

University of Szeged
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Theses booklet for doctoral (PhD) dissertation

„That Others May Live!”
*The evolution of the combat search and rescue
capability of the United States Armed Forces in the
light of doctrines,
1982–2007*

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I. Objective and methodology of the dissertation

The field of combat search and rescue (CSAR) has not been previously addressed by domestic military historiography, and internationally, researchers have focused primarily on the Vietnam War and the Gulf War. However, the war environment of today and the dynamics of modern war make the topic relevant not only for historical research, but also for its general relevance.

The study of these operations is important because it provides an insight into the world of special operations and how they work, and the experience gained can be directly applied by the armed forces. In addition, the fact that similar operations often take place in today's war environments shows the relevance of the subject. The analysis of these can be important and useful for historiography, which – we might say – “owes” (interdisciplinary) analysis of recent history.

There is also a strong social interest in the subject, due to the fact that people want to understand the background to the operations, but lack the necessary background knowledge, as evidenced by the reactions to the ongoing Russo-Ukrainian war. Such research can help to remedy this. The pop-cultural dimension of similar operations should not be neglected either, as there was huge interest in films such as *Lone Survivor* and *Black Hawk Down* when they were released, and similar operations are also featured in many other films and video games.

For this reason, and because of the specificity of military history as a discipline, the essay uses the methodology of both historiography and military science. The study adopts a qualitative approach, as the quantitative method, which is essentially statistical in nature, can be misleading regarding the topic, and therefore requires a deeper contextual analysis.

The methodology of my thesis is mainly based on the *process tracing* method. It uses case studies to observe the evolution of a process and to examine organizational changes as well as the practical application of procedures and tools. The methodology can also be used to explain and link phenomena that appear isolated and unrelated. The analysis of case studies follows the established methodology of battle analysis.

Given the interdisciplinary nature of the topic of this thesis, it is also worth reviewing the academic debates surrounding military history. Military history is an interdisciplinary field of research that uses the methods of both history and military science, and thus its results can be useful and beneficial for both disciplines. This duality is also reflected in the issues raised by the discipline. The approaches, methods and classification of the discipline are still a matter of debate. Ferenc Pollmann wrote an article in issue 33 of *Korall* 2008 entitled „*Marcona*” *történelem: hadtörténetírás határon innen és túl*”, which was intended to launch a debate on the issue, but no debate has emerged about clarifying the status of the field.

In my thesis, I have therefore consciously used methods from both disciplines. The general methodology of the dissertation is dominated by historical methodology, but the subject matter also implies a military approach. In line with the topic, the vocabulary was drawn from several disciplines in addition to the methodology.

II. Short summary of the dissertation

The aim of the research can be divided into two main areas: the development of doctrine and the impact of changes in doctrine on different deployments and their impact on changes in doctrine. In addition, I have examined the reception of the topic in commemorative culture and popular culture in a brief survey.

The presentation of doctrinal development requires a complex approach, as the period under review has seen significant changes in the US Armed Forces. This is because, although the transformation into a volunteer force following the Vietnam War had already taken place, the development of a unified operational culture between the forces had only just begun, and in fact the whole period under study covers the building and consolidation of this institutional culture. Consequently, it was necessary in this chapter to examine not only CSAR doctrine, but also the unified doctrines of the United States, in particular the Army's 1982 FM 100-5 *AirLand Battle* doctrine, which was one of the first doctrines to attempt to synchronize the operations and combat and military principles of two forces, in this case the Army and the Air Force. Full doctrinal unification was finally mandated by the *Pub. L. 99-433 Goldwater-Nichols Department of Defense Reorganization Act of 1986*, with full unification achieved by the mid-1990s, but even after that, continued refinements were necessary to bring the doctrines of the various forces into full alignment.

Also, in the chapter on doctrinal development, it was important to look at the impact of the chain of command and command and control principles and the creation of the United States Special Operations Command (USSOCOM) on the conduct of special operations and thus CSAR missions.

The chapter concludes with a discussion of the evolution of CSAR doctrine. In the general doctrinal changes, a learning process induced by the actions carried out can be observed, however, it is little present in the specific combat search and rescue or special operations doctrines in general. This is particularly evident in the field of mission control.

In the case of the development study, I examined which forces had CSAR doctrine in the period under study. Only the Coast Guard does not have such a manual, nor does its operational capability include the conduct of similar operations. The Marine Corps and Navy are in a special situation: they have the necessary capability but no doctrine. Nevertheless, a similar doctrine

existed for the Navy and both forces participated in CSAR operations. Dedicated doctrine was available to the Army and the Air Force during the period under review.

In the case studies, I examined combat search-and-rescue missions in five campaigns spanning the period from the Gulf War to the stabilization phase of the US intervention in Afghanistan. In selecting them, it was important to focus not only on successful operations, but also to examine the impact of various doctrinal changes.

The first period examined was the Gulf War, and I analyzed six operations from this period. It was clear from the case studies that the unification of operational principles between the forces was still in its early stages, and the fact that General Norman Schwarzkopf, who commanded the operations, was much more in favor of traditional, centralized command principles than a more modern, decentralized approach, had a major impact. Consequently, he also assigned a lesser role to the Special Forces, and the organization of CSAR operations followed a much less efficient principle. It also became clear, however, that the preparation of the various missions and the availability of support and backup forces had a major impact on the success of missions in a conventional war environment.

The second event examined was the 1993 Mogadishu raid and the resulting rescue operation. The Mogadishu operation was unique in that it took place in a built-up area, and initial ad hoc attempts were unsuccessful, with successful execution only after the establishment of an adequate armored support force, air cover and a sufficiently organized and prepared sub-unit.

The third period under review is the bombing of Yugoslavia in 1999. During this period, two missions were successfully carried out by US forces, and more effective, decentralized command and control played a significant role.

The fourth period under review is the invasion phase of the war in Afghanistan and the Takur Ghar clash. The most important lesson from the operation is that overlapping chains of command prevent effective mission control and that thorough situational awareness and adequate fire support are crucial to successful operations.

The last period under review was the stabilization phase of the war in Afghanistan and Operation Red Wings. It is important to point out that the chances of failure are much greater in ad hoc operations without adequate preparation.

Finally, I looked at the cultural impact of war and the examined CSAR missions. It is important to point out that the United States does not have a centralized commemorative policy like Europe, and the existence of traditional commemorative sites (statues, memorials) is therefore very variable.

In this area, it is important to highlight the memorial to the Battle of Mogadishu at West

Perry High School, which features two bronze plaques and 19 October Glory red maple trees. The other piece of artwork worth highlighting is *The Guardian* sculpture in Cupertino, whose two figures are modeled after two Navy SEAL operators killed during Operation Red Wings.

In pop culture, the processing and representation of CSAR deployments is higher than in traditional commemorative settings. Video games and films are particularly important here. In the case of video games, both the battles of Takur Ghar and Mogadishu have been covered in video games. In the case of the former, the 2010 *Medal of Honor* is a partly fictionalized account of the events, while the events of the Battle of Mogadishu are reconstructed more on the basis of the film of the event in the video game *Delta Force*.

Among the deployments covered, there is the feature film *Black Hawk Down* from the Battle of Mogadishu in 2001, one of the most authentic war films, and the Red Wings film *Lone Survivor*, based mainly on the character of Marcus Luttrell. However, as well as dealing with real-life events, there are many other instances of rescue operations in feature films. Examples include *Behind Enemy Lines* and *Top Gun*.

III. Theses of the dissertation

The outcomes of the dissertation can be summarized in the following points:

- 1) I think it is important to point out that no similar comprehensive work on combat search and rescue, and on American doctrinal development in general, has been written before, and this paper is a pioneer in the field.
- 2) When examining CSAR doctrines, we can observe a steady shift towards more modern, decentralized management and governance principles. The reasons for this are twofold. On the one hand, operational effectiveness depends to a large extent on the freedom of choice given to the operators and their officers during special operations. On the other hand, during the period under review, there has been a shift away from large-scale combat operations towards low-intensity conflicts involving smaller forces, such as counterinsurgency or limited intervention.
- 3) The convergence of doctrines can be traced in several areas. One of these areas is the convergence of principles, vocabulary, and operational methodologies. Another area that should not be neglected is the standardized coding of doctrines.
- 4) The role of the *Goldwater-Nichols Department of Defense Reorganization Act of 1986*, which significantly simplifies the chain of command, creates USSOCOM and mandates doctrinal unification, is inescapable. From the perspective of CSAR doctrine, the changes in 2007, when the concept of combat search and rescue was replaced by personnel recovery, mark the end of the unification process.

- 5) The *AirLand Battle* is the starting point for a new all-army operational thinking. By the mid-1980s, this line of thinking had become dominant in US military thinking and gained considerable political support. In line with the Goldwater-Nichols Act, the process of unification of the US Armed Forces is initiated. Another major achievement of the doctrine is that it begins, albeit in a small way, to integrate special operations forces into large-scale operations and attempts to create a looser chain of command than previously. All these factors have favored the emergence of CSAR teams and the special operations community in general. In addition, it is not insignificant that, in addition to the overall military thinking, the roots of modern command and control principles are also to be found here.
- 6) A clear and unambiguous command and control system is essential for effective CSAR deployments. In the case studies, it was observed that where the command-and-control system was not clarified or overlapping chains of command and authority were established, complications usually arose. It is also important to have a flexible command and control system, which is essential for the effectiveness of special operations deployments. In addition to the flexibility of the command-and-control system and a well-defined and effective system of cooperation, the existence of fire support - whether fixed-wing or rotary-wing aircraft or other fire support assets - is essential for the execution of the operation.
- 7) Finally, it is important to point out that I have also managed to clarify the public perception of the vulnerability of helicopters. It is a well-established and often quoted historical topos that helicopters are highly vulnerable and an easy target, not only for air defense, but also for various light and medium small arms. However, an examination of the data available on helicopters lost or damaged in the case studies in this thesis suggests that this historical topos is exaggerated. However, helicopters, although not among the most defended well-protected / armored combat vehicles, are very durable and can withstand serious hits to non-critical parts such as the tail rotor for stability, and the potential for serious damage is particularly high when the helicopter is landing or hanging / hovering / (loitering). In addition, it is important to stress that the helicopters shot down in the examples examined were shot down with devices that even more heavily defended vehicles are not necessarily resistant to, such as rocket-propelled anti-tank grenades, .50 caliber heavy machine guns or larger caliber machine guns. However, there have also been examples of helicopter gunships being able to leave the combat zone under their own power after being hit by an anti-tank shell and then return to service.

IV. Possible further research directions

The research that has been started can be developed further in a number of possible directions and can provide a starting point. For me, the most promising direction is the study of changes in US military thinking, which I would like to pursue after obtaining my degree. In doing so, my main aim is to examine how German-Prussian philosophy of war has influenced American military thinking since the 1980s. This research is warranted because, to my knowledge, it has not yet been examined, but at the same time, I have found that in the 1980s, in the context of the AirLand Battle, and again in the late 2000s, in the context of the *mission command* principle, some American authors have returned to *Auftragstaktik*.

The research can be continued directly by extending the study of doctrinal development to the present day, or even by examining earlier periods - however, it may not be possible to examine earlier periods, as my research so far suggests that the CSAR doctrines of the Vietnam War were more a collection of unofficial combat principles, and thus no documents remain available. A further direction of research could be to study special operations more broadly and broaden the field of study. Another possibility is to extend the study to other countries that have CSAR units.

In addition to these, and I think a very useful and interesting line of research could be to continue the study of cultural impact already begun in this thesis. In this respect, it is particularly interesting to examine modern pop culture representations, since the United States does not have a centrally controlled memory policy, but the media and pop culture have a significant impact and convey a kind of self-image to the world through the globalization of cultural consumption.

V. Publications related to the dissertation

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