

The Talented Gamers

Part 1 – Decisive Edge Personnel Management

Maj. Anthony M. Formica, U.S. Army

Bob: “And we are live in three, two, one, cue Casey.”

Casey: “Thanks Bob, and good evening to everyone here at home and wherever you might be streaming from around the world and cyberspace! I’m your host, Casey Raymond, and for those of you just tuning in, we’re interviewing Gen. Jasmine Smith, the chief of staff of the U.S. Converged Forces. We are asking her to

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Casey: “Can you clarify what you mean by that for our listeners at home?”

Gen. Smith: “Certainly, certainly. Back in 2028, when the Chinese seized Taiwan—”

Casey: “—and when you were what, ten?”

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fill us in on some of the details about her department, both its recent activities in our conflict with China and its overall structure and operations. Gen. Smith is widely hailed as the face of the new U.S. military; at twenty-four, she is the second-youngest person ever to hold her office, and she holds advanced degrees from both the Massachusetts Institute of Technology ... and Yale, if I’m not mistaken?”

Gen. Smith: “Yep, that’s correct, Casey.”

Casey: “So, you’re exceptionally young, and exceptionally well-credentialed. You also can claim credit for a string of twelve campaign victories in our current—well, what would you call what we’re currently engaged in with the Chinese? Is it accurate to call it a war?”

Gen. Smith: “I think it is, Casey, yes. It’s a restricted war in the sense that no humans have been deliberately killed on either side, but if you dig out your

Gen. Smith: “Ha, yes, more like eight. Anyway, the Chinese seized Taiwan and America was unable to do anything about it. Now, there’s plenty of blame to cast around, and whole careers, mostly in academia and journalism, have been basically built around castigating the military for its failure in that critical moment. We were, preconflict, awed by China’s more exquisite cyber capabilities; we never stopped to think about what their more run-of-the-mill capabilities, applied at scale, could do to routine operations, which fundamentally still depended on timely and accurate data processing ... like ordering and transporting a replacement widget for a carrier reactor. Just ... embarrassing.

“I’m sorry, I’m going down a rabbit hole. The bottom line is that America failed to live up to the moment in 2028, because it could do nothing to stop China’s taking of Taiwan ... unless we wanted to initiate a nuclear holocaust. And of course, we took a diplomatic hit. Yes,

we were not under any treaty obligation to support the island's autonomy, but we took a hit in the court of public opinion.

“So when Beijing decided last year to close the Strait of Malacca in some ill-begotten scheme to extend its control over global trade networks, no. We'd made the technological and organizational changes necessary to respond and resist in a timely manner. This time, we had the wherewithal to back up our ideals. Or, put more simply, we can now pursue our politics by other means.”

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Casey: “And by wherewithal, you're referring specifically, of course, to America's preeminence in applied quantum computing, quantum communications?”

Gen. Smith: “Well, partly, but what I'm actually talking about is the entire revamping of our personnel management system. Our technological advancements have been impressive, yes ... but what has really set us apart from the Chinese in the sixteen years between 2028 and now is the fact that we have optimized our ability to find and recruit the best talent. And by best talent, what I really mean, and I think you and all our viewers know this intuitively at this point, is that we deliver the exact right person to command at the exact right place, at the exact right time—always.”

Casey: “You're describing your department's Total Population Analytics, the ability you have to cull all of the knowledge, skills, and attributes of the entire engaged population, and figure out who the specific individuals you need at the present moment to command are?”

Gen. Smith: “Yeah, that's right—and then offer them the right incentives to come work with us for a period of time. At least, within my own purview as the senior military official in the Department of Converged Forces. Of course, we still have the Army, the Navy, and the rest of the services, and they're still manned by permanent green, black, and blue suiters ...

but the Department of Converged Forces is unique in that it has forged its entire identity around the idea of marrying human talent with cutting-edge tech to solve discrete problems. The right Americans don't need to find us; we'll find them and offer them a fair contract for meaningful work.”

Casey: “How would you assess the Department of Converged Forces' contribution to the war effort in comparison to the other military services?”

Gen. Smith: “Well, our drones and operators are responsible for 100 percent of the kinetic and nonki-

netic actions America has undertaken in the past eight months to safeguard freedom of navigation in the Strait of Malacca. It's allowed the other services to focus on modernization, which is not trivial; we still definitely need them at a high state of readiness in the event of a global, prolonged conflict. However, for now, the DCF has spent some treasure—no blood—and meanwhile, our national honor is on the rise.”

Casey: “And what do you say to those who describe the DCF as little more than overpaid, overlionized technicians, or worse, simple mercenaries?”

Gen. Smith: “You know, I've heard this criticism since I was a kid, but I think we are the embodiment of the professional ideal. We find and promote the best talent to fight and win our Nation's wars. At the end of the day, that's our sole charge, and we're basically the best in the business at it.”

Casey: “Yet some are quick to suggest that there's more to professional identity than that. For example, Jacques Russell, who we'll have on tomorrow and who is perhaps one of your more vociferous critics, frequently claims that your department has completely abandoned the notion of having a unique stewardship of an abstract body of knowledge—such as the application of violence. He calls this an inseparable component of a professional ethos and maintains that you've essentially outsourced that ownership to the coders

who design your AI models and the technicians who keep the quantum network up and running. What do you say to that charge?”

Gen. Smith: “First, I’d like to acknowledge Col. (Ret.) Russell’s many, many years of service to our Nation, and thank him for his service.”

Casey: “As do we all. Many, many years of service, as you said, most distinguished.”

Gen. Smith: “Yes, of course. And I’d also like to acknowledge that I know Col. Russell also says the DCF has abandoned its professional responsibility to its client, American society. And I think he’s off base on both counts.

“The term ‘mastery of an abstract body of knowledge’ is a euphemism people use to gloss over the fact that it is easier to tinker in many trades than it is to achieve mastery of any one. We now live in the era of Big Data—have been living in it for my entire life. And now it’s essential for our warfighters to be masters of some very discrete, very practical, very applicable knowledge ... like how to manipulate their sensor and shooter networks to mass their distributed drone networks at key locations in their battlespace. I’m happy to leave the general and the abstract to the academics, provided my department continues to produce results.

“Now, Col. Russell is rightly preoccupied with the notion that my department should never forget its responsibility to the society we’re all culled from and which we all serve. I’d just ask him how we could possibly be any better serving that ideal than we currently are; again, we’re finding and hiring the best among us to serve all of us. And we do it on the cheap. Before we discontinued the academy and ROTC systems, it cost nearly half a million dollars to train a second lieutenant, and that individual had no guarantee of being able to actually do their j-o-b. TPA, Total Population Analytics for your viewers, allows us to find the man or woman we need today to lead a converged battalion

in Indonesia, to find the peacekeeper governor we need in Syria, and to let both go when the mission is over.

“The costs this has saved us can’t be calculated. Moreover, it’s democratized the military in a way it really hasn’t been since at least 1944. Everyone and anyone can be the next general commanding our forces, as I myself can attest to. Two years ago, I was just a regular carbon capture technician in Tacoma; I entered the TPA marketplace on a whim and a hope and, as fate would have it, I was also the right person the DCF needed ... and I evidently continue to be the right person the DCF needs today. Tomorrow, that might not be the case, and our formation will by definition be the better for finding a replacement for me.”

Casey: “Well, if that were to be true, I think myself and our viewers would nevertheless be saddened by the loss of such an eloquent and frankly charming general officer. That being said, we have to take a break for this word from our sponsors. When we come back, we’ll continue our interview with Gen. Smith by asking her what she thinks about the importance of physical training for converged battalion commanders.” ■

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Formica, U.S. Army, serves as the 82nd Airborne Division’s Information Warfare Task Force. He holds a BS from the U.S. Military Academy and an MA from Yale University’s Jackson Institute for Global Affairs, which he obtained through the Downing Scholars Program. Formica deployed in support of Operation Enduring Freedom with 1st Stryker Brigade Combat Team, 25th Infantry Division, and in support of Operation Atlantic Resolve-North as a company commander with the 173rd Infantry Brigade Combat Team (Airborne). He has also served as an observer-controller at the Joint Readiness Training Center.