

Book Reviews

Special Warfare

Leadership and the New Science. By Margaret J. Wheatley. San Francisco: Barrett-Koehler Publishers, 1992. ISBN 1-881052-01-X. \$22. 164 pages.

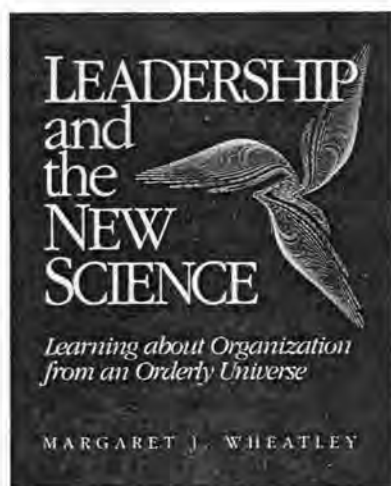
It is not often that a book is truly surprising — this one is. Margaret J. Wheatley, Professor of Management at Brigham Young University, has made a unique contribution to our understanding of leadership and its relationship to the newest discoveries in science.

At 164 pages, the book is clear and concise. But watch out for that first step: The new science is not immediately comprehensible to all.

The author makes a convincing argument that 17th-century Newtonian principles have led us collectively down the wrong leadership path. Her thesis is that we have become victims of our own science, and that repeated attempts by a Western, linear and mechanistic culture to reduce humans to quantifiable entities is doomed to failure.

We may all have an aversion to the conduct of human affairs "by the numbers," yet this anti-human methodology has infected CEOs and senior military officers alike. We create questionnaires, take polls and collect data, all in a vain attempt at prediction. Our correct focus should be on the "process" of leadership and the establishment of productive and mutually beneficial relationships with co-workers and subordinates.

Rigidly hierarchical organizations, like the Army, are the very antithesis of Wheatley's conception. Yet even the Army and its soldiers can benefit from the author's



unusual approach to the topic. One of the keys is "informal leadership."

We all have memories of poor leaders who, because they were bright enough to trust in a high-quality senior NCO or subordinate officer, succeeded. Perhaps they weren't so dumb after all. Even loyal subordinates will seek the leadership they need, perhaps outside the chain of command, when the boss is not up to the challenge.

Wheatley recognizes that organizations develop their own kind of consciousness. Soldiers who have been present for the deactivation of a beloved unit know that it is like attending the funeral of an old friend. Our memories and the energies that all former members expended in that unit make it so, creating a very human reality.

The point is that organizational energy is the result of the contributions made by every member, not the leader or CEO alone. The best leaders manage to control their own egos and to develop the collective energies of all to meet organi-

zational ends.

One of the most radical departures taken by Wheatley from conventional wisdom is reflected in this quote, "Growth is found in disequilibrium, not in balance. The things we fear most in organizations — fluctuations, disturbances, imbalances — need not be signs of impending disorder that will destroy us. Instead, fluctuations are the primary source of creativity."

Creative solutions to problems encountered during ARTEPs, for instance, are generally not well-received by evaluators — prescriptions based on doctrine are. In the attempt to measure intangibles like combat readiness, we are compelled to create only those situations which can provide us measurable results, in something like an ARTEP. The result is a skewed perception of reality. Is the unit truly combat-ready or just ARTEP-smart?

Lenin said "Freedom is good, but control is better." Wheatley points out, "If organizations are machines, control makes sense. If organizations are process structures, then seeking to impose control through permanent structure is suicide." Although it is overstated, her assertion contains an underlying truth. Overarching control and the failure to give subordinates decision-making authority can destroy any chance for a positive command climate.

Information, according to the author, is the primary ingredient in creating a successful organization. This comes as no surprise to senior Army leaders, but putting information to work is often problematic.

The senior leader's task is twofold: (1) create a vision of where the unit needs to go (2) articulate that vision so it is understood by every member of the organization.

Those interested in quantum mechanics, nonlinear equations, fractals, chaos theory and self-organizing systems will find this book particularly interesting. Wheatley makes some startling connections between these new sciences and the art of leadership — connections most of us wouldn't look for. Her unconventional approach to the topic, in this reviewer's opinion, possesses extraordinary merit. The book is well worth the price.

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Bravo Two-Zero. By Andy McNab.
London: Bantam Press, 1993. ISBN:
0-593-03421-X. 374 pages.

The author, a British Special Air Service NCO, provides a candid first-person account of his patrol's action in the 1991 Gulf War. The eight-man patrol (call-sign Bravo Two-Zero) received two missions: to locate and destroy Iraqi telecommunication land lines which paralleled a main supply route; and to identify and destroy mobile Scud missile launchers. Inserted 100 miles northwest of Baghdad by helicopter five days after the air war began, the dismounted patrol quickly encountered a series of incidents that doomed the mission.

Radio frequencies for the operation were inoperative, causing the patrol to lose communication with its base. Contrary to intelligence reports, 3,000 Iraqi troops were present in the immediate area of operations. The patrol's four survival radio beacons proved incapable of contacting orbiting AWACS aircraft, eliminating any possible close air support or aerial extraction. The hide site was com-

promised by a young Iraqi goat herder, leading to a firefight and a subsequent escape-and-evasion attempt of 120 kilometers toward the Syrian border.

Three patrol members died. Four were captured and endured captivity and torture in Baghdad for a month before repatriation. Their interrogation, described in brutal detail, provides a classic contemporary case study of resistance to interrogation, reiterating some points taught in our own SERE course. One man successfully evaded capture, completing a 300-kilometer march to arrive at the

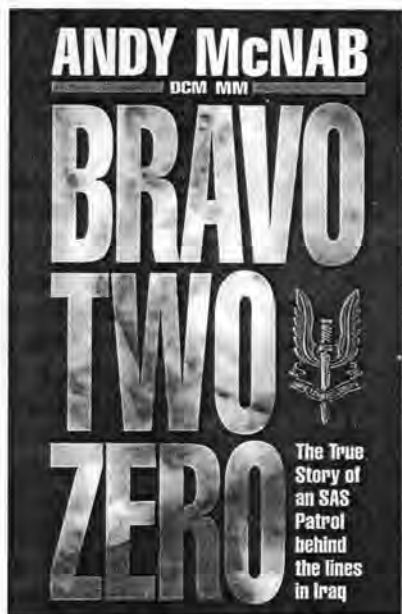
done?"

The straightforward narrative dispels some of the popular myths and mystique of the SAS while providing frank observations and insight into the unit. For instance, the author's comments on the essentials of the regiment's professionalism, "It's all very well doing all the exciting things — abseiling, fast-roping, jumping through buildings — but what being Special Forces is mostly about is thoroughness and precision. The real motto of the SAS is not 'Who Dares Wins' but 'Check and Test, Check and Test.'"

The brief discussion of lessons learned and why things went wrong is disappointing, possibly leaving the reader with unanswered questions. With the benefit of hindsight, one can speculate, Was the pre-mission planning thorough enough? Why was intelligence on the area insufficient? What specifically caused the failure of the patrol's communications? Was the combination of direct-action and special-reconnaissance missions excessive for the size and composition of the unit?

Not surprisingly, Bravo Two Zero reportedly became the most decorated patrol in the British Army since the Boer War. The story leaves one staggered by the sheer courage, tenacity and endurance of the participants. It should evoke discussion and introspection from the professional soldier, reminding him that exceptional individuals must always be the foundation of any special-operations organization.

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British Embassy in Damascus. According to the author, "It was one of the most remarkable E&Es ever recorded by the Regiment."

As the patrol leader, the author gives an honest, often anguished, overview of the mission planning and execution. While some terminology, equipment and tactics might differ from our own, U.S. soldiers will find the concepts and techniques familiar. He is blunt in explaining the circumstances and the rationale for his decisions, providing ideal points for the reader to contemplate, "What would I have