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Clausewitz, Complexity, and Custer: An Analysis of Decision Making in a Nonlinear System.

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Abstract : Decision making in combat is one of the core competencies most valued in

leaders. Much effort is dedicated to the analysis of decision-making models, processes, and methodologies in order to develop skills that enable leaders to make qualitatively better decisions under duress. However, little attention is directed toward the study of decision-making with respect to complexity, the fundamental environment of combat. In addressing a legendary tale of military failure, this monograph synthesizes historical analysis, classical theory, and contemporary science. Rather than revisit an argument worn by time, the intent of this document is to overlay the elements of complexity theory onto a map of history, then present the problem from the perspective of the Prussian military theorist, Carl von Clausewitz. Ultimately, this monograph seeks to resolve whether the defeat of the U.S. 7th Cavalry at the Little Big Horn was due to a logic of failure brought on by George Armstrong Custer's inability to recognize and predict the behavior of the complex nature of the environment of combat. The first section of the monograph examines the historical events leading to the Battle of the Little Big Horn. Chapter Two proceeds into a comparative analysis of the complex metaphors presented in On War while the third chapter details the effects of decision-making in a complex system. Finally, Chapter Four addresses the logic of failure that defined the chain of events eventually leading to Custer's defeat. The monograph conclusions presented in Chapter Five bring together the elements of complexity present in the environment of battle and resolves the basic research question.

Descriptors : *MILITARY STRATEGY , MILITARY HISTORY , WARFARE , DECISION MAKING , LEADERSHIP , THEORY , NONLINEAR SYSTEMS , MILITARY TACTICS

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