

Book Reviews

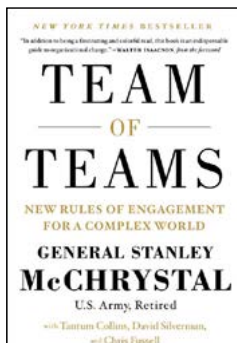


Team of Teams: New Rules of Engagement for a Complex World

By GEN (Retired) Stanley McChrystal with Tantum Collins, David Silverman, and Chris Fussell

NY: Penguin Publishing Group, 2015, 304 pages

Reviewed by MAJ Justin Bakal



To lead an organization in the 21st century, GEN (Retired) Stanley McChrystal argues, requires a change in both mindset and organizational structure. McChrystal and his fellow authors recount the struggles of the Joint Special Operations Command (JSOC) in the early stages of the war in Iraq and explain how the task force changed in order to meet those challenges. They sell the point that efficient, complicated organizations that dominated the 20th century are inappropriate for the 21st century.

McChrystal and his co-authors are not the first to assert that organizations must change to meet a new environment. In 1981, organizational theorist Henry Mintzberg explained the effectiveness of implementing an “adhocracy” to deal with complex and unstable environments. Military strategist Edward Luttwak also proposed this in his 1983 essay “Notes on Low Intensity Conflict.” The value of McChrystal’s perspective is that he built on these theories as a counterinsurgency practitioner. McChrystal and his writing team identify the problem set of a complex environment in the context of JSOC’s mission to defeat al Qaida in Iraq (AQI). What he discovered while leading a special mission unit with virtually unlimited resources, was that adaptability is the critical attribute of successful organizations in the new century. Regardless of how efficient JSOC was in 2003, it was not effective against al Qaida.

Although the book aims at demonstrating universally applicable concepts for contemporary organizations, McChrystal’s argument is especially relevant to military professionals. His real-world findings are derived from leading a military unit in a conflict that remains active today. He and his staff learned to make the necessary changes to “build the aircraft in flight” and meet the challenge presented by AQI. The types of challenges that AQI presented in the early stages of Operation Iraqi Freedom are becoming more familiar to the U.S. military. These adaptable, networked enemies are growing more ubiquitous and cannot be defeated by an organization that operates on outdated concepts.

Team of Teams does not advocate that these challenges are special circumstances that can only be dealt with by

special units. They are challenges that require cooperation and information sharing among a wide assortment of units that can bring different perspectives and capabilities to the fight. The universal applicability of McChrystal’s concepts supports the need for all military organizations to recognize the value of interaction and networking. Large, networked organizations can reach a common end state when subordinate elements abandon the urge to operate within their own, isolated silos. A comparison of McChrystal’s concepts with those in ADP 3-0, *Unified Land Operations* (May 2012), reveals that the U.S. Army already has the doctrinal framework to apply his recommended changes. U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC) Commander GEN David G. Perkins and his staff are no strangers to organizational design theory and have already provided the U.S. Army with a plan for implementing the types of changes that McChrystal recommends.

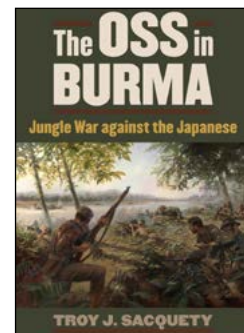
In Silicon Valley, leading corporations are grasping for the kind of improved adaptability that McChrystal integrated into JSOC. Not by coincidence, McChrystal and his new company, the McChrystal Group, offer to implement these structural changes. That McChrystal is marketing a service to the business world through his book does not detract from the lessons learned from a counterterrorism expert of exceptional accomplishment. McChrystal is convincing in his assertion that there is a major shift in the global environment, and some organizations are already structured to deal with it while some are not. The effectiveness of each of his proposed solutions is debatable, yet he provides sufficient evidence to show that they are relevant to operating in a complex environment and that change is necessary.

While this book is valuable to anyone looking to improve a large organization, it is not essential reading for the tactical leader. *Team of Teams* is more useful for a military professional assigned to operational-level headquarters. Any officer or NCO joining a major command would benefit from the ideas this book provides.

The OSS in Burma: Jungle War Against the Japanese
By Troy J. Sacquety
Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2013,
336 pages

Reviewed by LTC (Retired)
Rick Baillergeon

There are relatively few windows of opportunity for authors to pursue



in regards to unexplored World War II subject matter. Yet, there are still some gaps existing in the body of knowledge. Troy Sacquety has seized on one available opportunity in his volume, *The OSS in Burma: Jungle War against the Japanese*. In it, he focuses on one of the organizations of the OSS (Office of Strategic Services), Detachment 101.

For those unfamiliar (perhaps, many) with the operations of Detachment 101, let me offer a brief synopsis. As part of the OSS, Detachment 101 operated in the China-Burma-India (CBI) Theater from April 1942 to July 1945. During this period, the tasks executed by the unit included gathering intelligence on the Japanese, conducting guerrilla operations, and being utilized in conjunction with conventional forces to assist them in accomplishing objectives. It was a unit which clearly was far more successful than anyone could have anticipated. It is also a unit which has seen little mention in historical accounts of World War II.

For prospective readers, you must know what Sacquety's volume "is not" and what it "is." In regards to what it is not, the title may be a bit misleading. As referenced earlier, the author has narrowed his focus to a unit within the OSS — Detachment 101. Those looking for a broader perspective will not find it in this volume (this is a good thing). This more overarching view is available in other volumes and resources.

Sacquety has also narrowed his focus in another characteristic. As he emphasizes in his introduction, the author keys on the organizational aspects of Detachment 101. Consequently, specifics on the tactical operations the unit conducted in the CBI Theater are minimal. This will disappoint some who were seeking a volume detailing the fascinating missions of Detachment 101. This is another gap that should be filled by another opportunistic author.

What Sacquety does achieve is providing readers with a comprehensive look at the organizational make-up of the unit during its existence. He obviously dedicates many pages to the formation of Detachment 101 and its early days in theater. However, Sacquety continues this in-depth analysis of the organizational structure until it was disbanded in the summer of 1945. In his introduction, the author states his aim is to present "how" Detachment 101 accomplished their missions. He has achieved this purpose in his volume.

There are many strengths within *The OSS in Burma*. Readers will find it highly readable, exhaustively researched and well structured. Perhaps, what will stand out most is the notes section of the volume. Sacquety has placed a meticulous 70-page appendix at the conclusion of the book. It provides details on the sources utilized and in many cases, tells the "rest of the story." Those searching for more information regarding Detachment 101 will undoubtedly find potential resources in this section.

As in most volumes, a reader will find areas that could have been improved upon by an author. In regards to the OSS in Burma, I feel the one weakness of the volume is its lack of maps and charts. Within the book, Sacquety has added only one organizational chart of the unit (November 1944) and one large scale map of the theater. In a book emphasizing

organizational structure, additional organizational charts would have added significant clarity and understanding. Moreover, the addition of further smaller scale maps would have been a great complement to Sacquety's verbiage.

I believe the value of Sacquety's volume lies in two areas. First, it is an excellent link between past and future studies tied to Detachment 101. In regards to the past, it provides a solid backdrop for those who have read some of the excellent personal memoirs written by members of Detachment 101. In reference to the future, I believe it will spark interest in other authors (or Sacquety himself) to study the tactical operations of the unit. As stated previously, there is a clear need for further examination of the missions of Detachment 101.

Second, Sacquety has provided an excellent case study of how an organization adapted its structure in combat. The author superbly describes how Detachment 101 leadership understood its environment and adapted to meet it. Sacquety's ability to articulate this makes it added value for leaders in both the military and civilian sectors.

In summary, Troy Sacquety has not rehashed the works of other authors. He has filled in one of those existing gaps in the study of World War II. In doing so, his volume also highlights that there still exists many holes in our understanding of the role of Detachment 101 in the CBI Theater. This combination makes *The OSS in Burma* a valuable contribution to current and future World War II scholarship.

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