

# WARRIORS

## of the 13<sup>th</sup> Generation

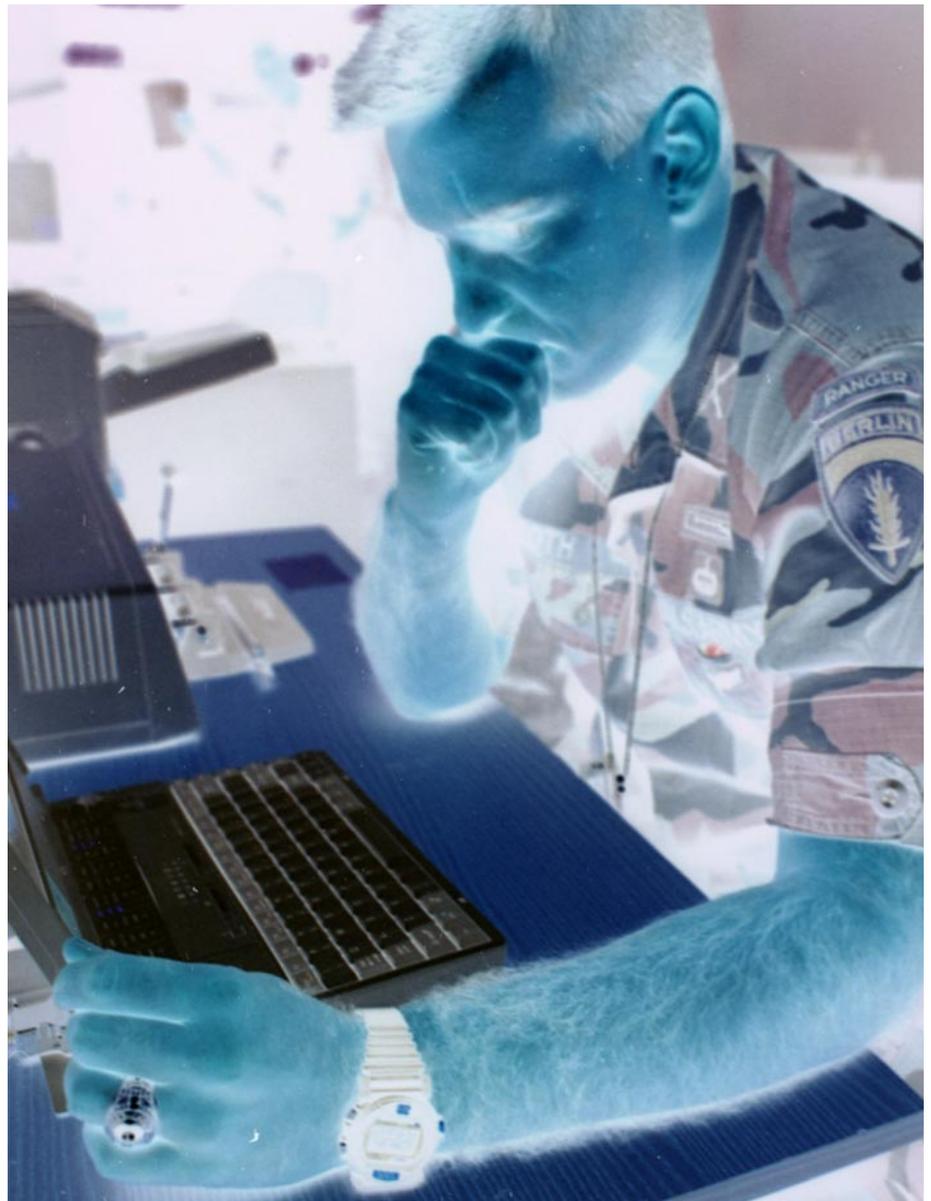
By LEWIS WARE

**T**he article by Lieutenant General Jay W. Kelley, USAF, the commander of Air University, on "Brilliant Warriors" which appeared in the last issue of *JFQ* offered various thought-provoking ideas on professional military education (PME). Since the author sought to stimulate debate, let me accept the challenge.

Kelley assumes that PME should teach students to recognize strategic environments of the next century as "alternate futures." They "are descriptive," he says, "not predictive or normative." Thus from the outset he begs the question of the reality that such futures claim to represent and in which officers will be expected to operate. Even if one succeeds in grasping the general shape of "alternate futures" for objective scrutiny, nowhere does he spell out how to validate their concrete nature. One is asked, in fact, to view alternate futures in terms of "planning stories or scenarios." Thus it may be hard to resist predicating the future on subjective predilections.

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U.S. Air Force (Ken Wright)

If alternate futures are nothing more than plausible constructs of reality, Kelley nevertheless encourages applying a rigorously objective method in creating them. The system chosen to build the future uses the same inferential reasoning that he asserts is sufficient in order to know the past. As proof he claims that a proportional relationship exists between creating alternate futures and commercial profitability. Thus, for a business to neglect shaping the future environment in which it expects to sell its products might entail a loss of its market share to another business that does. By the same token, one is counseled, a military that does not generate alternate futures may lose the nation it serves.

Equating the loss of a market to the loss of national security is inappropriate. The military does not make a product whose profitability determines the degree to which national survival may be assured. On the contrary, it is one of many instruments whose power ensures the execution of policy on which national security is based, security itself being the result of many complex social, political, economic, and military interactions.

The marketplace comparison is perhaps more apt when one service is bested by another for a share of the defense budget. But even here the survival of one service vis-à-vis another, to say nothing of a nation as a whole, is never in doubt. Still it is not surprising that Kelley frames our national survival in such terms since services are expected to make the ultimate sacrifice to defend the Nation and undercapitalized militaries are presumed to be weak.

Though conclusions about the future can be drawn from present evidence, to make similar inferences from the past may ignore the objectivity of established facts. Alternate futures dismiss the past by absolving us from tediously analyzing empirical data, enabling us to make theoretical quick fixes on reality. The need to infer the nature of both the past and future is an occupational hazard of the military that flows invariably from pressure to act decisively. For this reason, the process proposed can rapidly become an exercise in expediency if driven by

concern that any action is preferable to misdirected action or no action at all.

This perspective leads to other pitfalls. The need to pick the *right* future from the profusion available encourages Kelley to suggest that technology will provide the instrument of analysis to validate the correct choice. From here, it is but a single step to define the sole purpose of education as helping the military select the proper technologies to evaluate alternate futures. But more than a simple instrument of analysis, technology will itself ultimately become, to his mind, the facilitator by which the next generation of officers will be creatively nurtured and educated. Hence it follows that "if we can envision alternate futures, we can use technology to create them as virtual realities." Similarly, because officers have been exposed to the high potential of technology during training, they will expect the same quality of exposure in education. Therefore traditional approaches to education will no longer do.

If alternate futures are manifested as virtual realities and technology is key to gaining access to those realities, PME is doing its job correctly when it furnishes the reasons for students to make informed choices from the virtual realities they may confront. To quote Kelley, "PME must come at the right time, offer the right experience, point to the right information, provide a nearly risk-free laboratory to innovate, apply technology to unusual conditions, and reach conclusions that can [be] tested." The rationale for exposing students to such a technologically-driven system is to produce officers with appropriate behavioral responses at the lowest possible cost. From his perspective, only an experience-based program can provide the optimal environment for this process.

Be this as it may, to insist that experience-based education contains little risk is to place unwarranted faith in the value-free nature of technology and in the capacity of machines to solve all intellectual problems with minimum effort and maximum efficiency. Furthermore, Kelley feels

strongly that appropriate behavior ought to be measured against a moral as well as an intellectual standard. Thus his interest in experience-based education has the added attraction of reestablishing the "confident assurance of virtue, right conduct, and fidelity to core values." In this way PME is sensitive to problems of a larger society by recreating an environment in which institutional civics with its associated standard of morality may be inculcated and a professional ethos restored. As he says, a military that loses public support may be, like a faltering bureaucracy, in more trouble than a military which loses a battle.

This concern over core values is laudatory. One must ask, nonetheless, whether such remediation is really possible given the vast range of experiences that PME curricula intend to tailor technologically in addressing the needs of individual students. The problem is that the requirement to meet student expectations will almost certainly guarantee that students remain the subject, not the object, of a process designed for their improvement. Thus they may ultimately exercise a deciding influence on the structure of their education according to a principle of personal utility rather than intellectual or moral rigor. It can be argued that since education has no output except students, undue deference to the will of students may, in the final analysis, exact a price in entitlements that PME can little afford. Once granted, entitlements may embolden students to make further demands on the educational system in the name of individual progress. As Carl Builder pointed out in his recent book entitled *Icarus Syndrome*, the military has lost a sense of its collective mission, leaving a vacuum that the careerism of individual officers has promptly filled. It would be tragic indeed if suggestions made by Kelley to make PME more meaningful to students ultimately encourages this vexing trend.

That could conceivably be the case if the PME system which he envisions is decentralized, organized around short courses of a practical nature, and conducted throughout an officer's career in the form of continuing education. The chance for students to attend a resident

college dedicated to a synoptic vision of the educational process rather than specific and discrete student needs would decrease proportionately and, also, any possibility that students would be personally counselled by mentors in the intellectual values that Kelley wants PME to inculcate. Thus the essence of learning by observation, example, and personal interaction with leaders will no longer be available. From there it is but a short step to the compensatory belief that informational technology will replace the mentor in the same way one is told to expect that it will create the virtual reality of alternate futures. That the system is envisaged, under these conditions, to furnish an environment of high innovative potential capable of offering intellectual and moral guidance in which the educator is more, not less important, seems highly improbable.

The ideas in "Brilliant Warriors" attempt to respond to the certainty that the Armed Forces will decrease in size while conducting a wider range of both traditional and nontraditional roles. Equally certain is that the military will carry out these missions in coalitions and must find the most advantageous way to more fully understand their partners. Kelley feels that a recourse to the study of human motivation alone is needed to perfect interpersonal skills. While it is important to know that certain signals have broad social meanings which can impede communication, the suggestion that the antidote may be found in studying the psychology of cross-cultural relations is misplaced. One may tend to forget that studying culture as social behavior is, after all, only a small part of a constellation of meaning when compared to the greater value obtained from studying the historical evolution of national values and leadership.

I do not disagree that Kelley's preference for the behavioral, experiential, and technological in education may produce "smart, adept, agile, and savvy" professionals. These warriors certainly will be better equipped to exercise the quick reflexes of decision-making that greater familiarity with

virtual reality and the wargames modelled on it can sharpen. But will experience-based education produce the desired brilliant warriors? So long as the purpose of PME is to encourage students to behave in a consistent moral and intellectual manner according to functions determined by alternate future technology alone and student demands on the educational system, the chances of producing "brilliant" officers are slim.

The lack of critical thinking decried in Kelley's article cannot be remedied by more interest in the future at the expense of less interest in the past. Nor will critical thinking be encouraged by better and more sophisticated gaming. The result will be officers who are not brilliant but facile, who are more quick-minded but whose intelligence lacks any depth because their ideas are devoid of real content. In losing their point of reference to the past, they will never grasp the notion that critical thinking is both a process by which the evolving social and historical contexts of ideas are comprehended and a matrix in which the quality of new ideas is judged. How to make conceptual interconnections is exactly what studying Clausewitz, Mahan, and the great campaigns of military history can teach brilliant warriors. To eliminate a learning environment in which critical attitudes are formed by great books in favor of technology of dubious educational value will yield results which are ambiguous at best. If one accepts the PME recommendations proposed by Kelley, both the individual forms and the signatures of concepts may be lost in the mass of undifferentiated data that information technology demands that one absorb and manipulate. And this may occur simply because the services have not prepared teachers as competent mentors and in those academic skills which are necessary to help students make this very fundamental distinction.

I propose that PME be designed with fewer technological schemes and more emphasis on human capital. At the senior and intermediate levels of Air Force education, academic preparation and experience to act as mentors are not yet given the full attention which they deserve as criteria for faculty selection. Without a military career spe-

cialty for academic personnel, a PME institution is devalued. When continuity and collective wisdom—essential to the health of such an institution—are violated by frequently assigning instructors to improve their promotion profiles, the standing of the PME system is diminished. When the inability of the personnel system to identify and assign competent officers to faculty positions in a prompt way is sometimes excused as administratively unfeasible, a college suffers. All too often such problems result in temporary technological fixes to long-term issues with the vain certainty that, by so doing, a virtue has been made out of the inconsistencies in military culture. Sadly that conviction lingers beneath the approach to the problem of PME found in "Brilliant Warriors."

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