

Boyd's Philosophy: 'People Not Weapons Win Wars'

By MARY AMIDON
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Retired U.S. Air Force Col. John R. Boyd is a maverick with a mission. He wants to reshape U.S. thinking on military strategy.

To accomplish that mission, Boyd, an Erie native and renowned fighter pilot in the 1950s, has amassed an army of missionaries from a number of quarters in the nation's capital.

There, his ardent supporters comprise the Military Reform Movement, sometimes called the Boyd group, sometimes the Reform Caucas. Included are such Capitol Hill heavy hitters as Sen. Gary Hart, D-Colo., Sen. Sam Nunn, D-Ga., Sen. William Cohen, R-Maine., Rep. Newt Gingrich, R-Ga., Rep. William Whitehurst, R-Va., and Rep. Richard Cheney, R-Wyo.

Central to Boyd's philosophy is the idea that "people not weapons win wars." Moreover, it is the shrewd combination in which people, ideas and equipment or hardware are used that determines the outcome of a war.

"We just can't think in terms of hardware all the time," the Strong Vincent High School graduate said in an interview with the *Times-News* during a recent visit to Erie.

As advocated by Boyd, the winning combination should be based on a balance of strategy and tactics, people and hardware.

"If you base everything on hardware, and that changes, how can you have a coherent plan?" Boyd asks. "Human nature tends to exhibit constancy over time."

Boyd, 54, has been developing his theory — one that calls for a blend of blitzkrieg and guerilla tactics — over the past five years, a task resulting in a voluminous historical document of military tactics dating back to 400 B.C. It is entitled "Patterns of Conflict."

As Pentagon consultant on air and ground warfare, Boyd initially sought to look at the great military minds, their concepts and the application of their military models.

The more Boyd studied the theories and battles of military strategists such as Napoleon, Genghis Khan, Hitler and Clausewitz, the more he decided there had to be a complete rethinking of the U.S. position on warfare. Boyd says the ability to be adaptable is a key element to a superior military as well as the ability to surprise and confuse the enemy with swift, lightning moves targeted at his weakness, denying them an opportunity to completely assess the situation.

Boyd's encyclopedic "Patterns of Conflict," boiled down into a four-hour "painful presentation" as he calls it, begins with the Chinese theorist Sun Tzu in 400 B.C.

Boyd quotes Tzu as saying that, of the four ways to destroy an enemy, the most desirable is to disrupt his plans by confusion or surprise. "Sun Tzu said you should impose your will against your adversary's weakness, move like water flowing down a hill, seeking the holes."

What all this means in actual dollars and kinds of equipment, Boyd won't say, claiming the numbers cannot be determined until the military first takes stock of its situation and looks at all the options.

"If you start with a solution prior to doing your homework, you will end up with disarray," he explained. "You have to start with the options and converge down to the solutions."

"I'm maintaining that people are starting out



John R. Boyd, a retired U.S. Air Force colonel, makes a point while being interviewed recently in the *Times-News* city room. A native of Erie, Boyd graduated from Strong Vincent High School.

with the answers. I want to invert that process. The American strength, if they (the military) use it, is that in the past when we've been presented with a problem, we have had the ability to adapt," Boyd continued.

"I certainly think we can do better than we are doing," he added. "We need to expose the alternatives; I feel we tend to suppress alternatives."

Boyd, himself, is a model of adaptability. He first challenged the established line of thinking in the 50s when his theories revolutionized aerial warfare.

During his days as a fighter pilot in Korea in 1953-54, Boyd flew 22 combat missions. As a fighter weapons instructor at Nellis AFB, Nevada, in both the F-86 and F-100, he became known as "40-Second Boyd" because of his standing offer to pay any pilot he could not beat in the first 40 seconds of a dogfight. He never lost.

In the 1960s Boyd developed the "energy maneuverability" concept for new fighters. He won top Air Force recognition for his work which influenced the design of the F-15 and F-16 fighters.

Indeed, and by his own admission, Boyd's concepts are gaining wider acceptance in Washington. Besides swaying Congress, Boyd's creative and imaginative overview of military strategy is gained measurable support from the top leadership in the Marine Corps, Army War College and junior officers in the Defense Department.

"They are getting a deeper sense that we have to go back and study history," Boyd says of his supporters. "The only thing we have to go on by is experience. What kinds of things has caused certain things to happen, what errors, what judgments..."

Comparing the relative youth of the U.S. to older, more traditionally-oriented Eastern countries, Boyd cautions that Western commanders have often been more concerned with winning the battle than avoiding a protracted war.

Described by the *Washington Post* as a man of "considerable circumspection," Boyd is reluctant to specifically discuss current U.S. military tac-

tics and strategy, but it is apparent he is not impressed with big budgets for small numbers of highly sophisticated hardware with limited maneuverability.

Careful not to criticize, Boyd also points out that his concepts need to be applied to the U.S. experience in Vietnam. "What have we learned from Vietnam?" he asks.

"Have we gone back and looked at it to see why, in a sense, we were forced to leave? Have we really gone back and tried to learn from our failures and mistakes? My feeling on that is no."

What Boyd is hoping for is that those in Washington who will influence how the U.S. spends its military budget over the next few years will "get up to speed." In Washington parlance, that means gaining and understanding of a situation in order to participate in a positive way.

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