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SMALL FORCE--BIG IMPACT: THE STRATEGIC VALUE OF WORLD WAR II RAIDING FORCES.

BY

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SMALL FORCE — BIG IMPACT,
THE STRATEGIC VALUE OF WORLD WAR II
RAIDING FORCES.

A MONOGRAPH

by

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→ Some of the greatest successes in warfare have come with relatively little bloodshed. Raids have been used for centuries. Their strategic purpose is to force a foe to draw away his own strength to protect his threatened rear. Strategy in its highest form is the art of achieving one's goals with the smallest expenditure of blood and treasure. Time and surprise are the two most vital elements in war. Surprise is seldom achieved by the orthodox. The most economic dislocation of an enemy comes when a small force causes him to divert large portions of his force to unprofitable ends. The new mobility of World War II raiding forces presented opportunities never before known in warfare. The first raids studied are British Commando raids along Europe's northwest coast. Next studied in order are the desert raids against the Italians and Germans, and Raids of the French Coast. Both the Japanese raid on Pearl Harbor and Doolittle's Tokyo raid fit our definition and are studied. The spectacular German Special Troop Operations of Mussolini's Rescue, destruction of the Bridges of Nymegen, Budapest, and the infiltration of a few Germans in US uniforms are examined last. After studying this selected array the strategic value of World War II raiding is drawn together with a glance toward the role of raiding today.

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ORIGINS

We hear too often of the great bloody battles of massed armies pressing the attack until one or the other is destroyed. Yet some of the greatest successes in warfare have come with relatively little bloodshed; successes because of what Liddell Hart calls strategic dislocation of an enemy; thereby causing him to divert an inordinate amount of his troops from his prime goal. Thus, is the real purpose of the raider identified; jab at and bleed a foe, force him to dispense and draw away his own strength that he may protect his threatened rear, and above all continually upset the mind and plans of his leaders.

It is an old military concept to engage an enemy in his rear. As armies grew large they became more vulnerable along their rear, less able to live off the land and more dependent on bases for support. Napoleon in 1807 considered the secret of warfare as the art of maintaining one's own communications while denying the enemy his.¹

RAIDERS OF HISTORY

Though raiders are seldom given much credit by their contemporaries their deeds usually loom larger in historical perspective. It was Quintus Fabius Maximus who turned from the tactics of Rome's Legions to hit and run raids against Hannibal, and after being dismissed and then recalled by the Senate finally

convinced Carthage that it would not defeat Rome. Vikings were the first great amphibious raiders and changed the course of Anglo-Saxon history. English speaking peoples have a long list of raiders. Hereward the Wake and Robin Hood attempted to evict the Norman invaders. We recall Roger's Rangers, Thomas Sumter, George Rogers Clark, and Francis Marion, the Swamp Fox of the American Revolution. There were the Civil War raiders of Bedford Forrest, John Henry Morgan, and John Singleton Mosby. Union forces by their own account had at times more than 50,000 men tied up either hunting down or protecting against Mosby who seldom used more than a few hundred men to raid. Certain cultures are noted for their skill in raiding: the Zulus, Moros, Afgans and American Indians. Geronimo and War Chief Victorio each with a few dozen men tied up most of the U.S. Cavalry for several years and paralyzed much of frontier life. Decades before, the hardy Spaniards taught Europe's first great massed citizen army of Napoleon the slow death of small strikes. Few personalities loom more dramatic than Lawrence of Arabia.² There are many others. The history is long and colorful.

The more astute will recognize that among the names of the great raid leaders and cultures there was a mixture of raids and ambushes. Most leaders were full time warriors though some were not, as were their men. Raids have long been associated with guerrilla and underground movements, yet the advent of World War II created unprecedented opportunities for regular

military forces to raid and raid they did, from the sea from the air, and from the land.

CHARACTERISTICS

Seldom does Webster's Dictionary fail to be definitive enough, but in this case it simply describes a raid as "a sudden hostile attack".³ We will be more definitive. A raid is a surprise attack against a fixed enemy force or installation. The enemy sets the place, the raider sets the time. An ambush is just the opposite; an attack against a moving or temporarily halted enemy target. In an ambush the enemy sets the time and the attacker the place.

Raids are conducted to destroy or damage supplies, equipment or installations, capture supplies, equipment or enemy personnel; cause casualties to an enemy or his supporters; and to distract him, keep him off balance and force him to use his troops to protect his own rear.

Raids are characterized by secret movement to a target; brief, violent combat; rapid disengagement; and swift, deceptive withdrawal.⁴ Surprise is more difficult to achieve in a large raiding force but equally as desirable. Each step of the way there is the possibility of a security leak; in the planning, training, equipping, and movement. An enemy force expecting and prepared makes a raid a suicide mission. Because such daring efforts differ from the experience and comprehension of conventional

military minds, their formentors are at times called mad by the unimaginative. After similar accusations were made in the dark days following the fall of France, Winston Churchill, never lacking for imagination replied "madness is, however, an affliction which in war carries with it the advantage of surprise".⁵

Raids are exclusively offensive. Churchill's orders upon giving Mountbatten responsibility for Commando operations were very specific: "You are to plan for the offensive. In your headquarters you will never think defensively."⁶ It must be a hit and run affair. It should not and cannot hold - such would be a waste of precious trained talent. Timing in all aspects is critical. A target must be struck at just the right moment when it is most accessible and vulnerable. Conduct of the raid itself must be precise and well rehearsed -- withdrawal swift and well planned. Virtually all aspects become more difficult the larger the unit. But if a substantial force is needed, using one too small courts disaster. Even in raiding Liddell Hart's words apply: "The principles of war can be condensed into one word - concentration - the concentration of strength against weakness."⁷

SCOPE

This study makes no attempt to be complete. It only examines an array of World War II raids, raiding forces and their strategic impact. Our definition of a raid is narrow. It must be a surprise attack of high violence and short duration against

a fixed target followed by a rapid withdrawal. Surprise must be total in act, form, and timing. By this definition, many attacks which others call raids are not. Air strikes are raids only if they have strategic surprise. While they can achieve some measure of tactical surprise in timing, there is seldom surprise in form or style. Doing the expected with variations in time does not constitute surprise. There are some glaring exceptions. Japan's raid on Pearl Harbor and Doolittle's Tokyo raid were completely unexpected except by a scattering of perceptive individuals.

By the same definition the devastating submarine warfare will not be examined. Their lurking menace was a real threat, took a high toll of allied shipping, and had enormous strategic impact. But once submarine warfare was launched, there was only the question of, 'will he be here today?', not by what unorthodox method will he strike. Moreover, strikes at sea do not carry with them the same psychological impact as face to face presence of enemy raiders within one's own occupied or controlled areas. The danger is too distant for most to grasp.

Significant units like Wingate's Chindits, Merrill's Marauders, and the U.S. Rangers, all distinguished units, will be left out. Though there were American forces trained for the task, their raiding potential was rarely used; a result of conventional thinking superiors as well as strategic requirements differing from those of the British and Germans.⁸

THE PEOPLE

There is something more than just the characteristics of a raid which we have just described or of the strategy which we'll shortly examine. There are the people. Brigadier Peter Young has written: "Neither civilian nor soldiers are necessarily warriors. . . . In truth all too few of either category make warriors, yet it is warriors that win wars. . . . men who, whether their background was civilian or military, had 'fire in their bellies', men who meant to carry the war to the enemy, officers whose audacity was tempered with originality, who were prepared to experiment and throw 'the book' to the winds."⁹ And for such men there is a place in war.

THE STRATEGY OF RAIDING

Strategy in its highest form is the art of achieving one's goals with the smallest expenditure of blood and treasure. Its purpose is reduction of fighting to the slenderest possible proportions.¹⁰ Tactics fills the province of fighting. If you have to engage an enemy in large-scale, massive fighting, your strategy has to some degree failed.

THE OPPORTUNITY

B.H. Liddell Hart the foremost military strategist of our day points to dislocation as the aim of strategy. Dislocation is

produced by upsetting enemy dispositions, and compelling a sudden 'change of front'; thereby altering his distribution and organization of forces. It is usually a consequence of a combination of the following efforts:

1. Separation of his forces from one another. (Destruction of bridges, transport and communications.)
2. Endangering his supplies.
3. Menacing his routes of retreat to reestablish himself in his homeland.

History is abundant with enemies who backed off with menaced lines of communication and retreat.¹¹

Time and surprise are the two most vital elements in war.¹²
Total surprise is surprise of time, place, force, and tactic, and is rarely achieved with the orthodox. It is the habit of the less imaginative to believe that doing the same thing, with the same type force but varying the time somehow constitutes surprise.

Surprise can only be attained, therefore, by a subtle compound of many deceptive elements. Instead of seeking to upset the enemy's equilibrium by an attack it must be upset before a real attack is, or can be successfully launched.¹³ Deception and distraction deprive the enemy of his freedom of action - to divert his forces to unprofitable ends. He becomes too widely distributed, too committed elsewhere.¹⁴ The most economic method of distraction would be to divert an opponent with a small force of your own while the largest portion of one's own force was kept

available for the real line of operation. Rarely does possession of superior force offset the disadvantage of attacking in the obvious way.¹⁵ Stonewall Jackson's strategic motto 'mystify, mislead, and surprise' was true when Gideon "smote the enemy hip and thigh" and it is true today.

The need for a raiding force becomes obvious.

THE PROBLEMS

Only in desperation do most nations turn to raiding forces. While recognizing encirclement as a legitimate form of warfare in an enemy's rear, most leaders have discounted completely or not even considered the value of harassing an enemy's lines of support through other than massive military forces. The strategic impact of less than massed armies was not even acknowledged by the German General Staff until shortly before World War II. That the enemy could conduct many small but strategic operations was overlooked.¹⁶

Orthodoxy is the bane of raiders. Surprise is not possible by doing the ordinary. It comes in its most stunning form when precisely what an opponent thought impossible has just been done. The impossible is rarely defended against. To those men with 'fire in their bellies', audacity in their hearts, and imagination in their minds a conventional enemy stuffed with regulations, standard movements, and standardized procedures is a welcomed adversary. His very size, power, and methodology will be used against him. But this requires initiative and aggressiveness far beyond the norm.

Special units, no matter which side they fought on find their "main enemy" to be their own bureaucracy and officialdom.¹⁷ Few military commanders like specialist forces, knowing how they can develop into 'private armies' and absorb a disproportionate share of men and material.¹⁸ While per man they do consume a higher ration of training, bullets, gasoline, parachutes, and rank, their share of the total is usually miniscule. By those more "proper" soldiers they are usually looked upon as a motley collection of misfits, brigands, and adventurers. Yet from General Davidov's Cossaks, who destroyed Napoleon's rear to the raiders of Son Tay Prison in North Vietnam, the men are characteristically first rate.¹⁹ Other reasons make them unpopular. Conventional commanders are loathe to give up any significant measure of control. It is an old axiom that response to fleeting opportunities demands wide latitude and flexibility. Security, rapid movement and size of operations prevent extensive radio communication, making coordination with superiors difficult and dangerous once an operation is launched. The limited control vital to raiding forces is unacceptable to commanders with little faith in their men.

In spite of the preponderance of those who accept only the known, familiar and the comfortable, there were bold men emerging on the eve of World War II. Their tasks were gigantic.

RAIDS AND RESULTS

BRITISH

The summer of 1940 was desperate for those who stood against what appeared to be an invincible German war machine. Western Europe from Arctic Norway to the Pyrenees belonged to Hitler. Only Britain, with her army defeated and Russia near defeat remained. Winston Churchill was facing an age-old problem of war - what does a nation do when its army is defeated in the field but does not accept the decision? What can Britain do to its powerful foe when attack on a grand scale is impossible?²⁰

American help in the fighting was still only a distant hope for the future. Something must be done to keep the spirit of the Island Kingdom from breaking. Not only must her spirit be preserved but a fighting will built that would carry the allies back to the continent and crush Hitler. But how could it begin? What was the first step? How could the Wermacht be kept off balance?

In June, 1940 Churchill wrote: ". . . The completely defensive habit of mind which has ruined the French must not be allowed to ruin all our initiative. It is of the highest consequence to keep the largest numbers of German forces all along the coasts of the countries they have conquered, and we should immediately set to work to organize raiding forces on these coasts. . . . Enterprises must be prepared with specially trained troops of

the hunter class, who can develop a reign of terror down these coasts, first of all on the 'butcher and bolt' policy; but later on, or perhaps as soon as we are organized, we could surprise Calais or Boulonge, kill and capture the Hun garrison, and hold the place reduce it and then away. The passive resistance war, in which we have acquitted ourselves so well, must come to an end."

The Commandos were born. Great care was taken in selecting the men; most were well chosen.²¹

EARLY RAIDS

Within three weeks of their formation, the Commandos launched their first raid. There was little time for training. Now less than a month after Dunkirk Commandos, carrying with them half of the 40 tommy guns in Britain, crossed the channel to France to raid Boulonge - LeTouquet for virtually any target of opportunity. Little of value was accomplished. Three weeks later in mid July the Island of Guernsey was raided with small results.²²

These two relative failures were music to the ears of those legions of bureaucrats seeking reasons to obstruct a fresh, new idea. Sir Roger Keys, Director of Combined Operations, the organization responsible for conceiving, planning, and conducting raids; was frustrated by shortages and deliberate denials of almost everything, especially weapons and landing craft. He

abandoned his policy of frequent, small raids and sought opportunities for larger raids, further aggravating the problems of shortages.²³

Operation after operation was cancelled and the fire that had led those early men to volunteer now burned with resentment. Morale and discipline declined. Nearly eight months were to pass before this fire could strike again.

THE FAR NORTH

By March 1941 there had been ample time to train. Smooth and complete interservice coordination was now recognized as essential. The critical impact of navigation, wind, and tide was much better understood. In spite of unofficial opposition within the officialdom Churchill continued to believe he could hurt Nazi Germany with Commando raids.

When the Commandos set sail for the Lofoten Islands in the cold waters off Arctic Norway it was a well trained and coordinated land and sea force. This time there were specific tasks of major importance to be accomplished. Glycerin for explosives was being manufactured from an assortment of small fish oil factories. They must be destroyed. German ships were always present to transport the glycerin or make refueling stops. Sink as much shipping as possible and burn the oil. Norway brimmed with patriots seeking ways to strike back at the Germans. Bring as many back as possible and give them the opportunity.

There were collaborators; discourage them. Bring back German captives.

The nearest large German garrison was at Bodo, 50 miles away. Small enemy posts dotted the islands. There were no known German warships in the area. Very important, since the British were still critically short of aircraft, there were no fighter airfields within 300 miles.

Combined Operations knew that navigation must be precise and the first of many submarines was used as a beacon for the raiders. There were five escort destroyers. Better to have enough - Combined Operations was going to have a success.

Surprise had its normal paralyzing effect. By the time the Commandos withdrew 18 factories had been destroyed. Eleven ships had been sunk including a German armed trawler. One trawler was boarded, manned, and sailed to England. German prisoners numbered 216; 60 Norwegian Quislings were taken back, along with 315 Norwegian patriots who volunteered to go to Britain for their chance to fight. Nearly 800,000 gallons of gasoline and oil were burned. The entire operation was filmed and produced excellent propaganda footage.

The Lofoten Islands raid was a great strategic success, a flash of brilliant light piercing months of dark days. Churchill had hit his Hun. The hated enemy was no longer immune. The suffering nations on the continent had new hope.²⁴ For the first time morale within the Commandos turned upward.

Though smaller raids were being pulled in North Africa and the Middle East, six more months were to pass before anything of significance was to be done north of the Mediterranean. Sir Roger Keys was bitter, but would be able to raid Spitzbergen.

Britain and Russia had been fighting alone for more than a year. Each knew the other must be kept fighting. Churchill intended to keep German shipping in the Norwegian Sea off balance and destroy enemy ability to transport troops by sea to attack Russia's Arctic flank and its sea routes to Murmansk and Archangel.²⁵

Spitzbergen's coal production was significant. The mines must be disabled to prevent their feeding Germany's war machine.

Spitzbergen, lying 350 miles north of the northern most point of Norway, was another of those important places too abundant to all be defended. Few Germans were present and little opposition was expected. It was not strictly a Commando raid. The main body of raiding troops was Canadian.

The mines were put out of operation. Nearly half a million tons of coal were set on fire, as well as 275,000 gallons of petroleum. All the inhabitants were evacuated. They would no longer mine coal for Hitler.²⁶

The following month, the young, dashing Lord Louis Mountbatten was appointed Chief of Combined Operations. He was a man of daring with a remarkable skill of cutting through red tape and smoothing the frictions of interservice cooperation. In two months he launched an operation that was to influence

the course of the entire war. He would raid Vaagso, Norway.

Vaagso to Churchill was important strategically as part of a continuing harassment to keep as many Germans as possible defending Europe's northwest coast. The more they were employed in defensive roles, the fewer there would be to fight in North Africa and Russia.

The short run objectives were similar to those of the Lofoten Islands raid: fish oil factories would be destroyed, shipping sunk, Norwegian volunteers brought to Britain, collaborators discouraged, and this time code books and documents captured. German forces could be a threat with its garrison of 150; a 100 man Labor Corps, a tank and several gun batteries. There were three German fighter bases within air range.

Vaagso would be a big raid. A cruiser headquarters ship escorted by four destroyers. R.A.F. fighters could just barely give some protection. Bombers would attack and distract Vaagso defenses while the entire flotilla slipped up the fjord. There were other diversions. The day before a second Commando raid hit the Lofoten Islands again. While the Vaagso raid was being carried out R.A.F. bombers put the nearest Luftwaffe base out of operation.

Planning was the most detailed yet. The ground force of nearly 600 men included a detachment of Royal Engineers and Royal Army Medical Corps. The men were well briefed with alternate objectives.

Vaagso is one of those classic examples of how difficult it is for most humans to recognize the unexpected even when it is obvious. German Naval lookouts were dismissed as imagining things when they attempted to report warships gliding into the fjord. Those same naval observers hesitated to inform the nearby army commander because he was army. All the while precious minutes were gained.

In the four hours and twelve minutes more than 110 Germans were killed, all enemy guns destroyed, the ammunition dump blown up, eight ships sunk, three German ships run aground, several factories and warehouses destroyed, and 70 Norwegian volunteers boarded for Britain. But these are only the tactical results.

Code books were captured which German intelligence had every reason to believe had been destroyed. Britain now knew the call sign and challenges of every German vessel operating in Norwegian and French waters and ports.²⁷

Hitler was furious. The concentration of the three small efforts on December 26 and 27 had been just enough to convince him that the British and the Americans, now in the war, would attempt to invade and occupy northern Norway. He stated in January, "Norway is the zone of destiny". Whether, in fact, it was the zone of destiny mattered little. Hitler considered it so. It had to be defended at all costs.²⁸ All his battleships were to move north. Those in France would run the English Channel and take their chances. Thirty thousand new troops were sent to

immediately shore up General Falkenhorst's ground forces. A new armored division was formed in Norway. New coast defense guns were placed. The buildup astonishingly continued and on June 6, 1944, D Day, while Germany was decidedly short of good infantry, its garrison in Norway was 372,000 men. The Battleships Scharnhorst, Gneisenau and Prinz Eugen broke out of Brest on February 11, 1942 and with the aid of foul weather dashed up the Channel and into Norwegian waters. The Tirpitz had arrived a bit earlier.²⁹ At the very time when Hitler's U-boats were sinking 102 U.S. and friendly ships in American waters in January and February, he chose to tie up his surface raiders in northern seas. Allied naval tasks were thus greatly simplified. Britain's life-line would stay open. The dimensions of the coming 'Battle of the Atlantic' would be much less ominous than feared.³⁰

All this through the risk of a small flotilla, the equivalent of a weak battalion, and six squadrons of aircraft. History gives us few examples of such large strategic gains for such small stakes.³¹

THE DESERT RAIDERS

Italy occupied Libya with more than 250,000 men. To the east in Egypt General Wavell knew with his 86,000 men he must keep the Suez Canal open. Britain sorely needed troops from Australia, New Zealand and India, oil and supplies must come through; airplanes, tanks, and guns had to get to Asia.³²

Suez and Gibraltar were of major importance. Spain's dictator, Franco, had already agreed that once Suez was closed Spanish soldiers would retake Gibraltar, for centuries a severe irritant to these Iberians. The Mediterranean would become an Axis lake.³³

On June 10, 1940 Italy declared war. Only the day before, a scientist, engineer, geographer career officer in the British Army came through with a radical plan. Major Ralph Bagnold felt his years of travel across much of the 2,000,000 square miles of the Great Sand Sea could be put to valuable use. He would organize a unit, later called the Long Range Desert Group, watch enemy movements in and beyond the Sand Sea and send vital information back to Wavell.³⁴

The situation in the Middle was critical, many thought it desperate. Churchill had stated: "The fate of the Middle East and much else, may be decided at Alexandria or on the Canal the decisive theater at the moment."³⁵

Desperate or critical it is one of those moments where a man with a radical idea, a superior with vision, and a difficult position converge to once more permit the unorthodox to surface. Of course, the problems were immense. First of all there was the 'enemy within' that now familiar conventionally limited understanding. There was the problem of learning to navigate to tiny spots on a trackless desert. How do you avoid detection in areas intelligence maps color red while the enemy has air surveillance. And when you do get somewhere and conduct an attack, you get away to where?³⁶

The men were all volunteers and of the same breed as those who had flocked to the Commandos a few weeks earlier.

Everything was in short supply but Bagnold was able to coerce or steal most of what he needed. Training was intense and concentrated on desert driving, navigation, gunning, maintaining equipment and communications. In five weeks his men were ready for their first operation, remarkable speed permitted by Bagnold's skills as soldier and explorer.³⁷

True to form rumors were flying among those close in - Grazioni, the Italian General in Lybia, was to have his headquarters raided. Rumors fly and seldom hurt the true mission of raiding forces - contrarily they often distract the enemy, and cause confusion. Wavell and Bagnold wished to launch many raids, keep the Italians guessing and confused, shake Italian morale, and force his troops from the front to the rear.³⁸ In its very first combat, the reputation of the Long Range Desert Group was made when it drove into Cairo with two Italian trucks and their prisoners.

Wavell doubled his strength to some 70 officers and men and gave them the task of striking deep into Libya. Wavell launched his own large scale offensive while the Raiders continued to upset the Italian rear. Later British armored units would follow routes considered impossible by the enemy and left undefended - routes discovered and used by the LRDG.³⁹ There were no Vaagsos for these men, rather a series of continuous small military and psychological blood-lettings.

It took ten months to get the first Commando units into the Desert war. Combined Operations' attention was focused on the northwest European coast but there was something left over. Lt Colonel R.E. Laycock lead a large raid of 800 Commandos at Bardia, Libya on the night of April 21/22, 1941. It was Layforce's first raid and generally had undecisive results and modest damage. The Commandos learned much. Though destruction was light, the enemy was sufficiently alarmed to pull back an armored brigade to protect Bardia, a worthwhile achievement for a battalion size unit.

Unfortunately, their new found experience was not to be used for awhile. The desert Commandos were practically Wavell's only general reserve. Greece collapsed on May 2. Eighteen days later Germany invaded Crete and Layforce was sent to cover the British retreat, a job, in reality, wasteful of their special talents and unsuited to their light weapons. Nevertheless, the Commandos, always ready to tackle anything, did their task - at the cost of 600 casualties among the 800 who went to Crete.

In June, a raid of limited strategic importance, but high courage, hit a Vichy French unit in Syria. Keep the enemy off balance.⁴⁰

Tobruk had been besieged by Rommel for three months when its small detachment of 75 Commandos, part of the larger British garrison still holding, decided to move. In a well planned and executed small raid, their tiny band destroyed the Italian

ammunition dump, killed several dozen Italians at a cost of one Commando killed and four wounded. Doing the unexpected once more was the greatest factor in success. Three months with no significant British offensive operations had made Italian defenses complacent - three months is enough for most armies to relax. This raid relieved considerable Italian pressure on British defenses and tied-up enemy men and material in defense against other possible raids.⁴¹ British spirit went up, the Italian's down.

Laycock's Commando, having been badly cut up by its Crete and Syrian operations, was disbanded, but part of it was kept together for a very special and hazardous task. It was time for the newly formed British 8th Army to drive west. The power balance in the Mid East was shifting to the allies. He was to strike at the nerve center of the Africa Corps at a critical moment - kill Rommel and change the course of the war.⁴²

Laycock considered the mission extremely hazardous with little chance of evacuation. Yet as is the character of this peculiar breed of men whether it is raid Rommel's headquarters, Rescue Mussolini, or raid Son Tay Prison in another war, they volunteered. There was virtually no training for the raid itself. The plan was not even worked out until the night before the raid after the raiders had been infiltrated ashore. The raiders had no map of the compound and relied on the sketch of an Arab boy. There were no movement rehearsals.

Rommel was nowhere near. They had hit the headquarters of German and Italian supply services. Many Germans and Italians were killed but Rommel lived. All but two of the raiders were killed or captured. Courage is no substitute for good intelligence and proper planning. Still more enemy resources were tied up defending.⁴³

When Layforce disbanded in July, 1941, some of its officers, led by brash, young Lieutenant David Sterling, had it in their mind that they could destroy Rommel's air force on the ground. It was to be a more combat oriented outfit than the Long Range Desert Group. There was, in fact, about to be a marriage of Sterlings new Special Air Service, SAS, and the year old LDRG. Sterling faced the usual hostile, orthodox staff assistance but the saving factor was his units unique command relationships. His unit was directly under the Auchinleck, the General Officer Commanding, Middle East Headquarters.⁴⁴ Sterling had found what most other raiders had discovered; unless you are close enough to the highest superiors, imagination gets crushed beneath ponderous conventional thinking staffs.

Special Air Service raided and raided. Often on short notice to take advantage of a momentary opportunity. It was much used for strategic diversion and caused Rommel to exert considerable efforts to counter these tiny raiders who lived almost continually behind his lines. Late in the North African War with the German supply position desperate every blow in their

rear became more effective. When Sterling was finally captured, Rommel wrote in his diary that the SAS "had caused him more trouble than any other British unit of equal strength".⁴⁵ The LRDG and the SAS were numerically a minute part of the total effort. Their role in warfare remains unique.

THE FRENCH COAST

About the time David Sterling was captured in North Africa, Combined Operations was preparing what has been called the greatest raid of all. The United States was three months into the war and German U-boats were continuing their high toll of allied shipping. Neither Washington nor London knew how long Hitler would keep his great surface raiders in Norway. The most fearsome of these was the giant battleship Tirpitz, so large that only one drydock on the Atlantic could take her, the drydock at St. Nazaire, France. If it could be destroyed, sorties into the Atlantic would be far more dangerous for the Tirpitz.⁴⁶

Intelligence and photo coverage was good, but there remained the extremely difficult problem of getting the raiders up the six miles of the Lorie River to reach their target. Once more boldness and audacity would be relied upon to confuse and buy time. Training was extensive. Numerous deceptions were used. The British still had their captured code books and used them.⁴⁷

The night of March 28, 1942, three destroyers, one motor gun boat, 14 motor launches, and single motor torpedo boat glided

up the river. The old destroyer packed with explosives rammed the drydock gates. Ground units of 265 men carried out their job of destruction.

The gates were destroyed and were never repaired during the rest of the war. With no place to dock, the Tirpitz remained in Norwegian waters until September 1944.⁴⁸ The psychological impact on the Germans was enormous. Rumors of invasion were rampant. Hitler was enraged. The supermen could be made to look bad. A continent gained a further measure of hope.⁴⁹ Churchill said, "...here was a deed of glory intimately involved in high strategy."⁵⁰

In the late summer a massive raid was carried out on the French port of Dieppe. Churchill felt it necessary to conduct a large scale raid to serve as a planning base for the great invasion yet to come. Though Commandos raided on the flanks, the main attack was carried out by six battalions and an armored regiment of Canadians.⁵¹ At first glance the cost of Dieppe seems out of proportion to the results though tactical results were considerable. The real purpose must be kept in mind. It was a goldmine of information on tactics and revealed weaknesses on both sides. New landing craft and equipment were developed. It showed the absolutely vital importance of joint training and teamwork. It helped hold German troops in the west, taking pressure off the Russians. The German High Command was more convinced than ever that the invasion would come at or near a major port.⁵²

The many tiny, pin-prick raids carried out in 1942 are mostly obscure, though well done and contributed to the general sense of unease which gradually gripped German garrisons of northwest Europe. By late 1942, the nature of the Commando role changed. They were no longer the only offensive part of a defensive strategy. They would be used for spearheading an offensive strategy by conventional forces. Though there were occasional raids along the Adriatic coast for two more years, their raiding days were ending.

THE PACIFIC

PEARL HARBOR

The Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor December 7, 1941 fits our definition of a raid. It was of complete strategic surprise, short duration, high violence with a rapid withdrawal. Admiral Yamamoto knew, "If we are to have war with America, we will have no hope of winning unless the U.S. fleet in Hawaiian waters can be destroyed."⁵³ The best time to crush the fleet would be right away, before a declaration of war. Japan had done exactly that against Port Arthur in the 1904-1905 war with Russia.

The task was almost overwhelming. Thousands of miles from its shore Japan would attack the greatest concentration of U.S. strength. December was considered a bad weather month. If the fleet could stage in a remote area, cruise far to the

north, and remain undetected it might be done. Everything depended upon surprise. If sighted before December 5, the fleet would turn around and go home.⁵⁴ The U.S. had every reason to expect war in the Pacific, but there was little response in Hawaii. America was sure Japan would hit the Philippines; the fleet in Hawaii would be too distant and risky for Japan.⁵⁵ The strategic setting practically guaranteed success.

In less than two hours Japan gained control of the Pacific and cleared the way for the unimpeded seaborne invasion of Malaya, the Malay Archipelago and the Philippines. By the end of April 1942, Japan invaded Java, Borneo, New Guinea, and Burma.⁵⁶ Of the 96 ships in Pearl Harbor, 18 were sunk or seriously damaged, including three battleships sunk and six damaged. Of the U.S. Army and Navy's 394 aircraft 188 were destroyed and 159 damaged. Dead Americans numbered 2403, wounded 1178. Japan's cost for all this was 29 airplanes, one large and five midget submarines involving total losses of approximately 125 men.

Strategists debate the long run psychological impact of the raid. With psychological dislocation one of the prime goals of strategy it can be argued that what Japan really did was generate America's fury and in the long run the strategic impact of Pearl Harbor worked against the Japanese. After the initial confusion and rumors in the days immediately following, there emerged the overwhelming urge to get things going. Pearl Harbor welded America together in angry unity.⁵⁷

TOKYO

By late spring 1942 the Japanese defense perimeter extended from Burma to the Western Solomons, north to Wake Island and thence to the Kurile Islands off the Siberian Coast. She considered herself able to fight indefinitely within this perimeter and its inexhaustible supplies. The flush of victory was not long enjoyed. The tide began turning in May 1942 with the battle of Midway. In the months before Midway there was nothing but bad news for the allies.

Doolittle's Tokyo raid was purely strategic. His sixteen B-25 bombers, each carrying four 500-pound bombs, could hardly inflict any major damage. What they could do was raise American spirits and deliver a stunning shock to Japanese morale. Because such a blow was totally unexpected, Doolittle's launch from the aircraft carrier Hornet had a high probability of success. Though all 16 aircraft were lost, most of the crews returned safely. The raids' strategic goals were accomplished.⁵⁸

GERMAN COMMANDOS

The war had turned bad for Germany by late 1942. Stalingrad was lost, Rommel was in flight, and the U.S. was poised for Italy. Germany's position was fast becoming desperate. The now familiar moment was ripe for an extraordinary, unorthodox personality. Hitler had closely watched the successes of Britain's raiders and now, in desperation, wanted raiding forces of his own.

He found his man with demonstrated irreverence for tradition. Lieutenant Otto Skorzeny was breveted to Chief of Germany's Special Troops on April 20, 1943.⁵⁹

Though defeat loomed everywhere for Germany, Skorzeny's men vividly displayed what a handful of this special breed doing the unexpected could accomplish. Immediately he discovered his 'main enemy', his own bureaucratic adversaries with their single-minded devotion to preserving the order of things and their place within it. They contended his scheme was nothing more than a glorified bunch of Apaches, whooped up on the spur of the moment and manned by a rabble of homicidal delinquents.⁶⁰ Liddell Hart recognized that the German General Staff frowned on all novel ideas, especially by amateurs, procrastinated whenever possible, and saw that the Special Troops were short on supplies.

His volunteers were of the same type that came to the British Commandos, the Long Range Desert Group, and the SAS. Training was intense, for Skorzeny considered the first essential of strategic surprise to be preparation.⁶¹

MUSSOLINI'S RESCUE

Their first raid was so spectacular it is still their best known. On September 12, 1943, he and approximately 90 of his men rescued Mussolini from his prison on an Italian mountain top. His glider assault, an attack which any good soldier knew was

impossible, so stunned the garrison that there were no casualties. Mussolini was flown out in a tiny light plane.⁶²

At the very time when the Provisional Italian government was bargaining with the allies and when German forces were heavily engaged in the peninsula, Mussolini's rescue enabled Germany to set up a rival fascist government in northern Italy, clamp down her occupation north of Rome, and exercise complete control over the now puppet Mussolini.⁶³

THE BRIDGES AT NYMEGEN

Late 1944 was an active period for the Special Troops. Two bridges over the lower Rhine River still stood in September. Stubborn allied airborne units still held a salient across the bridge, and had beaten back more than a dozen division size German attacks. More than 500 planes had tried and failed to destroy the bridge. This gateway to the fatherland must be closed. Skorzeny was called up, sent 14 of his frogmen, attached explosives beneath the water and blew up both bridges. It cost two frogmen killed and seven captured. These few men had succeeded where divisions of troops and an armada of airplanes failed. The allied thrust into Germany was slowed.⁶⁴

BUDAPEST

The following month German intelligence found that Hungary, Germany's last ally, was secretly planning to surrender.

Americans were in the Rhineland, Russia was nearing East Prussia, the Baltic had collapsed, Rumania was gone, Bulgaria nearly lost, Tito and the Red Army were fighting together, and Germany's cities were in ruins. If Hungary fell it would cut off a million German troops in 70 divisions. Russia's 120 divisions in the area would pour across the Danube plains, into Austria and into Germany. The war would be over in a few weeks. The Hungarian Army was still fighting well. The problem was with Admiral Horthy, the Regent who planned to spring the news of peace just as Italy had done a year before.⁶⁵ Hungary must be kept as a German ally without destroying Hungarian friendship.

Once more Skorzeny, who had posed as a tourist while collecting first-hand intelligence, relied upon audaciously doing the unexpected helped by on-the-spot innovations. With deceptions and trickery and cheerful waves he moved a small force of infantry and four tanks past puzzled Hungarian guards and into the government's medieval walled compound in Budapest.

Horthy was in no position to resist and at once abdicated. Hitler had been let out of a very tight spot. German and Hungarian troops in the field hardly knew of the incident. The Hungarian Army fought beside Germany to the last day of the war. Skorzeny had given a vivid lesson in the fine art of holding on to shaky allies.⁶⁶

'KILL EISENHOWER'

Immediately upon returning to Germany he was told of Hitler's grand offensive to throw the British and Americans into the sea, allowing him to turn the whole weight of Germany against the Russians. Fantasy now controlled the Fuehrer. Skorzeny's part was nevertheless to raise an armored brigade using captured U.S. tanks, jeeps and uniforms, mingle among American units and hold key bridges. Other advance troops in U.S. uniforms would scout ahead and demoralize.

Both equipment and troops were scarce, nevertheless, he was able to create massive confusion behind allied lines. Road signs were turned, communications cut, harmless areas red flagged as minefields. More important was psychological chaos. As soon as some infiltrators were captured rumors exploded. "Assassination teams were out for Bradley, Montgomery and Eisenhower", the rumors said. Everyone suspected everyone. Half a million American troops played cat-and-mouse. Even in his headquarters in Paris, Eisenhower could hardly move. The monster Hun Skorzeny was coming. The entire allied effort slowed down. All this caused by only a handful of half trained, ill equipped soldiers, seldom knowing what next to do or even where they were. The success was of an alarming magnitude compared with the means employed. Twenty eight Germans in American uniforms actually went over the lines.⁶⁷

LOOKING BACK AND AHEAD

Raids offer a striking example of the classic principle of economy of force. Force to be effective must be exerted along the line of least resistance, but where is the line of least resistance? It is where the enemy does not expect to be hit, in a form which he does not expect, when he does not expect it. Big or small scale, "to hit with effect the enemy must be taken off his guard. Effective concentration can only be obtained when the opposing forces are dispersed."⁶⁸ What better way to use modern mobility to force an enemy to disperse than by raiding.

Raiding offers a wide range of alternatives and the absence of alternatives is contrary to the very nature of war. At the outset of any war going badly they can blunt the enemy offensive. Even a seriously weakened opponent can still launch small raids when other offensive options don't exist.

Skorzeny viewed classic forms of power as a handicap against raiders. An attack by any means is usually possible so long as it is unexpected. Shock action produces paralysis long enough to gain one's ends.⁶⁹

Procrastination is the enemy of effective raiding, and seems always present. Opportunities for true strategic dislocation are often fleeing. Both allies and axis lamented lost opportunity in World War II. Most delay seems associated with the fundamental conventional distrust of special purpose units.

Detractors are quick to criticize and characteristically exaggerate the risks. Vital smooth and intricate interservice cooperation is difficult under such adversaries, and a command relationship that places raiding operations under very high level control is mandatory. Special units will continue to be disliked and distrusted by many in their own military.

The time for raiding forces has not passed. Modern transportation and communications permit much wider areas to select from in order to keep opponents in doubt. He cannot protect everywhere. There will always be far more small than large options. The politics, security problems, and delicate time frame of today mostly preclude development of an indigenous raiding force. For many nations, if they raid, they will do so with their own uniformed troops. A determined and ingenious enemy will always find a way to raid any position. In times of real disorder almost anyone can get away with almost anything.⁷⁰

One must be prepared to follow up on the advantages accredited by surprise and momentary unbalance.⁷¹ Even raids that at first glance appear as tactical failures can have great strategic impact. Never lose sight of the psychological dislocation of an enemy.

Unless an enemy's calculations are constantly subjected to upset you are simply engaged in a war of attrition until one side or the other bleeds to death. "Adaptability is the law which governs survival in war as in life."⁷²

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