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Foreword

C. J. Dick's two-volume study is a comparative critique of the differing approaches employed by the Allied powers as they conducted military operations in western and eastern Europe against the Wehrmacht of Hitler's Germany during the summer of 1944. Its uniqueness rests in its comparative nature. Rather than detailing the course of military operations, emphasizing battles and leaders as so many previous books have done, Dick analyzes and compares Allied approaches to conducting war strategically and, more importantly, operationally. As he states in his introduction, "My purpose is to put forward broad arguments about the conduct of war at the operational level—the handling of armies and army groups by both the Western Allies and the Red Army in contemporaneous campaigns." This he accomplishes objectively, sometimes caustically, but always thoroughly, with the "jeweler's eye" of a professional army officer and a skilled student of military history and with the analytical tools of an accomplished military theorist.

Dick's background has uniquely equipped him to do what other military historians have been unable to achieve. His experiences as an airborne and later intelligence officer in the British army, as an accomplished teacher of military history, and as the organizer of countless staff rides to the battlefields of Europe in the service of the British army and NATO's Allied Rapid Reaction Corps provided him with fresh perspectives regarding Allied operations in France during the last two years of the war. Likewise, as a member and then director of the renowned Soviet (later Conflict) Studies Research Centre during and after the Cold War, he possesses keen insights into how and why the Red (Soviet) Army prepared for and conducted war as it did. Accordingly, this two-volume study exploits these experiences in support of its distinctive comparative approach.

Titled *From Victory to Stalemate*, the first volume of this study focuses on why and how the Western Allies—specifically, the United States, Great Britain, and Canada—conducted military operations in France from July through September 1944. Although Dick touches on the difficult task of forming and managing a strategic coalition, his emphasis here is on how the imperatives of coalition warfare affected the nature of subsequent operations or, more specifically, impeded the development of so-called operational art—that is, the ability to perform sequential operational tasks necessary for the timely

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achievement of strategic aims. Thus, as this volume points out, “victory” in the breakout from Normandy in August 1944 ended with “stalemate” in the fall of 1944.

The chapters in volume 1 unfold chronologically, from the prelude of the dramatic but costly establishment of the Normandy lodgment, through the painstaking fighting in the hedgerows around St. Lô, the euphoric breakout eastward in Operation Cobra, and the frustrated hopes of the dash to Paris, and, ultimately, to the burgeoning stalemate on the approaches to the Rhine in late September. In the end, Dick ponders what all this meant, especially the impact of coalition warfare (as well as national military traditions) on the strategies and operational concepts employed and their positive or deleterious effects on the ability of coalition armies to operate effectively enough to achieve their strategic aims. He understands the truth in this statement: “Tactics makes the steps from which operational leaps are assembled; strategy points out the path.” This volume serves as a warning and an exercise in the management of expectations for those countries and their leaders contemplating the conduct of coalition warfare in the future.

David M. Glantz
Carlisle, PA



Acknowledgments

I found writing this book much more difficult than I had expected when I blithely embarked upon the project. There were many times when I stared glumly at my computer, bereft of ideas, or gazed at the little birds industriously building their nests in my garden fence and wished I too could be out in the sun, indeed, anywhere except at my desk. That the project came to fruition is due in significant part to my beloved wife, Heather. She tolerated my spells of irritability or abstraction, demonstrating extraordinary forbearance in the face of periodic neglect. She encouraged me when I seemed despondent and disinclined to work, offering helpful suggestions to make some passages read more mellifluously. But her finest hour came with the proofreading. Her patience, attention to detail, and constructive ideas have combined to make this study more readable and accurate than it would have been if it had been left to me.

The ideas and opinions contained in this work owe much to my reading but more to innumerable discussions over the course of staff rides and battlefield tours, in the wake of lectures, or over a glass of wine or beer. I cannot begin to list all those who, during thirty or so years of study, made a contribution. I can, however, single out for special thanks the five people who read my drafts, made suggestions, and gave me insights. I worked with and came to know each of them when I was with the Soviet (later, Conflict) Studies Research Centre. All are deeply knowledgeable about military history and, critical for my purposes, about the central theme of my study—operational art. Four were soldiers who thought deeply about their profession and spent much of their careers, whether during their military service or after, educating officers in staff colleges and through their writings. In Britain, they are Major Generals Mungo Melvin and John Sutherell. In the United States, they are Colonels David Glantz and Les Grau, both soldiers turned academics. My lone civilian, Professor Jake Kipp, has spent a distinguished career in academe, much of it with David and Les, studying and writing about the same themes. I owe David a double debt. He provided me with indispensable material from his unparalleled collection of Soviet articles and General Staff documents.

Of course, writing a book is but one stage in a journey. It has to be published. I am grateful to Michael Briggs, the editor in chief at the University

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Press of Kansas, for his encouragement and advice to expedite this process. My colleague and friend from Soviet Studies days, Anne Aldis, made an invaluable contribution. She edited my work with helpful suggestions about content and structure, an uncanny eye for the details of punctuation and grammar, and proposals for improving infelicitous phrasing. Much more computer literate than I, she organized it into the format required by the publisher and sorted out the endnotes and bibliography. I have Russell Chalusian to thank for putting his skills as a draughtsman to work to convert my original colored maps with neat but illegible writing into monochrome versions that are easy to read and understand.

My thanks to you all.



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Abbreviations, Acronyms, and Selected Foreign Words

ACM	Air Chief Marshal
AEAF	Allied Expeditionary Air Forces
AEF	Allied Expeditionary Forces
AFV	armored fighting vehicle
AGF	Army Ground Forces
AGRA	Army Group, Royal Artillery
ANXF	Allied Naval Expeditionary Forces
APCa	armored personnel carrier
APDS	armor piercing discarding sabot, a type of ammunition
AVM	Air Vice Marshal
AVRE	engineer tank
BAR	Browning automatic rifle
BEF	British Expeditionary Force
BG	battle group
<i>bocage</i>	hedgerow country
CAO	Canadian Army Overseas
CCA	Combat Command A
CCB	Combat Command B
CCR	Combat Command R
CCS	Combined Chiefs of Staff
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency (US)
CIGS	Chief of the Imperial General Staff
C-in-C	commander in chief
COMZ	communications zone
DZ	drop zone
ETO	European theatre of operations
FFI	Forces Françaises de l'Intérieur (French Interior Forces)
<i>flakkampfgruppen</i>	antitank groups
FM	Field Manual
FOO	forward observation officer
FUSAG	First US Army Group
G2	Staff Branch, Intelligence

xiv Abbreviations, Acronyms, and Selected Foreign Words

G3	Staff Branch, Operations
GHQ	General Headquarters
GOC	General Officer Commanding
GSO	General Staff officer
HE	high explosive
HQ	headquarters
JCS	Joint Chiefs of Staff
KG	<i>Kampfgruppe</i> (battle group)
KSLI	King's Shropshire Light Infantry (British)
LD	line of departure
LMG	light machine gun
LST	landing ships tank
LZ	landing zone
MV	medium velocity
NCO	noncommissioned officer
NPAM	Non-Permanent Active Militia (Canadian)
OKW	Oberkommando der Wehrmacht (German High Command)
ORBAT	order of battle
ORS	Operational Research Section
OSS	Office of Strategic Services (US)
PAM	Permanent Active Militia (Canadian)
<i>panzerschreck</i>	manpack 88mm antitank rocket launcher
POL	petrol, oil, and lubricants
RAF	Royal Air Force (British)
RMA	rear maintenance area
SAS	Special Air Service (British)
SF	Special Forces
SHAEF	Supreme Headquarters, Allied Expeditionary Forces
SIGINT	signals intelligence
SMG	submachine gun
SOE	Special Operations Executive
SP	self-propelled
SSV	soft-skinned vehicle
TA	Territorial Army (British)
TAC	Tactical Air Command
TAF	Tactical Air Force
TO&E	table of organization and equipment
TOT	time on target
USAAF	United States Army Air Force
USSTAF	United States Strategic Air Forces in Europe
V	long-range (weapon)
VE	victory in Europe

Introduction

The purpose of this book, which has been divided into two volumes, is to study the practical application of military theory in the most testing of circumstances—fighting the German army in the summer of 1944. It is not, in other words, a straightforward military history, a descriptive account of operations. There are already more than enough narrative histories of the campaign and plenty of studies evoking the horror and pity of war. My purpose is to put forward broad arguments about the conduct of war at the operational level—the handling of armies and army groups by both the Western Allies and the Red Army in contemporaneous campaigns.

The genesis of this work lay in the battlefield tours and staff rides I used to conduct, or contribute to, for the British Army and NATO's Allied Rapid Reaction Corps.¹ These were not military tourism or evocations of past glories but serious didactic exercises aimed at improving the professional education of the participating officers. Not infrequently, at the conclusion of these exercises, senior officers would remark that I had offered interpretations and drawn lessons they had not previously encountered. They also found comparisons between Western and contemporaneous operations on the Russo-German front to be illuminating. Several suggested that I write up these accounts and lessons drawn from them for wider dissemination. This is the origin and primary purpose of my book: through the lens of military history, to broaden Western military officers' perspectives on the conduct of conventional war, together with that of serious scholars of the subject. In fact, I conceive this study as, in essence, a written staff ride of great scope. I follow the same methodology: setting out the operational-strategic context, examining the situation at the start of each operation as perceived by the commanders tasked with its execution, outlining their plans, discussing developments at key points during the evolution of the operation and decisions made in consequence, and evaluating the results and assessing the generalship involved.²

This is therefore an analytical study of the choices, compromises, and judgments made by the senior commanders. It is, I hope and believe, exacting but not carping when venturing evaluations. The vast majority of the opinions that follow were informed by discussions that took place on staff rides. Most of them represent consensual views; a few are mine alone. Some of the latter, particularly those involving Generals Montgomery, Bradley, and

2 Introduction

Eisenhower, at first surprised, intrigued, or even shocked some British and American officers. That is one of the functions of the staff ride: to stimulate thought, discussion, and argument and to challenge received wisdom. This, in turn, encourages the replacement of stereotypical by original thinking when former students face their own, seemingly intractable problems in future wars.

While the primary audience for this investigation is military, I believe those concerned with shaping government policy can also profit from it. In an age when few policy makers have military experience, especially at senior levels, there is a pervasive superficiality of understanding about what armies can and cannot be expected to accomplish, especially at short notice, in unfamiliar operating environments, and against an imperfectly understood enemy. Similarly, many overestimate what can be provided by military intelligence and underestimate the difficulties, frustrations, and, consequently, the disappointing combat capabilities of coalitions and alliances. These and other problems in contemporary as well as past war fighting are illuminated in the pages that follow; they combine to make war an often unreliable and unpredictable instrument of policy that can lead to unforeseen and unwelcome outcomes. I would be delighted if these volumes, which emphasize the uncertainties of using military force as much as its utility, induced a degree of caution among those charged with deciding on its use.

I believe this is the first comparative analysis of synchronous campaigns in the west and the east during World War II to be published. That in itself enhances its educational value. My staff ride participants found the Soviets' different approach to operational problems not only interesting but also, in some cases, potentially applicable to their own, albeit very different, armies. Examples include concepts such as the forward detachment and the meeting engagement and the approach required to succeed therein.³ In adopting my methodology, I made every effort to avoid the accusation of comparing apples and oranges. To this end, I carefully selected the operations studied, and I point out the differences as well as the similarities between the western and eastern fronts. My study is largely confined to the high summer of 1944, when both the Western Allies and the Soviets possessed the strategic initiative and disposed of forces capable of mounting strategic offensives against the same, weakening foe. Within that period, I concentrate principally on those operations characterized largely by maneuver, for it is in the conduct of operational maneuver that creative generalship is revealed; attritional methods, however unavoidable on occasion, are its antithesis.

The study has been divided into two volumes; the first and more detailed, as it is aimed primarily at a Western readership, deals with American, British, and Canadian operations in France and the Low Countries. Its title, *From Victory to Stalemate*, reflects the great, though flawed, achievement

in Normandy that severely but not fatally damaged a German army group, and the Allies' subsequent failure to convert operational into strategically decisive success. (One might argue that, whatever the inflated hopes or expectations at the time, the Allies could not have delivered a coup de grâce to the Nazi regime that summer. But I contend that, before culminating for logistic reasons, they could have inflicted more damage on the enemy and seized major bridgeheads over the Rhine to launch the final campaign from a favorable line of departure.) Volume 2 deals with the contemporaneous major Soviet offensives. Called *From Defeat to Victory*, it briefly recounts, as essential background, how the Red Army clawed back from the catastrophes of 1941–1942 and survived through 1943, the year of contested strategic initiative. It then concentrates on three successive strategic offensive operations from late June to September 1944 that effectively annihilated three different army groups. Each ended with the Soviets advantageously placed—for example, with bridgeheads over major rivers—to resume the offensive when the effects of operational exhaustion had been overcome. The penultimate chapter of volume 2 looks at the interaction of the western and eastern fronts, compares and contrasts the conduct of operations in the west and the east, and draws conclusions about the different ways the Allied and Soviet militaries approached the problems of campaigning against a formidable enemy. The short, concluding chapter offers some reflections about recent and contemporary American and British approaches to the difficulties of waging war.

My aim is analytical. For that reason, the summaries of operations are restricted in length, giving only enough information to provide a basis for argument and assessment. Accordingly, they are dry but, I hope, for the most part, mercifully short; some, however, are not as short as I would have liked, as there is often a great deal of devil in the detail. Just as chronicling events is a minor part of this work, so too is deconstruction of strategic decisions and, even more so, analysis of tactical methods and their results. Both aspects of military activity necessarily figure to an extent, but only insofar as they bear on my main area of concern—operational art and generalship, the conduct of operations at theatre, army group, and army levels. In order to pass judgment on the soundness or otherwise of commanders' decisions and actions, it is necessary to establish criteria by which all are evaluated. Therefore, I establish a conceptual basis for discussion in chapter 1 of volume 1. The theory of the realms and concerns of strategy, operational art, and tactics and the interaction among them are outlined, along with commonly accepted principles of war and the attributes of senior commanders generally considered prerequisites for success. However, it is not always possible for armies to provide that which is theoretically desirable. Brief résumés of the education, training, and careers of the seven top Allied field commanders in the west in the summer of 1944 show how varied was their preparation for the

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challenges they faced in Normandy and beyond. Moreover, the armies they led were products of historically derived concepts and practices—all armies are prisoners of their own experience—not all of which proved well suited to the campaigns they would have to fight. These too are briefly described, for all judgments on generalship must take into account the capabilities and limitations of the instruments the generals commanded.

My purpose in the rest of volume 1 is to cast light on the practice of operational art by American, British, and Canadian generals in the European theatre of operations (ETO) in the critical summer campaign of 1944.⁴ This project runs into an immediate conceptual obstacle. Although operational art was a concept born in the Red Army of the 1920s and was (after vicissitudes) entrenched there by 1944, it was unfamiliar in Anglo-American thinking until about forty years later.⁵ It would be unreasonable to criticize generals for not doing what they had not been taught. They did, however, subscribe to the principles of war discussed in chapter 1. These principles had been set out in the British *Field Service Regulations* of 1935 and parts of Military Training Pamphlet No. 23 (*Operations*) of 1942 and the American *Field Manual 100-5* of 1941 and 1944. They formed the basis of the doctrine that Allied generals had been taught and presumably were expected to implement in 1944. Indeed, this doctrine could more accurately be described as principles of operational art, being devoid of political content and concerned purely with the business of how to fight, including at a higher formation level. Admittedly, for the historical reasons outlined in chapter 1, these principles had been developed with far less rigor and detail than was the case in the Red Army (the evolution of the latter's concepts is outlined in volume 2). The Allies had also had four years to observe—and, in the British case, had been at the receiving end of—the Wehrmacht's methods on the offensive. These methods, like the Soviets', were based on an understanding of the operational level of war. Finally, the British and, to a lesser extent, the Americans had their own experience of waging contemporary, mechanized warfare. However, as chapter 1 describes, the Allies faced an uphill task that was far greater than simply modernizing their military theory and moving past small-wars thinking or the linear, attritional methods of the First World War. They had to grow their small armies into large ones, with all the attendant difficulties of finding, educating, and training a vastly expanded officer corps, including at senior levels. As chapters 3 to 7 of volume 1 make clear, the learning curves of the Allied generals were varied. It took some time before most ceased to rely on superior combat power to grind the enemy down and began to exploit their superior potential for operational maneuver; one or two generals largely failed to make the transition.

This study of the northwest European campaign of 1944 is limited to only a short period within it. I do not dwell on the seven weeks of essentially

attritional struggle during which the Allies built up their combat power and decisively tilted the balance of forces in their favor. However, chapter 2 is largely devoted to a description of the state of armies on the opposing sides in the west on the eve of Operation Cobra, the American breakthrough toward the end of July. To understand the swift development of operations that followed the breakout, it is necessary to understand the correlation of forces that opened up the possibility of decisive operations and the strengths and weaknesses of the protagonists. This is explored in some detail, not only with regard to the quality and quantity of materiel and personnel but also, and every bit as important, in terms of logistic flexibility and sustainability, command and control, and intelligence gathering. The aim here is to counter the misperceptions and even myths that have distorted an understanding of the relative capabilities of the two sides and thus skewed interpretations of events.

My analysis of Allied operational art and command starts in chapter 3 with Cobra. This operation, aided by a British supporting attack, rapidly and seamlessly developed into a war of movement. Chapter 3 examines this breaking of the quasi-stalemate. Of course, the German defense had reached its culminating point, most importantly in the sphere of logistic sustainability, by the time Cobra struck and split the front wide open. This was, of course, the result not of an event but of a process whereby the defender grew weaker as attrition took its steady toll and air interdiction deprived the Germans of even minimum requirements of ammunition and fuel. Meanwhile, the Allies grew stronger as replacements and reinforcements poured into Normandy. It would be difficult to maintain, however, that the Allied breakthrough could not have been achieved prior to a tipping point in the last week of July. Certainly, both the American and the British armies needed to attain suitable lines of departure (in the former case, south of the Cotentin wetlands; in the latter, over the Orne and south of Caen) in order to develop an offensive with decisive aims. But could they not have accomplished this earlier, as the scales were tipping? I examine the evolution of the concepts and methods that more fully exploited American strengths and increased their operational effectiveness. The British, still largely wedded to linear, attritional methods, could not achieve comparable operational effect, although their supporting blow certainly contributed significantly to a marked deterioration of the German situation.

By early August, the means had been built up and the possibility created for operational maneuver to achieve decisive ends. Chapter 4 describes the exploitation of this opportunity. Thanks to their own initial success and potentially catastrophic German errors, the Allies were in a favorable position to achieve their stated aim of annihilating the enemy armies in Normandy and to do so, moreover, before their own looming logistic problems became

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intractable. This they failed to do completely because two successive encirclement operations were essentially improvised rather than planned and were then imperfectly conducted. Part of the problem lay at army level. Three of the four army commanders were, by education and experience, more tactically than operationally minded; they were happier when directing set-piece battles and relying on superior firepower than when conducting inherently less controllable operations that emphasized superior mobility to outmaneuver the enemy into a position where his destruction became certain. Alone among his peers, Lieutenant General Patton grasped both the parlous plight into which the German army had descended and the dividend that momentum, by retaining the initiative, would bring, while at the same time greatly reducing the apparent risk involved in his decisions. His boldness was not mirrored at the critical army group and theatre levels. There, caution combined with uncertain direction resulting from the essentially improvised nature of operations, exacerbated by intra-alliance rivalries and misunderstandings. The result was vacillation and compromise inimical to decisiveness in a rapidly changing, fluid situation. The Germans certainly suffered a major defeat, but within a month, the forces they had managed to extricate from disaster would play a significant role in restoring a precarious stability to the defense. Chapter 4 concludes with an analysis of Allied operational art and generalship that recognizes its achievements and deconstructs its weaknesses.

The crushing defeat inflicted on the Wehrmacht in August could (perhaps should) have been a prelude to decisive operations that would have ended the war in the west in 1944—an outcome senior German generals thought likely. Failing that, it should have placed the Allies in such an advantageous strategic position from which to resume a subsequent campaign that a coup de grâce could have been delivered earlier than the spring of 1945 and at less cost. Chapter 5 describes the Allied drive northeastward and eastward out of Normandy. The Supreme Headquarters, Allied Expeditionary Forces (SHAEF) preinvasion appreciation and, following from it, concept of operations are studied and contrasted with the unexpected situation facing the American and British army groups at the beginning of September. SHAEF plans were expeditiously adapted, and the Supreme Commander issued directives to his army groups for a general advance, with the aim of forcing the Rhine more or less simultaneously across the front. Immediately the commanders of those army groups, disliking his decisions, began to subvert his intent. I describe the development of British and American operations and the high-level compromises and fudges that were made to preserve the appearance of Allied unity as each pursued its own favored, and divergent, path to victory. In doing so, armies and army groups tended to follow a beggar-thy-neighbor approach to logistics, and both they and SHAEF shied

away from making the hard choices and decisions necessary to avoid premature culmination. In late September the Allies' offensives duly culminated, without having delivered a fatal blow or seized bridgeheads over, or even reaching, the Rhine. I conclude my study with the onset of autumn because by then, the front was quite evidently congealing. Once again, the Allies were reverting, like it or not, to an attritional struggle.

A former British theatre commander wrote:

The more I have seen of war the more I realize how it all depends on administration and transportation (. . . logistics). It takes little skill or imagination to see where you would like your army to be and when; it takes much knowledge and hard work to know where you can place your forces and whether you can maintain them there. A real knowledge of supply and movement factors must be the basis of every leader's plan; only then can he know how and when to take risks with those factors; and battles and wars are won only by taking risks.⁶

The most important reason for the Allies' culmination short of a strategic result was that they allowed their desires to override their knowledge of supply and movement factors, which led to mounting logistic problems. The careful calculations on which supply had been based were invalidated by unexpectedly sudden and all but complete success in Normandy and by the command decision to continue operations without the projected operational pause to build up stocks and improve infrastructure. Against minimal opposition, the armies advanced swiftly into the German depth, but it was obvious from the start of the exploitation that, within a very short period, the number of formations that could be sustained in action would shrink rapidly—to less than half in the US case. The logisticians improvised gamely, but their efforts were vitiated by SHAEF's failure to prioritize and to provide clear and consistent direction. These failings were compounded by a similar reluctance among senior commanders to accept that not all goals could be pursued simultaneously, and national and interarmy rivalries exacerbated the problem of overstretched supply lines. Chapter 6 demonstrates the inadequacy of operational level decision making in the campaign-determining sphere of logistics.

Chapters 5 and 6 outline the operational developments and parallel logistic deterioration of the late-summer campaign. Chapter 7 delves into the causes of its less than satisfactory outcome: the decisions of operational level commanders. At the beginning of September the Allies had almost everything going for them. The enemy was beaten and demoralized, forced into a purely reactive posture with force levels insufficient to react effectively. The Allies had total command of the air and vastly superior firepower and mobility on the ground. Their weakness lay in the sustainability of the force, and

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that was essentially calculable. As long as their commanders adopted objectives and operational plans that took adequate account of logistic constraints, they could be fairly certain of achieving their aims. For once, but only fleetingly, the enemy did not have a vote.

Various factors relating to command and control combined to rob the Allies of decisive results. One was the actual organization of command and the related issue of authority, particularly at theatre but also at army group levels. Another was a tendency to neglect the stated aim of the campaign—the destruction of the enemy—in favor of territorial gains, with disputes over where those gains would contribute most to victory. In pursuit of their divergent operational goals, the army group commanders acted in competition and did not hesitate to undermine or occasionally ignore their Supreme Commander's intent. Both Montgomery and Bradley showed much less loyalty and obedience to their superior than they demanded from their own juniors. Of course, such disagreements were partly the result of personality clashes—as Patton remarked, “all very successful commanders are prima donnas and must be so treated.”⁷ One of the more important responsibilities of senior commanders is the management and direction of capable but difficult subordinates, a challenge not always met by Eisenhower, Montgomery, and Bradley.

At least as important, however, were significant differences between the Americans and the British in operational doctrine and concepts. Mutual lack of understanding was aggravated by disagreements over the allocation of resources to tasks. These in turn were exacerbated by political considerations, both intra-alliance and domestic. Diverging aims prevented unity of effort, and the diffusion of effort in pursuit of multiple goals led to culmination short of everyone's objectives. Had there been more foresight and more objectivity at critical command levels, had the implementation of operational art been more uniformly effective, and, above all, had Eisenhower insisted on a consistent course of action and enforced compliance by his subordinates, greater success could have been achieved. I suggest some alternative decisions that sounder and more original operational thinking might have prompted, with beneficial results. Inevitably, the most important of these would have been made at the top. However, I recognize that the Supreme Allied Commander faced command problems that were essentially intractable. Probably no one could have done better. He deserves much more praise for his accomplishments, which were critical to the alliance, than censure for his failures.

Volume 2, *From Defeat to Victory*, deals principally with the summer campaign of 1944 on the eastern front and has its own introduction. Suffice it to say that my approach there is somewhat different. The campaign in the east was much larger in scope and scale. Consequently, I adopted a broader-brushed approach in recounting the progress of each operation. The nature of my analysis changes to an extent, becoming more mathematical. This is

due to the distinctive nature of much of the Soviet source material, which is, in important respects, dissimilar to the Anglo-American. The constant between the two volumes is a focus on operational art. In the last two chapters of volume 2, I draw conclusions about the conduct of war in the different theatres and offer some reflections on its relevance for the future.

The main emphasis in chapter 4 of volume 2 is to compare and contrast the campaigns in the two theatres. It begins, however, by considering the interaction between them. Of course, the very fact that Germany had to fight a war on two fronts (arbitrarily to lump the Allied European and Mediterranean theatres together) doomed it to defeat. That doom probably could have been accomplished earlier had the Allies and Soviets cooperated more closely to achieve synergistic effect. In fact, they were as much mistrustful rivals, especially on the Soviet side, as they were partners, and practical teamwork was largely absent. Unfortunately for the Western Allies, their relationship too became increasingly antipathetic, not regarding ends but increasingly with respect to means. Strategic and operational decisions became a source of discord, prevarication, and compromise that weakened the alliance's effectiveness. Unconstrained by allies, the Soviets' decision making was simpler and more effective.

The other issues examined in the chapter relate to the conduct of operations. While the Allies achieved strategic surprise as to the Normandy location and subsequent main effort of the invasion, the Red Army made a greater effort, to greater critical effect, to practice operational-level deception and thus achieve surprise. It could also be argued that the Allies, with complete command of the air and, above all, Ultra, enjoyed better operational intelligence but exploited it less forcefully. This was partly the result of an approach to operational art that essentially saw it as merely tactics writ large—grand tactics, in British parlance. Western armies, especially the Anglo-Canadian, were inclined to focus on tactical problems to take ground of tactical significance, while minimizing casualty levels and maintaining tight control of the battle to avoid confusion. Such preoccupations tended to make commanders think small; they executed rigidly timetabled, deliberate, and consequently slow attacks to achieve limited objectives. Soviet operational ideas tended to be on a larger scale and were thought through to the desired end state. For the Soviets, destruction of the enemy was generally the main object, with the seizure of ground an important by-product. The Red Army prized tempo as a key component of success. It was seen as a force multiplier, forcing the enemy onto the back foot and keeping him there while destroying the cohesion of his formations and his ability to control them. Deliberation and caution were the antithesis of rapidity. To achieve momentum, the Soviets were prepared to accept heavy initial casualties, risk, and a degree of chaos as its price.

10 Introduction

These differences in approach explain the contrasting development of operations in the west and east. Both the Allies and the Soviets evolved quite similar methods to penetrate the Germans' prepared positional defenses. The big difference was in exploiting a breakthrough. The Allies tended to create only small reserves for the conduct of exploitation and, moreover, to proceed with caution into the enemy's rear area; only Patton showed any real enthusiasm and flair for deep and rapid thrusts into the operational depth. They also tended, especially at theatre and army group levels, to lack consistent focus. Main efforts were seldom specified and even less often maintained, and forces were accordingly too dissipated to achieve decisive effect. The Red Army, by contrast, usually started operations with strong, armor-heavy "mobile groups" held ready to conduct operational maneuver in the enemy depth. Having contributed to the annihilation of a significant enemy grouping, these mobile groups then concentrated on key axes to forestall enemy efforts to restore the front. There was, however, one factor common to both eastern and western theatres. In both, mounting logistic problems more than German resistance often brought operations to a close.

The last chapter of volume 2 leaves the realm of the past to consider what lessons for the future can be found in these campaigns. Plainly, they do not present recipes for the conduct of future operations. Military and other technologies, and both political and social climates, have wrought a revolution in military affairs that is far greater than that of the 1930s and 1940s. Any useful lesson must focus on *how* to think, not *what* to think. The chapter examines, and questions, some common assumptions about intelligence, surprise and deception, and the utility of alliances (especially NATO) that have grown in recent decades. The historical record suggests a pause for thought on these issues, as well as in the area of doctrine. None of the armies fighting Germany in the summer of 1944 was engaged in the sort of war they had anticipated and prepared for. The Red Army came closest to having a sound doctrinal basis on which to build appropriate concepts and force structures. By 1944, it was beating Germany at its own game. The United States and Britain had to adjust from a small-war orientation to cope with a theatre-level conflict against the most sophisticated land power in the world. That adjustment took time and, arguably, was not fully successful even during the course of 1944. How well will American and British military thinkers and leaders adapt to an increasingly unstable twenty-first-century world in the throes of fundamental technological and ideological change? Even more importantly, will their political masters understand the challenges and give them appropriate direction, armed forces, and tasks? If they fail, their countries face traumatic times.

CHAPTER ONE

Immature Armies

CONCEPTS OF WAR FIGHTING

A Little Theory: Strategy, Operational Art, Tactics, and Doctrine

Nowadays, three interrelated and interdependent levels of war are identified: strategy, operational art, and tactics.¹ The operational level provides the vital connection between military-strategic objectives and the tactical employment of troops on the battlefield. It is the realm of the conception, planning, and execution of major operations and campaigns designed, through a succession of steps, to destroy the enemy's centre of gravity. In other words, it determines where, when, and to what purpose tactical units and formations are committed to battle. Probably the most succinct explanation of their relationship was provided by the Soviet theorist A. A. Svechin in the 1920s: "tactics makes the steps from which operational leaps are assembled; strategy points out the path."²

Strategy sets out the goal of operations in a theatre of war. In the era of major interstate conflicts, this was usually the destruction of the principal enemy grouping or the seizure of specified territorial objectives of critical economic or political importance. The aim depended on the perception of the enemy's centre of gravity—that is, which facet of his political, economic, or military power would, if eliminated, destroy the enemy's will or ability to continue the war. Until the Napoleonic era, it was sometimes possible for one climactic battle to destroy the enemy's main force or seize an objective indispensable to the enemy. This kind of decisive battle, which determined the outcome of the war, was the aspiration of most commanders in chief. In the industrial age, however, states could mobilize and equip mass armies. Their size and resilience meant the strategic aim was rarely achievable (against a major opponent, anyway) in a single operation. Rather, it required a campaign (or even successive campaigns) in which a series of operations by several major formations cumulatively led to the accomplishment of the strategic aim. Of course, the attack on the enemy's centre of gravity did not have to be direct, grinding attritionally through the strongest enemy groupings. Often an indirect approach, which dislocated the enemy by not conforming to his expectations and by exploiting his comparative disadvantage, was more economical, more effective, and, in the end, faster.

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Operational art consists of the sequencing and synchronization by theatre, army groups, and armies of a series of operations and battles conducted by subordinate formations. Taken together, these must produce a whole that is greater than the sum of the parts, which results in progress toward a successful campaign and thence strategic success. Strategy makes demands on operational commanders in terms of the destruction to be wrought, the territory to be seized (or defended), and the time allowed for the accomplishment of these goals. In turn, the strategic concept must be rooted in operational reality. It is not merely pointless but fatal to set goals that are beyond the capabilities of the forces available—as Hitler often did, to the ultimate ruin of his Third Reich. That said, Allied strategists sometimes forgot that almost as important as correctly identifying the aim was choosing what *not* to do; in the event, excessive effort was dissipated on secondary or even marginal tasks. The skill of the operational-level commander lies in using deception, interdiction, operational maneuver, logistic resources, and carefully orchestrated battles to structure a successful campaign. It follows from this that operational requirements provide the sole justification for fighting battles; these requirements determine why, where, when, and how an enemy grouping is to be engaged. Fighting unnecessary battles, whether they are won or lost, inevitably absorbs valuable, usually scarce resources that might be more gainfully employed elsewhere and wears them down, to the detriment of future operations.

Tactics are employed by corps, divisions, and their subordinate units to solve the problems that must be surmounted to achieve operational goals. Tactics, in other words, is concerned with the conception, planning, and execution of current and very near future battles. The tactician does not, however, have a free hand. He is constrained by the demands of his operational superior, who lays down objectives and specifies groupings, forms of action, and their sequencing and timing. As at the higher level, the plans of major formations must be firmly based on the actual capabilities and limitations of their subordinates; without sure steps, no leaps will be possible. At the tactical level, as at the operational level, successful generalship is a function, among other things, of achieving synergistic effects. Battles, and the operations of which they are a part, must be linked in aim, timing, and geographic location, such that the totality of their achievements is greater than the sum of the individual parts.

Operational art has always been concerned with the relationships between mass, firepower, and maneuver. Its evolution has been conditioned largely by the impact of technological development and scale of deployment on these three factors, coupled with creative conceptual thinking (or, more often, its absence). By the First World War, the immense reserves accumulated as a result of conscription had resulted in armies of unprecedented

size and resilience. The range and destructiveness of their firepower had increased by several orders of magnitude compared with armies of a hundred years earlier. Yet, although they could travel rapidly over long distances by railway in strategic moves (and therefore countermoves), on the battlefield they still moved at the speed of (usually excessively laden) men on foot or on horseback who were often impeded by ground torn up by shell fire or turned into a sea of mud. Moreover, armies had grown to such a size that there was no flank for the enemy to turn. The inevitable result was static (or in Russia, semistatic), trench-dominated warfare and generals who saw the grim business of attrition as the only realistic way to destroy the enemy.

The interwar years saw the development of weapons and equipment that had been in their infancy between 1914 and 1918. Tanks, combat aircraft, mechanical transport, and relatively efficient and portable radios promised at least a partial shift in the balance between firepower and mobility toward the latter. This “revolution in military affairs” (to use a term coined by the Soviets), in turn, offered maneuver as an alternative to the sterile campaigns of attrition. Instead of bludgeoning the enemy to death, and inevitably being bludgeoned back in the process, the aim was to reject battle on the enemy’s terms and instead paralyze him by rapidly shifting the focus of combat to his rear areas, destroying the command and control and logistic systems on which he depended and demoralizing his troops and leaders by doing the frighteningly unexpected. Such an approach emphasized not force ratios but surprise, deception, unexpected maneuvers and tactics, and speed in the advance.³ A rapid convergence of forces from dispersed assembly areas onto an apparently unlikely sector could concentrate sufficient strength against weakness. The superiority of this unexpected ground force could be coupled with the focused application of airpower on the chosen sector. The protracted artillery preparations that had previously been needed to penetrate a strong defense could be dispensed with. Thus, there would be no painstaking and obvious buildup for the offensive to provoke a defensive counterconcentration. Surprise is an all but essential prerequisite for unbalancing the enemy; it thus sets the conditions for the early achievement of the momentum that makes operational maneuver possible. Its restoration as a key principle was central to maneuver warfare. The wholeheartedness with which both the Wehrmacht and the Red Army accepted the logic of this revolution in warfare and changed their methods would set them apart from the British and the Americans.

Maneuver and attrition are often portrayed as opposite approaches to war fighting. This is too simplistic a dialectic. In Normandy, a preliminary wearing down of German strength was an inescapable prelude to breakthrough and the generation of operational maneuver; so too was the fixing and grinding down of the enemy’s main strength by the Red Army.⁴ It is

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also a false dichotomy: maneuver is not the opposite of attrition. Attrition's true opposite is annihilation, which is best accomplished through a judicious combination of firepower and mobility, battle and maneuver.⁵ In the German and Soviet views, offensive battles were generally worth fighting only if they enabled the subsequent generation of operational maneuver. In turn, the purpose of operational maneuver was to make a major contribution to strategic success through the destruction of the enemy. This would be accomplished by disrupting the enemy's cohesion, command and control, and logistic support on a large scale by driving rapidly into his depth and causing his forces to become progressively less capable of putting up effective resistance, not least through fragmentation, psychological shock, and demoralization. It is easier to convince significant numbers of enemy soldiers that they have lost the battle, thus persuading them collectively to withdraw from combat through retreat or surrender, than it is to wear down formations in a toe-to-toe slugging match.

The term *operational art* is rightly chosen because it is not a science. There is great scope for creativity at the operational level, and the more senior the commander, the more scope there is. Many tacticians who were competent at the corps level and were promoted to army command proved capable only of massing superior forces for what was essentially an attritional contest. They lacked the necessary imagination and flair—indeed, daring—to make the transition from careful craftsman to inspired artist. Fundamentally, tactics is largely concerned with getting the most out of a combined-arms team to maximize the enemy's attrition. At least until the enemy's defense has been penetrated, most attacks are frontal. As the situation becomes more fluid, there are greater opportunities to maneuver and mount flank attacks, and even to bypass. However, the operational commander orchestrating these tactical battles often requires the destruction of the enemy facing him, at least initially, if only to create an opening sufficient for the committal of exploitation units and then whole formations into the enemy's depth. A crucial link between tactics and operational art is therefore the provision, in advance, of forces and plans to convert tactical into operational success. A division or corps might destroy the enemy to its front, seize ground vital to the integrity of the defense, and thus create a gap in the enemy's deployment. This, however, is of little operational significance if the hole is not exploited by the successive insertion of additional forces to penetrate first into the enemy's tactical depth and then into his operational rear. Moreover, against a capable enemy like the Wehrmacht, which was famous for its quick reaction to emergencies, the committal of subsequent echelons or reserves had to follow the initial penetration immediately. Delay would have given the defender time to react and restore the integrity of his defense before the damage became irreparable.

Time is a critical factor in war, especially in fluid, maneuver-dominated operations. These operations therefore assume the character of intense contests for that precious commodity. Win the battle for time, thus retaining the initiative and forcing the enemy into a purely reactive posture, and the defeat of the physical enemy becomes much easier. A rapid advance capitalizes on surprise, and speed itself is surprising—indeed, shocking—to the enemy. A formation that achieves a high tempo in the advance can generally disrupt and fragment the defense, disorient or paralyze its commander, and damage the morale of his troops; the commander's capabilities become less than the sum of the parts, and self-preservation becomes the main focus of the increasingly uncontrollable elements of his command.

Exploitation is the decisive phase of a battle or operation, the time when the fruits of hard fighting are gathered. Armies wary of exposing any significant elements to flanking counterattacks or even encirclement generally eschew vigorous exploitation or undertake it so cautiously as to give the enemy time to recover or to withdraw and restore the integrity of his defense. In this case, tactical attacks continue to be frontal, for the most part, with only limited scope for tactical maneuver. In turn, operational formations are condemned to fight attritional battles rather than keeping the foe off balance and causing his position steadily to worsen and his reactions to become increasingly belated as the tempo of the offensive mounts, until his position becomes irredeemable.

Doctrine consists of an approved set of principles and methods that provides an army with a common outlook and a uniform basis for action; in simplistic terms, it determines how an army fights. The organizational structure and equipping of an army stem from its doctrinal precepts, and doctrine provides the basis for military training and for command and control. Its importance cannot be overemphasized. If doctrine is unsound or contradictory, or if it has not been properly disseminated and thoroughly absorbed, the army will enter battle with systemic problems. At the operational level, doctrine comprises principles and guidance, as befits an art, where creativity is encouraged. At the tactical level, its character is largely prescriptive. It cannot dissipate Clausewitz's "fog of war," but it can simplify decision making under the stress of combat by limiting the range of choices that are deemed relevant in given circumstances. By ensuring that all commanders and staff officers view similar situations in broadly similar ways, it ensures that they will react in a more or less predictable fashion when faced with tactical problems. This is important for operational-level and higher-level tactical commanders, as they have neither up-to-the-minute knowledge of a situation nor the time and means to micromanage their subordinate commanders and solve problems for them. Effective common doctrine is one of the few means by which senior commanders can, albeit indirectly, influence the conduct of the tacti-

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cal battle. Doctrine helps to ensure that all the moving parts work together to propel the military machine forward in a broadly predictable way, without Clausewitz's "friction" bringing it to a juddering halt.

In providing a framework of understanding, doctrine is useful as a guide to action. But if it becomes a template, it can also become a straitjacket, inhibiting some commanders. Mediocre commanders, especially if they fear the wrath of overcontrolling superiors who are intolerant of any error, commonly suffer paralysis in decision making when the textbook does not provide a clear prescription for action. In this case, they may do the safe thing, rather than boldly grasping a fleeting opportunity that could pay big dividends; worse, they may fail to act without orders from above, which inevitably arrive far too late by the time the situation is reported, a decision is made, and orders are communicated back down the chain of command. Doctrine that is allowed (or used) to stifle initiative may not prevent victories from being achieved, but it will probably result in their being more costly and less decisive.

The theoretical prescriptions outlined above are well known to today's senior officers, at least in terms of conventional interstate warfare.⁶ It was not always so. All armies are prisoners of their own experience. For instance, there are some that, for societal, political, or historical reasons, will probably not progress beyond the suppression of their own populations. Others are capable of fighting one sort of war better than another, at least until they accumulate experience in the less familiar environment. Major continental armies and, in the era of universal conscription, the societies they served became used to large-scale, bloody, and sometimes protracted struggles. As a result of the climactic First World War, the French became convinced that linear-attritional warfare was inevitable in fighting their historic enemy, Germany. For the next two decades, France prepared diligently and thoughtfully to reprise the methods of 1918—failing to understand the implications of the revolution in military affairs that took place during that period. This failure led directly to its catastrophic defeat in 1940.

The Germans and the Russians had different experiences in the vast, featureless expanses of the Russian front, where trench deadlock was less intractable. Even more formative for the fledgling Red Army was the civil war that swung to and fro over all of Russia before the Soviets finally triumphed. Given creativity, it was clear that maneuver could be decisive. Moreover, both these powers were losers in the First World War, which gave impetus to thoughts about the future of warfare. How to avoid the pitfalls of the last war and do better in the next one became the obsession of their General Staffs. It was this imperative that led to their separate arrivals at the concept of operational art. The British and American victors had no such incentive to develop military theory. Both their societies, though for different reasons,

rejected the very idea that there might be another such cataclysmic war, and both denied their armies the incentive and the resources to fight one. Thus, it is not surprising that the theoretical developments that did take place (for instance, the British *Field Service Regulations* of 1935) proved inadequate when exposed to the test of another major war.

Principles of War

While superior technology, numbers, and various other advantages may contribute, victory depends ultimately on sound generalship. Successful generalship requires adherence to certain principles. Those enunciated by the British Army after the First World War and elaborated on below are almost identical to those cited in US doctrinal publications (albeit with slightly different phrasing). They are very broad in nature—so broad, in fact, as to be universal; as such, they are far from being a recipe for victory. Rather, they provide some guidelines that must underpin decision making and planning. They vary in relevance and importance from one situation to another, and their application requires judgment and intelligent interpretation.⁷

Selection and Maintenance of the Aim. The aim of any operation must be carefully selected to contribute toward the attack on the enemy's correctly identified centre of gravity. It must also be clear and unambiguous. The commander must have no doubt about what he is trying to achieve, and his subordinates must be equally clear so that all their efforts are directed toward the desired end. Moreover, the aim must be realistic and achievable with the forces and in the time available. Conversely, consistency in pursuing the aim does not require bullheaded persistence in carrying out a plan that has proved far from optimal; the aim is constant, but the means employed to achieve it may—indeed, should—change to fit altered circumstances.

Maintenance of Morale. One of Napoleon's aphorisms was that the moral is to the physical as three is to one. High morale is probably the most important factor in war. It leads to an offensive spirit and the will to win. By contrast, however numerous and well equipped, a dispirited army that lacks faith in its leadership is unlikely to succeed. High morale stems from good leadership at all levels and the trust and confidence that this engenders; strong discipline, which is as necessary as leadership to overcome fear; unit cohesion, which comes from fostering comradeship (another facet of leadership) and, to an extent, from unit tradition; the self-respect of the individual soldier; a sense of purpose, reinforced by propaganda (although, as successful motivators, ideology, religion, and patriotism vary from time to time and from army to army); success in battle (the surest way to achieve high morale); and the ma-

terial well-being of the soldier, so far as wartime conditions allow—he needs to feel that his leaders are doing their best for him in the circumstances.

Offensive Action. The offensive confers the initiative and, with it, freedom of action. Being able to dictate the course and pace of events is another prerequisite for victory: if the enemy has his hands full reacting to attacks, he will usually lack the opportunity, resources, or time to hit back effectively. The greater the rate of advance, the more belated and ineffectual the reactions of the defeated side are likely to be. Win the battle for time, and the defeat of the physical enemy becomes markedly easier. Moreover, the side enjoying the initiative establishes a moral ascendancy over the enemy; the force that is continually on the defensive will find it increasingly difficult to keep its morale intact. Observance of this principle does not, however, require an army to be always and indiscriminately on the attack. A few repulses or some partial, expensive successes may sow seeds of doubt in the soldiers' minds, leading them to believe that their lives are being put at risk by uncaring leaders for unimportant objectives. Morale will then suffer.

Concentration of Force. It is necessary to concentrate at the decisive place and time a force of sufficient superiority to carry an attack through to the specified objective without an operational or tactical pause that gives the enemy time to restore the integrity of his defense. Ideally, usually through the achievement of surprise, strength is concentrated against weakness. It should also be used to turn or envelop the defender, as such maneuvers do more to unbalance and demoralize him than frontal attacks. Concentration is a necessary but insufficient condition to be tolerably certain of success. An obvious and leisurely buildup merely prompts the enemy into a counterconcentration and thus hardens his resistance. The battle then inevitably becomes an attritional affair, with the attacker gnawing through the defense at a heavy cost in men, equipment, and time. Therefore, concentration must be either covert or accomplished rapidly from dispersed locations, with forces arriving at the selected attack sector only shortly before H-hour. The former approach is usually very difficult (and the greater the scale, the more problematic it becomes). The latter requires fine judgment and timing and good communications and traffic control; it is very vulnerable to Clausewitzian friction.

Economy of Effort. This principle is the corollary of the concentration of force. It is impossible to be strong everywhere. Thus, whether in attack or defense, the greater the concentration desired, the more secondary sectors must be extended in length, stripped of troops, or both. This can create a vulnerability (though the risk may be mitigated by deception). It is also possible, *pace* Clausewitz, to be too strong at the point of main effort. Attempts

at excessive concentration for an offensive will probably attract the enemy's attention and lead to a counterconcentration. They may also give rise to congestion, which impedes mobility and thus the achievement of tempo. On the defensive, an excessively weakened sector may invite an unexpected attack that proves difficult to repulse. In either case, overinsurance diverts troops from other efforts where they might be better employed. Secondary efforts are supporting and not necessarily unimportant.

Surprise. With hard work and imagination, surprise in the offensive can always be achieved, at least at the tactical and operational levels. The higher the level at which surprise is achieved, the more profound its effects. It requires painstaking attention to camouflage, concealment, secrecy for the buildup, and usually deception too, to attract the enemy's attention and forces elsewhere. Surprise can take several forms, including location of attack and axes of advance, timing, and new techniques (perhaps involving new capabilities). When achieved, it causes disorientation, even paralysis, in the enemy chain of command and induces "big-picture blindness" in and consequent poor decision making by senior commanders. It harms the morale and cohesion of enemy units or formations, often causing panic. Some analysts believe it is the greatest single contributor to success, with an impact more profound than a numerical superiority of ten to one.⁸ *Ipsa facto*, where the attacker can be confident of achieving surprise, he can afford to reduce the force superiority required for success and therefore the scale of the surprise-compromising prior concentration. Surprise is, however, a wasting asset. Its effects do not last long against a capable enemy. It is therefore vital to capitalize fully on its achievement, seize the initiative while the enemy's equilibrium is upset, and exploit vigorously; a rapid advance deep into the enemy's rear prolongs the effects of surprise and is, indeed, surprising in itself.

Security. Security means the creation and maintenance of an operating environment that confers freedom of action at the necessary place and time to achieve the aim. Enemy efforts to prevent the achievement of the aim can be thwarted only if security—in its widest sense—is assured. Operational (including communications) security must be tight. Bases and lines of communication must not be subject to serious disruption by nonmilitary means or by physical attack. A favorable air situation must be achieved: "since . . . 1939, no country has won a war in the face of enemy air superiority, no major offensive has succeeded against an opponent who controlled the air, and no defense has sustained itself against an enemy who had air superiority."⁹ Balance must be kept so that any countermove can be defeated without diverting forces, or even serious attention, from the aim: thus, flanks must be protected and a reserve maintained. As the offensive gathers momentum and the initiative is

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firmly held, the requirements for flank protection and reserves to cope with enemy reactions dwindle as the enemy's freedom of action becomes increasingly curtailed.

Flexibility. Possession of the initiative is fundamental to success. It is, however, a mistake to think that imposing one's will on the enemy is synonymous with imposing one's plan on him. The elder Moltke's aphorism that no plan survives contact with the enemy is a profound truth. The aim must remain constant, but the plan to achieve it must be open to modification in the light of changing circumstances—and the commander must have the elasticity of mind to recognize altered circumstances and speedily reach a decision and adapt his plan accordingly. For instance, unexpected resistance or the appearance of a fleeting opportunity in one sector may require the shift of effort to another, more promising one. This requirement for flexibility means that a plan must be simple; a complicated plan is unlikely to survive the stress and friction of battle and cannot be easily or quickly adapted to meet unforeseen developments. It also underscores the need for balance, including, above all, the possession of a reserve, so that any change in the chosen course of action can be accomplished rapidly, without time-consuming regrouping. The ability to commit a reserve is usually the most significant way a commander can influence the course of a battle, whether to exploit an opportunity or deal in good time with an unexpected threat.¹⁰ Not infrequently, the outcome of an operation depends on which side runs out of reserves first. The need for flexibility also puts a premium on having an efficient staff directing well-trained, agile, and responsive forces with good communications and a high level of mobility.

Cooperation. At all levels, the foundation stone is a clear and common aim coupled with a clear division of responsibilities. US doctrine stresses unity of command as essential. At the tactical level, this principle implies little more than ensuring that the combined-arms team works smoothly without interarm or interservice rivalries or conflicts to prevent the synergies that make the whole so much more effective than the sum of the parts. This is, of course, far easier to demand than to achieve. Even in the relatively simple Napoleonic period, Clausewitz was driven to observe: "Everything in war is very simple but the simplest thing is difficult. The difficulties accumulate and end by producing the kind of friction that is inconceivable unless one has experienced war."¹¹ The number of parts in the military machine that have to interact harmoniously has increased logarithmically since those days. At the operational level, the increasing size and complexity of formations and their logistic support create greater scope for cooperation to falter. This is the case even when everyone wants the machine to run like clockwork and agrees on

what is required. This was far from the case with the land-air interface during the Second World War, where senior soldiers and airmen, especially British ones, had both philosophical and practical disagreements about the purpose and control of airpower. Introduce the complicating factors of clashing personalities and coalition operations, where national prejudices combine with a mutual lack of comprehension, a different way of doing things, and often disparate goals, and the opportunities for breakdown become legion. Allied operations in northwest Europe in 1944 were frequently marred by poor interservice and inter-Allied cooperation.

Sustainability. The outcome of many battles and an even greater number of operations has been decided by logistic considerations, what in the Second World War was termed “administration.” A clear appreciation of supply and transport constraints is every bit as important to success as a commander’s correct estimate of the operational situation. Logistic resources take time to accumulate, and time is a scarce commodity for an army desirous of retaining the initiative and freedom of action. Thus, while it is necessary to predict accurately how much of everything will be required to sustain an operation through to its planned conclusion, it is undesirable to overinsure; doing so wastes time, possibly prejudicing surprise, and leaves some other part of the force deprived of assets it could use to good effect. Logistic economy is as necessary as economy of effort; therefore, to ensure flexibility in the deployment and timely switching of resources to meet the unexpected, control must be exerted at the highest possible level. To achieve the level of foresight required, the logistics staff must be taken into the commander’s confidence early in the planning process, and must work closely with the operations staff.

To some readers, the principles outlined above may seem unhelpfully general, even platitudinous. Yet disregard of one or more of them runs the risk of failure. As will be seen, the summer campaign of 1944 provides many examples of generals who were guilty of such disregard, with predictably adverse consequences. Subjected to the pressures of high command, even the most intelligent, professionally well educated, and experienced commanders could make the misjudgments examined in subsequent chapters.

Although official manuals describe the foregoing principles rather grandly as principles of war, they are in fact only principles of operational art and tactics. By this misnaming, the British and Americans armies showed that they conflated war and battle. This is not merely a matter of semantics. It is important to differentiate between the two, as they require different approaches, different thinking. Battle is simply a matter of how to apply

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military force. The prosecution of war involves a whole range of nonmilitary instruments such as economic, financial, political, ideological, and informational, which are often more important than the military. Moreover, principles that may apply to the conduct of an operation or a battle are an insufficient guide to the formation of a strategy or even the preparation and conduct of a campaign. First, the enemy centre of gravity must be correctly identified. Given that it is rarely reachable through a single operational gambit, the possible routes to that centre must be determined; then the least unsatisfactory course of action must be found, based on assessments of the relative risks and costs in lives and time and the amount of each that can be expended. Then it is necessary to determine the optimal sequence in which operations and battles should be conducted to maximize the damage inflicted on the enemy while minimizing the loss to friendly forces. Because they failed to differentiate between campaigning and battle, the Western Allies sometimes failed to identify a clear and consistent operational aim and to synchronize their actions to optimal effect, avoiding unnecessary combat. General Montgomery himself illustrated this doctrinal failing in his damning verdict on the Italian campaign: “The High Command . . . embarked on a major campaign on the continent of Europe without having any clear idea or plan as to how they would develop and fight the land battle. There was no object laid down. The whole affair was haphazard and untidy—in fact typically British.”¹²

THE CHALLENGES OF COMMAND

Numbers and equipment, doctrine and training are all important determinants of an army's performance in war. Even more important is the ability of its commander. A mediocre general can achieve less than stellar success with a fine force. An inspired and inspiring commander can coax astonishing feats from an apparently tired or merely workaday army. This section examines the requirements of generalship, primarily at the operational level and primarily from the point of view of the side holding the initiative, the happy position of the Allies in the late summer of 1944.

Tactical command, even at the highest level (generally corps), is a relatively straightforward business, however confusing, uncertain, and disorganized battles turn out to be. The commander is bound by the resource, time, and space constraints imposed by his superior. His task is the conceptually simple one of bringing superior firepower to bear on the enemy in close proximity to destroy him or to take ground (or both), synchronizing his fire and movement capabilities to optimal effect to do so. His sole concern is the immediate battle, with the limited terrain and time horizons this implies.