

~~To Think or Not to Think ... Without Thinking~~ Survival – An Analytical Perspective
By 2LT Beau Teal

Throughout the history of mankind, ~~the mind has been challenged by~~ situations from simple to complex have challenged the mind. The strength of the mind and its ability to interpret and process data continues to be paramount in the decisions we make when faced with these situations. Richards Heuer, Jr. portrays his viewpoint on thinking in his book Psychology of Intelligence Analysis ~~states~~ that the human mind is flawed and we must apply methodologies in order to remove them. Another viewpoint is that of Malcolm Gladwell, who believes that through time and experience, experts are able to develop their instincts and ‘gut-feelings’ and apply these to complex situations. Each author recognizes that his viewpoint is not an all-encompassing theory and there are exceptions. However, each theory is relevant when applied to acts of survival.

In survival situations, complex ~~the mind is challenged more by complex situations than in perhaps any other. and unpredictable factors challenge the mind more than in perhaps any other situation. One is suddenly immersed in conditions beyond one’s control - affected by weather, climate, terrain, injury, scarcity of resources – and This occurs due to numerous critical variables being out of one’s control due to both environmental and human factors. Those~~ in survival situations must make decisions quickly and clearly. In fact, often times one must just ‘know’ what to do or “‘think without thinking,’”¹² as Gladwell states in his book Blink. However, once the instincts

and ‘gut-feelings’ have performed their job, one must then apply Heuer’s methodologies in order to maintain his or her~~their~~ survival. One must ‘make a plan’ as Laurence Gonzales explains in Deep Survival, his~~her~~ scientific approach to survival. Applying Gladwell and Heuer’s viewpoints to the following survival examples will allow a greater understanding of the human mind and its flaws when analyzing these complex situations.

On a Saturday in late April, 2003, proven mountain climber Aron Ralston travelled from his home in Aspen, Colorado to Utah’s Moab Desert for a weekend canyoneering trip. Once reaching the Canyonlands National Park, he mountain biked and hiked into Horseshoe Canyon and by early afternoon transitioned to the slot canyoneering portion of his trek. Upon entering the canyon, he faced many chockstone rocks and boulders caught between the one to three-foot walls, which he was forced to traverse, either over or under. Next, Ralston used a technique called chimneying in order to reach the height of one of the boulders in his path. This allowed him to climb over the ~~the~~ boulder and descend to the other side. While descending though, he loosened the boulder causing it and another to fall toward his head directly after he landed on the canyon floor. He blocked his face using his left arm as the initial ~~the~~ rock smashed it against the wall as the subsequent boulder fell pinning and crushing his right arm to the opposing wall.² ~~fell pinning and crushing his right arm to the opposing wall.~~

~~With only a few bean burritos, a liter of water, the clothes on his back, his climbing equipment, an inexpensive utility tool, and a headlamp, Ralston managed to survive six days before freeing himself and finding aid and exit from the Moab Desert.~~

Malcolm Gladwell discusses what he calls the adaptive unconsciousness in Blink. This is; “the part of our brain that leaps to conclusions ... It is thought of as a kind of giant computer that quickly and quietly processes a lot of the data we need in order to

keep functioning as human beings.”³ He then states, “...decisions made very quickly can be every bit as good as decisions made cautiously and deliberately.”⁴

Ralston made the decision within the first hour that amputating his own arm would give him his best chance to survive, following a few unrewarding attempts at less drastic measures. He also ~~very~~ quickly determined that his water amount was much too low to last any prolonged length of time in that canyon, therefore fighting his initial urge to consume all of it. His instincts were sharp.

Gladwell writes, “Snap judgements and rapid cognition take place behind a locked door ... I don’t think we are very good at dealing with the fact of that locked door. Its one thing to acknowledge the enormous power of snap judgements and thin slicing but quite another to place our trust in something so seemingly mysterious.”⁵ He later states, “We need to respect the fact that it is possible to know without knowing why we know and accept that – sometimes – we’re better off that way.”⁶

Next Ralston made a plan, the second reason he survived. He did ~~not~~ wait for rescue (although he hoped for it), but made his own. He regulated his actions and assigned himself tasks. Jack Davis writes in the introduction to Psychology of Intelligence Analysis that one of Heuer’s three fundamental points about the cognitive challenges that intelligence analysts face is, “Tools and techniques that gear the analyst’s mind to apply higher levels of critical thinking can substantially improve analysis on complex issues...”⁷ These include; “techniques for structuring information, challenging assumptions, and exploring alternative interpretations.”⁸ Ralston accomplished this in a variety of ways. He rationed his water as much as possible, drinking only a sip every ninety minutes. When out of water, he forced himself to drink his own urine. His food quantity was limited at best. He set up a feeding schedule, eating only enough to sustain,

knowing it would not last long. ~~He used his climbing rope as extra “clothing” wrapping it around his arms and legs to keep warm at night.~~ He ~~also~~ periodically took pictures and videotaped his situation, benchmarking the times during his imprisonment as well as recording messages for his family and friends to view at a later date. He also used his climbing rope as extra ‘clothing’ wrapping it around his arms and legs to keep warm at night.

Ralston’s instincts and his disciplined methods allowed him to survive and finally climb out of the slot canyon (with one arm), travel on foot several miles until soliciting the aid of a family of day hikers, and reach a nearby hospital via helicopter to be treated.

Another of Heuer’s three fundamental points about the cognitive challenges that intelligence analysts face is, “~~The~~ The mind is poorly ‘wired’ to deal effectively with both inherent uncertainty (the natural fog surrounding complex, indeterminate intelligence issues) and induced uncertainty (the man-made fog fabricated by denial and deception operations),”⁹ Davis writes.

In 1971, lightning split a Lockheed Electra airplane forcing it to ~~was split by lightning and then~~ crashed into the triple canopy jungle of Peru. Juliane Koepcke was the ~~The~~ lone survivor of that flight; she was ~~a~~ seventeen years of age ~~old named Juliane Koepcke~~. What’s more amazing is that a dozen other passengers survived the crash, but not the jungle.¹⁰ While all of the passengers’ fate may have been in someone else’s hands during the descent and landing, it was his or hers ~~theirs~~ to control (at least partially) from there.

So then, how did Juliane Koepcke survive? Simply stated, she executed both Gladwell and Heuer’s viewpoints. Koepcke spent little time determining that rescue aircraft ~~she~~ would never ~~be~~ viewed her from above ~~by rescue aircraft~~ and therefore must

exit the jungle. She followed rivers travelling downhill and stumbled upon a hut eleven days later where she was found the next day and finally transported to medical personnel for care. Equipped with only the exposure of being in similar jungle with her researcher parents (her mother was killed in the crash) and a few survival facts~~oids~~, she seemed to manage remarkably. She was not well-trained or highly experienced. Nor did inherent or induced uncertainty keep her from making decisions (mostly good) in an extremely complicated situation. She followed her instincts and applied methodologies.

— The rest of the crash survivors on the other hand remained in their original location, awaiting rescue, and eventually died. They were perhaps not, “wired to deal effectively^y”¹¹, with their complex situation~~nn~~.”

Both Heuer and Gladwell’s viewpoints are valid. Some humans have inherently flawed minds that only adding a methodology to can fix, while others have accurate intuitions and ‘gut-feelings’ developed through experience and training, both when facing complex situations.

Then how does one explain Koepcke’s lack of training and experience? In Deep Survival, Gonzales has a conversation with Kenneth Hill, a Search and Rescue (SAR) manager, who states, “The category that has one of the highest survival rates is children six years of age and under, the very people we are most worried about.”¹² Gonzales offers that the reason for this may simply be that children that young have ~~not~~ developed certain abilities yet. They make decisions to stay comfortable (sleep when tired, warm-up when cold, aren’t in a hurry, etc) which keeps them alive. They follow their instincts.

Conversely, the age group with one of the lowest survival rates is the six to twelve year olds, as they have begun to develop and adopt adult biases, traits, and abilities to

think.¹³ Perhaps this is the beginning of the man-made fog inducing uncertainty as Heuer explains.

One would find it very hard to argue that Koepcke survived because she ~~was~~ child-like, but maybe her parents engrained in her during her upbringing a certain comfort in the jungle and in solitary situations, not to mention a certain cool~~ness, a~~ and collectiveness.

In January 1982, Steven Callahan set out on an estimated one month solo voyage across the Atlantic Ocean in his 21-foot cruiser from Spain to the Caribbean. Days into his journey, a violent storm sank his sailboat forcing him to survive on the open seas for months in a dinghy.¹⁴

Gonzales writes, “Survival starts before the accident.”¹⁵ He continues later, “A survival situation brings out the true, underlying personality. Our survival kit is inside us. But unless it is there before the accident, it is not going to appear magically at the moment it’s needed.”¹⁶ Callahan was an experienced and well-trained sailor. He designed his own vessel ~~allowing it~~ to prolong sinking with many watertight compartments. His dinghy was of greater size being a six-person raft. His survival bag was well-stocked for just this kind of scenario. He was also well read on maritime survival situations. “There are few perfect survivors. ~~—~~ Steve Callahan may be one,”¹⁷ according to Gonzales.

Callahan’s ‘gut-feeling’ kicked in immediately following his accident. Being asleep when it occurred, he awoke, grabbed his knife, and failed in his attempt to free his survival bag from its lines. He then boarded his life-raft.

— He knew that his sailboat would not sink immediately and therefore should remain tied to it as long as possible. Next, he decided that he could not survive without

his well-equipped survival bag. So, he plunged into the ocean, diving back into the sinking boat and retrieved it. His instincts were clear and concise. He followed them.

Callahan critically analyzed his situation and made a plan. He kept a journal tracking his voyage. This helped maintain order and set a routine. He drank only half of a pint of his water per day. His senses were astute enough to keep from crying as he could not afford the fluid loss. Callahan held himself in check, watching closely for signs of self mutiny. He was his own leader. ~~He created a sextant using a pencil to navigate and~~ used a cheap spear gun to shoot fish to include dorados providing sustenance for much of his journey. He patched his raft when it was punctured and created a sextant using a pencil to navigate. ~~and overcame several shark attacks.~~

Callahan survived seventy-six days at sea, completing his solo excursion across the Atlantic Ocean, most of it occurring in his raft. He was so calm and collected when he reached the Caribbean, that he refused the assistance of the fishing vessel's captain that spotted him first, saying, "No, I'm O.K. I have plenty of water. I can wait. You fish. Fish!"¹⁸ as he drank four pints in his own glory.

All of the survival situations discussed above required more than tools or know-how. All of them involved solo survivors who relied on a sharp instinct or 'gut-feeling' and a methodology or plan in order to survive. Each of them subscribed to Richards Heuer, Jr.'s viewpoint as well as Malcolm Gladwell's outlook. Studying these ~~individual's~~ survival situations and applying these thinking experts' viewpoints ~~to them~~ may provided a allow a greater understanding of the human mind and its flaws when analyzing complex situations.

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- ¹Go in the order Heuer lists these three things.
Value added of para? Gladwell, Malcolm, *Blink*, (New York: Back Bay Books, 2007), cover.
- ² Ralston, Aron, *Between a Rock and a Hard Place*, (New York: Atria Books, 2004), 231-3.
- ³ Gladwell, Malcolm, *Blink*, (New York: Back Bay Books, 2007), 11.
- ⁴ *Ibid*, 14.
- ⁵ *Ibid*, 51.
- ⁶ *Ibid*, 52.
- ⁷ Heuer, Jr., Richards J., *Psychology of Intelligence Analysis*, (Langley, Virginia: CIA, 1999), xx.
- ⁸ *Ibid*, xxi.
- ⁹ *Ibid*, xx.
- ¹⁰ Gonzales, Laurence, *Deep Survival*, (New York: Norton, 2004), 172-74.
- ¹¹ Heuer, Jr., Richards J., *Psychology of Intelligence Analysis*, (Langley, Virginia: CIA, 1999), xx.
- ¹² Gonzales, Laurence, *Deep Survival*, (New York: Norton, 2004), 170.
- ¹³ *Ibid*, 171.
- ¹⁴ *Ibid*, 193.
- ¹⁵ *Ibid*, 195.
- ¹⁶ *Ibid*, 223.
- ¹⁷ *Ibid*, 208.
- ¹⁸ *Ibid*, 226.
- *Figure 1: Ralston, Aron, *Between a Rock and a Hard Place*, (New York: Atria Books, 2004).
- *Figure 2: Herzog, Vernor, *Wings of Hope*, (Germany, 2000).
- *Figure 3: Callahan, Steven, *Adrift*, (New York: Mariner Books, 2002), cover.