

# SUN TZU

## “THE ART OF WAR”

A Commentary on the book, plus excerpts



### HISTORY:

Little is known about the man Sun Tzu. He wrote 13 chapters which were (are) obligatory reading in the USSR political-military hierarchy and has been available in Russian for centuries. It was the source of all Mao Tse-tung's strategic and tactical doctrine. These 13 chapters were written in approximately 490 BC. About 100 BC one of his chroniclers, Su-ma Ch'ien, gives this biography:

Sun Tzu whose personal name was Wu was a native of the Ch'i State. His Art of War brought him to the notice of Ho Lu, King of Wu. Ho Lu said to him, "I have carefully perused your thirteen chapters. May I submit your theory of managing soldiers to a slight test."

Sun Tzu replied, "You may."

The king asked, "May the test be applied to women?"

The answer was again in the affirmative, so arrangements were made to bring 180 ladies out of the palace. Sun Tzu divided them into two companies and placed one of the king's favorite concubines at the head of each. He then made them all take spears in their hands and addressed them thus: "I presume you know the difference between front and back, right hand and left hand?"

The girls replied, "Yes."

Sun Tzu went on. "When I say eyes front, you must look straight ahead. When I say 'left turn', you must face towards your left hand. When I say 'right turn', you must face towards your right hand. When I say 'about turn', you must face right around towards the back."

Again the girls assented. The words of command having been thus explained, he set up the halberds and battle axes in order to begin the drill. Then to the sound of drums he gave the order 'right turn', but the girls only burst out laughing.

Sun Tzu said patiently, "if words of command are not clear and distinct, if orders are not thoroughly understood, then the general is to blame." He started drilling them again and this time gave the order 'left turn'. whereupon the girls once more burst into fits of laughter.

Then he said, "If words of command are not clear and distinct, if orders are not thoroughly understood, the general is to blame. But, if his orders are clear and the soldiers nevertheless disobey, then it is the fault of their officers." So saying, he ordered the leaders of the two companies to be beheaded.

Now the king of Wu was watching from the top of a raised pavilion, and when he saw that his favorite concubines were about to be executed, he was greatly alarmed and hurriedly sent down the following message: "We are now quite satisfied as to our general's ability to handle troops. If we are bereft of these two concubines, our meat and drink will lose their savour. It is our wish that they shall not be beheaded."

The Sun Tzu sent a messenger to the king saying: "Your soldiers, Sire, are now properly drilled and disciplined and ready for Your Majesty's inspection. They can be put to any use that their sovereign may desire. Bid them go through fire and water and they will not now disobey."

Sun Tzu replied even more patiently: "Having once received His Majesty's commission to be general of his forces, there are certain commands of His Majesty which, acting in that capacity, I am unable to accept." Accordingly, and immediately, he had the two leaders beheaded and straight away installed the pair next in order as leaders in their place. When this had been done the drum was sounded for the drill once more. The girls went through all the evolutions, turning to the right or to the left, marching ahead or wheeling about, kneeling or standing, with perfect accuracy and precision, not venturing to utter a sound.

But the king replied: "Let our general cease drilling and return to camp. As for us, we have no wish to come down and inspect the troops."

Thereupon Sun Tzu said calmly: "The king is only fond of words and cannot translate them into deeds."

After that the king of Wu saw that Sun Tzu was one who knew how to handle an army, and appointed him general. In the West Sun Tzu defeated the Ch'u State and forced his way into Ying, the capital; to the North he put fear into the States of Ch'i and Chin, and spread his fame abroad amongst the feudal princes. And Sun Tzu shared in the might of the kingdom.

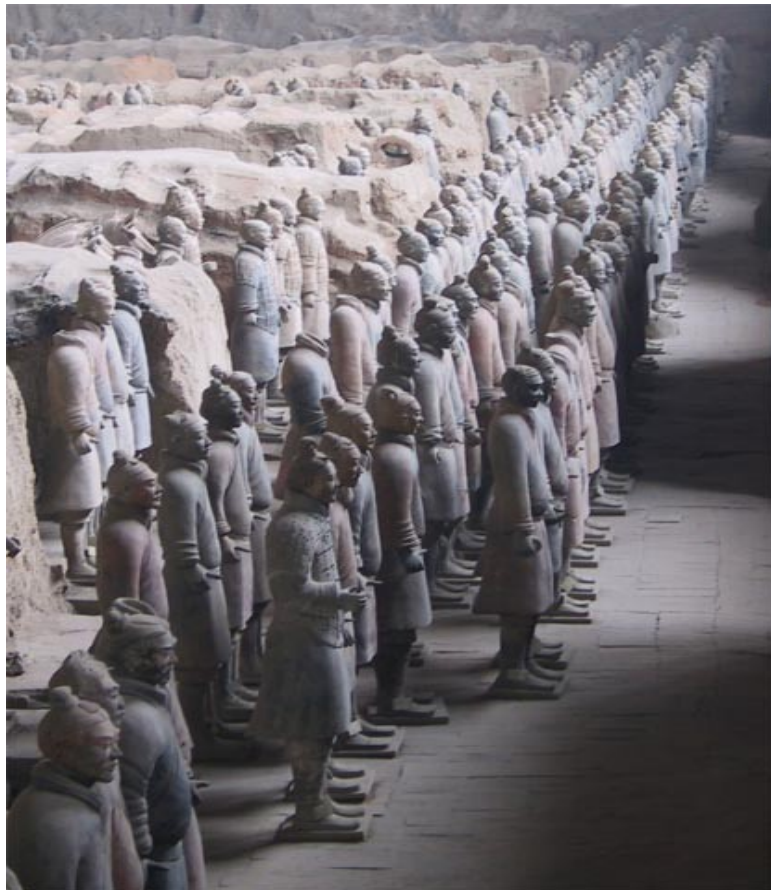
Sun Tzu became a general for the king of Wu in 512 BC. For almost two decades the armies of Wu were victorious over their hereditary enemies. After his death, in 473 BC the armies of Wu were defeated and the kingdom made extinct.

In 1782 the Art of War was translated into French by a Jesuit, Father Amiot. Legend says this book was the key to Napoleon's success.

In 1905 the Art of War was translated into English by P.F.Calthrop, the second on which the following excerpts are based were published in Shanghai and London in 1910. They were translated by Lionel Giles.

And so, on to these short excerpts. The 12th chapter, attack by fire, is I believe self explanatory, and thus little is said at all. However, the basis of this book can be understood in the following sentence:

***"The purpose of war is peace."***



### COMMENTS:

The following excerpts are taken from Sun Tzu's "Art of War". His expression of war is important to understand, and the reasons for the actual expression. Without getting into a theological debate on the subject, it is my opinion that to understand the following helps us Christians, especially those of us in the prayer in intercessory networks where "Spiritual Warfare" is often talked about.

It is also interesting to note that for us as Christians, our focus is of Christ reigning in total peace, following a war of course. And we do know that we are in a spiritual battle as such. In the 5th century BC, Sun Tzu wrote, "In peace prepare for war, in war prepare for peace. The art of war is of vital importance to the state. It is a matter of life and death. A road either to safety or ruin. Hence it is a subject of inquiry which can on no account be neglected..."

This statement is true, and thus the CIA, FBI, KGB, Interpole, etc., all are set up and all spy rings set into motion SO AS TO AVOID WAR.

Sun Tzu wrote at the end of the book, "Hence it is only the enlightened ruler and the wise general who will use the highest intelligence of the army for purposes of spying, and thereby they achieve great results. Spies are a most important element in war because upon them depends an army's ability to move."

And so in our own lives, we seek the biblical prophetic world-view, seeking not to know the day and the hour, but to be enlightened as to what the Lord is doing and to keep up the good fight of faith.

"The supreme act of war is to subdue the enemy **without fighting** ..." This saying is the epitome of war.

And so ever onward to excerpts from the book, Sun Tzu "*The Art of War*"

(Comments from a booklet entitled "*Tips For the Spiritual Warrior*" by Ron Kernahan, [www.xodigo.com](http://www.xodigo.com))



## CHAPTER ONE EXCERPTS - "LAYING PLANS"

The art of war is vital.

5 constants to weigh in ones deliberations:

a) Moral Law b) Heaven (weather) c) Earth (terrain) d) Command(er) e) Method and discipline

Continue to compare the military conditions.

Be able to go over and above ordinary rules in planning.

Be able to modify ones plans.

All warfare is based on deception. (Don't tell anyone the plans.)

[The summary is simple: Sun Tzu suggested that war must be fought:

a) in the shortest possible time;

b) at the least possible cost in lives and effort;

c) with infliction on the enemy of the fewest possible casualties.]

## CHAPTER TWO EXCERPTS - "WAGING WAR"

War is expensive.

Be swift - never prolong war.

Proximity of the army determines the cost.

If prices go up, the poor lose.

Therefore, use the enemies resources.

Victory is the main object of war. If war is long delayed, weapons are blunted and morale depressed... there has never been a protracted war from which a country has benefited.

## CHAPTER THREE EXCERPTS - "ATTACK BY STRATAGEM"

To capture is better than destruction - take the country whole and intact.

To win without fighting and to break the enemies resistance without the shedding of blood is excellence.

The most brilliant scheme is to:

a) balk the enemies plans (need spies.) b) isolate him from his allies c) attack in the field

the worst is to besiege walled cities (leads to a prolonged war).

The skillful leader subdues without fighting; captures cities without sieges; overthrows without lengthy campaigns.

WITHOUT LOSING A MAN HE TRIUMPH'S - THIS IS STRATEGY

10-1, surround; 5-1, attack; 2-1, divide and attack (front and rear)

If equal we can offer battle. If inferior, avoid the enemy. If unequal, run.

Rulers can destroy the army if they HOBBLE, or try to rule by governmental ways or by indiscriminate use of officers.

Know when to fight and when not to fight.

The army must be animated by the same spirit throughout (united we stand, divided – fall).

Recognize and know how to handle both superior and inferior forces.

Be prepared at all times.

Don't be interfered with by the sovereign.

Know yourself and know the enemy.

#### CHAPTER FOUR EXCERPTS - "TACTICAL DISPOSITIONS"

Be beyond defeat.

One may know how to conquer without being able to do it (knowledge must be coupled with wisdom).

SECURITY against defeat is DEFENSIVE TACTICS; ability to defeat means OFFENSIVE TACTICS.

Be skilled in defense to hide - be skilled in offense to attack and flash forth.

A clever fighter not only wins but excels at winning with ease.

He wins battles by making no mistakes.

Seek battle **after** victory.

Get the power of knowledge to control success.

#### CHAPTER FIVE EXCERPTS - "ENERGY"

In general, control of a large force is the same as a few; it is merely a question of dividing up their numbers (managing and organization).

Using a large army requires better, sophisticated communications.

Keep the army unshaken while under attack by direct and indirect methods.

Know the science of weak points and strong.

Indirect tactics must be steadily developed.

Indirect tactics are inexhaustible.

By combining direct and indirect tactics we find an inexhaustible number of manoeuvres.

ONSET - terrible; DECISION - swift.

Simulated disorder postulates perfect discipline; simulated weakness postulates strength.

Thus, keep the enemy on the move with deceitful appearances.

Use combined energy. Do not require too much from individuals.

Combined energy makes fighting men into rolling stones.

The chief lesson is RAPID EVOLUTIONS and SUDDEN RUSHES.

## CHAPTER SIX EXCERPTS - **“WEAK POINTS AND STRONG”**

Whoever is first in the field is strong.

Therefore, the clever combatant imposes his will on the enemy.

By holding out baits we can cause the enemy to approach - inflict damage and the enemy cannot approach.

If the enemy rests, harass him; if he has food, starve him out.

Be swiftly on the move to places you are least expected.

An army can march great distances if there is no enemy in the territory.

You can be assured of victory if you attack undefended places.

SUBTLETY and SECRECY.

You may advance and be irresistible if you head for the enemies weak points.

If you want one part of the enemy to fight, attack some other place and he will be obliged to relieve.

If you do not want to fight, throw something odd and unaccountable in his way.

Discover the enemies dispositions but remain invisible.

Be a single united body and force the enemy to split.

The spot we intend to fight on must not be made known - the enemy must prepare many spots.

If he sends reinforcements everywhere he will be weak everywhere.

Numerical weakness comes from preparing against possible attack; numerical strength from forcing the enemy to prepare against us.

Know the place and time to fight and call all the army in - ESPECIALLY concentrate on bringing the farthest away in FIRST.

Force the enemy to reveal himself and so find out his vulnerable points.

In making TACTICAL DISPOSITIONS - CONCEAL THEM.

Do not repeat tactics which have gained you one victory.

THE RULES OF STRATEGY ARE FEW AND SIMPLE. They may be learned in a week. But tactics leading up to victory are infinite.

In war, AVOID what is strong and attack what is weak!

He who can modify the tactics in relation to his opponent and thereby win, is a heaven-sent captain.

## CHAPTER SEVEN EXCERPTS - **“MANOEUVRING”**

The general receives his commands from the sovereign.

Having collected an army and concentrated his forces, he must blend all and harmonize.

Then comes the extreme difficulty of TACTICAL MANOEUVRING.

[Hannibal and Napoleon, two thousand years apart, crossed the Alps in the brilliant speed of a tactical manoeuvre and both won great victory.]

Manoeuvring with an army is advantageous, with an undisciplined mob, disastrous.

If you send a fully equipped army to snatch a single advantage, the chance is you will be too late.

To push the men in forced marches will suffer loss.

[Stonewall Jackson said, "The hardships of forced marches are often greater than that of battle."]

Do not march an army through strange, unknown country.

Use local guides.

Move only if there is real advantage to be gained.

He who learns the ART OF DEVIATION knows the art of MANOEUVRING.

IN A SINGLE, united body, brave men cannot advance alone - weak cannot retreat alone.

Let there be proper communications set up. (Flags, drums, etc.)

A soldier's spirit is keenest in the A.M. Avoid the enemy when it's spirit is keen.

Be disciplined and calm.

Be near the goal when the enemy is away; be fed when he is hungry; be waiting when he is rushing.

Do not advance uphill in the face of an enemy or oppose him when he comes down.

Do not pursue an enemy simulating flight: do not fight an angry army.

Do not interfere with an army returning home or press a desperate foe too hard.

When you surround an army, leave an outlet free.

## CHAPTER EIGHT EXCERPTS - **"VARIATIONS OF TACTICS"**

In war, the general receives his commands, collects the army and concentrates his forces.

In difficult country, do not encamp. Sometimes unite with allies, ....

There are roads which must not be followed, army's which must not be attacked, .....

Understand the advantages of variations of tactics.

hence, the wise leader considers advantages and disadvantages and blends the two.

Let the unknown and undetermined be factored into our calculations. BE FLEXIBLE.

If we are in the midst of difficulties - always be ready to seize an advantage.

Do not rely on the enemy not coming but rather on our own ability to receive him.

Five faults attributed directly to the general:

a) Recklessness, which leads to destruction; b) Cowardice c) A hasty temper, which can be provoked by insults d) Pride e) Over-solicitude for his men.

## CHAPTER NINE EXCERPTS - **"THE ARMY ON THE MARCH"**

Pass quickly over mountains, keep in the neighbourhood of valleys.

Camp in high places facing the sun. After crossing a river get far away from it.

All army's should prefer high ground and sunny places.

If you are careful and camp on hard ground and thus keep the army healthy, you are on the road to victory.

Always take the sunny side of the hill.

If there are places we must shun, force the enemy to approach them.

When the enemy is close at hand and quiet, he is relying on the NATURAL STRENGTH of his position.

Humble words and increased preparations are signs of eminent attack. Boasting and violent language are symbolic of retreat.

When those sent to draw water drink themselves, the army is suffering from thirst.

THE SIGNS OF THE ARMY. (Birds rising, dust, etc.)

He who exercises no forethought but makes light of his opponents is sure to be captured by them.

If soldiers are punished before they have grown attached to you, they will not prove submissive; and unless submissive, they will be practically useless. If when the soldiers have become attached to you, punishments are not enforced, they will still be useless.

Therefore soldiers must be treated in the first instance with humanity, but kept under control by means of iron discipline.

If in training soldiers commands are habitually enforced, the army will be well-disciplined; if not, its discipline will be bad.

If a general shows confidence in his men but always insists on his orders being obeyed, the gain will be mutual.

## CHAPTER TEN EXCERPTS - **"TERRAIN"**

Six kinds of terrain.

a) Accessible ground (The secret of war lies in the communications. Leave free and accessible ground for supply lines.);

b) Entangling ground; c) Temporizing ground (neither side will gain by making the first move.); d) Narrow passes;

e) Precipitous heights; f) Positions at a great distance from the enemy. (If you are situated a long way from the enemy and the army is of equal strength, to fight will be disadvantageous.)

Six calamities from the GENERAL.

a) Flight; b) Insubordination; c) Collapse; d) Ruin; e) Disorganization; f) Rout.

Six WAYS of COURTING defeat.

a) Neglect to estimate the enemy's strength; b) Want of authority; c) Defective training; d) Unjustifiable anger; e) Non-observance of discipline; f) Failure to use picked men.

Regard soldiers as your own children and they will follow you anywhere.

If you are indulgent, but unable to make your authority felt; kind-hearted, but unable to enforce your commands; and incapable of quelling disorder: then you have spoilt children; the army is useless for any practical purpose.

Know the enemy and yourself AND heaven and earth - then the victory will be complete.

## CHAPTER ELEVEN EXCERPTS - **"THE NINE SITUATIONS"**

Nine varieties of ground:

a) Dispersive ground; b) Facile ground; c) Contentious ground; d) Open ground; e) Ground of intersecting highways;

f) Serious ground; g) Difficult ground; h) Hemmed-in ground; i) Desperate ground.

RAPIDITY is the essence of war.

The FURTHER YOU PENETRATE into hostile country the greater the SOLIDARITY and thus the defenders will never prevail.

Carefully study the well-being of the men. Do not over-work them.

Soldiers when in desperate straits lose the sense of fear.

Let all superstitions be strictly forbidden.

Thus, do not TAKE AWAY the army's vehicles so they will be forced to stay with you; but rather have them love and fight ON INSTINCT and they will not leave you.

To manage an army is to set up one standard of courage which all must reach.

To manage both strong and weak is to use PROPER GROUND. (Position the weak where great strength is not needed and they will gain confidence and grow.)

Thus, lead the army as if it were one man, willy-nilly by the hand.

The business of the general is to be quiet, secret, upright and just, and to mystify officers and men alike with 'brilliant' reports.

By altering arrangements and plans, he keeps the enemy mystified.

No one knows where he is going.

To muster his army and bring it into danger - this is the business of the general.

THE RULE IS: GO DEEP INTO ENEMY GROUND - GO all the way or facial ground occurs.

A soldier will fight hard when desperate.

Confront your soldiers with the deed, not the design.

Place the army in deadly peril and it will survive.

Victory is all that matters, not the laws to victory.

## CHAPTER TWELVE EXCERPTS - "THE ATTACK BY FIRE"

The intelligent use fire.

Fire cannot always be used but equipment for setting fires must always be on hand. (Be prepared for everything.)

Enlightened rulers deliberate about plans, and good generals execute them.

If you cannot succeed, do not use troops. If you are not in danger, do not fight.

A leader cannot raise an army because he is enraged, nor can a general fight if he is resentful. An angered man may again be happy, and a resentful man again be pleased, but a state that has perished cannot be restored, nor can the dead be brought back to life.

## CHAPTER THIRTEEN EXCERPTS - "THE USE OF SPIES"

To remain in ignorance of the enemies condition simply because one grudges the outlay of a hundred ounces of gold IS THE HEIGHT OF INHUMANITY.

Take the most intelligent of the army and make them spies.

Five types of spies include:

a) Local spies; b) Inward spies; c) Converted spies; d) Doomed spies; e) Surviving spies.

Spies are a most important element of war for upon them depends the army's ability to move.

(These notes are compiled by [Ron Kernahan](#) from several of the translations of Sun Tzu's works and are subject to the © copyright laws of the publishers. Special acknowledgment is given to the Oxford University Press for their 1963 addition.)