

Meet Officers Lewis and Clark – Exploring Situational Awareness

What if the famous explorers Lewis and Clark were police officers? How would they look at the multitude of situations that cops handle from their viewpoint as explorers? Back in their day they did not have two-way radios, cell phones, GPS, and computers, 6 inch policy and procedure books, but had to depend on their natural instincts and look at each exploration from a new and unique perspective observing their surroundings and trying to make sense of every situation. How much better would we be? How much safer on the street?

“Making headway in competitive situations in complex, unbounded, interactive, and unpredictable human environments, such as any extended business, military, or political endeavor, requires some new critical thinking about some old subjects – tactics, strategy, and operational art -- the art of “campaigning.”

Huba Wass de Czege, Brigadier General US Army, Retired wrote an outstanding article **Thinking and Acting Like an Early Explorer (Operational Art is Not a Level of War)** that explains the relationship of strategy, tactics and operational art as it relates to a crisis and “what’s happening now.” All law enforcement and security can benefit from this line of thinking.

The metaphor in the article, “*the early American explorer*” relates to, law enforcement responding to calls for service. Often times in our world due to minimum standards in or lack of consistent training, know how, or the always dangerous “false sense of urgency” there is no exploration, no change in navigation. Instead response to a problem is just a direct route to the problem, like ducks in a row. We street cops follow one another to the problem and attempt resolves it, is all too often the only thought process that goes into it. No observation and orientation taking place when it’s necessary. Operational art is a concept foreign to most in our profession. Too much reliance on standard operating procedures, practices and too little reliance on the ability and know how of experienced people using their insights, imagination and initiative to solve complex problems.

“The logic the explorer must follow is one that will exploit the potential for a successful crossing to the far ocean within the country the expedition is traversing, based on an understanding drawn from partial clues only. This is choosing a strategic logic or rationale to decide what short-term concrete ends are achievable, reflect progress and allow the expedition to learn how to make even more progress. Whatever his strategic

rationale of the moment, it is only as good as his current understanding. It is inconceivable that any strategy of ways and means he could formulate at the outset would not require extensive revision as he progressed and learned more about the country. (Assuming he was not capable of easily overpowering all known and unknown potential difficulties – a very rare case, indeed.)”

Due to the heavy policy and procedure driven culture, that stifles initiative we cops get stuck in decision and action response mode, necessary at times, BUT not all the time! The “*early American explorer*” had to adapt and make his decisions on the fly, based on the current conditions. This ability to decide under pressure makes a big difference in our effectiveness.

Full spectrum cops, in a cohesive learning environment, bound by trust (mutual trust) equals individuals and organizations, capable of campaigning and adapting to, shaping and reshaping the conditions as they unfold. In other words getting things effectively and safely done by adapting and doing! Don Vandergriff often reminds me cultivation of adaptability requires a vast effort, from the top down as well as bottom up. Good leadership is a key!

“The explorer’s journey into the wilderness is also a purposeful journey of learning. In fact, effective explorers are always improving their scouting. And the expedition’s maps are constantly in revision.”

The numbers of cops getting killed in the line of duty over the last couple of years has escalated way too much. In 2010 the officers feloniously killed in the line of duty was up 37% and a third of these cops were killed by ambush. In 2011 we already have 43 law enforcement officers killed in the line of duty up at this point 2% from last year. A dangerous trend and I am a firm believer that much of the reason why, lies in our lack of *knowledge and ability* to apply what we know in our heads to the street, known as operational art or “*campaigning*” as the General describes it.

We are making some headway, slow moving but headway, in law enforcement utilizing Adaptive Leadership Methodology ALM and Outcomes Based Training and Education OBT&E to help create and nurture problem solvers and decision makers. In a thread discussing this article Col Casey Haskins of the United States Military Academy, West Point posed an important question: “*How do we develop creative thinkers? Answer: It can’t be done in a rigid framework that prizes conforming to pre-approved solutions...*”

“A strategic end is conceptual and general; it cannot be specific or concrete. It would be foolish to make it so. A very specific desirable end may be impossible to achieve, while the route to an acceptable one may be readily at hand after some progress. Or, an even better outcome than could be first imagined may become available by a new route not currently exposed. Strategy is moving from one promising position to another, occasionally retracing steps to find a way around obstacles, and following where learning takes it.”

At times explaining the relationship between Strategies, operational art and tactics can be difficult, as most see them as separate entities and fail to see the crucial relationship one has on the other. [General Huba Wass de Czege article](#), I feel does an outstanding job at explaining this evolving relationship very well.

As Col John Boyd stated so often; *“Machines don’t fight wars. People do and they use their minds.”*

“Operational art is not a level of war, or the art of generalship. It is what goes on in the explorer’s mind, the mediating and balancing interaction between his strategic and tactical reasoning.”

Stay Oriented!

Fred