

June 22, 1959

Dr. John Wheeler
Palmer Physics Laboratory
Princeton University
Princeton, N.J.

Dear Dr. Wheeler:

This is really a followup to my letter of September 18, 1958. I have had no acknowledgment of this, and hope this just means that there was nothing much to rejoin with rather than that the letter went astray.

I brought up the question there of the importance of tools of limited, as well as of ultimate, warfare. I also suggested that (from my own poor vantage point) ~~that~~ it seemed as if a disproportionately small amount of 'advanced project thinking' was going into these, and e.g., into the general question of automation of infantry functions.

I may have been partly wrong, judging from recent publicity on 'the ground cushion phenomenon', which obviously supplies something of the needed machinery for transport. But there is also some garbled testimony (see enclosure) by General Britton that I hope is either irrelevant to, or even a smokescreen for, what is really being thought about. In any case, I hope to bring this to your attention to help assure that you and your colleagues are pressing for a fundamental consideration of the actual functions of 'that final man on the ground' and the extent to which he can be replaced or amplified by automata. General Britton's statement does not sound very convincing to a layman in his field.

The 'motor' end of this device doesn't ~~have~~ to present any very serious problems; perhaps the sensory ~~mechanism~~ side does, and you have to do some thinking about refined systems of IFF. Optimally, this has to ~~also~~ discriminate four targets, friend, foe, neutral and surrendered-foe; in many situations, you might settle for the first two.

You will not want to give me any followup on this, but I hope you can tell me enough that the problem is being given adequate review somewhere.

Yours sincerely,


Joshua Lederberg