

## **Combat Case History in Advanced Officer Development: Extracting what is difficult to apply**

*"A little military history may be more dangerous than none at all."<sup>1</sup>*

*"Unless history can teach us to look at the future, the history of war is but a bloody romance".<sup>2</sup>*

When you want to inspire a young man or woman to become a good and motivated professional officer in one of the armed services and then one of their branches, you should use national, service and unit history both as a bait and tool. Thereby you can offer a framework for the junior officer's initial efforts by presenting the organisation's roots and highlight the hoped for professional ethos, and it can present a well-illustrated role models copy.



Role of military history in basic officer training: influencing the basic professional ethos.  
From the Korean War: tough infantry and the army as an early model for racial integration

An inspiring Military-Naval-Air Academy history instructor or unit historian may even catalyse an interest in the history of the profession that will make the officer go on reading other history works relevant to his or her later responsibilities and missions. Together with the critical scepticism and human insight that ought to come with age, such reading should help in the development of robust insight that could make the officer a mature and consolidated professional.

However, to achieve this, it is important that both the choice of later literature and the way it is read is feeding and guiding that development. The successful career officer has very little time to read books and long history articles

when not a student in staff and later war courses. Therefore it is critically important that the way historical cases is used in such courses is the best possible. It is likewise important than such use is mirrored in the historical studies that take should take place before new operations to gain relevant understanding of the character of the planned tasks and the regional conditions, thereby minimizing the risk of repeating avoidable mistakes and costly learning.

This article is an attempt to ensure that the “*little military history*” that the career officer consumes avoids being “*dangerous*”. It might even help future commanders realising and countering sources of friction and inefficiency with deep roots in human and organisational opportunism and other frailties. To make the conclusion clear and limit the length the cases are focused on land/air-land combat cases.

Developing and writing the text has been what the wise Swedish historian of European military thought, Alf W. Johansson, characterised as “*an educational adventure*”.<sup>3</sup>

## The core role of the mature career officer

The essential role of the successful mature armed force officer - from major/lieutenant commander to general/admiral – is to predict the likely outcome of various possible actions. In the opinion of the author this understanding should guide and focus everything that is done to educate and motivate the officer from the time he or she has proven after commissioning to be capable of effective leadership and independent thinking. If the officer is employed as a staff officer, the predictions should guide the planning and advice. If appointed as the responsible commander, the prediction decides how the officer interacts with the political or military superiors as well as with supporting agencies and allies. Thereafter the prediction of outcomes and the immediate learning from reality guide how the chosen action is implemented.



The professional senior officers’ job is analysis, prediction and implementation – here the Israeli Chief of General Staff consulting with other senior officers during a border incident

All prediction is built on an updated, robust and unsentimental understanding of the real strengths and weaknesses of all involved units and their equipment – whether own, neighbouring or supporting from own or other branches or services – and of their commanders.

However, even with that too rare understanding in place, the character of the military profession means that predictions cannot be based fully on a combination of investigations and calculations as that of an engineer building a bridge. It cannot even be built on a thorough practical training and personal experience as those of a doctor of medicine. Lack of time and relevant intelligence, the independent mind of the enemy (as well as subordinates, partners and allies), the unique character of any major military operation as well as the role of chance and “*friction of war*” means that maximum concrete assistance a staff officer or commander can get are “*rules of thumb*” and norms for force and logistic requirements extracted from simplified analyses of somewhat similar cases. Even an officer fortunate or unfortunate enough to have much combat in his earlier career – as the British army officers in France in 1914 and 1940 had from colonial warfare and policing – cannot count on such experience as being a safe base for prediction of outcomes.

Ever since the period of Enlightenment military theorists and others have tried in vain to produce *positive* theory meant to guide the commander and ensure victory by scientific management of resources. Henry Lloyd and Dietrich von Bülow did so in the 18th Century and, Henri Jomini and Karl Wilhelm von Willisen tried after 1815. The French Army battle managers and the United States’ Air Corps Tactical School in the Interwar Period sought scientific guidance to avoid a repetition of the losses and costs of 1914-18 in a new major war.

After the Second World War Robert McNamara’s team simply forced the U.S. and Allied militaries to copy the current civilian scientific management and game theories until both they and their theories lost legitimacy by the U.S. failure in Vietnam. After that war John Warden III developed a modernised version of the Air Corps Tactical School doctrine that should be relevant at all levels of war-fighting and this was later morphed into similar dogmatic U.S. and NATO guidelines under a sequence of buzzwords.

The problem is simply what Carl von Clausewitz realised in his testing of various positive theories against his own combat experience and the analysis of a large number of wars in depth. The character of war and war-fighting and the uniqueness of any war made it futile to attempt to develop a positive theory that could become a guide for action by its predictive value. War theories had to be limited to assisting the officer in focusing his interests and efforts thereby developing relevant professional insight when gaining personal maturity and experience and studying earlier wars. However, because of his own experience with the difference between the brutal character of war in his own time and earlier, more limited 18<sup>th</sup> Century warfare, Clausewitz saw it as important to focus study on the most recent conflicts.

As already stated it is the understanding of this article that the central element and result of adequate professionalism is the ability to outline probable outcomes and risks of a course of action. It follows that all activity of a military organisation - such as structure and doctrine development; administration; training and education - is built on a more or less conscious understanding of what will be effective in operations. As the military profession is a practical one this understanding - this “*theory*” - is to a significant degree based on an analysis of projected experience. All experience in a profession that cannot conduct realistic experiments must be historical.

As the central and unique mission of the military is fighting and the ability to influence, deter, coerce or enforce by the effective ability to fight, the focus of the historical investigation must be combat cases.

## **The conclusions of Michael Howard when young war veteran and historian**

The young, decorated Coldstream Guards war-time officer, Michael Eliot Howard, who had just returned from the Second World War Italian Campaign, proceeded to resume his history studies at Oxford University.<sup>4</sup>



He went on to lecture in King's College, London, where he led the creation of the Department of War Study and started his life-long effort to bridge between the military profession, the historians and any interested political scientists. In November 1961 the 39 years old historian gave his ground breaking lecture on "*The Use and Abuse of Military History*" to the Royal United Service Institute audience.

He accepted - as this article does - that the use of historical myth might have some legitimate social function. However the focus of his analysis was how military history could be used to catalyse and nourish professional insight among armed services' regulars. To achieve this, he thought that they had to move beyond the myths of the past to a deep and comprehensive understanding about how and why a war, campaign or battle ended as it did.

This was and is complicated by the confused and contradictory narratives from battlefields due to the chaotic character of fighting. However, the effort had to be done, because "*war is a distinct and repetitive form of human behaviour... war is ... clearly defined with distinct criteria for success and failure*". The military professional had to seek understanding from military history, because there was no other real alternative path to gaining robust insight than the study experience. By studying and seeking wisdom from cases from different time periods, places and types of conflict, the officer could develop an understanding of the character, possibilities and limitations of armed forces as political tools. Otherwise the profession could repeat past mistakes that might have been avoided. However, if the officer studied superficially, he was likely to be guided by extracted positive theoretical guidance that was rendered obsolete by technological or political changes or irrelevant by fundamental differences between the past and the actual problem or situation.

Michael Howard recommended that the officer studied in "*width*" to become alert to the fundamental changes in war and warfare through history and the differences between his specific case and other superficially similar cases. The hoped for insight can probably only be achieved by successfully inspiring the young cadet or officer to read military history continuously throughout his career. Otherwise Howard emphasized that any chosen case should be studied in both "*context*" and "*depth*" to make it possible to extract general and not anachronistic professional insight.

Sir Michael's guidance is the foundation of this article. His recommendations were roughly in line with the now century old contributions from such historians as the German Hans Delbrück<sup>5</sup>, the Swede Carl Bennedich<sup>6</sup> and the Dane August Peder Tuxen,<sup>7</sup> however such studies built on in-depth understanding of both sides of the strategy process have been rare thereafter, especially in Continental Europe.

The author only aims to add a few warnings and rules of thumbs on how to conduct case studies during formal advanced officer education and in any individual effort to seek focused insight by study of cases. What he recommended and what this article recommends is to seek general answers to open scientific questions. It does not in any way inspire to formulate any positive "theory". It would be both futile and potentially dangerous, at Clausewitz convincingly argued in "*On War*".

### **The normal approach: Cases simplified to illustrate desirable behaviour**

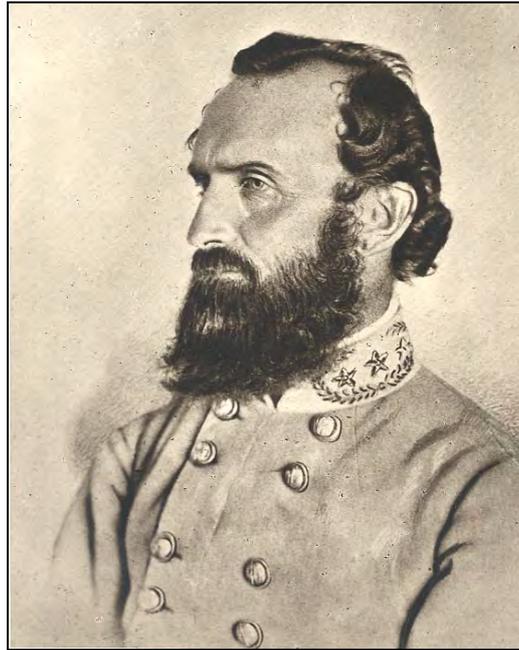
The typical choice of military history focus in north-western European advanced officer education has – *firstly* - been on homage to the professionally brilliant, momentous and heroic (such as 1916 Verdun, Guderian's break-through at Sedan in 1940, the 1944 Normandy landings and John Frost's last but futile stand in September that year at the Arnhem Bridge).

*Secondly* it has been on cases meant to teach the officers something about their conditions in the expected war such as Operation GOODWOOD in Normandy (the effects on defence of massive fire-power) or the battle for the Seelow Heights during the final Soviet offensive in Europe during the Second World War (Soviet offensive tactics).



Operation GOODWOOD for illustration of massive (tactical nuclear) fire-power

*Thirdly* military history cases have been used to as pure illustrations to support the teaching elements of current doctrine and best-practice. When an army staff course directing staff focused on e.g. offensive division level operation, the military history teacher was brought in to lecture on a Second World War example, thereby adding reality and a reference framework and thus reinforcing learning (in reality assisting indoctrination and potentially dangerous dogmatism).<sup>8</sup>

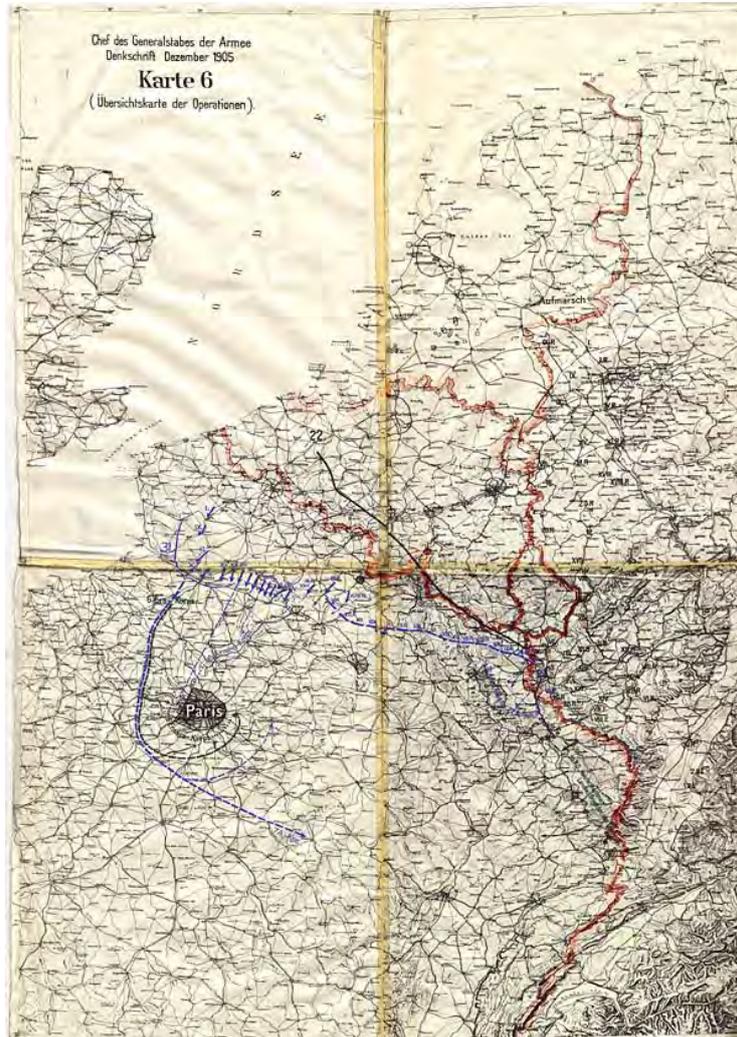


Civil war general "Stonewall" Jackson as British Staff College role model

The use of military history cases as illustrations is no new idea. In *"On War"* Clausewitz constantly integrate references to historical cases in his arguments. Alfred Mahan did the same when he started his teaching in the U.S. Naval War College. The British Army staff education on the eve of the First World War was nourished by a heavy and ever more superficial diet of George F. R. Henderson's brilliant studies of American Civil War operations. When the author had been the lecturer, he had been able to make his case relevant, but his successors lacked the in-depth knowledge to ask for more than an empty copying of the manoeuvres of the brilliant "Stonewall" Jackson.<sup>9</sup>

The observation and conclusions of the main theoretical writers of the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> Century such as Cardwell were massively supported by references to historical cases.<sup>10</sup> It was obvious that these authors could assume an intense historical interest and high level of knowledge among their readers.

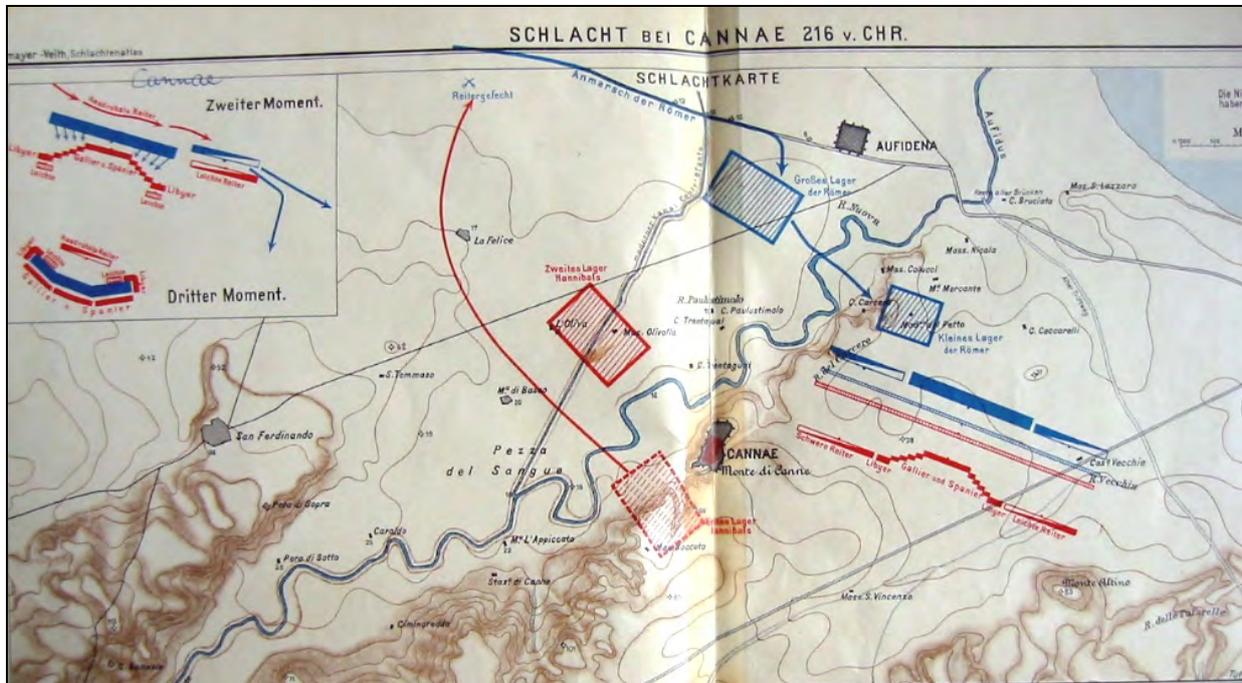
## Schlieffen's Cannae case and thereafter.



The most influential use of a historical case came from that period. Germany needed quick and total operational victories in a future continental war. The now retired Chief of the General Staff, Alfred von Schlieffen, tried to educate his country's operational commanders and their General Staff assistants in the operational and tactical behaviour that would enhance the chances of such a victory. He found a usable template for "*best practice*" in Hannibal's victory at Cannae 216 before Christ. He thereafter presented his analysis of the battle scheme as the operational model for Germany's military strategy.

Schlieffen accepted that both the arms and modes of combat had changed completely during the more than 2000 years since the battle. However he considered that "*the greater conditions of warfare have remained unchanged*". Therefore he noted that a "*battle of extermination*" might use roughly the same idea as the one demonstrated by Hannibal. It was essential to understand that the own forces' main attack should not be directed against the enemy front. The essential thing was to destroy the flanks in the entire depth of the enemy army formation with own mass and reserves. The operation should thereafter complete the destruction of the enemy army by mobile attacks against its rear.

The Cannae case highlighted the necessary way of operating when the strength of modern defence made direct frontal attack costly and unlikely to succeed.<sup>11</sup> The U.S. Army War College published a complete translation in 1931, because “these theories must be weighed, whether accepted or denied, in whole or in part, in the major conceptions of a future war should, unhappily, such occur.”<sup>12</sup>



The illustration of best practice

Schlieffen’s endeavour may have mirrored the need to study “in depth” later underlined by Michael Howard. However, the purpose of the study was far more ambitious than the latter would consider realistic and sound, as the field marshal sought directly applicable guidance rather than mere general professional insight. He did his study with a clear focus on evidence supporting his operational idea rather than with an open mind for contrary evidence and case irrelevance due to the fundamental differences between the conditions of Italy 216 B.C. and Europa 1907 A.C.

Normal officers of the services are practical utilitarian persons, and during the next many decades other lesser and less diligent professionals followed the same path. With less credibility than the field marshal they looked for the supporting evidence in historical cases for their preferred doctrinal choices.

In the post-WW2 period, when the Finnish Army was considering how to deter or meet and stall another possible massive Soviet invasion, it naturally sought inspiration and illustration from their own successful defensive operations in the 1939-40 “Winter War” and the final months of the “Continuation War” in 1944. The enemy, the terrain and the climate was the same, but even so, a critical Finnish staff officer has argued recently that such use of military history cases does more harm than good.<sup>13</sup>

To the new German post WW2 Bundeswehr and Austrian Army the enemy was the same, and they used Second World War Eastern Front cases as guidance in the preparation for another war with the Soviet Union.<sup>14</sup> Their experience with actually fighting the potential enemy made senior German officers cherished contributors to NATO’s doctrinal thinking as the Alliance in the 1970’s moved beyond its previous heavy dependence on immediate use of tactical nuclear weapons on the battlefield.

The wish and requirement to illustrate, document and legitimise by using historical cases was also illustrated in the new joint U.S. Army and Marine Corps Counter-Insurgency doctrine developed in the middle of last decade.<sup>15</sup>

### Rejection of use as “best practice” guides

The author’s own first experience with the use of military history in support of doctrine dates back to the time in the Military Academy 1965-68 and the follow-on service as junior officer in one of the two armoured infantry brigades tasked with the defence of the main Danish island of Zealand against Polish and Soviet sea and air landings. The example of the German reaction to the British air landings at Arnhem in September 1944 was used to highlight the need to react immediately within the designated unit area of responsibility. Because the Germans had been successful in immediate reaction to the landings, Danish companies and battalions should copy their action - *within their area of responsibility*.

However, the use of the case did not include an attempt to transmit or understand the German battle philosophy that was the foundation for the German tactical behaviour. This may have been because of the lack of awareness of that philosophy. However, it may also have been because of the battle management philosophy that totally dominated the tactical nuclear period of Western land warfare doctrine. Actually, another military history example, an incident in the Battle of Schleswig in 1848 early in the Danish-German Three Years War was used to underline the risks of unauthorized action by part of the army. In this battle the Prussian commander’s balanced and well-considered plan was derailed due to tactical opportunism by parts of his avant-garde.



Teaching tactics became supported by selected pieces of military history cases

Fifteen years later – around 1990 – the author was tasked with teaching military history in support of the advanced operational education of future army general staff officers. That included assisting students’ work with their military history lectures within the framework of the teaching of the Danish Army doctrine for attack, defence, delaying action, etc.

The experience made clear that such use of cases did not encourage the officer to gain the insight critical for any later professional development and contributions. Instead it promoted direct application of the case and thus illustrated doctrine. It liberated the officer even more from having to think independently to identify difference between the case and the requirements of the actual situation. It became a case of a little military history being worse than none. It certainly did not encourage understanding that military history studies might be relevant for the later career.

Simplifying historical cases to illustrate legitimises and reinforces the already too widespread tendency of the intellectually lazy to make doctrine dogmatic. Copying what was learnt from memory always seems more bureaucratically safe than independent analysis of situation and options.

It also gave good support to those who saw use of military history in officer development as anachronistic and to those purists who felt deeply that military history like all history should just be studied, never be used, because every historical situation is unique.

The author's immediate reaction was to ask the students to refocus the use of the cases in a basic way. Instead than focusing on the winning side of a campaign, battle or engagement to learn good bits to memorize and copy, they were to analyse the case to extract understanding of why the original operational plan failed fully or partly. Thereby they might realise the reality of friction, uncertainty and chance in combat and gain some insight into what was required to succeed in spite of these fundamental conditions of military action.

However, before having the chance to test and develop this pedagogic option, the author moved on to command and responsibility and would only return to the issue recently when tasked with teaching how to learn lessons from own and others' experience recent or more distant experience of war.

## The basic issue

The basic problem is how to develop professional judgment in staff officers and commanders so they can better understand the real requirements in force development and in the choice of operational options. Thereby they should become better at perceiving both the necessity and limitations of planning and other pre-battle preparations and somewhat more accurate in advice on risks and likely outcomes.

One way to do so was the Soviet Army extraction of norms from historical cases that should be used to establish the force requirements and tasks for any combat mission. It was deliberate done to create "*scientific*" certainty of the outcome of any operation. The costs, however, were huge. They eventually led to unrealistic demands on economy and society, to predictability of action as well as to the loss of flexibility and initiative in execution because all subordinates became reduced to dependent tools. In any operation different from a traditional force-on-force operation such as counter-insurgency both this Soviet method and the American somewhat similar massive firepower management approach proved both wasteful and counter-productive. Both approaches had their roots in the positive military theories for operational action of the Enlightenment already mentioned and in the writings of their successor Henri Jomini.

We should now return to Clausewitz' classical analysis. It was nourished by his rejection of the positive enlightenment theories. Experience and study had made him realise than the maximum theory could do was assist the maturing commander in gaining insight that could help him towards developing some of the "*genius*" that a field commander required to succeed in the fundamentally chaotic conditions of land engagements and battles. The insight into requirements and risks were also essential for the military participant in the decision-making at the state level.<sup>16</sup> We will combine Michael Howard's recommendation with Clausewitz' understanding of the limitations of theory.



Land battle chaos in art through two centuries: in Clausewitz' time at Borodino in September 1812 and at Ypres in 1915 in painting, on OMAHA Beach in 1944 in film and in Fallujah in computer game

This focus is to some extent also inspired by the revisionist, journalistic approach to battle reconstruction and lessons learning recommended by the controversial official U.S. Army Second World War historian S.L.A. Marshall. His view of the necessity of a bottom-up method of building using oral history in gaining an understanding of reality mirrors how Clausewitz originally met siege warfare as a teenage boy in the War of the First Coalition. The approach differs from how the traditional general staff histories were developed based on plans and reports from the various headquarters' and national levels. In 1988, the U.S. Army Military History Institute put Marshall's method within the framework of its history of lessons learning when it outlined how it lived-on in the Israeli Defence Forces.<sup>17</sup> Fortunately much of what had been published during the latest decades have done what Marshall recommended, even if authors such as Stephen E. Ambrose may not have been directly inspired.

One could say that what is aimed at here is roughly similar to what Colonel J. F. Maurice had as his ambition lecturing military history in Camberley in the 1880s. The Staff College student was not only to collect facts about battles and identify causes to what happened, "*but to improve his judgement as to what ought to be done under the varied conditions of actual war*".<sup>18</sup>

## The suggested way forward

*“Gentlemen, in spite of your excellent training and orders, do not be daunted if chaos reigns. It undoubtedly will”.*<sup>19</sup>

If a case is to give meaningful professional insight, both sides must have had a reasonable objective chance to succeed at the outset of the engagement. If it was or seem obvious who would succeed due to numerical or technological superiority, insight is reduced to a confirmation of the need to be superior at the decisive place and time. If, however, the result must be considered uncertain and in balance, the author suggests that the chances to learn something really relevant with a limited study are far better.

The ideal is still to follow Michael Howard’s advice to study cases in context and depth, but this is unfortunately not a realistic option for most career officers.

It is also suggested that focusing on the eventually defeated side in the search for reasons is more useful than searching for the reasons leading to success. One reason is that it reduces the temptation to copy what has been learned directly. However, the essential is not mainly which side is studied for insight; it is that the focus of the investigation should be on *why* rather than *how*. The important is that study is conducted in depth and with full understanding and acceptance of the context. The main aim of the analysis would be to find and understand human, organizational and technological friction and the role of chance that influence combat.

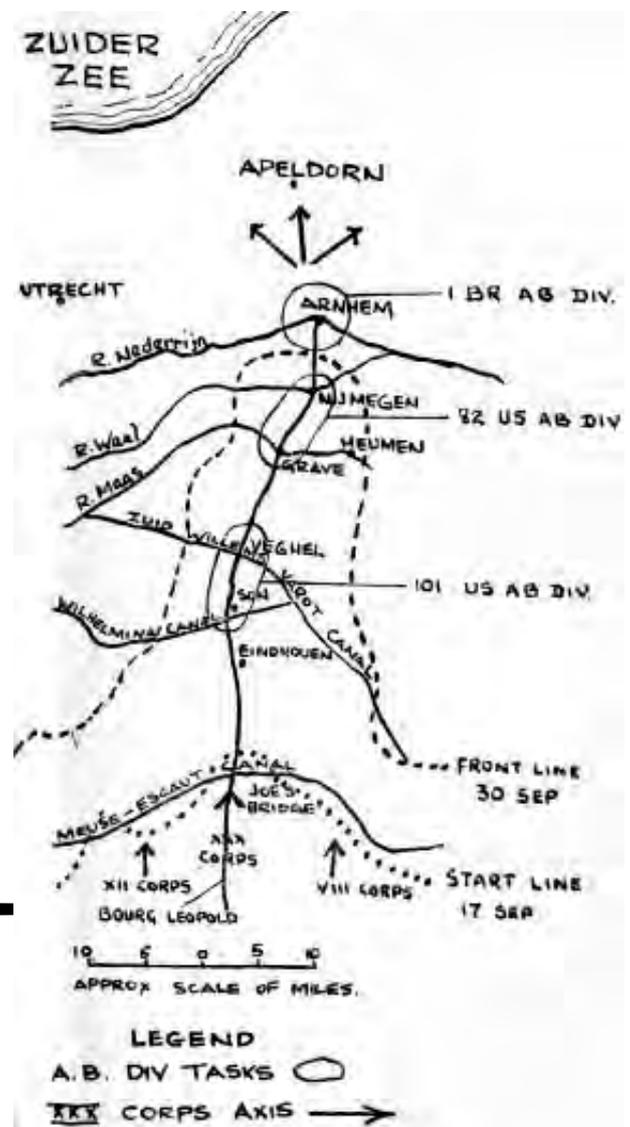
## Case Market-Garden revisited

*“General Sosabowski was again astonished at the casualness with which his British counterparts received the briefing. They sat about, cross-legged, looking bored”.*<sup>20</sup>

MARKET-GARDEN is one such balanced operation open to extraction of the elements leading to failure. The basic one, of course, was arrogant contempt of the German enemy’s ability to recreate a stable defence after the massive defeats and losses during June, July and August.

The analysis of the case concentrates on the critical northern part at NIJMEGEN and ARNHEM as well as the area between the WAAL River at the former town and the LOWER RHINE River at the latter.<sup>21</sup> To add context, the case should be considered through the best analyses of the strengths and weaknesses of the British,<sup>22</sup> German<sup>23</sup> and to some extent American<sup>24</sup> Second World War armies.

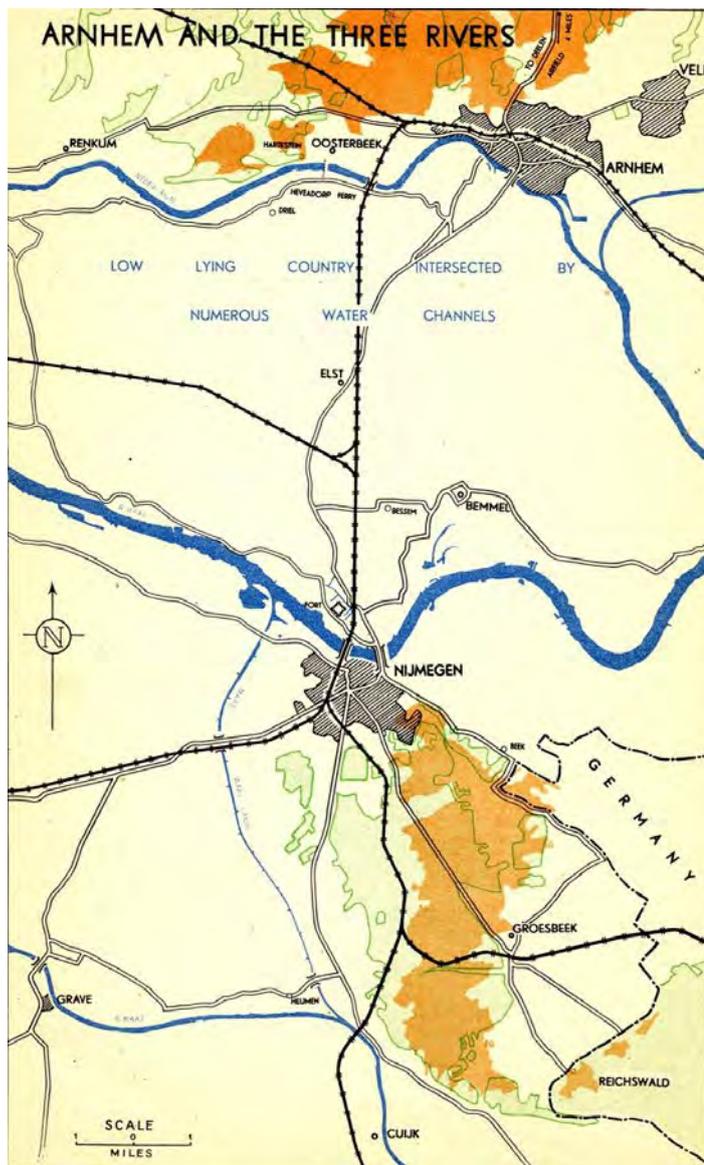
The certainty of the Allied planners of early final German defeat led to insufficient use of the intelligence that came from the Dutch Resistance from early September onwards of a German reinforcement and stabilisation of the front and rear in Belgium and the Netherlands. Sir Bernard Montgomery was aware that the situation was quickly changing in the days after 7 September, and the commander of the British 2<sup>nd</sup> Army, Sir Miles Dempsey, considered any risky operation as unjustified. However, the outline MARKET-GARDEN idea was approved by reached the Supreme Allied Commander, General Eisenhower,



on 10 September and adopted by an Allied Airborne Army eager to get a visible role to prove itself in the final phase of the war.

The intelligence of German armoured units had reached Eisenhower's HQs and the 1<sup>st</sup> British Airborne Corps. It been accepted in both staffs as significant and thereafter ordered controlled and was confirmed by aerial photo reconnaissance. However, it was ridiculed by Montgomery and deliberately ignored as inappropriate instead of triggering additional tasking of the Dutch Resistance.

The arrogance had other effects. After the landing the use of the local Resistance and the initially intact Arnhem telephone system could have improved both tactical intelligence and its use might have helped establishing effective communication between the different elements of the 1<sup>st</sup> British Airborne Division.<sup>25</sup>



The very light-hearted attitudes to the challenges ahead may also have been the reason why the Airborne Corps Commander, Sir Frederick Browning, did not ensure a common focus on the mission of capturing the bridges and holding them to until the arrival of the overland offensive. Only the 101<sup>st</sup> Division's plan was effectively focused on this mission. The 82<sup>nd</sup> gave first priority to capturing and holding the Groesbeek Heights, which succeeded, but did little to limit the German freedom of action to attack the corridor and hold the Waal River bridges at Nijmegen. Neillands note that Browning contributing actually contributed to that loss of focus by asking Gavin to take a hold the heights because he wanted the area for his corps HQs. Nobody seemed to see the contradiction between seeing the heights as a likely concentration area for German counter-attack forces and using it as the location of a corps HQs.<sup>26</sup> Due to the width of the Waal, the main channel of the Rhine River, the demolition of the two bridges would have left all forces north of the river unassisted to be destroyed and the operation as a total failure. The fact that the division did succeed in capturing both the Grave and Waal bridges intact in time to support XXX Corps crossing has obscured the lack of mission focus. To support the overall mission, all landings – both at the Grave and the Waal - should have been made at the bridges, aiming at capturing both their ends. The heights were secondary to that main mission – nice, but not need to take - so the 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne plan was as faulty as that of 1<sup>st</sup> Airborne, both due to weak professional leadership from Browning, but the former formation escaped blame due to luck and a friendly and uncritical historical narrative

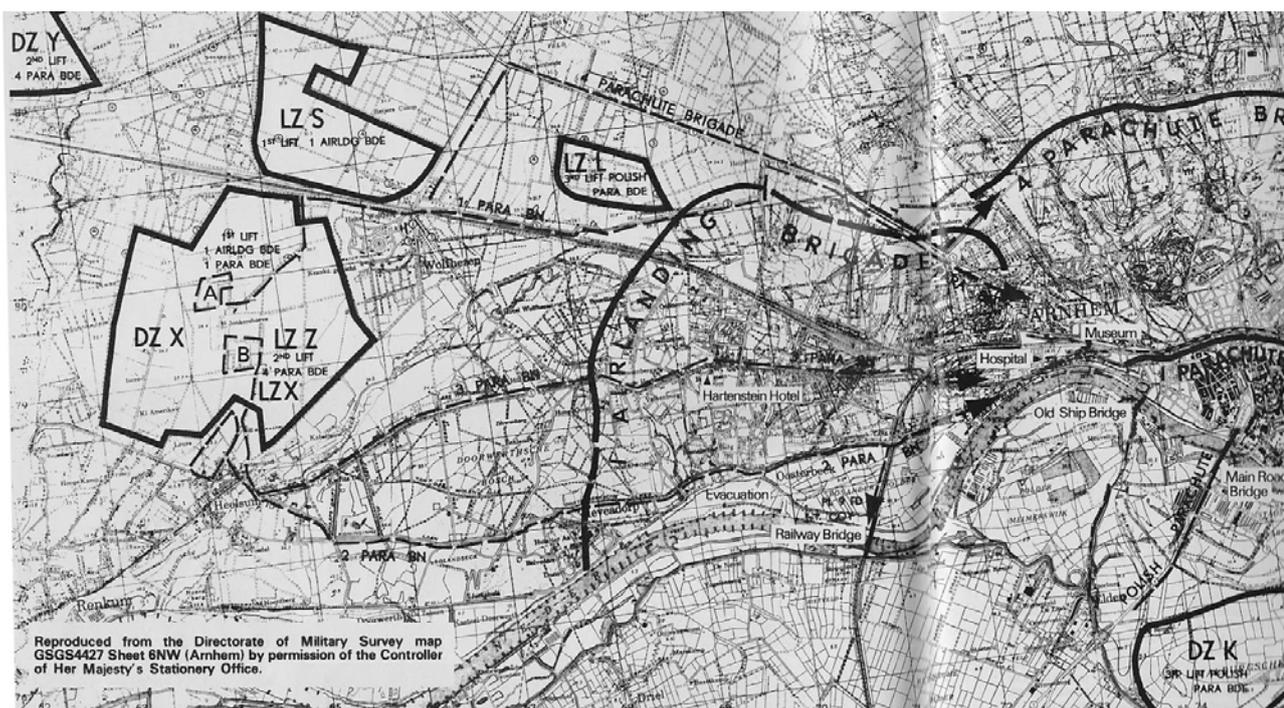
tradition. The too late capture of the Waal Bridge, which was Gavin's fault, was the main reason why the XXX Corps advance from Nijmegen to Arnhem became seriously delayed.<sup>27</sup>

The operation was not under one, dynamic operational commander driving and focusing both the Airborne and over-land parts. MARKET-GARDEN planning seems in practice to have been left to hopefully friendly co-operation between Browning and Sir Brian Horrocks, the XXX Corps Commander, instead of being closely monitored and directed by Dempsey (or by Montgomery, who actually wanted to control everything himself)<sup>28</sup>.

Therefore nobody was around with sufficient authority – based on professional arguments and will power - to force the air forces to do what was necessary to support an effective operation such as flying more than one sortie a day, fly where the airborne forces needed to land to make immediate tactical success more likely and employ fighter-bombers in close support of the airborne troops. Such use of Allied air power might have led to higher initial casualties, it would have been stressing for the squadrons and might have led by bad blood between the two services, but it would have enhanced the chance of success significantly. However, the senior American air force commanders were allowed to derail the logic that had guided Plan COMET that had preceded MARKET GARDEN. The preparation of the airborne operation was probably also hampered by the lack of trust of that was allowed to exist between the senior British and U.S. commanders.<sup>29</sup>

General Urquhart: *“A whole brigade dropped at the bridge would have made all the difference... Both the Army and the R.A.F. were over-pessimistic about the flak.”*<sup>30</sup>

*“It appears that at Nijmegen Gavin and Browning either forgot or elected to ignore one of the principles of war. Their prime task was to take the bridges...”*<sup>31</sup>



Map from the Arnhem planning shaped by the concerns of the key air force generals.

The commander of the 1<sup>st</sup> British Airborne Division correctly saw himself as less than perfectly suitable for the position. The British army was hampered throughout the war by mediocre generals and Roy Urquhart was probably very suitable for the command of a normal infantry division, but the way he commanded at Arnhem proved that he was out on his depth. He simply did not have the necessary understanding of the special strengths and weaknesses

of the different parts of his formation. Neither he nor his staff seemed to understand that the decisive phase of an airborne operation was a combination of reinforced company-battalion level engagements. He failed especially by not effectively resisting the air force choice of drop and landing zones.

The brigadiers were the highest command level with a meaningful coordinating role when reality after landing failed to mirror planning assumptions. All previous airborne operations of the war had illustrated the fundamental chaotic character of the post-landing situation. The operation might only later develop into a more traditional offensive or defensive engagement, where the division level could influence the battle by the employment of any reserves and heavy support. The division's pre-landing task could not go beyond the development of a clear and realistic and flexible plan for each reinforced brigade. To enforce the seniority principle for promotion to command in war is an irresponsible experiment. The British airborne generals misunderstood the character of the battle. The degree is illustrated by Browning's decision to fly-in his HQs on D-day. Thus he occupied a large number of transport aircraft and gliders needed for other purposes.<sup>32</sup>



Post-battle photo – view east towards Arnhem - of the summer resort “Westerbouwing” on the high ground controlling the Driel Ferry-crossing

The division plan execution in Arnhem ignored the basic principle for river crossings that options should be created at the widest possible front, here meaning the main bridge in Arnhem, the bridgehead terrain of Westerbouwing covering the Driel Ferry and thirdly the more exposed railway bridge.<sup>33</sup> When the railway bridge blew-up in the face of the battalion tasked with its capture and move-on to the south-end of the road bridge, the chance of capturing an intact crossing had all but gone. However, no full terrain analysis seems to have been conducted at by corps or division as a basis for the plan; identifying what areas north and south of the Lower Rhine should be captured immediately and held, and when Urquhart decided to land his artillery on D-day rather than his last British parachute brigade, he tied-up his air-landed brigade to the defence of the landing zones and became reduced to only three combat battalions until the follow-up landings on the second day.<sup>34</sup> This illustrated his orderly, phased way of understanding tactical manoeuvre.

Neither Browning nor Urquhart seemed to understand that airborne operations succeeded by combining surprise with tough and preferably realistic and detailed preparation, creating chaos in the enemy reaction at the same time as the airborne units maintain the ability to act effectively in spite of the confused environment. Urquhart assumed

that he would be allowed to conduct an orderly, phased land operation, where the enemy was controlled as in a peace time-exercise. This was the natural consequence of the tactical orderly management paradigm that guided most British land operations in the war. The result became that the main bridge was left partly in German hands so that they could destroy it if necessary and that the final bridgehead at Oosterbeek was without any tactical purpose because it did not control the high ground over-looking the Driel Ferry.<sup>35</sup>

Urquhart's combat management ambition ended up as totally unrealistic because of the failure of proper field testing and training in the use of the tactical and long range radio equipment. The division signals officer did expect problems, but failed to convince the bureaucrats that more powerful tactical sets were required in the built-up, sandy and wooded area.<sup>36</sup> The only radios that worked properly during the operation were those of the artillery support nets.

It was not only the air force generals, the 1<sup>st</sup> British Airborne Division and Browning that failed professionally. In its systematic progress up the road to Nijmegen and onwards to Arnhem the XXX Corps cleared obstacles with fire support and engineers before proceeding. The weak German forces opposing it were never being stressed and bypassed by aggressive use of dismounted, outflanking infantry. The Guards infantry unit working together with the forward armoured regiment was only deployed when the advance had been stopped.

It is only 10-15 kilometres on foot between the Waal to the Lower Rhine, easily within support distance of field artillery. That distance could have passed by infiltrating infantry with ease in one night. It seemed as if the infantry had unlearned to leave the trucks and carriers behind move quickly on foot, infiltrating around the weak enemy forces blocking the roads.<sup>37</sup>

Stanisław Sosabowski was right in his observations on 10 September. His counterparts considered the war to be over. The best analysis – and most brutal condemnation of the MARKET-GARDEN planning and decision process - has been given by John Buckley, He presents how Montgomery's, Browning's, Gavin's and others' ambitions – and Urquhart's lack of professionalism all contributed to the failure. He also clears Dempsey of responsibility. Montgomery simply forced the 2<sup>nd</sup> Army Commander to implement Browning's plan.<sup>38</sup>

### ***Simple insights***

It is important to repeat that no case, and no number of cases, can give positive guidelines for future action. The maximum they can do is to highlight general human and organisational as well as specific cultural frailties that are likely to undermine the effectiveness of preparations for and action in war. If the future commander or planner is able to accept, learn and find the morale courage and will-power to address these problems, he will be able to minimize the risks and effects of friction and be able to develop and maintain more effective military units and create more realistic and robust plans for action.

#### **The enemy**

The MARKET-GARDEN case underlines the risks resulting from implicitly assuming that the enemy is defeated. The assumption led to deeply unprofessional operational and intelligence planning and preparations. It may have contributed to Browning's weak performance in controlling the mission focus of the 82<sup>nd</sup> and 1. British Airborne planning and the rather unprofessional character of the latter.

#### **Mission focus**

However, as the lack of effective common control of the two employed corps and the lack of forceful integration of the air and army operations, the reason may also have been the always present lack of will to force allies and other armed services to act towards one objective rather than accepting a risky compromise.

### **Tribal live and let live behaviour**

Forcing other organisational “tribes” to act in full support of the common plan takes both effective professional arguments built on a thorough understanding of the others’ capabilities and limitation and much determination and energy. Browning never lived up to that requirement. The reason was probably that he was a case of promotion a couple of steps beyond his professional command ability.

One of the most difficult rules to enforce is always joint unity of command because all the tribes agree that coordination is sufficient to ensure effectiveness.

### **Personnel management**

The appointment of the sound infantry officer Urquhart as Airborne Division commander must be read as any mainstream organisation’s automatic reaction to upstarts elements such as the airborne units. Where the American Airborne forces had been developed within the framework of reactivated infantry division that had attracted some of the best officers, the British had been created outside the regular forces and thus *had* to be brought under normal administration by bureaucratic action.

Any organisation will promote centralisation and standardisation when not forced to act otherwise. It takes extraordinary effort and energy to avoid the suffocating of new, necessary capabilities.

### **Chaotic land battle**

The same applies to the organisation’s drive for orderly, managed tactics with optimistic, maybe hidden, assumptions about enemy action that was must be judged to be behind the British Arnhem plan. The British 1944 combat units had received tough training, but this may not have been the case with the higher officers.

The actual character of land combat means that there is always a requirement to ensure the presence of independent, high quality subordinates rather than loyal, well-drilled obedient clients.

### **Challenging plans**

MARKET –GARDEN underline the importance of a robust and simple plan as well as the requirement of brutal testing of any plan by gaming aimed at “destroying” it. Redundancy and well-prepared delegation of authority to subordinates as well as the encouragement of local flexibility and initiative is always essential.

### **Equipment**

The case also pointed at the need for realistic testing of key equipment, effective training in its operation and the replacement with more suitable equipment if necessary. If the testing and training proves insufficient to solve the problems, alternatives should be developed including alternative tactics and procedures.

All these insight should just be simple common sense to a mature professional. However, they are never easy to follow when exposed to the realities and pressures of any future operation.

## **Consolidation**

*“If ... some historical event is being presented in order to demonstrate a general truth, care must be taken that every aspect bearing on the truth at issue is fully and circumstantially developed – carefully assembled, so to speak, before the reader’s eyes. To the extent that this cannot be done, the proof is weakened, and the more necessary it will be to use a number of cases to supply the evidence missing in that one...” (Clausewitz “On historical Examples”)<sup>39</sup>*

As quoted above, Clausewitz recommended that insight from one case should be tested against similar cases for rejection, consolidation or supplement.

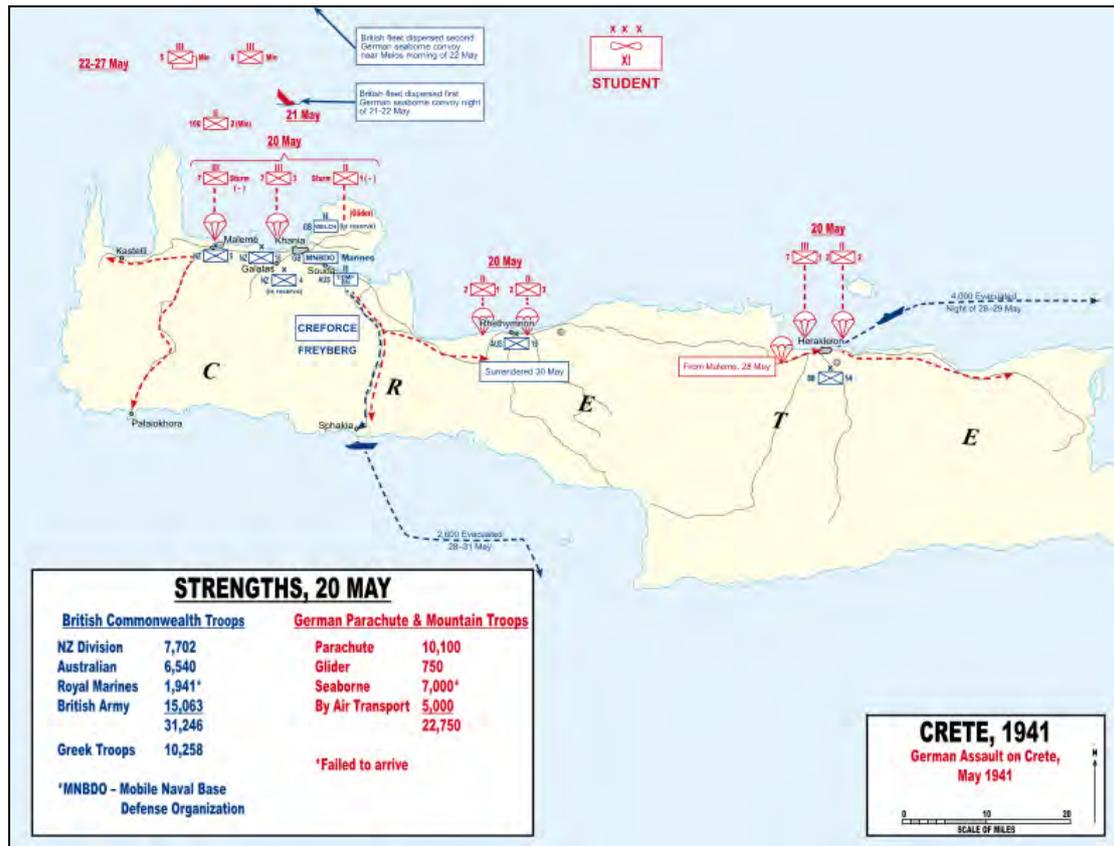
The author has therefore chosen the one rather similar operation: Unternehmen MERKUR (Operation MERCURY), the German invasion of Crete in May 1941.<sup>40</sup> As MARKET-GARDEN, MERKUR is very well covered by a variety of studies. The purpose of the second case is to reinforce general observations from the first or identify these as case specific.

### ***Case MERKUR (Crete May 1941)***

*“The airborne troopers had a decentralised command concept different from the centralised one guiding the New Zealanders. The German troopers had been trained to act independently, not to wait for orders. They were guided by Auftragstaktik. After the landing there were no superiors around, everybody was alone but sought to join others. Small groups formed with a clear sense that their mission was to attack. No orders were needed for that, and it happened even if officers became casualties.”<sup>41</sup>*

As in MARKET-GARDEN, the Crete battle could have gone both ways, but it differed by being far more stacked in favour of the British defender. He had availability of accurate intelligence about the enemy operational plans and the date of attack as well as the resulting knowledge that the defence deployment matched requirements. At MARKET-GARDEN only gained access to the Allied plan by chance after landing.<sup>42</sup>

As roughly three years later in the Netherlands, Crete’ defenders consisted of army formations disorganised and materially weakened by previous unsuccessful defensive fighting. The main losses to the Crete defence were the heavy equipment and transport left in Greece rather than human casualties. However, the equipment losses of the Crete defenders were aggravated by incomprehensible peace-time like administration. When the New Zealanders evacuated from Greece landed in Chania late April, they were ordered by the Suda Base representative to leave all weapons but rifles and side arms on the jetty. Even when their commander protested, the order was enforced by military police. Therefore the later defence against German elite infantry armed with submachine guns had to take place without the normal complement of machine guns and mortars.<sup>43</sup>



As in MARKET-GARDEN, the Crete battle was decided at two places within less twenty Kilometres from each other with one more important than the other: In 1944 Wolfheze-Arnhem-Nijmegen, in 1941 Maleme-Galatas. Both battles were decided by highly intensive, well-fought short engagement by a few good battalions on each side. The New Zealand forces involved in Crete were renowned to be some of the best all-round infantry units of the British Empire during war.

Where the MARKET-GARDEN case focused on the events at Arnhem and Nijmegen, the MERKUR case focuses on the roots of the unsuccessful engagement of the 5<sup>th</sup> NZ Infantry Brigade at Maleme-Platanias against the German Airborne Assault Regiment and to some extent on the equally unsuccessful 4<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> NZ Infantry Brigades at Galatas on the road to Chania. The former was the more important due to the presence of the Maleme Airfield, which was the only entry point for air landed follow-on forces, logistics and heavy weapons in the area. However, in both places the local tactical outcome was the same.

As MARKED-GARDEN, MERKUR was decided by the success or failure of an airborne operation; however where the objective of the Allied landings in the Netherlands only was to facilitate a major over-land offensive, in MERKUR, the purpose of the planned follow-up surface operation was only to reinforce the airborne forces in their mission and sustain this logistically. This should be kept in mind during the analysis.

In both battles, the attacking side enjoyed clear air superiority over the battle area.

In the Netherlands the terrain between the two main rivers – “The Island” - was flat, open farm land with off-road armoured movement hampered by meadows, dikes and ditches and with the terrain north of the Lower Rhine

wooded or urban. In Crete the terrain was characterised by foothills and creeks extending north from the mountain range further south with road movement limited to the coastal road and with unobserved foot movement eased by olive groves, some bamboo thickets and the generally rough terrain.

In Crete, the landing succeeded, in spite a fundamental lack of surprise. One element was probably that here the British forces were hampered by having no tactical success against the German Army during the previous year of fighting. On the other side the Germans had no experience of any serious and lasting tactical defeat.



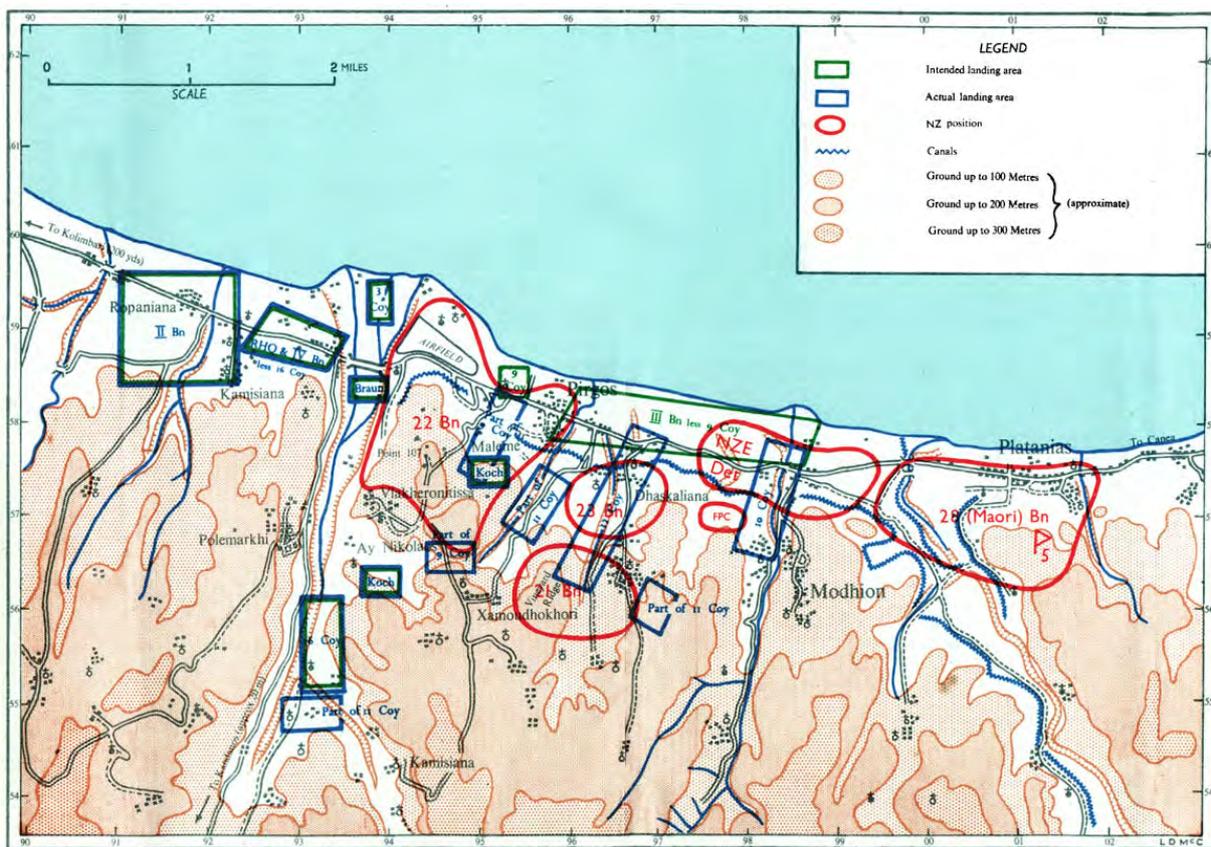
German paratroopers in Crete advancing

The only element of the German plan unknown to Freyberg, the British commander, was knowledge of the balance between the air landed and sea transported parts of the German forces. Therefore it is not possible to criticize the deployment of units close to the possible landing places on the coast. Freyberg did misinterpret the intelligence in the sense that he saw the treat as a landing operation rather than the transport of reinforcements and supplies to a bridgehead already established by air landing. This perception does not seem to have been followed-up by an identification of the relatively few really suitable landing places. The general had been selected as commander by Churchill for his courage in First World War rather than for any clear ability to think and command effectively. As commander he was known for his lack of will both to replace unsuitable commanders and to force subordinate commanders to comply with his orders and directives. The latter weakness resulted in a timely lack of integration Royal Air Force and Royal Marine forces into the defence of the Maleme Sector.

Even with the misguided focus on defence against an assault from the sea, the defensive deployments of the NZ forces and their defence arrangements are far from logical. This applies to the over-extended deployment of the 22<sup>nd</sup> Battalion and therefore weak defence of the airfield, worsened by the lack of clearing bamboo thickets from the fields of fire towards the air field of the company on the slope of Hill 107. It is also indicated by the disorganised

character of the defensive perimeter with the remnants of the RAF presence in the area left politely un-integrated between three infantry company positions. Both mean that the companies could be defeated one by one.

With the knowledge that the enemy planned landings at the airfields, it is rather difficult to understand that the Maleme field remained unmined, only lightly blocked and thus fully intact after previous German airborne operations had been aimed at airfields necessary for follow-on operations. It had been evacuated on the morning 19<sup>th</sup> April, when the last surviving RAF Hurricane fighter took off. That the RAF might return is only an explanation, not professionally valid justification. Simply cutting the runway by ditches or prepared demolition would not have hindered later use. It seems as if the defenders were without both a perception of the threat and a sense of urgency to counter it.



MALEME, Intended and Actual Landing Areas of Assault Regiment, 20 May

The whole problem of the deployment is likely to have roots in the original late April brigade understanding of its mission to “deny the advance of enemy landing parties from the west”. Thus in this framework the 22<sup>nd</sup> Battalion must be considered as the forward element in a west-facing main defence line based on 21<sup>st</sup> and 23<sup>rd</sup> Battalions placed behind it and with 28<sup>th</sup> Battalion in reserve. The original defence plan was apparently not inspired by a threat analysis, but by the wish to defend own values directly, meaning defence of Chania with the Suda Bay naval base. Freyberg’s island defence plan of 3 May placed the 4<sup>th</sup> NZ Brigade in corps reserve behind the 5<sup>th</sup> Brigade but in front of Chania. It had orders to deploy as central reserve on the coastal road. Nobody seemed to realise that enemy control of the air would mean that reserves would be unable to influence the battle outside its own area.

To this author with four decades of army service the far most likely explanation is that the NZ brigades were never deliberately fully redirected against the ever clearer threat as their deployment covered the enemy objectives in a general sense. Anything that happened was an adaption of the original plan and deployment, not a fundamental



defence, many had been destroyed by German suppression operations during the days before the assault. Andrew's infantry platoons in the company defending the air field were dispersed with the guns to protect the guns until these were destroyed. Thereafter the platoons should control the field with the fire of their rifles. They were to fight from their prepared defensive positions, not leave these to fight the enemy.

22<sup>nd</sup> Battalion had been ordered to conduct "*static defence*" of the airfield. That this meant defending positions rather than anything more active was clear to Andrew, another brave First World War veteran. However, the perimeter had not concentrated on holding the three key points: the airfield itself, the dominating hill 107, and the west slope of that hill overlooking the open river bank of the Tavronitis. The battalion was responsible for an area twice as large, and due partly to its size, the companies were unable to support each other. Some minefields had been established in front of the positions but left unarmed not to hurt Greek civilians.

The acting division commander, Brigadier Puttick, had realised that the area immediately to the west of the Tavronitis and 22<sup>nd</sup> Battalion should be covered, but this could not be done with his own units without a major redeployment. When Freyberg visited the Maleme area for a second time on 14 May, Puttick asked the island commander to send Greek troops to the area. However, the idea was thereafter dropped. The German attack was still expected to come three days later, and the positional defence minded New Zealand commanders thought that the Greeks would have to construct field fortifications before they would be effective. With the limited amount of entrenchment tools that could be spared such work could not be completed within the available time. The decision was not changed when Freyberg received intelligence about the postponement of the invasion.

21<sup>st</sup> Battalion had three missions: to stay in position, to move to Tavronitis in case of attack, and to replace 23<sup>rd</sup> Battalion if that unit moved to counterattack. 23<sup>rd</sup> Battalion should hold his position until called upon to assist 22<sup>nd</sup> Battalion. Any action depended on orders from the 5<sup>th</sup> NZ Brigade commander, James Hargest, or a direct request from 22<sup>nd</sup> Battalion.

Hargest had been a young battalion commander in the First World War. After that war he had returned to farming, and during the last decade he had been a Conservative Member of Parliament. As all the New Zealand brigade commanders, he was an amateur handicapped by a view of land warfare formed in trench warfare. He had been politically appointed brigade commander in spite of the fact that Freyberg considered him both unsuitable and too old.

Puttick was as old as Hargest. He was reputed to be a good administrator. As a tactical commander he was a worrying manager, afraid to take decisions because they ruled-out other – theoretically better - options.

Signal communication was so weak that action depended on visual signals. As already noted, the commander of the much dispersed 22<sup>nd</sup> Battalion had only the unprotected field telephone communications with his five subunits and his reserve platoon, the two Mathilda tanks, and the Bren gun Carrier platoon. All these reserve elements were deployed close to his command post.<sup>44</sup>



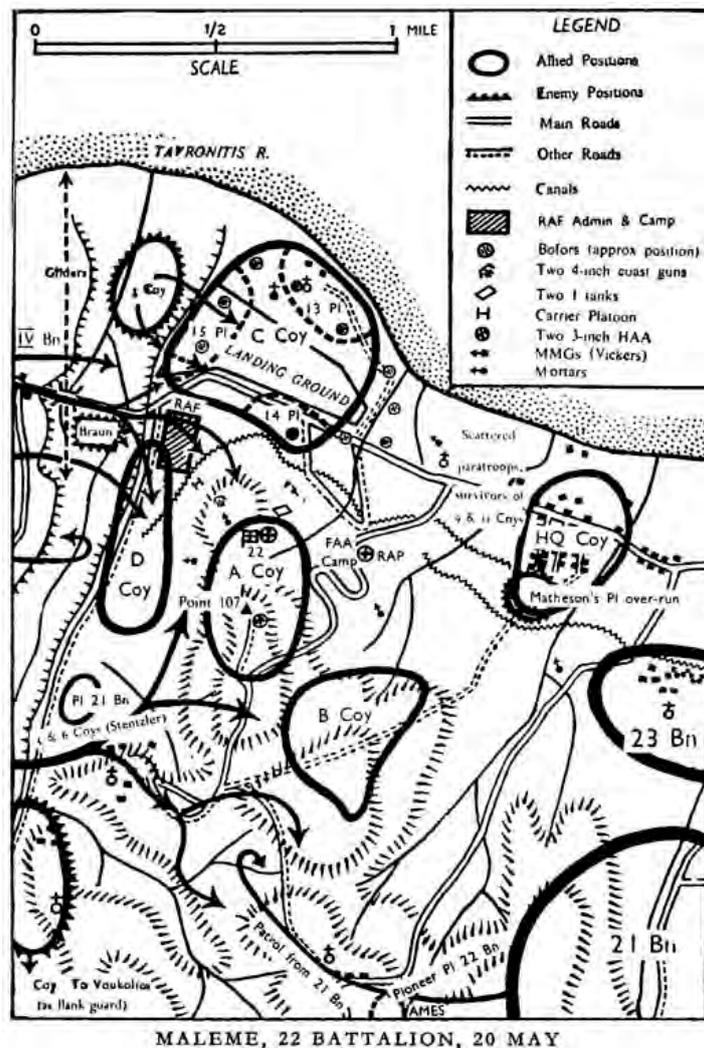
Junkers 52s dropping  
paratroops

When the landings took place in the Maleme area, the paratroopers dropped to the east landed in 23<sup>rd</sup> Battalion's area and many were slaughtered before they reached their heavy weapons dropped separately in containers. They landed only armed with submachine gun and hand grenades. However the gliders landing in the Tavronitis River bed and the paratroopers dropped west of 22<sup>nd</sup> Battalion could form-up and attack the airfield with its 40 mm Bofors and 3" anti-aircraft gun positions. During the initial assault the Maleme air defence did not fire on the transport aircraft and gliders because of lack of authority from the Suda Base air defence commander.

After landing intact elements of the air assault troops attacked the battalion perimeter from the south-west using the uncovered dead ground along the slopes of the river bed and infiltrating through the RAF compound that formed a weak point in the perimeter here. The air force had vetoed the construction of 22<sup>nd</sup> Battalion defences through its camp.

The bombardment had cut the field telephone cables and the battalion commander now depended on runners. The radio connection to brigade was at best erratic. The static defence of the dispersed 22<sup>nd</sup> Battalion meant that Germans were allowed to defeat the New Zealand unit in detail. One by one the two western companies' platoons were successfully attacked by the surviving, weakened, but reorganised groups of German assault troopers.

“... Andrew’s (22<sup>nd</sup> NZ Bn commander) bravery is not in doubt. Like his superior officers in the chain of command upwards – Hargest, Puttick (acting division commander) and Freyberg – his imagination and instincts seem to have become shackled to his command post. This did not mean that Andrew was behaving like an ostrich – he did not try to belittle the threat – but his thought processes had jammed.”<sup>45</sup>



When the two heavily armoured Mathilda tanks were finally launched in a counter-attack, they failed totally due to lack of equipment testing and effective tactical preparation. Their turrets could not turn and the ammunition did not fit the guns. The fact that the tanks had not been tested in spite of coming directly from repair shops indicates the low level of preparation and crew quality. The two tanks attacked - or rather just rolled - north, without any mutual or other effective support and apparently without any understanding of their mission. Detailed instruction and reconnaissance was essential because the tanks lacked radios.

The 21<sup>st</sup> and 23<sup>rd</sup> Battalions waited for brigade orders or requests for support, the latter unit occupying itself with small-scale mopping-up of the remainders of those dropped on top of its companies. However, both battalions were

ready to assist 22<sup>nd</sup> Battalion if ordered forward. With the brigade commander far to the east in Platanias, the brigade stayed in the dark assuming all was fine, giving orders built on assumptions rather than intelligence. All seemed content with waiting for the clear situation picture that could result in a measured, logical management of the battle. Neither brigade nor the two reserve battalions, with the 23<sup>rd</sup> nearly within shouting distance of the closest 22<sup>nd</sup> subunit, sought information by seeking contact and clarity personally or as a minimum by liaison combat patrolling. The brigade's fourth battalion, the 28<sup>th</sup> (Maori), remained unemployed, in position, five kilometres from the decisive action (meaning 3-4 hours' cross-country march in the actual terrain). Even considering that the brigade thought that it needed to protect the coast around Platanias against a sea landing, the largest part of its infantry could have been deployed to support 22<sup>nd</sup> in the afternoon of 20 May with the 23<sup>rd</sup> reinforcing the airfield defence and 21<sup>st</sup> assisting in the defence of Hill 107.

However this did not happen, and when the German operational commander, general Kurt Student, took the risk of reinforcing the Maleme battle by crash landing transport aircraft with mountain infantry units in the airfield from the evening of the first day, this desperate measure became decisive when combined with the decision of the commander of the divided and unsupported 22<sup>nd</sup> NZ Battalion to withdraw east to avoid total destruction. Andrew's decision was logical within the framework of the original late April brigade mission. <sup>46</sup>

In the early afternoon the New Zealanders captured a map indicating a German operation against Chania, probably something that might have contributed continuing lack of focus on fighting the actual battle to ensure complete destruction of the enemy air head before it could be reinforced. The remaining parts of the NZ division, the 4<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> (ad hoc) brigades and the Greek units under NZ command, remained in place at Galatas west of Chania.

Even before noon 5<sup>th</sup> Brigade's reports had underlined that the decisive assault in the west had been against the Maleme airfield and the 22<sup>nd</sup> Battalion area, but the two other NZ brigades and Greek units were occupied by direct attack of the reinforced German 3<sup>rd</sup> Parachute Regiment. The combat north and immediately west of Chania made it impossible for both the division and the force commander to consider assisting the 5<sup>th</sup> Brigade during the crucial late hours of the first day, even if it had been possible to use the coastal road in spite of the complete German control of the air. <sup>47</sup>



The follow-up mountain troops air-landed under fire – an image of air power in effective support of the mission

## ***Simple insights***

Let us then compare the “why” of MERKUR with that of MARKET-GARDEN.

### **The enemy**

The problem of underrating the enemy did not apply in Crete. It was specific to the MARKET-GARDEN case. If anything the defeated British troops may have harboured an inferiority complex that reinforced the tendency to seek an orderly battle where any available fire-power could support moves by the infantry.

### **Mission focus**

The insufficient mission focus of the defeated side was as significant in MERKUR as three years later, even if its form and specific consequences were different.

The confiscation of the heavy infantry weapons in Suda Harbour on landing in late April is only really understandable to somebody with a lifetime’s experience on unfocused bureaucratic administration.

The Plataniass-Maleme area commander never seemed to come to a clear understanding that his mission was no longer a forward defence of the Suda Bay base, but a decisive defence of Maleme airfield and what General Freyberg saw as possible landing beaches in his area. The general never energetically forced the army and marine anti-aircraft artillery batteries to integrate fully into the 22<sup>nd</sup> Battalion defence plan in spite of clear requests from the battalion commander.

### **Tribal live and let live behaviour**

The lack of the defeated side’s willingness to enforce effective cooperation by unity of authority and responsibility applied in both cases.

Thus the lack of drive and focus left the airfield intact and unblocked after the last RAF fighter had been evacuated in spite of intelligence that the enemy assault would take place the next day. No steps seem to have been taken to make effective use or evacuate the now redundant RAF personnel of the administrative base area on the western slope of hill 107 or at least ensure that it did not block observation and fields of fire.

### **Personnel management**

Again same problem, but different form.

Of the three key commanders Hargest and Puttick were too old without updated tactical understanding. Neither of the two could or should be considered suitable for their command. As already mentioned, Hargest was politically appointed against the opposition of his commander, Freyberg. The 22<sup>nd</sup> battalion commander, Andrews, had a regular and routine officer’s career in the Interwar Period. As 44 years old he was beyond the age of an infantry battalion commander and he too was hampered by his First World War tactical experience. However, he basically did well under the impossible conditions offered by Hargest’ distant combat management.

The 2<sup>nd</sup> NZ Division was still in transition from the criteria guiding command appointments in peace to the essentially different standards required for war. The fighting in Greece had not lasted long enough to create a basis for the promotion to brigade command based on demonstrated talent.

### **Chaotic land battle**

This observation and the implications were the same as three years later. The British not only planned for initial phase of the operation to create a basis for designing combat and logistic support. Their ambition was to create an orderly framework for the later management of the battle, expecting that intelligence would supply the foundation

for launch of foreseen tailored actions in later phases of the engagement. This led to damaging hesitation, passive command style and defeat in detail while waiting. With the commanders' First World War background, this tendency to expect a controlled battle was easier to understand and accept in 1941 than in 1944.

### **Challenging plans**

Again, similar story: No full critical discussion, testing of even partial gaming of the developing 5<sup>th</sup> NZ Brigade plan is reported in the literature to have taken place.

### **Equipment**

As later at Arnhem, the defeated side was hampered by lack of proper equipment testing, training in its use and the search for technical or tactical alternatives. Proper preparation and use of the two infantry tanks would have been likely to have given the Germans serious problems. However, their use had not been tested or otherwise prepared and this led to total failure. No attempt seems to have been made to improve telephone communication in and between battalions by redundancy in spite of the constant experience with the effects of bombardment, and the measures to compensate in other ways seems to have been half hearted.

## **Concluding observations**

For anyone who is looking for positive guidelines for operation action, what has been extracted from the two cases must be considered deeply unsatisfactory and meagre. However, this is what has been extracted:

*Firstly* that it is essential to plan and act on the insight that tactical land combat remains chaotic due to friction and chance. Only overwhelming superiority in quantity or quality may render condition irrelevant for the outcome. This means normally that success depends on delegation of resources and authority to implement the plan in a flexible way. This is no easy observation to have accepted in the western culture with its belief in the possibilities of scientific management built on standardisation and centralisation.

*Secondly* that personal management of command personnel must understand the destructive effect of privilege and nepotism and the essential importance of recent demonstration relevant practical leadership as well as the ability to act independently and "*outside the box*". Ignoring privilege and seniority and promote on the basis of "*subjective criteria*" is certain to lead to jealousy, frustrations and conflict and will therefore normally be avoided.

*Thirdly* that the commander must be willing and inconsiderate enough to enforce and maintain effective and robust coordination between contributions from allies and different elements of own armed services and other state agencies. This will bring frustration and "*tribal*"-organisational self-defence, but is essential.

*Fourthly* that any plan must be tested by ruthlessly honest, critical gaming whenever time is available. As a minimum it must be tested by candid analysis of alternatives. Plans must be adjusted according to any new understanding of opportunities and risks. This is not necessarily easy to achieve due to the natural inclination to please senior officers, who control ones' promotion chances, and to doctrinal "*group-think*".

*Fifthly* there is the need to ensure the testing of equipment and training of the crews under realistic conditions as well as to develop redundancy of capabilities in all key areas. It means confronting and defeating the optimistic assumptions and views of rationality held by civilian or uniformed managers. Not confronting such assumptions and views is to invite defeat or extended losses (as happened in the invasion of Iraq in 2003).

This small analysis was focused sharply on extraction insights from a close look on the defeated side in two narrowly balanced air-land operations. Similar benefits can be extracted from any critical in depth, in context study of an

operation or battle, if the study focuses on the difficulties and problems rather than trying to learn and copy how to succeed.

In pure sea or air operations technological factors will have a far more decisive influence than in land engagements. If insights are sought from the study of extended campaigns such as insurgencies/counter-insurgencies, the in-depth study of the military elements must be balanced by similar thorough analysis of the cultural, political and economic factors to develop a meaningful level of insight.<sup>48</sup>

As mentioned Clausewitz recommended focusing on in-depth studies of recent wars, because any conflict would be shaped by the spirit of the time and the character of the warring societies. Normally military professionals studying cases would hope to be able to extract something more than the general insights into the effects of human and organisational frailty listed here. If so, if the officer needs to identify current trends in a special type of warfare as a foundation for prediction and advice, Clausewitz recommendation is even more relevant now than in his time. Currently we do not only experience a fast and constant development of societies and cultures and of their interaction. Both the societies and their wars are shaped and nourished by fast interaction of new technologies in a way that has only been the case previously in the years 1890 to 1920.

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<sup>1</sup> Quoted from John P. Kiszely: The relevance of history to the military profession: A British view. In: Williamson Murray and Richard Hart Sinnreich: The Past as prologue. The Importance of History to the Military Profession. (Cambridge 2006), p.32

<sup>2</sup> J.F.C. Fuller: British light infantry in the eighteenth century (London 1925), p.242.

<sup>3</sup> "bildningsäventyr". He did so in the foreword of his: Europas krig. Militärt tänkande, strategi och politik från Napoleonstiden till andre världskrigets slut, (Stockholm 1989). Unfortunately the book was never translated. Alf's Clausewitzian view of the relationship between theory and history is basically what is mirrored here.

<sup>4</sup> See his own narrative in: Captain Professor, a life in war and peace, (London 2006).

<sup>5</sup> See Arden Bucholz (ed.): Delbrück's Modern Military History, (Lincoln 1997).

<sup>6</sup> See Gunnar Åselius: Military history in an age of military change. Carl Bennedich, the Swedish General Staff, and the First World War in: Claes Ahlund (ed.) Scandinavia in the First World War. Studies in the War Experience of the Northern Neutrals, (Lund 2012).

<sup>7</sup> Unfortunately Ole A. Hedegaard: Generalløjtnant A. P. Tuxen. Militærhistoriker og æresdoktor, (Viborg 1982) does not place his ground-breaking work on the Great Nordic War in context.

<sup>8</sup> Is a short outline of the use of military history in the Danish Army Operational Command Course and the Joint Staff Course from 1979 until recently.

<sup>9</sup> Brian Bond: The Victorian Army and the Staff College, 1854-1915, (London 1972), p. 157.

<sup>10</sup> Important examples are C.E. Callwell: Military Operations and Maritime Preponderance: Their Relations and Interdependence, (London 1905), and his Small Wars. Their Principles and Practice (3<sup>rd</sup> Edition), London 1906, as well as George Grey Aston: Letters on amphibious wars, (London 1911).

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- <sup>11</sup> VI and X annual volumes of “Vierteljahrshefte für Truppenführung und Heereskunde”, (1907, 1913). Berlin; Arden Bucholz: Moltke, Schlieffen and Prussian War Planning, (New York/Oxford 1991).
- <sup>12</sup> Brigadier General Stuart Keintzelman’s foreword to: General Fieldmarshal Count Alfred von Schleiffen: Cannae, The Command and General Staff School Press, (Fort Leavenworth (Kansas), 1931).
- <sup>13</sup> Mika Kerttunen: An Abstract Approach, Rational Non-sense to Replace Historical Nonsense in Educating Leaders, in: Journal of Military Studies, Vol 2 (2011), No. 1, Helsinki.
- <sup>14</sup> One small example is the small booklet Truppendienst: Gefechtsbeispiele Aus dem zweiten Weltkrieg, Wien 1971.
- <sup>15</sup> FM 3-24 (MCWP 3-33.5) Counterinsurgency, FM 3-24/MCWP 3-33.5 Headquarters, Department of the Army (Headquarters United States Marine Corps), (Washington (DC) 2006).
- <sup>16</sup> Carl von Clausewitz: Vom Kriege. Siebzehnte Auflage. Vollständige Ausgabe im Urtext mit historisch-kritischer Würdigung von Dr. Werner Hahlweg, (Bonn 1966), especially Book 2, 2nd Chapter; Michael H. Clemmesen: Clausewitz – Liv og Person: Nils Berg (ed.): *Clausewitz: Om Krig III* (Copenhagen 1981); Patrick J. Speelman: Henry Lloyd and the Military Enlightenment of Eighteenth-Century Europe. (London 2002); Baron Antoine Henri de Jomini War: The Art of. (London 1992); Andrej N. Merzalow & Ljudmila A. Merzalowa: Antoine-Henri Jomini – der Begründer der wissenschaftlichen Militärtheorie. Eine Bewertung aus russischen Sicht. (Zürich 2004).
- <sup>17</sup> S.L.A. Marshall: Men Against Fire. The Problem of Battle Command, (New York 1947); F.D.G. Williams: SLAM. The Influence of S.L.A. Marshall on the United States Army, (Fort Monroe (Virginia), 1990); Dennis J. Vetock: Lessons Learned. A History of US Army Lesson Learning, (Carlisle Barracks (PA) 1988), pp.69-70, 163-165.
- <sup>18</sup> Brian Bond: The Victorian Army and the Staff College, 1854-1915, London 1972, p. 136
- <sup>19</sup> Brigadier James Hill, 3<sup>rd</sup> British Parachute Brigade, just prior to the D-Day landing. Quoted in John Buckley: Monty’s Men.
- <sup>20</sup> On 10 September, after the Airborne Division Commander had announced the dropping zones more than 10 kilometers from the bridge, Cholewczynski, p.82.
- <sup>21</sup> The key works used from of the large number of books about the operation Robert J. Kershaw: ‘It Never Snows in September’. The German View of Market-Garden and The Battle of Arnhem, September 1944, (Marlborough, Wiltshire 1990); The far best and most balanced analysis of the Allied side is by Robin Neillands: The Battle for the Rhine 1944. Arnhem and the Ardennes: the Campaign in Europe, (London 2005); Cornelius Ryan: A Bridge Too Far, (London 1974); George F. Cholewczynski: Poles Apart. The Polish Airborne at the Battle of Arnhem. (New York 1993); James A. Huston: U.S. Army Airborne Operations in World War II, (Nashville 1972); James M. Gavin: Airborne Warfare. (Washington (DC) 1947); Lawrence Wright: The Wooden Sword, (London 1967).
- <sup>22</sup> See Elizabeth Kier: Imagining War. French and British Military Doctrine Between the Wars, (Princeton 1997); David French: Raising Churchill’s Army and the War against Germany, (Oxford 2000); Brian Bond: British Military Policy between the Two World Wars, (Oxford 1980); John Buckley: Monty’s Men. The British Army and the Liberation of Europe, (Yale 2013)
- <sup>23</sup> The key works remain James S. Corum: The Roots of Blitzkrieg. Hans von Seeckt and German Military Reform, University of Kansas 1992, and Robert M. Citino: The Path to Blitzkrieg. Doctrine and Training in the German Army, 1920-1939, (Boulder (Colorado) 1999).
- <sup>24</sup> The most convincing analyses are William O. Odom: After the trenches. The Transformation of U.S. Army Doctrine 1918-1939, (Texas A&M University 1999) and Brian McAllister Linn: The Echo of Battle. The Army’s Way of War, (Cambridge (Mass) 2007).
- <sup>25</sup> Ryan, pp.86, 107-110, 285-287.
- <sup>26</sup> Neillands, pp. 95, 102-103.
- <sup>27</sup> Neillands, pp.109-113.
- <sup>28</sup> See the the description of the relation between Montgomery and his subordinate British commanders in John Buckley: Monty’s Men.
- <sup>29</sup> Neillands, pp.90-94.
- <sup>30</sup> Quoted by Lawrence Wright, p. 234.
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<sup>31</sup> Quoted from Neillands, p.106.

<sup>32</sup> Kershaw, p.139, Neillands, pp.105-106.

<sup>33</sup> Realised at the time, see Ryan p.281.

<sup>34</sup> Niellands, pp.132-136. Niellands does not really see that the division – as the corps – would not really have any relevant mission on the first day.

<sup>35</sup> Ryan, 92-95; Cholewczynski, p.82.

<sup>36</sup> Neillands, p.132.

<sup>37</sup> E.g. Ryan pp.204ff, 240.

<sup>38</sup> Buckley: Monty's Men, Chapter 8.

<sup>39</sup> Quoted from "On Historical Examples": Clausewitz: On War, Book 2, Chapter 6.

<sup>40</sup> The most important work is the relevant volume of the Official History of New Zealand in the Second World War: Daniel Marcus Davin: Crete, (Wellington 1953). This very detailed narrative includes quotations from the here essential plans, orders and reports from the preparations and decisive combat. The main supplement is the first volume of F.H. Hinsley: British Intelligence in the Second World War. Volume 1, (London 1979), that includes the Enigma intelligence information unavailable to Davin. Both are supplemented by: Howard Kippenberger: Infantry Brigadier. (Oxford 1961). The most important newer works are especially Heinz A. Richter: Operation Merkur: Die Eroberung der Insel Kreta im Mai 1941, (Wiesbaden-Erbenheim 2011), and Antony Beevor: Crete: The Battle and the Resistance, (London 1991). Older works used are John Hall Spencer: Battle for Crete, London 1962; Franz Kurowski: Der Kampf um Kreta, (Bonn 1965); George Forty: The Battle of Crete, (Hersham 2001). An earlier analysis by the author is: Kampene ved Maleme i maj 1941. *Militært Tidsskrift, Juli, August, September 1987*.

<sup>41</sup> Translated from Richter, p.119.

<sup>42</sup> Hinsley, pp.417-421, Beevor, pp. 82-101.

<sup>43</sup> Beevor, pp.59f.

<sup>44</sup> Davin, pp.28, 33, 45, 53-66, 92, 98; Richter, pp. 90-120; Beevor, 82-128.

<sup>45</sup> Quoted from Beevor, p.124.

<sup>46</sup> Davin, pp.88-138; Kurowski, pp.28-55.

<sup>47</sup> Davin, pp.139-169; Kippenberger, pp.46-58.

<sup>48</sup> See e.g.: Gil Merom: How Democracies Lose Small Wars. State, Society, and the Failures of France in Algeria, Israel in Lebanon, and the United States in Vietnam, (Cambridge 2003); Douglas S. Blaufarb: The Counter-Insurgency Era. 1950 to the Present, (New York 1977); Richard Duncan Downie: Learning from Conflict. The U.S. Military in Vietnam, El Salvador, and the Drug War, (Westport 1998); David H. Ucko: The New Counterinsurgency Era. Transforming the U.S. Military for Modern Wars, (Washington (DC) 2009).