COMMANDERS of WORLD WAR TWO

For my grandchildren, Devin, Tayla, Chloe, and Ava.

Also by Bill Brady

World War Two, Cause and Effect
The Global Tragedy and Triumph 1939-45
US Pacific Victory in World War Two

FOREWORD

Bill Brady is arguably one of the foremost South African writers of the present era on the military history of World War Two. A former Chairman of the Durban based South African Military History Society, Bill has done readers proud by writing and publishing this fascinating and educational book about some of the most recognisably famous and infamous 'Commanders of World War Two'.

The author has demonstrated, many times over, in his previously published works that he has the ability and sagaciousness to relate historical facts in an interestingly descriptive manner devoid of irrelevant detail. No less in this work.

In this book we can read about some of the prominent 'Commanders of World War Two' who strategically planned campaigns and battles, directed them, won and lost them and who even lost the war itself.

In addressing the strengths, weaknesses and idiosyncratic behaviours of the commanders, Bill enables the reader to gain insights into the working of their minds and to evaluate their actions following their decisions both good and bad.

This is a valuable work which should become a valuable addition to any historian's war history collection.

Graham L Coggin
Business Process Re-Engineering Consultant, Writer
and Author

CONTENTS

CHAPTER ONE

EISENHOWER.

General Dwight David Eisenhower (1890-1969) was selected in June 1942 to head US forces in Europe. Five months later he commanded the 'Torch' landings in North Africa, and just over a year after that he was named Allied Supreme Commander for the Normandy invasion. It was a meteoric rise for a man who had never before exercised command in battle.

He had a dominant personality and most capable of making critical decisions. In the vast bureaucracy of high command, he was the single person who could make judgments and issue orders. Of the many high-powered subordinates, most famously Generals Montgomery and Patton, from the time of his appointment as Supreme Commander to the end of the war, he was the one who ran the show.

Eisenhower was a West Point graduate (1915) and professional soldier. When the war broke out for the US on 7th December 1941, he was a brigadier general and chief of staff at the Third Army, stationed in Texas. On 12th December he got a call from the War Department ordering him to proceed immediately to Washington for a new assignment. He soon discovered how ill-prepared the Americans were for war, and how fortunate they were to have Eisenhower in the ranks.

'Ike', as he was affectionately known throughout his multinational command and subsequent US presidency, was among an elite group for advancement chosen by General George Marshall, US Army Chief of Staff,. When he was given overall command of the 'Torch' invasion, he had to coordinate the efforts of subordinates who in many cases were vastly more experienced. He created a joint command headquarters and an integrated staff, with a British and an American officer for each job. This worked brilliantly, due to his tact and skill. His leadership talents would eventually take him to the White House, where he served two terms, from 1953 to 1961, and was extremely popular.

The key to his success as a leader of men was his insistence on teamwork and his commitment to democracy. General Eisenhower liked to speak of the fury of an aroused democracy. It was in Normandy on 6th June 1944, and in the campaign that followed, that the Western democracies made their fury manifest. The success of this great and noble undertaking was a triumph of democracy over totalitarianism. Eisenhower said he wanted democracy to survive for all ages to come.

In 1964, on D-Day plus twenty years, he was interviewed on Omaha Beach by Walter Cronkite. Looking out at the Channel, Eisenhower said; "You see these people out here swimming and sailing their little pleasure boats and taking advantage of the nice

weather and the lovely beach, Walter. It is almost unreal to look at it today and remember what it was. But it's a wonderful thing to remember what those fellows twenty years ago were fighting and sacrificing for, what they did to preserve our way of life. Not to conquer any territory, not for any ambitions of our own, but to make sure that Hitler could not destroy freedom in the world. I think it's just overwhelming. To think of the lives that were given for that principle, paying a terrible price on this beach alone, on that one day over two thousand casualties. But they did it so that the world could be free. It just shows what free men will do rather than be slaves".

Few, if any, American officers performed a wider array of strategic functions as Eisenhower; he was a staff planner in the War Department, wartime commander of a massive coalition force, peacetime Chief of Staff, and Supreme Allied Commander of NATO. Eisenhower was directly involved in a number of major transitions including the building of the wartime American Army, its demobilization following victory, and the resuscitation of American military strength with the on come of the cold war.

Eisenhower was born in Denison, Texas, on 14th October 1890, the third of seven sons. Soon after his birth, the family moved to Abilene, Kansas. His family was not wealthy, necessitating Eisenhower to quickly learn the value of hard work. David Jacob Eisenhower (1863-1942), his father, was a professional engineer and his mother was Ida Elizabeth (Stover) Eisenhower.

Ike attended Abilene High School and graduated with the class of 1909.Although Eisenhower was an average school pupil, he enjoyed studying history, particularly figures like George Washington and Hannibal. He had to take a job to pay for tuition fees prior to entering the United States Military Academy, West Point in June 1911. While Eisenhower's mother was opposed to war, it was her collection of history books that first sparked Eisenhower's early and lasting interest in military history. He persisted

in reading the books in her collection and became a voracious reader on the subject. His decision to attend West Point saddened his mother, but she did not overrule him. He graduated 61st in a class of 164 in 1915, in what became known as 'the class the stars fell on' because fifty nine members eventually became general officers.

Shortly after the United States entered World War One in 1917, Eisenhower was promoted to captain. He was given command of Camp Colt, Pennsylvania, a post of the newly formed Tank Corps. In March, 1918, he was promoted to major and awarded the Distinguished Service Medal. On 15th September 1918, Eisenhower was promoted to lieutenant colonel and was ordered to embark on 18th November for combat service in France. However, the deployment did not take place due to the 11th November 1918 Armistice that ended the war. Completely missing out on the battlefield left him depressed and bitter for a time. Later, in World War Two, rivals who had experienced combat service in World War One sought to denigrate Eisenhower for his lack of combat duty. Due to the post World War One reduction of

the army, he reverted to the rank of captain, until June 1920, when he was promoted to major. Which was the rank he held for the next 16 years.

Eisenhower met and fell in love with Mamie Geneva Doud from Iowa. They wed on 1st July, 1916, and had two sons. Doud Dwight Eisenhower was born in 1917, and died of scarlet fever at the age of three. Their second son, John Sheldon Doud Eisenhower, was born in 1922. John served in the United States Army, retired as a brigadier general, became an author and served as U.S. Ambassador to Belgium from 1969 to 1971. John, coincidentally, graduated from West Point on D-Day, 6th June 1944.

From 1920, Eisenhower served under a succession of talented generals, including John J. Pershing, Douglas MacArthur and George Marshall. In 1925-26 he attended the Command and General Staff College (CGS) at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, and graduated first in his CGS class of two hundred and forty five officers. His schooling continued, focusing on the nature of the next war and the role of the tank in it. His new expertise in tank warfare was strengthened by a close collaboration with George S. Patton and other senior tank leaders. Their leading-edge ideas of speed-oriented offensive tank warfare were strongly discouraged by superiors who considered the new approach too radical and preferred the tank continue to be used in a strictly supportive role for the infantry.

During the late 1920s and early 1930s, Eisenhower's career in the army stalled somewhat, as military priorities diminished. This caused many of his fellow officers to resign for high-paying business jobs. He was then assigned to the American Battle Monuments Commission directed by General Pershing, and produced a guide to American battlefields in Europe. Pershing wrote a letter praising Eisenhower, and from then on the army saw him as one of its future leading officers. He then served as chief military aide to General Douglas MacArthur, Chief of Staff of the United States Army, until 1935. He then accompanied MacArthur to the Philippines, where he served as assistant military adviser to the Philippine government. In June 1941, Eisenhower was appointed Chief of Staff to General Walter Krueger, Commander of the 3rd Army, at Fort Sam Houston in Texas, and promoted to brigadier general on October 1941. Although his administrative abilities had been noticed, he was far from being considered by many as a potential commander of major field operations.

After Pearl Harbor, Eisenhower was assigned to the General Staff in Washington, where he served until June 1942. He was appointed Deputy Chief in charge of Pacific Defences under the Chief of War Plans Division (WPD), General Gerow, and then succeeded Gerow as Chief of the WPD. Then he was appointed Assistant Chief of Staff in charge of the new Operations Division (which replaced WPD) under Chief of Staff General George Marshall. It was his close association with Marshall that finally brought Eisenhower to senior command positions. Marshall recognized his great organizational and administrative abilities.

The Americans were eager to get going on defeating the Germans. Eisenhower's first task as Marshall's principal advisor had been to save the Philippines, which by January 1942 was already obviously impossible. Meanwhile, Eisenhower was beginning to think on a worldwide scale. On 22nd January he scribbled in his diary, „We've got to go to Europe and fight, and we've got to quit wasting resources all over the world, and still worse, wasting time". He had concluded that the correct strategy was „Germany first", on the grounds that the Germans were the main threat. It was imperative to keep the Red Army in the war by putting pressure on Germany from the west. Once Germany was defeated the Americans could go over to the offensive against the Japanese. He recommended to Marshall a program: spend 1942 and the first months of 1943 building an American force in Britain, then invading France. Marshall agreed and told Eisenhower to prepare a draft directive for the American commander in Britain.

Eisenhower came up with a name, the European Theatre of Operations (ETO), and produced the draft. He urged "that absolute unity of command should be exercised by the Theatre Commander, who should organize, train, and command the American ground, naval, and air forces assigned to the theatre". At the end of May 1942, Eisenhower accompanied Lt. General Arnold, commanding General of the Army Air Forces, to London to assess the effectiveness of the theatre commander in England, Major General Chaney. He returned to Washington on 3rd June with a pessimistic assessment, stating he had an "uneasy feeling about Chaney and his staff". On 23rd June 1942, he returned to London as Commanding General, ETO, based in London.

Eisenhower proved to be outstanding at public relations. There was, first and foremost, the man himself. He stood erect; with his square, broad shoulders held back, his head high. His face and hands were always active, his face reddening with anger when he spoke of the Nazis, lighting up as he spoke of the immense forces being gathered to crush them. His relaxed, casual manner was appealing, as was the nickname 'Ike', which seemed to fit so perfectly. His good humour and good looks attracted people. Most reporters found it impossible to be in Eisenhower's presence and not like him.

In November 1942, he was appointed Supreme Commander Allied Expeditionary Force (AEF) of the North African Theatre of Operations. The campaign in North Africa was designated „Operation Torch" and was planned from a dank underground tunnel within the Rock of Gibraltar. Eisenhower was the first non-British officer to command Gibraltar in 200 years. French cooperation was deemed necessary for Torch to succeed, and Eisenhower encountered a „preposterous situation" with the rival French factions, and gave his support to Admiral Darlan. Eisenhower came in for severe criticism for the move, considering Darlan's previous high offices of state in Vichy France. Darlan was assassinated later that year and Eisenhower appointed General Giraud.

In February 1943, his authority was extended as commander of the Mediterranean

Theatre of Operations (MTO) to include the British 8th Army, commanded by General Montgomery. The 8th Army had advanced across the Western Desert from the east and was ready for the start of the Tunisia Campaign. Eisenhower gained his fourth star soon after the capitulation of Axis forces in North Africa. In the Mediterranean campaign Eisenhower and his team had improved dramatically from the team that had invaded North Africa in November 1942 and they now prepared for the invasion of France. In that respect, the payoff for Torch was worth the price. In December 1943, President Roosevelt decided that Eisenhower, not Marshall, would be Supreme Allied Commander in Europe to plan and execute the Allied assault on the coast of Normandy in June 1944 under the code name Operation Overlord.

Eisenhower, as well as the officers and troops under him, had learned valuable lessons in their previous operations, and their skills had strengthened. Admiral King fought with Eisenhower over King's refusal to provide additional landing craft from the Pacific. He also insisted that the British give him exclusive command overall strategic air forces to facilitate Overlord, to the point of threatening to resign unless Churchill relented, as he did. Eisenhower then wanted a bombing plan in France in advance of Overlord He also had to skilfully manage to retain the services of the often unruly General Patton, by severely reprimanding him, when Patton earlier had slapped a soldier and then when Patton gave a speech in which he made improper comments about post-war policy. There is no doubt that without Eisenhower's support at critical moments, Patton would never have had the chance to make his name in the coming campaign.

General Bradley got on very well with Eisenhower, but he did not share his chief's tolerance towards that loose cannon, Patton. Patton, a God-fearing man famous for his profanity, enjoyed addressing his troops in provocative terms. He once told them; “Now I want you to remember, that no bastard ever won a war by dying for his country. You win it by making the other poor dumb bastard die for his country”.

Although neither Eisenhower nor Bradley could admit it, the most difficult of the D Day landing beaches was going to be Omaha. This objective for the American 1st and 20th Infantry Divisions had been closely reconnoitred by the British. In the second half of January, the midget submarine X-20 had been towed close to the Normandy coast by an armed trawler. General Bradley had requested that, having checked the beaches selected for the British and Canadian forces, they should also examine Omaha to make sure that it was firm enough for tanks. Captain Scott Bowden, a sapper, and Sergeant Bruce Ogden-Smith of the Special Boat Section swam ashore, and reported back that the beach was most formidable and there were bound to be tremendous casualties.

Air Chief Marshal Leigh-Mallory, who made everyone angry had even managed to rile Eisenhower. He was convinced that the two US airborne divisions due to be dropped on the Cotentin peninsula faced a massacre. He repeatedly urged the cancellation of this vital element in the Overlord plan to protect the western flank. Eisenhower told Leigh-Mallory to put his concerns in writing. This he did, and after careful

consideration Eisenhower rejected them with Montgomery's full support. Eisenhower's ability to keep such a disparate team together was an extraordinary achievement.

Early on 2nd June 1944, Eisenhower moved into a trailer hidden in the park at Southwick under camouflage nets. He dubbed it 'my circus wagon', and when not in conference or visiting troops, he would try to relax by reading westerns on his bunk and smoking. At 10 00 hours that Friday, in the library in Southwick House, Group Captain Stagg, a meteorologist, gave Eisenhower and the other assembled commanders-in-chief the latest weather assessment. Stagg knew that by the evening conference he must produce a firm opinion on the deterioration of the weather over the weekend. The decision to proceed or to postpone had to be made very soon.

Eisenhower, despite his nervous state and the appalling responsibility heaped upon him, wisely adopted a philosophical attitude. He had been selected to make the final decisions, so make them he must and face the consequences. The biggest decision, as he knew only too well, was almost upon him. Quite literally, the fate of many thousands of his soldiers' lives rested upon it.

General Eisenhower, who started it all with his "OK, let's go" order, gets the last word, although, it was never certain that Operation Overlord would succeed. The seriousness surrounding the entire decision, including the timing and the location of the Normandy invasion, might be summarized by a second shorter speech that Eisenhower wrote in advance, in case he needed it. He stated he would take full responsibility for catastrophic failure, should that be the final result. Long after the successful landings on D-Day and the BBC broadcast of Eisenhower's brief speech concerning them, the never-used second speech was found in a shirt pocket by an aide. It read: “Our landings in France have failed to gain a satisfactory foothold and I have withdrawn the troops. My decision to attack at this time and place was based on the best information available. The troops, the airmen and the Navy did all that bravery and devotion to duty could do. If any blame or fault attaches to the attempt, it is mine alone”.

The D-Day coastal assault landings were costly but successful. Many prematurely considered that victory in Europe would come by summer's end; however German capitulation would not come for almost a year. From then until the end of the war in Europe, Eisenhower had command of all Allied forces, on the Western Front. He was ever mindful of the inevitable loss of life and suffering that would be experienced on an individual level by the troops under his command, and their families. This prompted him to make a point of personally visiting every division involved in the invasion.

Once the Normandy break-out had succeeded, Eisenhower insisted on retaining personal control over the land battle strategy, and was immersed in the command and supply of multiple assaults through France. Montgomery insisted priority be given to his 21st Army Group's attack being made in the north, while Generals Bradley

(12th U.S. Army Group) and Devers (6th U.S. Army Group) insisted they be given priority in the centre and south of the front. Eisenhower worked tirelessly to address the demands of the rival commanders to optimize Allied forces, often by giving them some tactical latitude; many historians conclude this delayed the Allied victory in Europe. However, due to Eisenhower's persistence, the pivotal supply port at Antwerp was successfully, albeit belatedly, opened in late 1944, and victory became a more distinct probability.

In recognition of his senior position in the Allied command, on 20th December, 1944, he was promoted to General of the Army, equivalent to the rank of Field Marshal in most European armies. In this and the previous high commands he held, Eisenhower showed his great talents for leadership and diplomacy, winning the respect of front-line commanders. He interacted adeptly with, Churchill, Montgomery and de Gaulle. Nevertheless he did have serious disagreements with Churchill and Montgomery over questions of strategy, but these rarely upset his relationships with them.

The Germans launched a surprise counter offensive in the Battle of the Bulge in December 1944 which was turned back in early 1945 by the Allies after Eisenhower repositioned his armies. The improved weather then allowed the Air Force to engage. German defences continued to deteriorate on both the eastern front with the Soviets and the western front with the Allies.

After the Rhine victories, the allies pushed into Germany. Eisenhower was free to send his armies wherever he chose. Montgomery wanted him to give 1st Army to 21st Army Group and let it join 9th Army for a drive on to Berlin, under his command. Hodges wanted Berlin, as did Simpson, Patton, Brooke, and Churchill. But Bradley didn't and neither did Eisenhower. Partly their reason was political. At the Yalta conference the Big Three had agreed to divide Germany into zones of occupation, and Berlin into sectors. In central Germany, the Elbe River was the boundary.

If Simpson's 9th or Hodges's 1st Army fought its way across the Elbe and on to Berlin, they would be taking territory that would have to be turned over to the Soviet occupation forces; if they fought their way into Berlin they would have to give up more than half the city to the Red Army. On the advance towards Berlin, Eisenhower was notified by General Bradley that Allied forces would suffer an estimated one hundred thousand casualties before taking the city. This was borne out when the Soviets sustained almost two hundred thousand casualties in taking Berlin. "A pretty stiff price to pay for a prestige objective, especially when we've got to fall back and let the other fellow take over". Further, Eisenhower believed that if the Americans tried to race the Russians to Berlin, they would lose. 9th and 1st Armies were 250 miles from Berlin; the Red Army was on the banks of the Oder River, about 60 miles from the city. And the Red Army was there in great strength, with well over a million troops.

Another consideration: Eisenhower's goal was to win the war and thus end the carnage as quickly as possible. Every day that the war went on meant more deaths for the concentration camp inmates, for the millions of slave labourers in Germany,

and for the Allied POWs. If he concentrated on Berlin, the Germans in Bavaria and Austria, where many of the POW and slave labour camps were located, would be able to hold out for who knew how long.

The SS and Hitler Youth were not only fanatics but were armed with the most modern weapons, which gave small groups of them deadly firepower. Even after the surrender of the Ruhr, the Germans never ran out of guns or ammunition. These boys could get all the panzerfausts, potato mashers, machine guns, rifles, and mines they could carry. If they were lucky enough to have fuel, they could have Tiger tanks, 88s, and more heavy stuff. This combination of fanatic boys and plenty of weapons and ammunition created a nightmare situation.

After the mid-April mass surrender of German troops, including thirty generals in the Ruhr pocket, the Wehrmacht collapsed. The code word 'werewolf" was sent out by Hitler's command post. This meant that small groups were to be formed and head east. Few did, the veterans sat down and awaited their American captors. The Volkssturm, the Waffen SS, and the Hitler Youth were another matter. They fought fiercely and inflicted great damage. The GIs never knew, when the lead jeep rounded a corner, what was ahead. If inexperienced boys were there, they would fire, most often a panzerfaust shell at the jeep. The Americans retaliated by smashing the village. "I'm not going to be the last man killed in this war" was the feeling, so when some teenage boy fired on them, they brought down a tremendous amount of shells. It was chaos and catastrophe, brought on for no reason, except that Hitler had raised these boys for just this moment. The fanatics were forcing the Americans to do to the German civilians and cities what Hitler wanted to do to them, because, in Hitler"s words, “they had shown themselves to be unworthy of him”.

The Allied fear was that Hitler would be able to encourage these armed bands over the radio to continue the struggle, His voice was his weapon. If he could get to the Austrian Alps he might be able to surround himself with SS troops and use the radio to put that voice into action. Precisely that was happening, according to American agents in Switzerland. As early as 11th March 1945, it was declared, "The main trend of German defence policy does seem directed primarily to the safeguarding of the Alpine Zone. This area is practically impenetrable. Evidence indicates that considerable numbers of SS and specially chosen units are being systematically withdrawn to Austria. Here, defended by nature the powers that have hitherto guided Germany will survive to reorganize her resurrection. Here a specially selected corps of young men will be trained in guerrilla warfare, so that a whole underground army can be fitted and directed to liberate Germany”.

Eisenhower's mission was to get a sharp, clean, quick end to the war. The Russians were going to take Berlin anyway. There were more German divisions in southern Germany than to the north. The best way to carry out the mission was to overrun Bavaria and Austria before the Germans could set up their Alpine Redoubt. Eisenhower ordered 9th Army to halt at the Elbe, 1st Army to push on to Dresden on

the Elbe and then halt, and 3rd and 7th Armies, plus the French army, to overrun Bavaria and Austria.

Put another way, he refused to race the Russians to Berlin. He was much criticized for this. It remains his most controversial decision of the war, and has been much written about. However, there is no concrete evidence that the GI's wanted to charge into Berlin, For the GI's, what stood out about Eisenhower's decision was that he put them first. If the Russians wanted to get into the ultimate street fight that was their business. The British had wanted Berlin but Eisenhower decided it would be a military mistake for him to attack Berlin, and said orders to that effect would have to be explicit. The British backed down, but then wanted Eisenhower to move into Czechoslovakia for political reasons. Washington refused to support Churchill's plan to use Eisenhower's army for political manoeuvres against Moscow. The actual division of Germany thus followed the lines that Roosevelt, Churchill and Stalin had previously agreed upon.

Day after day over the last couple of weeks, more concentration camps were discovered. On15th April, the British got into Belsen. That day Edward R. Murrow went to Buchenwald, just north of Weimar. Like Eisenhower and every GI who saw one of the camps, Murrow feared that no one could believe what he saw. He gave a description on his CBS radio program. In his conclusion he said, "I pray you to believe what I have said about Buchenwald, I have reported what I saw, but only part of it. For most of it I have no words. If I've offended you by this rather mild account of Buchenwald, I"m not in the least sorry. I was there". Upon full discovery of the death camps that were part of the Final Solution (Holocaust), he ordered camera crews to comprehensively document evidence of the atrocity for use in the Nuremburg war crimes tribunals.

Later that day an awful black, acrid smoke appeared. It came from one of the outlying camps of the Dachau system. When the Americans approached, the SS officer in charge had ordered the remaining four thousand slave labourers to be liquidated. The guards had nailed shut the doors, and windows of the wooden barracks, hosed down the buildings with gasoline, and set them on fire. The prisoners had been cremated alive. Later, soldiers that loaded civilians from Landsberg into trucks to take them to see the atrocity, later wrote; "Would you believe that no one admitted any knowledge of the camp, they told us they thought it was a secret war factory, so they didn't ask questions. They all defended Hitler, saying, the Fűhrer knew nothing of this! They blamed the Nazi's, but not their dear Fűhrer".

Their dear Fűhrer, meanwhile, declared that; "the German people have not shown themselves worthy of their Fűhrer," and on 30th April, killed himself. He named Admiral Karl Dönitz as his successor. Dönitz's task was to surrender, hopefully to the Western Allies only. He therefore sent General Alfred Jodl, the German Chief of Staff, to Eisenhower's headquarters in Reims to accomplish that goal. Jodl arrived on Sunday evening 6th May. Eisenhower conferred with his aides Generals Smith and Strong, emphasizing that the Germans were willing, indeed anxious, to surrender to

the West, but not to the Red Army. Dönitz, he said, would order all German troops remaining on the Western Front to cease fire. Smith replied that the surrender had to be a general one to all the Allies. Jodl then asked for forty-eight hours “in order to get the necessary instructions to all their outlying units”. Smith said that was impossible. After the talks dragged on for over an hour, Smith put the problem to Eisenhower.

Eisenhower felt that Jodl was trying to gain time so that more German soldiers and civilians could get across the Elbe and escape the Russians. He told Smith to inform Jodl that "he would break off all negotiations and seal the western front preventing by force any further westward movement of German soldiers and civilians, unless Jodl signed the surrender document”. But he also decided.to grant the forty-eight-hour delay before announcing the surrender, as Jodl requested.

Smith took Eisenhower's reply to Jodl, who thereupon sent a cable to Dönitz, explaining the situation and asking permission to sign. Dönitz was enraged; he characterized Eisenhower's demands as "sheer extortion". He nevertheless felt impelled to accept them, and was consoled somewhat by the thought that the Germans could still save many troops from the Russians during the forty-eight hour delay. Just past midnight, therefore, he cabled Jodl: "Full power to sign in accordance with conditions as given has been granted by Grand Admiral Dönitz".

At 02 00 hours on 7th May, Generals Smith, Morgan, Spaatz, Tedder, a French and Russian representative, gathered at Reims in a relatively small room. The Allied officers had to squeeze past one another to get to their assigned chairs around a heavy oak table. When they had all sat down, Jodl, accompanied by an aide, was led into the room. Tall, perfectly erect, immaculately dressed, his monocle in place Jodl looked the personification of Prussian militarism. He bowed stiffly. Strong found himself, to his own surprise, feeling a bit sorry for him.

While the somewhat elaborate procedures for the signing went on, Eisenhower waited in his adjacent office, pacing and smoking. The signing took a half hour. Jodl delivered the German nation into the hands of the Allies and officially acknowledging that Nazi Germany was dead; outside, spring was bursting forth, promising new life. Eisenhower knew that he should feel elated, triumphant, joyful, but all he really felt was dead beat. He had hardly slept in three days; it was the middle of the night; he just wanted to get it over with. At 02 00 hours, Strong led Jodl into Eisenhower's office. Eisenhower sat down behind his desk, Jodl bowed, then stood at attention. Eisenhower asked Jodl if he understood the terms and was ready to execute them. Jodl said yes. Eisenhower then warned him that he would be held personally accountable if the terms were violated. Jodl bowed again and left.

Eisenhower then entered and surrounded with officers and aides, photographers were called in to record the event for posterity. Eisenhower then made a short newsreel and radio recording. When the newsmen left, Smith said it was time to send a message to the CGS. Everyone had a try at drafting an appropriate document. Smith later recalled, "I tried one myself, and like all my associates, groped for

resounding phrases as fitting accolades to the Great Crusade and indicative of our dedication to the great task just completed".

Eisenhower quietly watched and listened. Each draft was more grandiloquent than the last. The Supreme, Commander finally thanked everyone for his efforts, rejected all the proposals, and dictated the message himself. "The mission of this Allied force was fulfilled at 02 00 hours local time, 7th May 1945".

After his many wartime successes, General Eisenhower returned to the U.S. for a hero's reception. This was quite unique for a military hero that had never seen front line in his life. The nearest he came to being under enemy fire was in 1944 when a German fighter strafed the ground while he was inspecting troops in Normandy. Eisenhower dived for cover like everyone else and after the plane flew off, a British brigadier helped him up and seemed very relieved he was not hurt. When Eisenhower thanked him for his solicitude, the brigadier deflated him by explaining "my concern was that you should not be injured in my sector". This incident formed part of Eisenhower's fund of stories he would tell now and again.

Following the German unconditional surrender, Eisenhower was appointed Military Governor of the U.S. Occupation Zone, based at the IG Farben Building in Frankfurt am Main. He had no responsibility for the other three zones, controlled by Britain, France and the Soviet Union, except for the city of Berlin, which was managed by the Four-Power Authorities. Eisenhower followed the orders laid down by the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS), but softened them by bringing in 400 000 tons of food for civilians and allowing more fraternization. In response to the devastation in Germany, including food shortages and an influx of refugees, he arranged distribution of American food and medical equipment. His actions reflected the new American attitudes of the German people as Nazi victims not villains, while aggressively purging the ex-Nazis.

In November 1945, Eisenhower returned to Washington to replace Marshall as Chief of Staff of the Army. His main role was rapid demobilization of millions of soldiers, a slow job that was delayed by lack of shipping. Eisenhower was convinced in 1946 that the Soviet Union did not want war and that friendly relations could be maintained. He strongly supported the new United Nations and favoured its involvement in the control of atomic bombs. However, in formulating policies regarding the atomic bomb and relations with the Soviets Truman was guided by the U.S. State Department and ignored Eisenhower and the Pentagon. Indeed, Eisenhower had opposed the use of the atomic bomb against the Japanese, writing, "First, the Japanese were ready to surrender and it wasn't necessary to hit them with that awful thing. Second, I hated the thought of our country being the first to use such a weapon". By mid-1947, as East–West tensions over economic recovery in Germany escalated, Eisenhower gave up his hopes for cooperation with the Soviets and agreed with a containment policy to stop Soviet expansion.

In January 1948, after learning of plans in New Hampshire to elect delegates supporting him for the forthcoming Republican National Convention, Eisenhower

stated through the Army that he was "not available for, and could not accept nomination to, high political office; life-long professional soldiers, in the absence of some obvious and overriding reason, should abstain from seeking high political office". Eisenhower maintained no political party affiliation during this time. Many believed he was forgoing his only opportunity to be president;

In 1948, Eisenhower became President of Columbia University in New York. During that year, Eisenhower's memoir, *Crusade in Europe*, was published. Critics regarded it as one of the finest U.S. military memoirs, and it was a major financial success as well. Eisenhower's profit on the book was substantially aided by an unprecedented ruling by the U.S. Department of the Treasury that Eisenhower was not a professional writer, but rather, marketing his lifetime experiences, He only had to pay capital gains tax on his $635 000 advance instead of the much higher personal tax rate. This ruling saved Eisenhower about $400 000.

The contacts gained through university and American Assembly fund-raising activities would later become important supporters in Eisenhower's bid for the Republican Party nomination and the presidency. In December 1950, he took an extended leave from the university to become the Supreme Commander of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), and he was given operational command of NATO forces in Europe.

President Truman, symbolizing a broad-based desire for an Eisenhower candidacy for president in 1951 pressed him to run for the office as a Democrat. However, Eisenhower declared himself and his family to be Republicans. He was persuaded to declare his candidacy in 1952. The effort was a long struggle; Eisenhower had to be convinced that political circumstances had created a genuine duty for him to offer himself as a candidate, and that there was a mandate from the populace for him to be their President. Henry Cabot Lodge, who served as his campaign manager, and others succeeded in convincing him, and in June 1952 he resigned his command at NATO to campaign full-time. Eisenhower's campaign was noted for the simple but effective slogan, „I Like Ike". It was essential to his success that Ike express his opposition to Roosevelt's policy at Yalta and against Truman's policies in Korea and China, matters in which he had once participated. It was necessary for Eisenhower to appease the right wing Old Guard of the Republican Party; his selection of Richard M. Nixon as the Vice-President on the ticket was designed in part for that purpose. Nixon also provided a strong anti-communist presence as well as some youth to counter Ike's more advanced age.

He defeated Democratic candidate Adlai Stevenson in a landslide, marking the first Republican return to the White House in 20 years. Eisenhower was the last president born in the 19th century, and at age 62, was the oldest man to be elected President since James Buchanan in 1856. (President Truman stood at 64 in 1948 as the incumbent president at the time of his election four years earlier.) Eisenhower was the only general to serve as President in the 20th century, and the most recent President to have never held elected office prior to the Presidency. Eisenhower's

cabinet, consisting of several corporate executives and one labour leader, was dubbed by one journalist, "Eight millionaires and a plumber". The cabinet was notable for its lack of personal friends, office seekers, or experienced government administrators. He also upgraded the role of the National Security Council in planning all phases of the Cold War.

Eisenhower made greater use of press conferences than any prior president, holding almost 200 in his two terms. While he saw a positive relationship with the press as invaluable, his primary objective in press conferences was to maintain an indispensable direct contact with the people. Throughout his presidency, Eisenhower adhered to a political philosophy of dynamic conservatism. He continued all the major New Deal programs still in operation, especially Social Security. He expanded its programs and rolled them into a new cabinet-level agency, the Department of Health, Education and Welfare, while extending benefits to an additional ten million workers.

Initially Eisenhower planned on serving only one term, but as with other decisions he maintained a position of maximum flexibility in case leading Republicans wanted him to run again. During his recovery from a heart attack late in 1955, he consulted with his closest advisors to evaluate potential candidates; the group, in addition to his doctor, concluded a second term was well advised, and he announced in February 1956 he would run again. In 1956, Eisenhower faced Adlai Stevenson again and won by an even larger landslide.

The death of Joseph Stalin in March 1953 presented Eisenhower with an opportunity. He gave his 'Chance for Peace' speech in which he attempted, unsuccessfully, to forestall the nuclear arms race with the Soviet Union by suggesting multiple opportunities presented by peaceful uses of nuclear materials. Many considered this was the best speech of Eisenhower's presidency.

Nevertheless, the Cold War escalated during his presidency. When Russia successfully tested a hydrogen bomb, Eisenhower, against the advice of Dulles, decided to initiate a disarmament proposal to the Russians. In an attempt to make their refusal more difficult, he proposed that both sides agree to dedicate fissionable material away from weapons toward peaceful uses, such as power generation. This approach was labelled 'Atoms for Peace". The U.N. speech was well received but the Russians never acted upon it, due to concern for the greater stockpiles of nuclear weapons in the U.S. arsenal.

With Eisenhower's leadership and Dulles' direction, CIA activities increased, to resist the spread of communism in poorer countries; the CIA in part deposed the leaders of Iran, and Guatemala. In 1954 Ike wanted to increase surveillance inside the Soviet Union. With Dulles' recommendation, he authorized the deployment of 30 Lockheed U-2's at a cost of $35 million. The Eisenhower administration also planned the Bay of Pigs Invasion to overthrow Fidel Castro in Cuba, which John F. Kennedy was left to carry out.

On the whole, Eisenhower's support of the nation's fledgling space program was modest until the Soviet launch of Sputnik in 1957, gaining the Cold War enemy enormous prestige around the world. He then launched a national campaign that funded not just space exploration but a major strengthening of science and higher education. He rushed construction of more advanced satellites, created NASA as a civilian space agency, signed a landmark science education law, and fostered improved relations with American scientists.

In strategic terms, it was Eisenhower who devised the American basic strategy of nuclear deterrence based upon the triad of B-52 bombers, land-based intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs), and Polaris submarine-launched ballistic missiles (SLBMs). In late 1952 Eisenhower went to Korea and discovered a military and political stalemate. Once in office, when the Chinese began a build-up in the Kaesong sanctuary, he threatened to use nuclear force if an armistice was not concluded.

In July 1953, an armistice took effect with Korea divided along approximately the same boundary as in 1950. The armistice and boundary remain in effect today, with American soldiers stationed there to guarantee it. In November 1956, Eisenhower forced an end to the combined British, French and Israeli invasion of Egypt. In response to the Suez Crisis, he publicly disavowed his allies at the United Nations, and used financial and diplomatic pressure to make them withdraw from Egypt, receiving praise from Egyptian president Gamal Abdel Nasser. Simultaneously he condemned the brutal Soviet invasion of Hungary in response to the Hungarian Revolution of 1956.

After the Suez Crisis the United States became the protector of unstable friendly governments in the Middle East via the „Eisenhower Doctrine". Designed by Secretary of State Dulles, it announced that the U.S. would be "prepared to use armed force to counter aggression from any country controlled by international communism. Further, the United States would provide economic and military aid and, if necessary, use military force to stop the spread of communism in the Middle East". Most Arab countries were sceptical about the 'Eisenhower doctrine' because they considered 'Zionist imperialism' the real danger. Egypt and Syria, supported by the Soviet Union, openly opposed the initiative.

Early in 1953, the French asked Eisenhower for help in French Indochina against the Communists, supplied from China, who were fighting the First Indochina War. Eisenhower sent Lt. General O'Daniel to Vietnam to study and assess the French forces there. Chief of Staff Matthew Ridgway dissuaded the President from intervening by presenting a comprehensive estimate of the massive military deployment that would be necessary. Eisenhower stated prophetically that "this war would absorb our troops by divisions".

Eisenhower did provide France with bombers and non-combat personnel. After a few months with no success by the French, he added other aircraft to drop napalm for

clearing purposes. Further requests for assistance from the French were agreed to. When the French fortress of Dien Bien Phu fell to the Vietnamese Communists in May 1954, Ike refused to intervene. Eisenhower responded to the French defeat with the formation of the SEATO (Southeast Asia Treaty Organization) Alliance with the U.K., France, New Zealand and Australia in defence of Vietnam against communism. At that time the French and Chinese reconvened Geneva peace talks; Eisenhower agreed the U.S. would participate only as an observer. France and the Communists agreed to the partition of Vietnam,

While President Truman had begun the process of desegregating the Armed Forces in 1948, actual implementation had been slow. Eisenhower made clear his stance in his first State of the Union address in February 1953, saying "I propose to use whatever authority exists in the office of the President to end segregation in the District of Columbia, including the Federal Government, and any segregation in the Armed Forces. We have not taken and we shall not take a single backward step. There must be no second class citizens in this country". Eisenhower told District of Columbia officials to make Washington a model for the rest of the country in integrating black and white public school children. He proposed to Congress the Civil Rights Act of 1957 and of 1960 and signed those acts into law.

On 24th September 1955, while vacationing in Colorado, he had a serious heart attack that required six weeks' hospitalization, during which time Nixon and Dulles assumed administrative duties and provided communication with the President. Instead of eliminating him as a candidate for a second term as President, his physician recommended a second term as essential to his recovery. As a consequence of his heart attack, Eisenhower developed a left ventricular aneurysm, which was in turn the cause of a mild stroke on 25th November 1957. This incident occurred during a cabinet meeting when Eisenhower suddenly found himself unable to speak or move his right hand. Eisenhower's health issues forced him to give up smoking and make some changes to his dietary habits, but he still indulged in alcohol.

The last three years of Eisenhower's second term in office were ones of relatively good health. Eventually after leaving the White House, he suffered several additional and ultimately crippling heart attacks. A severe heart attack in August 1965 largely ended his participation in public affairs. In the 1960 election, to choose his successor, Eisenhower endorsed his own Vice President, Republican Richard Nixon against Democrat John F. Kennedy. He told friends, "I will do almost anything to avoid turning my chair and country over to Kennedy". Nixon narrowly lost to Kennedy. Eisenhower, who was the oldest president in history at that time (then 70), was succeeded by the youngest elected president, Kennedy was 43.

Eisenhower's was not a failed presidency. He did, after all, end the Korean War without getting into any others. He stabilized, and did not escalate, the Soviet - American rivalry. He strengthened European alliances while withdrawing support from European colonialism. He rescued the Republican Party from isolationism. He maintained prosperity, balanced the budget, promoted technological innovation,

facilitated the civil rights movement. Not until Reagan would another president leave office with so strong a sense of having accomplished what he set out to do.

On 17th January 1961, Eisenhower gave his final televised Address to the Nation from the Oval Office. In his farewell speech, Eisenhower raised the issue of the Cold War and role of the U.S. armed forces. He described the Cold War: "We face a hostile ideology global in scope, atheistic in character, ruthless in purpose and insidious in method".

Because of legal issues related to holding a military rank while in a civilian office, Eisenhower had resigned his permanent commission as General of the Army before entering the office of President of the United States. Upon completion of his Presidential term, his commission was reactivated by Congress and Eisenhower again was commissioned a five-star general in the United States Army.

Eisenhower retired to the place where he and Mamie had spent much of their post-war time, a working farm adjacent to the battlefield at Gettysburg, Pennsylvania. In 1967 the Eisenhower's donated the farm to the National Park Service. In retirement, the former president did not completely retreat from political life; he spoke at the 1964 Republican National Convention and appeared with Barry Goldwater in a Republican campaign commercial.

On the morning of 28th March 1969, at the age of 78, Eisenhower died in Washington, D.C. of congestive heart failure at Walter Reed Army Hospital. The following day his body was moved to the Washington National Cathedral's Bethlehem Chapel, where he lay in repose for 28 hours. On 30th March, his body was brought by caisson to the United States Capitol, where he lay in state in the Capitol Rotunda. On 31st March, Eisenhower's body was returned to the National Cathedral, where he was given an Episcopal Church funeral service. Eisenhower's death was an occasion for national mourning and for worldwide recognition of his important role in the events of his time. Few presidents have enjoyed greater popularity than Eisenhower. He was widely admired for his strong character and his modesty

That evening, Eisenhower's body was placed onto a train en route to Abilene, Kansas. His body arrived on 2nd April 1969, and was interred later that day in a small chapel on the grounds of the Eisenhower Presidential Library. The president's body was buried as a general. The family used an $80 standard soldier's casket, and dressed Eisenhower's body in his famous short green jacket. His only medals worn were: the Army Distinguished Service Medal with three oak leaf clusters, the Navy Distinguished Service Medal, and the Legion of Merit. Eisenhower is buried alongside his son Doud. His wife Mamie was buried next to him after her death in 1979.

CHAPTER TWO

MacARTHUR

General Douglas MacArthur was one of the Second World War's most flamboyant and controversial figures. He was a military commander who had a keen idea of the value of keeping the public informed, and a past-master at image projecting. He made sure that the photographers were there to take his picture at key moments, such as his return to the Philippines in 1944.

MacArthur graduated top of the class of 1903 at West Point Military Academy and served in the Philippines, Panama and Mexico, before being posted to World War One in 1917, twice being wounded and much decorated. He was promoted to major general in 1925 and became Army Chief of Staff by 1930. In this post, he clashed bitterly with political leaders over cuts in US defence budgets.

MacArthur was constantly in conflict with President Roosevelt since he had taken office in 1933; the politics and personalities of the two men were in total contrast. MacArthur was a thoroughgoing conservative whom some Republicans on the home front regarded as a candidate for the presidency after he retired from the army to take a military post in the Philippines. MacArthur was also in conflict with the new Army Chief of Staff George Marshall and the Army establishment on a number of issues, including the 'Germany first' policy against which MacArthur repeatedly protested. Nevertheless, the Army was glad to have a strong and popular figure like MacArthur to uphold its role in the Pacific and oppose the ambitions of the Navy.

He had been recalled to duty when, in December 1941 Japan attacked the Philippines. MacArthur commanded both the embryonic Filipino Army and US Army

Forces. The Japanese quickly overwhelmed the defenders and soon held the three air bases in northern Luzon and on 22nd December gained control of Manila.

A further series of Japanese assaults forced the US defensive lines back and MacArthur ordered a general retreat to the Bataan peninsula. On 22nd February, 1942,
MacArthur was ordered to leave Bataan and proceed to Australia. General Jonathan Wainright remained behind with 11 000 troops and managed to hold out until the beginning of May.

When MacArthur arrived in Australia on 17th March, he found his new command short of manpower, poorly equipped and quite deficient in air power. He also found Australian morale shattered due to the Allied *debacle* in Asia, particularly by the fall of Singapore, which had been regarded by Australians as the keystone of their security; hence his first task was to infuse the Australians with an offensive spirit and confidence.

MacArthur transformed Australia's morale. He told parliament in Canberra a week after his arrival; “We shall win or we shall die, and to this end, I pledge you the full resources of my country. My faith in our ultimate victory is invincible, and I bring to you tonight the unbreakable spirit of our just cause. The President of the United States ordered me to break through the Japanese lines for the purpose of organizing the Allied offensive against Japan, a primary object of which is the recovery of the Philippines. I came through and I shall return”. By the time he had finished speaking, the audience were on their feet cheering.

American reinforcements arrived, and together with Australian troops were sent into the areas of undefended Australia. On Anzac Day (25th April), MacArthur issued orders that wherever the Japanese landed, they were to be resisted and thrown back into the sea.

The Japanese High Command, meanwhile, had indeed been considering an invasion of Australia. The navy, in particular, was keen, but the army protested. To them, the war in China was all-important, and the generals refused to provide enough men to invade Australia. On 4th March, the High Command reached a compromise: they would capture Port Moresby and push south-east in order to cut Australia's shipping routes across the Pacific to the USA. Then they might consider an invasion of Australia itself. On 31st March, they began their drive but, without knowing it, the Japanese had almost reached the limit of their spectacular expansion. The tide of war was about to turn. Attempts to capture Port Moresby would lead to their first major defeats - in the Coral Sea, then on New Guinea's Kokoda Trail.

At the beginning of American participation in the war, Roosevelt and Churchill had agreed that the Pacific area, including Australia, should be under American command, with the Middle East and India remaining under British control. Europe and the Atlantic would come under joint Anglo-American direction. The command in the

Pacific was further divided between MacArthur's Southwest Pacific Command and the Central Pacific Command of Admiral Chester Nimitz. Each was in control of the land, sea and air forces in his zone except that Nimitz retained control of the amphibious operations.

For almost 40 years the American Navy had expected war with Japan and, now that war had finally come, was determined that the Navy was to have the pre-eminent role in the Pacific. Nimitz and the Naval Chiefs of Staff headed by Admiral Ernest King did not want any naval forces under Army command and hence advocated a purely naval campaign, advancing from their big base at Hawaii. The army commander in the Southwest Pacific was to stay on the defensive. MacArthur, however, was too strong a personality for him to accept this role. Having been driven out of the Philippines by force of arms, MacArthur was most firm that the only way for the United States to regain control was by the same means, otherwise she would never be able to reassert her pre-war authority in the Pacific.

MacArthur believed that the Western Allies, having been beaten so decisively and disastrously by the Japanese, must prove their superiority again. He felt it would be folly not to take this into consideration when planning the Pacific strategy. For MacArthur the only road to Tokyo lay through the Philippines.

Thus Nimitz and MacArthur were to compete against each other to see which of them could be more effective. Roosevelt approved the divided command in the hope of using the natural rivalry between the Army and Navy to produce faster results. MacArthur thought it was incredible that the Navy could allow inter-service rivalry to determine the course of the war and later wrote; “Of all the faulty decisions of the war, perhaps the most inexpressible one was the failure to unify the command in the Pacific”. Through the insistence of Admiral King, however, the commands of Nimitz and MacArthur remained separate throughout the war.

MacArthur soon developed a highly efficient team which played a major role in his coming success. An invaluable asset for MacArthur was the discovery of Commander Long of the Australian armed forces. He was the organiser of the superb intelligence network of coast-watchers whose information made the difference in many operations. So, within three months of his arrival, MacArthur was able to start on the road back to the Philippines.

MacArthur began the campaign to clear Papua and New Guinea by increasing the garrison of Port Moresby which ultimately attained the strength of 55 000 American and Australian troops. The Japanese advance over the Owen Stanley Range was subsequently halted by the Australian forces, who then began to push the enemy back, but a lengthy contest ensued. The Japanese High Command then decided to down-grade the Papuan campaign and throw all their resources into the struggle for Guadalcanal after the Allies landed there on 7th August. Over the next eight months there were ten major land battles and seven major naval engagements in this area. At the turn of the year General MacArthur, in denying the enemy access to Port Moresby

in New Guinea, had now assumed the initiative which he was to keep until the end of hostilities

The reconquest of New Guinea, which was completed in mid-January, cost MacArthur dear and, in view of his losses and the enemy's tenacity, he decided his methods had to be more efficient. As he wrote in his memoirs: "It was the practical application of this system of warfare, to avoid the frontal attack with its terrible loss of life; to by-pass Japanese strongpoints and neutralise them by cutting their lines of supply; to thus isolate their armies and starve them on the battlefield; to as Willie Keeler used to say, 'hit 'em where they ain't', that from this time guided my movements and operations.

Briefly, MacArthur was applying the „indirect approach" method recommended in the months leading up to World War II by the British military writer Basil Liddell Hart and practised also by Vice-Admiral Halsey in his advance from Guadalcanal to Bougainville and in the following autumn by Admiral Nimitz in the Central Pacific Area. When staff members presented their glum forecasts to MacArthur at meetings, stating that strong points could not be taken with our limited resources. MacArthur would reply; “let's just say that we won't take them. In fact, gentlemen, I don't want them, you incapacitate them.

The results of this method were strikingly described after the end of the war by Colonel Matsuichi Ino, formerly Chief of Intelligence of the Japanese 8th Army: "This was the type of strategy we hated most. The Americans, with minimum losses, attacked and seized a relatively weak area, constructed airfields and then proceeded to cut the supply lines to troops in surrounding areas. Without engaging in large scale operations, our strongpoints were gradually starved out. The Japanese Army preferred direct assault, but the Americans flowed into our weaker points and submerged us, just as water seeks the weakest entry to sink a ship”.

This could not be better expressed; nevertheless, MacArthur's method demanded perfect collaboration of the land, sea, and airborne forces under his command and he handled them like some great orchestral conductor. He was also aided by the appointment in October 1942 of Admiral Halsey as commander of the naval forces in the Southwest Pacific. Like MacArthur, Halsey had a well-deserved reputation for leadership, confidence and aggressiveness. MacArthur now turned his attention to the rest of New Guinea and his main objective of Rabaul, the key Japanese military and air base in the Solomon Islands.

According to the decisions taken at Casablanca, by Churchill and Roosevelt, Nimitz's objective was Hong Kong via the Marshall and Caroline Islands and Formosa. Here he was to join MacArthur; who would have come from the Philippines, reinforced in the vicinity of the Celebes Sea by the British Pacific Fleet. In Hong Kong the Anglo-American forces were to enter into contact with those of Chiang Kai-shek, whose objective was Canton.

However, a few weeks later the American Joint Chiefs-of-Staff defined as follows the missions to be carried out by MacArthur and Halsey. Their Pacific forces to cooperate in a drive on Rabaul, then to press on westward along the north coast of New Guinea. Halsey was reduced to the men and *materiel* allotted to him by the C.in-C. Pacific. This excluded aircraft-carriers, as the new generation of aircraft-carriers only reached Pearl Harbour at the beginning of September. Nimitz, firmly supported by Admiral King did not intend to engage *Enterprise* and *Saratoga,* which were meanwhile filling the gap, in the narrow waters of the region.

In the meantime, whilst at Port Moresby General MacArthur was setting in motion the plan which was to put a pincer round Rabaul and allow him to eliminate this menace to his operations. The Japanese high command had decided to reinforce the Bismarck Sea region. On 28th February a convoy left Rabaul on board eight merchant ships escorted by eight destroyers. But Major General Kenney unleashed on the convoy all he could collect together of his 5th Air Force. The American bombers attacked the enemy at mast-height, using delayed-action bombs so as to allow the planes to get clear before the explosions. On 3rd March the fighting came to an end in the Bismarck Sea with the destruction of the eight troop transports and five destroyers.

The battle of the Bismarck Sea had lasted for three days, with Kenney's bombers moving in upon the convoy whenever there was even a momentary break in the clouds. “We have achieved a victory of such completeness as to assume the proportions of a major disaster to the enemy. Our decisive success cannot fail to have most important results on the enemy's strategic and tactical plans. His campaign, for the time being at least, is completely dislocated”.

Rightly alarmed by this catastrophe, Admiral Yamamoto left the fleet at Truk in the Carolines and went in person to Rabaul. He was followed to New Britain by some 300 fighters and bombers from the six aircraft-carriers under his command. Thus strengthened, the Japanese 11th Air Fleet, on which the defence of the sector depended, went over to the attack towards Guadalcanal on 8th April. But since the Japanese airmen as usual greatly exaggerated their successes, and as we now have the list of losses drawn up by the Americans, it might be useful to see what reports were submitted to Admiral Yamamoto who, of course, could only accept them at their face value. Yet it must have been difficult to lead an army or a fleet to victory when, in addition to the usual uncertainties of war, you had boastful accounts claiming 28 ships and 150 planes. The real losses were 5 and 25 respectively.

But this was not all, for during this battle the Japanese lost 40 aircraft and brought down only 25 of their enemy's. The results were therefore eight to five against them. Had they known the true figures, Imperial GHQ might have been brought to the conclusion that the tactical and technical superiority of the famous Zero was now a thing of the past. How could they have known this if they were continually being told that for every four Japanese planes shot down the enemy lost fifteen?

With the victories in Papua and Guadalcanal, the offensive in the Southwest Pacific had definitely passed to the Allies. MacArthur was now arguing with his superiors in Washington, and not increasing his popularity in the process, that the best route to Japan lay along the 'New Guinea-Mindanao Axis'. Nimitz and the Navy argued cogently that a route through the Gilbert, Marshall, Caroline and Mariana Islands was not only shorter but necessary to protect the New Guinea-Mindanao Axis from air attacks staged from these islands. Thus the Nimitz-MacArthur race continued, although MacArthur now had greater resources as increased supplies and equipment flowed to his command

At the Quadrant Conference at Quebec in August 1943, MacArthur and Halsey were directed to bypass Rabaul. This was surely a wise decision as Rabaul contained one hundred thousand defenders under a tough and resourceful general with ample supplies. An assault on Rabaul would have delayed the Allied advance by many months. With the fall of Bougainville to the south, Rabaul was now sealed off and left to 'die on the vine'.

Supported by Halsey's Seventh Fleet, MacArthur's forces pushed rapidly forward in a series of amphibious operations. There were still mopping-up operations and many by-passed Japanese troops to be watched, but now MacArthur could look across the Celebes Sea towards Mindanao.

In the Pacific the year 1943 was marked, as far as Admiral Nimitz and General MacArthur were concerned, by a series of limited offensives which, whilst gradually wearing down the Japanese forces, were to give the Americans and their Australian allies the necessary bases for the decisive offensive of 1944.The objective of this latter offensive was the complete and final destruction of the Japanese military machine. No more than with the Germans, the Allies were not prepared to accept, anything less than Japan's total and unconditional surrender.

Any change of opinion over these radical aims would have aroused the opposition of the American public. The war against Japan was deeply felt by the American people and, in Churchill's entourage, during the conferences which took him across the Atlantic, it was often noticed that the reconquest of some obscure island in the far corner of the Pacific raised as much enthusiasm in New York and Washington as did a whole battle won in Africa or Italy. The White House and the Pentagon had to take these feelings into account.

Along with the concern shown by Roosevelt and Hopkins for the U.S.S.R., a concern which caused them to urge the opening of a second front, there was also the fact that the Americans did not look favourably on their hero MacArthur being kept short of men and *materiel* whilst in Europe U.S. forces stood idle on the wrong side of the Channel. In the Joint Chiefs-of-Staff Committee, that was the sentiment of the rugged Admiral Ernest J. King: instead of giving complete and immediate support to the principle of ‘Germany first’, the centre of gravity of American power should be shifted over to the Pacific. To forestall this reversal of strategy the President and General

Marshall were therefore constrained to set in motion Operation ‘Round-up’, which was to become ‘Overlord’.

In the first two years of the war, Washington had allotted more troops and combat ships to the war with Japan than to the war with Germany, and almost as many planes. The real cause of MacArthur's annoyance was a trend he foresaw in the making. With the invasion of Europe now in the planning stage, an increasing percentage of the United States' men and materiel was being earmarked for the European and Mediterranean theatres. Even worse, from the general's standpoint, was the fact that of the most recent allocations for the Pacific theatre, a smaller share was going to support his advance toward the Philippines from the southwest Pacific than to Admiral Nimitz' advance across the central Pacific.

General MacArthur's mood at the start of 1944 was less than happy. Over the past 16 months, Australian and American troops of his southwest Pacific command had driven the Japanese out of Papua and New Guinea and regained a firm Allied foothold on neighbouring New Britain. But in all they had advanced only about 280 miles closer to MacArthur's cherished goal. By the end of 1943, he was later to recall, "I was still about 1 600 miles from the Philippines and 2 100 miles from Manila”.

The general made no bones about his dissatisfaction, and unlike other commanders he did not feel he had to limit himself to military channels. An added outlet of expression was available to him in exchanges of letters with his fervent admirers back home.

In linking the Nimitz and MacArthur operations as a ‘dual drive’, planners in Washington had inadvertently touched off a competitive spirit that made the normal inter-service rivalries seem pale: Part of the problem lay in the sharply divergent ways in which people reacted to MacArthur's lordly personality. With few exceptions, his staff thought he could do no wrong. They treated him with a deference that bordered on idolatry, and they shared his belief that his projected return to the Philippines was in the nature of a sacred mission. Among Navy officers, on the other hand, MacArthur was viewed as a pompous windbag and an incurable ham, always playing to the galleries. They hooted when, in late 1943, he took note of press rumours that his part in the War was to be reduced by issuing a statement asserting that "however subordinate may be my role, I hope to play it manfully”. They felt certain that MacArthur's massive ego would never allow him to yield his claim to supreme charge of the war against Japan-or to give the Navy proper credit for its vital contribution to that effort.

Dislike of the general reached to the top of the Navy's hierarchy. The hard-bitten Chief of Naval Operations, Admiral Ernest J. King, voiced such hostility to MacArthur in the privacy of Joint Chiefs of Staff meetings in Washington that he eventually drove presiding General George C. Marshall to an uncharacteristic act. The usually mild-mannered Marshall smashed his fist down on the table, declared "I will not have any meetings carried on with this hatred," and cut King off in mid-tirade.

Apart from their personal rancour, Navy officers found fault with the thinking at MacArthur's headquarters. They felt that his operations planners were locked into an ‘Army mentality’ unsuited to dealing with an arena of war that was mostly an expanse of ocean. Captain Raymond D. Tarbuck, who served as naval liaison with MacArthur, later remembered his surprise at "how little the Army officers at GHQ knew about water”. The Navy concept of a body of water as a pathway was foreign to them; they treated "even the smallest stream as an obstacle”. Even their maps, Tarbuck claimed, stopped at the water's edge. Coral reefs and other hazards that seagoing men had to take into account did not figure in their calculations. Predictably, the Navy took a dim view of MacArthur's repeated attempts to enlist some of its prized carriers to support his operations.

MacArthur's opinion of Navy thinking was no more flattering. Frontal assaults on heavily defended islands, the strategy chosen by the Navy's planners for the drive across the central Pacific, struck him as an utter waste of men and time. The American losses at Tarawa provoked a blistering MacArthur memorandum to Washington. Directed over the heads of the Joint Chiefs of Staff to Secretary of War Henry L. Stimson, the MacArthur memo denounced the Navy's frontal attacks as "tragic and unnecessary massacres of American lives," and clearly implied that the cause of the tragedy was "the Navy's pride of position and ignorance”.

There was, in fact, no difference between this strategy and the strategy of leapfrogging and starving out the enemy that Admiral Halsey had introduced and successfully employed in his drive up the Solomons in the closing months of 1943. Halsey was one of the rare Navy men for whom MacArthur had any kind words-he called him "a battle commander of the highest order”.

The term Macarthur preferred for bypassing enemy strongholds was throwing „loops of envelopment‟ around them. But whatever the semantic shadings, the strategy was to work as successfully for MacArthur as it had worked for Halsey. During the first eight months of 1944, his forces were to advance 1 100 miles to come within 300 miles of the Philippines.

In the War's early months the shock of the fall of the Philippines the Dutch East Indies, Burma and Malaya had temporally diverted Allied attention from Japan's quieter moves into the southwest Pacific. Besides taking Rabaul on New Britain, much of the Solomons chain and a stretch of the east coast of New Guinea, the Japanese had occupied a number of sites along New Guinea's north coast, as well as a number of islands in and around the Bismarck Archipelago. Seizing these places from Australian or British or Dutch control had proved easy enough, and promised the Japanese two vital advantages. In addition to bringing them closer to cutting Australia's lifeline, it gave them a valuable edge in case the fortunes of war shifted. A far-flung perimeter of outposts to guard against Allied attack on the Philippines and the home islands.

By the start of 1944, the perimeter had sizable dents in it. The Solomons were in American hands due to Admiral Halsey's success, along with MacArthur's landings on New Britain. All these developments enhanced the prospects of MacArthur's drive on the Philippines. But ultimately its success hinged on his disposing of key Japanese outposts along his projected route. ln line with MacArthur's philosophy of waging war at the least possible cost in lives, he intended to bypass as many of the enemy's bases as he could, seizing every opportunity that arose as his operations proceeded.

On the ways to get to Tokyo and the means to be employed there was, to put it mildly, lively discussion between Admirals King and Nimitz on the one side and General MacArthur on the other. This is not surprising, as each of these leaders was a man of strong character and not given to compromise solutions of which his conscience would not approve.

It fell to General Marshall to pronounce judgment on their arguments and, in the last resort, to impose a solution. We shall see under what circumstances he did this, but let us say at once that it was done with both authority and a sense of opportunity.

The strategy question was still unresolved at this point. The Naval Chief of Staff, Admiral Ernest King, led the Navy school of thought which wanted to by-pass the Philippines, invade Formosa and set up a base on the Chinese mainland for the final assault on Japan. MacArthur's position was based on the liberation of the Philippines and the use of Luzon as a base for the final assault on Japan. Luzon could be sealed off by Allied air and sea power far more successfully than Formosa, which Japan could easily reinforce from the Chinese mainland. He also insisted that the United States had a compelling moral duty to liberate the Philippines which had been nourishing the Filipino resistance movement, and where the troops he had left in 1942 were still imprisoned. At a conference at Pearl Harbour in July, MacArthur converted Nimitz and Roosevelt to his 'Leyte then Luzon' strategy which was then formalised by the Joint Chiefs of Staff. MacArthur and Nimitz were to continue their advances and converge on Leyte in December. The fast carrier forces of Halsey, spearheaded by the new *Essex* class carriers, demonstrated graphically at Saipan Japan's great weakness in air power, so the date of the Leyte assault was moved forward two months to 20th October 1944.

The prior action at Saipan had brought about a massive air battle in which the Japanese lost 300 irreplaceable planes and pilots, the 'great Marianas turkey shoot' as American pilots called it. On 12th-15th October Allied Task Force 38 knocked out a further 500 planes based on Formosa, leaving Japan denuded of her naval air force. A powerful fleet was detached from the Central Pacific Command to assist Halsey in protecting MacArthur's 700 transports and auxiliaries carrying one hundred and seventy four thousand troops. These forces landed on schedule the morning of 20th October in the Gulf of Leyte in the central Philippines.

The Japanese High Command regarded the Leyte operation as a major crisis. If the enemy succeeded in occupying the Philippines, the supply lines of Japan would be

fatally obstructed. The High Command, therefore, decided that the issue of the war hung on its ability to defend the Philippines, so it gathered its Navy to turn the American threat into a Japanese victory with one decisive blow. However, now that Japan's naval air force had been virtually eliminated, the attack would have to rely on the battleship fleet led by the awesome *Yamato* whose 18-inch guns made it the most powerful battleship afloat. The Japanese were also well supplied with cruisers and destroyers, but these would go into battle alongside the capital ships without air cover and with no way of striking at the enemy other than with gunfire and torpedoes. The Japanese Chief of Naval Staff, Admiral Toyoda, devised a complex plan to use a decoy force to draw off MacArthur's protective fleet of battleships and carriers under Halsey, after which two strong fleets would move in and attack the American forces while they were unprotected and in the highly vulnerable process of disembarkation. Toyoda counted on his forces making unimpeded contact with the enemy, free from air attack, and destroying the American transports and troops by sheer gun power. Thus Toyoda laid his plans for what was to become the largest sea battle in history, a battle which if successful would have had the impact of a second Pearl Harbour and kept Japan in the war for at least another year.

On 23rd October the battle opened on a successful note for Toyoda as Halsey withdrew his entire force to chase the decoy force, a fact for which he was subsequently heavily criticised. Spearheaded by five battleships, the larger Japanese attack force was intercepted by a weak force of American escort carriers and a few destroyers. These delayed the Japanese for hours with a heroic fight while reinforcements were mustered. The Japanese commander withdrew as he was coming under heavy air attack and was uncertain of the strength of his opposition. The decoy force escaped completely. The Battle of Leyte Gulf was the final action of the war for the Japanese Navy, which was so heavily battered that it was reduced to an auxiliary role. The great naval lesson of Leyte Gulf once more proved that battleships without air cover are helpless in a modern sea battle; Toyoda's plan was defeated mainly by Japan's lack of planes and to a lesser extent by bad intelligence and a lack of co-ordination among his commanders. The largest naval engagement in history, resulted in a decisive victory for the Americans. The Japanese Navy lost four carriers, three battleships and ten cruisers.

But, had the Japanese decided to press home their attack after Halsey had left MacArthur dangerously exposed, this surely would have resulted in the stunning disaster for the Allies as envisaged by Admiral Toyoda. In the event, however, the assault on Leyte was successful. Standing on the beach, MacArthur made the broadcast to the people of the Philippines for which he had been waiting two and a half years: “People of the Philippines, I have returned. By the grace of Almighty God, our forces stand again on Philippine soil, soil consecrated by the blood of our two peoples”. The broadcast made a tremendous impact on the Philippines, and there on the beach MacArthur scribbled a note to Roosevelt urging him to grant immediate independence to the islands.

Although Japan had suffered a shattering defeat at Leyte Gulf, there were still sixty thousand Japanese troops on Leyte under the tough and determined command of General Yamashita (the tiger of Malaya). Ever since their defeats in Papua and Guadalcanal, the Japanese had followed a policy of making the Americans pay as high a price as possible and Yamashita continued to do so on Leyte. MacArthur was forced to commit a quarter of a million troops to its capture. Progress was slow as American troops, largely conscripts, tended to bog down in the jungle and relied on artillery fire power to clear the way. When the battle for Leyte was over the Japanese had lost an estimated forty eight thousand killed, as against three thousand five hundred for the Allies.

The strategy debate had continued right up to the assault on Leyte. MacArthur wanted to land on Luzon as soon as possible while Nimitz was still arguing for Formosa. Admiral King was all for by-passing Luzon in favour of Japan itself. Most of the others had come around to MacArthur's point of view, except for the adamant Admiral King. MacArthur informed the Joint Chiefs of Staff that he could land on Luzon on 20th December, and finally received a directive to do so. At the same time, orders were issued to attack Iwo Jima in January 1945 and Okinawa in March. So the two-pronged assault leading to Japan was to continue. MacArthur was understandably relieved at the final demise of the Formosa plan. The order to land on Luzon also meant that now he had authority to liberate all of the Philippines instead of only parts of them. It was a job he relished as he intended to eradicate all traces of the Japanese presence.

On 3rd February American troops entered Manila and after two weeks of hard fighting had secured control of the city, though Japanese diehards continued to hold out in the old quarter until 3rd March. Under MacArthur's personal supervision the island fortress of Corregidor, last American position to surrender in 1942, took weeks to capture as it was defended almost to the last man, only twenty six of its five thousand man garrison, being taken prisoner.

These were highly emotional days for MacArthur who had been enthusiastically welcomed by the Filipinos and who was now reconquering territory which he had been unsuccessful in defending in 1942. As the prison camps were liberated, the ragged, half-starved inmates wept at the sight of him and came running to touch him. These were the men for whom he had felt so strong a need to return to. On 27th February MacArthur reintroduced constitutional government and insisted on the Philippine Commonwealth having the same autonomy as it had before the war.

MacArthur's last amphibious operation was at Okinawa. Lying just 350 miles from the Japanese mainland, it offered excellent harbour and airfield facilities. It was also a perfect base from which to launch a major assault on the Japanese mainland. Consequently it was well-defended, with one hundred and twenty thousand troops under General Ushijima. On 1st April 1945, after a four day bombardment the 1 300 ship invasion forced moved into position off the west coast of Okinawa. The landing force, under the leadership of Lieutenant-General Buckner, initially totalled one

hundred and fifty five thousand. However, by the time the battle finished, this had almost doubled.

On 4th May, at sea off Okinawa a 700 plane kamikaze raid on 6th April sunk and damaged 13 US destroyers. The giant Japanese battleship, *Yamato*, lacking sufficient fuel for a return journey, sent out on a suicide mission was sunk on 7th May.

On 11th May, the Japanese were finally forced to withdraw. Lieutenant-General Buckner was killed by shell fire on 18th June and three days later his replacement, General Geiger, announced that the island had finally been taken. When it was clear that he had been defeated, Ushijima committed ritual suicide (hari-kiri). The capture of Okinawa cost the Americans fifty thousand in casualties of whom over twelve and a half thousand were killed. More than one hundred and ten thousand Japanese were killed.

While the island was being prepared for the invasion of Japan, a B-29 Superfortress bomber dropped the atom bomb on Hiroshima on 6th August 1945. Japan did not surrender immediately and a second bomb was dropped on Nagasaki three days later. On 15th August the Japanese surrendered and the Second World War was over.

When Japan capitulated, there were still about fifty thousand Japanese holding out on Luzon. The Japanese defence had been admirably resolute, stalling the American re-occupation for months, and requiring large numbers of troops. Luzon in fact became the largest land campaign of the Pacific theatre, involving 15 American divisions and substantial numbers of Filipino troops as well. This was the most difficult and stubborn jungle fighting that MacArthur's troops had seen since Papua and Guadalcanal, with the Japanese soldier at his defensive best.

The road from New Guinea to the Philippines had been a long and hard fought trip, usually against superior enemy forces. In New Guinea, MacArthur had had to overcome the arts of the Japanese in defensive warfare in territory favourable to the defenders, yet he had inflicted enormous losses on them. In the Papuan campaign, for example, thirteen thousands of twenty thousand Japanese participants were killed as against three thousand Allied losses. In the Philippines, MacArthur faced a similar situation, except that he had far greater forces at his disposal during that campaign. As he once told Roosevelt; "The days of frontal attack should be over. Modern infantry weapons are too deadly. Good commanders do not turn in heavy losses".

MacArthur's battles were won by sheer artistry, by bringing his usually inferior force to bear on the enemy in places and at times when his opponent was off balance, so that his attack could succeed with minimum loss. Rather than assaulting the Japanese fortresses directly, MacArthur's tactic was to envelop them by attacking their lines of communication until they were isolated and MacArthur later wrote that this tactic was the ideal method for success by inferior in number but faster-moving forces. He determined that such a plan of action was In the sole chance of fulfilling his mission.

By contrast the island-hopping campaign in the Central Pacific by Nimitz relied much more on simply overwhelming the enemy with a superior force, often resulting in appallingly high casualties.

The Japanese surrender took MacArthur by surprise. He and his staff had actually been planning the re-occupation of the Netherlands East Indies and the invasion of the Japanese home islands when the use of the atomic bomb by President Truman removed the latter need.

Worried that the US Navy would beat him to it, he flew into an air base near Tokyo on 30th August to take the formal surrender three days later on board the battleship USS Missouri. Named after the home state of President Truman

During 1945-51, when MacArthur was Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers (SCAP) in Japan, his rule was absolute but benevolent, thereby, accelerating Japan's reconstruction. As head of the Allied occupation of Japan, he was given responsibility of organizing the war crimes tribunal in Japan. He was praised for successfully encouraging the creation of democratic institutions, religious freedom, civil liberties, land reform, and emancipation of women and the formation of trade unions.

On the outbreak of the Korean War in 1950, MacArthur was appointed commander of the United Nations forces. On 15th September, 1950, MacArthur landed American and South Korean marines at Inchon, 200 miles behind the North Korean lines. The following day he launched a counterattack on the North Koreans. When they retreated, MacArthur's forces carried the war northwards, reaching the frontier between Korea and China on 24th October, 1950. Truman and Dean Acheson, the Secretary of State, told MacArthur to limit the war to Korea. MacArthur disagreed, favouring an attack on Chinese forces. Unwilling to accept the views of Truman and Acheson, MacArthur began to make inflammatory statements indicating his disagreement with the United States government policy. MacArthur gained support from right-wing members of the Senate such as Joe McCarthy who led the attack on Truman's administration.

In April 1951, Truman relieved MacArthur from his command of the United Nations forces in Korea. On his arrival back in the United States MacArthur led a campaign against Truman and his administration. Soon after Dwight Eisenhower was elected president in 1952 he consulted with MacArthur about the Korean War. MacArthur's advice was the "atomic bombing of enemy military concentrations and installations in North Korea" and an attack on China. This was rejected and MacArthur played no role in Eisenhower's new Republican administration. He was however, given a hero's welcome and made a moving speech to Congress which he concluded by saying: When I joined the Army even before the turn of the century, it was the fulfilment of all my boyish hopes and dreams. The world has turned over many times since I took the oath on the Plain at West Point, and the hopes and dreams have long since vanished. But I still remember the refrain of one of the most popular barrack ballads of that day which proclaimed most proudly that; "Old soldiers never die, they just fade

away. And like the old soldier of that ballad, I now close my military career and just fade away - an old soldier who tried to do his duty as God gave him the light to see that duty. Good-by"

Three weeks later MacArthur was the Sylvanus Thayer Medal, the highest honour of the United States Military Academy. He reviewed the Corps of Cadets on the Plain at West Point and then, speaking without preparation, he responded to the presentation, speaking of Duty, honour and country. This speech was the real soldier's farewell. After this speech, MacArthur really did fade away.

MacArthur accepted a job as chairman of the board of the Remington Rand Corporation. Described by biographer William Manchester as the 'American Caesar', MacArthur saw himself as a man of destiny and became immodest to the point of egomania.

Douglas MacArthur died in the Walter Reed Hospital, Washington, on 5th April, 1964.

CHAPTER THREE

NIMITZ

Admiral Chester Nimitz was born in Texas, of German descent in 1885. He served in World War One as Chief-of-Staff to the Commander of the U.S. Atlantic Submarine Force, and is considered by many to have been an astute tactician and strategist. Nimitz, was commissioned in the US Navy in 1907. After a shaky start (he grounded a destroyer), he rose to prominence as a submariner.

After World War One he was an integral member of the team that set up the Reserve Officer Training Corps program at the University of California, then he headed the destroyer base at San Diego. Other inter-war positions included captain of the cruiser Augusta and assistant chief of the Bureau of Navigation in Washington. Besides submarine warfare, he was also an expert in ship power plants, developing a system of refuelling ships whilst still at sea, and mastered the integration of aircraft carriers into task forces.

Perhaps his most valuable contribution was during an advanced course at the Naval War College when he declared; "The enemy in our war games is always Japan". The courses were so thorough that when World War Two commenced, nothing that happened in the Pacific was really strange or unexpected. With the Japanese threat growing more ominous, he took command of a heavy cruiser division in the Far East; his familiarity with the region would prove a valuable commodity. He was promoted to

rear admiral in 1938, commanding a battleship division. In 1939, with the rank of admiral, he was appointed head of the navy's Bureau of Navigation, a key administrative post in which he oversaw the service's rapid expansion. On 17th December 1941, the highly capable Admiral Chester W. Nimitz replaced Admiral Husband E. Kimmel as CINCPAC (Commander in Chief of the US Pacific Fleet), when the latter was blamed for being caught unawares at Pearl Harbor.

Nimitz immediately began efforts to rebuild the shattered Pacific Fleet and halt the Japanese advance across the Pacific. His appointment transformed his men's morale, infecting them with his own calm confidence. He also started to gather a team of gifted subordinates, such as the brilliant strategist Rear Admiral Forrest Sherman. Nimitz and General Douglas MacArthur were made responsible for the conduct of the entire Pacific war. Urged on by Admiral Ernest King, Commander in Chief of the US Navy, Nimitz sent Vice Admiral William Halsey to attack the Marshall Islands and Vice Admiral Frank Fletcher to raid the Gilbert Islands, starting the early phases of his island hopping strategy. This strategy clashed with those of the other Pacific region personalities, which includes MacArthur's wish to strike directly at the Philippines, and King's plan to take Taiwan.

Nimitz decided to mount a series of raids on Japanese-held islands in the Pacific to harass the enemy, maintain the morale of his crews and give them valuable operational experience. The first attempted raid, against Wake Island in January 1942, had to be called off when an oiler was torpedoed. But on 1st February Vice Admiral William F. (‘Bull') Halsey, with the carriers Enterprise and Yorktown, attacked Japanese bases in the Marshall and Gilbert Islands. Then in late February and early March he took the Enterprise group to hit Wake and Marcus, the latter just 1 180 miles from Tokyo. These raids excited an American public crying out for success.

As considerable as his tactical skills were, perhaps Nimitz's greatest gift was his leadership ability. Naval historian Robert Love writes that Nimitz possessed "a sense of inner balance and calm that steadied those around him. He also had the ability to pick able subordinates and the courage to let them do their jobs with little interference. He moulded such disparate personalities as the quiet, introspective Raymond A. Spruance and the ebullient, aggressive William F. Halsey Jr. into an effective team”.

Of course, these same qualities helped ease Nimitz's relationship with MacArthur, no small feat given the amount of coordination called for between their two services. It is indeed most fortunate that Nimitz did not share MacArthur's need for publicity; even the vast Pacific would not have been big enough for two great military leaders. Journalist Robert Sherrod, who spent time in both of their headquarters, said that "the Admiral was frequently the despair of his public relations men; it simply was not in him to make sweeping statements or to give out colourful interviews”.

The Japanese had made great gains in the vast Pacific Ocean. The conquest of the Philippines, Malaya and the Dutch East Indies had cost the Japanese Navy only 23

warships and none had been larger than a destroyer. 67 transport ships had also been lost. The Japanese naval command had expected far greater losses, therefore, encouraged by such success, they looked to expand still further.

The very success which the Japanese had achieved in implementing their initial war plans had raised a fresh series of questions in the minds of those responsible for shaping Japanese naval strategy. Admiral Yamamoto and the staff of the Combined Fleet, regarded the first priority as being the destruction of the United States aircraft carriers in the Pacific. He urged early operations against Midway, to the eastward, seeing this as necessary for an attack on Hawaii. The Japanese calculated that the United States fleet would certainly be drawn out into a decisive battle, and could be dealt with before the Allies brought their emerging superior resources to bear against Japan.

It was the Americans who forced the hand of the Japanese. On 18th April 1942, the unique Doolittle raid on Tokyo, launched from the aircraft-carrier Hornet, created much confusion and inevitably strengthened the case for the Midway operation. Particularly in the failure to keep the capital immune from bombing attacks. Any opposition promptly vanished. By 5th May, Yamamoto was ordered to occupy Midway Island.

However, the Japanese had already decided on a course of action that spilt their forces. The attack on New Guinea could not be called off as it was too far advanced. Therefore, Yamamoto, could not call on all the forces he would have preferred to muster for an attack on Midway Island as some were concentrated in the Coral Sea to the south-east of New Guinea, thereby, forcing upon the Japanese two concurrent strategies which were destined to over-extend their forces.

Nimitz's carrier forces won a strategic victory at the Battle of the Coral Sea in May 1942, which halted Japanese efforts to capture Port Moresby, New Guinea. This was the first carrier versus carrier engagement, where ships on both sides never sighted one another. The Japanese labelled the attack on Port Moresby as „Operation MO". The main part of the Japanese plan was to move through the Jomard Passage, to the south-east of New Guinea, allowing it to attack Port Moresby.

The Carrier Strike Force left Truk on 1st May and by the afternoon of 5th May it was in position. Its opposition was Task Force 17 with the aircraft-carriers Lexington and Yorktown. The Americans had a slight edge over the Japanese in aircraft. They also had radar, but above all they had the benefit of superior intelligence about the Japanese dispositions.

Since Pearl Harbor, the United States had succeeded in completely breaking the Japanese naval code, and therefore possessed accurate and fairly detailed intelligence concerning the Japanese plans. Not only had the Americans broken the code, so that Admiral Nimitz and his staff knew exactly what the Japanese objectives

would be, but there was a constant flow of reports from the Australian 'Coastwatcher's', who reported sightings of Japanese ship movements.

The Japanese were also aware that about 200 land-based aircraft were operating from airfields in northern Australia, and that American air activity made the concealment of their ship movements difficult. However, it was estimated that Allied naval forces in the area were 'not great', and that only one aircraft-carrier, the Saratoga, would be available. The Japanese hoped that the prior occupation of Tulagi, due to be taken on 3rd May, and the establishment of a seaplane base there, would make it more difficult for the Allies to follow Japanese movements from their nearest bases at Port Moresby and Noumea. The Support and Covering Groups and the Striking Force would cover the Port Moresby Invasion Group which would leave Rabaul on 4th May, and on 7th May land a sizeable force.

To the Allies, Port Moresby was vital not only for the security of Australia, but also as a springboard for future offensives in the south-west Pacific. Admiral Chester Nimitz and General Douglas MacArthur thus gave the threat the attention it merited. Before 17th April, reports had reached CINCPAC headquarters that a group of transports, protected by the light aircraft-carrier Shoho and a striking force that included two large aircraft-carriers, would soon enter the Coral Sea. By the 20th Nimitz had concluded that Port Moresby was the objective, with the attack likely to develop on or after 3rd May.

It was one thing to know the nature of the task, but yet another to be able to summon up the resources to meet the situation. The Saratoga was undergoing repairs for torpedo damage sustained in January. The aircraft-carriers Enterprise and Hornet did not return from the Tokyo raid until 25th April, and were unlikely to reach the Coral Sea in time to participate in the coming battle.

The problem with the American command structure was the rigid demarcation of command between Nimitz and MacArthur, according to the decision of the Combined Chiefs-of-Staff, whereby CINCPAC could exercise control over all naval operations in the Pacific, but could not usurp MacArthur's command of ground forces or land based aircraft within the latter's area. Thus Nimitz could not readily call upon the 300 odd land-based aircraft of the USAAF and the RAAF for air searches in the area.

Knowing, however, that he would have to rely mainly on air strike to frustrate Japanese plans, Nimitz decided to utilise what' remaining aircraft-carrier strength was available to him. For this task, he called upon the air groups of the Yorktown and Lexington. The Yorktown task force (No. 17) included 3 heavy cruisers, 6 destroyers, and the tanker Neosho.

The Lexington task force (No. 11) was fresher, having left Pearl Harbour on 16th April, after three weeks‟ maintenance. With the 'Lady Lex', as she was affectionately known, were 2 heavy cruisers and 5 destroyers. The Lexington could truly be called a happy ship; many of her crew had served with her since she was commissioned in

1927, while her air group included such notable naval aviators as 'Butch' O'Hare and John Thach. Rear-Admiral Aubrey Fitch, a distinguished carrier-tactician, had been on the flag bridge since 3rd April. Task Force 17, with the Yorktown, was commanded by Rear-Admiral Frank Fletcher, and had already been in the area for two months.

Task Force 1, operating out of San Francisco, consisted mainly of pre-war battleships; these were simply not fast enough to keep up with the aircraft-carriers, nor could the oilers be spared to attend to their fuel requirements. The Australian heavy cruisers Australia and Hobart, then in Sydney, were ordered to rendezvous with Fletcher in the Coral Sea on 4th May. The heavy cruiser USS Chicago and a destroyer were ordered to join the same commander three days earlier.

On 29th April, Nimitz completed his plans. Fletcher was to exercise tactical command of the whole force and ordered to operate in the Coral Sea commencing 1st May. The manner in which Inouye's threat was to be met was left almost entirely to Fletcher. At 07 00 hours, Fletcher commenced refuelling from the *Neosho.* In the light of reports of the enemy's approach, Fletcher steamed out into the middle of the Coral Sea to search for the Japanese. He headed west on the 2nd, leaving orders for Fitch to rejoin him by daylight on the 4th.

By 08 00 hours on 3rd May, Fletcher and Fitch were over 100 miles apart, each ignorant of the enemy's detailed movements, when a report was received which Fletcher 'had been waiting two months' to hear: the Japanese were landing at Tulagi. The news brought about an immediate change in Fletcher's plans. Ordering Fitch to proceed in an easterly direction to re-join Yorktown 300 miles south of Guadalcanal. Fletcher headed north at 24 knots, determined to strike Tulagi with the Yorktown's available aircraft.

Fortunately for Fletcher, the Japanese had estimated that, once Tulagi was in their hands, it would remain unmolested. The groups, which had supported the operation, had consequently retired at 11 00 hours on 3rd May, after the island had been secured. First blood went to the Americans, when the invasion transports in Tulagi harbour were sighted. At 06 30 hours on 4th May, the first strike was launched from Yorktown, consisting of 12 Devastator torpedo-bombers and 28 Dauntless dive-bombers. With only 18 fighters available for patrol over the carrier, they were forced to rely on their own machine guns for protection. According to the practice of the time, each squadron attacked independently. As so often happened during the war, the pilots overestimated what they saw, mistaking a minelayer, for a light cruiser, minesweepers for transports, and landing barges for gunboats. Beginning their attacks at 08 15 hours, aircraft of the two Dauntless squadrons and the Devastator squadron were back on Yorktown by 09 31 hours, having irreparably damaged a destroyer and sunk minesweepers. A second strike later destroyed 2 seaplanes and damaged a patrol craft, at the cost of 1 torpedo-bomber; while a third attack of 21 Dauntlesses, launched at 14 00 hours, dropped 21 half-ton bombs, but sank only 4 landing barges.

By 16 32 hours the last returning aircraft were safely landed on the *Yorktown,* and the 'Battle' of Tulagi was over. Only 3 aircraft had been lost, the other two being Wildcat fighters which had lost their way returning to the aircraft-carrier and had crash-landed on Guadalcanal, the pilots being picked up that night. But, in the words of Nimitz: “The Tulagi operation was certainly disappointing in terms of ammunition expended to results obtained”.

Fletcher headed the whole force south for his rendezvous with Fitch. Once again luck had been with him; for Takagi was by now making his best speed south-eastward from Bougainville, having received calls for help from Tulagi at noon that day. If Fletcher had not achieved complete surprise in his Tulagi strike, and Takagi had moved earlier, the Yorktown would have met the Japanese aircraft-carriers on her own.

On the 6th May, the tension grew, as Fletcher knew that the clash was bound to come soon. He decided that it was now time to put into effect his operational order of 1st May, and accordingly redeployed his force for battle. An attack group, under Rear-Admiral Kinkaid, was formed from the four heavy cruisers, the light cruiser Astoria, plus five destroyers. The heavy cruisers Australia, Hobart, and Chicago, with two destroyers formed a support group, while the air group, comprised the Yorktown, Lexington, and four destroyers. The oiler Neosho, escorted by the destroyer Sims, was detached from Task Force 17, and ordered to head south for the next fuelling rendezvous, which was reached next morning.

If the air searches of either side had been more successful, the main action of the Coral Sea might have taken place on 6th May. Some elements of the Japanese force had, however, been sighted. B-17s from Australia had located and bombed the Shoho, south of Bougainville. The bombs had fallen wide, but Allied planes then turned south to locate the Port Moresby Invasion force. The Japanese were in an optimistic mood, that very day they had heard the news of the fall of the Philippines and the surrender of General Wainwright's forces on Corregidor.

Fletcher launched a search mission from Yorktown. One of her reconnaissance aircraft reported 'two carriers and four heavy cruisers' about 225 miles to the northwest. Assuming that this was the main striking force, Fletcher launched .a total of 93 aircraft between 09 26 and 10 30 hours, leaving 47 for combat patrol. However, no sooner had Yorktown's attack group become airborne than her scouts returned, and it immediately became obvious that the 'two carriers and four heavy cruisers' should have read 'two heavy cruisers and two destroyers'. Fletcher, now knowing that he had sent a major strike against a minor target, courageously allowed the strike to proceed, thinking that with the invasion force nearby there must be some profitable targets in the vicinity.

The next day the battle began in earnest. 15 high-level bombers attacked, but failed to hit their targets. However, about noon, a further attack by 36 dive-bombers sealed the fate of the destroyer Sims. Three 500 pound bombs hit the Sims, of which two

exploded in her engine room. The ship buckled and sank stern first within a few minutes, with the loss of 379 lives. Meanwhile, 20 dive-bombers had- turned their attention to the oiler Neosho, scoring seven direct hits and causing blazing gasoline to flow along her decks. Neosho was to drift in a westerly direction until the oiler was scuttled. But the sacrifice of these two ships was not vain, for if Japanese planes had not been drawn off in this way, the Japanese might have found and attacked Fletcher.

In a belated attempt to save the day, the Japanese launched another strike at the Yorktown, but an error in calculating the target's position led the strike astray. On their way back they were hammered by the Yorktown's Combat Air Patrol (CAP), which shot down 9 aircraft for the loss of 2 of their own. The survivors then lost their way and 4 even tried to land on Yorktown in error, until the carriers opened fire.

The Japanese had wasted almost 20 percent of their strength, all for an oiler and a destroyer, and still the American carriers had not been located. The Japanese carriers turned northwards, while the Yorktown turned southeast to clear a patch of bad weather which was hindering flying, but during the night the Japanese reversed their course so as to be able to engage shortly after dawn. They kept in touch with the Yorktown's movements and were able to launch a dawn search next morning, with a strike to follow as soon as the target was located.

Fletcher ordered Rear-Admiral Fitch in the Lexington, to launch a big search to be flown off at 06 25 hours. At about 08 00 hours a Japanese plane radioed a sighting report which was intercepted by the Americans and passed to Fitch, but almost immediately this disquieting news was followed by a report that the Japanese carriers had been found. A combined strike of 84 aircraft was put up by the Lexington and Saratoga, but 30 minutes earlier the Japanese had launched their own strike of 69 aircraft. The world's first carrier-versus-carrier battle had started.

The two American carriers' strikes were about 20 minutes apart and so Yorktown struck first with nine torpedo bombers and 24 dive-bombers. The torpedo strike was a failure, but two bombs hit Shokaku, one forward which started an avgas (aviation fuel) fire, and one aft which wrecked the engine repair workshop. The Japanese attack began at 11 18 hours, with 51 bombers and 18 fighters operating as a single unit. The raid was detected at nearly 70 miles range on Lexington's radar, but a series of errors positioned the defending Wildcats at the wrong altitude. To make matters worse they were not stationed at a reasonable distance from the carrier, so that only three fighters made contact before the attack developed. There were also 12 Dauntless dive-bombers stationed at 2 000 feet three miles outside the screen to try to break up the torpedo-bombers' attacks. The Japanese torpedo-bombers were flying much higher than anticipated, and they simply flew over the Dauntlesses to take up their dropping height inside the carriers' destroyer screen, but were largely ineffective.

The attack group from Lexington, well ahead of the Yorktown aircraft, was nearing the target location shortly after 11 00 hours, when they spotted an aircraft-carrier, two or

three cruisers, and some destroyers, about 25 miles to the starboard. This was the Shoho. The first attack, succeeded only in blowing 5 aircraft over the Shoho's side, but was closely followed by 10 Dauntlesses and the Lexington's torpedo squadron. Under such a concentrated attack, the Shoho stood little chance: soon she was on fire and dead in the water and sank soon after. Only 6 American aircraft were lost in the attack. Back on the American aircraft-carriers, listeners in the radio rooms heard the jubilant report from Lieutenant Commander Dixon, leading Lexington's other Dauntless squadron: "Dixon to carrier; scratch one flat-top"!

With the air groups safely landed again, Fletcher decided to call-off any further strikes, as he now knew, from intercepted radio messages, that his own position was known. The worsening weather dissuaded him from further searches, he thus set a westerly course during the night in the anticipation that the Japanese invasion force would come through the Jomard Passage the next morning. The 7th May had been a day of serious blunders from the Japanese viewpoint, and they were determined to destroy the American aircraft-carriers before the next day; Selecting the 27 pilots best qualified in night operations, they launched a strike from the Shokaku and Zuikaku just before 16 30 hours.

The gamble came near to success. Although the Japanese aircraft passed close to Task Force 17, they failed to locate owing to foul weather and poor visibility. The American combat air-patrol, vectored out by radar, intercepted and shot down 9 precious aircraft. An hour later, some of the returning Japanese laid a course for home right over the American carriers, which they mistook for their own. Twenty minutes later, 3 more attempted to join the Yorktown's landing circle, and 1 was shot down. Only six of the original 27 got back safely.

Next morning, one of Lexington's scouts, reported that the Japanese were 175 miles to the north-east of Fletcher's position. The Yorktown's group of 24 bombers and 9 torpedo-bombers with fighters, departed ten minutes before the Lexington aircraft. The dive-bombers spotted the Japanese first, at 10 30 hours, and took cloud cover to await the arrival of the Devastators. While Shokaku was engaged in launching further combat patrols, Zuikaku disappeared into a rain squall. The attack thus fell only on the Shokaku. Although the Yorktown pilots coordinated their attack well, only moderate success was achieved. The slow American torpedoes were either avoided or failed to explode, and only two bomb hits were scored on the Shokaku, one damaging the flight-deck well forward on the starboard bow and setting fire to fuel, while the other destroyed a repair compartment aft. The Shokaku, now burning, could still recover aircraft, but could no longer launch any.

The Japanese had begun launching at about the same time as the Americans, but their attack group of 18 torpedo-bombers, 33 bombers, and 18 fighters was larger, better balanced, and more accurately directed to the target. Although the American radar picked them up 70 miles away, Fitch had far too few fighters to intercept successfully, and was forced to rely mainly on his anti-aircraft gunners for protection. At 11 18 hours the battle 'busted out', as one American sailor described it. The

Yorktown, with a smaller turning circle than the Lexington, successfully avoided eight torpedoes launched on her port quarter. Five minutes later she came under dive-bomber attack but, skilfully handled, escaped unscathed until 11 27 hours, when she received her only hit from an 800 pound bomb which penetrated to the fourth deck, but did not impair flight operations. During this time, the evasive manoeuvres gradually drew the American aircraft carriers apart and, although the screening vessels divided fairly evenly between them, the breaking of their defensive circle contributed to Japanese success.

The Lexington, larger than the Yorktown, had a turning circle of 1 500 to 2 000 yards in diameter, compared with the 1 000-yard tactical diameter of her consort. Moreover, she had the misfortune to suffer an 'anvil' attack from the Japanese torpedo-bombers, which came in on both bows to launch their missiles at the 'Lady Lex'. Despite valiant manoeuvres, she received one torpedo hit on the port side forward at 11 20 hours, quickly followed by a second opposite the bridge. At the same time a dive-bombing attack commenced from 17 000 feet, the Lexington receiving two hits from small bombs. One exploded in a ready-ammunition box on the port side, while the other hit the smokestack structure. To add to the din of battle, the ship's siren jammed as a result of an explosion and shrieked weirdly throughout most of the attack.

Some 19 minutes later, the aircraft-carrier battle was, to all intents and purposes, at an end. At this point, honours were more or less equal, but for the Americans the real tragedy was still to come. At first it appeared that the doughty Lexington had survived to 'fight another day. A list of 7 degrees caused by the torpedo hits was corrected by shifting oil ballast, while her engines remained unharmed. To her returning pilots she did not appear to be seriously damaged, and the recovery of the air group went ahead. Minutes later, at 12 47 hours, a tremendous internal explosion, caused by the ignition of fuel vapours by a motor generator which had been left running, shook the whole ship. Although the Lexington continued landing her planes, a series of further violent explosions seriously disrupted internal communications. Yet another major detonation occurred at 14 45 hours, and the fires soon passed beyond control. The need for evacuation became increasingly apparent. At 19 56 hours the destroyer Phelps was ordered to deliver the 'coup de grace' with 5 torpedoes, and the Lexington sank at 20 00 hours, a final explosion occurring as she slipped beneath the waves.

The Yorktown had been luckier. Her fires were soon brought under control and at no time was her operational efficiency seriously impaired. But the elated Japanese pilots had seen her burning furiously and reported that both she and the Lexington had been sunk. The Shokaku, badly damaged by fire, was unable to recover her aircraft. She limped back to Japan with so much water on board that she nearly capsized in a gale. Her sister ship Zuikaku also needed attention for minor defects and so the two best Japanese carriers were out of action for some time.

The Battle of the Coral Sea was now over. The Japanese pilots had reported sinking both American aircraft-carriers, and acceptance of this evaluation influenced the

decision to detach the Shokaku for repairs, as well as the order that the Striking Force should be withdrawn. Tactically, the battle had been a victory for the Japanese. Although they had lost 43 aircraft as against 33 lost by the Americans, and had been left with only 9 operational aircraft after the *Zuikaku* had proved unable to take on all *Shokaku's* aircraft. Their air strikes had achieved greater results. The sinking of the Lexington, Neosho, and Sims far outweighed the loss of the Shoho and the various minor craft sunk.

Strategically, however, Coral Sea was an American victory: the whole object of the Japanese operation, the capture of Port Moresby, had been thwarted. Moreover, the damage to the *Shokaku,* and the need to re-form the battered air groups of the *Zuikaku,* was to keep both these carriers out of the Midway battle, where their presence might have been decisive. The battle was the first naval engagement in history in which the participating ships never sighted or fired directly at each other. Instead, manned aircraft acted as the offensive artillery for the ships involved. Thus, the respective commanders were participating in a new type of warfare, carrier-versus-carrier, with which neither had any experience. The commanders „had to contend with uncertain and poor communications in situations in which the area of battle had grown far beyond that prescribed by past experience but in which speeds had increased to an even greater extent, thereby compressing decision-making time". Because of the greater speed with which decisions were required, the Japanese were at a disadvantage as command Inoue was too far away at Rabaul to effectively direct naval forces. The Japanese admirals involved were often slow to communicate important information to each other.

While the Americans did not perform as expected, they did learn from their mistakes in the battle and made improvements to their carrier tactics and equipment, including fighter tactics, strike coordination, torpedo bombers, and defensive strategies, such as anti-aircraft gunnery, which contributed to better results in later battles. Radar gave the Americans a limited advantage in this battle, but its value to the U.S. Navy would increase over time as the technology improved and the Allies learned how to employ it more effectively. Following the loss of Lexington, improved methods for containing aviation fuel and better damage control procedures were implemented by the Americans. Coordination between the Allied land-based air forces and the U.S. Navy was poor during this battle, but this too would improve over time.

Since Yamamoto had decided the decisive battle with the Americans was to take place at Midway, he should not have diverted any of his important assets, especially fleet carriers, to a secondary operation like *MO*. If either operation was important enough to commit fleet carriers, then all of the Japanese carriers should have been committed to each in order to ensure success. By committing crucial assets to *MO*, Yamamoto made the more important Midway operation dependent on the secondary operation's success. Moreover, Yamamoto apparently missed the other implications of the Coral Sea battle: the unexpected appearance of American carriers in exactly the right place and time to effectively contest the Japanese, and U.S. Navy carrier

aircrews demonstrating sufficient skill and determination to do significant damage to the Japanese carrier forces.

Due to remarkable American code breaking intelligence, Admiral Nimitz, was now aware that the Japanese fleet was intent on throwing down a challenge, which, in spite of local American inferiority, had to be accepted. The proceeding Battle of Midway ranks among one of the truly decisive battles in history. In one massive five minute action, Japan's overwhelming superiority in naval air strength in the vast Pacific Ocean was wiped out.

More than half the Japanese fleet-carrier strength, together with their irreplaceable, elite, highly trained and experienced aircrews were eliminated; resulting in the Japanese naval air arm being thrown on the defensive from then on. The early run of victories which Yamamoto had predicted had come to a premature end. Now a period of stalemate was to begin, during which American industrial muscle would overpower their Pacific enemy, which Yamamoto had also foreseen.

On the 26th May 1942, the aircraft-carriers Enterprise and Hornet of Task Force (TF) 16 had steamed into Pearl Harbour, to set about, in haste, the various operations of refuelling and replenishing. The next day the Yorktown with blackened sides and twisted decks, bearing the scars of her bomb-damage in the Coral Sea battle, berthed in the dry dock. Yorktown had been so badly damaged that the Japanese believed it was sunk, and thus, they would face only two American carriers.

With the knowledge that the Japanese were heading for Midway, Nimitz ordered the Navy Yard to make emergency repairs in the utmost speed. Work was to continue, night and day, without ceasing, until the ship was at least temporarily battle worthy. One thousand four hundred workmen swarmed aboard to begin repairs. Under normal circumstances, two months of work would have been necessary for maintenance. The men of the dockyards completed this in less than 46 hours.

Therefore, on 28th May, TF 16, consisting of the Enterprise flying the flag of Rear Admiral Raymond Spruance with the Hornet, 6 cruisers, 9 destroyers, and 2 replenishment tankers following, left Pearl Harbour. The next day the Yorktown, as TF 17 left harbour under the command of Rear Admiral Frank Fletcher, accompanied by 2 cruisers and 5 destroyers headed to rendezvous with TF 16, 350 miles northeast of Midway. The Americans had been forced to make changes in their command structure. Rear-Admiral Fletcher continued to fly his flag in the Yorktown as commander of TF 17, but Halsey had fallen ill and the command of TF 16 passed to Rear-Admiral Spruance. Although not an aviator Spruance had commanded the screen under Halsey and backed up by Halsey's highly competent air staff he was to prove an able task force commander.

The main objective of the Japanese was to extend Japan's newly conquered eastern sea frontier so that sufficient warning might be obtained of any threatened naval air attack on the homeland. Doubts on the wisdom of the Japanese plan had been

voiced in various quarters; but Yamamoto, had fiercely advocated it. He had always been certain that only by destroying the American fleet could Japan gain the breathing space required to consolidate her conquests. A belief which had inspired the attack on Pearl Harbour. Yamamoto, believed rightly, that an attack on Midway was a challenge that Nimitz could not ignore. It would bring out the US Pacific Carrier Fleet where Yamamoto, with superior strength, would be waiting to bring it to action.

The Japanese Northern Force sailed from Honshu for the attack on the Aleutians. This was expected to induce Nimitz to send at least part of his fleet racing north. But Nimitz, being forewarned, refused to rise to the bait. Yamamoto believed that the capture of Midway would pose a serious threat to Pearl Harbour. His opposite number, Admiral Nimitz, would then have to try to retake Midway. Waiting for him would be the powerful Japanese fleet. Yamamoto would spring the trap, and achieve what had eluded him at Pearl Harbour; the destruction of American naval power in the Pacific. With the western seaboard of the USA seemingly at the mercy of the Japanese, President Roosevelt would have no alternative but to sue for peace, or so the argument ran.

Admiral Yamamoto committed almost the entire Japanese fleet to his plan to take the Midway atoll: some 160 warships, including 8 aircraft carriers, and more than 400 carrier-based aircraft, compared with the 3 carriers, about 70 other warships and 233 carrier aircraft (plus another 115 planes stationed on Midway) at Nimitz's disposal. But Yamamoto separated his forces into five main groups, all too far apart to support or reinforce each other. At the head of the procession was the First Carrier Striking Force under Vice Admiral Nagumo, with 4 carriers, Akagi, Kaga, Hiryu and Soryu, and their 225 fighters and bombers. They were to give Midway a powerful preliminary bombardment before the five thousand strong invasion force landed from 12 transport vessels. Apart from its immediate escort, the invasion force was to be protected by two support groups, each 50-75 miles away. Over 600 miles astern of Nagumo was the main Japanese battle fleet with seven battleships, led by Yamamoto's giant new flagship, the 70 000 ton Yamato. These, Yamamoto planned, would finish off the US fleet after the carriers had inflicted the decisive damage. Knowing that the odds were stacked heavily against him, Nimitz staked everything on his faith in aircraft carriers, with their ability to strike at long range. He decided that his much slower battleships would be a liability and ordered them to stay on the US west coast.

At 09 00 hours on 3rd June, a flying a Catalina flying boat based at Midway, spotted the Japanese invasion force steaming towards the atoll, some 470 miles west of Midway. But this was not the carrier force's main target, and Fletcher left it to bombers on Midway to attack that afternoon, to no effect. The US carriers' main prey, Admiral Nagumo's Carrier Striking Force, was zigzagging through dense fog farther north, oblivious of its foe. It emerged from the bad weather into beautiful calm conditions in the early hours of the following morning, 4th June. At 04 30 hours Nagumo launched a strike of 108 planes at Midway. They were spotted on Midway's radar, and its planes scrambled. The Japanese shot down many of the defenders and

damaged the US base, but its bombers were safely out of the way and the airfield was still usable. A second attack was needed to knock it out.

This put Nagumo in a quandary. He knew neither where the US fleet was nor how many ships it had. His search planes had spotted no enemy ships and he needed to finish the job at Midway. Just then Midway-based bombers started attacking his ships. They did no damage, but they made up Nagumo's mind for him, and changed the course of the battle. The Japanese commander ordered his second-wave torpedo bombers to be rearmed with bombs for another attack on Midway. But at 07 28 hours, 15 minutes after the torpedo bombers went below to be rearmed, one of Nagumo's search planes spotted 10 US warships some 210 miles north-east of the Japanese carriers. This plane had taken off half an hour late that morning, delayed when the launching catapult on the heavy cruiser Tone jammed. Had it taken off on time, it might well have spotted the US ships half an hour earlier.

Nimitz's advance knowledge gave him a clear picture and, from his HQ in Pearl Harbour. He exerted effective overall command. Unlike Yamamoto, keeping radio silence in Yamato some 10 hours behind his carriers: Lacking radar, 3 Japanese carriers were surprised and sunk whilst planes jammed their decks. A fourth was sunk the next day. Yamamoto displayed unwonted emotion on hearing of the mortal damage inflicted. Wary American manoeuvring, ruled out a night action: leaving the Japanese commander to consider the risk of a daylight attack without air support.

The risk was too great. Shadowed by US aircraft, Yamamoto led his force back to Japan, spending the voyage in the seclusion of his cabin. Worse than the loss of 4 carriers was losing 250 aircraft with most of their highly trained crews. Well over two thousand highly skilled men had lost their lives.

The Battle of Midway was a significant moment in naval history. For the first time battleships fled before aircraft carriers. It was also a turning point in World War Two. Japan had lost its main naval striking force and the US Pacific Fleet, far from being destroyed, had won a remarkable victory, despite the loss of a carrier, 137 aircraft and 307 men. By the time Japan rebuilt its carrier fleet in 1944, American industrial power was fully mobilised in all the unstoppable might that Yamamoto had so feared.

With heavy reinforcements arriving, Nimitz began a protracted campaign in the Solomon Islands in August 1942, attacking Guadalcanal. His victories at the battles of Coral Sea and Midway had severely weakened the Japanese fleet and assured the safety of the United States from direct naval attack. At Guadalcanal, a struggle of terrible ferocity developed, and continued for six months to inflict heavy losses on both sides. In the end, however, the Japanese were forced to abandon the island, and with it their last chance of launching an effective offensive to the south. After several months of bitter fighting on land and sea, the island was finally secured in early 1943. While General MacArthur advanced through New Guinea, Nimitz intensified his campaign of „island hopping" across the Pacific. Rather than engage sizable Japanese garrisons, these operations were designed to cut them off and let

them "whither on the vine". Moving from island to island, Allied forces used each as a base for capturing the next.

On 20th November 1943, landings on Makin and Tarawa marked the beginning of the Gilbert Islands offensive. Nimitz's forces secured Makin after four days. Tarawa, with its network of pillboxes, mines and coastal gun emplacements proved more difficult; after a bloody landing operation, US troops inched inland, slowly crushing the Japanese defences and receiving some hard lessons in amphibious operations.

The victory paved the way for the invasion of the Marshall Islands. During January and February 1944, the US wrestled control of Kwajelein, Majuro and Einwetok from the Japanese. They also succeeded in neutralising Truk, the formidable Japanese naval base on the Caroline Islands. Now able to move its fleet and air units forward, the US captured Saipan, Tinian and Guam in the Marianas in June and July. Crucially, the capture of the Marianas provided a fixed base from which to launch B29 air attacks on the Japanese home islands. Between September and October 1944, Nimitz crushed the Japanese fleet as it tried to halt the US advance in the First Battle of Philippine Sea; the unstoppable island hoppers then took Ulithi in western Caroline Islands and Peleliu in the Palau Islands.

Between October 1944 and February 1945, MacArthur fulfilled his famous promise to return to the Philippines. Between October and December, a fierce naval battle raged in Leyte Gulf. As the US slowly gained control, Manila and Luzon were occupied in February 1945. The next step was the first American landing on Japanese territory, at Iwo Jima. US troops invaded in February 1945, following ten weeks of relentless aerial bombardment. As the Japanese emerged from tunnels and underground bunkers, a bloody 36 day combat began.

Admiral Nimitz entrusted overall control of the Iwo Jima operation to Admiral Spruance's Fifth Fleet which, with its fast carrier and battleship units supported by a mobile fleet train, was the most powerful naval body in the world. Its role was to give distant cover against enemy air or naval attack and to participate in the bombardment of the island. Rear Admiral Turner, probably the most experienced leader of amphibious operations in World War Two, was given command of the landings. The assault troops, eighty four thousand in all, were to come mainly from 4th and 5th Marine Divisions, with 3rd Marine Division in floating reserve.

Air reconnaissance had given them some idea of the strength of the defences, then the initial naval bombardment had blown away some of the camouflage and exposed further emplacements. But what they did not know was that their adversaries had built what was probably the most complex underground defence system in the Pacific, with a 3 mile labyrinth of tunnels. Guns were carefully sited to cover the beaches and a series of inland defence lines, consisting of over thirteen thousand men plus some seven thousand Navy troops. There were 361 guns of over 75-mm calibre (with 100 000 rounds of ammunition), 300 A.A. guns (150 000 rounds), 20 000 light guns and machine guns (22 million rounds), 130 howitzers (11 700 rounds), 12 heavy mortars

(800 rounds), 70 rocket launchers (3 500 rounds), 60 antitank guns (600 rounds), and 22 tanks.

The Marines began a rigorous training programme for the invasion: practice landings were made on beaches as similar to Iwo Jima‟s as possible, and a hill shaped much like Mount Suribachi, was attacked time and time again in mock assault. Meanwhile, as preparations continued, the air force had begun, on 8th December, 1944, the longest and heaviest aerial bombardment of the whole Pacific war, a 72-day 'softening-up' by B-24s and B-25s. The US navy, too, laid down its bombardments, which began in November 1944 and continued with intervals until 16th February, 1945, when it began its pre-assault barrage. For three days US warships pounded the island from the sea in an attempt to pulverise, or at least neutralise, the Japanese guns capable of hitting the landing beaches.

In addition to shellfire, the Navy had also used aircraft from carriers to drop bombs and napalm, and fire a multitude of rockets. But although some of their weapons were destroyed, the Japanese garrison cosily sat it out in their deep underground shelters. The final three-day naval bombardment was carried out by six battleships and their support elements. Like their counterparts in the air force, the navy too believed they had succeeded. Again, the verdict of the Marines would be the one that counted. A few optimists thought that the island had been neutralised. Only the Marines who had to hit the beaches would be able to verify this.

On 17th February, two days before the actual invasion was scheduled to begin, gunboats and rocket boats came close inshore to cover the frogmen clearing the beach approaches and checking beach and surf conditions. Suddenly, at 11 00 hours, the Japanese, who felt certain that this was the invasion they had so long awaited, opened fire with their heaviest artillery. Some one hundred and seventy casualties were suffered in this action. But the frogmen did return with a full report of beach and surf conditions. Moreover, by revealing their carefully concealed positions the massive coastal guns had marked themselves for certain destruction before being able to cause havoc on the day of invasion.

With a broad rocky plateau in the north and Mount Suribachi at the southern tip of the pork chop shaped island of Iwo Jima, the only place a full-scale invasion could be mounted was on the black cinder beaches along the south-east coast. From this point it was only a short distance to airfield No.1; but a landing here also meant that the open beaches would be subjected to an intense fire from higher ground to the north and the south.

The naval bombardment had driven the Japanese into their bunkers, even so, it is hard to imagine that any of the defenders could have survived the bombardment. The finale included 2 000 rounds of 16-inch shells, 1 500 of 14-inch, 400 of 12-inch, 2 000 of 8-inch, 2 000 of 6-inch, and 30 000 of 5-inch. It was the heaviest pre-landing bombardment of the war at that time.

The morning of invasion, 19th February 1945, found 450 vessels of the US 5th Fleet gathered offshore the tiny island, the largest collection of ships yet for a Pacific operation. And around and among these vessels swarmed the 482 landing craft, packed with troops that would carry the 8 marine battalions into action. The bombarding warships closed in to 1 000 yards and began firing. Then the air strikes began and the navy laid down a creeping barrage, the first time it was used in the Pacific. The first wave of 68 LVT‟s, aligned itself for battle. Every few minutes one of these waves would begin the 4 000 yard dash to the shore and certain violence. If all went according to schedule, the first seven battalions of fighting Marines would be ashore within 45 minutes.

Slowly, desperately slowly, the Marines pushed inland, a confused collection of small groups rather than a united force. Each bunker, each rabbit-hole meant a fight to the death. Each enemy position was supported by many others the Japanese would disappear down one hole and pop up at another, often behind rather than in front of the advancing Marines. The Marines struggled on, pouring bullets, grenades and flame into enemy positions. Flail tanks rumbled forward with the Marines, detonating land mines, tankdozers carved channels through the terrace and ordinary tanks relieved the pressure on the Marines by knocking out machine-gun nests and pillboxes. But it was no pushover, even with the armour. Facing 4th Division's lines, for example, were 10 reinforced concrete blockhouses, 7 covered artillery positions and 80 pillboxes. A battalion commander asserted that “whenever a man showed himself in the lines it was almost certain death”. By mid-afternoon the reserve battalions of four regimental combat teams and two tank battalions had been committed to the battle to relieve the pressure on the leading units.

Yet the price of Iwo Jima had been extraordinarily high, and whether the dead were Japanese or Americans they had died with the utmost violence. 24 Medals of Honour were won; 12 600 pints of blood were transfused: It had been a fight with a fury unprecedented in the Pacific, and must have left America's military leaders, including Admiral Nimitz, with one haunting thought at least: if to conquer tiny Iwo it took a 72 day air bombardment, a three-day naval hammering, and. 36 days of the best the Marines could offer, how long would it take to overwhelm Japan herself? And at what cost?

But before that Okinawa had to be neutralised in April 1945. The Japanese launched massive kamikaze attacks on the US invasion fleet in the bloodiest battle of the Pacific War. Responsibility for taking American troops to their target, shielding and supporting them once they came ashore rested with Admiral Spruance's 5th Fleet. Its Joint Expeditionary Force, commanded by Admiral Turner, was designated Task Force 51 which comprised half a million servicemen, over 300 warships, and over 1 130 auxiliary vessels and landing craft. It was shielded by Vice-Admiral Mitscher's Task Force 58, which would also carry out the initial bombardment and neutralisation of the Japanese defences. Task Force 58 consisted of four fast carrier groups, together with the British carrier force commanded by Vice-Admiral Rawlings,

designated Task Force 57, although it was only the equivalent of a single American carrier group.

Admiral Nimitz had ordered Admiral Mitscher's big carriers to begin the first phase of the softening-up process on 18th March, launching heavy strikes against Japanese airfields on Kyushti. On the 19th the Americans switched to the naval bases at Kobe, Kure, and Hiroshima and to Japanese naval vessels in the Inland Sea. Kamikaze"s and bombers hit back fiercely, damaging the new carriers Yorktown, Wasp, and Enterprise and setting Franklin ablaze. A Japanese bomber dived out of the 2 000 foot clouds and dropped two bombs on the Franklin, hitting the deck which was packed with aircraft armed with the new 12-inch rockets called 'Tiny Tim'. This set off a shipboard inferno which was probably unequalled in any other American ship in the Pacific. For nearly 4 hours the giant ship lay dead in the water, burning, exploding, and listing heavily. Heroic rescue work saved the ship, but seven hundred and seventy two of her crew were killed. The Wasp, was hit by a bomb and suffered three hundred and two casualties. The bombardment force (which had delivered 13 000 tons of shells against Okinawa before the invasion) was hit by many kamikazes, also a battleship, a cruiser, 4 destroyers, and 6 other United States ships were all struck by Kamikazes before a single American fighting man even set foot on Okinawa.

Task Force 58 began to withdraw on the afternoon of the 19th March, 1945 and during the next 48 hours was harried by repeated Japanese air attacks. These, however, were fought off by the American fighter pilots, who ran up impressive scores. The tally of Japanese aircraft destroyed between19th-22nd March was 528, and 16 Japanese surface ships were also damaged during the same period, including the super-battleship Yamato. Mitscher's force had amply fulfilled its role. When the main landings took place on Okinawa, the Japanese were unable to throw in a serious air counter-attack for a week.

It was ranked as one of the bloodiest and most sustained fighting of the Pacific war. Japan's casualties totalled one hundred and thirty one thousand dead, including some forty two thousand civilians. In addition, about eleven thousand Japanese were taken prisoner. American land forces suffered fifteen thousand five hundred killed and fifty one thousand wounded.

Admiral Nimitz estimated that, at this rate, the US could expect some quarter of a million dead in an invasion of Japan. These thoughts offered the Japanese some hope that Washington would seek peace instead of invading. But they had not bargained for Washington's ultimate blows; the world's first and only atomic bomb attacks.

Total United States naval casualties on board ships in the Okinawa campaign were almost ten thousand, of whom almost five thousand were killed, most of them by kamikazes. As the war drew to its close, Okinawa became a vast air and naval base, for which a heavy price had been paid. United States naval losses were the heaviest

of any naval campaign in the war. The 10th Army also suffered heavy casualties: almost eight thousand killed or missing in action, thirty two thousand wounded, and more than twenty six thousand non-battle casualties. These heavy losses were the dear price paid for Okinawa but, like Iwo Jima, the land was an invaluable asset in pressing the war against the Japanese homeland. These victories also helped to make it clear to the Japanese, the inevitability of their defeat.

The Americans had conquered Okinawa and were now only 330 miles from mainland Japan. The objective had been achieved, but at a terrifying cost. The Americans had lost 763 aircraft and 36 ships sunk; another 368 of their ships had been damaged. Only seven thousand four hundred Japanese prisoners were taken on Okinawa, most of them in the last days when their armies were disintegrating. Ten major kamikaze attacks had been thrown against Okinawa, using up some 1 465 aircraft. The Japanese losses in aircraft were a staggering: 7 800. The Imperial Navy lost 16 ships sunk and 4 damaged.

What did the Okinawa campaign prove? First and foremost, it gave a bitter foretaste of what the Allies could expect if they ever tried to land on Japanese soil. In Japan's home islands, meanwhile, the people were preparing to resist the now inevitable invasion. Air and naval kamikazes prepared to batter the invasion fleet, while a fanatical citizenry-in-arms would back the army. All were ready to die in the defence of the „sacred soil" of Japan and the 'sacred person' of the emperor.

Okinawa was the bloodiest fight of the Pacific war. But above all it proved that nothing could stop the Allies in the Pacific from moving where they wanted, even if it did mean killing every Japanese in their way. And Okinawa commander Ushijima himself paid tribute to this in his last message to Tokyo. "Our strategy, tactics, and techniques all were used to the utmost and we fought valiantly. But it was as nothing before the material strength of the enemy".

In August 1945, the dropping of two atomic bombs on Japan forced the country to surrender, rendering an invasion of the Japanese mainland unnecessary.

General Macarthur accepted the surrender on board the US battleship Missouri. The Missouri was selected to represent the navy and the home state of President Truman. General Percival the British OC who surrendered at Singapore and American General Wainwright who surrendered at the Philippines were present at the signing ceremony

With the conclusion of the war, Nimitz departed the Pacific to accept the position of Chief of Naval Operations. Replacing Fleet Admiral Ernest J. King. Nimitz took office on 15th December 1945. During his two years in office, Nimitz was tasked with scaling back the US Navy to a peacetime level. During the Nuremberg Trial of German Grand Admiral Karl Doenitz in 1946, Nimitz produced an affidavit in support of the use of unrestricted submarine warfare. This was a key reason why the German admiral's life was spared.

Chester Nimitz, along with Douglas MacArthur, dominated American strategy in the Pacific during World War Two. Although Douglas MacArthur and Chester Nimitz were the two men most directly responsible for the Allied victory in the Pacific, that's where the similarities end. It is difficult to imagine two people more different: MacArthur was a forceful and colourful personality, a man of dramatic gestures and rhetoric, Nimitz was soft-spoken and relaxed, a team player, a leader by example rather than exhortation.

Retiring from the US Navy on 15th December 1947, Nimitz and his wife settled in Berkeley, CA. On 1st January 1948, he was appointed to the largely ceremonial role of Special Assistant to the Secretary of the Navy in the West. Prominent in the San Francisco area community, he served as a regent of the University of California from 1948 to 1956. During this time, he worked to restore relations with Japan. In late 1965, Nimitz suffered a stroke which was later complicated by pneumonia. Returning to his home on Yerba Buena Island, Nimitz died on 20th February 1966.

Admiral Chester W. Nimitz had the capacity to organise both a fleet and a vast theatre, the tact to deal with sister services and Allied commands, the leadership to weld his own subordinates into a great fighting team, the courage to take necessary risks, and the wisdom to select, from a variety of intelligence and opinions, the correct strategy to defeat Japan. This fitting eulogy was delivered at the funeral of Chester William Nimitz (1885-1966).

Following his funeral, he was buried at Golden Gate National Cemetery in San Bruno, CA.

CHAPTER FOUR

PATTON

General George Patton Jr. was a strange mixture of bloodthirsty ravings and military sentimentality. On the one hand he would scream at his soldiers: “Remember, war is kill, kill, and kill! You kill them or they'll kill you. The Nazis are the enemy. Wade into 'em and spill their blood! Shoot 'em in the belly and rip out their guts with your bayonets”! On the other hand he could raise a glass and, with tears in his eyes, propose a toast to his officers and their ladies: “Here's to Army wives. God bless 'em”!

Few military commanders have ever exhibited such glaring eccentric contrasts of character. The tough, weather-beaten face; the profane and extravagant speech; the appeals to God to lay on good weather for his soldiers; the endless reiteration of 'Kraut-killing' and the insistence on Third Army's great mission.

Seeking to inspire his men, Patton developed a flashy image and routinely wore a highly polished helmet, cavalry pants and boots, and a pair of ivory-handled pistols. His speeches were frequently laced with profanity and espoused the utmost confidence in his men. While his behaviour was popular with his troops, Patton was prone to indiscreet remarks which often distressed Eisenhower, and caused tension among the Allies.

Born on 11th November, 1885 in San Gabriel, CA, Patton was the son of George S. Patton, Sr. and Ruth Patton. He was descended from Revolutionary War Brigadier General Hugh Mercer and several of his relatives fought for the Confederacy during the Civil War. During his childhood, Patton met former Confederate raider John S. Mosby who was a family friend. The old veteran's war stories fuelled Patton's desire to become a soldier. He enrolled at the Virginia Military Institute in 1903, before transferring to West Point the following year.

Compelled to repeat his first year due to poor grades in mathematics, Patton reached the position of cadet adjutant before graduating in 1909. Assigned to the cavalry, Patton went on to compete in the modern pentathlon at the 1912 Olympics in Stockholm. Finishing fifth overall, he returned to the United States and was posted to Fort Riley, Kansas. Assigned to the 8th Cavalry Regiment at Fort Bliss, Texas, he took part in Brigadier General Pershing's Punitive Expedition against Pancho Villa in 1916.

During the expedition, Patton led the US Army's first armoured attack when he assaulted an enemy position with three armoured cars. With the US entry into World War I in April 1917, Pershing had Patton promoted to captain and took the young officer to France. Desiring a combat command, Patton was posted to the new US Tank Corps, and saw action at the Battle of Cambrai late that year.

Swiftly advancing through the ranks to colonel in the wartime army, Patton was given command of a Tank Brigade in August 1918. Fighting as part of the 1st US Army, he was wounded in the leg at the Battle of St. Mihiel that September. Recovering, he took part in the Meuse-Argonne Offensive for which he was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross and Distinguished Service Medal. With the end of the war, he reverted to his peacetime rank of captain and was assigned to Washington, DC.

While there, he met Captain Eisenhower. Becoming good friends, the two officers began developing new armoured doctrines and devising improvements for tanks. Promoted to major in July 1920, Patton tirelessly worked as an advocate for the establishment of a permanent armoured force. He was promoted to lieutenant colonel

in 1934 and colonel four years later, Patton was placed in command of Fort Myer in Virginia.

With the formation of the 2nd Armoured Division in 1940, Patton was selected to lead its 2nd Armoured Brigade and promoted to brigadier general in October. He was given command of the division with the rank of major general in April 1941. In the US Army's build-up prior to World War Two, Patton took the division to the Desert Training Centre in California. Given command of the 1st Armoured Corps, Patton relentlessly trained his men in the desert through the summer of 1942. In this role, Patton led the Western Task Force during Operation Torch.

Torch had been in preparation for only three months, but in conception much longer. At the Arcadia Conference in Washington, the first Allied meeting following Pearl Harbour, Churchill put forward the 'North-West Africa Project' as the first step towards 'closing and tightening the ring around Germany'. However, Roosevelt's service advisers were dubious about its practicability preferring an early and more direct attack against Hitler's Europe. They were of the view that this diversion to the Mediterranean would only prolong Allied efforts; preferring an early cross-Channel attack to be launched by August or September 1942. This was aimed at meeting Stalin's demand for the opening of a 'Second Front' to relieve pressure on Russia.

The President and his strategic advisers had already decided on a 'Germany first' strategy. The United States would remain on the defensive against Japan while exerting every effort to defeat Germany and of course Italy. They could then turn to the Pacific and eliminate Japan. This commitment to Germany First was heartening to Churchill, but the enthusiasm to fight the Germans immediately was unrealistic. The British Prime Minister emphasised the drawbacks of a premature landing in Europe with inadequate strength; pointing out the risks of being overwhelmed, without bringing any appreciable relief to the Russians.

He was aware that American military forces were in the process of expanding, organising, and training for combat; therefore, they were hardly a match for their strong and veteran foe. Churchill cabled to Roosevelt that the plan for a landing in France in 1942, should be discarded, and went on to urge, once again, the case for Torch as the sole means by which the U.S. could strike at Hitler. The American Chiefs of Staff reacted with renewed objections.

Then, a major event occurred that was to change the entire situation. Rommel's unexpected counterstroke dislocated the 8th Army's westward advance and forced the British to retreat more than two hundred miles to the Gazala Line. This was followed in June by the collapse at Tobruk. So, instead of advancing westward as planned, the 8th Army was thrown back in disorder a further four hundred miles before halting at Alamein. Alamein was the last possible stop-line short of Alexandria, Cairo, and the Nile Delta. Churchill was in Washington with his Chiefs of Staff when he learned of the disaster at Tobruk. A joint Allied operation in North Africa was now

viewed as essential. The operation was approved and Roosevelt promised to provide three hundred Sherman tanks to the 8th Army.

Considering the long ties of Franco-American friendship, 'Operation Torch' would have to be in essence an outwardly American show. The French still remained bitter about the British attack on their fleet shortly after France fell and would certainly oppose a British landing. The initial landing waves would therefore consist solely of American troops; also the commander of the overall operation would have to be an American.

For this reason, Eisenhower was appointed the Allied Commander-in-Chief. He had never been in combat, but had impressed his superiors with his thorough grasp of military matters, and his ability to make people of different backgrounds work together. Yet he was relatively unknown and „Torch", a complicated venture to be undertaken in considerable haste, would be a serious challenge. As it turned out, he grew in stature and self-confidence resulting in a meteoritic military and later political career.

Eisenhower chose Major-General Mark Clark as his Deputy Commander-in-Chief. Clark would prove invaluable in dealing with the French in North Africa. Lt. General Kenneth Anderson was to command British ground forces and the flamboyant and charismatic Major-General George Patton the American. Patton was aggressive and experienced in combat, and he would soon gain the reputation as America's best fighting general. A Combined Planning Staff, responsible to Eisenhower was established with the overall strategic objective of gaining control of North Africa from the Atlantic to the Red Sea.

Torch had profound political implications that were to influence the campaign. The Americans had hopes that the French would greet them as liberators. But, in the event that they resisted, Allied forces would have to overwhelm and defeat them. This was one of the great imponderables of „Operation Torch".

The next stage was to co-ordinate plans for Eisenhower's forces to push into Tunisia and link up with the British 8th Army under Montgomery. This would entrap and eliminate Axis forces, thus giving the Allies complete control over the northern shore of Africa. It would open the possibility of further operations across the Mediterranean into the European continent and secure Middle East oil supplies for the Allies.

Close coordination among Allied land, sea, and air forces would be essential. Major air units included a fleet carrier and 4 escort carriers, which embarked 180 fighters, 36 dive bombers, and 26 torpedo bombers. The entire task force also included 3 battleships, 7 cruisers, 38 destroyers, 4 submarines, 30 troop transports, plus numerous support vessels; a vast undertaking of over one hundred thousand men.

„Torch" would consist of three major landings; the Western, Centre and Eastern Task Forces. The Western Task Force was to be wholly American and would sail across the Atlantic from Norfolk, Virginia. Patton would sail on board the flagship, USS Augusta, and planned to come ashore near Casablanca in French Morocco.

The Centre Task Force would consist of American troops transported from the United Kingdom to Oran in Algeria. The Eastern Task Force was also formed in the United Kingdom and would be predominantly British. Making the initial landings near Algiers, however, would be a relatively small American force. Air support during the first few critical days would be from the carriers. Once the French airfields came into Allied hands, carrier borne aircraft would be flown to those airfields.

Regarding the complicated political situation; officially, French leaders in North Africa pledged their support for Vichy to defend their colonies against any attacker. But, covertly, many of them conspired against the Axis; realising that the only chance of liberating their country was through an Allied victory.

Robert Murphy, the chief American diplomat in North Africa, had been actively engaged in discreet meetings with French officers sympathetic to the Allies. As a result, the French now urged that a senior Allied military representative should come secretly to Algiers for talks. Accordingly, General Mark Clark flew to Gibraltar with four key staff officers. The party was then transported by a British submarine to a rendezvous west of Algiers. Clark told the French that a large Anglo-American force was being dispatched to North Africa. In the interests of security, however, he abstained from giving details of the time and places of the Allied landings.

An important issue discussed was the choice of the most suitable French leader to rally the French forces in North Africa to the Allied side. Admiral Darlan, Vichy's second in command, had by chance happened to be in Algiers visiting his sick son in hospital. Darlan was the highest governmental official on the scene, and he represented the legal authority of France. He was, however, anti-British, this rendered him doubtful in view of the fact that the British were playing a major role in Torch.

De Gaulle was also ruled out. Roosevelt had developed a deep distrust of him and disliked his arrogance. Roosevelt actually insisted that all information about Torch should be withheld from de Gaulle. In these circumstances the Americans, from the President downward, readily accepted the view that General Giraud was the most acceptable candidate for the leadership of the French in North Africa. Giraud, had been taken prisoner by the Germans in May 1940, but had managed to escape and reach North Africa. Here he met many officers, who shared his desire to liberate France.

The Allies still hoped that the French would not resist. For that reason there would be no pre-assault bombing or naval bombardment. Only the task force commanders could initiate the general engagement of French forces.

Patton's western task force route took it south of the Azores and had the good fortune that no Axis submarines spotted it. By 6th November, as the task force approached the Moroccan coast, the weather took a turn for the worse. It was nevertheless decided to keep to schedule, despite a heavy surf along the coast. The Western Task Force split into three attack groups and took up positions off the shore line defended by coastal defence guns, and the 15-inch guns of the battleship Jean Bart.

Patton, on board the flagship, USS Augusta had intended to be part of the initial landings, just north of Casablanca. However, as the Augusta had to join several other capital ships in controlling shelling from the shore batteries at Casablanca and French naval vessels in the harbour, Patton's landing was delayed.

Once the beach-heads were secured, Patton's attack group would break out and advance on Casablanca. A major threat was the French fleet based less than fifteen miles from the landing beaches. It consisted of a light cruiser, ten destroyers, and eleven submarines. The U.S. Navy, therefore, placed its most powerful ships close to the Assault Groups. This included the new battleship Massachusetts armed with nine 16-inch guns. Heavy cruisers armed with 8-inch guns, including Augusta with Patton aboard, plus light cruisers and destroyers.

As the first waves hit the beaches, shipboard loudspeakers blared across the water in French "Don't shoot, we are your friends, we are American". But the French did resist the landings, and the sea erupted from coastal defence guns plus Jean Bart firing on U.S. Ships. The French Fleet then attacked and several U.S. vessels were hit. The US ships immediately engaged.

By early afternoon five French destroyers had been sunk, and a cruiser driven ashore. Additionally, Jean Bart's main guns were put out of action following several hits from the Massachusetts. More troops stormed ashore north of the harbour and began to fan out while simultaneously overrunning artillery positions. Overhead there were numerous dogfights between French and U.S. aircraft. Dive bombers sank three French submarines in the port. The threat of a French naval attack was thus eliminated. There was a great deal of disorder on the beach. Many landing craft had overturned in the surf and numerous landings had occurred well away from the designated sites. Furthermore, there were delays in unloading supplies from the transport ships. However, later that day, Patton was nonetheless able to set up his HQ ashore.

The advance on Casablanca got going on the second day, and met no serious opposition, but it was halted due to lack of equipment, which was piling up on the beaches. Even on the third day little progress was made. It was not until evening that the airport was captured.

With over five thousand French troops in or near the city, and reinforcements on the way, there was the potential for a major battle near the heavily populated city. But by the morning of 10th November, French opposition began to collapse. Darlan, after a brief discussion with his staff, ordered a cease-fire.

Meanwhile, the Americans were landing at Oran. The plan was to capture the port by a double envelopment. The operation started well, surprise was complete and no opposition was met on the beaches. The advance from the beach-heads got going and soon reached the airfield that was readied to receive aircraft. By 10 30 hours the first carrier borne P–40's landed at the airfield and the Port was firmly in American hands. American casualties totalled two hundred and seventy five killed, three hundred and twenty five wounded, and fifteen missing.

Algiers was the most important objective of „Torch" as it was closest to Tunis. Following a small American detachment, the first wave of British troops came ashore west of Algiers. The operations went surprisingly smoothly. French units in the area reported they had been ordered not to resist and on 8th November, the British had taken their objectives.

The Axis powers were now, as anticipated, dispatching forces to Tunisia. German and Italian aircraft started to arrive near Tunis and heavy equipment was brought over to Bizerta.

The success of the British 8th Army had immediately placed expectations that the 'Torch' troops would unite with Montgomery's desert veterans to destroy the Germans and Italians before Christmas. Unfortunately, these hopes were proved unfounded. Northern Tunisia's, airfields and ports were readily accessible to the Axis. Tunis was five hundred and sixty miles away from Algiers over mountainous country across which there were only two metalled roads and an indifferent railway.

A stalemate now set in to bring the initial stage of 'Torch' to an end. The Germans aided by the weather and the terrain, were able to stabilize a line in the mountains west of the Tunisian Plains; thus frustrating Allied hopes of capturing Tunis and Bizerta by Christmas. The stalemate was disappointing. But much had gone well, the intricate organization had been effective and had proved it possible to form integrated American and British staffs.

Despite the aspirations of the US Chiefs of Staff, Torch did not initially bring American troops into contact with the armed forces of Germany. That confrontation would only take place in 1943. But the quick and perhaps injudicious success over the French resulted in American overconfidence, even arrogance.

Having observed this, Rommel and his commanders were openly contemptuous of the Americans" ability to fight. After a build-up that included heavy Tiger tanks mounting the 88mm gun, the Afrika Korps shattered the Americans at Kasserine Pass

and drove them back. Kasserine Pass was a bitter introduction for the Americans and would teach them much about the Wehrmacht.

The American M3 Lee and Grant tanks were no match for the German Mark IV and Tiger Panzers. American tactical doctrine was inflexible and did not account for the rapid German advance. As a result, the Americans suffered heavy losses at Kasserine.

The Germans analysed captured American equipment and sent back unfavourable reports, which would entice German commanders to underestimate them in the future. Whereas, the Americans studied the action of the Kasserine Pass more intently than the Germans. This resulted in a change of leadership and gave junior officers the authority to make on-the-spot decisions.

Major General Fredendall, was replaced by the more aggressive Patton. The M3 tank was quickly replaced with the M4 Sherman. While it was never the equal of the German tanks, it was easier to maintain and had greater range. Most importantly Kasserine Pass taught the Americans the doctrine of massed firepower, and to coordinate aircraft with ground forces.

Montgomery's 8th Army attacked from the east and in a series of probing battles weakened the Axis forces. There was a break-through at the Mareth line and the Allies linked up on 8th April, 1943. Rommel, a sick and exhausted man, had already been flown out, too ill to continue the battle. The besieged Panzerarmee was now confronted by the Royal Navy that was gathering for 'Operation Retribution'. A Dunkirk in reverse for which Admiral Cunningham had issued instructions – Sink, Burn, Destroy, let nothing pass. The Axis forces were rapidly running out of food, ammunition and fuel. By 13th May, 1943, the day the last resistance ended, two hundred and forty thousand Italian and German prisoners were rounded up.

The Allied victory in North Africa opened a second front against the Axis to remove the threat to British supply lines to Asia and Africa. It was critically important to the course of the war. The Torch landings represented the first major British-American combined offensive, and it set the pattern for Allied unity and cohesion in subsequent coalition ventures.

Largely improvised, 'Torch' was a triumph of planning and execution. It required an unprecedented effort to build up an American assault force in the United States, separated by three thousand miles from the other two assault forces; then to arrange for the entire task force to converge simultaneously on the North African coast. „Torch" was the largest joint amphibious operation undertaken up to that time. Thus it was in many ways a watershed event.

The number of issues that had to be considered and resolved was enormous. The joint services had never conducted an operation like this. The coordination and

control of naval gunfire and air support was also in its infancy during ‘Torch’. The capabilities of land, sea, and air forces had to be carefully orchestrated, especially since the enemy was, at least on paper, numerically equal or in some areas superior.

It was the overall capability of the joint force that resulted in the timely accomplishment of the mission. Certainly the inexperienced forces that took part in ‘Torch’ were fortunate that the French did not put up protracted resistance. Had the Vichy troops been more determined, had the Navy not been able to quickly suppress their defences, or had the enemy been better alerted, the landings could have been much more costly. The United States could not afford a defeat at this stage of the war. Strategically, it would have been an enormous setback if their first offensive had ended in defeat.

In July 1943, Operation Husky saw Patton's Seventh US Army land on Sicily with General Sir Bernard Montgomery's 8th British Army. Tasked with covering Montgomery's left flank as the Allies moved on Messina, Patton grew impatient as the advance bogged down. Taking the initiative, he sent troops north and captured Palermo, before turning east to Messina. While the Allied campaign was successfully concluded in August, Patton damaged his reputation when he slapped a private at a field hospital, and called him a coward, having no patience for ‘battle fatigue’.

Patton’s reputation was enhanced by ‘Torch’. On the second day of the operation, Patton spent 18 hours on the beaches driving his raw troops inland. Despite Patton’s overbearing and swashbuckling manner, his actual method of command, matters of strategy and tactics were freely discussed by his subordinate commanders and staff in a democratic way; a practice utterly foreign to the British way of war. And, having decided what was to be done, Patton then allowed his officers to get on with it. “Never tell people how to do things. Tell them what to do and they will surprise you with their ingenuity”! Coming from a man who was a Virginian by descent and autocratic by inclination this was surprising and sound advice.

In the wake of the US II Corps defeat at Kasserine Pass in February 1943, Eisenhower appointed Patton to rebuild the unit. Assuming command with the rank of lieutenant general. Patton diligently worked to restore discipline and fighting spirit to II Corps. Taking part in the offensive against the Germans in Tunisia, II Corps performed well. Immediately after the fall of Tunis and recognizing Patton's achievement, Eisenhower delegated him to aid in planning the invasion of Sicily; code named „Operation Husky“.

The Allies turned to the task of securing air dominance over Sicily which must be gained before a single ship could safely approach it or one soldier step ashore. First, the Allied aircraft ranged far and wide against strategic targets in Italy. Then they began an intense bombardment of the enemy airfields and radar stations within striking distance of Sicily arid the proposed routes of the convoys. Tedder interrupted

the first stage of his air plan to seize Pantellaria; the island fortress Mussolini had constructed to rival Malta.

Starting in May, 1943, the bombardment of this island gradually increased in intensity till 7th June. Thereafter for four days it rose to a crescendo: over 5 000 tons of bombs were dropped. On 10th June, the third anniversary of Italy's entry into the war, a force from 1st British Division approached the island covered by a precision attack by American flying Fortress B17 bombers. The garrison of 4 600 surrendered without a struggle. For the first time victory had been gained by air power alone.

At the end of June, Alexander's plans for the assault were complete. Montgomery's 8th Army, was to land on a 30-mile front with two corps, 13th Corps (Lieutenant General Dempsey) just south of Syracuse and 30th Corps (Lieutenant General Leese) astride the Pachino peninsula to capture the airfield there. Patton planned to land his Seventh Army on a 70-mile front in three simultaneous seaborne assaults; two on the east flank by Major General Bradley's 2nd Corps with 45th Division at Scoglitti and the 1st at Gela and 3rd Division (Major General Truscott), directly under his own command, at Licata. As a floating reserve he had 2nd Armoured Division and part of 9th Division. All were battle-hardened with the exception of 45th Division.

Initially Alexander prescribed the establishment of beachheads and the early seizure of Syracuse, the Pachino and Ponte Oliyo airfields and the port of Licata. Thereafter Montgomery was to seize the Augusta airfields. Patton planned to advance about 15 to 20 miles inland on the first day. Both armies were to link up on a common boundary, the Yellow Line. But what was to be done thereafter was, unfortunately, not clear. Patton suspected (with good reason) that the major role of exploitation would be given to Montgomery. He protested to Alexander but when over-ruled, like a good soldier for the moment raised no further objection. Both British and American landings were to be preceded by airborne assaults; the British 1st Airborne Division in gliders and the 82nd American Airborne Division parachuting.

Meanwhile, in early June, General Guzzoni, had assumed command of the Italian forces on the island with his Sixth Army headquarters at Enna. He found, even by Italian standards at this stage of the war, an appalling situation. There was a total Italian garrison of thirty thousand men and 1 500 guns but only four divisions out of 12 were relatively mobile. The rest were scattered in low grade coast defence units on the scale of 41 men to the mile. Many of them were of local origin and virtually untrained; the standard of their officers was exceptionally low. Most of their arms and equipment were obsolete and the coast defences, except near the ports, were either perfunctory or non-existent. One Corps headquarters presided over the destinies of these depressing troops at the east end of the island and another at the west. Only German assistance gave cause for any hope

In July 1943, „Operation Husky" saw Patton's Seventh US Army land on Sicily with Montgomery's 8th British Army. Tasked with covering Montgomery's left flank as the

Allies moved on Messina, Patton grew impatient as the advance bogged down. Taking the initiative, he sent troops north and captured Palermo, before turning east to Messina. While the Allied campaign was successfully concluded in August, Patton damaged his reputation when he slapped a private at a field hospital, and called him a coward, having no patience for „battle fatigue".

Though tempted to send Patton home in disgrace, Eisenhower, after consultations with Chief of Staff General George Marshall, retained the wayward commander after a reprimand and apology. Knowing that the Germans feared Patton, Eisenhower brought him to England and assigned him to lead the First US Army Group (FUSAG). A dummy command, FUSAG was part of „Operation Fortitude" which was intended to make the Germans think that the Allied landings in France would occur at Calais. Though unhappy with losing his combat command, Patton was effective in his new role.

It was in the Normandy battles of July to August 1944, and the lessons learned during the North African and Sicilian campaigns that Patton came into his own. The break-out from the Normandy bridgehead was exactly the task most suited to his talents. It has always been Montgomery's contention that the British and Canadian armies had tied down the German Panzer divisions in the eastern part of the Normandy bridgehead so that when the right moment came the Americans under Patton would have little difficulty in bursting out of the western part.

.

On 15th July, 1944, Field Marshal Rommel, commanding the forces containing the Allied bridgehead, had expressed that before long the enemy would succeed in breaking through the thinly held line and thrust deep into France. Ten days later the American break-out operation began. The initial advance was to be made by Bradley's First Army. Patton (his Third Army almost ready for action) was to follow up. By his rapid manoeuvres between 28/30 July, Patton succeeded in cutting through the gaps made by Bradley's attacks. He then advanced on Avranches, fanned out from there across the River Selune and reached Brittany.

Patton sent one Corps to motor straight for Brest and Lorient, while another made for Rennes. In doing so, he disobeyed all the rules of movement, discipline, and traffic control; by sending division after division over the vulnerable bottleneck of the Avranches bridge; he moved so fast that no fewer than seven divisions, one hundred thousand men and 15 000 vehicles, were despatched along this one road in three days.

His orders were: 'get going and keep going till you get to Brest". In this fashion the Third Army swept on to Orleans. Patton's divisions were sometimes covering 50 miles a day; a speed which astonished even those German generals who had developed and applied the doctrine of blitzkrieg. They had not foreseen that the Americans would think and act with such initiative and daring. They had reckoned without Patton.

Like all controversial figures Patton inspired many revealing comments from those who served with him. Eisenhower, the most balanced of all World War Two American commanders, regarded command of an Army as the ideal position for Patton because “for certain types of action he was the outstanding soldier our country has produced”. The Supreme Commander meant bold, cavalry-type moves with a powerful and flexible force, large enough to influence the outcome of battles, but not so large that grand strategic ideas were involved.

Fortunately, Patton himself agreed with this estimate. Eisenhower recognized that underneath all the 'Blood and Guts' bravado lay a real student of war, “an extremely able leader, who, despite his overriding ambition to be a successful commander, always received the loyalty and support of his subordinates and had a fine judgement of tactical situations”.

Above all, Patton seized opportunities and fully exploited them: his dash for Palermo and Messina in July to August 1943; speed at disengagement and redeployment during the Ardennes battles; his subsequent crossing of the Rhine at Oppenheim with one regiment of infantry on 22nd March 1945; and his tearing rush through the Palatinate, as the war drew to its close, simply confirmed an astonishing flair for rapid advance and improvisation. The only 'fly in the ointment' was that Patton regarded the operations of his own Third Army as the be-all-and-end-all of Allied strategic matters. This conviction of getting his troops so committed to a battle that they needed supplies which would have been far better employed elsewhere. It also led him to ensure that his own command was to be used only in pursuit of his aims; notwithstanding under strategic options.

It was because Eisenhower valued Patton's generalship highly that he was able to smooth over the Sicilian slapping incident. The blow itself had sprung from Patton's emotional state brought about by the strain of operations, the presence of many suffering, wounded soldiers. Patton rejected the psychiatric concept of 'battle fatigue'. And when a soldier, apparently unharmed, spoke of 'his nerves', the general flew into a rage. And when yet another answered in similar vein, Patton actually swung his hand at the soldier's head, knocking his helmet off.

Afterwards Patton wrote to Eisenhower: “I am at a loss to find words with which to express my chagrin and grief at having given you, a man to whom I owe everything and for whom I would gladly lay down my life, cause to be displeased with me”. Eisenhower knew that underneath the hard-boiled attitude lay Patton's greatest handicap as a commander, his soft heartedness. The Supreme Commander tried to restrain Patton from making explosive and controversial public statements which did more harm than good. But despite all the difficulties and criticisms caused by Patron's indiscretions and extravagances, Eisenhower was right to retain him in command. He told Patton: “You owe us some victories, payoff and the world will deem me a wise man”. The victories were not long in coming.

Montgomery is predictably cooler on the subject of Patton and in his book 'Normandy to the Baltic' makes no mention of the man or his doings. In his memoirs too, he offers no word of appreciation or praise. Bradley, on the other hand, is lavish with it. “Few generals could surpass Patton as a field commander. But he had one enemy he could not vanquish and that was his own quick tongue”. These two men made a good team. “No longer the martinet that had sometimes strutted in Sicily”: wrote Bradley of his friend in July 1944, “George had now become a judicious, reasonable and likeable commander”. And then again: “His vigour was always infectious, his wit barbed, his conversation a mixture of obscenity and good humour, at once stimulating and overbearing, George was a magnificent soldier”.

To Patton, war was a holy crusade. At one moment he would kneel humbly before God and at another finish off his orders with a pronouncement perilously close to utter disaster. If his troops were not victorious in the next day's attack, then no one need come back alive: Bradley was unable to accustom himself to the vulgarity with which Patton skinned offenders for relatively minor infractions of discipline. He could not agree that profanity was necessary for communicating with troops. Patton, he thought, was undoubtedly a good corps or army commander, but was unable to command himself. While some men prefer to lead by suggestion and example, Patton chose to drive his subordinates by bombast and threats. These mannerisms achieved spectacular results. But they were not calculated to win affection among his officers or men. That was true, but then the vast majority of military commanders have inspired fear rather than love. By this method Patton whipped the 2nd US Corps into shape after the debacle of Kasserine.

Patton's merits and short-comings are best illustrated by his conduct during the battle of the 'Bulge' in the winter of 1944. On 19th December, three days after the German offensive in the Ardennes started and just as its scope and gravity were beginning to be realized, the Allied Supreme' Commander, General Eisenhower, was conferring with three of his principal subordinates-Lieutenant Generals Bradley, Devers, and Patton. Eisenhower made it clear that since the Germans had left the protection of the Siegfried Line defences, they ran the risk of annihilation and there was every reason to be cheerful.

Patton responded with a typical comment: “Let the son uv a bitches go all the way to Paris!” Then they would “cut em off and chew em up”, When Eisenhower outlined his plan for stemming the German advance by plugging holes in the American line and then counter-attacking the German bulge from the south with 3rd Army, Patton astonished and delighted his colleagues by stating that he could start his counterattack on 22nd December, only three days later.

This claim, fulfilled in practice, underlined one of Patton's greatest attributes as a soldier; an ability to turn his forces round with remarkable speed and skill. That Patton, in the space of a few days, was able to break off one offensive in the Saar region; regroup his Army; switch half of it 90 degrees north for a mid-winter attack

towards new objectives, and actually get everything moving on time is a real tribute to his determination, flexibility and driving energy.

Patton's 3rd US Corps began to attack the southern flank of the German Ardennes penetration on 22nd December, making its main effort to relieve Bastogne, a key road centre besieged by the Germans and vitally necessary to them, for its defiant stand was proving to be “an abscess on our lines of communication”, as the German Corps commander had predicted. Patton, brimming over with customary confidence, had expected to reach Bastogne and even St. Vith, by Christmas. He was in for a bitter disappointment.

It manifested his extraordinary zeal for rushing ill-trained troops pell-mell into a battle where their baptism of fire would be discouragingly unpleasant. In spite of this, and after four days of slogging forward, during which sheer weight of numbers and armour overcame a skilful and obstinate German resistance, Bastogne was reached and relieved.

Yet one of the most extraordinary of Patton's achievements, his dashing field exploits apart, was the handling of his staff. Bradley recorded that he had not initially thought much of Patton's staff, either individually or as a team. The Ardennes battles changed all that. He saw that Patton had seasoned and coaxed his staff to be capable of the most brilliant efforts in turning 3rd Army inside out and pointing it in a different direction.

Moreover, Patton was even able to get excellent work out of mediocre material. Improvisation was, of course, his great talent, and in swinging his troops about and pushing them up the road to Bastogne, he improvised superlatively. Most of it was done on the telephone, adjusting and adapting from day to day as road capacities changed. However, if dependability for your own side is the yardstick, then right up until the end of the war Bradley was able to be sure that Third Army would move swiftly and effectively.

When Patton was given the task of cutting off the so-called National Redoubt in Southern Germany during April 1945 (which, so far as a last stand by Nazi diehards was concerned, turned out to be myth), he rapidly reached Austria, drove down the Danube towards Vienna and was before long on the Czech frontier; Patton's far-flung columns had driven 200 miles in three weeks.

Then he begged Bradley for permission to liberate the Czechs, and when the latter asked him why 3rd Army was so keen for the task, George grinned. "On to Czechoslovakia and fraternization!” He whooped, "how in hell can you stop an army with a battle cry like that”? Patton could have entered Prague three days before the Russians; he even planned to 'get lost' on 6th May and report the city's capture to Bradley from a phone booth in Wenzel Square. But categorical orders from Eisenhower halted 3rd Army on the Czech border.

Patton's own account of affairs is naturally enough full of good stuff. One of the combat principles he laid down sums up his tactical ideas in a single sentence: “Catch the enemy by the nose with fire and kick him in the pants with fire emplaced through movement”. It was just another way of describing the two basic elements of fighting - mobility, and applying agents of violence - but colourfully done and characteristic of the man.

His letters show him with broader interests (which ranged from horses and yachts to archaeology and ethnology), his humour and humanity, his religious convictions, his absolute dedication to a cause; these speak out clearly. Patton's unwavering confidence in himself, in the justness of the Allied cause and in God were emphasized by his prayer for fine weather on 23rd December 1944.

He told the 3rd Army Chaplain: “I want you to publish a prayer for good weather. I'm tired of these soldiers having to fight mud and floods as well as Germans. See if we can't get God to work on our side”. When the chaplain objected that it was not customary to pray for fair weather in order to kill fellow men, he was sharply reminded that he was the 3rd Army Chaplain and was not required to give his commander a lesson in theology. The prayer produced fine weather and enabled the first of many airdrops to bring much needed supplies to beleaguered Bastogne.

What did the enemy think of Patton? The German view of the decisive battle tor Normandy leaves us in no doubt about the conclusiveness of Patton's break-out. Major General Blumentritt, Chief of Staff to Field Marshall von Kluge, Commander-in-Chief, West, judged Patton to be the most aggressive of the Allied 'Panzer' Generals and spoke of his incredible initiative and lightning speed. It would be a view shared by all the former practitioners of blitzkrieg, who referred to his command not as the 3rd Army but as Armee gruppe Patton. Field Marshal von Rundstedt, canniest German general of the war, made Montgomery and Patton strange bed-fellows in his estimation of old adversaries.

Patton's pistols were so renowned that they even provided material for a book. He wore his pistols, sometimes one, sometimes a pair, endlessly, in North Africa, in Sicily, in France and in Germany. He used them in anger only once. This was at San Miguelito in 1916 during the Mexican War crisis, while serving with General John 'Black Jack' Pershing.

Second Lieutenant Patton was in charge of a foraging expedition when he decided to combine this duty with a hunt for a wanted bandit. It ended with a gun battle in the finest traditions of the Wild West. Three Mexicans, surprised by Patron's patrol, rode straight at the young officer and his companions, shooting as they rode. Patton returned their fire with his revolver. He hit one bandit who fell, then shot the horse of a second, killing the still shooting Mexican as he rose, and finally helped to run the third one to earth. Ironically, the gun he used was a Peacemaker.

It was Pershing who saw Patton off to war again in October 1942, saying “I am happy they are sending you to the front at once. I like Generals so bold they are dangerous”. When he subsequently wore a pistol together with the rest of his 'showmanship' outfit. it was, he confided to another general, because he wanted the men of the 3rd Army to know where I am and that I risk the same dangers that they do. A little fancy dress is added to help maintain the leadership and fighting spirit that I desire in the 3rd Army. He was perhaps the last general to consider his personal weapons an important factor.

With the termination of hostilities, the 3rd Army and its inseparable comrade-in-arms, the XIX Tactical Air Command, completed 281 days of constant battle during which they engaged in every type of combat except defensive. In each type of fighting successful solutions have been evolved.

It is noteworthy that while our operations in pursuit or exploitation have at times developed phenomenal speed, they have always been preceded by bitter and sometimes prolonged assaults. This is particularly true in the initial breakthrough at St. Lo in July, in Lorraine from 8th November to 19th December, and in Luxembourg and Germany from 22nd December to 5th March. The success of all our operations has been due to teamwork and mutual cooperation. To the untiring efforts of a devoted and experienced staff. To the ability of commanders from Corps and Tactical Air Commands to platoons and individual pilots. But above all to the fighting heart of the American soldier

With the end of the war, Patton, wearing his famous pistols, enjoyed a brief trip home to Los Angeles where he and Lieutenant General Jimmy Doolittle were honoured with a parade. But he left his pistols behind him on the day that Eisenhower relieved him of command of 3rd Army in September 1945.

Assigned to be the military governor of Bavaria, Patton was irritated not to receive a combat command in the Pacific. He was openly critical of Allied occupation policy, believing that the Soviets should be forced back to their borders. It was the saddest day of his military life when he said goodbye to the Headquarters of his beloved Army. “All good things must come to an end. The best thing that has ever come to me thus far is the honour and privilege of having commanded the 3rd Army”.

He wore one of the famous pistols once more at a parade south of Heidelberg, early in December. A few days later came the car collision which resulted in his death on 21st December, 1945. For eleven days, Patton fought to live against a broken neck, paralysis, and lung embolism, leading to heart failure.

Eisenhower recorded that the Army had lost 'a brilliant figure' whose daring execution of bold plans 'struck terror at the heart of the enemy'. President Truman spoke of the great loss to the nation and of the inspiration which Patton's career had been. General Douglas MacArthur, a kindred spirit if ever there was one, called him “a gallant romantic soldier of unquestioned greatness”. The 'New York Times,

expressing its wonder that Patton had not died in battle because of all the chances he had taken, referred to him as “spectacular, swaggering, pistol-packing, deeply religious and violently profane”. But it was plain that in this contradictory and outspoken figure lay both a unique tank leader and an earnest profound military thinker.

Was George Patton, as some people have it, the best field commander in United States history? He had neither the political and strategic vision of MacArthur, nor the genius for management and compromise of Eisenhower, nor even the tactical grip and brilliance of Bradley. Bur if we may judge a commander by his imagination in making plans; his flair in organizing and training his troops; his thoroughness in equipping and administering them; and his character in making them feel capable of doing anything, then his claims must remain high.

Luck, eloquence and character were all attributes of the good general that Patton displayed. He had a quick eye and a stout heart, although not always a cool head. And he was the last commander to consciously act the part of a warrior, the last Napoleonic general in a century of mass-warfare.

CHAPTER FIVE

MONTGOMERY

Abrasive, opinionated, at times infuriating to superiors, equals, and subordinates alike, 'Monty' was inimitable. The key to his character was supreme confidence and refusal to allow himself to be diverted by worrying over details. Added to all this was a genuine flair for 'getting through to the rank and file, to make them feel that they were being led by a no-nonsense general who knew what he was doing'. The sum total was the most colourful British general of World War Two, who delivered the goods by winning victories.

Bernard Law Montgomery was born on 17th November 1887, the son of a London vicar. In 1889 his family moved to Tasmania, where his father had been appointed Bishop. Returning in 1901, the young Montgomery spent five years at St. Paul's School before entering the Royal Military College, Sandhurst. He passed out in 1908, joining the Royal Warwickshire Regiment, and was commissioned into the 1st Battalion as a second lieutenant, and posted overseas later that year to India. He was promoted to lieutenant in 1910, and in 1912 became adjutant of the 1st Battalion.

.

When World War One broke out in August 1914, Montgomery's regiment moved to France. He saw action at the Battle of Le Cateau during the retreat from Mons and was shot through the right lung by a sniper. Montgomery was hit once more in the knee and was awarded the Distinguished Service Order (DSO) for gallantry. After recovering, he returned to the Western Front in early 1916 as a staff officer in the 33rd Division and took part in the Battle of Arras in April/May 1917. He became a general staff officer with IX Corps, part of General Sir Herbert Plumer's Second Army, in July 1917, finishing the war as chief of staff of the 47th (2nd London) Division. Montgomery was shocked by the murderous cost of the fighting**,** and by the detachment of the High Command from the fighting troops. These were lessons he never forgot.

Montgomery commanded the 17th Battalion, the Fusiliers, serving in the British 'Army of the Rhine' before reverting to his peacetime rank of captain in November 1919. He had not been selected initially for Staff College (his only hope of ever achieving high command), but was able to persuade the Commander-in-Chief of the British Army of Occupation, Sir William Robertson, to add his name to the list.

After graduating from Staff College, he was promoted to the rank of major in the 17th Infantry Brigade in January 1921. The brigade was stationed in County Cork carrying out counter-insurgency operations during the final stages of the Irish War of Independence. Montgomery came to the conclusion that the conflict could not be won by conventional means, and that self-government was the only feasible solution.

In 1923, after the establishment of the Irish Free State and during the Irish Civil War, Montgomery wrote to Colonel Arthur Percival (later of Singapore disaster) of the Essex Regiment: “Personally, my whole attention was given to defeating the rebels but it never bothered me a bit how many houses were burnt. I think I regarded all civilians as rebels and I never had any dealings with any of them. My own view is that to win a war of this sort, you must be ruthless. Oliver Cromwell, or the Germans, would have settled it in a very short time. Nowadays, public opinion precludes such methods, the nation would never allow it, and the politicians would lose their jobs if they sanctioned it. That being so, I consider that Lloyd George was right in what he did, if we had gone on we could probably have squashed the rebellion as a temporary measure, but it would have broken out again like an ulcer the moment we removed the troops”.

He returned to 1st Royal Warwickshire Regiment again, as Commander of Headquarters Company in January 1929 and went to the War Office to assist in the writing of the Infantry Training Manual. In 1931 Montgomery was promoted to lieutenant-colonel commanding the 1st Battalion and saw service in India and Palestine. On his promotion to colonel in June 1934, he became an instructor at the Indian Army Staff College. On completion of his tour of duty in India, Montgomery returned to Britain in June 1937. As brigadier general he became commanding officer of the 9th Infantry Brigade. In 1938, he organised an amphibious combined operations landing exercise that impressed the new commander-in-chief, Southern Command, General Wavell. He was promoted to major-general in October 1938, and took command of the 8th Infantry Division in Palestine. There he quashed an Arab revolt before returning in July 1939 to Britain, to command the 3rd Infantry Division.

In 1927, he had met and married Elizabeth Carver, née Hobart, widow of Oswald Carver, Olympic rowing medallist who was killed in World War One. Elizabeth Carver was the sister of the World War Two commander Percy Hobart (Hobart’s Funnies on D Day). Montgomery and his wife were a devoted couple, and their son, David, was born in August 1928. But the marriage ended in tragedy, with Elizabeth’s death in 1937 after a long illness. While on holiday, she had suffered an insect bite which became infected, and she died in his arms from septicaemia following an amputation. It was a tremendous blow and the loss devastated Montgomery, but he insisted on throwing himself back into his work immediately after the funeral. In his memoirs Montgomery writes "The three outstanding human beings in my life have been my father, my wife, and my son. When my father died in 1932, I little thought that five years later I would be left alone with my son”.

On 3rd September 1939, Britain declared war on Germany. Montgomery’s 3rd Division was deployed to Belgium as part of the British Expeditionary Force (BEF), commanded by Lord Gort. At this time, Montgomery faced serious trouble with his military superiors and the clergy. This was due to his frank attitude regarding the sexual health of his soldiers, but was defended by his superior Alan Brooke, commander of II Corps.

When the Germans began their invasion of the Low Countries and France on 10th May 1940, Montgomery's training methods really paid off. The 3rd Division, disastrously, as it transpired, advanced to the River Dyle, only to hastily withdraw to Dunkirk, after it was realised that this was not the main attack and they had walked into a trap. Montgomery showed great professionalism, entering the Dunkirk perimeter in a famous night march. He placed his forces on the left flank which had been left exposed by the Belgian surrender. The 3rd Division was evacuated to Britain almost intact and with minimal casualties.

Montgomery antagonised the War Office with trenchant criticisms of the BEF performance in France. He was, nevertheless, appointed lieutenant-general in July 1940, and placed in command of V Corps, responsible for the defence of Hampshire and Dorset. A long-running feud with the new commander-in-chief, Southern Command, Claude Auchinleck developed. Montgomery then assumed command of the II Corps. Later commanding V Corps and XII Corps during the „invasion scare" period.

During this time he instituted a programme of continuous training and insisted on high levels of physical fitness for both officers and other ranks. He was ruthless in sacking officers he considered would be unfit for field command. He further developed and rehearsed his ideas for training his troops, culminating in May 1942 with a combined forces exercise involving one hundred thousand men. In August 1942 Montgomery was informed that he would be commanding 1st Army during 'Torch', the scheduled landings in North Africa, but this plan dramatically changed.

Prime Minister, Winston Churchill, had already decided that a new field command structure was required in the Middle East, where Auchinleck was fulfilling both the role of commander-in-chief Middle East Command and commander of the 8th Army. He had stabilised the Allied position at the First Battle of El Alamein, but after a visit in August 1942, the Prime Minister replaced Auchinleck as commander-in-chief with General Alexander and General Gott as commander of the Eighth Army in the Western Desert. After Gott was shot down and killed flying back to Cairo Churchill was persuaded by Alan Brooke, who by this time was Chief of the Imperial General Staff (CIGS), to appoint Montgomery.

General Sir Harold Alexander was born in 1891 and entered the British Army by means of Sandhurst. He served with great distinction with the Irish Guards in World War One and after the war served in India. Alexander commanded the British rear-guard at Dunkirk very ably, and further enhanced his reputation as General Officer in Command (G.O.C.), Southern Command in 1940 and by his masterly retreat through Burma in 1942. He was then appointed Eisenhower's deputy for Operation Torch, but almost immediately took over from Auchinleck in the Western Desert, with Montgomery commanding in the field, and Alexander in overall command,

A story, probably apocryphal but popular at the time, is that the appointment caused Montgomery to remark that "After having an easy war, things have now got much more difficult". A colleague is supposed to have told him to cheer up, at which point Montgomery said "I'm not talking about me, I'm talking about Rommel".

In taking up his command he was fortunate to find that Auchinleck had fought Rommel to a stand-still in Egypt and new supplies of tanks and other essential equipment were already on the way. But there were snags. It was clear that Rommel was going to make one last attempt to turn the Alamein line and 8th Army's morale was not good. Montgomery's first battle would be not so much to hold Rommel but to stiffen 8th Army's backbone to defeat the new attack and pass to the offensive for good. He, therefore, issued orders that there would be no further retreat at any cost.

Montgomery's assumption of command transformed the fighting spirit and abilities of the 8th Army. Taking command on 13th August 1942, he immediately became a whirlwind of activity. Montgomery reinforced the 30 miles long front line at El Alamein, something that would take two months to accomplish. Montgomery was determined that the Army, Navy and Air Forces should fight their battles in a unified, focused manner according to a detailed plan. He ordered immediate reinforcement of the vital heights of Alam Halfa, expecting Rommel to attack the heights, something that Rommel soon did. Montgomery ordered all contingency plans for retreat to be destroyed. "I have cancelled the plan for withdrawal. If we are attacked, then there will be no retreat. If we cannot stay here alive, then we will stay here dead", he told his officers at the first meeting he held with them.

Montgomery made a great effort to appear before troops. He set in motion tours of the front and showing himself to the men, as often as possible, with the gimmick of a flamboyant selection of cap badges as his identifying mark. Although he still wore a standard British officer's cap on arrival in the desert, he briefly wore an Australian broad-brimmed hat before switching to wearing the black beret (with the badge of the Royal Tank Regiment next to the British General Officer's badge) for which he became notable. Another notable contribution to 8th Army's morale reconstruction was his cracking down on what he called "bellyaching", pessimistic quibbling by subordinate commanders. And the first, vital victory at Alam Halfa at the beginning of September 1942 was the well-earned result frequently visiting various units and making himself known to the men. Both Brooke and Alexander were astonished by the transformation in atmosphere when they visited on 19th August 1942, less than a week after Montgomery had taken command.

The difference between defeat at Gazala, the previous July, under Auchinleck and Ritchie, and the coming victory at El Alamein, lay in generalship; Montgomery's generalship. Montgomery's Battle of El Alamein was won by three critical pre-battle decisions taken long before the British artillery opened fire on 23rd October 1942, and by four equally important decisions taken during the battle itself. Hitler took the first of the pre-battle decisions in April 1942 when he reversed the agreed Axis

Mediterranean strategy for the summer campaign. Malta was to have been seized to protect Axis supply lines across the central Mediterranean before Rommel opened his Gazala offensive. Hitler disliked the proposed plan for a combined Italo-German parachute and amphibious assault on Malta, because he feared a costly repetition of the German invasion of Crete in 1941, so Rommel had little difficulty in persuading him that his Panzer Army's attack on the British at Gazala should be given priority. Malta could be taken later. Rommel won his field-marshal's baton for smashing the Gazala Line and taking Tobruk; Hitler lost Africa when he compounded his original strategic error by allowing Rommel to plunge onward into Egypt with Malta still unsubdued behind him. The battle of supply turned against the Axis, and by the third week of October, just four months after the fall of Tobruk, the Eighth Army had regained quantitative and qualitative superiority over Rommel's Panzer Army.

The second critical pre-battle decision stemmed from General Sir Alan Brooke's request to Churchill for permission to fly from London to Cairo to assess for himself what was wrong with the British forces in the Middle East. Churchill decided to accompany his Chief of the Imperial General Staff and then fly on to Moscow to explain to Stalin the reasons for not mounting a second front in 1943. Their tour of 'the vast but baffled and somewhat unhinged organisation' in Egypt convinced them that there must be a change of command. Their decisions were, however, frustrated, when Gott was killed by the chance action of two Luftwaffe fighter pilots who, in August 1942, shot down the transport aircraft carrying Gott back to Cairo.

Gott's death robbed the Eighth Army of its most experienced and respected desert hand who had fought in all the major battles in the Western Desert. And yet it was sadly fortunate that fate compelled the selection of Montgomery, the second choice, to command the Eighth Army at this critical moment in British affairs. Montgomery was the right man, in the right place, at the right time. He had the depth of military professionalism and the egocentric force of personality to master in a remarkably short time the strengths and weaknesses of his new command and of the many strong personalities who led the British and, more importantly, the Commonwealth contingents. He had the extrovert flare for contrived publicity which enabled him to impress his presence and policies on the Eighth Army. And he believed in the type of military policy needed by the British army at that time. All his generation of British commanders had been junior officers in World War One, which had etched deep prejudices on their minds. Men like Alexander, who had fought principally as regimental officers, were determined not to emulate methods which had led to debilitating loss of life in battles such as the Somme and Passchendaele.

Montgomery prepared meticulously for the new offensive after convincing Churchill that the time was not being wasted. He was determined not to fight until he thought there had been sufficient preparation for a decisive victory. He achieved this with the gathering of resources, detailed planning, the training of troops - especially in clearing minefields and fighting at night, plus, the use of the latest American Sherman tanks, and making a personal visit to every unit involved in the offensive. By the time the

offensive was ready in late October, Eighth Army had two hundred and thirty one thousand men.

The British and German positions at El Alamein had much in common with those on the Western Front of 1914-18. There was no way round; the defences had been developed in great depth; the garrisons were securely entrenched; mines laid in profusion replaced barbed wire entanglements; and the men on both sides were too battle-experienced to give up easily. Only a man who was psychologically prepared to fight a ruthless battle of attrition could hope to defeat the Panzer Army at El Alamein in defences which it had strengthened for four months. Montgomery was well cast for this role. But, first, Montgomery had to prove himself to the tired, cynical men of the Eighth Army. They had seen too many failures in the desert to do more than 'Give him a try', as the Australians expressed it. And the third critical pre-battle series of decisions were taken by Montgomery himself at a very late stage in the planning.

In his initial tours of the Eighth Army he emphasized ten points as he talked to officers and men. First, and most important, the Eighth Army was to get out of the habit of having one foot in the stirrup; all withdrawal plans were to be scrapped; forward defences would be strengthened with more troops brought up from the Nile Delta; transport held ready for further withdrawal would be moved to the rear; and all defensive positions would be stocked with ammunition, food and water for a protracted defence. Second, the days of employing small 'ad hoc' columns of all arms (Jock' columns) were over; divisions would be fought as divisions under proper control by corps H.Q"s with artillery, engineer and logistic policy centralized at the highest practical level. Third, there were to be no more failures due to taking unnecessary operational or logistical risks; the Eighth Army would stay „on balance' at all times; it would be deployed and handled in such a way that it need never react to Axis moves to its own disadvantage. Fourth, he was forming a Corps to rival Rommel's Africa Corps. It was to be composed of the 1st, 8th and l0th Armoured Divisions and the 2nd New Zealand Division. Fifth, if Rommel attacked through the weak southern half of the El Alamein towards the end of August, as British intelligence predicted, he would be confronted with the strongly held Alam Halfa Ridge on his northern flank which he could not ignore and upon which his panzer divisions would meet well dug-in British tanks and anti-tank guns. There was to be no 'loosing of the British armour' (allowing them to leave their dug-in positions) in cavalry style which had lost the British so many tank battles in the past.

The training required of the troops was to be reduced to simple battle drills and so thoroughly rehearsed with such realism that men would say during the battle itself, “It's just like an exercise”. Seventh, enthusiasm and a sense of involvement were to be inculcated by telling every officer and man, at the appropriate moment, what was afoot and what was expected of him. This was to be done by commanders at all levels briefing their subordinates much more fully than had been the custom hitherto.

In his instructions for the battle Montgomery said, “Morale is the big thing in war. We must raise the morale of our soldiery to the highest pitch; they must be made

enthusiastic, and must enter this battle with their tails high in the air and with the will to win". Eighth, his own army H.Q. was to move from its present location on the eastern end down to the coast where it would be alongside the Desert Air Force H.Q., and where its staff would be able to work with greater efficiency. Ninth, there was to be no more 'belly-aching': orders were orders and not a basis for discussion. He did not mention publicly, though all his listeners were aware, that he was removing the 'belly-aches' and all those commanders who did not measure up to his standards of professionalism. Few of the senior officers who fought at Gazala survived this purge.

Rommel attempted to turn the left flank of the 8th Army at the Battle of Alam Halfa from 31st August. The German/Italian armoured Corps infantry attack was stopped in very heavy fighting. Rommel's forces had to withdraw urgently lest their retreat through the British minefields be cut off. Montgomery was criticised for not counterattacking the retreating forces immediately, but he felt strongly that his methodical build-up of British forces was not yet ready. A hasty counter-attack risked ruining his strategy for an offensive on his own terms in late October, planning for which had begun soon after he took command. And tenth, and last, as was appropriate for a God-fearing man and son of a bishop, he did not neglect his Christian upbringing, ending his pre-battle order of the day: "Let us pray that the Lord Mighty in battle will give us the victory".

Montgomery was given the opportunity to demonstrate his abilities just a fortnight after taking over command. Rommel did attack, where and when predicted, and was stopped as Montgomery planned by British tanks and anti-tank guns defending the Alam Halfa Ridge. In Rommel's enforced retreat the R.A.F. and the Eighth Army artillery inflicted heavy losses upon the Axis forces. There was no counter-attack. The Eighth Army stood fast and went on with its preparations with renewed confidence in itself and a growing enthusiasm for Montgomery's leadership. Montgomery's first concept for El Alamein was based upon the orthodox belief, which had been held by successive British commanders in the Western Desert, that the Axis armoured forces must be destroyed first. He envisaged blasting two breaches in the Axis defences through which he would place it on ground of its own choosing. The Axis armoured divisions would be compelled to attack at a disadvantage, as at Alam Halfa, to prise the British tanks off their life-line. The two breaches would not be equal in size or importance. The main breach would be made in the north, using four infantry divisions.

The secondary breach would be a diversionary effort designed to pin down the Axis reserves in the south. No heavy casualties were to be incurred but to make sure that the operations were realistic enough to hold the enemy's attention. As detailed preparations and training went ahead doubts began to arise in the minds of several of the senior commanders. They thought that his plan was too ambitious. The British armoured commanders doubted whether the infantry divisions would be able to reach their objective in one night, and whether the artillery would be able to neutralise the German anti-tank guns when their tanks tried to fight their way through. All their experience of past desert operations had taught them not to rush anti-tank guns and

minefields in broad daylight with inadequate infantry and artillery support. The Commonwealth infantry commanders, with equally bitter memories of the failure of British tanks to give them adequate support, doubted whether the British armoured divisions, would try to break out at all.

After pondering these views, Montgomery took a further critical pre-battle decision. He reversed the orthodox concept: “My modified plan now was to hold off, or contain, the enemy armour, while we carried out a methodical destruction of the infantry divisions holding the defensive system”. This was a radical change of policy, but fortunately necessitated only a change in emphasis rather than a major change of plan. The X Corps' armoured divisions would be given a more modest objective, they were to fend off Axis counter-attacks while the British infantry dealt with their Axis opponents. Montgomery put his new plan to his army using colourfully expressive phrases which have since entered the British army's military vocabulary. There would be a quick 'break-in' by the infantry and an equally „quick passage of the armour". Then there would be a prolonged 'dogfight' lasting ten to twelve days during which the British infantry and their supporting tanks would 'crumble' away the Axis static defences, using carefully prepared but limited attacks supported by heavy artillery and air bombardments. And finally, when Axis endurance had been brought to the point of collapse, the 'break-out' phase would come with the British armoured divisions delivering the decisive blow.

On the Axis side, the adverse effects of Hitler's mistaken change of strategy were becoming increasingly apparent. Rommel found himself so short of fuel and spare parts for his tanks and vehicles that he was forced to adopt a defensive posture alien to his instincts. Instead of keeping his German and Italian tank formations concentrated for decisive counter-attacks of the type that had so often won him the advantage in the past, he deployed them in six mixed German and Italian armoured groups evenly spaced and close behind his static defences so that they could intervene quickly to seal off any British penetration before it became a major breach. This would save fuel, and it would reduce the distances his tanks would have to move in daylight and hence lessen their vulnerability to an R.A.F. attack. In the northern sector, the Panzer Divisions provided three mixed Italo-German groups, and in the south the Panzers also combined to provide three more. The German and Italian infantry divisions, which were not mechanized, were deployed within the main defensive line to stop the British singling out Italian sectors for attack. Rommel’s static defences consisted of two deep belts of about half a million anti-tank and anti-personnel mines, running from north to south across the front some one to two miles apart with irregularly spaced and angled lateral belts between them producing a honeycomb effect called 'Devil's Gardens'. But, strong though his positions became, Rommel had no illusions about the battle which he knew was coming. In all great set piece battles the attacker tries to deceive the defender about the exact point and time of the assault. Montgomery's deception plan was worked out and executed with meticulous attention to detail. Its aim was to suggest that the southern sector was under greatest threat; and that the full moon period at the end of November was the most likely date for the next British offensive. Vehicle densities in the desert were

adjusted constantly by prolific use of dummy vehicles and tanks to maintain this illusion; bogus radio traffic was propagated to reinforce visual evidence; and the rate of construction of a dummy water pipe-line into the southern sector was timed for completion in mid-November. Some of these measures had their desired effect. Rommel was allowed to return to Germany for medical treatment and much needed sick leave, and was replaced by Panzer General Stumme from the Russian front. Stumme and his staff were deceived into thinking that the British offensive would strike the southern sector.

The decisive Battle of El Alamein commenced at 21 40 hours on 23rd October 1942, with a fifteen-minute air and artillery bombardment of all identified Axis gun positions. The assault infantry crawled out of their slit trenches where they had lain cramped but hidden all day and assembled on their start-lines. For five minutes there was silence; then the guns reopened at 22 00 hours. The night was fine and the moon clear, but the dust thrown up by bursting shells and by the movement of tanks, armoured carriers and other vehicles created a haze which made direction keeping difficult.

The four assault divisions made rapid initial progress through the first minefield belt. Delays thereafter accumulated as the infantry fought their way forward through the 'Devil's Gardens'. By dawn most of the assaulting brigades were on schedule. The pace of clearing lanes for the armoured divisions proved slower than expected. The improvised 'Scorpion' Flail tanks were mechanically unreliable, and the electronic mine detectors failed in a number of lanes, reducing the Sappers to the slow and hazardous business of prodding for mines by hand. When daylight came the 1st Armoured Division was only half-way through the Northern Corridor, with its tank regiments still entangled in the partially cleared gaps in the first minefield, the l0th Armoured Division's sappers in the Southern Corridor had been more successful and had four routes cleared. However, when its tanks tried to nose their way over the ridge they found another minefield and were forced by Axis anti-tank guns to pull back, thus creating congestion.

Reviewing the situation as the first reports came in, Montgomery decided to continue the planned phase for another twenty-four hours before starting the crumbling process of the dog fight. The daylight hours of 24th October belonged to the R.A.F. who flew over 1 000 sorties.

On the Axis side, the command structure was temporarily upset by the disappearance of Stumme, who went forward to see for himself what was happening. His body was not found until the following day. General von Thoma, commander of the Afrika Korps, took over, and that evening reported to Berlin that he had contained the British penetration with an anti-tank screen. Thoma's confidence confirmed what Montgomery had refused to admit in pre-battle planning: that the Axis defences were too deep to be breached in a single night's work. When darkness fell it had only advanced well short of objectives with considerable loss of Sherman tanks and could go no further. In the Southern Corridor, sappers went forward at dusk to gap the minefield. They found more mines and took far longer to clear passable gaps than

they had hoped. In consequence, the leading armoured units were held up in their assembly areas, presenting attractive targets to enemy aircraft. At about 22 00 hours one Luftwaffe aircraft unloaded its bombs, possibly by chance, on these crowded vehicles, setting some on fire. The conflagration attracted every enemy gun within range and dislocated the efforts to gain a passage of the minefields.

Major-General de Guingand, Montgomery's chief of staff, realised the gravity of the situation and decided to awake Montgomery who listened to what his corps commanders had to say. Both believed that the battle had gone so wrong that it should be broken off before heavier losses were sustained. Their pleas fell on determinedly deaf ears. Montgomery reaffirmed his earlier orders that the armour was to break out. If his armoured commanders were not prepared to obey, he would find others who would.

This was the psychological turning point in the British army's affairs and the first critical battle decision. Previous Eighth Army commanders would have flinched from giving such an order for fear of repeating the unreasoning obstinacy that World War One commanders had shown. Montgomery did not hesitate. He believed, like Churchill, that war was a battle of wills not only between opposing commanders but also between a commander and his subordinates. The leading elements did manage to fight their way through the minefields, but, as had been feared, were driven back by unsubdued anti-tank guns. This adverse tactical outcome of the night's work was irrelevant to the main issue: Montgomery had shown who was master. His corps and divisional generals knew where they stood. Alamein would be fought to the limits of endurance by the British as well as the Germans. The initial phase had not gone according to plan. The dogfight would have to start with the armoured divisions amongst instead of in front of the infantry.

Montgomery intended to start the crumbling process with an attack south-westwards whilst probing forward from the Northern Corridor to engage enemy tanks. During the morning a sense of frustration and stalemate settled over the congested area. Tank crews, dog-tired, were sitting hull-down engaging enemy targets at long range; equally tired, infantry huddled lower in their slit trenches cursing the tanks for drawing retaliatory fire; and behind the ridge a confused jumble of artillery and logistic transport clogged the narrow tracks through the uncleared minefields. Montgomery conferred again with his principal commanders and accepted that it would be operationally costly and organizationally difficult to renew the battle in the Southern Corridor. Fortunately, affairs in the Northern Corridor were less depressing. Montgomery accepted the logic of the situation and took his second critical battle decision, deciding to concentrate on the Northern Corridor.

His commanders had anticipated these instructions and so were able to agree to launch attacks that night. Fortune favoured the willing. During the evening, patrols captured the German regimental commander and one of the battalion commanders responsible for defence. They were carrying a marked map showing the Axis

minefield layout, enabling Montgomery to take the justifiable risk of rushing some infantry mounted in armoured carriers.

The third day of the battle, 26th October, saw Montgomery's planned crumbling operations. It was also a day for second thoughts by both army commanders. Rommel had returned to Panzer Army H.Q. during the evening of 25th October, having been hastily summoned back from his convalescence by Hitler. Thoma reported that the Axis situation was deteriorating under the heavy artillery and air bombardments and the long-range shooting by British tanks, which were better armed than they had been in past desert engagements. The German-Italo divisions, whose sectors had been breached, had suffered severely. Rommel's first reaction was to order the recapture of a vital a position, from which he realised was threatening defences of the main coast road. He also gave orders that German tanks were to be husbanded and anti-tank guns, particularly 88s, were to be used to contain the British offensive while he concentrated the reserves for a major counteroffensive.

Montgomery, for his part, was taking another critical battle decision with similar ideas in mind. Throughout the desert fighting British commanders had been poor at recreating reserves as they were expended. Eighth Army's principal striking forces, had been committed, therefore, it was time to assemble new striking forces, with which to launch the break-out. He decided that he must risk some relaxation of pressure in the dogfight to regroup the Eighth Army. They would maintain some pressure by mounting a further crumbling attack northwards to clear the coast road, and continue their operations from the Northern Corridor. The rest of the Eighth Army would adjust its sectors to release Armoured Divisions to form the new striking force.

Rommel's hastily mounted attempts were broken up by artillery fire and R.A.F. bombing, but he was quicker than Montgomery in creating a striking force of his own. His Panzers were summoned northwards. With these troops Rommel planned to strike the British positions attacking from both north-west and south-west. Field Marshal Albert Kesselring, German Commander-in-Chief, South, agreed to concentrate every available Axis aircraft to support this counter-offensive, which would be launched with all the old violence of a *Blitzkrieg* attack, to enable Rommel to snatch victory out of defeat. The first attack was broken up by the British gunners. Towards evening, when the sun was low and in the eyes of the British tank and antitank gun crews, the Panzers attacked in the wake of a series of heavy dive-bomber raids. However, the defenders stood their ground. Their guns did great execution, as did the tanks and guns of other British units on either flank. The Panzer's recoiled defeated, a far cry from the disastrous First Battle of Sidi Rezegh, when the Africa Korps overran the 5th South African Brigade, or the Second Battle of Sidi Rezegh in 1941, when the New Zealanders suffered a similar fate.

But it was one thing to repulse the Africa Korps in attack, quite another to beat it in defence. Rommel was quick to read the omens and interpret them correctly. He knew he could not win, but he was equally determined not to lose. He could still enforce a

stalemate as long as his fuel and ammunition lasted. As a prudent precaution he ordered a reconnaissance of a potential delaying position at Fuka, fifty miles to the west, to which he could retire if forced to do so. Since such a retirement would mean abandoning his non-mechanized infantry, this had to be a last resort. In the meantime he decided: “We were, therefore, going to make one more attempt, by the tenacity and stubbornness of our defence, to persuade the enemy to call off his attack. It was a slim hope, but the petrol situation alone made a retreat, which would inevitably lead to mobile warfare, out of the question”.

Rommel might perhaps have imposed a stalemate on other British commanders, who soon found how difficult it was to unseat the Germans when they launched their second crumbling attack northwards on the night 28-29 October. They had some initial success but were stopped well short of the coast road. There seemed little to show for the enormous expenditure of ammunition and tanks, though fortunately not of lives. Anxiety began to show in London and Cairo as the inherent possibility of stalemate grew into an ominous reality. Churchill became restive as he noted Montgomery's withdrawal of divisions from the line, and began to minute the Chief of the Imperial General Staff, saying querulously: “Why had he [Montgomery] told us he would be through in seven days if all he intended to do was to fight a half-hearted battle? Had we not a single general who could win a single battle”?

That evening Montgomery took his final critical decision of the battle. His intelligence staff confirmed that the coastal sector had been heavily reinforced. On de Guingand's advice, Montgomery decided to abandon the coastal thrust and ordered the attack to be moved southwards. Although he believed in maintaining a steady balanced course, he showed that he was prepared to make sensible changes provided there were strong enough reasons and adequate time to do so without causing confusion in the vast complex mechanism of the army he was commanding.

Preparations could not be completed before 31st October because of the extraordinary congestion behind the northern sector of the front, and so Supercharge was postponed twenty-four hours. In order to keep up the pressure on the enemy and to draw more of their strength into the coastal sector, it was agreed to make a third northerly crumbling attack to cut the coast road and to exploit to the coast if possible. This last attack went in on the night 30-3I October. It reached and cut the coast road and railway, but efforts to exploit to the coast were stopped by German reinforcements. Rommel assumed that this was the start of Montgomery's break-out, and counter-attacked strongly, giving the toughest twenty-four hours since they had resisted his attacks in the first siege of Tobruk in the summer of 1941.

A preparatory air raid by 100 bombers disrupted the Africa Korps' communications. By midnight the two British infantry brigades, leading the attack, reached their objectives. But there were delays and they were caught by daylight short of objectives. They found strongly held German anti-tank gunnery positions. They had run into the main Africa Korps concentration and not, as British intelligence had hoped, into weaker Italian units. The advance was delayed by continued traffic

congestion in the rear. Warnings were already being received from H.Q. that the Africa Korps was assembling to make one last bid to force a stalemate.

During the night Rommel had misjudged the direction of the advance and had ordered Thoma to counter-attack, believing Montgomery was intent on breaking through in that sector. At dawn he realized his mistake in time to stop Thoma's attack. He redirected him to deal with the breach on the coast road. But although armoured cars had penetrated the German front, there was no real breach in the anti-tank screen and containing line.

However, the thrust during 2nd November was increasingly successful, capturing the first objectives and taking substantial numbers of Italian prisoners. The stubbornness of the enemy defence, however, was deceptive. At nightfall Thoma reported to Rommel that, though he had checked the British attack, he could not do so much longer. He was down to 35 operational tanks; he was grossly outnumbered; and outgunned by the new American Sherman tanks; and his units had lost two thirds of their established strength. Withdrawal to Fuka was imperative, if they were to save the nucleus of their mobile troops on which to rebuild the Panzer Army. Rommel agreed and lost no time in ordering the preliminary moves to make a methodical withdrawal possible. He had just heard of the loss of two more merchant ship tankers: one sunk by the R.A.F. at sea and the other by American bombers in Tobruk harbour. He reported his intentions to Berlin.

Operations started slowly on 3rd November. At Thoma's suggestion Rommel decided to take advantage of the lull to thin out his front by sending as many of his non-mobile units back to Fuka as his available transport would allow. His mobile units were ordered to concentrate in the northern sector from which they could cover the withdrawal along the coast road. British hopes rose as reports of a slackening of opposition were received, but towards evening resistance stiffened again and the chances of an enemy collapse faded. A drama was being enacted on the German side.

During the afternoon, just as Rommel and Thoma were beginning to hope that they might yet extract the Panzer Army successfully, a signal arrived from Hitler ordering Rommel to hold on as help was being rushed to him. It ended with the words: “Despite his superiority, the enemy must also have exhausted his strength. It would not be the first time in history that the stronger will has triumphed over the enemy's stronger battalions. You can show your troops no other road to victory or death”. Adolf Hitler.

Rommel hesitated, but tried to obey. He cancelled all rearward moves and ordered the re-establishment of a front some six miles west. But even his great powers of improvisation could not reverse the momentum of the withdrawal process. The Italians were beyond caring; and his Afrika Korps were nearing the end of their endurance. Montgomery sensed that the crisis had come and issued orders to increase pressure west and south-westwards next day.

The 4th November, 1942 saw the end of the Battle of El Alamein. About midday the over-strained German defence snapped. Cohesion was lost and the containing line fell apart. Thoma was captured fighting with his battle escort to check the X Corps advance. At 17 30 hours, Rommel realized the end had come and ordered a general withdrawal to Fuka to save the mobile elements of the Panzer Army. He was forced by circumstances to abandon most of his Italian infantry.

The immediate British pursuit was not a success. During 5-6 November indifferent British staff work caused by psychological exhaustion, shortage of fuel (due to difficulties in switching supply from large quantities of ammunition to equally large quantities of fuel), and the resolute action of the German rear-guards, all conspired to delay the British advance. The official British historians comment, “The magic of Rommel's name undoubtedly conjured up extra wariness”. Any chance Montgomery might have had of trapping Rommel disappeared during the evening of 6th November when heavy rain stopped all cross-desert movement. By then, Rommel had regained control of the remnants of his Panzer Army and had started the long 1 500 mile withdrawal to Tunisia. He stood twice: at Mersa Brega on the Tripolitanian frontier in December; and at Buerat, covering Tripoli, in January 1943. On neither occasion did Montgomery trap a significant part of Rommel's force. He refused to be diverted from his avowed intention of staying 'on balance' at all times, avoiding any risk of failure and ensuring that his formidable opponent could never again turn the tables on the Eighth Army.

There are four reasons for numbering Montgomery's Battle of El Alamein amongst the decisive battles of the twentieth century. First, it was a major victory in material terms. Rommel lost half his Panzer Army and nearly all his tanks. He left thirty thousand prisoners in British hands and suffered about twenty thousand battle casualties. He abandoned over 1 000 guns of all types, and saved only 20 of his 500 tanks. Second, in strategic terms, El Alamein secured the British position in the Middle East for the rest of the war. There was no German riposte. Third, in psychological terms, the British mastered their fear of attritional battles which had been inherited from their bitter experiences in World War One. El Alamein gave them back their military confidence. And fourth, the British at last found a command team in Alexander and Montgomery which could inspire and lead them to success. Churchill summed up the decisive nature of Montgomery's victory with the words: “It marked in fact the turning of the Hinge of Fate". It may almost be said, "Before Alamein we never had a victory. After Alamein we never had a defeat”.

By May, 1943, the Axis forces in Africa had been destroyed, and Alexander started planning the invasion of Sicily (Operation Husky). Montgomery considered the initial plans for the Allied invasion, which had been agreed in principle by Eisenhower and Alexander, to be unworkable because of the dispersion of effort. He managed to have the plans recast to concentrate the Allied forces, having Patton's Seventh US Army land in the Gulf of Gela (on the left flank of Eighth Army, which landed around Syracuse in the south-east of Sicily) rather than near Palermo in the west and north

of Sicily. Inter-Allied tensions grew as the American commanders Patton and Bradley (then commanding II US Corps under Patton), took umbrage at what they saw as Montgomery's attitudes and boastfulness.

Montgomery continued to command the Eighth Army during the landings on the mainland of Italy itself. In conjunction with the Anglo-American landings at Salerno (near Naples) by Mark Clark's Fifth Army and seaborne landings by British paratroops in the heel of Italy (including the key port of Taranto, where they disembarked without resistance directly into the port), Montgomery led the Eighth Army up the toe of Italy. Montgomery abhorred the lack of coordination, the dispersion of effort, and the strategic muddle and opportunism he saw in the Allied effort in Italy and was glad to leave the "dog's breakfast" on 23rd December 1943.

Montgomery returned to Britain in January 1944. He was assigned to command the 21st Army Group which consisted of all Allied ground forces that would take part in Operation Overlord, the invasion of Normandy under overall direction of the Supreme Commander, Allied Expeditionary Forces, General Eisenhower. He presented his strategy for the invasion. He envisaged a 90 day battle, ending when all the forces reached the Seine, pivoting on an Allied-held Caen.

Montgomery's initial plan was to break out immediately towards Caen, but was unable to do so. As the campaign progressed Montgomery altered his initial plan for the invasion and switched to a strategy of attracting and holding German counterattacks in the area north of Caen, which was designed to allow the United States Army in the west to take Cherbourg. Hampered by stormy weather and the bocage terrain, Montgomery had to ensure that his old foe Rommel focused on the British in the east rather than the Americans in the west, who had to take the Cotentin Peninsula and Brittany before the Germans could be trapped by a general swing east. By the middle of July Caen had been taken. The Germans continued to prioritise prevention of the break-out by British forces rather than the western territories being taken by the Americans. This was broadly as Montgomery had planned, albeit not with the same speed as he had outlined. An American break-out was achieved with Operation Cobra and the almost complete encirclement of German forces in the Falaise pocket

On 21st August 1944, Montgomery issued a declaration to the 21st Army Group: “The victory has been definite, complete and decisive. The Lord Mighty in battle has given us the victory”. Many, however, did not agree that the victory had been 'definite, complete and decisive'. German General Eberbach estimated that perhaps some twenty thousand men, 25 tanks and 50 self-propelled guns had escaped the encirclement. „The losses of tanks from lack of gasoline were greater than those due to all kinds of enemy armaments put together“, he wrote later.

Air Chief Marshal Tedder said after the war: “One of Monty's great errors was at Falaise, there he imperiously told US troops to stop and leave the British area alone.

He didn't close the gap". Predictably, Air Chief Marshal Coningham, who loathed Montgomery, was even harsher: "Monty is supposed to have done a great job at Falaise. But he really helped the Germans get away. He still wanted to do the job by himself, and kept the Americans from coming up. We closed on Falaise too late". Coningham attributed his actions to jealousy of Patton, perhaps because he was afraid of the Americans taking all the credit"

These strictures certainly indicate the frustration which boiled among both British and American officers at the missed opportunity to destroy the German armies in Normandy entirely. They are unfair in some respects. It was Bradley's decision to allow Patton to split Haislip's corps at Argentan, not Montgomery's. But there can be little doubt that Montgomery's failure to reinforce the Canadians at the crucial moment constituted a major factor in allowing so many German troops, especially those of the SS panzer divisions, to escape. The only chance of catching the German battered remnants during the last ten days of August now lay on the River Seine.

It was tragic that Montgomery should have thus diverted attention away from his own undoubted qualities and from the sacrifice of his troops, who had held down the vast bulk of the German panzer formations and faced the greatest concentration of 88 mm anti-tank guns.

Montgomery's unplanned battle of attrition, as unplanned as the Americans' bloody slog through the *bocage,* had of course been handicapped by the delays caused by the appalling weather in mid-June, Yet British and American alike had gravely underestimated the tenacity and discipline of Wehrmacht troops. This was partly because they had failed to appreciate the effectiveness of Nazi propaganda in persuading its soldiers that defeat in Normandy meant the annihilation of their Fatherland. These soldiers, especially the SS, were bound to believe that they had everything to lose. Their armies had already provided so many reasons for Allied anger.

General Eisenhower took over Ground Forces Command on 1st September, while continuing as Supreme Commander, with Montgomery continuing to command the 21st Army Group, now consisting mainly of British and Canadian units. Montgomery bitterly resented this change, although it had been agreed before the D-Day invasion.

Montgomery was promoted to field marshal by way of compensation. He was able to persuade Eisenhower to adopt his strategy of a single thrust to the Ruhr and take Arnhem (Operation Market Garden) in September 1944. It was uncharacteristic of Montgomery's battles: the offensive was strategically bold but poorly planned. Montgomery either did not receive or ignored ULTRA intelligence which warned of the presence of German armoured units near the site of the attack, resulting in catastrophic paratrooper losses.

When the surprise attack on the Ardennes took place on 16th December 1944, starting the Battle of the Bulge, the front of the U.S. 12th Army Group was split, with

the bulk of the U.S. First Army being on the northern shoulder of the German 'bulge'. The Army Group commander, General Omar Bradley, was located south of the penetration at Luxembourg and command of the U.S. First Army became problematic. Montgomery was the nearest commander on the ground and on 20th December, Eisenhower (who was in Versailles) transferred Hodges' U.S. First Army and Simpson's U.S. Ninth Army to his 21st Army Group, despite Bradley's vehement objections on national grounds. Montgomery grasped the situation quickly, visiting all divisional, corps, and army field commanders himself and instituting his 'Phantom' network of liaison officers. He grouped the British XXX Corps as a strategic reserve behind the Meuse and reorganised the US defence of the northern shoulder, shortening and strengthening the line and ordering the evacuation of St Vith.

The German commander of the 5th Panzer Army, von Manteuffel said: “The operations of the American 1st Army had developed into a series of individual holding actions. Montgomery's contribution to restoring the situation was that he turned a series of isolated actions into a coherent battle fought according to a clear and definite plan. It was his refusal to engage in premature and piecemeal counterattacks which enabled the Americans to gather their reserves and frustrate the German attempts to extend their breakthrough”.

Montgomery's 21st Army Group advanced to the Rhine with operations Veritable and Grenade in February 1945. A meticulously planned Rhine crossing occurred on 24th March. While successful it was two weeks after the Americans had unexpectedly captured the Ludendorff Bridge at Remagen and crossed the river on 7th March with less than a battalion. Montgomery's river crossing was followed by the encirclement of the German Army Group B in the Ruhr. Initially Montgomery's role was to guard the flank of the American advance. This was altered, however, to forestall any chance of a Red Army advance into Denmark, and the 21st Army Group occupied Hamburg and Rostock and sealed off the Danish peninsula. On 4th May 1945, on Lüneburg Heath, Montgomery accepted the Surrender of German forces in northwest Germany, Denmark and the Netherlands.

The post-war squabble between Allied generals, claiming credit and apportioning blame in their reports and memoirs, was correspondingly ferocious. That keen observer of human frailty Field Marshal Sir Alan Brooke was presumably not surprised. He had once written about a row in June between senior naval officers: “It is astonishing how petty and small men can be in connection with questions of command”.

Montgomery placed himself at the centre of the post-war storm mainly because of his preposterous assertions that everything had gone according to his master plan. He felt that he should be seen on par with Marlborough and Wellington and implicitly denigrated his American colleagues. Almost single-handedly, he had managed in Normandy to make most senior American commanders anti-British at the very moment when Britain's power was waning dramatically. His behaviour thus constituted a diplomatic disaster of the first order. Whatever the merits of his

arguments at the end of August 1944 about the planned thrust into Germany, Montgomery mishandled the situation badly. He had also provoked the higher ranks of the Royal Air Force, who were even more enraged than the Americans.

After the war Montgomery became the C-in-C of the British Army of the Rhine (BAOR), the name given to the British Occupation Forces, and was the British member of the Allied Control Council. He was created 1st Viscount Montgomery of Alamein in 1946, and was Chief of the Imperial General Staff (CIGS) from 1946–48, succeeding Alanbrooke. But, was largely a failure as the role required strategic and political skills that he did not possess. He was barely on speaking terms with his fellow chiefs, sending his VCIGS to attend their meetings. And he clashed particularly with Arthur Tedder, who as Deputy Supreme Commander had intrigued for Montgomery's dismissal during the Battle of Normandy, and who was by now Chief of the Air Staff.

Montgomery became Eisenhower's deputy in creating the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) in 1951. He continued to serve under Eisenhower's successors, Matthew Ridgway and Al Gruenther, until his retirement, aged nearly 71, in 1958.

Montgomery's memoirs (1958) criticised many of his wartime comrades in harsh terms, including Eisenhower, whom he accused, among other things, of prolonging the war by a year through poor leadership, allegations which ended their friendship, not least as Eisenhower was still US President at the time. The usually tolerant Eisenhower refused to forgive Montgomery for the claims he made after the war. Eisenhower exploded in an interview in 1963. ”First of all he's a psychopath, don't forget that. He is such an egocentric that the man, everything he has done is perfect, has never made a mistake in his life”.

He was threatened with legal action by Field-Marshal Auchinleck for suggesting that Auchinleck had intended to retreat from the Alamein position if attacked again, and had to give a radio broadcast (20th November 1958) expressing his gratitude to Auchinleck for having stabilised the front at the First Battle of Alamein.

In retirement he publicly supported apartheid after a visit to South Africa in 1962, outraging much British liberal opinion, and after a visit to China declared himself impressed by the Chinese leadership.

Montgomery died from unspecified causes in 1976 at his home at Isington, in Hampshire, aged 88. After his funeral at St George's Chapel, Windsor, Montgomery was interred in Holy Cross churchyard, Binsted.

CHAPTER SIX

MOUNTBATTEN

Earl Mountbatten of Burma played a dubious role in many of the great events of the twentieth century. As last Viceroy of India, Supreme Commander South East Asia and as a member of the Royal Family Lord Mountbatten was quite unique. He was born into the Victorian world and his first photograph was on the knee of Queen Victoria who was his godmother and his great-grandmother. This world was soon to be shattered by the Great War in which he served as a midshipman. Then followed the Russian Revolution and the deaths of his close relations, the Russian Imperial Family with whom he had spent many happy holidays. Better times followed when he accompanied his cousin and great friend, the Prince of Wales (later King Edward VIII), on two world tours visiting New Zealand, Australia, the West Indies, Japan and India. It was during World War Two that he became known to a much wider public, first as Captain of the renowned HMS Kelly, then as Chief of Combined Operations and later as Supreme Commander South East Asia. Having presided over the surrender of the Japanese at Singapore he and Lady Mountbatten returned home to a media welcome as war heroes. Then as last Viceroy of India and its first Governor-general in the momentous events surrounding the birth of independent India and Pakistan, resulting in the dissolution of the British Empire. In 1955 Lord Mountbatten achieved his great ambition and became First Sea Lord. This was the first time a father and son had both held the highest appointment in the Royal Navy and both were appointed by Winston Churchill. Mountbatten met his death at the hands of the IRA in 1979.

On 23rd August 1939, only days before World War Two broke out, Mountbatten was appointed Captain (D) commanding the 5th Destroyer Flotilla. These were all brand-new ships of the 'J' and 'K' Class and Mountbatten's own ship, the flotilla leader, HMS Kelly, was named after Admiral Sir John Kelly and launched by his daughter. During the Norwegian Campaign in April 1940, the Kelly was ordered to intercept and destroy some German minelayers, and while speeding to her destination was hit by a torpedo. Luckily, a destroyer from another flotilla, arrived and took the Kelly in tow.

While the Kelly was being repaired, Mountbatten continued to command the flotilla from other destroyers, which went on to carry out bombardments at Cherbourg and later Benghazi, and fought in day and night actions against enemy destroyers. In a night action of November 1940 the ship he was in, HMS Javelin, had her bow and stern blown off by a salvo of torpedoes but again got way under tow, this time to Devonport. In November 1940 the Kelly was recommissioned and as many of her old company as were available rejoined her. In 1941 Kelly was sent to the Mediterranean, and in May, after the successful bombardment of Maleme airfield in Crete, the Kelly was herself attacked by twenty-four Junkers 87 dive-bombers (Stukas), and took several direct hits, causing Mountbatten to be thrown overboard. More than half the Kelly's officers and men were lost. The oil-smeared and burnt survivors, with only one raft to cling to, were machine-gunned whilst in the water, before being rescued.

At the end of 1941, Captain Lord Louis Mountbatten was promoted from a Royal Navy ship's captain and appointed Chief of Combined Operations, with a seat alongside Field-Marshal Sir Alan Brooke on the Chiefs of Staff. By March 1942, Mountbatten had been elevated *three grades* to become the youngest Vice-Admiral in British naval history. Mountbatten's principal claims to fame were threefold. He had been portrayed as a dashing captain of destroyers. Second, he was a master of personal public relations, projecting the image of a young, dashing and heroic commander able to carry the war to the enemy. And thirdly, Mountbatten was formidably well connected. A cousin of the King, confidant of the Prime Minister, personal friend of Noel Coward and able effortlessly to summon powerful friends from Hollywood and the British Establishment alike. Mountbatten was a public relations dream in the dreary Britain of early 1942. There was even talk among some Conservative politicians (almost certainly started by Mountbatten himself) that he should be elevated *over* the Chiefs of Staff in some capacity.

.

Mountbatten's carefully cultivated legend hid a ruthlessness and ambition that frequently accompanies great men and their success. In the midst of his wartime responsibilities he could be found posturing on the film set of '*In Which We Serve',* a propaganda biography based on his own experiences in which the dashing destroyer captain was played by his dose friend Noel Coward. Mountbatten actually wrote to Coward after the Dieppe raid saying; "Your letter caught me on my busiest day, but since the matter is so pressing, I am dealing with it before my service duties". A normal commander would have 'been visiting the wounded and dying and debriefing the survivors.

Beaverbrook himself warned during the war, "don't trust Mountbatten in any public capacity", knowing that Mountbatten's dark and untrustworthy side would brook no attack on his carefully managed reputation or self-image. Despite Beaverbrook's warning, the young, unscrupulous, vain and ambitious aristocrat had now been given a seat on the highest military council in the land, together with the resources and authority to attack the German-occupied coasts of Europe. Mountbatten's personality combined with his newly acquired power and ambition were to have tragic consequences.

The roots of the 1942 attack on Dieppe are to be found twenty four years earlier, in the World War One attack on Zeebrugge on St. George's Day 1918. Under the leadership of Admiral Sir Roger Keyes of the Dover Patrol, a raiding force of warships, marines and soldiers stormed the German submarine pens on the Belgian coast in a daring attempt to block the Kaiser's U-Boats from access to the sea. The raid was partly successful and despite heavy casualties, provided a much needed boost to British morale at the time. The Zeebrugge raid created an image of a brilliant military raid, causing serious damage at little cost, precisely the sort of indirect attack so beloved of British strategists over the years.

By 1940 Keyes was back, this time as Chief of Combined Operations with the purpose of attacking the Germans around the coasts of Europe and repeat his success of 1918. Quite why the British felt that they had to raid the defended coasts of Europe is a question that seems rarely to have been asked. The Germans never felt a reciprocal urge to mount similar military adventures against the British coastline. In 1940, however, Britain's new Prime Minister Churchill was determined that even though British forces had been evicted from the Continent, the offensive must be maintained, not just to inflict casualties on the Germans but also as an act of faith with the suffering populations of occupied Europe, who in 1941 had virtually no hope of liberation. Apart from Bomber Command; it was the only offensive option at the time.

Combined Operations was a curious command. It was essentially an experimental inter-service coordinating and planning staff, put together as a result of wartime experience and designed to bring together the military assets of the three armed services to launch, as its name implied, combined operations against the enemy. By the time Mountbatten took over in late 1941 on the direct instruction of Winston Churchill, his orders were in Mountbatten's own words "to continue the raids, so splendidly begun by Keyes, to keep the offensive spirit boiling. Secondly, to prepare for the invasion of Europe, without which we can never win this war". Mountbatten also claimed that Churchill said, "I want you to turn the south coast of England from a bastion of defence into a springboard for attack".

This was heady stuff for a recently promoted 41-year-old naval captain whose next command was to have been one of the Royal Navy's new aircraft carriers. But

Churchill had another, political, agenda implicit in his choice of the dashing Mountbatten for such
a high-profile appointment: the Prime Minister had to sell British aggressive spirit to the Americans, sceptical of their ally's fighting capabilities.

After the humiliations of Norway, France, Dunkirk, Greece, Crete, Malaya and Singapore. Plus Rommel's victories in North Africa culminating in the surrender at Tobruk in June 1942, the Americans had every justification for their scepticism about the British Army's ability to fight. Even Churchill could not understand why the Army kept surrendering, saying plaintively on more than one occasion, "Why won't our soldiers *fight".*

The wily Premier knew that if anyone could impress Britain's fighting spirit upon the highest councils of American decision-making, it would be Mountbatten. During visits to Washington the new commander of Combined Ops won over all the Americans he met, including America's most powerful soldier, General George C. Marshall, who became a personal friend. The young hero had done his diplomatic PR work well, doing what he did so brilliantly, and at a time when it mattered for the rest of his countrymen, not just for himself, Churchill was justifiably proud of his protégé.

Mountbatten himself appears to have been well aware of Churchill's wider intentions, boasting to a friend, "Winston told me what he wanted and now it was up to me to carry it out". Given this level of backing, it would have been difficult for the most humble personality not to have been tempted into delusions of grandeur, and Mountbatten's many friends had never accused him of excessive humility. In turning Mountbatten's head, Churchill was in no small measure responsible. There is even a case for seeing Mountbatten as a *victim* of an unscrupulous Churchill, manipulating the young Admiral's ego for his own ends.

Once Keyes had gone, Mountbatten lost no time in putting his own stamp on Combined Ops and was, like many others in his position, able initially to reap the rewards of his predecessor's efforts. Combined Ops basked in the glory of successful raids on Norway and the Parachute Regiment's first battle honour, the daring theft of German radar secrets from Bruneval in northern France. Even the St. Nazaire raid of 27th March 1942, despite its cost (and five VCs), was counted a success because the destruction of the huge dry dock, the only one capable of servicing German battleships on the Atlantic, removed a major strategic pressure on the British. All these attacks were originally the fruits of Keyes's staff regime and planning.

For Combined Ops‟ new plans for 1942, Mountbatten's staff unveiled wide-ranging schedule of attacks, from the temporary seizure of Alderney in the Channel Islands to a hare-brained scheme for a raid on the Gestapo headquarters in Paris. The set piece was to be an attack on Dieppe in June, under the code name 'Rutter'. The aims at Dieppe, despite later claims that it was the invasion of Europe gone awry, or some kind of bluff to confuse the Germans, were really quite straightforward: to see whether

it was possible to seize and hold a major port for a limited period; to obtain intelligence from captured prisoners, documents and equipment; and to gauge the German reaction to a sizeable demonstration blow against the French coast.

In addition to these purely military goals, there were three other, less clear-cut agendas in play. The first was the wish of the Air Staff to draw the Luftwaffe in the West into a major air battle and inflict serious casualties on the German aircraft deployed in France; the second was the purely political goal of showing the USSR that Britain really was trying to get at the Germans' throats; and the third and most hazy agenda of all was the wish of the Canadian government to get their troops into the war.

The first of these was to play firmly into Mountbatten's hands later. Although the Royal Navy and the Army were wary of committing too many forces to ‘Rutter’, the Chief of the Air Staff, Air Marshal Portal, was only too keen to demonstrate the power of his vastly expanded fighter force in 1942 and bring the Luftwaffe to action in the hope of inflicting a crushing defeat on them. A major fighter sweep over a port well within range of the southern English airfields would „draw the Luftwaffe up“. As a result, RAF Fighter Command became willing supporters of the plan whereas the other fighting services were relatively lukewarm.

Churchill's political difficulties in the spring and summer 1942 had much to do with his backing for Operation „Rutter“ in particular and Combined Ops activities in general. Any British victory in the West would be an important bargaining chip in the complicated manoeuvring that was taking place between the Allies. The need for decisive action had become more acute following a speech by Stalin in February 1942 in which he made what seemed to many to be a hint of negotiating a separate truce with Hitler. A thoroughly alarmed British Foreign Office assessed the speech as an attempt to bring pressure to bear on the British to ease the pressure on the Russians. In any case, the USSR had to be reassured of Britain's determination to fight. A major attack in the West would do this, irrespective of its outcome.

As the summer wore on with its wearisome defeats in the desert and rumblings of political discontent with his leadership at home, Churchill became evermore depressed and desperate for a success - any success. With the fall of Tobruk on 21st June 1942 the political volcano in Westminster and Whitehall erupted as the murmurings against his wartime leadership surfaced. A torrent of political and press criticism burst over Churchill and his administration. A vote of no confidence was tabled in the House of Commons and, although the outcome was four hundred and seventy five votes to twenty five in his favour; Churchill was badly shaken.

Churchill needed a success to survive, and he knew it. Now he had a sceptical Parliament and Whitehall to battle with as well as the Germans and his strategic allies, Roosevelt and Stalin. The cautious and pragmatic Chiefs of Staff frustrated most of his military adventures as premature, content to build up Britain's military strength for the long haul. Churchill the politician, ever conscious of the need to keep

his opponents informed in a democracy, needed some short-term gains. Only Bomber Command under the energetic Harris and Combined Ops under the dashing Mountbatten seemed to share his values and be prepared to carry the fight to the enemy in the summer of 1942.

The third agenda for operation Rutter was to have the greatest human consequences, but was the least practical of the attack's aims. It was the desire of the Canadian Expeditionary Force, after two and a half years of inactivity to get into action. Since the outbreak of war the Canadian Prime Minister, Mackenzie King, had followed a politically sensible but basically unsustainable policy. He had given the public appearance of vigorous Canadian support for the war but without committing his troops to actual fighting. Inevitably, with the raw aggression and justifiably famous fighting spirit of the Canadians, this policy could not last for ever. Although thousands of Canadians flocked to the colours, Mackenzie King knew that conscription, especially in French-speaking Canada, for service overseas was a recipe for political trouble and so he ensured that Canada's exposure to front-line combat was reduced to the minimum.

The political contradictions inherent in Canada's war policy gradually forced themselves upon the politicians in Ottawa. Having created a large, well-trained and well-equipped army and sent it to Sussex in England to prepare for battle, Canada's politicians discovered that their military machine had built up a momentum of its own. The Canadian Expeditionary Force's senior commanders in England, MacNaughton, Crerar and Roberts, with two years of training under their belts, were pushing hard for a more active part in the fighting if only to give their bored soldiers something to do. As usual, this showed itself in increased ill-discipline in which the Canadians stole, got drunk, fought and got up to the usual sexual activities common to any large group of fit young men a long way from home with too little to do and too many lonely women available.

The grim and increasingly irritated citizens of Sussex witnessed over three thousand Canadian courts martial up to August 1942 and hoped, like their high-spirited guests, that action would soon focus their minds on other things. In Lord Haw-Haw's mocking words from Berlin. "If you really want to take Berlin, why don't you give each Canadian soldier a motor cycle and a bottle of whisky? Then declare that Berlin is out of bounds. The Canadians will be there in 48 hours and end the war". By 1942 the Canadians in Britain were the most exercised but least tried army in the war. The Canadians, and their commanders, wanted to fight. When Lieutenant-General Harry Crerar, commanding the 1st Canadian Corps, was summoned to Montgomery's headquarters, South East Command, on 27th April 1942 and asked whether his Canadian soldiers would like to take part in a major attack on the French coast his answer was brisk - "You bet"!

On 13th May 1942 the Chiefs of Staff approved Operation Rutter. As it stood, the plan relied on a frontal attack across Dieppe town beach, supported by flanking attacks by commandos to knock out coastal batteries covering the approaches. In the air a

thousand RAF sorties would be flown to seize control of the air and provide an umbrella; and offshore, the Navy would bombard the town's defences.

'Rutter' was not a good plan, and in the final stages was considerably weakened: the Navy refused to provide a battleship or any other large ship for fire support, and the RAF scaled down their plans for heavy bombing of the seafront at Dieppe to a series of fighter-bomber sweeps and strafing attacks in order to avoid French civilian casualties. The Canadian 2nd Division would spearhead the assault and go on to seize a radar station and an airfield three miles inland, for a limited period.

On 5th and 6th July the Canadian troops embarked on their assault ships, but when the weather began to deteriorate they were ordered to batten down the hatches and ride out the weather at anchor. While the troops lay heaving with sea sickness in their small landing craft, two German bombers appeared over one of the Isle of Wight staging ports and bombed the flotilla, without significant result. As the Channel gale continued to blow, on 7th July the operation was cancelled and the troops disembarked to flood the pubs and billets of southern England with stories of the raid on Dieppe that never took place and the horrors of small landing craft in a storm. Most concerned, believed that raid was now hopelessly compromised and it was cancelled.

It was just as well. Neither the Army commander, Montgomery, nor the Naval Commander at Portsmouth, Admiral Sir William James, really believed in the plan. The more 'Rutter' had developed, the greater their concerns. Army Commander, Montgomery was very uneasy about the whole idea of a frontal infantry attack, particularly without a proper bombardment by the RAF to soften up the opposition, which C in C Bomber Command was not now prepared to provide in daylight. Montgomery had fought in the First World War and knew all about poorly prepared frontal attacks without proper fire support.

For their part, both the Royal Navy's Commander in Portsmouth and the Admiral commanding the amphibious forces were mindful of the fate of HMS *Prince of Wales* and HMS *Repulse* only six months previously off Malaya. They had no intention of risking battleships within five miles of an enemy coast and within striking distance of the Luftwaffe's bombers. The First Sea Lord, Admiral Sir Dudley Pound, agreed wholeheartedly. The professional military view was that the 'Rutter' attack on Dieppe had been badly conceived, lacked sufficient fire support and was uncoordinated. Now that it was off, they could all breathe a sigh of relief.

What followed the cancellation of 'Rutter' is the beginning of the mystery of Dieppe. Seething from the cancellation of a long-cherished project that would place his command firmly in the public eye, Mountbatten decided to act on his own. On 8th and 11th July be called two meetings of the main staffs involved in the original operation and asked for their support to remount the raid. He did not get it. The Chiefs of Staff disliked Mountbatten, regarding him as an upstart foisted on them by Churchill.

No written record exists of the Chiefs of Staff approving the raid in its final form. Was it really Mountbatten who remounted it without authorisation?

As the second conference broke up, a number of Mountbatten's subordinate officers were quietly asked to remain behind after the main critics of the scheme had left the room. No one is completely clear what transpired at the closed meeting that followed, but from then on Mountbatten and his principal staff officer, Captain John Hughes-Hallett RN, were wholeheartedly dedicated to a substitute operation for 'Rutter'. This was to be called „Jubilee", and the target was to be Dieppe - again.

Any major operation to attack the continent of Europe needed the authority of the Chiefs of Staff. What followed that July is one of the more remarkable stories of World War Two: the Commander of Combined Operations, protégé of the Prime Minister and darling of the media, Lord Louis Mountbatten, set out deliberately to deceive the combined British Chiefs of Staff, British intelligence, other armed services and most of his own staff officers: Mountbatten had decided to re-launch the aborted attack on Dieppe under another name and without formal authority. He admitted as much towards the end of his life, in a little- publicised interview with BBC Television in 1972: "I made the unusual and I suggest rather bold decision that we would remount the operation against Dieppe".

Even Captain Hughes-Hallett, who was closest to Mountbatten and a total accomplice in the scheme to remount the attack on Dieppe, was concerned at this lack of authorisation from the top. He pointed out that as Combined Ops Principal Staff Officer he needed to quote some official authority on all the operation's paperwork and requisitions. Accordingly, on 17th July, Chief of Combined Operations formally minuted the Chiefs of Staff, asking the COS Committee for a specific decision to be included in the minutes of their next meeting that the Commander Combined Ops is directed to mount an emergency operation to replace 'Rutter' using the same forces. The Chiefs of Staff refused, and the item was not recorded in the minutes.

Mountbatten was now getting desperate. He had another go at the Chiefs of Staff Committee on 25th and 26th July, this time asking for a blanket authority to conduct large-scale raids but without specifying the target every time. Already jealous of Mountbatten's rapid rise and privileged access, and highly suspicious of his ambitions and motives, the Chiefs of Staff were having none of it. On 27th July they recorded a decision that merely widened his planning powers slightly, but specifically endorsed the existing need for Combined Ops to seek formal authority before embarking on any new operations.

That was enough for Mountbatten. Excited at getting his chance and chafing to do something, he gave direct orders for Captain Hughes-Hallett and a few trusted staff officers to proceed. No one knows precisely what he said to Hughes-Hallett, but there seems little doubt that he deceived him. Probably by claiming that he had authority from the Chiefs to proceed with the new plan, Jubilee, under the blanket authority of

the decision of 27th July widening his planning powers. Hughes-Hallett was a more than willing accomplice and believed what his charismatic master, a man who spoke directly to prime ministers, film stars and chiefs of staff, told him.

On 28th July orders were issued to selected Combined Ops staff officers that Rutter was back on, under the authority of the Chiefs of Staff and with the code name Jubilee. New operational orders were issued to the raiding force headquarters on 31th July, and the whole planning frenzy for the aborted operation started again. On 12th August 1942, the Chiefs of Staff noted that Mountbatten could, in principle, *plan* to mount a substitute raid for the abandoned Rutter. Dieppe as a target was not mentioned, nor discussed.

To the end of his days, Mountbatten used these broad planning directives to give the impression that he had received official backing for his second Dieppe raid. Interestingly, none of his colleagues on the Chiefs of Staff nor the Cabinet papers have ever supported this claim, either during or after the war. Even Churchill had great difficulty retracing the decisions for the Dieppe raid when he wrote his own history of the war, '*The Hinge of Fate',* in 1950. Eventually, frustrated, he accepted Mountbatten's account and took responsibility himself: but we know from his correspondence that Churchill did so only because neither he nor anyone else could locate any substantive Cabinet documents to the contrary.

The fact was that there was no specific authorisation to re-launch an attack on Dieppe and Mountbatten knew it. He got round the problem of the troops by telling the Canadian commanders to keep details of the new operation to themselves, "in the interests of security". A limited number of staff officers began to plan 'Jubilee' in great secrecy. But not everyone was informed. Under the guise of 'security', several key agencies were deliberately kept in the dark. Admiral Baillie-Grohmann, the uncooperative naval commander, was excluded and Captain Hughes-Hallett offered the job by Mountbatten. Montgomery's army staff at GHQ were ignored as Mountbatten dealt directly and secretly with the Canadian Army's chain of command. Most dangerous of all, neither Mountbatten's own Chief of Staff nor the high-level intelligence liaison officer and his official deputy; Major General Haydon, were informed that Dieppe was back on. One is left wondering how Mountbatten thought he could ever get away with it. Presumably he was gambling on a major success, in the knowledge that „victory has no critics".

The real danger to the revised operation lay in the intelligence world. While the logistics and administration will always give the game away that a military operation of some sort is afoot, they need not give the *objective.* The demands for intelligence will inevitably expose the target, however: Mountbatten's subterfuge needed maps, plans, pictures and information about Dieppe. Mountbatten, in fact, now had two threats to his security; not only did he need to keep his revised operation secret from the Germans, but he also had to keep it secret so far as possible from the Chiefs of Staff. The scale of the deception is breath-taking. But Mountbatten still needed

intelligence, a lot of intelligence, to mount a successful assault on a defended port in occupied Europe.

The official history, *British Intelligence in the Second World War,* is absolutely clear on the omission. Not only that, Mountbatten did not request any support from the major intelligence agencies like the Secret Intelligence Service, preferring to rely on the existing „Rutter" target dossiers. He updated this basic intelligence with an *ad hoc* series of low-level intelligence tasks put out to tactical photo-reconnaissance flights and small special signals units which could be tasked directly by Combined Ops without awkward questions being asked.

The dangers of this disregard of intelligence were serious. In the first place, Mountbatten risked not getting the very best intelligence for his troops as they were beached: In the second, he could not be sure how much the Germans knew of his plans. Dieppe was without doubt by now a deeply compromised target. Six thousand soldiers had been talking about the cancelled 'Rutter' raid of 7th July all over southern England since they had disembarked. Why should they not? It was history now so far as they were concerned. Any real security about the Dieppe raid was long gone.

The British Double Cross operation, using MI5's turned agents to send false messages back under control to their German masters, had a field day in the summer of 1942. As a result, the German intelligence service had at least four specific warnings about Dieppe from false agents whom they trusted in the UK. The Germans, in fact, were extremely well-informed, so much so that some commentators have speculated that the second Dieppe operation was a deliberate deception operation offering a sacrifice to build up the reputation of MI5's false agents with the Abwehr. This seems far-fetched. The most likely explanation is clearance to leak redundant secrets to the Abwehr after 'Rutter' was aborted. The only problem was that they were *not* redundant secrets: Dieppe really was going to be attacked, but Mountbatten had chosen not to tell MI5 that the operation was back on again. The risks to Mountbatten's forces were horrific.

The intelligence requirements for Operation Jubilee were relatively straightforward. To attack a defended coastline, operations staffs require four specific kinds of information: the topography of the battlefield, beach gradients, currents, etc.; the enemy's strengths, dispositions and layout; enemy weapons, their locations and capabilities; and last, knowledge of the enemy's reaction plans, to fight, to reinforce or to withdraw.

None of these are particularly difficult in theory, but they all require access to the complete pantheon of intelligence sources and agencies. For example, beach composition and gradients may be laid out in pre-war books, but time and tide mean that a frogman has to double-check what the topography is really like as close to the time of the raid as possible. The enemy's strengths, dispositions and morale can be gleaned from a number of sources: photo-reconnaissance, agent reports disclosures and even open source material. Finding his weapons and their ammunition stocks is

harder; once photo- reconnaissance has shown where they are sited, only local information from agents, will reveal the real details from the camera's pictures.

The point is that the whole of Britain's exceptional intelligence-collection armoury was needed to mount a successful operation of Dieppe's scale. It was available and perfectly capable of answering all the questions. But if Mountbatten asked for the full Joint Intelligence Committee support-package for Dieppe, he knew that this would alert the Cabinet Office and Chiefs of Staff to his scheme to remount the raid, and they might stop him. So, by bypassing the Chiefs of Staff, Mountbatten was forced to bypass the intelligence agencies

Mountbatten was accepting the risk of deliberately keeping his troops in the dark about vital information. This failure to use the full intelligence resources available was to cause needless casualties. To give only two simple but deadly examples: the beach at Dieppe was too steep and too stony for loose-tracked tanks; second, there were artillery pieces hidden in the caves at either flank of the beach. The failure to identify these points would cause many Canadian casualties. Both could have easily been answered by the Joint Intelligence Committee and its intelligence collection assets, had they known. But Mountbatten dare not risk asking for help from an outside and senior agency. He wanted to keep his private bid for glory secret.

The defending German commander of 302 Division wisely chose to concentrate his forces to cover the most likely and most dangerous enemy approach: the shingle beach at Dieppe. Equally wisely, he ordered a policy of not keeping his guns in the prepared emplacements in case they were spotted and attacked from the air. Combined Ops' tactical air reconnaissance flights were quite incapable of seeing *inside* the caves in the cliffs at Dieppe as they swept low along the beach. The wisdom of General Major Conrad Haase's simple but effective divisional defence plan from the defenders' point of view came on the day, when the flanking fire from his concealed assortment of weapons and his single captured French tank, firmly cemented into the sea wall, slaughtered men and machines alike as the Canadians struggled up the steeply sloping stones of the beach.

As the day for the attack drew closer, concerns about the prospects for „Jubilee's" success and the security of the operation began to emerge. Security became the prime concern; after the cancellation of the first attack this seemed a bit pointless, but various scares over compromise and lost documents highlighted the need to keep the force secure from the British and the Joint Intelligence Committee, if from nobody else. Even the eager Canadians had their doubts. Major-General Roberts, the divisional commander, was uneasy about the plan but was gulled into an uneasy silence by the slick reassurances of Mountbatten and his staff at Combined Ops; after all, he reasoned, these were the experienced officers, not he. But many Canadians shared his unease.

Without prior warning the troops were hastily assembled, and then transported to the coast. Weapons were issued on board ship, Sten guns in oily packaging. The raid,

cancelled early in July, was now on again, but there had been no training for it since. One reassuring fact sustained the soldiers in the tension-filled hours prior to attack: The German defences would be pulverised by saturation bombardment making for a quick exit from the beaches. But the bombardment never occurred, as the British had opted to maintain „tactical surprise" and not alert the Germans to the pending attack until it began when men hit the beaches. This change in plan was withheld from the soldiers. Unmolested, the Germans commenced machine gun and mortar fire before the landing craft reached shore, killing all but two before they had hit the beach.

The attack began to go wrong from the outset. The German Navy had a regular inshore milk run which tried to slip small merchant shipping along the French coast at night. This was well known to the Dover and Portsmouth maritime search radars, as was the Germans' general routine and timings for these little convoys. Precise intelligence on the convoy programme was held at the highest levels, however, it would have come from sensitive strategic sources like the Enigma code-breaking operation. No one on Mountbatten's intelligence staff had asked for details of German Channel movements. To do so would have compromised the operation to the Joint Intelligence Committee and thus the Chiefs of Staff.

The result was inevitable. In the early hours of 19th August, as the convoy carrying the men of 3 Commando closed on the cliffs to the east of Dieppe, their escort blundered into a German coastal convoy in the dark. Despite two clear signals from the RN radars in England to the Force Commander aboard HMS *Calpe,* giving the German convoy's precise position, the warning was not passed on to the naval escorts. Combined Ops planning had gone wrong from the start.

The first the „Jubilee" attackers knew of the German convoy was when a star shell burst overhead and in the light the German escorts opened fire, knocking out the vulnerable Gun Boat providing close protection for the eastern landing craft. A furious firelight developed with tracer streaming in all directions „like a firework display" as other Royal Navy escorts joined in. ‘Jubilee’ was compromised. As dawn broke, the shocked occupants of the eastern landing craft closed on the coast in an eerie silence. As one of the sergeants in 3 Commando said, "Through the binoculars you could see the bloody Germans watching us through their binoculars as we ran in to the beach”.

At first light the various assaults got under way. Out to the east on the left flank, 3 Commando under the redoubtable Peter Young led the commandos in a successful assault that silenced the Goebbels artillery battery inland. By noon Young was back in Newhaven, his battledress and his hands ripped to shreds. On the extreme western flank Lord Lovat's disciplined 4 Commando destroyed the guns of the Hess battery in a textbook pincer movement assault.

These diversionary commando attacks to knock out the German guns covering the flanks were the only real successes of the day. Closer in, on the eastern edge of Dieppe, the Royal Regiment of Canada was mowed down as the soldiers struggled to

get ashore, suffering two hundred and twenty five killed and two hundred and sixty four prisoners. Only thirty three wounded men survived. To the west of the town, the South Saskatchewan‟s and Cameron Highlanders of Canada got ashore without too much difficulty but were unable to cross the River Scie to enter Dieppe. Of the thousand men in the two battalions, only three hundred and forty one managed to get off; one hundred and forty four were killed and the remainder went straight to German prisoner of war camps.

With both headlands covering the beach still firmly in German hands, the Canadian divisional commander, General Roberts, would have been wise to abandon the attack. But he was inexperienced, never having commanded a battalion attack before, let alone a divisional amphibious assault. He could not see the beach or the flanking headlands because of the thick smokescreen the attack force had laid down, and he could not talk to his commanders ashore because of communications failures. A tough-minded, decent soldier, who believed all the assurances Mountbatten and his staff had given him, Roberts allowed the main frontal assault to go in on the beach as planned.

Somewhat surprisingly, the Royal Hamilton Light Infantry and the Canadian Essex Scottish got ashore in the centre without heavy casualties. Flights of cannon-firing RAF Hurricanes blasted the German defenders into momentary silence as the attackers closed the sea wall. Once the regrouped Canadians launched themselves across the wall and barbed wire into the buildings opposite, however, the full fury of the German defences shot them down in droves, with machine-guns and mortars firing on fixed lines. Any officer or signaller was promptly sniped from the cover of the various buildings on the seafront, and the casino turned out to be a defensive strong point with arcs of fire covering right down the beach. The attack stalled, with the Canadians taking cover and the Germans firing at anything that moved.

Into this firelight lumbered the Churchill tanks of the Calgary Regiment. Under a hail of fire, which included the Germans dropping mortar bombs accurately into the landing decks of the ships, the LCT‟s reached the beach and disgorged their loads. Despite the damage and the difficulties, 27 of the 29 tanks got ashore but only15 managed to struggle up the smooth pebbles of the beach, slipping and sliding, to get on to the esplanade. And there they stayed; for the Germans had built tank traps for just such an occasion to keep any invading tanks from getting into the town. In the words of one Canadian trooper, "We just went round in bloody circles, using up our gas and firing off all our ammo”.

“The battle as far as we were concerned was really nothing but a massacre”, I remember going in with the second wave with the commanding officer. There was no sound of firing, so I said to him, “they must have got through the first line of defences”. And he replied. “The hell they did, they’re all dead”. When we landed there wasn’t anybody standing, everybody was just strewn on the beach.”

One tank managed to push its way down to the western end of the beach and helped to assault the casino, but that was the only success for the armour. If the intelligence for Dieppe had been properly coordinated, the planners at Combined Ops would have known that they had to deal with anti-tank walls more than six feet high and four feet thick protecting the exits from the esplanade. They were, after all, hardly secret, and every citizen of Dieppe knew just what they were and where they were. The French Resistance sources in the area were equally aware of them; but no one asked or attempted to co-ordinate all the intelligence for „Jubilee", and the tank traps had not shown up well on Combined Ops' last-minute photo-reconnaissance flights. The Canadians had been let down by a basic lack of intelligence. Even on the Somme in 1916 the assault troops had known the enemy positions in more detail.

The disaster was compounded at about 07 00 hours. Desperately straining to make sense of the scanty and fragmented messages from ashore, General Roberts managed to pick up two clear pieces of information: the Essex Scottish were across the seafront and into the houses of Dieppe, and the casino had fallen. Roberts then took the only decision an attacking commander has left to him once his battle plan is in operation: to commit his reserve at a time and place of his own choosing. It was a defining moment for the stolid, steady thinking Manitoban, who had won a Military Cross and been wounded as an artillery officer in World War One. His soldiers' lives and his own career hung on his decision. He ordered his mobile reserves to land on the beaches in the centre to reinforce what he took to be a success so far.

French-Canadian soldiers are a breed apart with a frighteningly fierce national pride that makes formidable fighting soldiers. As they ran in, a storm of fire burst over their vessels: Undeterred, they stormed ashore into six feet of water and „a positive blizzard of firing". Tragically, they were unable to accomplish anything at all, except to add to the losses being suffered. Of the six hundred men who landed, only one hundred and twenty five got back to England that night.

At 08 17 hours, Roberts made his penultimate decision of the day and ordered 40 Commando to land on the very western edge of the town in a vain attempt to outflank the Germans. Lieutenant-Colonel Joseph ‘Tiger’ Phillips, Royal Marines, had already tried once to take his group into the harbour at Dieppe but had been driven back by the intensity of the German opposition. Phillips, a man who had bivouacked with his soldiers in the open all through the winter of 1941/42 “to make sure we're all sharp and toughen us up", was not a man to quit lightly. He led the boats of 40 Commando Royal Marines in to the west edge of Dieppe.

As they broke from the cover of the smokescreen about 600 yards offshore into the bright sunlight, the terrible truth dawned on Colonel Phillips in the front boat; he was leading his men onto a shambles of a beach, swept by tracer bullets and dotted with dead men and the human remains of scores of others blown to bits by the intensity of the fire. Despite his orders Phillips was leading his commandos into what looked like another Charge of the Light-Brigade. Even as he took stock, watched by the officers

in the command group, a storm of small-arms fire cracked overhead and tracer began to rake the assault craft.

In an act of astonishing moral and physical bravery, and realising the futility of further action, Phillips stood up on the stern of the command motor launch. In full view of the enemy he put on a pair of white gloves and signalled the following boats not to attack, but to turn back into the cover of the smoke. Seconds later he was shot down, mortally wounded. In the words of one of his officers, "His final order undoubtedly saved the lives of over two hundred men".

At 10 50 hours, Roberts gave the order to withdraw. The Navy managed to rescue only three hundred men from the beaches. As the battered survivors of 'Jubilee' limped home across the Channel, the firing gradually died down and stretcher-bearers and cautious Germans slowly put their heads up and began to help the moaning wounded. The remaining survivors surrendered. Jubilee was over.

The final cost was appalling: one thousand and twenty seven dead and two thousand three hundred and forty captured, and only Canadian pride on the credit side together. To add insult to injury, overhead the RAF had also suffered a major defeat. The new Focke-Wulf 190 had come as a nasty shock to the RAF's fighter pilots. One hundred and five British aircraft were shot down, no less than 88 of them fighters, and another 100 were damaged; the Luftwaffe lost only 46 aircraft. The Navy lost a destroyer and 13 major landing-ships. For Combined Operations, and the Canadians, it was the worst day of the War.

Once the propaganda boasting was over, the world took stock. Churchill briefed the House of Commons, taking full responsibility, and saying that "Dieppe had been a reconnaissance in-force, to which I gave my sanction". But he had not, and he knew it. This was made quite clear in a private note dated December 1942 to General Ismay, the War Cabinet's representative on the Chiefs of Staff Committee. By this time the Chiefs of Staff had identified the duplicities behind the Dieppe operation and were taking steps to "prevent a recurrence of these unfortunate breakdowns in procedures". The finger pointed clearly at Combined Ops and Mountbatten.

Churchill's note is worth quoting in full because it identifies the real mystery of Dieppe: "Although for many reasons everyone was concerned to make this business look as good as possible, the time has now come when I must be informed more precisely about the military plans". In a torrent of questions that reveals just what Churchill did *not* know in 1942, he goes on; "Who made them? Who approved them? What was General Montgomery's part in it? And General MacNaughton's [the senior commander of the Canadian Expeditionary Force] part? What is the opinion about the Canadian generals selected by General MacNaughton? Did the General Staff check the plan? At what point was the Vice Chief of the Imperial General Staff [VCIGS] informed in the Chief of the Imperial General Staffs absence"?

If Churchill did not order the attack on Dieppe and the Chiefs of Staff, including the acting Chief of the Imperial General Staff on the day, were not consulted or advised, then just who did give the order to attack Dieppe? All roads lead to Mountbatten. His sleight of hand in misrepresenting a Chiefs of Staff directive to widen his powers to make plans, and their later agreement that he could explore a substitute for „Rutter" is the key to the mystery. Mountbatten misrepresented these decisions to give his staff the impression that he *did have* official clearance for a second attack on Dieppe. After all, who was to challenge the Commander of Combined Ops? Senior commanders do not lie to their own staff.

This analysis is reinforced by Mountbatten's subsequent furtiveness in planning the second assault. It is clear that the only high level staff informed of the new „go" decision for 'Jubilee' were Hughes-Hallett, the senior Canadian officers, the individual force commanders and certain selected staff officers acting in good faith on the direct orders of their powerful new chief.

Any queries about the extraordinarily tight security for the operation were explained away by Mountbatten as special measures for a secret surprise operation, ordered personally by the PM himself. Only Mountbatten could have provided the necessary authority inside Combined Ops HQ for the way the operation was planned and handled. Only Mountbatten had the power and could have sanctioned the actions taken in his name and on his behalf, as he finally admitted in 1972.

Why did he do it? Ambition and vanity appear to have been the main driving force behind Mountbatten throughout the war. One friend wrote of him, presumably as a result of personal confidences, at this time, "This operation [Dieppe] is considered very critical from the point of Commander Combined Operations' *personal career.* If he brings this off, he is on top of the world *and will be given complete control".* The last statement is probably an allusion to Mountbatten's ill-concealed desire (expressed to Leo Amery, Conservative MP) for a post as *supreme commander* of all British forces reporting directly to Churchill. Mountbatten certainly did not lack ambition or self-belief. The view of Mountbatten at this time is given weight by other sources. At least one informed commentator has described him at Combined Ops as "a master of intrigue, jealousy and ineptitude, [who] like a spoilt child toyed with men's lives".

The implications of Mountbatten's "vanity and conceit, and anxiety to steal the glory", in the 'words of the CO of 4 Commando, Lord Lovat, about his commander were profound. Operation 'Jubilee' may well have been ill conceived, poorly supported, lacking in basic intelligence and badly planned. There can be little doubt, however, that if only Mountbatten and his dupes on his staff had been honest and asked for help from the official intelligence agencies, then his soldiers would almost certainly have known about the beach, the tank walls, the guns hidden in the caves and the need for overwhelming fire support from bombers and battleships to suppress the Wehrmacht's defences at Dieppe.

Certainly the Germans thought so. General Haase of 302 Division, the victorious commander on the day, described the plan as "mediocre, the timetable too rigid and the fire support entirely insufficient to suppress the defenders during the landings". He paid tribute to the gallantry and determination of the Canadians, when he forwarded his after-action report to von Rundstedt and Berlin. Field Marshal von Rundstedt added his own prescient postscript about the Dieppe Landing; “the enemy will not do it like this a second time”.

As the guns fell silent at Dieppe, so too did public calls for a second front. The shift in attitude was total, seemingly on cue, like this Hamilton Spectator editorial: “This raid should sober the judgment of amateur strategists and silence the irresponsible clamour for a second front. That action will no doubt be taken when our military leaders deem the hour to be ripe for it”.

The brutality of 19th August 1942, is contrasted by the kindness bestowed upon the raid since, namely its designation as a ‘rehearsal’ for D-Day. Much has been said since about the fact that the Dieppe raid was a necessary precursor to the great amphibious operations that were to follow, in terms of the lessons learned and experience gained. Mountbatten pursued that line all his life. But as Chief of Combined Operations, he did bear some of the responsibility for mounting the operation, so one can only comment, “he would say that, wouldn't he”?

The lessons supposedly learned from the disastrous attack are easily refuted, yet are routinely used as justification for the raid. On this subject, one Canadian soldier was particularly succinct: “Since the time of the Roman legions, it’s been known that there is no possibility of dislodging a well-entrenched enemy without superior fire power. I don’t know of any lessons we learned at Dieppe. Cannon fodder is a term typically associated with the trench warfare of 1914-18, not the conflict of 1939-45”.

In the series of lies, blunders and myths that have grown up around Dieppe, it is plain that intelligence failures take second place to, and were a direct consequence of the basic lie by Mountbatten about the whole operation. It is equally clear that if he had used all the intelligence resources available to his command properly, many Canadian lives could have been saved. With proper intelligence, the operation might have been more successful and brought Lord Louis the adulation and further promotion he appeared so single-mindedly to crave. Certainly in many quarters he was never trusted again. However, Mountbatten was one of those almost pathologically self-assured personalities who genuinely believed that he had never made a mistake in his life. "It is a curious thing”, he is on record as saying, "but I have been right in everything I have said and done in my life", a statement of breath-taking arrogance.

The disaster did point up the need for much heavier firepower in future raids. It was recognised that this should include aerial bombardment, special arrangements to be made for land armour, and intimate fire support right up to the moment when troops

crossed the waterline (the most dangerous place on the beach) and closed with their objectives.

However, it did not need a debacle like Dieppe to learn these lessons. As judged by General Sir Leslie Hollis, secretary to the Chiefs of Staff Committee and deputy head of the Military Wing of the War Cabinet with direct access to Churchill, the operation was a complete failure, and the many lives that were sacrificed in attempting it were lost with no tangible result. Well-fortified, Dieppe was a horrific testing ground for green troops. In the face of murderous fire, the troops had but one task before them, to press the attack forward. Failure to do so would result in the regiment's annihilation. And annihilated it was!

What remains to be answered is if there was another element at play shaping events. The late Brigadier General Forbes West of Toronto thought so, identifying a political reason for the raid's launch. "I feel that from the day planning began, it was intended to be a failure. Perhaps not as costly a failure, but a failure nevertheless. The British were being pressed by the Russians and Americans to open a second front, so we were put in with the firm intention of being destroyed. Men at the Chiefs of Staff level would consider four thousand casualties a small price to pay for convincing the Russians and Americans an invasion would be a disaster".

Wounded prisoners of war, during their time in captivity reflected on the raid: many came to the conclusion that the attack was meant to be a disaster. One said, "To have a frontal assault, which is not very good practice, it has to be supported with heavy bombing; capital ships and paratroopers, and then each of these are taken away leaving just infantry to attack a fortress with rifle and bayonets. I'm absolutely certain it was intended to be a failure".

The story has a footnote. On 3rd September 1944 an irritated Montgomery demanded of Lieutenant-General Crerar, the Canadian Army's commander in Normandy, why Crerar had seen fit to be absent from one of Montgomery's battle conferences. Having just taken the salute after the Canadian Army had captured Dieppe, Harry Crerar replied that there were *hundreds* of reasons why he had not been able to be at Monty's conference: the hundreds of Canadian graves he had just visited for the first time in the cemetery at Dieppe. Montgomery, wisely, let his Canadian commander have the last word.

CHAPTER SEVEN

WINGATE

The British have a strange talent for producing military 'eccentrics'. The long list includes most notably the Earl of Peterborough, Charles Napier, Gordon of Khartoum, and Lawrence of Arabia. Another appeared in World War Two, possibly the most

innovatory of all. This was the brilliant but erratic Major-General Charles Orde Wingate, a 40-year-old Royal Artillery officer. By his extraordinary force of character and powers of persuasion he had made himself the master of a small army complete with its own air force, trained and organized in a revolutionary technique of warfare that was peculiarly his own.

Wingate, born in India on 26th February 1903; and died in northern Burma on 24th March 1944. Between those two dates stands the career of one of Britain's outstanding 'irregular' soldiers; what Lawrence of Arabia was to World War One, so Wingate was his parallel in World War Two. The comparison enraged him, even though, Lawrence of Arabia, was actually a distant relative. Both had piercing blue eyes, hawk like noses, and a devotion to the causes of foreign peoples that disturbed and even frightened their own superiors. They also shared a commitment to irregular warfare carried out by indigenous troops.

In the fall of 1936, Wingate went to Palestine, which was then administered under a British mandate. There he became a passionate advocate of Zionism at a time when Britain, on the whole-was pro-Arab. Wingate's reputation for conducting unorthodox warfare behind enemy lines began while he was serving as an intelligence officer in Palestine in 1936. Axis-inspired Arab terrorists were sabotaging oil pipelines and attacking Jewish settlements. Captain Wingate set up several small raiding parties which he called Special Night Squads. Using Palestine Jews as guides, he turned the tables on the terrorists, intercepting and pre-empting their attacks so successfully that he was soon accorded the title of 'Lawrence of Judea'. Wingate's patrols were so aggressive in their ambushes and night raids that they made British officials uneasy; at one point his enemies alleged that Wingate had offered to lead the Jews in an uprising against his own government. In early 1939, the Special Night Squads were disbanded and Wingate was abruptly recalled. Back in England he found his loyalty questioned, and though his career survived it was under a cloud.

Wingate was born in the 20th Century but he really belonged to that Victorian era in which British gentlemen adventurers roved the globe, exploring, climbing mountains, bird-watching and waging war. He was often slovenly and unkempt, dressed in sagging socks, ill-fitting uniforms with undone buttons, and an old pith helmet shaped like an inverted coal scuttle. He ate quantities of raw onions, believing them beneficial for health, and carried strapped to his wrist a miniature alarm clock, the clanging of which signalled the end of his interviews and audiences.

He was frequently rude and contentious, and had on occasion struck subordinates when they aroused his wrath. To show his disdain for authority he donned dirty, grease stained uniforms when he met with his orthodox superiors, whom he called 'military apes'. At times he wore no clothes at all, entertaining his guests or colleagues in the nude; during conversations he rubbed his naked torso with a rubber brush, a method of grooming that he seemed to prefer to bathing. In the field, he strained his tea through his socks and often served it this way to others.

While some of Wingate's associates undoubtedly thought him mad, his madness was not without method, and to some degree his strange behaviour may have been calculated. He once said; "With English of a certain class, the worst crime you can commit is to be different, unorthodox, and unexpected. I am all those things. The only way to get these qualities tolerated, and accepted, is to transform one's 'difference' into eccentricity". For all of his quirks, Wingate had a fierce, driving ambition and a profound, almost mystical sense of his own destiny. Born into a distinguished Puritan military family, Wingate had a highly erratic career. At times his unorthodox successes brought him notice out of proportion to his rank or station; at other times his behaviour and tendency to insubordination brought him to the verge of court-martial. As a young officer he studied Arabic and became proficient enough in the language to secure a post with the Sudan Defence Force. There, while leading patrols against ivory smugglers and slave traders, he began to store up knowledge about guerrilla warfare.

When World War Two broke out he was in an obscure post in an antiaircraft brigade in England. But General Wavell, who had once been Wingate's commander in Palestine, now came to the rescue. A cautious man himself, Wavell was nevertheless open to unconventional ideas, and after becoming commander in chief in Africa he sent for the strange young major. Soon Wingate was commanding an Ethiopian partisan army, trying to drive vastly superior Italian forces from Ethiopia and restore Emperor Haile Selassie to the throne. It was Wingate's first experience with a sizable command; he made a number of tactical mistakes but he achieved some stunning triumphs, culminating in an operation in which his force of less than one thousand seven hundred bluffed more than fifteen thousand Italian and colonial troops into surrendering.

In spite of his victories in the field and the successful restoration of the Emperor, Wingate so annoyed his superiors by his refusal to communicate with them or even to obey orders that he was recalled to Cairo. There, depressed because he felt his work was unappreciated, he slashed his throat with a knife. Though the suicide attempt failed, his apparent instability might have ended his military career then and there. But once again Wavell, now commanding in Asia, intervened. In desperate straits as the defence of Burma collapsed, he asked for the audacious Wingate to join him in Delhi. Given the temporary rank of colonel, Wingate was put in charge of guerrilla operations in Burma. Even in a theatre already known for its oddballs and eccentrics, Wingate, who was suddenly propelled to the forefront at this point, was extraordinary.

Wingate soon proposed what he called „long-range penetration" (LRP). His plan called for the insertion of conventional forces far behind enemy lines. There, supplied by air and directed by radio, the LRP force would cut the enemy's lines of communication and cause as much disruption as possible. Pressing his proposal on anyone who would listen, Wingate made something of a nuisance of himself around headquarters in Delhi. As Slim recalled, he "fanatically pursued his own purposes without regard to any other consideration or purpose". Most officers with conventional ideas about warfare found him tedious and annoying, and nicknamed him 'Tarzan' or

‘Robin Hood’. But others found him mesmerizing. Said one officer: "Soon we had fallen under the spell of his almost hypnotic talk; and by and by we, or some of us, had lost the power of distinguishing between the feasible and the fantastic”.

One of those who was persuaded by Wingate's proposal was Wavell. The Allies were still planning to launch the offensive to retake Burma in February 1943, and it appeared to Wavell that Wingate's long-range penetration could disrupt the Japanese reaction. And so he authorised Wingate to prepare the first LRP group, the 77th Indian Infantry Brigade. Ultimately the unit became known as Chindits, a name derived from the mythical lions carved in stone that guard Burmese pagodas.

Wingate threw his three thousand British, Ghurkha and Burmese soldiers into intensive training during the monsoon. The men had to learn not only how to fight in the jungle, but also how to cope with the 1 000 mules that would form their heavy transport on the expedition. (Among the troops were draftees from such urban centres as Liverpool and Manchester, and they liked to joke that the decoration called the DCM, Distinguished Combat Medal, stood for (‘Died Chasing Mules’). At the start of the rigorous training programme a staggering proportion of the men fell out sick or exhausted, in some units as many as 70 per cent were either in the hospital or trying to get in. But Wingate ordered his doctors to root out what he called "the prevailing hypochondria," and pointed out in lectures to his troops that behind the enemy lines there would be no hospitals.

Wingate was almost ready to lead his brigade into Burma when the Allies cancelled their planned operation, code named ‘Anakim’. Without a major operation for the Chindits to support, Wavell felt that Wingate's expedition would be meaningless. As he saw it, the brigade was not strong enough to engage in a major battle, and any damage Wingate's men might inflict on the lines of communication would be temporary. On 5th February 1943, Wavell visited Wingate, intending to cancel the operation. But in a two-hour discussion Wingate put up a barrage of arguments; Wavell finally yielded, and in a speech to Wingate's troops said they were embarking on "a great adventure". This proved to be an understatement. In mid-February the Chindits crossed the Chindwin and plunged into Burma's jungles. While two columns - including an officer masquerading as Wingate, created a diversion to the south, Wingate's main force slipped east toward the Mandalay railway line.

In the jungle Wingate was a stern taskmaster. He had the notion that marching prevented malaria, and he kept his men on the move constantly. He forbade shaving, to save five minutes in the morning, and he set little personal ambushes to check up on the alertness of his officers and men. During the first weeks in the jungle the Chindits' operations matched Wingate's hopes. They cut roads, destroyed bridges, attacked outposts, set ambushes and booby traps, and sabotaged the Mandalay railway in many places. Aerial supply operations worked well, and there were few casualties. The enemy hunted the elusive Chindits in vain, finally committing two divisions to the search. After much deliberation, Wingate decided to cross the mile-wide Irrawaddy and raid even deeper into enemy territory. It was a grave

misjudgement. Wingate now found himself trapped in a hot, dry forest, with the broad river at his back. A Japanese reconnaissance plane spotted some of his troops, and it seemed only a matter of time before the Japanese would catch up with the brigade. Airdrops were hard to arrange, and the men were beginning to wilt from hunger, disease and the constant strain.

For the next several weeks the Chindits kept on the move, living out a nightmare. Water was so scarce they drank the fluid contained in the stems of green bamboo. Unable to bathe, they were crawling with lice, and were tormented by ticks, leeches and vicious red ants. The men became obsessed with thoughts of food and described to each other in loving detail the great meals they would have when they got home. They ate their mules, made soup of their horses, and when all else failed took lessons from their Burmese riflemen in the preparation and consumption of locusts, rats, monkeys and the shoots of jungle plants. Dysentery, malaria and Japanese patrols took an increasing toll. There was no way of evacuating the wounded. Some who could not go on were left in villages in the hope that the Burmese would not turn them over to the Japanese; others were simply left in the jungle to meet their fate alone.

On 24th March 1943, Wingate was ordered to return to India before the enemy and disease could annihilate the brigade. Getting out proved much harder than getting in. Wingate told his men; "Just put yourself in the position of the Jap commander; your one aim will be to prevent anyone from getting out alive. We can take it for granted that from now on the Jap commander is going to do everything in his power to wipe us out. And the first thing he'll do is to make a strong effort to prevent us re-crossing the Irrawaddy".

The brigade split up into small groups with Wingate leading a force of two hundred and twenty. At the river, Wingate's men came under fire from the Japanese. Wingate stalked the riverbank, looking "like some minor prophet with his huge beard and blanket wrapped around his shoulders", according to one of his subordinates. He decided that, rather than attempt a crossing, he would break his force into five small groups and infiltrate back through the enemy lines.

Wingate himself led a group of forty three men. Instead of crossing the river under fire, Wingate and his tiny command remained in a secluded patch of jungle. There, the men spent a week resting and feeding on their remaining pack mules and horses, which they slaughtered by cutting their throats to avoid alerting the Japanese with gunfire. After a week of rest during which the chief enemies were leeches and the ever-present mosquitoes, Wingate led his men back to the Irrawaddy, which they now crossed without difficulty. For another couple of weeks they marched on through the jungle. They ran out of rations, and the Burmese soldiers killed pythons for them and made soup of roots. One of the officers grew so weak from dysentery that he could not continue; Wingate camped beside the man for 48 hours hoping that he would regain his strength, but in the end he was left to die in the jungle. When another

soldier, a lance corporal crippled by sores on his legs, saw that he was holding up the column, he simply walked off into the jungle and disappeared.

At last, the party neared the Chindwin. Across the river lay safety, but the Japanese had taken all the available boats and their patrols were everywhere along the east bank. Wingate and a few others who felt strong enough decided to swim the big, fast-flowing river, then contact the British, and send boats for those left behind. To avoid disclosing themselves to enemy patrols, Wingate and his swimmers spent seven hours hacking through dense elephant grass to reach the river. When they finally set off for the far bank, it turned out to be a near thing for all of them. Wingate probably survived only because he rested in midstream by floating on his back with his head cradled in his buoyant old pith helmet. But they made it, and the following night most of the others came across in boats under Japanese fire.

Wingate brought out thirty four of the forty three men he had started with. Other Chindit groups took heavier losses. One column or one hundred and fifty men headed east and marched all the way to China. Of the three thousand who had gone into the jungle, fewer than two thousand two hundred returned, and the majority of the survivors were so debilitated by their experience that they could never serve in combat again. Theirs had been an incredible ordeal: they had operated for three months behind enemy lines, had marched 1 500 miles through difficult country and had been forced to leave many of their comrades behind, dead or dying in the jungle. But they had achieved what other British forces had failed to: before crossing the Irrawaddy, they had carried the war to the Japanese, operating far behind their lines, attacking outposts, setting up ambushes and wreaking havoc on communications.

The reaction at British headquarters to Wingate's operation was mixed. To many senior officers it was an unmitigated disaster. Wrote Slim later: "As a military operation the raid had been an expensive failure. It gave little tangible return for the losses it had suffered and the resources it had absorbed. The damage it did to Japanese communications was repaired in a few days, the casualties it inflicted were negligible, and it had no immediate effect on Japanese dispositions or plans. If anything was learned of air supply or jungle fighting it was a costly schooling".

The response in other quarters was quite different. Back home in Britain, where the events that had occurred in the Burmese jungle were only dimly perceived, the fact that the British had gone over to the offensive and had penetrated far behind Japanese lines was regarded as a great achievement. In sore need of a victory, the British now had something that could be interpreted as one, and the propaganda mills began churning. Newspapers hailed Wingate as 'the Clive of Burma' and the Chindits became overnight heroes.

Among those most impressed was Winston Churchill. After months of what seemed to him indifferent performance by British commanders in Asia, here was a man of daring and imagination who seemed able to win battles. Churchill wrote at the time; "All the Commanders on the spot seem to be competing with one another to magnify

their demands and the obstacles they have to overcome. I consider Wingate should command the army against Burma. He is a man of genius and audacity and no mere question of seniority must obstruct the advance of real personalities to their proper stations in war".

Churchill's proposal to place the unorthodox and rather peculiar junior brigadier in charge of the Burma campaign stunned senior officers. They succeeded in dissuading the Prime Minister from making such a move. But now a relationship began that paralleled the one existing between Chennault and Roosevelt, in which a daring general formed a personal alliance with his Commander in Chief, much to the discomfiture of his direct superiors. Churchill had Wingate come to England for discussions, and he found Wingate's ideas about long-range penetration, much to his liking.

Wingate held that long-range penetration groups could establish strongholds and airstrips deep in the jungles and defend them against concerted attacks, thus forming a permanent rather than a temporary presence in the enemy's rear. He also argued that LRPs should: not be considered mere supplements to conventional troops; they should be the main force. Given a few well-trained brigades, he felt he could turn the tide of war. Churchill found great appeal in the relatively minor effort envisaged by Wingate. Before the Trident Conference, Churchill had expressed his misgivings about the Burma campaign by saying that "going into swampy jungles to fight the Japanese is like going into the water to fight a shark. It is better to entice him into a trap or catch him on a hook and then demolish him with axes after hauling him out on to dry land". While the Americans were agitating for the recapture of Burma so that a land supply route to China could be reopened, Churchill wanted the main thrust in Asia to be toward Sumatra instead and then on toward Singapore. Wingate's proposal seemed to offer a way of satisfying U.S. demands for action, and perhaps a cheap victory over the Japanese as well.

Churchill immediately asked Wingate to accompany him to the Allied Quadrant Conference in Quebec in August 1943. Newly promoted Major-General Wingate joined the Chiefs-of-Staff and Prime Minister Churchill, where Allied strategy in the China-Burma-India theatre was top of the agenda. Churchill introduced Wingate as the successor to Lawrence of Arabia. President Roosevelt was so impressed with Wingate's proposals to assist US theatre commander General Joseph 'Vinegar Joe' Stilwell in reopening a land supply route from India to China that he promptly instructed his air force chief, General 'Hap' Arnold, to provide Wingate with his own direct air support.

There Wingate presented a plan to insert eight long range penetration brigades behind enemy lines during the forthcoming dry season. While the plan brought howls of protest from most of the command in India because of the resources it would require, Wingate found substantial support for his proposal at the conference. Churchill liked the idea, as did some of his general staff; the Americans were also impressed. At the conference, Marshall became a great admirer of Wingate, and

General ‘Hap’ Arnold, Chief of Staff of the US Air Forces, wrote of the strange Englishman: "You took one look at that face, like the face of a pale Indian chieftain, topping the uniform still smelling of jungle and sweat and war, and you thought: Hell, this man is serious”. Indeed the American chiefs were so taken with Wingate that they promised an American brigade for his force, as well as air craft and gliders to support his operation.

At the Quadrant Conference, in addition to approving the new Wingate campaign, the Allies agreed that there would be an attempt to seize northern Burma in the 1943-1944 dry season. A joint operation was envisaged involving Slim's regular forces; Wingate's Chindits and Stilwell's Chinese troops. The British also decided to alter their own command structure, in accordance with Churchill's feeling that some life had to be pumped into the sluggish India command. Wavell had already been made Viceroy of India and replaced by General Sir Claude Auchinleck, the former commander in chief of British forces in the Middle East. Now the command function was to be split; Auchinleck would take on the responsibility of training and equipping the Indian Army and developing India as a base for operations. The actual campaign against the Japanese would be conducted by a new organization, the Southeast Asia Command. As Supreme Allied Commander for SEAC the British chose Acting Vice-Admiral the Lord Louis Mountbatten. A cousin of King George VI.

Less than four months after his depleted force stumbled out of the Burmese jungle, Wingate was plotting another expedition against the Japanese. He said confidently; "The first was the experiment, now comes the full dress show”. Helping Wingate to orchestrate this new operation was an innovative young American fighter pilot named Philip J. Cochran, whose Air Commandos were to bring a new dimension to jungle fighting. Under Cochran's direction, gliders would be used for the first time in this theatre; they would transport more than four hundred men and ground-clearing equipment behind enemy lines.

The take-off was set for Sunday, 5th March 1944. Meanwhile, B-25s and P-51s softened up enemy positions with more than 335 sorties. Tow planes practiced getting off the ground with heavily laden gliders attached to them by ropes, while the Chindits themselves practised getting in and out of mock-glider interiors thrown together out of bamboo.

At 18 12 hours on the evening of 5th March, a C-47 towing two Waco gliders roared down the runway of the Lalaghat airfield in eastern India. The second Chindit foray into Burma was under way. Within two hours, waves of gliders slammed down on an obstacle-ridden jungle clearing dubbed „Broadway". Most of them landed safely, but some somersaulted over ditches, smashed into trees or hurtled into other wrecked aircraft. Seventeen had snapped loose from their tow lines while in the air, and nine of them had come down in Japanese territory. Confused Chindits in one downed glider fought a pitched battle with a rescue team of British troops.

Within a week after the landing at Broadway, Wingate had nearly twelve thousand troops in Burma, three quarters of whom had arrived by air. Other strips were quickly established, each protected by its own stronghold. The Chindits dug bunkers, laid telephone lines, aligned their heavy weapons and strung miles of barbed wire not only around entire positions, but around individual platoons, companies and battalions as well. The stronghold at Broadway eventually included a hospital, cultivated fields, a chicken farm and shops.

From these fortresses in the jungle, Wingate's raiders slashed out time and again at enemy lines of communication, tearing up railroad tracks and destroying supplies. And when the Japanese moved to eject the invaders from their bases, the Chindits fought back fiercely in hand-to-hand combat. Chindit Major John Masters, in his book '*The Road Past Mandalay',* described the terrible aftermath of the fighting in vivid wasteland terms: "blasted trees, feet and twisted hands sticking up out of the earth, bloody shirts, ammunition clips, holes half-full of water, and over all the heavy, sweet stench of death, from our own bodies and entrails lying unknown in the shattered ground, from Japanese corpses on the wire, or fastened, dead and rotting, in the trees".

By 12th March 1944, a force of nine battalions with heavy weapons had been flown to areas 100 miles east of the string of Japanese posts along the Chindwin River which mark the 'front', between the British Fourteenth Army and the Japanese. The initial fly-in was nine thousand men, 1 300 pack-animals (mules) and 223 tons of stores and ammunition; a terrific feat of airmanship and staff-work. This was only the beginning. Before March was over another brigade had arrived, having marched successfully through the Japanese outposts and another was being flown in. Defended bases complete with landing grounds had been established deep in Japanese held Burma.

At the period of its greatest expansion Wingate's army was giving the Japanese blow for blow and were harrying the supply routes of their two fronts; one facing the British in the west and the other General Joseph 'Vinegar Joe' Stilwell's Chinese to the north. By then, the long-expected Japanese offensive against the British Fourteenth Army had begun. Stilwell with his Chinese army was struggling through the forests and mountains of far northern Burma, and not making much progress.

After much debate, the Chindits, were ordered north to assist Stilwell directly, their agreed strategic mission all along. Some Chindit senior officers opposed the whole scheme from the beginning. They pointed out sourly, but not without military sense, that this vast force had achieved little of value in relation to its cost. The upshot was that some twenty four battalions, almost three divisions, were out of the war crippled by malnutrition, exhaustion and tropical illness. Moreover, they had been absent from the scene of the decisive battle on the borders of India around Kohima-Imphal. As for the main aim, in spite of the Chindits' great effort, a handful of Japanese had held Stilwell up for over two months. The debate has gone on ever since at great length

and with no little bitterness. Much of it has centred on Wingate's personality and relations with fellow generals

The Chindits fought on valiantly in Burma until they were finally withdrawn in August. With the help of close air support, they had defeated eleven Japanese battalions and tied up troops the enemy desperately needed elsewhere. But their inspiring, eccentric leader was not on hand to share their success. On the evening of 24th March 1944, Wingate was returning from a visit to his troops when the B-25 he was in suddenly plunged into the rugged hills west of Imphal. So violent was the crash and the ensuing fire that little more than Wingate's battered pith helmet and some charred letters from home remained with which to make positive identification.

Long Range Penetration, as advocated by Wingate, rested on three pillars. The first was airpower. The Chindits were to reach their objectives by air, and they were to be supplied by air, while their heavy fire support was to come from the air as well. This freed them from all conventional worries about front or flanks, and dependence on artillery and road bound supply columns. The second foundation was radio control. Radio communications freed the columns from a rigid command and staff HQ structure. They were to be manoeuvred from a single HQ far away, like ships at sea. Thirdly, the Chindits were an *elite* fighting force. It is often said that they were not specialists like commandos or paratroops but ordinary regiments trained according to Wingate's unique methods. This is not altogether correct. There was extensive and ruthless reform of ordinary line units transferred to Wingate; everyone over 40 years of age was excluded and there were army-wide appeals for volunteers, and many came forward. These last were the best, for they were drawn from a large number of eager young men stranded in boring, static duties all over India, remote from any kind of action.

Wingate's doctrine was largely derived from his guerrilla experience in Palestine, Ethiopia, and on the first Chindit Raid of February-April 1943. His specially designed units were designed to exert the maximum leverage by emerging from the jungle cover of Burma to raid, ambush and cut communications. But formal operations were not precluded; far from it. The Chindits were prepared to hold positions, with mobile columns. They could march on a key position, sending some columns to isolate it, and capture it in formal assault. Wingate's strongholds, the fortified camps where his troops could rest and refit were sited deep in the jungle and only accessible on foot or by air. Supply in the field was by air-drop and the wounded were flown out by light aircraft from the actual battlefield direct to hospitals in India.

The detailed strategic picture of the South-East Asia theatre was extremely complex and continually changing. Basically it was dominated by the United States, which saw that Japan could most effectively be defeated nearer Japan. The US planners were realists; to them, India and Burma were secondary theatres, even irrelevant. China was far more important. Given aid, her land forces could soak up enormous Japanese resources. And better still, if the Japanese could be cleared from parts of Eastern China, US bomber bases could be established near the coast and Japan

attacked from close range. But China was cut off by land and sea, all war materials' having to be flown in, and of course, of all bulk supply methods the air is the most wasteful and costliest. General Stilwell (Chinese expert, former, chief instructor at Fort Benning, the US infantry school, fire-eater and Anglophobe) with two, later three, US equipped Chinese divisions, trained by Stilwell himself, was given the mission of clearing the extreme north of Burma. This would open up a land route for road and a petrol pipeline to be driven from Assam to China.

What the Americans *were* prepared to listen to was any plan designed to help Stilwell forward. This was where Wingate came in. The US planners saw that a descent on occupied north Burma could cut off Stilwell's opponents from supply and reinforcement. The British tend to look at any new idea to see what's wrong with it and then find reasons for rejecting it. The Americans are quite the reverse, they see if they can make it work better. At the Quebec conference in July 1943 they gave Wingate their enthusiastic blessing. He was given No 1 Air Commando, a pocket air force, to enable him to put his doctrine into practice and an American infantry regiment to train according to his peculiar methods. It was later transferred to Stilwell and became the so-called 'Merrill's' Marauders'.

Wingate thus had his foot in the door, but with lofty strategic vision he looked far beyond the prosaic task of cutting supply lines for some other commander to reap the victory and glory. His official mission could be accomplished by raiding operations and something more ambitious against the road-rail focus in the Indaw area. But Indaw had two airfields. One of the many plans made, and discarded, for the SE Asia theatre was Operation Capital, in which an airborne descent was to be followed up by the fly-in of two conventional divisions; the idea being to avoid the long plod over the mountains. Capital was dropped because it required too many resources for what, in US eyes, was a secondary theatre; they didn't care what happened in the rest of Burma as long as the Ledo supply road went through to China. As for the British, they were happy for the Japanese to come and attack the retrained Fourteenth Army, strongly posted on its own ground. That didn't suit Wingate: The Indaw airfields and the prospects of establishing an impregnable base there fascinated him to the exclusion of all other considerations. If only the authorities would give him the necessary few extra aircraft and troops. The trouble was that nobody wanted it. A solid defence of India, a political time-bomb in the Empire and Commonwealth, was the British strategic requirement. Wingate's fiery nature rejected such timid, defensive thinking.

He explained his real intentions fully and candidly; "Propaganda, is essential to this force. Without propaganda it would never have existed". He described how he feared that the heavy casualties and lack of results of his little 1943 operation might have led to his whole grand project being rejected, how he overcame this, and what his next move was. He intended to seize and hold the line Indaw-Bhamo and obtain such a resounding success that it would not be possible for higher command to deny him the resources for his grand design. "They say that there are no troops available. They *do* exist: it's just that higher command have not the ability or imagination to see how they

could be used". If successful, he was going to press for further expansion of his force. He would capture and consolidate the whole area around Indaw, hand it over to conventional divisions as their base. Then by repeating the process, step by step, he would leapfrog his way across SE Asia to Bangkok in Siam (Thailand).

The 'Chindits'. Wingate's highly personal instrument, were organized into six brigades each of four battalions. Each battalion broke down into two jungle-tailored 'columns'; four hundred strong mini-battalions with British or Ghurkha soldiers plus Burma Rifle troops for scouting and local knowledge. These formations had mortars, machine guns and engineers. The command structure was less well-thought-out because there was no intervening command level between the brigadier and his eight columns. This was too many for one HQ to control. Wingate himself at Force HQ was trying to command two equivalent divisions and an air force without divisional commanders. Brigadier Michael Calvert of 77th Brigade, when plunged into close combat and personal control of one battle, had six battalions to command and was responsible for four separate operations.

The air component was the highly effective and efficient US No 1 Air Commando, an all-American affair with 13 C47 transport aircraft, 12 B25 Mitchell medium bombers, 30 P51 Mustang fighter-bombers and no fewer than 100 light aircraft. These last were capable of landing on the shortest and roughest of jungle air strips. Their tasks were reconnaissance, target-marking, intercommunication and, above all, evacuating the wounded. The Air Commando also had over 200 Waco gliders, but to tow these had to call on outside help. Lack of time for trials and over optimism led to the C47s each being given two gliders to tow, which proved to be well below the margin of safety; and a number were lost or prematurely released on the fly-in.

Tactically his whole operation was flawless. While the two columns sealed off the selected area north and south, he cleared it of the enemy by some dashing attacks, using 3rd Battalion, the 6th Ghurkha Rifles and 3rd Battalion, The Staffordshire Regiment, often led by Calvert in person at the head of his own elite Ghurkha assault company. In the twentieth century it is a commonplace of warfare that the enemy is never seen and fighting is largely an exchange of fire. The clash at Mawlu reverted to eighteenth-century mayhem; hand-to-hand fighting and the *melee* reappeared; Lieutenant Cairns (posthumous VC) leading one attack went on fighting and shot a Japanese after his arm had been hacked off by a sword. The Japanese, only too often previously accustomed to seeing British and Indian troops running away from them, were first shaken and then routed.

By contrast, Calvert's defensive blocking position was organized on the most scientific lines. The '*White City'* was wired in, mined and booby-trapped; the troops dug in, with telephone lines laid, co-ordinated with mines and machine gun lines of fire to cover the approaches. Supplies of food and water were assured, field and AA artillery flown in. The full defensive system was in three rings or zones. Farthest out, the Burma Rifles, with their local knowledge, organized the local tribesmen to provide an observer and informer screen to give early warning of any approaching Japanese

force. Inside this, the 'floating' columns hovered to ambush or pounce when it was found. Finally, the actual perimeter of this jungle fortress proved to be a nut on which the Japanese regularly broke their teeth.

One very striking participant in the successful fighting was the American 'flying artillery', for that was the function of No 1 Air Commando. Following a scheme devised by Squadron-Leader Robert Thompson (now Sir Robert Thompson), each column was accompanied by an RAF pilot, with a special radio to call for and control the fighter-bombers. They could arrive in two and a half to three hours, and be guided accurately on to targets within 200-300 yards of the Chindit columns. This was the most advanced close air support system of the day. No other aircraft at that time could react as quickly or as close to friendly troops. In modernised form it is still in use today.

Brigadier Fergusson's plans, rehearsed in training and looking very attractive on a map, was for a wide, sweeping movement of his dispersed columns. One of 2nd Battalion, The Queen's Regiment was to block off Indaw from the west and the other to come in from the south, two columns of 45th Reconnaissance Regiment would converge from the NE and two of 2nd Battalion, The Leicestershire Regiment strike from the north. This sort of finesse and envelopment can work against a weak and irresolute enemy, but against the Japanese it was a sure formula for being bloodily defeated. To work it would have required a lot of luck, and Fergusson was not lucky. Wingate had hustled his exhausted troops into action against his better judgment. Fergusson lost radio touch with Special Force HQ, his own stronghold and airbase *(Aberdeen,* some 20 miles to the north), and at the crucial moments, with his widely scattered columns. The jungle traversed on the approach march was bone-dry and to obtain vital water the columns had first to dislodge the Japanese, this in a climate where a man carrying a heavy load can drink 16 pints in a day!

Both 45th Recce columns ran into bad trouble. The Japanese were ready for them and surprised one column by attacking first. Another, having gone without water for two and a half days, was cunningly ambushed by the Japanese as they approached a stream, ruthlessly shooting down the crazed men and animals as they stampeded for a life-giving drink. One column of the Queen's was also ambushed and lost all its weapons.

Just as this battle was beginning, Wingate was removed from the scene. He remains in the eyes of some a charlatan. Others see him as a military genius frustrated at every turn by the stupid and orthodox, some of whom in Chindit demonology include the most distinguished soldiers and airmen of the day. As an innovator, an inspirer of troops and a military politician (a 'propagandist' *he* would have called it) who could persuade the highest soldiers and politicians to accept his plans he stands in the first rank. But against this he trusted no one wholly. He was devious and secretive: "At times the truth was not in him: He took no one wholly into his confidence", said Fergusson.

Wingate's strategic concept was daring and imaginative and could just have worked: his putting of it into practice was far less sure. To be blunt, the flaws in his opening plan were glaring. He had decided that possession of Indaw and its airfields was the key to his whole plan. Then why adopt so circuitous and risky an approach? He started 16th Brigade off on foot at faraway Ledo with every chance of being discovered by the Japanese and of being late (Wingate himself was doubtful of Fergusson's chances of success).

There were also serious flaws in Wingate's system of command, or lack of system. Admittedly too much detailed British-style military planning can lead to rigidity, but in many respects command and control was sloppy and led Wingate to arrive at wrong, last-minute decisions. There was the rash attempt to double-tow and resultant loss of gliders. Fergusson's stronghold was chosen at the very last minute, with a dangerous airstrip. The diversion of part of Lentaiqne's brigade to the Bhamo road force was also made at the last minute. So also was the sudden early insertion of Brodie's 14th Brigade into the campaign without a definite plan for its use. This was Wingate's last important decision before his death and led to considerable bewilderment.

Wingate had a feeling for the art of command but little for its science. Charisma and 'propaganda' must be supported by a flow of information, full understanding of the plan by all concerned, and clear, frequent orders. The actual physical presence of the general at the point of decision where he can immediately and decisively influence events is indispensable. He exercises command by reassuring, encouraging, advising and above all weighing the situation up for himself. Wingate had a contempt for professional staff officers and freely expressed it. His technique of command was to take sudden, impulsive decisions when he was either at HQ in India at the end of a tenuous radio link or flying about in an aircraft.

At the crisis of the Indaw battle when co-ordination of the three brigades involved was vital, Special Force HQ was moving even farther *away* from Imphal, and Wingate was also flying *away* from the point of decision. The situation screamed for an overall commander on the spot with operational staff and a battery of powerful radio sets. Both were available, major-General Symes, Wingate's deputy commander and a host of staff were unemployed far away in Central India.

What is, then, the verdict on Wingate? Historians should be chary of dogmatic verdicts on genius unfulfilled. Generalship is an immensely difficult art, practised under great personal stress and is too often a forced, hasty choice between bad and worse options. The Indaw fiasco was enough to get any ordinary general sacked. But Wingate was a man of intelligence and ability and he might have learned much from more responsibility and experience. Generalship to a great extent has to be learnt on the job and other more famous generals have survived worse muddles.

Wingate died in a plane crash on the night of 25th March, 1944, in Assam, north-east India. At that time, with a minimum of releasable news, it is hardly surprising that wrong facts were printed in news reports, and these have been perpetuated over the

years. For instance, many references are made to the bad weather on that night in 1944. Storms of thunder and lightning have often been suggested as the possible cause of the crash of Wingate's plane. So much so that this has almost become the accepted fact, even to the point where some have recorded that Wingate flew out of Imphal in bad weather against all advice.

Journalists of the day were constrained by the censor. Similarly, official press releases were scant and understandably short on detail. As early as 27th March 1944, the PR men were putting their stories together and were requesting permission to send cables. Admiral Lord Louis Mountbatten, the Supreme Commander in South-East Asia, refused to sanction the release of any of these reports and it was not until 1st April, that the official news was announced. Even then, the communique carried only the barest of detail and it was left to the press to fill in some of these.

Having finished his inspection of the various bases, and conferences with his officers, Wingate then returned to Broadway on the afternoon of the 24th March. Arrangements had been made between Wingate and Lt. Colonel Cochran to have him transported from Broadway to Imphal. At about 15 45 hours, Wingate spoke by radio to Cochran and amongst other things asked if he would send a plane to pick him up from Broadway. Cochran replied that a B-25 was already on its way and should arrive at Broadway within the next ten minutes or so, which it did.

With nine people on board, Wingate's plane took off and headed due west for Imphal. He had previously arranged to have a meeting there with the commander, Air Commodore Vincent, According to Squadron Leader Larsen, the commanding officer at Imphal airfield, Wingate's *B-25* touched down at 18 23 hours local time. Arriving at Imphal, the aircrew and passengers all disembarked and, along with Wingate, went into the control tower.

Whilst at Imphal, the crew used the radio to enquire the state of the weather along the flight path back to base. It is also on record that the plane was under guard from the time of its arrival until its departure at just after 20 00 hours local time. At the same time that the aircraft was airborne, Captain Benjamin, USAAF, piloting a Dakota, was flying a similar course to Wingate's plane. He and his co-pilot witnessed an explosion on the ground after which a fire ensued.

In the total absence of any official information about the cause of Wingate‟s crash. It was the newspaper reports that began the storm theory at the time of the release of the news that Wingate was dead. All the news reports were similar. Officially they only had the news that Wingate had been killed in an aircraft accident whilst returning from the front line. Unofficially it is most likely that PR men in the area all had additional information about the incident which Mountbatten would not allow to be released.

The *Sunday Times* dated 12th April 1944, said: “It is believed in New Delhi that the bomber in which Major-General Wingate, the guerrilla leader, was travelling when he was killed on 24th March 1944, in Burma encountered a severe storm and crashed into a mountain side".

His death was regarded by many as a blow to the Allied cause in Burma. “A bright flame was extinguished", said Prime Minister Winston Churchill in tribute.

CHAPTER EIGHT

HARRIS

To this day, RAF Bomber Command's role in World War Two is considered possibly the most controversial. Arguments continue to rage over his conduct, effectiveness, and morality in wartime. Some going to the extreme of suggesting it was a war crime. At the centre of this controversy stands 'Bomber' Harris, Commander-in-Chief of Bomber Command. Many named him 'Butcher' and accuse him of irresponsibly and incompetently sending his crews on 'missions impossible'. He is also accused of mistakenly believing that bombing alone would win the war. Conversely, others counter by arguing that by applying all the means available to him, combined with his hard work and dedication brought the war to a successful conclusion.

Arthur Travers Harris, born in England in 1892, left school at the age of sixteen years and went to Rhodesia (Zimbabwe), taking a variety of jobs ranging from gold mining to farming. When World War One broke out in 1914, he joined the 1st Rhodesia Regiment as a bugler and participated in South African General Botha's campaign in German South West Africa (Namibia). At the end of the campaign, he sailed to England and joined the Royal Flying Corps. For the remainder of the war he was in Home Defence
fighter squadrons and in an artillery spotter squadron on the Western Front, finishing with the rank of major. He was decorated with an Air Force Cross and offered a permanent commission as Squadron Leader in the post-war RAF and stationed in India. For the remaining inter-war years, Harris was mainly posted overseas gaining promotion and experience in operations and intelligence.

From the start of World War Two, Harris was engaged in a variety of roles at the Air Ministry, until 23rd February 1942, when he took over as RAF Commander-in-Chief, Bomber Command. For the next three years of war, there was seldom a night on which Bomber Command was not involved in some type of operation. His years of experience in the Air Ministry had given him a virtually limitless capacity for paperwork and the sheer volume he produced each day was huge by any standards. He had a good grasp for detail, both technical and non-technical, gleaned through his own experience. Once a week he would chair a Group Commanders' conference at High Wycombe, and similarly he would attend Marshall of the RAF, Sir Charles Portal's weekly conference in London. For these reasons, he did not show himself to his crews, yet they all felt his presence. He had been well known for his characteristics of bluntness and single-mindedness in the peacetime RAF. Harris's gruffness and cold, penetrating stare made him a difficult man to get to know well.

Harris assumed command of Bomber Command at a dark time for the Allies. Admittedly, Russia was fighting desperately, and the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor had precipitated America's entry into the war, but otherwise the outlook was bleak. In the Far East the Japanese were sweeping all before them, while in North Africa, the British were on the back foot. Merchant shipping losses in the Atlantic were increasing alarmingly. The Russians had held the Germans before Moscow, but they were now clamouring for munitions from the Western Allies and increasingly agitating for the opening of a Second Front.

Harris maintained that, although he lacked the resources at this stage to carry out a decisive campaign, he had the only force in the West which then could take any offensive action at all against Germany. At least, his bombers would force the Germans to keep their fighters at home rather than use them against the Russians. Indeed, it would tie down a significant proportion of enemy manpower on defence of the homeland. Harris was no sooner ensconced at High Wycombe, however, when bombing policy was questioned. During 24/25th February 1942, a two-day debate on the conduct of the war was held in the House of Commons. A number of MPs complained of the seeming independence of Bomber Command, and Hore-Belisha, Secretary of State for War, argued that the escape of the German warships, Scharnhorst and Gneisenau after the incessant pounding which Bomber Command had given them 'does suggest that we are putting too much energy and too much of our manpower into the long-distance bombing policy'.

With aircraft available in operational squadrons being greater than the number of crews, the first requirement for Harris, was to try and increase the latter. At the same time, Harris wanted to force the Germans to spread their anti-aircraft defences as widely as possible in order to reduce their concentrations in the Ruhr and other prominent and important targets. It was then a question of finding a point in the enemy's air defence crust through which the bombers could be escorted by fighters and then choosing a route inland where they were unlikely to meet heavy fighter opposition. Harris needed a suitable and worthwhile target which could be easily located, and which could be attacked in daylight with the bombers returning in darkness.

Harris's first major raid was against Augsburg, and in particular the MAN factory which produced diesel-engines, and was reputed to be the largest of its kind in Germany. The aiming-point was to be the machine assembly shop. Seven crews each from the first two Lancaster squadrons were chosen, under the command of South African Squadron Leader J. D. Nettleton. They pressed home and attacked, losing 7 aircraft; the remainder, all damaged, eventually made it back, including Nettleton himself, who was subsequently awarded the Victoria Cross. While all applauded the gallantry shown and the fact that the machine assembly shop had been hit, it was quite clear to Harris that such raids, although spectacular, were too costly to be pursued in daylight with heavy bombers.

By the beginning of May 1942, Harris estimated that with 1 000 bombers, utilising operational training aircraft and crews, and calling on other Commands, especially Coastal, it was possible to attack the Ruhr or the vicinity. Harris decided on Cologne during the next full moon, which would be at the end of May. Having worked out his plan in some detail, Harris now had to sell his plan to Churchill, which he did on the 17th May.

Churchill was enthusiastic, and next day Harris saw Portal, Marshall of the Royal Air Force, asking him to seek assurance from the Admiralty that a sizeable Coastal Command contribution would be made. This Portal achieved and thus, Harris had his 1 000 bombers and more. Harris informed his Group Commanders of the plan. The objective was to cause a complete and uncontrollable conflagration throughout the target area. To that end the maximum number of incendiary bombs would comprise the main load. The date was fixed at 28th May or the first suitable night thereafter.

The operation order went out dated 23rd May, 1942. A significant amount of redeployment of aircraft was needed, especially of those from the other Commands. It was essential, however, that maximum secrecy be maintained. Then on 25th May, in the midst of the preparations, Harris was hit by a bombshell. The Admiralty suddenly stepped in and removed the whole of the Coastal Command contribution. No reasons appear to have been given. A further dredging of the Bomber Command Groups managed to raise the aircraft availability figure to 916, which still was not enough to reach the magic figure of 1 000. Harris decreed that all training and conversion flights within the operational groups would also be used. Although, the concentration of bombers over a target had been steadily increasing, there was now to be a 'quantum leap', with more than 1 000 bombers expected to deliver their loads in a period of only 90 minutes.

At his daily 09 00 hours conference, Harris decided that he could wait no longer for a suitable target within range, and Cologne was selected for that night. No less than 1 050 bombers took off from 55 airfields. When the first aircraft, arrived over the target, flak was light and they noticed that dummy fires had been lit outside the city. They dropped their incendiaries on each of three aiming-points in the centre of Cologne and then turned away, while the second wave began their attacks. Soon, there was an enormous conflagration, and the later aircraft had little difficulty in identifying the target. When the figures were correlated, it was found that 40 aircraft were missing (Churchill had been prepared for a loss of 100 and Harris 60), although a further 12 were so seriously damaged that they had to be written off and another 33 were categorised as seriously damaged. Even more encouraging was the fact that no less than 890 claimed to have hit the target, representing 540 tons of HE and 915 tons of incendiaries. Because of the enormous pall of smoke over the city, it was to be some days before the damage could be accurately assessed, but it was clear that Bomber Command had had a spectacular success.

The Press had a field-day: 'the greatest air operation ever planned and undoubtedly achieved the greatest single success in aerial warfare'. The normally sober headline

of The Times proclaiming: 'OVER 1 000 BOMBERS RAID COLOGNE: Biggest Air Attack of the War. Of the many tributes which flowed into HQ Bomber Command, two meant more to Harris than any other. From Churchill: “I congratulate you and the whole of Bomber Command upon the remarkable feat of organisation which enabled you to dispatch over a thousand bombers to Cologne in a single night. The proof of the growing power of the British Bomber Force is also the herald of what Germany will receive, city by city, from now on”. Harris had shown what he could do if he had the aircraft.

On 13th June 1942, Harris told the Prime Minister that he intended to mount another 1 000-bomber operation during the June full moon and urged him to apply pressure to the Admiralty to release Coastal Command aircraft for it. Churchill in a minute of 15th June wrote to the First Sea Lord informing him of further 1 000 bomber raids and the necessity for Coastal Command to participate. The Admiralty offered 100 Hudson medium bombers, Harris had hoped for 250 aircraft, but, the Admiralty being adamant, he had again to draw heavily on training units for the next 1 000 Bomber Raid on 25th June 1942. This time the target was Bremen, and 1 006 aircraft took off.

Although considerable damage was caused to the town, especially to the Focke-Wulf factory, the results were disappointing. After the success of Cologne, Harris had hoped to make the 1 000 bomber raids the cornerstone of his campaign. On the evidence of the Cologne damage analysis, he believed that two to four successive raids of this size on a similar city would knock it out 'for any foreseeable duration of the war', and suggested that a list of 20-30 such towns be drawn up. Meanwhile, Harris relentlessly continued his battle to make Bomber Command the decisive weapon of the war, and bombarded Churchill with his views. Meanwhile, as the Bremen 1 000 Raid had only too amply demonstrated, the need to improve bombing accuracy was paramount. This was being tackled in two ways; by the formation of a specialist target marking force, and the introduction of new technical aids.

The idea of forming a special target marking force appears to have been first officially mooted in the Air Ministry in March 1942, when Group Captain Bufton, Deputy Director of Bomber Operations, suggested in a minute to Harris that he should designate six squadrons for this task, which could then concentrate on developing effective tactics. During the summer of 1942, Harris came round to Bufton's proposal. He was now convinced that the more effective the illumination the easier it would be to penetrate the industrial haze of the Ruhr, which was causing such problems at the time. He agreed to the need for a specialised role for expert crews and the use of flares or incendiaries in the vicinity of the target. In a letter dated 20th June he ordered four squadrons to be set aside for this purpose. Even more significant was the fact that at this very time the Germans began jamming the GEE direction finder. New technical aids were still under development, so for the rest of the year the newly formed Pathfinder Force was to be reliant on merely their own experience and natural ability to identify targets.

The two aiming devices on which Bomber Command was pinning its hopes for the future were OBOE and H2S. Meanwhile, the Pathfinder Force was cutting its teeth, and during the period August 1942 - January 1943 took part in 26 attacks. With the introduction of OBOE and H2S, there was every reason to presume that Bomber Command's offensive against Germany would really begin to bite in 1943. Especially with ever more huge four engined Lancaster heavy bombers coming off the production line, and the United States Army Air Force (USAAF) adding its weight to the fray. The Americans pinned their faith on the heavy armament of the B-17 four engined bombers and its Norden bombsight.

The end of 1942 saw Bomber Command in a much better position than it had been at the end of the previous year. OBOE had already been fitted to the Mosquito twin engined fast fighter bombers. The Pathfinders, too, were now obtaining proper Target Indicators (TI) and these were first used on Berlin on the night of 16/17 January. The effectiveness of the bombs themselves was also increasing, and by this time there was an 8 000lb High Capacity (HC) bomb in service, which was carried in modified Lancaster's.

Operation 'Chastise', the Dams Raid of the night 16/17 May 1943, is undoubtedly, in terms of technical ingenuity, imaginative planning and courage, one of the greatest feats of RAF Bomber Command. Barnes Wallis, designer of the Wellington bomber and the man who made 'Chastise' technically possible, had been considering methods of attacking the dams since the outbreak of war. His ideas eventually generated sufficient interest for the Ministry of Aircraft Production to set up a special Air Attack on the Dams (AAD) Committee, which met three times during 1942. A number of tests were carried out by Wallis. Through these, Wallis developed his 'bouncing bomb' concept, but for a long time the Air Ministry were sceptical. Indeed, the Admiralty showed somewhat more enthusiasm for it as an anti-ship weapon.

Consequently, by the end of 1942, Wallis was working on two versions: 'Highball', which would be carried by a Mosquito for attacks against ships, and 'Upkeep', a larger version, which would be carried in a Lancaster for use against the dams.

Trials from a Wellington in Dorset at the beginning of 1943 proved the concept, and won the Air Ministry over. Harris was initially unenthusiastic: "This is tripe of the wildest description, there is not the smallest chance of its working". Harris thought that this was another Admiralty diversion; he had only recently received the Casablanca Directive and was gearing himself up to launch his attacks on the Ruhr and other targets in Germany, in which the Lancaster was to be his cornerstone. Harris still poured scorn on the idea, something he later denied. Portal, who had lived with the idea of knocking out the dams since its inception, believed that the idea should be given a try, and three Lancaster's were allocated for 'Upkeep' trials. By mid-March 1943, Harris had been told that the operation was to go ahead, and that twenty Lancaster's would be modified to take 'Upkeep'. Harris personally selected Wing Commander Guy Gibson to command 617 Squadron. Gibson epitomised all

that was best in Bomber Command, having been awarded a DSO for his leadership and gallantry. The other highly trained and experienced pilots were all volunteers.

On 16th May 1943, nineteen Lancaster's took off in three waves. The first, consisting of 9 aircraft led by Gibson himself, was to attack the Mohne Dam and then the Eder. Any aircraft with a bomb still on board after these two attacks would tackle the Sorpe. The second group, acting as a diversion for Gibson's group, would take a different route and go for the Sorpe. The third wave were to act as an airborne reserve. The outward and return routes would be flown at a height of 60 feet in order to avoid enemy radar. This was to cause three casualties on the outward trip. One of the second-wave aircraft had to return early when it hit the sea and lost its bomb, another hit a high tension cable and crashed. Another hit trees while trying to avoid flak. Three more were shot down by flak on the way out.

Gibson's wave breached the Mohne, losing one aircraft in the process, and then went on to attack the Eder which was successfully breached. Meanwhile, the second wave, had caused a small breach in the Sorpe Dam, which was later widened, but not decisively. Tragically, two aircraft were shot down on their way back, making a total of eight aircraft lost, only three members of the crews survived to become prisoners of war. As the aircraft returned, Harris and Wallis motored over to Scampton to greet them, and one of Harris's first actions was to telephone Churchill in Washington to inform him of the success of 'Chastise'. The Dams Raid undoubtedly produced an enormous fillip not just for British morale, but to that of the Allies and the Occupied Countries. Among the many plaudits was one by Churchill, who used the success of the raid to reiterate the Allied bombing strategy when he addressed the US Congress on 19th May.

The Americans were clearly impressed, and it certainly helped the Combined Bomber Offensive plan to gain acceptance as official Allied policy, and a valuable morale booster to Bomber Command. It showed the skill and determination of which it was capable. It was these factors which made the raid so important, not so much the physical damage caused, which turned out not to be as substantial as first thought or hoped. Nevertheless, the lesson had once more been reinforced that the casualty rate was too high for Bomber Command to seriously contemplate.

The destruction of the major port and U Boat construction yard of Hamburg, was viewed by Harris as essential to reducing the industrial capacity of the enemy's war machine. Together with the effect on morale, success would play a very important part in shortening the war. Some 10 000 tons of bombs would be needed to complete the process. With the use of the dropping of aluminium strip foils successfully tested to jam radar defences, code named 'WINDOW', Harris planned Operation 'Gomorrah', as the offensive against Hamburg was called. Harris at his 09 00 hours conference gave the 'green light' for the night of 24/25 July 1943, and 791 Lancaster's, Halifax's, Stirling's and Wellington's took off for Hamburg. Each aircraft bound for Hamburg carried its own bundles of 'WINDOW' and the crews were instructed to drop them at one-minute intervals from the moment that they were within

about 60 miles of the target. Their effect on the German defences was to prove devastating. The main force attacked the target with a mixture of H.E. and incendiaries. In the space of some fifty minutes, 728 aircraft dropped almost 2 400 tons of explosive on the target, with some 40 per cent getting within three miles of the aiming-point. Its effect on the ground was that of a firestorm, fanning the flames caused by the incendiaries, so that small fires quickly linked up. Such was the concentration of the attack, that the temperature quickly built up and fierce hot winds blew.

Night fighter crews and German controllers were totally confused; only twelve bombers were posted as missing. It was an auspicious beginning. The following day, the US Eighth Air Force joined in the battle, with 234 B-17 Fortresses being sent to the area, 68 of which attacked Hamburg specifically. That night, however, instead of going back to Hamburg, Harris launched a `maximum effort' on Essen, using 'OBOE' and 'WINDOW'. It was the most destructive raid on Essen to date; fires were still burning two days later, and heavy damage was done to the Krupp's works. Aircraft losses, were comparatively light for Essen, with only 26 aircraft being shot down. During the day, the Americans paid another visit to Hamburg with 54 Fortresses attacking and 2 only being lost. The following night, a second major attack was launched against Hamburg. This time 787 bombers took off, and the effect was much more concentrated than the previous effort. 'WINDOW' again proved effective, but the Germans, now adopted a new system with the controllers concentrating on giving a running commentary on the height and position of the bomber stream rather than trying to acquire individual targets for the night fighters. Nevertheless, only 17 bombers were lost. Once again the firestorm raged.

The city was devastated by the raids, and it seemed that Bomber Command was now finally capable of inflicting decisive damage, with a significantly lower loss rate than hitherto. Hamburg had been selected as a target because it was the second most important city in Germany, also because, being near the coast it was easy to find. Whether the same results could be achieved against targets deeper into Germany remained to be seen.

On 3rd November 1943, Harris sent a minute to Churchill with some details of what had been achieved so far. He listed 19 towns and cities in Germany, which he claimed were 'virtually destroyed' and these included Hamburg, Cologne, Essen and the majority of the Ruhr towns. Under 'seriously damaged' were a further 19 population centres, including Munich, Nuremberg and Berlin, while a further 9 were considered 'damaged'. He said; "we can only claim what can be seen in the photographs. What actually occurs is much more than can be seen in any photograph". As for future plans, he listed target areas in order of priority, with Berlin at the top. "I await promised USAAF help in this the greatest of air battles. But I would not propose to wait forever, or for long if opportunity serves. In conclusion, he wrote: "I feel certain that Germany must collapse before this programme which is more than half completed already. We must get the USAAF to wade in in greater force. If they will only get going according to plan and avoid such disastrous diversions as Ploesti.

We can wreck Berlin from end to end if the USAAF will come in on it. It will cost between us 400-500 aircraft. It will cost Germany the war".

On 2/3 December Berlin was visited yet again, but there was a sharp rise in aircraft lost, with 40 out of 458 posted as missing. Nevertheless, in spite of these frustrations, Harris remained optimistic. On 7th December he wrote a formal letter to Churchill. He began by asserting that during the first ten months of 1943 Bomber Command had destroyed 25 per cent of the acreage of the 38 principal towns attacked, and believed that the enemy would 'capitulate'. So long as he was able to maintain the same tempo of attack, he calculated that this would be achieved by 1st April 1944. Based on a forecast loss rate of 5 per cent and the planned production of 212 Lancaster's per month: stating "the Lancaster force alone should be sufficient for the devastation in which surrender is inevitable. This, however, is a reasonable expectation only if the assumptions made are actually fulfilled"; emphasising that Lancaster production must be increased over the next four months. Finally, he stressed that: "Time is an essential factor and if we are to fulfil our task by the 1st April 1944, or indeed at all, any delay in taking all measures possible to ensure the delivery of sufficient aircraft suitably equipped for their difficult task and adequately protected against the ever-increasing defences of the enemy is likely to prove fatal". Harris clearly believed that Bomber Command, given the necessary tools, could finish the war on its own.

The Air Ministry had become increasingly concerned over the need to reduce German fighter strength and there was nothing to indicate that Harris had this in mind. It was pointed out that Harris's 38 principal cities contained only 11 per cent of the German population. He was reminded that the US Air Force's priorities were the wearing down of German fighter strength and the destruction of the German ball bearing industry as a prerequisite to 'OVERLORD' (code word for invasion of France), and that "as far as is practicable your efforts should be coordinated with and complementary to those of the US Air Force". Harris was told, "Your night bombers would make the greatest contribution by completely destroying those vital industries which can be reached by day only at heavy cost; examples are Schweinfurt, Leipzig and centres of twin-engined aircraft". He also believed that Hitler "could control German morale, but feared precision day attacks on vital industries". In other words, Harris was being told that he must alter his complete policy. The suggestion of Schweinfurt as a target had already been put to Harris on 17th December. Harris had replied on the 23rd, and used much the same arguments as he had in 1942, pointing out that "the claims as to the actual percentage of Germany's ball-bearing supply manufactured in Schweinfurt have always been exaggerated and have been progressively reduced, even by their author". He was quite certain that the Germans would have now dispersed this particular industry. He went on to say: "you must excuse me if I have become cynical with regard to the continual diversions of the bomber effort from its legitimate effort in which, as we all know, has inflicted the most grievous and intolerable damage to Germany. If Schweinfurt were a vital target, the US Air Force should be invited to carry out another attack on it, and if they can set the place alight in daylight, then we may have some reasonable chance of hitting it in the dark on the same night".

Harris maintained that the main effect of 'de-housing' was the devastation of economic life. He also bridled at being reminded that his efforts should be complementary to those of the US Air Force, when Bomber Command had dropped ten times the bomb-load of the latter on Germany during 1943. And, in any event, the American effort had
been mainly against fringe targets. The Air Ministry reiterated on 14th January 1944, stating that Harris was to attack “as far as practicable, those industrial centres associated with German fighter production and ball-bearing industries”. Although it was appreciated that there were tactical difficulties involved, it was believed that the task was not beyond the present operational capabilities of Bomber Command with the navigational aids now available. Armaments manufacturing centres, were specified as priority targets. Berlin not mentioned, Harris had been brought to heel. Nevertheless, during the first part of January 1944, attacks on Berlin were continued, despite the appalling weather. On the night of the 1/2 January, 421 Lancaster’s were sent against Berlin and 28 failed to return. The following night 383 Lancaster’s, Halifax bombers and Mosquitoes attacked and a further 27 were shot down.

The weather prevented any further major operations until the night of the 14th when 498 bombers attacked, losing 38 in the process. A third attack on Berlin, the largest yet, was mounted on 20/21 January, with 769 aircraft taking off, and 35 being shot down. Harris had no intention of complying with instructions, resulting in a more specific Air Ministry directive issued on 28th January. It reiterated the priority of attacks on the fighter aircraft and ball-bearing industries to be given top priority. Bomber Command and the US Air Force were to attack Berlin only when weather and tactical conditions were unsuitable for priority attacks. Harris, therefore, was being allowed very little leeway. Weather during the first part of February 1944, prevented any operations. The US Air Force, which at last had received the P-51 Mustang single engined long range fighter, now began daylight attacks on Berlin.

Harris next selected a target which had been little visited, but which was important both politically and economically. This was Nuremberg. Much has been written about this raid: suffice it to say that it was the worst night of the war for Bomber Command with 96 aircraft out of 795 being posted missing. Apart from the fact that Harris took a gamble on the weather, most of the losses were caused by a new tactic developed by the Germans. This had been first noticed during the Stuttgart attack on 15/16 March, when German night fighters had been divided into two forces. While one harried the bomber stream, the other was held back to deploy over the target. Once identified, they took advantage of the fact that the bomber formations were at their most concentrated during this phase of the operation. Nuremberg confirmed that the only answer to this was to divide the bomber force, and on 1st April Harris laid down that from now on the main force would attack at least two targets each time it operated. Otherwise, it was clearly a night that Harris wished to forget. As for the crews themselves, when they heard of the total casualty list, there was perhaps more relief at having survived than any despondency over the missing. Harris had failed in his attempt to bring Germany to her knees by 1st April 1944. In all, during the five months from November to March, he had dispatched 28 903 sorties by night, from which 1

128 aircraft had failed to return, and another 2 034 had been damaged. Yet, he had no time to bewail his failure or mourn his losses, for the Allies were about to embark on another phase of the war, the planning of which had been increasingly drawing his attention during the past few months.

As early as 26th April 1943, a directive had been issued to General Sir Frederick Morgan, Chief of Staff to the Supreme Allied Commander (COSSAC), ordering him to draw up plans whose object would be 'to defeat the German fighting forces in north-west Europe'. It would be some time before the British and American air staffs were drawn into the planning, mainly because they were too engrossed in the prosecution of bombing Germany into oblivion. Then, in August 1943, Air Chief Marshal Sir Trafford Leigh-Mallory was appointed Commander in Chief, Allied Expeditionary Air Force (AEAF). He advocated that the strategic air forces should also be brought in to give direct support to 'OVERLORD'. The strategic air forces should switch 50 per cent of their effort to support the invasion during and after the landings. General Dwight Eisenhower was appointed the Supreme Commander, and Harris and Eaker placed under his command. Harris accepted the commitment to „OVERLORD" and expressed himself 'most ready' to discuss the matter with the AEAF Commanders. He did, however, request confirmation that the overall aim of bombing Germany still held good, and that in order to prevent 'the whole of the German fighter force being transferred to the invasion beaches, the bomber offensive must be maintained. Tactical bombing during the landings and beyond was only feasible if the weather was right. Harris then discussed the problems of bombing accurately by night, outlining the limitations of his technical aids, the problems over weather, the fact that the Pathfinder Force could not mark more than two targets in one night and that if used more than two nights in a row its efficiency would be impaired.

He warned that any cessation of attacks against Germany would lead to a resurgence of German strength and morale. In conclusion, he wrote: "It is thus clear that the best and indeed the only efficient support which Bomber Command can give to 'OVERLORD' is the intensification of attacks on suitable industrial centres in Germany as and when the opportunity offers. If we attempt to substitute for this process attacks on gun emplacements, beach defences, communications or dumps in occupied territory we shall commit the irremediable [sic] error of diverting our best weapons from the military function, for which it has been equipped and trained, to tasks which it cannot effectively carry out. Though this might give a specious appearance of 'supporting' the Army, in reality it would be the greatest disservice we could do them. It would lead directly to disaster".

The AEAF pinpointed the flaw in Harris's argument in that it was based entirely on his experience of tackling deep penetration targets in Germany. He ignored the fact that the much shorter range of the targets he would be called upon to attack in support of 'OVERLORD' would mean that his technical aids would be that much more effective, he would be able to mount more sorties, and that weather forecasting would be much more accurate. The Air Staff pointed out that, using the marker bombing technique, targets could be changed at short notice. In any event, it should still be possible to

carry out some attacks on Germany during this time. The AEAF view on this was that failure of ‘OVERLORD’ would create far greater repercussions than a temporary halt to attacks on Germany, but, in any event, diversions from the latter would be considered and decisions to do so taken at the 'highest level'. One cannot help but suspect that Harris, while overtly willing to support ‘OVERLORD’, secretly still believed that air attack could defeat Germany before any invasion had to be launched. Thus his heart was not in ‘OVERLORD’ and he would prove that Bomber Command should not be diverted from its main task as he saw it.

The Air Chiefs were suspicious of the way that Harris's mind was working. One of the other flaws in Harris's paper was that he made no consideration of the types of targets, i.e. communications, which AEAF were expecting him to undertake, merely restricting his remarks to defences actually on the beaches. It is most unlikely that he would not have had some idea of the plan by this stage, and one can only assume that he omitted mention of it because it did not suit his overall argument. However, just over a week after Harris had written his paper, AEAF came out with a fresh plan.

A planning paper distributed on 22nd January 1944 mentioned that an attack on the 76 most important railway servicing and repair facilities in North-West Europe would paralyse movement in the whole region they serve and render almost impossible the subsequent movement by rail of major reserves into France. Attacks on enemy road and rail communications would make the best use of strategic air support to the invasion. Attacks on railway communications were best served by going for large rail centres. Less bombing accuracy was needed to cause decisive results. The US Strategic Bombing Force were against the plan because they, like Harris, wanted to continue attacks against Germany.

Lack of oil resources would damage the German war machine more quickly than the Transportation Plan, and in any event it would certainly force the German fighter force into the air, whereas attacks on communications targets in occupied countries would not provoke such an intense reaction. However, the British Air Staff, while viewing oil as a good secondary target system, did not see it as relevant to the prime strategic bombing aim of destroying the Luftwaffe. Harris, too, was against it as it meant too many precision targets, which he saw as being beyond his capabilities. There were also deep reservations from Churchill and the War Cabinet in that the Transportation Plan would cause the deaths of many French civilians, something which went against a long-standing War Cabinet ruling that this type of attack was unacceptable. During February, as part of the plan to destroy German air strength, a series of attacks had been launched to prevent the Germans using French aircraft factories. Twelve such targets were identified and the task of destroying them was entrusted to 617 Squadron, using a 12 000lb blast bomb. The low-level marking techniques developed by Leonard Cheshire during this short and very successful campaign resulted in high bombing accuracy.

On 14th April 1944, Bomber Command was formally passed to the Supreme Allied Commander, who exercised this through his Deputy, Tedder. Nevertheless, it was

decided that it was only fair that the French population be warned, and Bomber Command put out a broadcast on the evening of 18th April that air attacks against factories and railways in France would be intensified in the coming weeks. Churchill then, on 7th May, sent a personal telegram to President Roosevelt warning him that the Cabinet feared that civilian casualties might 'easily bring about a great revulsion in French feeling towards their approaching liberators', but Roosevelt replied that the decision was a military and not a political one.

On 15th May, there was a gathering of Allied commanders. It provided the opportunity for each commander to brief the others on his role in the forthcoming operations and among those who spoke was Harris. He warned that if the bombing of Germany dropped below 10 000 tons per month, her industry would recuperate, and that if it ceased she would be back to normal production in five months. His speech did not go down well. Meanwhile, the air campaign in support of 'OVERLORD' continued, of the 362 bombers sent over France, 42 failed to return, and the same happened a week later when 12 out of 89 were posted as missing from an attack on the marshalling yards at Lille. It was clear that the Germans had radically increased their night fighter strength over northern France. It was also noted that they were carrying out many of their attacks unseen by the bombers, and in particular making their approach from below and firing upwards into the belly.

Indeed, Bomber Command losses over north-west France and Belgium jumped from 1.9 per cent in April to 4.3 per cent in May, Much of the problem lay in the fact that since they were precision targets, the bombers had to spend more time over the target waiting until the Master Bombers were satisfied that the markers were in the right place. It was a very worrying time for Harris and there was little he could do about it apart from continuing to disperse his forces to attack as many different simultaneous targets as possible. In spite of this, Bomber Command's contribution to the Plan was spectacular. A high standard of accuracy was achieved and it succeeded in knocking out all 37 targets assigned to it. Bomber Command also made a significant contribution during the night prior to D-Day itself. A force of 111 aircraft armed with WINDOW flew diversions over the Pas de Calais to simulate an invasion in the Boulogne area, and a bomber stream flew over the area of the River Somme to create another invasion scare in the area of Le Havre. In addition, 1 136 Halifax's, Lancaster's and Mosquitoes attacked coastal batteries.

With the armies now ashore in Normandy, Harris had to devote attention to close support of their operations. While many attacks continued to be made on railway centres, there were other targets to be taken on as well. Bomber Command was used to great effect on the German garrisons in the Channel ports, which Hitler had ordered to be turned into fortresses, and the bombing effort undoubtedly contributed much to their eventual reduction. Attacks were also made in direct support of other ground operations, notably around Caen.

The Germans began their V1 (pilotless flying bomb) offensive on 16th June 1944 on England, and within a few days a significant part of the Bomber Command effort had

been diverted to deal with this menace. Indeed, no less than one-third of Bomber Command's strength was concentrated on attacking the V1 bases, and its part in reducing the intensity of the attacks was significant.

After the break-out from Normandy and the subsequent spectacular dash across France, Eisenhower wished to retain control, arguing that lack of airfields in France and the fact that the front line had moved so far east meant that only heavy bombers could give worthwhile support. The Combined Chiefs of Staff meeting in Quebec at the beginning of September refused to accede to his request, and on 14th September 1944 Eisenhower surrendered control over them, Harris wrote to Eisenhower, - ”I wish personally and on behalf of my Command to proffer you my thanks and gratitude for your unvarying helpfulness, encouragement and support which has never failed us throughout the good fortunes and occasional emergencies of the campaign”. Eisenhower was clearly touched by this, especially in view of the difficulties which he had feared he might have with Harris, and kept the letter as a treasured momenta. Indeed, Harris had given Eisenhower unstinted support. Another who also appreciated Bomber Command's efforts was Montgomery, after the air attacks on enemy concentrations around Caen.

On 14th September 1944, a directive was issued laying down the overall mission of the strategic bomber forces. Oil was now given top priority, together with transportation, and tank production. The German Air Force was given no specific priority in view of the fact that 'its fighting effectiveness has been substantially reduced. When weather or tactical conditions are unsuitable for operations against specific primary objectives, attacks should be delivered on important industrial areas". Harris was reminded that precision bombing was now to be the prime technique used, and area targets were very much in a subsidiary position. On the night of the 23rd/24th October, Harris sent 1 055 bombers against Essen, of which only 8 failed to return, and this target was visited again two nights later by 771 aircraft.

Even more marked was the very low casualty rate, less than 1 per cent both by day and night. Overwhelming Allied air superiority kept the losses from flak above those from night fighters. As for the pattern of Harris's operations during the month, he tried to satisfy closely all the demands being made on him, but there was a significant emphasis on area targets, which seemed to indicate that he was veering back towards his long-held belief in this. While the strategic air forces, after they had been formally disengaged from support of the land battle, wished to concentrate on oil, Air Marshall Tedder still believed that communications should remain the prime target in order to assist the advance into Germany. Eisenhower saw the Ruhr, the industrial heart of Germany, as his intermediate objective, and he and Tedder believed that weighty attacks here would be of much help to the ground forces.

In addition, it was thought that the sight of so many bombers overhead would affect morale, and the 'unprecedented impact of this new form of attack coupled with the belief that it will be repeated, may well cause a panic evacuation'. Harris pointed out that the armies in France had not yet suffered the casualties incurred on the first day

of the Battle of the Somme in July 1916, but implied that they were in danger of heavy casualties once they crossed the German border. Therefore, the Allies should `now get on and knock Germany flat', while they still had over-whelming air superiority. He also warned that, although the bombing of Germany had not stopped over the past six months, its easing had given her 'considerable breathers'. The final air strike against Germany should therefore take place 'while the going is good'. Portal, however, advocated communications as the prime target. Harris, emphasised the need to divide and dilute the enemy's defences. He believed that attacks against precision targets should be accompanied by diversions on area ones, and pointed out that Bomber Command had now destroyed some 45 of 60 cities in Germany, including a rate of two and half per month during the OVERLORD diversions. Once more he reiterated that, although he could finish his programme of the destruction of the cities without detracting from his support of the ground armies, he believed that his policy would bring about the defeat of Germany more quickly than the land forces had yet done.

There was no doubt that the Air Staff were now trying to rein Harris in. Portal told him, “I believe the air offensive against oil gives us by far the best hope of complete victory in the next few months”. The correspondence continued during the first half of November 1944, with Harris assuring Portal that he fully appreciated the importance of oil, although he voiced his doubts on his ability to be effective against it. Indeed, the weather had now worsened, with much cloud, which meant that not only was bombing accuracy affected, but also that there was a problem in obtaining clear post-raid photographs to check on the damage done and whether the target needed to be attacked again. Portal relied on Harris's determination to overcome these problems, and indeed the latter did markedly increase his attacks on oil that month, with 20 per cent of his sorties being involved against it, as opposed to only 5 per cent in October.

As far as Harris's 'cities plan' was concerned, he started November off with raids on Dusseldorf, a major industrial city, which was just short of another 1 000 bomber raid. Then his efforts became less concentrated as he devoted more time to oil, though the average number of aircraft was less than 400. He also continued to be called upon to support the land battle, and on 16th November launched his heaviest attacks towards the Rhineland. This offensive became bogged down, but then attention was drawn to the seven dams on the Roer. It was realised that the Germans could, by demolishing some of these, flood the Roer valley. This obviously would seriously impede future Allied operations. Harris looked at the prospect, but recognised that the two dams in question were similar to the Sorpe, which although hit, had not broken because the retaining earth had proved impervious to it. Harris warned SHAEF that he thought it unlikely that he would have any success. Furthermore, because the dams were so near the Allied forward positions, he could not risk blind bombing. In the event, it was not until 3rd December that the visibility was good enough, but two hundred Lancaster’s with Pathfinder Mosquitoes were still unable to identify the target. On the 4th, the defences were very strong, which ruled out low-level attack as suicidal, and Harris cancelled any further attempts, considering them a waste of time, much to the

dismay of Eisenhower. The German counter offensive in the Ardennes then broke, and Harris heard nothing more of it.

Harris's calculations showed that Bomber Command would require 9 000 sorties per month to knock out and keep out of action the 42 synthetic oil and benzol plants in the Western theatre of operations. He could cope with those in the west of the country, which could be attacked by day, but the 15 targets in central Germany, which required 6 400 sorties per month were more difficult, especially as they would have to be tackled by night. Also, there was the uncertain weather. Statistical records showed that there were likely to be only 3-4 suitable nights per month. He therefore argued that the Americans would have to take on the bulk of those targets. Portal reminded Harris that "the essence of the immediate task before the Allied bomber forces is to put out and keep out of action the 11 synthetic plants in Central Germany". Thus, it was clear that Portal did have a strong case that Harris was not putting the effort that he should into oil. As for area attacks, "he knew of no evidence to support Harris's statement that on more than one occasion Germany has nearly collapsed under our area blitzkrieg. We know she was seriously alarmed by Hamburg and the early Berlin attacks, but this condition was far from collapse.

Despite Harris's deep misgivings over oil, there is no doubt that January 1945, saw a stepping up of his attacks on it, with 20 per cent of his total sortie effort devoted to it. Admittedly, 'city blitzing' still accounted for more than 30 per cent, but only on seven occasions during the month did he attack these targets with more than 300 bombers, while oil attacks, which required fewer bombers over the target, exceeded 100 bombers on eight occasions, besides a number of Mosquito attacks. His oil efforts also compared very favourably with those of the Americans. While Bomber Command dropped a total bomb-load of over 10 000 tons, The United States" Eighth Air Force and Fifteenth Air Force respectively, only managed 3 500 and 2 000 tons. Thus, he could hardly be accused of dragging his feet. However, it must be pointed out that a further directive had been issued to Spaatz and Harris on 15th January which, while oil and communications retained both first and second priority, stressed the importance of attacking the Luftwaffe's resurgence in fighters, especially the Messerschmitt 262, the first operational jet of the war, and the U-boat organisation, and this served to deflect attention from oil, especially by the Americans.

On 12th January 1945, the Russians had launched their long-awaited offensive in the East. Towards the end of January, the Joint Intelligence Sub-Committee proposed Operation 'THUNDERCLAP', to assist the Russians. Attacks on Dresden, Leipzig, Chemnitz, or any other cities where a severe blitz would not only cause confusion in the evacuation from the East, but also hamper movement from the West. Churchill fully supported the operation to demonstrate to Stalin that his offensive was being materially assisted by the Western Allies. Consequently, Harris was instructed on 27th January to put 'THUNDERCLAP' into effect. He could now wage an area bombing campaign in the East. On the night of 13/14 February he unleashed what has become probably the most controversial Allied bombing attack of the war, that against Dresden. Dresden was seen as an important communications centre, and

had been left relatively unscathed. The RAF went in first, with 805 Lancaster's and Mosquitoes in two waves, each with its own Master Bomber in a Mosquito. The weather forecast was for little cloud, otherwise the skies would clear. At 22 05 hours the Master Bomber and his eight marker Mosquitoes arrived over the target and came down below the cloud at 2 500 feet and laid red Target Indicators accurately on the aiming-point, which was in the centre of the town.

The Group's main force bombed from 10 000 feet. The second wave attacked at 01 30 hours in order to cause maximum disorganisation of the rescue services on the ground.
The town was old, with many wooden buildings, resulting in fires that quickly raged, especially with the preponderance of incendiaries dropped. Next day, just after noon, it was the turn of the Americans, with 400 aircraft attacking, and they would return the following day, and again on 2nd March. An Associated Press report stated that 'the Allied Air Chiefs had adopted deliberate terror bombing of German population centres as a ruthless expedient to hastening Hitler's doom'. Although five hours later Reuters issued a denial, it was too late, for the story broke in the American evening papers. This caused much embarrassment on both sides of the Atlantic, and during the debate on the Air Estimates in the House of Commons, Richard Stokes, MP, another long-standing opponent of area bombing, rose and asked: "What are you going to find, with all the cities blasted to pieces, and with disease rampant? May not the disease, filth and poverty which will arise be almost impossible to arrest or to overcome? I wonder very much whether it is realised at this stage".

After the Dresden raid, Bomber Command did not return to the population centres in the East. With the Allies now closing up to the Rhine, Harris devoted attention to the Ruhr, and added to the damage already inflicted, in order to make life as difficult as possible for the German armies in the West. Once the Allies had crossed the Rhine it was clear that the sands of time were rapidly running out for Germany, and it was perhaps then that Richard Stokes's outburst in the House of Commons struck home. For on 28th March, Churchill addressed a minute to the Chiefs of Staff: "It seems to me that the moment has come when the question of bombing of German cities simply for the sake of increasing the terror, though under other pretexts, should be reviewed. Otherwise we shall come into control of an utterly ruined land. We shall not, for instance be able to get housing materials out of Germany for our own needs because some temporary provision would have to be made for the Germans themselves. The destruction of Dresden remains a serious query against the conduct of Allied bombing. I am of the opinion that military objectives must henceforth be more strictly studied in our own interests rather than that of the enemy".

The danger of taking over a completely devastated country was sound, however, the comment about Dresden was somewhat unfair in that it was Churchill who, in January, had ordered an offensive on the cities in the east, and, Harris responded characteristically: "To suggest that we have bombed German cities simply for the sake of increasing the terror, and to speak of our offensive as including wanton destruction is an insult both to the bombing policy of the Air Ministry and to the

manner in which that policy has been executed by Bomber Command. We have never gone in for terror bombing and in the attacks which we have made in accordance with my Directive have in fact produced the strategic consequences for which they were designed and from which the armies now profit. Attacks on cities, like any other act of war, are intolerable unless they are strategically justified". Churchill was persuaded to amend his minute, which was presented to the Chiefs of Staff on 1st April, with 'area bombing' substituted for 'terror attacks'.

Undoubtedly, Harris enjoyed a special relationship with Churchill. He corresponded directly with him, and was a frequent visitor to Chequers, which was only half an hour by road from High Wycombe. Much of Churchill's change of heart over the bombing campaign in early 1942 was due to the immediate impact that Harris made, and in many ways, particularly in Harris's `bulldog' determination, Churchill probably saw much of himself in him. Some assert that Churchill turned his back on Harris and Bomber Command immediately the war ended. This could not have been farther from the truth, and is one of the myths which has been perpetuated since. For a start, on 15th May 1945, Churchill sent a letter to Harris: "Now that Nazi Germany is defeated, I wish to express to you on behalf of His Majesty's Government, the deep sense of gratitude which is felt by all the Nations for the glorious part which has been played by Bomber Command for forging the Victory. For over two years Bomber Command alone carried the War to the heart of Germany, bringing hope to the peoples of Occupied Europe and to the enemy a foretaste of the mighty power which was rising against him".

This was hardly the tone of one who was turning his back on the achievements of the Command. The main argument used to support the proposition that Churchill wished to distance himself from Harris is that Harris was not made a Peer, unlike other high commanders. For a start, he was advanced to a GCB in the Birthday Honours of 1945, and then on 1st January 1946, was promoted Marshal of the Royal Air Force, specifically for his „distinguished service'. When Churchill returned to power in 1951, attempts were made to get Harris to reconsider, and eventually he accepted a Baronetcy, which was announced in the New Year's Honours of 1953. Perhaps, therefore, this particular myth will be laid to rest once and for all.

Bomber Command did not win the Second World War independently, but the war could not have been won without their efforts. The RAF‟s attacks forced Germany to divert invaluable men, guns, aircraft and equipment to defend its airspace, effectively opening a second front long before D-Day. The brave young men of Bomber Command faced dangers that today can barely be imagined, all in defence of their country and to rid the world of the scourge of Hitler and the Nazi's. Their sacrifice and extraordinary courage should never be forgotten.

A statue of Marshal of the Royal Air Force, Sir Arthur Harris BT, GCB, OBE, AFC was unveiled by the Queen Mother on 31st May 1992, the 50th anniversary of the first Allied 1 000 bomber raid on 30/31 May, 1942. This was also Harris's centenary year. On the front of the plinth, under the RAF wings, a plaque is inscribed; „In

memory of a great commander and of the brave crews of Bomber Command, more than fifty five thousand of whom lost their lives in the cause of freedom. The nation owes them all an immense debt".

On 28th June 2012, Her Majesty the Queen officially unveiled a memorial monument to RAF Bomber Command near Hyde Park Corner in London.

CHAPTER NINE

ROMMEL

Of the greatest names in German military history Rommel stands out as a man apart. His exploits during his years of battle owed a breath-taking audacity and an imaginative approach to fighting consistent with the greatest commanders of all time.

Erwin Rommel came from a typical middle-class environment in provincial Germany. He grew up in Bismarck's Second Reich, saw it collapse in 1918 and witnessed Germany struggle through the 1920's and emerge again under Hitler's regime before the final cataclysm of World War Two. Like many great commanders Rommel remains an enigma, for although his life spanned a period of his country's most turbulent politics he seemed only awakened by the demands of battle. His military achievements were so spectacular that they have ensured his reputation in the history of war. On the battlefield, Rommel was often a man of genius; off it, he was essentially a small-town German hardly compatible with the romanticised image his military exploits have earned for him.

Rommel's military experience emerged from the field of battle, rather than through any administrative or policy-making process at the level of grand strategy or in the general staff. He was more at home in the execution of decisions than in the formulation of policy. He was an instinctive rather than an intellectual fighter. It took the smell of gunpowder, almost literally, to excite his senses.

Erwin Rommel was born on 15th November 1891, at Heidelheim, near Ulm. His father was a schoolteacher, as had his father before him. His mother was the daughter of a former president of the provincial government. Rommel joined the army in July 1910, having abandoned his first thought of becoming an engineer. He signed up with his local infantry regiment as an officer cadet, and went to the officer's military school at Danzig. While he was in Danzig, Rommel met a young language student, Lucie Maria Mollin, the daughter of a Prussian landowner. They married in 1916, and their only child, Manfred, was born in 1928.

On 2nd August 1914, Rommel's regiment marched off to war, with bands playing, drums beating, and crowds cheering. A few days later, he was at the front savouring his first taste of a way of life which changed him from the shy, conscientious young man that he was, into what has been described as 'the perfect fighting animal'.

Rommel was posted to a mountain unit, in which his talents as an infantry subaltern with plenty of dash, initiative and energy could be put to better use than in the static trench warfare. On the Carpathian front, he saw action against the Rumanians in the assault on the heavily-fortified positions, then against the Italians at Caporetto. For his action at Caporetto, Rommel was awarded the *'Pour le Merite'* which was normally won only by generals and had been awarded to only two junior officers before him. He was also promoted to Captain.

These brief but spectacular campaigns as a young man were all the fighting experience Rommel was to gain until he led a Panzer division across France in 1940. Yet these early experiences of war must also have left their mark on him, for he always seemed to think of battle as a kind of wild dance, an adventure, in which he had to pit his imagination, actually his genius, against improbable odds;

After the Armistice of November 1918, Captain Rommel was reposted to his old regiment, and prepared to settle down in the same barracks in which he had enlisted as a young officer cadet eight years previously. In October 1929, Rommel was posted as an instructor to the infantry school at Dresden. It was while lecturing there on his World War One experiences that he had the idea of publishing his lectures as the manual, *Infantry Attacks.* In October 1933, he was promoted to Major and in October 1935, he was sent as a lieutenant-colonel to teach at the war academy at Potsdam. In November 1938, he was appointed to command the war academy at Wiener Neustadt, leaving only shortly before the outbreak of war.

But, by then, the years of obscurity were almost over for him. When Hitler had marched into the Sudetenland, Rommel had been in attendance as the commander of his bodyguard. He had at last come to the Fűhrer's attention. Six years from that first assignment for the dictator, Hitler was to give orders that Rommel was to die. But during those years Hitler was to catapult Rommel into high rank, give him an army, and finally promote him to the rank of Field Marshal.

When Germany invaded Poland on 1st September 1939, Rommel, recently promoted to Major-General, was once again at Hitler's side. Throughout the Polish campaign, he commanded the Fűhrer's bodyguard and was obviously well placed at the centre to see the devastating effect achieved by the Panzer divisions applying all the tactical principles of the Blitzkrieg. When the campaign was finished, Hitler asked him what command he would like. In his own words, Rommel made the 'immoderate' request for a Panzer division. The request was granted. On 15th February 1940, Rommel assumed command of the 7th Panzer Division. Rommel, 'the fighting animal', was back in the fight.

On 10th May, 1940, Hitler struck west. In the space of a week, his Panzer divisions had burst through Holland, Belgium and France to reach the Channel coast. Within three weeks, the remnants of the British Expeditionary Force, a quarter of a million men, had been evacuated across the Channel in any vessel they could find. On 5th June, the Germans were on the Somme; on the 9th they crossed the Seine; on the 14th they entered Paris; they had reached the Rhone valley by the 16th. That same night, a new French Cabinet under Marshal Petain sent Hitler a request for an armistice. There was some token negotiation while the panzer divisions roared on. When France's surrender became effective on 25th June, it was a bare six weeks since the German tanks had first rolled forward into the hilly and wooded country of the Ardennes.

Like most of the other armoured divisions, Rommel's force made some quite spectacular advances during those summer days and nights. Perhaps its most decisive contribution to the overall campaign against France was in the crossing of the River Meuse, which took place after only two days of fighting. The glory and panache of that night-and-day runaway dash through a bewildered France was something common to most of the Panzers.

The pace and distance of the 7th Panzer Division's sweep from the German frontier to Cherbourg earned it the subsequent title of the 'Ghost Division'. In his very first action, on 10th May, Rommel's division brushed through some fairly light opposition from French forces. Rommel, in character, had trained his men to react instantly and aggressively to any encounter. His motor-cyclists were trained to drive on with machine-guns firing at anything which smacked of the enemy. The whole division thus displayed the behaviour of that aggressive young man who had won his spurs in the Argonne.

Rommel’s natural enthusiasm for the battle, and his profound belief that the commander must lead from the front, not only to infect his men with his confidence and enthusiasm but also to see for himself what was going on, naturally became more hazardous as the formations under his command became larger, and the area covered by the battle more extensive. At the head of a Panzer division in France, it was easier for him to command in this way. He was part of a much larger front which was advancing at speed, and the quality of the opposition was clearly not presenting much of a threat

At Arras, Rommel had, for a time, one of his most severe encounters in the French campaign. It was also the first time that he found himself fighting against British troops. His plans to by-pass Arras to the south, and swing round it, nearly foundered under the counter-attack by two British tank regiments. They represented the spearhead of two British divisions which had been ordered to counterattack against the Germans; to protect the right flank of the British Expeditionary Force as it withdrew from Belgium back towards the Channel.

Rommel's encounter at Arras, was in fact only a very minor engagement. On 10th June, Rommel's division reached the sea west of Dieppe, after a non-stop run of sixty miles in pursuit. The next day, he walked into St Valery beside the leading column of tanks to receive the British surrender. Rommel then raced across northern France to the Cherbourg peninsula

On 19th June, the garrison at Cherbourg surrendered. The division's casualties since 10th May were six hundred and eighty two killed, one thousand six hundred and forty six wounded and three hundred missing, with only 42 tanks lost. It captured ninety seven thousand prisoners, 458 tanks and armoured cars, 4 000 trucks, and several hundred guns.

After the fall of France, Rommel's division wintered in Bordeaux. Rommel spent most of the time working on his war diary of May and June 1940, and discussing it with his staff officers. He was promoted to Lieutenant-General in January 1941, and then in early February received a summons to Berlin. He had been posted to Africa. He went straight to Tripoli and was to stay in Africa for more than two years. During those years, he was twice to march1 500 miles eastward up the desert into Egypt, and twice to flee 1 500 miles westward down it, with the British army performing the same movements in reverse.

It is doubtful, however, whether any such dramatic and disastrous developments were anticipated by Hitler and the German general staff when they chose to send Rommel to Africa in early 1941. The desert war had started in September 1940, when Graziani, the Italian commander, pushed his divisions into Egypt against virtually non-existent British defences, and soon reached Sidi Barrani. There he started to consolidate his position. This gave the British time to prepare a counterattack which was duly launched in early December 1940. Thirty thousand British troops were sent in against the Italian army, which numbered, in the forward areas alone, nearly three times their strength. By 8th February 1941, when Rommel was in Berlin, the British army had taken Tobruk, forced the Italians out of Cyrenaica, captured nearly one hundred and thirty thousand prisoners and was in a position to threaten Tripolitania. Rommel later noted in his diary that if Wavell, the British Commander-in-Chief in Cairo, had continued his advance into Tripolitania, no resistance worthy of the name could have been put up against him. The Italian army in Africa had almost ceased to exist. In fact, Wavell was prevented from exploiting his victory by the decision of the British Cabinet to divert many of his troops from the North African theatre to the defence of Greece.

The British Cabinet after the Greek fiasco soon returned to the view that the Libyan campaign was, for Britain, the vital strategic engagement, worthy of all the time and military resources that could be applied to it. For the High Command in Berlin, however, the Africa campaign, certainly at its inception, and perhaps really for its duration, was a sideshow designed as a holding operation, originally conceived to prevent the Italians from being forced out of Africa.

When Rommel answered his summons to Berlin on 6th February 1941, he was told that on account of the Italians' critical situation in Africa, a German Afrika Korps was to be formed with two German divisions. One light and one Panzer, and was to be sent to Libya to help Graziani. Rommel was to be the corps commander and was to move off immediately. The first German troops would arrive by mid-February, the 5th Light Division by mid-April and the Panzer Division by the end of May. Ominously for Rommel, he was also told that, though he would be in command of the Italian motorised elements, he would be subordinate to the Italian Commander-in-Chief, Marshal Graziani. His command relationships with the Italians were destined to create endless trouble for Rommel in the two years in which he was in Africa.

As it turned out, Rommel's genius on the battlefield, and his distance from Berlin, enabled him to transform the situation he found in Africa, and to create there a whole new range of possibilities for German strategy. He assumed that his leaders in Berlin would also revise their original evaluation of the relative unimportance of his mission. In this he was mistaken. They never really did so. Throughout Rommel's time in Africa, and for months even before he went out there, the whole weight of German military preoccupation had been concentrated on the preparations for the gigantic attack on Russia, Operation Barbarossa, which was to be launched in June 1941.

On 10th March, Rommel was told by the OKH (the German supreme army command) not to advance too far until the 5th Division arrived. On 11th March, he flew home to report to Hitler and his generals. He told them that the British position in the bulge of Benghazi offered favourable conditions for him to carry out a successful attack. He would not be able to attack further eastwards, towards Tobruk, until he had dislodged the British forces from their positions. It was agreed between them, and von Brauchitsch repeated to Rommel, that they did not believe that the Afrika Korps was yet strong enough to undertake major operations, but should start, to prepare for a drive on Tobruk the following autumn. The OKH then turned its mind to the ever dominant planning for Barbarossa.

One can see what Rommel had to contend with in his superiors, but one can also see what Halder had to contend with in Rommel. Even allowing for the very different temperaments, they were clearly from the very first meeting talking two totally different languages born from almost diametrically opposite perspectives. Halder was to become obsessed with the Russian venture; yet Rommel could not appreciate that his own part in German grand strategy was, at that stage, only minor.

Rommel’s victories in the desert, however imaginative his plans for exploiting them, German strategy at the time was ineluctably caught up in the Russian operation; and that campaign had a momentum and a scale which would have required more than the victories of two enterprising German divisions in the North African sideshow to alter its course.

Because Rommel was still unaware of the recent British decision to divert resources to Greece, his first days were spent arranging measures to obscure what he thought

was the basic weakness of his position and to bluff, what he imagined were the still overwhelming British forces into believing that a substantial Axis reinforcement was in progress. In those early days, Rommel literally commuted every morning from Tripoli to Sirte, flying back in the evening for a round trip of seven hundred miles. He started to plan a counter-offensive at the moment at which his early patrols told him that his fears of an imminent British attack were unfounded.

Rommel ordered an attack on 24th March, and this attack was duly, and successfully, accomplished. The assault was not intended to be the beginning of a major campaign, but once he had started, Rommel soon found that he could not stop. Warfare was to him something more like a continuous operation than a series of set piece attacks. It was a dynamic and unpredictable process in which the only hope of any kind of mastery was to keep moving. So, six days after the assault, he ordered another advance.

In his diaries, one senses the same atmosphere of dynamism and constant movement which characterised his narrative of the French invasion nearly a year before. Of course, there are differences; instead of the divisional commander carrying out his forward reconnaissance on foot, and travelling up and down his divisional area in an armoured car, we now see the corps commander flying everywhere in a little Storch spotter aircraft. Where, in France, fifty miles was an exceptional leap for his division, here the Africa Corps is already strung out over desert distances twice or three times as long. One thing about Rommel's campaign which never changed, however, was his capacity to become exposed to personal danger, and his equally good fortune in escaping from that danger. His plane was fired on, at a height of only 150 feet, by Italian troops who had never seen a Storch before. Another time, he was caught in a sandstorm, and only the refusal of the pilot to be bullied by Rommel into flying on saved them both from flying into death.

By 3rd April, ten days after the first move, Rommel's personal air reconnaissance had given him enough evidence to conclude that a major British retreat was in hand. He decided to recapture the whole of Cyrenaica. Indeed, his thoughts were already reaching much farther than that. One evening, in his tent, he laughed and told his staff officers: “We shall reach the Nile, make a right turn and win everything”.

As the speed of the advance started to quicken, two things happened to Rommel which typified the highly idiosyncratic and personal nature of his command of the Afrika Korps. His Storch landed in a sand hill and could not take off again. He narrowly escaped capture by an approaching British column by taking flight in a discarded German truck which he found in the vicinity. The other event, which was a direct consequence of the first, was that he was completely out of contact with his headquarters, indeed with his entire army. No one knew where he was or where to find him. There was thus a certain amount of confusion between Rommel's original orders for the newly-arrived 5th Light Division to advance, and new orders from his staff who felt that the situation had developed promisingly enough to justify bypassing the British in a leapfrog movement straight to Tobruk. When Rommel reappeared, he

declared angrily that he had personally visited the 5th Light Division headquarters and confirmed his original order to attack. But his anger could not obscure the fact that the corps had been forced to operate for some time in a fast-moving mobile battle without its commander, who might easily have come to the same decision to go straight to Tobruk had he remained in a central position at which he could more competently assess the overall situation. Had he done so, he might well have reached Tobruk in time to prevent the British defences consolidating. As it was, the British had time to build up Tobruk, and Rommel's subsequent failure to capture it in 1941 prevented him from a much longer eastward advance.

In fairness to Rommel, he was not the only general in the desert hurrying about out of touch with troops and headquarters. The North African campaign was singular for the number of generals who were captured simply because sharp battle lines were so seldom drawn, and because each engagement resembled nothing so much as a general melee over a very large area. On the night of 6th April, Generals Neame and O'Connor got lost together in their staff car and were captured by a German recce group as they drove north, hoping to make contact with the British units. The next day, Rommel found O'Connor's armoured command vehicle, the Mammoth, lying abandoned but otherwise intact, even to the provision of a pair of sun and sand goggles. He climbed into the vehicle and put on the goggles saying: “Booty permissible, I take it, even for a general”. The goggles and the Mammoth were to become an inseparable part of Rommel's image during the next two years.

By 10th April, Rommel had reached the outer defences of Tobruk, and there he was brought to a halt for the first time. However, in the space of just over two weeks, he had driven the British out of western Cyrenaica and had reversed the strategic situation in North Africa from when he arrived. Naturally, it was not entirely his own doing, but Rommel's genius in the desert was his exploitation of every offensive opportunity that presented itself to him, however small, in the hope of acquiring such momentum that his innate confidence in victory would become, in a sense, self-fulfilling. Indeed, from his point of view, the victories in those two weeks had the desired effect on the British.

As Rommel approached Tobruk in early April, Wavell just had time to fly to Tobruk and pull the British forces together to stop the helter-skelter slide back into Egypt. He decided to make Tobruk into a fortress, with the main British defence line farther east at Sollum. Ironically, Rommel's victories proved upsetting in Berlin. The German general staff were clearly reluctant to make any further provision for the Afrika Korps, whatever its successes, if this would jeopardise the final preparations for Barbarossa. Rommel had hardly reached the outskirts of Tobruk before Halder was referring to his 'preposterous demands'. After Rommel's forces had again been repulsed from Tobruk, Halder drily notes: 'Rommel has at last admitted that his forces are not strong enough to take full advantage of the unique opportunities. It is the impression we have had for some time. Our air transport cannot meet his senseless demands. Aircraft landing there find no fuel for the return flight. He decided instead to send out

General Paulus as perhaps the only man with enough personal influence to make Rommel see reason.

Two factors were really at work. One was the crescendo of preparation for Barbarossa, which was due to start in just under two months‟ time. The other was the fact that, basically, the German general staff did not want to be bothered by the Africa campaign. They had sent Rommel out there to get on with it with a certain number of troops. If he did anything which required more troops, they became rather irritated.

Wavell decided on a three pronged attack against Rommel's forces, ultimately to join up with the garrison at Tobruk, Rommel, for his part, intended to let any British offensive just wear itself out on the by now well-prepared anti-tank defensive positions. His two armoured formations were held in the rear for later committal as the battle developed. His army was poised rather like a dancer ready to sway or swivel in any direction. Perhaps this is how Rommel himself saw it, because he later described how “in a decisive moment it is often possible to decide the issue by making an unexpected shift of one's main weight”. On the third day of the battle, that is just what he did.

The first day of the British attack found Rommel well prepared. No great British headway was made, though the centre column succeeded during the first afternoon in taking Sollum. One of the most serious factors affecting early British tank losses was the devastating use made by the Germans of their 88mm anti-aircraft guns converted into an anti-tank role. Rommel meanwhile decided to commit his two armoured formations to the battle, having decided that the British armour had by then been satisfactorily worn down on his defences.

It was at this point, on the second night of the three-day battle that Rommel decided to shift his weight. In doing so, he achieved a decisive change in his fortunes. Until that moment, the battle of attrition of the first two days had, on balance, probably ended better for the British than for the Germans. Certainly, that was what the British felt on the second night, and Rommel too knew that the 15th Panzer Division's tank strength had dropped from eighty to thirty. But Rommel's subsequent manoeuvres managed to take the British by surprise, throw them off balance and cause a hasty withdrawal, leaving Rommel in sole possession of the battlefield.

Rommel and the Afrika Korps were exultant. In London, Churchill, if not inconsolable, nevertheless resolved to change his commanders. On 21st June, 1941, the day on which Hitler attacked Russia, Wavell was replaced by Auchinleck. With his victory Rommel's first phase in Africa was virtually over. It was to be some months before the new phase began. From June until November 1941, the desert war saw a period of consolidation and reorganisation on both sides. While the first weeks of the enormous German offensive against Russia were in progress, Rommel clearly had little chance of attracting much attention from anybody at supreme headquarters.

One of the main disputes during the summer concerned the command structure of the African forces, which were eventually reorganised from being merely the Afrika Korps to becoming the Panzer Group Afrika. Rommel, newly promoted to Panzer General, was put in command of the army group which consisted of both the Afrika Korps and five Italian divisions.

As the months went by, it became more and more obvious to Rommel that his position was basically untenable as long as the British held out in Tobruk behind his forward lines and threatening his lines of communication, which stretched back three hundred miles to Benghazi and nearly a thousand miles to Tripoli. He decided to time his attack for the second half of November. Berlin told him to postpone it, but Rommel ignored this advice and went ahead with his plans. It was to be a costly decision, for the British had not been idle either. Rommel refused to listen to the warnings that he received that the British were planning an offensive which might occur before his own plans came to fruition. When the British did start their offensive, Rommel was taken by surprise; although his tactical acrobatics saved him from disaster, the overall outcome was a six-week retreat across all those precious miles of desert he had won the previous spring, so that by the end of the year he was almost back where he had started from.

In these months he was to have his first experience of General Auchinleck's influence on the campaign. When Auchinleck had arrived in Cairo to succeed Wavell, he reached a fairly early conclusion that British forces could not return to the offensive in the western desert until the situations elsewhere in the theatre, were made secure. Churchill was badgering him as usual, and Auchinleck initially agreed that Tobruk might not be defensible after September, particularly if Rommel advanced far enough east to take the airfield at Sidi Barrani, thus putting Tobruk out of the range of British fighter cover.

The offensive that Auchinleck was planning, which came to be called „Crusader", was something he refused to be rushed into until the right preparations were made. So, in preparation for Crusader, Auchinleck organised the construction of large forward supply-dumps; the railway from Alexandria was extended farther westward; and a pipeline for fuel was laid along 150 miles. There is an inescapable contrast between these deliberate and methodical preparations for a British offensive and the impression which Rommel nearly always gives of an almost haphazard approach to the problem of supply. This may partly have been due to the fact that in the desert he was not in sole command of the supply organisation, and that there was constant feuding about it with the Italians, aggravated by the different equipment the two allies used. Nevertheless, one suspects of Rommel that he was always a little too ready to bewail the lack of supplies, and to imply that the supply organisation had let him down, without seeing that in desert war an acute awareness of supply was absolutely central to every tactical appreciation.

Meanwhile, Auchinleck and his new 8th Army commander, General Cunningham, were making their final dispositions. They agreed that the overall objective for

General Cunningham should be the destruction of the enemy forces in the desert; this to be achieved by a feint towards Tobruk by a motorised infantry division in order to lure Rommel's two Panzer divisions out of the protected positions, so that the British armour could do battle with them in the open.

The torrential rain had put all airfields out of operation, so that there was no air reconnaissance, and the British forces therefore achieved almost total surprise when they advanced to the first attack. Rommel was reluctant to believe that it was anything more than another reconnaissance in force and, for the best part of the first day's fighting, he refused to abandon his cherished plan to attack Tobruk and instead concentrate on the British threat.

By 21st November, after three days of fighting, the British were still consolidating their position round Sidi Rezegh, and hoping to link up with the 70th Division, which had been given orders to break out of Tobruk. It was in the Sidi Rezegh area that the battle now became concentrated. Both German and Italian forces were deployed there to prevent the British link-up, and the clash of armour which ensued lasted three days. At the end of it, Rommel, had had the best of almost every engagement, had recaptured the airfield at Sidi Rezegh and had seen off the 7th Armoured Division. The British had withdrawn; but at least they were still in one piece, while the Germans suffered extensive losses which they could ill afford. The desert was littered with the charred hulks of literally hundreds of vehicles. The tank strength of both sides was now reduced to between seventy and eighty apiece.

On 23rd November, Rommel decided to gather up his armour, or what was left of it, and, to destroy the 7th Armoured Division. While Rommel was making this quite unexpected choice, a crisis of confidence was gripping the British leadership. General Cunningham had lost his nerve. Having lost so many tanks, he feared for the safety of his infantry divisions under the ravages of Rommel's Panzers. Should he continue the battle, at such risk possibly to the security of all Egypt? He decided that the magnitude of this decision was too much for him alone, and signalled for Auchinleck to come up from Cairo. After Cunningham had briefed him, Auchinleck replied that he had no doubt whatever that their only course was to continue the offensive with every means at their disposal. At last, Rommel was being opposed by an equal will.

Auchinleck, in his official despatch, later explained his reasons, and in the process gave a not inaccurate analysis of Rommel's real situation at this moment in the battle. But how nearly Rommel, in his next trick, created just that chaos and loss of balance which Auchinleck was at such pains to prevent. Rommel's plan was not quite as he had described it in his cable to Berlin. He was to put himself at the head of the Africa Corps and drive round behind the British, which was immediately between him and the frontier. He wanted then to force them back against the minefields The exhilaration of battle must by then have overcome him, affecting the coolness of his judgment, for the task he set himself involved an initial drive of at least sixty miles of desert even before he reached the frontier wire, and he would have to go well past the wire before he could swing up to the left. Yet Rommel told his subordinates that

he intended to complete the whole operation that day and be back possibly by that night.

On the morning of the 24th, at 10 30 hours he set off at the head of just one Panzer regiment, with the rest of the corps following at noon. Rommel was destined to create almost as much chaos and confusion among his own staff, as he was on the enemy, in the what has come to be known as his 'dash to the wire'.

The immediate effect on the British, was to induce a state of near panic. The confusion was indescribable as staff officers and supply units, more used to the ordered routines of a life comfortably to the rear of the battle, suddenly found themselves in a helter-skelter nine-hour rush back to the wire and beyond. Everyone was running. General Cunningham himself was caught up in this panic. He was visiting the headquarters of the 7th Armoured Division when the alert sounded, and he narrowly escaped capture, or a worse disaster, when his Blenheim aircraft was shelled on take-off. When he reached his own headquarters, far to the south, his confidence was probably not helped by receiving instructions from Auchinleck to continue fighting 'to the last tank'. But in the new situation created by Rommel's dash, Auchinleck, though by then back in Cairo, finally decided that Cunningham still lacked the will to assert his authority over the battle. Cunningham was dismissed and replaced by General Ritchie, a reliable but unimaginative member of Auchinleck's staff.

The start of 1942 saw Rommel's resilience in springing back into the attack as really remarkable. As early as 5th January, the arrival in Tripoli of a convoy with fifty five new tanks and twenty armoured cars encouraged him to start making new offensive plans. A week later Colonel Westphal came back from an air reconnaissance over the British positions and told Rommel that they were ripe for a surprise German attack. Serious planning started, and Rommel gave his final orders on 19th January. He informed his divisional commanders, but took care to let neither the Italian nor German High Commands into the secret, so that he would suffer less interference. On the day on which Rommel's final orders were given, Auchinleck and Ritchie were making their own plans. Ritchie told his Commander-in-Chief that the state of repair and maintenance of his mechanised units ruled out an offensive until mid-February.

Auchinleck believed that he would then be strong enough either to force Rommel out of El Agheila or to surround him. It was clear that Ritchie could not for long stay in his present position in the Cyrenaica bulge, as this was not tenable. He should either advance west or else retire. Auchinleck asked him therefore to advance farther into Tripolitania. But he added a prophetic rider to these orders, presumably on the basis of his understanding of how extremely tenuous was Ritchie's position unless he could continue the advance. Should a withdrawal from Cyrenaica become necessary, he wrote, Ritchie should take the southern route back to the frontier wire. Two further paragraphs stated that, in those circumstances, Auchinleck would not hold permanently either Tobruk or any other locality west of the wire, and that work on the El Alamein defensive position should now be speeded up.

Two days later, on 21st January, in Auchinleck's own words, “The improbable occurred and Rommel attacked”. The British troops facing him belonged to the newly-arrived 1st Armoured Division which had been sent up to relieve the 7th Armoured Division so that it could recover from the ravages of battle. The division was inexperienced in the desert, and also contained three cavalry regiments which had only comparatively recently converted from horses to armour. They were a poor match for the seasoned armoured warriors in the Panzer divisions, mounted as they were on newer and stronger tanks. In the first four days of the fighting, both sides made misjudgements, Rommel thought that he had the British division surrounded and in the bag, while the British were unaware of the strength and purpose of his attack and still thought that it must be no more than a reconnaissance in force. However, in the space of a few days, the 15th Panzer Division punched through to Benghazi, that was to fall shortly afterwards and the whole British position in the bulge of western Cyrenaica became untenable.

The situation of Malta was intimately linked with the North African fortunes of both the British and the Axis forces. It dominated Rommel's supply lines and was also highly relevant to the occasional British convoy which braved the Mediterranean run to Alexandria rather than the very much longer route round the Cape. In early 1942, the island was subjected to ever-increasing attacks by the Luftwaffe, to the point at which it was thought in London that Auchinleck must start a new offensive in the desert to relieve the pressure on Malta. Rommel and his masters were also discussing Malta. The German arguments swung round the question whether Rommel's plans for a major offensive eastwards could ever be really viable so long as a hostile Malta lay athwart his rear. Should not the destruction of the Malta base therefore take precedence over Rommel's plans for a further advance eastwards in the desert? The outcome of a conference held by Hitler in late April was that Rommel would be allowed to attack as far as Tobruk, provided that once Tobruk was taken he would then go over to the defensive, while the Axis powers concentrated on eliminating the threat from Malta. Rommel objected to this as short-sighted, though the failure to adhere to this plan after the fall of Tobruk was probably one of the main reasons for his subsequent undoing.

Auchinleck, in his pre-battle appreciation, believed that Rommel would either drive straight towards Tobruk, cutting into the rear of the British position, or else feint and then direct the main weight of his assault in a frontal attack on the centre of the line of boxes, hoping to break through to Tobruk from there. Auchinleck thought that the latter plan was the most likely, and also the most dangerous as it would cut the British line in two; but if Rommel advanced north towards the coast he should present a favourable target to the British armour, and suffer from a long, exposed flank.

In the first actions, however, the Panzers received a nasty shock from the newly arrived Grant tanks, which were definitely superior to the Panzers. They also discovered that the new six-pounder gun was helping to restore the previous British inferiority in anti-tank guns. By the end of the first day, Rommel's position was

distinctly unfavourable. Had Auchinleck's original advice to the 8th Army been heeded, to hold back the armour and then concentrate it in a counter-attack against Rommel's weakened position, the German commander would have been in serious trouble. As it was, the British armoured units were eventually sent in one by one to attack the Afrika Korps, thus eroding the overall British superiority until it was non-existent.

At this stage, the British Command was still optimistic of success. Auchinleck instructed Ritchie to press on with the battle by mounting an attack along the coast to the north, the very thing which Rommel hoped would happen. Ritchie, however, hesitated. On 5th June, the 8th Army failed to dislodge Rommel from his central position behind the boxes. The fighting on 12th June ended with Rommel in command of the ridge which overlooked Tobruk's defences. What remained of the British mobile forces were sheltering in the two boxes at El Adem and Knightsbridge, or strung out precariously along the fifteen-mile salient between them. On the night of the 13th, they evacuated Knightsbridge, and Ritchie started to consider withdrawing what was left of his infantry before they were completely cut off. But Auchinleck told him that he must stay where he was. A rasping endorsement of this came from the pen of Churchill in London: “Retreat would be fatal. This is a business not only of armour but of willpower. God bless you all”.

But the British position was sliding all the time. While Auchinleck was assuring Churchill that he had no intention of allowing Tobruk to be besieged, or of giving it up, Ritchie was working at cross purposes and pursuing a course of action which was bound to make nonsense of Auchinleck's undertakings. By 17th June, El Adem was lost; the Africa Corps had cut the coast road east of Tobruk, and was turning back west to roll up the British forces. With the loss of El Adem, Tobruk was virtually in Rommel's hands, though as late as 19th June, Auchinleck was still protesting to General Smuts, who had enquired after the fate of the South African Division in the Tobruk garrison, that he had no intention of giving it up. The correspondence between Auchinleck and Ritchie at this time shows Auchinleck becoming increasingly perturbed at the deliberate nature of the latter's preparations and the lack of urgency with which he seemed to be viewing the battle. “Crisis may arise in a matter of hours not days”, he said. He was right. But it was already too late: by the time that his messages arrived at Ritchie's headquarters on 21st June, Tobruk had fallen.

The capture of Tobruk was the high moment of Rommel's career. Hitler that day made him a Field Marshal. He was only fifty. Mussolini shared in the general exultation and was boasting that in fifteen days they would establish a commissariat in Alexandria.

Rommel experienced a minor disappointment at Tobruk when he discovered the supplies which the British had left. He had expected much more. When Rommel met the South African Divisional Commander, General Klopper, and his staff after they had surrendered, he was so angry and shouted at them like a sergeant major. On the other hand, Rommel told a very different story that very day to Kesselring, who

arrived to discuss whether they should continue the drive towards Egypt or now go over to the defensive, as had been previously agreed, and concentrate on the elimination of Malta. Kesselring was all for 'Operation Hercules', the Malta plan, but Rommel insisted that he must go on and claimed that, with the capture of all the equipment at Tobruk, he could now do so. When Kesselring refused, Rommel appealed directly over his head to Hitler and Mussolini, making a very early use of his right of direct access as a Field Marshal. Hitler and the Duce let him have his way. “It is only once in a lifetime that the goddess of victory smiles”, said the Fűhrer.

On 25th June, Auchinleck finally left Cairo to come up and take over command of the 8th Army from General Ritchie. In the plane on the way up, he decided to make his real stand at El Alamein. Rommel believed that the last fortress port in the desert was now his. However, there could be no rest for his nearly exhausted troops. Although he had captured a great deal of equipment and thousands of prisoners, the great bulk of the British infantry had managed to elude him and get back to the position at El Alamein, where the desert narrowed to about thirty miles between the sea and the impassable Qattara Depression. It was therefore doubly important for Rommel to get to El Alamein and overrun it before the 8th Army had time to organise itself and complete the defences. In fact, he was already too late. But nobody who witnessed the chaos on the British side would at that time have dared believe so. The few desert roads were crammed and blocked with retreating vehicles in convoys of a hundred miles and more. The days and nights were shattered by the thump of huge explosions as dump after dump which had been supplied with such sweat was blown up in the face of the advancing Germans. In Alexandria, the British fleet put to sea as a precaution.

The scene which Auchinleck left behind him in Cairo was pandemonium. The city was under curfew. Eastbound trains for Palestine were packed with refugees. Even members of the general staff at headquarters were evacuated if it was thought that they knew too much to risk capture. Auchinleck, at the front, was clearly not affected. “I've never been a good loser. I'm going to win”, he said, and sent a message to all ranks in the 8th Army saying: “The enemy hopes to take Egypt by bluff. Show him where he gets off”.

So both armies came to El Alamein. The battle of that name which most people now remember is that which was fought the following October, when General Montgomery succeeded in breaking through Rommel's defensive positions and sending him off on the long retreat back to Tunis. It was the start of the campaign which led to the strategic victory in North Africa. But the first battle of Alamein, fought in July between Rommel and Auchinleck, is of almost more decisive significance. It ended the possibility of a British strategic defeat in North Africa. After it, Rommel's eventual defeat was just a matter of time and resources. Between the two battles, the tide in North Africa turned.

Rommel intended to overrun the El Alamein position in much the same way as he had tackled previous British defences in the desert, either by going round their flanks or

by piercing the centre and then swivelling round to cut off the rear. In view of the narrowness of the El Alamein gap, he could not go round the position, so he planned to pierce the centre of the British defences and fan out on either side behind them to cut off their retreat. For the first three days of the battle, he had the initiative, attacking here and there, hoping to implement his plan. After 4th July, the initiative hung in the balance, with a series of British counter-attacks designed to turn Rommel's own flank and drive him off. These were no more successful than Rommel's own earlier attempts. Then, for the next three weeks, both sides attacked and counterattacked with ever-decreasing effect. By the end of July, after one final British attempt to break through Rommel's front, the battle subsided in a situation of stalemate. It may have been a tactical stalemate, but it was a strategic defeat. Rommel was to advance no more.

Rommel's failure at the first battle of El Alamein can be ascribed to many factors. His first plan of attack failed because of inadequate reconnaissance, which meant that when the Germans pierced the first part of the British positions, and prepared to fan out, they found that the British defences were much deeper than expected, and were pinned down before they could make their outflanking manoeuvre. By this time Rommel's divisions were each down to a strength of about twelve hundred fighting men and fifteen tanks, and Rommel himself was clearly nearing exhaustion. Perhaps, because in Rommel's mind it was already becoming clear that this was not just an ordinary setback which could be recouped by his normally inventive generalship. He was at the end of his tether, so were his troops, so were his supplies. There was nothing left with which to be inventive, and not much sign that the long-term prospect would change.

The strategic significance of the first battle of El Alamein, the fact that it spelled the ultimate end of Rommel's position in North Africa, becomes much clearer than it was to the British at the time. Rommel, it is true, seems to have become increasingly infected with an almost unshakeable pessimism after it, only occasionally relieved by those frenzied bouts of activity which he found irresistible in the heat of battle. Moreover, he recognised that unless he could keep up the momentum of his advance from Gazala, and keep the British on the run so that they could not take advantage of their much shorter supply lines and much larger supplies, victory would in the end elude him.

The British leadership, on the other hand, clearly failed to appreciate the measure of Auchinleck‟s achievement. Churchill and his advisers descended *en masse* on Cairo in early August. During the Cairo meeting, Churchill was discovered stumping round his hotel bedroom grumbling: “Rommel! Rommel! Rommel! Rommel! What else matters but beating him”? By the end of it, Churchill had decided to dismiss Auchinleck and replace him with General Alexander, appointing General Montgomery to the command of the 8th Army. So, for the second time in his desert career, Rommel had the scalp of a British Commander-in-Chief to his credit. If victory had in fact eluded him already at El Alamein, he had none the less achieved a psychological victory by demoralising Churchill sufficiently to destroy his confidence in Auchinleck

and blind him to what the latter had achieved. With Montgomery and Alexander against him, however, Rommel was to be less lucky, not only because of the personalities of those two generals, but because the political context of the desert battle had also changed.

In the autumn of 1942, Churchill politically needed a victory more than he had ever done, so much so, in fact, that he showed himself prepared to wait for it in a way in which he never had with Auchinleck and Wavell: 1942 had been a bad year for British arms; Churchill himself had had to fight a vote of censure in the Commons, and his position as Prime Minister had therefore been questioned. But the second half of 1942 also saw the development of a joint Anglo-American strategy which, when implemented, would naturally eclipse any independent operations which the British were likely to carry out. Planning for the Anglo-American landing in north-west Africa, code-named „Torch", was already in an advanced stage. It was thus doubly important for Churchill, on political grounds, to show that Britain could achieve a decisive victory of her own against the Axis forces before the centre of gravity of the alliance shifted to Washington and the opportunity for major independent initiatives passed away from Churchill and his war Cabinet.

At the time of the Cairo meeting, however, it was not America's entry into the war which dominated the discussion, but the question whether Russia was going to be able to resist Hitler's second offensive which was even then penetrating down into the Caucasus. In the light of that, it was important to Britain to prevent the Afrika Korps from breaking through east of Suez and advancing to link up with the German Caucasian front somewhere in Asia Minor.

However, by August 1942, Rommel clearly still believed that his own tactical weakness was better overcome by pressing on, in the hope of unbalancing the superior enemy. But more important, he had by his own optimism and boasting created such expectations in the minds of Hitler and Mussolini that he would almost certainly have lost his job if, only two weeks after predicting the capture of Cairo, and scarcely a month after talking about an advance into Persia and Iraq, he had to confess that he had no alternative but retreat. Mussolini, after all, had already ordered his white horse for the triumphal entry into Cairo, and had even had his finery flown out to an advanced position in Libya to enable him to make a quick return to Africa for the, expected victory parade. The German and Italian High Commands had agreed that Egypt would be in the Italian sphere of influence, governed by an Italian civilian delegate with Rommel as Commander-in-Chief. Rommel had encouraged these expectations, and his reputation was naturally to suffer most from their shortfall.

In this situation, with a perilous shortage of supplies aggravated every day now by the Axis failure to take Malta, Rommel had at all costs to try to avoid a reversion to that static warfare, in which, he said, “victory goes to the side with the most ammunition”. While he was at the end of the 'elastic', that side would clearly not be the Germans. So, in the last days of August, he decided to try one final attack, this time against the new opponents, Alexander and Montgomery. In fact, the Axis attack was to fail, but

when the British showed no inclination to exploit the victory and pursue Rommel westwards, he also settled down into a defensive position opposite them, a return to the static warfare he so feared and hated, and both sides then prepared and waited for the set-piece engagement of late October, when the final battle at El Alamein was joined.

In September, Rommel demanded 30 000 tons and another 35 000 tons for October as the minimum supplies needed if his African army was to stand any chance of neutralising the forthcoming British attack. Less than half had arrived when the battle was again joined in late October. His appeals fell on German ears deafened by the mighty battle of Stalingrad which even at that moment hung in the balance. It is quite likely also that, Stalingrad apart, the German High Command were less susceptible to Rommel's appeals than they might have been, because so often in the past he had proved himself capable of military successes which defied all the accepted laws of logistics. Why should he not do it again?

Eventually, later that month, it was not Rommel's reputation which finally forced a recall from Germany, but his health. Rommel's replacement turned out to be General Stumme, the very man whose Panzer division he had taken over in 1940. On 23rd September, he left Stumme 'with a heavy heart', assuring him that he would return if the British opened a major offensive. He went first to Rome, where Mussolini found him 'physically and morally shaken' and was convinced that he would not come back. Then he flew to Hitler's eastern headquarters. In both places, he stressed the importance of air power in the desert and claimed that British air supremacy was one of the main causes of his setbacks. He also warned his leaders that, without the supplies he had asked for, the Afrika Korps would not be able to keep going.

Rommel had placed all his infantry divisions behind a screen of 500 000 mines, and kept his two Panzer divisions to the rear, separated from each other by about twenty five miles. This separation of his armour was another unusual decision, again forced on him by the exigencies of the fuel situation. It meant that he was able to use much more of his armour for instant counter-attacks against any place at which the British might break through, and it also meant that, wherever the breakthrough occurred, he would soon have some armour in the vicinity without using too much fuel.

At the start of the battle, the 8th Army's fighting strength was two hundred and thirty thousand, while Rommel had only eighty thousand, of whom twenty thousand were Germans. British air superiority was about five to one, though the Royal Air Force had already made its most telling contribution to the battle, even before it started, by the destruction and strangulation of the Axis supply routes from Italy. All through the night of 23rd October, British infantry struggled slowly through the minefields after the attack had been heralded by a fifteen-minute bombardment from I 000 guns. Early the next day, General Stumme decided to drive up to the front unescorted to see for himself. But he lacked the luck of Rommel. He was never again to be seen alive. When his vehicle came under fire, he leaped out, and though he clung to the side he seems to have died there of a heart attack, falling off without the driver noticing.

Hitler ordered Rommel to return to Africa, and he took off the following morning. Rommel reached his headquarters at dusk on 25th October. The next day, the British again suffered from an attempt to ram their armour through such a narrow gap cleared in the minefield. A tremendous slugging-match ensued around the area of the breach, with German anti-tank defences taking a heavy toll. However, though the Germans managed to contain the British breakout, they could not afford the losses this involved, whereas the British, even with their greater losses, had many more reinforcements.

By the third day, Montgomery realised that he was making insufficient headway and changed his plan. On the night of the 28th, he started a new attack due north from his wedge, in an attempt to reach the coast and encircle those Axis defenders who would then be between him and the minefield. This plan also miscarried. It was clear then to Rommel that he should wait no longer for a decisive breakthrough, which could not be long postponed, but should pull out before it came. But he was induced to stay on a little longer by the realisation that, when he did retreat, he would have to leave his non-motorised units behind him. The shortage of petrol meant that the retreat, when it came, could not be a fighting withdrawal, but would involve total disengagement and a straight leap backwards to a new defensive position. There was no question of mobile defence, still less of taking his non-motorised units with him. They would have to make their way back as best they could. The decision clearly spelled the end of all he had fought for in Africa.

When Montgomery's coastward thrust failed, he went back to his first plan and attacked once more through the wedge on 2nd November. Again his tanks were caught by the Germans, and suffered severely. But however badly the British suffered, the sheer process of attrition was working in their favour.

Rommel decided to withdraw. He intended to break off and fight as many delaying actions as he could on the long retreat west, until either he had recovered his strength enough to hold the 8th Army in one position, or else had covered the retreat successfully enough to enable German troops to be evacuated entirely from Africa. There was no question in Rommel's mind that the logical outcome of his defeat was the Axis evacuation of Africa.

On 3rd November, the day after he had started his withdrawal, he received a cable from Hitler insisting that the position must be held to the last man. “As to your troops, you can show them no other road but victory or death”, the Fűhrer concluded. Rommel was shattered. So was everybody else in the Afrika Korps. For the first time in Africa, Rommel confessed that he did not know what to do. He says that a kind of apathy came over his staff. Always a stickler for obedience from his own juniors, Rommel reluctantly obeyed his Fűhrer.

His compliance with Hitler’s order, even for only twenty-four hours, meant that his retreat, when it came, was saved from being a rout only by the incredible speed with

which he executed it, and the enormous bounds which he made between stands. By 4th November, the British breach was at last so wide that the 7th Armoured Division was able to pass through. Superior orders could no longer count. “We had to save what there was to be saved”, wrote Rommel. He issued orders for the retreat to start immediately. Twenty-four hours later, a signal arrived from the Fűhrer, authorising a withdrawal. Rommel later asserts that the twenty-four-hour delay after Hitler's first order came through was his only mistake, and robbed him of the opportunity of saving his non-motorised, largely Italian infantry in a battle-worthy condition.

Once again, after the battle, Rommel's luck held. This time it took the form of exceptional caution on the part of Montgomery, which deprived the British of an opportunity to cut off and destroy the entire Axis army. Each time the British forces wheeled round in a left-hook to cut off the retreating Axis forces, their turning circle was too small and the enemy escaped the trap. Then heavy rain started to fall between the escarpment .and the coast. Rommel was saved.

Throughout his long retreat back to Tunisia, Rommel was to exploit shortcomings in his opponents' tactics so successfully that it is hard to believe how few troops he had fighting against the massive and deliberate advance of the 8th Army. The British were ever wary of his potential for savage counter-attacks, though this time they were surely guilty of a gross over-estimate of his strength. Nevertheless, each time he stopped, they too stopped for reinforcements, to make doubly, trebly, almost infinitely, sure of their ability to take him on. And then, he was gone again before they had the chance.

On 8th November, Rommel had heard that an Anglo-American landing had been made in north-west Africa. While Rommel continued to retreat into Tripolitania, the British and American forces started to plan their first offensive against Tunisia, which started on 25th November. It stumbled forward, “violating every recognised principle of war”, as its supreme commander, General Eisenhower, wrote at the time. The result of its failures in December meant that the moment would be delayed for Rommel’s entrapment. It also meant that Hitler and Mussolini had time to send out reinforcements to Tunisia, in the form of a new Panzer army under General von Arnim; this infuriated Rommel.

Rommel was technically removed from his command on 26th January, when he received a signal from the Italian High Command saying that, on account of his bad health, he would be released from his command at a date to be left to his own discretion. His first reaction was to say the sooner the better. He told Lu that it was not for health reasons, but principally for prestige reasons, that he was being removed, though he did also admit to feeling unwell, suffering from headaches, overstrain, circulation troubles and insomnia. His successor designate, the Italian General Messe, arrived at the beginning of February, 1943.

Rommel soon developed a reluctance to take his dismissal lying down. Contrary to the advice of his doctor, he decided to stay where he was until he was ordered to go.

Not only did he not feel able to tear himself away from 'his Africans', he also saw an opportunity for a final attempt to seize back the initiative before the two wings of the Allied forces closed in on him. Unfortunately, the plan which Rommel devised to restore the Axis fortunes relied for its success on the fusion of effort between his army group and von Arnim's army; but, owing to the clash of personalities involved, this was impossible to achieve. Kesselring, between and above the two feuding army commanders, tried his best to achieve some co-ordination, but the eventual result was that they operated with only the minimum of co-operation.

Rommel's plan was to take advantage of Montgomery's laborious preparations at the Mareth line to turn on the Allies advancing eastward into Tunisia from Algeria, savage them in the mountains on the frontier and then return to the coastal plain to deal with Montgomery. The Anglo-American force was already threatening to come down through the mountain passes and endanger Rommel's right flank if he continued his retreat round the coast to Tunis. Rommel intended to penetrate those passes and drive up in a north-westerly direction to a depth which would totally disrupt the enemy's rear

The battle of Kasserine started on 14th February with Axis thrusts into Allied forward positions which were immediately successful, unbalancing the inexperienced American units and causing heavy losses. Rommel soon wanted to exploit this victory as best he could, and press on. He said later that, though never before had he gambled with his troops, a highly questionable statement from a man who had fought consistently against vastly superior opponents with the minimum of support he now decided that he must push on hard, at the risk of losing everything.

For a brief moment, the adrenalin of a mobile and offensive battle started to work its old magic on Rommel's imagination. The deep, almost impregnable pessimism of the last few months momentarily evaporated. His narrative bristles once again with the old self-confidence. Rommel lay with his troops in the fighting line. He appeared in the battle area to cheer on a new division in the course of their attack, and to be cheered back by the admiring soldiers. Although he captured the Kasserine pass on the 20th, the attack petered out and by the 22nd, he and Kesselring had agreed that the weight of Allied reinforcements inhibited any further advance.

The second leg of his double attack was against Montgomery in the Mareth line at Medenine. It was already too late. But by the time Rommel did attack, on 6th March, the British had increased their forces to four times their initial number, in a strongly defended position. They were also aware of Rommel’s intentions through Enigma decrypts. Rommel was immediately outgunned, and was forced to call off the attack on the first evening.

He was a sick man, and a defeated Field Marshal. He complained to Lu that he thought that his nerves would snap. There was nothing left for him here, Three days later, he handed over his command to General von Arnim, and flew to Hitler to try to

persuade the Fűhrer of the hopelessness of the Axis position in Africa. He never returned.

Rommel by then was recommending a complete withdrawal from Africa while there was still time, or, failing that, a shorter line of defence round the northern end of Tunisia. Perhaps his reputation for pessimism invalidated such arguments from him even before they were put. Anyway, Hitler was unrelenting. Africa was to be held. He ordered Rommel on sick leave. He decorated Rommel with the highest order of the Iron Cross, oak-leaves with swords and diamonds, and insisted on the utmost secrecy being preserved about Rommel's recall from Africa. With or without him, however, the end for his troops in Africa was to be the same. Inexorably, the Allied forces closed in on them until by 13th May, virtually the whole Axis force, over two hundred thousand men, had surrendered. Three days before this final disaster, Hitler summoned Rommel to Berlin and confessed: “I should have listened to you before. But I suppose it's too late now”. It was indeed.

Hitler's feelings towards Rommel were generally benign until the final suspicions overwhelmed him in the hysteria which followed the unsuccessful attempt on his life in July 1944. Rommel had clearly appealed to the Fűhrer ever since they first met. Rommel's plain ways probably comforted Hitler, whose paranoia so often persuaded him that he was surrounded by plotters, as indeed he frequently was.

It is not surprising therefore that soon after the African debacle, Hitler attached Rommel to his own staff, thus relieving him of the 'unbearable loneliness' which he had felt after leaving Africa. While he was on Hitler's staff he obviously came to know the Fűhrer better than ever before and had several long talks with him. In these, Rommel appeared to have broached what most of Hitler's generals would surely have regarded as the great unmentionable, the possibility of German defeat. In spite of the enormous mobilisation of German resources which really only started to get underway in l943, Germany could not eventually 'keep pace with the whole world', he told the Fűhrer. Hitler appeared, this time at least, to take what he said in an almost philosophical mood, agreeing with the premise but concluding that the West would never agree to peace with him. On another occasion, a very different Hitler blurted out angrily to him “If the German people are incapable of winning the war, they can rot”. The best were already dead, he said; a great people must die heroically, it was a historic necessity. Rommel later told his son, “Sometimes you feel that he's no longer quite normal”.

On 10th July 1943, Rommel's fairly dull summer was broken by the Allied landings in Sicily, and in early September they went on to land in southern Italy. Hitler had clearly toyed with the idea of putting Rommel in command of all Axis forces in Italy, and was to flirt with this thought again, but for the moment it did not materialise. Rommel was given a totally new task as Inspector General of the Atlantic wall defences against an Allied invasion across the Channel, which by then everyone realised was bound to come.

From November 1943, Rommel was to be totally preoccupied with the defensive preparations for the battle against the Allied invasion. For the first two months as Inspector General, he was in the uneasy position of having responsibility without power. He had been deputed to inspect the state of the coastal defences, but possessed neither the staff nor the established authority to do much about it, since the area came under the command of Field Marshal von Rundstedt, the Commander-in-Chief West. In spite of these difficulties, Rommel was to achieve enormous improvements in the defences.

Rommel's first analysis of the situation was that the Allies would invade across the Channel in the Pas de Calais, largely because this was the area from which the V-I rockets would be launched against England. He concluded that the only way in which his generally inferior forces could defeat the invasion was by preventing the enemy from developing a major bridgehead from which it could exploit its own superiority. Every effort must therefore be made not to lie back waiting to launch a major counter-attack when the Allies' bridgehead was established, but to contain them as near to the coast as possible. To this end, he ordered a swathe of fortifications to be built along the entire coast, shore batteries, minefields and foreshore obstacles on the beaches. By May 1944, he had organised the construction of 517 000 obstacles, such as the iron stakes which impeded landings on the most probable beaches, and over four million mines, not nearly enough, but nearly four times as many as were in place when Rommel started his work.

Rommel then turned his attention to the kind of tactics which would be required for the land battle after the invasion. He immediately became involved in a typically acrimonious dispute with his fellow commanders. Of all the German commanders at the time, none had suffered so much as Rommel at the hands of enemy air forces. He believed that his colleagues, particularly those with experience of the Russian front, had no conception of the difficulties of having to fight a battle when the enemy had nearly total air supremacy. This dominated his thinking at the time, with a great deal of justification, as events were to show. But at the time it is possible that his colleagues felt that he was exaggerating the effect as a subconscious palliative for his Africa defeat. Indeed, this probably was to some extent true, since the effect of air inferiority in Europe would not be nearly as disastrous, even in a mobile battle, as it obviously was in the open stretches of the desert. Rommel assumed that the Allies' air supremacy would make itself felt on D-Day, and therefore that the policy of holding the Panzer divisions in reserve for a major counterattack was invalid, because the Allied air attacks would interdict their ability to move forward. The only hope was to keep the armour as close as possible to the likely invasion-points, ready for immediate counter-attacks, on the same principles which he had with great effect applied to his armour at El Alamein.

Von Rundstedt, held a different view. He wanted to adhere to the more classical doctrine of holding their armour altogether in reserve until it was clear where the main enemy bridgehead was being established, and then concentrate all their reserve in a massive counter-attack. The Normandy campaign lasted only five weeks for Rommel.

It was his last campaign, and the least satisfactory for him. He is a long way from the battle-front in his army group. One gets the impression that much more of his energy is directed to fighting high-level battles within the German hierarchy than to the struggle taking place in Normandy. His command is somehow too remote from the actual fighting. There is too little independence, indeed, virtually none. There are too few opportunities of savouring the frenzy of the front line which so obviously inspired Rommel and clearly enhanced his earlier campaigns.

By 10th June, von Rundstedt had come to share his views. Indeed, only about two weeks later, von Rundstedt apparently received a telephone call from Field Marshal Keitel, the joint Chief-of-Staff, who asked: “What shall we do?” “Do?” replied von Rundstedt. “Make peace, you idiots, what else can you do”? And then hung up. Rommel and von Rundstedt tried to bring home the situation to Hitler himself in two meetings, on 17th and 29th June. For the first meeting, Hitler came to Soissons, his last visit to France. Rommel complained of the impossible fighting conditions, and then proposed one final attempt to draw the Allied forces farther south into France before counter-attacking their flanks out of range of support from their naval artillery. Rommel told Lu that Hitler was “very cordial and in a good humour”. But he was unimpressed with the arguments and left hurriedly the next day with the injunction that victory was to be gained by holding fast to “every yard of soil”.

The Field Marshals tried again on the 29thth, in Germany. The arguments became heated but not explosive. Both soldiers spoke their minds to Hitler, a situation more familiar to Rommel than it was perhaps to von Rundstedt. They both expected to be dismissed for it, and von Rundstedt was. Perhaps Hitler had so come to expect this from Rommel that he took it from him but not, as something new, from von Rundstedt. Perhaps his old faith in Rommel was still working. However, that kind of talk would have made Hitler feel more uncomfortable coming from someone of von Rundstedt’s age, seniority and patrician background. Perhaps he had heard of the conversation with Keitel.

Field Marshal von Kluge was sent forward to succeed von Rundstedt as the Commander-in-Chief West. He arrived at Rommel's headquarters with clearly preconceived views about Rommel's pessimism and insubordination, planted, no doubt, by the mandarins of the general staff. In front of Rommel's own staff, he told him that he would “now have to get accustomed to carrying out orders”, a strange public conversation to take place between Field Marshals. Rommel was not prepared to put up with this and demanded a written explanation. It was not long, a matter of days, before von Kluge had inspected the front and totally accepted the validity of Rommel's analysis of the situation. On I5th July, Rommel sent von Kluge a report which he asked to be forwarded personally to Hitler. It forecast that, owing to the widespread weakness of the German position, they must expect an imminent Allied breakthrough in Normandy. “The troops are everywhere fighting heroically, but the unequal struggle is nearing its end. It is urgently necessary for the proper conclusion to be drawn from this situation”, were the words which he used to end this, his last operational memorandum. Von Kluge forwarded it to Hitler on 21st July, with a

covering note in which he concluded that Rommel's analysis was correct. But, by then, Rommel was not in a position to appreciate the support he had received.

On 17th July, his long run of personal invulnerability was broken. His staff car was attacked by one of those British aircraft whose very freedom to roam the skies over the German lines had caused Rommel such concern. He survived the crash that followed, but only just. His skull was fractured in three places, his cheek-bone destroyed and there were numerous minor wounds, as well as one more serious, in the left eye. While von Kluge was endorsing Rommel's message in effect saying that Germany was defeated, Rommel was fighting, and in the end winning, a much more desperate struggle for his life. But to what end, for both of them? The two Field Marshals were soon to die, von Kluge in five weeks, Rommel in twelve: both by their own hands.

Internal resistance to Hitler had existed in many quarters of Germany throughout most of the time in which he was in power. But, the most dramatic of these was the unsuccessful plot to blow Hitler up at his headquarters on 20th July 1944, organised by a wide circle of army officers led by Klaus von Stauffenberg. In the bloody frenzy of its aftermath, Hitler had at least seven thousand suspects arrested, and liquidated about five thousand of them, many of whom had nothing to do with the plot and would have disapproved had they known of it, on the grounds that Hitler's assassination in itself was not going to cure the sickness in German society.

Rommel was a victim of this revenge, as was von Kluge. This did not mean that Rommel was personally active in the mainstream of resistance to Hitler. But he *was* connected with it. Rommel did not come into the conspiracy until very late. It has to be emphasised that, unlike so many others, he was not a plotter in either the moral or political sense of the word. Nor, until very late, was he a plotter even in the patriotic sense, though, when he eventually lent himself to the movement and to the idea of deposing Hitler.

Rommel's value lay, paradoxically, in the fact that Goebbels' propaganda had built him up into the most popular and widely-known of Hitler's senior generals. His reputation was more or less untarnished as far as the Nazis were concerned, certainly not by the series of dreadful defeats in Russia, nor even by his own African debacle, which, compared with that in Russia, had not involved many troops; which he had left before the end; and where, for domestic Germany, memories of his more spectacular exploits probably outlasted the agony of his long retreat.

At Herrlingen, there was an ominous quiet, as all over Germany the plotters one after another were rounded up or disappeared. Rommel was still technically in command of his army group, but no one came to visit him; no one telephoned to him; no mention was made of him in the Press. On 6th September, the Rommel family realised that the house was being watched. Rommel told Manfred that they would have to carry pistols with them whenever they went for walks. On 7th October, a few days before Rommel was due to go by car for treatment, he had a message from

Keitel summoning him to Berlin for an important interview on the 10th. Rommel declined to go, on doctor's orders. Five days then went by without a word, while Rommel told one of his closest associates, Admiral Ruge, that he would never go to Berlin. “I would never get there alive, I know they would kill me on the way and stage an accident”, he said.

On 13th October, a telephone call announced that two generals would call on Rommel at noon the next day. Rommel's reaction to this message was unusually quiet, but if he had fears, he transmitted them to no one. The next day started early. Manfred arrived home on leave at 07 00 hours, and found his father already up. They breakfasted together and went for a long walk. The generals arrived punctually at noon, and were greeted by the whole family, including Rommel's long-standing ADC, Captain Aldinger. The generals went off with Rommel into a downstairs room, while the others went upstairs. In a few moments, Rommel came out and went straight up to see his wife. “I have come to say goodbye. In a quarter of an hour I shall be dead”, he said as he walked into the room. The generals had told him that he was suspected of having taken part in the plot to kill Hitler. Rommel denied this, but to no avail. Hitler had given him the choice of taking poison and having a state funeral, or going before the People's Court like many of the other accused. There was the added rider that Rommel's family would receive good treatment if he chose the poison, and bad treatment, no pension, and perhaps worse, if he went before the court. Rommel had chosen the poison.

Rommel then re-joined the waiting generals. They all climbed into the small green staff-car and drove off. They did not drive far. A few hundred yards up the hill from the Rommel’s house, the car stopped in an open space at the edge of the wood. The driver and one general got out and went for a walk. When they returned, five minutes later, the other general was walking up and down the road beside it. Inside the car, Rommel lay on the back seat, lifeless. They sat him up, put his cap on his head and his Field Marshal's baton in his hand. They then drove off to the hospital at Ulm. It was from the hospital, about twenty minutes after Rommel had left his home that the telephone rang there once again. Aldinger answered it, and took the message. “The Field Marshal has had a haemorrhage, a brain storm, in the car. He is dead”.

It was officially stated that Rommel had died of his wounds. His state funeral was staged with great pomp four days later. It was a day of national mourning, ordered by Hitler. Four generals of the army stood at the four corners of the coffin, which lay in state, draped with an enormous swastika, in the town hall of Ulm. His decorations were laid out on a velvet cushion. The unfortunate von Rundstedt, then the most senior officer in the German army, had to read Rommel's funeral oration in the name of the Fűhrer. Read it he did, but he surely could not have written it too, not the old, embittered but always upstanding and patrician officer who never had anything but contempt for the Nazis. He spoke; “A pitiless destiny has snatched him from us, just at the moment when the fighting has come to its crisis. Rommel had been a tireless fighter in the cause of the Fűhrer and the Reich, he had been imbued with the National Socialist spirit”. This was almost too much for von Rundstedt, and the

manner of his delivery became so stilted that when he ended with the words “His heart belonged to the Fűhrer”, it was not only Frau Rommel in the congregation who longed to cry out that it was all a pack of lies.

CHAPTER TEN

GUDERIAN

The credit for the establishment of the German armoured forces and their subsequent unique place in the history of warfare must go principally to General Guderian more than to any other officer. His inter-war career had been directed to one specific aim; the creation of a mechanized army whose tactical concept was the *blitzkrieg.* Unlike his contemporaries in the British and French armies, Guderian appreciated that the

tank, in co-operation with infantry, artillery and air power, would produce a combination of mobility and velocity, to surprise and defeat the enemy.

Guderian took tank tactics by the scruff of the-neck and thrashed out a new and revolutionary branch of tank warfare. He used his *Panzers* as strike weapons to thrust deep into his enemy's heart, moving as fast as possible and without stopping to consolidate. This role was given to the infantry following fast behind.

Heinz Guderian had been born in Kulm on the Vistula on 17th June 1888. His father was an army officer, but most of his close relations were professional men or landed gentry. His outstanding intelligence did not express itself in the conventional field of operational strategy; Guderian was always a rebel in his profession, his mind always attuned to the possibilities of innovation. He also possessed a single-minded determination and was a man of his times, rare in the military profession where most lag behind it.

The last two years of World War One had offered a number of clues to solving the principal problem which had beset both sides; the immobilisation of fixed defensive lines. The most obvious of these clues was the future potential of mechanisation, of mobilising both firepower (the tank) and troop movements (motorised infantry). The Germans had achieved little in this respect during the war, but the British successes were not forgotten in its aftermath. And Guderian studied them in detail.

Guderian had secured a place in the Reichswehr, and because of his interests was given a post in the Inspectorate of Transport Troops. He began to study the writings of British Army officers Fuller and Liddell Hart that expanded his ideas. It was not merely a tactical improvement he was aiming at, he began to realise, but a revolutionary development of awesome implications.

Practical experience was essential. Since Versailles had forbidden the Germans real tanks, Guderian constructed dummy ones, cars draped in sheet metal. It was not just the weapons which fascinated him; there was also the question of their insertion into the existing structure of the Army.

He became convinced that tanks working on their own or in conjunction with infantry support could never achieve decisive importance. The exercises carried out with mock-ups had persuaded him that tanks would never be able to produce their full effects until the other weapons on whose support they must inevitably rely were brought up to their standard of speed and cross-country performance. In such a formation of all arms, the tanks must play the primary role, the other weapons being subordinated to the requirements of the armour. It would be wrong to include tanks in infantry divisions; what was needed were armoured divisions which would include all the supporting arms needed to allow the tanks to fight with full effect.

This was easier said than done. Fortunately for Guderian he had a sympathetic superior at the Transport Department, and allowed to create a Motor Transport Battalion. The four companies, true to Guderian's all-arms theory, were composed of tanks, anti-tank weapons, motorcycles, and armoured reconnaissance vehicles. The greatest boon was a visit from the new Chancellor, Adolf Hitler, in 1933. Watching Guderian's units going through their paces, Hitler could see *Lebensraum* opening up before his eyes. “That's what I want! That's what I need”! He said excitedly. Guderian, as yet not privy to the Fűhrer's dreams, could only be grateful for such vindication. Hitler had won him over. At least for the time being.

Accordingly, Hitler's expansion of the truncated Reichswehr contained provision for three panzer divisions. All that remained for Guderian was to convince the Army High Command, with, if need be, Hitler's assistance, that they be used in a certain way. Through the first six years of the thousand-year Reich he published numerous articles to this effect, and a book, *"Achtung! Panzer!'* (Attention! Tanks!).

How should the panzer divisions be used? To Guderian the answer was clear. Their essential asset was their mobility; it must not be wasted in frontal assaults on prepared defensive positions. Such work, the pinning down of the enemy front, was for the less mobile infantry. The panzers should bypass what the enemy defends and must go for the flanks, and vulnerable spots. In the nineteenth century the flanks of a nation at war were no longer the flanks of its fighting armies; they were the supply lines and command channels which maintained those armies in existence as a collective force.

Introducing a new method into the military, and then to sustain it, is a particular achievement. There is always resistance to change from conservative thinkers to anything new, and this was emphatically so in the German army in the years before 1939. The older-established regiments were particularly reluctant to accept mechanisation. But their powerful opposition led ultimately to a compromise which was to produce a far more effective fighting unit. It prevented the dominance of the tank over all other arms and led to a closely knit fighting formation based on intimate co-operation between tanks, infantry, artillery and air power.

Guderian, instrumental in creating this force, received acknowledgement of his efforts by being given command of the 19th Armoured Corps. It was a unique honour for a soldier who was the creator of a new concept, to be given the opportunity to put the method to the test. The *blitzkrieg* campaigns in Poland and France were to prove beyond doubt that Guderian the innovator, was also Guderian the brilliant tactical commander.

Poland, for the German Army, was the hors-oeuvre before the final reckoning with France. At dawn on 1st September 1939, the 19th Armoured Corps commanded by General Heinz Guderian at the spearhead of the German 3rd Army rumbled over the frontier into Poland. The era of the *blitzkrieg* had begun. Guderian, well forward with his leading troops, travelled in an armoured command vehicle. For a Corps

commander to move and command so far forward was a unique innovation, but above all, Guderian was an innovator.

His new command consisted of the 3rd *Panzer* Division and the 2nd and 20th Motorised Infantry Divisions. As they crossed the frontier, the 3rd *Panzer* Division, had been given the task of advancing to and crossing the River Vistula. The 2nd Motorised Division was to break through and destroy the Polish frontier defences while the 20th Motorised Division was to secure the northern flank. The overall Corps task was to cut off and destroy the Polish troops in the Polish Corridor.

The main thrust was to be made by the 3rd *Panzer* Division and this was where, not surprisingly, Guderian placed himself. Being a forward tank commander had its dangers, and an initial setback robbed Guderian of his armoured command vehicle. The divisional artillery was firing short and he was forced into a ditch. But he quickly re-joined the 3rd Division, much to the surprise of the leading commander who had halted on the river bank. The commander was keen to take a rest and not attempt a crossing of the river until the following day. Guderian was not impressed by his approach and while admonishing him, a young officer, who had just returned from the other side of the river reported there was still a bridge intact and that the Polish defences were weak.

Guderian went forward to the river's edge, located the enemy position, and personally briefed a motor-cycle battalion to cross, followed quickly by tanks. The result was the capture of the Polish company defending the sector. The bridgehead was consolidated and the advance continued over the River Vistula. Guderian had always insisted that for success in the *blitzkrieg* the commander had to be well forward 'reading the battle' and be prepared to take calculated risks; he had done just that. By the night of 2nd September the Corps reconnaissance troops had reached the River Vistula, and the Motorized Infantry Division followed up quickly. The Polish Corridor had been breached.

The tactical success of Guderian's advance is shown in the relatively small expenditure of lives, some 150 killed and 700 wounded out of a force of about 50 000 men. Hitler, visiting the Corps after its successes, remarked that this was in great contrast to his own experience in World War One. Guderian had realised the vital fact that successful *blitzkrieg* tactics meant avoiding head on attacks by bypassing the enemy and quickly reaching the rear of his positions. Where a head-on attack was inevitable, reconnaissance elements would accurately locate the enemy, and the tanks and infantry supported by dive-bombers would then destroy the opposition so that the advance could continue rapidly.

Guderian's Corps was now ordered to join General von Kuchler's 3rd Army. This was not to his liking. He suggested to the Army Group Chief of Staff that he should be directed by Army Group Command, and work on the left of von Kuchler where the non-mechanized infantry would not slow down his tank advance. Guderian realized that a slow advance determined by infantry pace would allow the Poles to withdraw

and establish another defensive line. A rapid *Panzer* advance would prevent this happening.

The 19th Corps was now reinforced by the addition of the 10th *Panzer* Division and given the formidable task of advancing to Brest-Litovsk by crossing the River Narev and then following the east bank of the River Bug. The crossing of the Narev at Visna by the 10th *Panzer* Division's' infantry went well. But on one of his visits to the forward edge of the battle area, Guderian discovered that they had made no attempt to seize the Polish defensive positions: They were across the river but they had not reached the concrete defence emplacements on the far bank. For the time being nothing was happening. Guderian, therefore crossed the river himself to see the Regimental commander. And found himself in the front line; there was no sign of the division's tanks, which were all still on the north bank of the river. Guderian ordered them across immediately. This intervention from a front line position was typical of Guderian

The tanks had by now started to cross by ferry and newly constructed bridges. The 3rd and 10th *Panzer* Divisions pressed on again, capturing the 18th Polish Division and its commander. By 14th September, the reconnaissance troops of the 10th *Panzer* Division had reached the line of fortified positions outside Brest-Litovsk.

Guderian, acting with flair and judgement, ordered the entire corps to move rapidly forward to Brest-Litovsk.

The advance to Brest-Litovsk had been a masterpiece of simplicity and tactical brilliance. After crossing the River Narev, the 20th Motorized Division advanced on the Corps' right flank, thereby engaging the Poles and giving the impression of a major thrust at this point. Meanwhile the tactics of deep penetration were put into effect by the 3rd and 10th *Panzer* Divisions. Guderian had given them the task of advancing on the left flank, bypassing opposition and thus outflanking the Poles and striking in depth towards Brest-Litovsk. This was textbook *blitzkrieg:* a feint designed to confuse the enemy and draw attention from the real attack.

Both *Panzer* divisions advanced rapidly: 20 to 30 miles a day, with their reconnaissance regiments well forward locating the Polish opposition. When contact was made, minor opposition was destroyed by quick attacks involving the close cooperation of *panzers, i*nfantry, artillery and air support. Stronger positions were simply bypassed. It is an impossible situation for the defenders to hold out when enemy forces are in their rear; the Poles were no exception. The Polish defenders facing the 20th Motorized Division and finding both *Panzer* divisions behind them, surrendered. Their communications gone, the Poles fell back towards Brest-Litovsk.

Guderian's strategic thrust in depth to Brest-Litovsk was a master stroke. It fulfilled all the dictates of the *blitzkrieg* mobility, velocity, and indirect approach. The link-up of Guderian's Corps with the Russians at Brest-Litovsk had enormous political significance. Guderian's reward was the Knights Cross of the Iron Cross: “It seemed

to me to be primarily a vindication of my long struggle for the creation of the new armoured force".

The campaign gave the German army the opportunity to evaluate the *blitzkrieg.* The results spoke for themselves. The Polish nation lay in ruins, an entire army of 750 000 men and its equipment lost. The German debit balance by comparison was insignificant, some 8 000 dead and 200 tanks lost. However, some refinements had to be introduced before Hitler could launch his mechanized forces on the next military task in compliance with his expansionist policy.

The German High Command, ordered by Hitler to take the offensive in the west, was intending to put into operation the outmoded Schlieffen plan of 1914, a thrust in the north of Belgium. This was a totally predictable line of approach. The Maginot Line naturally reduced the possibility of an attack in the south, and the French and British considered the Ardennes impassable to tanks. General von Manstein, Chief of Staff to von Rundstedt, could not accept this uninspired and desolate plan. After discussions' with Guderian, he submitted a plan to the High Command proposing a feint attack in the north, and a major tank thrust through the Ardennes towards Sedan, splitting the French defences in two.

Guderian gave von Manstein's plan his full support, and emphasized the importance of using all the *Panzer* divisions for the major Ardennes thrust. But to get this plan accepted became a continuous struggle for Manstein and Guderian, and at a war game in Koblenz on 7th February the Chief of the Army General Staff, Colonel General Halder, declared that it was "senseless". Because of his determined insistence on the plan, Manstein was relieved of his contact with *Panzers* and given command of an infantry corps. During a subsequent war game on 14th February the old Schlieffen plan was again discussed and decided upon as the best solution. Both Guderian and Manstein, declared emphatically that they had no confidence in the plan or the proposed employment of the armour by the High Command.

The final decision was forced on the High Command by an apparently insignificant event. A courier, flying at night with vital papers containing references to the Schlieffen plan, was brought down on Belgian soil and it was impossible to know if he had destroyed his papers. This, coupled with Hitler's personal liking for the more daring Manstein plan, decided the course of, action. A feint attack was to be made by moving against Holland and Belgium in the north, giving the impression that the Schlieffen plan was being pursued. But the decisive blow was to come in the Ardennes, delivered by the *Panzer* Corps that were positioned in depth. The remainder of the army together with Schmidt's 39th *Panzer* Corps and Hoeppner's 16th *Panzer* Corps moved against Holland, Belgium and the Maginot Line. The *Panzer* Corps comprising Hoth's 15th, Reinhardt's 41st and Guderian's 19th were to strike at the supposedly impassable tank country of the Ardennes.

Guderian's Corps, consisting of three *Panzer* Divisions, the 1st, 2nd and 10th, was given the difficult task of crossing the Meuse at Sedan. The High Command had

given no further instructions if the crossing proved a success. Guderian himself had no doubts, he had told Hitler “unless I receive orders to the contrary I intend the next day to continue my advance westwards. The Supreme leadership must decide whether my objective is Paris or Amiens. In my opinion the correct course is to drive past Amiens to the English Channel”.

The defending Anglo-French forces could muster some 4 000 armoured vehicles against the 2 800 of the German Army, so the numerical odds were on the Anglo-French side. But in quality there was not much to choose between the two armies. The Char B was the best French tank mounting a 47mm gun and their Somua, a faster tank, also carried a 47mm gun. The armour of the French tanks was normally thicker than the German, but the British light tanks were vulnerable. British infantry tanks with 70mm of armour were proof against the German anti-tank guns, and their 2- pounder gun could penetrate any German armour. The Germans mustered 627 of the good Mark III and IV *Panzers,* but 1 478 of their tanks were the earlier and less efficient Mark I and II’s. But the critical fact was deployment. Whereas the Anglo-French armoured forces were scattered throughout the battle area, the German *Panzers* were concentrated and commanded as an entity.

At 05 30 hours on 10th May, 1940 Guderian's force struck out across the Luxembourg frontier. The General was well forward with the 1st *Panzer* Division and the advanced guard had soon passed over the Belgian frontier and made contact with the airborne forces that had been dropped in the rear of the forward battle area. But extensive road demolitions were encountered, and they could not advance as deep as their commander wanted. On the following day the path was cleared and the 1st *Panzer* Division pressed forward again. .

The north bank of the Meuse was quickly taken and Sedan fell. The Meuse crossing, the more difficult second phase, began with the prearranged air attack. The French positions were pounded by wave after wave of Stuka‟s, Guderian's mobile artillery. The attacks were concentrated on Huntziqer's French Second Army. The French artillery were offered superb targets as the German forces massed for the main river crossing but the opportunity could not be taken. The Stuka‟s had severed all communications, and prevented the much needed defensive fire. Guderian records the French artillery was almost paralysed by the increasing threat of attack by Stuka‟s and bombers.

After six hours of continuous battering, panic developed and the French Commander was staggered to see his troops retreating past his headquarters. Guderian now decided to push his infantry across the river in rubber boats to deceive the French into thinking the front had broken. The ploy worked. General Georges telephoned his group commanders and ordered them to destroy their guns and retreat; and widespread panic broke out behind the French divisions still trying to hold the front.

Guderian now launched the *Panzers* of the 1st Division in a concentrated thrust against the widely dispersed French armour and quickly finalized the victory. His

skilled tactical handling had produced a refinement of *blitzkrieg* tactics, a preliminary pounding by Stuka‟s and artillery, an infantry assault and a rapid *Panzer* exploitation.

On 15th May, von Kleist ordered a halt to all further advances, Guderian reacted violently to this and demanded the order should be rescinded. After a heated discussion, von Kleist agreed that the 19th Corps could advance for a further 24 hours. On 16th May, a French order was captured which indicated that the defence was having difficulty in holding the line. Guderian instantly appreciated its significance and read the order out to his troops. They had been advancing continuously for seven days, but realizing that complete victory was within their grasp they surged forward again. Once more the Supreme Command ordered a halt on 17th May. General von Kleist arrived and remonstrated with Guderian for disobeying orders. It was clear to Guderian that there was a total lack of understanding of *blitzkrieg* tactics at Supreme Headquarters, and threatened to resign.

Colonel General von Rundstedt, alarmed at the disagreement between his senior officers, told Guderian to assume command again, obey the order to halt but carry out a reconnaissance in force. In effect this gave Guderian the scope he needed. Nevertheless it was not until 19th May that his corps received orders to attack in strength. Ironically they were now crossing the old Somme battlefields of World War One but the *blitzkrieg* was in complete contrast to 1914-18 methods and this time victory was virtually secure.

The old city of Amiens now lay before Guderian's forces, and with his customary style he wanted to participate in the attack. By midday the city had fallen. During the night the infantry battalion of the 2nd *Panzer* Division pushed through Novelles and was to become the first German unit to reach the Channel coast.

Prisoners and equipment were now falling into the hands of the advancing *Panzer* Corps with monotonous regularity. In Amiens, a British artillery battery lined up on the barrack square and equipped only with training ammunition was captured complete. But the momentum of the advance was slowing, and the next day was spent in waiting for orders. Guderian was impatient. Orders were eventually received on 21st May to continue the advance and capture the channel ports, but with only two divisions, the 10th *Panzer* Division had been detached and placed in reserve. If it had been possible to deploy the three divisions, Guderian's plan would have been to make for Dunkirk. But two divisions reduced his flexibility, and the less ambitious objective of Boulogne was chosen.

The *Panzers* had outstripped their air cover by the afternoon of the next day, and fierce fighting was in progress on the outskirts of Boulogne. It was to be another four days before the town eventually fell. The German demand for surrender to Brigadier Nicholson, the town commander, was returned with the reply: “No. It is the British Army's duty to fight as well as it is the German's”. It was decided to return the 10th *Panzer* Division to Guderian together with the *SS* Division *Leibstandarte* Adolf Hitler.

Instantly he changed his tactical plan. The 1st *Panzer* Division struck out for Dunkirk and the 10th *Panzer* encircled Calais.

Guderian's brilliant tactical handling of the three divisions had brought absolute victory within sight. Then an unpredictable order from Hitler demanded a halt to the advance. Dunkirk and Calais were to be left to the *Luftwaffe.* The General wrote: “We were utterly speechless. But since we were not informed of the reasons for this order, it was difficult to argue against it”. Guderian told his *Panzers* to hold the line of the canal they had reached and make maximum use of the time for rest. Under Sepp Dietrich the *Leibstandarte* Division disobeyed orders and occupied the far bank of the canal. But Guderian supported the move which had been made for sound tactical reasons. And he moved in the 2nd *Panzer* Division in support.

The 10th *Panzer* Division were poised ready to capture Calais; Guderian asked the Divisional Commander if he wanted the town left to the *Luftwaffe.* They jointly agreed that this was not necessary and the division attacked contrary to orders. In the afternoon, the British surrendered: “We took 20 000 prisoners including between 3 000 and 4 000 British, the remainder being French, Belgian and Dutch of whom the majority had not wanted to go on fighting and whom the English had therefore locked up in cellars”.

On the afternoon of 26th May, Hitler at last gave the order for the advance on Dunkirk to continue. What triumphs the 19 Corps would have achieved if they had been allowed to take Dunkirk when it was first a possibility is open to speculation. Certainly the delay prevented the overwhelming victory that was within Guderian's grasp.

The British attack on the German extended flank at Arras was precisely what Hitler had feared might happen; this influenced him to issue the notorious „halt order“ before Dunkirk. An order that has been the subject of debate almost since it was issued and interpreted in many ways. Some claim that Hitler wished to spare the British the humiliation of total surrender, in the hope that this would make them more amenable to a peace settlement.

Others argue that he wished to give Göring, the commander of the Luftwaffe a share of the glory, by allowing him to finish off the trapped British troops. However, perhaps the most credible explanation is that Hitler did not want to commit his panzer forces in the swampy terrain around Dunkirk. He needed to conserve, re-group, and re-fit them for the next phase of the campaign in France. Whatever the reason, it meant that the chance of reaching Dunkirk before the British was missed and the Germans were unable to complete their overall objective; which was the total destruction of all the Allied armies.

Meanwhile, the Belgian army finally surrendered on 28th May, which left the British flank wide open and effectively sealed the fate of the BEF in France. With their head now in a noose, they had no choice other than to evacuate to England; by 4th June, three hundred and thirty eight thousand British and French troops escaped in „the

miracle of Dunkirk". There was much rejoicing in Britain about the rescue operation and the media hyped this into a major victory; thus prompting Churchill to announce that "wars are not won by evacuations".

To this day, the phrase 'the Dunkirk spirit' has passed into the English language. It epitomises some of the primary virtues which the British like to claim for themselves. But just how close is the relationship of the Dunkirk spirit to the Dunkirk facts? Of course, there was courage and faith in abundance before, during and immediately after the incredible operation which saved the bulk of the British army from death or capture, and preserved the nucleus of the British Army for future campaigns. No one would wish to deny that. But in reality, a long, close and hard look at this single event which, it may be cogently argued, shaped the course of the war.

Had the full truth been known at the time, the nation's exultation at its deliverance would have been greatly dimmed. And the Dunkirk spirit, which helped to sustain the British people through five more hard years of war was to a considerable extent based on a myth. A necessary myth, which was eagerly embraced by a nation under the spell of Churchill's oratory. For while the soldiers, or most of them, displayed fortitude, there was deception, conflict and contradictory orders at the political and high command level. It may be argued, that in war, it is sometimes necessary to deceive allies, as well as enemies on the morality of actions taken by desperate men as catastrophe loomed ever nearer.

Two days after the fall of Dunkirk the new and larger *Panzer Gruppe Guderian* was formed. The first objective for *Panzer Gruppe Guderian* was southwards to the Plateau de Langres. French opposition was strong. They adopted the tactics of defending the woods and towns strongly, leaving the open spaces for the *Panzers* to progress freely. The River Aisne was well defended, and it was some time before a sizeable bridgehead could be established. After fierce fighting, the crossing of the river was successfully completed, and the *Panzers* exploited forward to Chalons.

At this point, Guderian experienced difficulty with the High Command: "From now on the *Panzer* Group received contradictory orders, some ordering a swing towards the east, others a continuation of the advance southwards". Somehow, Guderian directed his victorious force on the most advantageous route. On 15th June Langres fell, and the Commander arrived in the town at midday. He was already considering the next move. No instructions had been received from the Army High Command, and Guderian sent back a liaison officer suggesting an advance to the Swiss frontier. By 17th June the 29th Motorized Infantry Division had reached the border, Guderian was personally forward in the battle taking instant and accurate decisions. He signalled Supreme Headquarters indicating that he had reached the Swiss border at Pontarlier, to which HQ signalled back "Your signal based on error. Assume you mean Pontailler sur Saone'. The reply was curt: 'No error. Am at Pontarlier on Swiss border".

The French Army in Alsace Lorraine was now trapped. Since crossing the Aisne

Panzer Gruppe Guderian had captured 250 000 prisoners. On 22nd June the French Government agreed to an armistice. For Guderian the campaign in the west was over. His reward was promotion to Colonel General, and the oak leaves for his Knight's Cross. The achievements of the campaign were summed up in Guderian's farewell message to his soldiers: “The victorious advance from Aisne to the Swiss border and the Vosges will go down in history as an example of a breakthrough by mobile troops. I thank you for what you have done, it has been the finest fulfilment to my labours and struggles of more than a decade's duration”.

Now it was to be the turn of Russia!

Hitler's assertion that continued British resistance made elimination of Russia a strategic imperative was mere gloss, designed to quiet his generals, perhaps even to quiet himself. Göring and Raeder urged that the defeat of Britain would leave Germany in a stronger position *vis-á-vis* the Soviet Union, and made far greater strategic sense.

The other argument he urged upon his generals, that Russia was preparing to attack Germany, was equally specious. Stalin was certainly preparing for war, but with the greatest reluctance. No, Hitler was not about to attack the Soviet Union on strategic grounds; he was about to do so because he believed that Russia *should* and *could* be defeated. The 'should' sprang from his most deeply-felt political desires; living space for the *Herrenvolk,*and the subjugation of 'inferior' races. The latter provided the 'could'. Communism was merely a social system devised for and by the corrupt and the primitive. Hitler stated, “we have only to kick in the door and the whole rotten structure will come crashing down”.

Here we come once more upon Hitler's extraordinarily one-sided intelligence. He had grasped the idea of *Blitzkrieg* as no other politician and few other soldiers had; grasped its potential but not its limited applicability. He had grasped intuitively the importance of the air and naval arms in land warfare; yet not their applicability outside the confines of *Blitzkrieg.* He had grasped, as he never tired of telling his generals, the economic dimension of warfare, yet insisted on reducing it to flags on maps. He never understood interdiction, only seizure. The importance of the Caucasus oil rightly obsessed him, the importance of Suez forever eluded him. And, above all, he played like a maestro on the fears and uncertainties of his opponents, yet never grasped the art of playing on their strengths. France in 1940 was easy prey; Britain's stance confused and angered him; Soviet tenacity would have the same effect.

Delayed by the Balkan campaign and the late thaw in White Russia, *Barbarossa* began on 22nd June 1941. At dawn, the artillery opened fire; an hour later German troops crossed the frontier. South of Brest-Litovsk those of Guderian's tanks that had been waterproofed for 'Sea Lion' drove across the shallow bed of the river Bug, Moscow was six hundred miles in front of them. Guderian, across two hours later in his armoured wireless truck, followed 18th Panzer's tracks eastward. Overtaking the armour he reached the Desna Bridge to find a few Russian pickets, who took to their

heels, when they saw his vehicle. Throughout the morning the Red Army High Command was forbidding its troops to violate the frontier without authorisation. Guderian would have smiled had he known. More than three years separated the Red Army from their next sight of the frontier.

As the armoured columns plunged forward through the bewildered Soviet defences the Luftwaffe crowded the skies above. By the end of 23rd June it had destroyed over one-and-half thousand planes on the ground, and decimated the reserves flown hastily and piecemeal from Central Russia. Its mastery in the air undisputed, the Luftwaffe could devote all its attention to the ground, to breaking up enemy concentrations, interdicting the rail system, providing constant forward reconnaissance. In short, clearing the path of the long columns of German armour advancing below.

Through these first few days the ill-prepared Red Army, deprived of its experienced leaders by recent purges, broke before the onslaught. *Blitzkrieg* seemed irresistible.

As the campaign's first week unrolled the panzers continued their advance. By 27th June, 17th Panzer had reached Minsk, two hundred miles from the Bug, and linked hands with Hoth's in-wheeling 3rd Panzer Group. In two pockets around Bialystok and Volkovsk six Russian divisions were trapped; now, west of Minsk, another fifteen felt the panzer ring tighten around them. Guderian had orders to swing in again on Smolensk, a further two hundred miles east, as fast as tank engines, opposition, and the security of the pockets behind him allowed.

These last two factors were already becoming a thorn in the side of success. Opposition was badly directed from above; it nevertheless had a daunting quality, even in those first days. A captain in one of Guderian's panzer divisions wrote that “there was no feeling, as there had been in France, of entry into a defeated nation”.

If this was but a fleeting thought to the panzer commanders, to the hard-pressed infantry around the pockets that refused to surrender, it was a matter of continuing concern. Guderian, true to his code, preferred to solve the problem obliquely, by motoring further and further into Russia. Why waste time reducing pockets by direct confrontation when the sweep of advance would eventually render them irrelevant? Time, after all, was not on the Wehrmacht's side. Unfortunately for Guderian his use of infantry divisions for the assault had caused him to be placed temporarily under von Kluge's Fourth Army, and Kluge was not of the same mind. Neither was the Fűhrer.

Hitler, during the first week, had almost forgotten about the advance, obsessing himself instead with Soviet attempts to break free of the Bialystok pocket. Consequently a continual battle was being fought in the higher reaches of command between Hitler and O.K.H. Beck's dispute with Brauchitsch in March had been a precursor of this dispute, Guderian's with Kluge was its practical expression. The real problem for the Germans, as yet unrealised, was that both schools of thought were

essentially correct and mutually exclusive. The risks involved in leaving large bodies of Russians across their communication and supply lines were obvious. So were the risks of advancing in insufficient strength into the heart of Russia, with minimal flank guard and uncertain supply routes.

Guderian's argument that a minimum amount of the Panzer Group could be left to secure the pockets begged the obvious question. What if the 'minimum amount' necessary was too much for the continuation of his advance? Similarly the proponents of the opposite view had no answer to Guderian's pleas; that a postponement of the advance in strength would allow the Red Army time to strengthen its defensive line, and so make even the minimum amount he proposed to leave behind necessary to the success of the spearhead. Yet, if both schools of thought were correct, the inescapable deduction to be drawn was that the Germans had, literally, bitten off more than they could chew. There were not enough teeth for the amount of enemy and space. And if the only solution to this was to reduce the enemy and space without weakening the teeth, thus creating a more favourable balance, the argument still held. To take large uncertain bites and save time, or to take small certain bites and lose time? Advance or secure the pockets. One or the other. The Wehrmacht could not decide, and indecision would prove the most fatal thing of all.

For Guderian and Hoth, a straight drive for Moscow was decided upon. Risky indeed, but no more so than the inevitable winter campaign promised by Hitler's solution. Halder and Brauchitsch wrote a memo to Hitler expressing their displeasure. A delay in Army Group Centre's advance, inevitable without its armour, would, they argued, give the Soviets ample time to deepen their defences. The Red Army was placing all its hopes in a winter campaign; they would avoid fighting whenever possible with this in view. In front of Moscow they would have to stand and fight. The fall of Moscow - the seat of government, a major industrial centre, and, most crucial of all, the hub of the railway system - would cut Russia in two. Such a possibility must take precedence over mopping-up operations.

The memo was not delivered for the moment, although its contents would hang in the air for another month. The actual situation intervened, in the form of a Soviet counter-attack around Elnya on 25th July. An Army Group Conference was called for the 27th to discuss future operations. Guderian, blissfully unaware of Hitler's new conservatism, arrived expecting to be told to push on to Moscow, or at least Bryansk. He was soon disillusioned, receiving orders to move *south-west* against Soviet divisions in the Gomel area. The reason given was Hitler's new policy of small encirclements and safety-first. One can imagine Bock and Guderian sitting together, sharing their disgust at this development.

One sign of creeping paralysis in any operation, military or otherwise, is a plethora of conferences. Barely a week after Army Group Centre's meeting Hitler's private plane touched down at the airstrip. He interviewed Bock, Guderian and Hoth in turn. All apparently pressed for a resumption of the march on Moscow, but disagreed as to

when they could resume. Bock said immediately, Guderian in two weeks, Hoth in three. Hitler then brought them all together and announced that he had decided to give Leningrad first priority. He had not yet firmly decided on the second, but was inclined to favour the Ukraine. So much for consulting the professionals.

The most interesting statement made by Hitler was to the effect that he would never have started the war (against Russia) had he believed Guderian's statistics for Soviet tank strength, printed in *Achtung Panzer!* This breath-taking admission of political and military irresponsibility characterises as well as anything the gigantic gamble that *Barbarossa* had been from the beginning. The indecision of the German Supreme Command throughout August must be seen in this light, in the shock of discovering something that they should have known from the beginning. Suddenly their decisions spelt success or failure, not merely the speed of success.

Guderian's attack towards Roslavl was proceeding smoothly, and by 8th August had achieved its objectives. A huge gap had been torn in the Soviet front, through which the way to Moscow seemed tantalisingly open. Now, surely, was the moment. Bock sent Kesselring's planes forward to spy out the land; they reported that between Moscow and their front defences the Russians had virtually nothing. Kesselring said later that in his opinion; “If the offensive against Moscow had been continued, [the city] would have fallen into our hands before the winter and before the arrival of the Siberian divisions .The capture of Moscow would have been decisive, in that the whole of Russia in Europe would have been cut off from its Asiatic potential and the seizure of the vital economic centres of Leningrad, the Donetz basin and the Maikop oilfields in 1942 would have been no insoluble task”.

Hitler would not see it, and by this time some of Hoth's divisions were en route for Leningrad. How could his mind be changed? Even Jodl was convinced, and together with Brauchitsch succeeded in dragging a compromise out of the Fűhrer, by which Army Group Centre's two Panzer Groups would operate on the flanks for only two weeks, before returning to resume the march on the capital at the end of August. In the meantime the Army Group was allowed to 'improve its position for subsequent operations'. The possibilities open to the likes of Guderian were spelt out by Halder.

“In themselves these decisions represent a cheering progress, but they still fall short of the clear-cut operational objectives essential to a sound basis for future developments. With this tactical reasoning as a staring-point, the Fűhrer was deftly steered towards our viewpoint on operational objectives. For the moment this is a relief. A radical improvement is not to be hoped for unless operations become so fluid that his tactical thinking cannot keep pace with developments”.

At O.K.H. their sights were set on the paramount Objective, Moscow. Hitler was still thinking of Leningrad and the Ukraine, the Army's striking power still spread too wide, but Moscow at last had the priority it deserved and a force concentrated of commensurate strength. It must have been obvious to many by late September that

the risks of *Barbarossa* had been high as their wilder fears, that at the political level the campaign had been riddled with misjudgements. The door had come crashing in, but the resilience of the Soviet structure had grown rather than diminished as summer gave way to autumn. In the background, still dim and indistinct, lurked the nightmare possibility of a long war, and defeat. For the moment such thoughts could be shrugged aside. The Wehrmacht could still win a short war. It had two months at most in which to take Moscow. Man against man, tank against tank. It must succeed. Failure would raise questions that could not be answered.

There were sound reasons for expecting success. Since 22nd June the Soviet losses in men, tanks, guns and aircraft equalled the German intelligence estimates of those in existence. The Soviets must, *must,* be scraping the barrel. The Wehrmacht, though greatly weakened by the campaign's exertions, could still assemble a force on the upper Dnieper whose paper strength came close to that assembled in June for the entire front.

However, German efforts in Russia soon fell apart. Political wrangling among German military leaders and ineffective supply lines caused dissension and chaos. When Guderian learned that Hitler intended to transfer his division to the South, he confronted his Commander-in-Chief. Guderian felt the move would cost Germany the chance at total victory.

The move to the South had been initially successful and Guderian played a major role in the victory at Kiev. Turning north once again, with weary soldiers and wornout vehicles, he joined the delayed drive toward Moscow. Guderian's most explicit insurrection occurred when he defied Hitler's order to stand-fast during the harsh Russian winter. Guderian proved that a gradual retreat would work. Looking out for his men, he moved his troops back to safer positions.

Guderian's bravado cost him his position in the German army. Along with a list of other successful military leaders, Hitler forced Guderian to retire. Guderian welcomed the relief from the German propaganda machine. The inactivity did little for his health. A heart condition slowed him down and gradually worsened.

Although German prospects for victory waned, they were able to repel Russian and British offensives in the winter of 1941 and into early 1942. The Germans pushed into Stalingrad after vicious, hand-to-hand combat in the streets. Searching for someone to bring order to the German war effort, military leaders convinced Hitler that Guderian was needed. Hitler agreed and recalled Guderian in 1943 to be Inspector General of Panzer forces. Soon, the general was back in the middle of Nazi political and military infighting, including open arguments with Hitler. A pervasive doom hung over Germany.

On 18th July, 1944, Guderian had received a visit from his old Luftwaffe liaison officer, General von Barsewisch. The two had gone for a long ramble in the woods, and there, far from prying ears, Barsewisch told his friend of the impending

assassination attempt and the possibility of von Kluge negotiating a separate armistice in the West. The conspirators, he said, wanted Guderian's active participation.

The Inspector-General was hardly shocked by the thought process, but perhaps shaken by the imminence of action. He reluctantly refused Barsewisch's request. He could riot break his oath; he must pursue his duty as a German officer. This latter he then proceeded to interpret rather widely. He did not have Barsewisch arrested or convey a report of the conversation to higher levels. Instead he undertook on the following day a lightning inspection tour of all those forces in or around Berlin and Rastenburg, forces whose loyalty might prove decisive in the event of a coup. He also granted a request from General Thomale, his conspiratorially-minded Chief of Staff, that panzer units due for dispatch eastward should be held in Berlin another day for use in an 'Operation Valkyrie' exercise. Guderian knew what this implied. He was not going to partake of the plot, but if it succeeded he was determined that the Army and not the *S.S.* or Party should pick up the reins dropped by a fallen Fűhrer. This, to him, was keeping faith with his oath and pursuing the duty of a German officer.

The next day - which Thomale's request had suggested was *the* day - Guderian spent at home. Following the example of an old commander who used to take long walks when trouble loomed Guderian spent the afternoon incommunicado, out inspecting his estate. Thus insulated from the drama unfolding in Rastenburg, Berlin and Paris he tensely awaited news. Around four o'clock a dispatch rider caught up with him. He could expect a telephone call from Supreme Headquarters. Back at his house he heard that the radio had announced a failed assassination attempt on the beloved Fűhrer. No decision was now necessary. The evening was spent in waiting for the expected call. Around midnight, as Stulpnagel's staff were drinking their forlorn champagne in far-off Paris, it came through. Thomale gave Guderian the astonishing news that he was the new Chief of the General Staff. Through a chain of reasoning known only to himself the narrow escape had persuaded Hitler to sack Zeitzler. Guderian was to report to Hitler on the following day.

It is not hard to imagine the contradictory thoughts and feelings crowding Guderian's mind as he made the journey to Rastenburg. He was assuming the most prestigious post in the German Army, at a time when the Army was in full retreat across the breadth of Europe, involved in a permanent crisis of confidence with its Commander-in-Chief, which had climaxed the previous day with his attempted assassination. It was hardly an auspicious moment to realise a life's ambition.

Reaching his new office, he attempted to telephone the army groups in order to find out the situation at the front. There were three telephones in the Chief of Staff's office, and no way of telling what purpose each one served. He picked up the nearest one. A female voice answered. When he said his name she screamed and hung up.

Nerves were worn thin at Rastenburg, thin as the German fronts. These should have been Guderian's first priority. Hitler had other ideas. Though claiming that only a small

clique had been responsible for the plot against him he used it to punish the whole Army. Guderian, who wanted unity above all else and realised that Hitler was its only possible source, was an obedient if unenthusiastic servant. He found himself preparing nauseating declarations of the Army's fidelity, accepting, at last, the Nazi salute for the Army, and attending the 'Courts of Honour' which delivered Army personnel to the 'people's‟ revenge meted out by the Nazi courts.

It might seem difficult for Guderian to have justified acceptance of this role to himself. But really there was little choice. Unlike Rommel he had more than merely mental horizons to transcend. Guderian was a Prussian, and it was his homeland that lay in the path of the Soviet advance. For *him* at least the duty of his professionalism was unequivocal; the skill he possessed must be used to beat back the Bolshevik hordes. All else was subordinate to this, a feeling, as we shall see, shared by von Kluge and Rommel. It is ironic that the situation that most closely parallels that of the German generals in July 1944 was that of the leading Bolsheviks in the 1920s. Everything had gone wrong, and each conscience chose a different path. As Trotsky challenged Stalin, so Rommel prepared to challenge Hitler; as Zinoviev and Kamenev dithered between deference and defiance so did von Kluge; as Bukharin stayed with Stalin, stayed within the source of power, so Guderian stayed with Hitler, almost to the end, because only with Hitler could anything be achieved, could anything be saved from the wreck.

The situation when he took over was, as he put it with a certain understatement, 'appalling'. Since the beginning of the Soviet offensive of 22nd June there had occurred the aptly named 'destruction of Army Group Centre'. Twenty-five divisions had been consumed in the fire of the Soviet advance. The Dnieper, where Guderian had argued with Kluge three years before, had been left far behind. In the south-central sector the Russians had reached the upper Vistula, in the centre they were advancing rapidly. In the north-central sector knocking at the gates of East Prussia. By the end of July they were on the Vistula, in the east bank suburbs of Warsaw. There the momentum ran out. The Red Army had covered nearly five hundred miles in six weeks, and had far outdistanced the capacity of its supply services.

In the north and south it was a different story. The width of the German front had expanded as the Army retreated west of the narrow neck of land between Memel and Odessa. Army Groups North and South Ukraine were becoming increasingly disconnected from the central front. In the former Army Group's case this had been made explicit by the Red Army, who had reached the sea west of Riga on the day Guderian took office, thereby cutting it off. In the far south an even greater catastrophe had occurred. At the end of August the Red Army lunged into Rumania, overrunning most of the country within a fortnight. In the process Rumania changed sides. Bulgaria would soon follow suit. On 3rd September Finland sued for peace. Only Hungary remained of the German allies, anxiously scanning the lower Danube for the coming Soviet onslaught.

Guderian's efforts to shore up this collapsing position were hampered by shortage of troops and decisions taken by his superiors. Having reconnected Army Group North with a swift drive of Manteuffel's panzers he was unable to secure its necessary withdrawal. Needless to say the Soviets proceeded to cut it off again, and, also needless to say, Hitler refused to sanction its withdrawal again, this time by sea. Its fifty divisions, he said, would tie down a large Soviet force, safeguard Swedish iron ore deliveries, and protect the U-boat training grounds in the Baltic. Guderian, who had other ideas for those fifty divisions, was unimpressed. He wanted a strategic reserve.

Nevertheless the breathing-space granted in the central sector was welcome enough, as it provided time for the construction of fortified defence positions. Hitler, who had always opposed these as unnecessary encouragement of his generals' tendency to retreat, had at last grasped their importance. Unfortunately, not only did he insist that they be built in the wrong place, too close up behind the front line, but he had too few troops left to man them. Guderian's suggested volunteer force was co-opted by Bormann for the Party; their consequent quality of leadership fulfilled his most pessimistic predictions. Those full combat divisions still being raised and equipped in Germany were all being sent west. In the East now, as had been the case in Normandy, it was a matter of waiting. For the water to rise, for the dam to burst.

After the 20th July, 1944 coup failed, Guderian was one of the leaders Hitler counted on for support. Guderian's main focus was the defence of the Eastern Front. Since Hitler took a strong personal interest in the events in Russia, Guderian had to put up with frequent intrusions, even though disagreeing with Hitler could be detrimental to his own well-being. Guderian, ever the patriot, hoped to save Germany from Russian occupation.

Guderian knew the war could not be won, but still had not resolved himself to Germany's total defeat. In March 1945, he flagrantly opposed Hitler in meetings. Hitler had to get rid of Guderian. With Berlin under threat, Hitler ordered him to take six weeks' sick leave. He went to Munich where he underwent treatment for his heart condition.

The American forces captured Guderian on 10th May, 1945. His reputation as the designer of the blitzkrieg made him a favourite for interrogation. He spoke freely of his experiences. In fact, when Guderian heard whispers that he would be turned over as a criminal, he refused to cooperate with his questioners. Most of his captivity was spent writing articles on his experiences and commenting on the German war effort. He was not released until his 60th birthday in June 1948.

Once released, Guderian wrote his memoir, Panzer Leader, which was translated into ten languages and became an international best-seller in 1952. Soon after its publication, Guderian's health failed. He died in Germany on 17th May, 1954

Like American General George S. Patton, Guderian was a fiery leader. His personal motto was "Nicht kleckern, sondern klotzen" translated as "Don't tickle them - slug them”! A gifted military leader, he excelled at training his men to fight. In Russia, where his armies were often outnumbered and he had inadequate supplies, he won victory after victory by getting his men to give more than 100 percent. Although from an aristocratic background, he sympathized with his troops and was concerned about their well-being. He fought at their side in battle like few leaders would.

A true warrior, however, Guderian was difficult to command. Both calculating and impetuous, he had little time for those who did not share his beliefs. He held grudges and was not politically adept. Fellow German officers referred to Guderian as „Hothead". Throughout his career, he alienated more conservative generals with his audacious tactics, which they considered brash and offensive. Ultimately, many of the roadblocks he faced were a result of this animosity. One of Guderian's chiefs of staff, Walther Nehring wrote. "His thoughts would race ahead and sometimes he had to be pulled back, and while he was a deep thinker he was also liable to act without thinking”. As a military commander, this dichotomy led to success, but in the world of politics, Guderian was less successful.

Had Guderian been in full command of the German armour during the invasion of Russia the *Wehrmacht* may have been successful. His remarkable powers of intuition, creative imagination and accurate assessment gave him control of any situation, and his *Panzers* would have followed him to hell and back. But Hitler's vacillation over the *Wehrmacht's* objectives and the deadly, fearsome cold of the Russian winter, the fanatical resistance of the Red Army, plus the immense capability of the Russians to find limitless supplies of men and material proved too much, even for Guderian’s imaginative tactics.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

MANSTEIN

Erich von Lewinski was born on 24th November, 1887 in Berlin and was the tenth child of Prussian aristocrat and artillery general, Eduard von Lewinski. Adopted after the untimely death of his parents, by his uncle General Georg von Manstein, he took the name of Erich von Manstein. His military career began in 1906, as an Ensign with the 3rd Foot Guard Regiment. In 1913, he entered the War Academy and in 1914, received the rank of Lieutenant. At the outbreak of World War One, he served on both the Western and Russian fronts. He was wounded and after recovery transferred to the staff of the Army Group commander.

Manstein rapidly rose through the ranks. In 1915, he was promoted to the rank of Captain and remained as staff officer until the 1918 armistice. Erich von Manstein then took part in the process of creating the Reichswehr and by 1927 had risen to the rank of Major. In 1932 he was promoted to Lieutenant-Colonel and received the command of Jager Battalion.

By 1936 Manstein had progressed to the rank of Major-General and became deputy Chief of Staff to General Bock. In 1938, he took part in the German take-over of the Sudetenland as the Chief of Staff to General von Leeb. Achieving the rank of Lieutenant-General in 1939, Manstein served as Chief of Staff to General von Rundstedt, who commanded Army Group South during the Polish campaign. In preparations for the Invasion of France, he was Chief of Staff of Army Group A.

Manstein had in the meantime devised a daring plan to invade France by means of a concentrated armoured thrust through the Ardennes Forest. Though this plan was rejected by the German High Command, Manstein managed to bring it to the personal attention of Adolf Hitler on 7th February 1940, who enthusiastically endorsed it.

His plan of attack on France was based on his experiences in Poland in September 1939, where he mastered the technique of Blitzkrieg. Completely ignoring the originally intended Schlieffen Plan dating back to 1914, he devised Operation Sichelschnitt (cut of the scythe). The main idea of his plan was to attack using a concentrated Panzer force through the Ardennes to seize the bridges over the River Meuse before striking towards the Channel. This was intended to outflank the Maginot Line and cut off Allied armies in the north.

In 1940, Sichelschnitt succeeded beyond all expectations. The scythe had taken its harvest. France was beaten and Germany rejoiced. Manstein's plan had eliminated

the French and British armies in continental Europe and achieved what Imperial Germany had failed to do twenty-five years before. Erich von Manstein was promoted to the rank of General and awarded the Knight's Cross.

However, quite perceptively, Manstein now posed the question. What next? It was now obvious to him that Hitler had no long-range plans, and could neither conclude peace nor invade Britain. The question of crossing twenty miles of sea had not arisen. When it did arise in June 1940 there was no answer. Herein lay the major flaw, not in what Sichelschnitt had done, but in what Hitler as supreme commander had failed to do. Especially when combined with the fatal mistake of halting the panzers outside Dunkirk; thus allowing the British to evacuate their troops back across the Channel.

What was Sichelschnitt? – Later to be referred to as the 'Manstein Plan'.

Von Manstein's plan of the 1940 German offensive required a thrust through the Ardennes, the line of least expectation. It achieved the decisive break through on the Western Front, and led to the fall of France. At this time Manstein's tenacious arguments to change the modified First World War Schlieffen plan had become irritating to his superiors.

Consequently he was pushed out of the way to command a reserve corps of infantry. However, when the original German attack plans fell into Allied hands, Hitler flew into a rage and demanded a revision. Manstein again forwarded his proposals. On learning of Manstein's plan for the offensive, Hitler immediately grasped the idea. The new plan was adopted and succeeded spectacularly to trap the Allies on the Channel coast.

But, the next step had not been thought through. This lack of foresight was the first evidence of the manner in which Hitler would conduct his war. Decisions would be taken on the spur of the moment, with little proper planning or consideration for the implications.

When the problem of Britain became apparent in June 1940 it was already too late. The German Navy was ill prepared. Göring had insufficient aircraft of the type required. The Luftwaffe had been created primarily as an Army support-arm, not as a strategic bombing force. Even had the Luftwaffe secured the sky above the English Channel the Navy could only muster sufficient forces to protect a narrow corridor between the two coasts. Neither were there enough craft, certainly none designed specifically for this purpose. An invasion in the summer of 1940 was, therefore, never a practical possibility.

So what was to be done about Britain? Before the war Hitler assumed that Britain would remain neutral and he made virtually no preparations for war against her. His offer of peace produced only a growl of defiance. Clearly a tiger had been taken by the tail. Hitler saw the Channel as Britain's salvation, not his own failure to plan for a protracted war. Hitler, therefore, decided that if *Blitzkrieg* was inapplicable to Britain, then it had to be applicable elsewhere on the European continent.

Victory in France had been so swift that Hitler was now convinced he was infallible. He did not take into consideration that France had been an ideal environment for panzer warfare. The distances were short, the roads and weather good and casualties low. Everything had gone according to plan. But not many countries had the road network or the political vulnerability that existed in France in 1940. Nevertheless Hitler decided that the Soviets were for political and economic reasons his next target.

In February of 1941, Erich von Manstein received the command of newly formed 56th Panzer Corps, which in preparation for Barbarossa was assigned to Army Group North. From June 22nd to 26th, von Manstein advanced over 320km, while capturing bridges across Duna River and almost capturing the city of Leningrad. On 13th September, 1941, von Manstein received the command of 11th Army (part of Rundstedt's Army Group South) in Southern Russia. He then successfully drove southwards into the Crimea, while taking over four hundred thousand Russian prisoners and by November 16th, secured the entire Crimea with the exception of Sevastopol. During the winter, Manstein withstood the Soviet counteroffensive and in July 1942, he captured the city of Sevastopol, and on the same day received promotion to the rank of Field Marshal. In late July, he was ordered northwards to join the Army Group North and in August 1942, Manstein was once again in charge of forces attacking Leningrad. In November, he received command of the newly formed Army Group Don, which included Paulus's 6th Army. Hitler had become obsessed with the symbolism of capturing Stalingrad named after his arch foe, regardless of its strategic value.

When the magnitude of the disaster became obvious, Manstein was sent to conduct the efforts to relieve Paulus's Sixth Army, trapped that winter at Stalingrad. The effort to relieve Stalingrad failed because Hitler refused to agree with Manstein's insistence that Paulus should break out westward and meet the relieving forces. The relief column actually got to within thirty miles, but Paulus did not break out to meet it, unless he received direct orders from Hitler. Approval could not be obtained, mainly due to Göring's assurance to Hitler that his Luftwaffe would supply Stalingrad. Manstein, a brilliant strategist, now perceived the obvious. He realised that the chances of bringing out 6th army intact from Stalingrad was hopeless. He was forced to abandon the rescue mission when a Russian counter stroke threatened him with encirclement. In fortress Stalingrad the conditions of the stricken army rapidly deteriorated. The exhausted troops were reduced to scavenging and eating horseflesh. Paulus bitterly complained that the Luftwaffe had left him in the lurch.

Temperatures had plunged to -30 degrees C, and due to Göring's incompetence, hardly any winter clothing had arrived. The men were suffering from frostbite, dysentery and typhus with little hope of survival. The airlift was a chronic failure. Manstein informed Hitler that due to the Stalingrad disaster the position in the Caucasus had become untenable. The German forces had to be withdrawn immediately from this position. The Wehrmacht's situation was critical. Hitler eventually relented, and gave the necessary order to withdraw from the Caucasus. Manstein, by skilful military manoeuvring, managed to evacuate the endangered

German armies which Hitler had recklessly and fatally thrust south into the Caucasus. Total disintegration on the eastern front was thus avoided. Manstein, could not save the trapped 6th army, but he did rescue the armies in the Caucasus from a similar fate.

He was now experiencing how Hitler fulfilled the responsibilities of supreme military commander combined with Head of State. Previously, during the campaign in Poland Manstein had been unaware of any interference by Hitler in the military leadership. Hitler had listened sympathetically to military interpretations of the situation and made no attempt to intervene. He undoubtedly had an eye for operational openings, as had been shown by the way he opted for Sichelschnitt. In addition, Hitler possessed an astoundingly retentive memory and an imagination that made him quick to grasp all technical matters and problems of armaments.

He was amazingly familiar with the effect of the very latest enemy weapons and could reel off whole columns of figures on both German and the enemy's war production. Indeed, this was his favourite way of side-tracking any topic that was not to his liking. He prided himself with the production figures of the German armaments industry, which he had boosted to an amazing extent; preferring to overlook the fact that the enemy's armaments figures were immensely higher. His belief in his own superiority in this respect ultimately had disastrous consequences. His interference prevented the smooth and timely development of the Luftwaffe, and he hampered the development of rocket propulsion.

Hitler lacked military ability based on experience; something for which his 'intuition' was no substitute. He failed to understand that the objectives of an operation must be in direct proportion to the time and forces needed to carry it out. He did not realise that any long-range offensive operation calls for a steady build-up of reserves over and above those committed in the original assault. All this was brought out with striking clarity in the planning and execution of the 1942 summer offensive in Russia. What he lacked was experience in strategy and grand tactics. His active mind seized on almost any aim that caught his fancy, causing him to fritter away Germany's strength by taking on several objectives simultaneously. The rule that *one can never be too strong at the crucial spot,* to achieve a decisive aim, was something he never really grasped.

As a result, in the offensives of 1942, and 1943 he could not bring himself to stake everything on success. Neither was he able or willing to see what action would be necessary to compensate for any unfavourable events that may occur. In mid-February I943 Kharkov fell to the Red Army. The German southern wing hung limp and well-nigh shattered, but on I8th February 1943, Manstein received command of Army Group South (made up of Army Group Don and Army Group A) and recaptured the city of Kharkov on 15th March. Launching the hastily reformed Fourth Panzer Army on a limited but devastating 'backhand stroke' Manstein recaptured Kharkov and rolled back the Russians in confusion. That counterstroke was the most brilliant operational performance of Manstein's career, and one of the most masterly in military history.

Towards the end of March l943 a lull which was to prove of unusual and unaccustomed duration settled over the Soviet-German battle front. Both sides were sorely in need of respite after the ferocious winter fighting. The entire southern wing of the German army in the East, increasingly marooned in the mud brought on by the spring thaw, had barely escaped destruction. Also, the Soviets occupied a salient extending to the west of Kursk.

The front assumed a new configuration: Kharkov was in German hands, but the substantial Soviet 'Kursk salient' obtruded westwards into the German lines and jutted into the flanks of two German army groups, South and Centre. Faced with this unstable equilibrium, both sides fixed their gaze on that singular bulge formed by the Kursk salient, which offered tempting opportunities to the Soviet and German commands alike.

Even in the wake of the German defeat at Stalingrad, Hitler was determined to win back in the coming summer what had been lost during the grim winter. A resolve full of fateful implications. Manstein had already submitted his own appreciation of the situation on the Eastern Front, which pointed to the conspicuous bulge in the German front, which, in Manstein's own words, “was just begging to be sliced off”. Moreover, any major Soviet breakthrough here might again imperil the German southern wing, as well as bringing the Soviet armies to the Ukraine. It was practical to assume that the Soviet command would mount a major effort in the southern theatre, as indeed they did, and for the same reason the anticipated Soviet attack should be met by a deliberate German withdrawal, enticing the enemy to the lower Dnieper and then confounding him utterly by smashing into his flank with powerful armoured forces assembled for this purpose in the area west of Kharkov.

Though reconciled momentarily to going over to the defensive, Hitler nonetheless made it clear and expressed the view unequivocally on 13th March 1943, that a limited offensive in the East provided the most effective defence: the attack should be carried out immediately the ground dried out and before any assault on Europe could develop from the Anglo-Americans. Manstein's own victory at Kharkov contributed powerfully to his belief in an offensive. The Kursk salient, the semi-circular bulge jutting westwards for some seventy-five miles into the German lines and with a base of not less than 100 miles from north to south, suggested itself as the main target. The Red Army's men and machines would be pounded in an attack which would emasculate Soviet striking power. Slicing off the Kursk salient by mounting an enveloping attack from the north and the south would immolate that vast bulk of Soviet manpower and armament which had poured into the area west of Kursk, thus not only deeply wounding the Red Army but also restoring the German position in a rapid and spectacular victory. The outlines of „Operation Zitadel“ thus loomed up in March, though in this form it was the least preferable of the solutions advanced by Manstein, but one favoured by Hitler; a 'forehand stroke' whose success depended crucially upon a certain speed of execution: the longer the German forces waited on the defensive, the greater was the possibility of the Red Army expanding their salient and rupturing the German front in its entirety.

It was mid-April 1943, before the plan took any firm shape. Early in the month Colonel-General Zeitzler, chief of staff of O.K.H., (the Army High Command), convened a conference at Rastenburg to discuss the coming offensive operations. Here Manstein's subtle 'backhand stroke', plan was formally rejected: it was to be rather an all-out set piece assault on the Kursk salient. The memorandum submitted to Hitler on 11th April by Zeitler proposed that Colonel-General Model's Ninth Army (Army Group Centre) would attack the salient from the north, out of the Orel salient held by German troops, while to the south Colonel-General Hoth's Fourth Panzer Army would strike northwards from the Kharkov salient to join up with Model moving from the northern face.

Time was of the essence and yet vacillation hung heavy in the air. On 15th April 1943,
Hitler stated that “Kursk must be a victory to shine out like a signal beacon to the world”, insisting on the need for surprise. The assault armies would be equipped with the new Tiger and Panther tanks, in which Hitler placed so much faith, having already averred that one battalion of Tigers was worth a whole panzer division. The Tiger tank produced by Henschel was already in service in small numbers and the Panther exemplified the German answer to the formidable Soviet medium tank, the T-34. Meanwhile, out of a belated recognition of the plight of the panzer troops Hitler had recalled Colonel-General Guderian to service as Inspector-General of Armoured Forces: he had to grapple with the consequences of the mayhem inflicted on the once invincible panzer divisions, reduced in January 1943 to a mere 495 tanks to do battle across the length and breadth of the Eastern Front. Needless to say, Guderian became almost from the outset a vehement opponent of the attack on the Kursk salient, a stance in which he was joined before very long by Manstein. Both feared for this sacrifice in tanks.

The signs of Hitler's hesitation were already apparent, while the German High Command fell to feuding within itself. The dilemma was becoming cruelly plain: the proposed attack promised great risk and dangerous sacrifice, at least in the minds of Guderian and Manstein, yet not to attack could only expose the Germans to the threat of being assaulted by the massed and replenished ranks of the Red Army. Hitler refused to believe that Army Group South faced anything approaching mortal danger, Stalin for his part had rammed his armies forward in the belief that a German collapse was imminent, only to have Manstein's 'backhand stroke' smash into depleted Soviet divisions in his drive to recapture Kharkov. As they struggled to control the situation the iron hand of Marshal Zhukov fell on this front, as Stalin hurriedly recalled him from the north-western theatre. Zhukov moved up all available reserves, including a tank army.

The vital question at this juncture was how the Red Army should respond to the growing threat: mount a spoiling attack, or fight defensively and then strike back in full force? There is much to suggest that Stalin wanted to pre-empt any German offensive and that he was only with difficulty dissuaded from this predilection. Zhukov, however, had solidly based views on this subject. Early in April his reserves were

reinforced; they mustered 1 200 tanks, a figure which was to triple within two months and thus justify Manstein's warning to Hitler over the dangers of undue delays. Zhukov made his own inspection of the front area, and on 8th April 1943, after consultation with the General Staff and front line commanders, submitted a major strategic appreciation to Stalin. He predicted a German offensive on a much narrower front than in previous campaigns: “The Germans will assemble maximum forces including up to 13-15 tank divisions supported by large numbers of aircraft. They will attack in an attempt to outflank Kursk from the north-east and south-east”. Zhukov concluded his detailed appreciation with the stipulation that “an offensive on the part of our troops in the near future aimed at forestalling the enemy I consider to be pointless”.

\

The Red Army continued to mass in the salient, digging in on a gigantic scale and embarking on massive fortification work. Each front built three defensive lines, with the Steppe Front forces building two additional rear lines, providing in all eight major defence lines echeloned to a depth of some 100 miles. Artillery and armour rolled into position, while Red Army engineers laid 40 000 mines.

The ominous lull continued, though the air war rapidly intensified. On 4th May Hitler convened yet another conference to discuss Zitadel: Manstein demurred cautiously, Guderian came out flatly against the folly of an offensive, and Model expressed some serious reservations, while Kluge favoured an attack but no further delay with it. Yet delay there was once more.

On the ground the Russians dug in and the Germans proceeded with their meticulous preparation. Throughout June the forces on both sides swelled prodigiously, bringing together more than two million men, 30 000 guns, over 6 000 tanks and assault guns and a little over 5 000 aircraft. Whatever misgivings the German command felt were well concealed from the men, while the Soviet command persisted with its intensive training at a well tried pace. The final array for Zitadel was by any count immense, encouraging the attacker and giving the defender pause for thought: on a front of some thirty miles. Model's Ninth Army, comprising the northern arm of the German pincer, deployed six panzer divisions, two panzer-grenadier divisions and twelve infantry divisions, while to the south Manstein mustered an even more powerful force with twenty-two divisions, with three panzer and three infantry divisions committed to a diversionary attack. There was every reason for Guderian to shudder at the extravagant commitment of precious armour, and even Hitler's faith in the new tanks could not be offset by the fact that the new models were relatively few in number, Manstein had 94 Tigers and 200 Panthers, and plagued with technical troubles which showed all too quickly on the battlefield.

Behind the minefields and the breastworks even greater masses of Soviet infantry, armour and artillery had been deployed. Central Front disposed of five rifle armies, one tank army and one air army. In all some 5 000 guns and 1 120 tanks lying across the main line of Model's assault. The Southern Front also deployed five rifle armies supported by the First Tank Army and the Second Air Army, amounting to almost 6 000 guns and 1 500 tanks. All fronts also had powerful reserves of their own,

amounting to several corps, but the heaviest punch was packed by the Soviet artillery; no fewer than ninety-two artillery regiments moved into the salient, bringing the total artillery strength to just under 20 000 guns plus 900 and more 'Katyusha' rocket-launchers.

The scene was now set completely for this massive clash. It remained only to signal the final, irrevocable date (and time) for the German attack. After a final review of the attack plans between 1st and 2nd July, Hitler revealed his great secret: Zitadel would open on 5th July 1943. Stavka informed Soviet front commanders that a German attack was imminent and could be expected between 3rd and 6th July, a tribute to Stalin's intelligence apparatus, 'Lucy', while local confirmation came through a Jugoslav deserter from the Wehrmacht who intimated that the German offensive would open at 03 00 hours on 5th July. The anguish for both side of weeks of waiting was almost over and during the afternoon of 4th July the strained and sinister lull finally ended. Manstein's southern assault force moved off, with his Panzer Corps striking at the Soviets at 10 00 hours. Soviet artillery opened fire, disrupting the German assembly on the northern face. German artillery returned its own barrage. Both German army groups, Centre and South, were now committed to their main assaults, and the Soviet command was left in no further doubt.

On Monday morning, 5th July, General Model, attacking the northern face of the salient, launched his first main assault supported by formidable infantry and tank strength. After fighting off several mass attacks, the Soviets fell back to the second defensive line some five miles to the south. The power of the German blow also bludgeoned them into a limited withdrawal of three miles. German assault troops also broke into the Soviet positions in a thrust aimed at the salient, but they were finally checked. By nightfall large numbers of German tanks were marooned within the first line of Soviet defences, though assault infantry forced its way in hand-tohand fighting through most of this defensive system, clearing mines and closing on the stranded armour. The Soviet front commander had already ordered up his reserves to bolster his left flank. The Soviet tanks reached their concentration area in time, but the brief hours of darkness allowed no chance to secure passages through the minefields or to reconnoitre, and what was meant to be an effective counter-blow ended only as desperate support for the second line of defences. Model attacked at dawn on 6th July, but another day of murderous assault brought him only a few miles southwards, all at staggering cost: twenty five thousand men and some 200 armoured vehicles.

On 6th July, the Soviets were ordered to dig in and fight German heavy tanks only from the hull-down position: charging Tiger tanks head-on had proved too costly. The Soviet armour had been flung back behind the infantry lines, and only guns firing over open sights had saved the day. A counter-attack by the Soviets failed to restore the situation, but it did block the German advance and thus actually decided the fate of the German northern offensive, for the Soviet command gained time to concentrate on other threatened sectors

At dawn on 7th July, waves of German tanks, crashing through the Soviet minefields, opened a series of massed attacks, with German dive-bombers seeking out the

Soviet artillery. Model committed a mass of infantry and armour supported by motorized infantry, and this was hurled against the defenders. On 8th July, a wave of fire and steel which burned and blasted away the Soviet defenders, forced them to withdraw to the top of the ridge. Battered mercilessly, they held on with only a handful of guns, and dwindling ammunition. The timely arrival of Soviet artillery and infantry reinforcement finally secured the ridge.

Neither to east nor west along this 25-mile front was there any significant German breakthrough: the maximum penetration reached only ten miles, all for the grim tally of fifty thousand German dead, 400 tanks and self-propelled guns lying shattered and 500 aircraft destroyed. But, even more ominously, Model had now to look to his rear, for there were threatening signs from the Soviets. On 11th July Model's assault on the northern face ceased, only a matter of hours before five Soviet armies rolled over the German defences east of Orel, in a massive counter-offensive stroke which opened on 12th July. On that same day the Soviets recovered their original positions and sealed the northern face of the salient

The southern face, however, saw no such speedy resolution of the struggle: on the contrary, here the 12th July brought a hideous climax all its own in the shape of the mightiest tank battle in the history of modern war, following a week of ferocious fighting which introduced German armies deeper into the Soviet defences than in the north. The reasons for this were many and various, though prominent among them were Manstein's own formidable skill in the field, and his proven ability as an armoured commander, and the effectiveness of German tactics. Manstein's attack opened in all its intensity on the southern face when his panzers attacked. Though a sudden summer deluge brought fresh floods and delayed the German armour, the Luftwaffe, having beaten off a Soviet pre-emptive strike on German airfields, used its temporary air superiority to good effect, striking hard at the massed Soviet artillery.

The German shock groups moved on relentlessly, and unlike Model, used the available armour in massive wedges rather than committing it piecemeal. These fearsome German panzer divisions struck out in the south virtually shoulder-to-shoulder, steadily crunching into the Soviet defences. The panzers made good progress on 7-8th July, with the *Gross-Deutschland* Division forcing Soviet armour back to the last defensive line. At midday on 8th July the Soviet command came to realise that a highly dangerous situation was building up. The S.S. Panzer Corps was now moving in its easterly drive for a major breakthrough and full freedom of movement.

On the morning of 12th July, tanks met head-on in a furious high-speed charge; the T-34"s rolling across the sloping ground and in a nightmarish mechanized re-enactment of the Light Brigade at Balaclava, passing through the entire German first echelon and throwing the battle from the outset into milling confusion. Though outgunned by the awesome Tigers, the Soviet T-34"s closed the range and used their 76-mm guns to devastating effect: tanks, literally locked together, blew up in mutual death or were separately blown apart, ripping entire tank turrets off and flinging them yards away from the mangled wrecks. Overhead Soviet and German aircraft battled

among themselves for local superiority or tried to support the ground troops, though the swirling smoke from burning tanks made distinction between friend and foe difficult. Gradually, however, the Soviet air force gained the upper hand.

By nightfall more than 300 German tanks (70 of them Tigers), 88 guns and 300 wrecked vehicles littered the steppe, while more than half the Soviet tank strength lay shattered on the same ground. Though the Eastern Front had seen some appalling fighting, German troops insisted that there had been nothing like this. In the blood-bath of Kursk, the arrogant, merciless S.S. troops, whose very emblem was so often their automatic death warrant once in Soviet hands, had taken a Valkyrie ride to death and destruction. The Tiger crews splayed out beside their tanks or interred in these steel tombs; no longer men but merely remnants of bodies amidst a ghastly litter of limbs, frying pans, shell cases, playing cards and stale bread. For three more days (13-15th July) German troops stabbed at Soviet defences, with S.S. units trying to get round the Soviet strongpoints. Even if they could get round, Soviet tanks beat off attacks.

Zitadel was, nonetheless, dying on its feet, if not actually dead. On 13th July Hitler had summoned Army Group Centre and South commanders (Kluge and Manstein) to a conference at his East Prussian H.Q., the *Wolfsschanze:* the mauling of the German armour was bad enough, but other dire events had already imperilled the German offensive in the Kursk salient. On 10th July, 1943 an Anglo-American force had landed in Sicily, thus forcing upon Germany not merely the prospect but the reality of a two front war in Europe, while two days later, on 12th July, the Soviet counter-offensive aimed at Orel had begun and put substantial forces of Army Group Centre at grave risk. Hitler proposed at once to take panzer divisions from the Kursk front for use in Italy and the Balkans; Zitadel had to make way for this prior commitment to Germany's entire southern flank which could not be put in jeopardy. Kluge, less impressed with the turn of events in Italy, pointed in the first instance to the growing danger to Model, if the Red Army succeeded in slicing off the Orel salient: a catastrophe was inevitable on a massive scale, unless Model's Ninth Army pulled well away from the northern face of the Kursk salient. Manstein, however, took a wholly different point of view and argued that the attack in the south should continue: Model must stand firm.

For all his apparent agreement with Manstein, on 17th July Hitler personally ordered the removal of the S.S. Panzer Corps from Army Group South for eventual transfer to Italy. That date, 17th July, effectively marks the calling off of Zitadel; it had passed the point of no return. On 23rd July. German troops had already begun pulling back, a withdrawal screened by powerful rear guards but a withdrawal nonetheless.

The remainder of July was taken up with furious Soviet preparations for the coming counter-offensive in the south and feverish German preparation to fight it off. To the astonishment of the German command, the Red Army launched a powerful blow from the northern segment of Army Group South's front, thus belying the notion that Soviet operational reserves about Kursk were depleted and enfeebled. Three weeks after

the counter-offensive unleashed against Army Group Centre, the Red Army attacked Army Group South, on 3rd August. Within two weeks Kharkov had been recaptured.

After the battle of the Kursk salient, Kursk itself was scarcely involved, for even at their closest in the southern thrust German divisions were still more than fifty miles from Kursk and almost 100 from Model in the north, and the fighting on the Eastern Front became an unbroken catalogue of Soviet advances. Myths as well as men had been consumed in that massive collision: before Kursk, it had always been assumed that the Wehrmacht must advance in the summer, but that aura of overweening invincibility vanished for ever in the Kursk salient. The psychological effect was profound, though paradoxically the salient fighting lacked much of the drama of Moscow in 1941 and Stalingrad in 1942. Nevertheless, the monstrous scale of the clash impressed itself starkly upon the Russians, anxiously awaiting the outcome of a critical encounter taking place in the very heart of Russia.

The scale of the Soviet preparations, above all that massive concentration of reserves, combined both to rob the Kursk salient operations of the high drama played out before Moscow in 1941, where the Soviet army had been bereft of major reserves, and to grind the German armies into the steppe. Some twenty panzer divisions had been mangled almost out of recognition, and while the Soviet armour had been ferociously mauled these were losses the Red Army could speedily make up. For Germany, as Guderian had gloomily predicted at the outset, such a loss could only be catastrophic, a profligate squandering of vital armour in an offensive badly conceived from the beginning. Strategic success totally eluded the Germans, because tactically the tasks were impossible of execution; thus were German divisions impaled. And as the bell tolled for the German armies in the East, so did Soviet confidence grow. It is this factor which invests the battle for the Kursk salient with its singular decisiveness: though defeat at the approaches to Moscow and at Stalingrad had wounded the Wehrmacht, neither had wrenched the strategic initiative in the East from the Germans. Kursk was the true turning point for the Soviet Union, and high, indeed inhuman, as the cost was, it was amply justified by that irreversible advance already begun in the late summer of 1943. Thereafter the German army was consigned to unrelieved retreat, to fight still, but with the certainty of losing in the end.

In September 1943, Manstein skilfully withdrew to the west bank of the River Dnieper, while inflicting heavy casualties on the pursuing Red Army. From October to mid-January 1944, Manstein „stabilized" the situation but in late January was forced to retreat further westwards by the new Soviet offensive. In mid-February of 1944, Manstein disobeyed Hitler's directive and ordered his Army Group South to withdraw from the „Cherkassy Pocket", which occurred on 16/17th February. Eventually, Hitler accepted this action and ordered the breakout after it already took place.

Manstein was called on repeatedly to conduct a fighting withdrawal in the face of much superior forces. He showed great skills in checking successive Soviet thrusts and imposed delays on the westward advance of the Russian armies. He constantly looked for opportunities to deliver counter attacks. But when he urged that a longer step back should be made, that is, a *strategic* withdrawal, to facilitate the

development of the full recoil spring effect of a counter-offensive against an overstretched enemy advance, Hitler would not hear of it.

His unwillingness to sanction any withdrawal forfeited any chance of stabilising the front, Manstein maintained the Old Prussian tradition of speaking frankly, and expressed his criticism forcibly. Hitler repeatedly clashed with Manstein's defensive strategy. In the end it became more than Hitler could stand; particularly as the course of events continued to confirm Manstein's warnings. Therefore, in March 1944 Hitler dismissed Manstein; thus ended the active career of a man who combined modern ideas of mobility with a classical sense of manoeuvre. Manstein's favourite tactic was to allow a Russian penetration in a particular area and then encircle the attackers when they had been lulled into complacency. This successful ruse showed that he did not think merely in terms of fixed lines. When taxed with losing Kharkov, Manstein said: “I'd rather lose a city than an Army”.

Hitler's strategic aims were to a very great extent conditioned by political considerations and the needs of the German war economy. Political and economic goals are undoubtedly of great importance. However, what Hitler overlooked was that the achievement and, most importantly of all, the retention of objectives requires the defeat of the enemy's armed forces. Otherwise the attainment of territorial aims and their long-term retention is a sheer impossibility.

The strategic aim of any war is to smash the military power of the enemy before the way is open to the realisation of political and economic aims. This brings the factor which probably did more than anything else to determine the character of Hitler's leadership; his overestimation of the power of the will as one of the essential prerequisites of victory. Admittedly, many a battle has been lost and many a success thrown away because the supreme leader's will failed at the critical moment.

However, the will for victory which gives a commander the strength to see a grave crisis through is something very different from Hitler's will. He became impervious to reason and thought his own will could operate beyond the limits of hard reality. The essential elements of the 'appreciation' of a situation on which every military commander's decision must be based were virtually eliminated. With that Hitler discarded reality together with the enemy's resources and possible intentions.

The same man who, after his decisive successes in politics up to 1938, actually recoiled from risks in the military field during wartime. In the Russian campaign, Hitler's fear of risk manifested itself in his refusal to accept that elasticity of operations; which, in the conditions from 1943 onwards, could only be achieved by a voluntary, surrender of conquered territory.

There was also his fear to transfer troops from secondary fronts in favour of the spot where the main decision would fall; the principle reason why Hitler evaded these risks in the military field was the fear, common to all dictators, that his prestige would be shaken by any perceived setbacks. Hitler had an intense dislike of giving up anything on which he had once conquered. Whenever he was confronted with a decision which he did not like taking but could not ultimately evade, Hitler would procrastinate

as long as he possibly could. This happened every time it was urgently necessary to commit forces to battle in time to forestall an operational success by the enemy.

The General Staff had to struggle and battle in vain with Hitler to get forces released from less-threatened sectors of the front to be sent to a crisis spot. In most cases he would give too small a number of troops when it was already too late. Hitler always expected things to go his way in the end, thereby enabling him to avoid decisions which were repugnant to him; his inflated belief in his own will-power, and an aversion to accepting any risk when its success could not be guaranteed in advance influenced Hitler's military leadership. Obstinate defence of every foot of ground gradually became his style of leadership.

Hitler's reaction when the crisis occurred in front of Moscow was to adopt Stalin's precept of hanging on doggedly to every position. It was a policy that had brought the Soviet leaders so close to defeat in 1941 that they finally relinquished it when the Germans launched their 1942 offensive. Hitler was convinced that his refusal to authorise any voluntary withdrawal had saved the Germans from the fate of Napoleon's Grand Army in 1812. When, therefore, a fresh crisis arose in autumn 1942 after the German offensive had become bogged down at Stalingrad, Hitler again thought success lay in clinging on at all costs to what he already possessed.

It is generally recognized that defence is the stronger of the two forms of fighting. This is only true, however, when the defence is so strong that the attacker bleeds to death when assaulting the defender's positions. Such a thing was out of the question on the Eastern Front, where the number of German divisions available was never sufficient for so strong a defence to be organized. The enemy, being many times stronger, was always able, by massing his forces at points of his own choice, to break through fronts that were far too widely extended. As a result, large numbers of German forces were unable to avoid encirclement. Only in mobile operations could the German defenders repel the advancing enemy.

The effects of Hitler's 'hanging on at all costs' may be found deep down in his own personality. He was a man who saw fighting only in terms of the utmost brutality; substituting the *art* of war with brute force and will-power. Hitler was certainly quite clearly informed of conditions at the front through the reports he received. In addition, he frequently interviewed officers who had just returned from the front-line areas. Thus he was aware of the continuous overstrain they had had to endure. This could still have been counter-balanced, if he had been prepared to take advice from, and place genuine confidence in, an experienced Chief of the General Staff. This would have compensated for his lack of training and experience in the military sphere, particularly as regards strategy and grand tactics. By utilizing the skill of his Chief-of-Staff, quite an efficient military leadership might have emerged. But this was precisely what Hitler would not accept. He considered the power of his will to be in every way decisive.

As had his political successes, and, indeed, the military victories early in the war, which he regarded as his own personal achievement. This caused him to lose all sense of proportion in assessing his own capabilities. To him the acceptance of

advice from a Chief-of-Staff would not have meant supplementing his own will but submitting it to that of another. Added to this was a mistrust of the military leaders, whose code and way of thinking were alien to him. Thus he was not prepared to have a really responsible military adviser alongside himself. He wanted to be another Napoleon, who had only tolerated men under him who would obediently carry out his will. Hitler had neither Napoleon's military training nor his military genius.

Hitler thought he could see things much better from behind his desk than did the commanders at the front. He ignored the fact that much of what was marked on his situation maps was out of date. From that distance, moreover, he could not possibly judge what the proper and necessary actions to take on the spot were. In any discussion of operational intentions one is almost always dealing with a matter whose outcome nobody can predict with absolute certainty. Nothing is certain in war.

The more he came to regard the principle of 'holding on at all costs' policy, the less prepared was he to issue long-term directives. His mistrust of his subordinate commanders prevented him from giving them, in the form of long-term directives, freedom of action, which they might put to a use that was not to his liking. In the long run even an army group could not function without directives from the Supreme Command. Whenever Hitler perceived that he was not making any impression with his opinions on strategy, he immediately produced something from the political or economic sphere, when no front-line commander could compete; his arguments here were generally irrefutable.

Naturally no military relationship could develop between this dictator, who thought only of his political aspirations and lived in a belief in his 'mission.' Manstein made no less than three attempts to persuade Hitler to accept some modification of the Supreme Command. He was fully aware that Hitler would never be prepared to relinquish the supreme command officially. As a dictator he could not possibly have done so without suffering what for him would have been an intolerable loss of prestige. Everything depended, therefore, on persuading Hitler, whilst nominally retaining the position of Supreme Commander, to leave the conduct of military operations in all theatres of war to one responsible Chief-of-Staff and to appoint a special Commander-in-Chief for the Eastern theatre. These attempts proved unavailing. Hitler knew full well that Manstein was the very man many people in the army would like to see as Commander-in-Chief in the east.

With regards to the changing of the leadership of the Reich by violent means, as on 20th July 1944, Manstein would not contemplate a *coup d'ètat* in wartime because he considered it would have led to an immediate collapse of the front and probably to chaos inside Germany. Apart from this, there was always the question of the military oath and the committing of murder for political motives. Stating 'No senior military commander can expect his soldiers to lay down their lives for victory and then precipitate defeat by his own hand". In any case, it was already clear by that time that not even a *coup d'ètat* would make any difference to the Allied demand for unconditional surrender.

Manstein was trusted by his staff and by his commanders as a man who thought carefully. He only took risks when he felt them justified and usually managed to outthink the enemy. His peers regarded with near unanimity that Manstein was their finest brain and best commander and this has been echoed by military commentators from the Allied countries. They called Manstein 'the most brilliant and gifted strategist of all German generals; always full of new and often brilliant ideas; an organizer of genius, who was always in the front rank where the interests of the Army were at stake'.

'The ablest of all the German generals was the verdict of most of them on Field Marshal Erich von Manstein".

Returning to 1940, Hitler saw Sichelschnitt as a personal triumph over his own General Staff, considering them to be lacking in imagination and resolve. The vindication of victory removed any remaining inclination to listen to his professional advisers. This made him more inclined to assume the right to interfere in the military conduct of war, In the summer of 1940 Hitler held sway over the continent of Europe. Britain nursed her pride and prepared for the Luftwaffe's onslaught; on the other side of Europe the Soviet Union held its breath and rushed more troops into Poland. Manstein stated that Germany's power had never been higher. Up to 1940, the German military was united as never before. The Führer and generals, all worked together. The result was triumph. It was the last time they all worked in harmony. The consequence, not surprisingly, would be tragedy for the Third Reich.

In June 1941, Hitler totally miscalculated both his resources and the immensity of the task when he invaded the Soviet Union. Unable to determine which political and economic targets to pursue, he fragmented his military forces and in the end lost all. Hitler's policies of supreme command, led to growing disenchantment among the officer corps. The dilemma for all German professional soldiers like Manstein was that of trying to serve their country while disapproving the Fűhrer's aims and methods. True to their tradition of blind obedience, most of them concentrated on the military role and ignored politics, whilst deploring the lack of political direction. They witnessed the strategic opportunities that were missed and the bright prospects that were ruined.

After the war Manstein was tried as a war criminal. He was charged with seventeen offences, including responsibility for the execution of Jews in Poland and Russia; plus the deportation of civilian populations, the execution of Hitler's Commissar Order and unjustified reprisals against, partisans. It emerged after the trial that most military commentators thought Manstein had conducted himself very well as a commander. It would have been impossible for Manstein to personally supervise the whole of the vast areas under his control and undoubtedly atrocities did occur, but Manstein did not countenance them. Nevertheless, the court found him guilty on two charges and he was sentenced to eighteen years imprisonment. This sentence provoked opposition from several distinguished quarters.

One letter to The Times newspaper ended:

“I have studied the records of warfare long enough to realize how few men who have commanded armies in a hard struggle could have come through such a searching examination of their deeds and words as well as von Manstein did”.

The original sentence was reduced greatly and Manstein was released in 1952. Following his release, he was called on by West German Chancellor Konrad Adenauer in 1956 to act as a senior advisor in the effort to help build the new German army and thereby enable Germany's entry into NATO. Manstein suffered a stroke and died in Munich on the night of 9th June 1973. He was buried with full military honours. He had written his memoirs before he died.

After the war, German military commanders would claim that Hitler's grandiose plan was never really feasible and totally beyond the capacity of the Wehrmacht. Manstein, dismissed by Hitler in March 1944, sat out the rest of the war, watching, no doubt with dismay, the unnecessary prolongation of a conflict that had already been decided. Although he served an evil and brutal regime, he was patriotically motivated to fight for his country. He maintained the highest personal standards of character and became the officer most widely respected and admired by his colleagues. The overall verdict among the German generals interrogated in 1945 was that Field-Marshal von Manstein had proved the ablest commander in their Army. He was the man they had most desired to become its Commander-in-Chief. It is very clear that he had a superb sense and mastery in the conduct of grand strategy.

Clausewitz, in his writings on the ‘Art of War’ said everything in war is simple, but the simplest thing is incredibly difficult. Consider the basic relationship between politics and war. Clausewitz stated that war is an extension of politics by different means. Politicians establish the objectives; the military seek to attain them. Therefore, politics are thrust upon the military, to do their duty and await their fate. Nothing could be simpler. Except perhaps not in the case of Adolf Hitler, who gained remarkable political triumphs. He occupied the Rhineland, then annexed Austria, and Czechoslovakia; thereby expanding German territory without resorting to force. When he used military means in Poland to obtain his political aims, he demonstrated the close connection between politics and war. But, his invasion of Poland precipitated World War Two and from then on, his direction of the war became increasingly military and less political.

The result was that towards the end, the fighting degenerated into senseless destruction for the sake of merely continuing the struggle. He no longer had political objectives only total war. The consequences of which was the deterioration of the military and ultimate defeat. Highlighting this scenario; in the summer of 1940, Germany overran Denmark, Norway, and the Low Countries. On 14th June the Germans entered Paris, compelling the French to seek an armistice. Hitler's Germany was master of Western Europe and only awaited the British to accept terms.

Despite this, Hitler could not bring the war to a successful conclusion! He had played for time with the non-aggression pact with Russia which had been purely expedient, to dispose of the Western Powers and he was not prepared to wait for the balance of

power to shift against him. With Allied opposition crushed on the continent he prepared to risk a war on two fronts, contrary to his pledge to the German people.

His thoughts now focused on Russia where he proceeded to snatch defeat from the jaws of victory.

CHAPTER TWELVE

HITLER

Hitler's last testament, dictated in the Berlin bunker on 28th April 1945, while Russian shells rained into the Reich Chancellery overhead, opens, with the sentence; "Since 1914, when as a volunteer, I made my modest contribution in the Great War that was forced upon the Reich. At the outbreak of this conflagration, on 1st September 1939: I asked of no German man more than I myself was ready to perform during the four years of the Great War. I am from now on nothing more than the first soldier of the Reich. I have once more put on the coat that was most sacred and dear to me. I will not take it off again until victory is assured, or I will not survive the outcome". Thirty-six hours after signing his last testament, still dressed in his German soldier's tunic he had indeed worn throughout the war, he put a loaded service pistol to his temple and pulled the trigger.

On his accession to the German presidency in 1934 he became chief of the German military. In 1938, by his creation of the OKW, he invested himself with supreme operational authority over the armed forces. And on 18th December 1941, when he dismissed Brauchitsch from command of the German army, he himself acceded to that post and thereafter exercised direct control of the German armies in the field. He was, moreover, to hold high command for a longer continuous period than any other German during World War Two. All three of the Army Group commanders in post at

the outbreak, namely, von Leeb, von Bock and von Rundstedt, had been dismissed before the end, as had eleven out of the eighteen field-marshals he had created and twenty one of his thirty seven colonel-generals. None of his four wartime chiefs of staff, Halder, September 1939 - September 1942, Zeitzler, September 1942 - July 1944, Guderian, July 1944 - March 1945, or Krebs (killed in the battle of Berlin), held office for more than three years. Keitel and Jodl alone equalled him in length of duty at OKW; and they were his functionaries, not independent decision-makers. Hitler was, therefore, supreme commander not only in name but in fact, and so indeed was 'the first soldier of the Reich'.

Throughout World War One, he was continuously with his regiment, the 16th Bavarian Reserve Infantry, at the Western Front. This helps to explain why Hitler would speak years afterwards of “the stupendous impression produced upon me by the war, the greatest of all experiences”. All Hitler's biographers do agree in seeing him, from early manhood, as an individual set apart from others by his sense of difference, of unrecognized talent and frustrated fulfilment. He is, to social psychologists, a classic example of the lower middle-class enraged by the constrictions and closed doors of a settled social order which will make no room for anyone struggling to enter it from below except by connections and credentials that Hitler lacked or disdained to acquire.

The squalor and misery of his Vienna years: the odd jobs, the attempts to become a recognised painter, the postcard hawking, the nomadism of furnished rooms, bachelor’s hostel, the yearning to be accepted. And then came August 1914, and on16th August Hitler went to war. His selection for the 16th Bavarian Reserve was seen as a key ingredient of Hitler's life, for the regiment was composed of exactly that class of young Germans to which Hitler had failed to be granted admission. They were, in high proportion, high-school boys, university students and trainees for the professions who, by deliberate policy of the German military authorities had not previously been drafted for military service.

The significance of Hitler's role in the Regiment had a major effect on his personal development. An experience on which the Nazi party was to draw so heavily. Hitler, having been a soldier, was to become a commander. This goes far to explain both the nature of the war he had undergone and, in direct contrast to it, that of the war he was to direct. Of Hitler's three army group-commanders of 1939-41, Rundstedt, Bock, and Leeb, all brought back from the First World War an unbalanced view of its nature. So, too, did his longer-serving chief of staff, Halder, a gunner who had been a staff officer throughout, while even his two most talented field-marshals, Manstein and Kesselring, had been staff officers also. It may have been because Zeitzler had served as an infantry subaltern in the trenches that Hitler promoted him to be Halder's successor, and it was certainly in part because Rommel, Dietl, Model and Schorner had been outstanding junior leaders, significantly all were believing Nazis or popularly associated with the party, that he held them in such high regard. He was in consequence to give the former staff officer’s short shrift after 1939. By December 1941 Bock, Leeb and Rundstedt had all been sent packing, as was Halder shortly

afterwards. And he was to accord no soldier thereafter equivalent status. If there was to be a successor, it would be himself.

Hitler was electrified by his first view of a tank in 1934 (he had not seen one on the Western Front), and subscribed throughout the war to a trust in the power of new and 'secret' weapons to reverse its course. He died believing that it was only the failure of German inventors and German industry to deliver his `victory weapons' that had brought about his downfall. On 13th February 1945, he confided to a visiting doctor that “in no time at all I'm going to start using my victory weapons and then the war will come to a glorious end”. Hitler's faith in the capacity of weapons rather than human power to bring victory set him at the far side of a divide from the German generals who had directed World War One. Nevertheless, Hitler was not ultimately an opponent of the German generals who had preceded him in high command. Like them all he conceived of war as a test of will and national character, a Darwinian struggle for the survival of the fittest, and therefore an enterprise from which the outpouring of blood in streams could never be separated. In his political testament, he proclaimed that he died “with a joyful heart in the awareness of the immeasurable deeds and achievements of our soldiers at the front, of our women at home, the achievement of our peasants and workers, and the contribution, unique in history, of our youth”. That the war he fought had caused millions of men to suffer death and hundreds of thousands of women and children to be burned and bombed to death in the cities was not a reality from which he shrank.

Hitler's calculation in 1939 was that he could defeat Poland before the French and British mobilized a serious counter-offensive, thereby guessing right about the dynamics of a two-front war when Schlieffen had guessed wrong, that diplomacy should then settle things in the West but that, if it did not, he stood an excellent chance of fighting himself out of trouble. The Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact of 22nd August 1939, which assured Russia's non-intervention, secured his back. His front he could hope to secure by negotiation, the West Wall or, failing all else, Blitzkrieg. Blitzkrieg was not a concept directly of Hitler's making nor, strictly, was his Polish victory an exercise in its form. The Polish army, surrounded on three sides by one enormously superior in men and equipment, was doomed to rapid defeat in any case; Russia's stab in the back merely sealed its fate.

The three-week Polish campaign nevertheless practised the forces of Blitzkrieg, the panzer divisions and ground attack squadrons, in the operations of war itself so that when, in May 1940, they were committed to the test of Blitzkrieg proper they already enjoyed an advantage over their unpractised French and British opponents. But Blitzkrieg compounded that advantage. Essentially a doctrine of attack on a narrow front by concentrated armour, trained to drive forward through the gap it forced without concern for its flanks, Blitzkrieg was a formula for victory which owned no single father. The German tank pioneers, Lutz and Guderian foremost among them, had been avid students of the writings of the British 'apostles' of armoured warfare, Fuller and Liddell Hart. But it is a long step between the literary advocacy of a revolutionary doctrine, even from the conversion of influential individuals, and its

acceptance by an organization as monolithic and set in its ways as the German army. The truth is, indeed, that the German army never was formally converted to Blitzkrieg, essentially a headline word applied retrospectively to spectacular events. What it adopted in reality was a form of organization, the large all-armour force, and a code of practice, the concentration of effort behind it, whose effect on the battlefield surprised no one more than many of those at its head.

So set in their ways were some of these generals, Beck, chief of staff until 1938, foremost among them, that the doctrine of armoured concentration might have found no acceptance at all had the army's tactical innovations of 1918, called 'infiltration', not anticipated what Guderian and his confederates preached. In that year the German army in the West abandoned its war-long reliance on the heavy artillery preparation and rigid barrage in favour of tactics altogether more fluid and instantaneous. Its gunners were belatedly trained to 'neutralize' the enemy's powers of resistance with a brief hurricane of fire, thereby denying the enemy the warning on which defenders had hitherto counted to reinforce a threatened trench sector. The infantry, meanwhile, were schooled to `infiltrate' rather than occupy the enemy's positions as the neutralizing bombardment closed. ‘Storm troops’ led the assault; elite 'interlocking' divisions penetrated the gaps made and consolidated the ground won. In four offensives: in March, April, May and June, 1918 these tactics worked brilliantly, up to a point.

Tank divisions were by their nature 'storm' and `follow-on' forces in one. It was this evident capacity of theirs to fight and advance at the same time that impressed Guderian and his like; Hitler supported these Young Turks and by May 1940 their beliefs were in the ascendant. A new plan inspired by one of them, von Manstein, had, with Hitler's endorsement, supplanted another, much less adventurous, proposed by the traditionalists of the general staff. The freshly blooded field army stood in the slips. Victory beckoned on the far side of the West Wall. Its dimensions exceeded the expectations even of those most committed to the Blitzkrieg idea. The original general staff plan, codenamed 'Yellow', had proposed that, were Hitler to insist on attack in the West, it should have as its objective no larger piece of territory than the frontier area occupied by the French field army and its allied British Expeditionary Force. 'Sickle Stroke', as the Manstein-Hitler variant was codenamed, had a far more ambitious aim.

It committed the armoured forces to drive a corridor from the Ardennes in southern Belgium to the Channel coast near Abbeville, so cutting off the Anglo-French defenders from their base in the heartland of France, while a second armoured thrust through the Low Countries encircled them in a pincer movement. Ironically the Allied war plan might have been designed precisely to further the success of this bold enterprise. It enjoined that the Anglo-French field army should, at Germany's first violation of Belgian neutrality, advance headlong into the Belgian Lowlands, trusting to the strength of the Maginot Line to protect them on their Ardennes flank. 'Sickle Stroke', however, located the German centre of armoured effort exactly at the point where the Maginot Line stopped, in territory deemed `untankable' by the Allied high

command, and therefore at a point where neither fortification nor troops of high quality opposed it. The troops occupying the threatened sector, were, by the worst of bad luck, troops of the poorest quality. Hitler, whose decision to risk war in the West boasted in November 1939 to his generals, that he was going “to smash France to smithereens”. To smithereens was what three days of fighting reduced the French army in mid-May 1940. By 19th May, the German tank spearheads were at Abbeville. Two weeks later the British Expeditionary Force had fled the coast of France, the French field army was encircled and defeated and the French heartland lay open to Hitler's panzer columns. What ensued was scarcely war, so little so that on 15th June, ten days before the paralysed French government accepted an unavoidable armistice, Hitler had already issued orders for the disbandment of thirty-five divisions, about one-quarter of the army's war strength.

During the rest of the summer he tinkered with plans for the invasion of Britain, believing meanwhile that she would sue for peace. When it became clear she would not, he committed the Luftwaffe to the destruction of the Royal Air Force and, as that effort faltered, to direct attack on the British cities. But his real commitment during the glorious mid-months of 1940 was to exultation in his astonishing victory. Its fruits were all the sweeter for the evident consternation it caused his generals, twelve of whom on 19th July, he casually elevated to the rank of field-marshal. No such number had ever been created before, except by Napoleon. But no campaign of Napoleon's, had been so spectacular in its results as Hitler's of September 1939May 1940. In twelve weeks of fighting, perhaps a little more if the Norwegian side show of April is included, the Germans had destroyed two major European armies, gobbled up four smaller and inflicted on Britain the greatest humiliation in its history since the secession of the American colonies 170 years earlier.

Little wonder that he set himself to enjoy the summer of 1940. It was the first holiday he had permitted himself since the ecstatic early days of power. Then he had bathed in the adulation of simple people, as he and his inner circle toured the mountain villages and market towns of South Germany of his old regiment in Flanders, inspecting the Maginot Line and making his first trip to Paris, „the dream of my life“, where he brooded over Napoleon's tomb, and exclaimed at the magnificence of the Opera. But, if outwardly at ease, Hitler was inwardly preoccupied. Britain, though refusing to make peace, could not enlarge the war. Russia, pacified by a division of the spoils in the east, was a war-making power as great as Germany. The threat it posed to German primacy in Europe, characterized as the 'Red' or 'Slav menace' in his ranting years, never ceased to obsess him; it took equal and sometimes greater place beside his crazed denunciations of Jewry. At a meeting with his generals on 31st July 1940, called to consider the invasion of Britain, he alarmed them by advancing stronger arguments for invading the Soviet Union.

As summer drew into autumn, the arguments for what would be codenamed `Barbarossa' grew to seem more compelling. Britain, he was convinced, was postponing a settlement in the expectation that she would be saved by the United States; but the United States would abandon its neutrality only if Russia continued to

pose the threat of a two-front war. In November 1940 Hitler came to his decision. A visit to Berlin by Molotov, the Russian Foreign Minister, on 12-13 November dissolved any remaining hope that he would 'come to a satisfactory understanding with the Soviet Union. Its appetite for influence in the Balkans and Near East was revealed to equal his own. On 27th November Hitler issued orders to the commander of his air force that he had decided to attack Russia.

Hitler envisaged a short war and ordered preparations for Barbarossa to be complete by 15th May 1941. In the meantime, disturbances in the Balkans supervened to postpone its inception. Mussolini's decision to attack Greece in October, of which he had deliberately given Hitler no warning, so embarrassed the Führer by its failure that he was prompted to consider lending the Italians assistance, as in the following February he was to do in the Western Desert by sending Rommel and the Afrika Korps to bolster their defence of Libya against the British. An anti-German coup in Yugoslavia in March then made up his mind for him. It smacked of British influence, also strong in Greece, and was therefore not to be tolerated. In April he unleashed a Blitzkrieg against both countries, which culminated in a spectacular, though costly, airborne capture of Crete in May. Whether or not the Balkan diversion robbed Hitler of the time and good weather in which he might have brought his 'short war' against Russia to a successful conclusion in 1941 is now disputed. Some military historians have argued that Barbarossa could, for strictly operational reasons, not have started any sooner than it did. Certainly it seems more significant to striking a judgment that Barbarossa was itself a flawed plan; it hovered uncertainly between the aim of destroying the enemy's armies and the aim of neutralizing his capital.

Barbarossa, when eventually unleashed on 22nd June 1941, at once achieved enormous encirclements. By 1st July, von Bocks Army Group Centre had surrounded three hundred thousand at Minsk, and by 19th July it had encircled one hundred thousand more at Smolensk. Hitler assured the German people that “the foe is broken and will never rise again”. Events were to prove that the Russians were far from broken. Assisted by a delayed winter, which left the approaches to Moscow bogged in autumn, they reinforced the Moscow front, fought the invaders to a standstill in early December and turned them back. The Russians soon ran out of steam and the Germans, though bereft of winter clothing and equipment, halted the Russian counter offensive and redeployed.

By 22nd July 1942, the Germans had reached the Volga and Stalingrad on 23rd August. By that date the spearheads of Army Group South were pushing into the Caucasus, had planted the German flag on the summit of Mount Elbrus, highest peak in Europe, and were only 300 miles from Baku, the centre of Russian oil production. In thirteen months Hitler's armies had advanced 1 200 miles, taken nearly four million Russian soldiers prisoner, driven the Soviet government to the brink of flight from Moscow, caused the relocation of one-third of Soviet industry east of the Urals, and brought the richest areas of Russia's agricultural land under occupation and exploitation. Victory again seemed certain.

But on 19th November, the Russians penetrated the German line north and south of Stalingrad, in which bitter fighting had raged since September, and encircled the city. Thus began the Sixth Army's struggle for survival, which was to endure in conditions of mounting deprivation until the following February. While the battle lasted Hitler had thoughts for no other concern. Believing Göring's assurance that the Luftwaffe could supply the Sixth Army by air, and refusing to issue its commander Paulus with authority to break out, he devoted all his energies to retrieving his lost prize. But an effort by Manstein to break through to the city in December failed, the Russians widened the scope of their attacks and by 1st February, as the Sixth Army's resistance came to an end, the southern army groups had been pushed back behind the Don, retaining only Rostov as a bridgehead in the great swathe cut by their summer advances. Stalingrad marks, in broad retrospect, both the high point and end of Hitler's war. Certainly his confidence in his power to command either the enemy or his generals was so shaken by the defeat that he gave little of himself to the discussions on how best to recoup the army's fortunes in 1943.

Kursk, the eventually abortive and by Hitler much postponed offensive which resulted, was the brainchild of his new chief of staff, Zeitzler, rather than his own. Defeats and setbacks in other sectors shook his confidence also; the destruction of Rommel's army in Africa, the reversal of fortune in the Atlantic battle, the beginning of co-ordinated Allied air attacks on the Reich, the Anglo-American invasion of Italy and the overthrow of Mussolini. But it was the humiliation in Russia that cut deepest. The proof supplied by Kursk that his military instinct was superior to that of his generals, as represented by Zeitzler, restored some of his confidence; he bolstered it with his growing trust in the war-winning qualities of secret weapons his scientists were developing. Vilification of his faithless and gutless allies also served as a ready reinforcement of his sense of solitary indispensability. And the physical isolation of his headquarters ensured that he confronted reality only in self-administered doses. Somehow or other, as the disasters of 1943 gave way to the looming crises of 1944 - deeper Russian advances in the east, the menace of Anglo-American invasion in the west - he sustained his capacity to think, plan, command. The officers' plot of July 1944 sealed his conviction that he could trust no one but himself to fight the war to its end. Thereafter all military decisions were made by him alone. Many were made in the closest detail. Even in the last week of his life his staff were radioing precise operation orders from the Berlin bunker to units - by then, mere fragments, if not figments - whose movements he continued to plot on his situation map. Late in the evening of 29th April 1945, nineteen hours before his suicide, he signalled OKW to ask five categorical questions: 'Where are Wenck's spearheads? When do they attack? Where is the Ninth Army? In which direction is Ninth Army breaking through?'

The nominal size of the formations concerned apart, these were messages of the sort with which Hitler the messenger might have dodged, from shell hole to shell hole, across the Flanders front thirty years before. The world for him had come full circle. Incarcerated in an underground shelter, with enemy shells blasting and infantry fighting a few hundred yards distant, he was surrounded by military command, maps, map tables, phones, and by worried officers who looked to him to bring it to an end.

Flight or surrender they knew he would not countenance. The consequent expectation of his suicide in the bunker as the Battle of Berlin neared its climax. He would represent his suicide as a soldier's death.

Until now Hitler had refused to see the reality of events. The "Battle for Berlin" was the last major European engagement in World War Two and perhaps the most controversial; because the result of this battle was of immense proportions; not only for the major powers but for the entire world. By the spring of 1945, the war had moved beyond the point where all previous wars had ended and German military strategy to all intents and purposes had ceased to exist. The German armed forces which had seemed irresistible for the first years of the war were being smashed by superior strength; they were now outnumbered, outgunned and outmatched on every front. The Battle of Berlin undoubtedly ranks along with Leningrad, Stalingrad, Hiroshima, and Nagasaki as an example of the horror and destruction accomplished by modern warfare.

As the allied armies pushed into Germany from east and west, it finally became clear to more and more Germans that the Third Reich which was supposed to last for a millennium was nothing more than an illusion. In this, the sixth year of war, Germany had suffered four million casualties; the cream of the nation's manpower. Towards the end of this agonising conflict, devastating thousand bomber raids on German cities had become common place. Most German civilians had long ceased to believe in the Nazi propaganda promising „miracle weapons" which would dramatically reverse the tide of defeat. There were few left in the German military who were genuinely convinced that Hitler's Reich could still win the war; the Reich which had until only recently occupied most of Europe and had driven deep into Russia to the very gates of Moscow; the Reich that had gained control of more territory than that of the Holy Roman Empire had now shrunk almost to the suburbs of his capital city

.

Hitler's once powerful and superbly trained troops had been reduced to a mere shadow of the elite panzer forces which had stormed into the Soviet Union in 1941. The dreadful catastrophes of Stalingrad and Kursk had devoured whole army groups and inflicted unsustainable losses. The decimated and war weary Wehrmacht, fighting desperately to survive and prevent total defeat was near to total collapse. In the four winters of fighting in the east their equipment had been destroyed or left disabled in the vast terrain of the Russian snows; serving as eerie reminders of their dictator's vision which had gone horribly awry.

Hitler's purge after the assassination attempt on his life in July 1944 accelerated the decline of the army's officer corps and brought further irreplaceable losses. By now nearly the entire established army command had either been dismissed or committed suicide, been executed, or were interned in concentration camps. Following the July plot, no one had dared to suggest to the Führer that the Russians might one day threaten Berlin; for fear that this would have been construed as defeatism and a criticism of Hitler's conduct of the war. Therefore, the organisation for the defence of Berlin was an unbelievable mess and any chance of saving the capital had long since

vanished. The coming battle for Berlin, however, could no longer be ignored by Hitler who was by this stage acutely aware that he neither had the manpower nor equipment to accomplish its defence. The remaining strength was not enough to affect the outcome of the battle, but was enough to prolong the agony. For Hitler, isolated under six metres of earth and concrete and out of sight of the destruction rolling in on him there was to be no respite. Now in the last days of his life, Allied victory was no longer in doubt.

This was the situation in Nazi Germany in 1945. So why did the Germans knowing that the cause was irretrievably lost continue the unequal struggle against hopeless odds; and why did they not bring the war to a swift end thereby sparing unnecessary suffering? The answer to this question is that even at this late stage the Germans were still dominated by their dictator Adolf Hitler who demanded, and got, absolute obedience. His will alone was all that counted, and that was the most critical single factor for the continuation of the war. Citing Frederick the Great, he informed his generals that it was the strength and determination of the leadership which decided whether wars were won or lost. While he lived, Germany would go on fighting as he repeatedly said "until five past midnight".

He was convinced that the Soviets, having suffered enormous losses, had overextended themselves and had no operational reserves left. Therefore, the remaining, severely weakened Russian armies would easily be destroyed. Hitler constantly underestimated his enemies and frequently dismissed German intelligence reports of the massive troop concentrations being built up against them. In refusing to accept that the war was as good as lost, his interference in operations became more and more irrational. He repeatedly departed from original plans and these miscalculations would cause enormous logistical problems and fatal delays; all of which led to the great German disaster at Berlin in April 1945.

Guderian, Hitler's foremost panzer general, always claimed that Hitler was never capable of visualising anything larger than a division, which represented the limit of his competence. He was, however, circumspect when he made these comments; anyone who objected to Hitler's meddling was either silenced or ruthlessly eliminated. So, rather than argue with their leader the German generals who came into contact with Hitler chose to fall in line with his insane plans; despite being shocked at the decrepit extent of his physical decline. It is a biological fact that when the territory of an animal is threatened, it will fight to the death, regardless of the odds, and so it is with man.

In 1940, when driven back into their island, the British had good and sound reasons to accept an accommodation with Hitler. However, the British, seemingly illogically in the circumstances of the time, chose to fight on. That same deep animal instinct now took possession of the Germans. Hitler's somewhat fanciful scheme was to continue the war in the hope that Churchill's grand, if somewhat fragile alliance, consisting of Great Britain, the USA, and the USSR, would ultimately collapse. He reasoned that his enemies would become exhausted, quarrel amongst themselves and eventually

agree to a negotiated peace. Surely, he argued, the Western Powers would realise that bolshevism was their real enemy and join Nazi Germany in the common crusade. When you consider the advent of the cold war shortly after World War Two ended, this may suggest that he was not all that far wrong in hoping for this split. Therefore, rejecting the advice of his generals and refusing to leave Berlin, he awaited the dramatic turn of events that would hopefully save his crumbling empire.

As anticipated by Hitler, the western allies were in total disagreement on how the war should end. Supreme Commander General Eisenhower reminded the British that they were living on an overdraft and that they could only continue to do so on the bank's terms. Henceforth, the Americans, who were providing most of the logistical backing and with more than twice the number of troops in the field as the British, would call the tune. So, regardless of the policy the British urged, the American view was bound to prevail; British strategy was indeed in chains. The Supreme Commander then proceeded to shock his British Allies by announcing in March 1945, that his objective was no longer a direct thrust to take Berlin; they would continue their advance on a broad front which would facilitate surrounding and isolating German forces in the Ruhr. This would subsequently be acknowledged by friend and foe alike as a major tactical blunder; General Eisenhower seemed unable to comprehend that Berlin had become the strategic centre of Europe. British Prime Minister Churchill, on learning of this development, and being fully aware that the Germans in the West were finished; urged Roosevelt to order Eisenhower to make a bold thrust towards Berlin. The British Prime Minister was horrified at the prospect of leaving the German capital to be taken by the Russians. He knew that if the Red Army conquered Berlin; half of Europe would immediately become communist and there was every possibility that in a few years‟ time the other half would also be gobbled up.

But Churchill’s appeal to the dying President Roosevelt was in vain; as were British optimistic hopes of an equal voice in the Alliance. Perhaps the rationale behind this is that unlike their British counterparts, most American generals were not trained to consider political objectives as part of military strategy. American tradition schooled their officers never to usurp civilian supremacy; politics were to be left to the politicians. In giving the Red Army free rein to take Berlin, Eisenhower claimed that he was avoiding politics; insisting it was based on ‘purely military’ factors. But, in effect he was doing just the opposite. History was to prove that Eisenhower’s misjudgement in allowing the Russians to take Berlin first was one of the most; if not the most significant events of World War Two. Had the Western Allies continued as jointly agreed, the war would certainly have ended much differently and with very different consequences for Europe and the world.

As it was, the Americans adopted a completely misdirected policy with regard to the Soviet Union; it totally lacked elementary common sense, of which the penalty was still being paid almost half a century later. Returning to the allegations of disunity in the Allied camp; why did Eisenhower deviate from the original plan agreed to by the Joint Chiefs of Staff? One of the reasons for Eisenhower’s intransigence is that he had become quite paranoid about a German last stand in a ‘national redoubt’ in the

Bavarian Alps. It is now well known that this scenario existed only in the Supreme Commander's imagination; but while it persisted it shaped allied tactics, to the extent that after the enemy forces were trapped in the Ruhr pocket, Eisenhower astonished almost everyone by issuing orders for major Allied forces to be swung south away from Berlin towards Munich to counter this imaginary threat. 'Thus making it certain that Berlin would be taken by the Russians'!

This was a grievous political and military mistake, particularly when British intelligence had informed Eisenhower that there was no evidence to support the rumours regarding the so called national redoubt. All that remained between the Western Allies and Berlin was Eisenhower himself; moreover, it had become apparent that he was heavily influenced by his senior commander Bradley, who was still smarting from his embarrassment in the Ardennes and sought to redeem himself. Is it reasonable to suggest that Bradley's advice to Eisenhower was motivated by personal considerations? Bradley realised that if the plan to take Berlin was executed, due to the dispositions of the Allied armies the main thrust would have to be commanded by Montgomery and would include many American troops; this would mean that the kudos of the last victory would go to Montgomery, a man whom Bradley had learned to detest intensely.

It is, therefore, not surprising that it was Bradley who presented the report to Eisenhower which would change the whole course of the final strategy. This document indicated that the enemy was indeed preparing for a last stand in the Bavarian Alps, and it was this report that finally persuaded Eisenhower to make the fateful Berlin decision. Bradley convinced Eisenhower that national prestige was at stake and not personal jealousies; he also informed Eisenhower that this situation was quite unacceptable and would not only offend generals Marshall, and Patton, but would not be tolerated by the American people. He was not prepared to conduct a supporting role to Montgomery and threatened to resign if Montgomery was placed in command; he would ensure that Patton did the same. If this does not constitute military blackmail, then what does?

To alienate the British further, prompted by Bradley, Eisenhower without even notifying the combined chiefs of staff or the Allied governments, sent a telegram to Stalin informing him that he would not be advancing towards Berlin and would halt at the River Elbe. In the eyes of the British - and it would appear they were somewhat justified - Eisenhower had violated their agreement and usurped the authority of the Allied governments. Churchill and the British chiefs of staff were incensed at this unilateral abandonment of the jointly agreed plans. They also resented the high handed way which Eisenhower had exceeded his authority by communicating directly with Stalin over their heads. This unprecedented step was to have far reaching political implications for post war Europe, and would sow the seeds for a conflict potentially greater than the one coming to an end.

For the first time in almost three years of close cooperation, the British Prime Minister was furious with Eisenhower; stating the Supreme Commander was hell bent on

confusing an already confused situation, and he was now more than ever convinced that Eisenhower was a second rate general. Churchill believed that time was running out and the war would be lost politically unless the Anglo-American forces reached Berlin before the Russians. He expressed that the Americans appeared to be incapable of accepting what was obvious." It was the Russians who were now the mortal danger".

Churchill's suspicions about Stalin's post war aims had grown steadily since Yalta; arguing that the Russians had already reneged on their promises to hold free elections in Eastern Europe, which the Soviets were slowly swallowing up. Consequently, the Western Allies were entitled to advance as far east as possible and stay there, regardless of the Yalta treaty. The tragedy of the last weeks of the war was that the political destinies of the peoples of Europe lay in the hands of a few American generals. The dying Roosevelt, according to the British Prime Minister had abdicated his responsibility to Europe and the free world by passing full powers of decision making to General Marshall, his Chief of Staff. Marshall was hopelessly out of his depth on European affairs; he also regarded the British to be a spent force as a world power and was more interested in seeking Russian assistance against the Japanese in the Pacific.

Marshall warned Roosevelt that casualties would be astronomical unless Russia joined the battle to defeat Japan. He expressed the opinion that it was more important to conciliate the Russians than to remain on good terms with the British. Therefore, encouraged by Marshall, and manipulated by Bradley, Eisenhower placated the Soviets, by disclosing to them his plans. He also refrained Patton from driving into Czechoslovakia, which could have been achieved with ease. Quite apart from the immense prestige the Russians stood to win by capturing Berlin, there was the additional danger that they would reach the North German ports first and thus gain an outlet to the North Sea and the Atlantic. They would thus be in a position to threaten vital Western interests and the post war balance of power in Europe. British warnings of the danger were ignored.

In the history of war from Alexander the Great to Mao Tse Tung, the world has not produced more than a handful of men of genius capable of commanding armies. The name of Napoleon springs to mind, perhaps Wellington or Marlborough; such men, however are not thrown up generation after generation. It is certain that nothing even approaching genius touched the American commanders who served the Allied cause in Western Europe in 1945. Perhaps of them all, only general Patton was truly capable of commanding an army, and it would be a travesty to suggest that General Bradley's right hand knew much about what his left hand was doing.

When the Allied armies eventually reached the Elbe on 11th April 1945, the plea was again put forward by the British that the Elbe should be crossed in force and a determined drive be made on Berlin; but once more Eisenhower was adamant and refused. He was again encouraged by Bradley who advised that the capture of Berlin would cost one hundred thousand Allied casualties. This was at a time when the

Germans in the West had been decisively beaten. Instead of attacking across the Elbe towards Berlin with Montgomery's 21st army group, which had been specially prepared for this task, Eisenhower, held back to permit Bradley the leading role, relegating Montgomery to guarding Bradley's left flank. When they breached the Elbe defences, the Allies experienced minimal opposition; it was to all intents and purposes no more than a mopping up operation. By the speed of their advance and low casualties they showed that Bradley's estimate of one hundred thousand casualties to be ludicrous.

One last desperate appeal was made to convince Roosevelt of the vital importance of capturing Berlin. In a cable to the American President, Churchill stated that British intelligence had information that the vast majority of the population, due to their terror of the Red Army, desperately wanted the Anglo- Americans to take Berlin. From the British viewpoint, they were completely exasperated, realising that Eisenhower had made a colossal blunder. Churchill stated that the Allied commander had his armies in the wrong place and heading in the wrong direction. However, if the British were unhappy with Eisenhower, America's other main ally in this war was more than content. The political and military leaders of the Soviet Union were ecstatic with Eisenhower's assistance in establishing a communist empire in Eastern Europe.

Of significance leading up to the battle for Berlin in 1945 was that Hitler had not died in the July plot on his life, but Germany's last chance of finding a rational way out of the war had. By the autumn of 1944, Germany's foes on the Eastern and Western fronts, after their successful summer offensives had run out of steam. A more prudent German government would have used this pause to seek an armistice and escape the inevitable final wave of destruction. But Hitler refused to acknowledge that Germany was militarily bankrupt, and Nazi propaganda now steeled the people of the Third Reich to resolve to fight to the bitter end. As a result, hundreds of thousands more were to die needlessly. Many could see no other course open to them as effective Nazi propaganda emphasised what the horrors of life would be under occupation. One saying in Germany at the time was "enjoy the war because peace will be dreadful". Terror now reigned; German troops were being hanged and shot in the street because of their unwillingness to die for a Fuhrer who at that moment was contemplating the most appropriate method of suicide.

Advancing deeper into German territory, the Anglo-American armies were opposed by under-equipped and under-trained German troops mostly recruited from the Hitler youth or home guard. This was due to a proclamation issued by Hitler that all able bodied males aged between 16 and 60 were to be called up. In truth many of the recruits were over 60 and as young as 11 years of age; a pitiful ragtag of middle aged men and adolescents. In any case, these were essentially the death throes of the weary German people who were battered and demoralised in this pointless sacrifice. Awaiting the final assault, most only wanted this senseless war to come to an end. Fearing Nazi death squads, they were content to surrender after little more than a token display of resistance.

When the Red Army reached the outskirts of the city the stage was set for what was to become the final contest of the war in Europe. For the Berliners, no other shock would equal the sudden appearance of the Russians; this was their darkest period of the war. Hitler issued orders that what was in name only ‘Fortress Berlin’ was to be defended against the Bolsheviks, "to the last man and to the last bullet". This battle, he claimed would decide the outcome of the war. The defence consisted of an outer belt of minefields and anti-tank ditches with the underground railway and sewer network also to be used for defending the city.

Meantime, the Soviets were highly pleased to learn that the Anglo-Americans would not interfere; Bradley’s troops were turning away from Berlin; heading back to their starting positions across the Elbe. The Soviet troops, many of whom had seen their own towns and villages obliterated by the Germans, were bent on extracting the full price. They had fought their way from Stalingrad across half a continent to seek this moment of revenge. Political commissars were positioned amongst the troops, reminding them of the crimes the Germans had committed against Russian women and children, and the indignities suffered on Russian soil at German hands. They also provided statistics of German looting and destruction in the Soviet Union; the object was to give each man the feeling that he had a personal score to settle. To the Red Army, Berlin was the final objective, the true goal. The fall of Berlin was equated with the destruction of the Nazi system, and the end of the war.

Russian soldiers were motivated to be first into Berlin to demonstrate to the world the supremacy of the communist system in achieving the destruction of fascism. 5 000 tanks and 2 000 guns were concentrated in readiness for the battle for the capital. The Red Army, determined and vengeful, launched a massive pincer assault on Berlin; their commander Zhukov did not care how many lives he sacrificed as long as he won in the end. Preceded by a massive artillery barrage which opened up a huge breach, wave after wave of Soviet storm troops threw themselves at the poorly prepared German defences, which collapsed almost immediately and were wiped out. It was evident that the city was ill prepared to withstand an attack of this magnitude. The Germans could not stem the tide and the Soviets swarmed in everywhere, pushing the German lines further back and capturing most of the airfields. Although the fighting remained intense, the end was in sight at Berlin.

The Russians energetically exploited their success; launching further attacks with devastating effect. Russian vengeance on German civilians was swift, merciless, and more often than not, brutal. They exacted a fearful toll of rape, arson, pillage, and wanton murder. The wheel of retribution had turned full circle. The overwhelming superiority of the Soviets enabled them to break through north and south of Berlin to complete the encirclement. Using rockets and artillery, the Russians evened the scores for Leningrad and Stalingrad. Final German resistance crumbled. In Berlin the conditions of the stricken and demoralised defenders were horrific and rapidly deteriorating. The starving population and exhausted troops were reduced to scavenging and eating horseflesh.

Berlin was no Stalingrad; it might hold out against the Soviets through fanaticism and terror for a few days, but no more. It was fast becoming clear that 'Fortress Berlin' was a myth; it had never come into existence. Apart from the aged home guard with about five rounds per rifle, almost nothing of the once mighty Third Reich remained. Desperate orders flashed out from the deranged German leader as the remains of the Reich were dissected by the invaders. Confusion led to chaos, order led to counter order and finally everything led to disorder. The German command system disintegrated and the disillusioned German army now ceased to exist as a coherent force.

The German armies had been cut to pieces and defeated in the field, their own field. However, the citizens were too weary to be hurt by the degradation. Berlin was a city with nothing more to lose; three out of four buildings had been destroyed. The civilians could do nothing but lock themselves in houses and cellars, waiting in terror for the advancing Russians. There was no food, the water was foul, and of course no gas, electricity, or transport. On 2nd May the remains of the Berlin army surrendered and the battle for Berlin was over. The Soviet red flag fluttered over the ruins of the Reichstag; the dreaded enemy now occupied the capital. The procession of prisoners of war wound its way out of Berlin into captivity in another world. The Russian reign of terror was about to begin; fighting troops were withdrawn to be replaced with an ill disciplined and filthy rabble of Mongolians.

Hitler, on learning of the fate of his fascist partner Mussolini and dejected by the betrayal of Göring and Himmler, committed suicide in his bunker. For him there was no other way out; it was a long overdue event. His body was soaked in petrol and set alight; perhaps this was a fitting end to the man who had plunged the world into flames. His appointed successor Admiral Dönitz, vainly tried to negotiate a separate surrender with the Western Allies; desperately wanting to continue the fight against the Soviets in an effort to rescuing as many German civilians as possible. But the allies were unsympathetic; refusing to accept any compromise and demanded unconditional surrender.

With their cities ruined and reduced to rubble, the stench of death everywhere and millions of people helpless and hungry; the Third Reich capitulated. The Germans finally accepted total defeat and signed the unconditional surrender documents. This merciless conflict which had lasted almost six years ultimately came to an end on 8th May 1945. The victorious Allied powers did not recognise the successor government of Dönitz and had all of them arrested. Germany would be occupied, not partially as after World War One, but completely. Hitler had always said that Nazi Germany would never capitulate as in 1918. He was right, but in a way which not even he had been able to conceive; the Germany of 1918 had retained a government of its own, and though small, an army of its own. But the Germany of 1945 retained neither.

For the victors the war was over, but for the losers the agony would continue; a totalitarian state suffered a totalitarian defeat. The entire armed forces, officers and men, became prisoners of war, and sovereignty in Germany passed from German

hands into zones of the four occupying powers; each zone being a mirror of the nation which occupied it. In the assignment of the zones, the British had secured the industry, the Russians the agriculture, and the Americans the scenery.

Berlin was the climax of Hitler's ambition and highlighted the arrogant folly of launching operation Barbarossa; he had gravely under-estimated the capability of Stalin's Soviet Union which could sustain massive losses. Hitler's overconfidence and miscalculations caused the German army to find itself in a most perilous situation, and he had no one to blame but himself for Germany's greatest defeat.

No nation has ever been reviled as was the Germany of Adolf Hitler. When the mighty German military machine finally crumbled, seventy million bewildered and terrified people were left friendless and outcast. At the end of six years of bloodletting Europe lay prostrate; many blame the Allied policy of 'unconditional surrender' as the principal reason why the war did not end sooner. However, this is not necessarily true. Hitler must bear the whole weight of responsibility for the beginning and the end of this war. He and he alone brought down not only Berlin but the entire Third Reich in chaos, and the end result would be the partition of Europe. Had the Germans been able to fight on until August 1945, the outcome would have been the same. The terrifying power of the atom bomb would have forced them to surrender, just as it forced the capitulation of the even more stubborn Japanese.

Thus was concluded the second and last multi-front war which Germany had waged in the twentieth century, and with its conclusion the German general staff which had twice been confronted with carrying out tasks way beyond its strength, ceased to exist. The German military had won many great battles and its generals were acknowledged as the finest tactical and fighting soldiers in modern history. But, the political ambitions of Germany's leaders made victory impossible. The great irony is that Adolf Hitler had formed an army which proved capable of carving an empire surpassing even that of Napoleon and had raised Germany from the humiliation of Versailles; only to plunge it into destruction.

One can only speculate what might have happened if Eisenhower had seized Berlin ahead of the Russians. The results of battles which are never actually fought must always be a matter of conjecture. There are, however, strong reasons for believing that, if the main western allied effort had been directed on Berlin under Montgomery, he would certainly have got there before the Russians; consequently the political map of Central Europe would have been much different from what it was until 1990.

The question of logistics adds a further dimension to the great debate; these were, however, of Eisenhower's own making, for he had allowed his armies to be sprawled out in a "broad front" strategy which dissipated his strength. More than forty divisions had crossed the Rhine by 1st April, but only eight were positioned on the direct route to Berlin. Most were engaged in the pointless reduction of the Ruhr pocket or chasing after a hollow victory against the mythical Alpine redoubt. German military opinion later confirmed this viewpoint. Eisenhower subsequently made many feeble attempts

to vindicate halting his drive at the river Elbe. However, was President Truman as the leader ultimately responsible, right in endorsing this action? He was, after all the president who coined the phrase "the buck stops here".

The fault, and fault there most certainly was, as borne by the next generation, can be traced back to Truman's predecessor, President Roosevelt who trusted Stalin's good intentions, almost to the point of absurdity. He maintained that he could "handle Uncle Joe", and establish a partnership with the communists. The clanging descent of the Iron Curtain put an abrupt end to this concept; brought about the Cold War and terminated the brief elation at the defeat of the Third Reich. "The ally of one war becomes the enemy in the next".

Stalin took just six weeks to violate the Yalta agreement by installing communist puppet regimes in Eastern Europe. The single most important factor to arise from this war was that the frontier of the Soviet Union was no longer to the east of Poland but had moved so far west that it was less than one day's drive from the Rhine. Rather than a liberated Eastern Europe, with its people freed from Nazi tyranny; due to Stalin, being taken at face value by Roosevelt, there emerged an Eastern Europe burdened by the yoke of a not dissimilar tyranny. Furthermore, much to the consternation of the Western European leaders, the Americans did not even consider it necessary to negotiate an access corridor from the West Germany to West Berlin. In 1945 the Americans utterly failed to grasp the Clausewitz doctrine that "war is nothing more than the continuation of politics by other means". The Soviets, on the other hand, were clearly focused and never lost sight of their main objectives.

Acknowledging that the American decision not to take Berlin before the Soviets was a fait accompli, Churchill bitterly proclaimed; "there is only one thing worse than fighting with allies and that is fighting without them".

It is widely believed that Adolf Hitler instigated the largest wholesale slaughter of human beings in the twentieth century and proved capable of changing a well-disciplined civilised nation into one that murdered 6 million Jews, 3 million Gypsies and unknown numbers of Russians, Poles, and Germans. How much of that is true will never be known. For history belongs to the victors; and it is the privilege of the victors to tilt the balance of truth in their direction. Many historians consider Hitler a taboo subject, partly because the examination of his life might be seen as a step towards humanising him and excusing his crimes. Or even to be seen as challenging some of the worst Allied atrocities such as the bombing of Dresden. But it is the job of the historian to examine the facts. So let's stick to what is considered to be factual? And what we know for definite is that Hitler was a human being. He was born on 20th April 1889. He went to school, he had relatives, and above all he had an insatiable ambition. And probably it was this aspect that set Hitler apart from other men. He was single minded, relentlessly ambitious and was able to summon his awesome powers of persuasion to motivate the German people for war.

By April 1945 German military strategy to all intents and purposes had ceased to exist. The German armed forces that had seemed irresistible for the first years of the war were now outnumbered, outgunned and outmatched on every front. The dictator's vision had gone horribly awry, he had reached the end of the road. His overconfidence and miscalculations caused the German army to find itself in a most perilous situation, and he had no one to blame but himself for the great German disaster in 1945.

Hitler's interference in military operations had become totally irrational, causing enormous logistical problems and fatal delays. The German generals, despite being shocked at the decrepit extent of their leaders' physical decline had little option other than to fall in line with his insane plans, thereby prolonging the agony. The Allied armies had smashed into Germany from east and west and it was clear to most Germans that the Third Reich, which Hitler boasted would last for a millennium, was nothing more than an illusion. In this sixth year of agonising conflict there were few who genuinely believed that Germany could still win the war. They had suffered four million casualties, the cream of the nation's manpower. And frequent thousand bomber raids were devastating the homeland. The German people were battered and demoralised in this pointless sacrifice and most only wanted this senseless war to come to an end.

They had long ceased to believe in Nazi propaganda promising "miracle weapons" that would dramatically reverse the tide of defeat. The mighty Third Reich that had stretched from the Atlantic to the Caucasus and driven to the very gates of Moscow was now reduced to a narrow corridor little more than a hundred kilometres wide. Hitler's once powerful and superbly trained troops had been reduced to a mere shadow of the elite panzer forces that had stormed across Europe. Catastrophes the like of Stalingrad, Tunis and Normandy had devoured whole army groups and inflicted unsustainable losses.

The Western Allies were at this stage mainly opposed by under equipped and under trained German troops mostly recruited from the Hitler youth or home guard. Many of them were actually over 60 and as young as 11 years of age; a pitiful ragtag of middle aged men and adolescents awaiting the inevitable final wave of destruction. Hitler, now in the last days of his life, had survived the 1944 July plot, but Germany's last chance of finding a rational way out of the war had died. Knowing that the cause was irretrievably lost, Hitler continued this unequal struggle against hopeless odds. He was not prepared to bring the war to a swift end and spare unnecessary suffering. While he lived, Germany would go on fighting as he repeatedly said "until five past midnight". Even at this late stage the Germans were still dominated by Hitler who demanded and got absolute obedience.

Isolated in his bunker, he refused to accept the reality that Allied victory was no longer in any doubt. Clinging to the belief that Churchill's fragile alliance of Great Britain, the USA, and the USSR, would ultimately collapse. He reasoned that his enemies would become exhausted, quarrel amongst themselves and eventually settle for a negotiated peace. He perceived that the western powers would come to realise that Bolshevism was their real enemy and they would join Nazi Germany in a

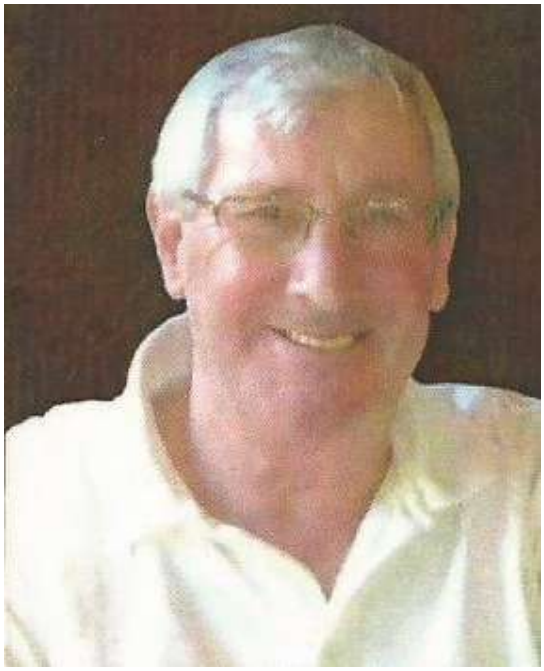
common crusade. When you think about it, the advent of the cold war shortly after the war ended may suggest that he was not all that far wrong; especially when the Americans had adopted a completely misdirected policy to the Soviet Union. The world and Eastern Europe in particular would pay the penalty for this misdirected policy for almost half a century.

Returning to the last weeks of the war, the Allied Supreme Commander, General Eisenhower had become quite paranoid about a German last stand in the Bavarian Alps. Eisenhower astonished almost everyone by issuing orders for Allied forces to be swung south away from Berlin to counter this imaginary threat; thus making it certain that Berlin would be taken by the Russians. The tragedy of the last weeks of the war was that the political destinies of the peoples of Europe lay in the hands of the American military. Churchill bitterly complained that the Americans were incapable of accepting what was obvious. It was the Russians who were now the mortal danger, not the Nazis. An exasperated Churchill stated that the Allied supreme commander had his armies in the wrong place and heading in the wrong direction. The German high commands' last desperate order had been to turn the whole western front about face and bring the German troops into battle with the Russians. This was intended to show the western powers that Germany's real enemy was Bolshevism.

What is the legacy of Adolf Hitler? For no nation has ever been as reviled as that of Nazi Germany.

Perhaps his legacy was not unlike that of Shakespeare's Macbeth; he was to prove the victim of his own delusions.

(Back Cover)



The author approaches this subject on several levels: grand strategy, the difficulties of coalition warfare, the personalities of the commanders (some of whom disliked each other more than they did the enemy) and analysis of the major battles. Recognising that wars in the last analysis are decided by the commanders, he describes the characteristics and fighting power of the combatants.

This is a penetrating study and an essential contribution to the understanding of the nature of warfare and an invaluable work of reference for the whole family.