

# DECCAN HERALD

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## White collars and GI Joes

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***The book delivers new meaning to the term corporate 'warfare' by citing examples of real military battles as guidelines for business operations.***

The teasing title is an acronym for different aspects of military software which can be fruitfully applied, according to army officer-turned-entrepreneur-turned-author Mukul Deva, to the field of business operations as well. It is a tempting idea like all the all win-win management solutions, which are not always practicable.

Successful entrepreneurs rarely read management strategy books or attend business schools. The same holds good for legendary military commanders. They do not carry strategy textbooks in their minds. They fall back on their native intelligence and genius to win wars and glory, even as the captains of industry achieve profits and fame through their honed skills and instincts.

This is not to deny the usefulness of management strategy primers like the one offered by Deva. They make for interesting reading, and leave one better informed. What is interesting about Deva's book is that some of the examples from military history he has chosen to illustrate management strategy principles are those of adverse conditions.

And in each one of the instances he proves that it is the calibre of the people on the ground that made the difference. It is usually the case with textbooks that only the successful instances are cited to prove a point. Like a good army officer, Deva is willing to refer to evidence of military setbacks to draw appropriate lessons from them.

Three of the examples he has chosen are interesting. The first is the difficult retreat managed by Hernando Cortez and his Spanish army on their retreat from Tenochtitlan— modern Mexico City and then the capital of the fabulous Aztec Empire in 1519.

The second is that charge of the Light Brigade during the Crimean War in 1854, made immortal in the poem of the same name by Lord Alfred Tennyson. The third is the battle on the grounds of Jaffna University that was fought by the 10 Paracommando and the 13 Sikh Light Infantry.

The Jaffna University was the headquarters of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Ealam (LTTE) and the objective was to capture the top LTTE leadership. But the Tamil rebels intercepted the messages and were fully prepared for the assault. The whole of the 13 Sikh Light Infantry except one was killed on the mission. Deva belongs to the same regiment, and was part of the team that had escorted LTTE chief Velupillai Prabhakaran to the Jaffna University Grounds in October 1987.

From the Cortex example, Deva infers the importance of the morale of the soldiers. Leadership is the key factor that he emphasises in the case of the charge of the Light Brigade. And in the case of the Jaffna operation, he talks about the security of information.

The connections are not always impressive. It would seem that Deva could have made the points without drawing the battlefield parallels.

But the book is interesting because of the glimpses of military history and not for the information he provides about the corporate world.

Deva has an informal style of narrating the battle stories. It seems that he would make an ideal military historian rather than a management guru.

***S.T.R.I.P.T.E.A.S.E. - The Art of Corporate Warfare***

***By Mukul Deva***

***Penguin/Viking; Price: Rs 325***