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ARMY JOURNAL

A periodical review of military literature

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(Australian War Memorial)

Salum, a small town and harbour close to the border of Egypt and Libya, changed hands several times during the see-sawing fighting between the British and Axis forces from the summer of 1940 to the winter of 1942.



OPERATIONS OF THE EIGHTH ARMY IN NORTH AFRICA August 1942 to May 1943



Lieutenant Colonel P. Varma
Royal Australian Infantry

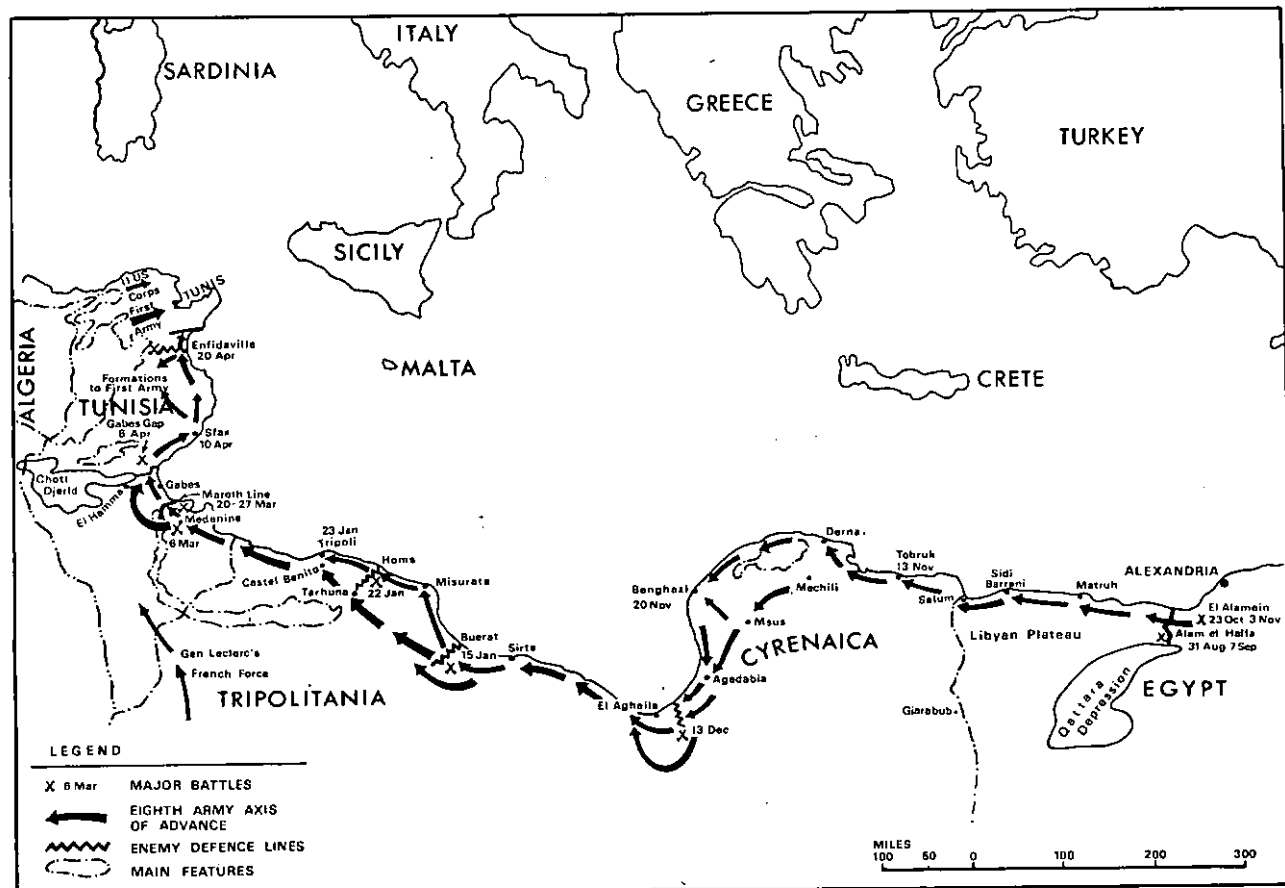
I

THE biggest pitfall in studying military history is that of trying to win the next war by blindly memorizing lessons from previous ones. Tactics and battle techniques become outmoded as armaments and technology change. Most of us, being but human, tend to view our own side with greater indulgence and to make allowances for deficiencies in our leaders. Unless we are aware of the operation of these two considerations we may well overlook what may be far better ways of fighting any future war.

Wars are notoriously unlike previous ones. The third world war — if it happens — will certainly be no exception. After World War I, the generals were markedly reticent about publishing their memoirs. Recent research published in such books as *The Donkeys* suggests that most of them were aware of their rank incompetence. Allénby and Monash, two of the greatest generals during World War I, left few documents. In contrast, many of the generals of World War II seemed to have been busy compiling their autobiographies even while the smell of cordite was still lingering over the battlefields. Their publications have supplemented their pensions handsomely in many cases. With the sophistication made possible by modern electronics, we can expect future field commanders to emulate them.

One of the major shortcomings of many World War II accounts of operations is that they were made too soon after the event. Personal bias and ignorance of what was really happening on 'the other side of

Full biographical details on the author appear in his 'Defence Studies' article in the April 1972 issue of Army Journal. At present he is the officer in charge of Casey Station in Antarctica. Prior to this appointment he was on the Command and Staff Training Group, Southern Command, where he was responsible for coaching officers for Subject 3H (Military History). This article covers part of the period of the main topic for the 3H examination 1974 to 1976.



the hill' often mar such accounts. Furthermore, we were part of 'the big league' then. The fact that we may have to fight unaided in the future constitutes an entirely new factor.

Historians sometimes try to be 'scientific' by seeking for constants amongst a veritable swarm of variables. One relative constant is the factor of military leadership. Others are geography, control of strategic resources, industrial mobilization potential and so on. The strength of personality of senior military commanders often influences a nation's political leaders in time of war and may, therefore, be a major determinant on overall strategy and the course of operations. As such, it is of greater significance than the outcome of particular tactical battles. The desperate bravery of the British Royal Air Force during The Battle of Britain, in which tactical and technological superiority combined to save that country and the way of life that we know and value, is a splendid testimony to the leadership and sagacity of senior RAF commanders.

We may say then, always bearing in mind that past experience and history needs to be related to the present and near future, the reappraisal of selected campaigns and battles can convey many lessons for present day and future wars. This is the underlying theme of this short study of the operations of the Eighth Army in North Africa between August 1942 and May 1943.

II

During the hot North African summer of 1942 German and Italian forces entrenched west of the Qattara Depression were planning to break through the British defended position at El Alamein and to capture the Delta of the Nile. Less than one year later, these Axis forces had been completely swept out of North Africa, Hitler was forced to fall back on his concept of 'Fortress Europe' and Mussolini began to totter. How was this achieved in such a comparatively short time?

In studying this great Allied victory and major Axis defeat the following events should be kept in mind as mental milestones on the road to victory:

1942

- *June.* British position stabilised on north-south line from the Mediterranean Sea at Tel el Eisa to Qaret el Himeimat, a 35-mile long front only 60 miles west of the great naval and army bases of Alexandria and Cairo. This position was known

as the El Alamein Line. It was based on the strongest, natural feature west of the Nile. Its southern flank was guarded by the desert. To its north was the Mediterranean Sea.

- *August.* Battlefield visit by the British Prime Minister Churchill. Accompanied by the British Chief of the Imperial General Staff and other military advisers. Decision to replace Auchinleck by Alexander. Gott appointed Commander of the British Eighth Army.
- *7 August.* Death of Gott in an air crash. Appointment of Lieutenant General B. M. Montgomery as Eighth Army Commander.
- *31 August/7 September.* Battle of Alam el Halfa. First major defeat of German-Italian forces in North Africa.
- *September/October.* Training, tactical and organizational overhaul of the Eighth Army. Accumulation of supplies, equipment and reinforcements by both sides: a race in which Rommel was outpaced from the start due to the increasing availability of United States war material.
- *23 October/3 November.* Battle of El Alamein.
- *4/6 November.* Pursuit failed due to rain and the absence of emergency supply arrangements. Successful breaking of contact by German-Italian forces.
- Advance of the Eighth Army to El Agheila:
 - (a) *9 November.* Advance commenced.
 - (b) *10 November.* Halfaya Pass. Fort Capuzzo. Salum, Bardia.
 - (c) *13 November.* Tobruk regained.
 - (d) *14 November.* El Gazala action.
 - (e) *15 November.* Capture of Martuba group of forward fighter airfields.
 - (f) *20 November.* Entry into Benghazi port after successful, skilful German delaying actions and extensive demolition of port facilities.
 - (g) *23 November:* Successful breaking of contact and withdrawal by Germans from Agedabia.

- Eighth Army attack on El Agheila:
 - (a) 24 November/11 December. Preparations.
 - (b) 13 December. German withdrawal.
 - (c) 14 December. Eighth Army attack.
 - Eighth Army advance to Buerat:
 - (a) 18 December. Nofilia action.
 - (b) 21/29 December. German rearguard contacted at Sirte.
- ~~Closing up of the Eighth Army before the Buerat defences.~~

1943

- Abortive Allied attack on Buerat:
 - (a) 4/6 January. Delay in administrative preparations primarily due to gale havoc at Benghazi port.
 - (b) 15 January: Attack on Buerat position. German withdrawal.
- 23 January. Entry into Tripoli. (Abandoned by German-Italian forces).
- 15 February. 'Forced' advance of Eighth Army to relieve German pressure against United States 2 Corps in West Tunisia — in contravention of Montgomery's 'balanced force' concept.
- 6 March. German spoiling attack at Medenine. Loss of 52 German tanks for no Allied tank casualties due to superior Eighth Army anti-tank defences and anti-tank guns.
- 20/26 March. Battle of Mareth Line.
- 6 April. Battle of Wadi Akarit.
- 10 April. Capture of Sfax port and railhead.
- 12 April. Capture of Sousse.
- Attack of Enfidaville:
 - (a) 13 April. Forward elements of Eighth Army reach Enfidaville.
 - (b) 19/20 April. Attack on Enfidaville position halted by German-Italian forces.
- 30 April. General Alexander visits Eighth Army. Strategic decision to switch part of the Eighth Army to the Plain of Tunis under command of British First Army while other Eighth Army formations were withdrawn into reserve to prepare for the invasion of Sicily.

- 7 May. Fall of Tunis and Bizerta to British First Army.
- 12 May. End of German-Italian resistance in North Africa.

III

Field Marshal Montgomery's book *El Alamein to the Sangro*, Chapters 1-9, provides an authoritative if bare outline description of the above Eighth Army operations; it is an essential reference to any serious study of the campaign. The maps in this book are particularly good. The terse style of writing characteristic of Montgomery is a good one to emulate in any examination. It should be kept in mind that the Field Marshal's interpretations and personal observations are now nearly thirty years old, the book was written in the early flush of victory and for many years afterwards there was no authoritative version from the German side. Montgomery's position as Chief of the Imperial General Staff and later as the land forces commander of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization were not conducive to early critical re-assessments. It is necessary, therefore, to study Montgomery's *El Alamein to the Sangro* in relation to later accounts such as *The Rommel Papers*. Rommel did not live to write his memoirs but his notes have a candidness and authenticity that are of inestimable value to students of military leadership, armoured tactics and the North African campaign. Other books, out of many that repay careful study, include De Guingand's *Operation Victory*, Churchill's *Memoirs*, the writings of Alan Moorehead, etc. The brief account of the North African campaign that follows will stress lessons that have relevance today. It has been written after a study of the authoritative statements and writings by commanders on either side.

IV

Rommel's final offensive in North Africa began on the night 27/28 May 1942. It met with the same success that had characterized all his actions in North Africa up to that time. After initial heavy tank losses, Rommel succeeded in destroying most of the British armour. However, the heavy German tank losses were the first tangible sign that British anti-tank armament was at long last achieving the required technical standard needed to knock out German armour. Rommel's tactics in this battle were as masterly as usual. After gapping the British mine-fields, he used these same obstacles to his own advantage in countering British counter-penetration and counter-attack moves. There can be no doubt that up to this point German tanks and German anti-tank guns

— especially the ubiquitous 88 mm — plus the battle experience of the German *Afrika Korps* all combined to render them superior under Rommel's leadership. The only achievement that our forces might claim up to that time was a bulldog tenacity despite repeated defeats in the desert. They were baffled, bloody but undaunted.

During an earlier strategic withdrawal by the British, the port and fortress of Tobruk had withstood a long siege and served a useful purpose as a thorn in the side of German-Italian forces planning to attack Egypt. During this offensive, the speed and weight of Rommel's assault led to the easy fall of Tobruk on 21 June 1942 — unexpectedly soon with far less resistance than expected by either side. Following the loss of Tobruk the small but useful port of Mersa Matruh was abandoned. Once again, the Eighth Army streamed east in full retreat. The Eighth Army fell back to the El Alamein position, the last suitable position at Army level for the defence of Alexandria, Cairo and the Suez Canal.

At that time De Guingand was the Brigadier, General Staff, Eighth Army. Previously he had been Director of Military Intelligence, Middle East; subsequently he was to be Chief of Staff to Auchinleck and Montgomery. This is his dry comment on the retreat:

How all this mess got sorted out I never could tell . . . The Desert Air Force . . . prevented . . . this retreat [turning] into an uncontrollable rout.

In view of this comment by the principal General Staff Officer of the Eighth Army it is understandable that Rommel made plans for the capture of Alexandria and Cairo. Mussolini installed himself impatiently near Derna (Cyrenaica) in full readiness to head the victory parade that he thought would be held in Cairo within a matter of days.

The use of air power in support of withdrawing forces, as commented upon by De Guingand, to prevent a total rout, is a useful lesson for the present day. It underlines the requirement for close co-operation between land and air forces. Two other factors saved the British: the natural strength of the El Alamein position and the resilient morale of the oft defeated British and Commonwealth troops. From the strategic aspect, the El Alamein position had the serious drawback of being far too close (60 miles) to the Nile Delta; nevertheless the political directors of the war, led by Churchill, accepted the views of their military advisers and permitted Auchinleck to fall back. Any other course of action would have resulted in the destruction of the Eighth Army in the open

desert. In contrast, only a few months later, Hitler refused his commander in North Africa permission to abandon the German position in the face of an imminent attack by vastly superior British forces. The sound state of British morale in 1942, despite repeated defeats and withdrawals in North Africa and elsewhere, was founded on earlier, spectacular victories by Field Marshal Wavell. A generally high standard of officer and non commissioned officer leadership was another factor, and that owes a lot to the successful evacuation of the British Army from Dunkirk in 1940. The example of British bulldog tenacity in defeat was another factor as was Field Marshal Auchinleck's strength of character, although he was no match in tactics for Rommel.

Prior to June 1942, Auchinleck's reputation was as high as anyone's in the hierarchy of the British forces, even though he was from the Indian Army. However, his reputation suffered as a result of Rommel's repeated successes against him in the desert. At this stage, Churchill made a personal visit to the battlefield. With the concurrence of his military advisers, in whom were included close friends and associates of Auchinleck, Churchill decided to remove Auchinleck from command. Auchinleck became Commander-in-Chief, India; he had failed in the Middle East. His replacement was Field Marshal Alexander whose reputation was untarnished despite his having been the senior commander in both the Dunkirk and Burma retreats. The change in the Middle East command was both timely and correct. It is not easy to put a finger on Auchinleck's deficiencies but he had not achieved the desired results and his command was beginning to show signs of losing confidence in him.

The change in the Theatre Commander-in-Chief was not made easy by the fact that Auchinleck was acting as his own Army Commander at the time, having gone forward and sacked Ritchie. Ritchie lacked experience of battle and of troops and had, therefore, been unequal to the task thrust upon him. Auchinleck had thereby made a personal contribution to halting the German-Italian forces at El Alamein. Gott was killed in an air crash whilst on the way to assume command of Eighth Army. The choice of Army Commander then fell on Lieutenant General B. L. Montgomery. He was already well known to General Alexander; they had worked together under the difficult conditions of the Dunkirk evacuation.

With the recipience afforded by history, we can now assess Field Marshal Lord Montgomery of Alamein. His personality profile sets

out both his success as an Army Commander and, at the same time, his limitations that were to come out in his later, higher appointments in war and in peace. The flamboyant — dare one say almost un-British? — aspect of his personality that antagonised so many of his compatriots detracted from his many other strong attributes as he rose higher and higher in the military hierarchy. Montgomery was at his best as Commander, Eighth Army. His responsibilities were purely military. Later, under Eisenhower and as peacetime Chief of the Imperial General Staff, Montgomery was not an unqualified success. When the great captains of World War II are finally paraded in history, Montgomery will be remembered for El Alamein — the mantle of victory he so aptly chose. Wavell and Alexander on the other hand will receive deserved merit in the strategic sphere, despite conducting several strategic withdrawals when British fortunes were at their lowest ebb — for example, Wavell's brief ABDA Command and Alexander's brief appointment in Burma in 1942.

V

Much has been written about Montgomery's personality. Some of the most revealing comments are contained in De Guingand's *Operation Victory*, although biased because of personal friendship. The following are the essential aspects of the man's personality in strict relation to his success as Eighth Army Commander: complete military knowledge and sound grasp of the tactical doctrine of the time, mastered by diligent self-education pre-war and continual study of current and new items of equipment; personal conviction of the manner in which men should be handled at all levels; carefully evolved ideas regarding the conduct of military operations in the field. Montgomery's indisputable ability as a field commander was the result of intense, continual personal study that saw its beginning well before the war when he was a junior officer. How many of us pause to think over — let alone examine in critical detail — the best way to command our companies, battalions, task forces and so on, so as to evolve better organizations, improved types of equipment and tactics? Montgomery — in distinction to Auchinleck — possessed penetrating insight into the abilities of his subordinate officers. He was far more ruthless than Auchinleck in sacking those subordinates in whom he found shortcomings. In war this is essential at every level.

To summarize so far: Montgomery was a new man when he arrived on the Eighth Army scene. At the time the Eighth Army had

suffered yet another defeat and stood as far back as ever in its history with preparations under way to abandon the entire Nile Delta. Montgomery was told beyond all doubt that the Allies needed a resounding victory. He saw the remedy. He had the moral courage and the physical means, as mentioned below, to reverse the entire strategy, in the same way as later General Ridgway was to retrieve the situation for the United Nations forces in Korea. In addition, arising out of Churchill's personal visit to the theatre and to the forward positions of the Eighth Army, combined with the effect of Montgomery's forceful personality on both Churchill and the War Office, Montgomery received adequate quantities of United States war material. This included Sherman tanks, whose armament and serviceability matched that of the German tanks. 1,000 tanks, 9,000 other vehicles and 41,000 fresh reinforcements reached Montgomery between the 1st and 23rd of August 1942.

However, Montgomery's task was far from being a clear cut march to victory. First of all he had to combat the Rommel legend of superior generalship and almost unbroken record of tactical victories. Secondly, Montgomery had to achieve a complete psychological reversal in the outlook of the entire Army, starting with his staff ensconced in Cairo planning a further withdrawal. Montgomery moved his headquarters out of Cairo and into the desert almost overnight. Another of his problems was that his front-line troops had perfect, oft rehearsed, orders for yet another withdrawal, but were far less versed in the attack, advance, or defence. Thirdly, Montgomery had to withstand an imminent further German attack for which he found the Eighth Army wrongly deployed, poorly equipped and inadequately trained. Fourthly, Montgomery saw that he needed time to re-equip, re-organize and to train his force, especially the newly arrived tank crews and their electrical and maintenance engineer workshop echelons. There was also the need to create a reserve and a striking force. Fifthly, Montgomery saw the requirement to bring about closer and more effective control over the battles to come, by knitting together the air and land efforts into a joint headquarters. Last but not least; Montgomery had to learn the tactics of the desert himself — he was new to the desert: 'the general without sand in his hair'.

Like any new commander worth his salt, Montgomery started his command by making a detailed personal reconnaissance of his entire Army area of operations. This had been preceded by a paper study

made before he had arrived in Cairo. He visited the Eighth Army battle line and studied the El Alamein position, the dispositions of his own troops and the reported positions of the enemy. The geography of the El Alamein position is one of the rare tactical gifts afforded in nature: a position that cannot be outflanked because of the sea to its north and the desert to its south. However, Montgomery perceived that notwithstanding the natural strength of the position, a purely linear defence would be inadequate to hold the imminent German attack and that despite the strong, often 10 miles deep minefields, Rommel was capable of penetrating these comparatively thin defences or of turning the southern flank. Such an event would lead to the usual disastrous results for the Eighth Army. The El Alamein defences needed more depth with greater strength. Clearly the El Alamein position was vital ground in Middle East strategy. As correctly appreciated at the beginning of the war, it would have to be held and it would certainly be attacked.

In August 1942, Montgomery's forces were neither trained nor equipped for a sustained offensive. Therefore a defensive battle was inevitable in much the same way as Slim had to defend Imphal (Burma) in 1944. Montgomery was not the first to realize the key importance of the Alam el Halfa Ridge as the vital ground of the Eighth Army. He was the first to give it its correct quantum of troops so as to ensure balance and to regain initiative in the battle about to begin. Ruweisat Ridge, the west edge of which was occupied by the forward defended localities of the Eighth Army (5th Indian Division) was ground of tactical importance to the Eighth Army. Montgomery appreciated that Rommel had three courses open to him. The first was to attack along the northern coastal strip, a possible course but one for which Rommel might lack the strength and supplies required for such a head-on slogging match. Secondly, a centre attack with Ruweisat Ridge as the first major objective. Thirdly, a southern turning movement aimed either wide at the Nile Delta itself or confined to seizing the Alam el Halfa Ridge. Montgomery could not be sure which course Rommel would adopt out of these three. He therefore kept forces in reserve which he would move only when the direction of the main enemy thrust became known. At the same time, Montgomery decided that he would do everything he could by deception measures to encourage Rommel to come via the south — the most likely approach according to typical Rommel tactics of manoeuvre.

VI

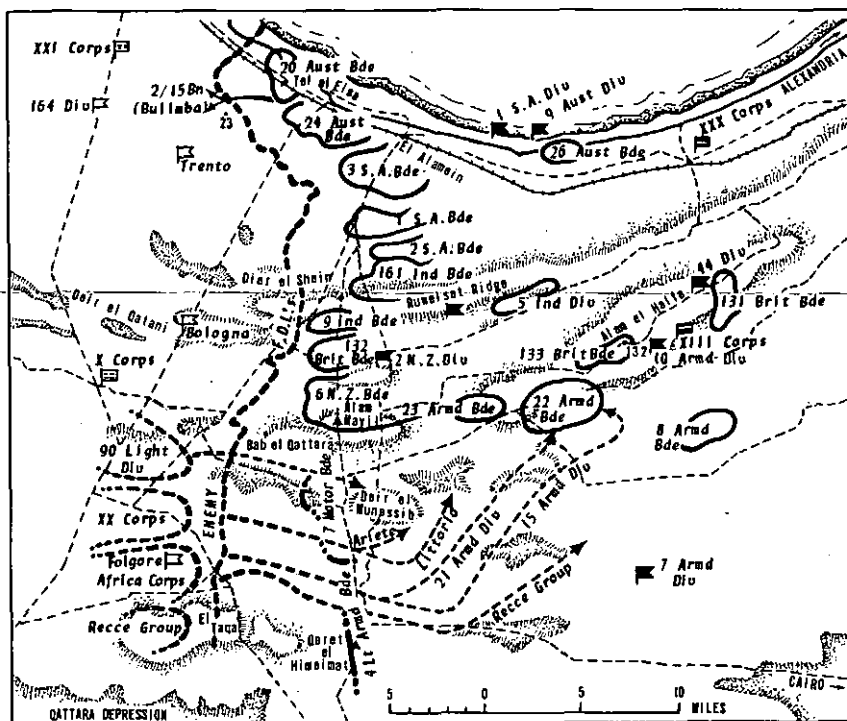
Rommel was still in command when the *Afrika Korps* began the Battle for the Nile, as the Italians and Germans called it. The *Afrika Korps* was short of supplies. The arrival of supplies and reinforcements was subjected to more and more interference and loss whilst crossing the Mediterranean from the mainland of Italy. However, the German force was well seasoned, German generalship had hitherto succeeded and there would be a wealth of petrol and other war material awaiting in the bases at Alexandria. The German Commander — von Stumme — made a slow concentration in the south, to achieve surprise and to allow the maximum of supplies to come up. This was not detected by Montgomery.

The German attack was launched just after midnight on 30/31 August 1942 in full moonlight. In the north the attack was but a strong raid made on the Australian positions; a feint. In the centre, a heavy holding attack was mounted on the Ruweisat Ridge (5th Indian Division); this met with initial success. The Germans were ejected only after a strong, rehearsed counter-attack made at first light on 31 August 1942. Simultaneously, the *Afrika Korps* made its main thrust from the south.

From Rommel's account of this 'do or die' attack on the Nile, we now know that the Germans met unexpectedly tough opposition right from the start, in the form of an unlocated British minefield of great depth, high density, extensive booby traps and anti-lifting devices. The Germans forced their way through this at great cost. Meanwhile, Montgomery awaited events to determine the precise direction of the main German thrust which he could now decide would be either wide towards El Hammam or, as hoped for, tighter and directed at Alam el Halfa. The forces available to the *Afrika Korps* were insufficient in numbers and logistic support for a wide sweep. Thus the German thrust was directed on Alam el Halfa, after penetrating the forward line of the El Alamein defences at their southern extremity. By the evening of 31 August 1942, Rommel's tanks commenced action against British tanks of the British 22nd Armoured Brigade, the latter firing from previously reconnoitred and occupied positions south of the Alam el Halfa Ridge. The decisive power of the tank on the battlefield is not its armament alone but its fire power combined with manoeuvre, so that an armoured assault against enemy armour in previously occupied positions denies the tank the advantage of manoeuvre. In this case, the German advance

to close with the position had been assisted by a natural screen of dust raised by high desert winds that concealed the German moves, and at the same time grounded the Royal Air Force. Visibility improved by the evening of 31 August and the Royal Air Force at once began intense bombing of German tank and vehicle columns. Rommel described this very aptly as a 'Party Rally' system of non-stop bombing.

By the morning of 1 September 1942, Montgomery had appreciated the capabilities of the German attack and had devised the German plan. Montgomery moved the British 10th Armoured Division, previously positioned in depth, to a reconnoitred battle position between the Alam el Halfa Ridge and the El Alamein line proper. He also ordered the strengthening of the Ruweisat Ridge and moved up one brigade of a reserve division in the Nile to restore the overall balance of the entire Eighth Army position.



The Battle of Alam el Halfa
30-31 August 1942

The German attack made no headway either on the 1st or the 2nd of September. The Germans were subjected to constant bomber and fighter attacks of an intensity that they had never experienced before. They began to run short of petrol, since their supplies were also being subjected to similar heavy attacks in their rear. Several senior German generals were lost through air action or from mine explosions. Rommel himself had a series of narrow escapes. Montgomery's appreciation had been proved correct in every essential detail. Even today — 30 years later and taking into account all present day conditions of warfare — it is a model of planning, reconnaissance and execution.

Rommel recognized his defeat. He ordered a complete withdrawal back to his positions west of El Alamein on 3 September 1942. This withdrawal was carried out according to plan despite continued air attacks and Montgomery's attempts to close the minefield gap defiles. The German columns had penetrated through these and had to return by the same route. Rommel completed his withdrawal and broke off contact by the morning of 7 September 1942. Thereafter the German-Italian force prepared itself to meet an Allied offensive. Hitler and Mussolini both agreed that a battle should be fought rather than contemplate a strategic withdrawal to, say, El Agheila. This was militarily unsound.

In the Alam el Halfa battle Rommel lost some 3,000 killed, wounded and prisoners, 51 tanks, 30 field guns, 40 anti-tank guns and 400 lorries. British losses were 68 tanks, no field guns, 18 anti-tank guns, 1,640 killed, wounded and missing. This record of losses reveals that Rommel's armour and guns were still superior in some respects to those of the British — compare Rommel's tank losses later at Medenine — but that the Royal Air Force's sustained hammering at the forward fighting columns and the rear supply echelons had brought the advance to a standstill, had wrought havoc amongst vehicles and had contributed to the abandonment of many guns. Montgomery's conduct of this defensive battle was masterly. Even the permitting of the German forces to break off the battle was a sound decision. Rommel himself comments:

There is no doubt that the British commander's handling of this action had been absolutely right... for it had enabled him to inflict very heavy damage on us in relation to his own losses, and to retain the striking power of his own forces... [by relying] instead on the effect of his enormously powerful artillery and air forces.

Rommel's comment also reveals a clear realization of what would inevitably follow, as will be seen later.

Of the many lessons that can be drawn from this classic battle (Alam el Halfa) the most striking and applicable ones are maintenance of aim, morale and the use of air power. In his appreciation, Montgomery deduced the patterns that would have to be followed and the possible attacks that could be made on his position. At a high level it is rarely possible to conclude that there is only one course of action that the enemy can follow; usually there will be several — at least at the outset. Montgomery catered for the enemy attack in all its initial aspects and subsequent variations so that the battle moved to its inevitable conclusion in the way Montgomery had foreseen. Montgomery was able to move his formations in a chess-like pattern, rather like the manner in which all the fielders of a test cricket team react on the orders of their captain to a series of batsmen. Victorious, Montgomery refrained from a pursuit for which he was not ready in terms of training, material or morale. Instead he consolidated and fortified the self-confidence gained by all, including himself, in this eight-day battle. He added to his success by further training and preparation. His aim was to strike a decisive blow in accordance with the directive given to him to clear the Axis forces from North Africa. There is no doubt that Montgomery's careful deliberation at this stage was entirely correct. On many later occasions critics were to find Montgomery over-cautious and tactically unenterprising. However, his overall strategic grasp is rarely criticized. The third lesson selected out of many others is the dramatic effect of air power. In point of fact, at that time, neither Montgomery nor the Desert Air Force, nor the Chief of Air Staff in London, nor perhaps anybody — barring the Germans who had made actual war experiments during the Spanish Civil War before perfecting their technique in Poland and France — had the correct concept of the use of air forces in close support of ground forces. There is a useful lesson here — the need for integral air support of armies today and of the key role they have to play against powerful enemy armoured columns.

VII

The Battle of El Alamein was fought from 23 October until 3 November 1942, after which the German-Italian forces retreated to El Agheila. In fact the final defeat of all German and Italian forces in North Africa followed as a result of Montgomery's advance and the landings of the Anglo-American Force in West Africa (Operation TORCH).

From the British viewpoint, El Alamein was a set-piece attack. From the German side it was a 'battle without hope', the outcome was clear to Rommel, who favoured a withdrawal. But Hitler ordered the position to be held. An accurate, concise and clear description of El Alamein the Battle is given in Montgomery's *El Alamein To The Sangro*. Montgomery's attack terminology — preparatory, break-in, dog-fight, break-out and pursuit stages — were subsequently incorporated into official War Office tactical doctrine. It seems most unlikely that the El Alamein type of battle would ever be fought in modern war. The concentration achieved by both sides, its ponderous progress and the long duration of the battle, would have presented first class targets for nuclear weapons on both sides.

It is now clear that the Battle of El Alamein should not have been fought. Rommel referred to it as the 'battle without hope'. He said that since the battle of supplies had clearly been won by the British by the end of October 1942 the only course of action left open was a systematic, strategic withdrawal. Rommel met Mussolini on 24 September 1942, and informed him that in view of the supply situation and the relative strength disparity both on the ground and in the air 'we should have to get out of North Africa'. Rommel, one of the finest generals to emerge out of World War II in any army, was far too robust of morale and soldierlike to be defeatist, apart from his personal enthusiasm over the *Afrika Korps* that he had created. His statement was a sober estimate of the situation. This battle was as grave an error in Africa as was the Battle of Stalingrad in Russia. In both cases the German High Command and Hitler, who tried to direct the war in minute detail, should have faced up to the inevitability of a planned strategic withdrawal — as was the case with the British withdrawal from Burma after the capture of Singapore.

El Alamein was a sledge-hammer battle fought by large forces within a restricted area. I have said that such a battle would not take place under the conditions of nuclear war. What, then, are the up-to-date lessons that we can derive from this battle? The first and foremost is command of the air. At this time the Royal Air Force was well on the way to achieving air supremacy but the higher commanders were too inexperienced then to realize that, with the dwindling of worthwhile air targets like enemy fighters, bombers, and airfields, they should have switched far more weight of air power onto German troop and vehicle concentrations, using rocket projectiles and bombs rather than machine-

guns, and lightly armed fighter and reconnaissance sorties. This should have been obvious from a study of German Air Force tactics in Spain, Poland and France. Today, the proper integration of close air support to the land battle still requires detailed and practical evaluation at task force, divisional and higher levels in the Army and equivalent levels in the Air Force. Demands for air strikes must be understood and seen as justified by the Air Force. The Army general in the field requires a senior Air Force adviser in the same way as every formation commander has his affiliated artillery adviser under existing concepts.

The second important lesson relating to modern warfare conditions is that higher commanders must plan and be prepared for the exploitation of major tactical opportunities immediately these become apparent. Far more alacrity must be shown than Montgomery displayed towards the end of the Battle of El Alamein. On the failure to pursue after El Alamein, Montgomery's Chief of Staff is apologetic, while Montgomery blamed the delay on the weather. The fact is that the final, inevitable outcome of the North Africa campaign was delayed considerably when the Germans were able to break contact on 6 November 1942 and that this could have been avoided with due foresight. In the age of nuclear warfare it is all the more important to prevent an enemy from breaking contact. It is by such 'limpet tactics' that the enemy's freedom of action to use atomic weapons is inhibited, out of fear of wiping out as much of his own forces as of his antagonists. How could this breaking of contact have been prevented? This question applies to present day tactics. In particular, the supply echelons of armoured forces must include some percentage of tracked supply vehicles so as to make the column independent of roads and weather conditions: there should be 'tanker tanks' and tracked ammunition re-supply vehicles for every armoured formation. This is a matter for serious consideration today and it is surprising how little support this idea has gained. Rommel himself comments on this problem:

The earliest exponents of armoured warfare in the 1920s had urged that the new model forces should be completely on a tracked vehicle basis... In the autumn of 1941 the German Army had forfeited its chances of decisive victory because the wheeled portion of their Panzer divisions became bogged. Now the British Army provided another object lesson.

An alternative or combined solution to the supply problem could have been found in emergency air supply of petrol and ammunition to sustain the advance. This was to be done later in Burma during the advance led by the 5th Indian Division from Meiktila to Rangoon.

A third way out was the use of airborne forces to cut off the main body of the Germans before they could fall back on the El Agheila position. The belated application of this tactic is seen later when Montgomery used airborne formations at Arnhem and Nijmegen under extremely unfavourable and inexact intelligence conditions.

When Montgomery assumed command of the Eighth Army in August 1942, one of his early orders was to wind up the brigade strength columns known as 'Jock columns'. For the defence of Alam el Halfa this was a prompt and wise decision. However, under non-nuclear conditions we have recently seen the flexibility of such columns as demonstrated by the Israeli attacks on Egypt. Certainly under nuclear conditions, as in jungle and mountain, and bearing in mind the increased capabilities of modern wireless communications plus the fire power available to modern task forces, some proportion of a field force should include battle groups with a fire control organization to facilitate the concentrated delivery of combined fire power onto selected targets as and when the opportunity presents itself.

El Alamein was a great victory. At that stage of the war Churchill was in desperate need for such a victory. The British had suffered defeats almost without remission since 1939 in France, Norway, Hong Kong, Malaya, Singapore, Burma and in North Africa. El Alamein gave a great fillip to British morale. It was also an answer in part to Stalin's understandable demand for more vigorous action against the Germans to relieve the pressure on the Russian armies. It is customary in British circles to ask the distinguished person on whom certain honours are to be conferred, the name of the place with which his name might thereafter be linked. Roberts chose Kandahar; Kitchener chose Khartoum; Montgomery chose El Alamein; it was, at the time, a great victory in the eyes of the world. As students of military history, we may regret that his choice did not fall on the less spectacular Battle of Alam el Halfa for, historically speaking, it was here that Montgomery truly won his laurels and not at El Alamein.

The backbone of German resistance was broken at El Alamein but with Rommel still in command there was plenty of fight left in the *Afrika Korps* although the Italian element showed little further will to resist. The remainder of the North African campaign consists of successive, planned, well executed withdrawals by the German-Italian forces, the landing of the Anglo-American forces in West Africa and their advance into Tunisia from the west, the eventual link up of this new

force with the Eighth Army, the evacuation of German-Italian forces into Sicily and Italy and the surrender of those left behind after the capture of the last two remaining ports, Tunis and Bizerta.

VIII

Rommel's withdrawal from El Alamein is as classic an example of strategic withdrawal as that of the British withdrawal to India through Burma. It was in many respects more skilful. Rommel never missed an opportunity to strike back at the Eighth Army even after the TORCH landings (8 November 1942). He was indubitably aided indirectly by the excessive caution shown throughout by Montgomery. This caution was understandable and is the usual characteristic of any commander until he is fully self-confident in handling his new command.

Although the Eighth Army covered some 700 miles to capture Benghazi within 15 days of advancing from El Alamein on 20 November 1942, the Germans found time to prepare positions for a stand three days later and 200 miles further west at the El Agheila position, the furthest point reached during Wavell's original offensive against the all Italian force. Montgomery closed up on El Agheila and took three weeks to prepare for the assault on this position. Rommel, naturally, had no intention of imposing anything more than the maximum possible delay so that it is not surprising that he abandoned this covering position on 13 December 1942 in the face of strong raids by Eighth Army patrols, and 24 hours before Montgomery's planned attack was launched. This was one of the few occasions where the follow-up and pursuit was prompt: in particular the vigour and enterprise of the 2nd New Zealand Division (Major General Freyberg, VC) threatened to cut off the retreating Germans who extricated themselves only after heavy and desperate fighting.

Rommel, who clearly favoured the clean break, demolition and small delaying parties — rather than a series of intermediate positions — fell back on Buerat. He might have chosen to impose further delay on the line Homs-Tarhuna, a natural bottleneck, but the number of places at which any commander can stand and fight during withdrawal has to be restricted because of the strain it imposes, physically as well as from the morale aspect, on troops. Before Buerat, Montgomery again planned a systematic set-piece attack after closing up on the enemy. The result was that Rommel again achieved the aim of every withdrawing commander; he gained time and withdrew before Montgomery

mounted his attack on 15 January 1943. To Montgomery's credit — the journalists had begun to hint at his over-cautiousness — he had concurrently provided for the supplies and tactical plan for an immediate further advance, with the result that the Eighth Army swept on to occupy Tripoli without a fight on 23 January 1943. Once again Rommel had slipped away. Tripoli was, of course, a great prize. Apart from being a port that made the forward supply of the Eighth Army easier, it had been the pride of all the Italian colonies.

Rommel's aim was to extricate as many as possible of his *Afrika Korps* troops along with the Italian force; the latter for political reasons only, since they clearly had little fighting value. In his writings Rommel refrains from the bitter criticisms that his Italian ally possibly deserved. Here he shows a statesman-like wisdom, for not only is the criticism of allies the common cause of inter-allied differences, but disdain for others was characteristic of Nazi Germany. In this and in many other instances Rommel shows qualities of leadership, and an understanding of men that is a lesson in man-management and behaviour that all too few German generals showed in two world wars.

IX

In January, the Anglo-American Conference (Casablanca, 14 January 1943) decided to unify the command of Allied forces in North Africa now that Eisenhower's and Montgomery's forces were approaching one another.

The Eighth Army followed up the retreating German-Italian force. Nalut on the border between Italian Africa and Tunisia was occupied on 4 February 1943. Here, rain again halted the advance of the Eighth Army. Ben Gardane was occupied only after its abandonment by the Germans on 15 February 1943. Montgomery was now approaching the Mareth Line defences. His administrative problems showed signs of easing with the opening of Tripoli port and the sea lane to Egypt. Leclerc's forces, operating from Lake Chad further south, made contact with Montgomery and were operating on the western flank of the Eighth Army. The advanced elements of the Army were halted at Medenine beyond which lay the Mareth defences.

At this point, on 15 February 1943, the Germans in Tunisia launched a strong attack against the unseasoned United States forces in West Tunisia. A forced withdrawal of the United States forces began and this showed every likelihood of becoming a worse rout than any

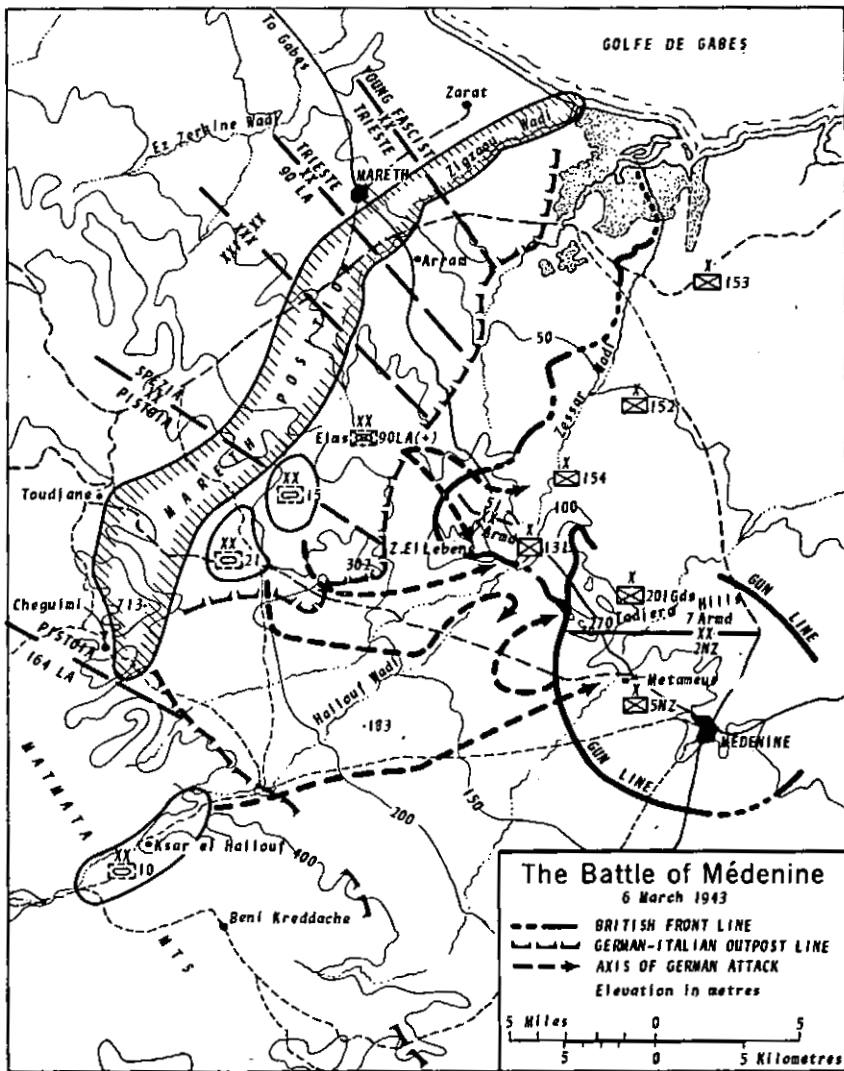
suffered by the Eighth Army or the *Afrika Korps*. By 20 February 1943, the Allies in North Africa were faced with a very grave military situation.

Montgomery, as usual, pronounced that he was not yet ready to attack the Mareth Line defences. However, some offensive action on Montgomery's part was essential to draw off the Germans attacking the United States forces. This Montgomery was quick to recognize. He therefore pressed an attack using the British 7th Armoured and the 51st (Highland) Divisions along the coastal Gabes Road sector. This certainly succeeded in relieving pressure on the Americans. Rommel reacted at once; he was concerned primarily with keeping open his evacuation route to Europe.

Rommel, who had gained some initiative through these events, now turned his attention to Montgomery's dispositions. In fact Rommel had received reinforcements that included the new 'Tiger' tank and seeing that the spearhead of the Eighth Army was unduly extended — a weak force in strength, exposed — he determined to put in a spoiling attack to destroy it before Montgomery could either reinforce or withdraw it. It was a sound plan and involved attacking Medenine.

The German attack was made at first light on 6 March 1943. Rommel, a sick man, directed his attack. Had Rommel been a fitter man at this time, had his Intelligence organization been less disorganized by the long withdrawal and fighting on two fronts, he may well have had second thoughts about the tactics used by his armour, if not the advisability of fighting the battle at all. However, this is mere conjecture. What actually happened is that during that day, 6 March, Rommel made four attacks, using three Panzer divisions against the British positions at Medenine. Tanks were employed in the assault role since there was an absence of barbed wire and anti-tank mines and the ground was tankable. Montgomery, however, was fully alive to the dangers facing his forwardmost troops. In anticipation of Rommel's attack he had positioned some 400 tanks and 500 anti-tank guns so that the Medenine position was really one huge tank death-trap. A novel feature of Montgomery's defensive layout was that tanks and anti-tank guns were sited primarily to kill tanks, as opposed to previous tactics of siting to protect infantry. This change was made possible by the improved range and penetration power at longer ranges of the new anti-tank armaments now available to Montgomery in quantity, i.e., the Sherman's 75-mm gun and the high muzzle velocity and penetration

capability of the British 17-pounder anti-tank gun and its discarding sabot warhead. As a result, 52 German tanks were knocked out and destroyed without the loss of a single British tank; 45 of these casualties had been inflicted by anti-tank guns. The Germans withdrew under cover of darkness and Montgomery had won a second defensive action that some have compared to Alam el Halfa.



The Medenine battle or action certainly deserves praise. Montgomery had shown himself to be more than a match against Rommel, although in manoeuvre Rommel remained the master both in the advance and withdrawal. The importance of good equipment used with matching tactical concepts is clearly demonstrated by Montgomery's use of tanks and anti-tank guns against massed German armour. Remember that this was before the introduction of effective portable anti-tank weapons like the rocket launcher, the Egera, RCLs, SS 10s, the Gustaf or missiles. One often hears heated theoretical debates on the use or non-use of tanks in the assault role. Fervent addicts to the cavalry charge — which is all the assault role of armour really amounts to — ignore the loss of range of a tank's main armament that is an inevitable consequence of closing with an enemy. In the contest of the modern battlefield they have to admit that where anti-tank defences are properly organized, an assault by tanks against enemy tanks and anti-tank guns in prepared positions is likely to be at the best a costly, if not pyrrhic, victory. The Medenine action emphasizes that it is the mobility factor of the tank that must always be exploited to the utmost. Reliance on the morale effects of the machine and the fire-power of its secondary armaments are unsound until and unless combined with manoeuvre. Such manoeuvre must, by definition, be wide, and this brings up again the point of sustained emergency re-supply already discussed.



X

After Medenine, Hitler ordered Rommel back to Fortress Europe where he was given even greater responsibilities; he was too capable a general to be allowed to fall into British hands.

The stage was now set for the last acts of the North African campaign. Montgomery, in his book, goes on referring to Rommel's attempts, since he was left in ignorance of his return to Germany. Von Arnim was left to fight to the end.

Montgomery refers to the Mareth Line battle as the toughest battle that the Eighth Army had fought since El Alamein; we may accept this as an accurate statement. Rommel, who had left detailed instructions for the final withdrawal before handing over, makes it clear that once again he had foreseen Montgomery's tactics. The Germans

withdrew according to plan. Montgomery describes the Mareth Line in considerable historical and geographical detail in his book. He deals at length with the narrow coastal plain and the wide enveloping movement that he planned, and which was executed over extremely difficult terrain by New Zealand Corps and part of British 10 Corps. The objective was El Hamma, the capture of which would turn the Mareth Line. The battle commenced on 20 March 1943; it made slow progress without piercing the defences. Meanwhile the outflanking force made slow but certain progress since Rommel lacked sufficient forces to put out a really strong flank guard. In the north the Germans launched a determined counter-attack on the afternoon and night of the 22nd of March under cover of bad weather that kept the Royal Air Force grounded. Montgomery thereupon made a clever tactical decision; he withdrew as much of his force as possible from the northern sector while reinforcing the southern outflanking formation in the hope thereby that the Germans would go on holding their positions in the north, while he outflanked them from the south and cut them off by seizing their layback or switch position around El Hamma. Rommel had long before foreseen this move, his staff were aware of the danger, and his successor had been warned about it. The result was that the Germans reinforced the El Hamma position and held up the New Zealand Corps while their forces in the Mareth Line withdrew towards Wadi Akarit on the night of 27 March 1943. There is no doubt that the German and Italian forces were subjected to a severe mauling during this last battle. However, events were to show that there was still plenty of fight left in them.

Montgomery was again slow to pursue, so that on approaching Wadi Akarit it was found to be strongly held. The German delaying position was contacted in strength on 31 March 1943, but an attack was not launched upon it until the early hours of 4 April. It was another head-on attack, a miniature El Alamein, and it led to the same bitter fighting and heavy casualties on both sides. Montgomery's vastly superior resources made the outcome a foregone conclusion, but even so, the Germans made yet another planned, orderly withdrawal on the night 6/7 April 1943. The main gain to the Eighth Army was 7,000 prisoners of war, mainly Italians.

After Wadi Akarit the British continued to press the retreating Germans who made their last stand before the Eighth Army at Enfidaville. Our leading elements contacted the Germans at Enfidaville and

closed up on them by 16 April 1943. Here once again Montgomery found it necessary to delay in order to concentrate his forces for an attack, and did not consider himself balanced and poised until the night 19/20 April. By this time the German-Italian defences were reasonably well prepared and the attack met stiff opposition: German morale in extreme adversity was as good as that shown by the British at Dunkirk in 1940.

At this stage the newly unified Allied command came into play. Eighth Army was ordered to contain the enemy, while part of that Army was switched to augment British First Army and United States forces advancing across the Plain of Tunis from the West. This was a correct strategic move dictated by the terrain. It led to the speedy fall of both Tunis and Bizerta on 7 May 1943. With the fall of these last two port towns of importance, the North African Campaign was virtually over: Mopping up of isolated German pockets continued. The Italians put up hardly any resistance. By 12 May 1943 the Eighth Army had reached the end of a long hard road. It had beaten its opponent and completely freed North Africa from the Axis forces. Already some of its formations, taken into reserve, were training for the seaborne assault on the island of Sicily.

XI

The Eighth Army operations that have been described took place over 30 years ago. Who can say whether the future pattern of war will include nuclear weapons? Quite conceivably the wildcat characteristics of nuclear warfare will result in a tacit agreement between antagonists not to use it — in the same way as poison gas was used in World War I but not in World War II, although both sides manufactured it in quantity. Even if tactical nuclear weapons are not used — let alone the bigger strategic bombs — the destruction that can be brought to bear by even small formations on a modern battlefield is many times greater in range and striking power than experienced during World War II. This destructive power is offset only in part by the improved cross country performance of vehicles, more efficient wireless communications, the use of helicopters and hovercraft, etc.

In his version of the battles, Montgomery stresses *Administration*. In fact, he promoted this factor to principle of war status. At the same time this principle was responsible, time and time again, for putting a halt to the advance of his Army. Rommel, whose supply problems were a far greater nightmare, managed to attack at Alam el Halfa and

to conduct a fighting withdrawal to the last. The reason is that Montgomery thought in conventional terms. As early as 1917 in World War I even the desert guerrillas of Lawrence of Arabia had been supplied by air, using the largest aircraft available in those early days; converted Handley-Page bombers. Since he fashioned Administration into a principle of war it is reasonable to suggest, that in deference to his new principle, Montgomery should also have devised some form of emergency supply by air, as did Slim in Burma. Considering the resources available in the Middle East in 1943, it is reasonable to say that opportunities were lost repeatedly due to the slow advance of the Eighth Army.

One forms the impression that Montgomery only just withstood the temptation of adding *Balance* as a Principle of War! Of course *Balance* is nothing more than one aspect of the Principle of Security. *Balance*, re-grouping and administration all too often add up to delay and lost opportunities and even today we see remnants of this mentality in our theoretical studies. Strong 'enemy' covering positions require two nights of reconnaissance before an attack can be made with full administrative preparation! Had German doctrine been on these lines their Panzers would still be trying to force a way to Dunkirk. In place of Montgomery's systematic but ponderous approach we would do better by taking the view that an objective of given size will require a definite calculable quantum of troops to assault it. If an enemy position is too strong, then it should be treated as a pivot of manoeuvre; something to be enveloped. The Israelis are the latest demonstrators of this dynamic concept. Small formations, highly mobile and hard-hitting, are the key to successful operations, rather than ponderous divisions of infantry or elephantine armoured formations. Whatever Montgomery may have contributed to the art of war at Alam el Halfa and elsewhere he did not exploit *Mobility* in a theatre ideally suited for mobile operations. This had been amply demonstrated by Wavell and was one of the key ingredients of Rommel's successes.

A great deal has been written on Montgomery's leadership — not a little of it by Montgomery himself. Montgomery had integrity and purpose. He showed a clear brain for tactical matters. He had adequate logistic support. In contrast, German logistics were being subjected to increasing interdiction by sea and air as they crossed the narrow sea gap between Sicily and Tripoli.

The leader who emerges *par excellence* from the campaign is Erwin Rommel. It is a similar situation to that of Robert E. Lee in the

American Civil War. A parallel might be drawn with Jan Smuts, the South African Boer rebel who was beaten by the British, but later rose to be a member of the British War Cabinet, a Field Marshal in the British Army, and a greater figure than many who had fought him. Rommel, as is well known, was eventually murdered at the express instance of Hitler. It is likely that Rommel had found himself in a dilemma when he saw his country failing under the faulty doctrines and policies pursued so recklessly by Hitler. Both as a general and as a man Rommel comes out very high indeed when rating the war leaders of either the Axis or the Allies. By comparison Montgomery appears as a Fabius Cunctator. Even in defeat, Rommel stands out as the superior strategical and tactical commander.

Last but not least: equipment. With some bias in favour of the Germans because of Rommel's genius the two forces were very much equals in morale. Neither the British, including Commonwealth forces, nor the Germans, cracked under the strain of battle. The exceptions were the South Africans. The Italians never had any real morale. Initially the Germans had far better supply and repair organizations. The British had not even devised a suitable petrol container, with the result that today we have the Cockney slang word 'Jerrican'. The technique of battlefield recovery of tanks and the origin of the Corps of Electrical and Mechanical Engineers are also to be traced to the example set by the German *Afrika Korps*. The real lesson here is that, however just a country's cause may be, however robust its national morale, however brave the troops and however vast its industrial output, that country is still doomed to defeat until and unless it produces, or otherwise procures, equipment in sufficient quantity to match that of its enemy. During World War II, the British failed to produce a tank that was a match for the Germans. British aircraft were far superior. Rommel saw that Africa was lost to the Axis due to logistic shortfalls, and that the only correct course of action was a swift withdrawal back to Cyrenaica, and even Tunisia.

The Eighth Army's campaign was not fought only in the desert. Some elements of it fought in mountains, forests, snow and in agricultural country. The Eighth Army under Montgomery consisted of seasoned fighting men with adequate supplies. They had tanks and aircraft that matched or surpassed those of the enemy. With Montgomery's highly competent generalship the Eighth Army was bound to prevail. One might well say it should have had an outright win

much earlier. We should seek to fight our defensive battles like Montgomery at Alam el Halfa and Medenine, but we should turn to Rommel for a proper understanding of the handling of Armour and the power of manoeuvre in the years ahead of us. ✂

The House did not of course appreciate the significance of Rommel's successful counter-stroke, for they could be given no inkling of the larger plans that would be opened by a swift British conquest of Tripolitania. The loss of Benghazi and Agedabia, which had already become public, seemed to be a part of the sudden ebbs and flows of Desert warfare. Moreover, as the telegrams here printed have shown, I had no precise information as to what had happened, and why.

I could not resist paying my tribute to Rommel.

I cannot tell what the position at the present moment is on the Western front in Cyrenaica. We have a very daring and skilful opponent against us, and may I say across the havoc of war, a great general. He has certainly received reinforcements. Another battle is even now in progress, and I make it a rule never to prophesy beforehand how battles will turn out. I always rejoice that I have made that rule. Naturally, one does not say that we have not a chance.

My reference to Rommel passed off quite well at the moment. Later on I heard that some people had been offended. They could not feel that any virtue should be recognised in an enemy leader. This churlishness is a well-known streak in human nature, but contrary to the spirit in which a war is won, or a lasting peace established.

—Winston Churchill, *The Second World War*.

The Projector and Other Barriers to Successful Instruction

**They shall indeed see but never perceive,
For this people's minds have grown dull,
And their eyes they have closed.**

—Acts 28: 26-27

*Lieutenant Colonel O. J. O'Brien
Royal Australian Infantry*

O THER barriers to successful instruction? A misprint, surely! We all know that projectors are essential equipment for the modern military instructor. Research has proved that the plain lecture is an inefficient, antiquated method of teaching. A military instructor no longer simply gives a lecture or delivers an unadorned oral briefing. He needs, it seems, a 'presentation', an elaborately staged production wherein the audience's eye is riveted upon the illuminated screen while its mind is enlightened by a well-rehearsed monologue delivered in measured tones from the shadows of the podium.

And there is my protest. We are forgetting, I fear, that training aids are supposed to assist the instructor, to enable him to vary his teaching methods, and to help the transfer of knowledge from teacher to student. Too often, the use of the projector replaces the instructor, causes him to standardize his teaching methods, and impedes the transfer of knowledge. There is danger that the instructor will cease to be a teacher and instead will become merely an assistant to the projector, imparting cold fact and sterile detail instead of wisdom and knowledge. I submit that many military instructors who lace their 'presentation' with slides, transparencies, and other visual displays often squander time, electricity, and student goodwill — precious commodities all.

Consider, for example, the student who sits numbly in a classroom while the screen outlines in turn the four roles of tank units, the six characteristics of the battle tank, the eight limitations of the tank, and

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the five factors and seven considerations affecting tank employment. Pity him, then, as his senses are assaulted successively by diagrams of the squadron organization, the regimental communications, and the layout of a regimental echelon. And weep for him as he tries to focus upon the screen and simultaneously listen to the instructor in the shadows, who is explaining in a dull monotone the ramifications of those splendid visual productions which include *all* the information, and *all* the tiresome detail, which the student knows can be found in Chapter 2 of the manual.

Now, I will readily acknowledge that visual displays are worthy instructional tools if properly used. It is axiomatic that, if an instructor makes his students use eyes as well as ears, they will probably learn more and remember more than if he merely lectures on his subject. The use of slides, transparencies, and films can help an instructor to make a telling point, explain a sequence or relationship, or portray a process. If, however, he uses the projector merely to show a list of functions, an unreasonably complicated diagram, or a number of factors, he may have more on the screen than the student mind can either absorb or remember. The result may be confusion instead of comprehension. Similarly, if the instructor is not especially careful about how he presents and explains his aids, he may diminish rather than increase student interest. In each case, the use of such instructional aids is sadly unproductive.

Heresy, you say? Every 'presentation', whether instructional or merely informative, should use slides and transparencies in abundance. Nonsense! Visual displays should be used only when they meet all the requirements of a training aid; that is, when they appeal to the senses, interest the audience, develop understanding, and save time.

But, you argue, audience interest will decline if attention is not visually stimulated. Rubbish! Audience interest may indeed decline if attention is not stimulated at all. Stimulus can be provided in many ways, aural and visual, but stimulation by means of unnecessary or confusing exhibits rapidly becomes ineffective.

You may insist that use of slides and transparencies increases the amount of information which can be presented in the time available. True enough, if mere presentation of information is the instructional objective. If, however, the instructor wants the audience to absorb and retain knowledge, he must sensibly limit the amount of information presented lest it become indigestible. A visual display should emphasize

and enlighten and clarify, thereby contributing to knowledge; it should not simply deliver facts.

The Cardinal Sins of Visual Imagery

In the light of these arguments, what dangers confront the instructor who fails to use judiciously his visual aids? At best, he wastes his own time in preparation of displays which achieve little purpose. Even worse, he may confuse his students and waste their time as well as his own. At worst, he may engender indifference or even hostility in the minds of his audience. Student indifference is detrimental to successful instruction, but student hostility is ruinous.

Successful instruction requires not only a projection of knowledge from teacher to student, but also a projection of personality, and the use of training aids in the classroom must supplement those two processes. The training aid criteria that aids should appeal to the senses, interest the audience, develop understanding, and save time, help to determine whether or not a visual aid is pertinent and useful. The real problem, however, is: how best to direct the student's eyes to important aspects of the topic, so that his mind is stimulated and his knowledge enhanced? Unfortunately, military manuals offer little guidance on how to employ the visual aids the instructor selects, and they do not clearly identify the pitfalls which await the instructor when he uses such aids. These pitfalls are the Cardinal Sins of Visual Imagery.

The projector is the most frequently used, and the most wantonly abused, visual aid in the arsenal of the military instructor. It seems to me that many an instructor reaches first for the transparency kit and then for the manual, in which the chapter headings, sub-headings, and diagrams so conveniently lend themselves to projection onto a screen. Armed thus with a cluster of transparencies, he proceeds to build his 'presentation' around them, thereby falling into the first pitfall and using training aids as crutches to support his instruction, rather than as levers to give it greater force. And if he displays so many transparencies that he bedazzles his audience with a seemingly endless succession of images, he has committed the first of the Cardinal Sins of Visual Imagery: the Sin of Multiplicity. There are five more sins which he may also commit.

The Sin of Multiplicity

The Sin of Multiplicity is the most common to the instructor and the most galling to the student. When it occurs, the instructor really has become an assistant to the projector, and his images are so numerous

that everything is emphasized and nothing is highlighted. The student gives to each display less attention than to the one before it, until his receptivity becomes very low indeed. By this stage, the instructor has ceased to instruct; his only hope of sustaining any interest at all is that he may somehow continue to entertain.

The Sin of Enumeration

At least as galling, and equally grievous, is the Sin of Enumeration. Jocularly known as the Laundry List Technique, it is characterized by tabulation of many disparate or related ideas in numbing profusion upon the screen. We have all been subjected to it: long lists of factors, considerations, capabilities, limitations, characteristics, principles, *et al.*

I have seen twenty-two separate points neatly tabled on a slide which illuminated the screen for less than forty seconds. Yet the instructor piously believed that he was being lucid and informative. The evils of Enumeration are twofold: 1. the very wealth of detail induces ignorance instead of insight; 2. the least efficient way to reach ideas is to present them baldly in writing. Factors and principles and characteristics and the like are conceptions and are intellectually appreciable. They can be discussed and argued about and comprehended. *It surely does no justice to their importance if the instructor treats them merely as points to be remembered rather than as ideas to be understood.* Of course, he may well explain and discuss such matters, and indeed he should, provided that he avoids the sins of Fatuity and Futility.

The Sin of Fatuity

Fatuity is particularly irritating to students because by being fatuous the instructor is, probably unwittingly, insulting their intelligence. For example, an instructor announces in a grave voice: 'Gentlemen, the subject of the next lesson is — logistics'. He pauses while his audience digests the significance of that momentous statement, the house lights dim, and upon the screen is flashed the splendidly illustrative word 'LOGISTICS'. An eloquent precis of his opening remark, to be sure, but it neither appeals to the senses, interests the audience, develops understanding, nor saves time. That visual display is quite unnecessary and thoroughly fatuous, and its use is indefensible.

The Sin of Futility

Even worse can come — Futility. The instructor develops his theme with the penetrating question: 'Gentlemen, what do I mean

by the term 'Logistics'?' Again a pause, and then the screen glows with a pearl of wisdom: 'LOGISTICS IS THE ART AND SCIENCE OF PROVIDING THE MEANS OF WAR'. And now, to the dismay of his audience and the discredit of his reputation, the instructor lapses into the Sin of Futility and earnestly recites the shown dictum: 'Gentlemen, logistics is the art and science of providing the means of war'. Futility indeed, for tedious repetition of a simple idea exasperates the student and also wastes time. This insufferable practice of repeating verbatim what is already on a screen can be condoned only if the audience is illiterate or blind, in which case the very usefulness of a written display must be at least questionable.

To the first four Cardinal Sins of Visual Imagery — Multiplicity, Enumeration, Fatuity, and Futility — may be added two more snares for the unwary instructor. These snares are perhaps harder to avoid but they still deserve considered attention by an instructor who aspires to success. The most notable is the Sin of Complexity.

The Sin of Complexity

Complexity is especially prevalent in instruction on organizational and technical subjects. What military student has never been confounded by a transparency which portrays a unit organization in all its awesome detail and eminently forgettable minutiae? And think of those singularly complex, multi-hued diagrams so dear to the hearts of men who teach us about communications systems, or joint operations, or electronics. The mind reels at the reciprocating arrows, the endless flow lines, the novel acronyms, and the other daunting details that the earnest instructor has placed upon the slide in order to include all the knowledge, and all the trivia, in one stupefying optical package.

The best way to avoid the Sin of Complexity is to ensure that visual aids are simple and useful, bearing constantly in mind the absorptive limit of the audience. That limit is the sum of many things — the students' intellectual levels, their familiarity with the topic, their physical or mental fatigue, and their natural or inspired levels of interest. Men's ability to visually absorb and mentally retain observed complexity is so variable, and so dependent upon mood, that the keys to instructional success must be clarity, relevance and, above all, simplicity. In this vein, the instructor should also consider the likely reaction of his audience to the use of slides and transparencies, and should carefully avoid the Sin of Insensitivity.

The Sin of Insensitivity

Insensitivity is the sixth, and the most insidious, of these Cardinal Sins. It is committed when the instructor fails to appreciate that his audience has developed a degree of immunity to the slide and transparency. For example, a group which has assembled for a particular lecture or a short course of instruction will probably be highly receptive to visual training aids, and likely to remain receptive if the optical displays are interesting, informative, and relevant. In contrast, students attending a long course of instruction are an entirely different audience. Within a few days or weeks, given the habitual use of visual aids in military schools, excessive exposure to slides and transparencies may have made them virtually insensitive to even the most artfully contrived display, especially if their instructors have used the projector immoderately and unwisely. The instructor who then hopes to use slides and transparencies must consider this immunity, or he may well find himself showing pictures and diagrams to those who will not see.

Successful Instruction

I would not care to define a limit to student toleration of slides and transparencies. Such a level must vary according to instructional skill and student motivation. There are no infallible maxims in teaching, just as there are none in learning, but some teaching methods are truly effective whereas others are not. If the teaching wholly or partially fails to impart knowledge, we should analyze that failure by critically examining not only the teacher and his topic, but also his tools and techniques.

The training aid is indeed a valuable instruction tool which, for best effect, requires skilful presentation. It is one of many means of instructional communication, and can be used in a fascinating variety of ways to *translate to the student the knowledge of the instructor*. The slide projector and the transparency projector are exceptionally potent aids to good military instruction if they are prudently and proficiently used. If they are not so used, then time and effort are wasted, knowledge is not imparted, and the military profession suffers.

We should all, when instructing, abstain from the Cardinal Sins of Visual Imagery, and ensure that our visual training aids help and do not hinder successful communication between ourselves and our students. Otherwise, 'they shall indeed see but never perceive', and their eyes *and* minds will be closed. ✂

Exercise 'Cracker's Persuader'

Implications for future joint ARA-CMF Unit Participation

*Lieutenant Colonel G. J. Farley, ED
Royal Australian Artillery*

Introduction

TWO Victorian Citizen Military Force (CMF) units travelled interstate for their annual camps in May 1973 to New South Wales. They were the 10th Medium Regiment (based at Geelong and Colac) and the 132nd Divisional Locating Battery (based at Brighton). They deployed in the second week of their camps to combine with regular army (ARA) units for joint participation in 'Cracker's Persuader', a fully tactical task-force level counter-battery exercise. At present, when exercises of similar joint participation are being actively considered, it is possibly opportune to describe and examine that particular exercise and its implications for such exercises. Both the ARA and the CMF commanding officers involved considered that 'Cracker's Persuader' was a success and was a blue-print that should be repeated from time to time for mutual benefit.

Factors relevant for successful joint participation would appear to be:

- Early planning.
- Joint ARA and CMF participation in decisions.
- An appropriate realistic and challenging role for both units, particularly the CMF.
- Inter-dependence and pooling of resources, both ARA and CMF.

Lieutenant Colonel Farley served in 15 NS Battalion in 1954, proceeding to Melbourne University Regiment for CMF obligation, in which he was commissioned in December 1955. He was transferred to 22 Field Regiment (SP) and converted to gunnery field branch. Successive units were 15 Field Regiment and 10 Medium Regiment, being BC, 2IC and CO of the latter (1971-73). He is now with 3 Training Group in 3 Infantry Division. His civilian occupation is that of High School Principal and he holds degrees in B.Com., B.Ed., and Th.L. (Licentiate of Theology). He has recently completed the Dip.Ed. Admin at the University of New England.

Early Planning

During the previous year's camp of the CMF units, the formation commander announced that a regular unit, the 8th Medium Regiment (now 8/12th), had requested a joint exercise. The exercise dates were determined by the host unit and were fixed as 13 to 18 May 1973. Consequently, the CMF units fixed the dates of their annual camp to include the week earlier in order to prepare for the second week's exercise.

Joint Participation

The exercise director, Lieutenant Colonel P. T. F. Gowans, commanding officer at the time of 8 Medium Regiment, kept the other units fully informed of his intentions for the exercise. At the earliest practical moment he held an orders group and reconnaissance of the range. To this he invited the *CMF regiment's commanding officer, second-in-command, adjutant and quartermaster*. This weekend was held in November 1972. Six clear months were left available for detailed planning and preparation.

The fully volunteer army which resulted from changes in national defence policy, consequent on the Australian Government elections in December 1972, was associated with reductions in numbers in both regular and citizen units. The scope of the exercise was scaled down to bring it within the new capacity of the participating units.

Task and Role

The CMF medium regiment was required to provide troops as sub-units, teams and individuals, each fulfilling a specific function in the exercise. The manpower demands for the medium regiment were fixed at about 140 men. This number was made up of:

- One medium four-gun battery.
- Battery command post.
- Forward observation party.
- Detachment to man the enemy gun.
- Six range sentries.
- Control and umpire command post teams.

In addition, the major CMF unit was to billet visiting officers and to handle public relations. Over and above the exercise requirement was

the need to provide an administrative echelon throughout the camp. This was principally staffed by the ARA cadre.

With approximately 180 men on the CMF unit's strength, maximum human potential would have to be derived to achieve the aim of the camp and the exercise. The CMF unit considered that it could just meet the director's requirement, with little to spare. It was this very small reserve in manpower that was to tax the unit's resources and to spur on the planning expertise and command of the regimental officers. The exercise and its planning fully extended the unit. Periodically, such an experience would seem valuable for any group of men in a task-achievement situation.

The role to be played by the medium regiments in the exercise was the precise role for which such regiments are raised and trained — that of counter-battery.

Besides the task of just getting the number of men for the exercise, there was the greater requirement to train such men in the tasks appropriate to the role, and to train them to a standard where they would be comparable to the standards of the regular troops also taking part.

Sharing of Resources

The fourth factor, that of the willing 'pooling of resources' became more and more important as planning proceeded. The regular army ordnance bath platoon was established one week earlier than the exercise dates to provide for the citizen force personnel. The CMF regimental medical officer provided facilities for the entire exercise. The workshop and light aid detachment personnel increasingly worked closely together sharing the recovery problem. The exercise director was able to call confidently upon all units to co-operate.

Liaison

Apart from the timely distribution of written orders and intelligence briefs, the director visited Victoria for a supplementary orders group and to meet the involved units. Together with his second-in-command, Major N. Paisley, Lieutenant Colonel Gowans attended functions at the medium regiment, where he met officers, NCOs and citizens. The occasion was used to present to 8 Medium Regiment three trophies bearing that regiment's title. These cups dated from the time when the unit at Geelong was prefixed '8', the prefix '10' being allotted in a subsequent re-organization.



Presenting the silver cups to 8 Medium Regiment RAA in March 1973, to be held by their 'heirs and successors for ever'. **L to R** — CO, 10 Medium Regiment, Lt Col G. J. Farley, with receiving 8 Medium Regiment guests, the 2IC, Major N. Paisley and CO, Lt Col P. T. F. Gowans.

'Getting the Numbers'

All CMF units are plagued with the problems of 'crystal ball gazing' and estimating how many men will actually turn up on the first day of camp. This factor was particularly important in 'Cracker's Persuader', as the contribution from the CMF had to be virtually guaranteed. Throughout the six months of the detailed planning, verbal assurances were continually sought from members of the regiment. The verbal promises reached some state of certainty by counting up the signatures on the accommodation stores issue sheets a week before camp, when vehicles had to be loaded for their road move.

In the final week, about twelve men had to withdraw from camp through one valid domestic or employment reason or another. Manpower was stretched even thinner. But it was sufficient in the end. Everyone was extended just that bit further.

Projecting the Challenge

It is one thing to project the adventurous picture of an interstate camp to gunners accustomed to motor and deploy on the familiar

Puckapunyal range. It is quite another to develop that state of confidence in a soldier in which he knows that his training and equipment is equal to the task. A five-day continuous exercise in tough country in the late autumn period of May alongside regular and well-trained troops might well daunt citizen soldiers surrounded by suburban life comforts and standards.

Since every soldier who had been on the Tianjara field firing range had his own particularly authentic tale of rain, mud and cold, the requirement to develop positive attitudes was a real one.

Besides a planned training programme, in which the various tasks in counter-battery warfare were progressively presented and tested, the unit had constructed a table-top panorama which was set up in the training depot. Thus, posters, photographs and maps were kept continually before the gaze of every man who entered the training depot.

The 'panorama' was supplemented by frequent short talks from officers to their men on every possible occasion, keeping them fully informed on the developing situation and gradually building up the confidence that the task was within the unit's capacity to achieve.



Captain D. Carr points out to members of 10 Medium Regiment RAA the panorama of the Tianjara Artillery Field Firing Range in New South Wales prior to the camp in May 1973.

Newspaper and local radio releases were made from time to time so that the public of Geelong and Colac were fully aware that their local CMF unit was undertaking 'something big'. The visit by the exercise director and articles in the Army paper added to this atmosphere. The decision to issue stores so that vehicles would be loaded one week in advance brought further reality into the scene. The emphasis placed on the drawing up of manifests and load lists sealed this excitement and anticipation.

Week One of Camp

The relative novelty of movement by air (RAAF Hercules aircraft) to the naval air base at Nowra, HMAS *Albatross*, together with the use of a completely fresh range (Tianjara) in terms of cross-country movement and supply, made the first week an interesting and logical build-up for the actual exercise. Counter-battery skills were exercised and the troops experienced working all round the clock. The weather, contrary to pessimistic predictions, was fine and it remained this way for the full fortnight.

Middle Weekend

On the Saturday and Sunday the remainder of the units, regular and citizen force, arrived and deployed into tactical locations on the range. The control and umpire teams met each other, set up their tents and tested their radio communications. CMF soldiers required in the first week for unit administration were re-allocated to the gun battery or other exercise duties.

Two points should be made at this juncture. One is that there is often concern as to how the 'surplus' command personnel will be employed when a regimental unit is requested to make available only a sub-unit for an exercise. The experience at Tianjara was that there was no surplus. The various unit command appointments worked alongside each other, and since they were used as the control and umpire network they were able to provide adequately for 'shifts' without prejudice to the exercise. Hence the CMF second-in-command worked with the gun area control team. Complete harmony characterized these teams. There were simply no surplus officers and every CMF officer was employed in a meaningful training role.

The other matter worth mentioning is to underline the feeling of apprehension within the CMF unit as to how the CMF soldiers would



Gunners — both field and medium, CMF and ARA — pull together to clean the barrel of a 5.5" gun on Exercise 'Cracker's Persuader'.

'find' the regular soldiers, in terms of attitude and training. Apart from a degree of professionalism and experience, the difference was relative. Once obliged to work together, as in the planned exchange of personnel between batteries, the 'native Australian' emerged in each soldier, and the harmony experienced amongst the control teams was also characteristic in the gun positions. Both regular and citizen soldier benefited from working with each other in a common and testing situation.

The Exercise

Three gun batteries (two equipped with 5.5" guns and one equipped with M2A2 equipments), together with locating resources (the combined 131 and 132 Divisional Locating Batteries), exercised in a simulated formation level exercise. Enemy weapons fired rounds into the impact area to test the locating expertise of the radar detachments. Counter-battery fire was called for and directed to the point of impact!

The exercise was controlled by radio, events being fed into the sequence of the battle. Sub-units received orders to redeploy as a result of the changed battle situation at all hours. Unprotected moves on the roads were ambushed, the troops being supplied by air force airfield

defence detachments. The RAAF also 'straffed' the uncamouflaged positions which were spotted from air photo reconnaissance. Army and RAAF helicopters provided battlefield transport and liaison.

The exercise ran its planned course. A barbecue for all participants was held on the final night. As to whether the citizen force units met the technical, tactical and physical requirements of the exercise is not for me to judge, but the exercise director expressed his official and personal satisfaction. Lieutenant Colonel Gowans demonstrated how important it was to monitor the ability of citizen units to cope with the situation. It was apparent that in the early stages of the exercise, deployment areas allotted to my regiment were more accessible. This was less so later in the week when units redeployed without reference as to their composition.

Conclusions

I strongly recommend that joint ARA-CMF exercises continue to be planned and held. Both groups depend on each other's contributions. The regular forces appear to need the additional CMF sub-units to make the exercise viable in size and nature; the citizen forces need the regular army invitation to provide them with realistic and meaningful challenges that not only exercise them in their correct roles but extend them in unfamiliar climates and terrains. Above all, the national army demonstrates itself as a unified and co-operating force.

For success, the principal parties in both force-groups must work closely together with personal contact. Mutual participation must be a characteristic of the decision making process. Planning must begin well enough in advance for both units to be correctly prepared. Both groups must feel that it is 'their exercise'. The scope of the exercise needs to be just within the citizen unit when that unit's resources are extended. Resources can and should be pooled. The exercise director must be flexible in his adjustment to the tempo of the exercise and to the contribution of each sub-unit. Joint exercises between citizen and regular forces and particularly those supported by the other services in the defence groups provide meaningful exercise and training opportunities in Australia in the 1970s. ✂

Soldiers or Policemen?

Brigadier K. Perkins, MBE, DFC

GREAT Britain is one of the few countries which maintains law and order in all situations with a virtually unarmed police force; there is as yet no sign that present trends in society necessitate a change in policy, or that one is contemplated. Indeed, the successful handling of demonstrations, hostile picketing and other forms of unrest has vindicated present strategy, which is based upon general public approval of the methods employed and carefully avoids any tactics which might lead to alienation of the public. Thus, any unruly crowd, no matter how large, is contained and controlled in a sophisticated manner by sheer numbers of police using little more than body weight, often in the face of extreme hostility and at the expense of considerable minor casualties. These tactics are in sharp contrast with measures used in most other countries where riot squads react vigorously to unrest, often without differentiating between demonstrator and spectator.

British methods have so far succeeded, and police handling of large and ugly assemblies has won the admiration of the public. However, the violence, like the counter measures, has been restrained by comparison with that offered abroad; but it surely cannot be assumed that this will always be the case. We live in troubled times and there is no historical trend to suggest that this country is permanently immune to internal disorder. The unexpected happened very close to home when Ulster erupted in 1969.

A good deal has been written on the threat from urban guerillas and the measures to combat them.* There is a good deal of support for the view that the Army (more correctly The Armed Forces although the Army would bear the brunt) should be integrated more closely with police planning.

The Army could, of course, form up on the streets whenever required, but a good deal more than that would be needed for the job to be done properly. The establishment of joint government/military/police agencies would be needed well in advance of the requirement for

*For an up-to-date study see: *Low Intensity Operations*, by Frank Kitson, *Protest and the Urban Guerilla*, by Richard Clutterbuck, and Economist Brief No. 29, *Counter Terrorism*, by Robert Moss. This article is republished from *THE BRITISH ARMY REVIEW* with the permission of the Controller, Her Majesty's Stationery Office. United Kingdom Crown Copyright is reserved.

military deployment in order to co-ordinate intelligence, psychological operations and civil affairs without which the Army would be reduced to using inefficient and unselective measures which might as a result seem repressive. However, it is extremely unlikely that any British Government would be willing to involve the military *in advance* of an emergency. There are also other factors. What follows is by no means a definitive solution but an airing of the problem and a conclusion as to how it might be handled should the need arise. But first the threat.

Any urban guerilla activity would almost certainly spring from The New Left which comprises a wide variety of movements pledged to violence as a means of political and social change. Although but a tiny minority, they have already demonstrated considerable 'rent-a-crowd' abilities and the irresponsible use of explosives: the protest in Grosvenor Square and the bombing of the home of The Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, are two well-documented examples. Between New Left movements there are international links. These have been used in Great Britain so far only for the exchange of ideas and temporary importation of leaders, e.g., Tariq Ali and 'Danny the Red', although elsewhere the exchange has proved more lethal, for example, gun-running to Ulster and a massacre at Lydda Airport by Japanese gunmen.

The most spectacular activities of the urban guerilla, hijacking and kidnapping would, fortunately, also be the least effective *modus operandi* in Great Britain as it would alienate public opinion. However, it is conceivable that anarchists here could emulate Uruguay's Tupamaros and kidnap an eminent person as a means of political leverage or of raising money to finance further operations. Undoubtedly the best defences against anarchy of this type are an efficient Security Service and Special Branch, although it might be necessary for the Army to help in isolated incidents. Military action would need only to be on a very small scale and would not involve the public at large; nor need any contingency plan be widely issued.

Serious unrest in Great Britain is likely only if The New Left successfully espouses a convenient and supportable cause and operates behind it. The occasion might result from dissatisfaction with government industrial or social policies or from disagreement with foreign commitments such as measures in support of NATO, and if dissidents set out to disrupt military movements they would undoubtedly receive international co-operation from others of their kind. Unrest tends, with

very little help, to spread. Witness how during *Les Evènements* in 1968 student protest triggered a broad movement of social unrest among factory workers throughout France. If the security forces fail to contain unrest there is a danger of backlash from those sections of the population who feel threatened. Should this backlash materialise, the security forces are liable to find themselves in conflict not only with the original dissident elements but also with people seeking to provide their own protection or antidote, possibly by vigilance patrols. At this stage, acts of terrorism (euphemistically called 'armed propaganda') would possibly pay off as a further means of undermining public confidence in the ability of the authorities to maintain law and order. Such action might also be intended to provoke an over-reaction from the security forces and thus stir still more public disquiet. This scale of disorder is inconceivable in Great Britain at the time of writing, but the scenario is well known in all its variations in Ulster. Moreover, violence is fashionable. We should be prepared to face similar problems here and we could reasonably be accused of complacency if we assume that present policies will always suffice.

In Great Britain it could well be necessary to ask for military assistance long before reaching the stage of unrest depicted in the previous paragraph. Before we consider the implications of this measure, let us briefly examine two other solutions used in countries where 'third forces', something between the military and the police, are in being. These third forces may be part-time, as in the National Guard in the United States, or professional, as in the CRS (*Compagnie Républicaine de Sécurité*) in France. The third force solution is widely used abroad.

A solution on the lines of the National Guard has little to commend it. In times of civil disturbance the need would be for a highly disciplined, professional and impartial force. Amateur forces, no matter how well trained, motivated or at home in the local environment, would be unlikely to provide a satisfactory answer. As civilians they might be involved in the underlying causes of the unrest which they were required to quell. They would be without much experience and liable to over-reaction, as we have seen on a number of occasions when the National Guard has been called out.

There would, however, be many advantages in a small mobile force of specially tasked police. There would be none of the complications of liaison and joint agencies which would be required if the

military were involved. The Home Secretary would have available a graduated response to violence tied permanently into the police intelligence network, a crucial factor in all internal security. In addition to dealing with unrest, this force would also be able to tackle hijacking and any operation requiring fire and movement, for which the normal police are unsuited even when armed. Against these advantages must be set the reluctance of senior police officers to employ any measures stronger than those currently in use on the grounds that the existing rapport between police and public would be endangered, to the detriment of normal policing. Undoubtedly the special force would attract some opprobrium which might also attach itself to the normal police, but it would be a local feeling engendered by an imported force and unlikely to stick. Public perception of the need for tougher police action would probably be a mitigating factor at the time. A further disadvantage is said to be that third forces are unduly repressive; this is certainly so in some cases. There is no reason, however, to assume that a British force would adopt similar attitudes; the example of the British Army in Ulster suggest otherwise.

To return to the present policy: a military solution would bring with it the highest degree of skill and complete impartiality, as we are seeing in Ulster. But there the similarity would end. In Ulster the Army, with full approval of the British public, has assumed wide responsibility for security and is, *de facto*, both a police force and an army. It patrols in lieu of policemen on their beat. It deals with riots, as third forces do elsewhere. It also engages in military operations involving fire and movement against well-armed terrorists. In sum, it is employed in holding the ring, pending a political solution, rather than traditional peace keeping in aid of the Civil Power which would be its role in Great Britain were the police unable to maintain law and order.

When the Army is called out to aid the Civil Power it remains distinct from the police who continue their normal role. It is worth digressing a moment to reflect that this distinction was maintained throughout our long colonial history until the emergency in Cyprus in 1955 when the Army, for the first time as a matter of deliberate policy, doubled as soldiers and policemen, the latter being unable to cope with their normal tasks. Previously the Army had deployed in support of the police, avoided close contact with riotous assemblies and, after due warning, had shot a ringleader if the disturbance had continued. How-

ever, it would now be unthinkable to use lethal weapons before shield and baton, water cannon, rubber bullet and CS gas had failed. What has happened in recent years is that the availability of a graduated response had blurred the distinction between police and military methods so that soldiers called out under the present policy would inevitably find themselves in close contact with a hostile crowd. Minimum force requires maximum numbers and in such circumstances there would be a need for a large body of troops prepared to use batons and rubber bullets. (Experience shows that military presence without action is likely to exacerbate the situation and, far from intimidating the demonstrators, is more liable to provoke an increased rain of bricks and bottles.) Bearing in mind the speed at which urban operations can develop, reserves would need to be close at hand and it would be difficult to conceal the large number of troops in the vicinity. There would also be other undesirable side effects such as the involvement of troops in arresting and questioning suspects.

These operations would be highly provocative. Soldiers could lose much public sympathy and, if disturbances continued, as they probably would in a situation so inflamed, the Army would almost inevitably become involved in the politics of the situation. Moreover, unless joint government/military/police agencies had been established, a requirement discussed in a previous paragraph, the Army could play only a limited and negative role.

~~To summarise: should it be thought that present police methods~~ will fail in times of unrest, the only reasonable alternatives would be a third force based on the police, or military involvement. If the Army were to be used there would need to be joint consultation and planning by commanders before the threat actually materialised, a political hot potato. If, however, the police undertook the commitment they could provide a graduated response from within an existing organisation with none of the disadvantages of special arrangements or the apparent over-reaction inherent in a military solution. Whoever was chosen could expect to alienate some sections of public opinion and it is a matter of judgement whether this handicap would best be carried by the Army or by a small and specialised part of the police force. From a purely military view-point a weighty argument against involvement would be the loss of morale and damage to recruiting which would almost inevitably follow operations within Great Britain.

There is as yet no need for a choice. Disturbances are infrequent,

in a low key and contained without undue difficulty by the police. A few sporadic acts of anarchy have been followed by swift arrests and subsequent convictions. Undoubtedly the Security Service and Special Branch have their fingers on the pulse. With reasonable luck the political climate in Great Britain will remain inimical to serious disturbance but, as soldiers, we are duty-bound to anticipate the consequences of variations in temperature so that we may advise on the necessary precautions.

Our view should surely be that the Army must be expert at all forms of warfare but that only as a last resort should it be required to operate in Great Britain. If that contingency appears likely then joint consultation between government, military and police must take place sufficiently well in advance to enable the military to operate with maximum sophistication. Violence short of nation-wide disturbance should be tackled by the police who should be prepared to bridge the gap between their present tactics, should these appear in danger of failing, and the deployment of the Army. Meanwhile all potential elements of the security forces need to develop a common outlook. ✕

MONTHLY AWARDS

The Board of Review has awarded prizes for the best original articles published in the March and April 1974 issues of the journal to:

March: Lieutenant Colonel R. J. G. Hall ('The Dragon in Bondage') \$10.

April: Major R. D. Manley ('A Defence Studies Information Exchange System') \$10.

Review Article

Biography of a Political General

Major P. A. Mench

Royal Australian Infantry

BLAMEY, *Controversial Soldier*¹ is John Hetherington's second, greatly expanded, biography of Australia's wartime Commander-in-Chief and only Field Marshal. Hetherington's first biography of Blamey was published in 1954; this volume is the product of new research and access to a wider range of sources. The author, who is a distinguished former war correspondent, journalist and biographer, has written an interesting account of the life of a very controversial general; it should be welcome on many bookshelves, especially those of students of Australian military history. The Australian War Memorial and the Australian Publishing Service, in a fruitful joint effort, have published a handsomely bound book.

Curiously, Australia which has been well served by its military leaders in war, has produced little serious military biography. Blamey's stature as our foremost soldier makes him a fitting subject for an essay in this undeveloped field. In my opinion Hetherington has just failed to produce a military biography in the grand tradition of, for example, Liddell Hart's *Foch*, but failed in an interesting manner, and we are in his debt for a great deal of information about an outstanding commander. The reason for Hetherington's relative failure will become evident later.

But first one might ask why Australia has little serious military biography? Is it because we have had no great Captains who held the destinies of nations in their hands, or were involved in romantic colonial adventures in the manner of a Napoleon or Wellington? Or is it that we have had no leaders called upon to exercise great strategic and

Major Mench is at present a post-graduate student in the Department of Government, Faculty of Military Studies, Duntroon, completing a thesis on PNG defence problems. He is a 1964 RMC graduate and holds a BA degree. He has had regimental service in PNG and Vietnam and held appointments as ADC to the Governor General and Instructor, RMC.

tactical skills in battles of manoeuvre like a Montgomery? Although all of this may be true it is my opinion, rather, that there has been a dominant egalitarian tradition in Australian military literature. Australian war history has been the history of regiments not commanders. Historians have seen the heroism or plight of the soldier in war as the proper focus of military history. Thus whilst unit histories abound, there are few biographies. It is perhaps the sort of history of which Tolstoy would have approved. For he had little opinion of the importance of great commanders and strategists on the actual outcome of battles.² One suspects that not a few of the men of the AIF would have agreed with him.

As well as a lack of biography there is also little Australian military autobiography. Monash, Australia's eminent commander of the First World War did hurriedly write *The Australian Victories in France in 1918* which did him little credit. Blamey, we are told, planned two volumes on the Second World War but got no further than an outline plan. Blamey was by no means illiterate — in fact he wrote well. The failure of Blamey and other leaders to write has left us the poorer. Perhaps they have felt that to write of war is to glorify war and warriors, which is often an unfashionable thing to do in the aftermath of wars.

Hetherington explains in his Preface that, like Plutarch, he is writing biography — the study of a man — not history. The depiction of personality and character is of primary importance to him, and the elements of military history are subordinated. Consequently, the author treats many important military events in Blamey's career with scant detail. This makes it difficult for the reader to form an assessment of Blamey, the military commander. Surely this is an important task, amongst others, of the biographer. There is even little actual military detail of the only two campaigns in which Blamey exercised tactical field command — Greece and Papua in 1942 (after Rowell had been relieved). There is not one map to be found in the volume.

¹ *Blamey, Controversial Soldier: A biography of Field Marshal Sir Thomas Blamey, GBE, KCB, CMG, DSO, ED*, by John Hetherington; published jointly by the Australian War Memorial and the Australian Government Publishing Service, Canberra 1973, pp. 403 of text. price \$7.50.

² Tolstoy's Kutuzov, the Russian commander and a 'soldier's general' even slept through his own councils-of-war in *War and Peace*. As for Napoleon, Tolstoy attributed little to the 'brilliance' of Napoleon's orders for the French victory at Austerlitz. In his opinion the day was won by French regiments not generals.

In regard to matters of grand strategy with which Blamey was involved, the author tends to proffer the assessments of others without reaching his own verdict. To take one example: Hetherington fails to deal satisfactorily with the charge which has been laid against Blamey that he enthusiastically supported the costly and misdirected 1945 offensives — a campaign which had become strategically irrelevant. Hetherington's attempt to exculpate Blamey on the grounds of 'following political orders' does not seem altogether adequate.

It is as a raconteur that Hetherington succeeds best, as Blamey comes alive to the reader as a tough man and ruthless commander. The author's approach is anecdotal, relying on the reminiscences of Blamey's associates and others, often distinguished Australians from other walks of life, who crossed his path. Here again one may carp: occasionally the biographer descends to a gossipy level using what seems uncorroborated evidence, as for example in the allegation that General Robertson 'took sick' when the doomed Greek campaign started. This is after all an extremely serious charge and should be fully documented if it can be substantiated. Nonetheless the author's techniques do reveal a lot of interesting information about the foibles and political factions to be found amongst the Army's senior commanders. Often, the picture of squabbling and in-fighting which the author draws puts the generals in a poor light, in a nation supposedly united and at war.

The book spans Blamey's life from his birth in 1884 at Lake Albert near Wagga Wagga, NSW, the son of a contract drover, to his death in 1951 as a Field Marshal. There is something of the log cabin to president romance in the Blamey saga. His parents had struggled unsuccessfully against the familiar Australian rural vicissitudes of bushfires, drought and falling prices as pastoralists and in 1878 the Blameys had been forced off a 'run' onto a 20-acre paddock on the edge of the town. Blamey's early life subsequently took him to Western Australia as a rather abstemious, Methodist school teacher with a developing interest in military affairs. Of all this it might be said that only his military interests survived. He was commissioned in the Cadet Instructional Corps in 1906 — rather an unorthodox and humble beginning for a future Field Marshal. He later gave up his Methodist faith and Staff College at Quetta taught him to drink.

Blamey left Australia in 1912 for India as a major; he was to return six years later as a distinguished and decorated brigadier with the reputation as Monash's right-hand man. Blamey had served as

Chief of Staff to General Monash in France. Of Blamey, Monash, whose Australian Corps had comprised a force two and one half times the size of Wellington's force at Waterloo, had unstinting praise:

No reference to the staff work of the Australian Corps during the period of my command would be complete without a tribute to the work and personality of . . . Blamey. He possessed a mind cultured far above the average, widely informed, alert and prehensile. . . . Some day the orders he drafted for the long series of history-making military operations upon which we collaborated will become a model for Staff College and Schools for Military instruction. They were accurate, lucid in language, perfect in detail, and always an exact interpretation of my intention (p. 42).

Such was the military repute of the man who was to become in 1925 Victoria's police commissioner. Soldiers, it seems, often fail to make successful policemen and Blamey was no exception. His enforced resignation was the consequence of the man's troubling combination of virtues and failings. The notorious 'Badge 80' affair might at best be attributed to misplaced loyalty to friends. His eventual resignation, forced on him in 1936 over a shooting affray, revealed Blamey's obstinacy and aggressive attitude towards criticism and the press. His testimony at the Royal Commission which investigated the incident was considered by the judge to be lacking in truthfulness. Blamey's abuse of Victorian drinking laws as commissioner revealed another defect in his personality — for a soldier, a curious lack of self-discipline and sense of leadership by example. One was to see this aspect later in New Guinea when Blamey wore shorts whilst the 'rest' suffered in long greens. A minor issue certainly, but well remembered even today by New Guinea veterans. One feels Hetherington is rather too indulgent with Blamey over these foibles. In this one cannot help but conclude with the reviewer of Hetherington's first book on Blamey that:

Blamey's heaviest handicap was not his private life but the fact that it fell so far short of being private (p. 384).

In the wilderness of a premature retirement in 1936 Blamey's grasp on a Field Marshal's baton seemed weak indeed. However international events, political preferment and a concatenation of fortunate events were to see Blamey at the head of the AIF 6th Division, and eventually, in due course Commander-in-Chief of the AMF.

One of the men who was responsible for Blamey's rise from the relative obscurity of a semi-retired militia officer, was one R. G. Casey (later Lord Casey). Himself a distinguished soldier with a DSO and MC and a fellow Gallipoli veteran, Casey had served with Blamey and held a high opinion of him. Casey, then a minister in the Lyons government,

had the task of convincing the devout Catholic, Lyons, of Blamey's talents. Hetherington relates that Lyons remained sceptical until he met Blamey personally. Casey's judgement of Blamey was to prove sound. The government's selection of Blamey for senior command is revealed in an interesting way by Sir Robert Menzies (also a member of the Lyons government) in a Foreword to Hetherington's book:

... Blamey was a controversial man and he never lacked hostile critics.... However he was conspicuously the man Australia needed and, when it came to the point of decision, we chose him without any real hesitation.... Australia had two or three other senior soldiers at the time who, as military technicians, were probably Blamey's equals, perhaps his superiors, but none clearly matched him in the *power of command* — a faculty hard to define but impossible to mistake when you meet it.

Hetherington's narrative brings out this elusive quality which Menzies has called *power of command* over and over again; and one is led to conclude that it was this quality, above all, which Blamey possessed in large measure: a mixture of confidence backed by wide knowledge, and a willingness to be ruthless in the pursuit of an objective. As Blamey himself is reported to have said:

You know, as Commander in Chief you must be prepared to have breakfast with your brother and shoot him before lunch (p. 262).

Blamey was himself at times unable to live up to this standard, as for example when he succumbed to filial bonds during his escape from Greece and selected his own son for a seat on his private aircraft. At other times one feels that his ruthlessness degenerated to a kind of vindictiveness, as for example in his treatment of the dismissed Rowell. Blamey was for a time insistent that the experienced and skilled Lieutenant General Rowell be reduced to his substantive rank of colonel for his alleged sins in New Guinea. In spite of all these blemishes Blamey remained a commander who knew how to command men; of whom someone remarked 'you would recognize him as the boss even with his shirt off'.

What of Blamey's generalship? As Hetherington points out, although appointed to supreme command, Blamey was to be denied the opportunity to win great victories at the head of an army. In the Middle East he was kept from senior field command by the 'Union of British Generals' and in the Pacific he was frustrated on two counts: First, the New Guinea battles were in many respects soldiers' rather than general's battles partly because of the nature of the terrain; and secondly, Blamey was increasingly to be shut off from strategic participation in the war by MacArthur — a man too jealous of personal

glory and national honour. As Hetherington argues, it is unfair to judge Blamey's merits as a general in battles he never fought. It was only in Greece and in the Kokoda trail and Buna, Gona battles that Blamey exercised real tactical control and on both occasions he did well within the limits imposed by the situation and the resources available to him.

One might say that Blamey's claim to greatness did not rest with his abilities as a 'Fighting General' but rather in his managerial abilities. Even in the First World War it had been his conspicuous ability as a staff officer for which he was known, and this had denied him a fighting command. He did command a battalion in that war for a short time but that was all.

Blamey was, like Monash before him, essentially a military manager — who was able to master the vast and complex problems of *General Administration* involved in the Army of a nation at war. Janowitz, in his important work *The Professional Soldier*³ has identified three types of leadership which are to be found in the modern military organization: heroic, managerial and technical. As Janowitz argues, it is the managerial leader who is best fitted at the top, to integrate and direct the contributions of the three. Blamey was such a man. It is possible that he also had it in him to be the 'heroic' leader but he was never to be tested.

Janowitz has also drawn attention to another aspect of successful modern generalship which interestingly fits both Blamey and Monash. Janowitz believes that the demands of senior command, which involve the broader considerations, beyond purely military ones, of politics, economics and national interests require men with broad experience. He shows that in recent times senior commanders in the USA have been men with *adaptive*, or extraordinary, careers rather than *prescribed* routine careers. Blamey as police commissioner had learnt lessons about politics which prepared him for the tough world of wartime civil-military relations. Monash had been a successful engineer before rising to high military command.

As one reads of Blamey's wartime stewardship, the more it becomes apparent that above all Blamey was a *Political General*, who understood politics and knew how to use power. Here one recalls the manner in which he rebutted the criticisms of Army Minister Forde after

³ M. Janowitz, *The Professional Soldier*, The Free Press of Glencoe, 1960.

a visit to New Guinea in 1942. Hetherington does not refer to Forde's visit, or Blamey's actions; however the records are to be found in the Blamey papers. Perhaps more than any other incident this showed the aggressive political style of Blamey, the C-in-C, and also the reason for his unceremonious downfall at the end of the war at the hands of the same group of politicians. Blamey in quite intemperate language told his minister to mind his own business as far as military matters were concerned — a field in which the minister had no competence. Civil-military relations in Australia under Blamey underwent such fundamental change, it seems, that since that time both civilians and politicians may have been wary of undue military influence in national defence.

Hetherington's anecdotal style and wide research reveal several interesting and sometimes unexpected aspects of Blamey's life. To take but a few, the reader will be intrigued by Blamey's contact with J. F. Cairns, his relationship with Alf Conlon, his advocacy of an Australian National University and his leadership of a shadowy postwar organization.

Blamey as police commissioner personally recruited one Constable J. F. Cairns, later a senior Australian Labor Government minister and distinguished politician. Hetherington tells us that Blamey encouraged the young Cairns in his part-time university studies (he later gained his PhD) and during the war secured his release from the police, a reserved occupation, so that he could join the AMF.

Blamey's association with Colonel Alf Conlon, head of the Research and Civil Affairs Directorate, shows his quite remarkable receptivity to 'new ideas'. Conlon, an extraordinary man in the diversity of his interests and his 'operational style', seems to have influenced Blamey on PNG especially. This influence may well have contributed to Australia's more enlightened post war colonial policies in Papua and New Guinea.

Few would have imagined that in 1944, amidst all his other duties, Blamey would have troubled to advocate to Curtin in a well-argued letter the importance of establishing an Australian National University in the postwar period. Blamey saw the need to retain the best Australian brains in Australia, rather than lose them overseas as had been the prewar pattern.

When Blamey relinquished his appointment as Commander-in-Chief he faded from importance, or so the public were entitled to believe. Hetherington however reveals that Blamey in the postwar years

headed what was surely a most extraordinary organization, in so far as I am aware, now made public for the first time. Hetherington tells us that Blamey commanded what was a nation-wide, counter-subversive secret 'Association', also known as the 'White Army'. The object of this vigilante group which met clandestinely was to put down a communist *coup d'etat* if it occurred in Australia. The 'Association' went out of existence when ASIO was formed. As Hetherington provides no references, the authenticity of all this is difficult to establish. One would like to know more of this Association, as the legal and constitutional implications are not inconsiderable.

Blamey received the accolade of a Field Marshal's baton long after he retired. (As the author recounts, and MS purists will be pleased to read, he had to be temporarily placed on the active list so that he could be promoted!). He was presented with his baton virtually on his death-bed in 1951 and by then few of his military foes could surely have begrudged him the honour of his unique rank. It was also a recognition of the services of the men and women he led to victory. In his lifetime, Blamey seems to have evoked strong personal reactions of either hatred or respect as have few men in Australian public life. Few held neutral opinions of Blamey — in the AMF it seemed you were either a Blamey man or anti-Blamey. He was indeed a Controversial Soldier. Perhaps the 'larrikin' element in his reputation best suited the style of an army of which the AIF was its elite. These were men, many of whom who had volunteered to fight, who expected adventure and didn't particularly like military discipline. Blamey may have characterized some of the rebelliousness of the Australian soldier.

Blamey may be recommended as interesting and enjoyable reading for those with either a voluntary or 'compulsory' interest in Australian military history. Hetherington's biography puts flesh on the bare bones of the detail of campaign histories. It gives a valuable insight into the wartime political and military decision-making process, humanizing it with stories of personal foibles, high-level bickering and military cryptopolitics. It is also useful evidence of wartime civil military affairs, and of the high command arrangements. (Is a C-in-C system the best means of directing a national war effort?).

As for Blamey — the man — one is left to agree with the biographer and Dr Johnson that:

Wherever human nature is to be found, there is a mixture of vice and virtue, a contest of passion and reason....

Blamey had ample measure of all these qualities.✕

Letters to the Editor

Dear Sir,

Multi-Volume War Histories Republished In One Volume

Brigadier Solomon's excellent review of Gavin Long's *The Six Year War* in the February 1974 issue provided material for further thought on two matters. First, at what point should a one-volume work of a multi-volume war history be published. Second, he referred to the need for pen portraits in war histories of the personalities of officers in senior command and staff appointments.

Until I read Brigadier Solomon's review of *The Six Years War* I did not know that 'apparently it had been intended that it should appear much earlier than 1973'. What does past experience indicate?

The first official multi-volume history to be published in modern times was probably the five-volume work produced by the War History Section of the Prussian Great General Staff in Berlin entitled — in the British official translation — *The Franco-German War, 1870-1871*. The original work in Berlin was progressively published during the period from 1872 to 1881. The English translation was published by the War Office in London during the period from 1874 to 1884. Towards the end of his long life Field Marshal Count von Moltke wrote a one-volume work on this war. The English edition, with the title, *The Franco-German War of 1870-71*, was published posthumously in 1893. But Moltke's English biographer, Lt Col F. E. Whitton, said of this book: 'It is difficult to believe that the work is from his pen'.

The eighth and final volume of Kinglake's non-official work, *The Invasion of the Crimea*, had been published for twelve years before William Blackwood and Sons published in 1899 a one-volume abridgment which was described as 'adapted for military students by Lt Col Sir George Clarke, RE'. Clarke later became Governor of Victoria.

Australia did not publish an official history of its part in the South African War of 1899-1902 despite the efforts of General Hutton

to obtain approval to have one written. In this instance, therefore, the problem of when to publish a one-volume work did not arise.

The British Official History of the Military Operations of the War of 1914-1918 has a similar history to that of Kinglake's *magnum opus*. This gigantic work was produced under the direction of its *de facto* general editor, Brigadier General Sir James Edmonds. He was officially the Director of the Historical Section of the Military Branch of the Committee of Imperial Defence from 1919 to 1949. He wrote a one-volume history of this work entitled *A Short History of World War I* which was published in 1951 by Oxford University Press, London.

As Brigadier Solomon pointed out, Dr C. E. W. Bean did not publish his one-volume work, *Anzac to Amiens*, until 1946. This was four years after the last volume had been published of the twelve-volume work, *The Official History of Australia in the War of 1914-1918*.

Although I do not doubt that instances can be given, I do not know off-hand of a multi-volume official war history which is an expansion of a one-volume basic work published earlier. It is probable, however, that investigations would show that the majority of these one-volume war histories are abridgments of multi-volume works published previously and not basic works expanded later into multi-volume works.

The ideal would be for the general editor of a major war history to begin with the publication of a one-volume work based on the plan for a multi-volume work. This would be for himself and his staff good preparatory training for the major task. Then after the writing and publication of the major work the original one-volume basic work could be re-issued in a revised edition. But in practice this procedure would probably be prohibitive for reasons of costs in time and labour, apart from the probability of glutting the market.

The fact needs only to be stated to be instantly recognized that the task of writing a one-volume war history, after the multi-volume work has been published, is a much easier task than that of writing it first as a basis for the writing later of the *magnum opus*. In the case of an abridgment the research for it has already been done; the materials for the task are organized and are usually available; the story in all its aspects is known; and the main task of the author is that of selection and compression.

Close attention should be given to Brigadier Solomon's important

comment on *The Six Years War* that: 'the author did not choose to present detailed studies of the principal characters and the often complex relationships that existed between them'. This important task needs skilled and adequate attention in the planning of any future official war histories. Where can one turn readily today for realistically comprehensive and satisfying personality sketches of, say, General Lavarack, General Northcott and General Wynter — sketches of the kinds that Lord Macaulay wrote?

This biographical work has a greater claim on space, for reasons of military training and general education, than long and tedious descriptions of tactical operations. These descriptions are often superficial and uncritical and so have little, if any, instructional value. Indeed, a knowledge of a commander's personality is a necessary preliminary to a proper understanding of his methods of command and of the causes of his successes and failures in planning and in conducting military operations.

Eaglemont
Victoria

Major Warren Perry, RL ☞

Australian Railways

I wish to comment on one particular aspect of Lieutenant Colonel L. D. Johnson's excellent article 'The Need For An Australian Amphibious Force' in the February 1974 issue of *Army Journal*.

It is apparent that the author has little faith in or knowledge of Australian railways. To set this right it is necessary to recognize that the singularly largest and most important defence transportation system in this country is the railways. This can be proved by a simple inspection of a map of the Australian railway network, mixed gauges and all.

Australian railways are notably efficient in the carriage of freight, particularly very heavy and bulk loads, and this characteristic is of direct importance to the defence of the continent. Railways may not be entirely relevant to the rapid deployment of the personnel and lighter equipment of modern military forces; however, they are absolutely relevant to the movement of heavy equipment and to the logistic effort required to maintain the large forces necessary to defend this continent.

Railways are not 'a hazardous proposition in time of war'. On the contrary, if they exist, their maximum use becomes paramount. It

has been amply demonstrated in World War II and the Korean war how difficult it is to effectively stop the military use of railways. Unfortunately this fact seems to have been overtaken by the popular fiction of how railways can be stopped easily, for example by air power, guerillas, but this fiction forgets how quickly railways can be repaired, rerouted etc.

Perhaps Australian military thought needs to be directed to the subject of railways and the conduct of wars. Also, the \$282 million which Lt Col Johnson suggests could be well spent on an amphibious force would go a long way towards the cost of constructing long overdue railway extensions in Northern Australia.

Victoria Barracks
Paddington, NSW

Lieutenant Colonel J. F. Hughes ✕

From the Past

WATERLOO DAY—To-day being the anniversary of the victory gained over Napoleon by the allied armies at Waterloo His Excellency the Commander of the Forces has deposited a sum of money with the quartermaster of the 80th regiment, to provide a substantial repast for every man belonging to that corps.

—*Sydney Morning Herald*, 18 June 1844.

DINNER TO THE 80TH REGIMENT—It will be in the recollection of our readers that by [sic] some of the latest vessels which arrived in Sydney, intelligence was received that His Excellency the Commander of the Forces had been appointed to the Colonelcy of the 80th Regiment, at present in Sydney Barracks. As the *London Gazette*, confirming the intelligence also arrived by the same conveyance, it was afterwards understood by the men of that regiment that their new Colonel intended to give them a proof of his liberality; but they could not find out when, where, or how, until the approach of Waterloo day, the 18th June, put them on the qui vive, and towards the close of last week, they received intimation that His Excellency had been pleased to order that a substantial dinner of good English cheer, with an ample supply of superior strong ale, would be provided at his expense, for the men of the regiment, with their wives and children; and as the 18th June is a day which will ever be remembered by British soldiers, his Excellency was further pleased to intimate his desire that the ample repast which he had ordered, should be given to his regiment on the anniversary of Britons' last and decisive victory over Napoleon. In pursuance with these intimations, at an early hour yesterday, the men of the 80th commenced decorating the Barracks with such evergreens and flowers as they could obtain, while, to increase the martial effect, recourse was had to the shipping in the port for the loan of such British flags as could be spared: these, to the number of about fifty, were displayed from the upper windows of the Barracks, and aided greatly in giving to the whole building an appearance of its being the abode of men prepared, at this extremity of the habitable globe, to defend the lives and liberties of England's Queen and all her subjects. The entrances to the rooms occupied by the respective companies in the regiment were further ornamented for the occasion by small bannerets with appropriate inscriptions, and in some cases very fine specimens of ornamental penmanship displayed to the spectators sentiments and verses appropriate to the occasion; at other entrances were stars formed by bayonets, each having an ornamented nucleus, tended greatly to heighten the effect of the whole. In order to provide accommodation for the guests and their families, a table was laid throughout the whole extent of the verandah, at which about thirteen hundred men, women and

children, sat down to dinner, about a quarter past one; as soon as they were seated, His Excellency Sir Maurice O'Connell, accompanied by his staff, and such members of his family as reside in Sydney, walked from the Brigade Office Buildings, (where they had previously assembled) to the centre of the Barrack Buildings, where he was received in due form. A salute of seventeen guns in the meanwhile was fired from four small swivels, which had been mounted for that purpose, in front of the building. The Band subsequently commenced playing, and continued to do so while His Excellency and those in his company walked leisurely along under the verandah throughout the whole extent of the table; the party, being then joined by all the officers of the regiment, proceeded south to the officers' mess-room, at the south end of the Barracks, where they partook of such refreshment as they deemed necessary, the band of the regiment being stationed in one of the ante-rooms, continued playing until the party began to disperse, which was about three p.m., His Excellency being saluted at his departure with another round of seventeen guns. During the time that the party in attendance on His Excellency, were proceeding to the mess room, the guests having disposed of a considerable portion of the good cheer before them, commenced pledging the toasts usually drunk on such occasions, each of which was received with three hearty cheers, and soon after retired to their respective rooms, where they enjoyed each others company, conversation, song and toast, during the remainder of the evening, when most of the rooms occupied by them were illuminated by tapers in the windows. During the course of the day, several thousands of the inhabitants visited the Barracks and appeared much pleased with the decorations and the dinner scene. Among those who were present as spectators were several of those who had fought on the 18th of June, 1815, decorated with their medals, bestowed upon them in commemoration of the victory then achieved.

—*Sydney Morning Herald*, 19 June 1844.

MILITARY JOLLITY—The soldiers of the 80th regiment had a 'regular spree' yesterday. Fun was the order of the day. Nearly every officer in the garrison was chaired and carried around the parade ground to the music of the band and the huzzars of the men, whose vociferous cheers could be heard all over the town. As the officers made donations to their respective companies, there was a large supply of beer and refreshments procured, with which the men regaled themselves, and apparently kept the steam up all the evening, for their shouts were to be heard long after the barrack was closed. It was pleasing to see the good feeling which existed, for although the reins of discipline were relaxed for the day, we did not hear of a single act of disorder of any description.

—*Sydney Morning Herald*, 20 June 1844