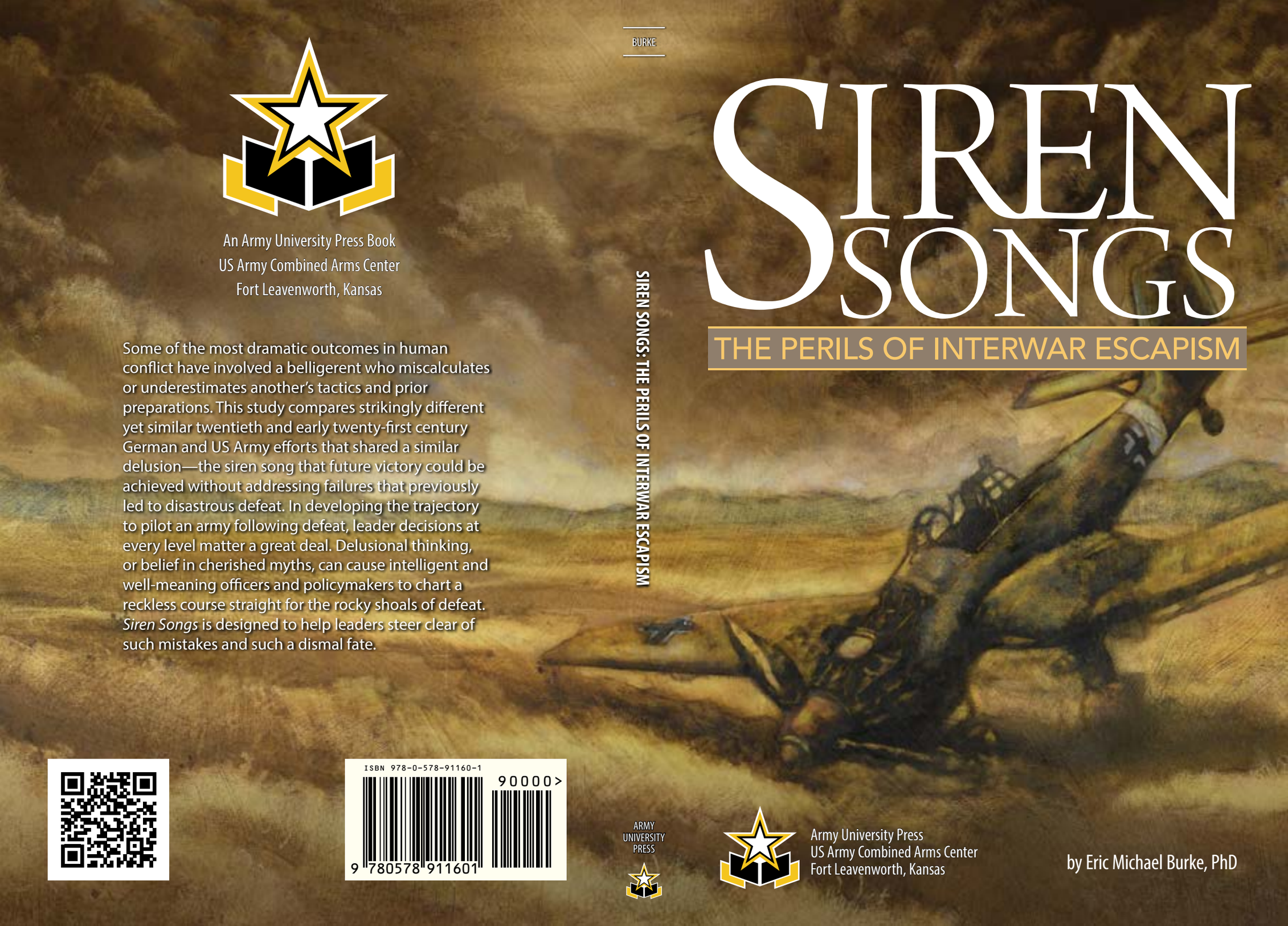

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Some of the most dramatic outcomes in human conflict have involved a belligerent who miscalculates or underestimates another's tactics and prior preparations. This study compares strikingly different yet similar twentieth and early twenty-first century German and US Army efforts that shared a similar delusion—the siren song that future victory could be achieved without addressing failures that previously led to disastrous defeat. In developing the trajectory to pilot an army following defeat, leader decisions at every level matter a great deal. Delusional thinking, or belief in cherished myths, can cause intelligent and well-meaning officers and policymakers to chart a reckless course straight for the rocky shoals of defeat. *Siren Songs* is designed to help leaders steer clear of such mistakes and such a dismal fate.

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BURKE

SIREN SONGS: THE PERILS OF INTERWAR ESCAPISM

ARMY UNIVERSITY PRESS

SIREN SONGS

THE PERILS OF INTERWAR ESCAPISM

Army University Press
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by Eric Michael Burke, PhD

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Preface

escapism (noun)—*the activity of avoiding reality by imagining exciting but impossible activities.*[1]

In the first chapter of his canonical treatise, *On War* (1832), Prussian military theorist Carl von Clausewitz offered an analogy in lieu of a formal definition of his subject. Aiming to avoid "any of the clumsy journalistic definitions of war," Clausewitz instead famously offered the vivid image of two dueling wrestlers (*Ringende)*, each striving "by physical force to compel the other to submit to his will."[2] This act of compulsion was achieved when one or the other had effectively "throw[n] his adversary, and thus render[ed] him incapable of further resistance."[3] No foe was truly defeated until he was left with no "prospect of a change for the better," and his position of decisive disadvantage became obviously not "of a transitory nature."[4]

In combat sports like wrestling, as in war, competitors vie for supremacy by applying a suite of tactics (in wrestling: positions, moves, strikes, holds, and "throws") in a coordinated and progressive attempt to render the other "incapable of further resistance." As each subsequent move or blow is parried, absorbed, or countered, each belligerent actively seeks to adapt to rapidly changing circumstances and flexibly apply carefully trained techniques at the right moment to clinch final victory. Neither knows with absolute certainty which tactics an opponent might employ at any given moment, or how a particular match might unfold. Thus, a fighter's likelihood of success is to the greatest extent contingent on his or her mental cunning, physical flexibility, stamina, and endurance. While striking power, raw strength, and even physical mass can prove advantageous, these attributes can also pose dangerous limitations. The ability to punch or kick with great force is useless against an opponent who can avoid or parry such a blow. The ability to hurl an opponent from the mat is useless if he or she cannot be grasped to begin with. Finally, while mass can be handy in pinning a fallen opponent, it can also make achieving the same dominant position a challenge in the first place. Ultimately, the athlete boasting the most versatile arsenal of skills, attacks, and defenses is the most likely to, quite literally, come out on top.

At least on paper, opponents in most organized combat sports are paired in part based upon their physical similarity, experience, and capabilities. Rarely will a markedly weaker, smaller, or significantly handicapped fighter face a comparative giant veteran competitor, let alone a

team of them. Although the relative skill, fitness, and spirit of athletes can vary dramatically, some modicum of control ensures at least a nominally fair fight. Even matchups with relative physical parity, however, often prove dramatically uneven for other more complicated reasons. The fact that such woefully uneven pairings almost routinely reveal themselves despite earnest attempts to avoid them beforehand lends much of the excitement to rooting for an ostensible "underdog." Victory against even the tallest odds always remains on the table, and allegorical tales of unlikely "David and Goliath" successes motivate and inspire those popularly unfavored at the outset.

Professional athletes train tirelessly between matches to condition, prepare, and improve their skills, seeking to perfect difficult moves and expand their range of options in their arsenal for future bouts. They reflect on recent victories and defeats, ponder their successes and failures, and, ideally, learn from their mistakes. For maximum efficiency, most develop training regimens—crafting fine-tuned conditioning and nutrition plans calibrated to realize the greatest benefit before the next match. Time and energy limitations require athletes and their coaches to make hard choices about what specific aspects of their capabilities to strengthen and perfect given their recent experiences and the likely weaknesses of known future competitors.

In some especially extraordinary situations, a fighter might incapacitate an opponent with a skillfully landed "knockout" at the very outset of a fight. Gambling everything on the success of such a rarified blow is a profoundly risky strategy. In most cases, bouts and wars alike end with one exhausted participant placed in a position wherein there is "no prospect of a change for the better," and no act of will or feat of bodily flexibility offers an escape. Far from being "knocked out," the pinned defeated is simply exhausted. They have run out of options.

Some of the most dramatic outcomes in both combat sports and human conflicts arise from a faulty calibration of one belligerent's tactics and prior preparations with the particular characteristics of a particular contest or foe. As Clausewitz warned, the "first, the supreme, the most decisive act of judgment" in war is to accurately assess the evolving political nature and strategic character of the crisis, "not to take it for something, or wish to make of it something which by the nature of its relations it is impossible for it to be."[5] Long-influential mistranslations of his assertion have suggested that conflicts can be neatly categorized into more or less static "kinds" (conventional, unconventional, limited, total, etc.), ignoring the political essence and chaotic dynamism organic to human conflict that

Clausewitz emphasized. Following this flawed conceptual azimuth, soldiers and scholars alike have taken the mistranslated admonition to mean that a nation's armed forces must be right-sized and relevantly prepared for the particularities of a specific "kind" of conflict supposedly looming on the horizon. At the very least, preparations to develop an army during interwar periods typically focus on getting the developmental equation "less wrong" than an adversary does.[6] To be sure, neither an army nor a championship fighter can accurately predict what variety of challenges will arise on the morrow. One particularly salient and historically prevalent blind spot, however, is the propensity for contests to prove frustratingly hard to define. More often than not, they exhibit "hybrid" characteristics of multiple types of conflicts or transform from one "kind" to another mid-stream via the chaotic exchange of blows and counterblows. Although Clausewitz barely addressed this explicitly, his operative paradigm of war as a fundamentally chaotic and utterly unpredictable bout between two violent politically charged *Ringende* implied the likelihood for just such a phenomenon.

While alluring in theory, the belief of military forces throughout history in the ability to prevent a conflict or contingency from transforming or evolving from one kind to another due to any number of causes (including, most saliently, enemy action) is a myth. The best that leaders can hope for is to prepare a force to effectively manage, cope with, and adapt to ever-changing circumstances, ideally anticipating likely transitions given their assigned objectives, national strategies, and the operational environment. Despite this reality, innovative ideas, technological breakthroughs, organizational restructuring, or novel operational concepts have frequently played the role of dangerous siren songs for armies in interwar eras that yearned for panaceas to avoid their most vexing weaknesses and leverage proven strengths. Instead of conducting maximally honest, painfully thorough, and uncomfortably comprehensive analyses of major defeats, armies tend to focus on how they will avoid particular "kinds" of conflicts next time—usually by winning so quickly or utilizing such means that any conversion of future wars into the kinds they apparently cannot win will be rendered impossible. After all, why prepare for something that is not going to happen?

The chapters that follow are not so much a comparison as a juxtaposition of two salient twentieth and early twenty-first century instances of this very phenomenon: the German military (*Kaiserheer*, *Reichsheer*, and *Wehrmacht*) during its half-century attempt to avoid the perils of attritional *Materialschlacht* warfare, and the post-Vietnam US Army during

its similar half-century attempt to avoid the perils of attritional (in terms of blood, money, and public support) low-intensity and counterinsurgency warfare. On its face, this apposition can seem inappropriate given the fortunately striking contrasts in the political organization, strategic objectives, and military ethos of the two armies. Despite this, as the following chapters illustrate, both organizations fell prey to much the same delusion: the siren song that future victory could be achieved without substantively addressing the failures that previously led to disastrous defeat. Both militaries were lured by the seductive notes of imminent salvation during interwar periods, while both contemplated how to develop forces which could cope with what senior leaders perceived to be fundamental changes in the character, if not the nature, of modern warfare. While many historians have referenced both armies as examples of military innovation "getting it right," when seen through a different lens, their stories become fraught with warnings. In contemplating the developmental trajectory for piloting an army through the aftermath of defeat, the decisions made by leaders at every echelon matter a great deal. Falling victim to delusional thinking, or giving into fallacies that confirm cherished myths, can cause otherwise intelligent and well-meaning officers and policymakers to unknowingly chart a reckless course straight for the rocky shoals of disaster.

Notes

1. “Escapism,” *Cambridge Academic Content Dictionary*, accessed 28 October 2022, https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/escapism.

2. Carl von Clausewitz, *Vom Kriege* (Berlin: Ferd. Dümmler’s Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1867), 3, 6–7; and Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, trans. J. J. Graham (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner, 1908), 2–3, 5.

3. Clausewitz, *Vom Kriege*, 3, 6–7; and Clausewitz, *On War*, 2–3, 5.

4. Clausewitz, *Vom Kriege*, 3, 6–7; and Clausewitz, *On War*, 2–3, 5.

5. Clausewitz, *On War*, 25.

6. Williamson Murray, *War, Strategy, and Military Effectiveness* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 141.

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Chapter 1
"We won the battles"
The *Reichsheer* in the Shadow of the Great War, 1918–21

The columns of grizzled veterans tramped eastward back into Germany in the late fall and winter of 1918, encountering a nation that embraced them as triumphant victors. They were not. Still, upon reaching Berlin, German troops bedecked in *feldgrau* and with sprigs of flowers protruding from their rifle barrels paraded down city streets lined with crowds waving the German flag. The city's population was still recovering from four exhausting years of grueling total war, but the only obvious evidence of defeat was the absence of the monarch who had sent them to war in the first place, Kaiser Wilhelm II. He had recently abdicated his throne and fled the country into exile and disgrace. In his place, the new socialist chancellor Friedrich Ebert greeted the veterans of storied battles like the Marne, Verdun, Tannenberg, and the final bloody *Kaiserschlacht*.[1] "I salute you who return unvanquished from the field," he proclaimed to troops gathered to hear him speak.[2] The hell through which these men had passed at the front was well known to all, adding to their grandeur in the eyes of the masses gathered to greet them.[3] Even so, the ranks of their legions were missing upward of two million men whose young lives had been sacrificed on behalf of a cause few understood.[4] In fact, such losses were in part a result of Germany having largely lost its way. The empire's prosecution of what allegedly began as an act of self-defense and honorable upholding of the empire's solemn treaty obligations had somehow transmogrified into the most inconceivably destructive war the world had ever seen. The Second Reich attempted a series of grotesquely risky *Glücksspiele* (gambles) with an entire generation of German youth, dramatically lost each and every bet, and paid with its existence.

Figure 1.1. Kaiser Willhelm II. Courtesy of Wikimedia Commons.

Das Glücksspiel

Given the young empire's perilous geopolitical situation and comparatively limited resources for war-making, German statesmen and soldiers at least as far as the mid-18th century recognized the imperative to win wars quickly and decisively.[5] Given war's frustrating habit of spiraling out of hand and moving in unforeseen directions, Germany critically needed to avoid a conflict's spontaneous transformation into something extending beyond the nation's finite means. The very first of many limited resources to be exhausted was likely to be popular support for any effort deemed too expensive in lives and treasure by the populace. The fragile fabric of national solidarity was liable to tear if too much blood was spilled, too many hardships endured, and too many heavy blows dealt to the Reich's economy. To avoid this, a corps of skilled and well-educated professionals needed to carefully manage the empire's warfighting and keep military affairs well in hand while the Kaiser and his retinue of policymakers took care of the bigger picture.[6]

For the most part during the early decades of the twentieth century, the German General Staff (*Generalstab*) developed impressive martial expertise that was unmatched by its neighbors and competitors.[7] Originally an outgrowth of Prussia's embarrassing and disastrous defeat at the hands of Napoleon I's *Grande Armée* in 1806, the *Generalstab* had by 1914 evolved into the world's foremost body of consummate military professionals. The elite of Germany's prestigious *Kriegsakademie* and the product of a remarkably rigorous and highly selective training and indoctrination program, *Generalstab* members took great pride in their command of the art and science of war. Operating as both a contingency planning and doctrine development proponent, staff officers also rotated between headquarters and combatant commands in the field. In training or in battle, *Generalstab* officers served as the staff's intellectual attachés, providing field commanders with insight as they pursued their assigned objectives. Following the 1871 ascension of the institution's first chief of staff, General Helmuth von Moltke, "The Elder," members increasingly served at the highest echelons of Imperial German Army (*Kaiserheer*) command.[8]

From the beginning, *Generalstab* officers toiled to become expert practitioners of a distinctive German way of war that accepted the necessity of fighting outnumbered. German officers were trained to habitually seek to envelop an enemy before striving to annihilate him in a decisive "cauldron battle," or *Kesselschlacht*. By encouraging junior tactical leaders to be independent and maintain the initiative, the *Kaiserheer* became world-renowned for its capacity to adapt amid the chaos of battle. Wide-

spread trust in the initiative of subordinates, expressed most famously in the Prussian tradition of "mission orders" (*Auftragstaktik*), was crucial to a style of war that relied on rapid decentralized maneuver and critical coordination of often-far-flung and disparate marching columns. By outwitting larger opponents, carving its armies up into smaller pieces by adept maneuver, and swallowing up the fragments through climactic *Kesselschlachten*, the *Kaiserheer* sought its victories more by finesse than sheer weight.[9]

As early as 1871, Moltke was convinced that Germany's future conflicts had to be taken one enemy at a time. Despite an ominous 1894 Russo-French alliance which augured the possibility of just such a contingency, a two-front war was to be avoided at all costs. "Germany dare not hope to free itself in a short time" by a swift decisive engagement on one front before turning to a second, he warned.[10] Adept diplomacy and statecraft would be required far more than military might in any such situation.[11] The Reich's creation itself had been achieved not only via decisive battlefield coups over the growing Reich's several enemies, but also the brilliantly effective *Realpolitik* of the "Iron Chancellor," Otto von Bismarck, Prussia's premiere politician and strategist.[12] This skillful marriage between politics and warfighting was the new empire's only hope to succeed in future endeavors.

Even so, practical realities did not prevent German military professionals from contemplating worst-case scenarios. In a 1905 bid to inspire the Reich government with the pressing need to enlarge the *Kaiserheer*'s strength, chief of the *Generalstab*, Count Alfred von Schlieffen, developed a potential plan to successfully confront just such a two-front scenario. While not an official operations plan, Schlieffen's exceedingly detailed memorandum approached what might in current US Army parlance be considered an operating concept — a broad outline of how Imperial Germany would fight such a war simultaneously with the Russian Tsar and republican France.

Figure 1.2. Count Alfred von Schlieffen. Courtesy of Wikimedia Commons.

Schlieffen understood that in such a desperate scenario, the Reich's only advantage would be the same as its major vulnerability: central position and interior lines. Swift and decisive victory over one or the other opponent had to be followed immediately by rapid transfer of forces across Germany to the opposite front to repel imminent invasion. Germany's impressive internal rail network would probably allow for this, but just barely. Only by this means could the Reich, "a mollusk without a shell" in Bismarck's metaphor, survive such a national emergency.[13]

Such planning, of course, essentially ignored the specific political contours of such a contingency, or the possible relevance a two-front war's causes and political objectives might have for what it would take to successfully prosecute it militarily. The *Generalstab*'s purpose, as its members conceived of it, was strictly the military—that is to say, tactical—prosecution of war on behalf of the Kaiser.[14] Due to widespread assumptions regarding the potentially laggard pace of Russian mobilization for war, the plan contemplated within Schlieffen's memorandum assumed that regardless of the political motivation for a German offensive war on two fronts, Germany would first need to neutralize the French Third Republic's armed forces, and then Russia's, in that order. The operation would hinge upon a bold logistical gamble requiring the sustainment and maneuver of hundreds of thousands of men and horses, along with their attendant weapons and equipment, across hundreds of miles in a little over five weeks' time. When penciled on a map, thrusting five whole field armies through the erstwhile-neutral Belgian countryside and into France to fall on the rear of an unsuspecting foe defending along the German border looked straightforward enough from a strictly military perspective. In reality, such an endeavor was without precedent in military history. Many scholars have argued that Schlieffen to some degree understood the fantastical expectations inherent with the operations outlined in his memorandum and only intended the draft as a clarion call for army expansion. Even so, the basic contours of the leviathan "hammer and anvil" offensive contained within its pages would ultimately be manifest in the *Kaiserheer*'s 1914 deployment orders.[15]

In 1906, *Generaloberst* Helmuth von Moltke, "The Younger," nephew of the famous "Elder," succeeded Schlieffen as the next chief of the *Generalstab* and commander of the *Kaiserheer*. Attempting to address the many inherent problems with the Schlieffen memorandum, Moltke drafted his own mobilization and deployment plans in 1911 and 1913, drawing more from the Count's staff rides than his famous 1906 memorandum. Moltke had strong doubts that Germany could successfully

fight two wars sequentially (as opposed to simultaneously) given the unfavorable geopolitical circumstances facing the Reich.[16] He eliminated the portion of Schlieffen's intended northern advance through the "Maastricht Appendix" in the Netherlands in favor of leaving Dutch ports open as a vital "windpipe" for German trade.[17] This would apply during a potentially prolonged conflict or even British blockade following Germany's arbitrary violation of the neutrality of Britain's continental ally, Belgium. Moltke also chose to bolster divisions assigned to the German left flank in the west by redistributing troops charged with contributing to the right hook, altering the proportionate balance of the wings.[18] In assessing the possibility of a simultaneous offensive strike to the east, he determined that the risk of Russian retreat across the vast open terrain of the western borderlands and consequent overextension of German lines of communication was altogether too risky. The war in the east would have to remain defensive until France was defeated.[19]

Figure 1.3. General Helmuth von Moltke, "The Younger." Courtesy of Wikimedia Commons.

Contrary to public assertions by the Kaiser and many other Germans, few in the *Generalstab* anticipated a short war when they initiated hostilities in the late summer of 1914.[20] Moltke had warned the Kaiser more than a decade before the onset of hostilities that any war with France would likely "be a people's war that cannot be won in one decisive battle."[21] Instead, given the massive population and prodigious resources of its enemies, along with major contemporary technological advances in defensive firepower, Moltke believed any conflict would almost certainly "turn into a long and tedious struggle" with an enemy coalition "that will not give up before the strength of its entire people has been broken."[22] The German people would eventually become "utterly exhausted, even if we should be victorious."[23] Moltke's dire prediction was shared by many other Prussian officers, who feared a "tenacious and protracted" war.[24] Quartermas-

ter-General Ernst Köpke insisted that the *Kaiserreich* could not possibly "expect quick, decisive victories," but rather "a tedious and bloody crawling forward step-by step . . . siege-style."[25] In fact, he cautioned, the German people should prepare themselves emotionally for "these unpleasant perspectives if we wish to avoid the worrisome pessimism already at the outset of war."[26] Unfortunately, these warnings were largely ignored.

Despite Moltke's misgivings about even his revised version of Schlieffen's vision, as well as *Generalstab* assumptions that a protracted war of attrition on two simultaneous fronts was both unavoidable and likely unwinnable, the staff enjoyed few alternative options given the institution's responsibilities as Germany's premiere warfighting body. Any further warnings to the Kaiser or German people concerning the extreme danger inherent in initiating what was almost certain to become a vexing two-front war would have threatened the prestige and self-respect of the *Generalstab*. The august body of officers interpreted its role as strictly to plan and conduct military operations, not advise the sovereign in his foreign policy deliberations. Regardless of the policy's relative soundness, the *Generalstab*'s duty was to strive for success. Everything else necessarily had to be left to a perilous trust in the supposed exceptionalism of the German martial spirit and the fickle hands of fate.[27]

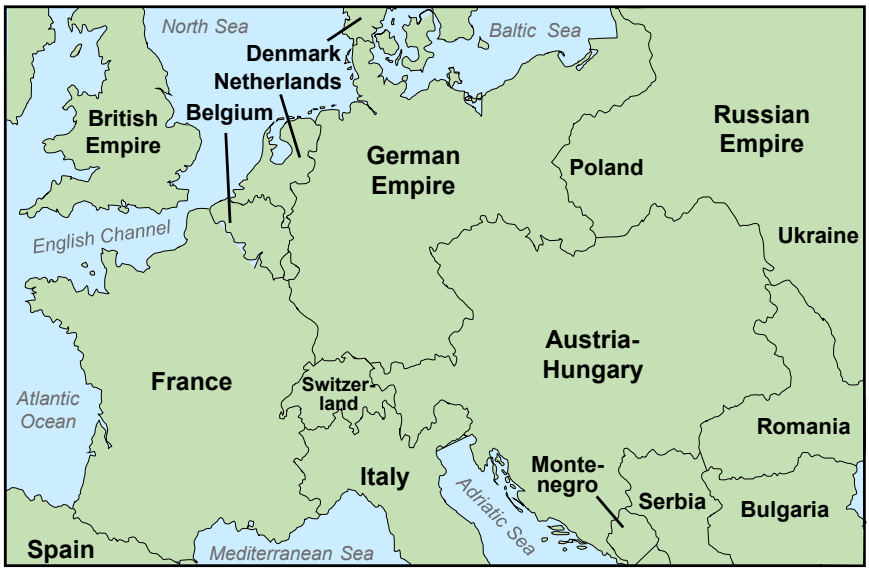

Figure 1.4. World War I Map, 1914. Created by Army University Press.

In truth, even the basic contours of both Schlieffen's memorandum and Moltke's plan were woefully out of step with both the Kaiser's political aims and the *Kaiserheer*'s real military capabilities upon the outbreak of war in 1914.[28] The planned invasion of neutral Belgium all but ensured the small nation's powerful British ally would intervene, dangerously increasing the already steep challenge facing the outnumbered Reich. Despite this, Moltke's revisions did not contemplate diplomatic or naval intervention to challenge a British expeditionary force landing on the continent. In fact, little to no meaningful coordination occurred between the German army and navy in planning for war. Moltke's plan, despite revisions allotting more forces to the east than in Schlieffen's draft, still fundamentally underestimated the severity of the Russian threat if troops mobilized more quickly than anticipated. In basely ignoring much of any role for Germany's own ally, Austria-Hungary, its treaty obligations to whom would play no small part in bringing about the war in the first place, it also illustrated a failure to grasp the many strategic advantages accruing to a coalitional approach to war of the kind Germany would inevitably face. Worse yet, when footsore and horse-drawn German divisions of the decisive right wing reached the rail network termination along the Belgian-French frontier, their requirements would almost certainly outstrip the Reich's limited logistical capabilities. The German army would be far from the end of its rope before any climactic engagement before Paris fought against an enemy enjoying the benefit of interior lines ever took place.[29] As historian Holger Herwig observed, given that the 1914 offensive's original political aims contemplated little more than a preemptive bid for self-defense against a mobilizing enemy coalition, the extraordinary risk taken by the Wilhelmine regime and *Generalstab* was wildly "inconsistent with the stakes involved and the consequences of failure."[30] In terms of *antebellum* force development, the empire had failed to build a *Kaiserheer* that was technologically prepared to succeed in its brazen quest for swift victory. The German military, and indeed any other modern military of the time, lacked crucial battlefield reconnaissance and communications assets to facilitate sufficiently rapid command and control of such massive dispersed operations.[31] In short, as historian Dennis Showalter notes, the *Kaiserheer* was "overextended from before the war's beginning."[32] Even so, under the distinct impression that the Reich, despite many of its industrial and manpower advantages at the outset, could not possibly hope to prevail in a protracted "people's war" of attrition against a vast coalition of enemies, a series of swift knockout blows seemed the only option short of an unthinkable abandonment of Germany's treaty obligations or base capitulation to its enemies.[33]

As chief of the *Generalstab* and head of the *Oberste Heeresleitung* (OHL), or army supreme command, Moltke enjoyed near-complete control over the *Kaiserheer*'s organization and operations in the field. He was technically at the bottom of a lengthy chain of leadership hierarchy terminating with the Kaiser himself; however, in practice the successive *Generalstab* chiefs, and later the army's Chief of Staff, maintained near autonomy in prosecuting military strategy.[34] At the same time, the chief had to contend with the influence of forty-eight other army and naval officers who also enjoyed direct access to the Kaiser. The exigencies of running a wartime economy, managing the Reich's mobilization policies, and planning for arms and equipment acquisitions were all outside the purview of the 1914 *Generalstab*, which restricted itself solely to the military prosecution of the conflict.[35]

Following the outbreak of war and the wave of sequential declarations of belligerency that swept through the European alliance system in August 1914, Moltke and OHL were forced to begin that prosecution. Millions of German soldiers departed by foot, hoof, and rail to both the eastern and western frontiers—putting into effect decades of imaginative postulating and detailed planning. As is often the case in war, however, things very quickly failed to unfold as anticipated. Despite Moltke's modest adjustments to Schlieffen's original vision, the German right hook still needed to traverse 300 miles to reach the Marne, moving 15 miles and consuming more than a hundred tons of rations and fodder every day for three straight weeks.[36] Living off the land to compensate for logistical strain inevitably damaged relations with Belgian civilians, many of whom used sabotage to vent their grievances.[37] Damage to railways further exacerbated the already intractable challenges of maintaining such a logistically expensive advance.[38] Communications between Moltke's overly centralized headquarters and his far-flung army commanders also became badly strained, with no dispatches at all passing between them for days at a time.[39] By the time the right wing reached within striking distance of its objectives, its lifeline rail hubs were nearly 100 miles to the rear.[40]

By the first days of September, multiple German armies reported exhaustion in their ranks.[41] Confronted with a dramatic Allied counterattack from the direction of Paris and fearing encirclement of its own right wing, OHL ordered the threatened divisions to fall back. The supposedly decisive war-winning blow proved decisive in an altogether different way.[42] As summer turned to fall, the belligerents were gridlocked in field fortifications stretching hundreds of miles across western Europe with no flanks on either side to exploit. Despite its best-laid plans, Germany's war in the

west changed from a swift war of maneuver to a prolonged battle of attrition.[43] While ultimate defeat was not yet a foregone conclusion, the enemy coalition could now employ its greatest strength against Germany's greatest weakness.[44] The challenge of swiftly maneuvering millions of troops and their seemingly countless logistical assets over the vast distances required by German plans had proven beyond the pale of possibility.[45] In the end, foot and hoof-borne columns could not move with greater expediency than a foe enjoying the manifold benefits of rail-laced interior lines.[46] Beyond the many miscalculations, missteps, and inescapable frictions of war that beset Moltke's dusty columns, the German martial imagination had outstripped its real capabilities—and not for the last time.[47]

In the east, Russian forces mobilized much faster than either Schlieffen or Moltke anticipated, aggressively invading the East Prussian frontier simultaneous with the German offensive into Belgium. After Reich forces were defeated at Gumbinnen and their local commander began the process of evacuating the region entirely, the Kaiser promptly replaced him with General Paul von Hindenburg and his chief of staff, General Erich Ludendorff. Taking advantage of a foolishly divided Russian force, the new command team adeptly rushed German units to envelop and annihilate one isolated Tsarist army near Tannenberg before turning to push the other out of East Prussia. Destroying an entire enemy field army and capturing more than 90,000 prisoners in the process, Hindenburg and Ludendorff quickly became national heroes.[48]

As historian Gerhard Gross and others have shown, the fundamentally defensive victory at Tannenberg was far more the product of impressive staff work and timely intelligence than ingenious operational art.[49] Nor had the strategically minor victory restored the odds of ultimate German success in the Reich's larger war effort. Nevertheless, the German people happily concluded that the victory demonstrated adroit military leadership—ignoring major differences between the geographical, strategic, and operational contexts of the eastern and western fronts. Certainly, will to victory had not been lacking in the Reich's western armies. Had the troops been adequately commanded, so the story went, success would have crowned their efforts just as under the Hindenburg and Ludendorff headquarters.[50]

The failure of German arms to secure the Reich's larger strategic objectives in both theaters during the initial months of the conflict laid bare the exceedingly specific necessary conditions for the *Kaiserheer*'s operational concept to not only succeed, but even remain relevant. Relying on decisive campaigns of swift envelopment and annihilation of outwitted enemy armies necessitated operating in close proximity to logistical bases,

as well as foes who guilelessly cooperated, as they largely had during the wars of German unification.[51] It also required a speed in the movement of unprecedently massive armies all but impossible beyond the termini of limited rail networks. Even worse was the tendency of both the *Generalstab* and the German people toward confirmation bias in the form of their problematic fixation upon the few moments when these necessary conditions for the successful German way of war had occurred: in 1914, Tannenberg, and Tannenberg alone.

Despite the inherent logical limitations of the army's operational concept, the Kaiser blamed the Reich's stalemate in the west on Moltke's personal failings as a commander and replaced him with General Erich von Falkenhayn in the fall of 1914.[52] While the stalemate in the west remained mostly unbroken through 1915, limited German offensives in the east sought to bludgeon the Tsar's armies in a manner that exacerbated Russia's internal social and political tensions. During a surprise offensive into Galicia, the Germans collected hundreds of thousands of Russian prisoners, effectively reducing the Tsar's threat to the Reich's Austro-Hungarian allies and allowing Falkenhayn to shift German focus back to the French front. Still, as the second year of the conflict opened, although most of the German public remained confident in ultimate victory, Falkenhayn and the OHL could read the depressing writing on the wall. As the "kind of war" the Reich confronted in the west increasingly crystallized into an intransigently static war of positions (*Stellungskrieg*) and material attrition (*Materialschlacht*), the possibilities for eventual decisive German victory seemed ever more remote—likely requiring more diplomatic negotiation than bold schemes of maneuver. [53] Despite the seemingly hopeless situation, historian Holger Herwig writes, Falkenhayn was still determined "not only to hold every inch of territory gained . . . but also to reconquer every inch lost [during enemy counter-offensives], regardless of the cost."[54] That cost would prove inordinately expensive.[55]

The Russian road network needed for large-scale maneuver farther eastward was less than encouraging. The vastness of the steppe supported continual strategic withdrawals of Russian forces, allowing troops to avoid decisive annihilation. Thus, the predominating German operational concept of swift encirclement maneuvers was all but nullified by the geography and logistical exigencies of invading the interior of Russia. If the enemy could routinely escape jaws that could only snap shut at the laggard pace of feet and hooves, there was no sense in getting pulled farther and farther away from the German army's life-preserving railheads. Thus, despite popular officer corps views to the contrary, Falkenhayn was

determined to hold the Russian host at bay in the east while shifting his focus to France.[56]

After opening a disorienting and shock-inducing bombardment on long-neglected French positions in the Verdun sector on 17 February 1916, Falkenhayn lodged German infantry divisions outside the iconic Gallic city—preparing to slaughter wave after wave of incensed counterattacking Frenchmen. While successful in inspiring a self-sacrificing ardor among the enemy to struggle for control of the symbolic landmark heedless of cost, the price of what proved limited gains for Germany was to quickly become surprisingly high in *Kaiserheer* formations which could not afford such severe attrition. By winter, Falkenhayn's bloodied battalions had nearly captured the city after evenly splitting 400,000 dead and more than double that number wounded between the two belligerents; however, Allied offensives elsewhere eventually forced multiple commands to redeploy away from the Verdun sector and brought the campaign to an indecisive conclusion. Although OHL had terribly mangled the French Army, its successes came at unsustainable costs to the *Kaiserheer*, and thus the prolonged campaign could hardly be seen as any more than a costly draw.[57]

Two more or less simultaneous Allied assaults elsewhere had dealt the killing blow to Falkenhayn's ambitions at Verdun. To the north, successive waves of British infantry followed a punishing artillery bombardment along the Somme River in Picardy, initially suffering brutal repulse. Subsequent British and Dominion attacks proved much more adept, striving for more limited objectives, and relying on Allied superiority in the long arm. Intent on maintaining control of every inch of enemy territory, Falkenhayn repeatedly ordered bloody counterattacks to reclaim ground lost to British penetrations. Although British reserves failed to exploit a particularly yawning gap produced in mid-July, they exacted a punishing toll on German troops rushing to redeem the situation. When the price in blood in northern France was added to that exacted by a simultaneous Russian offensive in the east that nearly produced the collapse of Austria-Hungary, the conflict's toll was rapidly extending beyond the Reich's means to pay. The year's desperate fighting had utterly exhausted the *Kaiserheer*, which suffered nearly 300,000 casualties at Verdun, 500,000 on the Somme, and 350,000 in Russia.[58]

"For the rest we will see"

Partly acknowledging this disastrous trend, the Kaiser again changed horses midstream in the fall, dismissing Falkenhayn and replacing him with the "heroes of Tannenberg"—General Paul von Hindenburg and his

chief of staff, General Erich Ludendorff, the latter exercising real control under the nominal guidance of the former.[59] Recognizing the military implications of insufficient civilian attempts to strengthen central controls over the wartime economy, Ludendorff sought to construct an army-driven comprehensive production regime in the country despite the strangling British blockade. Unsustainably high ammunition expenditures across the western front made clear that blood was not the only resource Germany risked exhausting in the near term. Demanding an exponential increase in industrial output through forced drafts of civilian workers, Ludendorff used his new command authority to increase military control over the German economy. "The whole German nation must live only in the service of the fatherland," Hindenburg wrote in support of the new plan.[60] While production output increased, it came at the price of dwindling food supplies, abysmal labor conditions, and overall misery across Germany—exacerbating the already extreme strain on national morale.[61]

Tactical-level innovations were initially more promising. After personally evaluating German operations in the west, Ludendorff concluded that continuing to pack forward trenches with defenders under the relentless weight of Allied artillery had become cost-prohibitive. Instead, *Kaiserheer* forces developed a series of echeloned defensive positions along reverse slopes on the most vulnerable portions of the line, manning the foremost of these only lightly. In a new defensive doctrine known today as an elastic defense-in-depth, German units capitalized on traditions of decentralized *Auftragstaktik* and tactical flexibility to launch local counterattacks from rear areas beyond the reach of enemy artillery.[62]

In a short time, however, French and British offensives adapted to these new defensive tactics, potentially nullifying any temporary edge the innovation provided German arms. Even so, the French Army had many problems of its own both on and off the battlefield, and after the *Kaiserheer* managed to blunt enemy assaults in the spring of 1917, these problems came to a dramatic head. Widescale mutinies erupted across the French Army, the government of the Third Republic fell into turmoil, and France itself seemed doomed to catastrophic defeat. When followed by disastrous British failures in northern France later that summer and the sudden collapse of the Tsar's regime at the hands of revolutionaries in Russia, 1917 seemed poised to deliver the Reich from its own rapidly impending catastrophe.[63]

Alas, conditions failed to deliver the Kaiser and his army from the full implications of their strategically unmoored prosecution of the most destructive war the world had ever seen. In yet another strategically di-

sastrous misstep, the Kaiser gave in to Navy entreaties to recommence unrestricted aggressive attacks on Allied shipping halted in 1915 in the interest of preserving American neutrality. Recognizing that the possibilities of ever prevailing over Britain and France in a prolonged *Materialschlacht* were profoundly slim, Wilhelm embraced his admiralty's siren song promises of complete and decisive strangulation of British trade that would force Anglo capitulation long before the United States could enter the war and field a significant force in France. In fact, neither of these confident assertions came to pass. As the fall of 1917 approached, Ludendorff recognized that Germany positively had to take full advantage of its probable last moment of opportunity. Striking decisive offensive blows on all fronts, he would win the war before a now-belligerent America threw its weight into the fight and eradicated all hope that the already badly exhausted Reich could achieve a respectable negotiated peace.[64]

To achieve a resounding and unlikely victory, Ludendorff placed an inordinately high degree of confidence in a new offensive doctrine which had incrementally evolved over the course of the conflict. Initially little more than an experimental concept, *Stoßtrupptaktik* (assault-troop tactics) gained widespread notoriety after German victories on the Italian front. The new doctrine—breaking up linear infantry formations into small teams of highly trained *Stoßtruppen* armed with a variety of close combat weapon systems—promised a return to a war of movement, offering a solution to the vexing penetration problem. Instead of sweeping into and over enemy positions in waves supported by rolling artillery barrages, *Stoßtruppen* would bypass enemy strongpoints that were being precisely targeted by German artillery. Slipping past Allied defenses into their vulnerable rear areas, assault troops would subsequently target enemy lines of communication, headquarters elements, and even artillery batteries to paralyze the foe. Shortly thereafter, conventional infantry units would strike along the front in a more traditional manner, taking advantage of the chaos sown by *Stoßtruppen* and consolidating gains in a renewed war of maneuver—the "kind of war" OHL remained convinced it could fight and win, despite having been defeated in just such an operation during the opening months of the conflict.[65]

Ludendorff embraced the new tactics in his army-wide "Attack in Depth" doctrine mandate during the fall and winter. Accordingly, forty German divisions were sequentially rotated off the line and retrained as *Stoßtruppen* divisions. Equipped specially for the new assault tactics, these divisions also siphoned off the best equipment, junior leaders, and officers from other army divisions, further stressing the already majorly strained

material and manpower resources of a strangling Reich. Moreover, the limited number of assault troops trained in the new tactics placed an especially outsized burden on an especially small proportion of the *Kaiserheer*.[66]

The final major series of German offensives during the war began in late March 1918.[67] Lacking any coherent strategic vision, Ludendorff simply planned to use the army's new tactics to "punch a hole into their line. For the rest we will see."[68] More than a million men attacking over a forty-mile front eventually achieved significant penetrations as Allied commands unprepared for the *Stoßtruppen* onslaught crumbled all along the line. Even so, tactical-level penetrations could not be adequately exploited; once again, the German troops were handicapped by the insufficient speed and mobility of supporting artillery and infantry reserves slogging through the mud and shell holes left behind the line of advance. Discipline among the new divisions fell apart as their limited logistical means fell farther behind as they plunged deeper into the enemy rear. Major transportation limitations also slowed the pace of forward momentum. By 1918, German forces operated with only 30,000 motor vehicles, against enemies maneuvering with nearly 100,000. The supply of horses to move vital supplies and advance crucial heavy artillery had also dwindled.[69]

The most significant problem with the offensive was its extraordinarily high cost in blood. By the summer, the army had sustained upward of a million German casualties since the opening of the Spring Offensive. These numbers were catastrophic and utterly unsustainable given dwindling manpower reserves and dramatically flagging national morale. Still worse, major Allied reinforcements arrived on the western front by spring in the form of American doughboys. These reinforcements, alongside the French and British, scored notable victories along the line that prompted more than 500,000 Germans to desert their commands. Yet again, the *Kaiserheer* was nominally effective in the short-run but decisively lacking in the long-run.[70]

Although a flagging German war effort was quite obviously the result of logistical shortfalls and the exorbitant supply requirements of an inefficient operational concept, few if any major innovations or adaptations addressed these crucial problems. Instead, OHL sought largely unsustainable tactical innovations to change the character of the battlefield without addressing the deeply flawed and overstretched supply system that struggled to sustain it. Ironically, since these innovations responded to tactical-level challenges while mostly ignoring the strategic or even operational realm, they tended to exacerbate extant problems rather than resolve them. Herwig notes that successful *Stoßtruppen* assaults typically occurred "in such

a way that they unsystematically exploited tactical advantages wherever those advantages might appear, without imposing on the offensive an operational or strategic coherence."[71] Victory came where victory was possible, not necessarily where it was actually needed.[72] Moreover, while *Stoßtruppen* proved capable of infiltrating enemy lines, inescapable short logistical tethers prevented the troops from puncturing deep enough to realistically threaten any vital arteries.[73]

The German tendency to allow tactics to supplant strategy may have been related to a *Generalstab* frustration that the army was not capable of achieving the Kaiser's exceedingly lofty and vaguely expressed policy aims. As historian Richard Weigley observed, limited *Stoßtruppen* thrusts that moved the rigid frontline even a short distance "might produce a reward on the battlefield proportionate to the effort that went into them"—"a kind of success at a time when policy, strategy, and operations all sought goals the pursuit of which had degenerated into bloody futility."[74] It would not be the last time Germany's military professionals buried their heads in the tactical sands of the battlefield in a futile attempt to shut out the seemingly inevitable impending strategic disaster.

There was a mortal flaw in the *Generalstab*'s myopic fixation on tactical virtuosity. While the apparently timeless principles of war suggest that certain tactics and operational concepts might prove objectively sound regardless of the strategic context in which they are applied, all tactics and operations must be calibrated to the strategic means and ends of a belligerent to prove fruitful. Offensive innovations like *Stoßtrupptaktik* may seem visionary to today's military professionals, given the evolutionary trajectory of land warfare (and especially small-unit infantry tactics) across the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. The novel doctrine, however, proved an unsustainably inefficient (most especially in German lives) means to produce tactical gains all but completely divorced from any meaningful grand strategy. Had the Reich enjoyed a deeper pool of available manpower reserves, adequate time and resources to train and drill new recruits in the complicated new schemes of maneuver, and bountiful means to supply and sustain the deep lightning strikes they might launch against enemy positions, *Stoßtrupptaktik* may have been an ingenious escape from the *Kaiserheer*'s many strategic problems. As it was, however, the OHL's new aggressive means to seize dramatic tactical-level success expedited the Reich's exhaustion and ultimate defeat in what, by 1918, had become a very different "kind of war" from the war of rapid maneuver the new tactics sought to restore.

On its face, the *Kaiserheer*'s other major claim to innovative ingenuity during the conflict, the elastic defense-in-depth, initially seemed more productive. While the novel defensive doctrine increased both the operational efficiency and effectiveness of the *Kaiserheer*'s effort to maintain a relatively stable western front, given the Reich's ever-growing disparity in manpower and materiel relative to its opponents, a purely defensive strategy could never hope to secure victory in a protracted *Materialschlacht*. By the final stage of the war, the elastic defense-in-depth proved ever decreasingly effective against the *Entente* forces' more impressive capacity to adapt and innovate themselves.

Although historians and military practitioners have long ranked *Stoßtrupptaktik* and the elastic defense-in-depth as two of the Great War's most innovative and influential contributions to Western military art, both had deleterious effects on the Reich's pursuit of its strategic objectives—chief among them by 1918, national survival. The organizing principles undergirding both innovations might have benefitted another army fighting another war with a different mixture of strategic means and ends, but for the *Kaiserheer*, these solutions were dangerously out-of-step with the limited means and particular strategic imperatives confronting the Reich.[75] The OHL and its successive commanders, and indeed the Kaiser himself and his beleaguered regime, failed to devise a coherent German grand strategy and accompanying tactics calibrated to the Reich's particular strategic means and ends. This disjuncture was one of the primary causes of ultimate German defeat.[76]

Given the Reich's extreme disparity of available resources and manpower relative to its many enemies, maximizing operational cost efficiency in blood, material, and treasure should have been of inestimable importance to the *Generalstab*. In the rapid maneuver campaign desired in the summer of 1914, short-term gross inefficiency—even if it brought a swift decision to the conflict—was an extreme gamble. Once the front stabilized and the kind of war the Reich confronted transformed into a static *Stellungskrieg* and *Materialschlacht*, operational inefficiency was no longer just risky, but disastrous malpractice. Imperial Germany would require extremely efficient methods and spartan husbanding of lives and materiel to successfully outpace its resource-flush opponents in a war of attrition. Even then, OHL understood that decisive victory was nearly impossible given the circumstances. In its wholesale abandonment of cost efficiency as a priority, however, the *Kaiserheer* made eventual defeat a certainty.

The Wilhelmine regime managed to adapt to the sudden and unforeseen demands of mobilizing the economy for the titanic struggle; howev-

er, impromptu agencies like the War Raw Materials Board—designed to funnel the Reich's finite natural resources toward industrial firms directly supplying the front—were ultimately limited by Germany's restricted resource base. Even stringent control measures during the later war years struggled to meet the demands of the Kaiser's forces in the field. Wilhelm's war effort never ground to a complete halt due to the exhaustion of resources, but neither was the Reich flush with deep reserves of foodstuffs and war materiel.[77]

While most Germans understood the need for unity during the conflict, rarely had Imperial society been universally enthusiastic about the war. Wilhelm's 1914 declaration of *Burgfrieden* ("peace within the fortress") eased partisan tensions for a time but failed to serve as a durable social glue for Germany's prolonged crucible. Though symbolic gestures of solidarity, most especially the erstwhile anti-war Social Democratic Party's shocking vote for military appropriations at the outset, suggested the recently united diverse German nation could bind itself together in crisis, the Reich was coming apart at the seams by 1918.[78]

Perhaps more than any other cause, this breakdown was exacerbated by a chronic lack of food across the Reich due in no small part to the British blockade. Compounded by the 1916 potato crop failure and the departure of huge portions of the agricultural labor force (man and beast) for the war, Germany's antebellum position as a net importer of foodstuffs proved a critical weakness in a prolonged war.[79] Food shortages led to immense hardship, which led to anger and dissent and inevitably rioting.[80] As summer turned to fall, and German prospects on the western front worsened by the day, the fate of the Second Reich became inevitable. The elite *Stoßtruppen* had been destroyed, many commands were operating at no more than 20 percent effectiveness, and unrest at home upended industrial output. Though Ludendorff hoped a ceasefire might allow time to stabilize affairs along the front, the end was at hand. Revolt among German sailors in the High Seas Fleet combined with frank OHL assessments that the war was lost promoted the abdication and flight of both the Kaiser and Ludendorff, and the guns fell silent on 11 November.[81]

Explaining Away Defeat

Piling insult atop injury, the emergent peace established at Versailles in the following spring of 1919 sought to obliterate the German empire and its vaunted war machine. Presented to the new republican German government as *fait accompli*, the nation's sovereign territory was dramatically reduced, a new hostile competitor in the form of Poland resurrected

on its eastern border, and all its overseas colonies surrendered to the victorious Allies. To render Germany martially benign in the future, the postwar German army could not exceed 100,000 men in strength, and restrictions on service terms prevented the army from accruing any significant trained reserve. The *Generalstab* was dismantled and outlawed, along with the *Kriegsakademie* which had given it life. None of the war's modern technological military innovations, to include military aircraft, heavy artillery, or the new lumbering tanks, were authorized for German manufacture or ownership. Finally, both banks of the Rhine extending for some distance in either direction were declared "demilitarized zones," preventing any acts of aggression into the Belgian or French countryside.[82]

The process of coming to grips with these brutal terms, the experience of defeat, and the ardent quest to identify the root cause of the Reich's defeat generated considerable debate after the guns fell silent.[83] Despite some dispute among the officer corps, historians have identified a constellation of retrospective convictions within the interwar German army, the *Reichsheer*, which suggest some consensus as to what went wrong.[84] These shared beliefs and assumptions formed the intellectual bedrock upon which German military professionals began to plot a means to avoid making the same mistakes in the future.

If there was one thing that most German military thinkers agreed upon, it was that there would indeed be a future in which their nation would regain its rightful place as a major power on the world stage. Moreover, this renaissance would almost certainly be realized not by adept diplomacy, but a swift and dramatic feat of arms of the kind they had envisioned in 1914. Allowing the embarrassment and dire consequences of the Great War to stand unchallenged was inconceivable. Germany's honor would one day be reclaimed, and those who had trampled upon it punished severely. Less certain was precisely when such righteous retribution would be realized as well as what military form it would take.[85] Hamstrung by the severe Versailles restrictions, dreams of future military grandeur seemed impossibly far-fetched in 1919. In the immediate term, the attention of Germany's interwar corps of military professionals was fixated on unpacking the many lessons of the recent conflict and confronting the looming prospect of protecting their defeated nation from dangerous and opportunistic competitors on its borders.[86]

Many Germans in and out of uniform were convinced the wartime *Kaiserheer* remained largely blameless for the national catastrophe. "In the field we were unconquered," one proclaimed. "We won the battles, but for various non-military reasons the enemies won the war."[87] For the

most part, debate centered on identifying which "non-military reasons" deserved the lion's share of blame for defeat. The most popular was the now-notorious "stab in the back" (*Dolchstoss*) mythology. Many Germans, several prominent *Reichsheer* officers among them, believed fervently that the army was failed by the wartime Kaiser government and even German society at large, but most especially by anti-war socialists and the Jewish community. They especially criticized overall failure to rally behind the war effort, insufficient galvanization of national morale by the Wilhelmine regime, and the treasonous pursuit of an unnecessary truce with the Allies to close the war.[88]

The *Dolchstoss* myth centered on a widespread conviction that the *Kaiserheer* could have fought all the Reich's enemies to at least a respectable draw—and thus achieved honorable terms—if the government and German people had shared the same determination and stamina as those at the front. This narrative shielded the conscience of army veterans and the prestige of the *Generalstab*, but also laid the cultural groundwork for social division that contributed to the Weimar Republic's eventual demise and National Socialism's assault on German Jews.[89]

To be sure, most veteran German officers rejected the *Dolchstoss* narrative. Having experienced the breakdown of the *Kaiserheer* firsthand, they had difficulty denying the German war machine's obvious failures in the latter years of the conflict. Even so, acknowledging those failures did not replace a widespread conviction that the Reich had always been capable of winning the war. Most argued the effort was criminally mishandled even while the raw material for victory, most especially in terms of battlefield skill and martial spirit, was rarely lacking.[90] The quest to assign blame for strategic missteps and identify scapegoats effectively prevented any substantive analysis of the deeper flaws in the German concept of war.[91]

Having died before the end of the war, Moltke was an especially inviting target for critics, and many seized on the opportunity.[92] Influential retired officers like General Hermann von Kuhl and Wilhelm Groener gained access to restricted classified materials and argued publicly that the Schlieffen memorandum had offered an ideal plan for the crucial first weeks of the war. Had Moltke adhered to its instructions to the letter, they argued, victory would have been all but certain. Most damning of all was Moltke's decision to redeploy forces away from the decisive right wing to support those on the left, effectively hamstringing Schlieffen's vision.[93] Detractors argued the chief of staff squandered his predecessor's best-laid plans by allowing the army to become bogged down on its left flank, where originally only a holding action was supposed to unfold.[94] Still

more to the contrary, historian and controversial German defense thinker Hans Delbrück believed even Schlieffen was mistaken. The proper course of action would have been a primary attack into the east, quickly knocking out the Russian enemy and avoiding British intervention due to incursion into neutral Belgium.[95]

Falkenhayn's decision to adopt a strategy of mass bloodletting in lieu of a campaign of adept maneuver at Verdun clashed with the German concept of war and thus attracted considerable ire from his many postwar critics.[96] For his part, Ludendorff—criticized for his failure to focus Germany's last-ditch offensive on a single strategically decisive point—defended his decisions in part by embedding them within the foundational biases of German operational thought. "Tactics had to be given priority over pure strategy," he explained.[97] According to his logic, no broader political strategy could have prevailed without victory on the battlefield.[98]

Of course, as historian Gerhard Gross observes, in emphasizing the supposed mistakes of any single officer, critics "officially prevented any questioning of operational thinking itself," and thus greatly limited the scope of the *Reichsheer*'s retrospective analysis, especially the fact that the Reich had never truly developed any coherent grand strategy.[99] "In five years of war," the *Kaiserheer* "did not manage to develop any strategic concept for ending the war beyond Ludendorff's all-or-nothing approach," Gross notes. "There is no evidence whatsoever for an overall German strategy."[100] The lack of substantive intervention by the Kaiser left the ball perpetually in the *Generalstab*'s court.[101]

While the war on the western front dominated retrospective narratives in France, Britain, and the United States, Germany's war in the east offered a far more diverse and complicated picture of modern warfare.[102] Eastern front operations routinely unfolded across vast distances, involved the distributed maneuver of disparate elements, and seemed to confirm most of the antebellum German operating concept. Unlike veteran officers in the armies of the western Allies, many *Reichsheer* veterans (including future field marshals like Erwin Rommel, Albert Kesselring, Paul Ludwig Ewald von Kleist, and Gerd von Rundstedt) witnessed a considerable amount of this "open warfare" during the conflict. These experiences powerfully influenced their interpretation of the conflict's lessons and implications for the future, most especially because they helped confirm the officer corps' own biases.[103]

Of particular importance to the German memory of the conflict was the 1914 victory at Tannenberg, seen as a veritable masterpiece of the

Teutonic way of war. Beyond validating the Moltkean *Kesselschlacht* concept, the campaign helped reinforce German tendencies to associate Russia with base inferiority in all martial matters.[104] Even so, Germans were much less likely to reflect on operations in the theater after the halcyon days of 1914. They typically ignored the tendency of Russian forces to use the expansiveness of the western borderlands to strategic advantage by trading space for time and avoiding encirclement by German forces.[105] Such facts might have limited perceptions of what German military power was capable of in the future.

For many German officers, experience suggested that the era of mass conscripted armies had—quite conveniently for a manpower-starved German republic—come to an end. The tremendous armies necessary to prosecute vast European great power conflicts were difficult to coordinate in direct proportion to their size. They also required immense economic, industrial, and logistical support in the field. Like their opponents, German forces increasingly relied on technological means (most especially artillery) to facilitate offensive operations and simultaneously became ever more dependent on rapid and regular resupply.[106] For the most part, production shortfalls were far less of a problem for the belligerents than the limitations of primarily horse-drawn logistical networks and insufficiently proximate railheads. To regain mobility, many theorists presumed, future armies would have to shrink and professionalize—trading quantity for quality. Indeed, the German experience on the eastern front, where masterful operational artistry had apparently counterbalanced often-major numerical deficits, seemed to many an apt testament to just such a conclusion.[107]

At the same time, and perhaps more to the point, the simultaneous experience of the protracted resource-consuming *Materialschlacht* on the western front—where Germany was ultimately defeated—did not support any of these conclusions. While the war in the east indeed upheld many of the *Generalstab*'s pre-war convictions concerning the preeminence of maneuver warfare, the same convictions were utterly overturned elsewhere. The war with France and Britain required a vast supply of manpower and materiel to even maintain the protracted strategic stasis which had proven so vexing to all belligerents. As the *Kaiserheer*'s late war attempts to break the gridlock with the supposed tactical virtuosity of *Stoßtrupptaktik* divisions had proven, no battlefield prowess or inspired operational artistry could extricate Germany from the inescapable grip of an attrition war—a contingency which the unavoidable dynamism of war promised would always remain a possibility in the future. Moreover, given their own hard-

won lessons learned, the Allies would have every reason to seek another *Materialschlacht* if they met the German military on the field again.

In many ways, the blisteringly painful sting of defeat spurred Germans to engage in an impressively comprehensive analysis of war. While no European nation could avoid an almost reflexive process of meaning-making in the wake of such titanic bloodletting, perhaps fortunately for the myopic *Reichsheer*, none of Germany's likely future competitors engaged in quite so substantive a historical reflection.[108] The *Reichsheer*'s official internal analysis of wartime operations focused primarily on the tactical face of the conflict, in close accordance with German military culture. In the winter of 1919, the first chief of staff of the interwar *Reichsheer*, General Hans von Seeckt, organized more than fifty historical committees manned by a full tenth of all veteran officers still in uniform and charged them with reflecting upon the lessons of the war, "while the impressions won on the battlefield are still fresh."[109] Seeckt ordered "short, concise studies" focused on novel tactical and operational situations, the effectiveness of prewar doctrine with confronting wartime challenges, the impact of innovative technology on the modern battlefield, and "new problems put forward by the war [which] have not yet found a solution."[110] The fruits of these studies were channeled directly to the *Reichsheer*'s training office to implement within published doctrine. The training office contributed to the list of topics to be studied beyond those that Seeckt ordered; the only restriction being that only novel and unprecedented aspects of warfare would be considered.[111]

Figure 1.5. General Hans von Seeckt. Courtesy of the Library of Congress.

The specific reports called for by the army's training office were fielded by a covert (to avoid Versailles restrictions on the study of military history) team of veteran officers operating under the command of retired general Rudolf von Borries. The group conducted countless detailed his-

torical analyses throughout the interwar years but did not exclusively restrict itself to tactical topics. Still, its questions of strategic import failed to draw explicit connections between the levels of war. Little evidence suggests that the officers considered how the *Kaiserheer*'s tactical performance either contributed to or detracted from the pursuit of the Kaiser's political objectives during the conflict. Instead, as with Seeckt's committees, the veteran officers extracted tactical lessons about topics like military transportation, fighting insurgents, conducting gas attacks, defending against enemy tanks, or effective machine gun fire from the larger strategic context in which they unfolded, hoping to derive universally cogent lessons that would apply to all modern land warfare.[112] In so doing, the conclusions of both Seeckt's committees and the Borries Group were well in line with the same problematic cultural trends that had hamstrung the army during the war.

This fixation on the tactical level of war was a somewhat curious trend for an army that historians have praised for its devotion to shoring up identified weaknesses. Even prior to the compilation of Seeckt's committee reports, most officers agreed that the *Kaiserheer*'s prowess at the tactical level was rarely matched by its enemies.[113] The capacity for improvisation shown by junior officers and those in the ranks was quite impressive—a necessity given that the German army was relatively unprepared in 1914 for the many unforeseen modern warfare challenges it would ultimately confront.[114] Despite this widespread conviction, while by no means completely avoiding questions of strategic-level import like manpower mobilization and even national economic policy, given that such policies were mostly beyond the traditional purview of the operations-focused German officer corps, most of the studies issuing from both the Borries Group and Seeckt's committees focused on warfighting at the sharp end.[115]

The final 1921 byproduct of these historical studies was the *Reichsheer*'s equivalent of a capstone doctrinal manual, *Leadership and Battle with Combined Arms*. Revised and reissued after a series of slight adjustments and updates in 1933 under the new title *Truppenführung*, the work ultimately served as the Wehrmacht's primary operational manual during the Second World War. Other than its continued commitment to the elastic defense-in-depth, this operational manual for large unit commanders focused almost exclusively on maneuver warfare and the crucial importance of mobility in operations—showing little evidence of influence by the western front's *Materialschlacht*. It spent little time on theoretical approaches to the nature and character of war as a political phenomenon

and thus failed to address the most salient problems that had plagued the *Kaiserheer*. No explicit statement was printed inspiring a respect for the extreme disparities of available resources from which Germany perennially suffered, and thus the importance of striving for cost efficiency in all operations. In fact, neither edition of the doctrine hinted at the importance of calibrating tactics and operations to particular political aims or strategic means and ends.[116] Instead, the army excised tactical warfighting lessons from their specific historical context to produce what leaders believed were objectively actionable universal tenets of modern combat.

"Something pointless and devoid of sense"

In contemplating the crucial and inescapable ties between politics and warfighting in his canonical *On War*, Prussian military theorist Carl von Clausewitz asserted that whenever martial thought or action occurs at any level of war which is "divorced from political life . . . the many links that connect the two elements are destroyed and we are left with something pointless and devoid of sense."[117] At some indeterminate point in the long painful experience of the Great War, if not from the very beginning, the German war effort became something matching just such a description. Prosecuted nearly independently by an institution which emphatically insisted upon the strict separation of warfare and politics and marked by a vertigo-inducing pace of technological and tactical change, the war Germany confronted in the trenches inspired an obsessive fixation on restoring a "war of movement." This obsession with maneuver warfare, especially due to the tantalizing evidence of its continued survival on the eastern front, eventually became the essence of what little German "strategy" ever existed. Without the directing hand of an adept political leader and grand strategist, and with a culture that deliberately eschewed direct intervention by politicians, the *Generalstab* and its army was perpetually adrift, striving to overcome successive tactical problems all but completely unmoored from any thought of how their solution would contribute to achieving the nation's floundering war aims.[118]

Despite a painstaking historical examination of the army's Great War performance at the tactical level, this obsession continued into the interwar era. *Reichsheer* officers stalwartly neglected to fundamentally broaden their approach to warfighting. Unlike in the wake of Prussia's catastrophic 1806 defeat at the hands of Napoleon, reflection on the Reich's disaster during the second decade of the twentieth century did not inspire any comprehensive rethinking of the nature of modern war at any level beyond the narrowly tactical.[119] Instead, the officer corps still fervently

believed military and political affairs belonged in permanently separate spheres and maintained there had to be a sound tactical solution to all the complex strategic problems besetting Germany. Despite the superior resources and potential coalitional advantages of its adversaries, the equation could not possibly be unsolvable. On the contrary, they insisted upon finding a solution.[120]

Much of this intellectual intransigence was likely related to the officer corps' neglect of metacognition: of critical and deliberate thinking about its own collective habits of thought as an institution. Of all the *Generalstab*'s admirable cultural traits as a martial body, deliberate introspection was rarely among them. Little attention seems to have been paid by *Kaiserheer* veterans to understanding how the experience of the conflict had (or should have) gradually altered their thinking about warfighting, influenced their grasp of the relationship between tactics and strategy, or highlighted their cohort's proven tendencies toward confirmation bias. Instead, as is so often the case within conservative military institutions, most *Reichsheer* officers tended to assume that their tactical-level successes, most especially on the eastern front, confirmed their cognitive grasp of warfare, and that they only needed to sort out the novel technological curveballs posed by the shifting paradigms of modern battle.

As historian Gerhard Gross has observed, the most obvious questions actually begged by the German experience of the Great War—namely, whether or not inspired maneuver could overcome massive disparities in the resources of an enemy coalition, and thus whether or not it would ever make sense to pursue a restoration of the nation's geopolitical position by feat of arms—were carefully avoided by those contemplating the recent past. After all, any truly objective analysis "inevitably would have led to the abandonment of Germany's claim to Great Power status." This was unthinkable.[121] Certainly, blunderers like the younger Moltke and Falkenhayn could be kept out of command authority positions in the future, "it was only necessary to adjust just a few of the tactical and operational parameters in order for Germany to regain its Great Power status."[122] Or so many believed.

To some extent, this willful cognitive dissonance was an inevitable byproduct of the perilous geostrategic position into which the Weimar Republic was born. Exceedingly vulnerable and outnumbered by potential adversaries to both the east and west, the new republic's situation was not fundamentally conducive to broadening the strategic thinking of its small professional military elite. The immediately pressing and highly specific

contingencies of preparing to defend the nation against particular potential enemies (namely Poland and France) during the immediate postwar years prevented extensive postulating about how the many lessons gleaned from historical analysis might eventually be turned to good use in some future restoration of German honor. In coming years, however, successive German chiefs of the disguised interwar *Generalstab* would gradually begin moving in an altogether different and more ambitious direction.

Notes

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2010), 48–79; and Holger Afflerbach, *On a Knife Edge: How Germany Lost the First World War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022), 13–16.

14. For a robust discussion of the *Generalstab*'s position on civil-military responsibilities, see Hughes and DiNardo, *Imperial Germany and War,* 41–43.

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16. Terence Zuber, "The Schlieffen Plan Debate, 1999–2014," Terence Zuber: Military Historian, accessed 29 October 2020, https://terencezuber.com/schlieffendebate.php.

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Chapter 2
"We won practically all the battles"
The US Army in the Shadow of Vietnam, 1973–76

In the late winter of 1967, the principal of West Springfield High School in Springfield, Virginia, invited Lt. Col. Donn A. Starry to deliver a brief presentation to its students meant to "put the Vietnam War in a little better perspective for you than may have been done by the press and television, or by what you hear from the [anti-war] demonstrators."[1] Having served in Vietnam as both an armor battalion commander and a high-level Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (MACV) staffer, Starry was supremely confident that he grasped the US mission in southeast Asia. By the beginning of the third year of the American War in Vietnam, "Free World" forces had successfully "offset" prior incursions of conventional Communist forces into South Vietnam and steadied the beleaguered Republic of Vietnam and its military. To be sure, US forces alone had not, and indeed could not, single-handedly "win" a Vietnamese civil war. "The conflict is still one which, in the final analysis, must be decided by the Vietnamese," Starry asserted.[2] Using all means available, the South Vietnamese government had to earn its people's respect for its legitimacy and earn their support. In the end, all American assistance could only achieve "an atmosphere suitable to the establishment of a stable, independent, and viable non-Communist society."[3] Doing so had already proven a complicated and bloody task.[4]

Figure 2.1. Lt. Col. Donn A. Starry. Courtesy of US Army Fort Benning and the Maneuver Center of Excellence.

Fostering such an atmosphere would require a comprehensive approach to confronting both conventional and unconventional threats to South Vietnamese sovereignty. Although only part of this broader effort concerned the US Army, Starry was most familiar with this aspect of Free World strategy. "We in the military are doing three things," he explained.[5] First, US soldiers, sailors, airmen, and marines were valiantly and re-

Figure 2.2. Map of North and South Vietnam, 1967. Created by Army University Press.

lentlessly "taking the war to the enemy." By "seeking out and destroying communist forces and their underground government in South Vietnam," the Army leveraged its major advantages in technology and firepower to dismantle the festering Communist insurgency across the country. At the

same time, US forces deployed to border regions skirting Cambodia and Laos fought and repelled conventional Communist forces bent on invading the republic and toppling its government. In short, the Army was mandated by US policy makers in the Johnson administration to provide "the shield that permits much of the Vietnamese Army to shift its weight to the tasks involved in winning the people."[6] Starry commented that "the enemy is everywhere," and thus fighting was never restricted to the sparsely populated jungles and mountains of the border regions.[7] Because of this, kinetic US "search-and-destroy" operations could not be neatly separated from the South Vietnamese government's Revolutionary Development efforts. One literally bled into the other.[8]

Despite recognizing there were few indicators that US efforts "imposed a real change in the determination of the government of North Vietnam to control and support the war," Starry remained optimistic.[9] After all, US analyses of kill ratios still suggested that Free World forces were neutralizing Communist fighters by at least a four-to-one ratio to friendly lives lost. Starry suggested that US forces had "met and solved the elementary military problem of massing men and firepower quickly enough to defeat an enemy force."[10] Indeed, the idea that such a definition did in fact contemplate "the elementary military problem" seemed beyond question to Starry. The key now, so far as he was concerned, was to resolutely stay

Figure 2.3. Nixon discussing the Cambodia invasion. Courtesy of Wikimedia Commons.

the course. That meant Americans like those about to graduate from West Springfield High School needed to remain stalwart themselves. Many of the young men in the audience would soon be drafted and slogging through the rice paddies of Vietnam regardless of their personal wishes. "With your support, your encouragement, and understanding," Starry pronounced, "we will prevail in this most difficult situation which, in the final analysis, involves the preservation of freedom."[11] Without such support, he warned, "any national irresolution" would strengthen the Communist war effort and damage "Free World" security across the globe.[12]

"This most difficult informationless sort of war"

As an armor officer fighting against an often-unconventional foe in a tropical environment, far removed from the stereotypical armored battlefield, Starry was repeatedly surprised at how well his tankers adapted to the novel challenges of operating in Vietnam. "Our doctrine normally describes linear battle areas, with fronts, boundaries, lines of contact, places where the enemy is, and others where he is not," he wrote in a 1968 *Armor* magazine article.[13] Vietnam, however, was "an area war"—a "new kind of war" for officers more familiar with the killing fields of World War II or Korea but still of a type that the Army "may face another day on other fields," according to Starry.[14] He felt that an "expansive application" of war's timeless principles as they related to the unusual "kind of war" being fought in Vietnam ought to be written into revised Army doctrine. Such doctrine "must be broad enough to include [the enemy] in all his roles—regular and irregular, organized and guerrilla," he wrote.[15] There was no telling when US forces would again find themselves confronting such an ill-defined and elusive enemy fighting what Starry termed a "most difficult informationless sort of war."[16]

Many who served "in country" during the conflict shared Starry's opinion that US troops were mostly unprepared for the challenges they faced. Shortly after the war, Sgt. Robert Graham, a 4th Infantry Division squad leader deployed to the unforgiving Central Highlands, penned an article for *Military Affairs* in which he analyzed "An Infantryman's View of Our Failure" in Vietnam.[17] Because of the incredible diversity of physical and human terrain, enemy tactics, and operational objectives across the country's four Corps Tactical Zones, any generalizations about the character of the US war effort would be challenging; Graham identified salient themes across most post-war reflections penned by American combat veterans.[18] The division's vast, remote, and unforgiving area of operations forced his unit to spread its component units dangerously thin across the

region's imposing mountains and thick jungles. Much of the area was almost completely inaccessible to foot traffic. "The rugged terrain allowed the Communists to operate with relative immunity when dispersed," Graham observed, explaining that the enemy soldiers only consolidated their far-flung elements just prior to an attack.[19] "It was difficult to spot them from the air or the ground," he lamented, "[and] hard to obtain intelligence on their movements from the area's few inhabitants."[20] Finding the enemy always proved the most vexing challenge.

By 1969, these intelligence trials prompted the Army to designate whole swaths of the region as Specialized Strike Zones (known popularly as Free-Fire Zones) wherein "everyone was considered the enemy."[21] Despite the intrinsic danger organic to such densely enemy-populated areas, most of Graham's comrades "preferred operating in these zones: there was no problem in trying to determine who was the enemy—everyone, men, women, children, could be considered such."[22] Shooting first and asking questions later, he grimly explained, "you could not be held responsible for firing on innocent civilians since by definition there were none there."[23] Conversely, when operating in areas deemed Pacified, infantrymen were at much higher risk, given that survival "often hinges on snap decisions" which were difficult to make when one had to "wait for the enemy to shoot first, then determine his target before opening up."[24] Unable to tell enemy fighters from civilians at a distance, units were frustrated by such comparatively stringent rules of engagement. "The soldiers I served with preferred to fire immediately upon sighting movement," Graham explained. "To hesitate could be a fatal mistake."[25] He understood the moral disgust that these tactics inspired within the American public. "These critics were not, however, in Vietnam," he commented. "The soldier in the bush wanted most of all to get home alive; he could not afford to have too tender a conscience."[26] While Free Fire Zones may ultimately have been "a questionable doctrine," he admitted, "the infantrymen didn't think so at the time."[27] Graham and his comrades cared little about the strategic ramifications—even if those ramifications helped rapidly erode American public support, encouragement, and understanding, all of which were earnestly sought by officers like Starry.[28]

American patrols routinely encountering stiff enemy resistance habitually tended to "sit tight and summon fire support."[29] By 1969, this tactic had evolved into an almost-automatic response by infantry platoons but had not yet overtaken the formal Army "fire and maneuver" doctrine taught at Fort Benning. "My training in the states had emphasized using fire and maneuver to close with your opponent," Graham remembered,

adding that his company never employed such a tactical approach in Vietnam. "Instead, we radioed for artillery or gunships as soon as contact was made; with few exceptions, there was no maneuver."[30] Given the confusion inherent with the dense jungles and lack of visibility, Graham confessed, such a strategy "accorded with soldiers' natural tendency to assume a defensive posture when being fired upon," and usually avoided unnecessary American casualties. "It was not, however, very successful."[31]

Employing search-and-destroy tactics, a US infantry command essentially was "sent into the field simply with the hope that they would stumble on, or attract, Communist forces," Graham asserted, adding that the enemy troops would subsequently be destroyed with American fire support in the form of artillery or air attack. "The mission was not stated as such, but the foot soldier could draw his own conclusions."[32] The American grunt "felt he was being used as 'bait,'" and indeed, to some extent, he was.[33] Communist forces typically broke contact before supporting fire mission rounds or bombs arrived on target, leaving smoldering vegetation and innocent civilians as the only casualties of the attack. This abandonment of the maneuver tactics which had dominated the battlefields of WWII and Korea, replaced by the wholesale embrace of firepower-contingent operations, also significantly limited the mobility and range of American infantry to the maximum range of supporting batteries or the availability of overworked fighter-bomber squadrons. Communist fighters also grabbed the tactical initiative, dictating where and when combat would occur.[34]

Relying so heavily on firepower to reduce casualties among vulnerable American infantry also had a high cost in Vietnamese civilian lives and thus "hearts and minds" in the vital South Vietnamese pacification campaign. Almost half of all US artillery rounds fired during the conflict were expended in what were called Harassment and Interdiction (H&I) fire missions against mostly unobserved area targets assumed to contain either enemy forces or supply routes. Historian John Hawkins observed that blind fire missions had all but disappeared by the summer of 1970, but not because of their frequently detrimental effects on pacification. Instead, the curtailment of blind H&I fire missions was driven more by budgetary constraints with America's late-war mission in Vietnam and the expense of funding such cost-inefficient tactics.[35]

The South Vietnamese Army (ARVN) depended on US assets in counterinsurgency campaigns across the South; as soon as US troops departed from a "pacified" hamlet, insurgents promptly returned.[36] As is so common in counterinsurgency campaigns, progress made in a particular

locale over months or even years could be undone in a single day or night. Even when conventional measurements indicated success, achieving developmental objectives and establishing durable popular support for the RVN government often proved vastly different.[37] ARVN soldiers and government representatives displayed a glaring lack of apparent integrity and dependability, which played directly into Communist hands. The South Vietnamese people perceived a general lack of ARVN staying power within their villages (as opposed to the Communists, who seemed always to return). This difference led to a rapid erosion of support for the republican government when ARVN combat forces were needed elsewhere in the fight against large-scale Communist incursions. The most significant incursions led to a few of the largest battles of the war in the Central Highlands. In the battles of Kontum, Plei Trap, and Dak To, invading North Vietnamese Army (NVA) units drew Free World and ARVN forces into long-term maneuver campaigns that ended in what appeared to be decisive US tactical victories—but usually eroded pacification success elsewhere in the country. Lacking sufficient troops on hand to simultaneously combat NVA incursions into the highlands and intermittent flare-ups of the Viet Cong insurgency along the coast, MACV was forced to pick one or the other. Fully recognizing this, Communist authorities shifted their operational focus back and forth while attempting to bleed US public support for the war faster than American firepower could punish its own forces. After the winter of 1968, this intensely risky strategy ultimately paid off.[38]

While often able to evade destruction in any given engagement, the human toll was beginning to weigh heavily on Communist authorities in Hanoi by the third year of major US involvement in the conflict. They planned a massive last-ditch "general offensive" across South Vietnam during the January 1968 Tet holiday, hoping the sheer destruction might dissuade the United States from continuing its commitment to the faltering Republic of Vietnam. This strategy, based in part on ongoing civil strife in the United States, was never founded in any calculation of likely military success on the battlefield. Instead, Communist leaders hoped to incur enough damage to the image of the "Free World" war effort that the American public would simply refuse to continue their already rapidly waning support for the expeditionary effort. The offensive, which exploded across South Vietnam in surprise attacks against urban and rural targets, continued for the better part of 1968. Despite nearly catastrophic losses, the North Vietnamese strategy eventually proved worth the price. While MACV celebrated its major tactical victories and quasi obliteration of Communist military forces across the country, the American people had

seen enough. Richard Nixon was elected that fall as the 37th US president after running on a platform of transitioning the war effort to an exclusively Vietnamese endeavor. Subsequently, the United States formally pronounced the very "national irresolution" that Starry had warned about the year prior. By March 1973, all US military personnel had departed. Two years later following a dramatic offensive by main force NVA armored divisions, the Republic of Vietnam fell to Communist forces and ceased to exist as a nation.[39]

In the end, the Vietnam conflict proved beyond the limits of MACV's capabilities. Although US soldiers proved profoundly adaptable at the tactical level, historian Gregory Daddis observes, they could not overcome the complex strategic challenge and "hybrid war" in Vietnam—most especially the "limitations of what a foreign force can achieve when advising indigenous armies."[40] The United States ultimately "could not simultaneously create an army, build a nation and fight a war," despite the fact that successfully juggling all three objectives was precisely what the communist threat required.[41] The US Army in Vietnam, like the *Kaiserheer* of 1918, finally had to admit that it had never enjoyed any realistic path to victory given its finite means and the rigid constraints of its strategic options as a mere enabler of RVN counterinsurgency efforts. While the leadership of both armies appreciated the near impossibility of the strategic imperatives inherent to the particular wars in which they were engaged at the outset, a healthy dose of optimism and cognitive dissonance led both to habitually hide from the truth. Like the *Kaiserheer*, many MACV battlefield innovations and habitual practices were calibrated not for the "kind of war" it faced, but rather for the "kind of war" it most wanted to prosecute, which exacerbated seemingly intractable strategic problems. Army historian Ronald Spector observed only a year after the American withdrawal from Vietnam: "It was not simply the *outcome* of military operations which affected American attitudes and policies toward the war. It was also the *manner* in which these operations were carried out."[42] He noted that tactical methodologies like "the massive use of firepower, the employment of defoliants, and the emphasis on big-unit operations all had an impact far beyond the battlefield."[43] While tactically expedient in terms of preserving the lives of American infantrymen, such methods simultaneously threatened the vital political support of Americans like those that Lieutenant Colonel Starry addressed at West Springfield High.

Just as the bold 1918 German *Stosstruppen* offensives disastrously increased the pace at which the *Kaiserreich* exhausted its meager warfighting means, America's near-complete tactical reliance on using overwhelm-

ing firepower to destroy enemy forces inadvertently led to countless civilian losses, generating greater affinity for the Communist insurgency and less for the RVN government. Aggressive search-and-destroy operations simultaneously resulted in lengthy US casualty lists and increased criticism of the war effort at home, eroding ever-shrinking public support for the war's continuance—a key element of the nation's limited warfighting capability. While neither *Stosstruppen* tactics nor US doctrine alone were responsible for the defeat of either belligerent given the near impossibility of the political and strategic objectives at hand, both were damning examples of military organizations operating well out-of-step with inconvenient realities. Indeed, despite the relative strategic futility of the US effort in southeast Asia, the conflict highlighted major weaknesses of the American way of war that subsequent adversaries would diligently note. Historian Ingo Trauschweizer notes that the "central question of the Vietnam War remained how to defeat militarily and politically an enemy that operated simultaneously at different levels of the spectrum of war."[44] Unfortunately, the Army officer corps was not interested in diligently pursuing an answer to this question in the immediate postwar era.

"A new 'Never Again' club"

General William Westmoreland expressed a near-consensus view among contemporary Army officers in the final pages of his 1976 memoir, *A Soldier Reports*, defending his own wartime decisions and actions as MACV commander and those of the Army at large. "The military quite clearly did the job that the nation asked and expected of it," he argued, convinced that the analysis of future historians would "reflect more favorably upon the performance of the military than upon that of the politicians and policymakers."[45] In 1975, Braddock Dunn & McDonald (BDM) Corporation analysts charged by the Army to produce its only official analysis of the Vietnam crisis, disagreed with Westmoreland's assessment. "There is sufficient credit and blame to share." they asserted.[46]

Figure 2.4. General William Westmoreland. Courtesy of the National Archives and Records Administration.

While acknowledging the cogency of arguments that South Vietnamese or Communist (as opposed to American) actions contributed to the conflict's ultimate outcome, the authors focused on the US per-

spective—why America's overwhelming military power did not provide equivalent political and diplomatic advantages in Indochina.[47] After all, as Maj. Gen. DeWitt Smith observed in July 1977, "we won practically all the battles but, by any sensible definition of strategic objectives, we lost the war."[48] Like many of his fellow officers, Smith believed it was "absolutely imperative" to understand how such an unfortunate circumstance had arisen.[49] He and similarly minded US comrades likely were unaware that their observations mirrored those of *Kaiserheer* veterans returning in 1918, who had proclaimed that the German army had "won the battles, but for various non-military reasons," lost the war.[50]

Figure 2.5. Maj. Gen. DeWitt Smith Jr. Courtesy of Wikimedia Commons.

The BDM analysts felt they knew the answer. While battles and campaigns are among the many tools available to commanders charged with the comprehensive military pursuit of political objectives, "unnecessary and costly" combat can ultimately contribute to strategic defeat, even if the battles and campaigns initially appear to be victories "in the traditional military sense." Conversely, what appear to be disastrous defeats on the battlefield can paradoxically "advance a determined and clever opponent yet closer to his ultimate aim."[51] American officers witnessed just such a phenomenon during the near suicidal Communist onslaught in the winter of 1968. Although enemy forces suffered near-catastrophic military defeats on the battlefield, the political and psychological implications of the Tet offensive ultimately redounded to their decisive strategic benefit.[52] In fact, dramatic political effects derived from American casualties sustained during the Tet offensive exacerbated the more than three long years of lesser Communist "victories" in the form of brief ambushes deep in the mountainous highlands and the "thousands of lives, limbs, and vehicles lost to mines and boobytraps with not one enemy in sight."[53] Though these ambushes would not classify as "battles" in the traditional American military lexicon, they cumulatively shaped both US and South Vietnamese morale and resolve—and finally proved decisive.[54]

In their final analysis, BDM writers attributed defeat not only to a "serious disconnect and mismatch between ends and means" within the American war effort, but also to major differences between a fundamentally "straightforward logic of the US leadership" as compared with a "subtle . . . sophisticated thinking" of its Communist foes.[55] Whereas MACV used conventional measures of progress such as casualty ratios and terrain features secured, Communist authorities maintained "a broader and longer-range view, focused more on political and psychological gains and losses, [and] shifts in the overall momentum" at the strategic level of war than on individual battles won at the tactical level.[56] US officers may have out-fought their opponents, but they were ultimately "outthought."[57]

The BDM study suggested US forces should contemplate and address the more nuanced political and psychological aspects of war in the future. Vietnam's obvious lesson was that "massive US military power was not the best or only weapon for the Vietnam conflict, at least as it was employed."[58] "Can US combat forces be trained and mentally conditioned for the kind of people's war that was waged in Indochina?" the authors asked.[59] Given near-axiomatic thought processes deeply ingrained within the American military psyche, the answer seemed doubtful. The historically derived "American Way of War," as the authors termed it, emphasized the science over the art of war, the physical, temporal, and spatial over the moral and psychological aspects of strategy, and firepower-centered direct-action tactics over indirect approaches to movement and maneuver.[60] One way to push back against these problematic habits of thought, the analysts suggested in their "Agenda for the Future," was to aim for more "broad/flexible" doctrine that changed the US military's tendency to write and train for "narrow/fixed" operational concepts.[61] They suggested the US Army likely would not have the luxury in the future to choose just "what sort of contest(s)" it would have to fight.[62]

The BDM analyst conclusions were mirrored by those of an especially thoughtful and reflective minority in the Army officer corps. A month after the January 1973 ceasefire agreement between the US and North Vietnamese governments, Army reservist Capt. James Thomas wrote in *Military Review* about his concerns for the Army's potential post-war developmental trajectory. Taking a cue from contemporary strategic thinkers like Robert Osgood and Roger Hilsman Jr., Thomas looked back to the years immediately following the 1950–53 "limited war" crisis in Korea. Following that early Cold War nightmare, many senior Army leaders developed a distinct distaste for—indeed repulsion to—"limiting international violence such as to accord with qualified political ends."[63] They

believed that if American political leaders called on the military to exert force abroad, the military should be allowed to employ all available weapons and tactics to swiftly and decisively achieve strategic ends. The Army should positively avoid "limited" operations—messy and seemingly intractable involvement in things like counterinsurgency and nation building. In their view, use of nuclear weapons and all other available options ought to be considered if political objectives warranted the deployment and use of military force. In the minds of many in the Army officer corps, having to fight the Communist enemy "with one hand tied behind our backs" contributed to strategic US defeat in Vietnam.[64] They were not concerned about inciting major foreign military intervention, exacerbating festering insurgencies, or even producing nuclear Armageddon in pursuit of "qualified political ends."[65] If political ends were "qualified" at all, presidents and Congress should not come knocking on the Pentagon's door. Like Hilsman before him, Thomas referred to such officers as members of the "Never Again club."[66]

A Vietnam veteran himself, Thomas differed from many of his peers. He felt the mentality that inspired the Never Again club was "a quietly pulsating issue" that "spread, tentacle-like, throughout the Army" and posed a major threat to a force almost certain to be deployed to yet more "limited wars" in the future.[67] "The recent past will thrust itself into the foreseeable future," he warned readers, as the "fact of limited war as an Army mission remains."[68] Thomas believed that instead of seeking to avoid such missions, the Army needed to capitalize on its 1973 shift to an all-volunteer force and adopt "changes in our training procedures . . . designed to prepare our soldiers psychologically and morally for the next limited engagement—should our elected leaders order such."[69] After all, he posited, an "alternative to what has twice occurred in our recent past might be desirable."[70]

Whereas the supposedly low intellectual quality of draftees in the latter years of the war might have precluded a more enlightened approach to prosecuting the hybrid Vietnam conflict, Thomas was confident that new Army volunteers would be far more amenable to abstract concepts like counterinsurgency. He believed that successfully prosecuting a complicated conflict while knowing that "there would be no victory in the traditional sense of that term" called for a different kind of soldier from those who faced clear-cut territorial objectives in World War II.[71] Thomas recommended that formal instruction "on the nature of limited war" be required at even the most junior echelons, with company commanders tutor-

ing their subordinates.[72] Above all, soldiers should be mentally prepared and trained for the dizzying challenges of "limited war."[73]

Though it is difficult to gauge the influence of Thomas's *Military Review* editorial, his ideas resonated with fellow Vietnam veteran Lt. Col. Donald Vought, who penned a letter to the editor in May. Vought, too, sensed that a new Never Again club was developing and was troubled that the members appeared to be "more senior than the advocates of the opposing view."[74] He noted that high-ranking Army leaders believed Vietnam was "over and so be it"—a phrase they frequently repeated with "a ring of biblical finality about it which I doubt will prove to be the case as regards limited war."[75] Indeed, the tendency to assume that future wars would principally involve large combat units in conventional operations led Vought "to suspect that we may not be preparing to fight the next war in the style of the last one [Vietnam] but in the style of the one before the last [Korea or WWII]."[76] After emerging bloodied and bruised from such a lengthy war, the Army should not discard "lessons so expensively learned" and instead seek "to disassociate from that unpleasant experience," he worried.[77] Vought was concerned that such escapism "may well be manifested in the creation of a professional army no more capable of fighting limited war than that of 1960."[78] Worse, if US and NATO enemies "refuse to engage in armed struggle in any other form, who will then exert the most influence?" he asked pointedly.[79]

Eight months later, *Military Review* published similar concerns from Lt. Col. James R. Johnson, a two-tour Vietnam veteran and Department of Strategy faculty member at the US Army Command and General Staff College. Johnson commented that too many of his fellow officers assessed that the cost of the Vietnam debacle had been "too great" and asserted that Army forces should "never be returned to a similar situation."[80] He noted that these leaders believed "there is no requirement to educate and train Army officers in internal defense and development doctrine" and that meddling in counterinsurgency had proven anything but cost-effective.[81]

Johnson did not agree. Assertions that the Army would face "no more Vietnams" and needed to focus instead exclusively on large-scale conventional warfighting "may provide a sense of comfort and well-being," he wrote, but were "justified neither by historical experience nor by current conditions."[82] After all, he noted, the Army had engaged in far more low-intensity and counterinsurgency operations across its history than conventional wars. "There is little reason to suspect that the future will bring substantial changes in ratio," he presumed, adding that while

"some soldiers may, therefore, prefer to study conventional tactics and battlefield technology," neither the past nor the present global situation justified such a preference.[83] Johnson noted that if conflicts like Vietnam were any guide, the Army should expect "a new period of warfare which is based on a doctrine that emphasizes people rather than machines."[84] In a follow-on essay later that year, Thomas described evidence of this trend: "Urban guerrilla operations already are a reality, . . . along with the emergence of a fanatical mind whose possessor invites, rather than fears death"—a threat quite different from that of menacing Soviet armored divisions marshalling against western Europe.[85] He commented that even in the most circumscribed conflicts, there always remained "the rest of war's spectrum, including the nuclear furnace" and cautioned that the Army's "entrance into this spectrum at any point . . . will remain a possibility for a long time to come."[86]

While most Never Again club members sensed an alarming atrophy of American capabilities to confront middle- to higher-end of such a spectrum, officers like Thomas, Vought, and Johnson feared instead that the Vietnam experience signaled a dangerous incapacity of US forces to reliably compete in "limited" and "people's" wars of the kind they had confronted for more than seven years. "American soldiers . . . should devote equal time and seriousness to the study of People's War when preparing themselves for future conflict," Johnson insisted. Extant Army doctrine had proven woefully inadequate for such complicated hybrid conflicts because of its focus on "mid-intensity nuclear warfare where combatants all wear uniforms, where civilians are regarded merely as possible obstacles . . . [and] where decisions are based on battlefield intelligence."[87] Instead, the Communist revolutionary warfare doctrine provided American enemies with "the capability of the weak to defeat the strong," according to Johnson, who saw "no reason to believe that the lessons will not be read by the planners of future wars."[88] Without adequate doctrine and training to do so, "how do soldiers fight an enemy who is not dependent on modern tactical weapons systems?" he asked.[89] Only a veritable revolution in the Army's approach to conceptualizing and training units for operations across the full spectrum of war could address the deficit.[90]

The incoming commander of the brand-new US Army Training and Doctrine Command, General William E. DePuy, could not have disagreed more. Arguably one of the most stalwart card-carrying members of the new Never Again club, DePuy reached a diametrically opposite conclusion based on his extensive World War II and Vietnam experience. "Regular US troop units are peculiarly ill-suited for the purpose of 'se-

Figure 2.6. General William E. DePuy. Courtesy of the US Army Transportation Museum.

curing' operations where they must be in close contact with the people," he observed.[91] By contrast, firepower-centric tactics were warmly welcomed by an officer who, while commanding an infantry battalion in World War II, thought of his primary role as facilitating the progressive advance of artillery forward observers across France.[92] In Vietnam, his 1st Infantry Division grunts had proven especially adept at search and destroy tactics focused on finding and neutralizing both Viet Cong and NVA "Main Force" units with overwhelming firepower. "DePuy viewed the US Army as geared and capable to fight only main force wars," historian Richard Lock-Pullan observed, adding that DePuy believed "Vietnam was an aberration rather than a fundamental challenge to the US understanding of war and the US Army's role."[93] Instead, the Army should "gear itself . . . to the type of warfare it preferred."[94] In 1973, Army Chief of Staff General Creighton Abrams instructed Depuy to rebuild the entire Army training enterprise, refocus Army developmental efforts to shore up a dramatic erosion of warfighting skills relevant to deterring and, if needed, defeat the conventional Soviet foe in Europe.[95] This is precisely what DePuy meant to do.

"A new ball game"

In the 1970s, the US Army faced major personnel reductions. Although significant, they were by no means as dramatic as those that the *Reichsheer* confronted after Versailles. From more than 1.5 million soldiers at the height of the war in 1968, the US Army's ranks numbered merely 785,000 one year after leaving Vietnam. To cope with these reductions, Secretaries of Defense Melvin Laird (1969–73) and James Schlesinger (1973–75) introduced a new Total Force Policy, shifting nearly three-quarters of the responsibility for combat support capabilities to the Reserve and National Guard components. Although not necessarily by design, the new policy effectively forced the active Army to rely on these components if deployed to future contingencies, freeing up more of its defense

budget share to "modernizing" its fighting edge. Active formations were organized into sixteen divisions designed to deploy alongside "round-out" brigades of Reserve support units.[96]

Aside from these major force structure modifications, by far the most significant adjustment was President Richard Nixon's 1973 ending of the draft and conversion of the US military into an all-volunteer force. Concerns about the ethics of mandatory military service and the readiness of the mostly draft-borne immediate post-Vietnam military proliferated throughout the country and its army during the early 1970s. Statistical surveys unveiled that nearly half of all American soldiers had never graduated high school. Nearly the same proportion of Army forces in Europe confessed to the use of illegal drugs—an alarming trend noted by many within units deployed to Vietnam during the latter years of the conflict.[97] A 1973 US poll found that only janitorial staff were respected less than members of the military.[98] Beyond qualitative concerns about those filling the ranks, Nixon and his political allies viewed the draft as "a costly, inequitable, and divisive procedure" that should be ended.[99]

Nixon also carried American foreign policy in a new direction. Instead of obsessively seeking to staunch the flow of communism beyond the country's contemporary borders, his administration sought détente and

Figure 2.7. President Richard Nixon with Secretary of Defense Melvin Laird. Courtesy of Wikimedia Commons.

Figure 2.8. General Creighton Abrams. Courtesy of Wikimedia Commons.

general de-escalation to avoid another Vietnam. This new Nixon Doctrine transformed the post-Vietnam Army. Its senior leaders embraced the president's commitment to prepare for one major regional conflict (MRC) and one simultaneous minor contingency elsewhere in the world.[100]

Partly in response to this new foreign policy trajectory and concerns about deteriorating Army capabilities following the prolonged quagmire in southeast Asia, General Abrams established the Astarita Study Group in 1973. The study would evaluate the service's readiness to face what he and the administration perceived as the free world's most pressing strategic threat: Soviet invasion of western Europe.[101] Admitting that determining "a course for the future is full of pitfalls . . . [and is] at best an imprecise science, shaped more by perceptions of the past and present than by visions of the future," the group advocated for an Army re-orientation back to Europe.[102] Though not published until 1974, the study was colored by ever-more-ominous US intelligence about menacing shifts in Soviet deployments.[103] At least five Russian armor divisions had re-deployed westward, many with much-improved modern T-62 and T-72 tanks. Most analysts believed these new weapons systems were superior to available NATO weapons; even if they were wrong, senior US Army leaders knew sheer numbers would compensate for any hidden qualitative disparities. Abrams, DePuy, and most other Army leaders recognized that a sudden Soviet onslaught would require NATO's limited forces to defend western Europe in a stopgap delaying action until help could arrive from abroad. How long that might take was anybody's guess. The potential price that NATO forces could pay if caught unready was made starkly clear on the afternoon of 6 October 1973, when Egyptian and Syrian coalition forces thundered across Israeli borders to open what was ultimately called, among many other names, the Yom Kippur War.[104]

By overwhelmingly surprising Israeli forces on two fronts, Arab leaders hoped to secure limited tactical objectives and hold them long enough to force diplomatic intervention by the United States, Soviet Union, or other Arab allies to shift the regional political situation in their

favor. Victory over the boastful Jewish state, still proud of its successes in the 1967 Six-Day War, would also help restore diminished Egyptian and Syrian morale.[105] In short, the Arab coalition sought to inflict "the heaviest losses on the enemy" to convince him that continued occupation of territory seized during the Six-Day War "exacts a price that is too high for him to pay."[106] The Israeli security strategy of intimidation would be directly threatened, which Arab leaders hoped would pave the way for "an honorable solution for the Middle East crisis" and a "basic change" in both Israeli and US diplomacy.[107]

Five Egyptian divisions launched the surprise attack on 6 October 1973, and within two days had secured most of their objectives on the eastern bank of the Suez Canal. Armed with deadly Soviet anti-tank missiles, a wide net of advanced anti-air missiles, and most crucially, total surprise, Egyptian infantry and armor rolled back astonished Israeli defenders from the vaunted Bar-Lev Line and stunned the world with their rapid tactical success.[108] When major powers appealed for a ceasefire, Egyptian leaders rejected the requests, hoping instead to maximize their territorial gains and solidify the sudden shift in the regional balance of power.[109] Although several Egyptian officers feared a recovery of Israeli combat power backed by US support should Arab forces advance beyond their strongpoints along the canal, successful Israeli counter attacks enabled by the adept deployment of reserves against Syrian forces on the northern Golan Heights front required a renewed Egyptian offensive in the south to relieve pressure on its northern ally.[110] On 14 October, after a several-day delay, the Arabs launched a second offensive that was bloodily repulsed.[111] Two days later, Israeli armor turned the tables in a breakthrough back across the Suez Canal, overwhelming Egyptian forces and surrounding the Egyptian Third Army. Although both US and Soviet leaders threatened military intervention in support of the belligerents, cooler heads eventually prevailed, and a ceasefire was secured.

By the end of the war, with a loss of fewer than 3,000 troops, Israeli forces had advanced significantly beyond the antebellum borders of the Jewish state and were rapidly closing on the capitals of both their Arab enemies. The Israeli troops had surrounded an entire Egyptian field army and, perhaps most importantly, not a single Israeli civilian life was lost. Almost 18,000 Arab coalition soldiers were dead, and more than 8,000 captured.[112] Even so, the intense trauma of the devastating Arab surprise assault during the first week of the war tended to overshadow Israel's eventual decisive victory in the collective consciousness of both belligerents. As an ironic result, the victorious Israelis saw the initial weeks of

the war as a shameful and intensely painful episode in their nation's history, even while the repulsed Arabs celebrated their success in shattering the global consensus of Israeli regional military dominance left over from the 1967 Six-Day War.[113] As if the rest of the war never happened, Egyp-

Figure 2.9. Map of Eastern Mediterranean, Levant area, 1973. Created by Army University Press.

tians lauded their crowning feats during the opening days of hostilities, especially their proven ability to surprise a supposedly invincible foe.[114] Despite dramatic reversals for Arab forces after the first week of fighting, Egyptians proclaimed the war was "certainly not a defeat, even if it is not the final victory."[115] Much like the North Vietnamese Tet offensive, the political objective of the conflict was never "the land or the casualties or even the fighting," but merely the psychological impact of a successful surprise offensive on the Israeli psyche.[116]

To many US Army senior leaders, the crisis in the Levant bore all the hallmarks of "modern war" they had long expected from a potential conflict against the Soviets in western Europe. Outnumbered Israeli forces armed with predominately American equipment initially were dramatically repulsed by Arabs armed with advanced Soviet weapons systems. The need to secure every foot of sovereign Israeli territory, disastrous implications of losing an opening campaign, and the urgent need to land a decisive blow prior to foreign intervention advocating a disadvantageous ceasefire agreement all matched projected NATO concerns and objectives in Europe.[117] Although the Yom Kippur War was a veritable wake-up call for a US Army focused on its quagmire in Vietnam, officers like DePuy had already decided to shift focus back to Europe before the first Arab columns rolled into Israeli territory. Historian Saul Bronfeld has observed that DePuy characterized the war as "a marvelous excuse . . . for reviewing and updating our own doctrine."[118] Indeed, the conflict would ultimately serve much the same purpose for American military reformers like DePuy that the eastern campaigns of the Great War had for the *Reichsheer*—unlike the *Stellungskrieg* on the western front, or the quagmire in Vietnam, the Yom Kippur War was the right kind of war.

When DePuy spoke and wrote of the need for "updating our doctrine" in light of the Yom Kippur War and the Army's needing to play "catch-up on modernization, having missed one generation of modernization during the Vietnam War," he revealed a powerful assumption that the Arab-Israeli conflict was in fact representative of the future in ways that the war in Vietnam had never been, it was an especially modern "kind" of war, and thus that close analysis of it (and not of Vietnam) would lend itself to improving the Army's ability to successfully confront the most dangerous contingencies on the near horizon.[119] To be sure, there was plenty about the war on its face that was concerning to even the most objective analyses. In one month, Israel lost more artillery pieces and armored vehicles to Soviet-manufactured Arab firepower than all US Army forces maintained in Europe. A "new lethality" seemed to define affairs on the Middle Eastern

battlefield, and DePuy and many others could not miss the glaring similarities between the Arab-Israeli engagements and those they anticipated would unfold in West Germany.[120] Of course, the similarities in the tactical and especially technical characteristics of the conflict dominated such comparisons. Army leaders paid little attention to the political, strategic, or even operational contours of the war.[121] They mostly ignored the fundamentally psychological Arab coalition objectives which had effectively nullified the sustainment of grievous battlefield casualties, much like the North Vietnamese before them. Nor did they address that prevailing Israeli doctrine was incompatible with changing strategic circumstances in the region.[122] Nevertheless, the conflict not only confirmed DePuy's preconceived notions of modern warfare but also offered "a means to gain leverage in negotiating Army budgets and to convince the infantry generals . . . of the need to change," Bronfeld explains.[123] Despite DePuy's apparent clarity of purpose, several of his senior-ranking peers—especially leaders at Fort Benning—were extremely reluctant to reshape doctrine based on Yom Kippur lessons and in anticipation of an imminent Soviet armored advance into western Europe.[124]

Infantry officers like Maj. Gen. Thomas Tarpley, who commanded the Infantry School at Fort Benning, and Lt. Gen. John Cushman, DePuy's pick to command of the new Combined Arms Center (CAC) at Fort Leavenworth, remained reluctant to embrace DePuy's eschewal of Vietnam lessons. Influenced heavily by the predominately airmobile and counterinsurgency operations the infantry conducted in southeast Asia for nearly a decade, both officers had a hard time believing that the brief Yom Kippur War illustrated that such operations were now miraculously a thing of the past. Resistance issuing from the Infantry School frequently raised DePuy's hackles, prompting him to condemn those he termed "the infantry generals" (although branched infantry himself) for their "2½ mile per hour mentality."[125] Yom Kippur had been a war of armor and mechanized infantry, he explained, completely alien to the Vietnam combat methods still being taught at Fort Benning. "They didn't understand it," DePuy later related, stressing the need to "shake them out of that lethargy."[126]

Figure 2.10. General Thomas Tarpley. Courtesy of Wikimedia Commons.

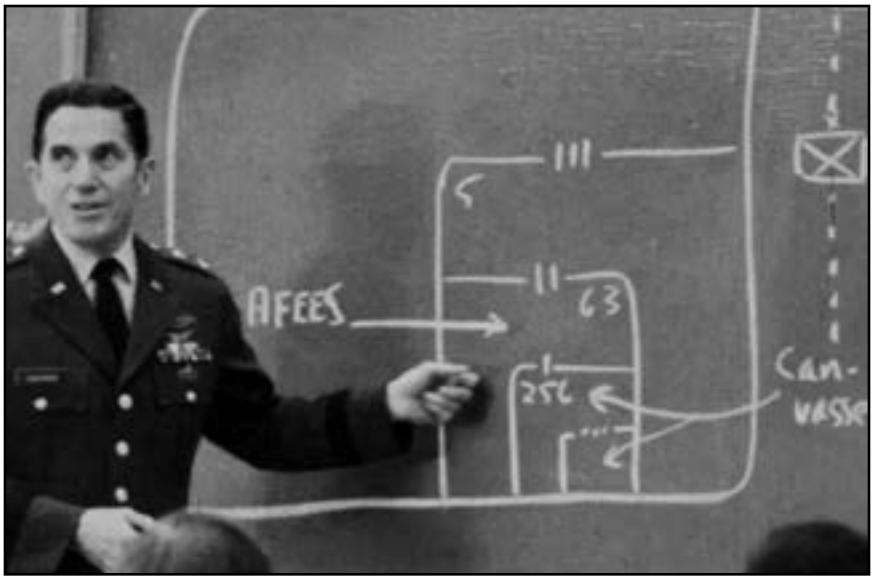

Figure 2.11. Lt. Gen. John Cushman. Courtesy of the US Army.

He was confident that future wars would match his vision, and was unwilling to suffer any significant departure from it by his subordinates.

Those visions only gained further detail following the spring 1974 signing of the Israeli-American Exploitation Agreement, which authorized the turnover of data and captured Arab equipment for US analysis. Over the course of the year, several officers traveled on orders to the Levant to collect the data and develop their own conclusions about lessons from the conflict. Among them was General Donn Starry, then commanding the US Army Armor Center and School at Fort Knox.[127] These visits and analysis efforts culminated in a series of reports on the lessons of the war, the most influential of which was penned by DePuy himself in February 1975.[128] In the report, DePuy concluded that modern weapons were "vastly more lethal than any weapons we have encountered," and that a "highly trained and highly skilled combined arms team" would be needed to overcome them.[129] "We are in a new ball game," he repeatedly asserted.[130] The war illustrated that the US Army would one day have to "operate on a battlefield which is populated with those very lethal weapons in very large numbers and still get the job done without catastrophic losses; losses for which we are really not prepared."[131] Doing so would be an exceedingly tall order, but not impossible.

"Well-trained Israeli tank crews," armed with "courage" and "imagination," had single-handedly "made the difference in 1973," and a close analysis of their performance "helped us to understand the requirements of battle, [and] the concepts of operations," DePuy explained.[132] Mobility was king. "You can't be static," he warned.[133] Combined arms assets had to be orchestrated to effectively suppress enemy capabilities and facilitate a war of maneuver culminating "at the critical point and at the critical time."[134] Sustainably maintained friendly commanders had to "see the battlefield better than the enemy sees it so you know where to go and when to go," all the while maintaining firm control over all mobile subordinate units.[135] DePuy recognized that the need for constancy of relevant intelligence and to see the battlefield better than the enemy were dramatically different from what many of his readers had personally experienced in Vietnam.

In discussing modern American M60A1 tanks versus the comparable Soviet T-62, DePuy emphasized the alarming reality that "we have no decisive advantage, nor do they."[136] Future war would simply be a matter of arithmetical kill ratios reminiscent of the infamous body counts in Vietnam. "He who has the most tanks on the battlefield will have an advantage," he warned an audience of officers who knew well which side was likely to boast the heaviest battalions.[137] The extended range and penetrative capabilities of advanced Soviet tank guns and anti-tank missiles meant that if US forces "can be seen on the battlefield, then they will be hit," DePuy cautioned. "What can be hit, can be killed."[138] The only way to avoid such a grim fate was to master the use of terrain and concealment when approaching enemy positions and use tanks to take the battle to the enemy. Such masterful maneuvering would require extensive training, and the support of an equally well-trained combined arms team.[139]

Ideally, the objective of American tanks—the "single most important weapon on the mechanized battlefield," according to DePuy—was to reach the enemy rear by one way or another.[140] Once there, they could destroy a foe's ability to continue combat operations. Well armored and packing a heavy punch, tanks would essentially exploit a position gained in the enemy's rear. Getting tanks into such an advantageous position required the coordinated efforts of combined arms to overcome the manifold challenges of an unprecedentedly lethal modern battlefield.[141] When Israeli armored counterattacks were not supported by infantry or artillery, they suffered a brutal and bloody repulse by Egyptian infantry armed with modern anti-tank weapons.[142] A similar fate had befallen Israeli air support, felled by surface-to-air (SAM) missiles. This spelled the end of the

era of "casual air support"—as DePuy referred to it, "where a battalion of American Infantry or tanks can have a long discussion with a fighter pilot to point out targets to be engaged," as was frequently the case in Vietnam.[143] At the same time, modern air-to-ground munitions that managed to pierce a SAM screen could wreck ground troops with unprecedented ease. "Therefore, we are in a new ball game in the air, too," DePuy explained. "The environment of the modern battlefield is becoming more complex, more lethal, and more interactive than ever before."[144] It was to become a very common refrain.

Above all, DePuy argued that lessons learned from the Yom Kippur conflict, "coupled and interacting with our concept of operation determine the characteristics required in our new systems."[145] It was important for "our schools, our combat developers, and those involved in training to remember these lessons and relate them to our concepts," he explained. "All that we do must relate to these very important lessons, crosswalked to our concepts, and result in the best weapons, the best tactics, and the best techniques for the US Army to enable it to win the first battle of the next war while fighting outnumbered."[146] The potential risks of aggressively and single-mindedly pursuing readiness for a profoundly specific strategic contingency were ignored. The possible implications should "the first battle of the next war," or indeed of any future conflict, not follow the script of the Yom Kippur War, or what might happen should such a war transform into a different kind altogether, were left out of DePuy's brief.

"We want to emulate the Germans"

Throughout his career, DePuy remained stalwartly committed to increasing combat power at the lowest tactical echelons.[147] This priority, forged through his combat experiences in Europe during World War II, informed every aspect of his approach to military reform. A veteran of the notoriously hard luck 90th Infantry Division, which suffered 150 percent losses in its officer corps during the 1944 campaign for Normandy, DePuy emerged from the war with little respect for the innate leadership abilities of American subalterns. He attributed almost all their failures to inadequate training prior to deployment.[148] The beating heart of the Army's fire and maneuver tactics, he reasoned, was learned skill wedded to junior ranks understanding of weapons system capabilities. Without these advantages borne of instruction and drill, all of the many innate advantages of American warfighters would be squandered.

DePuy, who used his WWII experience as a veritable *sine qua non* of warfare, rejected the legitimacy of more strategically messy conflicts

like Vietnam, which never fit neatly with his definition of real war. Yom Kippur, on the other hand, with its massed tanks and firepower-enabled mechanized infantry maneuver, was precisely the kind of fight he had in mind.[149] More responsible than any other single individual for the future trajectory of the Army's training and doctrine, DePuy and his personal experience now shaped the entire service's approach to war. The general saw little use for high-brow military theory and strategy at the tactical-level, where he felt the Army most required immediate reform. For this reason, he felt the Army needed to tack from emphasizing military *education*—more appropriate for the convoluted contingencies of the Kennedy Flexible Response era—to military *training* geared toward shaping units and leaders for an imminent Yom Kippur War of their own in Europe. Once again, the Israeli model greatly appealed to DePuy. Constantly pressed for time, Israel Defense Forces officers had precious few luxury moments to pursue education in the more abstract aspects of military art. Instead, they focused on what seemed the most immediately pressing contingency. Given recent advances in modern weaponry and Soviet doctrine, DePuy doubted that any alternative approach could survive on the modern battlefield, and thus the Army ought to scale back its attention on professional education in favor of training-based indoctrination in specific tactical and technical skills.[150]

Although initially charged by Abrams to revamp a collection of personnel issues related to dramatic force structure changes and the shift to an all-volunteer force, DePuy's principal focus as the first US Army Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC) commander quickly became the reform and wholesale reconstruction of Army doctrine and training methods. He understood that the only way to prepare the Army for what he was convinced was coming was to show it the way in writing. To that end, DePuy announced that all Army field manuals should be updated and replaced, bringing each into alignment with his concept of the force's primary mission in Europe.[151] By far the most important and influential Army manual had long been the successive editions of Field Manual (FM) 100-5, *Operations*, the service's capstone operational doctrine outlining the nature of war and the Army's role in it—updated in 1968 to address the most obvious lessons from the ongoing war in Vietnam. DePuy was convinced that a new heavily reworked edition was needed to set the tone and standard for all subsequent manuals composed at the branch schools and centers across the Army. The new FM 100-5 would be more than a field manual. DePuy wanted it to be a surrogate to revolution and a life preserver thrown to an Army he felt was on the brink of disaster in Europe.

Given the centrality of combined arms coordination that DePuy felt was at the very heart of operations on the new exceedingly lethal modern battlefield, it followed that General John Cushman's new Combined Arms Center at Fort Leavenworth would bear primary responsibility for crafting the new combined arms *Operations* manual. Accordingly, Cushman attended a December 1974 conference at Fort A. P. Hill—proudly prepared to brief DePuy on what he felt would be the Army's next capstone doctrinal manual. Alas, the engineer and MIT grad-turned infantry officer was wired quite differently from DePuy. He had an academic's intellectual bent mixed with a conviction that the best doctrine was flexible doctrine, avoiding hard-and-fast rules in the spirit of the BDM analyst prescriptions and emphasizing the need for independent judgement and context-dependent reasoning by Army officers in the field. After all, Vietnam had proven that military operations across the spectrum of conflict outlined in the 1968 FM 100-5 required outside-the-box thinking when the book on hand failed to provide ready answers. Accordingly, Cushman's exceedingly concise draft manual characterized war as a "thinking man's art" which had "no traffic with rules."[152] It also pushed back against the idea—so prominent among those enthralled with Yom Kippur—that armor and mechanized infantry would be key to future victories. There were no "supreme weapons systems" universally appropriate to all contingencies across the conflict spectrum, the draft asserted, meaning that all tools and techniques had to be left on the table.[153]

Contrary to Cushman's expectations, DePuy was appalled. The entire premise of the draft manual flew in the face of every conviction he had about the Army and warfighting in general. DePuy believed warfare was based on timeless principles and "inviolable rules" which arose naturally from the specific quantifiable capabilities of weapons systems.[154] Moreover, the kind of initiative necessary for creative problem solving was profoundly rare among the officers he had known throughout his career. Most required simplistic and to-the-point instructions that were strictly prescriptive in their intent. Soldiers needed step-by-step tutelage in "how to fight," not abstractions more appropriate to a war college seminar on the strategic theory, he argued.[155] As Cushman himself put it, his draft had intentionally focused on "how to think about fighting" instead of the strictly practical instructional manual DePuy had in mind.[156]

Perhaps worst of all, nothing about Cushman's draft promised to support Army acquisitions efforts given its tacit admission that the service could not effectively predict the likely contingencies threatening national and international security. DePuy believed the Army needed a manual to

convince congressional purse holders that the service knew precisely what was coming down the pike.[157] Military historian Paul Herbert observes that DePuy hoped to craft a manual which was "at once a fighting doctrine and a procurement strategy."[158] If the Army could design a cogent doctrine, he reasoned, "then we must buy the weapons that make it work and write the manuals that say how to use the weapons that make it work."[159] DePuy essentially dismissed the possibility that political and strategic objectives might not ultimately call for such weapons in future conflicts, just as the recent crisis in Vietnam had required a fundamentally different set of tools from those within the contemporary US arsenal. Force transformation started with a vision of the future battlefield interfaced with detailed descriptions of plausible tactical scenarios. Diligent calculations of known friendly and enemy capabilities would help identify shortfalls and gaps to shore up through wargaming and substantiated appeals for additional funding or acquisitions. To DePuy, such logic was unimpeachable. It was also wholly absent from Cushman's draft manual.[160]

DePuy dismissed Cushman's entire draft manuscript out of hand and scheduled a new conference in the spring of 1975, charging Cushman to revisit the project completely. Understandably upset, the CAC commander did not comply. Perhaps his plan all along, DePuy instead forged his own somewhat informal doctrinal composition team at Fort Monroe in April 1975. The handpicked officers saw eye-to-eye with their chief in terms of the Army's most pressing developmental needs. Under DePuy's direct supervision, they put pen to paper in a building on post colloquially referred to as the Boathouse to bring DePuy's vision to fruition.[161] While many officers looked forward to an all-volunteer Army filled with highest quality recruits, DePuy remained a product of his career-long experiences in the draft-based force. "Our system does not put the smartest people in rifle squads in the best of wars," he warned, adding that infantrymen and tankers serving in the forwardmost units were "great guys but are not articulate," and most certainly "not intellectuals."[162] DePuy stressed that doctrine should be mindfully written "so they can understand."[163] He instructed the "Boathouse Gang" to craft the new FM 100-5 with this in mind and avoid Cushman's academic theoretical abstractions; they should "stick to the arithmetic of the battlefield," he told them, including abundant graphics depicting the key ideas and statistics buried within the text.[164]

Few officers outside the "Boathouse Gang" were as intimately involved in revising Army doctrine as General Donn Starry at the Armor Center and School at Fort Knox. Herbert notes that Starry influenced the armor-centric character of the new combined arms doctrine, a reflection of

DePuy's conviction that "the wars for which the Army must prepare were tankers' wars, and tankers should lead the effort."[165] Having visited Middle East battlefields and spoken with many Israeli veterans about their recent experiences, Starry was convinced that DePuy was onto something. The conflict his new friends described sounded nothing like anything he had personally witnessed in Vietnam, having missed combat service in World War II.[166] Starry later reflected that the "intensity and the density of the battlefield" had far surpassed anything in his experience yet seemed to closely match much of what he and his peers had worried about for some time; "I came back to Fort Knox almost convinced that we had it about right."[167] Perhaps the war represented a "new ball game" after all, he reasoned, apparently forgetting sentiments he had penned in his 1968 essay calling for a much more flexible Cushman-like doctrine.[168]

For any new doctrine to serve effectively as an acquisitions tool, DePuy knew that it first had to earn acceptance within and across the Army itself, not just with Starry and his tankers. Accordingly, he organized a series of rigorous tactical analysis conferences across the country and in Europe to evangelize the forthcoming FM 100-5 and structured subsequent discussions to effectively preempt any meaningful resistance. While DePuy nurtured what he considered crucial ties to the US Air Force to ensure that the new tactics meshed neatly with modern close air support capabilities and doctrine, he also frequently dispatched draft chapters of the new manual to branch chiefs across the Army to appear solicitous of and earnestly interested in their opinions. In truth, he already knew well what he wanted, and was grudgingly resistant to any but the most undeniably relevant alterations from beyond the "Boathouse Gang." While not immune from outside influence, the new manual was to be chiefly a DePuy production.[169]

Because German and US forces were required to conduct combined operations in defense of NATO, DePuy knew their operational concepts and doctrine had to be compatible. He also anticipated that forging a close relationship with German planners would add an air of legitimacy to the new American doctrine.[170] Borne of a long tradition of compensating for lack of numbers with maximum mobility, the German approach to conceptualizing European defense appealed to DePuy's sensibilities—even though two disastrous defeats in multiple world wars lent a somewhat dubious legacy to the traditional German operational concept. *Bundeswehr* officers were increasingly committed to a staunch defense of the farthest eastern reaches of West Germany, motivated by fear of permanently losing German soil to a Soviet onslaught and inopportune ceasefire; however, their continued embrace of combined arms *Panzergrenadier* armor

and mechanized infantry tactics developed prior to and during WWII was especially attractive to DePuy. "We want to emulate the Germans," he explained in a 1975 letter to a colleague; thus the Army would require modern weapons systems and vehicles to match *Bundeswehr* capabilities.[171] This admiration and respect for German martial skill was really a continuation of a sentiment DePuy developed during WWII. In terms of warfighting priorities, the Germans spoke his language.[172]

When the "Boathouse Gang" completed its final draft of the new FM 100-5*, Operations*, commonly known as "Active Defense," it was clear that the Army had successfully "emulate[d] the Germans" in more than just an armor and mechanized infantry-focused approach to defending NATO.[173] The new manual represented a profound narrowing of focus in the Army's official approach to thinking about and prosecuting war, re-orienting the force to prepare for one and only one highly specific strategic scenario. The new doctrine would pull "the Army out of the rice paddies of Vietnam," and reintroduce it "on the Western European battlefield against the Warsaw Pact."[174] It urged leaders to focus on the likely imperatives of fighting outnumbered against comparable enemy capabilities in a "short, intense war" wherein the first battle very possibly might be the last.[175] Provided they could achieve readiness for such a mission, the doctrine's authors presumed the Army could combat supposedly lesser threats with only minor doctrinal adaptations on the ground.[176]

Whereas the 1968 FM 100-5 opened with a broad definition of Army operations as "actions, or the carrying out of strategic, tactical, service, training, or administrative military missions," DePuy's asserted in its first paragraph that the Army's "primary objective is to *win the land battle*—to fight and win in battles, large or small, against whatever foe, wherever we may be sent to war."[177] The 1968 manual explained the intricate connections between national objectives, national strategy, and military strategy and acknowledged the many forms that conflicts could take across what it called "the spectrum of war."[178] The Army, its writers asserted, "must be capable of conducting operations under each or all of these forms of war in all geographic areas of the world."[179] While the 1976 FM 100-5 acknowledged that the force "may find itself at war in any of a variety of places and situations"—facing either Soviet regulars or "irregular units in a remote part of the less developed world"—it offered almost no instruction on how to combat the latter, nor in the crucial connections between national objectives, strategy, and military operations. Much to the contrary, DePuy's battle-focused doctrine interpreted military operations strictly as "how the US Army destroys enemy military forces and secures or defends

important geographic objectives."[180] In fact, the new manual completely omitted guidance on "stability operations," which had been added to Army capstone doctrine in 1968 to reflect ongoing counterinsurgency challenges and lessons learned in Vietnam.[181]

To achieve decisive victory in the steep odds fight to defend West Germany against Soviet invasion, Active Defense doctrine coached that US forces adeptly apply combined arms firepower and maneuver in an "elastic, but not brittle" defensive array of units across a broad front.[182] These scattered units would coordinate with one another to sporadically harass and engage the lead elements of Soviet assault echelons, seeking to delay the main enemy effort long enough for reinforcements to arrive from elsewhere in Europe or even the United States. American warfighters would make up for their sparse numbers by overmatching the Communist foe in skill, timing, and meticulous management of battle. On the ground, armored units supported by mechanized infantry armed with the most advanced anti-tank missiles that money could buy would maneuver smartly, employing terrain benefits to their maximum advantage to avoid being compromised and eliminated by advanced Soviet weapons systems. Intelligence—namely, the requirement of being able to "see" and thus know the battlefield—would be of central importance to the fight. The new doctrine did not mention that such intelligence was glaringly absent in the "most difficult informationless sort of war" the Army had just suffered through in Vietnam. Presumably, the future battlefield would be different, with almost bottomless sources of actionable data and enemy targets to be plotted and "serviced."[183] DePuy was counting on it.

On 1 July 1976, Army Chief of Staff Bernard W. Rogers approved DePuy's new manual, published in a three-ring binder to underscore its tactical focus and ease of revisions.[184] To ensure compliance with the new doctrine and standardization across the Army's many branch schools and training centers, DePuy's TRADOC instituted a major reform of the Army training assessment methodology the following year. The new Army Training and Evaluation Program (ARTEP) established specific missions and tactical training objectives for every unit and formation in the Army, including standardized checklists of requisite tasks and skills to achieve each mission.[185] Representing a profound improvement over the time-based training measurements it replaced, ARTEP revolutionized the rigor and doctrinal relevance of training across the Army and set the stage for developing a highly professional and significantly more competent fighting force. At the same time, due to the narrowly focused doctrine that such training methods were calibrated to support, however, the changes

contributed to a marked decrease in the tactical flexibility of units specifically trained to conduct a particular mission or combat role. Even worse, it lent itself to the emergence of an inherently technocratic approach to both preparing for and thinking about war.[186] DePuy's commitment to this methodical training philosophy dovetailed with his passion for quantifiable combat capabilities. He routinely discussed how Israeli tank crews in the Levant had achieved 1-to-50 exchange ratios against enemy armor, and how modern artillery could reduce the combat power of assaulting armored units by exactly 33 percent.[187] On one occasion, he asserted the need to increase the professional capabilities of every Army battalion by exactly 500 percent, supposedly enabling them to dominate at least five enemy units of comparable size.[188] Precisely how such a dynamic set of variables would be measured was not stated, but the implied logic of the statement (or perhaps lack thereof) spoke volumes.

Historian Richard Lock-Pullan has observed how the challenge of NATO defense "provided the key specificity that is needed for successful innovation, by presenting a concrete problem for the Army as an institution to address."[189] While convenient for officers like DePuy committed to force "modernization," myopic focus on a hyper-specific strategic challenge introduced perils that extended beyond simply ignoring other possible contingencies. Even after acknowledging the major budgetary constraints of the era and the strategic limits suggested by the new "Nixon Doctrine, Ingo Trauschweizer asserts, it still "seems likely" that the Army "could have maintained greater expertise in small wars and counterinsurgency; yet these were neglected."[190] Moreover, as both Trauschweizer and Lock-Pullan note, early 1970s doctrinal, training, and acquisitions decisions laid a foundation for future changes that inevitably set the Army on a specific developmental trajectory.[191] For better and worse (and the vast majority of historians have focused predominately on the former), future Army leaders had to build on the structural and ideological bedrock put down by officers like DePuy—handcrafted for exclusive relevance in deterring or repelling Soviet armored divisions in West Germany.[192] Coping with its greatest institutional crisis of the post-World War II era by eschewing the lessons of its traumatic Vietnam experience, the Army instead refocused only on what its senior leaders deemed the "most demanding" mission conceivable based on the lessons of a single foreign conflict deemed sufficiently "modern" for relevant contemplation.[193] This singular focus materially contributed to struggles the US Army would face in coming decades when forced to adapt to a dizzying array of challenges fundamentally different from those it had been redesigned to confront.

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128. Herbert, *Deciding What Has to Be Done*, 30–37.

129. William E. DePuy, "Implications of the Middle East War on U.S. Army Tactics, Doctrine and Systems," in *DePuy Papers,* 76, 104.

130. DePuy, 78.

131. DePuy, 78.

132. DePuy, 76–77, 102.

133. DePuy, 76–77, 102.

134. DePuy, 76–77, 102.

135. DePuy, 76–77, 102.

136. DePuy, 82.

137. DePuy, 82.

138. DePuy, 85–86.

139. DePuy, 86; and Herbert, *Deciding What Has to Be Done*, 35.

140. DePuy, 87.

141. DePuy, 87.

142. DePuy, 88.

143. DePuy, 89–90.

144. DePuy, 92.

145. DePuy, 106.

146. DePuy, 111.

147. Kretchik, *U.S. Army Doctrine*, 194.

148. Lock-Pullan, "An Inward Looking Time," 496; and Herbert, *Deciding What Has to Be Done*, 16.

149. Herbert, 21; and Jensen, *Forging the Sword*, 55.

150. Bronfeld, "Fighting Outnumbered," 486; and Herbert, 26–27.

151. Herbert, 37; and Trauschweizer, "Back to the Cold War," 26.

152. Herbert, 51–56.

153. Herbert, 51–56.

154. Herbert, 54–58.

155. Herbert, 54–58.

156. Trasuchweizer, "Back to the Cold War," 27.

157. Kretchik, *U.S. Army Doctrine*, 195–96.

158. Herbert, *Deciding What Has to Be Done*, 1.

159. Herbert, 28.

160. Herbert, 28–29, 79.

161. Herbert, 57–59.

162. Kretchik, *U.S. Army Doctrine*, 194; and Herbert, 87.

163. Kretchik, 194; and Herbert, 87.

164. Kretchik, 194; and Herbert, 87.

165. Herbert, 41.

166. Mike Guardia, *Crusader: General Donn Starry and the Army of His Times* (Havertown, PA: Casemate Publishing, 2018), 115–16.

167. Bronfeld, "Fighting Outnumbered," 487.

168. Bronfeld, 487.

169. The process of the manual's collaborative production is assessed in Herbert, *Deciding*, 61–93.

170. Ingo Trauschweizer, "Learning with an Ally: The U.S. Army and the *Bundeswehr* in the Cold War," *The Journal of Military History* 72, no. 2 (April 2008): 497.

171. Trauschweizer, "499; Herbert, *Deciding What Has to Be Done*, 62–66; and Gross, *The Myth and Reality of German Warfare*, 290–94.

172. Herbert, 16, 21.

173. DePuy and Swain, *DePuy Papers*, 194; and Herbert, 7.

174. DePuy and Swain, 194; and Herbert, 7.

175. Jensen, *Forging the Sword*, 44; and Department of the Army, Field Manual (FM) 100-5, *Operations* (Washington, DC: Department of the Army, 1976), 1-1.

176. Herbert, *Deciding What Has to Be Done*, 9.

177. Department of the Army, FM 100-5*,* (1968), 1-1, 1-2; and Department of the Army, FM 100-5 (1976), 1-1; FM 100-5 (1968), 1-2.

178. FM 100-5 (1968), 1-1, 1-2; and FM 100-5 (1976), 1-1, 1-2.

179. FM 100-5 (1968), 1-1, 1-2; and FM 100-5 (1976), 1-1, 1-2.

180. FM 100-5 (1968), 1-1, 1-2; and FM 100-5 (1976), 1-1, 1-2.

181. FM 100-5 (1968), 1-1, 1-2; and FM 100-5 (1976), 1-1, 1-2.

182. Kretchik, *U.S. Army Doctrine*, 197.

183. Kretchik, 197.

184. Kretchik, 197.

185. Herbert, *Deciding What Has to Be Done*, 38-39; and Kretchik, 201.

186. Linn, *The Echo of Battle*, 200–1.

187. Herbert, *Deciding What Has to Be Done*, 80.

188. Bronfeld, "Fighting Outnumbered," 471.

189. Trauschweizer, "Back to the Cold War," 33.

190. Trauschweizer, 33.

191. Lock-Pullan, "Inward Looking Time;" and Trauschweizer, 33, 35. The most influential works lauding DePuy's redemptive and transformative efforts in this era include James F. Dunnigan, *Getting it Right: American Military Re-*

forms after Vietnam to the Gulf War and Beyond (New York: William Morrow and Company, 1993); James Kitfield, *Prodigal Soldiers: How the Generation of Officers Born of Vietnam Revolutionized the American Style of War* (Washington, DC: Brassey's, 1995); and Suzanne C. Nielsen, *An Army Transformed: The U.S. Army's Post-Vietnam Recovery and the Dynamics of Change in Military Organizations* (Carlisle Barracks, PA: US Army War College, Strategic Studies Institute, 2010).

192. Lock-Pullan; and Trauschweizer, 33, 35.

193. Few recent monographs effectively evaluate the Army's aggressive turn away from gleaning substantive lessons from its Vietnam experience as well as David Fitzgerald's *Learning to Forget: US Army Counterinsurgency Doctrine and Practice from Vietnam to Iraq* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2013).

Chapter 3
"To stake everything on a rapid decision"
The German Army and Avoiding *Materialschlacht*, 1921–41

The early *Weimarer Republik* (Weimar Republic) had little choice in selecting strategic imperatives while its very survival hung in the balance, beset by existential threats from without and within. Overburdened by the demands of Versailles, stripped of its colonial possessions and a tenth of its territory, and at pains to deliver reparations payments it could never afford, the new democratic German government seemed ill-fated from the start. Stomachs still grumbled from food shortages borne of wartime blockades mixed with mounting angst and frustration among working Germans. As the value of the Mark rapidly depreciated and inflation took hold, the apparent failings of both capitalism and republicanism inspired drifts to the radical fringes of the partisan continuum. A series of rebellions and strikes rocked the *Republik* between 1919 and 1923. Each was brutally put down by *Freikorps* paramilitary groups and a German army doing its best to preserve the state at almost any cost.[1]

The *Republik*'s beleaguered political leadership habitually looked to what was left of the military to shield the nation from danger. Given the limits of Versailles, however, there was only so much the army could achieve beyond suppressing internal unrest.[2] In the short term, military leaders were forced to subordinate visions of a German military power rebirth to confronting the *Republik*'s far bleaker prospects. The most concerning was the potential for imminent invasion by any, or all, of Germany's most dangerous adversaries: Poland, Czechoslovakia, and France.[3] While senior leaders remained modestly confident that the German army could outmatch Polish forces in the east—provided they retained the benefit of surprise through a preemptive strike—the *Republik* lacked the forces necessary to parry a simultaneous French or Czech incursion. According to the army's own logistical office, the store of ammunition available to the *Reichswehr* in 1923 was so small that the army was "absolutely unable to go to war."[4] Lingering war weariness amongst the German people did not bode well for success in any prolonged conflict either.[5] The sheer volume of Great War veterans in the population meant that, for at least a decade or so, Germany might enjoy a trained reserve of sorts. But the Treaty of Versailles was designed to starve the *Republik* of trained personnel over the long term. Officers could serve no less than twenty-five-year terms, and enlisted men twelve years. Given simultaneous limitations on the size

Figure 3.1. Post World War I Europe, 1919. Created by Army University Press.

of the *Republik*'s defense forces, this policy restricted the diffusion of military knowledge and experience across the German population.[6]

Above all, as the Great War had proven, Germany needed to avoid a protracted attrition war (*Materialschlacht*) to survive any future conflict. Although the nation's economic situation would ebb and flow dramatically over the twenty-year interwar period, Germany's sparsity of natural resources and manpower relative to those of its likely adversaries would never allow prolonged hostilities against a coalition of modern industrialized nations. Taking this largely for granted, most interwar German officers focused their attention on devising ways in which to avoid *Materialschalcht* and its handmaiden positional warfare (*Stellungskrieg*) like that of the *Westfront* altogether. They sought to do so either through the adept maneuver of highly mobile forces or by adopting guerrilla tactics in a nationwide war of liberation, harrying an overwhelming invader until a more conventional counterattack could be mounted with a reasonable degree of hope.

In either case, German military leaders from 1921 to the outbreak of war in 1939 pursued a developmental course that would ultimately result in a "dual-nature" army divided between a small, technologically advanced, combined arms maneuver force and a horse-drawn conscripted mass infantry army reminiscent of the 1914 *Kaiserheer*. Due to Germany's severe resource constraints, the limitations of Versailles, the Great Depression, and later the excessive pace of Nazi rearmament, neither the *Republik* nor the National-Socialist *Drittes Reich* (Third Empire) could field a fully motorized army of the kind the United States would eventually bring to bear. While this bifurcated force was by no means ideal, it proved amenable to the near-term defensive policy of the Weimar government, and later even to Adolf Hitler's early conquests of Czechoslovakia, Poland, the Low Countries, and France. In the dramatic success it enjoyed in operations proximate to the German border, crowned by risky mechanized strikes deep into the enemy rear supported by dive-bombing close air support, the German army fooled its adversaries and itself into thinking it had somehow cracked the code to all modern land warfare.

Historians have long praised the achievements of the interwar German military and its visionary leader-reformers. Even so, Germany had viable alternative pathways for remolding its defeated army. Many officers were unwilling to accept the necessity to gamble so boldly with the nation's future by relying on swift decisive battlefield victories that avoided Germany's lingering strategic shortcomings. Instead, they looked for ways to work within the limitations of European geography, politics, and economics. Ultimately, their voices and ideas were silenced under the weight of a military culture obsessed with the single-minded quest for tactical prowess. Their efforts proved insufficient to save the nation and its army from forthcoming disaster.

"Defenseless against inner and outer enemies"

The army's first interwar *Chef der Truppenamt* (Chief of the Troop Office, the disguised interwar *Generalstab*), *Generalmajor* Hans von Seeckt, interpreted that the *Republik*'s circumstances played a powerful role in shaping the developmental trajectory of the *Reichsheer* during his 1920–26 tenure. Seeckt's experiences in uniform shaped his vision for the future. As the *Generalstab* brainchild of multiple bold campaigns on the *Ostfront* (eastern front) and in Romania during the Great War, he had earned a reputation as a skilled tactician. Having escaped the disaffecting influences of the *Westfront*, which had deflated the ambitions of so many

of his peers, he retained a rare confidence in the ability of skilled armies to maneuver themselves out of almost any situation.[7]

Seeckt disagreed with several of his fellow officers who believed that firepower contingent *Stellungskrieg*, and thus *Materialschlacht*, were inevitable facets of modern industrial war.[8] He felt the *Republik* ought to make a virtue out of necessity. Versailles strictly limited the German army to 100,000 men; however, a small, highly skilled, professional, and maximally mobile force of the kind the Allies allowed could capitalize on its increased maneuverability to produce decisive results on the battlefield even when outnumbered. As Seeckt learned from his experiences during the Great War, a skilled tactician could achieve local numerical superiority if he enjoyed sufficient mobility. Convinced that horses could provide much of this mobility, he remained an ardent believer in the efficacy of horse cavalry. Internal combustion engines might one day provide exponentially greater speed and maneuverability, but Germany would be hard-pressed to motorize an army the size of the *Kaiserheer*—even if eventually freed from Versailles. Motorizing, or even mechanizing, a much smaller force of highly trained volunteers, however, seemed a plausible future escape from the sloth of mass armies. For now, though, given the impracticability (to say nothing of the illegality) of Germany fielding a respectable motorized force, horses would have to suffice.[9]

Figure 3.2. German Horse Cavalry. Courtesy of Wikimedia Commons.

Instead of an undifferentiated mass of conscripts, Seeckt envisioned a bifurcated wartime army comprised of a conscripted militia "covering army," or *Deckungsheer*, in the style of the *Kaiserheer* that would operate in tandem with a professional, if comparatively small, *Operationsheer*. The larger of these, he presumed, would be incapable of conducting any but the most basic defensive operations associated with *Stellungskrieg*. If the worst came to pass and positional warfare again reared its ugly head, the *Deckungsheer* would defend echeloned defensive zones reminiscent of the *Westfront* while the agile *Operationsheer* forced breakthroughs into the enemy rear like those envisioned by *Stosstrupptaktik* in 1918.

Of course, forcing breakthroughs would only be necessary if things did not go as Seeckt planned. In his opinion, the *Operationsheer* could prevent a prolonged *Stellungskrieg* (and thus *Materialschlacht*) by decisively defeating still-mobilizing foes through swift offensive maneuvers at the very outset of hostilities. Seeckt recognized that the *Operationsheer* would need to be doubled in size prior to war; then it would preemptively take the fight to the enemy on their own territory, annihilating their armies in massive envelopment battles under the protective cover of close air support while the conscripted *Deckungsheer* protected the German borders.[10] Given the *Republik*'s scant resources, these borders would be proximate to the theater of war. Seeckt's operating concept was not intended to prepare the army for far-flung operations, but rather strategically defensive spoiling attacks close to home. He envisioned the professional *Reichsheer* of the 1920s as a kind of *Führerheer*, or "army of leaders," which would ultimately form the nucleus of trained personnel for a future wartime *Operationsheer*.[11] By comparison, he paid relatively little attention to training or preparation of a future *Deckungsheer*.

By 1918, following the adoption of echeloned defensive zones and *Stosstruppen* breakthrough tactics, successful tactical prosecution of *Stellungskrieg* was a relatively manageable problem for German forces. It was *Stellungskrieg*'s tendency to transform a maneuver war into a protracted *Materialschlacht* which had ultimately proven fatal to the *Kaiserreich*, and it was this that Seeckt desperately sought to avoid with what he termed *Bewegungskrieg*, or war of movement. In truth, as Robert Citino and others have observed, the concept offered little real divergence from centuries of traditional German tactical art.[12] For the most part, *Bewegungskrieg* was more of the same, but faster. German ground forces would capitalize on enhanced mobility and decentralized command to break through defensive lines and swallow whole pockets of enemy units. Dispersed mobile

columns would coordinate with German tactical airpower—when and if the creation of such a military arm was again feasible—to facilitate these breakthroughs. In sum, Seeckt's future *Operationsheer* would conduct itself along much the same lines as the wartime *Kaiserheer* had attempted in 1914, only this time with the sorely lacking mobility shortcomings shored up and a renewed emphasis on combined arms and close air support. German forces would no longer be hampered by the lethargy naturally accruing to enormous field armies. This alone, Seeckt mused, would help avoid the disastrous fate of the *Kaiserheer* on the Marne in 1914.[13]

To maximize the greatest utility from a small *Reichsheer*, Seeckt emphasized the cultivation of "inner military strength" within each officer and soldier through education and training: "We will achieve the aim of turning every link of the army, according to his character, ability and knowledge, into a soldier who will be a man and leader, independent and self-confident."[14] To aid in this effort, the German army would restrict enlistments and officer commissions to only the best and brightest recruits.[15] Unfortunately, for Seeckt, the early Weimar economy was not conducive to his dream. Because of plentiful opportunities that promised higher salaries and better living conditions prior to the depression years of the 1930s, the army initially struggled to attract the most capable to its ranks. Even so, despite the lack of realism in Seeckt's plans, the *Bewegungskrieg* concept comprehensively informed, yet did not wholly determine, the interwar reconstruction of the army by shaping its earliest doctrinal and training priorities.[16]

While *Bewegungskrieg* embraced the German tradition of the offensive as the only truly decisive form of warfare at the tactical-level, it did so within a rigidly strategic defensive context. Seeckt's formulations were not intended to craft a *Reichsheer* capable of offensively confronting the *Republik's* enemies and reversing the indignities of Versailles, despite the insatiable appetite for such imaginings within the officer corps. Instead, Seeckt's concept sought to preserve what was left of Germany with what little the Allies allowed the *Republik* to maintain in its defense. Given the rigid Versailles limitations, Seeckt interpreted his mandate not as crafting a force capable of succeeding under any conceivable strategic circumstances, but rather under specifically those which he considered most likely to unfold.

The viability of Seeckt's vision, and indeed of the *Republik* itself, was brought under intense scrutiny following the humbling 1923 Allied occupation of the mining and industrial district of the Ruhr. After the young republic proved incapable of keeping up with its reparation payments of timber to France, French and Belgian forces summarily occupied the eco-

nomically vital district as a punitive measure. Shocked by the occupation, Chancellor Wilhelm Cuno ordered Ruhr residents to launch a general strike, refusing to operate the mines and industrial establishments for Allied military forces. Many suffered mass arrest, and the already hamstrung *Republik* economy was all but destroyed due to the loss of this key national income source. Feverishly printing more money to counterbalance deficits, the government exacerbated runaway inflation until the Mark collapsed to an exchange rate of more than 4 trillion marks to 1 US dollar in the fall of 1923. Immense hardship, especially amongst wage-workers, inspired rioting and discontent across the nation; many looked to the more radical wings of the partisan spectrum for alternatives to what they considered the failings of German democracy and republicanism.[17]

Figure 3.3. Chancellor Wilhelm Cuno. Courtesy of the Library of Congress.

For many German officers, the occupation signaled more than just the incompetence of the fledgling Weimar government. The fact that Seeckt failed to respond adequately, or even at all, to the Ruhr crisis—due in part to his single-minded focus on crafting a *Führerheer* for some imagined future conflict—grated on many in the *Truppenamt*.[18] By far the loudest critic was *Oberstleutnant* Joachim von Stülpnagel, then head of the *Heeresabteilung* and responsible for the army's strategic planning. Using the prestige and influence of his position, Stülpnagel formed subordinate officers into work-

Figure 3.4. Joachim von Stülpnagel. Courtesy of Wikimedia Commons.

ing groups charged with analyzing the *Republik's* capacity for self-defense under Versailles' severe limitations.[19] Among them were several men destined to hold some of the highest positions in the future *Wehrmacht*. Instead of looking far into the future like Seeckt and his acolytes, these officers focused on the far-less-attractive present in search of realistic solutions to national defense that could be implemented immediately.

Stülpnagel initially introduced his ideas in the winter of 1924, delivering an essay entitled "Thoughts on the Future War" to a gathering of officers at the *Reichswehr* ministry. Contrary to the Seecktian philosophy of attempting to prevent a prolonged *Materialschlacht*, Stülpnagel felt the *Republik* had no choice but to prepare to engage in an attrition campaign on its own initiative. At the very least, such a strategy would preserve the Reich until it could obtain foreign intervention or mobilize sufficient combat power to drive out an invader. Attempting to preempt an invasion by launching a risky offensive into enemy territory seemed to him a fool's errand.[20] Insurgency had long been the most successful strategic tool of the outnumbered. Despite a cultural distaste for such tactics, Germany could fight a *Volkskrieg* (peoples' war) against its foes—coordinating local government resources with those of the state then organizing, arming, and inspiring the masses of German citizens for a guerrilla war of resistance—and training bands of skilled marauders called *Feldjägers* to harry enemy lines of communication. With this preparation, the Weimar government could potentially prolong a conflict for long enough to allow foreign intervention or national mobilization in preparation for more conventional operations. Stülpnagel and his acolytes believed that although their strategy seemed farfetched, Germany enjoyed few realistic alternatives.[21]

Much of the officer corps had difficulty seeing either Seeckt or Stülpnagel's ideas as realistic given the *Republik*'s embarrassing circumstances. Still, Stülpnagel did win the attention of a modest group of followers somewhat pejoratively nicknamed *die Fronde* (the faction). Although their ultimate vision of decisive victory, like Seeckt's, still hinged on a final battle of annihilation prosecuted by conventional forces, their strategic prescription—involving the whole of the German civil population in a "systematically planned and deliberately conducted war of liberation"—was groundbreaking. Even more novel was the idea of crafting an operating concept that embraced the need to shift between different modes of warfare. Whereas Seeckt sought to avoid *Materialschlacht* via *Bewegungskrieg*, somehow preempting the inherent dynamism of war, Stülpnagel instead embraced the natural fluidity of conflict by attempting to turn Germany's most severe vulnerabilities into strategic advantages. In so doing,

his proto-operating concept entailed the requirement of a future national force able to flex or shift between multiple modes of warfare instead of seeking mastery in only one as a means by which to avoid another.[22]

It is impossible to know how an early embrace of Stülpnagel's ideas may have influenced the evolution of the interwar *Reichsheer* in the realms of doctrine, equipment, training, and perhaps most of all, culture. The values of cost effectiveness, conservation, flexibility, and strategic endurance, all crucial to the successful prosecution of any insurgency, may well have become watchwords for German officers in ways that Seeckt's *Bewegungskrieg* never required. These values, if widespread among the future *Wehrmacht* officer corps, could have paid great dividends in the coming conflict. In the end, however, despite his ideas informing a series of *Reichsheer* exercises conducted in 1924–25, Stülpnagel's vision failed to gain sufficient traction with the officer corps to overtake Seeckt's slightly more popular *Bewegungskrieg* concept.[23] Stülpnagel himself eventually accepted that he was little more than "an inconvenient admonisher" who had hoped in vain that sufficient numbers of German officers had "grasped the gravity of the problem" as illuminated by the Great War.[24] In a Seecktian attempt to purge the *Truppenamt* of such meddlesome detractors, Stülpnagel was quietly promoted to *Oberst* and transferred far away from the *Heeresabteilung* in 1926.[25]

Historians continue to laud Seeckt for "creating an army out of nothing," hand-crafted for the specific contingency he saw as most immediately pressing.[26] Despite the potential advantages accruing to a force designed to confront a particular scenario should such a contingency arise, Seeckt's single-minded commitment to a *Bewegungskrieg* counteroffensive was built upon shaky assumptions. What if a mobilizing enemy army avoided the encircling German noose? What if the decisive pincers failed to reach their assigned objectives? What if the annihilation of the initial enemy onslaught failed to bring the conflict to a decisive conclusion? What if the objectives assigned to the *Reichsheer* ultimately involved scenarios fundamentally different from those anticipated? Historians have well documented the process of forging Seeckt's *Führerheer* for *Bewegungskrieg* out of the ashes of the defeated *Kaiserheer*. The Phoenix-like rise of the vaunted *Wehrmacht* in the face of Versailles' stringent limitations continues to inspire military history students and professional soldiers alike. Even so, despite the impressive tactical-level rejuvenation feats that Seeckt and his successors achieved between 1921 and 1933, their concerted effort to craft a force relevant to a single contingency bred a *Reichsheer* of very limited strategic utility. Seeckt's army was hand-fashioned to avoid any possibili-

ty of a maneuver campaign suffering transformation into a disastrous *Stellungskrieg*. German forces had to maintain the initiative from the opening of hostilities to the conclusion of the decisive *Kesselschlacht* that crushed the foe while still on his own territory. Every facet of doctrine and training centered on this assumed strategic imperative. Seeckt's concept was not flexible enough to successfully prosecute a prolonged *Materialschlacht* precisely because it was designed to avoid a lengthy conflict. German warfighting would remain a gambler's art.

"As paradoxical as that may sound"

The *Truppenamt*'s efforts to achieve this avoidance began with revitalizing the army's outdated wartime doctrine. The *Reichsheer* training office issued the army's first major postwar doctrinal manual, *Führung und Gefect der verbundenen Waffen (F.u.G.)*, in two parts between 1921 and 1923. Its authors focused exclusively on combined arms tactics and worked under Seeckt's direct supervision, embodying his personal convictions in every page of the draft.[27] Conceptually, *F.u.G.* offered little in the way of real novelty.[28] Seeckt focused on timeless principles and the most important battlefield lessons from the Great War as derived from the rigorous analytical reports he ordered the *Truppenamt* to conduct (described in Chapter 1).[29] Instead of detailed courses of action, the manual offered frameworks to conceptually guide decisions. A series of new branch-level tactical manuals included more detailed guidance to the lowest tactical echelons.[30] This doctrinal style facilitated the development of a highly tactically competent force that retained a commitment to the creative initiative of skilled junior officers in and out of combat.

The army placed maximum emphasis on officers and soldiers mastering tactical concepts through training, issuing handbooks for diligent evening study, and rotating men through platoon leadership positions to ensure that all had some experience at the helm. Seeckt personally visited garrisons throughout the year to monitor their progress, signaling his serious interest in forging a tactically competent force.[31] All training prioritized combined arms principles. Officers of every combat arms branch were required to familiarize themselves with the operation and command of artillery.[32] Still, given extremely limited resources, training exercises for large-scale formations were impossible until 1923.[33] Evolutions followed a seasonal schedule, with divisions coming together for larger keystone maneuvers in the late fall. At all other times, soldiers trained in their respective companies.[34]

Meanwhile, Seeckt provided general officers and their staffs opportunities to attend instructional staff rides which he led personally. These annual training events focused on problems with defending against sudden invasion and allotted time for each officer to suggest potential courses of action to be weighed and critiqued by peers.[35] Decentralized mission command, or *Auftragstaktik*, would be of crucial importance in a highly mobile campaign of the kind Seeckt envisioned, but it had to be carefully balanced. He cautioned leaders to "understand when to act independently and when to wait for orders."[36] Due to Versailles limitations on officer commissions, noncommissioned officers were trained to fill traditional commissioned roles within their units in anticipation of a future enlarged wartime *Operationsheer*.[37]

Despite the *Reichsheer*'s glaring numerical disadvantages, most officers balked at training to fight defensive delaying actions against a sudden overwhelming enemy invasion. Such tactics felt like demeaning admissions of Germany's weakness and ran counter to the army's cultural fixation on offensive annihilation of the foe.[38] Instead, most of the army's training focused on the meeting engagement—"the freest, most original type of offensive resulting from movement."[39] The essence of the highly mobile maneuver warfare that Seeckt envisioned was to encounter a foe while on the march. Forging combat leaders capable of operating in an environment dominated by uncertainty would be crucial for success in such tactical situations. "Jumping in boldly is the rule," *F.u.G.* emphasized, encouraging officers to develop their capacity for thinking through scenarios which "have no diagram."[40] Combat leaders needed to accurately gauge the tempo of a developing fight, and judge when and how to employ their lead elements to buy maximal time to deploy the main body.[41]

In the wake of the 1923 Ruhr crisis, the character of German war games and staff rides took two major turns. Widespread shock at the army's evident inability to defend the *Republik* from French incursion inspired the *Truppenamt* to emphasize the tactical realism of training and simulations. In doing so, the army could explore how to protect the country with the finite means at hand, as opposed to dreaming of a day when such limitations would no longer exist; however, this necessitated a corresponding drift of the imagined strategic and geopolitical context of such exercises into absurd realms. Staff rides based on a defense against sudden Polish attack into eastern Germany conveniently also contemplated no action taken by any of Poland's allies on other fronts. War games designed to address French invasions relied on unrealistic sources of sal-

vation like the sudden and unexplained alliance and intervention of Great Britain or Italy on behalf of the German *Republik*. Historian Gerhard Gross has described this dynamic as training "at a realistic tactical and a utopian operational-strategic level."[42] While such fanciful solutions to Germany's intractable geopolitical conundrum allowed officers to focus their attention on mastering maneuvers, framing the geopolitical setting of exercises in such a ludicrous fashion fostered the notion that the efficacy of particular tactics was unrelated to the particular strategic context in which they were employed.[43]

Two major diplomatic developments occurred during Seeckt's tenure as *Chef der Truppenamt* which reshaped the geopolitical context of the *Reichsheer* evolution. They also made the prospect of miraculous foreign intervention on behalf of an assailed *Republik* a slightly less ridiculous prospect. In the spring of 1922, German and Soviet diplomats signed an agreement at Rapallo, Italy, that established friendly relations between the two black sheep of interwar Europe. Although greatly disappointing to the western Allies, the German-Soviet treaty opened the door to covert military cooperation between the two powers even though such cooperation was strictly banned by Versailles. The treaty also would deter Polish aggression, threatening Germany's most dangerous adversary with potential Soviet invasion should it threaten the *Republik*.[44] In 1926, Germany's western border was similarly secured by diplomatic efforts culminating in the Pact of Locarno between Germany, Belgium, Britain, France, and Italy. Among the agreement terms: establish permanent post-Versailles territorial boundaries and a mutual commitment to avoid all offensive military action between the great powers. Allied forces agreed to abandon their occupation of the Rhineland in 1930, leaving all *Republik* territory under exclusively German control.[45]

Partnership with the USSR and the lack of an imminent threat from the west allowed the *Reichsheer* to begin illicitly exploring new technologies for the battlefield. In early 1927, a combined Russo-German experimental tank training school was established at Kazan in Russia where *Reichsheer* officers explored the possibilities of mechanized maneuver warfare, often while donning Soviet uniforms, alongside their new Russian allies. The school's influence on future senior leadership of the *Wehrmacht*'s armored divisions cannot be overestimated. Nearly all the army's future *Panzer* leaders were among the program's thirty graduates.[46]

Officer instruction in Seeckt's *Reichsheer* focused almost exclusively on tactics; occasional forays into civics and geography were the only ex-

ceptions. While instruction on the latest technological advances in weaponry and equipment (much of which the army lacked) was foregrounded, most officers received no education in strategy, economics, or the relationship between politics, strategy, and war. Prussian military theorist Carl von Clausewitz's *On War* was, accordingly, "virtually unknown."[47] Historians have dismissed this pedagogical gap as unimportant, given that junior officers were tactical leaders with ostensibly "no conceivable need . . . to know Clausewitz or grand strategy."[48] But with no grounding in these topics, central as they are to modern warfare, officers could not understand how or why the particular tactical methods they employed either promoted or hampered Germany's pursuit of its strategic and political aims. Tactical success was sought for the sake of tactical success. Officers were to remain focused on the battlefield immediately in front of them and blindly trust in higher headquarters to manage, coordinate, and direct the trajectory of campaigns toward strategic goals. The *Republik* neglected even rudimentary strategic education for the junior officer corps—a direction that was manifest in typical topics of essays penned by its members for the widely read *Militär-Wochenblatt* journal. "The intellectual energies of these officers were turned away from the grander aspects of strategy," historian James Corum explains.[49] While nearly every issue overflowed with articles interrogating tactical questions, readers naturally concluded that the growing officer corps was "carefully studying the military tactics and operations in isolation from the politics and economics."[50]

A select few enjoyed brief opportunities to shore up this gap. Although officially outlawed by Versailles, the legendary *Generalstab* continued to operate under the disguised name of "leaders' assistants," with officer selection and a rigorous four-year education in tactics and operational art occurring in distributed fashion across the army. During the program's final year, officers attended mandatory lectures on questions of political and economic import. General Walther Reinhardt organized these talks at the University of Berlin, delivered by civilian faculty. They represented the only substantive effort by Seeckt's *Reichsheer* to address the strategic incompetence that hamstrung the *Generalstab* during the Great War. Fewer than ten officers annually reached the final year of the program, severely limiting the impact that the Reinhardt lectures would have on the officer corps.[51]

Despite this shortfall, by 1925 the army's performance in tactical field maneuvers suggested to Seeckt that the *Reichsheer* was finally "loosening the still binding chains of trench warfare."[52] As he had hoped, sys-

tematic instruction and training seemed to have restored the army's long-lost "elastic spirit," and the force appeared increasingly tactically prepared for *Bewegungskrieg*.[53] Even so, much of Seeckt's officer corps lacked confidence, still concerned that any future conflict on the continent would involve a titanic industrialized contest between mass armies more destructive even than the Great War. Given the *Republik*'s lack of resources and preparation for such a contingency, success seemed unlikely.[54]

Among those still doubting the efficacy of Seeckt's plans was Reich Minister of Defense Wilhelm Groener. In the spring of 1930, three years after Seeckt retired from the army, Groener issued a directive acknowledging the continued weakness of the *Reichswehr* and thus its limited strategic utility. In almost no case could the force be effective on its own without extensive cooperation by civil and political authorities. Its primary use, Groener asserted, remained addressing disturbances within the still-fractious *Republik*. Doubtful that the army could successfully defend the nation against invasion, most especially against France, he suggested the government should submit to such an incursion unless the situation somehow allowed better odds for victory. The idea of offensive operations beyond Germany's borders—unless as part of an international coalition—was beyond question. Even if only one of its many potential adversaries assailed the *Republik*, the *Truppenamt* reported, "we cannot defend our borders, cannot even fight to gain time, without having to fear a military catastrophe in a short period of time."[55] Short of a systematic effort to boldly throw off the restrictions of Versailles, Germany would remain—by Allied design—at the mercy of its neighbors.[56]

Seeckt's 1926 departure from the *Reichsheer* led more officers to call for a return to pragmatic realism in preparations and training. Groener represented the most prominent of these voices. Convinced that the army ought to cooperate closely with the navy in a strictly defensive capacity, he felt the *Republik*'s armed forces should prepare exclusively to defend against Polish aggression. He also believed that all military preparation ought to be closely aligned with the *Republik*'s immediate foreign policy objectives.[57] His position was less than popular among the officer corps. In fact, the still mostly Seecktian *Reichsheer* apparently ignored his wishes. War games remained completely detached from geopolitical realities. Large-scale training exercises emphasized delaying actions followed by counterattacks that resulted in decisive envelopments well in-line with Seeckt's *Bewegungskrieg*. Rapid maneuver, combined arms offensive operations, and the acceptance of great risk in the interest of tactical gain remained watchwords across the officer corps, even given the total lack

of many weapons systems and vehicles represented only symbolically in training. One *Truppenamt* commentary on the results of a 1933 staff ride underscored the mentality of most officers. "What must be strived for is not a heroic defense," the authors expressed, rejecting the *Reichswehrminister*'s call for realism, "but a decisive victory, as paradoxical as that may sound."[58] Given the army's continued lack of access to modern military technology and a lingering restriction to only 100,000 men under arms, it sounded quite paradoxical indeed.[59]

"The sword of the new German worldview"

A detailed chronicling of the 1932–33 demise of the *Republik* and political ascension of Adolf Hitler and his National Socialist German Workers' [Nazi] Party is beyond the scope of this work; however, these events brought sudden and radical change to the German military's developmental trajectory. Contrary to the *Republik*'s modest defensive policies, Hitler promised a "complete reversal" of Germany's diminished position on the European stage, absolute rejection of Versailles regardless of political or military consequences, and a commitment to the "strengthening of the nation's will" and vast enlargement of its armed forces.[60] A revitalized military would not just defend Germany's borders but regain the territory lost to Versailles and even conquer extensive swaths of *Lebensraum* (living space) to the east. A new German Reich would attain not only European predominance, but *Weltmacht* (world power) culminating in victory over the United States in an intercontinental war that would effectively deliver global domination into the hands of the German people.[61] Worried that the meteoric rise of American economic power would ultimately lead to the subordination of Germany within a US-dominated international system, Hitler sought to procure the necessary territory and resources for Germany to contest such a balance of power.[62] The prospect of American dominance concerned the Nazis first and foremost because of the supposed enthrallment of the United States to what Hitler referred to as "the world Jewish conspiracy."[63] His anti-Semitic ideology blamed most all of Germany's woes on the global Jewish population, asserting that Jews were bent on secretly enslaving the world. The Reich's security could only be assured by preserving the self-sufficiency and economic independence of those Hitler deemed members of the true German race. As American global influence began to slip during the tumultuous Depression years of the early 1930s, Hitler saw a brief window of opportunity to realize his vision.[64]

Given the past decade of anxiety about the undermanned and outclassed *Reichsheer*'s ability to defend the country for more than an hour

of high-intensity combat, Hitler's proclamations and policy objectives seemed far-fetched until he and the new Nazi government began to act. A modest *Republik* rearmament program began in 1928, seeking to ensure that Germany could field a sixteen-division *Reichsheer* by 1932 with sufficient ammunition and stockpiled supplies to defend against sudden invasion.[65] After assuming the chancellorship in January 1933, Hitler abruptly ended Germany's reparations payments and redirected these funds to realize a twenty-one-division army by 1938. This required both universal conscription and reclamation of the industrial heartland east of the Rhine, boldly flaunting Allied restrictions with impunity.[66] He made no effort to hide these Versailles violations from Germany's wary adversaries. On the contrary, Hitler announced the Reich's new trajectory publicly in the spring of 1935 to a stunned world. His simultaneous resurrection and promotion of the nineteenth-century *Volksgemeinschaft* unifying ideology encouraged the kind of nationalistic solidarity that many German officers had suggested would be necessary to prepare the nation for mass great power war in the modern era.[67] Hitler called on Germans from all walks of life to look past their differences and focus on the establishment and security of a thousand-year Third Reich. For this reason, along with his abiding support for revitalizing, modernizing, and dramatically expanding the German military, the *Führer* rapidly gained support from much of the army's officer corps.[68]

Generalmajor Werner von Blomberg, commander in chief of the armed forces (1933–38), eagerly embraced Hitler's vision. He recognized the opportunity for aggressive rearmament, and, like Hitler, paid little attention to the potential geopolitical costs of a wholesale dismissal of Versailles. "The more enemies, the more honor!" Bloomberg proclaimed in a striking display of strategic ineptitude.[69] The bold Nazi rearmament strategy and foreign policy agenda naturally alarmed the Allies, dramatically increasing the odds of

Figure 3.5. Generalmajor Werner von Blomberg. Courtesy of Wikimedia Commons.

sudden invasion. Even so, Hitler correctly predicted that neither Poland nor France could muster the political capital to launch a preventative offensive that risked dragging Europe into a second conflagration so soon after the close of the Great War. For the most part, Germany's adversaries sought to appease and contain Hitler's mounting aggression with hard talk and subtle diplomacy—a game that the chancellor quickly proved alarmingly adept at winning.[70]

Hitler's Four-Year Plan, initiated in the summer of 1936, identified military rearmament as Germany's principal industrial priority, aiming for complete German self-sufficiency, modernization, and preparation for a total war culminating in "Germany's self-assertion and the extension of her *Lebensraum*."[71] The lack of any unified plan for rearmament, however, prompted the military's three services (army, navy, and the new *Luftwaffe* air force) to vie with each other for finite resources, paying little attention to the perils associated with their lack of coordination.[72] Nazi authorities repeatedly increased the pace of rearmament between 1933 and 1936, exacerbating international tensions with each successive reckless iteration. This seemed entirely necessary and appropriate to Hitler and his closest ideological compatriots: "If we do not succeed in bringing the German army as rapidly as possible to the rank of premier army in the world . . . then Germany will be lost!"[73]

Hitler reintroduced mass conscription in the spring of 1935, then began converting the small defensively focused *Reichswehr* into an offensive tool for Nazi aggression formally renamed the *Wehrmacht*.[74] One year later, he ordered the army's expansion to a total of 102 divisions to be completed within the next four years, boasting more than two-and-a-half million men under arms—twenty-six times the force size authorized by Versailles. This rapid increase necessitated abandoning the *Reichsheer*'s commitment to restrict officer commissions to only the most qualified candidates. Given the increasing salience of Nazi political ideology across the German population, new officers frequently carried Hitler's political ideas with them into the ranks, producing a pronounced "Nazification" of the new *Wehrmacht*.[75] In conjunction with this political transformation of the army came a paradigm shift in its training, doctrinal, and organizational focus. Whereas the *Reichsheer* had focused on defending the Reich against steep odds for the last two decades, the *Wehrmacht* now prepared to expand its territory at the expense of its neighbors.[76] Even so, despite its new ideology, uniforms, equipment, and manpower, the increasingly threatening Nazi war machine

was erected atop the doctrinal and conceptual foundation of the Seecktian *Reichsheer* and the defeated *Kaiserheer* before it.

The army's first doctrinal manual published following Hitler's ascension to power made the conceptual continuities between *Reichsheer* and *Wehrmacht* clear. The authors of *Truppenführung* (Leadership of Troops), published in two parts between 1933 and 1934, held to the German tradition of portraying war at the tactical level as "an art, a free, creative activity that rests on scientific principles."[77] An engagement could shift suddenly and unpredictably, requiring flexible combat leaders trained to adapt on the fly. Officers needed competence in the full range of potential tactical scenarios, including attack, defense, and delaying actions across all types of terrain. Above all, the application of "the unified fire of all arms" guided by a stream of intelligence flowing from the frontline to headquarters and back remained the recipe for success.[78] As had long been the case, attacking German forces would strive to encircle enemy forces whenever possible, annihilating them in a ruthless combined arms onslaught. On the defensive, they would employ an echeloned mobile "defense in depth," nipping at vulnerabilities along an enemy's axis of advance until a decisive counterstroke was possible.[79]

While emphasizing the importance of tactical flexibility, *Truppenführung* ignored the strategic level of war completely. Officers were given no insight in calibrating their tactical choices with specific strategic means and ends. Battlefield victory was to be gained by any means necessary in the crucible of combat. The fact that such a victory might prove costly in terms of casualties and expended materiel was barely mentioned in the text. To be sure, the doctrine addressed but did not emphasize the importance of economical use of drinking water, ammunition, fuel, lubricants, weapons, and equipment.[80] Should a foe escape the deadly snare of dispersed German mobile columns, only the tireless pursuit of a retiring enemy could reliably secure victory, preventing at all costs "the chance to regroup and make a stand."[81] Exhaustion of men or equipment was "never a valid reason for failing to pursue," the authors asserted, adding that "the commander sometimes must demand efforts that seem impossible."[82] Even so, adequate ammunition supplies were of great importance, even as their sustainment "must not restrict the rapid advance of the pursuit."[83] Thus, the revitalized offensive spirit of the *Wehrmacht* paid little attention to the Reich's still-very-limited means even after rearmament. Although sound in an abstract tactical sense, *Truppenführung* contributed nothing to crafting an operational concept calibrated to Germany's all-but-inescapable strategic, economic, and industrial limitations.

Figure 3.6. Oswald Lutz. Courtesy of Wikimedia Commons.

Figure 3.7. Heinz Guderian. Courtesy of Wikimedia Commons.

The new doctrine discussed proper employment of tanks, derived from the fruits of experimentation at the covert armor school at Kazan and in maneuvers with dummy tanks conducted since 1928. Hitler's repudiation of Versailles and the nation's extensive rearmament effort now allowed armor advocates like officers Oswald Lutz and Heinz Guderian to act on their dreams of a German tank corps. In the summer of 1933, Lutz was appointed commander of the new *Kommando der Panzertruppen*, with Guderian at his side as chief of staff. Quickly expanding a prototypical skeleton company of fourteen vehicles to the full two-battalion 1. *Panzer-Regiment*, the two officers sought to convert the German manner of armored warfare from a stillborn novelty in the Great War to a tactically decisive combat tool.[84]

According to *Truppenführung*, armor would be employed only in close cooperation with infantry and artillery. The most decisive arm would remain the horse cavalry. Slicing boldly through enemy lines, angling to cut off the foe from his lines of communication and maneuvering in tandem with motorized supporting infantry riding in trucks, the German cavalry would enjoy marked independence in executing its assigned objectives.[85] Still, as historian Robert Citino observed, the "cold-blooded daring" and "mental elasticity," to say nothing of the mission set the authors of *Truppenführung* envisioned for the horse cavalry would ultimately find another

home in the new *Wehrmacht*.[86] Lutz and Guderian thought their new *Panzertruppen* would fit the bill.

The *Panzerkampfwagen I* tanks that comprised the bulk of the early *Panzertruppen* had relatively limited armor protection and only light mounted weapons; it was not the combat power of the tanks themselves that the two officers believed would revolutionize modern warfare. Unlike contemporary developments in Britain, France, and the United States, German armored forces would deploy as parts of integrated, self-contained, and tactically independent mechanized divisions called *Panzerdivisionen*. Complete with their own highly mobile subordinate infantry, artillery, and support units, all *Panzerdivisionen* components could match the speed and endurance of the tanks, integrating all their organic combat power into a combined arms symphony after plunging deep into the enemy rear.[87] In a reverential nod to Seeckt's *Operationsheer* vision, the new *Panzerdivisionen* could theoretically achieve rapid encirclements of enemy armies to be reduced by the much-slower-moving, horse-drawn infantry divisions that would comprise the bulk of the *Wehrmacht*. These lumbering, mass-conscripted, foot-slogging formations played the role of Seeckt's *Deckungsheer*, freed from its defensive focus by Hitler's new strategically offensive policy objectives, in a revitalized Nazi *Bewegungskrieg* operational concept.

Figure 3.8. *Panzerkampfwagen*. Courtesy of Wikimedia Commons.

Lutz, Guderian, and their acolytes had extraordinarily high hopes for the *Panzertruppen*'s potential strategic efficacy. Like Seeckt, they fervently believed that a highly mobile, well-trained, motivated force—even if small by comparison to its foe—could bring maneuver campaigns to a decisive conclusion prior to the onset of disastrous stagnation like that which beset the *Kaiserheer* on the *Westfront.*[88] In the introduction to his influential proselytizing work, *Achtung-Panzer!* (1937), Guderian scoffed at the notion that *Stellungskrieg* would define any part of the "combat of the future."[89] Officers who warned that Germany's wars likely would transform into prolonged static struggles of attrition, he asserted, were simply "incapable of summoning up the necessary act of will to stake everything on a rapid decision."[90] Naysayers lacked the vision to recognize "the prospects that are opened by a full exploitation of the internal combustion engine."[91] As Seeckt postulated a decade prior, Guderian attested that the Great War did not suggest any inefficacy of the traditional German tactical commitment to decisive maneuver warfare. German forces merely needed to become nimbler on the battlefield. *Panzerdivisionen*, he and many of his peers believed, allowed for just that.

Due to their organic combined arms assets, *Panzerdivisionen* could operate independent of supporting ground units. They could not, however, reliably operate independent of close air support. Continuous coordination with Germany's new *Luftwaffe* was crucial to success in the deep penetrations envisioned within the *Wehrmacht* operating concept, which emerged organically from the developmental trajectory of the new force. As disparate *Panzerdivisionen* spearheads plunged into the enemy rear, dive-bombing aircraft would facilitate their advance and dismantle the enemy's command and control nodes.[92] Deeply echeloned infantry divisions would subsequently "mop-up" the encircled foe then usher prisoners to the rear and repeat the entire process. In effect, Hitler's enemies would not be chewed up so much as swallowed whole, their territory and populations suddenly at the mercy of the Nazi regime.

Key to the *Wehrmacht* way of war was to judiciously and liberally employ modern radio technology, allowing all parts of the Nazi war machine to remain in regular contact. Although all modern militaries of the era adopted field radio sets, none employed them in the volume and density of Hitler's new army. Although it was not immediately evident at the time, fighting units that could communicate instantaneously with each other, with distant commanders, and even eventually with supporting aircraft shared a tactical advantage—one that proved the most significant innovation in the entire German operating concept.[93]

While historians have traditionally lauded Germany's interwar development of mechanized forces, reconsidering their development within the context of the Reich's extraordinarily finite means and Hitler's spectacular strategic ends shines a far more complicated light on the efforts of officers like Lutz and Guderian. For a multitude of reasons enumerated by historian Richard DiNardo, an operating concept centered on *Panzertruppen* was not only unrealistic, but ultimately deleterious to future Nazi strategic success. While, as Guderian pointed out, the *Reichsheer* would have been remiss to ignore the advances in armored warfare of foreign militaries, in fact Germany was grossly ill-suited to embrace mechanization as its operational centerpiece. The nation's motor vehicle industry—most importantly its tractor works—lagged markedly behind its adversaries in terms of scale and modernization. Germans were correspondingly unfamiliar with the maintenance, repair, and operation of motor vehicles compared with citizens of France, Britain, or the United States. Whereas the US boasted one vehicle for every five Americans in 1933, the Reich had only one for every seventy-five Germans. While remedying these disparities was arguably a matter of industrial expansion and training, the more serious limitations to a mass-mechanized *Wehrmacht* should have been impossible to ignore. In 1934, Germany imported 85 percent of the three million tons of petroleum products and most of the iron ore it consumed. As these two materials were by far the most indispensable to a mechanized army (as well as any air force that might support it), any such future German force would depend on foreign sources for its sustainment. Dependence spelt vulnerability and, given its many inescapable disadvantages, the Reich needed no further strategic liabilities.[94] Of course, officers embedded in a culture which habitually ignored the integral connections between tactics, strategy, and politics also blithely ignored such liabilities. Instead, they hoped for all-but-miraculous quick victories to render such risk a conveniently moot point. Disaster would be avoided through speed.

The Reich was not prepared for the intercontinental struggle that the Nazi worldview entailed. This struggle would extend well beyond Germany's lack of ample raw materials for mass mechanized warfare or a strategically flexible operating concept. Hitler's vision for securing Nazi *Weltmacht* necessitated a vast expansion of not only the German military machine, but also the German military mind. Greatly impressed with the strategic-level education provided to senior American military leaders at the US Army War College, Blomberg ordered the establishment of a *Wehrmachtakademie* in Potsdam in the fall of 1935 to serve as a joint-service war college on the advice of Hitler-favorite *Generalmajor* Walter von

Reichenau. The school was to be distinct from the army's predominately tactics-focused *Kriegsakademie* and would continue building upon the pedagogical legacy of the 1920s Reinhardt lectures. During the school's one-year term, military and civilian faculty taught a select body of staff officers about the crucial interconnections between politics, strategy, economy, and warfare to prepare them for service on a future *Wehrmacht* joint-*Generalstab.*[95]

Although Blomberg was an early advocate of the academy, he paid little attention to its subsequent operations, and the *Wehrmacht's* toxic culture of sharp interservice rivalry combined to produce less-than-brilliant results. Due in large part to the German military's continued obsession with tactical mastery, the academy never enjoyed much prestige within the rapidly growing officer corps. Rarely did the best officers from any service find their way into its halls; instead, they were retained with their units for tactical training. In fact, only three one-year terms were completed before a combination of interservice friction, command apathy, and Hitler's 1938 removal of Blomberg shut the academy's doors permanently. The school's demise would prove an ill omen for Germany's strategic future, but also powerful evidence of the Reich's continued refusal to substantively consider the vital interconnections between politics, strategy, and tactics.[96]

Less than three months before being reassigned due to the academy's closure, a team of five officers completed what they had anticipated would become the school's primary instructional text, *Kriegführung* (Conduct of War). While it is unclear who ordered its composition, the very existence of the never-published draft suggests that a modicum of interest in matters of strategy did thrive in some officer corps circles. Its contents ranged from elaboration of the political responsibilities accruing to various ministries during wartime to the interrelationship of national policy and warfighting, joint operations, and even the intricacies of coalition warfare. In retrospect, the forgotten manuscript reads like a laundry list of factors which would prove among the most decisively disastrous for the future wartime *Wehrmacht*. Today, it offers another glimpse of a path not taken.

Westfront veteran *Oberst* Hans Zorn, who chaired the committee and was later destined for *Armeekorps* command, opened the draft with a discussion that was stunningly alien from the typical tactically focused tone of *Wehrmacht* publications like *Truppenführung*. "Warfare is the sharpest tool of politics," he explained in Clausewitzian style, adding that its prosecution must always remain "in harmony with the aims of politics [which] always take precedence."[97] Although destroying an enemy's forc-

es in the field was usually the surest means to quell his will to resist, all campaign objectives had to be "consistent with the objectives of policy" as well as carefully calibrated to the Reich's "own means of power."[98] No universally applicable rules could be provided. A comprehensive comparative analysis of capabilities and policy objectives was necessary before senior military leaders could craft sound campaign plans.[99]

Figure 3.9. Hans Zorn. Courtesy of Wikimedia Commons.

Contrary to Seecktian ideas about crushing enemy forces in a single swift blow, Zorn warned about "the tremendous demands of war in the long run" on the Reich's population.[100] The military drew "its strength, both material and spiritual, from the homeland," and thus only "a mentally united people" could endure the immense trials of war on the scale contemplated by the Nazi vision.[101] Indeed, the Great War taught it would "seldom be possible to win the decisive victory over the enemy in one battle," the manual read, adding that even the most decisive campaigns would likely involve a series of battles, each lasting days or even weeks to conclude.[102] Moreover, the trajectory of any war was unpredictable. Zorn cautioned: "Changes in the overall situation due to the success or failure of combat operations, the entry or failure of allies or enemies may require fundamental new decisions."[103] Such changes might even include the onset of *Stellungskrieg* if German forces again lost the initiative in offensive campaigning. At times it "may even be necessary to switch voluntarily to *Stellungskrieg"* in certain theaters, he said, implying the need for German forces to prepare and train for such eventualities.[104] Senior leaders had to always keep the larger Nazi war effort in view without allowing immediate tactical circumstances to draw them into tunnel-visioned thinking.[105]

While destroying enemy armed forces would be of paramount importance, Zorn felt it was ludicrous to expect to accomplish such a task without the close cooperation of all the Reich's resources and agencies. "Any fragmentation of forces is to be avoided," Zorn warned. "Only planned cooperation of all parts of the *Wehrmacht* for the common goal" could bring victory.[106] The same went for coordination of military affairs with national industry and, perhaps most crucially, the allies that Germany joined with in a coalition. "The war of the future will not be fought among individual states but as an alliance war in the struggle of groups of states against groups of states," *Oberstleutnant* Hans von Greiffenberg wrote in his section on coalition warfare.[107] This was true, if for no other reason than Germany's inescapable manpower and materiel limitations. "No country is in such a position economically that it can meet the requirements of war on its own," he explained. State leaders needed, above all things, "to be clear and unanimous beforehand" about the "purpose and aim of the all-out war."[108] Each ally's roles and responsibilities within the coalition needed to be well-defined to avoid confusion or the squandering of precious mutual resources. Von Grieffenberg advised the establishment of a combined allied council as a decision-making body to ensure "equal political representation of all participating leaders."[109] The council would coordinate its planning efforts with allied military, economic, and propaganda councils to craft and maintain a seamlessly unified approach to prosecuting the coalition's mutual policy objectives. Like Zorn, Von Grieffenberg admitted that a war of coalitions was almost certain to be a long one, requiring senior leaders to use "means of power in sections and to master the situation by changing the conduct of the battle and by shifting the emphasis on the individual theaters of war."[110] Quite clearly, the scale and style of warfare contemplated within *Kriegführung*

Figure 3.10. *Oberstleutnant* Hans von Grieffenberg. Courtesy of Wikimedia Commons.

was entirely different from that envisioned by Seecktian *Bewegungskrieg* or even the new *Truppenführung*. Regardless, the draft manual fell victim to the officer corps' continued aversion to strategic thought, just like the institution which had fostered its composition. After the incomplete manuscript was filed away in obscurity, Hitler's Reich launched its violent crusade—without the benefit of a manual illuminating the connections between tactics and strategy.[111]

In no way was the strategic bankruptcy of Nazi policy more evident than in the reckless pace of the Reich's rearmament. The rate at which Hitler expanded the new *Wehrmacht* from 1933 onward began as a pleasant surprise for a manpower- and equipment-starved *Truppenamt.* Already by 1935, however, senior military leaders pleaded to halt the expansions due to the severe lack of qualified officers to command the growing legions. The *Führer* would have none of it, ordering additional increases every year and worsening the problem with each successive iteration while increasing the risk of foreign military intervention before the *Wehrmacht* was prepared to successfully defend the country.[112] By 1937, lack of raw materials, especially iron and steel, forced delays and even cessation of further growth. German factories fell to under 50 percent industrial capacity as machines were starved of the means to produce enough war materiel to fuel Hitler's ambitions. As late as the spring of 1940, just over 50 percent of the army's 157 divisions were manned and equipped to full capacity. More importantly, only 10 percent (16, including 10 *Panzerdivisionen*) were motorized or mechanized. The remainder relied on the same foot and hoof-dependent mobility that their forefathers used in 1914, or even 1814.[113] Almost by accident, Seeckt's vision of a highly mobile if comparatively miniscule *Operationsheer* and an enormous mass-conscripted horse-drawn *Deckungsheer* was finally manifest. In 1939, ironically concerned that the pace of rearmament made the threat of conflict imminent, Hitler finally took both to war.[114]

"Without parallel in world history"

Having identified the unification of the German-speaking population of central Europe as the first step in the Nazi quest for *Weltmacht*, in the spring of 1938 Hitler focused his attention on annexing Austria. Fortunately for a still-ill-prepared *Wehrmacht*, the *Anschluss* (joining) of Austria to the new Reich was accomplished without bloodshed. After a successful campaign of adept diplomacy and a corrupt Austrian democracy, Hitler ordered German forces over the border in mid-March to a mostly warm reception. Elsewhere, news of renewed German territorial expansion was re-

ceived with shock and dismay. The wary Allies, however, remained as ambivalent about intervention as the *Führer* had anticipated. Although senior military leaders harbored grave doubts about the diplomatic efficacy of such a bold maneuver, Hitler's success seemed to suggest a special acumen for manipulative statecraft.[115]

Figure 3.11. Ludwig Beck. Courtesy of Wikimedia Commons.

Later that fall, still high on his success, Hitler ordered *Oberkommando des Heeres* (Army High Command [OKH]) to begin preparations to invade the Sudetenland region of northwestern Czechoslovakia. Although the Sudetenland boasted a sizable population of German speakers, *Generaloberst* Ludwig Beck, Chief of the *Generalstab* and principal author of the new *Truppenführung* doctrine, remained highly skeptical that Hitler could again achieve a bloodless coup. Beck harbored no moral qualms with the prospect of further Nazi aggrandizement, but unlike the Austrians, the Czechs had powerful allies in Germany's most dangerous adversaries, France and Britain. While the still-meager *Wehrmacht* could very likely topple Czech defenses in quick fashion, Beck was convinced that any Nazi annexation of the country would result in a wider European war that would doom Germany to an even worse fate than it had faced in 1918. He estimated that the Reich would need two more years of aggressive rearmament, at the least, before it was prepared to face such an eventuality.[116] In a bluntly worded memorandum, Beck warned the *Führer* that a 1938 invasion of Czechoslovakia would risk a protracted *Materialschlacht* against the western great powers that the Reich would most certainly lose. Hitler, in a manner not dissimilar from the Kaiser's reaction to the Younger Moltke's admonitions, blithely brushed off these warnings. Beck was "imprisoned in the idea of the hundred-thousand-man" *Reichsheer*, he felt. All would be fine.[117]

Figure 3.12. General Franz Halder (far right) with Adolf Hitler (second from right). Courtesy of Wikimedia Commons.

Shocked and terrified by Hitler's reaction to his entreaties, Beck urgently sought to organize a mass resignation amongst the many *Generalstab* officers who shared his concerns. When this project ultimately failed, he resigned in ignominy, replaced by General Franz Halder, an officer far more pliant to Hitler's geostrategic whims.[118] In the end, the diplomatic efforts of British, French, and Italian representatives culminated in the peaceful September 1938 Munich Agreement, which handed the Sudetenland to Hitler in return for a promise that he would not forcibly seize additional territory. By spring of the next year, Hitler had reneged on this promise, annexing the remainder of Czechoslovakia with impunity. While many Germans believed this success validated Hitler's strategic judgement, his actions set the stage for catastrophic and total German defeat. The British and French stridently resolved to resist further German expansion, and Hitler's next step would inevitably invite the very prolonged *Materialschlacht* that Beck had warned about—against modern industrial foes with which Germany could never hope to contend over the long term.[119]

Unfazed by the potential for disaster given his recent successes, Hitler ensured that the new *Wehrmacht* operating concept underwent its baptism by fire in the autumn of 1939. The Nazi invasion of Poland, codenamed

FALL WEISS, in many ways represented a near-exact tactical scenario (save the strategically defensive context) for which both the *Reichsheer* and *Wehrmacht* had been designed over the previous two decades. Germany would wage a mobile maneuver campaign on Polish ground to envelop and annihilate the entire Polish armed forces long before the beleaguered nation's western allies could challenge the decision. One week after signing the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact with the Soviet Union, which temporarily ensured the partnership of Hitler's future victim, 1.5 million German troops in sixty-six divisions poured over Polish borders in a surprise onslaught against the outnumbered Polish military. Allegedly in response to false flag attacks on German facilities near the border, five Nazi field armies organized into two *Armeegruppen* crashed through a Polish cordon defense in both the northwest and southwest of the country. Relying on western Allied intervention that never came, Polish forces were quickly overwhelmed and swallowed by encircling Nazi columns maneuvering in close coordination with deadly *Luftwaffe* close air support. After a mere eighteen days, and following a concurrent Soviet invasion from the east, the sovereign nation of Poland ceased to exist, its territory and population divided between German and Russia authorities.[120]

Despite resounding success in the campaign, the *Wehrmacht* tapped into its predilection for tactical analysis in the wake of hostilities. Officers at all echelons carefully considered the operational successes and failures to identify weaknesses to be shored up before Hitler's next hostile gambit. Artillery needed to improve its responsiveness to German units in contact, and infantry commands needed to address shortfalls in their own close combat dominance instead of waiting for the results of air support and artillery preparation before assaulting. Many believed the vaunted *Panzerdivisionen*, however, had proven the very panacea to all the *Kaiserreich*'s 1914–18 struggles. "The essential difference between

Figure 3.13. General Georg Wetzell. Courtesy of Wikimedia Commons.

the conduct of the current eastern war and that of the World War is that the present army has both armored and motorized formations," General Georg Wetzell, chief editor of the *Wehrmacht* journal *Militär-Wochenblatt,* observed.[121] Breakthroughs into the Polish cordon that in 1914 would have constituted mere tactical successes were converted into strategically significant maneuvers due to the *Panzerdivisionen*'s greatly enhanced long-range mobility—boasting an array of organic combat and combat support assets. The *Wehrmacht*, it seemed, had finally proven to the world that *Stellungskrieg* was not an inevitability on the modern battlefield. Given ample tactical mobility and finesse, *Bewegungskrieg* was still a viable operating concept, even if several officers remained wary of its efficacy against stronger opponents than Poland.[122]

Although Nazi tactical success in the Polish campaign appeared decisive to many, the victory ultimately proved strategically and politically pyrrhic due to Poland's alliance with France and Britain. The Reich's hostilities with Poland did not constitute a war in and of themselves, but rather the opening campaign of a larger continental (and eventually second world) war with a powerful coalition of enemies of precisely the kind Beck had warned about. Only two days after the launch of the invasion, both France and Britain formally declared war on the *Drittes Reich*—the unavoidable consequence of such German aggression. Indeed, even before Hitler's invasion of Poland, French and British leaders had deliberately planned for a "long war" attrition-based defensive strategy as early as the spring of 1939. Though the confidence of some in the Allied camp for such a strategy wavered following the signing of the Nazi-Soviet pact, Hitler and his generals had every good reason to believe the Allies would ultimately seek to prolong hostilities to Germany's decisive detriment when events turned against them. After all, it was a commonplace among the western Allies that the Great War had been won principally by means of simultaneously isolating the Kaiser's empire by blockade and grinding it down gradually at the front. Time remained the Reich's perennial Achilles' heel; although prolonging the forthcoming conflict seemed both morally dubious and politically risky to both the French and British governments, they would not allow Hitler to continue extinguishing democracy in Europe.[123]

While the vast imperial domains of Britain and France provided the western Allies with manpower and materiel greatly superior to Germany's, realizing this advantage would require time and opportunity to transport these assets back to the metropole. In fact, the Allies found themselves slightly outnumbered in the late spring of 1940 in northwestern Europe itself; the situation would require a massive delaying action if a Nazi in-

vasion of Belgium, the Low Countries, or France unfolded too soon.[124] Having long since backed away from the more offensive-minded thinking of the early 1920s, Anglo-French grand strategy in 1939–40 relied on their combined ability to produce a Great War-style stalemate somewhere in Belgium. This vast defensive meeting engagement would be fought against invading Nazi columns while the Maginot Line fortifications and dense Ardennes Forest contained any fascist onslaught to the south. Once this stalemate was achieved and the campaign in Belgium converted into another *Stellungskrieg*, the Allied blockade would again transform the larger war into another *Materialschlacht* that Germany was certain to lose. Only when the Reich was on its knees, as its predecessor had been in the late fall of 1918, would the Allies launch a combined decisive counteroffensive of their own.[125]

Figure 3.14. *Generalleutnant* Erich von Manstein. Courtesy of Wikimedia Commons.

In the spring of 1940, Hitler finally turned his attention to France and the Low Countries. He had assured German security to the east with the combined fall of Poland and non-aggression pact with the Soviet Union, and his initial machinations were well calibrated to launch the victorious Nazi legions directly into the Allied *Stellungskrieg* trap in Belgium. Only a last-minute change of invasion plans occasioned by the loss of confidential invasion orders to Belgian authorities in January 1940 promoted greater odds of German success. The brainchild of *Generalleutnant* Erich von Manstein, the new *FALL GELB* plan embraced considerably more risk in return for potentially swifter and more complete tactical gain. Instead of repeating the ill-fated 1914 maneuvers as the Allies anticipated, the Nazi invasion would feint into Belgium while simultaneously driving its main effort directly through the lightly defended Ardennes Forest to unhinge the entire Allied frontline. After penetrating French defenses near Sedan, Hitler's *Panzerdivisionen* would spring directly for the

coast, effectively surrounding half of all French and British forces on the continent prior to their annihilation.[126]

Countless historians have recounted the dramatic events which unfolded across the same terrain which had featured the stalemated trenches of the *Westfront* during the spring of 1940. In short, the campaign went largely according to Manstein's plan, though at times nearly accidentally, and never without a hitch. On 10 May, 141 German divisions stormed across the borders of Belgium, Luxembourg, and France; the right wing of which drew Allied reserves north in an apparent repetition of the 1914 *Aufmarsch*. Fatefully committing ever-more combat power to the Belgian front to establish a tactical stalemate somewhere along the Dyle River, senior Allied military leaders played directly into the Nazi ruse, weakening their capacity to respond to the decisive punch. By the time French and British forces became fully aware of the *Panzerdivisionen* spilling across the Meuse River and into the Allied rear, it was too late to forestall the chaos and confusion that unhinged the entire defense of France. Far outstripping his orders, Guderian and his *Panzertruppen* sped toward the coast as Allied commands in Belgium reeled in their frantic attempt to escape the rapidly closing avenues of escape. Only Hitler's infamous *Haltbefehl* (halt order) stopping the German armor before it entered Dunkirk—and the resolve of the English people to rescue the survivors—prevented the total annihilation of the British Expeditionary Force. French and Belgian forces continued to resist the invasion for another seventeen days of vicious fighting across France, but the die had already been cast.[127]

The vaunted *Panzerdivisionen* had apparently "transformed *Stellungskrieg* into *Bewegungskrieg*," one ebullient officer proclaimed.[128] Of all *Wehrmacht* successes, the successful French invasion was viewed as "the greatest offensive operation of all times" and "without parallel in world history."[129] As in Poland, the swift maneuver of mechanized Nazi forces had "robbed the Allied commanders completely of their ability to make a decision," seemingly validating the *Wehrmacht*'s operational concept once again.[130] In only six weeks, Hitler's revitalized forces had accomplished in Belgium and France what the *Kaiserheer* had failed to achieve in the span of four bloody years.

In reality, however, Hitler's *Panzertruppen* had not so much "transformed *Stellungskrieg* into *Bewegungskrieg*" as capitalized on Anglo-French blunders in the Allied attempt to deliberately bring about the former. Allied counterattacks were disastrously uncoordinated. Because of plentiful mistakes at every echelon and flaws in everything from tactics

and operational concepts to misplaced interwar training and acquisitions priorities, the combined French and British effort failed to hold back the invasion until it was far too late.[131] While the campaign to destroy the Third Republic was by no means a walk in the park for Hitler's *Wehrmacht*, too many German senior leaders ignored major problems inherent to the army's operational concept that the invasion unveiled for now the second time. Chief among these was the obvious disconnect in both aggressiveness and logistical sustainment capabilities that remained between the rapidly advancing *Panzertruppen* and the much-slower-moving infantry formations that followed in their wake.[132] While the operation was considered a tactical success, many officers worried that far too much of the victory was attributable to a mixture of the occurrence of the nearly exact geographical and strategic circumstances for which the army's operational concept was involved and the enemy's incredibly fortunate (for Hitler) errors. In an even slightly altered context, German arms might just as easily have experienced a disaster similar to 1914.[133]

The victory was at least partially attributable to the preceding decades of interwar development—to the extent that Nazi forces benefited from more reliable communications, decentralized tactical decision-making, and doctrine designed for circumstances which all but accidentally unfolded. At the same time, the victories in Poland and France were mere campaigns of what had then become a broader global war which continued to grow in size and scope with each German tactical victory. The dramatic and violent toppling of the French Third Republic hastened the conversion of the larger world conflict into the kind of war Hitler's new Reich was woefully incapable of fighting, let alone winning.[134] The battle at the tactical-level had indeed been won, but at a pyrrhic cost of almost-decisive strategic detriment to Germany. The conditions within which the vaunted *Panzertruppen* had succeeded in Poland and France would never be seen again, and the fascist regime's merciless expansion program was already, quite literally, running out of fuel.

The Nazi *Wehrmacht*'s new strategically offensive orientation was built atop a strategically defensive foundation laid down by Seeckt's *Reichsheer* to preserve an outnumbered Weimar *Republik* through a go-for-broke combined arms counter-offensive. The approach would soon prove fundamentally out of step with Germany's capabilities. This was most especially the case because of the particular operational concept that the army's officer corps elected to pursue during the interwar era. Inspired by a careful study of tactical "principles of war" assumed to be timeless and

universal in their relevance and ostensibly reified by close examination of the German combat experience in the Great War, senior leaders and innovators had all but consciously avoided any realistic acknowledgement of the Reich's debilitating lack of key resources. These individuals also ignored the strategic and political contexts on which the efficacy of any specific tactic is entirely contingent.

Like its Imperial *Kaiserheer* predecessor, the Nazi war machine's early performance in circumstances well-calibrated to its strengths would prove disastrously hollow when forced to adapt to a different kind of war against a coalition of enemies that understood all too well Germany's abiding chief weakness: time. The celebrated achievements of innovation and adaptation during the *Reichsheer* years had revitalized a ruined army but, in so doing, had further cemented the vulnerabilities which brought about such ruination in the first place. As Hitler and his generals soon rediscovered after their turn eastward to pursue the grander ambitions of the global Nazi project, the true measure of an army's effectiveness can only be accurately assessed after the enemy successfully converts extant circumstances for which a force was intentionally designed into those which it was intentionally designed to avoid.

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Chapter 4
"We don't do insurgencies": The US Army and the Avoidance of Conflict Transitions, 1976–91

Although a post-Vietnam US Army eager for a coherent sense of direction and renewed prestige in the public eye initially embraced General William E. DePuy's Active Defense doctrine, the new Field Manual (FM) 100-5's positive reputation proved exceedingly short-lived. Ironically, arguably the most prominent figure in its ultimate rejection was one of its original co-architects and ardent advocates, General Donn Starry. Assigned to command V Corps in Europe at the close of his tenure at the Armor School in 1976, Starry found himself at an uncomfortably opportune spot to judge the real efficacy of Active Defense. Charged with preparing an Army formation which would bear an outsized responsibility for blunting any Soviet spearhead into Germany, Starry lacked the "Boathouse Gang's" luxury of treating the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) defense as an imaginative abstraction. The doctrine may have looked good on paper from the comfort of Fort Monroe, Virginia, but on the ground, he encountered a different reality. To begin with, "all too little consensus building had been done" in the composition of the new capstone doctrine, Starry later observed.[1] DePuy's iron-fisted personal control over the shape and character of Active Defense had ensured that his own subjective attitudes and opinions concerning NATO defense enjoyed almost unchallenged supremacy in the final draft. While Starry and others did not object to DePuy's heavy-handed approach because his views were similar to their own, the shock of reality that came from commanding a corps in Europe prompted Starry to begin questioning the assumptions that undergirded Active Defense.

More than any other factor, the new V Corps chief worried about the doctrine's supreme confidence that NATO units could halt a Soviet offensive through adept combined arms fire-and-maneuver directed against the tip of the Communist armored spearhead. For Starry, one look at the convoluted terrain along the potential eastern front confirmed DePuy's assertion that such topography could be used to American advantage; however, a subsequent look at the Soviet order of battle made shockingly clear that such wily maneuvering alone likely would not be sufficient for victory. Even if NATO forces could, against all odds, leverage skill, training, and combined arms coordination to blunt the first enemy wave into West Germany, it likely would not be able to repeat the performance immediately

after, or immediately after that, or immediately after that. Eventually, the sheer numbers of Soviet attack echelons arrayed in considerable depth would overwhelm exhausted NATO forces. NATO needed a different way of thinking about, sensing, and manipulating the battlefield in depth, engaging Soviet forces in their own deep rear in a way that ultimately would reduce the burden on frontline fighters; otherwise, no amount of tactical or operational virtue instilled in the latter was likely to be enough.[2]

As Starry and his V Corps staff considered these problems and brainstormed potential solutions, the collective voice of the officer corps issued its own litany of complaints. By far the loudest focused on what they perceived as the excessively defense-oriented tone of the new FM 100-5. US Army Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC) staffers did their best to dispel such assertions in the pages of *Military Review,* clarifying that Active Defense really amounted to a collection of tactical *offensives* as part of a broader strategic defensive; however, they failed to sweeten the bitter taste in the mouths of self-styled hard-charging American officers. Many of these voices complained about the manual's quasi-obsession with winning the "first battle" and its ominous warnings that there might never be a second.[3] If, as Starry recognized, Soviet forces attacked in depth, a future war might hinge on Communist victory in the second, third, or even fourth battle instead. Finally, and perhaps most poignantly, the new doctrine's assumption that Soviet armor would attempt to penetrate NATO defenses along a series of exceedingly narrow frontages was at odds with evolving intelligence suggesting quite the opposite. As Soviet military professionals themselves considered the lessons of the Yom Kippur War and the rumblings of their American adversaries, a "tactical revolution" unfolded within the ranks of the Red Army not greatly dissimilar from that emanating from Fort Monroe. Soviet training events increasingly used multi-pronged attacks across wide frontages culminating in numerous meeting engagements, flying directly in the face of NATO preparations and the new DePuy tactical doctrine.[4]

The gravity of the NATO defense challenge and the severity of the potential threat from eastern Europe tended to distract Army leaders from simultaneous global trends moving in a very different direction. While DePuy's TRADOC sought to pull the Army "out of the rice paddies of Vietnam" and place it "on the Western European battlefield," the challenges most immediately confronting American national security increasingly tended to look more and more like Vietnam.[5] As Soviet interest in sparring directly with NATO forces in a shooting war ebbed over the course of the late 1970s and 1980s, the Warsaw Pact tended to emphasize more subtle

means to erode western influence elsewhere in the world. By inspiring, emboldening, and fostering revolutionary Communist insurgent movements in what was termed the "third world," Soviet leaders hoped to deteriorate American influence in ways that direct military action would have struggled to affect, and at considerably lower cost to Moscow.[6] Though its leaders did not know it at the time, American military success and effectiveness in the coming decade would depend more on its capacity to learn from its failures in Vietnam and less on its capability to repel waves of onrushing Red Army armored battalions. Most of the historiographical treatments of this era of Army history have focused on the impressive successes of Starry and AirLand Battle doctrine in preparing the force for the 1991 war against Iraq. They tend to overlook what was perhaps the doctrine's most salient and valuable characteristic: an acknowledgement of the premium the new era would place on flexibility.

"There is no simple formula"

Starry sensed correctly that much of the criticism of the new strategically myopic FM 100-5 was rooted in the fact that, as he put it, the doctrine "was not firmly founded on enduring principles and did not even recount our principles of war."[7] After replacing DePuy as TRADOC commander in the summer of 1977, Starry first attempted to rectify this shortcoming by issuing FM 100-1, *The Army*, published in the fall of 1978 and again with minimal modifications in 1981. The intentionally slim 32-page booklet expressed "the fundamental roles, principles, and precepts governing the employment of United States Army forces," laying an intellectual foundation for training across the force not dissimilar from that originally envisioned by General John Cushman and dismissed out of hand by DePuy.[8] After elaborating on the Army's relationship to national power and defense strategy, the authors resurrected the old 1968 FM 100-5's "spectrum of conflict" concept which had been omitted from the "Boathouse Gang's" 100-5. While the Army's primary concern remained the defense of NATO, conflicts "occur in nearly infinite variations of intensity, scope, duration, and character," the manual explained, and "may be conceived in terms of a spectrum" ranging from general war to unconventional or revolutionary conflicts.[9] The authors particularly emphasized that to be effective as a global strategic deterrent, "general purpose forces must be perceived as capable of successful response to likely challenges to the nation, regardless of the form or level of conflict."[10] Deliberately placing the onus of responsibility for strategic flexibility on "general purpose forces" represented a challenge to the post-Vietnam vogue that low-intensity

operations were the proper purview only of Special Operations forces, or at the very least units not earmarked for the defense of Europe. Whether such a challenge would be properly heeded in the high-intensity warfare culture intentionally cultivated by DePuy remained to be seen. By far the most influential contribution of the new FM 100-1 was its introduction of nine "principles of war," loosely drawn from the theoretical work of British officer and military intellectual J. F. C. Fuller shortly after the First World War.[11] By grounding all decisions and actions in these principles (objective, offensive, mass, economy of force, maneuver, unity of command, security, surprise, and simplicity) during the planning and execution of Army operations, the manual's authors hoped to promote conceptual and cultural continuity across all commands. Starry and his doctrine writers felt these basic principles—borne of "centuries of tradition and experience"—represented wisdom derived from the study of military history and, most importantly would apply to most any conceivable mission or assignment Army leaders might face.[12] Unlike DePuy's model, the Army's new doctrinal approach embraced the requirement of such flexibility, preparing to fight "any war, anywhere, anytime, in any manner," as the manual asserted.[13] The flexibility mandates meant that no command could afford to "be limited by organization, training, or equipment to operations in a specific area or under special conditions."[14] Instead, soldiers and units had to hone skills and capabilities applicable across the full spectrum of conflict. Compared with DePuy's vision, Starry's appeared revolutionary, designed to produce a far-more-versatile Army prepared for a wide range of challenges well beyond Europe.

Starry was encouraged in this mission by the likeminded incoming Chief of Staff of the Army, General Edward C. Meyer (1979–83). An infantryman who, like Starry, lacked DePuy's Second World War experience, Meyer had instead risen through Army ranks during the limited and unconventional wars in Korea and Vietnam. He shared Starry's vision for a more versatile and strategically flexible force. In a white paper published shortly after taking office, Meyer laid out a framework for the future. Acknowledging that the threat to NATO remained the "cornerstone of our foreign policy" and arguably "the most demanding scenario facing us," he cautioned fellow officers that threats to American interests across the globe in the coming decade would be "extraordinarily diverse" and "span an increased spectrum of conflict ranging from terrorism to insurgency to highly intense conventional warfare." He added that the Army would need "unprecedented flexibility . . . in tactical employment options, in strategic deployability, in our thinking" to remain relevant and effective

in such a radically dynamic security environment.[15] In large part because of the weighty NATO commitment burden, forces deployed to lower intensity contingencies would need to achieve "rapid termination of hostilities," "avoid piecemeal commitment," and emphasize "rapid and successful accomplishment of the task."[16] While acknowledging major gaps in DePuy's exclusively high- and mid-intensity-focused doctrine, Meyer's injunction against prolonged involvement in low-intensity conflicts revealed his refusal to acknowledge the defining historical characteristics of such worldwide conflicts.

Figure 4.1. General Edward C. Meyer. Courtesy of the US Army.

Starry's tenure as TRADOC commander also indelibly shaped the way the Army would operate in the mid-intensity kind of war it wanted to fight. Responding to plentiful criticism of DePuy's doctrine and his own concerns borne of corps command in Europe, the new TRADOC chief set out to reform the service's capstone manual as quickly as possible. Hoping to avoid the pitfalls of his predecessor's personality-driven methodology, Starry issued a draft operational concept in the spring of 1981 and solicited the input of all Army branch schools. After reviewing these opinions, the Department of Tactics (DTAC) at the Command and General Staff College (CGSC) at Fort Leavenworth composed the final draft manual then published it in the summer of 1982. The first sentence of the new manual took a bold stance against the myopia of DePuy's doctrine. "There is no simple formula for winning wars," it proclaimed. "Defeating enemy forces in battle will not always insure [sic] victory," the authors warned, emphasizing that "other national instruments of power and persuasion will influence or even determine the results of wars."[17] This marked a major change from DePuy's fixation on the Army's supposedly decisive role in winning the first battle and thus the war in Europe. As outlined in the new FM 100-1, the Army had to prepare to confront the nation's foes in "a variety of situations and challenges," in the face of modern Soviet echelons or against insurgent terrorist groups operating anywhere on the globe.[18]

The new doctrine outlined in the manual, termed AirLand Battle, promised to offer insights, but not pat solutions, to the officers charged with confronting such challenges. To ensure broad relevancy "in all anticipated circumstances," the manual reiterated the nine "principles of war" laid out in 1979, adding four new tenets (initiative, depth, agility, and synchronization) to further inform all Army operations regardless of mission or operational environment.[19]

For an Army still fixated on the potential mid-intensity fight to protect NATO, the new manual's prescriptions for prosecuting AirLand Battle against the Soviet near-peer threat drew maximal attention from the officer corps. Instead of DePuy's elastic defense, reacting to the ebbs and flows of a Soviet assault while awaiting the prime moment for a counterattack, Starry's vision put the Army back on the offensive. US forces would use coordinated air and long-range fires assets to attack follow-on Soviet echelons while they were still situated in their own deep rear. Through this conduct of "Deep Battle," Army units could erode the enemy's ability to support and sustain its efforts along the bleeding edge of the Soviet advance, allowing outnumbered defenders to gradually gain both quantitative and qualitative advantages. The new doctrine also emphasized the vital importance of adept leadership and attention to human dynamics in warfighting, striking a markedly different tone from DePuy's more technocratic approach to systematic target servicing. The 1976 manual's obsession with firepower was not omitted, but rather tempered with an equally stalwart commitment to maneuver. Together, the combined arms employment of the two would enable Army forces to destroy enemy forces at echelon and across the entire battlefield in depth.[20]

Most importantly, as two of its DTAC authors explained in a 1982 *Military Review* article, AirLand Battle represented "a more comprehensive and balanced view of modern war" than DePuy's Europe-focused Active Defense.[21] The new capstone aimed for "worldwide applicability" with its framework of seven imperatives and nine principles of war that enjoyed maximum relevance to all varieties of Army operations. "Doctrine cannot be theater-specific," they wrote; "it must be adaptable to operations anywhere in the world."[22] Their words matched the spirit of Starry's own from fourteen years prior. During the war in Vietnam, Starry had argued for doctrine "broad enough to include [confronting the enemy] in all his roles—regular and irregular, organized and guerrilla."[23] This new generation of post-WWII senior Army leaders had come of age in a very different strategic environment from the one that forged DePuy and Army Chief of Staff General Creighton Abrams. The differences in the emphasis

and importance they placed on low-intensity operations were perhaps the most salient points of divergence, but the specific way in which they felt low-intensity readiness mattered was still suggestive of the formative influence of the elder generation of officers.

Despite history's lessons, Meyer, Starry, and the TRADOC staff primarily emphasized using the Army in contingencies at the lower end of the conflict spectrum to prevent low-intensity conflicts from escalating into larger ones.[24] No mention was made of the possibility or threat that general or limited war like that anticipated in Europe or elsewhere could potentially shift "down" the spectrum, effectively transforming into prolonged unconventional or revolutionary conflicts like that which had marked much of the Army's experience in Vietnam. Nor did the writers note the possibility of hybrid wars simultaneously exhibiting characteristics of multiple forms of warfare. This supposed unidirectional way in which Army doctrine conceptualized war and the Army's role in prosecuting it powerfully shaped how senior leaders crafted a strategically flexible force for the 1980s and beyond. Much like the misguided *Reichsheer* and its *Wehrmacht* successor, Starry and Meyer's Army anticipated an ability to effectively control and prevent any transformation of the kinds of war they prepared the Army to fight into some other kind—most especially one they considered it unlikely to win. According to the new doctrine, most wars could be classified as strictly one kind or another. Provided that Army forces could be employed in a timely and decisive manner to effectively prevent small wars from escalating into bigger ones, it merely required preparing units for the specific type of conflict they were deployed to fight to ensure their success. It was no longer enough to merely train units for the "most demanding scenario" in Europe and trust the US Army's time-honored capacity to adapt for all the rest. The Army, at least according to Starry's TRADOC, needed to prepare units for "any war, anywhere, anytime"—armed with a robust operational doctrine better calibrated for the task. The key was to ensure that whatever mission an Army command was deployed to confront never transformed into some other kind of mission it was not prepared to confront.

"The Army cannot afford to focus narrowly"

The publication and issuance of Starry's new doctrine coincided with a major shift in American foreign policy. Following his 1981election and signaling his allegiance to the "new 'Never Again' club," President Ronald Reagan publicly promised: "We will never again ask young men to fight and possibly die in a war our government is afraid to let them win,"

as he suggested it had done in Vietnam.[25] Only slightly different from his Democratic predecessors' foreign policies, the new Reagan Doctrine was premised on continuing to wage the Cold War by providing support to anti-communist forces across the globe while avoiding any large-scale deployment of US military forces that might threaten political tranquility at home.[26] While this commitment was well-calibrated to parry growing Soviet engagement in the Southern Hemisphere, it also signaled the likely increase in diversity and complexity of the Army's missions worldwide that TRADOC had anticipated.

One such contingency that the incoming administration inherited from its predecessor was an ongoing effort to bolster a series of El Salvadoran governments against the Soviet-backed insurgency *Frente Farabundo Martí para la Liberación Nacional* (Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front).[27] Reagan sought to sharpen the teeth of former President Jimmy Carter's aid and assistance to the still-embattled Salvadoran government, warning Americans that leftist adversaries were seeking "to install Communism by force throughout the hemisphere."[28] While he emphatically insisted that there was "no parallel whatsoever" between El Salvador and Vietnam, critics saw only another ill-fated attempt to bolster an apparently morally bereft and corrupt government under the guise of preventing the spread of communism.[29] Some who felt most strongly about the comparison even purchased bumper stickers reading: "El Salvador is Spanish for 'Vietnam.'"[30] Despite Army doctrine's lack of attention to counterinsurgency, most of the exceedingly small number of advisors in El Salvador had firsthand experience from Vietnam; as a result, many hard-won lessons were applied with success.[31] "Guerrilla warfare is based on the legitimate concerns of the people," General Meyer observed when discussing the conflict. "Having been involved in guerrilla warfare, in Vietnam, I realize that, unless you have the commitment of the people or the indigenous forces . . . you're not going to solve guerrilla warfare."[32] At the same time, Meyer knew that despite recent experience and given the glaring lack of relevant training, deployment of conventional Army forces to Central America would have been far more trouble than it was worth. "I wouldn't even know how to design, right now, a US military solution," he admitted.[33] While never boasting more than fifty-five Army Special Forces advisors in-country, operations in El Salvador proved that the need for further development of counterinsurgency (COIN) and stability doctrine and capabilities had not gone away since Vietnam. Indeed, the professed ignorance of the Army's senior-most officer regarding the potential design of an unconventional campaign prosecuted by conventionally trained forc-

es—a mainstay throughout American military history—should have been an alarming red flag.

The stubborn refusal of low-intensity contingencies to leave America alone inspired no little frustration among an officer corps primed by DePuy's culture-shaping initiatives to abandon nearly all focus on anything but a future ground war in Europe. As staff college instructors at Leavenworth attempted to plot a course to correct the deficiency in the Army's counterinsurgency acumen, they were shocked to discover that much of the service's Vietnam-era educational materials on the topic had been destroyed on order after the American withdrawal from southeast Asia. One soldier quipped: "We don't do dishes, we don't do windows, and we don't do insurgencies."[34] Unfortunately, the experience in El Salvador reaffirmed that the Army very much *would* have to "do insurgencies," whether it liked it or not.[35] In fact, the "Reagan Doctrine" entailed that an Army ever increasingly gearing up for a third world war in Europe would instead find itself predominately engaged in a dizzying array of messy, intractable, and politically complicated conflicts, very few of which looked anything like the diagrams printed in Starry's new doctrine.

Somewhat misleadingly, however, the next major operation to which Army units deployed, the invasion of Grenada, initially looked far more akin to the anticipated European war than had El Salvador. On the morning of 25 October 1983, Operation URGENT FURY launched more than 7,000 troops on a mission to seize control of the Caribbean island and ensure the safety of Americans living there amidst a violent Marxist coup. Most of the US troops were assigned to the 75th Ranger Regiment, 82nd Airborne Division, and other assorted Special Operations commands. An airborne assault on Point Salines Airport in coordination with an amphibious Marine landing overwhelmed just over a thousand Grenadian defenders. The cessation of hostilities by 29 October marked the successful, quite conventional, opening phase of the operation—effectively placing the island and its government in the hands of American forces in just four days. Though Americans on the island were protected and evacuated, the larger political mission of establishing a non-Marxist government in Grenada and eradicating lingering Communist insurgents on the island remained. The crisis was, contrary to Starry's new doctrine, effectively shifting *down* the "spectrum of conflict" from a conventional invasion to a potential counterinsurgency and reconstruction operation.[36]

Fortunately for the paratroopers assigned these post-conflict missions, the American invasion was quite popular among most Grenadians,

Figure 4.2. Paratroopers into Grenada, 1983. Courtesy of Wikimedia Commons.

and guerrilla resistance ultimately proved especially meager. Army civil affairs teams focused on reconstructing Grenadian infrastructure were mostly unhindered. Work to construct roads, repair facilities, install telephone lines, and restore schools to normal operations were not being conducted under fire. Airborne units provided area security until they redeployed in early November.[37] Army units had rapid success throughout the conflict except for major communications hiccups between services. As a result, the problem of transitioning from mid- to low-intensity operations seemed easy. If Grenada was indicative of what Army units could expect in such a scenario, additional training or preparation was not urgently needed.[38]

In the aftermath of the somewhat-unconventional campaigns in El Salvador and post-invasion Grenada, American observers, military professionals, and policymakers began using the term "low-intensity conflict" (LIC) to describe the range of hard-to-define tasks and missions associated with what soldiers were increasingly being asked to prosecute in Latin America. Given the rapid increase of its use and salience—before and even after it was formally defined within Army doctrine—the lack of a consistent definition for the phrase prompted considerable debate within the officer corps. While the Army focused time and attention on sharp-

ening the NATO sword to blunt Soviet invaders through Starry's Deep Battle, the problems of war and crisis in the "third world" attracted ever more attention from what seemed a particular breed of American officer. As within the interwar *Reichsheer*, debates concerning the Army's proper future developmental course erupted between two sparring camps: officers who felt that inescapable limitations and contemporary trends in particular threats demanded a maximally intellectually rigorous and strategically flexible force, and those who felt a mostly technological and tactical solution to the "most demanding scenario" of defending NATO ought to dominate the officer corps' attention.[39]

This discussion was fostered by a series of editors-in-chief of *Military Review*, the Army's premier professional journal. While most of the operational force remained focused on tactical challenges associated with confronting the Red Army, *Military Review* issues during the early and mid-1980s were a rare haven of considered thought on the imperatives of preparing for low-intensity conflict. "The Army cannot afford to focus narrowly on the European battlefield," two majors wrote in a summer 1984 assessment of continuing DePuy-era trends. "Army requirements are broader in scope," they argued, commenting that everything from doctrine to force design required maximal flexibility as a result.[40] It was not enough to develop weapons systems, doctrine, and technology for the European battlefield, another argued. Officers had to be able to "measure up *intellectually*" against potential foes across the globe to cope with "a very wide-ranging set of possible missions" and "greater uncertainty than ever before."[41] The journal teemed with references to the "wide array of contingencies" facing the United States, the pressing need for the Army to pursue "unprecedented strategic flexibility" and prepare for the characteristic "blurring of missions" that accompanied recent and likely forthcoming Army deployments.[42] Moreover, another wrote that LIC was not the exclusive realm of Special Operations: "It is a problem for the whole army, the entire defense establishment, and the country."[43] The complicated world of "LIC" was "an area of conflict *we must understand* and in which we *must become proficient*" so the Army could remain relevant as it approached the twenty-first century, he commented.[44]

One symptom of low-intensity conflict troubled many officers intensely: terrorism. The bloody fall 1983 terror bombing of the Marine Corps barracks in Beirut focused increased Department of Defense attention on terrorism as a mode of warfare. "Our forces were prepared for what was found in Grenada," Maj. Jeffrey Wright observed of the initial inva-

sion, adding that they were "unprepared for what happened in Beirut."[45] Although Vietnam veterans were no strangers to terror attacks by enemy personnel in civilian clothing, a new generation of soldiers and officers was not accustomed to and trained for such threats; terrorist attacks were "beyond the imagination" of soldiers, he wrote.[46] Strategies of terrorism allowed a technological underdog "to gain a degree of strategic equality with the world's major industrial powers," and effectively negate material advantages.[47] Such violent methods were frustrating to soldiers trained for conventional combat in Europe, and the enemy would only feed on that frustration. "We must understand that terrorism is a fully established mode of war," Wright urged, noting the need to "place as much emphasis on its study, and prevention, as we do on other forms of warfare." After all, he added, "the US Army is more likely to be attacked by a terrorist group . . . than by a Soviet motorized rifle regiment."[48] He felt it was high time to plan, train, educate, and prepare accordingly.[49]

Figure 4.3. Beirut bombing, 1983. Courtesy of Wikimedia Commons.

Maj. Gen. Donald Morelli, 9th Infantry Division commander in Vietnam and TRADOC deputy chief of staff for doctrine, was one of the few officers who spoke out about the need for a robust Army approach to prepare for low-intensity conflict. Morelli, who was heavily involved in drafting Starry's FM 100-5, worried later that the service was "not adequately prepared" for low-intensity conflict. Such crises, then prevalent across the globe, defied "purely military solutions," he explained in a November 1984 *Military Review* article, adding that they required "a cross-discipline approach which recognizes the interplay of social, economic, political and military factors"—something that could not be achieved by the application of combat power alone.[50] Brute force applied to the symptoms of social and political problems—like that which American forces had aimed at the Vietcong insurgency—would never address the underlying causes of those problems and thus might prolong the conflict indefinitely.

While the new AirLand Battle doctrine would be flexible enough to address a wide range of national security challenges, it did not clearly define how Army forces should approach complex situations at the lower end of the conflict spectrum. What was desperately needed, in Morelli's view, was an effort to "define the Army's total role and determine how we can best apply our military capability in synchronization with the other elements of national power."[51] Rather than simply distributing the new doctrine, leaders would need to lean on and adapt its basic tenets to a low-intensity environment and a battlefield that included human geography in addition to the traditional mission, enemy, terrain, troops, and time available (METT-T). Most importantly, all military efforts would need to address underlying political problems in a "multidiscipline fashion to ensure that . . . initiatives in one area do not interfere with or inhibit other efforts" and ensure "a synchronized approach to ameliorating the conditions which result in conflict."[52] If prosecuted adeptly, even the most intractable strategic problem could be solved. If not, applying exclusively combat solutions to nuanced problems "could accelerate the growth of other, equally dangerous sources of conflict," he warned. At the end of the day, "the goal is to apply the right resource at the right time to the *sources* of threat in harmony with the other elements of national power."[53] It also was not sufficient to train Special Operations forces for these challenges. "Conventional forces must be prepared to operate unconventionally," he explained, echoing the voices of many of his peers. Achieving this competency, he felt, was not so much a doctrinal problem as "a problem of application and training in tactics, techniques and procedures relevant to . . . potential threats."[54] Vietnam had proven the inescapable necessity to de-

ploy general purpose troops to conduct complex low-intensity operations and counterinsurgency. Though General Morelli sadly died of cancer before his essay was published, his warnings would prove far more prophetic than he could have known.

Still, not all voices found within *Military Review* during the decade were as interested in the challenges of low-intensity conflict or terrorism. Maj. John Woodmansee Jr., who would become the Army's Director of Force Development at the Office of the Deputy Chief of Staff for Operations and Plans, foresaw a dramatically different future for the service. In his article, "Blitzkrieg and the AirLand Battle," Woodmansee (with considerable unintentional irony) interpreted Starry's new doctrine and the tactical promises of the microprocessing chip as harbingers of a new American "Blitzkrieg" way of war. After idolizing what he saw as the *Wehrmacht*'s unparalleled tactical successes during the Second World War, Woodmansee promised a forthcoming repeat performance by American arms. "The chip is the technological key to the new doctrine," he explained, "the counterpart to the blitzkrieg's use of the gasoline engine."[55] Taking a page from the book of the *Panzertruppen* evangelists, Woodmansee argued that the chip alone, via its propensity to facilitate data sharing, would "allow us to achieve surprise, gain and maintain momentum, seize the initiative, cause the enemy to react and set the stage for the confusion and paralysis of the enemy." Perhaps most importantly (and tellingly) of all, it would neatly provide for an "avoiding [of] a purely attrition form of reactive defense" in a war for Europe, winning "rapid, decisive victory just as clearly as the German armed forces" had supposedly done.[56] Just as German General Heinz Guderian had neglected to emphasize the impotence of deep armored strikes in an operational environment like Russia that lacked reliable paved roads, Woodmansee failed to consider how such a force might find itself off balance in a low-intensity conflict with no threats conducive to chip-based target data processing. Just as Guderian's vision was implicitly limited to the immediate German frontier, Woodmansee's exclusive focus was on the mid-intensity battlefield, paying little to no attention paid to the strategic flexibility still urged by the Army's senior leaders.

Woodmansee joined a sizable chorus of Army officers engaging in what many critics within the ranks pejoratively termed the "Wehrmacht Mystique."[57] These officers excitedly recognized parallels between US Army initiatives to shore up its lagging conventional warfare capabilities and those taken by the *Reichsheer* in the interwar era; however, they ignored that German forces ultimately failed disastrously in the pursuit

of their strategic objectives. Given the attendant-if-misguided assumption that these failures were prompted exclusively by Hitler's strategic and political incompetence, American soldiers felt more than comfortable cherry-picking ideas they felt were sound from the defeated *Wehrmacht*'s tactical playbook without considering how those ideas may have contributed to the war's ultimate outcome. Directly facilitating this habit was the Starry doctrine's introduction of an "operational level of war" within the 1982 FM 100-5. The product of a misinterpretation of both *Wehrmacht* practice and Soviet doctrine, the new manual described operations unfolding within a distinct "level of war," as opposed to merely a byproduct of staff-driven processes of campaign design or "operational art;" this tended to cleave away responsibility for officers to connect tactics to strategy when designing military operations.[58] Planners focused on the operational level could effectively ignore higher-end problems that presumably was someone else's concern. This was somewhat paradoxical, given the express purpose of operational art to draw connections between tactical campaigning and strategic ends. Either way, the abstract concept of operations occurring at a distinct "level of war" stuck and would continue to confuse American warfighting for the rest of the century and beyond.[59]

Finally, in 1986, a revised 100-5 formally codified the meaning of "low-intensity conflict" within Army doctrine, if still leaving considerable ambiguity and room for discussion. Inspired by the "growing incidence of war at the low end of the conflict spectrum," the inclusion of the concept in the capstone Army manual lent credence to the argument that LIC was an inescapable and unavoidable requirement for all Army forces, special and general.[60] The definition seemed to depend on the character of the foe: "irregular or unconventional forces, enemy special operations forces, and terrorists."[61] It also entailed four primary missions: foreign internal defense (FID), contingency operations like raids or rescue missions, peacekeeping operations, and counterterrorism. Each of these, Morelli had cautioned, depended on the Army working "in concert with the initiatives of other US government agencies."[62] He noted that none any of the four would be the exclusive purview of special operations: "Light and heavy forces, aviation units, logistical support, and a variety of training teams" were all potential candidates for LIC service.[63]

The same year, a concurrent revision of FM 100-1, *The Army*, included TRADOC's attempt to clarify what the Army meant by "low-intensity conflict." While the 1981 edition had mentioned "limited" and "unconventional" war as inescapable components of the conflict spectrum, the service did not wrap its arms around a formal definition until 1986.

Mirroring the new 100-5 in most details, the manual added an important caveat that reflected the influence of senior Army leaders: "Success in achieving US national objectives in a low intensity conflict will ordinarily rule out the protracted commitment of US forces in a combat role."[64] While the force was finally willing to acknowledge the inescapability of low-intensity conflict, officers influenced by the rhetoric of the new Never Again club remained unwilling to sign another blank check for America's involvement in a prolonged conflict like Vietnam. If the Army would be required to conduct such operations, they felt, it would need to do so strictly on its own terms.

"Bite the bullet or duck"

Within the officer corps, there was little consensus on strategies for the Army to adjust its priorities to respond to the increased global prominence of low-intensity conflict. Army thinkers and leaders were divided on the relative importance of increasing and maintaining readiness at the low end of the conflict spectrum, and officers had varying opinions on how the service should cope with inescapable requirements to pursue the same. The most prominent and frequently voiced opinions during the Reagan era fell into three broad categories: those advocating robust preparation of all Army forces for LIC challenges similar to those associated with mid- and high-intensity conflict; those arguing for the service to take a stand against Congress in asserting its view that open-ended LIC deployments constituted a misuse of the military; and finally those who felt that LIC employment of American soldiers should be restricted to Special Operations or specialized "expert" light infantry formations so the bulk of the conventional force could exclusively focus on the kind of war it wanted to fight in Europe. Much to the detriment of the Army in coming decades, the sheer weight and popularity of the latter two arguments ultimately overwhelmed and silenced the first.

One of the easiest ways for Army leaders to signal the service's commitment to preparing for the entire spectrum of conflict involved updating extant LIC-focused doctrine. The preparation of an updated Field Circular (FC) 100-20, *Low Intensity Conflict* (1981), was the most substantive effort to reintroduce Vietnam lessons into the body of formal Army thought. The new manual, which cautioned leaders to consider American involvement in low-intensity conflicts "only when and where they have a high probability of decisively altering the situation," continued the new Never Again club commitment to prevent open-ended US involvement in counterinsurgency operations. Such involvement would be strictly to "effect a

decisive change in the conflict, preserve US interests that are in serious jeopardy, or provide the time and space for local forces to regain the initiative."[65] To be sure, this definition perfectly contemplated that originally handed to US forces at the onset of American involvement in Vietnam but suspiciously failed to address why a future counterinsurgency effort would not prove as malleable and intractable as the war in southeast Asia.[66]

The Army's Vietnam failures came under renewed scrutiny as the prominence of low-intensity conflict and the service's focus on it increased. In the spring of 1986, defense policy analyst Andrew Krepinevich's *The Army and Vietnam* prompted fiery discussions inspired by the author's direct assault on what had become the Army's consensus view of Vietnam's major lessons. Arguing that the Army's operational concept during the war disastrously neglected the counterinsurgency strategy necessary to combat the Communist invasion, Krepinevich blamed the failure on a firepower-obsessed US military more than any supposedly deleterious restraints imposed by civilian policymakers. In sum, the Army failed "primarily because it never realized that insurgency warfare required basic changes in Army methods," he explained.[67] Soldiers and officers who trained and prepared for Europe's Cold War battlefields were ill-equipped for a different kind of war in southeast Asia. Whether or not his thesis represented a more accurate portrayal of events, Krepinevich used it to draw unsettling conclusions about the future. While the Army hoped desperately to avoid another Vietnam, "attempting to set conditions for the commitment of US combat forces is likely to be as ineffective in the 1980s and 1990s as it was during the years prior to the Vietnam intervention," he argued, "when the Army shortchanged itself on both the doctrine and the force structure needed to fight effectively in an unfamiliar conflict environment."[68] Even worse, instead of taking an honest look at its failures, "the Army is perpetuating the fiction that its Concept of war remains valid in all conflict environments and that the problem in future FID conflicts will come from a weak-kneed American public, a foppish Congress, and an indecisive chief executive," rather than from within the ranks.[69] In one of the book's most provocative sentences, Krepinevich rejected the timeworn assertion by successive Army chiefs of staff that a Soviet invasion of Europe represented the most demanding problem facing the service: "Low-intensity warfare represents the most likely arena of future conflict for the army, and counterinsurgency the most demanding contingency." This was most especially the case, he explained, because "America's enemies are not going to play to its military strong suits; rather, they will exploit its weak points."[70] Inside the Army, the book arrived like a bomb.[71]

Long-retired, General DePuy disagreed with Krepinevich's book enough to comment publicly. As the officer arguably most responsible for the Army's lingering institutional embrace of new Never Again club tenets, he provided a scathing review of the book in the fall 1986 issue of *Army*—comments that likely resonated with many of the journal's readers. The general scoffed at what he called Krepinevich's borrowing "from the demonology of the military reform movement" in his castigation of "a strong preference for firepower and attrition."[72] After all, DePuy challenged, how else would American forces have dealt with the "formidable army" of North Vietnamese main force units? He identified "the most disturbing aspect" of the work as its explicit argument that "we should have been able to . . . use US combat troops directly in counterinsurgency operations in the highly populated enclaves" instead of merely "isolat[ing] the insurgent battleground from outside intervention."[73] American combat forces should have no hand in counterinsurgency operations, DePuy argued. If such operations were for some reason completely unavoidable, they "should involve only a small, select, fully empowered team of real experts" as opposed to troops trained for conventional warfighting in Europe. "Short of genocide or relocation," he could imagine no useful employment of such troops in such a war.[74]

By 1986, however, DePuy's school of thought had fallen increasingly under attack by a growing chorus of senior voices advocating reform. They argued for a much more rigorous pursuit of LIC competency at major Army thought centers like Fort Leavenworth. Maj. Gen. Gordon R. Sullivan, CGSC deputy commandant, had a very different reading of Krepinevich's study: "I think I agree in general," he wrote in an internal memorandum. Like Starry and many of the generation of officers who cut their teeth in Vietnam, Sullivan had a fundamentally different view of the global threat landscape. "We easily rationalize our focus on mid to high [intensity conflict] as the worst case and most 'preferred' focus of our organizational intellectual interest," he observed, noting that "our approach was wrong" in Vietnam. In Sullivan's view, the Army would be much better off to "devote as much organizational intellectual and analytical energy" to low-intensity capabilities as it did to potential war in Europe. Otherwise, he warned, "we are in danger of travelling a well-worn trail with predictable consequences."[75] Beyond merely adjusting the curriculum of study at CGSC and the new School of Advanced Military Studies to include more rigorous consideration of LIC, Sullivan argued for far more fundamental reform.

In his efforts to completely reshape the role of Army doctrine in everything from training and education to force design and acquisitions, DePuy envisioned capstone doctrine (in the form of FM 100-5) as the pacesetter for all subsequently published branch doctrine. In this way, TRADOC doctrine writers gained a profound degree of control over the Army's developmental trajectory when they determined what to include in capstone manuals and how to express the same.[76] The Army's tradition of neglecting LIC within successive iterations of capstone manuals since 1968 had contributed to subsequent inattention to LIC throughout the force. The system DePuy had designed was functioning just as he had envisioned. Starry's much-lauded and widely applicable AirLand Battle concept and the 1986 FM 100-5 had done more to increase the Army's doctrinal flexibility during an era marked by a wide range of contingencies and global responsibilities. Even so, many worried that it was still far too focused on conventional warfighting—combat tasks that played only a limited role in the larger suite of missions requisite to address low-intensity conflicts. In Sullivan's oft-quoted words, while the vaunted AirLand Battle tenants of initiative, synchronization, and depth were relevant across the full spectrum of conflict, "they were also useful for buying a house."[77] Starry's doctrine was too focused (on mid-intensity combat) and, at the same time, too vague.[78]

As the Army's global responsibilities extended well beyond merely combat operations—and because non-combat missions had long represented the bulk of the service's activities—Sullivan felt the sole capstone doctrine manual should not deal almost exclusively with warfighting. In a dramatic rebuff of the DePuy school, he suggested that the Starry manual be retitled *Combat Operations*, and suggested that a co-equal capstone manual on LIC be published to prompt all branches to consider and pen their own LIC-appropriate doctrine. The idea went nowhere. Sullivan's superiors and critics argued that having separate LIC doctrine could be problematic if the Army involved itself in an LIC that transformed into a mid-intensity conflict. Tellingly, the same critics remained mute on the possibility of the opposite scenario unfolding.[79]

If senior leaders refused to force all soldiers to learn, study, and train skills to confront low-intensity conflict, the only alternative for a world filled with such scenarios was to prepare a handful of Army units expressly for that task. To this end, Chief of Staff of the Army General John Wickham announced in the spring of 1984 that the Army would organize four "light infantry divisions" (LID)—with 10,000 soldiers each. These

divisions would be the Army's low-intensity conflict workhorses, designed for maximum mobility and rapid deployability. With an exceedingly minimal logistical footprint and specialized training in light infantry and counterguerrilla tactics, LIDs would effectively prevent low-intensity conflicts from traveling up the conflict spectrum toward general war. Leveraging cutting-edge technology and equipment, the formations would make up what they lacked in numbers through gear, skill, and determination. By providing the decisive combat power necessary for sovereign local national governments to address internal strife, a LID would conclude foreign conflicts in a manner conducive to US interests without risking the Army getting drawn into a costly protracted affair like Vietnam. The LIDs were also trained to participate in a meaningful capacity (though such a capacity was fiercely debated) if a general war erupted in Europe. The LID's very existence theoretically freed the remainder of the Army to essentially ignore any requirement to prepare for LIC.[80]

Figure 4.4. General John A. Wickham. Courtesy of Wikimedia Commons.

This postulation of LIC-specialized light infantry divisions as a panacea to the proliferation of "short of war" contingencies across the globe demonstrated that senior Army leaders finally acknowledged the great and increasing frequency of LICs but viewed such operations primarily as preventative medicine. By establishing a kind of global fire brigade specially trained in such politically nuanced operational environments, the Army could effectively prevent insurgencies from transforming into conventional wars. Provided it could, the remainder of the Army could continue to exclusively focus on confronting the Soviets in Europe without having to deviate from its training trajectory. The notion that all Army forces ought to be trained, equipped, and prepared to engage in LIC-relevant mission tasks, while stated unequivocally in doctrine, remained a minority opinion within the officer corps.

Regardless of the solution, most officers believed the absolute best course of action for the Army and nation was to avoid getting involved

in conflicts it deemed inappropriate from the outset. Like DePuy, they felt Vietnam proved that the country was never likely to be successful in prosecuting far-flung counterinsurgency or stability efforts on behalf of often-corrupt foreign powers. This was especially the case if the conflict could not be decisively concluded with extreme swiftness and violence of action. Much as the *Reichsheer* officer corps recognized the need to win Germany's wars quickly and decisively and avoid the beleaguered *Republik*'s inescapable resource constraints, the post-Vietnam US Army remained aware of the limits of public acquiescence in and support for prolonged military involvement in geographically distant conflicts. The president's national security advisors shared these concerns. "We cannot persevere if there is a sharp asymmetry of wills—if our adversaries' determination is greater and more enduring than our own," one 1987 National Security Council report to Congress acknowledged, with a not-too-subtle nod to Vietnam.[81] In both cases, the conversion of a conflict from decisive maneuver to protracted attrition (of resources for Germany; of public support for America) had to be avoided. In large part because of this imperative, potential adversaries maintained a powerful interest in quickly (and often decisively) transforming any conflict in the opposite direction.

In his 1987 dissertation at Princeton University, then-Maj. David Petraeus, an officer with considerable interest in counterinsurgency problems in the distant future, noted the tenor expressed by his peers and superiors. The "generally accepted lessons" that Army leaders drew from the frustrating Vietnam experience, Petraeus observed, led them "to establish certain conditions that they and many of their peers held as necessary before American troops should be committed to combat." In doing so, "they sought to avoid another Vietnam," he explained.[82] He described the most salient of these lessons:

> Clear military objectives must be established, public backing should be relatively assured, and commanders should be given the freedom and forces necessary to accomplish their mission before the public tires of American involvement. When it comes to the use of force . . . bite the bullet or duck, but [do] not nibble.[83]

These criteria, referred to as the Weinberger Doctrine and later Powell Doctrine after Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger and later General Colin Powell endorsed them, remained widely embraced touchstones of the new Never Again club.[84] Even so, their logic ran directly counter to the timeless dynamic nature of war and assumed that policymakers

and senior military leaders could reliably predict or control the organic transformation of conflicts from one "kind" to another, as had occurred on multiple occasions in Vietnam—often within a single corps tactical zone. Wars blessed with "clear military objectives" and plentiful public support—even those launched with carefully devised plans to achieve victory swiftly "before the public tires of American involvement"—could just as easily be derailed by the enemy or Clausewitzian "friction" and converted into intractable insurgencies. In essence, the still-disillusioned Army's embrace of such beliefs was inspired by a hope that the only breed of war it should be called on to win was that which it anticipated prosecuting against the Warsaw Pact in central Europe. In the absence of such a dramatic contest, at the very least the officer corps craved assignments with far more strategic predictability than had been on offer in southeast Asia.

Despite demands for predictable conflicts, the next major contingency to which the Army deployed proved once again the frustrating opposite. When Panamanian dictator General Manuel Noriega turned his violent and corrupt regime on Americans in Panama, resulting in the death of a Marine in the summer of 1989, newly elected President George H. W. Bush ordered Operation JUST CAUSE to capture Noriega and replace his regime with a pro-American government. Although roundly condemned by the United Nations as a flagrant violation of international law, Bush deployed a revitalized American military to Central America. Handcrafted to compete against the Soviets in AirLand Battle across central Europe, the high-tech overmatch and impressive combat acumen of the paratroopers and Special Operations professionals who jumped into Panama in December all but assured battlefield success against the outnumbered Panamanian defenders. Indeed, it took no more than eight days to detain Noriega and, alongside the new 7th LID and 193rd Infantry Brigade, dismantle the Panamanian armed forces. Coordinating closely with Air Force pilots, Army leaders took advantage of the joint organization of American combat power emerging from the 1986 Goldwater-Nichols Act which ensured that the coordination problems of Grenada would be avoided.[85]

Though the initial Panama operation was successful, troops failed to avoid post-conflict challenges like those experienced in Grenada. After all, the Army had taken very little substantive action beyond doctrine reform to address its LIC arena shortcomings since 1983. Following the wholesale destruction of the Noriega regime, the conflict shifted organically down the spectrum from mid- to low-intensity, and Army forces readiness was found painfully wanting. Extraordinarily outnumbered civil affairs and military police reservists were responsible for establishing law and order

across a nation of nearly two and a half million spread across an area larger than twenty-nine thousand square miles. Their inability to do so led to the formation of violent gangs which took advantage of the widespread power vacuum to destabilize Panamanian society. The failure to develop realistic plans for infrastructure repair and reestablishment of basic public services across the country inspired extensive looting and property losses valued at $1 billion. Major delays in training and deploying a new Panamanian National Police force further contributed to surging violence and instability across the country, even though the population maintained a friendly disposition toward the American invaders. Although never threatening to become an intractable quagmire like Americans suffered in Vietnam, Panama ultimately proved something short of a success story. Sadly, the many cautionary tales from JUST CAUSE were mostly ignored by an Army and nation quickly blindsided by two paradigm-shifting distractions.[86]

"The specter of Vietnam has been buried forever"

In the years immediately following its Panamanian adventure, the Army's self-described *raison d'être* very inconveniently disappeared. Rotted from the inside out by festering ethnic divisions, general social malaise, and mounting financial insolvency, the Soviet Union appeared to be in its death throes—even as Army leaders continued to focus their preparatory efforts on bracing for a Warsaw Pact onslaught. Instead, in 1991, the fifteen USSR republics declared their independence from the Communist leviathan, General Secretary Mikhail Gorbachev resigned his position, and the Soviet Union simply ceased to be. In almost the blink of an eye—with no exchange of gunfire between American and Soviet battalions or catastrophic nuclear destruction—the Cold War came to a rather pacific conclusion.[87]

Caught off guard by these developments and wary of a forthcoming "peace dividend" reduction in defense spending, senior Army leaders were suddenly confronted by a new challenger of decidedly lesser ferocity that reared its head in the Middle East. In a brazen effort to remedy Iraq's economic woes resulting from the recently concluded Iran-Iraq War and assert the nation's newly won regional dominance, the country's brutal dictator, Saddam Hussein ordered his army to invade neighboring Kuwait and seize its oil fields on the second day of August 1990. Other portions of the Iraqi Army deployed to the Saudi Arabian border to threaten another possible invasion. Despite eliciting United Nations and Council of the Arab League ire and ultimatums, Hussein considered permanently annexing Kuwait as an Iraqi province after overwhelming its armed forces in a swift two-day

lightning campaign. Having blatantly ignored UN demands to withdraw from Kuwait, Hussein's intransigence prompted the formation of a massive coalition comprised of conventional forces from the United States, United Kingdom, and France alongside those of Arab nations and a long list of other global contributors. With negotiations flagging, President George H. W. Bush, with support from the United Nations, finally determined to eject Iraqi forces from Kuwait, an American ally, by force. On 15 January 1991, Operation DESERT STORM began.[88]

Figure 4.5. Saddam Hussein, 1996. Courtesy of Wikimedia Commons.

The campaign marked the largest deployment of American forces since Vietnam. With 527,000 American troops and 2,000 tanks, to say nothing of the tens of thousands of allied forces, the Coalition dwarfed Hussein's 336,000 troops in theater. Yet it was the way these forces were employed by General Norman Schwarzkopf, who commanded all UN forces, that seemed most impressive to observers and participants alike. Schwarzkopf, a Vietnam combat veteran, had served as the deputy commander of US forces during the Grenada invasion. Though frustrated by interservice coordination, poor intelligence gathering, and communication failures at echelon following the success in the Caribbean, the general still felt the Grenada invasion proved the US Army was "through trying to paper over problems as we had in Vietnam" and that "the military had changed" since its failure in 1973.[89] As his force deployed into Kuwait and Saudi Arabia, he knew that the US Army had been fine-tuned for precisely the kind of operation he was about to conduct. In many ways, this sensation was the exact opposite of that experienced by nearly every other American commander since at least 1953.

Air operations opened on the morning of 17 January 1991, with an aerial campaign to gain Coalition air supremacy. The attacks destroyed key strategic Iraqi targets like command nodes, air defenses, and com-

Figure 4.6. Operation DESERT STORM. Courtesy of Wikimedia Commons.

munications assets while fighters grounded or destroyed the Hussein regime's minimal airpower. In less than a week, Coalition aircraft enjoyed all-but-untrammeled command of the high-altitude airspace over Kuwait and Iraq. Bombing and cruise missile strikes then increasingly shifted to tactical targets in anticipation of the forthcoming ground offensive. As Iraqi forces futilely launched sporadic Scud missile attacks against targets in Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, and Israel, Coalition ground forces readied to roll back Iraqi gains and direct a fatal "left hook" through Saudi Arabia and around the Iraqi right flank while the Marines and Arab allies held the enemy's attention in Kuwait. The combined assault would be conducted well in line with AirLand Battle imperatives and tenets, as well as the principles of war which every American officer in the theater had been taught and drilled across the Army's professional military education institutions. While not a strictly conceived performance of AirLand Battle doctrine, Starry's FM 100-5 informed every facet of the campaign.[90]

On 24 February, Schwarzkopf sprung both axes of his attack. Four fast-moving armored divisions wound across the open desert from the Saudi frontier into southern Iraq, enveloping the unknowing Iraqi Republican Guard as the I Marine Expeditionary Force and its Arab counterparts struck directly at the enemy's front in Kuwait. Outgunned, outmaneuvered, and disoriented Iraqi units collapsed or shattered all across the

Figure 4.7. General Colin Powell and General Norman Schwarzkopf. Courtesy of the US Army.

front, fleeing pell-mell northward or directly into the hammer of the "left hook." Coalition aircraft dismantled the surviving defenders, delivering more than 88,000 tons of ordnance on Iraqi targets. Within two days' time, Kuwait had been liberated in its entirety and Coalition forces continued northward into Iraq. As Iraqi resistance crumbled, only torrential downpours slowed the Allied onslaught. Then on 26 February, the regime requested a ceasefire and offered to negotiate. Iraq was defeated and the revitalized US Army had won its most spectacular victory of the latter half of the century.[91]

General Barry McCaffrey, commander of the 24th Infantry Division (Mechanized) of the famed "left hook" into Iraq, reflected immediately afterward on the deeper roots of the victory. "This war didn't take 100 hours to win," he explained, "it took 15 years."[32] Indeed, for the past decade and a half, if the Army had not studied, taught, practiced, trained, and designed for DESERT STORM, it had done so for an imagined conflict that was remarkably similar in all the most relevant tactical respects. Although global security imperatives perpetually kept the Army engaged in messy low-intensity conflicts, the lingering influence of the now-concluded Cold War had inspired a continued primary focus on readying for mid-intensity combat. Those preparations were apparently paying off in the Persian

Gulf. Due to the conflict's rapid conclusion and lack of regime-change objectives, there was little worry about the Army's continued struggles with low-intensity competence. Although many pundits called for wholesale removal of the Hussein regime, such a political objective was never on the table. One observer noted later in the decade that to do so "might also have caused an Iraqi civil war and divided the country, led to bloody urban warfare, and forced a lengthy UN occupation."[92] Such a scenario was too vexing to even contemplate. The war against Iraq was, finally, precisely the kind of war the Army wanted to fight; the kind of war its doctrine and force structure had been designed for in the wake of Vietnam; and the kind of war its senior leaders had long anticipated—even if against a different and perhaps less capable foe. Most importantly, the conflict had concluded long before it could transform into anything else—most especially the kind of war the Army specifically did not want to fight.

Although overlooked at the time, the language employed by ebullient Americans in the wake of victory was eerily similar to that employed by enthusiastic Germans after the brilliant success of *FALL GELB*. Amidst all the expletive-laced contemporary assessments of DESERT STORM as the greatest or utterly unprecedented of military operations, just as Germans had claimed their victory as "without parallel in world history," Americans now asserted that their victory over Iraq was "without parallel in modern military annals."[93] President Bush himself could barely restrain himself. "By God, we've kicked the Vietnam syndrome once and for all!" he exclaimed, adding that the "specter of Vietnam has been buried forever in the desert sands."[94] Much as the victorious *Wehrmacht* overestimated its prowess in the wake of France's fall, failing to recognize the extent to which the campaign's specific characteristics and fortuitous enemy failures had played to their narrowly bounded strengths, the revitalized American army failed to heed the emergence of a new "Desert Storm syndrome" arising in the shadow of victory.[95]

Seven months after the Hussein regime capitulated, three colonels with the US Army Military History Institute sat down with General Starry to discuss his reaction to the stunning victory in the Gulf. Interpreting the campaign against the Iraqis as the obvious fruits of his AirLand Battle concept, Starry was sorry he could not participate in the operation himself, having retired in 1983. "Proof [of the doctrine] is in the whole thing," he exclaimed. The Coalition had done "exactly what the doctrine said we were going to do" and, for his part, Starry did not "think we could have done it any quicker."[96] The General was especially impressed with the

decisive "left hook." Facilitating its advance with airstrikes against follow-on Iraqi forces, the maneuver was the fullest realization of AirLand Battle to date.

In closing, Colonels Douglas Johnson and Thomas Sweeney asked Starry if he had any concerns that the Army's leaders would overlook any of the important lessons to be drawn from the experience of DESERT STORM. The general pondered the question, having already asserted that, while he was not sure of the efficacy of getting "ready to do DESERT STORM all over again . . . I suspect that might not be a bad idea." Either way, there was always "a strong possibility that we may miss something, Tom, because we were so successful," he admitted. "Is it something critical? I don't know."[97] Though the Iraqis had proven "a cooperative enemy" who "could have done a hell of a lot more damage to us than he did," Starry commented, it had been "completely beyond their intellectual scope to conceive of the fact that we could go around through the desert the way we did, go that far and in that quick a time."[98] It all seemed so perfect. At the same time, he added, there was always danger in such perceptions. "You could lull yourself into a false sense of security," he noted, presciently.[99]

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Chapter 5
"A poor man's war": *Unternehmen* Barbarossa and the Siren Song of *Bewegungskrieg*, 1941

Although Adolf Hitler intended for his western campaign to decisively destroy the western Allies' ability to continue resisting his expansionist project, stubborn Britain refused to comply. Even after more than three months of punishing aerial bombardment, Britons would not yield to Nazi demands that they capitulate and sue for a compromise peace. In the Battle of Britain, the Royal Air Force—bested on the continent—proved a more-than-worthy opponent to a *Luftwaffe* exhausted by the 1940 summer campaign and designed to support short-range ground maneuvers like those in Poland and France. Lacking long-range fighters or strategic bombers, Hitler's air force struggled to project sufficient combat power to establish air supremacy. The revitalized *Wehrmacht*, designed for a highly specific kind of war, proved too inflexible to thrive in a fundamentally different kind. It would not be the last time.[1]

To sustain its operations against Britain, let alone expand Nazi conquests farther abroad, the *Wehrmacht* required at least 1.5 million tons of oil every year. Most of this requirement and the consumption needs of Nazi-occupied western Europe was supplied by allied Romanian oil fields, with the remainder provided by the Reich's extensive-yet-still-insufficient synthetic oil production effort. Hitler's aggression had already added many more mouths to feed and fuel tanks to fill than could be satisfied by the food, coal, or oil resources it had obtained by force.[2] Partly for that reason, Germany inevitably would need to seize the Soviet Union's vast resources. Hitler originally explained his decision to invade the Soviet Union in these strategic terms to the *Wehrmacht*'s senior leadership; however, the dictator's commitment to his ideological convictions and the Nazi *Weltanschauung* (worldview) essentially preordained the attack long before Britain's refusal to capitulate had rendered its immediacy strategically necessary.[3]

The admixture of these strategic and ideologically inspired political goals would lead the *Wehrmacht*—forged in the interwar era for short, decisive *Bewegungskriege* near Germany's borders—into a titanic multifront *Materialschlacht* of never-imagined ferocity, scale, and cost. While the immense danger of undertaking such a mission should have been obvious, the tendency of the army's senior leadership to ignore the interconnections between politics, strategy, and warfare allowed planners to bank

upon miraculous escapes from the tried-and-true laws of military logistics and Clausewitzian "friction." Such willful blindness was the byproduct of the *Reichsheer*'s "strictly military" tactics-only focus on training, education, and doctrine development. As the *Wehrmacht* would learn in the most dramatic way, armies cannot depend on tactical skill alone as a panacea to intractable strategic and logistical problems. The alluring promise that German *Bewegungskrieg* warfare would safely steer the Nazi war machine away from the rocky shoals of *Materialschlacht* was to prove a deadly siren song.

"[To] crush Soviet Russia in a fast campaign"

Unlike the Wehrmacht's fortuitous victories in the west, the invasion of the Soviet Union, codenamed *Unternehmen* Barbarossa*,* was planned as a *Blitzkrieg* from the beginning. Hitler and Chief of Staff of the German High Command *Generaloberst* Franz Halder both fully recognized that the Soviet Union had to be "shattered to its roots in one blow."[4] The Communist state "must be knocked out," Halder wrote. "The faster we destroy Russia, the better."[5] Given the *Wehrmacht*'s dramatic success elsewhere in Europe and the supposedly inferior racial quality of the Russian people, Hitler and his senior subordinates expected to achieve victory in no more than four or five months.[6] The *Wehrmacht* would surge over the border, encircle the Red Army, and destroy it before it had any chance to retreat or evacuate its factories and resources eastward. Preventing such an escape was imperative given that the front would inevitably widen, and logistics would become more challenging the farther east the war drifted. Trading space for time while falling back on reserves, the Soviets could conceivably draw the *Wehrmacht* toward a prolonged *Materialschlacht* that its leaders knew they had to avoid at all costs. Hitler, the *Oberkommando der Wehrmacht* (OKW, joint high command), and the *Oberkommando des Heeres* (OKH, Army High Command) were confident about ultimate success, even while they sparred over the primary objective—a drive to Moscow (Halder and OKH's view) or capturing Ukrainian grain, Caucasus oil fields, and the birthplace of Soviet communism, Leningrad (Hitler and OKW's view).[7]

The Nazi plan to quickly seize these objectives emerged from the synthesis of two studies conducted by *Generalstab* officers charged with addressing the many strategic and logistical problems presented. The first, *Operationsentwurf OST* (Operation DRAFT EAST), was formulated in the summer of 1940 by *Generalmajor* Erich Marcks, chief of staff of 18. Armee. Taking his cue from Halder, Marcks understood the invasion's

primary objective was to capture Moscow and destroy the Soviet state. Secondarily, *Wehrmacht* forces operating north and south of the main axis would strike to capture Leningrad, Ukraine, and the Caucasus in a nod to the Reich's desperate need for raw materials to continue Hitler's war. Preventing Russia's own attack into the Romanian oil fields was also a crucial secondary imperative. Importantly, Halder's and Marcks' order of priorities did not match those of their *Führer*. Halder and Hitler differed regarding the relative strategic importance of capturing Moscow, which led the former to delicately avoid direct confrontation while covertly directing his subordinates to craft plans that fit his personal convictions. This duplicity threatened the coherence and clarity of all German operations in the east from the very outset.[8]

Marcks foresaw the Nazi invasion unfolding in four distinct phases, each extending over a span of three to six weeks. In the first, three combined arms *Heeresgruppen* (army groups) would strike into Soviet territory in the north, center, and south simultaneously, hurling back surprised Red Army units to their prepared defenses not far from the border. Instead of establishing fortified lines and settling into a *Stellungskrieg*, the vaunted *Panzerdivisionen* attached to each *Heeresgruppe* would break through at key points along Soviet lines in the style of *Stosstruppen* and drive deep into the enemy rear. After deranging Soviet command and control and cutting lines of communication, the penetrating columns would unite in a characteristic encirclement, forcing a decisive *Kesselschlacht* as the trailing infantry divisions mopped up the resultant pocket. Presumably, Marcks argued, Soviet forces could not avoid the closing jaws of the *Panzerdivisionen* while defending immobile industry and vital resources in the westernmost portions of the country.[9] Preventing Soviet withdrawal would be crucial for the scheme of operations to succeed. Once it did, Marcks believed the army would transition to a third phase marked by simultaneous drives to both Leningrad and Moscow while the mass of prisoners was sorted out in the rear. After three to six weeks of sparring for control of the capital—battling what little Soviet combat power remained in the country—the once-again-victorious *Wehrmacht* would settle into a final three-to-four-week occupation while German forces consolidated their gains across the rest of western Russia and Ukraine, advancing by incremental stages via captured railroads. After no more than seventeen weeks, and possibly in as little as nine, Marcks anticipated the Soviet Union would simply cease to exist.[10] He mostly ignored an ominous Military Geography Department report that warned the mightiest challenges would be the vastness of the Soviet Union's dominion and unforgiving climate, and

cautioned that seizure of the westernmost industrial areas might not be sufficient to bring the country to its knees.[11]

Not long after submitting his study to Halder, Marcks grew uneasy with the exceptionally streamlined projections he had made. Accordingly, he returned to the drawing board and considered what would happen if a prolonged contest developed during the final phase of the plan; such a contest might add a Soviet alliance with Britain and even the United States into the mix. Should such a disastrous eventuality unfold, Germany would find itself in an intercontinental *Materialschlacht* of monumental scale. Instead of considering that such an invasion might be outside of the *Wehrmacht*'s capabilities or the Reich's best strategic interests, Marcks emphasized that the Soviet Union positively must be defeated in the earliest stages of the invasion. Sharing these new concerns with his peers, Marcks found that his considered reticence was not widely shared. All would be just fine, his fellow officers assured him. Halder never received Marcks's follow-on report.[12]

Oberstleutnant Bernhard von Lossberg was likewise directed by *Generaloberst* Alfred Jodl, chief of the OKW Operations Staff, to compose his own assessment later that fall.[13] In the resultant manuscript, Lossberg provided perhaps the clearest elaboration of the *Wehrmacht*'s concept of forthcoming operations. As Marcks had already elaborated, the invasion objective was "to destroy the mass of the Soviet Army in western Russia, [and] to prevent the withdrawal of battle-worthy elements into the depths of Russia." Following this, Nazi forces would "advance to a line which will place the most important part of Russia in our hands, and on which it will be easy to form a shield against Asiatic Russia."[14] It all sounded simple enough, conforming to the tacit assumption shared by seemingly all his peers and superiors that the feasibility of such a set of maneuvers was obvious on its face. It only remained to discern how best to orchestrate and sustain such a bold gambit.[15]

Like Marcks, Lossberg recognized the imperative that Soviet forces be encircled and crushed while they still defended the westernmost reaches of their territory, preventing a withdrawal that would draw German forces deeper into enemy territory and farther from their bases of supply. No more than two consecutive encirclements along the center (Moscow) axis would be required, he reasoned, the first near Minsk in Belorussia and the second at Smolensk. Taken together, these maneuvers would utterly cripple Soviet capacity to defend the capital, allowing victorious German columns to seize Moscow and swiftly end the conflict long before any foreign alliance could make a difference. Moreover, almost all the nation's

critical industrial centers situated in the western portion of the country would be firmly in Nazi hands. Recognizing the immense supply challenges during even such an abbreviated campaign, Lossberg stressed the necessity to capture Soviet railroads and rolling stock that Germany would subsequently use to sustain advancing German forces. Given the exceedingly poor state of Soviet road networks, such infrastructural booty constituted more than a nice-to-have. The railroads represented the logistical linchpin of Lossberg's entire plan. Without dependable rail supply, no Nazi force could maintain itself for any respectable length of time and over any meaningful distance by motor truck and horse-drawn wagon alone. The sheer expanse of barren Russian terrain would defeat an offensive even without Red Army intervention. The trains positively had to be captured.[16]

In October, shortly after Lossberg's report, the *Generalstab* operations division compiled its own strategic survey for Halder's consideration. While still convinced of the invasion's feasibility, its authors were less confident in easy success. The Soviets outnumbered available German forces considerably. Given this inequality, *Heeresgruppen* would need to mass their strength at operationally critical points, employing economy of force measures elsewhere. The element of surprise would help level the playing field, most especially in the critical task of ensuring that the Red Army was not able to withdraw from the western border killing fields planned for its destruction. Space and time were the chief enemies, and the only way to cope with their effects was to effectively shrink the battlefield and contain the war, or at least its initial decisive stages, to the westernmost reaches of the Soviet Union.[17] Using swift double envelopment, the *Wehrmacht* could contain enemy forces—and thus ensuing combat operations designed to annihilate them—without allowing the battle to spread eastward. After destroying the bulk of Soviet forces in the west, resistance to Nazi arms would naturally decrease the farther east the front moved.[18] The strategic study, like the ones conducted by Marcks and Lossberg, was littered with modal verbs. The laundry list of things that *must* or *had to* transpire in Germany's favor increased along with the amount of critical thought given to the strategic problem. With each addition to the list, the odds of success should have seemed ever dimmer. Due to several faulty assumptions, they did not.[19]

Perhaps the most salient of these assumptions was borne of the *Wehrmacht*'s stunning and swift success in Poland, the Low Countries, and France.[20] The latter nation had bloodily repulsed Imperial German efforts to subdue it over the course of four brutal years of war from 1914 to 1918, but now Hitler's *Panzers* had crushed the Third Republic in a matter of

six weeks. The speed with which France fell had surprised even the most optimistic *Generalstab* officers. Now, with the apparently most difficult challenge behind them, Hitler confidently anticipated that destroying the Soviet Union would be little more than *Sandkastenspiel* (child's play).[21] The viability of the *Bewegungskrieg* operating concept had been proven beyond doubt. Now it only remained for OKH to transplant what had worked (after tinkering a bit with what had not) from France into Russia, and the rest would take care of itself.

The Stalin regime's brutal 1937 purges of its military and government along with the Red Army's exceedingly poor performance in the recent Winter War with Finland (1939–40) seemed to legitimate prevailing perceptions of Soviet military incompetence and disaffection with political leadership.[22] Whereas Soviet forces would likely outnumber the *Wehrmacht* within the theater, and many of their weapons and vehicles were far more capable than German counterparts, superior German morale and racially derived willpower would easily surmount these challenges. Moreover, many German leaders anticipated that Russian civilians disenchanted with the heavy-handed Soviet leader's regime would welcome onrushing Nazi columns with sighs of relief. Such a kindly reception would negate any need for extensive preparations to protect rear areas, to include the life-giving railroads.[23] Far from facing any intractable guerrilla conflict, Nazi forces would be greeted as liberators. Of course, these assumptions clashed dramatically with the actual policy toward Soviet citizens that the Nazi regime planned to apply in those territories. In fact, most citizens who were not genocidally slaughtered outright as Nazi units arrived would be enslaved, starved to death—or in the case of Jewish and other "undesirable" populations—systematically executed in first labor and later extermination camps.

It was partly in the lack of any acknowledgement of the Nazi plan to exterminate Soviet citizens that the operational invasion plan became unhinged from Hitler's ideologically motivated political objectives. The notion that a "strictly military" plan could be crafted to demilitarize the Soviet Union then hand what was left to the Nazi government was a predictable if wholly erroneous assumption issuing from a *Generalstab* that had spent at least the past twenty years denying any direct inherent connection between politics and warfare. While Jodl's OKW devoted far more time and attention to the economical and logistical aspects of the forthcoming campaign, OKH—which would hold the reins in the prosecution of the invasion—focused entirely on the "strictly military" defeat

of the Red Army in the field.[24] The rest, its officers supposed, would follow on its own.

Charged by Halder to compile the final invasion plans, Assistant Chief of Staff of Operations *Generalleutnant* Friedrich Paulus conducted a map exercise in December 1940 to test the moving pieces prior to committing the plan to paper. The results were anything but promising. Unlike Marcks and Lossberg, Paulus directed his staff to account for the possibility that the Soviets would mobilize deep reserves of Russian manpower, progressively increasing the number of divisions the Red Army could field over time in a prolonged conflict. Once again, instead of mitigating confidence that the invasion was feasible, the knowledge of this dangerous contingency increased the apparent importance of winning an early decisive victory. Indeed, Paulus's map exercises vividly highlighted the potentially disastrous consequences of failing to win such a victory. When the invading "Blue" team armored forces were blunted by "Red" counterattacks, the rest of the enemy force could withdraw eastward away from the invader to trade space for time. Worse yet, as the "Blue" team pursued, Russian geography forced it to disperse decreasingly effective combat power over an ever-increasing expansive frontage as it advanced east. Balancing the two over time promised to be one of the most vexing operational challenges of any Russian invasion.[25] The closer to Moscow the "Blue" advance swept, the more its combat power depleted. It became vividly clear to Paulus that "the German forces were barely sufficient for the purpose." Although Paulus commented in an after-war account that the entire operation appeared "far beyond anything that the German forces available could hope to achieve," his pre-battle assessment matched the general overconfidence that pervaded a *Generalstab* flush with victory after the fall of France.[26] Jodl, Halder, and other superiors never received a formal report on the findings from Paulus's map exercise.[27]

On 17 December 1940, Jodl personally delivered the army's invasion order draft, *Weisung Nr. 21* (Directive No. 21), to Hitler. The German leader reordered priorities to effectively subordinate (but not eliminate) the central Moscow drive in the north; instead, isolating the Baltic states and capturing Leningrad would be the focus. Hitler approved the revised plan and issued the directive the next day: in the coming spring and summer of 1941, the *Wehrmacht* would "crush Soviet Russia in a fast campaign." The "mass of the Russian Army," Hitler explained, then arrayed in western Russia, would "be destroyed in daring operations, by driving forward deep armored wedges" intended to prevent the retreat of Red Army forces "into the vastness of Russian territory." A "quick pursuit" to a line east of

Figure 5.1. *Generaloberst* Alfred Jodl (center). Courtesy of the National Archives and Records Administration.

Moscow would follow the destruction of Soviet forces, establishing "a cover against Asiatic Russia," and placing Germany out of reach of whatever was left of the Russian Air Force. The latter was "to be prevented by powerful blows at the very beginning of the operation." The word *mussen* (must) appeared no less than six times in the document, indicating all that absolutely had to go right to meet with success.[28]

"Barely sufficient for the purpose"

Hitler launched the largest land invasion in human history at perhaps the least propitious moment for the Third Reich and its army. Despite Barbarossa plans calling for "daring operations . . . driving deep armored wedges" into the Soviet rear, the *Wehrmacht* had already suffered from severe shortages of almost every conceivably relevant resource. The extensively mobile operations in Poland and in the west, including the costly aerial campaign against Britain, had consumed massive portions of Germany's already limited fuel and oil supplies. Army Quartermaster General *Majorgeneral* Eduard Wagner cautioned that German forces could only realistically be expected to advance about 700 kilometers along such a broad front into Russia before exhausting all remaining fuel supplies.[29] Given that Soviet fuel was lower octane, unlike in France and Poland captured

fuel supplies could not be relied upon to extend the *Wehrmacht*'s operational reach until the gas could be converted—a laborious and time-consuming process.

Fuel was by no means the only critical resource running low in Reich inventories. Steel, crucial to produce and repair armored vehicles and other military impedimenta, was so scarce that authorities worried Germany might not be able to "muddle our way through 1941."[30] Rubber for truck tires was likewise nearing exhaustion. Damaged in recent western campaigns, large swaths of the *Panzerdivisionen* and motorized divisions required extensive vehicle repairs; they were far less than fully prepared for an exponentially larger operation.[31] Shortfalls in truck production forced many army commands to replenish losses with captured civilian vehicles from across Nazi-occupied Europe. Because of the variety of these vehicles, even routine maintenance was a mechanic's nightmare. Procuring spare parts often proved extremely vexing.[32]

Perhaps most shockingly of all, it was not that the *Generalstab* officers responsible for planning the invasion were unaware of this dire situation. They willfully, and in some cases even emphatically, chose to ignore it. "I refuse to allow economic considerations to influence operational direction," Halder proclaimed in response to War Economic Staff entreaties that resource-rich Ukraine and the Caucasus region be strategically prioritized. While far more sensitive to the need for raw materials in shaping strategic planning, Hitler himself "would not allow himself to be influenced in his planning by . . . economic difficulties" when considering whether such operations were feasible.[33] After all, the entire *Bewegungskrieg* operational concept had been forged by an interwar *Reichsheer* facing far-more-stringent economic restrictions, and its very purpose was to win swift decisive victories before such considerations could become relevant. Halder and his lieutenants ignored the many economic canaries in the Reich's coal mine, remaining confident that their scheme of operations would avoid their worst implications. Shortfalls in raw material availability, industrial production, and even fuel reserves only mattered in a prolonged *Materialschlacht*, but *Bewegungskrieg* of the variety the *Wehrmacht* had proved itself capable would avoid any such attrition contest; or at least it was hoped. The siren song of *Blitzkrieg* was too alluring to ignore.

What little hope of operational success the invasion plan enjoyed hinged entirely upon the ability of the four *Panzergruppe* constituting each *Heeresgruppe* spearhead to penetrate Soviet defenses and swallow large chunks of the Red Army before they could withdraw. Any significant

loss of momentum would almost certainly be disastrous to the entire campaign. Unexpectedly stiff Soviet resistance, insufficient fuel supplies for maneuver across shoddy Russian roads, or any other obstacle to smooth operations threatened to unhinge the entire enterprise. The first of these contingencies loomed large in the minds of some in OKH because of the raw quantitative and in many cases qualitative advantage of Soviet armor. While the German army planned to employ just over 3,500 tanks in the offensive, the Red Army had nearly 24,000 across Russia (only a fraction were present along the Russian frontier). Though the vast majority of these were outmoded models operated by poorly trained crews, the Russian tanks also included far more dangerous variants. The T-34 medium tank could operate with impunity beyond 500 meters (1,600 feet) of most any German weapons systems, whereas the armor thickness of the gigantic Soviet KV-1 heavy tank made it impervious to every *Wehrmacht* armored vehicle. Even worse, half of the German armor deployed to the east constituted light tanks that could not realistically spar with heavier Soviet counterparts. Nearly three of every ten *Panzergruppen* tanks were entirely obsolete *Panzerkampfwagen* I or II variants, the former armed only with machine guns.[34] Most German armor operated by radio in distinct contrast to their Soviet enemies; however, these communication advantages—while significant—would not slow Soviet shells or bullets. For an army operating on a shoestring manpower and materiel budget, losses of all kinds were exceptionally costly. Depending so heavily on vulnerable lightly armored fighting vehicles made sense in wars against comparably equipped enemies like Poland and France but far less sense when preparing to spar with the Red Army. To be successful, the *Wehrmacht* would need to endure a rough handling and yet still prevail. It was by no means armed and equipped to accomplish such a feat.

Tactical victory had to be achieved at an acceptable cost to the Reich given its extreme disparity of resources and manpower compared to the Soviet Union. Even if the *Wehrmacht* could inflict an enormous amount of pain for Soviet forces, the enemy's almost unimaginably deep reserves meant that avoiding excessive German loss and resource expenditure was ultimately of far greater strategic import than extensive destruction of Soviet combat power. Historian Sir Basil Liddell Hart observed that the invasion's success hinged less "on strategy and tactics than on space, logistics, and mechanics."[35] Another historian, David Stahel, likewise assessed the key challenge to have been "the complex relationship between space, time, and striking power."[36] A *Wehrmacht* which had been diligently shaped by interwar leaders into a paragon of skill in short-range maneuver and

tactical lethality lacked a concomitant fluency in these three most crucial facets of warfare. Very little of the army's interwar renaissance focused on shoring up shortcomings in campaign logistics planning even though such weaknesses proved disastrous on many occasions during the Great War. Due to the development of motorized and armored divisions, the challenge of campaign logistics had only increased since 1918.[37] Despite this, most *Generalstab* officers, products of the *Reichsheer*'s institutional neglect of the topic, felt comfortable trusting in the innate improvisational capacity of German soldiers to solve logistical problems.[38] Nothing in the entire historical German military experience compared to the sheer scale in space that the campaign plan envisioned. Provisioning and sustaining a force of more than three million soldiers, five thousand vehicles, and hundreds of thousands of horses across thousands of miles of Russian terrain with a force designed for operations across the relatively short distances between objectives in western Europe promised to be an almost insurmountable problem.[39]

Many historians have noted that the *Wehrmacht* was relatively unprepared for the invasion based on the sorry state of the German military and economy immediately prior to crossing the Polish border into Soviet territory. The roots of this unpreparedness lay in decisions made across the previous two decades. Likewise, military professionals have lauded the unlikely process by which the defeated German military arose from the ashes of the Great War to arrive at a position where it might consecutively invade Poland, France, and the Soviet Union. At the same time, they have neglected to emphasize how the ways in which that renaissance unfolded set the Reich up for disaster given Hitler's ultimate political aims. The *Wehrmacht* had been profoundly ill-prepared for its forthcoming ultimate test because of the developmental trajectory its senior leaders took across the years following the 1918 defeat.

Built upon a foundation laid down by generations of German military thinkers and crystallized by Seeckt in an effort to preserve the embattled *Republik* on a shoestring budget, the *Wehrmacht*'s modernized *Bewegungskrieg* operational concept was designed for an altogether different set of strategic objectives and geographical context than it now faced. Originally intended as a means of projecting a strategically defensive preemptive offense immediately across Germany's beleaguered borders, no part of *Bewegungskrieg* contemplated prudent preparation or planning for the potential of a conflict transitioning into a *Stellungskrieg* or *Materialschlacht*. The widespread assumption that its effective prosecution could effectively avoid such a transition had coaxed most *Reichsheer* and

Wehrmacht officers into believing that such preparation and planning was mostly a waste of time.

The swift and decisive campaigns against Poland, the Low Countries, and France had reified German convictions in the apparently universal efficacy of the *Bewegungskrieg* concept. The strategic and geographical context within which those operations unfolded was markedly similar to the strategically defensive scenario that Seeckt and his acolytes originally envisioned. The similarities were lost amidst the celebrations of brilliant Nazi military success. *Generalstab* planners anticipated similar swift and decisive conclusions to Barbarossa, blithely ignoring the fundamentally different geographical context of the invasion and its political objectives compared to those of any previous *Wehrmacht* endeavor. Eager to add another stunning victory to the *Panzergruppen* war diaries, OKH inadvertently prepared to deploy a force narrowly designed for a very particular kind of war into a conflict of a completely opposite character.

The interwar army's cultural fixation on tactical and operational questions at the expense of strategic, economic, and political matters also led to intense friction between OKH and Hitler. While Halder and the *Generalstab*, all products of the *Reichsheer* (indeed, many of them the *Kaiserheer* as well), remained obsessed with the operational problem of destroying the Red Army when planning for the invasion, Hitler cared far less about damaging the Soviet military and more about seizing vital economic and ideological objectives to sustain the long-term German war effort. This toxic dynamic inevitably led to a lack of clarity in what the *Wehrmacht*'s strategic or even operational objective was at any given moment, as Halder and the OKH continually sought to first persuade and then deceive Hitler as to their fealty to his political wishes.[40] An army fundamentally out of touch with the intricate ties between politics, economics, and warfare introduced extra friction into Hitler's already overextended plans.[41] It represented yet another way in which the 1941 *Wehrmacht*, for all of its impressive tactical skill, was a profoundly poor tool to achieve total conquest of the vast Soviet Union.

Finally, most operationally significant, the *Wehrmacht*'s effectual bifurcation into a small, motorized force and a mass, horse and foot-borne army proved a tortured if viable concept across the short distances in Poland and France. Nor would it prove well adapted to the expanses of the western Soviet Union. *Panzerdivisionen* needed improved roads for fast movements; there were many in France and very few in Russia. The army would need to rapidly cross major wet gaps in its eastward trek, a requirement that would create maneuver and logistics chokepoints along the way.

A delay or even stalling of the army's operational tempo would be risky. Flagging supplies or sharply contested river crossings could easily prove fatal to the invasion. Paradoxically, the most tactically self-sufficient arm of the *Wehrmacht*, the *Panzertruppen*, were also the least self-sufficient logistically. Given that the success of Barbarossa hinged first and foremost upon the movements of the *Panzergruppe*, the likelihood of the slothful Seecktian *Deckungsheer* plodding along behind them clogging up vital lines of communication should have been carefully considered. Amidst the air of overconfidence pervading OKH, it was not.

"We have underestimated the colossus of Russia"

After delaying more than a month to secure the invasion's southern flank in the Balkans, the Nazi legions were finally prepared for the operation by late June.[42] Organized into three leviathan *Heeresgruppen* (army groups)—HG *Nord* (North), HG *Mitte* (Center), and HG *Süd* (South)—and stretched across a frontage of more than 2,000 miles from northernmost Norway to the Black Sea, the force represented the largest invading host in world history. Only two *Panzer* and twelve infantry divisions were held in operational reserve. In total, the Axis order of battle boasted nearly 3 million men across 145 divisions. At 0300 on 22 June 1941, the war on the *Ostfront* (eastern front) began.[43] Leveraging total surprise, the *Luftwaffe* crippled Soviet airpower in less than a week.[44] As planned, German pilots enjoyed unchallenged supremacy, supporting the armored spearheads plunging into Russia.[45]

Figure 5.2. Wilhelm von Leeb. Courtesy of Wikimedia Commons.

Along the northern axis, *Feldmarschall* Wilhelm von Leeb's HG *Nord*, comprised of two armies fighting alongside the 4. *Panzergruppe*, sliced through Soviet frontier defenses in Lithuania and into the Baltic states in a lightning drive toward its primary objective: Leningrad. The pace was feverish, even despite poorly coordinated Soviet counterattacks. Many of the slow-moving *Infanteriedivisionen* covered nearly thirty miles a day on foot. In only 96 hours, despite challenging terrain, General Erich von Mainstein's LVI.

Panzerkorps crossed 200 miles of Russian countryside as disorganized Red Army forces fell back.[46] By early July, *Nord* was within striking distance (less than 200 miles) of Leningrad, but the offensive's expenditure of resources had negated any possibility of attacking the city directly. Logistical challenges already began to reshape Nazi plans as *Nord* prepared to settle in for a siege and Finnish allies closed in on the city from the north.[47]

Advancing along *Nord*'s right flank to the south, *Feldmarschall* Fedor von Bock's HG *Mitte*—two armies and two *Panzergruppen*—represented the largest of the three invasion axes. With orders to encircle the Soviet forces to its front and annihilate them in a massive encirclement near Minsk, *Mitte* struck out with a vengeance and with stunning success. Although surprised Soviet forces attempted to counterattack against one of the encircling *Panzergruppen*, HG *Mitte*'s jaws snapped shut around 290,000 prisoners, 2,500 tanks, and more than a thousand guns at Minsk on June 27. Within days, von Bock's infantry had cleared out the pocket, and *Mitte* surged eastward once more. Springing over the Dnieper River, the *Panzer* columns diverged in yet another massive envelopment near Smolensk, adding another 100,000 men and 2,000 tanks to the tally of Soviet forces neutralized by HG *Mitte*. By late July, the Army Group was within 200 miles of the Soviet capital.[48]

Figure 5.3. Gerd von Rundstedt. Courtesy of Wikimedia Commons.

In the south, the four armies and one *Panzergruppe* of *Feldmarschall* Gerd von Rundstedt's HG *Süd* confronted the largest concentration of Red Army units guarding the Soviet breadbasket. Faced with clearing the road to the only possible panacea to the Reich's pending economic disaster, *Süd* arguably represented the most strategically vital of the invasion's three axes despite OKH's lingering fixation on the seizure of Moscow. While the vexing terrain bordering the Pripyat marshes hampered the advance of Rundstedt's Panzers, stiff Soviet resistance proved the greatest and most unpleasant surprise. Still, as they had against HG's *Nord* and *Mitte*, piecemeal Soviet counterattacks failed to

decisively blunt the *Panzer* spearheads. Bloodied and delayed but by no means defeated, *Süd* closed rapidly on Kyiv.[49]

Seemingly confirming *Generalstab* assumptions, the Red Army—much like the Polish and French armies before them—courteously played the role of hapless victim. Senior leaders terrified of Joseph Stalin's wrath tended toward the most conservative and cautious decisions. The Soviet high command, *Stavka*, habitually flooded threatened sectors with ever more reinforcements, feeding troops directly into the open jaws of encircling *Panzerdivisionen* and thus hastening their elimination. In no more than two weeks' time, Soviet defenses were crumbling all along the front. Halder scribbled excitedly in his diary, echoing words on so many lips after the spectacular fall of France: "The campaign against Russia has been won in fourteen days," he crowed. The *Panzertruppen* had done it yet again, it seemed. Overcome with excitement at the imminent coup, Hitler began drafting plans to dial back the war effort and retool German factories for civilian production.[50]

Amidst these celebrations, however, the momentum of all three German army groups suddenly began to ebb as the scorching heat of a Russian summer and stiffening Soviet resistance combined to threaten Nazi laurels. Exhausted *Infanteriedivisionen* fell behind the still-onrushing Panzers as the faulty logic of the two-part *Wehrmacht* force structure began to tell. The already strained and dramatically overextended German lines of communication stretched nearly to breaking. Supply trains were harassed by bypassed Soviet partisan marauders, and captured civilian trucks used to supply and mobilize the *Wehrmacht* proved frustratingly incompatible with unimproved Russian roads. The fighting increased in ferocity as the *Panzers* moved closer to the spires of Moscow, and strained German logistical lines increasingly proved insufficient. By the end of July, things were beginning to look far less brilliant to Halder. Somehow, someway, the Red Army refused to break. Even after losing millions to death or captivity, Stalin always seemed to have yet-deeper pockets of manpower and materiel. Grievously underestimated by poor German intelligence, *Stavka* had mobilized more than five million Soviet men—including all the nation's reserves—in the wake of the Nazi onslaught. Because of this, the Red Army could afford astronomical casualty figures that the Reich simply could not. "We have underestimated the colossus of Russia," Halder wrote in frustrated awe in his diary. "When we destroy a dozen [divisions], the Russians simply add another dozen."[51]

Although impressive looking on the map and in the international press, the *Wehrmacht*'s method of tactically and operationally prosecuting

Bewegungskrieg in Russia was ludicrously unsustainable. Given the short distances involved in western operations, this had rarely proven a major problem. The *Ostfront* was very different. Before the invasion, German logisticians calculated an average baseline for petroleum, oil, and lubricant consumption by armored, mechanized, and motorized units when traversing a hundred kilometers of Russian terrain. This figure was considered a "unit of consumption" for campaign planning purposes. While actual conditions and the operations of a given unit could skew consumption one way or another, the Russian campaign's unanticipated factors threatened to upend OKH's calculations. Tortuous roads and dusty conditions necessitated excessive oil consumption to keep overused engines running. In a short time, many German vehicles relied almost exclusively on captured lubricants. Far more troubling, fuel allotments intended to carry a *Panzerdivision* at least 100 kilometers (62 miles) were frequently proving insufficient for even 75 kilometers.[52] As the weather worsened and Soviet resistance stiffened, the same unit of consumption would only suffice for less than fifty kilometers. Although diesel motors would have been far more efficient, most vehicles in OKH's motor pool ran on gasoline—a resource of which the Reich had exceedingly little. As early as fall 1941, the Army lacked sufficient fuel stores for any but the most basic driver training, sending soldiers to the *Ostfront* with less than fifteen kilometers of road experience. Opel, a leading manufacturer of supply and transportation vehicles for the *Wehrmacht*, was forced to stop production entirely in November because the company did not have enough fuel to test the fuel pumps of vehicles coming off its production lines.[53] All across the Reich and Western Europe, the overreach of Nazi ambitions was felt in empty tanks and grumbling stomachs even as the apparently victorious *Wehrmacht* consumed ever more in its *Bewegungskrieg* encirclements.

By early August, less than three months since the opening of the campaign, matters were starting to look truly bleak for the most advanced *Panzerdivisionen*. The lagging horse-drawn *Infanteriedivisionen* continued to choke strained supply lines, especially at river crossings.[54] Given the relatively slothful pace of the infantry striving to neutralize the massive pockets the *Panzers* had created, armored divisions increasingly found themselves statically holding positions instead of rushing farther east. Nazi logisticians struggled mightily to keep combat power moving forward, but the entire system was far too overstressed. Heavy casualties (more than 400,000 losses by mid-August), spent ammunition, and burned fuel (HG *Mitte* consumed more than 2,600 tons of fuel and lubricants per day on average) were not expendable commodities for the already resourced-starved

Reich.[55] Not only had German gains on the map fallen short of expectations, but even the *Wehrmacht's* comparatively modest successes had come at a dramatically unacceptable cost. While OKH scrambled to cope with what seemed a pending disaster, Hitler grew less and less patient. Even though nearly half of all German armor was out of commission due to destruction or disrepair, frustrated with the lagging pace of HGs *Nord* and *Süd*, he ordered their reinforcement by way of transfer from the far-more-successful HG *Mitte*.[56] Contrary to the advice of his Moscow-focused generals, Hitler understood that perhaps now more than ever, seizing the Ukrainian grain fields and Caucasus oil was a strategic imperative if the Reich was to survive a prolonged war against the Allies.[57]

As a now-bolstered HG *Nord* invested Leningrad, the reinforced *Panzergruppen* of HG *Süd* enveloped yet another massive Soviet pocket at Kyiv after Stalin once again forbade its defenders to withdraw. Struggling to break free through the ever-tightening noose, four whole Russian armies—655,000 men—finally gave themselves up on 19 September.[58] As German columns rolled toward Crimea and Sevastopol—despite logjams elsewhere—Nazi success in Ukraine seemed beyond question, prompting Hitler to shift the borrowed *Panzers* back to the central axis. With its temporarily detached elements returned, the *Führer* ordered HG *Mitte* to vigorously recommence its drive on Moscow in a renewed offensive called *Unternehmen* TYPHOON, confident that the army could seize the capital before the onset of winter. *Mitte* obediently spread its armored jaws wide again to swallow 650,000 more ill-fated Soviets at Vyazma. Their loss cut the number of Red Army forces defending Moscow in half and left a yawning gap before the capital. Although Nazi forces surged ahead to exploit the breach, fall rains hampered the forward progress of the mud-encrusted Panzers. HG *Mitte* marked its position on campaign maps as within forty miles of Moscow but given tremendous losses in effective manpower and equipment—and the tortuous condition of the remaining few miles of bottomless mud, the prize was anything but free for the taking.[59]

The *Wehrmacht* had spent all its energy reaching this position. It would go, it could go, no farther. The offensive had consumed nearly every bit of fuel and materiel available to the *Heeresgruppe*, and there were no depots or stockpiles from which to draw. "The army lives hand to mouth," one commander wrote, and indeed it was beginning to go hungry at the very same time the Soviet resistance—now in the able hands of Marshal Georgi Zhukov—stiffened mightily. The miraculous appearance of even more Russian divisions to the front, despite the capture of nearly three million Soviets across the summer and fall, eradicated hopes of success-

fully ending the war before Christmas. It also removed any lingering doubt within the OKH that the Soviet people would capitulate quickly or easily. Once a trickle of supplies arrived and the bottomless mud froze solid in November, one final desperate lunge brought HG *Mitte* to within sight of Moscow's spires, but it was too late. Temperatures plummeted to forty below zero, engines seized, infantrymen who lacked proper winter clothing froze, and the entire Nazi war machine ground to a decisive halt. Overconfident in the wake of German successes in the west, Hitler had gambled with everything and lost.[60]

Figure 5.4. Gary K. Zhukov and Marshal S. K. Timoshenko. Courtesy of Wikimedia Commons.

Even as an enraged *Führer* relieved senior officers across OKH, the war on the *Ostfront* turned ever more against him. Bolstered by 100 fresh divisions, the Red Army exploded out of its positions and hurled the exhausted *Wehrmacht* rearward in a panic on 6 December. Across the front, Nazi divisions were forced to retreat or fight exceedingly costly delaying actions, abandoning incredible amounts of equipment and vehicles that would not budge through the snow and ice.[61] At nearly the same time, counterattacking Soviets threatened to cut off HG *Süd*'s most advanced elements, blunting both of the invasion's strategically decisive efforts. Scrambling to find some vestige of stability amidst the chaos, Hitler seized nominal command from his generals and declared himself commander-in-chief of the *Wehrmacht* despite OKH's continued control over operations on the *Ostfront*.[62] In the wake of the 7 December Japanese attack at Pearl Harbor on Hawaii, he took the fatal step of arbitrarily declaring war on the United States—an act all but ignored by a *Wehrmacht* overwhelmed by the catastrophe unfolding in Russia.[63] Although the Soviet onslaught

eventually culminated, having outstretched its own capabilities after the brutal handling over the previous year, the damage had been done. The *Wehrmacht*'s loss of vehicles to destruction, damage, or lack of maintenance during the campaign was disastrous. OKH reported 30 percent of its vehicles on the *Ostfront* had been destroyed or were beyond possible repair. More than half the remainder required immediate maintenance. Only 75,000 of the 500,000 wheeled vehicles which crossed the Soviet border in June were still serviceable by the end of 1941.[64]

The army had exhausted the mobility central to its *Bewegungskrieg* operational concept in a mad dash for its objectives and failed. Much as had occurred in the early fall of 1914, the German spearhead had been decisively blunted and Hitler's dream of *Weltmacht* was teetering on the brink of collapse. Just as the *Kaiserheer* had not been annihilated on the Marne, the *Wehrmacht* would fight on—but under very different strategic circumstances for which it was not only unprepared, but which it had been specifically designed to avoid.[65] As David Stahel observes, while OKH would continue to prosecute the costliest war in human history against the Soviet Union for the next three years, scoring numerous impressive tactical victories along the way, "none of this could change the fundamental disparity between Soviet staying power and German offensive strength."[66] By August 1941, Hitler's political objectives were permanently beyond reach, even if he and his senior leaders refused to admit it. All interwar German efforts to craft an army capable of avoiding the conversion of a *Bewegungskrieg* into a dreaded *Materialschlacht* had failed; now, especially given its vehement insistence on avoiding any compromise peace, the Reich faced all-but-certain catastrophic defeat.[67]

"A poor man's war"

Working for the US Army Center for Military History in the winter of 1953, two ex-German officers and *Ostfront* veterans, Lt. Gen. Rudolf Hofmann and Brig. Gen. Alfred Toppe, assessed the consumption and attrition problems that dismantled Barbarossa. "The Wehrmacht fought a poor man's war," they concluded. "The loss of every major item of equipment had serious consequences, because its replacement was difficult and usually inadequate." While "a country with more resources and a more elastic armament potential" might have succeeded, it mattered little for the defeated Third Reich. Nazi Germany had not been such a country, had never enjoyed such resources, and thus had embarked on a disastrously ill-calibrated adventure that finally resulted in its total destruction.[68] Although German doctrine forged during the interwar years paid lip-service

to the need to conserve men and materiel, the *Bewegungskrieg* culture and concept embraced first by the *Reichsheer* and later *Wehrmacht* flew directly in the face of such imperatives. Highly mobile combined arms warfare of the kind envisioned by German visionaries from Seeckt to Guderian was anything but logistically conservative. It was an operating concept more appropriate to a resource-flush nation and military. It certainly did not fit a central European power which relied extensively on foreign import or hostile seizure of the commodities central to mass offensive motorized and mechanized operations.

Historians and military professionals have long lauded the *Wehrmacht* for its supposedly unmatched tactical and operational skill during the Second World War; however, the German failure to link actions on the battlefield with Nazi strategic ends and means through planning, force structure, and strategically well-calibrated operational art suggests a lack of martial competence extending well beyond lack of attention to strategic thinking. Though effective at damaging enemy formations in combat, tactics which produce unsustainable attrition in friendly personnel and equipment—or which fail to produce strategically valuable successes—are not sound by any meaningful measure. Actions taken by militaries at every echelon must be aptly calibrated to strategic means and ends. Otherwise, destruction wrought on the battlefield constitutes little more than random violence.

Historian Cathal Nolan has deemed Barbarossa "one of the worst planned, most chaotically mismanaged, most disastrous offensive campaigns in the history of modern warfare."[69] Although many participants and subsequent historians have sought to place primary blame upon the vastness of western Soviet Union, the merciless Russian winter, or Hitler's strategic incompetence, Nolan attributes the disaster to "shallow battle plans and worse logistical preparation heading into that space and weather, under that leader, whom they chose to follow," to say nothing of a profoundly resilient and increasingly effective Red Army that was not a pushover as the *Wehrmacht* had anticipated.[70] Fellow historian Gerhard Gross similarly notes that the invasion "exposed not only the striking tactical-operational weaknesses, but also the operational-strategic flaws inherent in the German concept of the conduct of operations." The *Generalstab* officers responsible for planning the operation had "let themselves be guided not by real facts, but by illusions."[71] Just as their Great War tactical victories in the east had prompted interwar *Reichsheer* officers to ignore the grave shortcomings inherent to the German operational concept, the young *Wehrmacht* gained a false sense of confidence from the stunning

faits d'armes in Poland and France. "None of that prepared the Wehrmacht to wage modern industrial total war" of the kind it would encounter in the east, Nolan explains. Worse, the early victories "braced a dangerous set of military and leadership and ideological concoctions that led directly to disaster."[72] Indeed, he comments, that disaster underscored the painful reality that the Reich's early victories "were in fact aberrations; that the deeper tendency of modern Great Power wars was to arc toward decision by exhaustion, to move from short-war illusions to long-war attrition."[73] The *Wehrmacht* and its *Reichsheer* predecessor were designed to avoid any such war instead of accepting its likely inevitability then planning, training, and developing accordingly—and encouraging senior political leadership to understand and accept the strategic limitations associated with such a contingency. *Materialschlacht* would prove inescapable, and with it, the Armageddon of Hitler's insidious vision.[74]

In truth, the Wehrmacht performed precisely the way it was designed to do. While, as David Stahel notes, the breakdown of Barbarossa occurred primarily as result of "harsh terrain, vast distances, fierce Soviet resistance and internal German weaknesses," the campaign's outcome was the natural result of a German military handcrafted over two decades for a very specific "kind of war" in a very specific geographical context and which proved incapable of adapting to the very opposite "kind of war" it encountered in the east.[75] The Reich's armed forces crashed through Soviet frontier defenses with abandon, its armor penetrated deep behind enemy lines with encircling spearheads, and its troops annihilated nearly all Red Army combat power in the western Soviet Union. Granted, the offensive proved far more costly than imagined and few elements had gone exactly according to plan. But given the army's handcrafted calibration for swift, short-range encirclement operations in frontier regions, it is less surprising that Nazi forces enjoyed considerable success at the outset of the invasion. Considering the many internal challenges and rife incompetence within Soviet military leadership, along with successive strategic blunders by Stalin himself, the battlefields of western Russia were ripe for German tactical victories. Even so, Nazi failure to achieve the political and strategic objectives laid out by Hitler for the invasion foundered not on the effectiveness of German forces in battle, but on the *Wehrmacht*'s inability to adapt its assumptions, plans, operational concepts, and tactical actions to the extraordinarily limited means and spectacularly expansive political ends assigned by their *Führer*. In the end, swift, short-range encirclement operations in frontier regions was not an apt tool for conquering the Soviet Union. The *Wehrmacht* failed to adapt culturally, intellectually, strategi-

cally, operationally, and tactically to this reality. It failed to look for another way better calibrated to Nazi means and ends.

While OKH remained confident throughout most of the war that the destruction of the Red Army was both well within its technical grasp and represented the center of gravity for the entire Soviet state, merely destroying its forwardmost echelons in the west was not itself Hitler's goal. The *Wehrmacht* had not been deployed to the *Ostfront* for the sole military purpose of capturing and killing Soviet troops. It had gone to destroy the Soviet state, to advance the security of the Nazi regime, and procure badly needed resources to gird Germany for what promised to be an imminent intercontinental war against the United States. In all three of these most crucial objectives, the German military's plans and methods of prosecution were woefully ill-calibrated for success. By the late summer of 1941, in fact, though its senior leaders were reluctant to admit it, the *Wehrmacht* had already disastrously and decisively failed. Millions of Germans and many more millions of Soviets would perish before Hitler and the defeated OKH were willing to accept that they had been decisively tricked by the siren song of *Bewegungskrieg*.

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Chapter 6
"You Break It, You Own It": Operation IRAQI FREEDOM and the Revolution in Military Affairs Siren Song, 1991–2003

In the spring of 1992, US Army Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC) senior leaders attended a conference at Fort Monroe to discuss the lessons of Desert Storm. The most prominent speaker on the agenda was Chief of Staff of the Army General Gordon Sullivan. Sullivan, who left his mark on the Command and General Staff College curriculum by modestly increasing its inclusion of low-intensity conflict (LIC) topics, turned his new power to subtly ensuring the Army would not ignore such responsibilities in the wake of dramatic victory. To be sure, the general was not immune from pride. "The more I study the Army's history, the more I appreciate how truly great the performance of this Army has been over the past couple years," he said. Sullivan thanked the men and women of TRADOC for their "dedication and commitment to do what's right" and credited them with the "decisive victory" forged in the Gulf. He rattled off a laundry list of the most important lessons to be derived from the recent campaign then referred, "perhaps as importantly," to lessons that should *not* be drawn. "We have to be careful to learn the right lessons," Sullivan emphasized, adding that it would be a dangerous error to think of Desert Storm as "the prototype for future wars." Every conflict is unique, and the war against Iraq had played to nearly every conceivable Coalition strength.[1]

Figure 6.1. General Gordon R Sullivan. Courtesy of the US Army.

Although historians still lack sufficient evidence for certainty, the proliferation of targets serviceable by air seemed to be especially conducive to the application of General Donn A. Starry's AirLand Battle doctrine.[2] "The unique character of the war" and the exceedingly limited political objectives assigned to the Coalition were well-calibrated to such airpower-centric tactics, Sullivan said, adding that future conflicts for more expansive political objectives, missions would exist "that airpower

[can] not perform alone." Nor should any expect that, despite dramatic advances in communications technology, the fog of war would ever dissipate entirely. "Let's not fool ourselves into an arrogance that will be dispelled by wasted lives," he warned. "Technology does not predict the future; it cannot reveal intentions and motives." Human minds and the interests that propel them toward political violence—the lifeblood of any enemy military or insurgent movement—were mostly inaccessible via technology. At the end of the day, "most of us were surprised by our degree of success," he admitted. "We must not be lulled into believing that the next one will be as easy."[3]

Unfortunately, Sullivan and Starry's cautions against the Army slipping into a "false sense of security" fell mostly on deaf ears. In the spring of 2003, when the US government again determined to combat the Hussein regime—this time with permanent consequences—a newly transformed Army prepared to, as Starry had envisioned, "do Desert Storm all over again." Like the *Wehrmacht* before it, the US Army rested principally on the laurels of its recent success. Anticipating a repeat performance culminating in the decisive toppling of the Hussein regime, planners at echelon spent precious little time considering the full ramifications of the political problem at hand. Like the *Kaiserheer* and *Wehrmacht*, the US military believed its role in the whole-of-government invasion effort was to address only the "strictly military" problem of gaining access to the Iraqi political system. Once the Arab nation had been forcibly entered and armed resistance eliminated, the ball would be handed off from military to civilian leadership. Who precisely would then be carrying the ball was left disastrously unclear by planners, leaders, or anybody else prior to the opening of the campaign. Rather than preparing to fulfil the political objectives assigned to it by the President, the Army instead focused merely on what it independently deemed the "strategic military objective," namely, gaining access to Iraq—the first step in President George W. Bush's wider vision. The challenge of breaking down the door distracted leaders from considering what they had to accomplish once inside for the campaign to truly be deemed a success, or how exactly to go about doing it.

Across the Spectrum

Much as during the post-Vietnam DePuy-Starry period that preceded the Gulf victory—and the Seecktian resurrection of the German *Reichsheer* before it—historians have long lauded the 1990s as an era of dramatic military reform and major qualitative improvement. Senior leader initiatives focused on "Transformation" brought the service into the Information Age

amidst communications and digital technology revolutions that actively reshaped life across the globe. The United States needed to focus on harnessing these changes for use on the battlefield while simultaneously adapting to the implications they would have on the security challenges faced. As with the immediate post-Vietnam era, US Army leaders had to make difficult choices between almost diametrically opposed alternatives as they charted developmental trajectories for future preparedness. These choices would have major implications for Army readiness to face whatever it ultimately confronted. The force that deployed to the Middle East in 2003 to prosecute President Bush's orders had been indelibly shaped by the experience of the previous decade—for better, and for worse.

The Soviet Union's 1991 collapse eliminated what American defense officials had long considered the most dangerous menace to national security, and the preeminent pacing threat of the prior four decades. The new Never Again club no longer had an excuse for neglecting substantive efforts to shore up LIC capability weaknesses because of a supposed imperative to maintain maximal readiness in Europe for mid- or high-intensity warfare. The succeeding decade (much like the decade preceding it) would be marked by a mass proliferation of low-intensity contingencies, or what in Army circles would be called "Military Operations Other than War" (MOOTW).[4] There was little preventing service leadership from leaning heavily in the direction of adapting the Army's training, educational, and doctrinal initiatives in accordance with this new reality. Unfortunately, while doctrine continued to pay lip service to the importance of preparing for low-intensity conflict and counterinsurgency operations, the mid-intensity-focused Army would continue rolling along.

Major reductions in the nation's defense budget arising from the "peace dividend" following the end of the Cold War dramatically shrunk the US Army's size and budget during the 1990s. To compensate for the decreases, senior leaders sought to capitalize on technological advances to make up the difference. As during the prior decade, staunch believers continued to evangelize on how information technology could transform the battlefield. Their ideas formed the foundation of "network-centric warfare," in which digitally networked military systems would allegedly usher in a Revolution in Military Affairs (RMA) on the modern battlefield. Capitalizing on communications and precision-guided munitions developments even more than before the Gulf War, Army units worked to eliminate the fog of war. Battle would become little more than an exercise in identifying targets to be destroyed from the air or space, tracking

their movements by satellite, and destroying them with precision-guided ordnance before they could be brought to bear against US forces. Standoff could be achieved, keeping numbers of friendly "boots on the ground" low and casualties at near-zero to eliminate what many viewed as the primary factor eroding American resolve to fight wars to a decisive conclusion. In this way, the RMA seemed a panacea to the lingering aftereffects of the "Vietnam syndrome," already dealt a mortal blow in the Persian Gulf.[5]

Though attractive to those hunting for a quick escape from the Army's perennial attrition problem, RMA evangelists neglected to acknowledge the near irrelevancy of precision-guided munitions or high-tech targeting systems in conflicts that lacked strategically significant targets to be "serviced." On the mid-intensity Desert Storm battlefield, Iraqi armored formations proved exceedingly vulnerable to a force well drilled in Starry's AirLand Battle and armed with a daunting array of precision munitions; however, few if any Army post-conflict problems in Grenada, Panama, or elsewhere in its recent LIC adventures could be solved through precise application of firepower. Instead, senior leaders insisted on avoiding any widescale turn toward prioritizing preparation, training, and education for LIC. Every time Army units were deployed to low-intensity contingencies during the decade, they were forced to adapt on the fly. Historian Chad Serena has noted that even as the Army's post-Cold War LIC adaptation capacity "significantly decreased . . . the necessity of adaptation [in LIC] significantly increased."[6] The more focused the service became on harnessing Information Age technological benefits, the less-interested soldiers and officers seemed to be in more adeptly navigating the difficult, messy, and nuanced dynamics that dictated political success or failure in most low-intensity environments. In nearly every case, a handful of especially intellectually pliable officers and their commands admirably adapted to the array of complicated political challenges they confronted.[7] The Army accepted a great deal of risk in assuming that the limited number of such soldiers would always be sufficient to meet demand.

The service's lingering struggles in the MOOTW realm were not due to lack of practice. In fact, the first challenges during a decade dominated by non-combat operations occurred in the immediate aftermath of Desert Storm. Ethnic minorities in the northern portions of Iraq, who had suffered for decades under the wrath of Saddam Hussein's regime, saw an opportunity to strike for independence while the Ba'athists were knocked off balance by their recent defeat. Unfortunately, the regime was not sufficiently off-balance to prevent it from crushing this fresh resistance with

Figure 6.2. Kurdish men gather at the edge of a refugee camp near Zakhu, Iraq, part of Operation PROVIDE COMFORT. Courtesy of the National Archives and Records Administration.

a merciless iron fist. Although it took a painfully long time before policymakers deployed US forces to address the major humanitarian concerns accruing to the situation, NATO troops were finally assigned to protect a sizable contingent of Kurdish refugees sheltering in the mountains hiding from Hussein's wrath. While air and heliborne drops delivered badly needed supplies and foodstuffs, Operation PROVIDE COMFORT ultimately required Army Special Forces teams to engage directly with the Kurdish refugees to ascertain and resolve their pressing concerns, medical and otherwise. Meanwhile, other troops ensured that the Iraqi Army maintained a healthy distance, maneuvering US forces to threaten their lines of communication without directly coming to blows. Senior officers coordinated with non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and Red Cross representatives as they confronted problems that looked like anything but the Air-Land Battle doctrine they had been trained in. These officers and many of the soldiers they commanded gained invaluable opportunities to expand their skills and intellectual horizons as military professionals despite the qualms of some that the mission was inappropriate for the Army.[8]

Not all MOOTW missions the Army undertook were at all as successful or as bloodless as Provide Comfort. By far the Army's most violent and costly low-intensity contingency in the 1990s was Operation

Figure 6.3. Black Hawk Down wreckage. Courtesy of Wikimedia Commons.

RESTORE HOPE in Somalia. The United States joined partners in a United Nations (UN) coalition sent to combat a titanic humanitarian crisis prolonged by merciless Somali warlords. About 25,000 soldiers distributed much-needed relief supplies to famine-ravaged communities while holding off violent militias. The latter opponent became more aggressive under the leadership of Mohammed Farah Aideed and, in June 1993, attacked a UN convoy leaving four Americans and two dozen Pakistani soldiers dead. To tamp down what appeared to be a crisis ratcheting up the conflict spectrum, President William J. Clinton ordered Army Special Operations forces to capture Aideed and relieve the militia threat to humanitarian operations. The mission faltered after the shootdown of an Army Blackhawk helicopter spiraled into a disastrous rescue mission which killed eighteen Americans and left more than seventy wounded. Knowing that the American people had absolutely no taste for such bloody contingency operations in the far-flung "third world," Clinton pulled the plug on the entire operation in the spring of 1994. It was a dramatically inauspicious start for Army MOOTW in the decade.[9]

Whereas the Somalia experience illustrated MOOTW's potential to escalate up the conflict spectrum, much as senior leaders had anticipated,

the Army's deployment to Haiti in 1994 was just the opposite. Charged by Clinton to forcibly eject rebels who had unseated President Jean-Bertrand Aristide in a coup, Army and Marine Corps units assigned to Operation UPHOLD DEMOCRACY girded for stiff resistance. Fortunately, former President Jimmy Carter conducted backroom negotiations—held while the invasion force was still headed south—that cooled Haitian tempers and secured Aristide's peaceful reinstatement without violence. Although access to the Haitian political system was assured, establishing and maintaining stability in the country while the Aristide administration reestablished power proved a vexing challenge for an Army largely unprepared for such a mission. Having readied for another dramatic expression of AirLand Battle against a staunch and resistant foe, finding the door unlocked left American troops at a loss. At no point during the nearly six-year campaign in the ruinously impoverished island nation did the situation devolve into a violent insurgency; however, neither did Army units trained and equipped principally for mid-intensity combat easily adapt to the nuanced political situation. Commanders in Haiti evinced a near obsession with force protection calibrated for war against a near-peer enemy with a panoply of deadly threats. They were out of step in a mission that called for close and sustained engagement with the Haitian population to ascertain and act on their diverse wants and needs. Knowledge of the recent Somalia disaster inspired an especial amount of caution in some formations. Even when troops ventured beyond their semi-permanent bases, their officers enjoyed little in the way of education or training for the complicated problems they encountered.[10]

The same pattern of obsessive force protection measures frequently mixed with reluctance to directly and consistently engage with local nationals occurred during the Army's next major MOOTW deployment to the Balkans. After NATO air strikes successfully ended ethnic and nationalist bloodletting in Bosnia between Serbian troops and Bosnian civilians, the Clinton Administration secured the promise of peace through the 1995 Dayton Accords. Ensuring that the promise was translated into concrete reality on the ground became the purview of the Army's 1st Armored Division when it deployed to Bosnia to enforce the accords. Soldiers did habitually conduct routine patrols, and some even lived within Bosnian villages.[11] Even so, American commanders still all too frequently prioritized force protection over nearly all other considerations, apparently unaware that the Army could not meaningfully contribute to the political mission of peacekeeping without directly engaging with the population.[12]

Perhaps unsurprisingly, the halfhearted effort to maintain peace in the highly fractious region came dramatically to naught in 1999. As Serbian troops launched a campaign to ethnically cleanse the Albanian minority of Kosovo, the Army's peacekeeping mission was forced to address increasingly shocking levels of internecine violence. Even after a sustained NATO bombing campaign caused Serbian President Slobodan Milosevic's forces to relent in their genocidal onslaught, international peacekeepers took on the daunting task of tamping down the extreme lingering hatred between the belligerents. Once again charged with establishing stability and order in a society fractured deeply along ethnic and nationalist lines, American troops and their leaders were fish out of water. Equipment and vehicles designed to combat a near-peer foe in mid-intensity warfare like that in the Gulf proved inefficient or worse in the underdeveloped rugged Balkan countryside. As the NATO mission struggled to achieve meaningful decision, more and more US troops were required to even maintain the region's still fraught status quo. High-tech targeting and precision-guided munitions wielded by a digitally interconnected Information Age force were ineffective at addressing the fundamentally human problems Army units encountered during their rare forays beyond their semi-permanent bases. There were no armored battalions to bracket with long-range fires. There were no follow-on echelons to erode through Deep Battle. There was no need for skillful and adept maneuver solutions like those still being drilled at the combat training centers and in Army educational institution classrooms. These were different kinds of problems requiring different kinds of solutions, but all occurring within an environment marked by endemic political violence sufficient to render the military the only responsible agent to take on the challenge.[13]

It would have been one thing if the knotty missions the Army faced in MOOTW in northern Iraq, Somalia, Haiti, Bosnia, and Kosovo were one-off exceptions. They were not. While their frequency was not altogether strikingly different from the previous decade, the lack of a peer pacing threat in the form of the Soviet Union to constantly distract senior Army leaders gave the 1990s a particular flavor. The prominence of low-intensity conflicts across the world as the bipolar Cold War international order crumbled and a new paradigm took shape made it clear to all that such operations were likely to be the norm for some time to come. Hiding from them, or pretending to be able to hide from them, was no longer an option. Nor, however, were officials prepared to accept the possibility that American troops could be pulled into a prolonged attrition fight against an insurgency of the Vietnam mold—a war of a kind they

were certain they could not win. A panacea of some kind was required; a tool or set of tools to address the array of complex security situations that the Army continued to confront abroad while simultaneously reducing the risk, time, and footprint required to achieve national strategic objectives. It was in response to this perceived requirement that the RMA siren song began to seductively rise in volume within American defense circles, if not quite as loudly within the ranks of the Army itself—a force that, for all of its contrary inclinations, had spent the vast majority of its history mired in what were best defined as MOOTW.

Soldiers and officers deployed to LIC situations had little opportunity to ignore the writing on the wall, even if they were reluctant to accept the reality. While the rest of the Army maintained its mid-intensity focus, units deployed to MOOTW rarely left the country without some preparation and training for low-intensity operations. The Army's combat training centers increased the prominence of peacekeeping scenarios across the decade, demonstrating that the service was committed to at least trying to prepare its formations for the specific tasks they were assigned. Such efforts were restricted to specific units—never part of generalized training or educational requirements for the entire force. As with the light infantry division concept of the previous decade, LIC competency was still widely viewed as a specialized skillset only necessary for troops deploying to low-intensity contingencies.[14] Still, even this limited preparation for peacekeeping duties seemed a bridge too far for those most heavily attracted to the bevy of RMA promises. As successive Army chiefs of staff borne of the Vietnam generation took up Sullivan's mandate to maintain LIC readiness, this difference of opinion between the Army and the rest of the American defense establishment only grew wider.

Figure 6.4. General David J. Reimer. Courtesy of the US Army.

When Sullivan's term ended in the summer of 1995, General Dennis J. Reimer took up the task of continuing to caution against excessively technological solutions to the diverse political problems Army units continued to face. Like many of his senior-ranking peers, Reimer was especially skeptical of RMA advocates promising dramatic

downsizing of the need to send flesh-and-blood soldiers into harm's way. "[It] takes soldiers to separate warring parties, to reassure fearful civilians, to restore public order, to keep criminals from taking advantage of the vacuum in civil order, to deliver humanitarian assistance," he asserted at the Association of the United States Army conference that summer. Almost as an afterthought, he added: "[and] to prevent and win the nation's wars."[15] The previous twenty years made clear that the Army's principal post-Cold War responsibilities were likely to fall at the lowest and most politically complicated end of the conflict spectrum. Reimer intended to develop a force that could cope with that reality while at the same time maintaining competency in mid-intensity warfare. At least initially.

The first shift for the new chief of staff was from the Army's traditional "threat-based" focus on designing a force to confront a particular enemy like the Soviet Union to a "capabilities-based" Army that maintained the ability to address challenges from across the "full spectrum" of potential operations. "Army Vision 2010," published in 1997, acknowledged the service's responsibility to make "contributions in a sustained and measured way across the broadest array of national requirements," including MOOTW, as it considered a future Army in 2010. Beyond the prosecution of land warfare, Reimer's address pointed out, the Army was the force that "protects and controls populations, restores order, and facilitates the transition from hostilities to peace." Soldiers were expected to "respond to natural and manmade disasters, assist communities during civil disturbances, and perform civic action/nation-building projects."[16] Indeed, given the post-Cold War security environment, the vision projected that "most operations will occur on the lower and middle portions of the continuum of military operations," with most conceivable contingencies requiring soldiers "directly interfacing with the civilians and/or military involved in the crisis."[17]

Still, Reimer's ability to or interest in fundamentally reshaping the Army's priorities remained limited. Despite the clear allusions to the LIC elephant in the room, and despite graphics depicting the Army's disproportionate historical employment in low-intensity operations, the new vision statement identified that the Army's fundamental role remained "to fight and win the Nation's wars."[18] To that end, the Army's "way ahead" was premised on the especially mid-intensity sounding concepts of "dominant maneuver," "precision engagement," "focused logistics," and "full dimensional protection," few of which had much if any obvious relevance to the types of non-combat operations deemed most likely forthcoming.[19]

Even though the authors emphasized the prevalence of recent non-combat deployments, the vision's prescriptions focused on "creating an image in the mind of an adversary of an unstoppable force," securing "moral domination," "hit-to-kill technologies," and forcing "the enemy to decide to give in to our will."[20] Readers could be forgiven if they came away with the idea that the rhetorical commitment to MOOTW was only surface deep. Moreover, nothing within the vision statement suggested an acknowledgement of the potential for a crisis to actively ebb and flow across the spectrum, requiring far more adaptability and intellectual agility than merely lethality in an engaged force. Nor did it suggest that non-combat skills and capabilities relevant to MOOTW (as opposed to the application of precision firepower) could in fact prove strategically central to winning the nation's future wars.

This failure to aggressively emphasize and prioritize the Army's leading role in planning, prosecuting, and learning from the nation's geographically widespread and predominately non-combat LIC engagements continued during the tenure of Reimer's successor, General Eric Shinseki. A severely wounded Vietnam veteran who commanded US forces in Bosnia for more than a year, Shinseki was no stranger to LIC challenges. Even so, his focused developmental initiatives as chief of staff—now formally (and strategically) termed "Army Transformation"—still tended to foreground mid-intensity readiness above all else. The new chief's most notable impact was the formation of Stryker-based "Interim Brigade Combat Teams" that shifted the service's still mostly division-based force structure toward increased modularity and rapid deployability. In so doing, Shinseki responded to Congressional yearnings for a ground force that could more quickly deploy to "brushfire" situations abroad and capitalized on technological developments which, it was hoped, could reduce the need for larger military footprints.[21]

Figure 6.5. General Eric Shinseki. Courtesy of the US Army.

Senior Army leaders like Reimer and Shinseki remained skeptical of technology's ability to replace the soldier on the future battlefield at scale but, at the same time, failed to refocus their developmental energies on LIC challenges facing the Army, instead of an imagined doomsday mid-intensity scenario. This left the force vulnerable to the RMA siren song even despite itself. If the service primarily responsible for solving problems that, by their nature, could not easily be solved by the judicious application of precision-guided munitions, chose instead to focus primarily on its concomitant responsibilities for solving problems that *could*, the final bulwark to the RMA culture's ascension to the highest echelons of the American defense establishment would erode. Following President George W. Bush's 2000 election, and after he appointed Donald Rumsfeld to his second tour in the office of Secretary of Defense, "network-centric warfare" reached the apex of its influence over US national military strategy.[22]

"A New *Blitzkrieg* Form of Warfare"

As a consummate neoconservative and ardent subscriber to the new president's commitment to avoiding military "nation-building" and peacekeeping missions abroad at all costs, the idea of a highly mobile, high-tech, and exceedingly small-footprint land force that could decisively win wars at low cost in blood and treasure was extremely attractive to Donald Rumsfeld.[23] The Bush administration asserted that the nation and its exhausted military had tired of President Clinton's efforts to win hearts and minds across the world through multilateral humanitarian intervention. Now that a Republican was returning to the White House, things would be different. US involvement in foreign MOOTWs—which led at best to indecisive stalemates like Haiti or Bosnia or at worst to bloody disasters like Vietnam or Somalia—had to be sharply reduced. American soldiers were "not a civilian police force," proclaimed incoming National Security Advisor Condoleeza Rice. "[The military] is not a political referee. And it is most certainly not designed to build a civilian society."[24] Rumsfeld emphatically agreed. "When foreigners come in with international solutions to local problems, it can create a dependency," he asserted. It worked best to leave the nation-building to local governments themselves. "To the extent we can have as few people in uniform doing non-military functions, I think we better serve ourselves," he argued, failing to define what precisely constituted "non-military functions." Soldiers ought to "organize, train, and equip, and recruit for people to come in and serve in the military in military functions," leaving peacekeeping and the maintenance or establishment of foreign governments to others.[25] Like many of his neoconservative political peers, Rumsfeld was confident that battlefield technology

developments would minimize the need for such long-term societal stabilization missions, provided the American military could be effectively "transformed."

Figure 6.6. Andrew W. Marshall. Courtesy of the US Army.

No figure in Rumsfeld's orbit had been as central to cultivating his confidence in the idea of the RMA as Andrew W. Marshall, longtime head of the Pentagon's Office of Net Assessment (ONA) and American intellectual foster father of the originally Soviet concept. Although he credited the Soviets for originally noting what appeared to be an onrushing "military-technical revolution," Marshall and his ONA colleagues produced the most intellectually rigorous analysis of the Revolution in Military Affairs during the 1980s and 90s. As the Soviet Union collapsed, Marshall and one of his newest subordinates—Andrew Krepinevich—evaluated how the United States might capitalize on its unipolar global leadership in information technology and precision munitions to achieve a new kind of overmatch on the twenty-first century battlefield.[26]

Figure 6.7. Andrew Krepinevich. Courtesy of the US Navy.

Although Marshall had long remained closely attuned to the discussions of Soviet military thinkers concerned with dramatic increases in the development and employment of, among other things, long-range precision-guided munitions in conflicts across the globe, it was the Gulf War against Iraq that triggered his 1991 decision to assign Krepinevich to determine if "technological developments would lead to major changes in warfare."[27] Marshall was deeply concerned that American officers would view the impressive results that US forces had achieved in the Persian Gulf as evidence that a Revolution in Military Affairs had already taken place, instead of evidence

that it was on the cusp of unfolding. "The Gulf War needs to be seen as something like Cambrai," he argued in a 1993 memorandum, referencing the first time in which significant numbers of armored fighting vehicles were deployed on a European battlefield in 1917. "A first trial of new technology and new ways of operating was [then] undertaken," he explained.[28] Extending his analogy, Marshall asked defense professionals to consider themselves as being "at the beginning, perhaps in 1922 . . . [when] we cannot fully foresee how things are going to work out." Clearly, the technological and communications advances in modern warfighting exhibited by the American fighting forces in the Gulf would continue to proliferate over the course of the coming decades, even among America's adversaries. Marshall was careful to emphasize how, "given the uncertainties, we are not sure how warfare will change." Most importantly, however, he emphasized that military professionals and policymakers should not be blinded by excessive trust in technological superiority. "The most important goal is to be the first, to be the best in the intellectual task of finding the most appropriate innovations in concepts of operation and making organizational changes to fully exploit the technologies already available," he explained.[29] Few historical examples of this feat seemed so relevant to him than what he interpreted as the long-term revolutionary reform of the interwar German *Reichsheer* that led to the genesis of *Panzerdivisionen*, an organizational and doctrinal innovation that Marshall felt married the right technology to the right operational concepts and force structure in a decisive manner.

To be sure, neither Marshall nor Krepinevich relied entirely on the *Wehrmacht* analogy to make their case; but the fact that both felt the example offered so salient a case study of getting things right was far more significant than most readers at the time could have intuited. In his widely circulated 1992 "The Military-Technical Revolution," Krepinevich described his assigned task as ascertaining "how we might identify a new 'blitzkrieg' form of warfare if we saw it."[30] His study examined historical case studies drawn from the innovative 1920s and 30s per Marshall's direction, ultimately confirming Marshall's conviction that revolutions in military affairs arose from systemic change in military organizations, and not merely the introduction of novel technological solutions to battlefield problems. After all, most belligerents involved in the 1939 and 1940 campaigns were equipped with tanks, aircraft, and radios. Yet only the *Wehrmacht* emerged successful in the short run. "It was the manner in which the Germans integrated these systems within a new operational concept that led to their shockingly quick victory over the French," he asserted, mostly ignoring

the dense webs of contingency and fundamentally unpredictable human factors that played such a major role in the *FALL GELB* outcome.[31] French doctrinal methods, borne of the stagnation of the last war, "proved, for the most part, irrelevant to countering the operational concept of *blitzkrieg*." The Germans, on the other hand, were "victims of a war of attrition [in 1918] . . . [and] saw the need to avoid that kind of war." Thus, the *Generalstab* diligently "looked for a way to win quickly and avoid a stalemate," resulting in the *Panzerdivisionen*-centric operational concept which "offered them the prospect of winning quickly, before France and England could fully mobilize their war potential." [32] Krepinevich's study did not address the complete and utter incompatibility between the *Wehrmacht*'s operational concept and Nazi Germany's actual long-term strategic means and ends. In fact, he suggested, the history of 1940 seemed to suggest that "it should be possible to operate effectively . . . with a force that comprises a 'high-low [tech]' mix of defense systems." After all, Krepinevich wrote, "not every division in the *Wehrmacht* had to be a panzer division to execute the *blitzkrieg* doctrine," ignoring completely the utter disaster that resulted from just such a bifurcated force structure on the Soviet frontier on the only occasion that the "doctrine" was intentionally employed.[33]

Most of the numerous Marshall and ONA-funded historical studies during the 1990s on the unfolding RMA bore out Krepinevich's conclusions. In one of the most influential ONA-funded products of the era within the canon of American professional military education, historians Williamson Murray and Barry Watts examined interwar peacetime military innovation for useful clues about the US defense establishment. As in Krepinevich's report, the *Wehrmacht* received glowing praise in their 1996 essay.[34] The fall of France had been produced by "the stunning effectiveness of the German campaign," waged by an army which "had evolved sound concepts for mobile, combined-arms warfare and had trained their army to execute those concepts" against an enemy which had simply failed to find the appropriate blend of systems, concepts, and technology during the interwar era.[35] They described the *Panzerdivision* as the most impressive example of success in German military innovation, representing "a creation that rested on an intertwining of a realistic reading of the past with considerable intuition about the future."[36] Given the fate of this same army just over a year later, however, one might be forgiven if a closer look sullied the reputation of *Wehrmacht* senior leaders for "considerable intuition about the future." After all, as the authors themselves acknowledged, "innovation . . . gives rise to the loss of long-term predictability." Any revolutionary transformation of battlefield systems could shift from

brilliant success to a source of disaster in the blink of an eye. "The most minute differences in initial or current conditions can, over time, give rise to completely different outcomes," they warned, "and can spell the difference between successful innovation and failure."[37]

Military analysts and historians were well aware, and even unironically proud of the similarities between the Army's "Transformation" efforts since 1973 and those of the interwar *Reichsheer*. "Not since General Hans von Seeckt's efforts . . . has a military organization so self-consciously set about transforming itself," military historian David Jablonsky pronounced in the Army War College's *Parameters* in 2001.[38] They did not consider, however, how the similarities between both the American and German developmental initiatives were caught by nearly the exact same intellectual snare. Both sought to rebuild a force in the wake of disastrous defeat, but only by avoiding, ignoring, or at the very least deemphasizing whatever kind of war had produced that defeat. If only a panacea of some kind could be devised which would prevent a military from falling victim to a war of a kind it could not or did not want to fight, all would be well—or so the tortured logic went. In both cases, dissenters saw through the siren song facade and warned their superiors of the cognitive trap into which they were falling. In both cases, these voices were mostly ignored or professionally snubbed.

While it all sounded almost too good to be true to the incoming administration, caveats like those issued by Murray and Watts, which drew the attention of many Army senior leaders, seem to have been mostly ignored by the new secretary of defense. Rumsfeld also overlooked the ONA's emphasis on systemic paradigmatic solutions to military transformation instead of relying on technology to reduce risk and the number of boots required on the ground to succeed in any variety of global conflicts. "Technology makes possible the revolution, but the revolution itself takes place only when new concepts of operation develop and, in many cases, new military organizations are created," Marshall had insisted.[39] While Rumsfeld's subsequent statements paid rhetorical respect to this entreaty, his actions suggested he mostly stopped reading after the first clause.

On 11 September 2001, the catastrophic terror attack launched by *Al-Qaeda* network Sunni Islamist extremists dramatically altered the nation's security priorities in just a few hours. After more than a decade without a clear and unambiguous primary threat to American safety following the downfall of the Soviet Union, Rumsfeld's Pentagon quickly shifted its sights to a collection of new if somewhat vaguely defined enemies at the president's direction: international Islamist terrorists and all those identi-

Figure 6.8. President George W. Bush 9/11 photo. Courtesy of Wikimedia Commons.

fied as having given them safe harbor. On the short list of the latter group was war-torn Afghanistan's Taliban, which US intelligence ascertained had sheltered *Al-Qaeda* leader Usama bin Laden in the country they nominally governed. After demands for bin Laden's arrest and turnover to US authorities were repeatedly rebuffed, President Bush implemented a strategy to forcibly remove the *Taliban* from power in Afghanistan and capture or kill bin Laden.

In many ways, despite the sheer geographical distance separating the United States from Afghanistan, and the lack of any extant in-theater infrastructure for such an operation, on their face Bush's orders did not greatly differ from missions assigned to US forces across its many LIC and MOOTW deployments to Latin America across the previous two decades. A small joint task force would forcibly enter Afghanistan, leverage technological advantages to assist an ongoing anti-*Taliban* insurgency called the Northern Alliance in the northern third of the rugged southwestern Asian nation, topple the regime, and kill or capture its primary high-value target: bin Laden. Presumably, some form of stabilization mission would be required to ensure that a sizable power vacuum did not result from the removal of the *Taliban,* but given the existence of an organized resistance movement already in active combat with the regime, viable alternatives seemed likely forthcoming. In any case, Rumsfeld and the US defense es-

Figure 6.9. Donald H. Rumsfeld (center) with (from left) Secretary of the Army Tom White, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Hugh Shelton, and Senators John Warner (R-VA), and Carl Levin (D-MI), the ranking member and chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee, at a news conference after terrorists crashed a hijacked jetliner into the Pentagon. Courtesy of Wikimedia Commons.

tablishment, though unquestionably caught off guard in their sudden new tasking, wasted no time employing the most cutting-edge technological fruits of Transformation to exact revenge for the 9/11 attacks and turn the invasion of Afghanistan into an RMA showcase.[40]

When intense air bombardment of *Taliban* positions began on 7 October 2001, US intelligence estimated that there were approximately 50,000 enemy fighters confronting something like 10,000 Northern Alliance members in Afghanistan. Given the massive disparity in numbers, Rumsfeld and his fellow RMA acolytes recognized the opportunity to test pet theories that unprecedentedly small numbers of American boots on the ground could effectively leverage network-centric warfare tactics and an arsenal of precision-guided munitions to dismantle the *Taliban* while keeping friendly casualty numbers negligible. Less than two weeks later, as but 300 Army Special Forces members landed in-country armed with laser-designators and the full panoply of modern combat tools, which would allow them to make American airpower little more than a volatile extension of Northern Alliance will, the theories seemed to rap-

idly transform into cherished truths. Layered echelons of aircraft rained 2,000-pound precision-guided bombs down on countless Taliban fighting positions which had stood all but impenetrable for years—erasing them from the map in the blink of an eye. As US operators advanced alongside their Tajik, Uzbek, and Hazaran counterparts in the immediate wake of the almost miraculous and near-surgical obliteration of enemy forces before them, it seemed to all as if the war was unfolding in an entirely different realm than that which had governed combat during all of the previous century. That is, for a time.[41]

Taliban fighters soon adapted to the new terrible threat from above. They became adept at camouflaging vehicles and fighting positions, dispersing their formations, practicing increasingly disciplined communications, and even establishing decoy targets to force US bombers to expend costly ordnance. As Northern Alliance fighters and their American companions struggled to identify targets for aircraft hungrily circling overhead, they were increasingly drawn into close combat of a variety not greatly dissimilar to that their forefathers had experienced, or their forefathers before them. The shock of the RMA seemed to have worn off quickly on a famously adaptable Afghan foe. Even as warlords across the country, who had seemingly played their cards right in their election

Figure 6.10. Condoleezza Rice and Hamid Karzai. Courtesy of the US State Department.

to spontaneously back the joint-American/Northern Alliance offensive, seized control of major population centers like Mazar-e-Sherif, Herat, and eventually even Bagram and Kabul, many of the *Taliban* fighters remained largely unaccounted for—transformed into ghosts, yet still presumed to be very much alive. Bin Laden himself fled to the unforgiving Tora Bora mountains alongside many of his top-ranking *Al-Qaeda* lieutenants, barely slipping the noose as special operator-guided American heavy ordnance pummeled the caves and valleys in a maddening attempt to destroy them. By December, it was clear to the world that the Taliban was no longer in control of Afghanistan. In what amounted to as close to a legitimate election as Afghanistan has ever had, Hamid Karzai was elected the new interim prime minster, and a NATO-borne International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) deployed 5,000 troops from eighteen different nations to establish a stabilization force in the Bosnia mold. Sharp fights continued with Taliban remnants in the most out-of-the-way portions of the country, occasionally levying a painful butcher's bill in American blood. But, for Donald Rumsfeld, President Bush, and the neoconservative American security apparatus, the war in Afghanistan was won. The veracity of the RMA thesis seemed, at least to them, unquestionable.[42]

Even so, compared to the immediate aftermath of DESERT STORM, consensus on the military significance of the Afghan campaign was far more elusive. Professional analysts and media pundits varied in their opinion of the key lessons to draw from the seemingly unique experience. Most fell into two broad categories surveyed in a prominent spring 2003 *Foreign Affairs* essay by Stephen Biddle. Many observers reflexively aligned with the Rumsfeld conclusion that thanks to the combination of Special Operations teams armed with laser designators and precision-guided munitions, a new age in the history of warfare had dawned. Others were less sure, arguing that the sheer particularity of strategic and political contexts in Afghanistan, to say nothing of the impressive fighting acumen of the Northern Alliance ally, tainted the representativeness of the campaign's results. Biddle felt the truth was somewhere in between. After surveying impressive successes of special operators surgically destroying Taliban positions from astounding standoff distances of beyond eight kilometers, the author was careful to consider the bevy of adaptations the Afghan enemy quickly evolved for overcoming the dramatically lopsided technological disparity. Once American forces were repeatedly drawn into close-in gunfights along the rugged Hindu Kush mountainsides, the war seemed to suggest "a future much more like the past than most now believe," he warned. The RMA's technological hallmarks—namely, precision-guided

munitions, digitally-networked communications, and a suite of other key equipment, force structure innovations, and cutting-edge training—were unquestionably effective at the tactical level. At the same time, though, none of these things had proven sufficient alone. "We should be wary of suggestions that precision weapons have so revolutionized warfare that either the American military or American foreign policy can now be radically restructured," Biddle wrote with an anxious nod toward Rumsfeld. "The model is thus at once oversold by its proponents and undersold by its detractors." Just as the *Panzerdivision* so often lauded by RMA evangelists had thrived only in exceedingly particular geographical and strategic circumstances, so too would the efficacy of light forces and precision bombs remain tied to what Biddle termed "some important preconditions." After all, he added: "In Iraq, for example, the lack of a credible, trained opposition bodes ill for an Afghan-style campaign without major American ground forces." As his essay went to press, the world would not have to wait long to find out.[43]

"You pay attention to the day after; I'll pay attention to the day of"

While the specific admixture of political circumstances that led President Bush to commit to the spring 2003 Iraqi invasion remains sharply contested by historians, for the purposes of this work it is enough to acknowledge that, as properly befits a republic, the American military had little say in the matter. Having by the fall of 2002 determined on not only the ousting of Saddam Hussein from power, but the permanent replacement of his regime with a duly elected democratic and pro-Western Iraqi state, though he would have denied it at the time, Bush's vision contemplated nothing short of "nation-building." Allegedly, US concerns regarding Iraqi development of weapons of mass destruction along with Hussein's refusal to comply with UN weapons inspection regimes prompted the final decision to launch the invasion. The trigger, however, mattered fundamentally less than the decision. [44]

The assignment that President Bush handed the joint force—much to the chagrin of most senior officers, especially those in the MOOTW-wary Army—could essentially be divided into two parts: the political problem and the access problem. Neither could be achieved by the Army or even Rumsfeld's Department of Defense alone. Both would instead require collaboration and coordination across US government agencies, allies, and partners. The first, the *political* problem, was the preeminent facet of the endeavor—removing Saddam Hussein from power and transforming

Iraqi society into a pro-Western democratic state which could defend itself while not threatening the security of its neighbors. No facet of the political problem could realistically be solved without, at the very least, signal contributions from the Army as the nation's largest armed land component. Even given complete acquiescence and ebullient joy issuing from the Iraqi people on the arrival of American forces into the country, logistical and humanitarian problems inherent to replacing the regime would have required vast military involvement. Needless to say, despite the overconfident prognostications of a handful of Bush's closest advisers, Rumsfeld's Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz foremost among them, such a bright outcome remained the least likely scenario.[45]

Figure 6.11. Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz. Courtesy of the Department of Defense.

The second, the *access* problem, involved overcoming the efforts of all Iraqis who stood in the way of the political problem, especially the upwards of 400,000 troops of the Iraqi armed forces still nominally loyal to Hussein. The articulation and maneuver of more than 140,000 Coalition troops and their equipment into Iraq in a manner which facilitated the complete destruction of these enemy forces consumed planning staffs at echelon. Staffed by officers primed by the service's mid-intensity conflict focus of the prior two decades, very quickly the solution to the access problem began to rule out much substantive attention to the more important MOOTW-style political problem (which rendered the access problem relevant at all). This was especially problematic since the manner in which the access problem was solved would inevitably have an outsized influence over the likelihood of success in prosecuting the political problem. Consolidating gains won on the battlefield would not wait until after the smoke cleared. It had to begin on the battlefield itself. To be sure, many senior defense officials and US joint staff members knew the risk of launching a leviathan nation-building project with little more than trust that Iraqis would welcome an invasion with open arms. Several had witnessed the flaws with such reasoning in Somalia, Haiti, and the Balkans. Others balked

at the idea of replacing Hussein by force at all, arguing instead that the containment regimen which successive presidents had continued since Iraq's 1991 defeat would eventually remove the dictator without outside intervention. The officer at the top of the pyramid, however, General Tommy Franks—US Central Command (CENTCOM) commander in chief, and the officer credited most directly with success in Afghanistan now hand-chosen to repeat the performance in Iraq—was not of this opinion.

Figure 6.12. General Tommy Franks. Courtesy of the US Navy.

Combined Forces Land Component Command (CFLCC) commander Lt. Gen. David D. McKiernan, an officer with a healthy respect for the troop-heavy requirements of even the most limited stability operation, would command all Coalition ground forces in theater; however, Franks still held sway over planning for the invasion. Unlike McKiernan, who came of age in uniform through the MOOTW-heavy 1990s, Franks cut his teeth in the Republic of Vietnam. Serving as a 9th Infantry Division forward and aerial observer, he was an artilleryman both by assignment and personal disposition. He understood and valued maneuver principles as much as the next soldier, but his intellectual upbringing as an officer had occurred in the branch most directly tied to what many saw as the Army's overexaggerated obsession with indirect fire as a cure-all tactical solution to far-more-nuanced problems. By some accounts, his leadership philosophy as it related to staff officers also lacked much nuance. In one oft-quoted anecdote, a CENTCOM staffer noted how the general would habitually "berate subordinates, frequently shouting and cursing at them," all in the interest of ensuring that their ideas and estimates would dovetail with his

own. "You can only resist for so long," the officer explained. "After a while, you break."[46] Franks himself had initially resisted the RMA siren song that Rumsfeld had been peddling. By the fall of 2002, however, he had effectively broken. While not comfortable with the absurdly low boots on the ground estimates that Rumsfeld's office suggested would be needed to achieve the mission, Franks dismissed the idea that soldiers ought to concern themselves with whatever came after the toppling of the regime. "You pay attention to the day after," he allegedly told the Office of the Secretary of Defense. "I'll pay attention to the day of."[47] After all, the cannoneer believed, the military was only responsible for the latter. This belief, in no small part a product of the culture of the mid-intensity focus which had been systematically cultivated by many of the Army's senior-most leaders since 1973, made Franks a particularly useful soldier for Rumsfeld.

Figure 6.13. Lt. Gen. David D. McKiernan. Courtesy of the US Army.

Divided into four phases, the resultant plan—cobbled together by a network of joint staffs, adopted by Franks, and approved by the president—relegated nearly all efforts to stabilize and politically transform Iraqi society to the final phase of operations. The planning staffs assigned to design this phase were, perhaps predictably, the most spartan and under-resourced elements of the broader joint planning effort. The administration had assured Franks that the State Department, the Iraqis themselves, and international NGOs would be doing the heavy lifting in the aftermath of Hussein's ouster. The fact that such a scenario failed to map on to any other historical instance of the Army invading an erstwhile hostile nation seems to have prompted little concern. Fortunately, McKiernan, again drawing on his experience with stability challenges of the past decade, was not as confident in these assurances. This prompted the CFLCC commander to ensure that at least a modest group of staffers began work on piecing together the military's role in an interagency effort to stabilize the post-conflict country and foster the democratic election of a new Iraqi government despite

the apparent disinterest of most at the Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD) and within Franks's planning teams.[48] "There wasn't a whole lot of intellectual energy being focused on Phase IV," one of them later wrote.[49] Confusion remained about which federal agencies would be responsible for which elements, the anticipated level of resistance or acquiescence from the Iraqi people, how quickly an interim government would emerge, among countless other vexing questions. The planning headaches did not begin to abate until formal Phase IV plans were finalized (or as finalized as possible)—well *after* the launch of the invasion.

Contrary to all joint planning doctrine and even simple sound military logic, staffers were not planning backward from the successful change of the regime—the remediation of the political problem assigned by President Bush.[50] They were merely planning backward from the successful destruction and dismantling of the regime. To recognize or acknowledge this flaw, officers, who had been trained to focus first and foremost on mid-intensity battlefield challenges, would instead need to consider how—despite the unprecedented complexity of solving the access problem—the challenges accruing to phases I through III would inevitably pale in comparison with those of IV and whatever lay beyond. Many of those who had personally been involved in the messy contingencies of the past decade were indeed concerned.[51] Unfortunately, due in no small part to the way many of their superior officers and the service culture in which they were embedded had evolved over the course of the post-Vietnam era, no such acknowledgement was forthcoming and their voices were mostly ignored.

While rarely mentioned at the time, the shoddy planning and groundless assumptions that shaped the Iraqi invasion were remarkably similar to those that had fatally flawed the Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union in 1941. This was not without reason. After all, both militaries had spent decades structuring themselves to achieve swift victory without the awkward encumbrance of missions they felt they could not succeed in prosecuting. Both believed their operational concepts had been very recently, and very dramatically, confirmed by historic victories. Both were exceedingly confident that the same operational concepts would ensure similar victories on other fields—without much substantive consideration of how those other fields might fundamentally differ in political, strategic, or even geographical contexts. Both presumed, again based on past experience, that their targeted foe was far weaker in most conventionally relevant military characteristics. Both considered themselves members of a corps of professionals and a functional elite whose role in government and public policy was appropriately limited exclusively to "strictly military" considerations—

namely the application of destructive combat power to the neutralization of enemy armed forces. And finally, both ignored numerous studies, war games, and other formal warnings that they were not being sufficiently comprehensive or pessimistic in their branch and contingency planning.

Those aspects of both Barbarossa and Iraqi Freedom which seemed to planners not to map on to their preconceived notions quite so neatly, or that the far more wary among them pointed out as grave holes in their organizing logic, were anticipated as mostly sorting themselves out when push came to shove. *Wehrmacht* officers mostly waved off the unparalleled economic and logistical challenges associated with maneuvering vast armored columns across the fuel desert of the Russian steppe. They tried their best to ignore the potential for even the slightest delay to decisively unhinge the entire operation due to the shoestring budget of supplies allotted to the mission. The *Panzerdivisionen* had moved with ample speed and mobility in France, after all; and Soviets were not the French. Quite similarly, joint and Army staffs planning the Coalition invasion of Iraq spent precious little time considering how to transform Iraqi society and stabilize it in the wake of Hussein's removal. Iraqis would greet American invaders with open arms, they had been assured, and any who disbelieved such fanciful notions were mostly ignored. The planners waved away the potential for a Vietnam-style quagmire in the Persian Gulf should an insurgency or bloody internecine conflict erupt as various actors sought to fill the power vacuum. Such a nightmare would never, could never, occur. Or so was thought.

Rumsfeld's OSD vehemently fostered this commitment to depending, if not planning, on a swift victory and no prolonged occupation of postwar Iraq. The joint force, and most especially the Army, remained divided in their relative confidence that OSD's predictions were accurate. Those officers least convinced by the promises of the RMA evangelists proved a problematically hard sell. Significant numbers of post-Vietnam Army officers, while shaped by the mid-intensity cultural and educational focus of the service to which they had devoted their careers, had also spent decades engaged exclusively in MOOTW—even if against their will.[52] This uniform body of experience shaped their expectations for the aftermath of Hussein's fall in a way that dramatically countered the OSD line of thinking and that of senior officers like General Franks.

Rumsfeld was obviously obsessed with replacing the Army's time-tested commitment to human solutions to the timeless human problems of warfare with high-tech gadgetry employed by small parties of

advanced warfighters. His obsession perpetually irritated General Eric Shinseki, who was wary of the invasion plans taking shape in late 2002 and early 2003. He had fostered the Army's 2001 adoption of a new capstone doctrine called Full-Spectrum Operations and took seriously the Army's responsibility to conduct operations across the entire spectrum of global conflict. Despite the continued focus on transforming the service to increase its proficiency in mid-intensity warfare, Shinseki and his fellow Vietnam veteran peers were intimately familiar with the challenges of military occupation. While eager to avoid the MOOTW responsibilities at all costs, Shinseki and his Army had no illusions about the weight in time, money, and manpower naturally accruing to such missions. After all, that was precisely why the service sought so ardently to avoid them in the first place. When Shinseki testified before Congress on 25 February 2003, he was asked what size of force might be necessary to confront the challenges of handling the transformation of Iraq after Hussein's removal. Shinseki promptly responded that he estimated "several hundred thousand, are probably, you know, a figure that would be required." What the veteran officer viewed as a common-sense response was received as something akin to a fragmentation grenade by both Congress and OSD. Such estimates were "wildly off the mark," Paul Wolfowitz promptly replied, adding that after witnessing the stunning display of the RMA in Afghanistan, it was "hard to conceive that it would take more forces to provide stability in post-Saddam Iraq than it would take to conduct the war itself and secure the surrender of Saddam's security forces and his army." As within Franks's planning staffs themselves, the concerned naysayers were ignored or waved away. Although having already announced his pending retirement, Shinseki's resistance to the RMA-borne overconfidence of OSD severely eroded his influence over the invasion plans moving forward.[53]

After months of dispute between the joint planning staff, which wanted a much larger invasion force, and OSD, which initially envisioned no more than a large brigade conducting the operation, a "hybrid" solution to the force size problem was reached in August 2002.[54] The final orders for the operation were distributed two months later, and commanders at echelon were instructed to prepare their formations for the invasion. The 65,000 Army soldiers and officers who deployed to the Middle East that winter and early spring in preparation for the invasion went with confidence in the US military's professional expertise and extreme technological advantages to secure a swift and decisive victory over Hussein's regime. In fact, they were beginning what would prove one of the longest and most protract-

ed conflicts in American military history—precisely the kind of war that, since 1973, the Army had single-mindedly sought to avoid.

"The Pottery Barn Rule"

Thirty-four minutes after five o'clock on the morning of 21 March 2003, the US military, and forty Coalition partners, executed a plan to access the Iraqi political system by force. An Army primed, prepared, educated, trained, and equipped for mid-intensity warfare for three decades applied its unmatched skill and prowess against a foe that was markedly weaker than it had been in 1991. In many ways, Operation IRAQI FREEDOM represented the culmination of the post-Vietnam Army's Phoenix-like rise from the ashes of ignominy. The "transformed" twenty-first century force flowed past the berm separating Iraq from Kuwait that morning—ready to conduct fast-paced maneuver warfare facilitated by digitally networked warfighting systems that could collectively pose tactical problems to Iraqi defenders that they could not possibly hope to overcome. A core of professional commissioned and noncommissioned officers led highly motivated well-trained volunteers against scattered Iraqi units barely able to maintain steady daily strength as their soldiers fled for home and survival ahead of the onslaught of American airpower. While much of the Army's equipment was already dated and many American troops began the campaign lacking protective gear and other combat assets that modern militaries expected under such circumstances, the technological disparity between the two belligerents could not have been starker. Franks and his lieutenants expected swift success in out-maneuvering and out-gunning Iraqi forces on the road to Baghdad, even allowing for unavoidable setbacks and hiccups of Clausewitzian friction along the way. Hussein's days were numbered, and that number was exceedingly small.[55]

Just as the Taliban had melted away before the storm of precision-guided ordnance, Iraqi forces were summarily divorced from their command-and-control nodes before being routed or destroyed piecemeal by each onrushing axis of the Coalition offensive, just as the RMA advocates had envisioned. As allied forces seized control of oil fields and strategic port facilities along the Gulf coast, Army and Marine commands plunged northward toward the capital. The heaviest of these columns, the 3rd Infantry Division (Mechanized) armor under General Buford Blount, sliced through the western Iraqi desert in a wide sweep directly for Baghdad. Cutting apart Iraqi defenses at Talil Airfield and continuing on to Najaf, the division's attack was only slowed by a harrying sandstorm that delayed entrance into the Karbala Gap. Having covered upward of two hun-

dred miles in a single day, the division expected to resume momentum once visibility cleared. Those Iraqi units still capable of independent maneuver attempted to utilize the sandy interregnum to organize a counterattack, only to be ruined by thermal surveillance wedded to even more precision strikes. It seemed nothing in Hussein's arsenal could blunt or even briefly deflect the Coalition spear. Or rather, almost nothing.[56]

Figure 6.14. Donald H. Rumsfeld and General Buford Blount in Baghdad. Courtesy of the US Army.

Deep in the rear of Blount's armored columns lay the bypassed city of Nasiriyah, sitting threateningly along the division's critical lines of communication. Occupied by Ba'athist *Fedayeen* irregular forces and Hussein's "Golden Division" of the Republican Guard, the town quickly proved an operational problem for Coalition forces focused on pushing toward Baghdad. Under orders from the regime to do all possible to draw in American units and chew them up in the tight alleyways and cluttered city streets, the Iraqi irregulars did their best to bring Somalia to Iraq. With their complete lack of uniforms, the *Fedayeen* blended with the locals and hid equipment and weapons in heavily populated areas—posing a threat markedly different from what the Coalition troops had prepared to confront during the invasion. Although swarms of Toyota pickup trucks armed with any number of available weapons systems failed miserably in launching direct assaults against Blount's armor out in the open, the requirement of securing the division's supply forced the deployment of ever more US forces to confront the bloody street fight that the *Fedayeen* brought on in Nasiriyah itself.[57]

Just as the Taliban had negated the advantages of an RMA-imbibed Army by utilizing the natural terrain to conceal and frustrate US aircraft trying to locate and target them, the *Fedayeen* used the built terrain of Iraqi cities to complicate the application of the Coalition's airpower-centric operational concept. In doing so, the enemy converted the war in Iraq from a kind the Army was expert in prosecuting to one it desperately did not want to confront. Deploying the 101st Airborne and 82nd Airborne Divisions to shore up the rear of his V Corps, Lt. Gen. William Wallace hoped to tamp down the threat to 3rd ID's rear, and the threat that the conflict would transform into something his fellow senior leaders did not want to contemplate, while refocusing the Army's efforts exclusively on Baghdad. They believed that once the capital fell and Hussein was deposed, the rest of the pieces would neatly fall into place. Or, at least, if they did not, it would be somebody else's problem.[58]

As the storm cleared on 4 April and both Blount's tankers and the Marines reached the outskirts of Baghdad proper, Army units successfully seized control of Saddam Hussein International Airport, sounding the imminent death knell of the Ba'athist regime. On the following day, in one of the most iconic maneuvers of the campaign, Blount ordered one of his modular brigade combat teams to conduct what he termed a "thunder run" through the streets of the city. It was to be one of several. Successive columns of tanks and Bradley fighting vehicles rumbled through the nation's capital at relatively high speed, engaging targets on all sides with near impunity and making it clear to all that Coalition victory was inevitable. By 7 April, US forces had reached the city center, and two days later oversaw the removal of Hussein's statuary likeness. With just eighty-three combined dead between the Army and Marine Corps contingents of the Coalition invasion force, Rumsfeld's "transformed" military had, as predicted, solved the access problem with exceptional speed.[59]

Unlike the sudden collapse of *Wehrmacht* divisions in sight of the spires of Moscow, the culmination of the invasion's strategic momentum in Iraq did not occur with exceptional drama. In the streets of Baghdad and other cities across the country, many Iraqis quickly opted to take advantage of the yawning power vacuum left by the ejection of Ba'athist military and civilian law enforcement authorities. In so doing, they actively forced the lingering political problem faced by the Coalition to the forefront. Mass private and public property looting started as a trickle and grew to a torrent of lawlessness accompanied by a wide variety of first petty and then more serious and violent crimes.[60] Although US forces had successfully gained access to the Iraqi political system, Army units who

were now the only contingents still armed and capable of enforcing any semblance of order stood idly by, watching as the nation tore itself apart from the inside. Elated at the tactical success of his V Corps soldiers, but at somewhat of a loss as to what his formations should do after seizing the capital, Lt. Gen. William Wallace called CFLCC headquarters to inquire: "We're here. Now what?"[61] His lieutenant, General Blount, was even more disoriented. "Never, from the first day that we ever started planning this until we got to Baghdad, in all the processes, rehearsals—nobody ever mentioned the word 'looter," he later admitted to *New Yorker* reporter Peter J. Boyer. His division's "focus was on fighting the war," he added, in an explicit nod exclusively to the access problem.[62]

McKiernan and his senior lieutenants were not entirely out to pasture when it came to executing the "rolling transition" to Phase IV operations envisioned within the invasion plans.[63] But given their of lack of training and proper preparation along with the extremely low resolution of the military's plans for the stabilization phase, many officers appeared adrift awaiting positive orders.[64] This lack of coordination across the Coalition led to a hodge-podge of tactical methods employed differently across the country by units hoping to find solutions to the mass criminality in their midst. Many commanders turned to the same kinds of presence patrols they had conducted in the Balkans in an effort to, at the very least, "show the flag" and attempt to make it more difficult to loot without being seen; but they had no direction on what to do if they discovered looters. No rules of engagement were established at the theater-level. The force that had fought its way into power now seemed at a loss about what to do with it or how. This lack of preparation or even inclination to govern first bred confusion and no little resentment in Iraqi society for the newcomers. In many places—especially those where looters were dealt with using a particularly heavy hand—it led to increasing hostility and violence. Even with the access problem solved, the political problem foundered.[65]

It was at this stage that the disastrous implications of Rumsfeld and Wolfowitz's conviction that changing the Iraqi regime could be accomplished on the cheap in terms of money and personnel due to the benefits of the RMA hove into view. In the summer of 2002, as planning for the invasion had ramped into high gear, Secretary of State Colin Powell, unlike his colleagues at the Defense Department, reminded President Bush of just what he was about to embark upon. "You are going to be the proud owner of 25 million people," he allegedly warned, adding a reference to what he called "The Pottery Barn Rule: You break it, you own it."[66] As the now-quite-libertine nation spiraled out of control, the small number of

armed Americans were not able to reestablish any meaningful semblance of order. Nothing changed the simple inconvenient fact that, with Hussein and his lieutenants on the run, the Coalition very much owned an Iraq it had most decisively broken. This was especially the case in the western Al Anbar province, home to some of the fiercest Ba'ath party loyalists but, somehow, someway, all but completely overlooked in the invasion plan. Conservative Sunni inhabitants of cities like Fallujah and Ar Ramadi, soon to be household names in a United States shocked at the rapidly increasing violence they saw on the nightly news, began to draw Coalition attention as the discontent and unrest of the Iraqi population ramped up.[67] Public demonstrations of this discontent and resentment regarding the US military's failure to effectively address local concerns led to cross-cultural misunderstandings or even bloodshed as confused and unprepared soldiers lashed out. Something had to give, and fast.[68]

Although the Bush administration's original plan was to conduct a relatively small-scale reconstruction project in the ashes of the defeated Hussein regime, the president quickly recognized that things on the ground were not going as expected. Hoping to aggressively nip any nightmarish Vietnam scenario in the bud, he sent L. Paul Bremer, an experi-

Figure 6.15. L. Paul Bremer signs over limited sovereignty to the Iraqi Interim Government, 28 June 2004. Courtesy of the US Army.

enced American diplomat, to organize the civilian effort to remake a free Iraq as the leader of the Coalition Provisional Authority.[69] As has now become almost legendary in histories of the conflict, Bremer's initial decisions would only exacerbate a problem already spiraling out of control. The envoy's arbitrary disbanding of the entire Iraqi military and ejection of all remaining Ba'athists from public office left an inordinate number of enraged, disfranchised, and militarily trained Iraqis in its wake. While these acts did not alone generate the already incipient Iraqi insurgency, their combined impact on its growth were undeniably signal.[70]

The longer the interregnum between declaring military victory and reestablishing anything even remotely resembling a functioning Iraqi state, the more angry Iraqis grew toward Americans, and the fiercer and more frequent the attacks against Coalition forces became.[71] The longer it took to consolidate strategic gains won through battlefield victory, the more difficult it became to consolidate them at all. By the summer and fall of 2003, sporadic attacks against Coalition convoys and patrols were becoming an endemic fixture of life in the theater. The most dramatic and deadly of these strikes were periodic suicide bombings. As headquarters across Iraq began to quantify and chronicle the recurring Significant Actions (SIGACTS) on reports distributed up the chain of command, it became clear that the Army was no longer lingering on the edge of an imminent transition in the character of the conflict. It was facing a fundamentally different war than it had prepared for, whether it liked it or not.

Given the limited focus of this work, it is not necessary to re-narrate the rapid intensification and progress of the Iraqi insurgency which plagued Coalition forces and a new Iraqi government for the next half decade and beyond. Within four months after President Bush declared that "major combat operations" had ended in Iraq, more Americans had been killed in insurgent attacks than had fallen during the invasion itself.[72] That number would continue to grow at a sickening rate over the next five years until, by the end of 2007, more than 4,000 had fallen in what amounted to the fiercest fighting in American twenty-first-century military history up to that point—in contrast with the fewer than 200 killed during "major combat operations." By then, the Iraq war had permanently transitioned "down" the conflict spectrum, just as the 1980s and '90s Army doctrine had avoided carefully considering. Shinseki's initiatives, inspired by 1990s MOOTW challenges was to shift the Army's doctrine, training, and orientation toward confronting missions across the "full spectrum" simultaneously in future operations; however, his efforts had yet borne little

Figure 6.16. Generals William Wallace (left) and David Petraeus. Courtesy of the US Army.

Figure 6.17. Maj. Gen. H. R. McMaster. Courtesy of the US Army.

fruit in the minds of the deploying invasion force.[73] The Army that sped toward Baghdad, and the Army that found itself mired in the quagmire of insurgency, was precisely the Army that had been constructed by a generation of post-Vietnam senior leaders: primed for mid-intensity warfare against "conventional" mechanized echelons, but only modestly prepared for solving the actual political problem it had found in the Iraqi desert.

As discussed in countless popular narratives by 2024, the US military ultimately managed to pull itself out of the dramatic tailspin caused by its all-but-intentional unpreparedness for the prolonged occupation of Iraq. Most historians now agree that the legendary Sunni Awakening which began in the winter of 2005 and gradually turned ever-larger swaths of the Iraqi population against the raging insurgency, was far more the product of Iraqi actions and agency than of any particular combination of tactical or strategic actions taken by Coalition forces. Even so, officers who had come of age in their profession during the MOOTW-dominated 1980s and '90s laid the groundwork for the Awakening. Soldiers and marines like David Petraeus, H. R. McMaster, James Mattis, and Sean MacFarland, while all supremely well-versed in the art of maneuver warfare, brought to the war in Iraq a combination of considerable intellect, an open and curious mind, and most importantly, undeniable experience in a range of MOOTW and stability-oriented missions.[74]

These qualities also existed in no small number of their subordinates, extending well down the chain of command and into the ranks themselves. The "transformed" US Army that invaded Iraq in the spring of 2003 had indeed been transformed by its experiences of the 1990s, but not only in the manner its senior leaders had envisioned and even intended. Major portions of the digitally networked Information Age service which had been entrusted with winning wars swiftly and decisively through an expert blend of maneuver and precision-guided firepower had been intellectually inoculated against an excessive trust in the RMA by and through their direct involvement with the messy challenges they had encountered in Latin America and across the globe. Their hesitance to embrace the same promises which appeared so appealing to many was borne directly of these experiences and was first evident in the friction that erupted between the Army and OSD even before the invasion began. Despite the Army's eagerness to extricate itself from its responsibility for prosecuting such tasks during the previous decade; despite the prominence of senior voices and civilian political leaders decrying "nation-building" as somehow irrelevant or inappropriate for an army, or as dangerous distractions from the mid-intensity war the Army needed to be preparing for; despite all the attempts, across three decades, to avoid what had, in the spring and summer of 2003, in the dusty streets of Iraq,

Figure 6.18. Maj. Gen. James Mattis. Courtesy of the US Army.

Figure 6.19. Lt. Gen. Sean MacFarland. Courtesy of the US Army.

finally come to pass, a key core of American soldiers, enlightened by invaluable past experience, and open to challenging the institutional cultural norm, managed to, in the final hour, steer the Army away from the rocky shoals of disaster from which the sirens of the RMA seductively beckoned. Unlike the *Wehrmacht*, the Coalition's misadventure in Iraq was never going to result in Armageddon. But for the families and comrades of the thousands of Americans who fell in Iraq between the declaration of victory and the beginning of the end of the Iraqi insurgency, the process of rectifying the avoidable flaws of gross overconfidence took far too long.

Notes

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2. Richard Hallion, *Storm over Iraq: Air Power and the Gulf War* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1998).

3. US Army, *Gordon R. Sullivan*, 41–45.

4. David Fitzgerald, *Learning to Forget: US Army Counterinsurgency Doctrine and Practice from Vietnam to Iraq* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2013), 86–98; and Chad C. Serena, *A Revolution in Military Adaptation: The US Army in the Iraq War* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2011), 437–39.

5. Keith L. Shimko, *The Iraq Wars and America's Military Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 1–25, 108–15; and Adrian R. Lewis, *The American Culture of War: The History of U.S. Military Force from World War II to Operation Iraqi Freedom* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 386–89.

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Chapter 7
Conclusion

As a form of political activity, warfighting always remains but one facet of a nation's panoply of strategic tools. To ensure maximal calibration of their actions with those of the other national power projection elements, military leaders at every echelon must remain constantly aware of their nation's ultimate political means and ends while remaining prepared to flex due to sudden radical shifts in the same. Such diligent cognizance is just as vital during interwar periods as it is during wartime. Armies and operational concepts hand-fashioned to thrive only in a narrowly conceived set of geopolitical circumstances that are deemed most dangerous can become irrelevant when engaged with a more flexible, determined, and agile foe. They create incentives for adversaries to actively strive to convert a conflict from one particular "kind" into another for which their opponent is least prepared or desperately hopes to avoid. Thus, the less an army seeks to avoid *any* particular scenario, the more resilient, flexible, and likely successful it will ultimately be on and off the battlefield; especially if it can successfully transform a conflict into a kind its own opponent hopes to avoid itself.

The two case studies considered within this book illustrate the extreme danger associated with attempting to somehow control or dictate the kind of future conflict or contingency an army will confront. This is especially true for the single-minded pursuit of speedy and decisive conflict resolution via organizational, doctrinal, or technological means (or, more often, all three as part of a dynamic system). While curtailing the potential length of any crisis or conflict is unquestionably preferable from a strictly humanitarian perspective, by failing to consider their own potential incapacity to avoid organic transitions during a future war, those most eager to avoid them often hasten their occurrence. In both of these examples, military leaders and security professionals who focused more on avoiding unwanted scenarios than maximizing force adaptability tended to give in to the most seductive ideas and promises on offer as potential panaceas during interwar periods. Because these individuals were prominent within their respective hierarchical organizations, their personal opinions were allowed to run roughshod over those of more cautious dissenters—even while they often simultaneously paid lip-service to the importance of fostering debate and discussion within a professional force. Worst of all, senior leaders and civilian policymakers who were

most committed to miraculously avoiding the kinds of conflicts they did not want to confront tended to drive the interwar development of both armies away from any preparation, consideration, or education for the variety of conflict then out of favor.

In both case studies, the armies sought to avoid wars of attrition—Germany out of a severe lack of resources requisite for a prolonged *Materialschlacht* and the United States because of a perceived lack of lasting public support for protracted low-intensity missions that came with a high cost in money and blood. In both cases, senior leaders pursued developmental trajectories during interwar periods that seductively promised an escape from the wars of attrition they despised and feared instead of, in the style of Odysseus, lashing themselves to the masts of reality and forcing a difficult, painful, challenging, but honest assessment of true capabilities, shortcomings, and responsibilities for the most likely future scenarios their armies would face. Although only one paid with its own and its nation's very existence, both suffered tremendous costs in lives, treasure, and the respect of their national populations.

While an interesting comparative exercise in military historiography, such siren songs in interwar military development remain a clear and present danger today. Just as in the immediate post-Vietnam era, Army leaders recently publicly asserted that in the wake of the Global War on Terror, the service should focus on executing a "cognitive break with the Middle East." "No more Iraq," one officer explained. "Let's . . . think about Eastern Europe, think about peer threats. . . . Let's get rid of the hybrid stuff. Let's make it hard."[1] An even more senior officer echoed the same: "We've got to get off Iraq and Afghan map sheets. . . . We've got to force ourselves to be uncomfortable."[2] On the heels of a disastrous twenty-year Afghan counterinsurgency campaign, the idea seems at least debatable that the Army has expertly mastered such operations and that now only large-scale combat operations against a near-peer pose a qualitative increase in difficulty and discomfort.[3]

As in 1976, the post-defeat Army has turned away from the kind of war it just unsuccessfully faced as it designs new doctrine for a supposedly unprecedentedly lethal future. "Today's operational environment presents threats . . . significantly more dangerous in terms of capability and magnitude than those we faced in Iraq and Afghanistan," Lt. Gen. Michael Lundy wrote in the foreword to the Army's 2017 Field Manual (FM) 3-0 capstone doctrine.[4] Lundy's warning essentially repeated DePuy's admo-

nition that a "new lethality" awaited the Army in 1976 on a future battlefield filled with "challenges beyond any the US Army has ever faced."[5] Just as DePuy worried that the lengthy Vietnam misadventure resulted in "a lost decade of weapons advancement," Lundy wrote that the Army had too long been "focused on counterinsurgency and counterterrorism at the expense of other capabilities."[6] Just as DePuy perceived a Soviet foe having "fielded three or four generations of new equipment while we were standing still," Lundy admonished soldiers that near-peer adversaries could leverage American inattention to large-scale operations and "put us at a position of relative disadvantage in places where we may be required to fight."[7] Most dangerous of all was inaction. "The less prepared we are to meet these challenges, the greater the likelihood for conflict with those who seek windows of opportunity to exploit," Lundy explained in what ironically could have been an exceedingly apt post-mortem on the Army's late vexations in both Iraq and Afghanistan.[8] Just as Army leaders in the post-Vietnam era urged US forces to prepare for war in Europe as the most demanding contingency, the 2017 FM 3-0 identified large-scale ground combat against a peer threat as "the greatest challenge for Army forces" rather than its proven shortcomings at pursuing recent objectives in the Middle East and southwest Asia.[9]

Also like the immediate post-Vietnam era, professional voices countering the Army's abandonment of irregular warfare study are not hard to find. "The US military has been here before," military historian Christian Tripodi and Army Special Forces officer Matthew Wiger wrote in a 2022 essay in West Point's *Modern War Institute*. They referenced DePuy era abandonment of counterinsurgency and worried that the Army was again "making a similar mistake."[10] Indeed, the post-Afghanistan era seemed to have all of the key elements in place for a disastrous repeat performance: a new highly technocratic doctrine in the form of Multi-Domain Operations, a shockingly modern proxy war between two near-peer belligerents in Ukraine which seemed to highlight the alleged unpreparedness of US forces for large-scale operations, and widescale assertions that large-scale counterinsurgency operations are an inappropriate mission for conventional Army forces. Of course, as Tripodi and Wiger (among many others) observed, even the anticipated conflict between the United States and an unidentified near-peer would almost certainly involve irregular warfare on some level.[11]

Wary of repeating the mistakes of the past half century, the Department of Defense has attempted to officially head off another abandonment

of the countless lessons gleaned during the last twenty years. Even though the Donald J. Trump Administration's 2018 National Defense Strategy had a mid-intensity near-peer focus, an October 2020 strategy annex focused on maintaining American capabilities in combating irregular warfare (IW). The authors asserted that the country "must not—and *will* not—repeat the 'boom and bust' cycle that has left the United States underprepared for irregular warfare" in the past.[12] The document directed the joint force to retain lessons learned in Iraq and Afghanistan as well as develop "policies, strategies, plans, and institutional processes to break the reactive cycle of investment in IW capabilities." Personnel would be trained, educated, and developed "to ensure expertise in IW as part of our operational culture," and "learn to embrace the mindset necessary to succeed in irregular warfare missions and compete more effectively against all adversaries."[13] Whether the annex will be read, cited, and respected remains to be seen.

Much as it did between 1973 and 2003, Army doctrine continues to diligently acknowledge, at least on paper, the unavoidable requirement to maintain competence and capabilities relevant to its low-intensity and non-combat responsibilities worldwide. In addition to the Army's ongoing refinement of its famed counterinsurgency manual, FM 3-24, the 2017 FM 3-0 formally introduced "Consolidation of Gains" as an operational task, requiring units to focus on achieving strategic and political objectives in their respective sectors before, during, and after combat operations.[14] But keeping doctrine, education, and training for non-combat, irregular warfare, or counterinsurgency operations partitioned from the rest of Army thought, preparation, and force development is dangerous. As this book has illustrated, history proves that preparing only particular commands for deployment to particular kinds of contingencies is not sufficient. This is especially due to the fluid nature of not only war but security challenges across the conflict spectrum. Soldiers and officers must be prepared for diverse operational environments and the wide range of political dynamics they might confront within them as contingencies organically transition up and down a continuum of severity in response to their own actions, those of the local population, those of the enemy, and as a result of the interaction of all three.

While the Army's formal doctrinal commitment to its responsibilities in conducting operations across the entire conflict spectrum simultaneously within the same operational environment began in the 2001 FM 3-0's "Full Spectrum Operations" concept, only in the most recent 2022

FM 3-0 capstone manual has the service come to acknowledge the imperative of mastering transitions.[15] One of the nine Imperatives identified in the new doctrine is the requirement of anticipating, planning for, and executing transitions which "mark a change of focus in an operation."[16] This new emphasis illustrates how the Iraq and Afghanistan wars have impacted American military thought. Transitions in military operations can occur between strategic contexts (competition, crisis, or armed conflict), tasks (offense, defense, or stability), operational phases, or branches of a campaign. They can unfold expectedly, as when a headquarters shifts from a main to supporting effort, during task organization changes, or when handing off responsibilities between units. They can also happen unexpectedly, forcing abrupt and often-dramatic adaptation from one kind of operation or conflict to another to avoid disaster. Thus, planning for and anticipating possible transitions, especially those of a potentially major character, is a key planning, training, and educational responsibility. "Transitions are typically points of friction," the doctrine warns; without prior preparation and anticipation, such friction threatens to destroy momentum and upend the tempo of even the most successful campaign.[17]

The doctrine advises commands to address potential transition dangers through six planning and preparatory steps: forecast when and how a force may be required to transition; arrange tasks in order to facilitate transitions when they occur; calibrate task organization to anticipate possible transitions; rehearse transitions; ensure understanding across a force about the fluidity of rules of engagement across transitions; and, perhaps most importantly, understand "potential unintended consequences and the risk they pose to successful transition."[18] In short, Army leaders and planners must carefully assess the orders they receive and the operational environments in which they operate while anticipating that circumstances may change suddenly, dramatically, and unpredictably in directions that are not only inconvenient but potentially disastrous for US and partner forces.[19]

As with many aspects of military effectiveness, successfully executing these six planning and preparatory steps for transitions is directly related to a force's education, training, and organization trajectories developed during interwar periods. No doctrine, force structure, or operational concept is universally relevant, applicable, or timeless in all circumstances and contingencies. For a military system forged in an interwar period to successfully pursue policy aims on the future battlefield, it must be calibrated to a nation's particular strategic means and ends, allowing for the

inevitable evolution of both over time. Although they are not involved in strategic-level planning and decision-making, junior officers and enlisted soldiers need nearly as much strategic and political competence as an army's senior leaders, especially when operating within a "mission command" leadership paradigm. The imperative of understanding and calibrating one's decisions and actions to the intent of superiors must extend beyond merely the intended tactical objectives of higher headquarters, to include the intended political objectives of a nation or coalition. Soldiers and officers of every grade and at every echelon can only calibrate their ground-level actions to larger strategic means and ends if they have been taught the many direct connections between levels of war and political authority. This imperative applies not only at the low end of the conflict spectrum, in highly politically sensitive counterinsurgency campaigns, but even in large-scale combat operations against a near-peer foe. War is a political act at every echelon, and tactical decisions made by even the lowest ranking members of an army (most especially when taken in aggregate and at scale) move a belligerent closer or further from success in the prosecution of its objectives with each and every action they take. If troops are ignorant of those objectives, their decisions can only be based upon their own preference for, at best, local tactical success and, at worst, mere survival, advancing national objectives only by coincidence.

When militaries pursue developmental strategies of avoidance during interwar periods, they risk selling goods they cannot possibly deliver. Worse, political leaders ignorant or heedless of the realities of war are easily drawn into the promises of martial evangelists offering the snake-oil of quick, easy, decisive victories. Military leaders who make groundless assertions that the trajectory of future wars can be largely controlled this time thanks to recent developments can prompt disastrous foreign policy decisions. In truth, no admixture of technology, training, or doctrine will ever allow an armed force to circumvent the inescapable dynamism of war. Friction, chance, contingency, and a willful enemy bent on taking advantage of every vulnerability are integral components of human conflict. In the end, victory will go to the most adaptable force—the belligerent that successfully endures the widest range of challenges and altered circumstances while simultaneously levying challenges and problems of its own beyond the range of its adversary's ability to adapt. The only way to avoid wrecking catastrophically on the rocky shores of defeat is to stalwartly ignore the seductive siren songs of soothsayers who promise to make war-

fare easier, more amenable to a force's extant strengths, or less likely to expose its weaknesses. Instead, victory comes to those who mindfully restrain their appetites for the preferred path and instead determinedly confront precisely that which they least want to face.

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