

STRATEGY RESEARCH PROJECT

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GETTING IT RIGHT QUICKLY WHEN THE MOMENT ARRIVES: LESSONS FROM THE INTERWAR GERMAN ARMY FOR THE 21ST CENTURY

BY

**LIEUTENANT COLONEL GORDON M. WELLS
United States Army**

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Lessons from the Interwar German Army for the 21st Century

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Gordon M. Wells
Lieutenant Colonel, U.S. Army

Colonel (Ret) Brian D. Moore,
Project Advisor

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U.S. Army War College
CARLISLE BARRACKS, PENNSYLVANIA 17013

ABSTRACT

AUTHOR: Gordon M. Wells, Lieutenant Colonel, U.S. Army

TITLE: GETTING IT RIGHT QUICKLY WHEN THE MOMENT ARRIVES:
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FORMAT: Strategy Research Project

DATE: 1 April 1999 PAGES: 42 CLASSIFICATION: Unclassified

Michael Howard, speaking on the topic of doctrine development and preparing for the next war has said, "What matters is to prevent . . . being too badly wrong . . . to get it right quickly when the moment arrives." The interwar German Army, or 'Reichswehr and its immediate wartime predecessor, were organizations that shared many of the same challenges we do today. Emerging from a major conflict (World War I vs. the Cold War) into an age of breathtaking technological change (the era of mechanization vs. the Information Age), the Reichswehr provides valuable lessons applicable to the U.S. Army of the 21st Century. The German Army of this period, through the wartime leadership of Ludendorff and the peacetime leadership of von Seeckt, demonstrated numerous institutional characteristics that enabled them to effectively manage change during a period of great uncertainty. First, they were very effective at executing what we call Force Integration: the integration of the six domains of Doctrine, Training, Leader Development, Organizations, Material, and Soldier Support (DTLOMS). Second,

they emphasized leader development down to the lowest levels and encouraged debate and discussion within the army to both surface new ideas and ensure all leaders felt a sense of ownership for the new doctrines being developed. Nevertheless, in the course of two world wars, Germany failed. Whereas infiltration tactics provided new tactical agility in WWI, the Germans failed because they lacked the operational agility to exploit the penetration. Similarly, during WWII the operational agility afforded by mechanization and mobile, combined arms warfare (Blitzkrieg) failed to serve Germany largely because it lacked strategic agility due to the inflexible strategy of their political-military leader, Adolph Hitler. Our task, as we look to the future through "lenses" like Force XXI and Army After Next, is to use the German experience to gauge our own institutional preparedness to "prevent being too badly wrong" and to "get it right quickly when the moment arrives."

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Michael Howard, speaking on the topic of doctrine development and preparing for the next war has said, "What matters is to prevent . . . being too badly wrong . . . to get it right quickly when the moment arrives." It seems to me that this is the ultimate challenge for all military professionals, particularly those of us who serve during periods of historical nexus. For it is left to us to peer into the future and divine what future war will look like so that when "the moment arrives" we are in a position to "get it right quickly" and thereby "prevent being too badly wrong." As we grapple with warfighting concepts like Force XXI and future operational capabilities like Army After Next, it is useful to draw lessons from those who have gone before us . . . those who served in similar times and likewise were tasked to build a force capable of winning tomorrow's wars with doctrine, equipment, and organizations not yet developed.

What institutionally characterizes armies who successfully navigated through periods of rapid technological, political, and social change? What kinds of leaders were needed? At the risk of addressing a topic that has been analyzed and dissected by historians and military writers for well over 50 years, I submit there is still much we can learn from the German Army. In particular, the interwar German Army, or Reichswehr, was an organization that shared many of the same challenges we do

today. Emerging from a major conflict (WWI vs. the Cold War) into an age of breathtaking technological change (the era of mechanization vs. the Information Age), the Reichswehr can provide valuable lessons applicable to the U.S. Army of the 21st Century.

Of all the armies to emerge from WWI, it was the German Army that took a systematic, holistic approach to breaking the stalemate of the trenches, first observed in the initial phases of WWII. Initially, the Allies were awed by this new form of warfare that they, not the Germans, dubbed *Blitzkrieg*, or "Lightening War." In truth, *Blitzkrieg* was simply the product of an evolutionary process which had its roots firmly set in the traditions of the German Army. Initially, we observe the embryonic stages of *Blitzkrieg* in the development of Stormtroop Tactics on the Western Front in 1916. Later, building on this wartime experience, General Hans von Seeckt, Chief of the Reichswehr from 1919-1926, established the foundation for combined arms warfare that most conventional armies would eventually adopt by 1944.

**EARLY GERMAN THOUGHT: MOLTKE, DELBRÜCK, SCHLIEFFEN,
AND VERNICHTUNGSGEDANKE**

Since the earliest days of the Prussian General Staff, the model conflict was the Battle of Cannae in 216 B.C. where the numerically inferior Carthaginians defeated the Romans in an extraordinary double envelopment. In 1757 after Frederick the Great defeated the Austrians at Leuthen in a similar maneuver, the battle of annihilation, became the standard for all future Prussian generals to follow.¹ Helmut von Moltke, chief of the Prussian General Staff from 1857 to 1887 emphasized the notion of Vernichtungs- or *Kesselschlacht* (cauldron battle) in which strategic surprise, combined with broad encirclements, would enable the concentration of force at the decisive point (*schwerpunkt*).²

Moltke also gave great credence to the utility of modern technology, specifically the railroad and telegraph for operational movement and strategic coordination. He believed it was the army commander's responsibility to properly maneuver his major forces into place and then, through generalized "mission orders" (*auftragstaktik*), allow his subordinate commanders to fight their respective battles as part of the overall campaign. Although his most famous quotation was, "No plan of operations survives first collision with the main enemy body," perhaps more

important to German operational artists, Moltke also said, "A mistake in the original concentration of the army can hardly be rectified during the entire course of the campaign."³

Moltke's ability to effectively concentrate forces was first observed in the Battle of Königgrätz (or Sadowa) during the Austro-Prussian War of 1866 where Moltke, operating on exterior lines, concentrated his Prussian Army of 220,000 against an equivalent-sized force of Austrian-Saxon forces under General von Benedek. Although the Cannae-like victory Moltke sought was not total, the Prussians decisively defeated the Austrians, bringing the war to an end in seven weeks.⁴ Four years later, Moltke led the German army in a similar, decisive defeat of the French forces under Napoleon III at Metz and Sedan, capturing over 104,000 prisoners. Although the French will to resist was not broken for another five months, the Germans decisively defeated the French Army within seven weeks.⁵

In the late 19th Century, the German military historian, Hans Delbrück, in his work, History of the Art of War, attempted to apply the scientific method to the study of military history. Delbrück described two forms of military strategy which he observed throughout history: *Niederwerfungsstrategie* (annihilation) and *Ermattungsstrategie* (exhaustion). Whereas the strategy of annihilation was focused solely on the decisive battle along the lines of Königgrätz and Sedan, the strategy of

exhaustion attempted to balance both decisive battle and maneuver, both operational and political. In other words, *Niederwerfungsstrategie* could be accomplished by the commanding general without interference from political leaders.

Ermattungsstrategie required greater finesse and a closer synchronization of effort between the military and political spheres.⁶

Unfortunately for Germany in WWI, their military leaders only ever seemed to understand and plan for campaigns of annihilation. Despite the brilliant diplomacy of Chancellor Bismarck that held off major conflict for many years, German leaders recognized that, once war began, the tyranny of geography demanded the decisive, rapid defeat of Germany's enemies.⁷ Cursed by a geographic position that placed them in the center of Europe between multiple potential enemies, German military leaders sought ways to conduct wars quickly and decisively.⁸

Count Alfred von Schlieffen, Moltke's eventual successor as chief of the German General Staff from 1891 to 1906, was the penultimate practitioner of *Niederwerfungsstrategie*. He built on Moltke's precepts of strategic encirclement and surprise to deliver the decisive blow at the *schwerpunkt*, coining the term, *Vernichtungsgedanke* to further emphasize these principles. Schlieffen developed his famous plan designed to quickly defeat

French forces on the Western Front, followed by an offensive against the Russians in the East. The notion of any operational flexibility was superceded by a complex series of mobilization and deployment schedules bound by inalterable timelines.⁹

Commenting on the German General Staff, Matthew Cooper has stated in his work, The German Army, "double envelopment became their theme, *Vernichtungsgedanke* their watchword."¹⁰ German military leadership would offer little flexibility to German political leaders once the decision to use force was made; policy became a prisoner of strategy. *Ermattungsstrategie* would not be an option. In his book, The Swordbearers, Correlli Barnett describes a very telling scene on August 1, 1914, between Schlieffen's successor, Colonel-General von Moltke (the elder's nephew), Chancellor Bethmann-Hollweg, and Kaiser Wilhelm II at the Berliner Schloss:

When Bethmann-Hollweg finished speaking, he (Kaiser Wilhelm) said to Moltke: 'Now we need only wage war against Russia! So we simply advance with the whole army in the east!' . . . 'I (Moltke) answered His Majesty,' he wrote later, 'that this was impossible. The deployment of an army a million strong was not a thing to be improvised it was the product of a whole year's hard work and once planned could not be changed.'¹¹

WORLD WAR I: A DOCTRINAL REVOLUTION

From August to December 1914, the German and Allied forces battled each other for the initiative, conducting the "race to

the sea" in successive attempts to outflank each other, ultimately culminating by year's end in the trench war stalemate which will forever characterize WWI. Schlieffen's "great wheel" through the Low Countries to encircle the French Army before it could effectively mobilize had failed, frustrated to a large degree by the effects of the new technologies: the machine gun, improved artillery, and barbed wire. Now the remainder of the war would be a contest of the warring powers to break the stalemate. The British experimented with a doctrinal solution through "operational maneuver from the sea" at Gallipoli in 1915 and a technical solution by introducing tank warfare at Cambrai in November 1917.¹² The French emphasized the importance of firepower and the moral superiority of the offensive (*elán*) throughout the war.¹³

The German Army, however, attempted something remarkable in the history of warfare. In spite of their strategic inflexibility at the outset of the war, the Germans demonstrated an institutional flexibility that enabled them to completely change their doctrine, organization, leadership orientation, and weapons systems down to the squad level. The result was Stormtroop, or Infiltration Tactics, that formed the doctrinal basis for what would later be known as the *Blitzkrieg* in WWII.

Like most armies of the period, the Germans entered WWI with a largely conscript army composed of infantrymen employed

in close-order tactics as a means of massing fire, or combat power. The close-order formations enabled junior officers to adequately control their largely conscript platoons and companies. Non Commissioned Officers (NCOs) served more as administrative links in the chain of command, and were not expected to exercise significant leadership on the battlefield.¹⁴

When Field Marshal Hindenburg replaced Falkenhayn as Chief of the German Army High Command (*die Oberste Heeresleitung*, hereafter called OHL) in August 1916 (Moltke had been replaced by Falkenhayn in November 1914 after the failure of the Schlieffen Plan), he brought with him from the Eastern Front his chief of staff, Lieutenant General Ludendorff and made him the "Quartermaster General." In this role, Ludendorff, under the German Army system, was Hindenburg's principal assistant. Because Ludendorff enjoyed the implicit trust of Hindenburg and was universally trusted for his technical competence, arguably, he became the de facto successor to Falkenhayn.¹⁵

Ludendorff's dynamic personality breathed a new sense of confidence in the OHL and the battered German troops of the Western Front. Visiting units across the front, Ludendorff sought the input of serving commanders down to the lowest levels. Most important, he demanded accurate reports from his subordinates and used his OHL Operations Section as a mechanism to further understand what was happening in the combat units,

what we in the U.S. Army might refer to as a "directed telescope."¹⁶

The Elastic Defense-In-Depth

The first product of the Ludendorff era was the development of a significant new form of defense, an elastic defense-in-depth. Because the war had degenerated into an intense fight to maintain terrain, armies on both sides of the front tended to weight their defenses heavily forward for fear of losing any ground to the other side. Local offensives were typically preceded by massive artillery bombardments, focused on the front-line defenders, resulting in tremendous casualties. Whereas the Allies had the manpower and matériel to support this approach, the Germans quickly realized that in a war of attrition, they would be the ultimate losers. Therefore, working closely with front-line units, Ludendorff led an Army-wide effort to develop this elastic defensive scheme, formally codified in a doctrinal publication developed by the OHL Operations Section in December 1916 called, The Principles of Command in the Defensive Battle in Position Warfare.¹⁷

In essence, The Principles outlined a substantial change in the German approach to the defense. Instead of a heavily fortified and manned front line, the Germans developed three successive zones: the Outpost Zone, Battle Zone, and Rearward

Zone. The Outpost Zone was lightly manned with a series of outposts oriented to disrupt enemy raids and patrols, provide early warning, and ultimately disrupt enemy attacks. The Battle Zone, typically about two kilometers in depth, consisted of a forward series of three successive trench lines and a second series of trench lines along its rear boundary, called the Artillery Protective Line. Artillery was placed in depth behind this last trench line in the Rearward Zone. Within the Rearward and Battle Zones, the defenders conducted counterattacks against penetrating enemy formations. The essential change to this approach was that it was force, versus terrain oriented. It was elastic by design, allowing the defender to give up terrain while attriting the attacking enemy, preserving his own combat power, and forcing the attacker to culminate somewhere in the Battle Zone.¹⁸

Of course, Ludendorff understood that such a drastic doctrinal change would be meaningless if it was not fully adopted by the army. Therefore, he encouraged army-wide discussion and refused to accept criticism as an attack on the OHL or himself, desiring instead that the entire army assume ownership of the new doctrine.¹⁹ Equally important, he supervised the establishment of schools and training areas behind the front lines where the new doctrine would be taught. A major program to reorganize and reequip the German Army

complemented this monumental training effort, which included schools for high-ranking officers and extended down to individual soldier training. A new light machine gun was developed and fielded down to squad level and artillery was reorganized and reallocated to make it more responsive to maneuver commanders. The squad assumed much greater importance as an independent unit on this more dispersed battlefield, compelling the Germans to place greater leadership responsibility on their NCO Corps.²⁰

The result was an army that was revolutionized in a remarkably short period. In less than a year, the German Army significantly changed its doctrine, organization, leadership training, fielded equipment, and training regime. More important, it worked. The Allied offensives of 1917 succeeded in producing high friendly casualties, with little ground taken to show for it. The new tactical approach had achieved the strategic effect Ludendorff planned for; the Germans conserved their strength while the Allies expended theirs. Now all the Germans needed to do was build an equally effective offensive doctrine.²¹

Sturmbataillon Rohr and Stormtroop Tactics

This offensive doctrine, later called Stormtroop or Infiltration Tactics, developed largely from the "bottom up"

across the Western Front. Faced with the stalemate of trench warfare, German front-line commanders quickly concluded that their close order tactics would have to be modified. Not insignificantly, one German soldier who came to this conclusion early was the chief of staff of the 3rd Army Corps, Colonel Hans von Seeckt. Tasked to plan a major attack to seize the Vregny Plateau in January 1915 with little time and reduced artillery support, Seeckt used the 5th Infantry Division to conduct the assault.²²

Deviating from the traditional close order formations taught in the pre-WWI German conscript army, the attack was led by German combat engineers (*pionieren*). Conducting the initial breach by cutting through the barbed wire and attacking French forward outposts with hand grenades (at the time, only a weapon of combat engineers), the *pionieren* were followed by infantry moving in open skirmish lines. The forward French positions fell quickly. Successive French positions were taken with greater loss, largely because the Germans had not planned for the integrated support of their own artillery. Colonel von Seeckt concluded in his after action report that traditional German infantry tactics would require significant modification.²³

At another position in the German lines, another unit and its leaders were coming to very similar conclusions. On December 30, 1914, an elite light infantry unit, the Guard Rifle

(*Schützen*) Battalion, used new tactics to seize a French trench line in the Vosges. Instead of the traditional massed frontal assault, the soldiers of the *Schützen* Battalion infiltrated into the French positions and entered at either end of the trench line, systematically clearing it in hand-to-hand combat. They seized the trench line in less than ten minutes and successfully fended off a major counterattack. The monumental success they enjoyed laid the groundwork for the unit's evolution into *Sturmbataillon Rohr*, named for its commander, Captain Willy Rohr, the eventual model for "storm battalions" throughout the German Army.²⁴

Desiring to build on its initial successes, Rohr's commanding general, General Gaede, gave him full authority to develop this new unit of "storm troops" (*sturmtruppen*). Breaking from the traditional notion that the infantryman's sole weapon was his rifle and bayonet, Rohr integrated machine guns (eventually both heavy and light), flame throwers, trench mortars, and light field howitzers into the inventory of weapons used by storm troops. Because, as with hand grenades, flame throwers and trench mortars were tools of German combat engineers who were the experts in siegework, Rohr built his battalion largely around a core of *pionieren* and infantry. His experiments resulted in tactics which emphasized three key elements: the squad became the primary maneuver unit, replacing

the skirmish line; squads would clear trench lines by "rolling them up," using primarily hand grenades; and the supporting arms (mortars, flame throwers, artillery, machine guns) would be coordinated at the lowest level to support the attack.²⁵

Recognizing the value of this new organization, Rohr's superiors directed *Sturmbataillon Rohr* to serve as a cadre to train other units in these new tactics, signaling the first step in what would be a radical departure in German offensive tactics. Rohr emphasized that the "objective guaranteed unity of action" and that independent action at the lowest level was critical, a key factor in revolutionizing the role of NCOs on the battlefield.²⁶ Rohr also stressed the importance of detailed rehearsals, conducting briefings with all leaders using large-scale maps and then executing full-dress, live-fire rehearsals on full-scale mock-ups of enemy positions in the rear area.²⁷

The first test of this mini-revolution in doctrine, organization, leadership, and training took place in January 1916 when *Sturmbataillon Rohr* led a double-regimental assault on a French position called the *Hartmannsweilerkopf*. Rohr's storm troops quickly penetrated the French position, enabling the follow-on regiments to secure and occupy it. Artillery was used, not to destroy enemy positions through massive bombardments, but to suppress the enemy to enable Rohr's storm troops to infiltrate the forward positions.²⁸

Shortly after assuming his new role in the West, while visiting Crown Prince Wilhelm's Army Group in September 1916, Ludendorff was greeted by an honor guard of *sturmtruppen* from *Sturmbataillon Rohr*. Although the work Rohr had been doing had already gained army-wide recognition, Ludendorff now directed that schools be set up to train the entire German Army in these new tactics. The timing of this decision coincided with the concurrent effort being made to develop the elastic defense-in-depth. Ludendorff recognized the complementary value the new infiltration tactics would add in infusing an aggressive spirit in German soldiers who would be executing a very "offensive" form of defense, the defense-in-depth.²⁹

To codify this new form of offensive, the OHL published The Attack in Position Warfare in January 1918. In the same way that The Principles stressed a defense focused on the enemy throughout the depth of the battlefield, The Attack emphasized attacking the enemy forces in depth using the various arms, including air support, in a supporting, simultaneous and sequential manner.³⁰ Led by the specially trained and equipped *sturmtruppen* now formally built into the structure of each army on the Western Front,³¹ follow-on forces of traditional infantry regiments and divisions would exploit the penetration. Theoretically, the new doctrine of infiltration tactics would provide the opportunity for the German Army to break the

stalemate and reestablish the momentum of the attack through operational maneuver.

Very similar to the approach they took in training the army in the defense-in-depth, the Germans pulled entire divisions off the line and retrained, reorganized and re-equipped them in preparation for the planned "peace offensive" of 1918. In total, of the 192 divisions on the Western Front, 56 were successfully transformed into "attack divisions," a remarkable achievement considering the conditions under which they operated.³²

On March 21, 1918, Ludendorff launched the German offensive and within a few days had achieved an impressive penetration 40 miles deep into the Allied lines in the Somme region. Several other offensives conducted into the early summer of 1918 included an equally notable penetration of the Allied lines in the Aisne River region in late May.³³ Unfortunately for the Germans, despite their initial tactical successes, in the end they simply outran the ability of their logistics system to keep up. They lost the momentum of the attack and never were able to fully exploit their breakthroughs. The Allies, operating on interior lines and with better rail and road networks feeding their front lines, were simply able to stop the German advances each time.³⁴

Infiltration tactics had solved the tactical dilemma of the breakthrough, but the lack of operational mobility kept the Germans from executing the operational maneuver necessary to achieve a decisive victory. In the end, they were simply worn out. The Schlieffen Plan of *Niederwerfungsstrategie* (annihilation) had failed. Because the Allies enjoyed superior numbers in men and material, the Germans were defeated in a war of *Ermattungsstrategie* (exhaustion), the very form of war their generals feared most.

HANS VON SEECKT AND THE BUILDING OF THE REICHSSWEHR

Hans von Seeckt emerged from WWI with a brilliant combat record, having served as chief of staff of units up to combined army group level.³⁵ Considered the logical successor to the position of chief of the General Staff following Ludendorff, he first served in 1919 as the General Staff representative to the Versailles Peace Conference. With the dismantling of the General Staff, Seeckt was appointed chief of its successor organization, the *Truppenamt* in late 1919.³⁶ Recognizing the immense value of the German General Staff as the intellectual engine of the Army, Seeckt ensured that the *Truppenamt* maintained the same capabilities. "The form changes, the spirit remains the same," he told the officers of the *Truppenamt*.³⁷

In this spirit, Seeckt took the opportunity to do something the Allied victors would not be able to do: create a new army from scratch. Immediately he directed an in-depth review using fifty-seven committees to analyze the results of the war. "It is absolutely necessary to put the experience of the war in a broad light and collect this experience while the impressions won on the battlefield are still fresh." In his directive to these committees, Seeckt directed them to produce:

short, concise studies . . . and consider the following points: a) What new situations arose in the war that had not been considered before the war? b) How effective were our pre-war views in dealing with the above situations? c) What new guidelines have been developed from the use of new weaponry in the war? d) Which new problems put forward by the war have not yet found a solution?³⁸

Clearly, any U.S. Army soldier who has participated in after action reviews (AARs) at the Combat Training Centers, will immediately recognize this line of logical introspection!

Based in part on this collective analysis, in 1921 the Truppenamt issued its keystone tactical regulation, Leadership and Battle with Combined Arms. It was in this manual, analogous to our FM 100-5, Operations, that Seeckt embedded his overarching guidance for the rebuilding of the new German Army, or Reichswehr. In Leadership and Battle Seeckt laid out the doctrine and the future operational capability he envisioned for the Reichswehr.

Implicit in the very title of Leadership and Battle with Combined Arms was the strong emphasis which Seeckt placed on the need for tactical mobility and the detailed integration of combined arms to achieve operational maneuver. Moreover, the spirit of the offensive was clearly a theme in Leadership and Battle:

The attack alone brings the decision . . . especially effective is the envelopment of one or more flanks and to attack the enemy's rear . . . the leader's will to victory must be communicated to the lowest-ranking soldier. The majority of the force must be employed at the decisive point . . . The defense is only justifiable against a greatly superior enemy and only to make possible an attack at another point or at a later time.³⁹

Seeckt recognized that modern weaponry and motorization were key to future warfighting. Further, he was not perplexed that much of the military technology that he envisioned in the hands of future warfighters either did not yet exist or was disallowed by the Versailles Treaty. In Part I of Leadership and Battle Seeckt wrote, "This regulation takes the strength, weaponry and equipment of a modern military major power as the norm, not that of the Peace Treaty's specified (limitations)."⁴⁰

Not content to merely rest in the *Truppenamt's* analysis of lessons learned from WWI and its subsequent development of a viable warfighting doctrine, in and of themselves monumental accomplishments for the chief of any army, Seeckt also directed

the development of the modern weapons and equipment needed to operationalize this doctrine. The account of Germany's numerous efforts to develop modern weaponry by evading the Versailles Treaty's provisions through foreign subsidiaries and secret factories is a story all its own. The key point to understand is that the Reichwehr's doctrine of mobile warfare provided the principal design criteria for the development of future arms and equipment.⁴¹

Seeckt also held a belief shared by few Army officers of any nation during this period. He believed that WWI had established the position of the air force as equal to the ground and sea services and that it should be constituted as a separate branch of service.⁴² Departing from the strategic bombing theory of Douhet, Seeckt's ideas had a very modern doctrinal theme to them:

The war will begin with an air attack on both sides, because the air forces are the most immediately available for action . . . It is not the chief towns and supply centers which will form the immediate object of the attack, but the opposing air forces, and only after the defeat of the latter will the attack be directed against other objects.⁴³

Further, because he saw the need for the integration of air planning with ground operations, Seeckt directed that each military district headquarters establish an air staff section.⁴⁴ To assist in both the training of military pilots and the

technological development of military aircraft, Seeckt was actively involved in the militarization of the German civil air industry. The merger of Junkers and Aero-Lloyd into the national airline, Deutsche Lufthansa, was a major component of this effort, as were the myriad gliding clubs all over Germany (still very popular today) which would provide a training base for future Luftwaffe pilots.⁴⁵

Of course, doctrine produced by a highly efficient General Staff and equipment developed by a top notch industrial base are of little value if the soldiers and airmen who must fight are not properly trained. It is in this arena that Seeckt made his most significant contributions.

Seeckt deviated from the paradigm of the pre-WWI Imperial Army that relied on mobilizing a huge base of reservists. Instead, he promoted the idea that Germany needed a small, professional force of volunteer soldiers.⁴⁶ Therefore, Seeckt placed a strong emphasis on the training of Reichswehr officers and NCOs, both leadership and technical training. This is because the Reichswehr was envisioned to accomplish two purposes: first, to serve as an immediately available elite strike force and second to function as a cadre around which a much larger army could expand. Hence, all Reichswehr soldiers were expected to function at least one level above their rank.⁴⁷

Much like the squad and team leaders of the *sturmtruppen* units on the Western Front, NCOs were expected to operate independently on the battlefield. "It is of fundamental significance that our junior leaders are taught to be independent thinking and acting men," Seeckt said in 1924. Not only were there institutional schools for NCOs, but the Reichswehr officer corps embraced the training of their NCOs by including them in unit-level officer training throughout the army, recognizing that many Reichswehr NCOs would be commissioned should the army have to expand.⁴⁸

Likewise, Seeckt emphasized the institutional training of officers, overseeing the establishment of four branch schools, as well as secret schools for armor and air force training in the Soviet Union.⁴⁹ At the unit level, in addition to staff rides and planning exercises, Seeckt directed that all junior officers take "Military District Examinations" as senior first lieutenants. With the abolition of the *Kriegsakademie* by the Versailles Treaty, Seeckt used this as a means to identify officers for the General Staff training program. To heighten professional development throughout the Reichswehr, he required that every junior officer pass these exams. If you failed after your second attempt, you could lose your commission. The intensive study programs that developed to meet these demanding standards undoubtedly contributed to the overall technical

competence of the Reichswehr officer corps. Equally important, they insured that the new warfighting doctrines being developed by the *Truppenamt* were thoroughly promulgated to the lowest level.⁵⁰

Although he rigidly enforced professional development across the Reichswehr, like Ludendorff, Seeckt also recognized the need for open discussion and intellectual freedom. The *Militär Wochenblatt* was a weekly publication of and for the leaders of the Reichswehr to express their views on any variety of professional topics, primarily tactics and weaponry. Authors were not chastised for "out of the box" ideas. Hence, the publication was a forum for the sharing and dissection of ideas by officers of all grades. In addition, officers were encouraged to publish their thoughts in other forms. The most famous of these works is Lieutenant Colonel, later Field Marshal, Irwin Rommel's book, Infantry Attacks, which he wrote while serving as an instructor at the Infantry School in Dresden.⁵¹

Finally, Seeckt was not shy about directing the professional development of the senior leaders of the Reichswehr. Annually, he published his "Observations of the Chief of the Army Command" to provide guidance and feedback on the training status of the Reichswehr. Stressing the need for combined arms training, in his 1920 "Observations" he did not

hesitate to make a negative example of one garrison he visited where the infantry and artillery units never trained together.⁵² In 1921, Seeckt initiated a series of staff rides for general officers, personally preparing and leading them, as well as conducting critiques of solutions proffered. Sounding like a modern Battle Command Training Program (BCTP) Senior Mentor, Seeckt later reflected:

Few commanding generals had the desire to become active in the training of their subordinate generals and critique their tactical problems. The idea that a commanding general still needed to learn was unusual. However, the result was that the General Staff was trained in a set of common principles.⁵³

In September 1939 when Hitler invaded Poland, the Wehrmacht forces that swept up the Polish Army in just over a month, were the product of the previous 25 years. Institutionally, the German Army had changed little, as evidenced by the immediate introspection that took place following the Poland Campaign. Wehrmacht officers ruthlessly analyzed their shortcomings at all levels, using their experiences to further improve doctrine, organization, and training.⁵⁴ As a result, the subsequent invasion of France was even more efficient. Hitler's fatal flaw was that he started to believe his own propaganda, leading to overreach in Operation Barbarossa, the invasion of the Soviet Union in 1941.⁵⁵

LESSONS FOR MODERN STRATEGIC LEADERS

What lessons can we learn from our study of the German Army during these time periods? I suggest three important lessons are readily gleaned: the imperative of a systematic approach to integrating doctrine, new force structure, material, and supporting training requirements; leader development and intellectual openness; and a warning about the tenuous linkage between operational and strategic agility.

Clearly, many of the institutional imperatives that Hans von Seeckt promulgated in the development of the Reichswehr closely paralleled those Ludendorff and his senior leaders stressed on the Western Front. In both cases, the German leadership adopted a very systematic approach to the development of doctrine and its supporting force structure, matériel, and training requirements. Both Ludendorff and Seeckt recognized the need to conduct what we in the U.S. Army call Force Integration: the integration of the six domains of Doctrine, Training, Leader Development, Organizations, Material, and Soldier Support (DTLOMS). Ludendorff supervised this task in combat and Seeckt similarly built an army almost from the bottom up in the aftermath of WWI, both with high degrees of success. Although the U.S. Army executes this process relatively well, as we consider what Army After Next (AAN) will look like and develop "leap ahead technologies" to outfit AAN,⁵⁶ we must be

ever-vigilant to ensure we heed Michael Howard's warning and "prevent being too badly wrong."

With regard to leader development, it is clear from the German Army experience that armies that emphasize leader training and development are more likely to "get it right quickly when the moment arrives." Just as both Captain Rohr and General von Seeckt stressed the importance of leader development at the lowest levels, so too should we be ever cautious of ignoring this important area. We enjoy a very strong institutional school system in our Army, as well as an NCO Corps second to none. Nevertheless, we must not allow these strengths to diminish. If there is a possible danger in the current environment, it lies in the desperately fast Operational Tempo (OPTEMPO) which often precludes serving soldiers from taking time to think and discourse about their profession. This view was addressed recently by a serving brigade commander and is worthy of our consideration.⁵⁷

Further, although we have myriad professional journals in the U.S. military, we really do not have a journal where, with minimal editorial requirements, the average junior leader can publish ideas for public consumption, along the lines of the *Militär Wochenblatt*. Too many of our professional periodicals are filled with uninspired articles written by miscellaneous senior generals (or their "staff groups") and civilian analysts.

The same brigade commander who suggested that OPTEMO is the killer of meaningful debate also offered the following very cogent thoughts for ARMY Magazine:

If ARMY Magazine wants to change the Army, it should change itself. Readers could do with less boilerplate and white-paper material . . . Instead, look for issues of relevance and immediacy . . . Seek out the input of writers who are not hesitant to shatter some dishes as they clear the table.⁵⁸

Of course, before we can encourage more serving officers to shatter a few dishes, we must first shatter a long-standing institutional bias that few are willing to openly discuss: anti-intellectualism. Like it or not, there is a common perception among serving officers of an anti-intellectual bias in our Army, that serving officers who get published too much get labeled as "egg-heads" as opposed to "muddy boots" soldiers. As an institution, we should be encouraging our "muddy boots" soldiers to share their ideas with the Army at large. Somewhere out there is another "Captain Rommel" who has something to say, but does not want to be labeled a "woolly-headed intellectual." Too bad. He probably has some extraordinarily good ideas.

Finally, we must consider the fact that operational agility is of little value in the absence of strategic agility. Whereas infiltration tactics provided new tactical agility, it was never fully exploited because the Germans lacked the operational agility to exploit the penetration. Similarly, the operational

agility afforded by mechanization and mobile, combined arms warfare failed to serve Germany in WWII largely because it lacked strategic agility due to the inflexible strategy of their political-military leader, Adolph Hitler. I am certainly not suggesting any direct parallels between Hitler's Third Reich and the U.S.

Nevertheless, we must consider the linkage between strategic and operational agility as we develop future operational capabilities like AAN that envisions strategically mobile strike forces being injected into crisis situations with unprecedented alacrity. Will tomorrow's National Command Authorities have the strategic agility to make the decision quickly enough to release those forces? Or, once released, will they have the flexibility to exercise all other elements of national power in a synchronized, supporting manner? What should the military's role be in facilitating that strategic agility? These are questions, which must be considered as we develop the ability to exercise capabilities envisioned in AAN.

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ENDNOTES

¹ Gunther E. Rothenberg, "Moltke, Schlieffen, and the Doctrine of Strategic Envelopment," in Makers of Modern Strategy, Peter Paret, editor, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1986), 296. Note: Leuthen was actually a single envelopment, versus a double envelopment, such as at Cannae.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid, 300.

⁴ R. Ernest Dupuy and Trevor N. Dupuy, The Encyclopedia of Military History: From 3500 B.C. to the Present, 2nd ed. (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1986), 830-831.

⁵ Rothenberg, 302-306.

⁶ Gordon A. Craig, "Delbrück: The Military Historian," in Makers of Modern Strategy, Peter Paret, editor, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1986), 326-353.

⁷ A very interesting discussion of the interaction between Bismarck and Moltke the Elder can be found in Stig Förster's article, "Facing 'People's War': Moltke the Elder and Germany's Military Options after 1871," The Journal of Strategic Studies vol. 10, no. 2 (June 1987), 209-230. Equally interesting, Förster traces the evolution of Moltke's thinking on this subject into his later years, where he clearly changes his view that all military planning must be focused on a single, decisive, "preventative war." In his famous speech before the Reichstag on 14 May 1890, Moltke warned: "The age of cabinet war is behind us—all we have now is people's war, and any prudent government will hesitate to bring about a war of this nature with all its incalculable consequences. . . . Gentlemen, if the war that has been hanging over our heads now for more than ten years like the Sword of Damocles—if this war breaks out, then its duration and its end will not be foreseeable. The greatest powers of Europe, armed as never before, will be going into battle with each other; not one of them can be crushed so completely in one or two campaigns that it will admit defeat, be compelled to conclude peace under hard terms, and will not come back, even if it is a year later, to renew the struggle. Gentlemen, it may be a war of seven years' or of thirty years' duration—and woe to him who sets Europe alight, who first puts the fuse to the powder keg!"

⁸ It is noteworthy that Delbrück himself was criticized by German General Staff historians when he suggested that one of the great practitioners of *Ermattungsstrategie* was Frederick the Great. How could he denigrate their hero by suggesting he would pursue anything less than a strategy of total annihilation? Craig, 342.

⁹ Matthew Cooper, The German Army: 1933-1945 (New York: Stein and Day Publishers, 1978), 133-134.

¹⁰ Cooper, 134.

¹¹ Correlli Barnett, The Swordbearers, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1963), 6-7.

¹² James L. Stokesbury, A Short History of World War I (New York: William Morrow & Co., Inc., 1981).

¹³ Michael Howard, "Men Against Fire: The Doctrine of the Offensive in 1914," in Makers of Modern Strategy, Peter Paret, editor, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1986), 510-526.

¹⁴ Bruce I. Gudmundsson, Stormtroop Tactics: Innovation in the German Army, 1914-1918 (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1989), 17-25.

¹⁵ Timothy T. Lupfer, The Dynamics of Doctrine: The Changes in German Tactical Doctrine During the First World War (Fort Leavenworth, KS: USACGSC, Leavenworth Paper No. 4, July 1981), 2-8.

¹⁶ Ibid, 8-11.

¹⁷ Ibid, 11-12.

¹⁸ Ibid, 12-21.

¹⁹ Ibid, 22.

²⁰ Ibid, 21-27. See also, Gudmundsson, pp. 91-104.

²¹ Lupfer, 35.

²² Gudmundsson, 27-32.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid, 33-35.

²⁵ Ibid, 34-49.

²⁶ Ibid, 50-51.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid, 51-53.

²⁹ Lupfer, 27-29 and Gudmundsson, 83-85.

³⁰ It is worth noting that the German Army, under the leadership of Lieutenant Colonel Georg Bruchmüller, developed advanced techniques for delivering accurate, controlled artillery fire in support of attacks. Lupfer, 41-45.

³¹ Gudmundsson, 84. On October 23, 1916, Ludendorff signed an order authorizing each army on the Western Front to establish a *sturmtruppen* battalion.

³² Lupfer, 46-49.

³³ Vincent J. Esposito, The West Point Atlas of American Wars, Volume II (1900-1953) (New York: Praeger, 1959), maps 62-65. See also Stokesbury, 259-280.

³⁴ Stokesbury, 274-275.

³⁵ James S. Corum, The Roots of Blitzkrieg: Hans von Seeckt and German Military Reform (Lawrence, KS: University of Kansas Press, 1992), 25-28. Von Seeckt initially served as the chief of staff of the 3rd Army Corps on the Western Front. In 1915 von Seeckt was appointed chief of staff of the 11 Army on the Eastern Front under General von Mackensen where he planned one of the significant German victories of the war, the offensive against the Russian Army at Gorlice in Galicia. Seeckt and Mackensen continued their winning partnership leading a Austro-Bulgarian-German Army Group that overran Serbia in late 1915 and later, a Austro-German Army Group that effectively delayed the Russian Brusilov offensive in 1916. As chief of staff of a new

Army Group under the command of Austrian Archduke Josef, Seeckt participated in the successful counteroffensive that effectively knocked Romania out of the war.

³⁶ Ibid, 28-29.

³⁷ Ibid, 35.

³⁸ Ibid, 37.

³⁹ Ibid, 40.

⁴⁰ Ibid, 39.

⁴¹ Ibid, 97-121.

⁴² Ibid, 147.

⁴³ Ibid, 31.

⁴⁴ Ibid, 148.

⁴⁵ Ibid, 144-151.

⁴⁶ Ibid, 29.

⁴⁷ Ibid, 69.

⁴⁸ Ibid, 76-77.

⁴⁹ Ibid, 78-80.

⁵⁰ Ibid, 85-87.

⁵¹ Ibid, 87.

⁵² Ibid, 74.

⁵³ Ibid, 89.

⁵⁴ Williamson Murray, "The German Response to Victory in Poland: A Case Study in Professionalism," in Armed Forces and Society Winter 1981.

⁵⁵ Robert A Doughty, "Myth of the Blitzkrieg," in Challenging the United States Symmetrically and Asymmetrically: Can America Be Challenged?, Lloyd J. Matthews, editor, (Carlisle Barracks, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, July 1998), 57-79.

⁵⁶ United States, Department of the Army, Knowledge and Speed: The Annual Report of the Army After Next Project to the Chief of Staff of the Army, (Fort Monroe, VA: Headquarters, U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command, 18 July 1997).

⁵⁷ David A. Fastabend, "Letters to the Editor," Army Magazine Vol 48, no. 7 (July 1998), 3-6. COL Fastabend, commander of the 555th Engineer Group at Fort Lewis, WA, wrote a very insightful letter which Army Leadership would do well to read and consider, titled, "Toning Down the Silence."

⁵⁸ Ibid, 5.

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