

REPORT DOCUMENTATION PAGE				Form Approved OMB No. 0704-0188	
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1. REPORT DATE (DD-MM-YYYY) 23-04-2008		2. REPORT TYPE FINAL		3. DATES COVERED (From - To)	
4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE Ars Operatio Gratia Aris Operatio: What We Can Learn About the Operational Art from the British and Boer War				5a. CONTRACT NUMBER	
				5b. GRANT NUMBER	
				5c. PROGRAM ELEMENT NUMBER	
6. AUTHOR(S) Dominic R. Lovello Paper Advisor (if Any): Professor Richard Martin				5d. PROJECT NUMBER	
				5e. TASK NUMBER	
				5f. WORK UNIT NUMBER	
7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) Joint Military Operations Department Naval War College 686 Cushing Road Newport, RI 02841-1207				8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER	
9. SPONSORING/MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)				10. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S ACRONYM(S)	
				11. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S REPORT NUMBER(S)	
12. DISTRIBUTION / AVAILABILITY STATEMENT For Example: Distribution Statement A: Approved for public release; Distribution is unlimited.					
13. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES A paper submitted to the Naval War College faculty in partial satisfaction of the requirements of the Joint Military Operations Department. The contents of this paper reflect my own personal views and are not necessarily endorsed by the NWC or the Department of the Navy.					
14. ABSTRACT As the United States begins its sixth year of combat operations in Iraq, it finds itself in a similar situation faced by the British Army during the Boer War. That is, the world's preeminent power dug in for a long hard slog against a tough enemy fighting asymmetrically and motivated by a volatile combination of religious fanaticism and nationalist furor. It also faces a significant logistics challenge of manning, training, and equipping its forces at the war front over several thousand miles of ocean and rough terrain while simultaneously facing the equally daunting challenge of maintaining public support on the home front. This paper defines elements of operational art and shows how British and Boer commanders applied it to their particular situations. It explains how the operational art can be used in guerilla war and provides a basic idea of how insurgencies are begun, maintained, and ultimately defeated. Finally, this paper draws some conclusions about the lessons that the British Army learned in the Boer War and how those lessons might be applied by American forces in OPERATION IRAQI FREEDOM.					
15. SUBJECT TERMS Boer War					
16. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF:			17. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT	18. NUMBER OF PAGES 22	19a. NAME OF RESPONSIBLE PERSON Chairman, JMO Dept
a. REPORT UNCLASSIFIED	b. ABSTRACT UNCLASSIFIED	c. THIS PAGE UNCLASSIFIED			19b. TELEPHONE NUMBER (include area code) 401-841-3556

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Newport, RI



Ars Operatio Gratia Aris Operatio: What We Can Learn about
the Operational Art from the British and Boer War

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A paper submitted to the Faculty of the Naval War College in partial satisfaction of the requirements of the Joint Military Operations Department.

The contents of this paper reflect my own personal views and are not necessarily endorsed by the Naval War College or the Department of the Navy.

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23 April 2008

Abstract

Ars Operatio Gratia Aris Operatio: What We Can Learn About the Operational Art from the British and Boer War

As the United States begins its sixth year of combat operations in Iraq, it finds itself in a similar situation faced by the British Army during The Boer War. That is, the world's preeminent power dug in for a long hard slog against a tough enemy fighting asymmetrically and motivated by a volatile combination of religious fanaticism and nationalist furor. It also faces a significant logistics challenge of manning, training, and equipping its forces over several thousand miles of ocean and rough terrain while simultaneously facing an equally daunting challenge at home of maintaining public support. This paper defines elements of the operational art and shows how British and Boer commanders applied it to their particular situations. It explains how the operational art can be used in guerilla warfare and provides a basic idea of how insurgencies are begun, maintained, and ultimately defeated. Finally, this paper draws some conclusions about the lessons that the British Army learned in the Boer War and how those lessons might be applied by American forces in OPERATION IRAQI FREEDOM.

INTRODUCTION

In his classic history, The Boer War, Thomas Parkenham recounts this culmination to the raid of Dr. L.S. Jameson in the Transvaal of 2 January 1896:

By eight o'clock Jameson's little band had suffered sixty-five killed and wounded. Inspector Cazalet was hit in the chest, Major Coventry in the spine, Captain Barry was dying. And the reality at last broke in to Jameson's world of make believe. Someone lifted a white flag – not a very good white flag, but the best they could do in the circumstances. It was made from the white apron of an African servant girl. The firing ceased. From all around them, the Boers rose up out of the ground, 'like ants, as one officer put it...Weeping, Jameson was led away in a cart to the jail at Pretoria.¹

As Byron Farwell is quoted as saying in his book, Queen Victoria's Little Wars, the Boer War, "...was not the usual little war fought by professional soldiers with armies largely composed of native troops, but a major war, a serious war, in which the general public became intimately involved."² Because of its nature, the conflict is an excellent example of how competent commanders from a great power can use the operational art to adapt to and overcome the challenges presented by an asymmetric insurgency motivated by a volatile combination of religious fanaticism and nationalist furor. While many pundits are quick to point out the similarities between the U.S. military's conduct of its counterinsurgency

¹ Thomas Parkenham, The Boer War, (London: The Folio Society, 1999). 5-6. The alternate spelling 'gaol' is actually used in the text.

² Byron Farwell, Queen Victoria's Little Wars, (New York: W.W. Norton & Company). 339.

in Iraq with the one it fought in Vietnam, and even the French counterinsurgency in Algeria, there are several good lessons to be learned from the British action against the Boers in the late 19th century and early 20th century as they relate to the operational art factors of time, space, and force.

BACKGROUND

Though it was fought from 1899 to 1902, the Boer War can actually trace its beginnings centuries earlier when Dutch settlers emigrated from Holland to the South African Cape. As French Huguenots and Germans arrived, the three farming communities eventually became known as the Boers.

The British for their part arrived late in the 18th Century after wresting control of the territory from Holland. A combination of British military fortification, English civilian immigration, and Victorian government administration of the Cape Colony through the first part of the 1800's eventually crowded out the Boers. The Boers made their way from the Cape Colony to the deep interior of South Africa during the Great Trek from 1835-1837. After defeating the Zulus in the interior, the Boers settled in the Transvaal and Orange Free State, where they farmed, ranched, and created two religiously ultra-conservative and fiercely independent republics out of the vast grassland. And so it remained until the discovery of the greatest mother lodes of gold and

diamonds the world had ever seen.³ As Parkenham states that since their discovery in 1867, the Kimberly diamond mines near the Orange Free State border produced, "...ninety per cent of the world's supply of diamonds, worth five million [pounds] per year,"⁴ making a fortune for the ambitious and driven prime minister of the English administered Cape Colony, Cecil Rhodes. Parkenham goes on to say that even that tidy sum "...was small change compared to the 20 million [pounds] output of the Rand gold-mines..."⁵ in the Transvaal discovered in 1886 that gave its leader, the dour and no less driven President Paul Kruger, immense wealth too. Had it not been for these discoveries, the two radically different men and the cultures they were part of might have coexisted separately and peacefully. But as more people came to the territories to seek their economic fortunes, cultural differences caused political strain. These foreigners, who the Boers called uitlanders, did not enjoy the same rights in Boer territory as their foreign counterparts enjoyed in English lands. When negotiations over citizenship and the franchise finally failed, Kruger delivered an ultimatum on October 9, 1899, that "unless the British took their troops from his borders...a state

³ James Barbary, The Boer War, (London: Victor Gollancz, LTD, 1971). 9-11.

⁴ Parkenham, 221.

⁵ Ibid, 221.

of war would exist.”⁶ Ultimately, it would be a clash that, as Farewell states, can be dissected into three distinct phases with the Boers winning phase one, the British winning phase two, and both sides fighting to a disturbing and bloody draw in phase three.⁷

DISCUSSION / ANALYSIS

Joint Publication 5-0 defines “operational art (a)s the application of creative imagination by commanders and staffs-supported by their skill, knowledge, and experience-to design strategies, campaigns, and major operations and organize and employ military forces.”⁸ It further amplifies this definition by stating that “operational art integrates ends, the conditions required to achieve the objective; ways, the sequence of actions most likely to create those conditions; and means, the resources required to accomplish that sequence of actions, across the levels of war.”⁹ The efficient management of time, space, and force and their interrelationships are critical elements of operational art. It is in those interrelationships, the groundbreaking ways that the Boers used them, and the hard lessons that the British learned from them in the South African Theater in the

⁶ Barbary, 51.

⁷ Farwell, 339-40.

⁸ U.S. Department of Defense, Joint Publication 5-0: Joint Operation Planning, (Washington, D.C.: Defense Printing Institute, 2006). IV-2.

⁹ Ibid. IV-2.

early part of the 20th Century that have the most interesting implications for the way that American forces are fighting the insurgents in the Iraqi Theater in the 21st Century.

At the initial outset of the Boer War, time, space, and force favored the Boer leaders, Paul Kruger and Mathinus Steyn, and their commandos. The overall Boer strategy was to limit British hegemony and influence and maintain control over the Transvaal's and Orange Free State's vast mineral reserves and rich farmland. Its best chance of succeeding, as James Barbary writes in The Boer War, was by executing an operation where "the Boer commandos [would] stream down into Cape Colony and Natal, arm their Boer blood brothers as they went, all riding hard for the coast."¹⁰ He goes on to say that the Boer forces "...needed to deny ports like Durban and Cape Town to the British Army Corps which was still on the high seas."¹¹ Doing so would maximize Boer space and force advantages and significantly increase the amount of time the Boers had to hold and solidify their position. The factors of space and force complemented Boer strategy well, as the commandos, "...would be fighting across country they knew intimately, and moving their troops on 'interior lines.'"¹² Additionally, Boer weaponry consisted of Mauser rifles, deadly accurate up to a

¹⁰ Barbary, 53.

¹¹ Ibid, 53.

¹² Ibid, 53.

mile, and "...seventy pieces of modern artillery...like the Maxim automatic machine cannon firing one-pound shells very rapidly - ideal for fighting on the open veld..."¹³ Factor time also favored the Boers in the short term, as the recently mobilized British Army Corps of 47,000 had yet to make the 8,000 mile journey from England to reinforce the 27,000 troops already in South Africa to face the 60,000 Boers of Presidents Kruger and Steyn.¹⁴ Boer operations in December of 1899 would show how well the Boers combined those three factors with "God and the Mauser."¹⁵ They would also show England that it was in for a long hard struggle indeed.

The operational campaign that came to be known as "Black Week" was actually made up of three tactical engagements - Stormberg in the south central part of the Cape Colony; Magersfontein near Kimberly on the Cape Colony and Orange Free State border; and Colenso in the east of the Natal province near the town of Ladysmith. All three allowed the Boers to use factors space and force to their advantage. Factor space of the operational art was used effectively because of the Boers sound use of tactical position as it related to operations in the theater. All three locations were along important railroad lines. Two of the three - Stormberg and

¹³ Ibid, 53.

¹⁴ Ibid, 51.

¹⁵ Ibid, 54.

Colenso – provided good cover with tall grass and hills, while Magersfontein provided good defensive position at the junction of the Modder and Riet Rivers. Additionally, the Boer commanders all made good use of camouflaged trenches that further enhanced their factor of space.

British operational art, such as it was exercised by the commander of the Empire's forces, General Sir Redvers Buller, also proved to be worth intensive study, but of how not to campaign against a well armed and well motivated foe. As the Boer War began, Her Majesty's forces were, in fact, victims of their own success. According to Barbary, the "...campaigns in the past fifty years, against backward races, had accustomed the British Army to warfare in which masses of ill-armed opponents were brought down by volleys of rifle fire from British soldiers closed up, shoulder to shoulder, in a formation not much different from that of Waterloo."¹⁶ He goes on to say that the British Army leadership's misuse of these factors of space and force, combined with poor training – a complete misuse of factor time – only succeeded in making the British soldier "...merely a splendid target."¹⁷ Specifically, as Rayne Kruger writes in Good-bye Dolly Gray, "...the British had walked into the arms of Boers they could not see and whose

¹⁶ Barbary, 53.

¹⁷ Ibid, 53.

strength or position was a total mystery to them – the Guards at the Modder, the Highlanders at Magersfontein, and now the Royal Artillery at Colenso.”¹⁸ He goes on to say that the “total British casualties in Black Week’s three battles were 3,000.”¹⁹

The British Army soon found that the blunders and disasters of Black Week opened up a new theater of operations beyond the veld and that was on the battlefield of public opinion. As word reached England of what transpired, the public’s reaction ranged from, as Kruger notes, stunned reservation to patriotic fervor.²⁰ Specifically, he states that “to the newspapers in fact the phenomenon of Black Week owed much. The telegraph enabled them to give news with an immediacy unknown in a major war before. And the education of the masses provided readership on a scale never possible before.”²¹ In other words, the compressed factor of time brought about by technology coupled with the increased factor of force brought about by a larger number of people reading the newspapers decreased the space between the home front and the war front 8,000 miles away. It also created a sense of urgency and an appeal to adventure, as “the ranks of the

¹⁸ Rayne Kruger, Good-bye Dolly Gray: The Story of the Boer War, (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott Company, 1960). 135.

¹⁹ Ibid, 141.

²⁰ Ibid, 141-143.

²¹ Ibid, 142.

Imperial Yeomanry were filled with crack shots and hardriding (sic) fox hunters from the English countryside, some supplying their own equipment and refusing all pay."²²

But if opinion at home was the cause of rallies around the Union Jack, world opinion was decidedly not in John Bull's favor. As Kruger states, "the Press in both Germany and France waged a violent anti-British campaign, and in Russia a war party urged the Tsar to seize the opportunity to strike south into long-coveted India."²³ With this "...hatred of all things English"²⁴, came the very real possibility that England's naval supremacy would be challenged by a new Continental alliance²⁵ and with that an already difficult and arduous resupply of forces in South Africa from home would be made even more so. The force of world opinion via the press therefore could potentially affect the space where England could operate. What the true effects would be in South Africa remained to be seen.

Because of the shift of world opinion, it could be argued that the factor of time was both an ally and enemy of British operations in South Africa. Time was an ally in that England,"...could undoubtedly crush the Boer republics when

²² Barbary, 64.

²³ Kruger, 144.

²⁴ Ibid, 145.

²⁵ Ibid, 144-5.

fully brought to bear..."²⁶ and had the force it needed in place. It would become an enemy as the minority voices in the British anti-war movement, who saw "...the Boers as the weaker side joined poet, scientist and politician in a condemnation that spared not the English Queen, the English soldier or the English people."²⁷

As the new year and new century dawned, British forces in the South African theater of operations would see the arrival of new commander Lord Roberts and his newly appointed chief of staff Lord Kitchener. General Buller would remain in theater in a much diminished role, leading troops in the field tactically but with no theater responsibilities. As the new task force commanders in theater, Roberts' and Kitchener's first task was to devise a new strategy and implement it operationally. The strategy hinged on understanding the Boers' weakness in manpower and that, as Barbary is quoted as saying, "...could be beaten in the field only if they were heavily outnumbered."²⁸ He goes on to say that "...this meant moving masses of men and supplies over the vast high plains of South Africa, and concentrating them for an attack."²⁹ The British had uncontested control of the South African coast and ports. It would need similar control of the interior for

²⁶ Barbary, 53.

²⁷ Kruger, 145.

²⁸ Barbary, 93.

²⁹ Ibid, 93.

victory and would gain it using the operational art to maximize the factors of space, time, and force. That the British relied heavily on the railroads for resupply was no secret to the Boers, who used that reliance with such stunning success during the Black Week operations. That the Boers commando units relied on speed and maneuverability through a friendly population was no secret to the British. The Roberts-Kitchener plan was a simple one. It would capitalize on speed and maneuver with "...men who really mattered in a guerilla war - mounted troops and commanders able to keep long hours in the saddle, sleep rough, live on bully beef and biscuit, [and] endure extremes of climate."³⁰ The combination of factors time and space worked splendidly. In the next eight months, British troopers outflanked the Boer force besieging Kimberly reversed all of the Boer gains in the theater, annexed both Boer Republics, and forced Paul Kruger into European exile.³¹ Lord Roberts was promoted and returned to England to a hero's welcome. Lord Kitchener accepted Lord Robert's former position as commander-in-chief of British forces in South Africa and all that remained of his mission there was to see to the final details of Boer capitulation.

³⁰ Kruger, 366.

³¹ Parkenham, 724.

The Boers, however, saw things differently. When given notice that the only terms for surrender were unconditional they chose instead to “persevere to the end.”³² Far from defeating them, Britain’s all or nothing proposal for peace in the South African theater, had, as Kruger is quoted as saying, “refined among the Boers a consciousness of their national identity which hitherto had lacked coherence or passion.”³³ He goes on to say that “Now it had both, generating a force like that behind the holy wars of old.”³⁴ The Boers would harness that force by fighting a small guerilla war.

In its Small Wars Manual, the Marine Corps defines, “...the essence of a small war is its purpose and the circumstances surrounding its inception and conduct...”³⁵ Parkenham defines the essence of guerilla warfare as “...not to win the war, but to preserve a country’s independence by forcing a stalemate on the enemy.”³⁶ According to Barbary, the Boer guerilla operational art would rely heavily on factor force by dividing the army into small, independent units that would maximize factor space by ranging from the Transvaal to the Cape using quick hit and run raids that, while not decisively defeating

³² Barbary, 111.

³³ Kruger, 358.

³⁴ Ibid, 358.

³⁵ Small Wars Manual, (Manhattan, Kansas: Sunflower University Press, 1940), 1.

³⁶ Parkenham, 648.

the British at one major battle, would bleed them of men and material over time.³⁷

The new operations were effective. Lord Kitchener faced a stalemate with determined enemy that could engage on ground of its choosing almost at will while half of his own 200,000 man force "...were strung out to protect railway bridges and culverts, or to do garrison duty in hostile little Boer towns."³⁸ He also faced growing opposition in England as stories appeared in the press "...denouncing him for incompetence and calling for his removal."³⁹ Clearly, time was beginning to be a key factor.

Kitchener would counter the asymmetric threat he faced by controlling the space the Boer guerillas operated in and applying brute force to counter their sustainment. First, he would fortify his lines of communication by armoring the supply trains to protect them against attack and connecting the railroads via a system of fortified blockhouses. Those blockhouses would in turn be connected by barbed wire that would ultimately act, as Parkenham states, "...not as cordons to keep out the enemy, but as cages in which to trap them..."⁴⁰ Next, he would use his mounted infantry to implement a scorched earth policy on Boer lands and farmhouses, thus

³⁷ Barbary, 121.

³⁸ Barbary, 123.

³⁹ Parkenham, 666.

⁴⁰ Ibid, 668.

removing the commandos' sources of food, fodder, and intelligence. It also created a humanitarian crisis. With their farmhouses and livelihoods destroyed, Boer women and children were forced to relocate to concentration camps so overcrowded and squalid that dozens died daily for lack of food, medicine, and proper sanitation.⁴¹ It was bad news and it would factor prominently in the growing anti-war sentiment in both the British Parliament and general public.

But horrible and inhumane as they were, the new tactics were an effective counter. As Boer guerilla Deney's Reitz states in his memoir Commando, "Lord Kitchener's relentless policy of attrition was slowly breaking the hearts of the commandos."⁴² Time, it seemed, was finally running out for the Boers. But it was no ally of the British either, as it found itself more isolated in the world as the war continued. Peace negotiations began and the treaty to end the war was signed on 31 May 1902, "without enthusiasm, but without opposition."⁴³

CONCLUSIONS

The British ultimately won on the battlefield and in the operational theater, but it could be argued that it was a pyrrhic victory. Overuse of the stick and limited use of the carrot did little to win the hearts and minds of the Boers and

⁴¹ Ibid, 632.

⁴² Deney's Reitz, Commando: A Boer Journal of the Boer War, (London: Faber & Faber Limited, 1932), 310.

⁴³ Barbary, 153.

resentments over the conduct of the war lingered long after the peace treaty was signed. Byron Farwell argues that it actually strengthened Boer resolve to maintain their distinct and separate culture, since "as all the world knows, the children and grandchildren of these proud, brave, bigoted men at last won their fight and in 1961 carried the Republic of South Africa out of the British Commonwealth."⁴⁴

LESSONS LEARNED

British lessons learned in the Boer War ran the gamut from the tactical to the strategic but are most evident in the operational realm. Specifically, as they related to the factors of space, time, and force when used against an enemy that fights asymmetrically. For factor space, it learned the value of technology in closing the huge tracts of unpopulated land on the veld. As Jay Stone is quoted as saying in his book, The Boer War and Military Reforms, "reconnaissance, observation, dispersion, and above all marksmanship were now all stressed."⁴⁵ The way the British Army trained its noncommissioned officers was also changed as a result of the conflict. "Key elements of the new training for infantrymen included...use of cover and independent fire, familiarization

⁴⁴ Farwell, 352.

⁴⁵ Jay Stone and Erwin A. Schmidl, The Boer War and Military Reforms, (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1988), 115.

with intermixed units, and the development and acceptance of interchangeable command..."⁴⁶

RECOMMENDATIONS

But how can these lessons apply to America's involvement in Iraq? What similarities can there be between a rural guerilla war fought by European settlers against a European superpower of the last century and an insurgency fought between foreign and native fighters against the world's only superpower in this century? An examination of the factors of operational art reveal that American can learn much from Britain's South African campaign, particularly with the factors of force and time. First and foremost, the U.S. must understand that winning the hearts and minds, and ultimately the trust, of the Iraqi people is be among them and engage them positively. While the U.S. forces arrived in Iraq woefully unprepared for any kind of long term engagement, each service understands now as Thomas Ricks states in his book, Fiasco, that success really means staying in Iraq for years."⁴⁷ A successful stay and transition from that stay begins with understanding the language and culture – force multipliers when fighting an insurgency.

⁴⁶ Ibid, 117.

⁴⁷ Thomas Ricks, Fiasco: The American Military Adventure in Iraq, (New York: The Penguin Press, 2006), 433.

But perhaps the greatest lesson that can be applied from the Boer War to the Long War is to be magnanimous in victory when it comes. As Boer commando Deneys Reitz articulated so eloquently: "The British, with all their faults, are a generous nation, and not only on the man-of-war, but throughout the time that we were amongst them, there was no word said that could hurt our feelings or offend our pride, although they knew that we were on an errand of defeat."⁴⁸ America too is a generous nation that has built its unique democracy in its own time on a foundation of hard lessons learned in war and peace. The time is now here for it to be generous enough to give Iraq the time it needs to learn and build its own distinctive democracy at its own pace and on its own schedule - not the Congress'.

⁴⁸ Reitz, 314

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