

*“War is the father of all
and the king of all.”*

- Heraclitus



The King-*dom* of Battle and the King of Domains

By CPT (P) William J. Nelson

This article is dedicated to men and women who do not evade responsibility, but with active initiative pioneer into, and through, the quagmire to find clarity for those in their formations.

The “King” is symbolic, but more importantly, he is an archetype or an “action-pattern” hard-wired into the human psyche. That is why the word “king” ubiquitously conjures imagery of authority, magnanimity, might and regality. These are the qualities that give kings their ability to shape outcomes. In our case, it is the Field Artillery’s ability to shape the outcomes of battles and dominate the domains that gives us our moniker. When one adds the suffix of “-dom”—meaning a state or condition, realm, a group of people—to our motto, we begin to learn about the kingdom that the king governs. So what is the King of Battle’s kingdom? It is the modern battlefield spanning five domains and into the electromagnetic spectrum and information environment. The Field Artilleryman and Field Artillery branch are well postured to lead the enterprise to achieve effects in all contested domains. This article encourages readers to draw from the king’s archetype to combat disorder and be a source of generativity for those in their formations.

“The King has Returned” was an article published by MG Maranian and then MAJ Kabat. It seems that it is written as a response to “The King and I: The Impending Crisis in Field Artillery’s Ability to Provide Fire Support to Maneuver Commanders” and goes on to speak of the 56th Field Artillery Command’s return to Europe. The article concludes with:

In order for our branch to truly say that the king has returned and to be able to fully provide necessary C2 of Fires at echelon on the modern battlefield, we must grow a similar capability at the Corps level.

That is a solution and the concrete one. The returning king is a common leitmotif in human myth and story. Humans, it seems, love the idea. The king of battle is an abstraction, but our abstract ideals can enhance our real concrete solutions. There is some real in every ideal. There are facts in the abstract. The pragmatism of psychology is in its effects, and effects are the pragmatism of Fires.

The King Archetype: An Energy Source for Leadership

Historically, and universally, good kings have had two functions, the first of which is ordering (Moore). A king works to bring order within the boundaries of the kingdom, which is one’s own area of operations (AO) at echelon. Luckily, the artillery is already good at defining the AO with fire support coordination measures (FSCMs). The first way one can order the battlefield is by naming it. A staff will never say, “the road over there.” A trained staff will say, “MSR Virginia to our north.” By

Civilian contractors operate a fog machine during Combined Resolve 26-05 at Joint Multinational Readiness Center’s Hohenfels Training Area, Germany, Feb. 18, 2026. (U.S. Army photo by Sgt. Christian Aquino)

simply naming the battlefield, Field Artillerymen are ordering it and therefore speeding up the time it takes for our Soldiers to understand it, staffs to articulate it and commanders to make decisions in it. Outside the boundaries, or past the coordinated fire line (CFL) and fire support coordination line (FSCL), lies chaos, order's opposite. The kingdom extends 300km (unclassified) in any direction. The king, when accessed, is an energy source because it aligns order, purpose and direction into the mission. The alternative is to waste energy on indecision and to be paralyzed by inherent ambiguity and disorder. Author of "Lord of the Four Quarters," John Weir Perry (1966), states this in his introduction:

The king was mediator of the life force itself, giving fertility and virility; carrier of the power of authority, giving order and integrity; and bearer of the aggressive might of the executive function, giving chastisement to disorder and encouragement to obedience.

ADP 5-0 reminds us that, "Disorder is an inherent characteristic of war" and historically good kings chastise disorder, but there is the other side as well: the king as "mediator of life-force." This kind of "king energy" is the kind one needs after a night spent upright in the High Mobility Multipurpose Wheeled Vehicle (HMMWV) and when the tactical operations center (TOC) coffee has no kick, black as it might be. When our physical energy seems spent, it is king potential that comes to our aid. When one begins to discover one's own potential, that person may also begin to feel its life-enhancing effect.

This archetype is generative. The Romans had a saying, "qualis rex, talis grex" which translates to "like king, like people" or "as the flock, so the king." We can interpret this axiom as a summarization that followers, for better or worse, adopt the traits of their leaders. We come to the domain of transformational leadership upheld by the tenets of idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation and individualized consideration (Northouse, 2021). If leaders can weave these tenets into the workplace, followers are more likely to change. Kouzes and Posner (2021), authors of "Credibility" developed their own transformational leadership model, which doesn't seem so different. It consists of five fundamental practices: to model the way, inspire a shared vision, challenge the process, enable others to act, and encourage the heart. Now, we segue to the king's second function.

The Archetypal King's Second Function

The second function of the historical and archetypal king is to provide blessing to the people. Here we see the king transition from a traditional role to one that is still public but more familial and fatherlier. With the previous Roman axiom in mind, if the king was generative, so too would be the kingdom. There is a heliotropic effect that leaders can have on followers. This is the "idealized influence" tenet, or simply charisma, of transformational leaders. The contention is that if the leader is strong, healthy and vibrant there is greater potential for the people to be the same.

Smalley and Trent (2011) in "The Blessing," outline the five aspects of blessing: meaningful touch, spoken blessing,

attachment of high value to the other, picturing for the other a special future and active commitment to the other to help realize that future. This may be as simple as being told, "You'll be a great Battalion Commander one day." When leaders ascribe high value to people, and help them visualize a special future, they provide this blessing function.

The Kingdom

The United States Army Europe and Africa's (USAREUR-AF's) Knowledge Management standard operating procedure (SOP) incorporates the Data Information Knowledge Wisdom (DIKW) Pyramid. This model suggests that data undergoes an evolution to information, into knowledge and then into wisdom. The catalyst for each change is human context, meaning and insight. Data means "a thing given;" it is raw and unanalyzed. When people put data into context, it is transmuted into information. The word information comes from middle French word "enformacion" and means "a criminal investigation." The unfiltered information that enters our command posts must literally be investigated until it reveals some kind of meaning. We fight for information and when we find it, we interrogate it to see what is still of use. According to the DIKW pyramid, information plus meaning equals knowledge. When insight is applied to knowledge, it becomes wisdom. Kingship without wisdom is its opposite, and that is tyranny.

The modern-day battlefield needs a king or, rather, in keeping with this article's main point, needs kings. Some may say the throne is the Theater Fires command. This article argues that the throne is the reader's 8-digit grid square. In war, communications will be disrupted, and survival will require units to be highly distributed, forcing leaders to rely on mission command. The current battlefield is complex, and the future battlefield will likely be even more so. Victory will require every artilleryman to order the chaos in each area of operations (AO). *ADP 3-0* (2019) is clear, "Waiting for more information might reduce uncertainty, but it never eliminates it." Staff officers do not blindly forward products; they analyze and judge them. They must investigate the information. They must dissect the data. They must consider the contingencies. In war there are no right answers, only answers we understand the impacts of. That is the ambiguity but also the beauty of what the artilleryman does.

The Return of the King – To Every Field Artilleryman

The King of Battle is more than a kinetic force. He is alive in every individual or staff working transmute data into wisdom. As officers, commissioned, noncommissioned or warrant, we find ourselves making (emphasis on the king) sense of the environment. We start with assumptions and, by our best prudent judgment, transmute them into something practical or just, well, like our Battalion Commander likes to say, "turn our assumptions into facts!" Not everything is relevant, and the best plans may be the simplest ones. In this role, we actively cut through ambiguity to achieve clarity for our Soldiers and order for what would be chaos. This is royal behavior. If an incision is cutting in, then by making decisions, we "cut out" that which we cannot use, a crucial skill in an age where it seems we are

drowning in information. Consider what *ADP 5-0* (2019) has to say:

Because uncertainty is pervasive during operations, success is often determined by a leader's ability to outthink an opponent and to execute tasks more quickly than an opponent can react. The side that anticipates better, thinks more clearly, decides and acts more quickly, and is comfortable operating with uncertainty stands the greatest chance to seize, retain, and exploit the initiative over an opponent ... Commanders seek to counter the uncertainty of operations by empowering subordinates to quickly adapt to changing circumstances within their intent.

For this effort, we turn to the Army staff. By taking data and forcing it through its evolution to wisdom, the staff enable the commander to be the leader who can outthink the opponent and execute tasks more quickly. A certain proverb, appropriately written by a king, states, "It is the glory of God to conceal a matter; to search a matter out is the glory of kings" (Proverbs 25:2). We'd like to think that our HQs will give us all the information we need, packaged nicely in an order. To uncover and to make complex matters understandable to the people is the domain of kings and of all leaders at every echelon.

Conclusion

Claiming the "King of Battle" motto carries implied tasks. That is to bring order and be generative to our formations. Archetypal king traits are not reserved for commanders or aspiring staff officers seeking to earn the guide-on. It applies to

every Advanced Field Artillery Tactical Data System (AFATDS) Operator, Gunner, Chief, Cannoneer and Fire Supporter and to every Soldier with a Zyn can in his pocket or Monster drink in his hand! Perhaps this is the chief who takes the initiative to copy graphics on his own battle board and briefs his young section so that they understand the battlefield and better anticipate risks. Or maybe it is the staff officer who, instead of evading, steps into the additional role of being a sub-hand receipt holder and orders the property, improving it for fiscal years to come. Or is it the 13M who understands what effect his Time on Target (TOT) will likely have in the Corps Deep Area and orders his own personal chaos to ensure it is met? When Soldiers exercise ownership, when they anticipate and consider risk and when the FDO's ammo tracking and AS3s COP speeds up decision making for the commander, they are all the King of Battle too. The enemy is more than human; it is persistent disorder, and it is confusion. The King of Battle will return to his throne when all 13 series welcome the King archetype into their lives because they have the self-efficacy to chart a course through conflict and on to resolution despite discomfort. Reader, maximize the human potential in your formation. Bring Soldiers up so that they are able to thrive in ambiguity and chaos. Our adversaries are contesting all domains, and we need each one to combat the complexity. Field Artillerymen everywhere must lead by combating disorder, understanding that it spans five domains and goes into the electromagnetic spectrum and information environment. The battlefield is complex today and will be more so tomorrow. The King's archetypal functions are available to all 13 series. It is here that the King must return.

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