

TURNING PAGES

~ book reviews of interest to the aviation professional

In Extremis Leadership:

Leading as if your life depended on it

By Thomas A. Kolditz. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers 2007. 249 pp. Available in hardcover and Kindle formats at https://www.amazon.com/Extremis-Leadership-Leading-Your-Depended/dp/0787996041/ref=sr_1_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1469554013&sr=1-1&keywords=in+extremis+leadership.

A book review by MAJ John P. Kurtzweil

The author of *In Extremis Leadership* is Brigadier General (retired) Thomas A. Kolditz. Kolditz is a professor at the Yale School of Management. During his service in the Army, he served in a variety of leadership positions and has held positions as a professor at the U.S. Military Academy, concept developer in the Center for Army Leadership, and was the founding director of the West Point Leadership Center. Through his book *In Extremis Leadership*, he gives real leadership examples that show how extreme life and death leadership skills can offer eye opening lessons to leaders with varying level of leadership experience in a variety of settings. Kolditz challenges leaders to learn from their own experiences and to lead as though their lives depended on it.

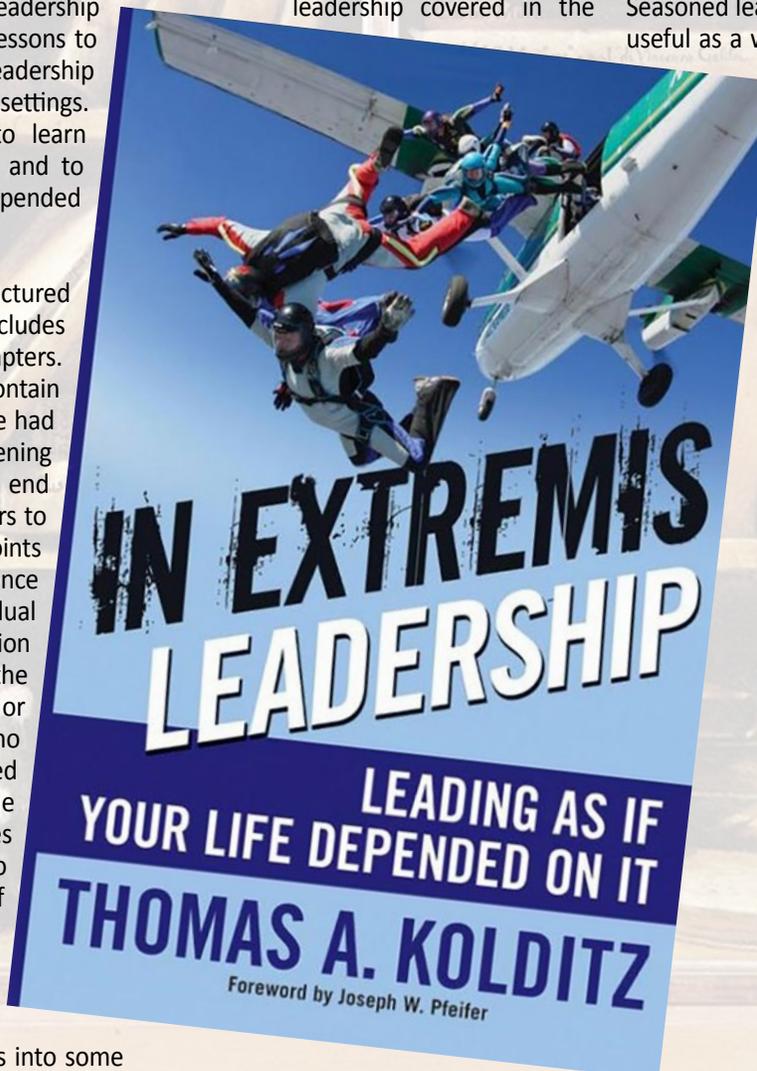
In Extremis Leadership is structured with six chapters and includes conclusion and resource chapters. The individual chapters contain vignettes of leaders who have had experiences in life threatening situations. A summary at the end of each chapter allows readers to quickly access the main points of the chapter as a reference for developing their individual leadership skills. The conclusion briefly identifies many of the individuals, associated with or interviewed by the author, who represent the values placed on in extremis leadership. The resource chapter describes what in extremis leaders can do to meet the physical demands of this leadership style.

Kolditz does an excellent job describing the concept of in extremis leadership. He goes into some

detail defining in extremis leadership, how to identify it, its strengths and weaknesses, and the circumstances under which it is best applied. Kolditz identifies and describes the attributes of in extremis leaders across a wide spectrum of professions and life experiences. These range from the youngest leaders who are just beginning to develop their leadership style to the most seasoned leaders who continue to develop and refine theirs. The author goes on to explain how the application of the lessons of in extremis leadership covered in the

book can improve leadership across all sectors of society.

In Extremis Leadership describes techniques that permit leaders to assess their response to situations or provides some understanding of how they might behave in potential life threatening or life altering situations. This book is a good read for junior leaders who want to understand and develop the skills necessary to lead others through tough and potentially life threatening situations. Seasoned leaders might find the material useful as a way to evaluate and improve their own leadership skills or as a tool to further develop their subordinate managers or leaders to take on roles of increased responsibility. This book is truly eye-opening and life changing if the reader chooses to take the examples and lessons and apply them to everyday life.



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Superforecasting: *The Art and Science of Prediction*

By Philip E. Tetlock and Dan Gardner. New York: Crown Publishers 2015. 340 pp. Available in hardcover, paperback, kindle, and MP3 CD formats at <https://www.amazon.ca/Superforecasting-Science-Prediction-Philip-Tetlock/dp/0804136696>.

A book review by CPT Sean Clement

The nature of the Army profession compels many, especially those in planning sections, to compile, list, and catalog assumptions for any plan being set before a commander. By the time a training calendar reaches a commander, by the time the assumptions have been vetted, re-vetted, and vetted once more in a seemingly endless chain of meetings, in-progress reviews, and slide shows we make the assumption that our predictions for the modern battlefield

What environment will we encounter? How will we fight? His S-3 is acting as a forecaster, and he is likely not very good at it.

Answering these questions can be difficult, they can be incredibly uncertain, and in the field of aviation, small mistakes or incorrect planning assumptions can cost lives. My assertion that the hypothetical S-3 is not a very good forecaster is not a judgement on S-3s in general nor is it a condemnation for Army officers as a whole. On the contrary, some of the most imaginative, quick thinking, and professional people I have ever met are officers in the military. However, people tend to be only slightly more accurate than chance, and usually worse than even the most basic extrapolation algorithms when it comes to predicting future events. What is worse is that fame (rank), and notoriety tend to make one a worse forecaster. So what can we do to improve our ability to predict what we face in the modern battlefield?

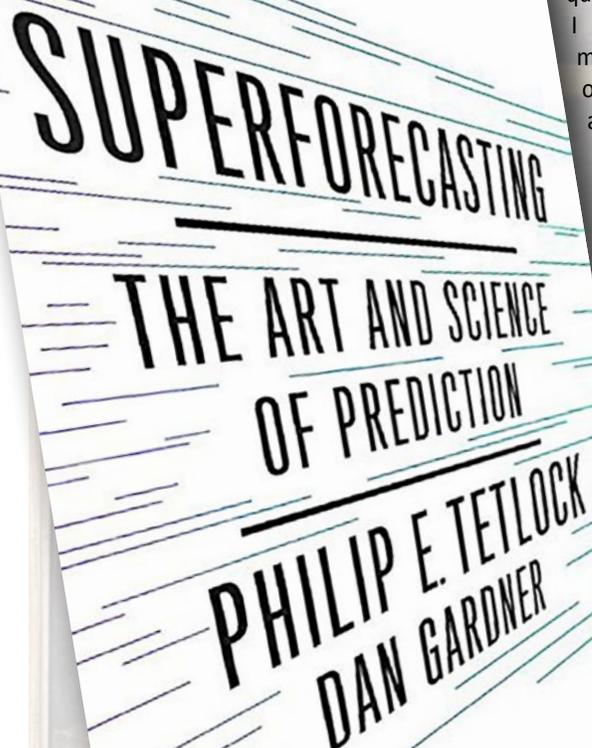
Activity (IARPA), the ability to forecast is trainable, achievable, and not at all a mysterious process.

During a multiyear long competition sponsored by IARPA, civilian forecasters, without access to classified information, were able to consistently outperform the intelligence community when it came to prediction by a margin of 30%. One of the main impediments that face those who use forecasting in their military professions, from weather observers to intelligence analysts, is that they are not keeping score. When an aviator takes a check ride, he receives instant feedback on his performance. Yet, we seldom hold forecasters to this same standard. When the S-2 told you that you were likely to encounter or not encounter enemy in a certain region, was he correct? The answer to this question becomes harder than we realize.

In P.E. Tetlock and D. Gardner's book *Superforecasting: The Art and Science of Prediction*, we can see that measuring the accuracy of a prediction, and making ourselves better forecasters is not impossible, but it does require diligent hard work, honest introspection, and intellectual openness. If we can take just some of the lessons from this book, such as understanding how to make our evaluation of risk more granular, supporting viewpoints only in so far as data supports or at least does not contradict, and explicitly specifying probability in a non-nonsense way, then perhaps we can avoid the same mistakes so many other forecasters have made. I would implore anyone in a decision making or analysis role to read and internalize the lessons of this book. It is well worth the time, especially when our estimates, analysis, and recommendations carry the weight of our Soldier's lives.

First of all, realize that difficulty predicting future events is not limited to the military. A cursory glance at mutual fund performance over a ten year stretch will show you that, while some do well if you compare them to the market index, the vast majority underperform. Another glance at the energy sector where just this year the price of oil crashed when most predicted it would rise. Or last year when 98% of economists predicted a rise in interest rates and were not just wrong, but 180 degrees off. So what hope do we have when professional forecasters are wrong so often? According to research done through the Intelligence Advanced Research Projects

will be at least accurate enough for us to adapt. Right now, somewhere in the Army there is a battalion or brigade commander taking command, and his S-3 is going through this exact process. Where will we be in two years?



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DAN GARDNER

