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Since January 1996

I read a fascinating article in my local newspaper about the activities of the 23rd Headquarters Special Troops during World War II. A classified secret for decades after the war, the Ghost Army as it was nicknamed will be receiving more recognition after an eight-year effort to document their tactics and effectiveness comes to fruition with the film's release on PBS due in May 2013, likely just prior to the release of this newsletter. Without giving away too much, the Ghost Army used inflatable replicas of tanks and artillery along with sound effects and fake radio broadcasts to fool the Germans into believing that US troops had established themselves in certain areas. Whenever the inflatables – or we could call them “drones” – were bombed, the Ghost Army would (simply) patch them up and move them along for the next mission.

In the April 1, 2013 issue of CIO magazine, the “From The CEO” editorial highlights how the use of drones are changing the battlefield: drones are more effective and cheaper to build and fly. We may expect to see logistics companies like FedEx and UPS using drone aircraft to move cargo according to MIT associate professor of aeronautics and astronautics Missy Cummings.

All of this got me thinking about how I use drone software in my professional life as a university instructor and consultant:

[a] I teach my university students to create prototype web sites using PowerPoint, complete with functioning hyperlinks that navigate across the slides and to external links. As part of their business development projects, the students get first-hand experience in designing the look-and-feel for their business web sites.

[b] Aside from using Microsoft Access to develop custom applications for my clients, I also use Access to quickly prototype (large-scale) database designs and as a report writing engine when connected to other databases. As a database designer, I can identify all tables and data field attributes, table keys, and create table relationship diagrams. As a reporting engine the user-friendly features make creating a nice reporting system a relative breeze even if it takes a programmer's flair to craft some creative queries to parse the data with just the right touch. Sometimes the Access database lives on as the report writing engine and other times it is just a great way to start when the reporting requirements are unknown or the data analysis is in its earliest stages.

Too often the simple solutions are overlooked in lieu of the more complex: A great example is a favorite success story of mine which was documented by the software company whose product I used to solve a six-figure problem which you can read at <http://www.katzscan.com/KatzscanBackTrack.pdf>.

Simplifying design and data analysis steps can shave time, costs, and frustrations from software projects. Who would have thought that the US Army could fool a sophisticated enemy by using scantily camouflaged inflatable drones? In the battle against project excesses, sending in the software drones is a tactic that should be strongly considered as part of the overall strategy.

Thank you.

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