained stationary as Sheikh Mohammed Bin Rashid, the Dubai Minister of Defense, tried desperately to negotiate with the hijackers. After a lull in progress, Sheikh Mohammed finally agreed to let LtCol Ulrich Wegner, the GSG 9 Commander, conduct the assault, but the opportunity was quickly lost when the plane took off again. The next opportunity to interdict the aircraft came at the Aden International Airport in Yemen, but unfortunately, the hostage rescue

⁴⁴ Source: McNab, 29.

⁴⁵ McNab, 30.

team was denied access to land. During the layover, Akache executed Captain Schumann. The hijackers forced co-pilot Jürgen Vietor to fly the aircraft into Mogadishu, Somalia, and news of Captain Schumann's death triggered an emotional turning point in the operation. The West German Government reached their threshold for acceptable risk and the cost of one German life provoked an immediate military response.

C. "FIRE MAGIC"

Soon after Flight LH181 was discovered in Mogadishu, Hans Jürgen Wischniewski, the German Minister of State, spoke with Somali officials to coordinate the hostage rescue operation. On October 17th, Major Klaus Blatte, the GSG 9 Deputy Commander, and twenty-eight of his men landed at Mogadishu International Airport behind Flight LH181 while the engine noise from Somali fighter jets masked their arrival.⁴⁶ Even though the hijackers were unaware of the hostage rescue team's arrival, several media outlets spotted them and continued to report on breaking developments.⁴⁷ Luckily, the hijackers were more focused on talking to negotiators in the airport's aircraft control tower. The negotiation team tried to stall by lying to Akache, stating that his demands were being met, but it would take time for the RAF prisoners to be transferred to Mogadishu. They requested the deadline be extended to 02:30.⁴⁸ Deception was critical to the hostage rescue team's insertion because the distraction provided by the Somali Air Force and negotiators enabled the team to get close enough to their objective to execute the assault.

⁴⁶ McNab, 47–48.

⁴⁷ Henry Tanner, "German Troops Free Hostages on Hijacked Plane in Somalia; Four Terrorists Killed in Raid," *New York Times*, October 18, 1977, <https://www.nytimes.com/1977/10/18/archives/german-troops-free-hostages-on-hijacked-plane-in-somalia-four.html>.

⁴⁸ Harclerode, 379–380.



Figure 10. GSG 9's Assault Plan.⁴⁹

After sunset, the hostage rescue team coordinated a plan that allowed them to approach the aircraft virtually undetected. To execute a clandestine approach, the team painted their faces, hands, and areas of exposed skin in black to blend into the shadows.⁵⁰ Additionally, the team wore civilian clothes instead of uniforms, and declined to wear helmets due to the concern of limited visibility inside the aircraft; the only layer of protection they did not remove was their bulletproof vests.⁵¹ When the assault force was ready, they consolidated at a predetermined holding area at 01:00 local, and thirty minutes later, they converged at an assembly point, positioning themselves directly behind Flight

⁴⁹ Source: McNab, 62.

⁵⁰ McNab, 59.

⁵¹ McNab, 52.

LH181.⁵² As the team slowly approached the aircraft from the rear, the negotiators distracted Akache from inside the control tower with a series of questions regarding the procedures for exchanging the prisoners who were in route from Cairo, Egypt.⁵³ With each step towards the aircraft, the runway lights on the tarmac stretched the shadows of the hostage rescue team, some spanning up to twenty-five feet in length, until they made it underneath the fuselage.⁵⁴ The use of camouflage and a convincing diversion enabled the team to consolidate under the belly of the aircraft, placing themselves in a position to finally mount their assault.

The team made their final preparations, placing double-stacked ladders to the front and rear on the aircraft's port side, as well as a single ladder over both wings with two people at each entry point. After confirming the location of Akache and another terrorist in the cockpit, LtCol Wegener gave the order for the Somali troops to ignite a large fire approximately three hundred yards in front of Flight LH181.⁵⁵ As the fire burned, it caught the attention of the terrorists in the cockpit and cued Maj Morrison and SSgt Davies to throw stun grenades over both of the wings and cockpit.⁵⁶ At 02:07 local, LtCol Wegener gave the order to commence the assault while the hijackers were dazed and deafened by the stun grenades.⁵⁷ The team made entry, clearing towards the flight deck and the rear of the aircraft simultaneously. The team sighted and engaged Hind Alamed first, then Wabil Harb outside the cockpit, followed by Akache in the first-class section. Suhailah Sayeh was engaged last while still inside the forward lavatory. During the assault, one of the terrorists managed to drop two grenades that detonated in the first-class section, but it did not stop the operation. Seven minutes after the assault, LtCol Wegener passed the code word for

⁵² Harclerode, 380.

⁵³ Harclerode, 381.

⁵⁴ Barry Davies, *Fire Magic: Hijack at Mogadishu* (London, United Kingdom: Bloomsbury Publishing, 1994), 139.

⁵⁵ Harclerode, 381.

⁵⁶ Davies, 140–142.

⁵⁷ Harclerode, 381.

mission complete, “Springtime.”⁵⁸ After five anguishing days, the hijacking was finally over.

After the hostages were safe and the hijackers were neutralized, Flight LH181 was secure. The mission was a success. As for the hijackers, Hind Alamed and Wabil Harb were pronounced dead on scene, Zohair Yousif Akache was wounded and died at a later time, and Suhailah Sayeh survived. All other injuries sustained by the flight crew and hostage rescue team were non-life threatening. The day after the raid, all eighty-two passengers onboard, including the remaining four crew members were safely escorted out of Somalia. The success of Operation Feuerzauber bolstered the legitimacy of the West German Government through its projection of power and enhanced hostage rescue tactics for the special operations community at large.

D. ANALYSIS

1. Mission-Enhancing Factors

The five-day hijacking onboard Flight LH181 created a series of challenges for the hostage rescue team that were mitigated through the use of tactical deception during key phases of the operation. Among some of the most critical challenges encountered, GSG 9 had difficulty maintaining operational security during their insertion into the country, remaining clandestine during their infiltration moving to their objective, and keeping the hostages safe until they could get close enough to neutralize the hijackers. In addition to deception, GSG 9 had a significant advantage over the hijackers due to their key military partnerships, innovative tactics, techniques, procedures, and advanced weaponry. The hostage rescue team was able to execute the rescue in a textbook fashion, demonstrating how tactical deception can improve the assault force’s ability to mitigate risk and complete the mission.

During insertion, the hostage rescue team had little control over maintaining their operational security, creating several complications that were eventually alleviated by the use of tactical deception. As local media outlets provided coverage on the developing story,

⁵⁸ Harclerode, 381.

the exposure of GSG 9's movements continued to put the lives of the hostages and the lives of the rescue team in jeopardy. Under these circumstances, the risk of losing hostages was mitigated by developing a cover story to conceal West Germany's intentions and the location of the hostage rescue team. In addition to the cover story, GSG 9's insertion at the airport in Mogadishu was also masked by the Somali Air Force. The Somali fighter jets' was an effective form of distraction. For both challenges encountered during insertion, tactical deception significantly lowered the chances of disclosing and detecting the hostage rescue team's location; a critical factor for ensuring the hostages' safety.

During the rescue team's movement to the target, they were presented with more difficult challenges: remaining clandestine, and getting to the hostages before the hijackers' deadline. To remain clandestine, the team used passive risk mitigation measures, such as applying black face paint, appearing as civilians, and approaching the aircraft from the rear during the night. Additionally, the distraction provided by the negotiation team from inside the aircraft control tower was critical to the mission because it preoccupied the hijackers and diverted their attention away from maintaining security. The most vulnerable part of the mission was the infiltration phase; however, the deception techniques used by the rescue team allowed them to approach the aircraft undetected.

Lastly, the most prominent challenge encountered by the hostage rescue team was finding a way to enter the aircraft with the element of surprise. In addition to their tactical expertise and the implementation of passive risk mitigation measures, deception also became a critical component during this part of the mission. The combination of the negotiation team's false negotiations, diversion made by the fire, and the effects of the stun grenades created enough confusion to enable the team to enter the aircraft and seize the tactical advantage. Tactical deceptions used on the objective were relatively short in duration, extremely effective and significantly amplified the element of surprise.

2. Mission-Inhibiting Factors

Tactical deception was an extremely useful tool for GSG 9, but its late implementation slowed the progress of the operation for the hostage rescue team. Initially, the hostage rescue team had difficulty acquiring the authority to conduct the assault on foreign soil while the aircraft was traveling abroad. Additionally, Flight LH181 made six different stops before its last in Mogadishu, and without communicating with anyone onboard, the aircraft was difficult to track. Unfortunately, during the initial stages of the hijacking, there were too many uncertainties and external factors to make quick decisions at the strategic and political levels. The concerns that weighed on government officials could have been alleviated if GSG 9 had proposed a deception plan that focused on interdicting the aircraft earlier without letting the situation develop, or become riskier. Therefore, an early proposal of a deception plan could have allowed them to execute the operation much faster if it was approved.

3. Operation Feuerzauber Deception Curve

The hostage rescue team first encountered their initial point of vulnerability at the edge of the runway when they stepped off from their assembly point. Represented in Figure 11, the deception curve starts from the initial point of vulnerability, below the relative superiority line, at the beginning of the graph. The deception curve's steady climb over time illustrates the decline in vulnerability and the increase in the probability of mission completion as the team advanced closer to the aircraft. During the infiltration phase, it took the hostage rescue team approximately thirty minutes to maneuver into position underneath the aircraft.

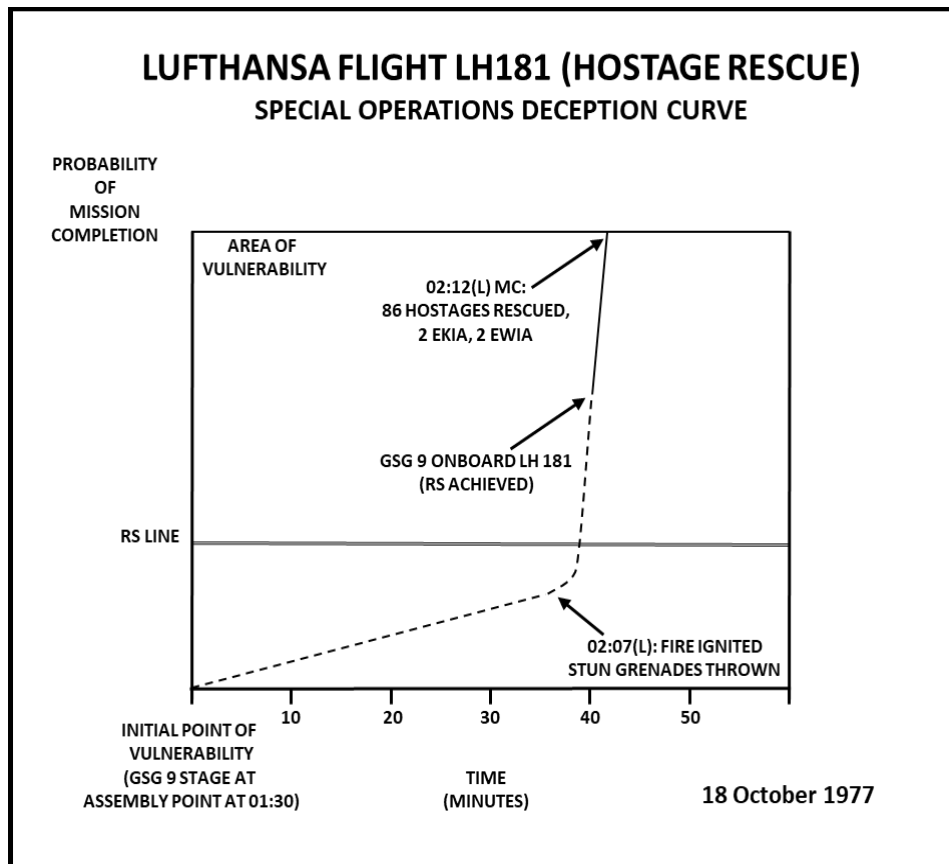


Figure 11. Operation Feuerzauber Deception Curve.⁵⁹

Prior to beginning their actions on the objective, the deception curve changes drastically as a result of the advantages gained by tactical deception and the hostage rescue team's tactical proficiency. Depicted in Figure 11, the slope of the deception curve swings upwards to illustrate the collective advantage gained from the false negotiations, the diversion created by the fire, and the temporary deafness and blindness caused by the stun grenades. Without the advantage gained by deception, the terrorists would have had the opportunity to either force the plane to take off, kill more hostages, or even position themselves to ambush the hostage rescue team inside the aircraft. At 02:07 local, the hostage rescue team gained the element of surprise and made a forced entry onboard the aircraft, considerably reducing the area of vulnerability.

⁵⁹ Adapted from, McRaven, 10.

After the hostage rescue team made initial entry, the effects from deception allowed them to catch the terrorists in exposed positions, achieve relative superiority and complete their mission swiftly. Illustrated in Figure 11, the deception curve passes the relative superiority line and continues upwards until it eventually ceases being a dashed line and becomes a solid line, signifying that the effects of the deception had faded. Five minutes after the team made entry, all of the terrorists were neutralized, and the hostages were safe. The rapid transition from using deception to open assault had a minimal impact on the mission because once relative superiority was achieved with tactical deception, the hostage rescue team's probability of successfully completing the mission was almost certain.

4. Findings on Tactical Deception

Operation Feuerzauber is a prime example of how the successful application of tactical deception can positively alter the course of a special operation to increase the likelihood of mission completion. From this case study analysis, there were four significant findings about the successful application of tactical deception to a hostage rescue mission. First, multiple deceptions can be used simultaneously, or near-simultaneously, without interfering with one another to create a barrage of confusion. Prior to the hostage rescue team's entry onboard the aircraft, the rescuers used distraction, diversion, and cover. Negotiations provided the distraction, fire the diversion, and stun grenades the confusion so that GSG 9 could efficiently enter the aircraft and acquire relative superiority with neither losses to their team nor the hostages. Second, a tactical advantage can be gained with a deception implemented by other friendly parties, and those deceptions can be coordinated by a single node. For example, LtCol Wegener was able to command the operation and dictate the timing of deception over the radio and by signaling. Third, directly communicating a tactical deception to its intended audience strengthens its message, increasing its effectiveness and ability to be received. Each of the deceptive measures was specifically aimed at impacting the terrorists in the cockpit. Lastly, the effects of tactical deception in hostage rescue operations inevitably fade when contact is made with the adversary. For example, the deceptions were used primarily to ensure the safety of the hostages and to allow the hostage rescue team to enter the aircraft. After the team was onboard, the effects of the deception faded, and the team relied on their tactical

expertise to complete the mission. Collectively, the use of tactical deception in Operation Feuerzauber exemplifies the positive impact it can have on reducing risk and enhancing the execution of politically sensitive special operations missions.

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IV. OPERATION JAQUE (JULY 2, 2008)

A. BACKGROUND

In the early 1960s, Colombia was a politically fractured state, and a band of Marxist-Leninist guerillas, known as the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), used violence as a means to gain political influence.⁶⁰ Operating in the sanctuary of the jungle, the FARC became a lucrative network, using kidnappings and the drug trade to undermine the legitimacy of the Government of Colombia (GOC). Among some of the FARC's most notable captives, were Colombian Presidential candidate Ingrid Betancourt and three American defense contractors named Marc Gonsalves, Keith Stansell, and Tom Howes. In an attempt to gain control of the cocaine trade and recoup prisoners held by the GOC, the FARC used Betancourt, the three Americans, and eleven previously captured Colombians as bargaining chips for negotiations with Colombian President Álvaro Uribe.⁶¹ Unfortunately, the FARC had a reputation for brutality, and without knowing the location or condition of the hostages, the GOC was at a disadvantage as it lacked leverage.

After Gonsalves, Stansell, and Howes were kidnapped, the U.S. Government assessed that a unilateral effort to rescue the hostages would be problematic. Locating the hostages was initially challenging because they had disappeared into an intricate hostage-holding network; the hostages were chained together and marched vast distances across the jungle under constant armed guard.⁶² Under these circumstances, unraveling the FARC network was a significant challenge because of their illusiveness. If there was a possibility

⁶⁰ Claire Felter and Danielle Renwick, "Colombia's Civil Conflict," *Council on Foreign Relations*, last modified January 11, 2017, <https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/colombias-civil-conflict>.

⁶¹ Caroline Davies and Sibylla Brodzinsky, "Colombia Hostage Rescue: The Audacious Plot that Freed World's Most Famous Captive," *Guardian*, July 5, 2008, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2008/jul/06/colombia>.

⁶² Gregory Wilson, "A Modern Day 'Trojan Horse' – Operation JAQUE and the Use of Stratagem in a Hostage Rescue Operation," in *Art and Science of Military Deception*, ed. Hy Rothstein and Barton Whaley (Boston, MA: Artech House, 2013), 384–385. Retrieved from <https://app.knovel.com/hotlink/toc/id:kpASMD0003/art-science-military/art-science-military>.

of rescuing the hostages, the U.S. needed to gather more information about the network's inner workings.

To enhance their efforts in locating the hostages, the U.S. began solidifying its bilateral military partnership with Colombia so both militaries could combine forces and capabilities. In 2003, the United States initiated a psychological warfare program that encouraged defection throughout the FARC's ranks by offering compensation for rebels who provided officials with information about the hostages.⁶³ Two years later, in May 2005, the United States military conducted Operation Willing Spirit (OWS), a combined U.S. Special Operations Forces (USSOF) and Colombian military operation that carefully applied pressure on the FARC hostage-holding network.⁶⁴ Both U.S. and Colombian forces continued to escalate their efforts, but without knowing the true extent of their progress, it was difficult to gauge whether they were close to finding the hostages.

⁶³ Wilson, 386.

⁶⁴ Wilson, 385.

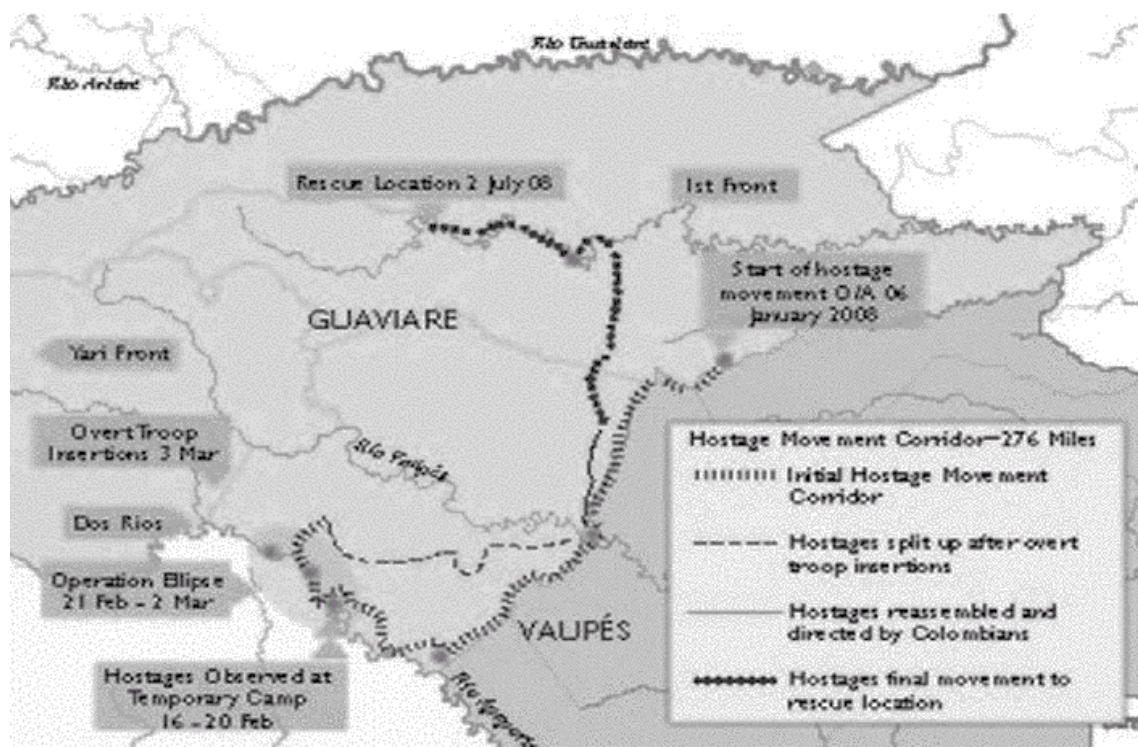


Figure 12. FARC Hostage Movements in 2008.⁶⁵

After years of exploiting the FARC network without much progress, Colombian Army commandos independently devised a clever plan to rescue the hostages using tactical deception. After failing to rescue the hostages using conventional means, the Colombians began targeting FARC leadership to gain information and access to their communications network. Only through a series of false messages and fabrications, was the commandos were able to infiltrate the network. The commandos knew that any direct engagement with the rebels posed serious risks. The safe recovery of the hostages required an elaborate plan. By devising a fictitious humanitarian organization and posing as aid workers and journalists, the commandos performed a daring ruse and recovered all fifteen hostages without any casualties. The operation was dubbed Jaque, or “Check” in English, referencing the chess term for cornering the opponent’s king.

⁶⁵ Source: Wilson, 387.

B. PRELIMINARY EVENTS

Initially, the hostage rescue efforts appeared promising but were unsuccessful due to the unforeseen challenges of operating in a dense jungle environment. Knowing that the hostages were moving largely by foot and small boats, motion detectors were positioned along the riverbanks of the Apaporis River Valley to increase Colombian and American surveillance.⁶⁶ However, the commandos had little external support and limited knowledge of the terrain, making ground operations in the jungle unfavorable. The FARC had a significant home-field advantage in the jungle because survival in this climate and topography was their way of life.

When the Colombian Army attempted their first hostage rescue mission, the plan fell apart from the beginning. In a cordon strategy called Operation Ellipse, the Colombians endeavored to corral the FARC and the hostages with helicopters and ground troops losing the element of surprise and causing the FARC to split the hostages into three separate groups, disappearing into the jungle.⁶⁷ The lack of success from the initial efforts at rescuing the hostages compelled the Colombian military to postpone any additional rescue attempts until they revised their concept of operations (CONOP).

After years of tireless work and dedication, the Colombian military gained a significant intelligence breakthrough into the FARC network. On March 1, 2008, Colombian forces crossed the border into Ecuador and killed a member of the FARC's elite Secretariat, Raúl Reyes, and obtained critical information on the FARC communication network from laptops seized during the raid.⁶⁸ From the information gathered, Colombian intelligence operatives hijacked the FARC's communication network, posing as radio operators during a routine frequency change.⁶⁹ Once inside the FARC's command and

⁶⁶ Wilson, 387.

⁶⁷ Wilson, 387–388.

⁶⁸ Wilson, 387–389.

⁶⁹ Wilson, 389.

control network, Colombian intelligence discerned their standard operating procedures and monitored daily FARC activities.

To get another opportunity at rescuing the hostages, the Colombian Army needed to have more influence over the FARC's daily operations. After the Colombian Army learned how FARC senior leadership communicated to its lower-level commanders, they issued fake orders to subordinate FARC commanders on behalf of the FARC's senior leadership.⁷⁰ The orders contained a specific set of instructions. The rebels were directed to consolidate the hostages, bring them to a pick-up site in the Guaviare District where a non-governmental organization (NGO) would transfer them via helicopter to Alfonso Cano, the FARC's commander.⁷¹ Additionally, the orders also had to prevent any suspicion from the rebels. As a result, the instructions specified that two rebels could escort the hostages to Cano.⁷² Therefore, issuing the orders in a similar fashion to how senior FARC leaders communicate made the deception appear authentic and trustworthy.

The commandos needed a flawless rescue plan, and to further deceive the rebels into handing over the prisoners required a credible deception. The commandos decided to shape their deception around an event already familiar to the rebels. Every step the commandos took was designed to resemble a similar hostage exchange between the FARC and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) earlier that year.⁷³ A few days before the operation, the Colombians created a fictional website titled "Mision Humanitaria International," going so far as to design an organizational symbol of a red bird in the center with blue leaves below and a white background.⁷⁴ To be consistent, the commandos painted two Mi-17 helicopters completely white with red wheel wells and placed an

⁷⁰ David Luhnow, "How 'Operation Check-Mate' Worked," *Wall Street Journal*, July 3, 2008, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/SB121504939072825309>.

⁷¹ Luhnow, "How 'Operation Check-Mate' Worked."

⁷² Luhnow, "How 'Operation Check-Mate' Worked."

⁷³ Simon Romero and Damien Cave, "Bold Colombia Rescue Built on Rebel Group's Disarray," *New York Times*, July 4, 2008, <https://www.nytimes.com/2008/07/04/world/americas/04rescue.html>.

⁷⁴ "Hostage Ruse's Fake website irks Group with Similar Name," CNN, last modified July 18, 2008, <http://www.cnn.com/2008/WORLD/americas/07/18/colombia.website/index.html>.

enlarged image of the fictional organization on the side.⁷⁵ To look the part, four helicopter pilots ditched their uniforms for civilian clothes, and an additional six commandos prepared for their roles as aid workers, mock guerillas, and media correspondents.⁷⁶ The commandos went as far as to take a week and a half of acting lessons to deliver a convincing deception.⁷⁷ The planning process for the rescue operation was deliberate, and everyone involved had a specific purpose that enhanced the deception's legitimacy.

The commandos' intricate deception was further enhanced because it so closely resembled legitimate NGOs. On July 1, 2008, Stansell remembered one of his captors stated that an international committee was nearby and attempting to contact them.⁷⁸ Independently, a real humanitarian organization was searching for the hostages in the jungle at the same time that the FARC was receiving messages regarding the plans with the fictional organization, supporting what the rebels were already hearing in the news.⁷⁹ The thought of being in the news or on television excited the rebels because it was an opportunity to spread their message and gain notoriety. The rebels started using the word "*international*" around the hostages, and told the hostages to pack their essentials and two sets of clothes in a knapsack.⁸⁰ Unbeknownst to the rebels, both the real and fictional organizations were sending similar messages. The overlap in communication from the real and fictional organizations could have potentially confused the FARC, but fortunately it made it even easier for them to believe the commandos' deception.

C. JAQUE

On July 2, 2008, the commandos flew overtly under their cover into the jungle via their two disguised Mi-17 helicopters to link up with the rebels and rescue the hostages. If

⁷⁵ CNN, "Hostage Ruse's Fake website irks Group with Similar Name."

⁷⁶ Romero and Cave, "Bold Colombia Rescue Built on Rebel Group's Disarray."

⁷⁷ Romero and Cave, "Bold Colombia Rescue Built on Rebel Group's Disarray."

⁷⁸ Marc Gonsalves, Keith Stansell, Tom Howes, and Gary Brozek, *Out of Captivity: Surviving 1,967 Days in the Colombian Jungle*, (New York, NY: William Morrow, 2009), 414.

⁷⁹ Gonsalves, Stansell, Howes, and Brozek, 443–444.

⁸⁰ Gonsalves, Stansell, Howes, and Brozek, 414–416.

at any point during the mission the commandos were compromised, a quick reaction force (QRF) of twenty helicopters with 400 troops was ready to respond within fifteen minutes of notification.⁸¹ As the two Mi-17 helicopters approached an open coca field designated as the pick-up site, both the rebels and the commandos expected to be part of a publicized event. The rebels snapped into formation after hearing the sound of helicopters, assigning one hostage per rebel in an attempt to appear organized for their meeting with the press.⁸² All parties involved put on their best performances because the events transpiring would be broadcasted on a national and international stage.



Figure 13. Map of the Colombian Operational Environment⁸³

The commandos' first interaction with the rebels was critical and would set the tone for the rest of the mission. When the door to the helicopter opened, out poured a group of multinational aid-workers wearing brown vests, led by a blond-haired man with Ray-Bans,

⁸¹ Wilson, 390.

⁸² Gonsalves, Stansell, Howes, and Brozek, 417.

⁸³ Source: Charles Briscoe and Daniel J. Kulich, "Operación Jaque: The Ultimate Deception," U.S. Army Special Operations Command (USASOC) History Office, *Veritas* 14, no. 3 (2018): https://www.soc.mil/ARSOH_History/articles/v14n3_op_jaque_page_1.html.

claiming to be an Australian named Daniel.⁸⁴ During insertion, one commando anxiously donned a bib with the ICRC's symbol.⁸⁵ Without hesitation, "Daniel" walked straight over to César and the guerillas, followed by a reporter and cameraman holding a microphone and a camera with a teleSUR logo: a recognizable symbol from a Venezuelan media outlet.⁸⁶ While the rebels were being interviewed by the commandos, posing as reporters, the others gathered the hostages and moved them towards the helicopter. According to Gonsalves, Daniel started to apply zip ties on Stansell when, "he yanked one end of the strap, pulled up his sunglasses for a second, and said, 'Trust me. Trust me.'"⁸⁷ At approximately 13:29, César, Enrique, and all fifteen hostages boarded the Mi-17 helicopter with the commandos.⁸⁸ What originally planned to take eight minutes on the ground, took the commandos just over twenty-five minutes from insertion to extraction.⁸⁹ The patience and credibility demonstrated by the commandos' performance made their deception more authentic and led to a safe extraction of the hostages.

⁸⁴ Gonsalves, Stansell, Howes, and Brozek, 418–419.

⁸⁵ "Colombian Soldier Wore Red Cross Logo in Hostage Rescue," *New York Times*, July 17, 2008, <https://www.nytimes.com/2008/07/17/world/americas/17colombia.html>.

⁸⁶ Gonsalves, Stansell, Howes, and Brozek, 419.

⁸⁷ Gonsalves, Stansell, Howes, and Brozek, 420–421.

⁸⁸ "Operacion Jaque Verdadero Video," July 3, 2009, YouTube, video, 8:37, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NDv-dw1cgKs>.

⁸⁹ Simon Romero, "U.S. Aid Was a Key to Hostage Rescue in Colombia," *New York Times*, July 13, 2008, <https://www.nytimes.com/2008/07/13/world/americas/13colombia.html>.



Figure 14. The Commandos' Arrival at the Pick-Up Site.⁹⁰

Throughout the mission, the rebels were enthralled by the commandos' performance. Shortly after take-off, the commandos jumped on César and Enrique to detain them. Before Gonsalves realized what was happening, a doctor yelled for him to grab the hypodermic needle underneath one of the seats, and when Gonsalves handed it to him, the doctor jammed it into César, causing him to suddenly pass out.⁹¹ Shortly after struggling with César, there was a loud thud towards the back of the helicopter; Enrique surrendered without a fight.⁹² By approximately 13:38, both rebels were subdued, followed by an immediate uproar of celebration onboard the helicopter.⁹³ The commandos revealed their true identities to the hostages and their captors. Twenty minutes after leaving the pick-up site, the crew arrived in San José where they were received with tears of joy.⁹⁴ After several

⁹⁰ Source: Briscoe and Kulich, "Operación Jaque: The Ultimate Deception."

⁹¹ Gonsalves, Stansell, Howes, and Brozek, 423.

⁹² Gonsalves, Stansell, Howes, and Brozek, 423.

⁹³ YouTube, "Operacion Jaque Verdadero Video."

⁹⁴ Gonsalves, Stansell, Howes, and Brozek, 426.

years of captivity, Ingrid Betancourt, Marc Gonsalves, Keith Stansell, Tom Howes, and the other eleven Colombian hostages were finally free.

D. ANALYSIS

1. Mission-Enhancing Factors

Operation Jaque is a leading example of how tactical deception can be deliberately planned and applied to a hostage rescue mission where it directly enhances the friendly force's ability to complete the mission. Without deception, the mission would have been impossible; the hostage rescue team was outnumbered, ill-equipped, and operating in an unfamiliar environment. Additionally, a conventional approach to this operation would have heightened the risk to the hostages to an unacceptable level. Under these circumstances, the commandos' deception was so successful because it was detailed, easy to implement, well-timed, and exploited known psychological weaknesses of the enemy. Therefore, Operation Jaque remains a significant milestone in special operations history because all of the hostages were safely recovered without any casualties and terrorist leaders were captured as a result of tactical deception.

The detail that was incorporated into the commandos' deception significantly improved its effectiveness by making the commandos appear as authentic members of an NGO. Using helicopters to meet with the rebels and painting them in a fashion similar to that of other NGOs was ingenious because it gave the commandos immense credibility. Although the helicopters did not have a recognizable NGO symbol on them, the fictional symbol on the side of the helicopters was large, visible and easily convincing. Moreover, the costumes and props used by the commandos added another visible layer of authenticity. If there was any additional uncertainty or hesitation about trusting the fictional organization, it could be researched online and contacted. Supplementing the deception with multiple mediums such as, visual aids, props and an internet website provided the necessary depth in detail to make the commandos appear like a legitimate NGO.

The commandos' planned to approach armed rebels completely unarmed, committing themselves to prepare a convincing deception that was easy to implement during the mission. The commandos were determined to look and play their respective

roles. Wearing costumes, carrying props, and acting like aid workers was an approach that could be practiced repeatedly and gave the commandos more confidence in their ability to deceive the rebels. By practicing, the commandos' actions became routine, embodying the identities of real journalists, camera crews and guerillas which made their deception appear more credible and less dangerous.

The commandos knew their adversary well and exploited the FARC's psychological weaknesses, contributing to the deception's success. The process first started by targeting the FARC's internal communication. The commandos knew the rebels' internal communication was poor and delivering messages from senior leaders was an opportunity to inject disinformation. The next step targeted the FARC's desire to appear like a legitimate organization because the commandos knew that providing the rebels with a platform, such as television, would bait FARC members into exposing themselves. Additionally, the timing of the hostage rescue was well orchestrated and made the deception appear ordinary. The rebels had already conducted one hostage transfer earlier that year and they were hearing daily broadcasts regarding a humanitarian organization in the immediate vicinity. While this example of deception had many variables, the commandos' consummate understanding of their enemy gave them the distinct advantage of knowing how the FARC would react to specific situations and perceived opportunities. Ultimately, the commandos' deception was successful because they knew more about the FARC than the FARC knew about them.

2. Mission-Inhibiting Factors

Imitating a humanitarian organization was a highly convincing deception, but its implementation remains controversial. It can be argued that the commandos did not have the capacity to fight and their deception was completely justified, or that it negatively affected future humanitarian organization activities and special operations missions. Although the intent of the mission was benign, impersonating the ICRC during the hostage rescue was unlawful and could pose danger to future NGOs. The Law of War Manual states, "Certain signs, symbols, or signals reflect a status that receives special protection under the law of war, and thus these signs may not be improperly used. They may not be

used: (1) while engaging in attacks; (2) in order to shield, favor, or protect one's own military operations; or (3) to impede enemy military operations.”⁹⁵ Using a real humanitarian organization's symbols as a form of protection could diminish a mission's success, damage political relationships or relationships with other NGOs, and even endangered humanitarian organization activities in the future. Although highly successfully, the deception used by the commandos was so unique and famous, that it will be difficult to duplicate in future special operations missions.

3. Operation Jaque Deception Curve

The execution phase of Operation Jaque was short in duration, and the commandos' use of deception rapidly accelerated the course of the mission. In the beginning, the commandos reached their initial point of vulnerability when the two Mi-17 helicopters arrived at the arranged pick-up site in the Guaviare District. As depicted in Figure 15, the deception curve starts at the initial point of vulnerability because the disguise Mi-17 helicopters were visible to the rebels when they arrived at the helicopter landing zone (HLZ). The slope of the deception curve continues to increase as time progresses because the commandos' disguises enhance the deception's credibility. As a result, the effectiveness of the tactical deception during the commandos' actions on the objective is represented by the reduction in the area of vulnerability.

⁹⁵ Department of Defense, *Law of War Manual*.

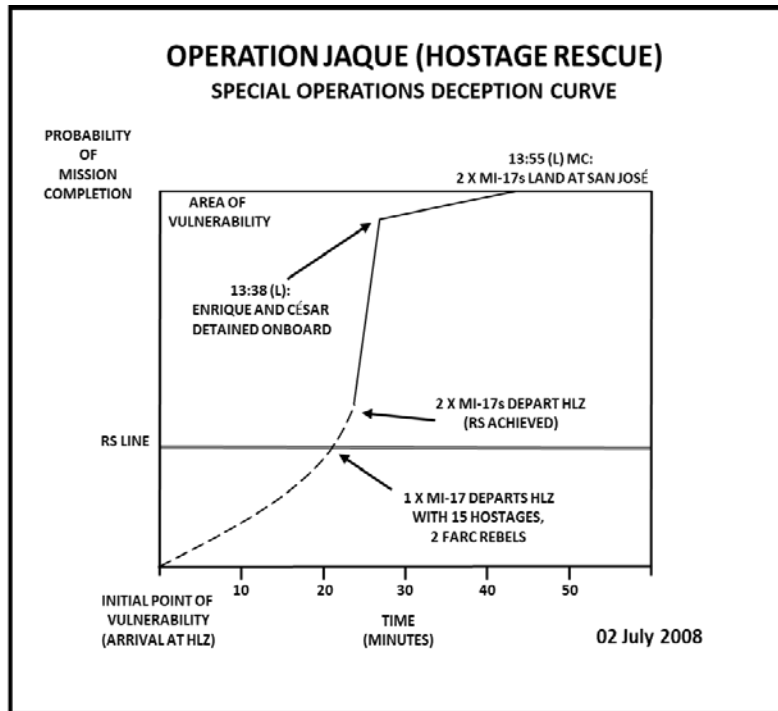


Figure 15. Operation Jaque Deception Curve.⁹⁶

As the mission progressed, the deception continued to reduce the area of vulnerability encountered by the commandos and persisted until they achieve relative superiority. As depicted in Figure 15, the deception curve intersects the relative superiority line when the team isolates César and Enrique and the hostages onboard the helicopters. When the commandos detain César and Enrique, the deception quickly fades because the commandos reveal their true identities. At this point, the deception curve abruptly transitions from a dashed line into a solid line because the deception ended. After detaining the rebels onboard the helicopter, the operation line continues upward, decreasing the area of vulnerability over time until mission completion when the team landed in San José.

4. Findings on Tactical Deception

After reviewing the commandos' use of disguise and distraction in Operation Jaque, several findings can be concluded about the use of tactical deception in hostage rescue

⁹⁶ Adapted from, McRaven, 10.

missions. First, a high level of detail incorporated into the deception enhanced its presentation and overall appearance of authenticity. When the commandos arrived at the pickup site to link up with the rebels, the commandos' portrayal of a humanitarian organization was strengthened by the helicopters, costumes, and their acting abilities. Second, the straightforward and public presentation of the deception made it appear genuine and normal for the rebels. For example, the symbol for the commandos' pretend humanitarian organization was highly visible to the rebels and created an appeal to authority. Third, subtle aspects of truth helped enhance the genuineness and effectiveness of the deception. The addition of a real doctor for the commandos' mission made the authenticity of a humanitarian organization more credible. Fourth, the effects of the deception dissipated shortly after relative superiority was achieved. When the commandos finally had César and Enrique separated from the rest of the guerillas and highly vulnerable onboard the helicopter, the commandos could reveal themselves and end the deception. Fifth, when deception becomes the only course of action (COA), commanders are accepting a lot of risks before the operation begins. Although the commandos' QRF mitigated some risk for the rescue team, it would have placed the hostages in a more dangerous situation if they were activated. Conclusively, the commandos' accepted some risk with their deception before the mission, but it ultimately accelerated the course of the hostage rescue by diminishing the area of vulnerability and reducing the time it took to acquire relative superiority.

V. CONCLUSION

A. OVERVIEW

The case studies in this thesis have demonstrated that the application of tactical deception to special operations is not only versatile but also can directly impact the success of a mission. Although there are no formulas for guaranteeing success in special operations, effective tactical deceptions share a common theme that dates back to ancient Chinese doctrine on war. In *The Art of War*, Sun Tzu states, “Know the enemy and know yourself; in a hundred battles you will never be in peril.”⁹⁷ In all three case studies, friendly forces exploited the known weaknesses of their adversaries to give them a tactical advantage, leading to mission completion.

B. RESULTS OF SUCCESSFUL TACTICAL DECEPTION

1. The Advantages

In testing each of the three hypotheses throughout the case studies, tactical deception has proven to be extremely valuable for overcoming challenges in special operations, specifically hostage rescue missions. In each mission, special operations forces were confronted with a series of obstacles that could have impeded their ability to succeed. For example, the need to evade media coverage, infiltrating occupied enemy territories, meeting timelines, reducing physical exposure, entering secure structures, and interacting with hostile networks. These complications posed a substantial amount of risk to force and mission for the ground force and hostages; however, each case showed that special operations forces were able to mitigate those risks by using compelling and creative tactical deceptions. Prominently, tactical deception demonstrates to be more influential in altering the course of both hostage rescue missions and less influential in a long-range surgical strike.

⁹⁷ Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*, trans. Samuel B. Griffith (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1963), 84.

Displayed in Figure 16, the deception curves from each case study are overlaid on one graph to compare their degree of effectiveness. Each deception curve is differentiated by a color-coded operational line: Operation Jaque is colored in green, Operation Feuerzauber in yellow, and Operation Aztec in red. Overlaying each of the deception curves on one graph will illustrate which deceptions were more effective at achieving relative superiority earlier, maintaining relative superiority longer, and reducing the overall area of vulnerability. Therefore, the graph will be used to support the conclusions made from testing each of the three hypotheses.

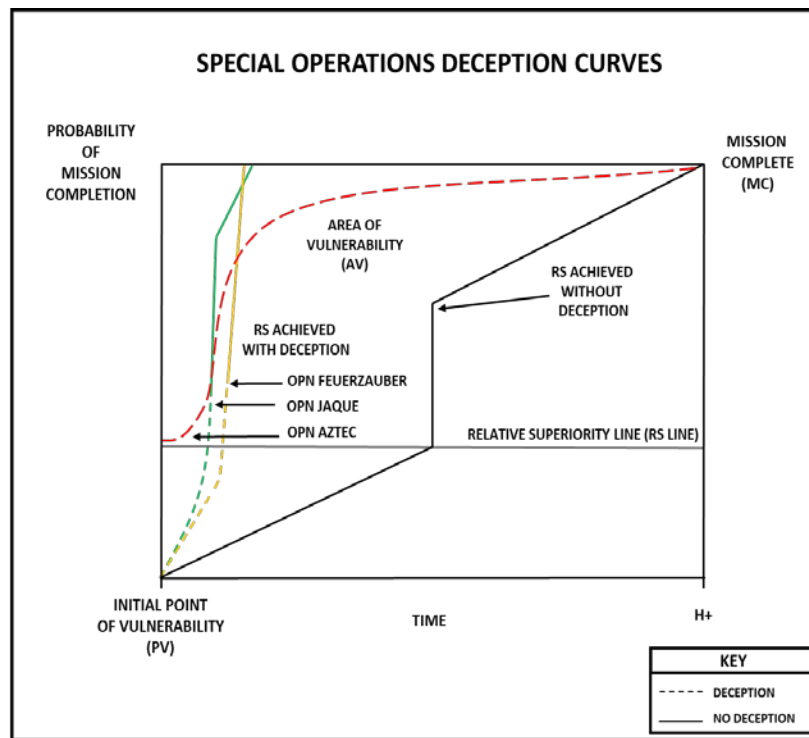


Figure 16. Combined Deception Curves.⁹⁸

The first hypothesis tested is: tactical deception can accelerate the rate at which relative superiority can be achieved compared to a mission without deception. Each of the deception curves illustrates that a successful tactical deception assists special operations

⁹⁸ Adapted from, McRaven, 10.

forces in achieving relative superiority at one of two points. Relative superiority is either achieved at the initial point of vulnerability when no contact with the enemy is made or shortly after the initial point of vulnerability when contact is intended. Depicted in Figure 17, Operation Aztec achieved relative superiority the fastest, Operation Jaque was second, and Operation Feuerzauber was the slowest to achieve relative superiority, represented by the shades of gray from light to dark, respectively. Therefore, it can be concluded that tactical deception accelerates the rate for achieving relative superiority; however, the relationship between achieving relative superiority and a successful tactical deception is highly dependent on the duration and effectiveness of the deception after its implementation at the initial point of vulnerability.

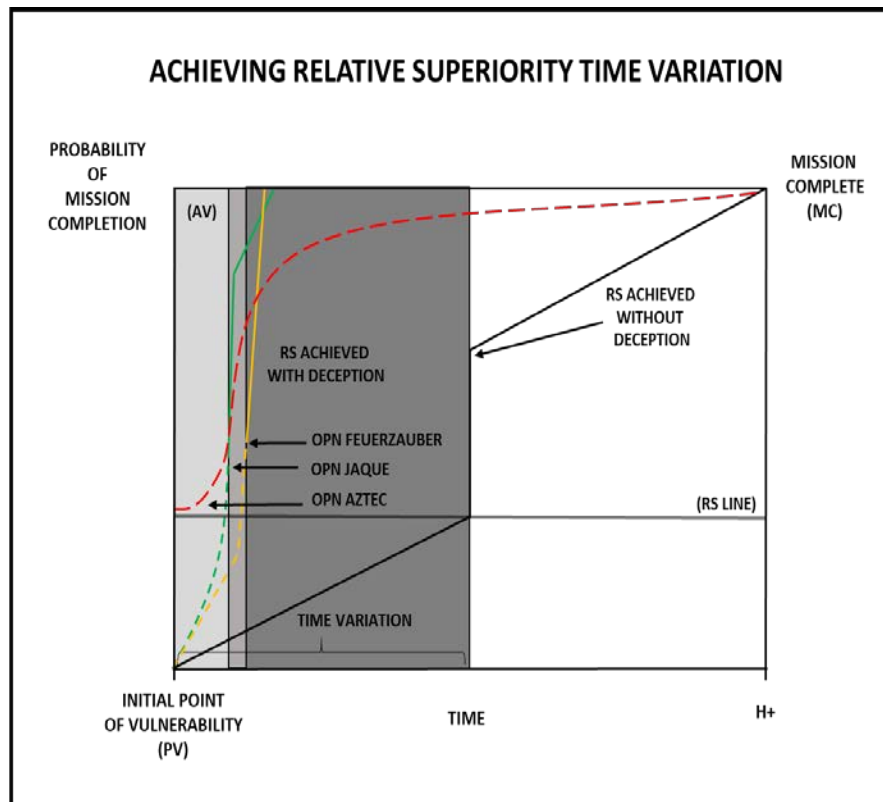


Figure 17. Achieving Relative Superiority Time Variation.⁹⁹

⁹⁹ Adapted from, McRaven, 10.

The second hypothesis tested is: tactical deception can assist friendly forces in maintaining relative superiority for longer compared to a mission without deception. Represented in Figure 18, the earlier friendly forces can achieve relative superiority, the longer it can be maintained during the mission. Illustrated by the shades of gray from light to dark, Operation Aztec maintained relative superiority the longest, Operation Jaque was second, and Operation Feuerzauber maintained relative superiority the shortest, respectively. Therefore, depending on when relative superiority was achieved, and if the mission was completed, it can be concluded that friendly forces can maintain relative superiority for a longer period of time with deception.

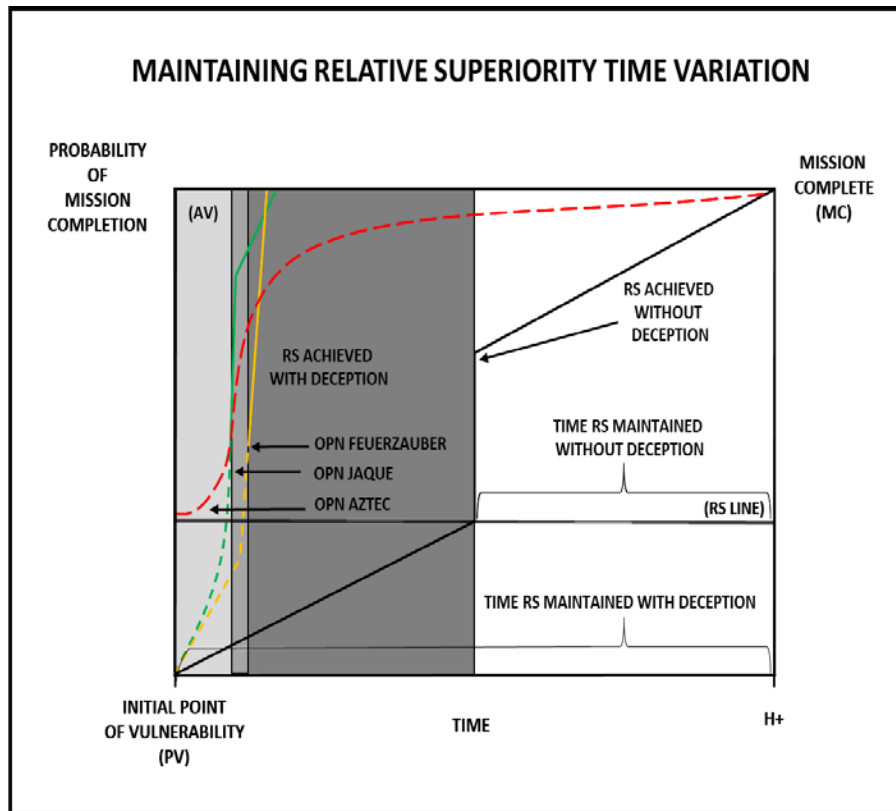


Figure 18. Maintaining Relative Superiority Time Variation.¹⁰⁰

¹⁰⁰ Adapted from, McRaven, 10.

The third hypothesis tested is: tactical deception can reduce the overall area of vulnerability compared to a mission without deception. Displayed in Figure 19, tactical deceptions that led to earlier mission completions reduced the most area of vulnerability. Illustrated by the shades of gray from light to dark, Operation Jaque reduced the most area of vulnerability, Operation Feuerzauber was second, and Operation Aztec reduce the least area of vulnerability, respectively. Therefore, tactical deception can reduce portions of the area of vulnerability but, the area of vulnerability experienced by special operations forces is also dependent on other tactical factors.

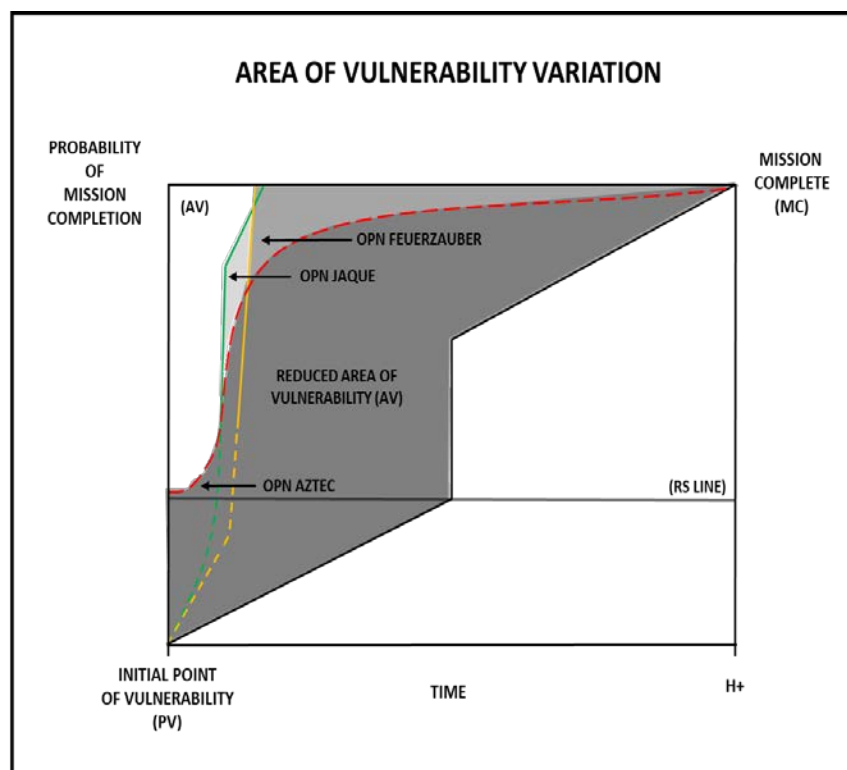


Figure 19. Area of Vulnerability Variation.¹⁰¹

2. The Limitation

Although tactical deception increases SOF's likelihood of mission completion, it also limits the course of a mission. Throughout the case study analysis, it was discovered that

¹⁰¹ Adapted from, McRaven, 10.

special operations forces who achieved relative superiority earlier also experienced a lower probability of mission completion. Represented in Figure 20, special operations forces who achieved relative superiority the fastest also experienced the greatest variation in their probability of mission completion. Illustrated by the shades of gray from light to dark, Operation Feuerzauber experienced the least amount of variation, Operation Jaque was second, and Operation Aztec experienced the most variation in probability of mission completion. Comparing the long-range surgical strike to the hostage rescue missions, other additional limiting factors include the amount of time and kinetic activity required to complete the mission. Therefore, by achieving relative superiority earlier, friendly forces have to maintain it for longer, potentially making the course of a mission more susceptible to volatility.

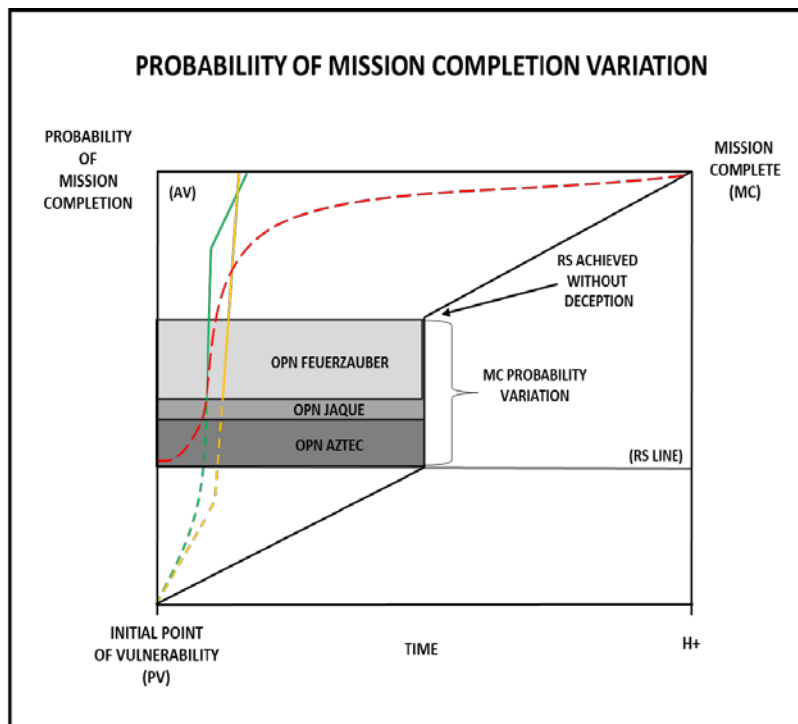


Figure 20. Probability of Mission Completion Variation.¹⁰²

¹⁰² Adapted from, McRaven, 10.

C. CONCLUSION

The Special Operations Deception Curve is not a panacea for predicting tactical deception's success or SOF's ability to accomplish their mission. From the case studies, each of the three hypotheses was tested and four conclusions were drawn. Tactical deception can help SOF achieve relative superiority earlier, it can help them maintain relative superiority longer, and it can reduce the area of vulnerability in a mission; however, it can also cause a variation in the probability of mission completion. Therefore, the Special Operations Deception Curve should be used as a conceptual tool to help explain deception's potential impacts on the course of a future mission when attempting to mitigate risk.

Throughout history, deception has demonstrated its potential to alter the outcome of a conflict. Special operations share a unifying connection with all military operations, in the uncertainty that is part of the nature of war. Carl von Clausewitz theorized about uncertainty in war saying, "Friction, as we choose to call it, is the force that makes the apparently easy so difficult."¹⁰³ Naturally, the frictions of war cannot be eliminated, and special operations forces will always experience a degree of uncertainty during an operation. However, the way in which SOF chooses to address these frictions can have a direct impact on the outcome of an operation. In this regard, deception is one of the many tools that can provide an advantage. By exploiting the weaknesses of an adversary via tactical deception, SOF can potentially displace the frictions of war, forcing the adversary to experience additional uncertainty, and mitigate friction, resulting in a more favorable outcome for a mission.

Using deception to exploit the thought and decision-making processes of the adversary is a powerful tool that must always be carefully considered and implemented. Although the application of deception to special operations may not always be appropriate or successful, the understanding of its utility will quickly atrophy if it is neither studied nor practiced. Therefore, the study of deception in special operations will always remain

¹⁰³ Carl Von Clausewitz, *On War*, ed. and trans. Michael Eliot Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1989), 121.

important to the special operations community because it will continue to teach military members and scholars alike different ways to implement an old art in modern warfare.

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