



British and German Approaches to Tactical Officer Training during the Late Interwar Period

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Above: An officer uses miniature tanks and troops and a shillelagh as a pointer to illustrate positions as he lectures young soldiers of the Royal Ulster Rifles on military tactics in 1941. (Photo from PA Images via Alamy Stock Photo)

The training systems for both British and German officers were seriously flawed by the outset of the Second World War. Still, on the whole, the German army's training system offered several advantages over that of the British. Tactical training in the German army required its officers to meet exacting standards, whereas tactical training in the British army had been neglected. German training was more standardized than the British training; the British spent much of their time on imperial policing. The German emphasis on "troop leading" and *Auftragstaktik* (a mission-oriented command style) made them much better at functioning in fluid or uncertain situations than their British counterparts, particularly during mobile operations. Even the British Officer Corps culture presented a problem since, unlike the Germans, professionalism and technical expertise

were not held in particularly high esteem. In addition, the British did not consider war to be an activity that required demanding, specialized training in the way that the Germans did. The German army also carried out large, realistic maneuvers regularly, which contributed to the fact that they were better prepared to wage a large-scale war against a first-class enemy.

It may be considered axiomatic that German training at the operational, and especially the tactical, levels was better than British training. Still, a direct *comparative* analysis will explain why and to what extent this is the case. Context is crucial. Overall, the German army was better prepared to fight the kind of war that would come compared with the British army, which was smaller and saddled with an ambiguous role, a lower budget when compared with the other services, and the need to protect its empire. Nevertheless, each army failed to achieve the appropriate balance. The German training system created many tactical and operational leaders but proved incapable of producing enough

German officers study maps in a military academy, 1935. (Photo from Sueddeutsche Zeitung Photo via Alamy Stock Photo)



effective strategic leaders. Meanwhile, the British training system created too many strategists and failed to produce enough effective operational and tactical leaders. This was a net benefit for the Germans because a country generally needs fewer strategists than tacticians and because most soldiers function at the tactical and operational levels of war. Nor did the training of either side match their respective levels of motorization. The German army was only partially motorized and unable to fully exploit its emphasis on freedom of action that greater mobility would provide. The British made the opposite mistake; their emphasis on methodical battle did not enable them to take full advantage of the level of mobility that their army had achieved by the outbreak of war. Besides the fact that an enormous amount of time, material, and most importantly, lives would have been saved had British tactical training been better, a close examination demonstrates that it is an absolute necessity for armies to establish training systems that create the types and numbers of leaders actually needed for present and future conflicts.

British and German Context

Unfortunately for the British, their army was anything but the subject of expansion until it was too late, and it was hamstrung by a poorly defined role for national defense. Of the three branches of the British military, the army held the lowest priority in rearmament.¹ It has even been referred to as the “Cinderella of the services.”² The British government prioritized the army’s roles in the following order from most to least important: defend the British Isles, protect British trade routes, garrison the British Empire, and collaborate with British allies in their defense.³ As Brian Bond argues, unless a clear-cut decision stated otherwise, the entire tradition, structure, equipment, training, and recruiting system of the army were all firmly adapted to defending the British Empire. Despite the threat posed by Nazi Germany, the British Cabinet did not clearly define the army’s role until February 1939 when it finally accepted a commitment to fight a large-scale war on the European continent.⁴ A field force of six divisions was to be sent to the continent to aid France against Germany in time of war, and on 21 April 1939 formal approval was granted for the army’s strength to be increased to six Regular and twenty-six Territorial divisions.⁵ This was simply too late. Given the British

army’s sudden expansion and the government’s belated acceptance of a continental commitment, no amount of extemporization or hard work could train and equip the field force for a major conflict in 1939 or possibly even in the following year, let alone the entire army.⁶

Lest one think that the German army was a flawless war machine, it should be remembered that it suffered from severe problems before the start of the Second World War. Firstly, while tactical training for German officers was very good overall, it was excessively oriented toward the tactical sphere of military activity. Logistics and intelligence were neglected, as were the strategic and political components of war.⁷ This was reflected in *Kriegsakademie* (war academy) training, aptly described by two U.S. Army exchange officers, Capt. Harlan N. Hartness and Albert C. Wedemeyer, who had attended from 1935 to 1937 and from 1936 to 1938, respectively. In his first year, Hartness’s class spent roughly ten hours

in an average week studying tactics, but only about two hours studying logistics. In his second year, the course of instruction included at least ten hours for tactics but only two for logistics. Wedemeyer reported that in both of his years at the *Kriegsakademie*, the course of instruction included about six hours per week on tactics and that the class was at the disposal of the tactical instructor for one whole day per week. During both years, only approximately two hours of instruction per week were devoted to supply issues. Hartness and Wedemeyer both stated that the *Kriegsakademie* had twelve tactical instructors but only two for logistics.⁸ Neither Hartness nor

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George Orwell (*back row, third from left*) poses for a photograph during training with the Indian Imperial Police in Burma, 1923. (Photo courtesy of Georgeorwellnovels.com)

Wedemeyer mentioned intelligence in their descriptions of the Kriegsakademie curriculum. Nor were the methods for supplying mechanized or motorized formations well developed, and the Germans were even willing to rely on improvisation. They accepted the idea that armored and light formations would frequently have to operate without concern for their rearward communications. While these formations also had to be amply equipped, particularly with fuel and ammunition, they might possibly be ordered to forage for supplies.⁹ In fact, by the start of the war, the German army had not figured out how to supply tanks and other vehicles with the enormous quantity of fuel they would require.¹⁰ As a result, armored formations would have great difficulty in maintaining a decisive effort.

Secondly, the German army underwent a rapid and enormous expansion from Adolf Hitler's rise to power on 31 January 1933 until 1 September 1939, growing from just 100,000 men to 2,741,064 men for the Field Army and its reserves, and 996,040 men for the Replacement Army.¹¹ A huge shortage of officers resulted, which seriously strained the German army's ability to train them properly despite an expansion of the training program and a reduction in its duration. On 1 April 1939, when the active army had reached a strength of about one million men, it had just

over twenty-five thousand officers and five hundred General Staff officers. This was half of what an army of its size needed.¹² By the end of 1938, only one-seventh of Wehrmacht officers had been officers before 1933, and their quality failed to meet the standards of even the Imperial German Army. Junior officers lacked adequate experience and training, and it was not possible to train young line officers to the requisite standard over the short term.¹³ The reality was that only about one quarter of the German army (twelve of the sixteen motorized and armored divisions) had enough equipment and training to be considered prepared for combat. The conventional infantry divisions that made up the mass of the army lacked a sufficient number of officers and an even greater number of noncommissioned officers, which meant that few of these divisions had been sufficiently trained.¹⁴ The army failed to train the number of General Staff officers needed for its expansion as well. The General Staff's three-year training program was reduced to two years by the fall of 1935, and the longer program was not reinstated before the war. It was hoped that

the shortage of officers could be surmounted in the short term by reducing periods of active service and deferring the reinstatement of the three-year training program until the fall of 1941, but a loss of quality was consciously accepted.¹⁵ Although the German training situation was not entirely negative, Franz Halder, chief of the General Staff, reached the conclusion that satisfactory unit and leadership training for the entire army would not be achieved until 1943 at the earliest.¹⁶

Lastly, it is not often realized that the British army's level of motorization was greater than that of the German army. By September 1939, the British

army, which totaled 892,697 men, was separated into thirty-one divisions (two armored and twenty-nine infantry).¹⁷ It was smaller than its German rival, and it went to war almost fully motorized. The British War Department possessed approximately fifty-five thousand vehicles when hostilities began.¹⁸ Mobility was at a premium because every British division had a complete complement of motor transport, and every British corps incorporated a troop-transport company of the Royal Army Service Corps that could carry the infantry of a complete brigade.¹⁹ Granted, the situation left much to be desired. When the British Expeditionary Force went to France in 1939, four Indian mule companies were still utilized and some fourteen thousand civilian vehicles were pressed into service. Maintenance problems were also a major concern.²⁰ Shortcomings notwithstanding, the British made serious efforts to achieve the mobility they sought through a high level of motorization.

The German army, however, was only partially motorized. It totaled fifty-one active divisions by the

war's start, and it consisted of an elite core and a mass conscript army.²¹ The former was composed of sixteen armored, light, and motorized divisions containing approximately two hundred thousand officers and enlisted personnel that possessed weapons and equip-

ment that were mostly new and extremely mobile. The latter was made up of conventional infantry divisions furnished with weapons dating back to World War I or with commandeered Czech equipment. The regular infantry divisions marched on foot, and experience would show that they were barely more mobile than infantry that existed seventy years before while their

artillery and transport predominantly relied on horses. One force was mobile and swift while the other was plodding and sluggish.²²

Basics of the German Training System

Despite the problems mentioned above, standards for the training of officers in the German army were extremely rigorous during the interwar period. Becoming a fully qualified junior officer in the *Reichswehr* took approximately four years, and this training program continued during the Nazi era.²³ Each officer candidate spent six months training with an infantry regiment as an enlisted man before transferring to a regular company where he was treated as any other ordinary soldier in company and large-scale maneuvers.²⁴ During the autumn and winter, when garrison training was conducted, classes in military administration, weapons, tactics, equitation, and the other arms of service were taught in the afternoon after company training and duties were completed in the



A Vickers Light Dragon field artillery tractor tows a limber (two-wheeled cart) and a 3.7 inch howitzer of A Battery (The Chestnut Troop), Royal Horse Artillery, British Army, in 1938. (Photo courtesy of Wikimedia Commons)

morning. The officer candidate would act as a junior section leader during this year with the regiment, and tactical exercises and lectures were also held.²⁵ One and a half years after enlisting, the candidate would be promoted to corporal, and after another three months, he would be promoted to sergeant. By this time, divisional exercises would have taken place. After passing the Officer Candidate Examination, which included subjects on general knowledge as well as the various service branches, he would be sent to the infantry school.²⁶ Tactics, camouflage, mapping, motor technology, aerial warfare, riding, foreign languages, and civics were among the courses of instruction. Tactics for a reinforced battalion were taught at this stage, and a very difficult test on civilian and military topics was held after the first six months. Fifty-eight officer candidates failed this exam at the infantry school in Dresden in 1927. Those who failed returned to their regiments and were normally discharged.²⁷ After one year in the infantry school, candidates from the other branches were transferred to the respective branch schools. More military courses were taught at all branch schools during the second year than in the first year, and tactics were the main theme. A six-week exam period, which

included oral examinations, eliminated several more candidates.²⁸ Finally, students were sent back to their regiments where they served as troop leaders and participated in an education program that incorporated foreign language courses, staff rides, and lectures. Once they passed the officer examination, regimental officers and the regimental commander would formally approve the candidates. The Reichswehr minister would make the final decision in cases where an aspirant's abilities were questioned.²⁹ This program was one of the most arduous officer training systems ever devised. Not only was German officer training extremely realistic, but it was modernized to the greatest extent practicable by taking account of the newest technology.³⁰

This training system was continued until 1937 when a shorter two-year program was put into effect, but the stringent requirements for obtaining an officer's commission were retained.³¹ Training was still divided in the same way, but it became more practical, with

A machine gun crew takes action during military maneuvers in Frankfurt district in the presence of the Chief of Army Command Colonel-General Wilhelm Heye in 1930. (Photo courtesy of the German Federal Archives via Wikimedia Commons)





German soldiers conduct MG34 gun training in 1939. (Photo courtesy of Wikipedia France)

the officer candidates receiving nine hours of tactical instruction per week rather than six hours per week as previously.³² Tactical field training without troops became more pragmatic as well. Before 1937, student officers were given a problem by their instructors and given roughly an hour to investigate the terrain and contemplate their answers, but after the change, they were only given a few minutes to develop an answer. A few students would then be called upon to present their answers, and then the instructors would walk the students through the plans to show how they might develop. Criticisms of each plan would be offered, but nothing was allowed to discourage initiative or daring.³³

The continued military education of German officers was also arduous. Taking the General Staff entrance exam (formally known as the Military District Examinations) was mandatory for all officers starting in 1921, and the system was expanded in the Nazi era until the outbreak of war with few changes. Subjects included field craft, weaponry, history, geography, foreign languages, physics, mathematics, chemistry,

and physical exercises. There was a heavy emphasis on tactical affairs.³⁴ Preparation for the General Staff exam was a major event in an officer's career and had to take place during his free time. Preparation usually took five months, an indication of the examination's difficulty. Examinees formed study groups, conferences were held, a correspondence course was offered, and General Staff officers published various tactical textbooks and study guides to help the examinees prepare themselves.³⁵ The excitement associated with the actual test, which took four days, was even seen as a kind of substitute for war's strain. Only the top 10–15 percent were accepted for General Staff training. If an officer failed the test, he could take it again the following year, but failing it twice could mean the loss of his commission.³⁶

The fact that the test was mandatory meant that the entire officer corps became a recruiting pool for the General Staff. It also forced junior officers into an intensive study course and placed an additional obstacle before less-educated officers. Graduates had to serve with regular formations as troop commanders, and

they enjoyed important benefits.³⁷ Despite the importance placed on character and practical evaluations, there can be no doubt that the German army highly valued technical proficiency and intellectual aptitude.

As previously referenced, the Germans severely overemphasized the operational and tactical levels of war. The main advantage was that most soldiers operate at the tactical or operational level, so German officers were better prepared to win battles than their counterparts. The main disadvantage was that Germany suffered at the strategic and political levels. German officers were not permitted to participate in any political activity. Strategy, politics, international

affairs, and economics were all included in the General Staff course, but these subjects and the industrial aspects of warfare did not receive the appropriate emphasis. One should also realize that Hitler removed his military leaders from the sphere of strategic decisions.³⁸ In any event, German officers tended to have a relatively narrow world view compared with British officers.

Basics of the British Training System

The training standards for officers in the British army during the interwar period were far below those of the German army. On 4 March 1938, a committee chaired by Brig. H. R. S. Massy completed a confidential report, which was concerned with the military training and education of the British Officer Corps.³⁹ The Massy report offered a scathing indictment of the British officer training program as it then existed. The training system of the British Officer Corps fell short in two key ways which were crucial to the conduct of war: training in command duties and leadership were

disregarded for the most part, and there was a serious lack of emphasis on tactical training. After noting that the ideal leader was a commander who possessed the qualities of the man of action, the thinker, and the trained technician, this report complained that there was no systematic or institutionalized way of training

officers: "It is surprising to find that no organization exists in the Army to provide a comprehensive and systematic training for the production of this type of officer."⁴⁰ There was no establishment responsible for the tactical training of officers or cadets. The committee recommended that a dedicated organization be set up so that every officer would "receive a comprehensive

and thorough training in this the most important of all military subjects."⁴¹ Commanders were responsible for both the tactical and administrative training of their subordinate officers, but they were so overburdened with administrative tasks that they found it hard to find the time to train them. Moreover, it was acknowledged that there were good commanders who were not good instructors, and that as a rule, formations were deficient in officers who were fit to aid commanders with officer education in a proper manner. Accordingly, the Massy committee felt that a more thorough scheme for training should be implemented, and that relieving commanders and other officers of their burdensome administrative load would improve training.⁴²

It cannot be denied that tactical training in the British army left much to be desired. To say that inadequate emphasis was placed on this subject would be an understatement. After graduating from one of the military academies or a university, an officer who joined an infantry battalion or cavalry regiment



A 3.7 inch howitzer crew of A Battery (The Chestnut Troop), Royal Horse Artillery, British Army, prepare their gun for firing during an exercise in 1938. (Photo courtesy of Wikimedia Commons)

received no training whatsoever in weapons or minor tactics before reaching his unit. The Massy committee felt this practice was completely unacceptable.⁴³ Nor was the committee content that classes for instructors at the army's weapons training schools spent enough time teaching tactics, and it was disturbed by the failure rates after conducting a review of the promotion examinations for the previous three years. The average failure rate for tactics and map reading (they were grouped together) was 32 percent for captains and 26 percent for subalterns, and the Massy committee was certain that officers were simply not up to the requisite standard for tactics and training.⁴⁴

Additionally, the British army spent an inordinate amount of time occupied with activities such as drill. For instance, roughly 8 percent of the total time at the Royal Military Academy and roughly 10 percent of the time spent at the Royal Military College was used to practice drill, which the Massy committee considered excessive.⁴⁵ John Masters, who wrote of his time at Sandhurst in the 1930s, even went so far as to say that his prospects for promotion depended on his proficiency at drill.⁴⁶ Furthermore, the Staff College focused on staff duties and the higher levels of the art of war. Too much time was spent on the broader strategic and political matters of imperial defense and on preparing students to command corps and armies. Consequently, excellent grand strategists were often created, but capable divisional and corps commanders were occasionally in very short supply.⁴⁷ This was problematic because there were not enough commanders who were competent tacticians or who were able to handle larger formations in battle effectively, particularly when compared with the Germans.

Moreover, the Massy report contained implicit criticisms of the regimental system and the ways in which it functioned during the latter 1930s: "We consider that the Army is suffering to-day [*sic*] from the presence of far too many officers who have never succeeded in breaking away from the humdrum existence of regimental soldiering and who, as a result of this fact and years of stagnation in promotion, have lost most of the enthusiasm with which they entered the service."⁴⁸ According to the Massy committee, the most significant reason for this attitude was that officers were not adequately encouraged to go away from their regiments for a time to gain broader experience.⁴⁹ The Massy

committee continued by criticizing the British practice of combined arms:

One of the greatest failings of the Army to-day [*sic*] is parochialism and a totally insufficient knowledge, on the part of officers, of arms other than their own.

This parochialism continues on the part of many officers until they reach high rank. It is obviously wrong that any officer should be promoted to command a formation unless he has a thorough grasp of the capabilities, limitations and tactical handling, of every arm in the service.

In our opinion, the best way of ensuring this will be by insistence on a large expansion of the system of attachment to other arms.⁵⁰

It was argued that, as a matter of principle, all officers should gain experience outside their regiments, and that service on the general staff should not be the only form of service outside the regiment that an officer undertook. Besides attachments to other arms, attachments to the Territorial Army or to the Royal Air Force, as well as colonial service, both military and civilian, were regarded as useful in helping a British officer broaden his outlook.⁵¹ The regimental system as such did not intrinsically lead to poor cooperation among the different arms of service. However, a serious training deficiency during the interwar period, which limited the combined training of units and commanders of different services to a five-week period at the end of the annual training cycle, led to a fundamental problem with regard to efficient combined arms practices.⁵² Although the regimental system had its advantages, the parochialism and narrow mindset fostered by it added to the difficulties that the British experienced with their combined arms training because they tended to undermine the idea of cooperation and limited its perceived value.⁵³

Operations in the Western Desert during 1941–1942 reinforce this point. Cooperation between arms was not intended to be close during Operation Battleaxe (15–18 June 1941), which took place along the Egyptian-Libyan border. For example, Maj.-Gen. F. W. Messervy, the commander of 4th Indian Division, referred to the advance in the Capuzzo area on 15 June when he insisted:

The method of our attack was to be for the 'I' [infantry] tanks to go in to the objectives

with the close support of the arty [artillery]. Infantry would follow in M.T. [motorized transport] and wait at about ten minutes' distance (5000) yards for the signal that the tanks had the area under control. The infantry would then move in and take over the objective.⁵⁴

Combined arms problems persisted. During the Battle of Gazala (26 May–21 June 1942), British tankers outright refused to cooperate with the infantry. At 0815 hours on 5 June, 2nd Highland Light Infantry requested support from some British tanks to their south, but “the tanks replied that they could [not] help as they had no orders to do so.”⁵⁵

The Training of “Higher Commanders”

Both armies tended to use the vague term “higher commander.” The German army differentiated between higher command and lower command. The former referred to formations down to the size of a division, whereas the latter referred to units smaller than the division.⁵⁶ The third volume of the British army’s *Field Service Regulations* (1935) was intended to provide guidance for

officers who worked almost continually in staff positions and had “dangerously little experience” in command positions were appointed to command brigades and higher formations. It was estimated that this would take several years to correct. The leaders who would take up higher commands in war were still chosen to a certain degree based on their performance during the First World War, but it was expected that officers must soon be selected on the basis of their performance during peacetime exercises. It was important that many maneuvers be undertaken so that commanders could practice and gain experience in their wartime tasks and allow for the assessment of formations’ abilities. The committee recommended that the War Office manage maneuvers at the corps level instead of the commanding generals, so that the latter and their staffs would be given the opportunity to participate. It was also suggested that commanders of neighboring units or other officers might plan and direct exercises for a particular unit so that its commander would be able to work with his staff and practice handling his formation. An additional problem was presented by the fact that only the Aldershot Command had enough communications facilities for two divisions to face each other in

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the tactical conduct of combined arms formations and it dealt with warfare from the higher commander’s perspective.⁵⁷ In practice, a “higher commander” was usually head of a division or larger formation.

Hardly any commanders of divisions or larger units in the British army received any instruction at all in their duties from their superiors. Senior officers were occupied in preparing and managing maneuvers for junior officers and they were given little or no chance to be in charge. One British general said, with reference to the 1937 War Office Exercise, “It was the first time I have had to make up my mind on any strategical or tactical problem during the last ten years.”⁵⁸ There was also an overpowering consensus, particularly among the generals whose advice was sought, that too many

maneuvers. Other commands did not have sufficient communications to carry out divisional skeleton exercises, which resulted in the neglect of the training of divisional commanders.⁵⁹

The disparity between the British and the Germans was again striking. Two important aspects of German officer training helped to provide them with better tactical and operational skills. Firstly, the German army recognized that the chaos, ambiguity, and unforeseen problems that frequently occur on the battlefield had to be dealt with effectively. This was to be done by seizing and maintaining the initiative and by being generally proactive. Secondly, the *Kriegsakademie*’s leadership training at the operational and tactical levels focused on what was referred to as “troop leading.” This

educational method tended to deal with unanticipated difficulties. Officer education that was totally or partially related to the tactical realm dealt with students evaluating the possibilities of a particular scenario, coming to conclusions, and estimating space and time variables. Nonetheless, “each student living and feeling that the situation is a part of him and he a part of it, that a detached, contemplative solution may function as a proper product but not as a life and blood proposition,” was even more imperative.⁶⁰ This was done

will ordinarily come to him only as a rather unsatisfactory surprise.⁶²

This was a benefit for the Germans since they were more psychologically prepared to alter their plans during active operations than the British, who did not systematically undergo similar training. At least in theory, German commanders were also more likely to act faster than their British counterparts when preparing and executing a contingency plan due to their previous training. Because the Germans considered the combat actions of



A student at the Kriegsakademie, like a commander on active service, was to imagine himself and his troops as they would be in the field.



through realistic training that presented the confusion and uncertainty of warfare instead of a “complete and harmonious picture,” as well as an emphasis on a war of maneuver and issuing orders. Students would be given a scenario one day previously so that they would be able to familiarize themselves with the situation. The next day each would be given a role, such as commander, operations officer, or infantry commander, and additional information regarding the situation might be provided. The students would then conduct themselves as they would in action, with the instructor developing the scenario realistically by doing things such as introducing difficulties or problems and allowing the commander to receive intelligence about the enemy. The intention was to produce sensible decisions rapidly.⁶¹ In short, a student at the Kriegsakademie, like a commander on active service, was to imagine himself and his troops as they would be in the field:

No purely mechanical or mathematical process can alone solve his problem. He must thoroughly live this problem. He must troop lead it. And so must a commander in action. When even theoretically in problems, he has lived and relived these troop leading situations, his conduct in the presence of troops is even more secure, more that of a commander. He is not waiting for more accurate and detailed information of the enemy, which in fact

corps and divisions to be tactical, troop leading can be considered to be mainly tactical, but it has an application at the operational level as well. German officers were expected to use the concept of troop leading even when serving in higher command positions.⁶³ It has been stated that blitzkrieg represented an “operational opportunism” without standardized techniques that sought to break the opposing leadership’s will through the greatest exploitation of success possible.⁶⁴ There is undoubtedly truth to this. The Germans never developed or specified a definitive list of general military principles during the interwar period.⁶⁵ Instead, they used the processes described above as an alternative to teach its officers a methodology for dealing with tactical and operational problems, but this technique was not a doctrine as the term is currently understood.

Freedom of Action versus Methodical Battle

German officers were given great freedom of action in carrying out their missions, and the German command system was highly decentralized. A key concept, referred to as *Auftragstaktik* (mission orders) embodied the German attitude toward command. The fundamental nature of *Auftragstaktik* was that a subordinate commander had a duty to attempt the execution of his superior’s mission concept continuously. Initiative was an inherently vital element for mission-oriented

command. Subordinate commanders were to complete their commander's objective regardless of whether they had orders or whether their orders applied to changing conditions. Moreover, every commander, noncommissioned officer, and even the enlisted man was to do whatever the circumstances demanded according to his own judgment. If a given action was deemed necessary, a German soldier should carry it out unquestionably without waiting for orders from his superior. This included contradicting orders if they were believed to be inconsistent with the present circumstances.⁶⁶ Put simply, *Auftragstaktik* meant that a commander issued broad goals or objectives and then permitted his subordinates to fulfill their role in the commander's scheme the best way they saw fit. This was in contrast to *Befehlstaktik*, which was a rigid and authoritarian style of command. *Befehlstaktik* involved "top-down" control with a commanding officer giving his subordinates inflexible orders that left little or no opportunity to employ their initiative. *Auftragstaktik* only dictated what was to be done, whereas *Befehlstaktik* dictated what was to be accomplished and how this was to be

In any event, the British army had a very methodical view of how to conduct battles, and it stressed consolidation and order over exploitation and improvisation.⁶⁹ For instance, use of artillery, whether offensively or defensively, was described as taking place in stages.⁷⁰ An assault against an opponent who possessed a prepared defensive system was likely to be carried out according to a timed program, especially in its opening phases in which tanks and artillery fire would assist the infantry in obtaining definite objectives. In the following stages, newly held objectives were to be utilized as springboards to hinder the enemy's ability to arrange counterattacks and to maintain momentum. When attacking a disorganized enemy defense, use was to be made of a plan limited in scope, and the attack was to move from one objective to the next, with a new plan of action chosen after each victory.⁷¹ The desirability of exercising an orderly command also contributed to the British army's precise conception of battle. For instance, it was thought that "a limiting factor is the control of the commander, be he platoon, company or battalion commander; on no account should infantry



The idea of a methodical battle could be an advantage, particularly when operations were more static in nature.



attained. Furthermore, commanders, especially those of divisions, were to place themselves far forward so that they could remain in touch with the current situation.⁶⁷

Just one example of the German system's benefits is provided by the British counterattack with the help of French tanks against German armor at Arras on 21 May 1940, where the Germans were so surprised that they thought there were five British divisions in the area. The German units panicked and their leading divisions were delayed. Erwin Rommel, then commander of the 7th Panzer Division, was almost killed when he personally brought antitank and anti-aircraft guns to bear against the British Matilda tanks, but the German advance resumed after suffering only a local setback.⁶⁸ Forward command and improvisation carried the day.

battalions be so extended that efficient control is lost.⁶⁹ The subordinate commander was even warned that his offensive and defensive plans "should not look too far ahead," the implication apparently being that doing so would either distract the commander from his current duties, or would be a waste of his energy because the situation could change in the meantime.⁷³

However, the idea of a methodical battle could be an advantage, particularly when operations were more static in nature. Before the Second Battle of Alemein (23 October–11 November 1942), the Axis forces established a defensive position with their flanks anchored on the Mediterranean Sea in the north and the Qattara Depression in the south. This consisted of large minefields, behind which was a fortified line of infantry supported by armored formations further to the rear.⁷⁴

The British relied on the extensive use of firepower to break through this defensive network and defeat the Axis. The opening artillery barrages of the two main British operations that occurred during the battle, Lightfoot and Supercharge, were prime examples with the former as the largest the British army had fired since the First World War.⁷⁵ The Germans were unable to employ a mobile defense, and they were forced to fight Second Alamein on their enemy's terms.

The Issue of Uniformity

German officers were required to serve a term of twenty-five years.⁷⁶ Because they served for such an extended period, training German officers to a higher, more consistent standard was easier, at least until the army's rapid expansion during the latter 1930s. The General Staff played a large role in this. Tactical instructors at the Kriegsakademie based their teaching on the *Truppenführung*, their "Military Bible," which they knew meticulously.⁷⁷ One Kriegsakademie student asserted that the instructors were "thoroughly trained in the application of the tactical principles laid down in the German Field Service Regulations (*Truppen Fuehrung I*). Therefore, sufficient uniformity of ideas is accomplished without creating a too academic and stultified atmosphere."⁷⁸ Each officer was required to be intimately familiar with German army doctrine, and the entire army was to function within the cogent structure created by it. For instance, General Staff officers were assigned to every senior regional and operational headquarters, and at least one or two General Staff officers were assigned to every division where they usually served as the commander and/or the operations officer. These men provided an example, issued orders, monitored and remarked on training, and gave lectures regularly. Additionally, German officers avidly read military journals, which contained articles on contemporary military thinking and military history that members of the General Staff wrote. The General Staff's standing among the German officer corps was also helpful in persuading individual officers to conform to the ideas offered in these writings.⁷⁹

The British army again contrasted sharply with the Germans since their approach to tactical issues lacked uniformity. This goes beyond the problems associated with training officers to serve in the wide-ranging conditions of the British Empire's distant outposts around

the globe. One reason for the desire to establish a "cycle d'information" for senior officers was to propagate a sensible tactical doctrine throughout the army.⁸⁰ The Massy report also included a proposal for sending young officers from the infantry and cavalry arms to courses on the tactical uses of the appropriate weapons. But straightforward policies for the employment of weapons had to be developed before this system could be implemented.⁸¹ Tactics were regarded as a subject requiring the collaboration of all arms, but if the units themselves were solely responsible for tactical training, competent instructors who could place the activities of the other service arms in proper context were only rarely available. The Massy committee proposed that a central school be created for training junior commanders in tactics so that its students would be imbued with a common tactical doctrine. It felt this was the best way of giving every officer sound tactical training that would supply a good basis for additional instruction and that it would allow officers to participate in their formation's instructional team.⁸²

Professionalism

British officer training did not stress professionalism adequately, and this encouraged disrespect for the development of tactical expertise and professional skill in general. British officers were required to attain a minimum standard of proficiency in the fundamental technical aspects of their craft (including subjects such as gunnery, musketry, and transport), and one reason for modifying the syllabus of compulsory promotion examinations was to infuse regimental officers with the knowledge necessary to perform their duties.⁸³ Nevertheless, British officers prized a gentleman-officer ideal and amateurishness, esteemed honor, bravery, good manners, and character in particular, but they did not regard ambition, ability, drive, merit, or intelligence highly. The main goal of British military schools by the interwar period was the development of character rather than professional expertise. At Sandhurst, one was expected to be proficient but not to be seen as actually "trying" under any circumstances.⁸⁴ One officer insisted in 1932: "There is no place for the mere bookworm. Let us keep in mind, therefore, throughout this talk on personal study that the goal at which we aim is men of character and sound judgment with the capacity for leadership, and not mere pundits."⁸⁵ An

officer's bearing and upbringing were what counted. While the technical branches were more professional and graded applicants according to their qualifications, the more prestigious cavalry and infantry regiments highly regarded "social suitability" as a principal mea-



British officers of the Coldstream Guards participate in a TEWT (tactical exercise without troops) at Fleet's Corner, Dorset, 1941. (Photo courtesy of Imperial War Museums, H8480)

sure for acceptance and did not consider those serving in technical branches to be soldiers in a proper sense. Equitation and athletic ability were the only highly regarded skills. Besides the resentment felt toward Staff College graduates that was observed among officers who did not attend the course, the Massy committee noted that instructors at the Royal Military College and Royal Military Academy were chosen for their proficiency at games or their "smartness" instead of their teaching ability or the knowledge of the subjects they taught.⁸⁶ It was even suggested that a course of instruction for mechanized cavalry officers be limited to five days a week so that the students could reserve a day for hunting.⁸⁷ The lack of professionalism within the British Officer Corps was a considerable problem.

In spite of the importance with which the commander's judgment was regarded, the British did not believe that battlefield leadership was an extraordinary activity that required specialized, rigorous training. The 1935 *Field Service Regulations* even likened the duties of a commander to the demands of a sport: "His next duty is

to apply to his task the commonsense rules which have guided all fighting since the earliest days, rules which the boxer, for example, learns and follows instinctively in the ring."⁸⁸ Tactics were thought to be dominated by "simple commonsense precepts," which were generally analo-

gous to the principles that presided over daily life, and a commander who prepared a plan for a military operation and a civilian who arranged a business transaction were thought to go through a similar process that required balanced discretion and common sense.⁸⁹ Nonetheless, war was different because of the frequent occurrence of fatigue and fear, because information was more difficult to obtain and less dependable, and because time was more pressing. In the British view, the problem was that the circumstances of war were so dissimilar from those that prevailed in peacetime, not

that war called for attributes that were different from the ones that peace demanded.⁹⁰ Neither the theoretical basis of war nor the philosophy of war was examined in the British army.

The German army's view of war was quite different. War was a severely challenging enterprise for the Germans that required a particular kind of leader with special qualities. Moral and psychological factors were fundamental to their understanding of the subject and the role that officers were expected to fulfill. It was thought that "the conduct of war is an art, a free, creative activity that is based on scientific principles. It places the highest demands on the personality."⁹¹ Consequently, the necessity for character was paramount: "War poses the severest test for the individual's moral and physical powers of resistance. That is why in war quality of character outweighs that of intellect. Some stand out on the field of battle who would be overlooked in peace."⁹² *Truppenführung* continued with the remark:

Every man, from the youngest soldier upwards, must be required at all times to employ

independently his entire mental, spiritual and physical strength. Only in this way will the complete capability of the troops be shown to advantage in decisive action. Only then will men develop, who will also maintain courage and determination in the hour of danger and carry their weaker comrades with them to achieve bold deeds.⁹³

Army and troop command required men of judgment with clear vision and foresight, a resistance against the fluctuations of the fortunes of war, and the ability to make independent and firm decisions and to carry them out with energy and persistence. An officer was expected to display a superiority of experience and knowledge, self-control, high courage, and “moral seriousness.” Officers and men serving in a leadership capacity were considered to have a decisive influence on the troops, and an officer who showed determination, coolness, and daring when opposing the enemy would be an effective leader. An officer also needed to possess a keen sense of the high degree of responsibility he had taken on, and the willingness to accept responsibility was considered the most important quality of a leader.⁹⁴

In this context, the term “character” did not imply that a person was morally upstanding but rather one who was able to withstand the mental and emotional shock of war. In another sense, character came to mean discipline and obedience more than an individual’s educational achievements or social origins. This became such a problem that Colonel-General Wilhelm Heye, chief of Army Command from 1926 to 1930, commented



British troops conduct a road march, 1930. (Screen capture courtesy of British Pathé)

as early as 22 September 1927 that the German army had a propensity for creating officers who possessed “the debilitating character of lackeys.” They tended to be conformists rather than independent thinkers.⁹⁵ When combined with their comparatively limited world view, it is no wonder that German officers were less likely to oppose Hitler’s rise to power and more likely to become complicit in the crimes of the Nazis.⁹⁶

Large-Scale Training

The Germans possessed yet another important advantage in that their large-scale unit training was far superior to that of the British. In Britain, the Army Council instituted a new training program for higher formations that started in 1938.⁹⁷ It consisted of a two-year cycle. In the first year, battalion, brigade, and inter-brigade training and a War Office skeleton force exercise, which included General Headquarters and at least one corps, would be carried out. Divisions would not usually assemble for training purposes in these years. In the second year, divisions would assemble for training purposes and army exercises would take place in which forces about the size of corps would fight each other. Each year, the Southern and Aldershot Commands were supposed to conduct corps-strength skeleton force exercises.⁹⁸ The British army had only carried out two large-scale maneuvers in which troops and corps headquarters or their equivalent participated between 1919 and 1937, and it was not scheduled to do



British army maneuvers, 1930. (Screen capture courtesy of British Pathé)



German Army recruits march in somewhat ragged ranks during a military drill in 1933. (Photo courtesy of the Warfare History Network)

so until 1939. They also conducted four skeleton force maneuvers for higher formations from 1931 to 1937, but they were less effective than full-scale exercises.⁹⁹

Although it was a definite improvement, the new training plan was less valuable than it could have been because divisions were only to be brought together for training every second year, and the focus of training was still at the relatively small battalion, brigade, and inter-brigade levels during the intervening years. Some individuals, such as Chief of the Imperial General Staff Field Marshal Sir Cyril Deverell, and Adjutant General Lt. Gen. Sir Harry Knox felt that full-scale exercises in which commanders fought each other in as close to realistic conditions as possible were the best preparation in the art of command, but the potential for gaining valuable experience by holding them every year, as was done before World War I, was lost.¹⁰⁰ In any case, it had little time to have any worthwhile impact since the new training cycle had begun practically on the eve of war. As a result, the British army was not well practiced in conducting war on a large scale.

Quite the opposite was true for the Germans. They had become quite proficient in the conduct of large-scale military operations. The German army's chief combat formation was the division, which was reflected by how it conducted maneuvers.¹⁰¹ The Reichswehr used most

of its forces to conduct multidivisional exercises in 1926. The German army maneuvers of that year were significant since they demonstrated that it had started to master the art of directing a mobile war with combined arms. Annual multidivisional exercises in which the majority of the army participated were held every year until the 1930s, and the timetable for group and divisional training intensified after Hitler's accession to power.¹⁰² One feature of German exercises was to provide each side with an initial scenario that contained very limited intelligence concerning the hostile force. During the army's expansion in the 1930s, great stress was placed on severe, challenging training in all exercises.¹⁰³

By the middle of the 1930s the German army was conducting the largest exercises since before the First World War. Nearly fifty thousand German soldiers participated in exercises at Hesse from 21 to 25 September 1936. These were the largest maneuvers since 1913, with two sides, including components of five divisions, facing off against each other.¹⁰⁴ These maneuvers were dwarfed by the 1937 Mecklenburg exercises in which 160,000 men, 830 tanks, 21,000 vehicles, and 25,000 horses took

part. Eight infantry divisions, one armored division, one armored brigade, seven antiaircraft battalions, and six reconnaissance squadrons were involved, with blue forces established as a complete army group and red forces established as an army.¹⁰⁵ The maneuver lasted a full week, and the strain on all participating commanders was probably as close to actual war as any exercise has ever been. The Mecklenburg exercises, which also included aircraft, showed that the army's doctrine was well developed and that armored divisions were capable of independent action.¹⁰⁶ The value of such maneuvers was obvious: "Invaluable experience, in combat exercises and maneuvers with war-strength units and combined arms, contributes to a professional knowledge, that renders cooperative initiative almost axiomatic."¹⁰⁷ The Germans' constant emphasis on multidivisional maneuvers was so great that one historian even claimed that in 1940, the average German major or captain took part in more multidivisional exercises than the typical French or British general.¹⁰⁸ One should also remember that other types of prewar experience, such as the annexation of Austria in 1938, helped to prepare the German army for war.¹⁰⁹

Conclusion

Both sides had serious training problems. Neither the British nor the Germans had the right mixture of leaders for the strategic, operational, and tactical levels of war. Since the German army was a two-tier force, with the smaller of the two fully motorized and able to maneuver more rapidly, it was less able to take advantage of the concepts of *Auftragstaktik* and troop leading than a greater level of motorization would have allowed. For its part, the British army's methodical conception of battle was a poor fit for its higher level of mobility, which would have enabled it to maneuver more quickly. Despite their difficulties, the Germans

had a number of significant advantages over the British, who largely failed at the most basic level. The Germans did create disciplined conformists, but at least they were meticulous, exacting, and consistent in the demands that they placed on their officers during their tactical training. The twenty-five-year service requirement for officers facilitated these high standards, and this was an extremely important advantage, particularly when one considers that most soldiers do not serve as strategists and just how difficult it was to defeat the Germans on the battlefield. In addition, the fact that the British conducted so few military exercises during the interwar period was a major flaw, particularly when compared with the number and type of training maneuvers the Germans carried out. However, the overriding lesson of this study is the need for armies to set up training programs optimized to create the right kinds of leaders in sufficient numbers for impending hostilities. Predicting the future is often difficult, but the burden for doing so is ever present nonetheless.

At any rate, a military culture that stressed technical proficiency, rewarded intellectual aptitude, regarded war as the harshest test of the individual, and sought to create an officer who could act decisively and quickly under the stress of realistic battlefield conditions was definitely superior to one that lacked these characteristics. Finally, the British army's shortage of funding and its ambiguous role with regard to the nation's defense further handicapped it. Thus, it is not difficult to understand that the British army's preparation for war, which included a more amateurish attitude and a methodical, but less realistic view of combat, would be trumped by the German approach. To put it another way, British officers may have chosen the profession of arms as the way they made their living, but their training, experience, and fundamental attitude did not make them professionals in the German sense. ■

Notes

1. Brian Bond, *British Military Policy between the Two World Wars* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980), 8; J. P. Harris, *Men, Ideas and Tanks: British Military Thought and Armoured Forces, 1903–1939* (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 1995), 273, 301.

2. Quoted in Harris, *Men, Ideas and Tanks*, 253.

3. Williamson Murray and Allan R. Millett, *Military Innovation in the Interwar Period* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 10.

4. Bond, *British Military Policy*, 188; Elizabeth Kier, *Imagining War: French and British Military Doctrine between the Wars* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997), 119.

5. David French, *The British Way in Warfare, 1688-2000* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1990), 193; M. M. Postan, *British War Production* (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1952), 72; G. C. Peden, *British Rearmament and the Treasury: 1932-1939* (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1979), 149. It was not envisaged that a thirty-two division army would actually be fielded until twelve months after the commencement of hostilities.

6. Bond, *British Military Policy*, 328.

7. Murray and Millett, *Military Innovation in the Interwar Period*, 47.

8. Captain Harlan N. Hartness, Report No. 15,260, The German General Staff School (Kriegsakademie), 27 April 1937, pp. 4-5, 7; Box 1113; Records of the War Department General and Special Staffs, Record Group 165; National Archives at College Park, MD (hereinafter cited as Hartness Report [27 April]). Captain Albert C. Wedemeyer, Report No. 15,999, Report on German General Staff School, 11 July 1938, pp. 7-9; Box 1113; Records of the War Department General and Special Staffs, Record Group 165; National Archives at College Park, MD (hereinafter cited as Wedemeyer Report). Capts. Harlan N. Hartness and Albert C. Wedemeyer were U.S. Army officers who attended the German *Kriegsakademie* during the 1930s as exchange officers. Hartness's class probably spent eleven hours studying tactics per week in his second year, but the layout of the report cited here makes it difficult to determine this with certainty.

9. *Truppenführung: II. Teil, Unveränderter Nachdruck* [Troop command: Part II, unaltered version] (Berlin: E. S. Mittler & Sohn, 1940), 7-8.

10. Mary R. Habeck, *Storm of Steel: The Development of Armor Doctrine in Germany and the Soviet Union, 1919-1939* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2003), 297.

11. James S. Corum, *The Roots of Blitzkrieg: Hans von Seeckt and German Military Reform* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 1992), 200-1.

12. T. N. Dupuy, *A Genius for War: The German Army and General Staff, 1807-1945* (London: Macdonald and Jane's, 1977), 250.

13. Bernhard R. Kroener, Rolf-Dieter Müller, and Hans Umbreit, *Germany and the Second World War: Organization and Mobilization of the German Sphere of Power: Wartime Administration, Economy, and Manpower Resources, 1939-1941*, vol. 5, part 1, trans. John Brownjohn, Patricia Crampton, Ewald Osers, and Louise Willmot (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000), 838-39; Dupuy, *A Genius for War*, 250.

14. Dupuy, *A Genius for War*, 250. These divisions suffered a shortage of modern weaponry and equipment. The impressment of Czech equipment and weapons improved German deficiencies to some extent but complicated supply and replacement

by introducing a multitude of different kinds of ammunition and types of kit and vehicles, thereby straining a growing and inexperienced logistical organization.

15. Kroener, Müller, and Umbreit, *Germany and the Second World War*, 841-43.

16. Dupuy, *A Genius for War*, 250, 252; Corum, *The Roots of Blitzkrieg*, 200-1; Matthew Cooper, *The German Army, 1933-1945: Its Political and Military Failure* (London: Macdonald and Jane's, 1978), 98-99, 443. Franz Halder was chief of the General Staff from 1 September 1938 to 24 September 1942. T. N. Dupuy has claimed that, regardless of its problems, General Staff officers were of as good a quality as ever, and that the officer corps generally was no less than adequate. Promoting a substantial number of former noncommissioned officers of the *Reichswehr* also helped to maintain the quality of the junior officer ranks. James Corum has written that the educational criteria of the officer cadet program were still retained, as were the strict requirements for obtaining a commission even after the shortening of the officer training program in 1937. Promoting a substantial number of former noncommissioned officers of the *Reichswehr* also helped to maintain the quality of the junior officer ranks.

17. Michael Carver, *Britain's Army in the Twentieth Century* (London: Macmillan, 1998), 310; George Forty, *British Army Handbook, 1939-1945* (Stroud, UK: Sutton, 1998), 328-35. Of these 224,188 were regulars, 219,613 were regular reserves, and 448,896 were territorials. These numbers represent male soldiers only. There were also a total of 22,801 women serving in the Auxiliary Territorial Service, Queen Alexandra's Imperial Military Nursing Service, and the Territorial Army.

18. Forty, *British Army Handbook*, 266-67.

19. David French, *Raising Churchill's Army: The British Army and the War against Germany, 1919-1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 38; see also Bond, *British Military Policy*, 329.

20. Forty, *British Army Handbook*, 108; Bond, *British Military Policy*, 329. For instance, B. L. Montgomery, the commander of 3rd Division, noted that his formation used many civilian vehicles. He referred to the British Expeditionary Force's deployment to France by reporting that "when my division moved from the ports up to its concentration area near the French frontier, the countryside of France was strewn with broken down vehicles" (Bond, 329).

21. Dupuy, *A Genius for War*, 250, 252; Corum, *The Roots of Blitzkrieg*, 200.

22. Martin van Creveld, *Supplying War: Logistics from Wallenstein to Patton* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 144-45, 147; Dupuy, *A Genius for War*, 252; Corum, *The Roots of Blitzkrieg*, 200. Corum states there were only fifteen German armored and motorized divisions.

23. Corum, *The Roots of Blitzkrieg*, 79, 82; Martin van Creveld, *Fighting Power: German and U.S. Army Performance, 1939–1945* (London: Arms and Armour Press, 1983), 138.
24. Corum, *The Roots of Blitzkrieg*, 80–81; David N. Spires, *Image and Reality: The Making of the German Officer, 1921–1933* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1984), 17. Spires uses the case of Eduard Zorn, an officer candidate, to describe the path one took to receive a commission. During this first phase, Zorn received “no special consideration” and was treated like any other recruit.
25. Corum, *The Roots of Blitzkrieg*, 81.
26. *Ibid.*, 81–82; Spires, *Image and Reality*, 17–19; Van Creveld, *Fighting Power*, 138. Martin Van Creveld states that the period prior to attending the infantry school lasted two years rather than eighteen months.
27. Corum, *The Roots of Blitzkrieg*, 82.
28. *Ibid.*
29. *Ibid.*; Spires, *Image and Reality*, 20; Van Creveld, *Fighting Power*, 138. Van Creveld provides a broad overview similar to Corum’s description of German officer training.
30. Corum, *The Roots of Blitzkrieg*, 82–83.
31. Van Creveld, *Fighting Power*, 138.
32. *Ibid.*
33. Corum, *The Roots of Blitzkrieg*, 201. For details concerning the practical orientation and technological aspects of German officer training, see Corum, *The Roots of Blitzkrieg*, 83–84; Van Creveld, *Fighting Power*, 138; Anthony Farrar-Hockley, *Infantry Tactics* (London: Almark, 1976), 15.
34. Van Creveld, *Fighting Power*, 146; Corum, *The Roots of Blitzkrieg*, 35–36, 85–86; Spires, *Image and Reality*, 31–32; Dupuy, *A Genius for War*, 216; Robert M. Citino, *The Path to Blitzkrieg: Doctrine and Training in the German Army, 1920–1939* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 1999), 7–8, 234–36. The regulation establishing the selection process was implemented in October 1920, but officers had to complete preparatory course lasting four to five months before attending the examination. The *Kriegsakademie* (war academy) was officially closed in accordance with the Versailles Treaty. But after October 1935, the three-year command and General Staff training course run by the 3rd Infantry Division in Berlin during the Weimer and early Nazi eras was again referred to as the *Kriegsakademie*, which was the name it held prior to World War I. In the meantime, even though there was no formal school, *Kriegsakademie* courses were conducted in a decentralized two-year scheme in the seven military districts.
35. Van Creveld, *Fighting Power*, 146; Corum, *The Roots of Blitzkrieg*, 86–87.
36. Van Creveld, *Fighting Power*, 146; Corum, *The Roots of Blitzkrieg*, 85.
37. Corum, *The Roots of Blitzkrieg*, 85, 86–87; Van Creveld, *Fighting Power*, 142–43, 146; Murray and Millett, *Military Innovation in the Interwar Period*, 48; Wedemeyer Report, 2, 12; Hartness Report (27 April), 3, 6, 17–18. The prestige of General Staff officers was immense and they were deeply respected by the rest of the officer corps. The General Staff protected them against jealous or malicious officers by controlling their assignments and promotions (they were given preference with regard to the latter). With few exceptions, general officers were selected from General Staff members, and they, along with generals, were favored by an evaluation system that enabled them to gain attention out of proportion to their numbers. Tactical instructors at the *Kriegsakademie* were also considered men of outstanding ability who were chosen for their soundness of judgment, troop leading skills, and capacity to teach.
38. See Spires, *Image and Reality*, 51–55; Corum, *The Roots of Blitzkrieg*, 87, 92, 95–96; Citino, *The Path to Blitzkrieg*, 96–98; Van Creveld, *Fighting Power*, 147.
39. Brigadier H. R. S. Massy, Lieutenant-Colonel C. W. Norman, and Lieutenant-Colonel A. E. Nye, Report of the Committee on the Military Education of the Army Officer, 4 March 1938, pp. 1, 69; War Office, WO 32/4357; The National Archives (Kew), UK (hereinafter cited as Massy Report).
40. *Ibid.*, 8, 66.
41. *Ibid.*, 29.
42. *Ibid.*, 8–9.
43. *Ibid.*, 18, 19–20.
44. *Ibid.*, 47, 48–49.
45. *Ibid.*, 14.
46. Hugh Thomas, *The Story of Sandhurst* (London: Hutchinson, 1961), 210. Not all of the British army’s tactical difficulties were caused by its training methods, however. British tactical training was hampered by a lack of personnel as well. For example, the commander of Southern Command insisted that, “I am really alarmed at the increasing lack of tactical sense and field-craft among junior officers. It is not their fault. It is not easy in the infantry to make much of a tactical display with a platoon consisting of, perhaps, a section serjeant [sic] and one man. This growing decline in field-craft and tactical instruction is, I think, by far the most serious product of the difficult times through which the army is still passing” (Massy Report, 29).
47. David French, *Military Identities: The Regimental System, the British Army, and the British People, c.1870–2000* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 161–63.
48. Massy Report, 50.
49. *Ibid.*
50. *Ibid.*, 52.

51. *Ibid.*, 50–53.

52. French, *Raising Churchill's Army*, 167–68, 169.

53. See Kier, *Imagining War*, 133; Bond, *British Military Policy*, 62; French, *Military Identities*, 16, 263–64. The regimental system's greatest advantage was the corporate identity that it engendered in members of the regiments and the group cohesion that resulted from it. A soldier enlisted with a regiment, learned its history, traditions, and customs, and remained within that regiment throughout his time in the army. The same was true for officers unless promoted above the rank of lieutenant-colonel. According to Brian Bond, the regimental system supplied the means for developing high peacetime morale and maintaining it under the most adverse wartime circumstances, and it could also encourage competence and technical proficiency.

54. Report by Commander 4 Indian Division on Operations in the Western Desert, 15–18 June 1941, 15 July 1941, p. 7; War Office, WO 201/2482; The National Archives (Kew), UK.

55. Log of Operations "Aberdeen," 5–6 June 1942, p. 3; War Office, WO 169/7540; The National Archives (Kew), UK. There are at least two additional examples of the failure of British tanks to offer assistance to the infantry.

56. Generalmajor a. D. Burkhart Müller-Hillebrand, *Deutsche und Sowjetrussische Militärische Führung im Zweiten Weltkrieg*, Foreign Military Study No. P-145 (Carlisle, PA: United States Army Military History Institute, n.d.), 85.

57. *Field Service Regulations*, vol. 3, *Operations: Higher Formations*, 1935 (London: His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1935), 1.

58. Massy Report, 54.

59. *Ibid.*, 56–58, 60–61.

60. Wedemeyer Report, 67; Captain Harlan N. Hartness, 2277-B-44/5, Report on German General Staff School, Staff Methods and Tactical Doctrine, 24 July 1937, p. 7; Box 1113; Records of the War Department General and Special Staffs, Record Group 165; National Archives at College Park, MD (hereinafter cited as Hartness Report [24 July]). Hartness wrote at least two separate reports concerning the Kriegsakademie. Unlike his report, which has already been cited, the report in this footnote was not given a report number. Thus, the original number used by the U.S. War Department has been used here. It should be noted that there is some overlap regarding the information contained within these two reports.

61. Hartness Report (24 July), 7; Wedemeyer Report, 12–13.

62. Hartness Report (24 July), 7–8.

63. See Generaloberst a.D. Franz Halder, *Stellungnahme zur Ausarbeitung des ehem. Gen. Majors Hellmuth Reinhardt über die Ausbildung Höherer Truppenführer im Deutschen Heer – MS #P-080: Training of Senior Officers*, Foreign Military Study No. P-080

(Carlisle, PA: United States Army Military History Institute, 14 August 1951), a–b; Generalmajor a. D. Hellmuth Reinhardt, *Ausbildung Höherer Truppenführer*, Foreign Military Study No. P-080 (Carlisle, PA: United States Army Military History Institute, 14 August 1951), 3. Officers received no special training for the tasks of higher troop command, and no "high school" was set up for senior officers. The Germans believed that a sufficient number of officers suitable for higher command was available and that their long practical experience in troop and staff positions gave them the necessary foundation for higher command. Thus, a special course was not deemed necessary. This meant that they were expected to default to their previous training.

64. See Peter Paret, Gordon A. Craig, and Felix Gilbert, eds., *Makers of Modern Strategy: From Machiavelli to the Nuclear Age* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1986), 585–86.

65. John I. Alger, *The Quest for Victory: The History of the Principles of War* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1982), 132.

66. Dupuy, *A Genius for War*, 116, 307; Gary D. Sheffield and Geoffrey Till, *Challenges of High Command in the Twentieth Century* (Camberley, UK: Strategic and Combat Studies Institute, 2000), 68–69. Even though it is written with reference to the division and corps commanders under British Field Marshal William Slim, the following quotation contains one of the briefest descriptions of *Auftragstaktik* (mission orders). Slim's subordinate commanders were "to act more on their own; they were given greater latitude to work out their own plans to achieve what they knew was the army commander's intention. In time they developed to a marked degree a flexibility of mind and a firmness of decision that enabled them to act swiftly to take advantage of sudden information or changing circumstances without reference to their superiors" (quoted in Sheffield and Till, 69).

67. G. D. Sheffield, ed., *Leadership and Command: The Anglo-American Military Experience since 1861* (London: Brassey's, 1997), 4; *Truppenführung: I. Teil* [Troop leadership: Part 1] (Berlin: E. S. Mittler & Sohn, 1936), 33–36; Wedemeyer Report, 42–43; Hartness Report (24 July), 20, 32. In cases where fighting had begun in the rear area while an engagement was winding down, a divisional commander was to position himself where the new resistance had appeared.

68. See Peter Young, *World War II* (New York: Exeter Books, 1983), 48, 78; Antony Beevor, *The Second World War* (New York: Little, Brown, 2012), 103–4.

69. This was inconsistent with the emphasis that the British placed on surprise and maneuver.

70. *Field Service Regulations*, vol. 2, *Operations General* (1935) (London: His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1935), 115, 137, 139–40; *Field Service Regulations*, 3:37. Volume 2 of the British

Field Service Regulations held that the attack was thought to consist of two phases, an initial one that most likely would be designed, organized, and scheduled according to a timed program, and a second one in which combat would be less regimented and would rely on extemporization to a greater extent than the first. However, volume 3 held that an attack was thought to consist of four stages: the period of preparation, a primary attack that would be carefully planned and organized, a phase in which reserves would either take advantage of success or restore the situation after failure, and pursuit after the opponent had been forced from the battlefield. Volume 3 also recognized that separating a battle into phases was somewhat artificial. The defense was to consist mainly of the use of firepower rather than of manpower, and a defensive fire plan was divided into three phases: to hinder the hostile force's attack preparations, to compel the enemy to withdraw during the actual attack, and to delay or stop any breakthrough or to assist a counterattack.

71. *Infantry Training: Training and War, 1937* (London: His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1939), 109–10.

72. *Ibid.*, 117.

73. *Field Service Regulations*, 2:25.

74. Erwin Rommel, *The Rommel Papers*, ed. B. H. Liddell Hart (London: Collins, 1953), 298, 299–300.

75. John Bierman and Colin Smith, *The Battle of Alamein: Turning Point, World War II* (New York: Viking, 2002), 276. 23rd Armoured Brigade Group Reports on Operations Lightfoot and Supercharge, 23 October–6 November 1942, p. 16; War Office, WO 204/8308; The National Archives (Kew), UK. Nearly one thousand guns took part in Lightfoot, and Supercharge started with a barrage of 360 guns.

76. Citino, *The Path to Blitzkrieg*, 7–8; Spires, *Image and Reality*, viii, 20.

77. Hartness Report (27 April), 6.

78. Wedemeyer Report, 12.

79. Murray and Millett, *Military Innovation in the Interwar Period*, 38; Dupuy, *A Genius for War*, 305.

80. Massy Report, 54–56. The "cycle d'information" was to take place in the form of a conference after the collective training period (sometime between 1 and 20 January) and its purpose was to help higher commanders by keeping their professional knowledge current.

81. *Ibid.*, 47.

82. *Ibid.*, 8, 30–31.

83. French, *Military Identities*, 177–78.

84. For an account of the gentleman-officer tradition, see Kier, *Imagining War*, 120–24.

85. Quoted in Kier, *Imagining War*, 124.

86. *Ibid.*, 123, 128, 134; Massy Report, 16.

87. Notes of a Meeting Held in the D. M. T's Room, 1st April, to Discuss Certain Recommendations of the Massy Committee, 1 April 1938?, p. 3; War Office, WO 32/4357; The National Archives (Kew), UK.

88. *Field Service Regulations*, 2:23.

89. *Ibid.*, 2:22.

90. *Ibid.*, 2:23.

91. These are the first two sentences in *Truppenführung: I. Teil*, 1.

92. *Ibid.* Notice the importance that strength of character held for the Germans as well as the British, which has been mentioned above.

93. *Ibid.*, 4–5.

94. *Ibid.*, 2–3.

95. Spires, *Image and Reality*, 49–50, 52–53.

96. See *ibid.*, 53–55.

97. Field Marshal Sir Cyril Deverell, War Office Minutes, 25 May 1937, p. 1; War Office, WO 32/4367; The National Archives (Kew), UK. Alan Francis Brooke, War Office Minutes, 14 July 1937, p. 2; War Office, WO 32/4367; The National Archives (Kew), UK. H. Creedy(?), War Office Minutes, 13 July 1937, p. 1; War Office, WO 32/4367; The National Archives (Kew), UK. Military developments were among the reasons for the new training program. These developments included the army's mechanization and its consequent alterations in organization and equipment that created administrative and operational difficulties that had not existed in the past, that the development of the offensive capabilities of aircraft and their rise in number had not been present before, that the number of staff officers and generals who had practical experience in controlling large formations was decreasing quickly, and that advances in the army's reequipment and reorganization had occurred. Although the author's name on the original is difficult to read, this document was probably written by Sir Herbert Creedy, who was permanent undersecretary of state for war at that time.

98. Creedy, War Office Minutes, 2.

99. Deverell, War Office Minutes, 1; Brooke, War Office Minutes, 2.

100. Field Marshal Sir Cyril Deverell and Lieutenant-General Sir Harry Knox, War Office Minutes, 25 and 28 May 1937, pp. 1–2; War Office, WO 32/4367; The National Archives (Kew), UK.

101. W. J. K. Davies, *German Army Handbook: 1939–1945* (London: Ian Allan Ltd., 1973), 23.

102. Corum, *The Roots of Blitzkrieg*, 183, 186.

103. Murray and Millett, *Military Innovation in the Interwar Period*, 27; see Citino, *The Path to Blitzkrieg*, 214–15, 234–35, 236–37.

104. Citino, *The Path to Blitzkrieg*, 234–35.

105. *Ibid.*, 236.

106. For details concerning the 1937 maneuvers, see *ibid.*, 236–41.

The 1937 maneuvers were notable for the successful use of a complete armored division. Although it took heavy losses, 3rd Panzer Division, located on the red side's right flank, penetrated the blue line and drove on to Stavenhagen, a position behind its opponents. The blue position was cut off from its rearward supply, and this action essentially decided the issue in favor of the red side, though Gen. Ludwig Beck, chief of the General Staff, disagreed and ordered that 3rd Panzer be dropped from the exercise. Beck seemed to have thought that the tanks would have suffered heavier losses in such an attack.

107. Wedemeyer Report, 78.

108. Corum, *The Roots of Blitzkrieg*, 205.

109. Citino, *The Path to Blitzkrieg*, 241–42. For instance, 2nd Panzer Division (Heinz Guderian) and the *Leibstandarte-SS Adolf Hitler* (Sepp Dietrich), a motorized infantry battalion, executed an improvised advance into Austria in March 1938 during the *Anschluss* (unification). Despite problems with staff work, maintenance, and a high number of breakdowns, Guderian pointed out that the former traveled approximately 420 miles and the latter roughly six hundred miles in a forty-eight-hour period. Moreover, he felt that maintenance and staff work were carried out adequately.