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ADAPTING

Fighting the Fight, Not the Plan

ON APRIL 7, 2004, a U.S. Marine convoy was driving through the Sunni Triangle in Iraq. At that point in the war, this area, south of Fallujah in Al Anbar province, was considered one of the deadliest parts of the country. The Marines guarding it, part of the elite First Reconnaissance Battalion, were used to being sent into dangerous spots. They are the equivalent of Navy Seals or Army Special Forces and, like them, are trained to be alert and ready for battle at any moment. As the convoy moved through the desert, the morning was like any other: hot, dry, and stressful. Then the ambush began. From along the Euphrates River, some forty to sixty insurgents fired on the fifteen-vehicle convoy. A rocket-propelled grenade crippled the lead vehicle, causing the other vehicles to stop behind it. The convoy was under massive enemy fire. Mortar and machine-gun fire had disabled the Humvee carrying Sergeant Willie Copeland, a team leader, and his men. Before they could get pinned down, Copeland jumped out and led the five men out of the line of fire and toward an open field. Firing as they ran toward the wide, murky river in front of them, they started to counterattack the insurgents' position. But the insurgents had been waiting for them and were well entrenched. Since they had the upper hand in the ambush, there was no reason for

them to retreat. Even by laying down a stream of fire, Copeland and his men could not dislodge them.

Copeland knew this. He knew firepower wasn't enough, so he continued to advance across the field. Leading his men across a deep, muddy canal, he got close enough to the insurgent positions to lob hand grenades into their machine-gun nest. Ten were killed, and the force of the counterattack prompted others to beat a retreat. Still under sporadic fire, Copeland noticed his men tending to Captain Brent Morel, his commanding officer. Morel had been hit in the chest and was barely moving. Copeland ordered the rest of his men to take cover while he lay across Morel to protect him from additional fire. Once he was able to move him to a safer spot, Copeland tried to bandage up his CO, tried to do anything to stanch the flow of blood until an armored Humvee arrived to evacuate him. Instead of getting in himself, Copeland led the withdrawal of his men, providing hand grenade cover as they retreated.

A year later, on April 21, 2005, Copeland was presented with the Navy Cross, the highest honor the Navy gives for valor and second only to the Medal of Honor, in recognition of his "extraordinary heroism." The citation detailed his actions during the firefight and ended with this commendation: "By his bold leadership, wise judgment, and complete dedication to duty, Sergeant Copeland reflected great credit upon himself and upheld the highest traditions of the Marine Corps and the United States Naval Service."

Yet to call his actions heroic is to understate how remarkable they were. Heroes put themselves at risk to save children trapped in buildings or throw themselves on grenades to save their comrades in war. What Copeland did involved strategic decision making under the most extreme pressure. Think through his actions. One, his Humvee was hit by enemy fire, and he led his men out of the vehicle to attack the enemy. They did not seek cover. They began to move strategically across an open field, over the berms and through the muck that lay between them and the insurgents. Two, he led from the front yet maintained the presence of mind to keep his team tightly behind him. He was throwing grenades right along with them. Three, while his goal was to stop the insurgents, he realized the more important task was saving his commanding officer,

Captain Morel. Four, he alone shielded Morel and bandaged his wounds, ordering his men to seek cover. Five, instead of getting into the armored Humvee, he stayed with his men and led the withdrawal, lobbing grenades for cover. Six, his team killed thirty insurgents at the cost of only one U.S. life. Seven, and most important of all, throughout all of this, Copeland maintained presence of mind. He wasn't calm. He was operating at maximum alertness but doing so without letting the stress of the situation overwhelm him. And he was doing this through a variety of unrelated actions: evacuating, running, attacking, shooting, throwing, tending to Morel, ordering his men to cover, leading the withdrawal. In short, with bullets flying around him, he never lost the ability to adapt under the pressure of a life-and-death situation.

RESPONSE AND ANTICIPATION

Copeland possessed an exceptional ability to respond to a rapidly changing situation. This ability to adapt is the third component to being clutch, but his ability to adapt so quickly was particularly remarkable. How did he do what he did under such extreme conditions? Was it his training or something more? Before answering these questions, let's consider a different type of adaptability, one built more on anticipation than response.

Early in the 1992 presidential campaign, Christopher Falkenberg, in his second year as a Secret Service agent, found himself assigned to guard a Southern governor named Bill Clinton. This might seem like a plum job, and it was, especially for someone so young and inexperienced. But he got the assignment largely because no one thought Clinton could win. At the time, he was not the leading Democratic contender, and few expected him to be. The front-runner was Paul Tsongas, the former Massachusetts senator, followed by either Jerry Brown, the former governor of California who was derisively called Moonbeam, or Bob Kerry, the rakish businessman-senator from Nebraska. Clinton was an unknown outside of Arkansas when he made his first appearance on CBS's *60 Minutes* to rebut an allegation of an extramarital affair, his

wife, Hillary, at his side. Falkenberg did not care whom he was guarding; he was thrilled to be part of his security detail, even if he figured it wouldn't last long. He had wanted to be a Secret Service agent since he was a kid growing up in Westchester County, New York. Guarding anybody at that point was a stepping-stone. It was a way to get noticed and secure a promotion later. Granted, as soon as Clinton conceded defeat, Falkenberg would be sent back to the New York office and resume his days doing the less glamorous job of the Secret Service—monitoring counterfeit currency. But there were not many twenty-five-year-olds who got to guard a presidential candidate, even one who was a long shot.

Then the improbable happened. The large crowds at Clinton's events started to translate into better numbers in the primaries. And by the time he won California in June, he had turned his campaign around, with very little time to spare. A month later, the Democrats held their convention in New York and nominated Clinton, the unlikely Southern governor from a town called Hope, to be their party's presidential candidate. Falkenberg's detail suddenly got a boost.

It was during a California campaign stop that it ran into trouble. Every Secret Service agent knows there are no such things as routine stops when they are guarding someone. If they are assigned to protect that person, he is by definition a possible target. While Falkenberg made it clear to me that a candidate was not a president and certainly not the president of the United States, the protocols are still tight. The service only began protecting candidates after Robert F. Kennedy was shot while giving a victory speech in Los Angeles after winning the California primary in 1968. At the time, candidates had to provide their own protection, and Kennedy had All-Pro defensive tackle Rosey Grier guarding him.

At the USC event in the spring of 1992, the Secret Service had protocols in place to keep people like Sirhan Sirhan out, but no outdoor event could be totally secure. Once Clinton was in motion, his detail began to check who was around him quite physically. "You're always touching people—'Hi, how you doing? Thanks for coming out today, great to see you. Can I look in there?'" he told me, while patting down my shoulders and torso as he would anyone in a crowd around his protectee.

“People are genuinely excited when they’re meeting someone famous,” Falkenberg said. “What you’re looking for is the person who is distant, who is completely inside of himself. That’s the person who is planning something.” Clinton’s greatest asset as a politician—his desire to mingle and talk to voters—provoked the greatest fear among his protectors. A rope line, as the meet-and-greets are called, opened the protectee up to potential threats all around him. It was a difficult situation to control; there were too many variables.

“Everything was normal,” remembered Falkenberg, who was number one that day. His number meant he was next to Clinton. Each agent on protection knows his role by the number he gets. There are no *Reservoir Dogs* debates in the Secret Service: Number eight does what number eight is supposed to do, without complaining like Mr. Pink. The idea behind this numbering is to allow any agent to fill in for any other on a given day. While the weather and settings may be different, the person who was number eight always had the same role. This plug-and-play model was a great asset to an agent under the extreme pressure of guarding someone.

At the end of the line, Clinton should have gotten into the waiting SUV, but he saw more well-wishers to greet, so he drifted off course. This was not in itself a problem. The Secret Service system is built to adapt. The agents protecting their person know how to move out and continue to secure an area. As Clinton walked down a side path, a person in the crowd held on to his hand and would not let go. “He was saying stuff like, ‘C’mon, you inhaled, I know you inhaled,’” Falkenberg recalled. “I was pretty sure the guy was stoned.” Falkenberg didn’t do anything, yet. If a member of Marine Recon was at risk of making a policy decision anytime he shot his rifle in an Iraqi street, a Secret Service agent was under similar pressure when free speech was layered over his responsibilities. Their job was not to filter out hecklers, stop protests of any sort, or censor what their protectee hears; it was simply to protect that person. If an agent ever has to take out his gun and fire into a crowd, Falkenberg repeatedly emphasized, something has gone seriously wrong.

“I heard Clinton say, ‘He won’t let go,’” Falkenberg told me. “That was the only thing I heard. I know that’s not possible. There were thousands

of people cheering around me. But I remember those words, and I reacted.”

Within seconds, the overzealous supporter or opponent—it didn’t matter what he was—was writhing on the ground, and Clinton had been whisked down the rope line and shunted into a waiting SUV. Falkenberg, who is five feet seven inches tall and weighs 150 pounds, grabbed the man’s forearm and pulled his thumb back with such force that the man collapsed, his thumb dislocated and his radius bone fractured, Falkenberg would find out later. This was what he had been drilled to do until it had become instinctual. The only thing that mattered was that he had freed Clinton’s hand and moved him safely along. He had adapted in seconds.

When I asked Falkenberg what happened to the guy whose thumb he shattered, he paused as if I had asked him the stupidest question imaginable, as if I had completely missed the point. “I don’t know. I didn’t care. My job was to get the protectee out of there,” he said. And that was what he had done, followed by numbers two and three, who fell in behind him. The job of rounding up the guy, now writhing on the ground, fell to agents behind them. Falkenberg said the man was arrested and questioned, but he stressed that this did not matter. What mattered was protecting Clinton. That had been his sole focus, confident that the other highly trained agents behind him would do their jobs.

“Someone gets shot, the police show up and try to figure out who shot him,” he said. “That’s reactive. That’s after the fact. The goal of the Secret Service is for that to never happen.”

The Secret Service’s plan is for nothing to happen, but that is not always realistic. Adapting is key. How Falkenberg reacted to an overzealous handshaker may seem extreme, but that was how it had to be. The man could have been John Hinckley, who emerged from the press pool and shot President Ronald Reagan in March 1981. That he succeeded in shooting the president was an enormous failure on the Secret Service’s part, but how they adapted showed the service’s strength. Each man fell into his role. Timothy McCarthy stepped into the line of fire and took a bullet meant for Reagan. Jerry Parr and Ray Shaddick threw the president into the bulletproof limousine. The one, though, who stood

out most was Drew Unrue, the driver. He was initially told to drive to the White House, but when it was clear Reagan needed immediate medical attention, he was redirected to George Washington Hospital, finding it quickly in an era before every car was equipped with a global positioning system. Every man had a job to do and did it. They did not bemoan the enormous breach of security that had enabled Hinckley to fire five shots. That would be handled later. They fell into line to save the president, allowing the others to clean up afterward. Their plan of protecting the president had failed completely when he got shot. But they didn't focus on that. They adapted and saved his life.

THE PLAN VS. THE FIGHT

So how did Willie Copeland and Chris Falkenberg know how to react as they did? In these situations they kept the goal, not the original plan, in mind. The plan for Copeland's Marine Recon unit was to guard a convoy so it arrived at its destination safely. Falkenberg's plan was to make sure nothing happened to Clinton while he was campaigning. When these plans failed, the people charged with implementing them adapted. Copeland responded to what happened, while Falkenberg anticipated it. These are the two facets of adapting under pressure. The key, though, is that they did not stick to their initial plans. They relied on their training to adapt to any possible scenario and focused on the outcome: surviving the ambush and protecting the candidate, respectively. This is a key difference between people who are great under pressure and people who are not. Those who wilt when the pressure is hottest fall back on what they expected to do ahead of time, as if it were a security blanket or the only way forward. Those who succeed under pressure readjust: They focus on the goal that needs to be accomplished, not a specific way to accomplish that goal.

This is what Colonel Thomas Kolditz, the head of the behavioral studies department at the United States Military Academy at West Point, strives to impress on cadets. "We teach our cadets to fight the fight, not fight the plan," he told me at his office in Thayer Hall at the

center of the garrisoned campus. “There is a break point where the plan goes in the trash. That’s the skill. The focus is on intent. It’s outcome based.”

Kolditz has his doctorate in social psychology, but he is a soldier first. For seventeen years, he was in an artillery unit. He served in Germany, commanded an 850-person battalion on the demilitarized zone in Korea, and worked on the ground in Iraq in 2003. This informs the research he does on leaders in extreme situations. (He refers to it as *in extremis* and defines the Latin phrase as “at the point of death.”) His war-zone experience has made him intent on finding out how to make sure leaders lead when the pressure is highest and human lives are at stake. He said he has little time for business-school case studies about companies that have pulled themselves out of crisis. “They’re amateurs,” he said, not joking. His nexus is life and death. “From my perspective, a leader who puts people in dangerous contexts or makes decisions about dangerous contexts has a moral obligation to get that right,” he said, leaning in for emphasis. “You’re not allowed to be bad about that. It’s not an option for you to be bad. We can be bad at golf; we can be bad at our office jobs. If you’re going to put yourself in a position of putting people in dangerous contexts, you have to be good at it.” This is a high bar, because the pressure is not only to make the right decision but to be able to make it when someone is shooting at you.

Kolditz’s mantra is fight the fight, but he believes a leader should do everything he can to get his plan right. This is the Secret Service way of protection. Kolditz breaks the creation of the plan into five points. The first is “commander’s intent.” It stresses that all crises are ambiguous, so no plan, as the military saying goes, survives contact with the enemy. Kolditz calls the second the concept of the *Schwerpunkt* [focal point], which is a term from the blitzkrieg. In World War II, the *Schwerpunkt* was the critical point in the other army’s line; the Germans would mass troops and tanks on it and blast their way through the front line. It is crucial, he said, for any leader to find that critical point and protect it. On an army mission, the *Schwerpunkt* could be an ambiguous turn where someone needs to be stationed to prevent the convoy from losing its way; at a company like Enron, he said, it was the accounting

department. A leader should ask himself, “Where does my direct influence as a leader need to be exerted right now?”

“Practical drift” is the third step in creating a plan. Devised by Lieutenant Colonel Scott Snook after his investigation into how two F-15s shot down two Black Hawk helicopters in the First Gulf War, the concept is rooted in the need to revisit protocols. Those that are rigid—in the hope that they will keep workers more focused—need to be reviewed more often, because in the daily exercise of his job, a soldier or worker is going to find a more practical way to do something. When that happens, the leader either needs to reinstitute the original way or adapt the protocol to the new system. The fourth step in Kolditz’s program is the “pre-mortem,” which is a check to make sure all of the available information has been gathered and checked before doing something. Last is “red teaming.” In this, the army has institutionalized the devil’s advocate, the person whose job it is to poke holes in the plan. This, Kolditz said, is a way to counter what happens to even seasoned leaders: “We fall in love with our plans.” All of these points are aimed at making the plan as strong as possible, to give it the best chance of succeeding.

And once the plan is as good as it can possibly be, Kolditz says, it is time for cadets to prepare for all the ways it will fail under pressure. This is when they learn to fight the fight. Kolditz said there are four key areas that need to be addressed so that in the heat of combat, the soldiers will stick together and continue the fight. The first is “shared risk,” or knowing that what your leader is telling you to do he can do himself. As the coach of West Point’s elite parachuting team, Kolditz literally coaches by hanging on to the side of the plane—with fourteen thousand feet of air beneath his windblown feet—and the cadets know he will be jumping with them. “When you climb out, it’s hard to climb back in. There is ninety knots of wind on your whole body,” he said. “They know you’re not coming back in. There’s shared risk, and they go.”

Another key for leaders in a pressure-filled situation is having a common lifestyle. If a leader uses a position of authority to gain an advantage—like better accommodations or food—those who are supposed to follow him won’t. And once this trust is lost, Kolditz said, it is nearly impossible to regain.

The third area is demonstrating competence and engendering trust and loyalty, which seem obvious. Yet this is a fine line to walk. A leader needs to be bold, but he cannot be cocky or arrogant, nor should he be humble and self-effacing. A bold leader has to step forward and say he understands the situation. “You tell them, ‘I’ve got it. I’ve been here before. The sun is going to come up tomorrow,’” Kolditz said. “You don’t say, ‘We’ve done everything we can, and we’ll just go forward from here.’ People pay attention to what leaders do and decide whether they’re credible.”

Yet it is the fourth of Kolditz’s precepts that is the most intriguing for clutch decision making. He calls it “inherent motivation,” which is slightly misleading. The idea is that in certain areas of life you need someone or something to motivate you. Running around a track is a good example: You are either trying to win or you probably have a coach pushing you to train. Without that extrinsic motivation, chances are you would take a few days off here or there and not become the best runner you could be. The situations soldiers—and, though Kolditz might disagree, leaders in non-life-and-death areas—find themselves in are so overwhelmingly stressful that there is no need for their leader to rev them up more. There is an inherent motivation in what they are doing or about to do. If someone had been shouting at Sergeant Copeland to shoot the Iraqis or at Falkenberg to save the candidate, it would have thrown them off their games. “Hollywood gets it so wrong,” Kolditz said. “All of their leaders are screaming into a microphone. Nobody needs any of the boot-in-the-ass, Hollywood Drill Sergeant motivation. That’s exactly the wrong thing. We want to teach our leaders to calm people down.”

Interestingly, Willie Copeland had none of the buttoned-up West Point bearing. He was a kid from Smithfield, Utah, who liked to hang out and talk about the rodeo. “Willie was one of those guys who came to my Recon battalion and no one wanted him,” said Colonel Michael Paulovich, a Harvard-educated Marine who was running the Recon School when Copeland came through in 2001. “He was skinny. He smoked cigarettes. He drank mugs of coffee.” On the plus side, Copeland had a very mechanical mind. He had come over from an infantry unit and could fix anything by simply studying it for a while. “The truck is broken

down, the machine gun stops working, you're looking at him in a panic, and he'd say, 'I can fix this,'" recalled Paulovich, who said Copeland intrigued him from the start. "He was cool all the time. Nothing flapped him."

Still, Copeland's physical appearance was not typical for a Recon Marine. These were usually strapping men. They were football quarterbacks and lacrosse players who were big and could take a hit but also had great instincts from their days scanning the field and assessing what was coming at them. Copeland did not seem to be one of them. "He wasn't the kind of guy who was taking vitamins and eating the best food," said Paulovich. "We had some guys who were ultimate triathletes. They metered everything they ate. Then you have the other guy who had a Big Gulp mug of coffee."

What Copeland lacked in physical attributes and diet, he made up for in his focus and discipline. He was resolute in the intense Recon training. To simulate conditions these Marines would face on the battlefield, they were sent as part of their training into the woods for days with nothing other than a compass; they were submerged in fifty-degree water, and they were forced to parachute when they were exhausted. The aim was to create environments in which the levels of fatigue and physical discomfort would approximate the mind-scrambling fog that an unanticipated attack creates. "You could have a guy fully rested on eight hours of sleep, and the convoy blows up," Paulovich said of combat situations. "Suddenly he has to Medevac people out of there, in a mine field, and, oh, someone is shooting at him." That was why extreme conditions were necessary in training and how Paulovich came to suspect Copeland would excel under pressure. He may have been skinny, but he was solid and tough. He swam hard and trained as fiercely as the rest of the Marines. What he lacked in strength and stature, he made up for by gutting it out.

Paulovich knew from experience that the most unlikely men could be molded into Recon Marines. He himself was only five feet six inches tall and weighed 150 pounds. Once he remembered a bugler trying out for Force Recon, the more covert of the elite Marine units. Copeland's smoking and coffee drinking were accepted quirks in a group whose

binding characteristic was the desire to be part of a high-risk, high-pressure battalion. They were all adrenaline junkies. And as the initial twelve-week training course wore on, Copeland continued to impress Paulovich and his fellow trainees.

Still, telling me about Copeland's actions in Iraq, Paulovich sounded amazed, if reluctantly so. After all, he had trained him. "You wouldn't have picked him out of the lineup that he would have been the hero," he said. "It throws off your thinking. I went out of planes in the dark, but he knew exactly what to do: Get guys to safety, engage the enemy, protect his leader." By every measure, his actions were clutch, not least of all for the extreme pressure under which he carried them out. When he was presented with the Navy Cross, Copeland summed up what he had done simply. "Nothing's natural about running into bullets," he told the Associated Press. "It's more important for me to make sure my men are OK."

In the fog of war, Copeland did what was most important to being clutch: When he had to adapt his plan, he focused on something other than himself. To Kolditz, this is everything. "When you're focused outward, you can't focus inward on your emotions," he said. "It's not a matter of teaching cadets how to control their emotions. What I try to teach them on the parachute team is not to feel their emotions at all. I say, 'Look at the wingtip as hard as you can.' What it does is take them out of their own arousal, and they can function. If you try to teach someone to control their emotions, they focus on them and it gets worse." Copeland focused on saving his CO and his men; Falkenberg focused on protecting the candidate. Retreating inward in either situation would have been a recipe for choking. Instead they adapted to the task at hand—the fight—and that allowed for the quick responses they needed.

FIGHTING THE FIGHT THAT MATTERED

Matthew Bogdanos is the archetype of the soldier-leader who could respond and anticipate, adapt and lead. On the cusp of the U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003, Colonel Bogdanos was commanding a group of

one hundred men inside the country. They were part of the Joint Inter-Agency Coordinating Group, created after the September 11, 2001, attacks on New York and Washington. They were a real-life A-Team, composed of veteran Special Forces and black ops soldiers but also agents from an alphabet soup of enforcement agencies—FBI, CIA, DEA, IRS, even NYPD detectives. Colonel Bogdanos, a Marine, had been given clear instructions from the commanding general: Find and eliminate terrorist cells, sources of their financing, and any prohibited weapons. He had been part of a similar covert operation in Afghanistan, where he was awarded the Bronze Star. (When we met shortly after he returned from Iraq in 2004, he said matter-of-factly that Al-Qaeda had put a bounty on his head, which required him to be armed at all times.) But this was the first mission he was leading. He had no problem being in charge. Handling the pressure of a mission came naturally to him. He was also a middleweight boxing champion and assistant district attorney in New York City. He was proud of this combination of fighter and thinker.

In the midst of his mission, he got word from locals that the Baghdad Museum was being looted, and he realized he had to change his plan. Bogdanos also has an advanced degree in classics from Columbia University, and he knew how important the museum's collection was—it was no less, as he told me many times, than the shared foundation of humankind. These were the first artifacts from Mesopotamia, the cradle of civilization. He feared they would be spirited out of the country. There was an underground network of antiquities collectors that he was familiar with from his work in the DA's office. They would pay top dollar for a sought-after item, and that piece of civilization would never be seen again.

There was only one problem with changing his plan. He did not have the rank to do it himself. "This was a general's decision," he told me about his desire to take fourteen men from the task force and race from northern Iraq to Baghdad. His new plan was to pile into their heavily armed Humvees and drive through the desert night. He knew this was not the typical way to move through an Iraq on the verge of chaos, but he did not have another option as he searched for a general to approve his

breakaway mission. One after another rejected him, starting with General Gary Harrell, a legendary Delta Force commander. Their rejections were the same: The mission was too dangerous, given the plan he had formulated. Yet Bogdanos knew he had to stop the looting, and he was convinced that his group was the one to do it. Within a few hours, he had racked up a half-dozen rejections, but then he got through to General Gene Renuart, director of operations for U.S. Central Command. “Had I not had my background, had I not had the feel for this stuff, would I have gone to General Renuart after a half-dozen nos? Probably not,” Bogdanos told me. Renuart granted him permission, and Bogdanos was ready. He had already sold a group of his men on the value of saving the museum’s holdings, and thirty-six hours later, they rolled into Baghdad.

When he went to Iraq, Bogdanos had had an important plan—stop terrorists. He changed it not because he had accomplished it but because he knew the looting of the museum had to be stopped as soon as possible. In an environment of overlapping and immense pressures, he realized that his original plan was not the most important one in the short term. Racing to Baghdad like a modern-day Dirty Dozen also meant more to the image the United States was trying to project: They were supposed to leave the country better than they found it, and the disappearance of three-thousand-year-old treasures would not count as better.

With a new plan came a new goal. When he entered the Iraq Museum, he sought out the directors and assured them that he was there to find lost antiquities. “I’m not here to investigate war crimes or political ideology,” he told them. “Frankly, I’d rather we never talk about it. Except to the extent that it proves necessary for the investigation, I have no interest in anyone’s contact with Saddam Hussein or the regime.”

Under extreme pressure, his focus narrowed to the essential task: Save the antiquities. If he succeeded, these artifacts would stay in Iraq, not be locked away in some private home in Zurich. He would also be able to show that the U.S. military was a liberating force meant to bring good to the region. And that was what made Bogdanos’s decision so clutch: There was a practical and a political motivation to his actions, and he had to navigate his way to that end.

Within days Bogdanos's team had its first success: The Statue of Shalmaneser, a vase of a Syrian king from 858 B.C., and a Sumerian bronze bull from the Temple of Ninhursag, the first such bull in relief, were returned. The man who returned the pieces was a violinist who said he had wanted to protect them. Bogdanos may or may not have believed him, but he arranged for the man to be interviewed on television so other Iraqis could see him keeping his word to provide amnesty. After that, goods poured in. Soon, members of Bogdanos's group were being sought out on the streets.

The decision to offer amnesty was Bogdanos's. He quoted the Geneva Convention to me and the responsibility of an occupational force to govern, yet he also admitted that such a sweeping proposal should have, again, come from a general. "I told my men, 'This one's on me,'" he said, meaning that if anyone up the chain of command objected, Bogdanos would take the heat for it. "You know the old saying that it's better to beg for forgiveness than to ask for permission? It was the right thing to do. Would General Renuart have said yes? Sure. But what if it had gone south?"

Far from insubordination, Bogdanos demonstrated the decision-making skill under pressure that the military hopes to inculcate into all its officers. It also solidified his leadership standing with his men. But most of all, his idea of granting amnesty worked. In an environment in which Iraqis did not trust anyone, even the forces sent to liberate them from Saddam Hussein, Bogdanos showed from the start that recovering the antiquities, many of them objects of world historical significance, mattered more than listening to the banal excuses of how someone came to possess each object. He tapped his shoulder and said, "I got these eagles for a reason, and one of them was to make a goddamn decision and stick by it. And if you're wrong, be a big boy and take the consequences. As George Patton said, a good plan executed now is better than a perfect plan executed too late. Everything was judged by that: the amnesty, the nonprosecution and recovery, the raids—it wasn't like we asked permission to go on the raids."

His decisions paid off. The greatest success came in June 2003, several months into the recovery operation, when the Sacred Vase of Warka

appeared. The meter-high Sumerian vase from 3200 B.C. is one of the most important antiquities in the world for the way it depicts human life. One day a man walked up to John Durkin, a member of Bogdanos's team who ran the New York Police Department's emergency services unit in civilian life. He showed him a picture of the piece among dozens of vases and jars; he wanted \$500 to return it. "Clearly, the guy didn't know what he had," Bogdanos said. "[If he had], it would have been the only thing in the photograph, and it wouldn't have been \$500." The next day three other men drove up to the museum with the vase in the trunk of the car and returned it without asking for a cent.

Bogdanos's plan had worked under pressure because it had matched his goal: Recover as many artifacts as quickly as possible. And that remained his focus even when circumstances changed. A few months into living in the Iraq Museum—he and his men wanted to be there to broker deals at any hour—Bogdanos became convinced that the looting had been an inside job. There was too much selection in what had been taken. It was almost as if certain pieces were stolen to order. Of twenty-seven cuneiform bricks arranged high on a wall, for example, only the nine most important ones were stolen—and they were interspersed at various levels up the wall. "A looter is going to grab the stuff that is on the ground," he said. Still, Bogdanos maintained his amnesty program: Anyone who returned an antiquity would not be questioned and would be allowed to walk back out. If Bogdanos began to prosecute while he was still recovering artifacts, he knew he risked the whole operation collapsing. "What you have to do is suspend moral judgment," he said. "Nothing gets in the way of an investigation more than moral judgment."

In the end, Bogdanos turned out to have made a clutch policy decision, for both moral and public relations reasons. But if you go back to Colonel Kolditz's four precepts for scrapping a plan and leading under pressure, Bogdanos followed all of them. He certainly shared the risk with his men—he was in the convoy with them and out front in the negotiations. He had a lifestyle in common with his soldiers, sleeping in the museum with the rest of them. His training in antiquities as much as, if not more than, his rank of colonel made it clear that when he said something was important, it was. And given the speed with which he and

his men initially got to Baghdad and how quickly they began recovering antiquities, he managed their inherent motivation. His success, though, was far from certain when he began calling generals to beg permission. Yet he knew he was right, and because of his training, he was confident he would succeed. It was no different from the way Willie Copeland knew how to react to an ambush and Chris Falkenberg swiftly handled a man accosting a presidential candidate. All three adapted their plan and carried out an effective, new plan. This was fighting the fight.