

## Introduction

This essay presents an operational account of Major-General Orde Charles Wingate's military praxis, the concept of Long-Range Penetration, being its cornerstone.

It tackles the subject through an interdisciplinary (generalized<sup>8</sup>) approach – the engagement of historiographic, martial and cultural perspectives. Its fusion fosters the quest for a holistic interpretation of this concept from a contemporary viewpoint, including its relevance to evolving strategic trends and to current transformations in the conduct of war.

From the historiographic faculty it takes the pursuit of a coherent narrative founded on tangible materials and references; from the cultural faculty it takes postmodern and postcolonial discourses, concepts borrowed from architecture and semiotics, epistemology, *Nomadology* (philosophy of space) and *Dromology* (philosophy of speed); and from martial faculties it takes operational art as *the* dominant approach in current warmaking, as manifested by the Naveh School<sup>9</sup>.

To date, despite voluminous accounts published on the Burma campaigns, only a few studies have dealt with Wingate's operational value. This is not to say that he is absent from history. On the contrary – although he was merely one divisional commander out of hundreds who fought a tremendous British effort over three continents during WW2, his meteoric rise through the command echelons was exceptional, and the publicity his Burma operations received almost mythical in proportions.

Yet his disputable heritage has undergone considerable change – from enthusiastic praise and case-studying of his operations in the Higher Command and Staff College, through harsh critique and rewriting of the *Official Histories*, to an institutional decision that he should not serve as a role model to junior officers<sup>10</sup>. In that sense, my work offers a new interpretation of old circumstances<sup>11</sup>.

The essay is comprised of two parts, a theoretical framework (Chapters One and Two) and a narrative manifesting it (Chapters Three through Seven):

Chapter One describes the prevailing discourse on war from a Western perspective and its collapse since the fall of the Soviet Union through the events of 9/11. It reflects border blending and questioning of our typifying of the phenomenon of war altogether, thereby inviting an interdisciplinary approach. It goes on to provide a conceptual framework of *culture*, while unveiling the roots of Western culture and its dominance upon our thinking,

and then challenges its manifestation in war-making, relying primarily on the works of French philosophers, namely: Deleuze, Guattari, Virilio and Jullien.

Chapter One further provides a framework for discussion of the cultural aspect of operational art through the engagement of two contending cognitive approaches, the *Western* and *non-Western*, dealing with relations between *reality*, *rationality*, and *existence*. It suggests transgression, heresy and systemisation are the three mind-states manifesting operational thinking through the notion of operational *Dao*.

Chapter Two questions the notion of asymmetry through a cultural lens, describing the conflict between Western and non-Western ways of war, the essence of which consists of the perception of the rival or opposition, the extent to which war is fought, and the manner in which war is fought. This provides a framework for discussion of the operational manoeuvre (manifestation of operational *Dao*) as an alternative to the classical approach, while adding the spatial dimension to that discourse.

Chapter Two follows with: the mapping of discussion on operational space; what a critical inquiry on operational space entails; and a genealogy of the discourse on space from an operational viewpoint. It then describes the shift from symmetric manoeuvre to operational manoeuvring systems, offering a phenomenology of current thought on manoeuvre warfare, a conceptual frame of operational manoeuvre, and a practical frame of operational manoeuvre.

The chapter concludes with some thoughts on emerging strategic trends, which may require rethinking of military space from the perspective of the operational manoeuvre. It also points to fundamental drawbacks in current operational discourse on space and suggests cultural projections that may lever the operational discourse of space.

In Chapter Three I suggest that special operations are the relevant military answer to rising cultural asymmetry. Beginning with a brief study of special operations forces (SOF), it provides a theoretical layout for their analysis based on four dimensions: conceptual, command, organisational, and managerial. It asks what *special* stands for and offers an abridged genealogy of the concept, questioning order, legitimacy and efficacy, and paying significant attention to the US SOF community (being the world's largest, the most invested in global conflicts and therefore the most studied reference).

Chapter Four outlines the professional atmosphere in which Wingate's *long-range penetration* idea developed (phenomenology of long-range penetration vis-à-vis the prevalent jargon of the time) while presenting a genealogy of its first two generations: Palestine's Special Night Squads and

Abyssinia's Gideon Force. The chapter also provides a short biography of Wingate, his social background, upbringing and military career up to his arrival in Burma, as well as comments on Wingate's organizational posture within the British institutions.

Chapters Five through Seven advance an extensive critique of Wingate's *third-generation* long-range penetration concept, weaving it into the Burmese context with three additional threads that both affect and are affected by it: (1) the evolution of Allied grand strategy; (2) the evolution of the South East Asia command scheme; (3) the evolution of operational plans in the theatre in relation to the LRP Force's role. The narrative is divided into three periods: Wingate's arrival in Burma and the outcome of the first Chindit expedition; the Quadrant Conference (marking the political peak of Wingate's career) through the commencement of the 1944 counteroffensive; and Operation 'Thursday'.

The Aftermath sheds additional light on the outcome of Operation 'Thursday' and the fate of the Chindit Force.

The Afterword returns to the core of *long-range penetration* from a contemporary viewpoint and suggests a framework for discussion of advanced perceptions of operational manoeuvring systems.