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RESEARCH ESSAY

OPERATIONAL LEVEL FAILURES AND SUCCESSES:

GENERALSHIP

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OPERATIONAL LEVEL FAILURES AND SUCCESSES:

GENERALSHIP

*There is nothing more important in war than the human heart. 'In a knowledge of the human heart,' says the Maréchal de Saxe, 'must be sought the secrets of the success and failure of armies.'*¹

General Sir John Hackett

INTRODUCTION

Various historians and scholars to establish the causes of operational level failures and successes have developed several methodologies. These methodologies are based either on organisational factors, internal and external factors, principles of war, the lack of personal qualities that must be inherent to all leaders in the conduct of war, or a combination of two or more of those methodologies and intrinsic factors. All these methodologies are useful tools to determine the reasons for operational level failures and successes. However, the conclusions in determining the causes for failures and successes will put in evidence the organisation(s), the individual(s) or the factors themselves.

¹ General Sir John Hackett, The Profession of Arms (London: Sidgwick & Jackson, 1984), 215.

Furthermore, Eliot A. Cohen and John Gooch, in Military Misfortunes, The Anatomy of Failure in War, mentioned that historians and scholars are studying military misfortune based on individual failure when it should be studied as organisational failure,² because they have the tendency "to focus on only one level of command, usually the very highest."³ Therefore, as a conflict is waged at three levels, strategic, operational and tactical, it is these levels that should be studied in determining the causes of operational failures and successes.⁴

While the author of this paper agrees with Cohen and Gooch that the study of military failure should encompass all levels of the organisation, it can be argued that a war "is the clash and interaction of opposing human wills."⁵ According to Clausewitz, war remains a test of will and faith.⁶ Consequently, operational failures and successes are the results of those human beings, within the organisation, that are responsible for the conduct of wars, namely the admirals/generals. Hereafter, the term general(s) will encompass both admiral(s) and general(s). Furthermore, although the generals may have to obey decisions over which they have no control whatsoever, they still have options on how they will use their resources to achieve success in outthinking, outsmarting or

²Eliot A. Cohen and John Gooch, Military Misfortunes, The Anatomy of Failure in War (New York: Macmillan, Inc.,1990), 38.

³ Cohen and Gooch, Military Misfortunes, The Anatomy of Failure in, 43.

⁴ Canada, Department of National Defence, B-GL-300-000/FP-000, Canada's Army We Stand on Guard for Thee (1 April 1998), 78.

⁵ Canada, Canada's Army We Stand on Guard for Thee, 77.

⁶ Karl von Clausewitz, On War ed. and trans. Micheal Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton: Princetown University Press, 1976), 10.

outfighting their opponent, or at least provide the best possible fight.⁷ Therefore, they must have the ability to weigh adequately all the factors inherent and uncertainties to the situation in order to make the right decision to achieve warfighting success, thus generalship. This means that a withdrawal, when conducted orderly, could be considered a warfighting success.

Therefore, to establish the causes of operational failures and successes, a combination of two methodologies will be used: a variation of the organisational factors' methodology based on the strategic, operational and tactical levels, and the methodology on the lack of personal qualities that must be inherent to all leaders in the conduct of war based on generalship. In doing so, this paper will first examine the responsibilities inherent to each level as well as how several authors define generalship. Then, one campaign and one major operation will be analysed to highlight generalship exercised at the strategic, operational and tactical levels that resulted in operational level failures and successes. Thus, this essay will demonstrate that operational level failures and successes are the results of the application of generalship either at the strategic, operational or tactical levels.

RESPONSIBILITIES AT THE STRATEGIC, OPERATIONAL AND TACTICAL LEVELS

As war is waged at three levels, generals will assume different responsibilities at the strategic, operational, and tactical levels.⁸ At the strategic level, generals will establish military strategic objectives, provide direction, allocate resources, and impose

⁷ Cohen and Gooch, Military Misfortunes. The Anatomy of Failure in War, 24.

⁸ Canada, Canada's Army We Stand on Guard for Thee, 78.

constraints and restrictions on the operations to be undertaken.⁹ At the operational level, they will link military strategic objectives to the required application of combat power at the tactical level by designing, planning, conducting and sustaining military campaigns and major operations within theatres or areas of operations.¹⁰ At the tactical level, they will plan battles and engagements where combat power will be used to achieve operational level objectives.¹¹ As mentioned earlier, to successfully accomplish these responsibilities, a commander must demonstrate generalship.

GENERALSHIP

The Concise Oxford Dictionary defines generalship as follows: "office of a general; strategy, military skill; skilful management, tact, diplomacy."¹² As the definition on generalship is very vague, the works of several authors, whom have written on the subject of generalship, were reviewed. It seems though, that in trying to define generalship, they have rather described it. Major-General Fuller, in his book titled Generalship Its Diseases and Their Cure: A Study of The Personal Factor in Command, establishes that there are "three pillars of generalship – courage, creative intelligence and physical fitness."¹³ He also identifies the most important qualities of generalship as will,

⁹ Canada, Canada's Army We Stand on Guard for Thee, 79.

¹⁰ Canada, Canada's Army We Stand on Guard for Thee, 79.

¹¹ Canada, Canada's Army We Stand on Guard for Thee, 80.

¹² The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Current English (United States, New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 411.

¹³ Major-General J.F.C. Fuller, Generalship Its Diseases and Their Cure: A Study of The Personal Factor in Command (Harrisburg, Pa.: Military Service Publishing Co., 1936), 35.

leadership, decision-making, operational art, decentralisation, headquarters staff and training.¹⁴ Furthermore, he also identifies an exhaustive list of personal qualities and factors inherent to generalship.¹⁵ He also states, "that moral is to physical as three to one."¹⁶

John M. Vermillion in an article titled The Pillars of Generalship, establishes that an operational campaign includes the employment of large military forces encompassing movement and support to achieve operational level objectives.¹⁷ He goes on to observe that operational art implies that leadership requirements at the operational level are quite different and that special talents are required, thus generalship.¹⁸ He also identifies the most important qualities of generalship as will, intellect, creativity, communication, decision-making, operational art, decentralisation and general staff.¹⁹ Furthermore, he identifies an exhaustive list of those special talents inherent to generalship.²⁰ He

¹⁴ Fuller, Generalship Its Diseases and Their Cure: A Study of The Personal Factor in Command, 23-35.

¹⁵ Fuller, Generalship Its Diseases and Their Cure: A Study of The Personal Factor in Command, 23-35. Major-General Fuller's list of personal qualities and factors inherent to generalship includes the requirement to learn to command and to know oneself, command, inspiration, the army, health, vigour, energy, personality, common sense, education, audacity and responsibility.

¹⁶ Fuller, Generalship Its Diseases and Their Cure: A Study of The Personal Factor in Command, 23.

¹⁷ John M. Vermillion, "The Pillars of Generalship," Parameters, (Summer 1987), 2.

¹⁸ Vermillion, 2

¹⁹ Vermillion, 2-17.

²⁰ Vermillion, 2-17. Vermillion's list of special talents inherent to generalship includes to anticipate and the ability to judge what is do-able, to command, to set aside time to reflect, to set aside time

concludes with a description on how a commanding general must apply those special talents.²¹

General Sir Archibald Wavell, in his book titled Generals and Generalship, has established three components, the general's physical, moral and mental qualities.²² He identifies the physical attributes of a general as being: courage (physical and moral), health, and youth.²³ The moral attributes are: character - a genuine interest in, and a real knowledge of, humanity - fighting spirit, the will to win - and a spirit of adventure, a

to rest and cope with stress, to have flexibility of mind, to deal with the uncertainty of warfare, to know his organisation strength, to fuse morally with his fighting troops and to have simplicity.

²¹ Vermillion, 16. Vermillion describes how a commander must apply those special talents as follows:

- a. Having selected an able staff, the commanding general in combat must then look to his communicating.
- b. He should pay special attention to carving out of his schedule time to think; to issuing simple, unambiguous orders; to decentralising control to the lowest levels possible; and to developing a tolerance for the uncertain and the unexpected.
- c. With respect to the delivery of force, the operational-level commander must furnish a clear-sighted vision of the conditions he wants to obtain at the conclusion of the campaign.
- d. Based upon an accurate understanding of the capabilities and limitations of the forces he commands, he must conjure a sequence of actions that will bring to fruition the desired outcome.
- e. Finally, the commander must be able to discern with certain knowledge the fine distinctions between tenacity and obstinacy.

²² General Sir Archibald Wavell, Generals and Generalship (Harmondsworth, England: Penguin Books, 1941), 25.

²³ Wavell, Generals and Generalship, 18-19.

touch of the gambler in him.²⁴ He also describes the general mental qualities as common sense, knowledge of what is and what is not possible, and sound knowledge of the mechanism of war: topography, movement, and supply.²⁵ In addition to decision-making, he also, under these pillars, mentions other important factors inherent to generalship.²⁶ Furthermore, he addresses leadership issues intrinsic to generalship.²⁷

According to Barbara W. Tuchman, generalship is very important "because the qualities that enter into the exercise of generalship in action have the power, in a very condensed period of time, to determine the life or death of thousands, and sometimes the

²⁴ Wavell, Generals and Generalship, 23.

²⁵ Wavell, Generals and Generalship, 25.

²⁶ Wavell, Generals and Generalship, 13-30. General Wavell's list of important factors inherent to generalship includes logistics, adaptability, robustness, the ability to stand the shocks of war, imagination and jointness.

²⁷ Wavell, Generals and Generalship, 33-48. The leadership issues addressed by General Wavell are:

- a. The relation between the general, his staff and his troops.
- b. Personal contacts with the troops .
- c. Good judge of character, inspiration, discipline and justice.
- d. The soldier's chief cares, which are: - First, his personal comfort – i.e. regular rations, proper clothing, good billets, and proper hospital arrangements; and secondly, his personal safety – i.e. that he shall be put into a fight with as good a chance as possible of victory and survival as the latter will generate confidence.
- e. Respect versus popularity.
- f. That a general must drive his men at times.

fate of nations."²⁸ She goes on to say that generalship's qualities could be divided into two categories: "those of character, that is, personal leadership, and those of professional capacity."²⁹ She also adds that when command is exercised in the field, the personal leadership should be more important than the professional capacity but that one without the other is useless.³⁰ She identifies for the first category, those qualities such as courage (physical and moral), will, judgement, imperturbability and assurance, as well as command. In the second category, she includes the capacity to decide the objective, to plan, to organise, to direct, to draw on experience and to deploy all the knowledge and techniques in which the professional has been trained.³¹ She sees intelligence as "the bridge that joins the two categories – that connects personal leadership to professional ability."³²

As it can be observed, Major-General Fuller, John M. Vermillion, General Sir Archibald Wavell and Barbara W. Tuchman, have each tried to establish either the pillars, components or categories and have identified similar and additional factors to describe what generalship is all about. This is not an easy task and several other factors could have been added such as respect of the enemy, mastering of the ten principles of war, supervision, cohesion, integrity, etc. However, Cohen and Gooch reports "that military incompetence is no longer the sole property of generals, but results from the

g. **Initiative.**

²⁸ Barbara W. Tuchman, "Generalship," Parameters, (Volume II, Number 2, 1972), 3.

²⁹ Tuchman, 3.

³⁰ Tuchman, 3.

³¹ Tuchman, 3-6.

³² Tuchman, 6.

combined efforts of inept strategists, in and out of uniform."³³ Furthermore, Vermillion says "the exercise of generalship today carries with it tremendous difficulties"³⁴ and that "the higher the echelon of command, the more the general has to be responsible for, yet the less direct control he has over subordinate forces."³⁵ He goes on saying that during the exercise of military command, a commander cannot obviously accomplish this unaided, he must have a staff to assist him.³⁶ It could also be argued that subordinates could be added.

Summary

In summary, all these generalship factors can therefore be regrouped under two categories: moral and physical. "Moral components are those spiritual, psychological, intellectual and sociological factors which enable soldiers to overcome fear and defeat the enemy in battle or successfully carry out a mission."³⁷ "Physical components, on the other hand, are those tangible, material assets that he requires to fight, operate, train, and sustain itself."³⁸ It could also be concluded that while the physical components are important, it is the moral components, which are individual-centred, that are the most important elements in determining the failure or success of operations.³⁹ Therefore, both

³³ Cohen and Gooch, Military Misfortunes, The Anatomy of Failure in War, 24.

³⁴ Vermillion, 4.

³⁵ Vermillion, 4.

³⁶ Vermillion, 4.

³⁷ Canada, Canada's Army We Stand on Guard for Thee, 38.

³⁸ Canada, Canada's Army We Stand on Guard for Thee, 38.

³⁹ Canada, Canada's Army We Stand on Guard for Thee, 38.

moral and physical components must interact at all times as one without the other is useless. Fuller, Vermillon, Wavell and Tuchman have also identifies the most important moral and physical components as will, leadership, decision-making, operational art, decentralisation, intellect, creativity, communication skills, courage, morale and, headquarters staff and training.

Hence, a brief analysis of a campaign and a major operation, in relation to the framework of the most important generalship's moral and physical components mentioned earlier, will serve to underline the causes of operational level failures and successes. The Sicily and Italy Campaign as well as the landing in Northwest Europe, Operation OVERLORD and the Normandy breakthrough, will be the subject of these analyses.

SICILY AND ITALY CAMPAIGN

Historical Background

At the January 1943 Casablanca Conference, the Combined Chiefs of Staff, Churchill and Roosevelt confirmed the decision made at the 1941 Arcadia Conference: that Germany was to be defeated first, the Japanese second, and that a second front had to be opened against Germany in 1943.⁴⁰ In regard to the Italy Campaign, there was discord among the Allied leadership. Following the conference, there was a significant divergence of opinion between the UK and US planners on how this should be accomplished. The US planners argued that a large build up of forces in Great Britain,

⁴⁰ Major-General E.K.G. Sixsmith, British Generalship in the Twentieth Century (London: Arms and Armour Press, 1970), 199.

and a push into France was the optimum route.⁴¹ However, long before the Allies had landed in Italy, it was clear that this could not be achieved in 1943.⁴² Furthermore, there were two other arguments to justify the operation in Italy: the Italian Campaign would be a contribution to taking the strain off the eastern front; and, that it would draw away enemy reserves from north-west Europe before Operation OVERLORD was launched.⁴³

While these arguments represented important contributions to other campaigns, strategically, the goals were rather negative and did influence how the campaign was conducted at all three levels of the art of war.⁴⁴ This was evident as the Italian Campaign revived all the controversy between British and American views of the war in Europe. The strategic concept of operations for Operation OVERLORD included a landing near Marseilles, to be known as Operation ANVIL, in conjunction with the landing in Normandy and at about the same time.⁴⁵ However, due to a lack of landing craft, the Americans were obliged to postpone Operation ANVIL. Despite the fact that it could not be carried out in concert with Operation OVERLORD, it had been decided that the landing, by then renamed Operation DRAGOON, would take place in July or August. This meant that Alexander (Commander 15th Army Group) had to transfer seven Allied divisions from Italy for Operation DRAGOON. This occurred at the moment when they were much needed for the exploitation of his victory in the capture of Rome. To

⁴¹ Sixsmith, British Generalship in the Twentieth Century, 202.

⁴² Sixsmith, British Generalship in the Twentieth Century, 204.

⁴³ Brian Holden Reid, "The Italian Campaign, 1943-45: A Reappraisal of Allied Generalship," The Journal of Strategic Studies, (March, 1990), 132.

⁴⁴ Reid, 132.

⁴⁵ Sixsmith, British Generalship in the Twentieth Century, 208.

safeguard the Anglo-American relations, Churchill and Brooke (British Chief of Imperial General Staff) had no choice but to accept this harmful decision.⁴⁶ Therefore, the Italian Campaign was a means to prevent German reinforcements in France or in Russia, thus dispersing the enemy resources by engaging forces, hence not an end in itself.⁴⁷

At the operational level, one of the main factors contributing to the slow tempo of the campaign was the fact that there were no cohesion and unity of effort. This, in essence, was the result of mistrust between American and British troops. From a British point of view, thus far, the American troops and their commanders had not made a good impression. The British regarded the Americans as their Italians.⁴⁸ That belief and the national rivalry between American and British generals, would have very negative consequences throughout the Sicilian and Italian Campaign. Following a successful landing in Sicily, General Alexander failed to maintain the unity of effort and concentration of force. He allowed General Patton to digress from the approved plan where he should have provided security on General Montgomery left flank for his advance toward Messina. That decision and the fact that he did not co-ordinate the employment of both the navy and the air force, even though very good intelligence was available, permitted the German and Italian forces to conduct a very successful evacuation of Sicily. "Almost 100,000 Axis soldiers and most of their arms and

⁴⁶ Sixsmith, British Generalship in the Twentieth Century, 209.

⁴⁷ Sixsmith, British Generalship in the Twentieth Century, 210.

⁴⁸ Reid, 135.

equipment had slipped from the island to the mainland as the result of their brilliantly organised and executed ferrying operation across the Strait of Messina."⁴⁹

After securing Sicily, the Allies attacked the Italian mainland on two fronts. Montgomery's British 8th Army worked north from the sole of the Italian boot, while Clark's 5th US Army landed at Salerno in an attempt to dislocate German forces by landing behind their defensive lines in order to disrupt their cohesion. It was the Germans however, that proved to be the more adept at exercising the art of operational manoeuvre.⁵⁰ "The Allies learnt the hard way that in mechanised wars, armoured forces on land could move faster to strike at amphibious landings than they could build up defences."⁵¹ Again the lack of unity of effort and co-operation within 15th Army Group made the success of the Salerno landings a very costly one as Montgomery's advance northward was similarly uninspired. "Montgomery seemed to be wilfully fulfilling the worst caricature of his generalship drawn by American critics. Nor did the crisis at Salerno spur him on. He took the view that 5th US Army had got themselves into this mess and they could get themselves out of it. Such mean-spiritedness would resurface again in this campaign."⁵² The lack of generalship by Commander 15th Army Group, General Alexander, was evident as he did not have the moral courage to impose his will to foster unity of effort, co-operation, mutual trust and understanding between American and British formations. Hence, he did not achieve concentration of force, decisive

⁴⁹ Martin Blumenson, "A Deaf Ear to Clausewitz: Allied Operational Objectives in World War II," Parameters, (Summer, 1993), 20.

offensive action and flexibility at the operational level. Only on three occasions during all the Sicilian and Italian Campaign did 15th Army Group fight as an entity which succeeded in integrating naval and air support to the ground offensive: the landing in Sicily, the fourth breakthrough attempt of the Gustav and Hitler German defence lines while breaking through the Anzio bridgehead and, the breakthrough of the Gothic German defence line.

At the tactical level, Operation AVALANCHE, the landing at Salerno by the 5th US Army took place in the night of 8-9 September 1943. As reported by Lieutenant-General Wentzell, Commander of the 10th German Army, the integration of Allied navy and air support worked very well.⁵³ However, the experience at Salerno demonstrated that air and navy superiority does not compensate for the lack of a sound operational plan on the ground.⁵⁴ Available forces were spread out instead of being concentrated. The landings occurred at two separate beachheads that were ten miles apart, separated by the River Salo.⁵⁵ The advance northward from Salerno to the Sangro and Garigliano rivers was a frustrating experience for both 5th US Army and British 8th Army.⁵⁶ It revealed a major difference, the British preference for methodological set piece attacks and the more

⁵⁰ Reid, 139.

⁵¹ Reid, 140.

⁵² Reid, 141.

⁵³ Lieutenant-General Fritz Wentzell, Italian Campaign 1943-45 as Seen by the Enemy (Germany: Canadian Military Mission, 1947), 6.

⁵⁴ Reid, 139.

⁵⁵ Reid, 139.

⁵⁶ Reid, 141.

aggressive American approach.⁵⁷ This became even more evident when both Allied armies reached the German main defensive line, the Gustav Line, in December 1943.

To break the stalemate at the Gustav Line, Operation SHINGLE, an amphibious landing at Anzio, was launched on the 22nd of January 1944. The aim was to land at Anzio and ca

Operation DIADEM was designed to achieve a breakthrough from the Anzio bridgehead followed by a strike eastward from Anzio to Valmontone where the Allied forces would link up following a simultaneous breakthrough of the Gustav Line. This major offensive went in accordance with the plan; both breakthroughs were successful. However, Clark, Commander of 5th US Army, had received instructions from both Roosevelt and Marshall to capture Rome as soon as possible. "Obeying Roosevelt and Marshall, Clark disregarded Alexander's orders. The opportunity, whether good or slim, to destroy the Germans in the Liri Valley around Valmontone was never put to the test. The Germans escaped."⁵⁸ Clark's disregard of Alexander's orders, once again forced the Allied forces to wage a series of battles of attrition against the same German forces throughout the remainder of the Italian Campaign, which lasted until the end of the war in 1945.

Analysis

At the strategic level the Sicily and Italy Campaign, as envisioned by Churchill, was an excellent example of attacking the Axis cohesion through manoeuvre warfare three approaches: pre-emption, dislocation and disruption. In the end, the Campaign pre-empted the German ability to re-allocate divisions to meet the threat of attacks in France or support the eastern front. The Campaign also dislocated Hitler, diverting material and attention from France and Russia, as the Germans were forced to build defensive lines, one after the other, in their retreat up the Italian peninsula. Finally, the Campaign disrupted the integrity of the Axis, removing Italy as a partner. However, the strategic discord between the British and Americans had dramatic consequences: thousands of

⁵⁸ Blumenson, 23.

Allied soldiers' lives. The lack of unity of effort and cohesion at the strategic level was evident. As "cohesion is what most generates combat power and enables a commander to impose will on an opponent, or to dominate a situation,"⁵⁹ the strategic level did not provide all the required moral and physical support required to its operational commander. As reported by Brian Holden Reid, "General Fuller's verdict is a harsh one, but it cannot be disregarded. The Italian Campaign was a campaign with inadequate means, with no strategic goal and with no political bottom."⁶⁰ Furthermore, Roosevelt and Marshall should never have instructed Clark to capture Rome. Their interventions allowed the German forces to escape once again and as a result, cost the lives of more Allied soldiers. Notwithstanding, let us assume that if Clark had followed Alexander's orders, the German forces might have been forced to surrender. Therefore, Hitler would have been obliged to re-deploy additional divisions from either the western or the eastern front or both. Thus, the Italian campaign would have contributed more significantly to the strategic objective, the landing in Normandy (Operation OVERLORD).

At the operational level, Alexander showed a definite lack of moral courage and leadership as he had been unable to impose his will to his subordinates. This was the case with Patton in Sicily, and again with Clark and Montgomery in Italy. As mentioned by Frank Kitson, "a commander needs moral courage to a far greater extent as without it, he can not make the right decisions when much is at stake; he may even be tempted to compromise where no compromise is possible."⁶¹ Furthermore, General Sir John Hackett adds that "unless a commander possesses the respect of his subordinates in this particular

⁵⁹ Canada, Canada's Army We Stand on Guard for Thee, 40.

⁶⁰ Reid, 133.

regard the leader/follower relationship may prove too frail to withstand the strains of battle."⁶² These comments reflect on Alexander's leadership in the context of the following definition: "the art of exacting willing and cheerful obedience from subordinates."⁶³ Therefore, Alexander's shortfalls regarding the operational art are related to his lack of leadership as he had demonstrated on several occasions that he mastered the knowledge of the operational art. Hence, it was the moral components of his generalship that were questionable. For that reason he was, on several occasions, unable to foster unity of effort and cohesion, and to bring about mutual trust and co-operation between British and American forces. This had severe consequences at the tactical level.

At the tactical level, there was a definite lack of manoeuvre, offensive spirit and ability to learn from previous lessons, especially for Clark. He did not respect one or more of the ten principles of war as evidenced by his failure to achieve concentration of force at the Salerno landing. As well, he did not adhere to selection and maintenance of the aim at the Anzio bridgehead breakthrough where he failed to follow Alexander's orders. Furthermore, he was disloyal to Alexander at the Anzio bridgehead breakthrough. He disregarded Alexander's orders and opted instead to capture Rome as instructed by Roosevelt and Marshall, thus allowing the Germans to escape and fight

⁶¹ Frank Kitson, Directing Operations (London: Faber and Faber Limited, 1989), 94.

⁶² Hackett, The Profession of Arms, 221.

⁶³ United Kingdom, United Kingdom Ministry of Defence, Principles of Leadership, BR 2138 (Naval Training Dept, Controller of Her Majesty's Stationery Office (Crown Copyright), 1964), 3.

again later. As for Montgomery, his lack of co-operation and support did not help the situation.

Summary

At the strategic level, both Roosevelt and Marshall wrongly instructed Clark to capture Rome. By not respecting the chain of command, Marshall demonstrated poor generalship.

At the operational level, the failure to use operational manoeuvre to defeat decisively the Axis forces in Sicily and Italy must be directly attributed to Alexander. It is clear that Alexander failed to demonstrate moral courage and leadership and in doing so, he lost control over his subordinates. The result was a series of operational plans that collapsed and schemes of manoeuvre that failed before even engaging the enemy. Clearly Alexander failed to meet high standards of generalship, and the result was an uninspired campaign of attrition, when bold manoeuvre was called for.

At the tactical level, Clark demonstrated important shortfalls in regard to his ability to apply manoeuvre, offensive spirit and the ability to learn from his mistakes, thus demonstrating very poor generalship. Furthermore, Clark was wrong to have complied with Roosevelt and Marshall's instructions. Had Clark followed Alexander's orders, the German forces might have been forced to surrender. Hitler would have been obliged to divert additional divisions from either France or the Russian front or possibly both. If this had happened, the Italian Campaign would have made a greater contribution in supporting Operation OVERLORD landings in Normandy than was actually the case. For his part, Montgomery was far from blameless, being responsible in large part for the

poisoned relationship between the American and British forces. In that environment, generalship would have been much needed.

Therefore, when one studies and analyses the Sicily and Italy Campaign, one can conclude that the Allies strategic objectives were met successfully. However, this success was very costly in terms of Allied human lives. This was the result of a lack of generalship mainly at the operational and tactical levels. The operational and tactical commanders were unable to weigh adequately the moral and physical components of generalship against the situation, the enemy and the uncertainties to achieve decisive operational success. As mentioned by Brian Holden Reid: "the Italian Campaign is a vessel, which holds endless disappointment: opportunities are squandered, blunders committed."⁶⁴

OPERATION OVERLORD AND THE NORMANDY BREAKTHROUGH

Historical Background

The decision on war priorities, the strategic terms for the defeat of the Axis, were laid out by Churchill and Roosevelt at the Arcadia conference in Washington. One of the major consequences was the American determination to make every effort possible to conduct a landing in northwest Europe as quickly as possible, so that no time should be wasted to achieve the defeat of Germany.⁶⁵ The Americans were of the opinion that the landing might be possible in 1942 and if not, certainly in 1943.⁶⁶ However, both Churchill and particularly Brooke, were concerned with the possibility of losing the war.

They felt that the Allies did not have yet the required resources to achieve a successful landing. Thus, they were determined to wait until sufficient resources could be concentrated in England.⁶⁷ They were right. The Allies had to win the Battle of the Atlantic to safely concentrate sufficient American forces, to acquire sufficient landing craft, and to gain air superiority over the English Channel. Thus, "a most pertinent note from Churchill to Roosevelt in June 1942 convinced the Americans that there could be no invasion in 1942."⁶⁸

Following that note, there were several conferences and meetings at which the date of the landing in northwest Europe was discussed. However, Churchill and Brooke were successful in delaying it until June 1944 when all the criteria mentioned earlier had been met. One of the key decisions regarding the landing in Normandy was the selection of the date. The Navy, Army and the Air force had special operational requirements for the landing, which limited the possibilities to only three days in each month. The 5th of June had been originally selected as D-Day, however, the weather had deteriorated badly at the beginning of June.⁶⁹ "It was impossible, owing to bad weather, to launch the invasion on 5 June, but, as Montgomery explained, to defer it after 6 June would have

⁶⁴ Reid, 128.

⁶⁵ Sixsmith, British Generalship in the Twentieth Century, 199.

⁶⁶ Sixsmith, British Generalship in the Twentieth Century, 199.

⁶⁷ Sixsmith, British Generalship in the Twentieth Century, 200.

⁶⁸ Sixsmith, British Generalship in the Twentieth Century, 201.

⁶⁹ Sir Brian Horrocks, Eversley Belfield and Major-General H. Essame, Corps Commander (Toronto: Griffin Press Limited), 12.

meant a postponement of two weeks, and this was virtually impossible."⁷⁰ The final decision, taken on Sunday 4 June was not an easy one to take due to the possibility of bad weather after the landing. This would have prevented the follow-up formations and vital supply to get ashore, thus leaving the leading troops open to counter-attack by superior German forces.⁷¹ Notwithstanding, Eisenhower demonstrated character, determination and moral courage. After pacing in deep thought he said, "O.K. We'll go!" - possibly the most momentous decision ever taken."⁷² Another important factor in the success was technology. As the Germans had developed several new types of obstacles on the Normandy beaches, the Allies had to develop counter-measures. This resulted in the creation of a special tank version, which were known as the Funnies.⁷³ As all this was explained to the troops, it became a moral booster.⁷⁴ Furthermore, the Mulberries allowed a quick build-up of Allied forces in the Normandy bridgehead as well as the essential replenishment for the leading troops.⁷⁵

One of the main reasons for the success of Operation OVERLORD at the operational level was the conception of one of the best, if not the best deception plan of

⁷⁰ Horrocks, Belfield and Essame, Corps Commander, 12.

⁷¹ Horrocks, Belfield and Essame, Corps Commander, 12-13.

⁷² Horrocks, Belfield and Essame, Corps Commander, 13.

⁷³ Horrocks, Belfield and Essame, Corps Commander, 18. The funnies were flail tanks to beat passages through minefields, bulldozer tanks to clear away mined obstacles, tanks which spouted flame to deal with German concrete emplacements, and above all, the D.D. tanks (amphibious Sherman tanks), which would swim ashore with the assaulting craft and give immediate support on the beaches.

⁷⁴ Horrocks, Belfield and Essame, Corps Commander, 18.

⁷⁵ Horrocks, Belfield and Essame, Corps Commander, 20.

all military history, Operation FORTITUDE.⁷⁶ The aim of FORTITUDE was to deceive the Germans regarding where the Allied main effort was to take place. In doing so, the Allies lead them to believe that the main landings in Normandy were in fact an Allied deception. As a consequence, they retained their forces in the Pas de Calais area.⁷⁷ As reported by Montgomery, the Germans had fallen for this deception. Although the Allies were building-up forces in Normandy, the Germans retained an army of a quarter of a million men in reserve between Antwerp and Le Havre awaiting the main Allied assault.⁷⁸ Following the successful landing, Montgomery was already planning the next battle. Notwithstanding his frequent visits to the front, he never allowed himself to be embroiled in the hurly-burly of the tactical battle.⁷⁹ According to Montgomery, notwithstanding the careful planning of the landings, it was the intense period of training, which had been conducted prior D-Day that had been the key to the success encountered.⁸⁰

Montgomery's masterful application of the operational art is well described by the summary of the breakthrough of the Normandy peninsula. Using pre-emption, he was able to tie down the bulk of the German forces, in particular their Panzers, on the British front where fourteen German Divisions and 600 tanks were engaged in combat.

Consequently, nineteen US Divisions were opposed by only nine German Divisions and

⁷⁶ Horrocks, Belfield and Essame, Corps Commander, 11.

⁷⁷ Horrocks, Belfield and Essame, Corps Commander, 11.

⁷⁸ Horrocks, Belfield and Essame, Corps Commander, 11.

⁷⁹ Horrocks, Belfield and Essame, Corps Commander, 14.

⁸⁰ Horrocks, Belfield and Essame, Corps Commander, 15.

110 tanks, thus allowing the US forces to breakthrough the German lines and to capture Brest.⁸¹

At the tactical level, the landing on Omaha Beach in particular had been a nightmare as the Americans had come up against a good German division. The landing craft were cast off from the mother ships too soon, causing the loss of twenty-seven out of thirty-two of their D.D. tanks and all their close-support artillery. The chaotic battles on the beaches were more costly due to the lack of adequate support from the sea and the air. Nevertheless, the American commanders had the situation well under control by mid-day.⁸² As Montgomery observed, although the Americans could make many mistakes, "they had a remarkable aptitude for quickly re-adjusting themselves, often with great ingenuity, to an unanticipated reverse."⁸³ The American forces experienced tactical difficulties with the troops that were in action for the first time as they had to fight in the very worst Bocage in Normandy. However, due to the intelligent leadership of Bradley, Hodges, Collins and others, they were able to overcome these difficulties and this resulted in high morale.⁸⁴ Furthermore, Patton and the 3rd US Army, who had missed the strain and frustration of the Normandy landing and of the Battle of the Hedgerows, were well launched for the pursuit and envelopment of the German forces.⁸⁵

⁸¹ Horrocks, Belfield and Essame, Corps Commander, 19-20.

Analysis

At the strategic level, Eisenhower had demonstrated qualities of moral courage, will, leadership and sincere concerns for the lives of his troops. As reported by General Horrocks, "there is one last quality, however, without which no one can hope to be a successful Commander – the power to take decisions."⁸⁶ The worst decisive moment for Eisenhower during the war was when he made the decision to launch the 82nd and 101st US Airborne Divisions prior to the D-Day landings. Leigh-Mallory, the Air Force Commander, advised Eisenhower not to proceed as casualties would probably be as high as 70 per cent. Eisenhower went down to the airfield from which the 101st US Airborne Division would take off where he gathered all the men around him. The men patted him on the back,⁸⁷ and "kept on saying that it would be all right and that he was not to worry – they would do the job for him, and so on. He then said, as he stood there and saw their aircraft disappearing into the darkening sky that he felt like a murderer."⁸⁸ Eisenhower's decision was very important as Montgomery commented that a commander must have that moral courage, which will enable him to stand firm when the issue hangs in the balance. When inwardly a commander is not too sure about the outcome, he must be able

⁸² Horrocks, Belfield and Essame, Corps Commander, 19.

⁸³ Horrocks, Belfield and Essame, Corps Commander, 19.

⁸⁴ Horrocks, Belfield and Essame, Corps Commander, 19.

⁸⁵ Horrocks, Belfield and Essame, Corps Commander, 19.

⁸⁶ Horrocks, Belfield and Essame, Corps Commander, 9.

⁸⁷ Horrocks, Belfield and Essame, Corps Commander, 9.

⁸⁸ Horrocks, Belfield and Essame, Corps Commander, 9.

to radiate confidence in the plan and operations.⁸⁹ The troops, which were going to take part in Operation OVERLORD, were well aware of the Dieppe disaster from which the Allied leaders learned a great deal. That is where a commander "must be able to exploit the technology underlying their weapons and equipment to the hilt and must therefore be taught to understand it."⁹⁰ As explained earlier, the troops were briefed and trained on the "funnies", which became a morale booster. Furthermore, "excellent leaders communicate,"⁹¹ and that is what Eisenhower did, even if he was the Supreme Allied Commander. His presence and his communication skills had great effect on the morale of the troops. As stated by Montgomery, one of the pillars of high morale is the confidence of the soldier in his commanders and morale is one of the most important factors in war.⁹² One very important factor in comparison to the Sicily and Italy Campaign is the fact that Eisenhower's leadership had fostered mutual trust and cooperation between British and American commanders. Moreover, he had been able to weigh with wisdom all the moral and physical component factors of generalship, including the ten principles of war. Furthermore, he was able to cope with uncertainty, the fog of war.

⁸⁹ Field-Marshal B.L. Montgomery, 21 Army Group, High Command in War (Germany: 21 Army Group, June 1945), 9/24.

⁹⁰ Kitson, Directing Operations, 157.

⁹¹ General W.L. Creech, Concepts for Air Force Leadership (Maxwell AFB, Alabama: Air University, College of Aerospace Doctrine, Research & Education, 1996), 175.

⁹² Montgomery, 21 Army Group, High Command in War, 7/24.

At the operational level, a commander must apply combat power most effectively and ascertain, preferably before hostilities begin, the end-state he wants to achieve. Only if he understands the end he seeks, will he be able to design a campaign plan as well as a clear statement of intent.⁹³ However, in the real world, it is not unusual for the commander's desired end-state to exceed his resources, thus the requirement for a commander to master the operational art.⁹⁴ This is exactly what Montgomery demonstrated at the landing and the Normandy breakthrough. To achieve this a commander must decentralise to allow himself time to rest and to think problems through fully in order to make sound decisions and to plan future operations. Montgomery believed fervently in this as he usually went to bed at 2130 hours, even amid tough battles. He made time to reflect and think ahead, calling these respites "oases of thought". He let his chief of staff handle the details, and never allowed himself to do so.⁹⁵

This brings us to the commander's headquarters staff. As for Montgomery, General Creech believes that a leader must be proactive, dynamic, informed and involved; however, that does not mean that the leader is a one-man band.⁹⁶ Therefore, as stated by Norman Dixon: "a senior military or naval commander does not, indeed cannot, act in lonely isolation but is fettered by the organisation to which he belongs,"⁹⁷

⁹³ Vermillion, 13.

⁹⁴ Vermillion, 15.

⁹⁵ Vermillion, 9.

⁹⁶ Creech, Concepts for Air Force Leadership, 173.

⁹⁷ Norman Dixon, On the Psychology of Military Incompetence (New York: Basic Books, Inc., Publishers, 1976), 34.

thus the importance of decentralisation. Another important factor in regard to Montgomery is that he "refused to be hustled into launching attacks before he was ready and this irritated Churchill."⁹⁸ Moreover, all training must be designed by a commander with the aim of developing force cohesion, thus providing soldiers with the personal will for victory. Hence, Montgomery's training philosophy was key to the morale and physical preparation for the Operation OVERLORD amphibious force.⁹⁹

At the tactical level, the same generalship qualities mentioned for the strategic and operational levels were demonstrated. In addition, the tactical commanders showed flexibility, creative thinking, initiative and the ability to learn from their mistakes. Unlike Clark during the Italian Campaign, they were able to adapt, improvise and overcome when faced with unanticipated situations.

Summary

At the strategic level, Eisenhower had demonstrated great qualities of generalship: moral courage, will, leadership, intellect, decision-making and sincere concerns for the lives of his troops. He was also able to exploit new technology such as the "funnies" and the Mulberries. Furthermore, his presence and his communication skills also had a great effect on the morale of the troops. One very important factor in comparison to the Sicily and Italy Campaign is the fact that Eisenhower's leadership had fostered mutual trust and co-operation between British and American commanders. Moreover, he had been able to weigh with wisdom all the moral and physical component factors of generalship,

⁹⁸ Horrocks, Belfield and Essame, Corps Commander, 10.

⁹⁹ Canada, Canada's Army We Stand on Guard for Thee, 41.

including the ten principles of war and, he was able to cope with uncertainty, the fog of war.

At the operational level, Montgomery demonstrated that he mastered the operational art at the OVERLORD landings and the Normandy breakthrough. He also demonstrated that a commander must decentralise to his staff to allow himself to rest and to think and prepare the following moves and battles. Another important factor in regard to Montgomery is that he "refused to be hustled into launching attacks before he was ready. Moreover, Montgomery's training philosophy was key to the morale and physical preparation of the Overlord amphibious force. Therefore, contrary to his performance during the Sicily and Italy Campaign, Montgomery demonstrated excellent generalship.

At the tactical level, the same generalship qualities mentioned for the strategic and operational levels were demonstrated. As well, the tactical commanders showed flexibility, creative thinking, initiative and the ability to learn from their mistakes. They were able to adapt, improvise and overcome challenges when they faced unanticipated situations, unlike Clark during the Sicily and Italy Campaign, thus demonstrating excellent generalship.

Therefore, the operational level successes of Operation OVERLORD and the Normandy breakthrough were the results of excellent generalship at the strategic, operational and tactical levels. The commanders were able to weigh most adequately the moral and physical components of generalship against the situation, the enemy and the uncertainties, the fog of war, to achieve operational successes.

CONCLUSION

In summary, it has been established that a war is waged at three levels strategic, operational and tactical. Then, it has been determined that a war is being conducted by generals. They must have the ability to adequately weigh all the factors inherent to the situation and uncertainties to make the right decision to achieve warfighting success, thus the application of generalship. It has also been established that the admirals and generals assume different responsibilities at the strategic, operational and tactical levels.

It has also been determined that generalship encompasses two categories of factors, moral and physical. The moral components are more important than the physical components, but that they must interact continuously as one without the other is useless. As the moral and physical components are the key factors of generalship, it is the ability of commanders to weigh those components those results in the art of generalship. While all the moral and physical components are important, some are more important than others or are pillars for the others. The most important moral components have been established as being: will or the determination of a commander, moral courage, creative thinking and intellect, operational art, decision-making, leadership, decentralisation, morale and communication skills. The most important physical components have been established as being: headquarters staff, training, subordinate commanders and the use of technology.

The analysis of the Sicily and Italy Campaign has demonstrated that the strategic objectives were met successfully. However, the poor generalship demonstrated at the operational and tactical levels, mainly the shortfalls in regard to will, leadership, moral courage, subordinate commanders and to a lesser degree operational art, was the cause

for a very costly strategic success in terms of Allied human lives. The Sicily and Italy Campaign should be considered as a success at the strategic level and a mixed of several failures and successes at the operational and tactical levels.

The analysis of Operation OVERLORD and the Normandy breakthrough has demonstrated excellent generalship at the strategic, operational and tactical levels, which resulted in successes at all these levels.

Therefore, it has been demonstrated that generals are the ones responsible for the conduct of wars, campaigns, major operations and battles. They have the authority to apply the required weight of the moral and physical components of generalship to achieve operational successes. They are the ones, whom are accountable for both operational failures and successes.

In conclusion, the analysis of the Sicily and Italy Campaign as well as Operation OVERLORD and the Normandy breakthrough demonstrates clearly that operational level failures and successes are the results of the application of generalship at the strategic, operational and tactical levels.

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