

## Artigo Selecionado

# Yamamoto: The Synergy of Vision, Intellect and Willpower\*/\*\*

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*In the first six to twelve months of war with the United States and Great Britain I will run wild and win victory upon victory. But then, if the war continues after that, I have no expectation of success.*

*(Admiral Isoroku Yamamoto)<sup>1</sup>*

## 1 INTRODUCTION

Leadership has many definitions. In the Canadian Forces, leadership is stated as “the art of influencing others to do willingly what is required in order to achieve a gain or goal. It is the projection of the personality, character and will of the commander.”<sup>2</sup> In generic terms, leadership can be divided into three basic levels: strategic, operational, and tactical.

The term operational leadership, the focus of this paper, defines the commander as responsible for the entirety of military actions by forces under national or coalition command. The operational commander provides the interaction between national or coalition policy on one side, and military strategy and tactics on the other – through application of operational art.<sup>3</sup>

This definition sets out some qualities that are required in order to wage war

at the operational level. Logically, the methods by which operational commanders plan, prepare, and employ their subordinate forces differ significantly from others, because each commander may be characterized by a specific set of qualities needed to accomplish objectives, and, consequently, to be successful.<sup>4</sup>

This essay will argue that there are three qualities that are essential to most operational commanders during wartime. Based on an analysis of Admiral Ysoroku Yamamoto’s actions in the Pearl Harbor Operation as a Commander-in-Chief of the Combined Fleet of the Japanese Imperial Navy, this paper will demonstrate that vision, intellect and willpower – when set up in synergism – are the three qualities required by an operational commander to be successful.

This paper will first provide a brief look in Admiral Yamamoto’s personal life and naval career. Then, it will discuss the qualities mentioned above – one by one, explaining its importance for operational commanders and demonstrate how Admiral Yamamoto displayed those qualities in his performance as a Commander-in-Chief. Finally, the paper will conclude by supporting the thesis statement.

1-1. John Deane Potter, *Admiral of the Pacific: the Life of Yamamoto* (London: Heinemann, 1965), 43.

2. Department of National Defence, B-GL-300-003/FP-000 Command (Ottawa: DND Canada, 1996), 6.

3. General Helge Hansen, “Leadership at Operational Level” (lecture, Canadian Forces College, Toronto, ON, October 23, 2004). In addition, the Canadian Forces defines operational art as “the skilful employment of military forces to attain strategic and/or operational objectives through the design, organization, integration and conduct of theatre strategies, campaigns, major operations and battles.” Department of National Defence, B-GG-005-004/AP-000 Canadian Forces Operations (Ottawa: DND Canada, 1996), 3-1.

4-4. Department of National Defence, B-GL-300-003/FP-000 Command ..., 11.

## 2 YAMAMOTO'S UPBRINGING AND NAVAL CAREER

Yamamoto was born in 1884, in Nagaoka, Japan. In 1904 he graduated from Japan's Naval Academy at Eta Jima and first saw combat a year later at the battle of the Japan Sea, during the Russian-Japanese War.<sup>5</sup> In 1919, he was stationed in the United States for language study at Harvard University, but failed to attend class as he was busier studying US resources – oil and industry production. During this time, Yamamoto became convinced of the future role aircraft would play in combat and Japan's need to develop an air-capable navy. In 1926, Yamamoto returned to the US, this time as the naval attaché to the Japanese Embassy in Washington, DC.<sup>6</sup>

As a rear admiral, Yamamoto played a leading role at the London Naval Disarmament Conference in 1930, sturdily opposing extension of the Washington Treaty ratios that, since 1922, had limited Japan's naval strength compared to that of the US and Britain. Yamamoto also represented Japan at the 1934 preliminary talks for the London Naval Conference. At this time, he was a dissenting voice in the chorus of believers who saw the battleship as the decisive weapon to win future struggles for control of the Pacific.<sup>7</sup>

In 1936, against his own desires, Yamamoto was appointed vice-minister of the Navy and then Navy Minister (1936-1939). He was a strong proponent of naval air power incorporating both land-

and-carrier-based aircraft. Yamamoto had always argued against the Tripartite Pact and war with Britain and the US. In 1939, Yamamoto was reassigned as Commander-in-Chief of the Combined Fleet when the signing of the non-aggression treaty between Germany and Russia sent shock waves through the Japanese Government. Yamamoto strongly opposed war with the US as he had respect and admiration for the American people.<sup>8</sup> Yamamoto also opposed Germany's and Italy's union with Japan, and saw the mistakes in the Japanese policy of imperialism and the destructiveness those policies offered the Japanese people. Once the political decision was made, however, Admiral Yamamoto turned his efforts to preparing the navy for war with the US.<sup>9</sup>

## 3 THE VISION – STRIKE ON PEARL HARBOR

### 3.1 Definitions and Concepts

The Pocket Oxford English Dictionary defines vision as “the ability to think about the future with imagination or wisdom.”<sup>10</sup> The Human Component of Command states “a fundamental objective of war fighting is to bring force in order to defeat the enemy.”<sup>11</sup> For this reason, the operational commander must focus on broad military objectives that can range from the destruction of enemy forces in the field to the undermining of public support for war or the weakening of the enemy's will to fight. Commanders need to set the conditions they wish to

5. Edwin Palmer Hoyt, *Three Military Leaders: Heihachiro Togo, Isoroku Yamamoto, Tomoyuki Yamashita* (Tokyo: Kadansha International, 1994), 80.

6-6. Edwin Palmer Hoyt, *Three Military Leaders: Heihachiro Togo, Isoroku Yamamoto, Tomoyuki Yamashita*..., 82.

7. Yamamoto argued that the attacking power of the planes would be increased enormously, making it possible to destroy ships from carriers or land bases. Hiroyuki Agawa, *The Reluctant Admiral: Yamamoto and the Imperial Navy* (New York: Harper and Row, 1982), 92.

8. John Deane Potter, *Admiral of the Pacific: the Life of Yamamoto*..., 44.

9-9. Edwin Palmer Hoyt, *Three Military Leaders: Heihachiro Togo, Isoroku Yamamoto, Tomoyuki Yamashita*..., 102.

10. This definition will be used as the official definition of this quality for the purpose of this paper. Catherine Soanes, *The Pocket Oxford English Dictionary* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 1032.

11. Department of National Defence, B-GL-300-003/FP-000 Command ..., 14.

establish at the end of the campaign, operation or battle; “they must work out in advance the desired end-state.”<sup>12</sup>

The operational commander must have in mind the entire spectrum of the war and be able to foresee the means (doctrine, organization, structures and equipment of the armed forces) for the attainment of the desired end-state through employment of military forces. The operational commander’s intent provides operational vision and enables subordinate commanders to clearly understand what actions they must take to accomplish the Commander’s overall aim.<sup>13</sup>

To be successful, the operational commander must be able to see the situation in this full complexity with broad vision – the ability to anticipate, and an understanding of the vital link between means and ends.<sup>14</sup> In the case of Admiral Yamamoto, vision was the key to the success achieved by the attack on Pearl Harbor on 7 December 1941.

### 3.2 Political situation

The US political actions designed to dissuade Japan from its imperialist advances in Asia, especially in the case of “the China Incident”, were responsible for Japan’s aggressive position towards America.<sup>15</sup> When Japan joined Germany and Italy in the Tripartite Pact, the US refused to sell Japan the oil and steel which Japan desperately needed for its war machine.<sup>16</sup> In effect, Japan had been backed into a critical corner and saw no way out but to fight a vastly superior force. Japan’s only

hope was a surprise attack that would annihilate the American Fleet and Yamamoto understood this. In addition, the Combined Fleet’s naval air annual training in 1940 provided the insight for the conception of Yamamoto’s vision.<sup>17</sup>

### 3.3 Yamamoto’s Operational Vision

At Yamamoto’s order, the Combined Fleet had emphasized aerial warfare tactics in its annual training, which brought together the various units of the Japanese Imperial Navy. Of special note was an exercise that included carrier-mounted air attacks, using air-launched torpedoes against warships in the harbor. Despite much controversy among the fleet’s members on the role of aerial strikes in a decisive battle, Yamamoto was evidently persuaded that such an attack, if coupled with secrecy and surprise, would be a success. Yamamoto had visualised that the range and firepower of Japanese naval aviation could make possible an annihilating aerial attack against the US Pacific Fleet, even in its home waters.<sup>18</sup>

In reflecting on the conception of the aerial attack, it is important to understand its rationale in Yamamoto’s operational vision. Abundant evidence suggests that Yamamoto was strongly opposed to war with the US. Even so, as an operational-level commander, he could see the entire spectrum of the war and could foresee the consequences for Japan in terms of visualizing a long-term campaign. Finally, he must have at hand the most powerful means for an early victory if war broke

12. *Ibid.*, 14.

13. Colonel J.J. Morneau, “What are the Key Attributes Required by an Operational Level Commander to be Successful?” (Toronto: Canadian Forces College Advanced Military Studies Course Paper, 1988), 8.

14. Department of National Defence, B-GG-005-004/AP-000 Canadian Forces Operations (Ottawa: DND Canada, 1996), 3-1.

15. Edwin Palmer Hoyt, *Three Military Leaders...*, 99.

16. *Ibid.*, 106.

17. Admiral Yamamoto developed a new sense of well-being in the Combined Fleet and concentrated on gunnery training, night manoeuvres and ship handling. *Ibid.*, 103.

18. Gordon William Prange, *At Dawn We Slept* (New York: Mc Graw Hill, 1981), 15.

out: “I can run wild for the first six months, but after that...”<sup>19</sup>

In Yamamoto’s vision, the navy’s doctrine - *the orthodox defense plan*- was a way for final defeat, because Japan would not avoid a long-term campaign which the US would eventually win as a result of its enormous industrial capacity. From his perspective, an aerial attack on the US Pacific Fleet at its Pearl Harbor base offered the Japanese Imperial Navy its best chance in a war against the US.<sup>20</sup>

On January 1941, Admiral Yamamoto committed his ideas to paper in his memorandum, “Views on Military Preparations”, for the navy minister. Its major point was the plan of an assault on Hawaii and his convictions that the navy needed to greatly expand its naval aviation. The document was divided into four sections; “preparation for war”, “training”, “operational policy”, and “a detailed plan of operations to be followed at the outset of hostilities.” Yamamoto also argued that the power of aircraft and submarines made it unlikely that a decisive gun battle would ever take place, and he concluded, “The outcome must be decided on the first day.”<sup>21</sup>

Fundamentally, in Yamamoto’s vision, it was essential to change the navy’s orthodox strategy. As a quantitatively inferior naval power, Japan’s best chance lay in a qualitatively superior strategy: a surprise, violent and fatal air attack at the enemy fleet in the first day of the war. Such actions would shift the strategic balance in

Japan’s favour, protect the all – important southern flank in Southeast Asia, and hopefully lead to a negotiated peace.<sup>22</sup>

In the process of envisioning the campaign, Admiral Yamamoto forecast the future pragmatically and realistically. Therefore, he developed ways (new concepts), and means (resources) to achieve the vision. Obviously, he demonstrated another essential quality: intellect.

## 4 INTELLECT – THE ESSENTIAL QUALITY TO BE VISIONARY

### 4.1 Definitions and Concepts

Clausewitz suggested that “no great commander was ever a man of limited intellect”, and that the difficulty of the intellectual activity increases as one moves up in command.<sup>23</sup> The Pocket Oxford English Dictionary defines intellect as “the power of reasoning and understanding objectively; a person’s mental power.”<sup>24</sup> According to the Canadian Forces publication, Command:

A Commander will not understand a complex situation in a campaign, major operation or battle, nor be able to envisage courses of actions and decide what to do, without intellect. Apart from intelligence, intellect embraces discernment (including the ability to seek and identify the essentials), originality (based on imagination), judgment and initiative.<sup>25</sup>

This paper agrees with the description of intellect above. However, one addi-

19. Yamamoto had already envisioned a task force made up primarily of aircraft carriers, cruisers, and destroyers, to deliver an annihilating strike against the US Pacific Fleet in Pearl Harbor. Gordon William Prange, *At Dawn We Slept...*, 15. In addition, Edwin Palmer Hoyt, *Three Military...*, 102 -103.

20. The orthodox defence plan was based on the idea to attack and destroy the American Fleet in Japanese home waters. Hiroyuki Agawa, *The Reluctant Admiral: Yamamoto and the Imperial Navy...*, 46. In addition, Gordon William Prange, *At Dawn We Slept ...*, 12.

21. Hiroyuki Agawa, *The Reluctant Admiral: Yamamoto and the Imperial Navy...*, 220.

22. Edwin Palmer Hoyt, *Three Military Leaders...*, 104.

23. Carl von Clausewitz, *On War ed.and trans. Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton: Princeton University Pres, 1989)*, 110-111.

24. This definition will be used as the official definition of this quality for the purpose of this paper. Catherine Soanes, *The Pocket Oxford English Dictionary (New York:Oxford University Press, 2002)*, 472.

25. *Department of National Defence, B-GL-300-003/FP-000 Command...*, 13.

tional component might be included in the definition: the capacity for learning. The operational commander actively seeks new knowledge and concepts, and he values innovation. It has been said, “The true leader is the creator quite as much as the applier of knowledge.”<sup>26</sup>

#### 4.2 Yamamoto’s Capacity to Acquire Knowledge.

Admiral Yamamoto, sought to perfect a plan, based on surprise, which would give Japan at least a chance, if it succeeded. As a younger officer during the Russian-Japanese War, Yamamoto saw close-up the tactics of one of the world’s greatest admirals. From Admiral Togo, he learned one thing above all: the need for surprise in battle.<sup>27</sup>

He also learned the lesson of the long-drawn-out war Japan had fought in China. He understood, if Japan fought contest another like that, miserable defeat was certain. In addition, Yamamoto had clear knowledge about the US, especially that American industry was more developed than Japan’s and unlike Japan, had unlimited the resources, such as the oil, iron, and steel, which they would need to support the war effort.<sup>28</sup> The Imperial Japanese Navy was convinced that, in the war with the US, *the orthodox defense plan* was the only solution. Instead, Yamamoto was strongly convinced that the initiative must be seized by Japan, because he knew that the US Pacific Fleet would move immediately into the Pacific to threaten Japan’s Southern Operations at the outset of war.<sup>29</sup>

Looking at Yamamoto’s life it should be apparent that this was a man who was always thinking objectively, and was very capable of anticipating his enemy’s actions. This was clearly demonstrated – Yamamoto’s synergy of intellect and vision – during 1940, when two important events occurred. The first one was the advance of the US Pacific Fleet from San Diego to Pearl Harbor, in May.<sup>30</sup> The second, in November, was the remarkable success of the British torpedo attack on Italian ships at anchor at Taranto. Yamamoto closely studied all details of the attack and that action revealed to him the vital role of the aerial torpedoes.<sup>31</sup>

Despite the Pearl Harbor attack “idea” being so dangerous, Yamamoto was convinced that the potential gain was worth the risk. In January 1941, Yamamoto envisaged the idea of a carrier-borne air attack on the American base at Pearl Harbor to launch a war by disabling the US Pacific Fleet, thus preventing its interference in Japanese operations in Southeast Asia. At the same time, he reasoned that the air attack on Pearl Harbor might be possible and would eliminate any American threat to the Japanese homeland early in the war.<sup>32</sup>

## 5 WILLPOWER – TRANSFORMING THE VISION INTO ACTION

### 5.1 Definitions and Concepts

The Pocket Oxford English Dictionary defines willpower as “the faculty by which a person decides on and takes

26. Lieutenant Colonel Charles M Black, *Leadership at Operational Level* (Carlisle Barracks: US Army War College, 1988), 4.

2-27. Gordon William Prange, *At Dawn We Slept...*, 29.

2-28. John Deane Potter, *Admiral of the Pacific: the Life of Yamamoto...*, 46.

2-29. Gordon William Prange, *At Dawn We Slept...*, 12. In addition, Hiroyuki Agawa, *The Reluctant Admiral: Yamamoto and the Imperial Navy...*, 46.

3-30. *Ibid.*, 13.

3-31. John Deane Potter, *Admiral of the Pacific: the Life of Yamamoto...*, 53.

3-32. *Ibid.*, 54.

action, control or restraint deliberately exerted.”<sup>33</sup> Willpower is one of the operational commander’s most important requirements for success. The operational commander must impose his will not only on the enemy, but also on his own staff and subordinates, and his allies. Willpower also enables an operational commander to impart his vision to his subordinates and to ensure that they adopt his vision as their own.<sup>34</sup> Within the Canadian Forces focus “a commander must possess willpower, a quality that relates directly to the first Principle of War – Selection and Maintenance of the Aim.”<sup>35</sup>

Willpower helps an operational commander to retain his original vision in the face of setbacks and losses. It is precisely then when the operational commander must make the utmost effort to maintain his vision and not allow his subordinates to lose hope. In short, willpower gives him the personal drive and resolve to see the operation through to success.<sup>36</sup> Finally, the Human Concept of Command states:

The essential thing is action. Action has three stages; the decision born of thought, the order or preparation for execution, and the execution itself. All three stages are governed by the will. The will is rooted in character, and for the man of action character is of more critical importance than intellect. Intellect without will is worthless, will without intellect is dangerous.<sup>37</sup>

## 5.2 The Japanese Imperial Navy facing Yamamoto’s Vision.

In 1941, the Japanese General Staff had been proceeding with its planning for a war with the US on the basis of a defense strategy. This, in turn, was predicated on *the orthodox defense plan*, based on the priorities of the “Southern Operations” to secure for Japan Southeast Asia and its resources such as oil, rubber and raw material.<sup>38</sup>

The fundamental divergence between the Navy General Staff and Yamamoto’s Combined Fleet Staff was based on the necessity and the risk of the planned Pearl Harbor attack. The Navy General Staff reviewed the Hawaii plan and provided a detailed list of objections, which stated that the Japanese Imperial Navy could not afford to wager its carefully built-up naval air strength in such an inadvisable risk, particularly in view of the fact that it would be needed in other major operations.<sup>39</sup> In this case, the Pearl Harbor attack was not truly necessary because, in the event that the US Pacific Fleet might try to hit the Southern Operations in the flank, the Japanese Imperial Navy had great confidence that it could intercept him near the home islands, and launch a smashing counter-attack.<sup>40</sup>

Despite this view, when Yamamoto made a speech of instruction to the officers of the Combined Fleet, new words and new ideas crept in:

Once the cabinet decision is made, our Combined Fleet will proceed to its post with the mission of placing the Empire in a position of perfect security, breaking down our powerful enemy through the

3-33. This definition will be used as the official definition of this quality for the purpose of this paper. Catherine Soanes, *The Pocket Oxford English Dictionary*..., 1062.

3-34. Colonel J.J Morneau, “What are the Key Attributes Required by an Operational Level Commander to be Successful?” ..., 8.

3-35. Department of National Defence, B-GL-300-003/FP-000 Command ..., 17.

36. *Ibid.*, 16.

3-37. *Ibid.*, 16.

38. Gordon William Prange, *At Dawn We Slept*..., 12.

3-39. The Navy General Staff argued that all energies should be concentrated on the primary objective: the seizure of Southeast Asia and its rich resources. *Ibid.*, 104.

4-40. John Deane Potter, *Admiral of the Pacific: the Life of Yamamoto*..., 67.



utmost efforts of officers and men. This is an unusual mission. (Ugaki Diary)<sup>41</sup>

zAt same time, the fleet was conducting military exercises for a special training – aerial and submarine attacks against ships anchored at harbor in the inland waters of Japan.<sup>42</sup>

The controversy was not resolved during the summer of 1941, even as training and preparations for the Pearl Harbor operations continued. The sharpest argument concerned the number of aircraft carriers to be used in the attack. Yamamoto had proposed forcefully that six carriers must participate in the attack, but the general staff insisted on reserving some carriers for Southern Operations.<sup>43</sup>

Also, within the Combined Fleet, a few officers had not accepted Yamamoto's plan. During a special meeting of admirals and senior officers, Yamamoto showed his strength of will:

I have been studying the entire strategic situation for some time. I realize that some do not think well of my plan, but the operation against Hawaii is a vital part of Japan's grand strategy. So long as I am Commander-in-Chief, Pearl Harbor will be attacked. I ask you to give me your fullest support. Return to your stations, and work hard for the success of Japan's war plan. Good luck! <sup>44</sup>

Then, on October 18, the Navy accepted Yamamoto's plan. In order to secure the final consent of the Navy General Staff to Operation Hawaii, and to convince its members to allow six carriers to the operation, Yamamoto sent his personal emissary who had been carefully instructed to pass the word to the high command that rejection of the Pearl Harbor attack

would result in Yamamoto's resignation:

Admiral Yamamoto insists that his plan be adopted. I am authorized to state that if its is not, then the Commander-in-Chief of the Combined Fleet can no longer be held responsible for the security of the Empire. In that case he will have no alternative but to resign, and with him his entire staff.<sup>45</sup>

Yamamoto's willpower enabled him to pursue the image of "what ought to be" for the Japanese Navy to position itself for success in the war with the US. Yamamoto envisaged an unpopular plan, supervised all details and perfected it, fixed his conviction in the face of adversity, acted boldly, and, therefore, was successful in Pearl Harbor Operations

## 6 CONCLUSION

This paper explores the concepts of vision, intellect and willpower, and its importance for the Commander at the operational level of war. At this level, in order to conduct successful campaigns, the operational commander needs intellect to envisage the perfect link of strategy and tactics to accomplish the aim. Willpower gives him the resolve needed to see the operation through to success, and to lead his forces in a direction he envisions as correct.

In order to understand the operational commander's personality, a brief analysis into the life of Admiral Yamamoto shows a man whose mind was constantly at work judging and anticipating the next move, capable of both intellectual and professional flexibility and possessed of considerable willpower: traits that would

4-41. Edwin Palmer Hoyt, *Yamamoto: The Man Who Planned Pearl Harbor.*, 146.

4-42. *Ibid.*, 147.

4-43. Gordon William Prange, *At Dawn We Slept...*, 282.

4-44. *Ibid.*, 285

45. *Ibid.*, 297

make him one of Japan's most able naval commanders and thereby one of America's most notable adversaries.<sup>46</sup>

In conclusion, the three qualities discussed here were demonstrated by this successful operational commander, as the architect of Japan's naval strategy in the opening years of the Pacific War in the World War II. Leadership is an art and, as such, certain talents are required to practise the art successfully. In the case of Admiral Ysoroku Yamamoto, such talents as vision, intellect, and willpower, formed a unique combination of human qualities, that set up in synergy and enabled him to execute one of the most brilliant naval operations of all time.

\*\*A página do CEE / ECEME ([www.eceme.ensino.eb.br/portalicee/](http://www.eceme.ensino.eb.br/portalicee/)) disponibiliza uma síntese traduzida para o português deste artigo.

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4-46. Admiral Yamamoto was carrying out a strategic review when his plane was ambushed by American fighters, on April 18, 1943. Edwin Palmer Hoyt, *Yamamoto: The Man ...*, 325.