

1992 – The Inception of Connections

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In December 1992 I was working as the Research Associate for Wargaming at the Air Command and Staff College's (ACSC) School for Advanced Air Power Studies (SAAS). Several months before, Colonel John Warden had assumed command as the Commandant of ACSC. Colonel Warden was something of a living legend. The Air University Press had just published *Hart of the Storm*, a book that made clear the key role Col Warden had played in shaping US strategy in the recent Gulf War. His book *The Air Campaign*, written while a student at the National Defense University, was seen as pivotal in shifting the focus of the Air Force from pure tactics to thinking about airpower in campaign terms. I had attended his assumption of command and a few talks he had given, but I was sure he didn't know I was alive.

Hence, "surprised" would not quite describe how I felt a few days before Christmas when I answered the phone and Colonel Warden was on the other end of the line. He was not happy about the state of wargaming in the Air Force. They had wargamed his plan for Iraq, and their software did not include many of his target sets, let alone model the system effects hitting them would had. In remodeling the ACSC curriculum toward a more operational focus, he was distressed to see that the wargames that ACSC had been using also did not account for system effects. He had also been told that much of the time spent on these wargames was spent learning the wargame interfaces, rather than actual tactics and war strategy.

He asked me if there was a wargame anywhere that was both comprehensive and exciting. I replied that I knew of no single wargame, but that some were easy to use, others relatively comprehensive, while others were more strategic. Colonel Warden asked if there a way to develop one wargame with the best features of various wargames. I replied we could put on a conference, so the folks who create wargames could learn the best attributes and practices from each other. He said something like "OK, go ahead," then went back to asking questions. When he finally hung up, we had talked for about three hours.

After I got over some of my shock I started to ask myself if Colonel Warden actually directed me to put on a wargame conference. I was at a loss as to know to confirm if I had heard him correctly. A lowly research assistant (and Major in the Air Force Reserves to boot) could not go to his office and ask him. I could ask my boss to ask, but would that look like I wanted him to ask me. After the holidays I still had not figured out how to ask him. However, while walking a hallway at ACSC I saw Colonel Warden coming the other way. His face lit up and he said, "Matt - how is the conference coming?"

A great deal was about to happen in very little time.