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WHAT WERE THE KEYS TO SUCCESS FOR P.E.V.'LETTOW-VORBECK AND T.E.'LAWRENCE AND CAN THEY BE SEEN AS OPERATIONAL COMMANDERS IN OUR CURRENT UNDERSTANDING?

KKpt S.W. Fliege

JCSP 41

Exercise Solo Flight

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EXERCISE *SOLO FLIGHT* – EXERCICE *SOLO FLIGHT*

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Syndicate 2

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**WHAT WERE THE KEYS TO SUCCESS FOR P.E.V.LETTOW-VORBECK AND
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**WHAT ARE THE PARALLELS BETWEEN THE TACTICS THEY USED AND
TODAYS SOF TACTICS/ DOCTRINES?**

Introduction

The First World-War from 1914-1918 is the historical background for this essay and also the starting point for the train of thought that will link the campaigns of von Lettow-Vorbeck (L.V.) and Lawrence (L.) with special operations today. In the last years the term of irregular warfare gained more and more attention and the big militaries around the world discuss if irregular warfare is new, how it is best to counter irregular warfare and if we should conduct irregular warfare by ourselves and what kind of military commanders we need for this task. The deployment of Special Operation Forces (SOF) is also related to this background and there are linkages between the way L. and von L.V. fought to today's definitions of special operations. To answer these questions and to gain more insight into the topic it is worth having a look into the past.

While the development of the war at the western front in Europe during WW I followed in general the basic traditions of warfighting between countries (regular war with regular troops) the development at the fronts in Africa and the Middle East followed

different tactics and was highly related and shaped by the commanders (L.V. and L.). Although they did not fought against each other and in a different area with different enemies the backgrounds and ideas of their tactics can be compared. L.V. fought against British troops in Deutsch Ost Afrika (today Tanzania) and L. fought with a combination of regular British troops and Arab tribes against the Turks in the southern part of the Ottoman Empire.

Although both conducted warfare on the tactical level, this essay will come to the conclusion that they were also acting as operational leaders. Some arguments are related to the time and some are based on intend but they can all be found in today's doctrines.

Thesis statement

Lettow-Vorbeck and Lawrence were commanders operating on the operational level and using guerilla tactics in a time when these were not common in regular forces. Further on they used tactics that are still valid today in special operations and which are persistent in today's doctrines.

Methodology

This essay will start by providing definitions of guerilla warfare, special operations, and the definition of the operational level. These definitions form the basis for the further analysis. The next step is the introduction of L.V. and L., their personal

background and their operational environment. The Command and Control Framework by Pigeau / McCann will help to analyze the dimension of legal and personal authority of the two commanders in order to support the argumentation that they were commanders on the operational level. The framework will not be used in depth as it is not the main focus of the analysis and because it was not only their style of commanding their troops, but also the dislocation from their home bases/ strategic level and the lack of communication that was sometimes evident and supported the development to commanders on the operational level. The analysis of the two leaders will bring up their strength and weaknesses, the commonalities but also the differences that were related to their characters and aims.

Examples of their campaigns will help to determine that they used the same principles and rules inherent to today's special operations. The focus will not be to analyze whether they did it intentionally or not. The basis for the examination of the rules and principles are the *Joint Publication 3-05 Special Operations* from the United States Joint Chiefs of Staff and the *Capstone Concept for Special Operations* from the Canadian Special Operations Command (CANSOFCOM).

Sources for this essay are primary sources from L.V. and L. themselves but also primary sources from their opponents in order to provide a realistic evaluation of the incidents. Further on this essay is based on literature on the topic of guerilla warfare, general description of warfare at the time of WW I and today's manuals and doctrines.

Definitions

In analogy to the way ahead described in the Methodology this essay will provide some useful definitions at the beginning. This methodology is essential to build a common understanding of the terminology and the most important terms used in this essay.

Guerilla Warfare: type of warfare fought by irregulars in fast-moving, small-scale actions against orthodox military and police forces and, on occasion, against rival insurgent forces, either independently or in conjunction with a larger political-military strategy.¹

Special Operations: Require unique modes of employment, tactics, techniques procedures, and equipment. They are often conducted in hostile, denied or politically and/or diplomatically sensitive environments, and are characterized by one or more of the following: time-sensitivity, clandestine or covert nature, low visibility, work with or through indigenous forces, greater requirements for regional orientation and cultural expertise, and a higher degree of risk.²

Operational Level: The link between strategic goals and the tactical employment of forces. Its practice involves the planning, conduct, and sustainment of major operations or campaigns.³

The essay will refer to these definitions throughout the following text and they were brought up at this point in order to make the following text more readable and to avoid interruptions.

¹ Encyclopaedia Britannica, "Guerilla Warfare", last accessed 29 April 2015, <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/248353/guerrilla-warfare>

² Joint Chiefs of Staff, *Joint Publication 3-05, Special Operations* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 2014), I-1.

³ A. English, et al., *The Operational Art: Canadian Perspectives: Context And Concepts*. (Kingston: Canadian Defence Academy Press, 2005), 7.

Analysis of Paul Emil von Lettow-Vorbeck and Thomas Edward Lawrence

Paul Emil von Lettow-Vorbeck



Pic. 1, Paul v. Lettow-Vorbeck⁴

L.V., shown in the picture on the left, was born on 20 March 1870 in Germany. His father was an Army General who encouraged his son to start a military career. In 1888 he studied at the War Academy. Later he was posted to China during the Boxer rebellion as adjutant of the commander of the German contingent.

During this time he fought alongside British troops and made experiences that would be useful in the future.

Additional key assignments were to South Africa where he worked as an independent Company and Detachment Commander and to German South West Africa (now Namibia) where he helped to suppress the Herero and Hottentot rebellion. L.V. used these years to learn and train that bush fighting tactics he would later use against the British during the East Africa Campaign. Back to Germany he got command of the 2nd Marine Battalion. In this time he had the chance to study the relationship between naval power, ground troops and expansionism, an experience that was rare at this time. Before he went back to

⁴ Picture 1. "Paul von Lettow-Vorbeck", last accessed 10 May 2015, <http://www.welt.de/kultur/history/article1782859/Lettow-Vorbeck-deutscher-Fels-in-Afrika.html>

German East Africa (now Tanzania) to become commander of the Schutztruppe (protection force) in 1913 he was commander of the Schutztruppe in Cameroun.

After his arrival in German East Africa he used the time to inspect the country, learn about the colony and its people, about the infrastructure and especially about the British neighbors in the British-ruled East Africa Protectorate (now Kenya). He inspected the border very closely and “once the war started, Lettow-Vorbeck defended German East Africa with skill, determination and courage.”⁵ His troops consisted of never more than 3000 Germans and 11.000 African Soldiers, known as Askari. During the war L.V.” managed to hold out against a considerably larger force of British, Belgian, Portuguese, and African troops”.⁶ It was obvious for him from the beginning, that it would be impossible to defeat the British with their settlements in East Africa and South Africa on the one hand and with the Royal Navy that controlled the sea and therefor the supplies to East Africa on the other hand. “Instead he decided that his greatest service to his country would be to occupy as many troops as possible, for as long as possible, in order to prevent them being used against Germany in other theatres of war.”⁷ Although the Schutztruppe had not been defeated, L.V. surrendered to the British 14 days after the end of the war in Europe. He returned to Germany in March 1919.

⁵ Paul Emil von Lettow-Vorbeck, *My Reminiscences of East Africa*. (Nashville: Battery Classics, 1990), Introduction 2.

⁶ Ibid, I-2

⁷ David Rooney, *Military Mavericks: Extraordinary Men of Battle*. (London: Cassel & Co, 1999), 101.

The war in East Africa was different to the war in Europe. No entrenched mass armies fought against each other, it was small scale engagement over large stretches of bush country and “the military commanders lived and fought with their troops”.⁸ This was necessary for three reasons.

- First, fighting a war in bush country with a relative small amount of troops calls for a lot of movements and quick reaction times, especially when the enemy has a lot more troops and communication over distance is not reliable.
- Second, the coherence of the troops is very important and the consistence of the Schutztruppe with 11.000 African soldiers called for a very engaged leadership, especially with the burden of long and fast marches and no supply lines.
- Third, the commander had to be able to react to the disposition of enemy forces and to adapt quickly to changes of the enemy’s tactics, which can be done best while being in theatre personally.

In the case of L.V. his leading philosophy and living with the troops was successful. His adversary, General Crowe, who served under General Smuts at that time made the comment: “Colonel von Lettow had undoubtedly gained the confidence of the forces under him.”⁹ L.V. died with the age of 94 in 1964.

⁸ Paul Emil von Lettow-Vorbeck, *My Reminiscences of East Africa*. (Nashville: Battery Classics, 1990), Introduction 3.

⁹ J.H.V. Crowe, *General Smuts’ Campaign In East Africa*. (Uckfield: The Naval & Military Press Ltd, 2004), 28.

Thomas Edward Lawrence



Pic. 2, Thomas E. Lawrence¹¹

Lawrence, “a British archaeological scholar, military strategist, and author”¹⁰ was born in 1888 and he attended high school and college in Oxford. His interest was in medieval military architecture and he studied Crusader Castles in France and later in Syria and Palestine. From 1911 to 1914 he joined an expedition on the Euphrates, excavating a settlement

During this period he used his free time to travel on his own. He had strong interest to learn the Arabic language and get in contact with the people of the region. Early in 1914 he was part of a map-making reconnaissance from Gaza to Aqaba which was supposed to be a scientific expedition but mapped the northern Sinai on the Turkish frontier east of Suez.

With the beginning of World War I L. became employee of the Map Department at the War Office in London using his experiences from his time in the Middle East. Soon later, by December 1914 he was assigned to intelligence, became Lieutenant and was posted to Cairo. His task was to gain information of the Turkish Army, which was an Ally of the Central Powers (Germany, Austria-Hungary and Turkey) and therefore the adversary of the British. He produced a Handbook on the Turkish Army and searched for

¹⁰ Encyclopaedia Britannica, “T.E. Lawrence”, last accessed 29 April 2015, <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/332960/TE-Lawrence>

¹¹ Picture 2. “Thomas E. Lawrence”, last accessed 10 May 2015, http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/2/2d/Te_lawrence.jpg

alternative options to undermine Turkey. He was convinced that the British strategy of the time was inefficient and that there must be better options to fight the enemy.

In 1916 L. accompanied the diplomat Sir Ronald Storrs on a mission to Arabia. It was during this mission when he recognized that Husayn the Emir of Mecca, which was in the hands of the Turkish at that time, had proclaimed a revolt against the Turks. On his own initiative Lawrence got the permission to consult with Husain's son, Faysal. He was commanding an Arab force southwest of Medina, which was also in the hands of the Turkish. It was L.'s idea to support the rebellion of the dissident sheikhs with arms and gold in order to line their efforts up with the general military strategy of the British. The aiming for independence of the Arabs would make good support for the British fighting the Turks. After his return to Cairo L. could convince his superiors and he returned to Faysal as liaison and political officer. In the book *Lawrence of Arabia*, David Murphy described it with the following words:

“Once posted to Arabia, he displayed an uncanny ability to assess the various Arab leaders and later to encourage them to support the Allied vision for the direction of the revolt. Above all, Lawrence showed himself to have an almost instinctive grasp of guerilla warfare.”¹²

The military aim of Lawrence was the exhaustion of the enemy. The Turkish troops were better equipped and trained, whereas the Arabs where not trained as units and did not have any coherence. According to this matter L. wrote: “In mass they were not formidable, since they had no corporate spirit, nor discipline nor mutual confidence. The smaller the unit the better the performance”.¹³ This cognition brought up the necessity to

¹² David Murphy, *Lawrence Of Arabia: Leadership, Strategy, Conflict*. (Oxford: Osprey Publishing Ltd, 2011), 6.

¹³ James Schneider, *Guerrilla Leader*. (New York: Random House, Inc., 2011), 42.

avoid mayor battles and instead of this the use of tip and run tactics with small units and clear tasks. L. further on laid out, that “our goal must be to keep the railroad working, but just barely while inflicting maximum loss and discomfort for the Turks”.¹⁴ This adds to the tactic of exhaustion by disruption of the main Turkish supply line, which was the Hejaz railway from Aleppo in the North to Medina in the South. Another key element of his tactics was the insight that “a dead Turk was a man who could no longer eat and remain a logistical burden. A dead Turk was a man who could no longer fear and spread the virus of terror among his living comrades”.¹⁵

It was his merit that most of the Leaders of the Arab tribes started to belief in an Arab Nation and that the support of the British troops would help them to achieve this goal. L. himself was supporting the vision of an Arab nation and was highly disappointed when his government made the Sykes-Picot Agreement official, which declared the division of Turkish-held Syria, Iraq, Lebanon, and Palestine into various French- and British-administered areas and thereby ended the dream of an Arab nation. In 1918 Lawrence returned to Britain and he died in a traffic accident in the age of 46.

¹⁴ James Schneider, *Guerrilla Leader*. (New York: Random House, Inc., 2011), xviii.

¹⁵ *Ibid*, xviii

Comparison

Popularity and school of thought

In the following chapter this essay will, according to the red line introduced in the Methodology, analyze the two commanders in a direct comparison, look at their personal authority and at their level of command. Further on it will point out the main differences and commonalities of the campaigns by using examples of certain operations they conducted.

It is obvious from the beginning that at the end of their lives they must be regarded as completely different characters. After the war L. was a very famous and recognized person and he was still at the end of his life and even after his death. His popularity was pushed by a show of Lowell Thomas in London, named *With Allenby in Palestine and Lawrence in Arabia*. It played to packed houses in London and later went on tour around Britain.¹⁶ He had written highly respected books (*Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, *Revolt in the Desert*, *The Mint* and *Minorities*) and also various articles about guerilla war and his experiences during the revolt in the desert. In 1962 the motion picture *Lawrence of Arabia* started with Peter O'Toole playing Lawrence which "offered some grainy insight into the role of Lawrence as a leader of the Arab Revolt".¹⁷ This made him famous in every country the movie was played. His book *Seven Pillars of wisdom* is well known in military circles and the basis for theories about desert war and especially guerilla tactics.

¹⁶ David Murphy, *Lawrence Of Arabia: Leadership, Strategy, Conflict*. (Oxford: Osprey Publishing Ltd, 2011), 56.

¹⁷ James Schneider, *Guerrilla Leader*. (New York: Random House, Inc., 2011), xxii.

L.V. never gained this reputation. He was well known in Germany after the end of WW I and the NAZI Regime wanted to use him for their Propaganda, what he strictly refused. This refusal caused a lot of inconvenience for him and by the end of WW II he lived in near poverty. He wrote eight books in the time between 1919 and 1955. The most recognized is *My Reminiscences of East Africa*. It “has gained a reputation among military strategists as a crucial treatise on insurgency warfare. Currently military schools throughout the world use it to study not only insurgency warfare but also leadership techniques”¹⁸but it was not translated for a long time. L.V. campaign in East Africa is also used as a case study in *War in the shadows: The Guerilla in History*. This book is a classic for studying guerilla warfare. All in all the military achievements and the life of L.V. did not find the way to the broader audience and it is valid to say that he is nearly forgotten outside the military environment.

¹⁸ Paul Emil von Lettow-Vorbeck, *My Reminiscences of East Africa*. (Nashville: Battery Classics, 1990), Introduction 6.

Legal and Personal Authority

According to the *Command and Control Framework to Analyse Command Challenges*, Authority is divided into a. Legal and b. Personal Authority.¹⁹

- a. Legal authority is the formal power an individual has in an organization. The Power over resources and personnel.
- b. Personal authority is the degree of informal power given to an individual by others. Earned for example through reputation, integrity, experience, strength of character and personal example.²⁰

Lettow-Vorbeck

a. L.V. was appointed as commander of German East Africa's Schutztruppe in 1913. The Kommandeur of the Schutztruppen was the highest commanding military authority in the country and subordinate to the Command of the Schutztruppen in Berlin. The Governor of German East Africa (Heinrich Schnee) was the supreme military authority in German East Africa. At the beginning of the war the Governor wanted the colony to stay independent but L.V. plan was to engage the adversary and do as much harm as possible. In the End L.V. convinced Schnee and after that he had the support of the Command in Berlin and the Governor in Dar-es-Salaam. Therefore he had full legal authority.

¹⁹ Allan English, *Using the Command and Control Framework to Analyse Command Challenges*. (Toronto: Defence R&D Canada, 2002), 4.

²⁰ Allan English, *Using the Command and Control Framework to Analyse Command Challenges*. (Toronto: Defence R&D Canada, 2002), 5.

b. L.V. had the experience of his postings to China, South Africa and Cameroun before he was appointed to East Africa. He also had experience as a Commander of a Schutztruppe from his time in Cameroun. Because of these facts his experience is not questionable. The quotation from page 8 supports the factor of personal example. Another example is the quotation from L.V. himself: "...it was laid down that no European should have more than five attendants (regular: 13). This order was drastic and a storm of indignation aroused, fortunately I [...] could point to the fact that I myself had for months managed with three, or at a pinch two."²¹ He further on explained the reaction of his officer corps:

"I'm still particularly grateful to those regimental officers who, as on so many other occasions, saw the necessity of this vexatious regulation and set the example. They upheld the tradition of our officer corps by not claiming any special comforts for themselves, and were the first to submit to the unavoidable discomfort."

This example from the mid time of the war proofs the personal authority of L.V. and his officers and it helps to explain why 11.000 native African Troops stayed with L.V. throughout the entire war and shared all the hardship. From this perspective L.V. had full personal authority.

All in all it is valid to conclude that L.V. had full legal and personal authority. There are a lot more examples in literature that support this conclusion and that give evidence but as this is not the main part of this essay the analysis will not go deeper and the result will be used in connection with the needs of special operations in the next chapter.

²¹ Paul Emil von Lettow-Vorbeck, *My Reminiscences of East Africa*. (Nashville: Battery Classics, 1990), 176.

Lawrence

a. It is difficult to find out what the legal authority of L. in the Arab Revolt was. Being a “rank amateur in all things military”,²² he was only one of many unusual personalities in the intelligence branch in Cairo of that time. The Intelligence environment was split into subsections and L. changed sections often, according to the task he had to fulfill. His superior in Cairo was Colonel Stewart Francis Newcombe who was supporting L. in many ways and later became a lifelong friend. He supported the idea to use the Arabs and the Arab Revolt to gain British goals. According to the literature it is not entirely clear what legal authority he had but he had strong supporters like Newcombe and especially Ronald Storrs who served as Oriental Secretary in Cairo. During the Arab Revolt L. stayed under the command of Newcombe and joined the Arab Army under Faysal as political and liaison officer. From his writings in *Seven Pillars of Wisdom* it is obvious that he was very engaged in the Arab question and identified himself with the Army of Faysal. “We were a self-centred army without parade or gesture, devoted to freedom, the second of man’s creeds, a purpose so ravenous that it devoured all our strength, a hope so transcendent that our earlier ambitions faded in its glare.”²³ This quotation shows how engaged he was and that he devoted all his strength to this army. All in all he had the legal authority as a liaison officer and his task was to influence the Arab Leaders in order to align them with British policy. It was not his task to lead the Arab Revolt.

²² David Murphy, *Lawrence Of Arabia: Leadership, Strategy, Conflict*. (Oxford: Osprey Publishing Ltd, 2011), 10.

²³ Thomas Edward Lawrence, *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*. (London: Jonathan Cape Ltd, 1946), 27.

b. The personal authority of L. was directly linked to the acceptance he had in the Arab Tribes, especially with the Hashemite Arabs, to which Faysal belonged. He was well known for his experience within the region and that he was able to analyze the interrelations and conflicts.

“Lawrence’s knowledge of Arabic and his experience in the area was widely respected, and although he was a rather scruffy junior officer, he was welcomed into discussions with such senior figures as Sir Ronald Storrs, Sir Reginald Wingate and Sir Henry McMahon, the high commissioner.”²⁴

Literature about L. agrees on the point that he was welcomed within intellectual circles but had its problems within the military environment of regular British troops. He was accepted in the intelligence branch and also in the more “less formal” Arab troops with which he shared the hardships during his time in the Arab Revolt. The following quotation underlines this argument: “For years we lived anyhow with one another in the naked desert, under indifferent heaven. By day the hot sun fermented us; and we were dizzied by the beating wind. At night we were stained by dew.”²⁵ Sharing of hardship brought him the acceptance of the Arab troops and later he was invited by Faysal to wear the traditional Arab Dress which he presented to him.²⁶ This was an honor for a foreign military in the Arab world. Finally it is valid to conclude that L. had personal authority because of his knowledge and his ability to cooperate with the Arab tribes. This ability to communicate in the right way brought him the respect and trust within the Arab

²⁴ David Rooney, *Military Mavericks: Extraordinary Men of Battle*. (London: Cassel & Co, 1999), 83.

²⁵ Thomas Edward Lawrence, *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*. (London: Jonathan Cape Ltd, 1946), 27.

²⁶ David Murphy, *Lawrence Of Arabia: Leadership, Strategy, Conflict*. (Oxford: Osprey Publishing Ltd, 2011), 20.

world. At this point it is important to point out that this authority and trust was built on a weak basis. One single order from the British headquarters which would have been against his convictions and his agreements with the Arabs could have destroyed this trust and authority immediately, like it was the case with the revealment of the Sykes-Picot Agreement.

Final assessment

L.V. had both unquestionable legal and personal authority, especially after he worked in coordination with the Governor of German East Africa (Schnee).

L. had legal authority in the status of an intelligence officer in Cairo. He was sent to the Arabs as political and liaison officer and his task was to influence the Arabs in favor of the British. It was not his authority to lead the Arab Revolt but he had supporters that were in the status to enable him. The personal authority of L. depended on the support of the British on the one hand but also on the behavior of the Arabs on the other hand. Misconduct on the side of the Arabs would have destroyed the trust into him from the British side very quick. In the End he was standing between two groups and his authority depended on the good/ favorable behavior from both sides. This was a very difficult and exhausting situation especially on the background of two different cultures that had to be lined up towards a common aim. The following quotation supports the analysis.

“Lawrence had the difficult dual role of liaising with British and Australian troops and personally leading Faisal’s troops into battle. As the advance continued, pressure on him increased dangerously. Faisal’s troops were now operating more closely with allied troops and this produces alarming tensions. Most Allied soldiers respected the Turks as brave professional adversaries, but felt complete contempt for the Arabs. [...] Lawrence had

constantly to make excuses for Arab atrocities, and the pressure on him built up and he was in a hysterical condition and close to a break down."²⁷

Although the view of the author David Rooney is often very critical and sometimes it seems that he is not a supporter of L., the same arguments can be found in different other books, too although not in this clarity.

Commanders on the operational level

According to the definition from page five, the operational level is the link between the strategic goals and the tactical employment of troops. This essay uses a current definition by purpose. First of all the concept of the operational level was not used at the beginning of World War I. At this time Strategy was the Art of the commander, like Moltke the elder argued in 1870. In his book *ON WAR*, Clausewitz is not talking about the operational level, because as a technical term it did not exist until World War II. At this time the U.S. and Great Britain developed a Grand Strategy, shifted the strategic level from the military to the politicians and opened a gap between the tactical and strategic level at the military side of the house. It was the operational level to close this gap.²⁸

The second reason to use the current understanding and definition of the operational level is that this essay will use the outcome of the analysis whether L.V. and L. were commanders on the operational level for the comparison with current special

²⁷ David Rooney, *Military Mavericks: Extraordinary Men of Battle*. (London: Cassel & Co, 1999), 94.

²⁸ Beatrice Heuser, *The Evolution of Strategy*. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 26-30.

operations definitions. Therefore it is necessary to talk about the same things, based on the same definitions from the same period of time.

According to the thesis L.V. and L. were both commanders operating on the operational level. This paragraph will analyze the command of L.V. during the East African Campaign and of L. during the Arab Revolt and by using examples, lay out that both commanders used the same guerilla tactics, although for the achievement of totally different outcomes.

Lettow-Vorbeck and the East African Campaign

Whereas the last chapter could conclude that there were commonalities in the motivation of the commanders and their devotion to the task, this paragraph will highlight some mayor differences of the campaigns, the theatres of operations and the composition of forces. As mentioned earlier the aim of L.V. was to ligate as many British troops as possible and to do as much harm as possible to the adversary. According to the force ratio between the Germans and British it was clear for L.V. from the outset, that it would be impossible to defend German East Africa against the British for an extended period of time. “The need to strike great blows only quite exceptionally, and to restrict myself principally to guerilla warfare, was evidently imperative.”²⁹

²⁹ Paul Emil von Lettow-Vorbeck, *My Reminiscences of East Africa*. (Nashville: Battery Classics, 1990), 63.



Pic. 3. Deutsch Ostafrika ³⁰

However, the aim of the Schutztruppe was to protect and to defend the colony against the Allies. The Schutztruppe consisted of about 3000 soldiers at the beginning and they were supported by local indigenous people (Askari), first in the role of supporting personnel and later as trained and highly respected soldiers. All in all the Schutztruppe was a regular force, defending German territory shown in the chart above against an invasion. The tactics to achieve this aim were absolutely different to those applied in Central Europe. There were no mass armies in Africa and no war out of trenches fighting for each single meter of ground. It was a guerilla war with small specialized fighting units, highly agile and mobile and highly motivated troops. The following quotations from L.V. underline this argument:

“Knowledge of the desert improved, and in addition to patrols for destruction and intelligence work, we developed a system of fighting patrols. The latter, consisting of twenty to thirty Askari, or even more, and sometimes equipped with one or two machine-guns, went out to look for the enemy and inflict losses upon him. [...] The influence of these expeditions on the self-reliance and enterprise of both Europeans and natives was so great that it would be difficult to find a force imbued with a better spirit.”³¹

³⁰ Picture 3. “Deutsch Ostafrika”, last accessed 10 May 2015, www.deutsche-schutzgebiete.de/webpages/Deutsch-Ostafrika_Karte_1912.jpg

³¹ Paul Emil von Lettow-Vorbeck, *My Reminiscences of East Africa*. (Nashville: Battery Classics, 1990), 63.

The next quotation is in line with the guerilla definition from page five and thereby supporting the argument that regular German forces conducted guerilla warfare.

“Small detachments of eight to ten men, Europeans and Askari , rode round the year of the enemy’s camps, [...], and attacked their communications.”³²

“From their ambush they opened fire on the enemy at thirty yards’ range, captured prisoners and booty and then disappeared in the boundless desert.”³³

Further on it was necessary for L.V. to adapt his troops and his tactics to the level of experience, the amount of supply and the terrain they had to operate in, which was highly diverse. This task in itself is not a task on the tactical level any more. It is a task on the operational level according to the definition. It is the planning of missions and also about the sustainment of troops. The following quotation is showing the reflections of L.V. on this topic:

“Such expeditions through districts providing neither water nor food require a degree on experience on the part of the troops which could not possibly exist at that stage of the war. [...] this conditions improved as the troops became better trained, and as our knowledge of the country, which was at first mainly *terra incognita*, increased.”³⁴

The absence of communication with the Headquarters in Berlin is another proof for the thesis that he was operating on the operational level and that he had to, because he could not receive orders on a regular basis and not sent reports on a regular basis. On the basis of the used quotations and the historical evidence the conclusion is, that L.V. was a

³² Ibid, 63.

³³ Ibid, 63.

³⁴ Ibid, 63.

commander on the operational level, conducted guerilla warfare with regular troops to defend a German Colony against the adversary and to inflict as much harm on allied troops as possible.

Lawrence and the Arab Revolt

In contrast to L.V. the task of L. was not to defend a colony or even homeland.

The aim of the British Government (strategic level) was to reduce the influence of the



Turks, who were an ally of the Germans at that time, in the region of the Middle East and therefore close to Egypt, the Suez Canal and the Red Sea, areas of British interest and influence.

Pic.4, The Arab Revolt, 1916-1918³⁵

L. area of operation is shown in the picture above and was in the area ruled by the Ottoman Empire. In his case he was part of an insurgency, using the Arab tribes to fulfill the goals of the British government within the region, mainly starting a northern

³⁵ Picture 4. "The Arab Revolt, 1916-1918", last accessed 10 May 2015
<http://cf067b.medialib.glogster.com/jtklagholz/media/61/61ab963870510eae923b85b9de75733044991ba1/a-rab-revolt-ottoman-empire-1916-1.jpg>

movement in Mecca and forcing the Turks to retreat to the north with the destination of Damascus. The Arab tribes have to be regarded as irregular forces because they did not belong to a state and were fighting in a loose alliance. Further on they were paid by the British government and the Arab Revolt was fed with British weapons and ammunition in order to support regular British forces, which “were too cumbersome for mobile operations in desert terrain.”³⁶ It is very difficult to provide evidence whether L. was an operational leader. As pointed out before it cannot be referred to his legal authority, so we have to look from the perspective of the outcome and not from the outset. It was L. who aligned the actions of the Arab Revolt with the campaign of the British forces in the Middle East. It was also him, who forced the conduct of the railway campaign which followed his idea, that it would be better to cut the supply of the Turkish than to enter a direct battle with them. This campaign outline also benefited the characteristics of the Arab troops as mentioned on page ten and discovered by L. In the end the Railway campaign was only one of a lot more but it was the plan of L. and he conducted the campaign with the troops of Faisal, even more recognized and the cause for a lot of praise was the march on Aqaba, May-July 1917. “While the action itself was impressive, Lawrence’s timing was also excellent as the momentum of the revolt had somewhat dissipated.”³⁷ Looking from the point of the outcome it is valid to conclude that he was leading this campaign on the operational level, on the background of the definition given at page five.

³⁶ James Schneider, *Guerrilla Leader*. (New York: Random House, Inc., 2011), 39.

³⁷ David Murphy, *Lawrence Of Arabia: Leadership, Strategy, Conflict*. (Oxford: Osprey Publishing Ltd, 2011), 24.

Final Comment

The analysis of the campaigns and the conclusion that both L.V. and L. were commanders on the operational level and that they were both conducting guerilla warfare is valid at this point. It is also important to point out that the mass armies in Europe were conducting a completely different kind of warfare at that time. Even the British forces in the Middle East used regular tactics against the Turks. Therefore L.V. and L. used uncommon tactics and especially L. did something very special in combining regular forces with irregular forces in the same campaign. Something that is leading in the direction of the combination of today's regular forces with special operations forces in the same theatre.

From L.V. and L. to Special Operations of today

In order to approach both commanders and their relevance for Today's Special Operations at the same time, the analysis will focus on one element within their campaigns that is absolutely comparable: The disruption of Railway lines.



Pic.5 Turkish work party repairing demolitions to the Hejaz Railway ³⁸

In the case of L.V. it was the Uganda Railway from Mombasa in Kenia at the Indian Ocean which via Nairobi and Kampala connected with Kasese in Uganda. This Railway, although it was difficult to reach was often the aim of L.V..

³⁸ David Murphy, *Lawrence Of Arabia: Leadership, Strategy, Conflict*. (Oxford: Osprey Publishing Ltd, 2011), 24.

For L. it was the Hejaz Railway which connected Aleppo in the North with Medina in the South. Both Railways were important for transportation of supply and personnel. During the time both commanders perfected the tactics of their raids and the means they employed to destroy not only the track but also the trains especially the locomotives.

According to the definition from page five these raids on the Railway fulfilled many of the requirements. It were small troops, equipped with special explosives, operating in covert nature with indigenous forces that had higher regional orientation. These raids, very beneficial in their outcome, were a high risk for the troops that conducted them. Some of these raids took days and during this time there was no chance to resupply or get in contact with other troops for support. McRaven writes in his book *Spec Ops* that “a special operation is conducted by forces specially trained, equipped, and supported for a specific target whose destruction, elimination is a political or military imperative.”³⁹ In their time, the forces that conducted the raids fulfilled all these prerequisites and followed the six principles of special operations: simplicity, security, repetition, surprise, speed and purpose.⁴⁰ L.V. had trained special teams to conduct the raids and L. chose the most reliable troops for this task and often accompanied them himself. At every time the number of forces was by far smaller than the defending enemy. Especially the Turks safeguarded the Railway extensively after their losses increased. On the other side the mines and charges were constantly developed further to guarantee maximum destruction. The prerequisite of unique operational methodologies⁴¹ was met at

³⁹ William H. McRaven, *Spec Ops: Case Studies in Special Operations Warfare: Theory and Practice*. (Novato: Presidio Press, 1995), 2.

⁴⁰ *Ibid*, 8.

⁴¹ Department of National Defence, *CANSOFCOM CAPSTONE CONCEPT for Special Operations 2009* (Ottawa: Canada Communications Group, 2009),4.

the beginning of the operations but this uniqueness vanished when, for example L. conducted this kind of raid for over 500 times.

Conclusion

The thesis that L.V. and L. were commanders operating on the operational level was demonstrated by analyzing their authority in accordance with Pigeau/ McCann and the analysis of their respective campaigns in East Africa and the Middle East. The enormous pressure that lay on L. was also addressed as was the ultimate devotion to their tasks and their foresight that made them successful. Both had to make the best out of what they had. They could not succeed with sheer numbers, they succeeded by being different, by moving quicker than the rest and especially by being unpredictable and surprising the enemy.

Both stated in their books (*Seven Pillars of Wisdom* and *My Reminiscences to East Africa*) that they employed guerilla tactics and this was also validated in this essay by analyzing the campaigns and looking at secondary sources about the topic. The focus was on using a mixture of both primary and secondary sources to make the arguments valid and to reduce the amount of “romantics” used by personally concerned authors. The last paragraph provided a comparison between special operations doctrine and definitions and comes to the conclusion that both commanders used tactics that are still used today in special operations and that the provided example of the Railways underlies this thesis. It

is important to point out that although they used special operations tactics these were not Special Operations Forces in our current understanding.

In the End there is the question for the “So what” of this essay. We can learn from this essay that regular troops can conduct special operations and that this has been done very successfully in the past. The second thing we can learn is that a look in the past is always worth to be taken. We can learn a lot or at least refresh our knowledge by doing so.

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