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Operational Level Command -- Who is in Charge?

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ABSTRACT

OPERATIONAL LEVEL COMMAND: WHO IS IN CHARGE? by MAJ Michael J. Barron, USA.

This monograph discusses how the establishment of command relationships at the operational level of war impacts on sound operational design and execution. It uses the 1940 French campaign and the Allied campaign of 1944 in Burma as case studies of the applicability of traditional military theory to present-day operational command.

The monograph first reviews theoretical concepts concerning the phenomena of command itself, and further, how it relates to the ability of a military force to generate combat power. It then analyzes the campaigns of 1940 and 1944 to gain insights concerning both ineffective and effective command structures for warfighting at the operational level. Next it looks at the implications for U.S. operational commanders in regard to their ability to plan and execute war at the operational level given present command relationships.

The monograph questions whether there is a direct link between the establishment of command relationships and the resulting operational success or failure of a campaign; do command relationships established in peacetime, and their modification during the course of conflict, set preconditions for success or failure. Insights provided by historical example do not point to a clear answer, but they do suggest factors which top civilian and military leaders should consider when establishing command relationships at the operational level of war.

Table of Contents

	Page
I. Introduction	1
II. Command	2
III. Historical Lessons on Operational Command	9
a. The French Campaign of 1940	9
b. The Allied Campaign in Burma, 1944	17
IV. Implications for Establishing Command Relationships. .	24
IV. Contemporary Application	28
V. Conclusion	35
End Notes	37
Bibliography	40

I. Introduction

When peace is lost and war begins, the military commander must shoulder the burden of responsibility to resolve the conflict by force of arms. His challenge is to employ the forces at his command to defeat the enemy, thus imposing the political will of the victors upon the vanquished. To accomplish this mission, the operational commander establishes military ends to achieve the strategic goals given by his political masters. The way he intends to achieve the military ends is expressed in his campaign plan.¹

Clausewitz, in his description of the nature of war, uses the paradigm of a "paradoxical trinity" to compare the army and its commander with the "play of chance and probability within which the creative spirit is free to roam."² The commander must be free to exercise his creative spirit in formulating and executing his campaign plan. Victory or defeat often hinges on how well the commander assesses risk and creates opportunity through the disposition of his forces. Unless established command relationships allow him freedom of action to employ his forces when, where and how he desires, the commander will never be able to convert his combat power potential into actual combat power.

Just as the initial disposition of forces within a theater limits a commander's options, command relationships, once established, also set limits on a commander's ability to

command effectively. Moltke the Elder once stated that it is difficult to recover from initial poor troop dispositions; poor command relationships at the beginning of a conflict may prove even more difficult to correct.

II. Command

"Command and control" -- how often does the phrase appear in military writings as a subject for discussion? Yet, there is value in considering each concept separately to discern the meaning of command as distinct from the meaning of control. The distinction is basic to a correct understanding of how commanders at the operational level of war influence and shape the outcome of campaigns and major operations.

"Command is the authority that a commander in the military lawfully exercises over subordinates by virtue of rank or assignment."³ Command relationships often impose limits on that authority. Within national forces two categories exist -- full command and operational command (or operational control).

Operational command and operational control are terms used to describe the authority exercised by joint commanders over subordinate components. These terms are synonymous. Operational command describes the authority granted commanders of unified and specified commands...Operational control describes operational command when

applied to other than unified and specified commanders.⁴

Command relationships between national forces restrict authority even further.

NATO defines command as "the authority vested in an individual of the armed forces for the direction, coordination, and control of military forces."⁵ Alliance members do not grant full command when their forces are employed outside national services. Rather, the national contingents are placed under the operational command of a designated NATO commander. It is within these bounds that the service, joint, and combined commanders operate.

Control is "physical or psychological pressure exerted with the intent to assure that an agent or group will respond as directed."⁶ Control derives from two factors: properly established command relationships; and a commander who is able to convey his intent and infuse his will and determination to those of his command. Someone has to be in charge both by definition (command) and in fact (able to exercise control). Control exists when subordinate units conduct military operations in accordance with the intentions and orders of the higher commander. Control in this sense is a function of command.

The discussion that follows will focus both on command and command relationships; their effect on control and efficient

use of combat power is the object of this study.

The concept of command has special significance to those in the military profession. Most commissioned officers aspire to assume the responsibilities of command as an ultimate challenge and test of their capabilities. Command at increasing levels of responsibility carries with it a commensurate degree of trust and confidence; ultimately, the fate of a nation and its ability to preserve hard-won freedoms are entrusted to a commander and the forces at his command. The first task then is to consider the essence of command -- its peculiar nature or quality. Secondly, it is necessary to understand the scope of command at the operational level of war. And thirdly, we will examine responsibility of the commander to achieve the full combat potential of his forces.

Essence of Command

Traditional theorists such as Jomini, Clausewitz and Sun Tzu provide useful insights into the concept of command and the attributes required in a commander.

Command is above all a weight of responsibility that governments place upon selected individuals to prepare the nation's military forces for combat, plan for the employment of those forces, and then lead them to victory in the event of war. Commanders are selected because of proven capabilities and their possession of certain attributes. Clausewitz points

to will and determination in describing two key attributes of a successful commander. "The role of determination is to limit the agonies of doubt and the perils of hesitation when the motives for action are inadequate."⁷ The commander's determination is seen as crucial to overcoming uncertainty in war.

A commander's will is also critical, especially when the plan is not working and he begins to feel his burden of responsibility more keenly.

"It is the impact of the ebbing of moral and physical strength, of the heart-rending spectacle of the dead and wounded, that the commander has to withstand -- first in himself, and then in all those who, directly or indirectly have entrusted him with their thoughts and feelings, hopes and fears. As each man's strength gives out and it no longer responds to his will, the inertia of the whole gradually comes to rest on the commander's will alone."⁸

Sun Tzu defines command in terms of the general's qualities of wisdom, sincerity, humanity, courage, and strictness.

If wise, a commander is able to recognize changing circumstances and to act expediently. If sincere, his men will have no doubt of the certainty of rewards and punishments....If courageous, he gains victory by seizing opportunity without hesitation. If strict, his troops are disciplined. They are in awe of him and are afraid of punishment. If a general is not courageous he will be unable to conquer doubts or to create great plans.

Jomini has some interesting thoughts concerning command in terms of a monarch leading his army. In this case the sovereign

would no doubt possess full command with the attendant authority and responsibilities. The benefits of untrammelled command would greatly assist the monarch in accomplishing his ends. Regarding the sovereign:

"He may do much by the certainty he has of being able to dispose of all the public resources for the attainment of his end. He also possesses the powerful accessory of his favor, of recompenses and punishments; all will be devoted to the execution of his orders, and to ensure for his enterprises the greatest success; no jealousy will interfere with the execution of his projects; or at least its exhibition will be rare and in secondary operations.¹⁰

Unlike the sovereign, today's operational commander has political and strategic heads to which he must respond. The unity of command which exists in its fullest sense with the sovereign must now be replicated by political and military decision-makers to achieve the desired result -- unity of effort.

To be successful, the commander must have at his disposal all the means he requires to win the war. A decision by political authorities to grant full command will be in part determined by the commander's reputation. As regards the matter of trust and confidence Jomini states, "if the prince possesses ...genius and experience..., he should be invested with untrammelled command, and be allowed full selection of his instruments."¹¹ The body politic should therefore seek to avoid any circumstance or policy that would hinder the commander in the accomplishment of his responsibilities.

Jomini also warns us about involvement of civil authorities

with no military training who attempt to direct the war. If the sovereign lacks military capacity, "his general will be interfered with and opposed in all his enterprises, and will be unable to achieve success, even if he have the requisite ability."¹²

What then is the essence of command? It is authority and responsibility vested in a commander who is worthy of that trust and confidence. The authority of the commander stems from command relationships established by his superiors; ideally this results in unity of command. The worthiness of the commander is a combination of his innate and acquired attributes. To find such a commander, Clausewitz suggests that we must "survey all those gifts of mind and temperament that in combination bear on military activity."¹³ We should not focus on a commander's courage, for example, but all of his attributes. What then is the scope of responsibility for the commander in whom the hopes of a nation rest.

Scope of Operational Command

The scope of command at the operational level of war is wide indeed. "The operational level of command is the level at which responsibility lies for the direction of operations beyond the immediate tactical battle in accordance with strategic directives."¹⁴ In the context of most foreseeable present-day conflicts, the lowest echelon for operational level command would

be corps, and the highest at the unified commands, the prime determining factors being the mission, the extent of the theater of operations, and the size of the force employed. Within the theater of operations, the commander must generate combat power and employ it at the proper place and time.

Generation of Combat Power

Generation of combat power is primarily a function of leadership. The combat potential of military forces assigned to the operational commander becomes combat power in the hand of the operational artist. Woven into the operational plan are elements that will take advantage of mobility, make effective use of firepower and provide protection to the force. "Leadership is the element of combat power upon which all others depend."¹⁵

If the essence of command and its application to the operational level of war are to have relevance, historical example should bear out the salient aspects. We now turn to two campaigns of World War II in order to examine commanders and command relationships in the context of France and Burma.

III. Historical Lessons on Operational Command

There are many campaigns which could serve as an historical basis for examining command relationships at the operational level of war; the French campaign of 1940 and the Allied campaign of 1944 in Burma offer contrasting examples of operational art at its worst and best. The purpose of this retreat into history is to discover the extent to which success and failure stemmed from command relationships and/or the commanders themselves.

The French Campaign of 1940

"The defeat of the Allies on the Continent in 1940 was a failure of communication and command. Time was the most vital factor, but it was squandered, not by sluggish production of aircraft or by slow tanks, but by slow decisions and a paralysis of command"¹⁶

The French armed forces were considered throughout Europe to be a formidable fighting force, although in truth, they lacked essential leadership, experience and training. The French armed forces in 1940 faced a multitude of problems. First, French senior officers represented "a world grown old" with the average age approaching 70.¹⁷ Secondly, relative to the Wehrmacht, the French had no recent combat experience from which to evaluate their instrument of war; they would face the Germans untested. Moreover, to attain wartime strength the French Army depended

largely on reservists whose level of training had suffered in the years prior to 1940.¹⁸ Thirdly, although the French had experimented with integration of arms, the doctrinal use of armor was still to support the infantry and not to act as an offensive spearhead.

A potential bright spot was the French Air Force which had modernized and boasted aircraft in numbers nearly equal to the Germans; however, in quality the German Luftwaffe had the advantage of greater speed and could produce aircraft at a faster rate than French industry.¹⁹ The problem was that French doctrine did not call for close liaison between the army and air force. The chief of general staff had only powers of coordination, not command over the air force.²⁰

The sad fact is that France was unable to generate combat power at the proper place and time even though her potential to do so was great. Uninspired leadership and convoluted command relationships both contributed to the indecisiveness that crippled the French war effort. The French did not establish unity of command and the resulting lack of unity of effort spelled disaster. How this catastrophe occurred is the question we shall now attempt to answer.

The instrument of war has a profound effect on the strategic options available for war planners. Since the French had the great preponderance of land forces on the Western Front in 1940, it fell to them to develop the war plan. Britain would "leave the planning to the leaders of France's invincible Army."²¹

The condition of the French armed forces permitted only one option in the winter of 1939; the Allies would have to cede the initiative to Germany and defend against the expected offensive. A successful defense would gain time and allow the build-up of French and British combat strength on the continent for future offensive action. Key to the plan was early identification of the decisive points and then generation of sufficient combat power at those points to stop the German offensive. The French failed in both endeavors.

The French plan, or "Dyle Plan", called for a continuous defensive front with --

- (A) a strong left wing pushed northwards to the Dyle River to meet the expected German main effort through the lowlands of Belgium;
- (B) a strong right wing on the Maginot line; and
- (C) a weak center as an economy of force measure to make use of the restrictive terrain in the Ardennes.
- (D) a strategic reserve comprised of approximately thirty-three divisions.

The left wing was subsequently reinforced on 20 March by an amendment to the plan. The adoption of the "Breda Variant" came as a result of intelligence which seemed to confirm the previously held belief that the German main effort would come as expected through the Lowlands. It amended the "Dyle Plan" by strengthening the left wing with an additional 20 divisions -- the elite of the French and British Armies. The strategic

reserve, thus weakened to a mere ten to thirteen low category divisions, could no longer serve the operational commander as an "instrument of decision" to influence the course of the campaign.²² Another indication of French shortsightedness was the absence of branches or sequels to the Dyle Plan to account for the uncertainty of war. The Allies had created a tempting center of gravity on the left wing that Hitler could not ignore.

France had more serious problems, however, than the preparedness of her armed force or high-risk troop dispositions. Neither the top French military commander nor the organization of his armed forces was adequate to the tasks that lay ahead. The organization of Allied forces at the outbreak of war on the Western Front, as of 9 January 1940, is shown at figure 1.

The Supreme Commander of all French Land Forces was General Gamelin. Gamelin was very reserved and felt ill-at-ease in front of troops. He isolated himself at his headquarters in Vicennes where he did not even have the benefit of radio communications with his commanders. "When Gamelin gave orders, they sounded less like the words of a fighting man calling for vigorous action than topics for academic discussion."²³ Gamelin's detachment from reality and the fragmentation of the High Command precluded the efficient use of the combat power the Allies did possess.

When General Gamelin recognized that he could not control overall war strategy and be the operational commander of the North-East Front, he gave his deputy, General Georges, command of

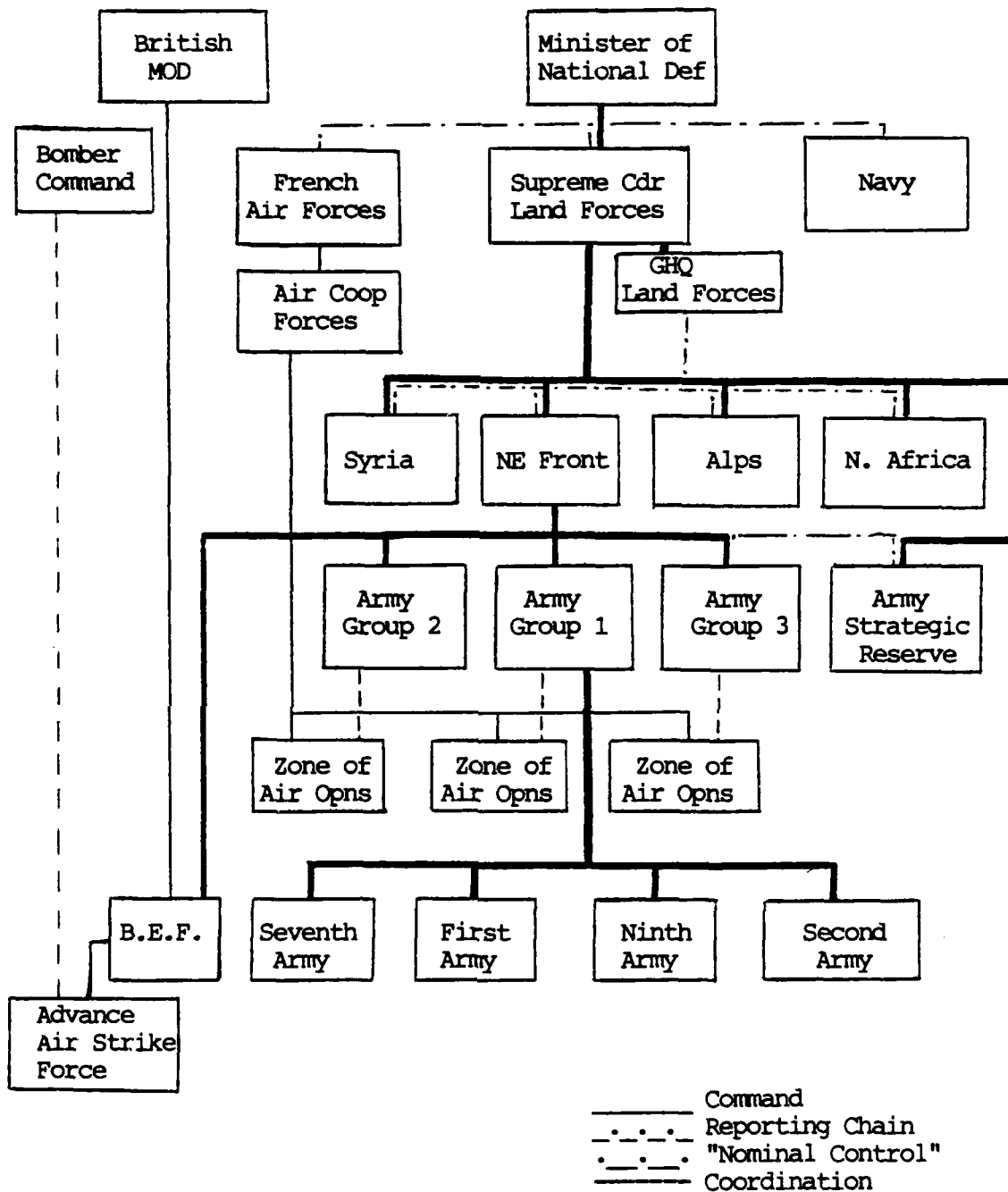


Figure 1.

the North-East Front and created a planning headquarters under his new chief of staff, General Doumenc (GHQ Land Forces) to "prepare and elaborate orders."²⁴ The result was that there were now three headquarters where there had previously been two: General Gamelin's personal headquarters, Gamelin's General Headquarters under Doumenc, and North-East Headquarters under General Georges.²⁵ When Gamelin "altered the army's command structure in January 1940, he chose a solution midway between giving Georges complete control over the northeastern frontier and retaining it completely for himself." He "...reserved the right to intervene in an emergency" but never did so until too late.²⁶

Georges was operational commander of all continental land combat forces to include the B.E.F., yet it was Gamelin in March who made the ill-fated decision to adopt the "Breda Variant" and critically weaken the strategic reserve. He did not entrust to his newly appointed operational commander the planning and execution of the campaign plan. To his credit Georges did recognize that the "Breda Variant" severely compromised the Allied defensive effort. His prescient warning, however, went unheeded. Georges would have to execute an operation plan he had personally opposed.²⁷

Instead of using his operational commander to fight the campaign, Gamelin chose to retain operational command prerogatives and attempted to direct the war as the Supreme Commander. "Too close to his political masters, too remote from

the zone of operations, Gamelin gravely compromised his authority over the fighting forces."²⁸

"Gamelin's view of the commander as the director of a tightly centralized operation fit perfectly with the methodical battle" which he envisioned fighting.²⁹ German Blitzkrieg tactics hardly fit the definition of the methodical battle, a fact which was lost on Gamelin. The German strategy reflected what Sun Tzu said centuries before: "Speed is the essence of war. Take advantage of the enemy's unpreparedness; travel by unexpected routes and strike him where he has taken no precautions."³⁰

When the German offensive began on 10 May with an attack through the Gembloux Gap in Belgium, Gamelin breathed a sigh of relief to know that the enemy was conforming to the expected plan. By 13 May, though, it became apparent that the attack through Belgium was a secondary effort and that the German main effort was developing in the weak French center through the "impenetrable" Ardennes.³¹ Two days later the Germans had penetrated the French defenses and were exploiting their success in the French operational depth.

The failure of the French to respond to the crisis confronting them was a result of many factors, not the least of which was a plan ill-suited to the means, and the absence of unity of command. Perhaps the greatest failing, however, was to leave a general in command who did not possess the skills

necessary to employ his combat forces. The French Prime Minister, Paul Reynaud, gave this assessment of Gamelin; "It would be criminal to leave this nerveless philosopher at the head of the French Army."³² Moreover, Gamelin was allowed to create a fatally flawed command organization which prevented the rapid assimilation of information and resulted in sluggish or no decision-making capability.

Given operational command, Georges may have been able to concentrate enough force at the decisive point to stop the Germans in the Ardennes. Most unfortunately for the French, he was not given the chance to generate combat power with the forces at his command. No one really knew who was in charge or to whom to report. It was a failure of command. Operational friction had paralyzed both French commanders.

"Friction occurs in a meaningful sense, when events arise that waste the efforts of the whole in accomplishing the intended goal."³³ When the commander is able to achieve unity of effort, the operational friction will be reduced and cohesion of the force improved. Neither Gamelin nor Georges was able to recover from the initially poor disposition of forces. An ill-conceived plan, indecision, and the loss of control due to the absence of unity of command wasted what combat power the French did possess.

The Allied Campaign in Burma, 1944

When the Japanese invaded Southeast Asia in 1942, they found an Allied army unprepared for the type of warfare demanded by the Burmese jungle. LTG Slim, recently named commander of the Burma Corps, had little time to familiarize himself with his new command or the terrain upon which he would fight. The fall of Rangoon, which occurred just prior to his assumption of command, created a sense of impending doom. No coherent plan, from which to branch or execute a contingency, existed prior to the Japanese invasion. Nor was any directive forthcoming from any higher headquarters to give direction or new objectives to the forces in Burma. Slim's first major task, therefore, was to prevent the destruction of his corps during its long withdrawal northwards up the length of Burma, while being relentlessly pursued by the aggressive Japanese. Upon crossing into India, his weary corps took up defensive positions at Imphal of Assam and literally collapsed.

As Slim pondered what had happened, he could come to only one conclusion: "The outstanding and incontrovertible fact was that we had taken a thorough beating. We, the Allies, had been outmaneuvered, outfought, and outgeneralled."³⁴ He identified several causes for the disaster that befell his Corps; the poor state of training, the terrain, poor intelligence and lack of operational direction had all worked against his beleaguered forces.

What weighed upon him the most was the thought that had he somehow chosen a bolder course of action, the Japanese might have faltered and shown a vulnerability. He would remember the lessons learned from this defeat when he assumed command of 14th Army. He was determined to forge a weapon that would defeat the Japanese and drive them out of Burma.

In August 1943 the United States and Britain formed the South-East Asia Allied Command (SEAC) to control forces in Burma, Ceylon, Malaya, the Dutch East Indies, Siam, and Indo-China (Burma-figure 2). Before planning the 1944 offensive into Burma, the Allies had to decide on key leadership positions. The first step in the process was to establish command relationships. Admiral Lord Louis Mountbatten was designated Supreme Commander of the new headquarters and had under his immediate command the Commanders-in-Chief (CINCs) for air, land, and sea. Slim was appointed commander of 14th Army and served as operational commander of land forces in Burma under CINC Land, General Giffard. Unlike the French senior commanders, Lord Mountbatten, General Giffard and Slim respected one another and cooperated to achieve a common end.

Admiral Mountbatten integrated Allied air forces under the command of Air Chief Marshal, Sir Robert Peirse. Peirse's second in command, United States Major-General Stratemeyer, was placed in command of the Eastern Air Command, which corresponded to Slim's command of all land forces on the Burma front.³⁵

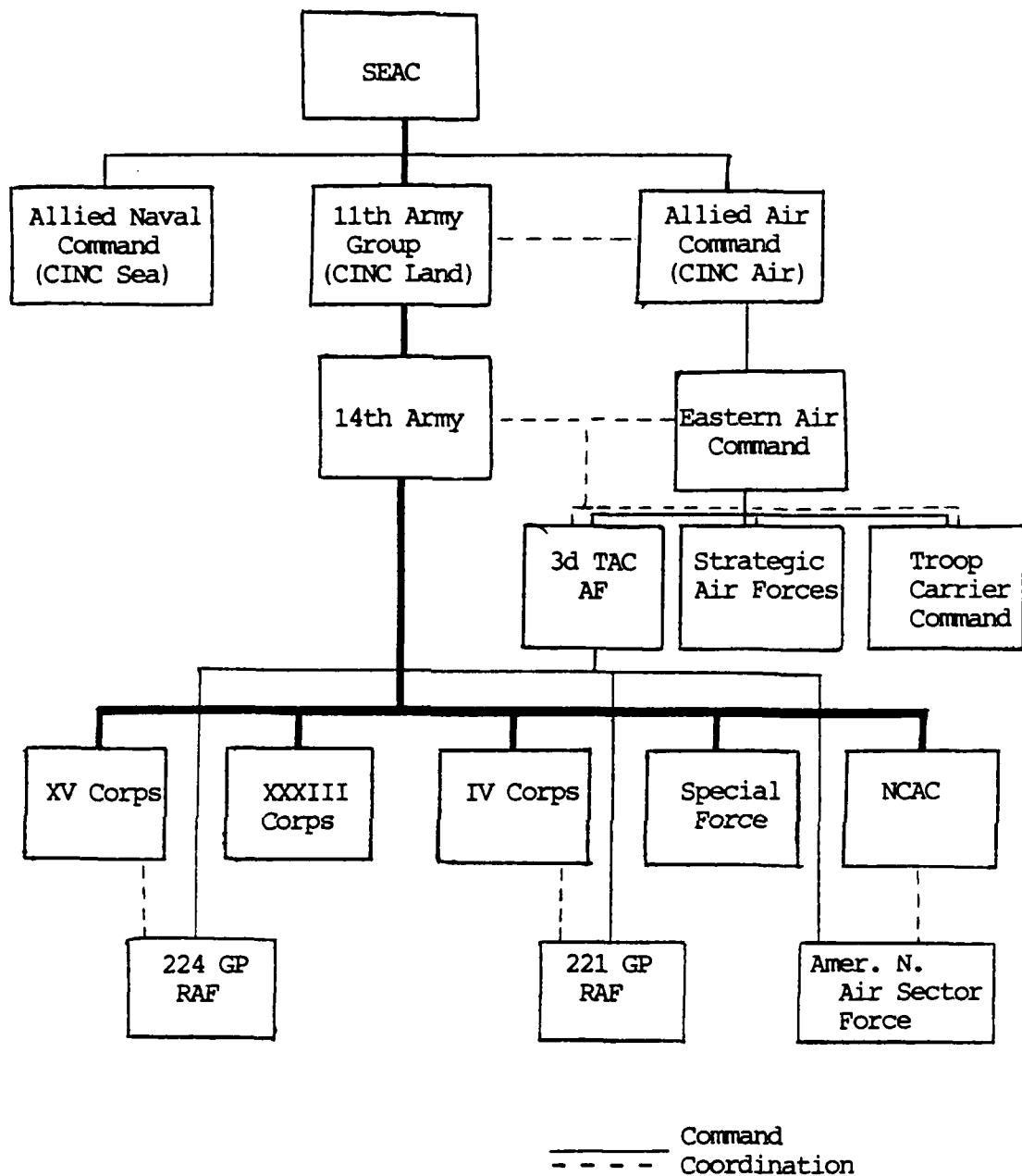


Figure 2.

Burma represented a secondary theater of operations for the Allies. There was an economy of force mission which greatly reduced the expectation of additional forces or any sort of priority for logistic support. As a result, the combined British and American chiefs had limited aims. Allied strategy for Burma

was twofold: keep Japanese formations engaged in Burma to siphon forces from the Pacific theater; and develop both air and land lines of communications with China to support combat operations in that theater. Britain, for her part, wanted to retake Burma as an end in itself. Unity of effort required that strategic and operational commanders agree on conditions which would constitute success in the theater of operations. The formulation of military strategy and resulting campaign plan should reflect the same end. As the operational commander in Burma, Slim set his operational objective to achieve both British and Alliance strategic goals, but by ways that the chiefs had not deemed possible. His focus on defeating the Japanese forces, rather than the terrain oriented objective envisioned by the combined chiefs, would achieve the desired ends, and also provide the opportunity for complete victory over Japanese forces in Burma.

Slim's leadership would be the critical factor in generating the 14th Army's combat power. He had taken a very active role in the rebuilding of his army. From the general malaise existing after the retreat, the 14th Army had improved dramatically as a fighting force. Slim instilled confidence through realistic training and made his soldiers believe that they could defeat the Japanese. He also ensured that the command fully understood his campaign plan and intent for both major operations. He would first make the enemy come to him and thereby create an opportunity for wresting the initiative from his adversary.

Those skilled at making the enemy move do so by creating a situation to which he must conform; they entice him with something he is certain to take, and with lures of ostensible profit they await him in strength. Therefore a skilled commander seeks victory from the situation and does not demand it of his subordinates.³⁶

Field Marshall Slim faced a strong enemy force in the Japanese and correctly discerned that he would have to conduct his campaign in two phases. The first phase was to be a defensive operation in which Slim intended to draw the Japanese out of their defensive positions to attack his forces near Imphal-Kohima. He was in a position of relative weakness and needed time to build up his forces sufficiently for the second phase of the campaign plan -- the offensive. He correctly employed the defense in order to gain time for the build-up or reinforcement of friendly forces, and simultaneously, to weaken the enemy force and bring him to his offensive culminating point.

The risk, of course, was that the Japanese might be able to concentrate sufficient force at a decisive point and achieve a penetration and/or envelopment. Slim had to ensure adequate strength confronting the enemy's main effort to prevent being overwhelmed. This was made more difficult in that he had badly underestimated the enemy strength; the Japanese had ten divisions instead of five. Fortunately, his reconnaissance and intelligence effort provided the information necessary to re-orient his forces when the Japanese threatened critical sectors.

When one of his corps was cut off by the Japanese and surrounded for days, Slim succeeded in resupplying the corps by air while they continued to fight, supremely confident that he would not leave them stranded. They knew his intent was to make the Japanese expend their combat power against strong defensive positions and that knowledge sustained them.

Slim's leadership during the operation produced maximum combat power from the forces available and brought the Japanese past their offensive culminating point. They lost 53,000 soldiers (a total of five combat divisions) during this phase of the operation.³⁷ The Japanese were unable to retain the ground won during their offensive action and withdrew to the south to gain defensible terrain.

Slim's drive to the Irrawaddy River during the second phase of the campaign was made possible by the defensive phase of the operation. His strength relative to the Japanese was now much improved; defense, the stronger form of war had set the preconditions for offensive action and victory. Mountbatten and Giffard allowed the operational commander to execute his plan and they supported him superbly. Slim achieved unity of effort by ensuring that both his superiors and subordinate commanders knew his intent. Unity of effort would not have been possible without unity of command.

At the operational level of war, unity of command exists when one person possesses the ultimate responsibility for

operations within the theater of operations. The Allies established command relationships that ensured unity of command. Slim was then able to formulate a campaign plan that linked two major operations to produce decisive results. He integrated the air force to provide the transport of troops and logistics so essential to his campaign plan. Mountbatten and Giffard allowed him to use his best judgement for planning when, where and how to engage the enemy. He had the freedom to make those difficult decisions and take the ultimate responsibility for success or failure. The Allies had chosen a superb operational commander who possessed the will and determination to succeed.

IV. Implications for Establishing Command Relationships

Historical examples provide insight into the type of challenges commanders face in war. Students of war endeavor to make logical deductions from such examples in an effort to preserve what led to victory and eliminate what led to failure. This section examines two such implications from WWII. The first implication is that command organization has a profound impact on unity of command and unity of effort. Secondly, historical example suggests that selection of the operational commander is crucial to victory.

FM 100-5 states that unity of command is required in order to employ military forces in a manner that develops their full combat power. "Unity of command means directing and coordinating the action of all forces toward a common goal or objective."³⁸ Unity of effort is possible only if unity of command exists as a precondition; it must exist in both the horizontal and vertical dimensions..

"Commands must not only ensure unity of effort within their own organizations, but must also promote it with supporting and supported elements as well as with sister services and allies. The fundamental prerequisite for unity of effort within Army organizations is an effective system of command which relies upon leadership to provide purpose, direction and motivation..."³⁹

Military units are matrix organizations; they are organized both functionally and operationally. The organizational

structure of the Army, for example, is easily understood in its basic form. Command relationships are defined by corps, division, brigade, battalion, etc., with each element in the hierarchy responsible to the next higher level.

Functional elements, however, also exist which have their own internal command relationships. The battalions and batteries of the artillery brigade, the battalions and companies of the engineer group, the battalions and batteries of the air defense brigade all may be attached to maneuver forces for operational control, however, they still retain a command-less-opcon relationship to their parent command. The "collision" of the functional and operational chains of command often creates difficulties for the commander even in tactical units/task forces. At the tactical level of war, command relationships are complicated as elements of functional commands are tasked to perform their functional specialty for the maneuver element. These procedures are fairly well refined at the tactical level (Corps and below) and habitual relationships usually help prevent serious differences of opinion.

At the operational level of war, command relationships are of increased importance because of the impact they have on the planning and execution of campaigns and major operations. Unity of command and unity of effort are more difficult to achieve.

Joint commanders face the "service component" problem. For example, a joint task force (JTF) commander, if an Army officer, will not have operational control of Naval forces. In that same

JTF, when the commander employs a Marine Amphibious Force, the Marine commander may appeal to his service component should he disagree with the manner in which the JTF commander employs the Marines. Another example is the question regarding whether there should be a single tactical air authority when both Air Force and Marine air assets are operating within the theater of operations.⁴⁰ It is obvious that unity of command is difficult to achieve.

In combined operations, the commander is even less able to exercise the prerogatives of command concerning other nations' forces. The B.E.F. in France was under the command of Gamelin (through Georges), but it ultimately responded to Whitehall if there was a conflict of interest.

To achieve operational effectiveness an operational commander must have the greatest possible freedom of action, with respect to his command authority. He must be allowed to shift forces and assign missions without undue restriction from service components in the case of joint operations, or national authorities in the case of coalition warfare.

Military history contains many examples of commanders vying for control of combat forces which they felt would be necessary to achieve victory. General Eisenhower fought for operational control of Allied air forces to support the Normandy landings (they were previously controlled by the combined chiefs of staff). General Manstein at Kharkov would not accept command of German Group A unless given full command. Unity of command in

both cases was deemed essential to accomplishment of the mission.

Establishing effective command relationships has a direct bearing on unity of command and unity of effort. A potentially more important implication from this study concerns the selection of an operational commander. The implication is that this is a crucial decision upon which the success or failure of the campaign hinges. " Command is the principle ingredient of and the foundation for successful organizational performance -- for mission accomplishment."⁴¹

V. Contemporary Application

Michael Howard has said that history should be studied in depth, breadth, and in context.⁴² In an attempt to apply lessons from previous conflicts to the present day, it is essential first to consider pertinent technological changes and the consequent increase in military capabilities. Lessons learned from history must be applied in today's context to be of value.

Technology has changed dramatically in the years following WWII. Information technology, communications, and precision guided weapons are among the most revolutionary changes which have military application. The capability now exists, for example, to acquire real-time target intelligence, communicate that information to decision-makers and launch highly accurate weapons systems to destroy targets at the enemy's operational and strategic depths. Thus, the constantly increasing lethality of the battlefield now extends past the immediate battle zone to rear area and intercontinental distances.

Targeting and deep strike capabilities derived from these technological advances have radically transformed the means available to the commander for planning and executing his campaign plan. Unfortunately, the enemy possesses many of these same capabilities making logistic infrastructure (ports and depots) and troop concentration areas especially vulnerable.

Perhaps the most important result of these changes is the

impact they have had on the time the commander has to apply operational art. Time has always been a precious commodity for the commander. Assessment of intelligence, decisions on courses of action and concentration or shifting of forces to execute the plan all take time. Any measure which provides a time advantage is of inestimable value in war. Without time, the commander cannot make effective use of the combat power available -- that very combat power he sought so diligently to develop.

In addition to the factor of change, application of lessons learned from history must also be viewed with regard to a potential enemy. NATO forces face a potential enemy whose operational concept of continuous combat characterized by mass, momentum and echelonment of combat forces threatens to overwhelm Western defenses. The Soviets have a maneuver based doctrine designed to disrupt the operational tactics of the defender. The complete wartime subordination of non-Soviet Warsaw Pact countries to the Soviet High Command of Forces provides a unified command structure whereby ground forces, naval assets and air assets are subordinate to one superior command.⁴³

The Western Alliance depends heavily on the advantage of the defender and technological advantage to counter this threat. The key to success will be effective operational fires to break Soviet momentum, combined with the ability to rapidly concentrate forces at the decisive points to blunt penetrations. The theater

commander must then use operational maneuver to gain the initiative and conclude the war on terms favorable to NATO. Speed will be of the essence both in terms of decision-making and execution.

The lessons learned from the Allied defeat in 1940 pointed to the need for a command structure where clearly defined responsibilities permit rapid assimilation of combat intelligence at the operational commander's headquarters. Gamelin did not achieve this and he was never able to keep abreast of the situation or meet the most critical threat with timely decisions. In other words, he was never able to get inside the enemy's decision cycle.

Overlapping or layering of command slows the process. We have seen on the Western Front how command relationships delayed the transfer/sharing of information between headquarters; commanders were unable to make critical or timely decisions due to poor command organization.

Edward Luttwak points to the problem of overcentralization and layering as endemic to the U.S. military establishment.

"The combat forces of each service are supposedly controlled by 'unified' or 'specified' joint service commands, but they still respond first and last to their own service fiefdoms, which train, equip, and maintain them with their own supporting commands, under the supervision of their own service chiefs, who alone decide the fate of each officer's career"⁴⁴

He suggests as a solution the creation of a central military staff independent of "military fiefdoms" to advise the Secretary of Defense.

The Packard Commission's report concluded in its section on Military Organization and Command, that "The measure of command now accorded the nation's combatant commanders is not always sufficient for our forces to perform with high confidence of success and coherence of effort. Unified Commanders require broader authority than "operational command", as now understood and practised, in order to meet the heavy responsibilities that their missions place on them.⁴⁵ The commission refers here to command relationships that require the operational commander to issue orders to subordinate units through those units' service component commander.

Prior to the Defense Reorganization Act a provision did exist whereby unified commanders, in an emergency or urgent situation, could exercise operational command over a service's force without going through the service component commander, but this could be done only upon approval of the Secretary of Defense and the JCS.⁴⁶ Now, recent changes contained in the Defense Reorganization Act of 1986 greatly expand the role of the Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff as a service integrator and also clarify the command authority of unified and specified combatant commanders.

The authority, direction, and control of the commander of a combatant command with respect to the commands and forces assigned to that command include the command functions of --

(A) giving authoritative direction to subordinate commands and forces necessary to carry out missions assigned to the command, including authoritative direction over all aspects of military operations, joint training, and logistics;

(B) prescribing the chain of command to the commands and forces within the command;

(C) organizing commands and forces within that command as he considers necessary to carry out missions assigned to the command;

(D) employing forces within that command as he considers necessary to carry out missions assigned to the command;

(E) assigning command functions to subordinate commanders;

(F) coordinating and approving those aspects of administration and support...and discipline necessary to carry out missions assigned to the command, and;

(G) exercising the authority with respect to selecting subordinate commanders, selecting combatant command staff, suspending subordinates, and convening courts-martial...

Subordinate commanders shall communicate with other elements of the Department of Defense only through the commander of the combatant command or in accordance with procedures approved by the commander....The Secretary of Defense shall ensure the commanders of combatant commands have sufficient authority over the forces assigned to their commands to exercise effective command over those forces....If a commander of a combatant command at any time considers his authority over any of the forces assigned to that command to be insufficient to command effectively, the commander shall promptly inform the Secretary of Defense.⁴⁷

The commanders-in-chief of the unified commands were also given a stronger voice in the military procurement and strategic-operational aspects of their responsibilities.

Another recommendation by the commission was also taken by Congress.

"Unified Commanders should be given broader authority to structure subordinate commands, joint task forces, and support activities in a way that best supports their missions and results in a significant reduction in the size and numbers of military headquarters."⁴⁸

Hopefully, this will reduce the impact on another aspect of layering -- the "service component mentality." This refers to the propensity of the services to "look out for themselves" in matters relating to command, assignment of mission, funding requirements, etc. Luttwak maintains that

...hardly any (of the past Secretaries of Defense) have tried to focus on the operation of the armed forces -- To question, say, the obsession of the Marines with classic amphibious landings in the Iwo Jima style, or the refusal of the Air Force to give up its role of close air support, notwithstanding today's proliferation of anti-aircraft weapons, or the Navy's entire concept of aircraft-carrier operations, for which less glamorous missions (e.g., mine warfare) are persistently sacrificed.⁴⁹

The problem created by this situation is that efficiency inevitable suffers. The French Army chose to rely on ground firepower systems rather than trust in French Air Force to provide a capability. The Army was jealous of its mission. Slim, in contrast, did not choose to employ airborne forces out of pure service pride, but instead chose the wiser option of using those same airframes for transport and logistic support .

However well the layers of the present command structure suit the contingency of general war, they are not always well-suited to the regional crises, tensions and conflicts that are commonplace today.⁵⁰ For example, there is a good possibility that the next conflict might be on the scale of the Korean War. Such a conflict in Southwest Asia would require rapid deployment of a mobile and versatile force, on the order of a joint task force.⁵¹ The challenge will be to establish command relationships for employment of the task force that will adapt well to the soon-to-follow greater level of commitment.⁵²

"For contingencies short of general war, the Secretary of Defense, with the advice of the Chairman and the JCS, should have the flexibility to establish the shortest possible chains of command for each force deployed,⁵³ consistent with proper supervision and support."

Reduction of the layering of commands, and elimination of the "service component mentality" through emphasis on joint assignments is a first step towards the goal of unity of command and unity of effort. Selection of the operational commander to command the joint or combined force is the decision which will determine whether the most is gained from the force available.

VI. Conclusion

The real danger is that generals may slavishly model their personal behavior and their organization on those of some outstandingly successful commander, when they are quite unlike him in character, mental qualities, and perhaps physical appearance. Imitations are never masterpieces.⁵⁴

Command relationships will differ for each set of circumstances. Civilian and military authorities must also reevaluate command relationships as doctrine and technology change. Even the establishment of the perfect command relationships for a given conflict will not guarantee success. They must be complemented by the condition of the instrument of war and senior commanders who possess the vision and level of competence to apply operational art. The U.S. military requires leaders capable of generating every ounce of combat power possible from the available combat potential.

The recent changes produced by the Defense Reorganization Act of 1986 are but the most recent attempt to match exigencies of national security to the way in which military leaders exercise command of the armed forces of the United States. Congress has granted combatant commanders increased command authority; it is now up to the services to ensure that the intent of the legislation is carried out. We have an opportunity and an obligation to get the command relationships straight and practiced before the next war.

No military force can afford to have the head severed from the body. Neither can it afford to have a head that is incapable of providing the required leadership. Too much is at stake for combat power to be wasted through improper use.

Whereas the tempo of warfare once allowed for recovery from the establishment of initially poor command relationships and troop dispositions, any future conflict may be most unforgiving of mistakes of either nature. The same applies to the selection of operational commanders. Time will be too short as evidenced in France for a change to do much good. Michael Howard says that the delta between doctrine and reality for the next war must be as minimal as possible; we cannot get in exactly right but it must be close.⁵⁵ We must, however, get the command relationships right, and place the right commanders with the right qualities and attributes into the critical positions. We will not be able to recover in time if we fail in these essential tasks.

The lessons gleaned from France and Burma must be applied by the Allies in any future conflict. "The German's gambled everything on the slowness and incompetence of the Allies and were proven right; France capitulated."⁵⁶ The Soviets may gamble in a similar manner if they perceive that NATO command relationships appear to preclude rapid response to an invasion. The Allies cannot afford to be paralyzed as the French were in 1940. NATO must be prepared to defend as Slim did at Imphal-Kohima, and wrest the initiative from the enemy through operational maneuver, again following the example of Slim on the Irrawaddy.

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