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"Riding two horses."

- Command and Control in Crisis Management Scenarios.

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Thesis submitted for the Degree of Master of Philosophy
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Summary

Literature about command and control, i.e. the direction and coordination of military forces, traditionally deals with technology and procedures. The underlying domestic conditions, including cultural, personal and political relations, are rarely the focus for command and control theory. This thesis' main assumption is that the conceptualising of command and control has to take such underlying conditions into account. At times, especially in crisis, some fundamental preconceptions are in conflict with each other, causing dangerous friction. The thesis analyses two instances, where several tacit, but still fundamental, assumptions were at loggerheads. The study is based on theoretical 'nuts and bolts', provided in the opening chapter.

The first case, the appointment of General Foch as 'strategic director' of the allied forces in 1918, involves coalition warfare and looks at the conditions that hampered the realisation of a much extolled principle in command and control, 'unity of command'. In March 1918, the 'luxury' of having several armies present in the field, without any central military authority, became too expensive, as the Germans threatened to destroy the allied forces piecemeal. The thesis shows how internal British disagreements over strategy initially weakened the British Expeditionary Force, and then how Field-Marshal Haig made matters worse by relentlessly fighting for his prerogatives as their supreme commander. The thesis also shows how Haig after the war, forged his own account of the incident, to disguise the intolerable 'surrender' to a French general, and how this sham has coloured historians' accounts of the episode, until today.

The second case analyses how Norway tumbled into war in 1940. The Norwegian government had a tacit, incoherent and ill-coordinated plan for how they should once again keep Norway out of war. Parts of the plan were secret, even to the generals, as it probably had to be given Norway's status as neutral. The problems of secrecy were enhanced by the fact that some of the precautionary measures run counter to common military sense. As a consequence, the *de facto* decision to resist German aggression was in fact taken by a rather insignificant colonel. The case demonstrates how the underlying conditions of command and control, and not the actual directives from the government, which have traditionally been the historians' focus, determined Norway's destiny.

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1 Introduction

'if you wish for peace, understand war'
- Liddell Hart

The object of command and control is to carry into effect those military actions that will lead to the fulfilment of policy. In no place is it more imperative to get this right, than in international crises, where a dissonance between the field of cerebration and the field of military mechanics may end in a catastrophe. Hence, in this essay I will make command and control in crisis management scenarios the topic of discussion. I will carry out an in-depth analysis of two crucial events in military history, where a crisis and a given layout of command and control arrangements converged and added up to something no one had foreseen.

In the first case we will find several nations involved, though our focus will be on the British view, and a crisis well inside a hot war. At 12 noon, 26 March 1918, the Allies met in the little town of Doullens. The outcome of the meeting was somewhat surprising given the parties' earlier views. At the conference Britain finally agreed to subordinate its generals to an officer from another country. Generals seldom hand over their prerogatives, unless forced to do so. And it is correspondingly rare that a nation, which in this case had fought a dreadful war for almost four years, hands over the ultimate responsibility for winning it to another state. The reason why they did it was that they faced an imminent crisis, which could cost them the war anyway.

The second crisis is cleaner cut. It involves only one nation, and the crisis is squeezed in between lopsided neutrality and a dubious war. In April 1940 Norway faced an abrupt and lethal threat from Germany. The Norwegian government was unwittingly on the brink of war. Due to the existing command and control arrangements in Norway the decisive decision to commit the first act of war was left to a colonel, far from the political maze in the capital. Had the layout of command and control in Norway been any different, the outcome of the crisis would arguably have been the opposite of what it actually was.

In the first case, command and control played a significant part both in the generation and the solution of the crisis. In the second case the command and control layout moulded the crisis, being neither cause nor effect. Hence, the case from 1918 will be

a before-and-after analysis, while the case from 1940 will focus on the 'before', as there was no 'after' so to speak, since Norway tumbled into war and occupation where much more than command and control had to be rebuilt from the ground. Consequently the first case will occupy the greater part of the thesis.

For some years now, the rather simple 'equation' of C^2 has been challenged by allegedly more 'advanced' equations, as for instance: C^3, C^3I, or C^4I, [1] or even more luscious still: C^4ISR og BM/C^2.[2] Thomas Coakley's book gives what I think to be the prevailing world record, which is $C^{27}E$, where 'E' stands for etc.[3] I can see no reason why it should stop there; alas he forgot 'confusion'. I will not add just another letter to the 'bulimic' equitation of command and control. I am going the other way. In the next chapter I will look at the phenomena that hide beneath the acronyms and buzzwords of command and control.[4]

The concept of crisis will be used in a slightly different way in this essay from what is usual in literature covering international crises. I will utilise it in accordance with the medical concept of 'crisis', where 'crisis' describes the point in the course of a serious disease at which a decisive change occurs, leading either to recovery or to death. Accordingly, crises can occur well inside a war, as in 1918. In chapter 3 I will elaborate more on the phenomena of crises.

The cases will be spelled out in chapter 4 and 5, and I will bring the essay to a close by the conclusion in chapter 6.

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[1] Command, control, communications (computers) (intelligence).

[2] James M. Liepman, '$C^{nth}I^{nth}$xyz, TACS, and Air Battle Management, The Search for Operational Doctrine', *AirpowerJournal* (Spring 1999); C^4ISR = command, control, communications, computers, intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance; BM/C^2 = Battle management/command and control.

[3] 'C^{27}: command, control, communications, computer, cohesion, counterintelligence, crypto analysis, conformance, collaboration, conceptualization, correspondence, camaraderie, commissaries, camuflage, calculators, cannon, caissons, canteens, canoes, catapults, carpetbaggers, caddies, carabineeris, carrier pigeons, corn whiskey, camp followers and calamine lotion.' Thomas P. Coakley, *Command and Control for War and Peace* (Washington, 1992), 9.

[4] It is not clear whether command and control refers to one thing, 'command and control', or two things, 'command' *and* 'control'. Is it a singular or is it a plural? Should we say that 'command and control' *is* one thing, or that they *are* something else? (Most writers tend to phrase it 'command and control *is*')

2 Command and control

'Command and control equipment is just radios and other devices soldiers use to talk to each other in combat, we don't want command and control in combat.'

- *Senator Gary Hart*

In the summer of 1263, the Norwegian king Haakon Haakonson gathered an armada just off shore by the city of Bergen. With 160 seagoing vessels he headed for Scotland. He was, according to the chronicles, very upset by the rumours of Scottish raids of terror, which threatened the Norwegian rule of the Hebrides and Isle of Man. In December 1262 the king died in Kirkwall, after what the Scots characterised as a downright fiasco.[5] Norway had been at its peak as a great power in Northwest Europe. Some generations later Norway did not exist as an independent nation.

On 22 June 1941, the first German *Panzer* crossed the Soviet border. 138 German divisions participated in *Operation Barbarossa*, and they confronted 148 Soviet divisions, which made this the largest land operation in history. Before the year of 1941 had come to an end, the Soviets had 2,5 million casualties, and in addition to that, one million of their troops were POWs of their former allies. A total of about 20 million people were slain in the horrendous war between the dictators, before the fighting was brought to an end in the streets of Berlin.

Why did the allegedly foolhardy Norsemen and the meticulous Germans embark upon such dangerous adventures? The authorities' motives, and the inducements to the soldiers, differed considerably in the situations mentioned, but the cases share something very important. Haakon and Hitler were both able to *extend* their *authority* over distance, at times over vast distances indeed. Hence Roger Beaumont defines 'command and control' just so: **'Command and control, [is] an extension of authority over distance.'**[6]

However, the most interesting question remains: how is such an authority produced, upheld and extended?

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[5] Narve Bjørgo, Øystein Rian and Alf Kaartvedt, *Selvstendighet og union. Fra middelalderen til 1905* (Oslo, 1995), 72.

[6] Roger A. Beaumont, *The Nerves of War: Emerging Issues in and References to Command and Control* (Washington, 1986), 8.

2.1 The nerves of war

Authority over distance exists, so to speak, within a triangle. One of the corners consists of the phenomenon of *authority* in itself. Why did millions of Germans sacrifice everything they got, their own lives included, to an unemployed and futile artist, in the shape of an Austrian corporal? Another corner is made of *intentions*. The target group must know what the authority wants to accomplish, before it can do anything. The third corner is occupied by *dissemination*. Even if Haakon had an intention to hammer the Scots, and the Norsemen had the motivation to follow him, it would not help him much if he was unable to disseminate his intention. Thousands of compatriots did not know where to meet, and what to bring. Haakon had to tell them. In the following we will look a bit closer at each of the triangle's corners.

2.1.1 Authority

We will not dig into all the connotations and philosophical implications connected to the concept of 'authority', saving establishing that military cohesion has to be based on psychological and sociological conditions. It is always possible to force *some* soldiers to follow suit, but the leader cannot coerce them all. A great majority of them have to choose voluntarily to comply. [7] The second point is that some societies have managed to restrict the privilege of issuing military orders to only one office, the political executive's. It is important to notice that the restriction of the military prerogatives is not without hazards of its own, something the Norwegian case below will show.[8] Hence, the first prerequisite for expanding authority over distance is that a relatively large portion of the target group *wants* to abide by an established authority.

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[7] 'Once the number of lawbreakers is more than tiny, the police typically retreat to the station house, or put on a ceremonial show of acting as if they were enforcing the law[.]The point for our present discussion is that we cannot assume that the system of acceptance is backed by a credible system of force. For one thing the system of force is itself a system of acceptance. Police forces and armies, for example, are systems of status-functions. But more important for our present purposes, the system of force presupposes the other systems of status-functions. We cannot assume that Leviathan will come to our aid in a genuine crisis; on the contrary, we are in a state of nature all the time, but the state of nature is precisely one in which people do in fact accept systems of constitutive rules, at least nearly all the time.' John R. Searle, *The Construction of Social Reality* (London, 1995), 91.

[8] General MacArthur has given an extraordinary articulated view in this matter: 'I find in existence a new and heretofore unknown and dangerous concept that the members of our armed forces owe primary allegiance or loyalty to those who temporarily exercise the authority of the Executive Branch of Government rather than to the country and its Constitution which they are sworn to defend. No proposition could be more dangerous.' MacArthur to the Massachusetts legislature after his dismissal. Quoted in Richard Ned Lebow, *Between Peace and War. The Nature of International Crisis* (Baltimore, 1981), 289.

2.1.2 Intentions

It is important to keep in mind that one intention is just a part of a huge web of intentions. If I have an intention to play golf with my brother on Tuesday, I also have intentions of having my bag ready, and the car available. Most of our intentions are not part of our train of thought, nevertheless they decide where that train is going. I am not able to reconsider all my intentions all the time: my mental capability is simply not sufficient, and moreover it is paramount that I do not do it. It would be impossible to reach complex goals if all my intentions were constantly up for revision, and it would likewise be impossible to co-ordinate my actions with others. What is really profound, regarding command and control, is that the politicians and the generals at the top have a much wider picture of that 'web of intentions' than the soldiers in the field. The misfortune of General John D. Lavelle testifies how serious the tension can be between the 'internal' and 'external' apprehension of an intention.

General Lavelle assumed command of Seventh Air Force in Saigon in 1971. He believed that North Vietnam had integrated their early warning, surveillance, and AAA radars with the SAM sites, in a way that constituted a deadly threat to the Americans.[9] The rules of engagement that he had inherited forbade engagement unless Vietnamese weapon systems had gone 'active against' US aircraft. The enemy's netting of several radars therefore posed a threat that Lavelle had no opportunity to counteract, within the prevailing rules of engagement (ROE), because the weapon system that actually engaged US aircraft did not need to 'go active'. He desperately tried to change the ROE, a futile attempt. Consequently he had to make a difficult decision, 'What took priority: the ROE or the safety and effectiveness of his command?' Lavelle chose the latter. From the external perspective, Lavelle's decision was the rational one, I guess. The overall American intention was to win the war in Vietnam, and you cannot win a war by letting the enemy decimate your airmen. From the internal perspective though, the decision was fatally wrong. What Lavelle did not know was that Henry Kissinger was in Paris conducting secret peace talks with the North Vietnamese. Kissinger did not know that Lavelle had violated the ROE. As a consequence Le Duc Tho of North Vietnam broke the talks off abruptly,

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[9] This passage is based on Major Lee E. DeRemer, USAF 'Leadership between a Rock and a Hard Place' *Airpower Journal* (Fall 1996).

because Kissinger either was lying or very poorly informed about the activities of Seventh Air Force. From the internal perspective of Kissinger, Lavelle's decision was irrational. A negotiator who lies unashamedly, or does not know the realities, is not worth talking to.

Lavelle was caught between a rock and a hard place, or between the crossfire of internal and external views on intentions. The two perspectives can at times be radically different, and can cause severe problems.[10] Lavelle was court-martialled, and his retirement rank was reduced to major general: 'Never before had such an action occurred in American military history.'

There is a close connection between intentions and plans: 'intentions are the building blocks of larger plans.'[11] But sometimes plans resemble the monster of Frankenstein. Initially a plan is an aid to fulfil your intentions, but rather soon your intentions will be to carry out the plan, regardless of whether the plan still leads to the fulfilment of your intention. The Schlieffen plan, the most monstrous of them all, is outside our scope, but we shall meet some of his smaller siblings in our cases.

2.1.3 Dissemination.

Given that the executive has an intention ready for use, how should he tell others about it? There are three ways to disseminate an intention. You could invite the recipients to a conversation. That is, you can use two-way communication. The benefit is that the recipient can ask questions and thereby get a much more comprehensive understanding of your intentions. A danger though is that the original intention can change during the dialogue. If I approach my spouse with an intention to convince her that our next holiday should be in London, I may end up with my intention totally altered. Maybe Copenhagen is a better choice after all? I will call this way of disseminating intentions 'reciprocal influence', to distinguish it from the other two.

The next option is merely to give an order, or broadcast it by radio waves or runners. This time the communication goes one way only. One-way communication is much faster than two-ways, and we are not in danger of being converted by the addressee, at least not overtly. The actions that follow are supervenient upon the intentions, that is, the

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[10] 'In most crises, tensions exist between the actions that appear to be most militarily prudent to officers in the field and those that are considered diplomatically appropriate by senior political officials.' Scott D. Sagan 'Rules of Engagement' in Alexander L. George (ed.), *Avoiding War. Problems of Crisis Management* (Boulder, 1991), 444.

action is influenced by the intention, but not vice versa. Hence, I label this way of disseminating intentions, 'supervenient influence'. Additionally, it is the subordinated who decides whether the person in charge has control over the organisation or not, when 'supervenient influence' is in use. If he simply does not comply, or deliberately returns biased reports to distort the foundation for new decisions at the top, the authority can be lulled into delusions, and lose control.

The third possibility is to let the addressee *guess* what your intentions are without communication at all, based on his previous knowledge of how things used to be done. He has to infer what to do, based on what he thinks the authoritative intention would be if the authorities had known, given what other members in the organisation do. I will call such actions isomorphic.[12]

In the old 'pre-digital' times, all telephone users had first-hand experience with coordination problems. If a telephone conversation was cut off unexpectedly, and both wanted the connection restored immediately, they had each to choose whether to call back, or wait. If both chose the same, the conversation was not restored. Whom to call back can be decided by previous agreement, or by salience. [13] For instance, if only the one who made the original telephone call knows the number to call, the solution is evident. Likewise, if it is regarded as good manners that the one who made the original call calls again, so that the expenses stay with the originator, there will no longer be a problem. You infer the other's intentions, due to a valid convention. [14] The purpose of military doctrines and standing operational procedures is exactly to prepare the ground for military conventions to take place. Actions based on isomorphism are swift and cost-effective: you do not use your time waiting on the telephone line. But the process is difficult, and it carries great risk.

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[11] Michael E. Bratman, *Intention, Plans, and Practical Reason* (Cambridge, Mass., 1987), 32.

[12] The relation between a correct map and the terrain it corresponds to is isomorphic, i.e. there is a relationship between them, but a change in one of them will not automatically result in a corresponding change in the other.

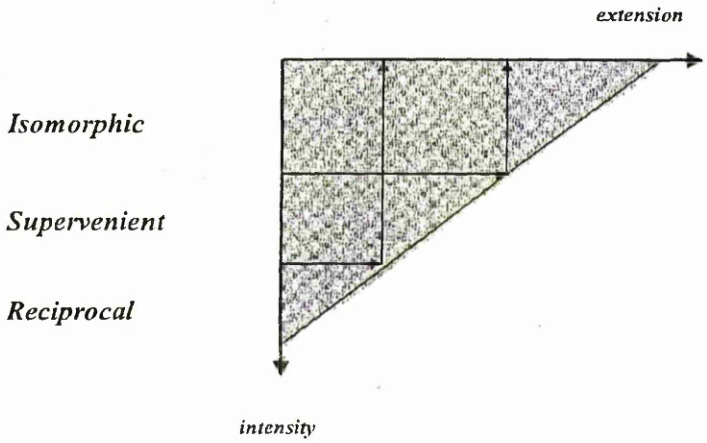
[13] David K. Lewis, *Convention A Philosophical Study* (Cambridge, Mass., 1969), 52.

[14] Convention is defined as: 'A regularity *R* in the behaviour of members of a population *P* when they are agents in a recurrent situation *S* is a *convention* if and only if it is true that, and it is common knowledge in *P* that, in almost any instance of *S* among members of *P*, (1) almost everyone conforms to *R*; (2) almost everyone expects almost everyone else to conform to *R*; (3) almost everyone has approximately the same preferences regarding all possible combinations of actions; (4) almost everyone prefers that any one more conform to *R*, on condition that almost everyone conform to *R*; (5) almost everyone would prefer that any one more conform to *R'*, on condition that almost everyone conform to *R'*, where *R'* is some possible regularity in the behavior of members of *P* in *S*, such that almost no one in almost any instances of *S* among members of *P* could conform both to *R'* and to *R*.' Lewis, *Convention*, 78.

2.1.3.1 The Gamut

Reciprocal influence is only possible within a small group. Supervenient influences can occur within a much larger group of people, containing millions. Isomorphic influence has an infinite reach, it can work around the world, instantaneously. We can illustrate this with a simple model.

Figure 2-1 The Gamut



The figure gives an idea about the relationship between the intensity and extension of command and control. The *intensity* describes the degree of control, i.e. how tight the reins are, while the *extension* denotes the geographic or organisational expansion. If a general wants a very intensive type of command and control he has to see his subordinates and talk directly to them: 'There is no alternative to looking into a subordinate's eyes, listening to his tone of voice'.[15] That's possible only for a small group, hence the extensions have to be modest.

Napoleon was able to extend his authority over almost the whole of Europe, just by reducing the traditional desire for close control, and allowing his generals to do much of the thinking. It was effective, but risky:

> Thus Napoleon at Jena had known nothing about the main action that took place on that day; had forgotten all about two of his corps; did not issue orders to a third, and possibly to a fourth; was taken by surprise by the action of the fifth; and, to cap it all, had one of his principal

[15] The Israeli General Yshayahor Gavish, quoted in Marine Corps Doctrine Publication 6, http://www.fas.org/irp/doddir/usmc/mcdp6/toc.htm

> subordinates display the kind of disobedience that would have brought a lesser mortal before a firing squad. Despite all these faults in command, Napoleon won what was probably the greatest single triumph in his entire career.[16]

I am not sure that there were any 'faults' in Napoleon's command at all. All he did was to relinquish control, by making a bet on the powerful but fragile isomorphic way of extending his authority.[17]

By enhancing the troops' skills and competence, or investing in new technology, the total 'amount' of command and control will increase, and one can reach further with the same intensity. It is not only the particular working skill that increases the extension, but also the troops' skill in cooperation. Eliot Cohen and John Gooch have noticed these phenomena through their studies of military misfortunes: 'Self-organization in the face of the unforeseen or the unexpected is at an especially high premium. Units and small groups must achieve levels of cooperation and mutual self-help that surpass those commonly expected of them or for which they have been prepared. Unexpected tasks must be delegated quickly and efficiently and competing demands resolved speedily and wisely.' [18] By buying a cellular phone and a helmet-mounted online camera for every soldier, or by working with a sagacious and visionary doctrine, the 'reservoir' of command and control will flourish, and the organisations can reach more complex goals than before.[19]

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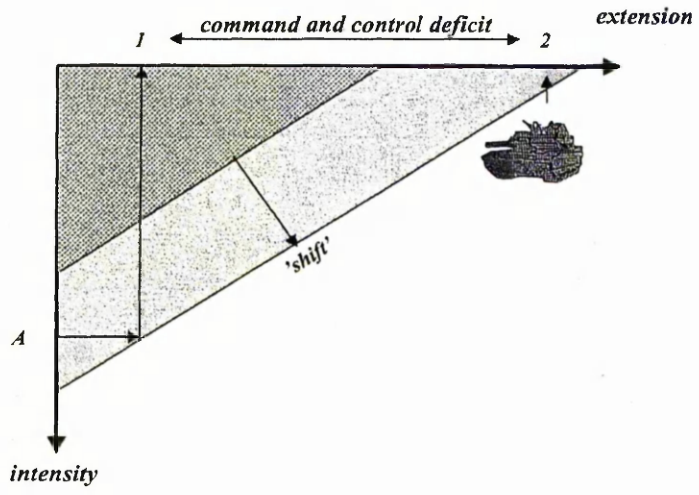
[16] Martin van Creveld, *Command in War* (Cambridge Mass., 1985), 96.
[17] The most serious charge against the usefulness of the term 'command and control' is that the concept of 'control' is like a stowaway that clings to the concept of 'command' without being invited. It is possible to gain astonishingly victories without 'control': Napoleon did it. But he could not do it without 'command'.
[18] Eliot Cohen and John Gooch *Military Misfortunes. The Anatomy of Failure in War* (New York, 1991), 161.
[19] Robert Leonhard has a similar experience of the relation between intensity and extension: 'One of the lessons I carried away that day was not to let my platoons disperse too far from me. I had lost confidence in my lieutenants' ability to navigate and communicate, and I did not want to lose another platoon to lack of command and control. Fortunately, over the following two years, I got better at commanding, and my subordinates improved as well. By the fifth or sixth time we manoeuvred, we had developed all the right standard operating procedures (SOPs) to overcome the inevitable navigation and communication problems. As our confidence in each other grew, our ability to manoeuvre effectively improved. But I learned a trend that I have observed ever since: *Soldiers tend to concentrate in order to facilitate command and control.* When all else fails, it is easier to control your men when they are within visual range or even better, shouting range. This is not just a fleeting observation based on one poorly trained company. It is a very old characteristic of tactics, and one of the tacit underpinnings of the principle of mass.' Robert R. Leonhard, *The Principles of War for the Information Age* (Novato CA, 1998), 109.

Figure 2-2 The Gamut in use.



The figure above conveys several ideas. First, it illustrates a positive shift in the availability of command and control. If the organisation increases its technology or competence, it is possible to extend a degree of intensive command and control over a wider area than before. But still it is possible to have a surfeit. In what must have been one of the darkest hours in the history of the Third Reich, the Allied landing on the beaches of Normandy, the Germans suffered a serious deficit in their command and control system. Field Marshal Gerd von Rundstedt initially ordered two panzer divisions, the Panzer Lehr Division and the 12th Hitlerjugend Panzer Division, to speed toward Caen.[20] Some hours later the divisions were halted by the OKW, and Rundstedt was harshly reprimanded for having assumed command of the two divisions without prior approval from Hitler. Rundstedt's operations officer describes the situation:

> Throughout the morning and early afternoon I, the Chief of Staff, General Blumentritt, and Rundstedt himself repeatedly telephoned the OKW, in order to find out what Hitler had decided in the matter of these two divisions. Apparently he was asleep, and no one dared wake him. It was not until his usual conference, between three and four o'clock that afternoon, that Hitler decided to allow the commitment of the divisions. They were immediately ordered to resume their advance. But by then it was too late.[21]

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[20] This section is based on James P. Duffy, *Hitler slept late and other blunders that cost him the war* (New York, 1991), 113-124.
[21] Ibid. 122.

Albert Speer reveals the surreal tranquillity that surrounded the Führer at this decisive moment: 'On June 6, I was at the Berghof about ten o'clock in the morning when one of Hitler's military adjutants told me that the invasion had begun early that morning. 'Has the Fuehrer been awakened?' I asked. He shook his head. 'No, he receives the news after he has eaten breakfast.'[22]

The situation can be described by the figure above. Hitler wanted tight control, i.e. his command and control were intensive. Let say Hitler's demand was at *A* in the figure above. Given the valid technology and doctrine, that gave an extension *1* in the figure. The Allied landings, though, demanded a much larger extension. Also the panzer divisions needed command and control to fulfil the Führer's overall intention, to hinder the Allies. As an illustration, the divisions were at point *2* above. Remember, the axis also indicates the organisational extension, and to reach them Hitler should have relinquished control and opted for more isomorphic actions. He did not: 'He [Hitler] decided from the outset to centralize decision-making at a point far from the front and thence to supervise the control of operations in the closest detail.'[23] He could not have *both* intensive control and forces spread over whole of Europe.

2.2 Conclusion

In this chapter I have tried to elucidate the concept of 'command and control'. I stated that command and control rest on three pillars, *authority, intention* and *dissemination.*

In both case-studies that follow I will analyse the intention, the authority and the way of dissemination that were at work. Regarding the intention I will examine whether there were substantial differences in the perspective, that is, whether the 'internal' perspective from the government was significantly different than the 'external' perspectives of the officers on the spot. I will also comment on the possible dysfunctional prominence of plans over intentions. Regarding authority, I will explore the origin of the intentions that were brought to bear on the operations. And I will assess the political 'dirigibility', that is. the politicians' ability to grasp the functional imperatives of military institutions, i.e. the vernacular and terminology of the military profession. It is increasingly hard for a modern party-political careerist, with little martial experience of his own, to master the 'nuts and

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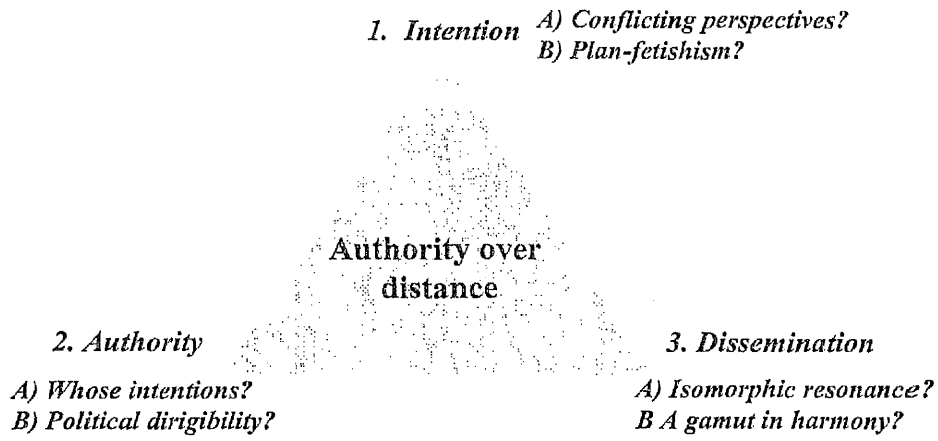
[22] Ibid. 122.
[23] John Keegan, *The Mask of Command* (London, 1987), 301.

bolts' of the increasingly complex military profession. Furthermore, a politician's behaviour in a crisis is also highly influenced by his image of crisis dynamics. On dissemination, I will investigate the 'sounding board' of military improvisations, that is, was there anything in the officers's backgrounds or education that gave them an inclination to one kind of action rather than another. Then I will analyse 'the gamut', or whether there was a sound harmony between needs and possibilities in command and control. The figure below gives a broad overview of the cases' framework.

Figure 2-3 Command and control in a nutshell.



Before we go to the cases, we have to make a short stop at the concept of crisis. A lot of books have been written about international crises, so I do not intend to build the concept from the ground. I will only outline my understanding of crisis, to show why both the German's assault in 1940 and their breakthrough in 1918 were instances of crisis.

3 Crisis

'[N]o staffer can manage crises. Once a crisis starts you can bet your life that, if you are the crisis manager's staffer, you will be kicked aside and all the principals, the President, the Secretaries, will take over and run it, and you might as well go home. During the crisis – that's the time to be away – that's your staff responsibility'

- William Odom

Is not the term 'Crisis Management' an oxymoron? If it is a real crisis, how could it be managed, or if it could be managed, is it then a crisis? In this chapter we will first look at the concept of crisis. Thereafter we will look at the management of it, if any.

3.1 Definition

The Greek word *krisis* was originally used in medical science to denote the point in the course of a serious disease at which a decisive change occurs, leading either to recovery or to death. Used that way in political science, a *krisis* can occur well inside a war. Ragnvald Rocher-Nielsen, a staff officer in General Ruge's headquarters during the operations in Norway in 1940, told an illuminating story.[24] General Paget, the commander of the British troops in Romsdal and Gudbrandsdalen, promised on 26 April that 2000 fresh troops would arrive in Åndalsnes each day. According to Rocher-Nielsen, Ruge estimated his future needs, and wrote in his diary for the 28th: 'The crisis is over.' Rocher-Nielsen rather laconically adds: 'Ruge was right, alas not the way he had anticipated.' General Paget returned on the 28th, just to inform Ruge that he was to withdraw his forces from the area. The battle for southern Norway was to all practical purposes over. This little story spells out the significance of a genuine crisis, Ruge hoped that the 'patient' would start his recovery on the 28th, but instead he became incurable.

But would not any war be prolific in crises? Does not the possibility of sudden death hide in any skirmish? I will draw a discrete demarcation line: to call a situation an international crisis, the situation has to be so serious that it threatens the *constitutive rules* that international relations are based on.

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[24] Ragnvald Rocher-Nielsen in an interview in a documentary television program. (Norge i krig, program 3, overfall og motstand.)

3.1.1 Constitutive rules

The philosopher John R. Searle distinguishes between *regulative* and *constitutive* rules. The regulative rules regulate 'antecedently existing activities'.[25] 'Drive on the right-hand side of the road', or 'don not pick your nose' or 'do not forget to clean your marching boots' are all examples of regulative rules. They can be in the form of judicial laws, rules of good manners, or rules of thumb, etc. What they all have in common is that they regulate activities that already exist. Constitutive rules on the other hand do not regulate already existing activities, but 'create the very possibility of certain activities'.[26] The game of football, as we know it, could not exist without the rules that describe the pitch, the teams and the ball. A game with 150 players or 10 balls, played with the forehead only, would not be football. The constitutive rules constitute the activity.

I think it is reasonable to say that a genuine international crisis threatens to alter the constitutive rules of the international community. The German assault on Norway was a genuine crisis because Norway's intercourse with Germany would change considerably if Germany occupied the nation. It would be a totally new ballgame, so to speak. Debilitation, that a state ceases to exist and disappear from the map, is the most extreme change in the constitutive rules of the international arena. The point is valid also in March 1918. The Allies feared that the war could be lost, if they did not manage to check the German offensive. It would be a totally new game, if the Germans won the war, or routed the allied forces. Hence, neither the catastrophe at the Somme nor the fall of Singapore in 1942 was a crisis in this respect. The UK would remain in the war, even with those losses.

I do not think that the definition is all embracing or foolproof. The primary concern is not whether I have grasped the 'essence' of crisis, but whether my definition is wide enough to be useful, and narrow enough to have practical significance.[27]

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[25] Searle, *The Construction of Social Reality*, 27.
[26] Ibid. 27.
[27] 'Some of [the descriptions] are, to be sure, better description that other. But this betterness is a matter of being more useful tools – tools which accomplish some human purpose better than do competing descriptions. All these purposes are, from a philosophical as opposed to a practical point of view, on a par. There is no over-riding purpose called 'discovering the truth' which takes precedence.' Richart Rorty *Philosophy and Social Hope* (London, 1999), 54.

3.2 Crisis management

Can a crisis be managed at all, or is it just like sitting in a barrel going down the Niagara Falls? I think it is possible to handle crises. In fact most crises in the world have been handled. Unfortunately those that got out of hand are usually those that make it into the history books. Chaos or turmoil is not an intrinsic part of a crisis. The Melian Dialogue, in the way Thucydides describes it, is for instance characterised by its calm and dignity, despite the fact that nothing less than the Melians' right to exist was at stake.[28]

In this essay I will not explore the generic origins of crisis. What is important, in this context, are the pitfalls that flourish in international crises. The subject of my survey is command and control; hence generic shortcomings in our cerebration are of greatest concern, since the brain is the 'biosphere' of command and control.

3.2.1 Misapprehension, the rough ground of command and control

People make decisions, all the time, not just in crises, and decision-research shows that people in numerous fields tend to make the same kinds of decision-making mistakes. The shortfalls are of course valid also for crisis managers.

An international crisis is distinguished by its seriousness, and the fact that the decision-makers work against the clock, or at least have a feeling of urgency. Richard Lebow claims that such a feeling often is unwarranted: 'The Berlin crisis lasted 311 days. It is accordingly wrong to speak of severe time pressure as a distinguishing characteristic of international crisis.' [29] Nevertheless, the *feeling* of severe time pressure is often present, and has an impact on the decision-makers. We know that the combination of high risk and the feeling of time shortage can cause mental malfunctions such as 'truncated time span', decisional closures, irrational procrastination, cognitive rigidity, reduced cognitive complexity, diminished creativity and a cripplingly biased view of the opponent. Still it is easy to forget these points, when we solve old crises in our armchair. Likewise, when we in retrospect talk about command and control in high-stress scenarios, it is important to remember the effect of numerous mental dysfunctions which are impossible to recreate artificially. The historian's privilege is not only that he knows the outcome, and the significance of variables, but that he is usually 'cool, calm and collected'. Even if he should

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[28] Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War* (London 1972), 400.

reach the old dream of writing history *wie es eigentlich gewesen ist* he will never be able to recreate the mixture of mental distortions that handicapped the actor. Hence, some sort of leniency towards the actors is appropriate also when dealing with command and control.

Compromises, horse trading, and straightforward hanky-panky are all equipment in any ambitious politician's toolbox. 'Dirty tricks' are often indispensable in crisis management. The ethos for the professional officer is completely different: 'The greatest misfortune which can befall an Army is to be involved in politics. Like the Crown, to whom our allegiance is due, we have nothing to do with politics.'[30] Hence, the tension between the civil authorities and the military professionals is likely to increase during a crisis. For politicians military professionalism can on occasion feel like a straitjacket.

In a crisis the armed forces will often find themselves in an uncomfortable twilight between peace and war, or war and peace. Military horse-sense is to prepare for war when the danger of a war lurks, a drive that can be counterproductive in a crisis. Soldiers traditionally dislike irregularities and peculiarities, despite the fact that the majority of military operations are something other than war.[31] A kind of military frustration is therefore an inseparable part of crisis.[32]

All crises are extraordinary, and the cases that follow are as idiosyncratic as any. They are not there because they are representative, but because they are genuine.

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[29] Lebow, *Between Peace and War*, 12.

[30] Major A. C. Grant-Duff during the 'Curragh Incident' in 1914. Quoted in Hew Strachan, *The Politics of the British Army* (Oxford, 1997), 6.

[31] 'While low-intensity conflict has most frequently been the actual practical soldiering experiences of the Western soldiers in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, it is the dream of what French soldiers knew as *la grande guerre* that has commanded the attention of theorists and of historians in turn.' Ian Beckett, 'Low-Intensity Conflict: Its Place in the Study of War' in David A. Charters, Marc Milner, and J. Brent Wilson (eds.), *Military History and the Military Profession* (Westport, 1992), 121.

[32] 'Civilian-military conflict is therefore very likely to develop when political leaders, concerned with broader national objectives, make victory difficult, more costly, or even unattainable by putting restraints on the use of force.' Lebow *Between Peace and War*, 46.

4 Case 1: The tactical field marshal

'All would be so easy if I only had to deal with the Germans!'
- Field Marshal Douglas Haig

The British Expeditionary Force (BEF) will cut a peculiarly sad figure in this thesis, and its leader for most of the war, Field-Marshal Sir Douglas Haig, will appear almost as a failure. Undeniably it seems self-contradictory to claim that the winning side of a war had serious malfunctions. Before I dive into the subject matter I will therefore say something about the assessment of military performance.

To compare the effectiveness of different belligerents is more difficult that it seems. The utterance 'may the best team win!' is superfluous in strategy. The best team is best *because* it wins. When we say that the best team lost, as Martin Samuels does, we blur our yardstick.[33] In games of strategy, where the participants are measured against each other, as in Samuel's book, the only yardstick is winning or losing.

On the other hand though, to most people the battles of Tannenberg and the Masurian Lakes in 1914 were great German victories, even if Germany eventually lost the war. Hence, waging war is also a 'game of skills', where an external yardstick, usually other's expectations, also measures how good a performance is.[34] Hence the evaluation of Haig's performance is also based on people's expectations, and not only relative to German performance. The problem arises when the two yardsticks are incommensurable.

The price Haig had to pay to win the game of strategy against the Kaiser exceeded what most people expected to pay. Many commanders, as for instance Sir Arthur Harris of Bomber Command and General Wesley Clark, have been stuck in the same dilemma. Their

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[33] 'The argument is not that the German Army was effective and the British Army was ineffective. It is that, in the given circumstances, the German Army's combat effectiveness was greater than that of the British Army.' Martin Samuels, *Command or Control? Command, Training and Tactics in the British and German Armies, 1888-1918* (London, 1995), 3.

[34] Thomas Schelling distinguishes 'games of skill', 'games of chance' and 'games of strategy', where games of skill are like golf or bowling, games of chance like roulette, and games of strategy like chess, where: 'the best course of action for each player depends on what the other players do.' Thomas Schelling, *The Strategy of Conflict* (Cambridge Mass., 1980; 1st pub. 1960), 3.

political masters have asked them to deliver 'goods' deemed necessary but still uncomfortable. The way to restore 'political' peace of mind after a regrettable battle is to blame the general.[35] Hence, when evaluating Haig, one has to remember that he was caught on the horns of a 'machiavellian' dilemma.[36]

Furthermore, saying that the combat effectiveness of the BEF was poor does *not* automatically impy that the German or French proficiency was any better. Your skills in for instance golf can be esteemed extraordinarily low by bystanders, but still you can be best, if your competitors have a really bad day.

In this essay I will drag Haig through a stone breaker until there is almost nothing left of him. But when all is said and done, Haig still stands, because: 'The critic, then, having analysed everything within the range of human calculation and belief, will let the outcome speak for that part whose deep, mysterious operation is never visible. The critic must protect this unspoken result of the workings of higher laws against the stream of uninformed opinion on the one hand, and against the gross abuses to which it may be subjected on the other.'[37] Many have tried to explain Haig's victory away, but they always fail in their duty to protect the unspoken result of Haig's leadership.

British accounts of the war are often accused of being 'entirely Britannocentric'.[38] The scope of this essay does not allow me to do much to remedy that. I will consider the official French monographs and the biographies of the most prominent French participants in the meeting, but, as it is impossible within this thesis to reach the same depth of research on both sides of the table, my focus will be on the British side.

4.1 The British *authority over distance* in 1917/18

In this chapter I will focus on the meeting in the town of Doullens, on 26 March 1918, where General Foch made a startling comeback and became the Supreme Commander of

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[35] 'Harris and his men have a legitimate complaint: they did what they were told to do and what their leaders thought was necessary and right, but they are dishonored for doing it, and it is suddenly suggested (what else can the dishonor mean?) that what was necessary and right was also wrong' Michael Walzer, *Just and Unjust Wars.* (New York, 1977), 324.

[36] Niccolò Machiavelli asserted in his *Discourses* that; 'one will find that it very rarely happens that someone good wishes to become prince by bad ways, even though his end be good...'.Niccolò Machiavelli, *Discourses on Livy* (Chicago, 1996), 51. Hence it is hard preserve your image as a 'good man' if forced to fight a 'bad war'.

[37] Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, ed. and trans. Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton, 1976), 167.

the Western front. Seeing it from the British point of view, I will start the chapter by analysing the British *authority over distance* in March 1918. I will focus on 1917, and the first months of the 'forgotten year' of the war, 1918. Thereafter I will narrow down on the days before the meeting, and the meeting itself. I will close the chapter by analysing the consequences of the meeting in terms of command and control.

4.1.1 Authority

Seen from 10 Downing Street, the authority of the Prime Minister was severely threatened during the war. Lloyd George's ability to empower the Prime Minister's intentions, and carry them through to the soldiers in the field, will be our first point of interest.

4.1.1.1 Whose intentions?

As one of the oldest democracies in the world, and the 'inventor' of the parliamentary system, Great Britain knew much about the advantages and disadvantages of being a democracy at war. A sufficient trade-off between parliamentary negotiations, based on representativeness and majority, and the secrecy and impetus of modern war was nevertheless hard to find. Lord Hankey gives a tragicomic description of the situation in the last days of Herbert Asquith's Coalition: 'The War Committee is hopelessly congested, great questions dealing with Man-Power, the Air Board, Food Supply, and Finance all urgently awaiting settlement. Yet I could not get a meeting for tomorrow, because X was going for a day's shooting, Lord Y for a week-end, and Lord Z to address his former constituents. I managed to get a meeting for Monday, but the Prime Minister said 'You won't get anyone'. Today's meeting had to end soon after 1 p.m. to enable Ministers to attend official luncheons.'[39] This way of doing business was maybe acceptable during the Crimean and Boer Wars, but not this time. The appalling casualty rate of the British Army forced the politicians to take a closer look both at the numbers of men assigned to the Army, and the use made of them by the generals. With the loss of 60,000 men in employable age groups in just one day, military operations became just as much a question of economic survival, demographic disruption, and national husbandry, as of ethics and tactics. Leaving the rather complicated personal and political relationships aside, the

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[38] Correlli Barnett 'Did they doctor the records?' (A review of Denis Winter's *Haig's Command: A Reassessment.*)' *Times Literature Supplement*, (19 April 1991).
[39] Lord Hankey, *The Supreme Command* (London, 1961), Vol II, 557 (Diary entry, 10 November 1916)

conclusion was that Asquith resigned on 5 December 1916, and Lloyd George formed a new government some days later. Provided that he operated in constitutional forms, and with reasonable deference to Parliament and public opinion, it was from then on Lloyd George's intentions that should govern the country and the war.

The traditional view of British soldiers was that the politicians should pick which wars to fight, and then deliver sufficient numbers of men to the generals to win them. But this time the generals had asked for more than could be provided. [40] Great Britain as a nation was at war, not only the British Army, hence the head of the nation should direct the war, not the head of the Army. According to Lord Beaverbrook the generals thought otherwise: 'The generals were to claim a freedom from restraint. They demanded the sole right to determine all military issues even though their decisions would have repercussions for the whole population of Britain, soldier and civilian, man and woman, shopkeeper and banker, financial and commercial, every section of the community.'[41] Consequently, on Christmas Eve 1916, just days after Lloyd George's rise to power, General Sir William Robertson, Chief of the Imperial General Staff (C.I.G.S), informed Haig: 'There is a very dangerous tendency becoming apparent for the War Cabinet to direct military operations.'[42] Lloyd George had apparently started his campaign to curb his own warlords, a dangerous and difficult battle, in the midst of a war. Lloyd George did not dare a *coup de main*, since his own political position was not secure enough to risk an open vote of confidence in competition with Haig.[43] His plan was a *coup de grace*. He would shortcut Haig through Paris, without disavowing him. Haig would have his cup of bitterness at the Calais conference, an Anglo-French meeting in February 1917.

Lloyd George was convinced that the French general, Nivelle, was the only man that could break the deadlock of the Western front.[44] Some would turn this upside down,

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[40] '[I am] not prepared to accept the position of a butcher's boy driving cattle to the slaughter, [I will] not do it.' Lloyd George to Repington in February 1917. Quoted in John Terraine, *Douglas Haig, The Educated Soldier.* (London, 2000; 1st pub. 1963), 242.

[41] Lord Beaverbrook, *Men and Power 1917-1918* (London, 1956), 46.

[42] Keith Grieves 'Haig and the Government, 1916-1918' in Brian Bond and Nigel Cave (eds.) *Haig A Reappraisal 70 Years on* (Barnsley, 1999), 110.

[43] 'His Conservative allies limited Lloyd George's room for manoeuvre in dealing with the generals, especially Haig, who enjoyed Conservative support.' Gary Sheffield, *Forgotten Victory. The First World War: Myths and Realities* (London, 2001), 81.

[44] 'I have complete confidence in him, and the deepest conviction that he is the only man who is capable of bringing the operations to a successful conclusion this year. ' Lloyd George to Lord Hankey and the French

and say that the main attraction of Nivelle's plan was 'the fact that Haig would temporarily be under the French general's command'.[45] The main problem, though, envisaged by the Prime Minister, was that Haig would resist any kind of subordination to Nivelle, and that he probably would have the War Cabinet's support in refusing it. Lloyd George's plan was to inform the French of his intentions, leaving them ample time to prepare their arguments, whilst deceiving his own Cabinet, and keeping Robertson and Haig completely in the dark.[46] It is not necessary to go into details about what happened at the conference, just to say that both Robertson and Haig would have preferred to be tried by court-martial or to resign rather than to follow orders from a French general.[47] Lloyd George was prepared to let them both go.[48] The crisis was solved by a compromise proposed by Hankey. What is important for us is not the wording of the compromise but the vehement resistance against paying the price for unity of command among the generals, and the bitterness the conference created among the participants. Terrain concludes: 'One thing is certain: a cloud of mistrust was created at Calais which was never dispelled during the whole of the remainder of the War. Not only were new difficulties added to those (sufficiently formidable) which already existed in the relations of French and British Headquarters, but a special brand of poison was injected into the relations between the British Government and its leading soldiers.'[49]

Nivelle's abrupt fall from grace, after his hyped push had dwindled away into just another deadlock, marked a setback in Lloyd George's battle against his generals. 'The Man' whom the Prime Minister had supported so strongly, proved to be just another

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Liaison Officer at the War Office, Commandant Bertier de Sauvigny, quoted in Terraine, *Haig*, 265. As a curiosity, Nivelle, speaking perfect English, had in fact an English mother. At first sight he would be the perfect supreme commander, being the incarnation of 'amalgamation'.

[45] Anthony Bruce, *An Illustrated Companion to the First World War* (London, 1989), 226.

[46] 'It is difficult to refrain from using emotive words like 'plot' and 'conspiracy'[...] Lloyd George's motives were complex, personal, and not all dishonourable; but he had embarked upon an underhand course, and the methods by which he sought to gain his ends were necessarily devious.' John Terraine, *Haig*, 266.

[47] Terraine, *Haig*, 270. Hankey gives an instructive description of the encounter: 'When Haig objected that the 'Tommies' wouldn't stand being under a Frenchmen, Lloyd George said – 'Well, Field-Marshal, I know the private soldier very well. He speaks freely to me and there are people he criticises a good deal more strongly than Nivelle.' He more than hinted that Haig would have to resign if he did not come to heel...' Hankey *Supreme Command*, ii. 616.

[48] Ibid. 616.

[49] Terraine, *Haig*, 276.

'butcher'. When Haig asked for permission for a big push of his own (Third Battle of Ypres), Lloyd George was unable to refuse, though he deeply resented the idea.[50]

When the shambles closed in November, 310.000 British casualties were left behind, leaving Haig with almost nothing to show for the effort. Such a number should normally have provided Haig with more than enough rope to hang himself.[51] If the Prime Minister wished to relieve his principal military subordinate, as he most likely did, the overt failure of Third Ypres offered a splendid opportunity. Why did he not do it? At least a part of the answer, beside the fact that Haig still had very powerful friends, is that Lloyd George's problem was bigger than just Haig's person. It was the orthodox military strategy and the poor prospects of further attrition warfare on the Western front that worried the Prime Minister. The loyalty of the Army was the *sine qua non* for a new Commander-in-Chief, and such a man would probably be a spitting image of Haig. Haig survived in command due to the want of a better man or better plan.[52] Thus Lloyd George decided to curb Haig's influence *and* keep him as the figurehead of the Army.

The conclusion is that Lloyd George had struggled for more than a year to establish the authority of 10 Downing Street in military affairs when we reach 1918, and had more or less succeeded: 'By late 1917 the prime minister's own position was much more secure. The third battle of Ypres had turned both the conservatives and the press against the generals.' [53] It was *his* intentions that counted, but a serious problem remained. Lloyd George still had to steer his course 'through' Haig. How could the Prime Minister secure his political dirigibility, when he could not get rid of the grudging general, who actually had to carry Lloyd George's intentions into effect in the field?

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[50] Terraine states that Admiral Jellicoe's warning that the threat of the German submarines made it 'impossible to continue the war in 1918', was probably decisive for the outcome of the controversy between Haig and the Prime Minister. Terraine, *Haig*, 333. Prior and Wilson's explanation of why the Third Ypres campaign was launched is more complex, but maybe less dramatic: '[T]he decision-makers of Britain, little though they cared to recognise it, had no choices: the terrible logic of this war drove them to reach what was actually a predetermined decision.' Robin Prior and Trevor Wilson, *Passchendaele, the untold story* (New Haven, 1996), 35.

[51] The metaphor is Henry Wilson's, quoted in John Keegan, *The First World War* (New York, 2000;1st pub. 1998), 365.

[52] In his *War Memoirs* Lloyd George wrote: 'It is easy now to say: 'You ought to have sacked him[...] Who could be put in his place? It is a sad reflection that not one amongst the visible military leaders would have been any better.' Quoted in Terraine *Haig*, 389. In other words, the Army was in 'the best possible hands', but those hands were not good enough.

[53] Hew Strachan, *The Politics of the British Army,* 137.

4.1.1.2 Political dirigibility

After the Third Battle of Ypres, Lloyd George built several safeguards against his own Commander-in-Chief, to restrict his freedom of action.

Sir Henry Wilson, 'universally distrusted throughout the Army...our only military black-leg', delivered one of them, by his suggestion of an inter-allied war council.[54] 'It became very clear to me tonight that Lloyd George means to get Robertson out, and means to curb the powers of the C.-in-C. in the field. This is what I have been advising for 2½ years, and this is what the whole of my paper is directed at – not to getting Robertson out, but to forming a Superior Direction over all C.G.S.s and C.-in-C.s'[55] Lloyd George's answer was The Supreme War Council. [56] A Supreme War Council to coordinate the efforts of the British, French, Italians and later the Americans, and watch over the 'general conduct of the war', seemed long overdue when it was finally created in November 1917. Alas, the Council did not remedy the major problem, the disunity of command.[57] Not even Lloyd George, the instigator, was willing to curtail his own freedom of action. 'Mr Lloyd George, with the unfortunate result of the Calais Conference of 1917 in his mind, declared that he was opposed to unity of command, and when on his return to London he explained the reasons for the formation of the Supreme War Council and its functions to the House of Commons on November 19, he said that 'unity of command' would not work. It would produce real friction, and might really produce not merely friction between the Armies, but friction between the nations and the Government.'[58] Unfortunately the 'new doctors' at the Supreme War Council in Versailles lacked sufficient knowledge to compete seriously with Haig's judgement: '[T]he opinions of the independent British Military Representative at Versailles were often wrong, because he was independent and had not the latest and most accurate information at his disposal. He could in fact only get his information at second-

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[54] The unfavourable description of Wilson is Brig.-Gen John Charteris's (at G.H.Q) quoted in John Terraine, *To Win a War. 1918 The Year of Victory* (London, 2000; 1st pub. 1978), 52.
[55] From Wilson's diary, 17 October 1917, quoted in Terraine, *Haig*, 374. Haig, needless to say, suspected that Wilson's proposal was motivated by Wilson's own wish for a military comeback as 'head of the British Staff section'. Ibid.
[56] 'Lloyd George favoured an allied co-ordinating council as it would enhance Britain's political influence, check increasing American influence, and break the military's control over strategy.' William J. Philpott, *Anglo-French Relations and Strategy on the Western Front, 1914-18* (London, 1996), 150.
[57] 'Since each ally supported the Supreme War Council for different reasons, and expected different things from it, its creation introduced more tensions into allied relations than it resolved.' Ibid. 150.
[58] Sir Frederick Maurice, *Lessons of Allied Co-operation: Naval Military and Air 1914-191 8* (London, 1942), 105.

hand either from the War Office or from our General Staff in France. The remedy for a Prime Minister who does not like his military adviser is to change him, not to set up another to give conflicting advice.'[59]

Haig was deeply frustrated over the gremlin in Versailles, quite understandably.[60] Robertson actually resigned, in February 1918, due to serious disagreement about the Supreme War Council's position in the British chain of command, and was substituted by Wilson, after the latter's short interlude as Permanent Military Representative at Versailles. Robertson's removal was not the only one that affected Haig. In the 'purges' in the months preceding March 1918 he also lost his Chief of Staff (Kiggell), his Deputy Chief of Staff (Butler), and his intelligence officer (Charteris), with unpredictable consequences for his war effort.[61]

Haig's freedom of action was not only restricted through new arrangements of command and control. Lloyd George also choked the supply of manpower in the last months before March 1918. In addition to sending five of Haig's divisions to Italy to bolster that front against Austria-Hungary, Lloyd-George also agreed to take over more frontline from French troops. On top of this Lloyd George kept huge numbers of soldiers back in Great Britain.[62] All this seems very hazardous, given the fact that Russia was on the verge of collapse, and that Germany could concentrate within the near future on the Western front. Why did he still do it? First of all, Lloyd George probably did not trust his ability to control Haig, despite the new dual-tracked command and control layout. In the words of Robert Blake: 'The creation of the Versailles Committee was not the only or the most important move in Lloyd George's campaign against Haig. In the autumn of 1917 he had come to a much more serious and far-reaching decision. Lloyd George was determined

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[59] Ibid. 106.

[60] '[T]his raises the whole question as to the status of the 'War Council' in an acute form. The Government now have two advisers! Will they accept the advice of the Versailles gentlemen (who have no responsibility) or will they take my advice? Wilson has arrived at his conclusion (so he writes) as 'the result of a War Game' and on 'mathematical calculations.' The whole position would be laughable but for the seriousness of it.' Robert Blake (ed.), *The Private Papers of Douglas Haig 1914-1919* (London, 1952), 279. (14 January, 1918.

[61] '[W]as the absence of familiar faces and personalities a handicap to Haig in the crisis that was now so close upon him? The true answer is probably mixed; on balance the new team would appear to have been better. The result, certainly, did them all credit.' Terraine, *Haig*, 389.

[62] 'War Office returns for 1 January 1918 show that no fewer than 38,225 officers and 607,403 men were in England, fit, fully trained and immediately available for service in France. Just 150,000 of these men would have brought Haig's divisions up to full strength and provided a pool of reinforcements.' Martin

to avoid a repetition of the Passchendaele campaign. But he not only considered himself too weak to dismiss Haig, he even doubted his own ability to overrule Haig if the letter were to propose a renewal of the offensive. He therefore decided that the only way of escaping this dilemma was to keep the Commander-in-Chief so short of troops that he could not even suggest a renewal of the British offensive.'[63]

Consequently, Haig was deliberately and severely weakened when the *Kaiserschlacht* hit him in March.[64] Unfortunately, Lloyd George had not become comparatively stronger by weakening his means of 'military production'. By tying Haig's hands, he unwittingly helped Ludendorff to reach his goals.

4.1.2 Intention

Lloyd George had become the strong man in British politics, almost strong enough to mould the British strategy into a shape of his own choosing. He had established his authority, even if the method he had chosen hampered the BEF's ability to fight. But Lloyd George was absolutely not strong enough to dictate the strategy of the alliance. If Lloyd George restricted Haig's freedom of action, the membership of the alliance restricted Lloyd George's freedom of mind even more. He could not opt for optimal solutions, from the British point of view only. Before he formed his intentions he had to take the intentions of Paris and Washington into account as well.

4.1.2.1 Conflicting perspectives

The generations that became used to the high-pitched American rhetoric of good and evil during the Cold War are apt to see an alliance as a band of brothers. Hence the phrase *entente cordiale* is prone to give the wrong impression. Cordiality is rarely a feature of military alliances, as 'military alliances were, and are not, the same as friendships'.[65] Modern readers expect alliances to be sincere, and it is hard to imagine that you could fight a war against your biggest enemy in a coalition with your second biggest enemy, or vice

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Middlebrook, *The Kaiser's Battle. 21 March 1918: The First Day of the German Spring Offensive* (London, 1983; 1st pub. 1978), 25.

[63] Blake, *Haig*, 46. Lloyd George's fear was well founded, since Haig actually asked for a new offensive in Flanders in 1918. Blake, *Haig*, 278. (7 January 1918)

[64] The BEF was also weakened by the fact that a major reorganisation, dictated by the Cabinet, took place in February and early March 1918. Such 're-tailoring' always causes temporary disorganisation and demoralisation, and takes time – time the BEF did not have.

[65] Paul Kennedy 'Military coalitions and coalition warfare over the past century' in Keith Neilson and Roy A. Prete (eds.) *Coalition Warfare, An Uneasy Accord* (Ontario, 1983), 3.

versa.[66] The point is not that the relationship between Britain and France was especially tense: on the contrary.[67] The relationship between Germany and Austria-Hungary, on the other side of the hill, was maybe even less cordial: 'Germany became increasingly frustrated by Vienna's refusal to subordinate itself to Berlin as fully as the economic and military realities suggested it should. For each power the description of its ally as 'the secret enemy' was applicable.'[68] The interests of France and Great Britain were not congruent, although some of them were overlapping, as for instance the urge to crush the German bid for power. Lloyd George's fear was not only that Germany would win if Haig broke the BEF's back in another 'Passchendaele', but also that by doing so Britain would become the junior partner to France and the American latecomers. That consideration was not new. Kitchener's strategic plan, for instance, was probably to wait for the exhaustion of the continental armies before committing his own, probably in 1917.[69] The challenge was to strike the right balance between national interests and common effort. Quite contrary to military horse sense, and the rough-and-ready logic to it, 'unity of command' was not the way to strike that balance.

The aim of every military coalition is *unity of effort*, that's why it sticks together. Regarding the effectiveness of military forces, unity of command is just a means to an end, not the end in itself.[70] To some this will look like semantic hair-splitting: their idea is presumably that unity of *command* will automatically lead to unity of *effort,* and in most cases that is a sound assumption. But given that the *entente cordiale* was 'beset by

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[66] Lord Palmerston's statement in 1848 highlights the perpetual motivation for military alliances: 'It is a narrow policy to suppose that this country or that is marked out as the eternal ally or the perpetual enemy of England. We have no eternal allies, and we have no perpetual enemies. Our interests are eternal and perpetual.' Quoted in Sheffield, *Forgotten Victory*, 35.

[67] General William Robertson asserted: 'I believe [the French] are as good allies as any country could have. I merely wish to emphasise the great difficulty there as been and always will be in operations conducted by allied armies. It is only natural.' Robertson to Stamfordham (1 Oct. 1915) quoted in Philpott, *Anglo-French Relations*, 161.

[68] Hew Strachan's preface to Holger H. Herwig, *The First World War, Germany and Austria-Hungary 1914-1915* (London, 1997), xiii.

[69] 'This would enable Britain to shape the subsequent peace process and make sure that the world that emerged after the war was in accordance with British interest. German militarism would have been broken, and a new balance of power constructed that would serve to keep the British Empire safe from the attentions of her erstwhile allies France and Russia, who might otherwise re-emerge as colonial rivals.' Sheffield, *Forgotten Victory*, 66.

[70] Politically, unity of command may be an end in itself (for instance for constitutional reasons), and be an internal security measure that deliberately hampers the effectiveness of military forces.

suspicion, antagonism and double-dealing',[71] unity of command would have caused insurmountable friction. The alliance had to find a way to coexist and co-operate despite the huge disagreements. The way to do it was simply not to talk about them. If pushed to take a firm stand on controversial issues, the alliance would founder. Hence, a kind of 'mutual agreement of avoidance' was soon developed on the Western front.

The philosopher John Rawls' ideas about 'Justice as Fairness' give us a broader view on the method of avoidance: 'To secure this agreement [justice as fairness] we try, so far as we can, to avoid disputed philosophical, as well as disputed moral and religious, questions. We do this not because these questions are unimportant or regarded with indifference, but because we think them too important and recognise that there is no way to resolve them politically. The only alternative to a principle of toleration is the autocratic use of state power. Thus, justice as fairness deliberately stays on the surface, philosophically speaking[...]The hope is that, by this method of avoidance, as we might call it, existing differences between contending political views can at least be moderated, even if not entirely removed, so that social cooperation on the basis of mutual respect can be maintained.'[72] Coalition warfare is by definition devoid of 'autocratic use of state power', and military and 'social cooperation' has to be based on toleration, and avoidance. The *modus operandi* of the *entente* was a war by compromise, where some of the presuppositions were kept secret, or at least 'under-communicated'.[73] The challenge was how to reap the fruit of common effort among parties with incongruent agendas.

Given the endemic friction in coalition warfare, it is usually better to fight side by side, than to fight together. The hunt for celebrated synergy effects is often futile at best, if not bluntly counterproductive. That was how the *entente cordiale* preferred to fight the war.

To secure unity of effort the allies had to fine-tune the length of the frontline in accordance with the number of troops available, and their anticipation of German plans. To avoid 'under-kills' in one sector, and 'over-kills' in another, the generals had to reach an

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[71] William Philpott 'Haig and Britain's European Allies' in Bond and Cave, *Haig*, 129.
[72] John Rawls, 'Justice as Fairness: Political not Metaphysical', *Philosophy and Public Affairs* (Vol. 14 no. 3, 1985), 230-231.
[73] For instance, the full extent of the French Mutinies in spring 1917 was kept secret, for a number of reasons. For a supreme commander it was necessary to know that the French were afraid of further offensives, something the French were unwilling to admit.

agreement on how many kilometres of front line each should hold. Although the idea was never formally adopted, Haig and Pétain had at the end of 1917 'solved' the problem of divided command. Haig wrote in his diary: 'Pétain showed me a short note which he had written on the question of an Allied Commander-in-Chief (à la Hindenburg). It was possible amongst Allies only when one Army was really the dominant one as in the case of the Central Powers. Our case was different. The British and French Armies were now in his views on an equality. Therefore, he and I must exercise command, and if we disagree, our Governments alone can settle the point in dispute. The front should be divided from the coast in Flanders to some point to be fixed between us, S. of the Oise, under me; and from that point to the Adriatic, under Pétain.'[74] As seen above, Haig with already more frontline than he wanted, was instructed to extend his line further south by twenty-five miles in January 1918.[75]

With too few men to cover an increasing front line, Haig had to take a calculated risk. The worst-case scenario for the BEF was to be cut off from the Channel ports. Hence Haig had to have sufficient troops north, to secure him against his worst nightmare, even if he did not expect the Germans to attack him there. The price he had to pay was to dilute his line in the south, where the attack probably would come.[76] The main advantage of this oblique solution was that it virtually forced Pétain to help him if the Germans attacked at the junction.[77] But Haig could not know for certain that Pétain would volunteer to help if necessary. Just a week before Ludendorff's attack, Haig's staff put down a 'note on general reserves' containing the following: 'It is recognised, however, that in the conditions which prevail in France, it may be well to vest in some central authority the power to order one or other of the Commanders-in-Chief to move a portion of his forces to the assistance of another Army, or to attack as a means of relieving the pressure on his neighbour. In the case of a divergency of opinion between the Commanders-in-Chief, such an authority may be necessary, but to vest in a Committee the power to handle troops, even if such were available, which is not now the case, would be to create, in fact, a Generalissimo in the

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[74] Blake, *Haig*, 262 (1 November 1917).
[75] Middlebrook, *The Kaiser's Battle*, 25.
[76] Gough's Fifth Army had 12 infantry and 3 cavalry divisions to cover 42 miles front. His neighbour, Byng's Third Army, had 28 miles and 14 infantry divisions. General Horne, First Army, had 33 miles and 14 infantry divisions, and General Plumer's Second Army in north had 23 miles and 12 divisions. Ibid. 72.
[77] 'The promise of immediate French assistance in the event of an attack had been part of the bargain struck when the Fifth Army had taken over the French line south of St Quentin in January.' Ibid. 276.

form of a Committee. History affords numerous examples of the failures of such forms of authority.'[78] Haig's fear was probably that Pétain would stand by and watch the BEF perish for too long, before coming to his assistance. Therefore, some person should have the authority to compel. On the other hand though, Haig fought hard against the idea of establishing such an authority before the crisis actually occurred.

Initially, the alliance wanted the Supreme War Council in Versailles to include an Executive Committee presiding over an earmarked Allied General Reserve, with General Foch as the nominated head. Haig resisted this, and threaten to resign if he was forced to accept it: 'Wilson [the new C.I.G.S.] pressed me to earmark certain Divisions as an 'Inter-Allied General Reserve.' I pointed out that I had only six Divisions under my hand, and with the prospect of an early attack by the enemy, I could not agree to place any of my Divisions under the hand of another person, without grave risk to the plans of defence which had been most carefully drawn up in accord with General Pétain and his Staff. Rather than run such risk at this time, I would prefer to be relieved of my Command.'[79] Again Lloyd George's deliberate parsimony had backfired, by giving Haig a good reason for declining the establishment of a general reserve.[80] The motivation for rejection was probably that without his own reserves Haig would be out of business. Due to the virtual absence of portable radios, all that commanders could do during battles was to commit their reserves at the right time and place: hence 'whoever controlled the Reserves controlled the Armies'.[81] Pétain was also sceptical about making Foch a 'Generalissimo with no troops', probably because it would push him down the ladder too.

Furthermore, Haig knew that modern campaigns, such as Third Ypres, took several weeks to carry through. Consequently he would have plenty time to regroup his own troops, and if necessary beg for help. In the 'note on general reserves' he stated: 'The theory that a reserve should be maintained in the hands of every commander is correct[...] To weaken Armies in order to place a general reserve wanting in homogeneity in the hands

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[78] O.A.D.776, (12.3.1918), W.O 158/20 'General staff notes on operations'.
[79] Blake, *Haig*, 290 (25 Februar 1918).
[80] Certainly, there were more substantial arguments against a general reserve. Maurice claims that the crisis of March 1918 would have been even more serious if there had been such a thing as unity of command over the general reserves. '[I]n view of Pétain's contention that the Germans had not made their main effort and that he was about to be attacked in force in Champagne, there would certainly have been discussion in the Executive War Board before the decision to release the General Reserve for the benefit of the British front was taken.' Sir Frederick Maurice, *Lessons of Allied Co-operation*, 131.
[81] Terraine, *Haig*, 402.

of a Committee composed of members of different nationalities is a complete misunderstanding of the role of a reserve in great modern battles. The modern battle between Armies equally trained and armed and of equal resolution is not generally an affair of two or three days, but is a prolonged struggle lasting for weeks and perhaps for months.'[82] Years of experience told Haig that the next battle would be a 'prolonged struggle'. Hence, there would be plenty of time to improvise *if* necessary.

In addition to the countermeasures mentioned above, i.e. preparing to regroup his own troops and to 'borrow' French divisions if necessary, Haig decided to introduce a novelty in the 5th Army, which held the southern section, called 'defence in depth'. With a bit of luck it would enhance their resilience, and give Haig even more time to carry out the prepared countermoves. Unfortunately, as we shall see below, all three pillars of Haig's plan were rotten.

Although close to an oxymoron, the conclusion of this chapter is simple. On the Western front, unity of effort was sought through disunity of command.

4.1.2.2 Plan Fetishism

One way to get one's intentions adopted in an organisation is to pin them down in a written plan. Chapter 2 claimed that plans often resemble the monster of Frankenstein, as a plan initially is an aid to fulfil your intentions, but soon your intentions will be to carry out the plan. It is easy to understand why the belligerents of the Great War focused on military plans. Literally mountains of supplies had to be moved in accordance with the movements of hundred of thousands of troops, and devastating artillery-, and later, air-support had to be coordinated with the infantry's movement across no man's land. The problem was not the multitude as such, but the fact that the generals lacked adequate means of directing it. That the BEF had the agility of a sledgehammer was mainly a consequence of the disparity between the ability to destroy and the ability to command. Without portable radios all armies in the Great War moved in syrup.[83] Comprehensive plans, mostly worked out at subordinate levels, were the only feasible way through the dense fog of war.[84]

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[82] O.A.D. 776. (12.3.1918), W.O. 158/20 'General staff notes on operations'.

[83] 'The era of the First World War stands as the only period in history in which high commanders were mute.' Sheffield *Forgotten Victory*, 99.

[84] It is easy to be awe-struck by the high ambitions and courage of mind that the Germans showed through their trials with *Auftragstaktik*, but the result was questionable. 'Yet some German officers were then concerned about the dysphasia that had appeared when microbattles fought by lower level commanders under

Accordingly, Haig had obviously made his preparations to meet the anticipated attack in March 1918. In fact he was afraid that he was too well prepared for it. When the Intelligence Officer, Brigadier-General E.W. Cox, told him in early March that he expected the enemy to 'attack the fronts of our Third and Fifth Armies', Haig wrote in his diary: 'I was only afraid that the enemy would find our front so very strong that he will hesitate to commit his Army to the attack with the almost certainty of losing very heavily.'[85] When the plan to meet the attack was finished, Haig's duty as Commander-in-Chief was apparently over: 'Not that my actual presence in France at the moment of attack is necessary because all reserves and other questions such as moving up troops to support have already been settled. But on general principles, I ought to be with the Army when the battle is active.'[86]

It is common knowledge that while it is much more important to *command* than to *control*, most political and military leaders end up doing the latter, irrespective of historic epoch, or their place in the chain of command.[87] What is more easily forgotten is that soldiering also presupposes authoritative plans and a recognised chain of command. No one has illustrated this point more convincingly than the soldier and philosopher J. Glenn Gray:

> As an 'arm' and not the 'head' of the state, the professional soldier often prides himself on being nonpolitical. This frees him, he feels, to act in war without regard for consequences other than the military. Responsibility must be clearly defined and portioned out; it is always a matter for angry puzzlement on his part that such definition and apportionment are rarely possible in actual combat. As a specialist in warfare, he wants none of the half-light and dubiety of morals and politics in his profession. He desires to be under orders and to know what is expected of him all the time. Since war is so much simpler if

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the principle of *selbstandigkeit* (independence of initiative) warped operations out of alignment with the intent of higher commanders and staffs, especially in placing unanticipated demands on reserves. Some of those Prussian military theorists anticipated the dilemma that unhinged von Schlieffen's grand maneuver scheme in 1914 as they grappled with the tension between 'ground truth' and 'the big picture'. They formulated a 'Law of the Situation,' but did not resolve the basic quandary, nor could they foresee either the scale or the ramifications of the impending extension of combat in time, space, and velocity on land, at sea, and in the air.' Roger A. Beaumont, *War, Chaos, and History* (London, 1994), 9.

[85] Blake, *Haig*, 291 (2 March 1918)

[86] Haig to Lady Haig 20 March, National Library of Scotland (NLS) ACC 3155/164 'Extracts of letters to Lady Haig March 1st 1918 – May 1st 1918'

[87] '[It is] a tradition deeply ingrained in the whole Army...that the chief task of each rank is not the doing of the work of that rank, but the controlling of the work of the ranks below.' L.S.Amery *The Problem of the Army* (London, 1903) Quoted in Martin Samuels, *Command or Control?*, 94.

> played according to rules, he yearns for the security and stability of formal principles in fighting.[88]

The conclusion of this section is that the chain of command is a kind of totem that eases the existential anguish of the bloodstained soldier. Plan fetishism is most often accounted for as the dysfunction of military control-freaks. The *urge* from below for something firm to stick to is often forgotten. Haig's plan to meet the anticipated German attack became obsolete in a couple of hours. By default he had to hand over the initiative to lower echelons, as 'Haig's headquarters broke down in an avalanche of orders and counterorders'.[89] How did the BEF cope with this newly acquired freedom of action?

4.1.3 Dissemination

So far we have seen how Lloyd George enhanced and preserved political authority in the midst of a war, and we have seen how heterogeneous interests within the *entente cordiale* curtailed the ingenuity of strategy, and how basic human needs restrict the elasticity of the military hierarchy. Much has been said about *telephonitis* and the vulnerability of entrenched wires during the Great War.[90] I will not elaborate on such topics in this essay, even if they are highly relevant. I will first analyse the British Army's ability for coordinated action on a larger scale, without communication or valid plans. Could they perform *isomorphic actions*? Thereafter I will look at the 'gamut', or the relationship between the *need* for command and control, and what could actually be 'delivered'.

4.1.3.1 Isomorphic actions

During civilian disasters, as for instance car crashes or derailments, a remarkably well-organised cooperation appears. Without any formal authority taking charge, and without any published procedures, people who lack formal education, and who are strangers to each other, co-operate to rescue victims, support the injured, etc., until the professional rescuers

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[88] J. Glenn Gray, *The Warriors, Reflections on Men in Battle* (New York, 1998; 1st pub. 1959), 143.
[89] Herwig, *The First World War*, 405.
[90] Martin van Creveld argues that many officers 'fell victim to telephonitis, a tendency by higher headquarters to interfere in every small detail simply because it was easily done'. Creveld, *Command in War*, 169. However, what they achieved by that was questionable: 'While men were being mowed down by the thousands, the staff, immersed in their routine, found nothing better to do than to serve warning concerning the effect of verdigris on vermorel sprayers or the need to keep pets out of the trenches.' Ibid. 166.

arrive.[91] Without diving into social psychology as such, we can conclude that most people have an ability to improvise cooperation and 'self-organise' on a large scale, based on some sort of inferred purpose of action. In an armed force, as for instance the British Army, where people are known to each other, and standard operational procedures are prepared, one should expect that the sophistication of isomorphic actions would outperform the improvised civilian group effort mentioned above. Strange as it may seem, one of the major purposes of a military hierarchy has traditionally been to eradicate that very ability. Too adventurous and self-reliant soldiers could be a bigger threat to their own society and officers than to the enemy.

Regardless of whether the industrialised city dwellers of 1914 were untrustworthy or obtuse, or whether the army only needed simpletons due to mechanical 'timetable tactics', the consequence was that 'individuality was systematically stamped out of the recruit', and the ability to undertake isomorphic actions, based on their own initiative, crumbled.[92] Consequently, the British inability to *adapt* was a major cause of error during the first part of the war.[93]

In March 1918, the BEF had been in the field for almost four years and Great Britain now used conscription to fill the ranks. The BEF of 1914 was irrevocably gone, and the 'Army of March 1918' looked different: '[It] was an hybrid army. There were a few Regulars, more New Army volunteers, and many conscripts. It was a tired and war-weary army. The veterans in it had seen many of their friends die in past years –for what? Victory seemed as far away as ever.'[94] As a consequence of Lloyd George's refusal to give Haig more men, Haig had to teach this bunch of soldiers to fight defensive battles; a new skill to most of them, as the BEF had not done it since the autumn of 1914.

Haig knew from first hand experience over the last three years how difficult it was to penetrate the German lines. Hence he 'decided that the BEF would use the German

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[91] Cohen and Gooch, *Military Misfortunes*, 161.
[92] 'The complete hypnotization of the soldiers by their officers was looked on as the ideal of training. Discipline supplied the place of courage, and intentionally superseded both reason and will.' Amery, *The Problem of the Army*, quoted in Samuels, *Command or Control?*, 118.
[93] 'In military terms, 'adapting' can be defined as identifying and taking full advantage of the opportunities offered by enemy actions or by chance combinations of circumstances to win success or to stave off failure.' Cohen and Gooch, *Military Misfortunes, The Anatomy of Failure in War*, 161.
[94] Middlebrook, *The Kaiser's Battle*, 338.

doctrine against the Germans themselves'.[95] It is outside the scope of this thesis to analyse how the BEF actually transformed the Germans' 'defence in depth' to meet British needs, or the built-in hazard of converting military ideas across different military cultures. Nevertheless, the 're-education' of the BEF was difficult as the ossification of the British army was almost beyond cure.[96] In fact it was not used to 'prefabricated' doctrines at all.

The word 'doctrine' is one of those words that can mean everything or nothing. Does, for instance, a doctrine imply prescription of military actions, or just a conceptual checklist for military professionals? Does it actually have to be verbalised and authorised through regulations, or could it just be an unconsidered but nevertheless shared tacit knowledge? On which military level does it operate, and does it imply all weapons? It is obviously impossible to give a comprehensive analysis of the use of a doctrine, or cognate devices, in the BEF during the early twentieth century, but it is possible to make some statements.

On the tactical level the BEF had something resembling a prescriptive doctrine during the war, in the way that the daily life of British soldiers was relatively homogeneous, regardless of where they served at the front. To be under command, and follow rules were not unique to military service.[97] On a higher level there was also some sort of a doctrine that gave the commanders comparable ways of thinking about warfare. The problem, though, was that the British Army had evolved such a 'frame of mind' more by accident than by design, and it was difficult to change it deliberately as result of new experiences.[98] British generals' tacit knowledge about warfare was at least as good as their foreign colleagues' after nearly four years of war, but their *focal* knowledge about their

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[95] Samuels, *Command or Control?*, 202.

[96] 'The years of trench warfare, the necessary issue of lengthy orders entering into meticulous detail, and the rehearsal of attacks over a marked-out practice course with fairly well-defined objectives, had produced an army which was prepared to stand enormous losses uncomplainingly, but was practically devoid of real tactical sense.' *The Official History* quoted in Terraine, *To Win a War*, 202.

[97] '[F]or the lad from a factory, the military society was not entirely unfamiliar. Its rules were enforced more strictly and for twenty four hours a day.' Shelford Bidwell and Dominick Graham *Fire-power : British Army Weapons and Theories of War 1904-1945* (London, 1982), 119. To middle class men, though, the life in the army could certainly be harder to get accustomed to.

[98] 'The staff still [January 1918] thought of the Army as an infantry supported by other arms. Unfortunately much of the infantry still fought in the frame of mind it had acquired in the earlier years.'Ibid. 139.

practice was comparatively poorer.[99] In our case, to base isomorphic actions on a new doctrine was questionable, due to the British ambivalence towards the device, and their inability deliberately to change the rules. Tim Travers' observations give us a convincing picture of the British attitudes towards formally elaborated doctrines: 'The officer corps was traditionally conservative and often anti-intellectual, in line with Edwardian upper middle-class prejudices, and this is reflected in a typical, although not total, rejection of doctrine. This anti-intellectualism had something to do with class attitudes, something to do with Social Darwinism, something to do with Victorian empiricism, and something to do with nineteenth-century colonial warfare.'[100]

The conclusion of this chapter is that despite the fact that the BEF obviously had improved its war fighting ability considerably during years of continuously fighting, its skills in the type of operations that loomed was dubious.[101] Given that the BEF was an apprentice in defensive operations, Haig's role as master became more important than ever. How well did he cope?

4.1.3.2 A gamut in harmony?

Martin Samuels states that the British Army employed two 'mutually contradictory' command systems, termed 'umpiring' and 'restrictive control', where restrictive control is a 'system in which subordinates are given orders which lay down their actions in detail and must be obeyed regardless of circumstances', and umpiring is the 'practice in which an officer abdicates his command responsibilities'.[102] The consequence of 'restrictive control' is the loss of low-level adaptability, while the price of 'umpiring' is deprivation of badly needed 'triggers' and steering signals.

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[99] A professional golf player has great *tacit* knowledge about how to play golf, he *plays* it well. But his *focal* knowledge, or his ability to put his tacit knowledge into words may be almost zero, as he cannot *explain* his playing.

[100] Tim Travers, *The Killing Ground. The British Army, the Western Front and the Emergence of Modern Warfare 1900-1918* (London: 1987), 38.

[101] '[L]ower commanders were as unfamiliar with the problems of rapid movement to the rear as they had shown themselves to be with those rapid advance at Cambrai; the Army itself was utterly untrained and unprepared for this sort of fighting.' Terraine, *Haig*, 414.

[102] Samuels, *Command or Control?*, 49. As 'umpiring' and 'directive control' look similar on the outside, they can be hard to distinguish: 'While superficially similar, the decentralising inherent in umpiring is very different from that employed in directive control. The umpire often avoids 'interfering' out of an excessive respect for the feelings and reputation of the subordinate. The relationship between the umpire and his subordinate may be considered more important than the successful attainment of the objective. Decentralisation therefore becomes an end in itself. In directive command, the decentralisation of decision making is purely a means towards the end of fulfilling the higher intent most effectively.' Ibid. 51.

Haig vacillated between the two styles of command. The British Army commanders, or the 'Wicked Barons', subsequently become confused and at times paralysed by Haig's unpredictable oscillation between the aloof setting of overall strategy and intervention in details at a tactical level. By that he unwittingly created a command vacuum that hampered military efficiency considerably.[103] Nevertheless, his remoteness seems to have been a bigger problem than too restrictive control.

According to John Keegan, Haig's aloofness was almost ridiculous: 'Even at Montreuil he preserved an Olympian detachment from the work of the staff; one of them recalls that, as a special concession, staff officers were allowed to leave their desks to watch him ride in and out from his office provided they did not show themselves at the windows. Haig's residence was not even in Montreuil; he preferred to seclude himself from its relative hurly-burly at the château of Beaurepaire some ten miles away in the heart of the countryside.'[104] Neither Travers nor Keegan is a great admirer of Haig, but even John Terraine, his most distinguished 'defence counsel', questioned Haig's seclusion: '[Haig was], if anything, over-scrupulous about the rights and responsibilities of subordinates; it was practically a sacred principle with him to leave to Army and Corps commanders a free hand, and to interfere as little as possible once a course of action had been decided.'[105] The inherited impracticability of the umpiring system was amplified by the fact that the 'chief umpire', Douglas Haig, was extraordinarily tongue-tied.[106] Given Haig's style of *laissez faire,* his 'inability to communicate' could be fatal. It was easy to get on the wrong foot from the start, due to incoherence and lack of eloquence, and then to continue to stumble due to the insistence on the 'rights of subordinates'. Lets look a bit closer at just one of those occasions, related to our case.

Haig assumed that a section of 5th Army's front was 'impassable' due to the obstacles of the River Oise and its marshes.[107] As a consequence Haig apportioned his troops based on the assumption that 12 miles of Gough's 40 mile front were 'not likely to

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[103] Tim Travers paraphrased in Peter Simkins, 'Haig and his Army Commanders' in Bond and Cave, *Haig,* 94.
[104] John Keegan, *The Mask of Command* (London, 1987), 334.
[105] Terraine, *Haig*, 179.
[106] Ibid. 179.
[107] Terraine, *Haig*, 410.

be the scene of a serious hostile attack'.[108] But General Gough, commanding 5th Army, no longer shared that interpretation. He understood the significance of the arrival of the German General Oskar von Hutier on the other side of the front, and told his commanders: 'in view of the fact that the battle of Riga was opened by the enemy (von Hutier) forcing the passage of the Duna, that section of the line guarded by the Oise should not be considered as immune from attack.'[109] As Gough had predicted, but not managed to convey to his superior, an absolutely 'serious attack' did hit him in his soft underbelly, with a disastrous effect, as we will se below. Terraine explains: 'Here again one meets one of those peculiar failures of communication which haunted relations between the Fifth Army and the G.,H.Q.[.]'[110] How peculiar could that failure be, given Haig's style of leadership?

To encapsulate: what did the British *authority over distance* look like when the *Kaiserschlacht* broke loose on 21 March 1918? First, the strong man on the British side was in London; the British Commander-in-Chief was severely weakened. Nevertheless, the political dirigibility was still dubious, because the military arm itself had been relentlessly damaged in the 'turf war'. Furthermore, unity of command, which apparently everybody wanted, was out of reach, due to both incongruent agendas and personal aspirations among the generals. Moreover, the obsession with plans among senior officers, and the addiction for them in the lower echelons, tightened a firm straitjacket around the BEF. The commanders who would handle this torpidity in a new condition of an unpredictable defensive warfare ought to have been clearly visible to troops in desperate need of guidance. But given the ominous aloofness of British generalship, they remained virtually invisible.[111]

The British command and control layout had during four years of trial and error been tailor-made for offensive attrition warfare, more by accident than by design. Suddenly, the ability to take low-level initiative, devoid of directions and pre-planned artillery schedules, became more important than to carry out orders. BEF was not

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[108] Ibid. 410.
[109] Gough to his Corps Commanders, 3 February 1918. Ibid. 410.
[110] Ibid. 410.
[111] 'Few men saw their commanding officer that day [21 March] and many never saw any officer at all[...] A sergeant or second lieutenant might have appeared for a minute, told them to 'hang on, lads', and disappeared again[...]No one had bothered to explain to him the finer points of 'defence in depth'; all he knew was that once the Germans got in behind him he was caught like a rat in a trap.' Middlebrook, *The Kaiser's Battle*, 335.

accustomed to 'a platoon commander's war'.[112] The consequence were inevitable: a horrendous German breakthrough.

4.2 Die Kaiserschlacht

In this chapter we will first look at the short week between 21 and 26 March; thereafter we will narrow down on the meeting at Doullens.

As said earlier, the German offensive was expected. After the fall of Russia everybody understood that Germany would try to win the war 'before America can throw strong forces into the scale'.[113] Based on the interrogation of prisoners, air reconnaissance and 'numerous successful raids', Haig knew almost exactly where and when the strike would fall, as did the Cabinet in London.[114] Hence, Thursday 21 March, when the *Kaiserschlacht* started, was apparently just another day at the office for Haig, while Friday was a rather exciting one: 'All reports show that our men are in great spirits. All speak of the wonderful targets they had to fire at yesterday. Enemy came on in great masses.'[115] Haig sent telegrams of congratulations both to his men and to Pétain, who according to their agreement had come to his assistance.[116] But he also heard from Gough that 'parties of all arms of the enemy are through our Reserve Line', and that 'certain Irish units did very badly and gave way immediately the enemy showed'.[117] When we reach Saturday 23 March, there was no longer any doubt about the seriousness of the German attempt. 5th

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[112] The phrase is Haig's. Quoted in Terraine, *To Win a War*, 202.

[113] Ludendorff quoted in Keegan, *The First World War*, 393.

[114] 'I am glad that the attack has begun at last, because our men are eager for it and have been expecting it for some time. I was beginning to be afraid if the attack did not come till later that our men might have become stale from expecting and preparing for so long. But they are in the best spirits now, and I have every confidence that the enemy will get more than he anticipates when his Infantry does attack. The enemy's attacks seem to be coming exactly against the points on our front which we expected, and where we are prepared to meet him. Our information thanks to our numerous successful raids, has been very good.' Haig's letter to his wife March 21. NLS ACC 3155/164, 'Extracts of letters to Lady Haig March 1st 1918 – May 1st 1918'. On the 21st General Wilson informed the cabinet of the attack, and stated that the 'front of attack was in general accord with the one anticipated by the British Staff at Versailles'. CAB 23 War Cabinet 369.

[115] Blake, *Haig*, 296. (22 March 1918). To his wife he wrote on the 22nd : 'You will see we had a great battle yesterday and have done very well. Reports this morning state that our men are in great heart, and had very good targets yesterday. It was a case of 'kill, kill, all day long[...]How absurd it seems that I should have been troubled about forming a General Reserve last week, when events of such magnitude were so imminent. It is well that I remained firm then.' NLS ACC 3155/164 'Extracts of letters to Lady Haig March 1st 1918 – May 1st 1918.'

[116] 'My dear General, I beg to thank you for the prompt manner in which you are despatching three divisions in support of the right flank of the British forces. I feel sure that the close and cordial co-operation of the French and the British troops in the great battle which has developed will have a decisive influence on the course of the operations and lead to the defeat of the enemy. Yours very truly (sd. D.Haig) Field-Marshal'. PRO WO 256/28 (Haig's diary March 1918.) O.A.D. 781, 22 March, 1918

Army was apparently on the run, suddenly Gough's troops were *behind* the Somme, and Haig could not 'make out why the Fifth Army has gone so far back without making some kind of stand'.[118]

As mentioned above, all three of Haig's assumptions were false. First of all, it would not be a 'prolonged struggle' after all. Haig had anticipated that Ludendorff would use 'unconventional tactics', in the form of *Stoßtrupptaktik* and *durchfreßen*. But he did not expect him to break the 'golden rule' on the operational level, which was to feint an attack to commit the enemy reserve before the launch of the 'real' attack. Haig particularly was not to blame for that mistake. Pétain did the same, waiting for the big push to come in Champagne, and Wilson's lectures to the War Cabinet revealed the same stereotypic outlook.[119] Hence, both Haig and Pétain were reluctant to move reserves towards Amiens in the early stage, because that would be the capital mistake to make, if only Ludendorff had played by the rules. But this time Ludendorff was forced to break the scheme. He decided to play the 'last card', against the advice from several of his high-ranking commanders, who seriously questioned the army's ability to sustain a major offensive in the coming year.[120] He had neither time nor resources for more than one big push, before the presence of the Americans would be too overwhelming for the battle-weary Germans.[121] Ludendorff decided to focus on the tactics of the battle, and to let the strategy of the war follow: 'I object to the word 'operation'. We will punch a hole into [their line]. For the rest, we shall see.'[122] Ludendorff came with almost all he had on the first day, and thereby almost 'managed to get through a revolving door held open for them with sufficient force to burst the door clean off its pivot'.[123] Haig's earlier concerns, of being too strong,

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[117] Blake, *Haig*, 296. (22 March 1918)
[118] Ibid. 296. (23 March 1918)
[119] '[Wilson] was of opinion that the attack would develop into a long-drawn battle deliberately intended for a trial of strength, in order that a decisive result might be arrived at.' CAB 23 WC 370, March 22,
[120] Herwig *The First World War,* 394.
[121] 'Having heard his subordinates out, [Ludendorff] announced that German strength sufficed for only one great blow[.]' Keegan, *The First World War*, 393.
[122] Ludendorff quoted in Holger H. Herwig 'The German Victories, 1917-1918' in Hew Strachan (ed.), *First World War, A History* (Oxford, 1998), 260. In his Memoirs Ludendorff explained: 'Tactics had to be placed above pure strategy. Without result on the tactical level, there is nothing left of strategy. A strategy that does not take the tactical results into account is bound to lead to nothing. The attacks of the *entente* during the first three years of war give ample examples.' Ludendorff's *War memoirs.* (Copenhagen, 1919), 408.
[123] Denis Winter, *Haig's Command A Reassessment* (London, 1992; 1st pub. 1991), 182.

proved to be ridiculous, and later caused Lord Beaverbrook to state that Haig committed suicide 25 years after his death, when Blake published his diary in 1952.[124]

As we know, Ludendorff eventually ended up by unleashing a number of attacks during the spring and early summer of 1918, but this was not his initial plan. Hence, the attack on the 21st was initially launched as a mammoth war-winning onslaught, far exceeding Haig's expectation, but turned into just another battle, in a 'conventional' sequence of battles, due to Ludendorff's lack of a comprehensive strategic scheme.[125]

Haig's second pillar, 'defence in depth', proved also to be a grave mistake. According to Martin Middlebrook the British defences were not strong enough, and had not been properly trained for it, with the result that the troops did not fully understand their new role.[126] The BEF was used to fight in line, and did not cope well with the new redoubts, or 'bird cages', of the 'defence in depth.' It was virtually impossible to make 'some kind of stand'. A platoon sergeant who was wounded and taken prisoner later stated: 'I must confess that the German breakthrough on 21 March 1918 should never have occurred. There was no cohesion of command, no determination, no will to fight, and no unity of companies or of battalions.'[127] Obviously many soldiers fought bravely and with great determination, but the overall impression was that many were 'rather ashamed of what had happened'.[128]

Haig's third pillar, French support, broke as well. As mentioned earlier, French assistance in the event of an attack was a part of the bargain struck when the Fifth Army took over the lines. Subsequently some French divisions came 'surprisingly quickly' to British aid, but not as many as expected.[129] By Saturday, the 23rd, it was obvious that France had to take a bigger share of the burden. They had taken over the line as far as St. Simon, but it was 'hoped that they would take over very shortly along the line of the

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[124] Robin Prior and Trevor Wilson, 'Book review of Winter's *Haig's Command*', *Journal of the Australian War Memorial,* 23 (October 1993).
[125] 'Ludendorff's original scheme to deliver a single, powerful blow against British strength gave way to a series of small attacks with limited objectives against both the British and the French. In the process, Ludendorff weakened the momentum of the entire assault. ' Herwig, *The First World War,* 407.
[126] Middlebrook *The Kaiser's Battle*, 329.
[127] Ibid. 323.
[128] Ibid. 333.
[129] Ibid. 277.

Somme as far as Ham, and later as far as Péronne'.[130] The Cabinet in London had a discussion whether they should 'put any political pressure' on the French Government in order to urge them to do more, but decided to wait until Haig had had a meeting with Pétain.[131]

The meeting with Pétain took place at 4 p.m., on the 23rd, and Haig was quite satisfied: 'P[étain] seems most anxious to do all he can to support me and agrees that the only principle which should guide us in our movements is to keep the two Armies in touch.'[132] Pétain on his side was anxious about the British willingness to keep the armies united: '[I]t is we who have to stretch out our hand to him, and we are stretching too wide...we are stretching too wide. It is dangerous. Douglas Haig is fleeing from Pétain [to cover his bases], one might say, and the unity of action which had been hinted at does not exist.'[133] Pétain had indirectly been 'blackmailed' to take a greater responsibility at the junction between British and French troops, by the deliberately weakening of the British troops in the area. But now Haig's oblique order of battle, i.e. his dilution of the forces adjacent to Pétain's troops, suddenly boomeranged. The BEF could not hold long enough for the French Army to 'rescue' them, as the Germans came too fast.

Haig's gambling, forced upon him by Lloyd George's inability to follow a coherent strategy, turned out disastrously.[134] Holger H. Herwig's words encapsulate the dimensions of the catastrophe and the reasons for it:

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[130] Colonel Kirke to the War Cabinet. WC 371 (March 23). Colonel Kirke, of the General Staff, had been on a 'fact finding mission' at G.H.Q after order by Lloyd George, who was not satisfied with the information-flow from G.H.Q,

[131] 'It had to be remembered, however, that the French were themselves, expecting an attack in Champagne, and we must not be too great in demand upon them until the situation there was clearer. [...] The question was then raised as to whether it was necessary to put any political pressure on the French Government to render us the necessary assistance, and it was suggested that the Prime Minister or some other Member of the War Cabinet might proceed to Paris for the purpose. The War Cabinet had no reason to suppose that the French would show any reluctance, and decided – That the question of putting political pressure on the French Government need not arise until the result of Field-Marshal Sir Douglas Haig's conference with General Pétain was known.' CAB 23, WC 371 (March 23)

[132] Blake, *Haig*, 296 (24 March 1918)

[133] Herbillon ('expressing the views of the General') quoted in Richard Griffiths, *Marshal Pétain* (London, 1970), 66.

[134] 'The British army in the First World War was battling for the ability to shape strategy or, at a minimum, to give a coherent body of strategic advice which the government might then accept or reject in the light of its political priorities. The nature of the war – the fact that waging it permeated every facet of national life and in the end subordinated, at least for its duration, the principles of liberalism and democracy to its demand – rendered uncertain the precise boundaries of what constituted proper military concerns.' Strachan, *The Politics of The British Army*, 143.

> In 2 days, Ludendorff's 'mobile' and 'attack' divisions had decimated Gough's Fifth Army and driven the British almost 40 miles behind the Somme and the Crozat Canal. Haig had lost 200 000 killed and wounded, 90 000 prisoners of war, and 1300 guns. Most importantly, his defences had been ruptured, a 50-mile gap driven through the lines. 'Open field' lay aheead of the Germans. The British had attempted to adobt the 'elastic defence in depth' without really understaning it, were not used to being on the defensive, and had failed to defend the marshy Oise region of Gough's thinly-deployed Fifth Army.[135]

4.3 Doullens

According to Haig, the road to Doullens started on the night of Sunday the 24th, after a meeting with Pétain.

> Pétain struck me as very much upset, almost unbalanced and most anxious. I explained my plans as above [thin down Plumer's front, and concentrate at the Somme], and asked him, to concentrate as large a force as possible about Amiens astride the Somme to co-operate on my right. He said he expected every moment to be attacked in Champagne and he did not believe that the main German blow had yet been delivered. He said he would give Fayolle all his available troops. He also told me that he had seen the latter to-day at Montdidier where the French Reserves are now collecting and had directed him (Fayolle) in the event of the German advance being pressed still further, to fall back south westwards towards Beauvais in order to cover Paris. It was at once clear to me that the effect of this order must be to separate the French from the British right flank and so allow the enemy to penetrate between the two armies. I at once asked Pétain if he meant to abandon my right flank. He nodded assent and added 'it is the only thing possible, if the enemy compelled the Allies to fall back still further.' From my talk with Pétain I gathered that he had recently attended a Cabinet Meeting in Paris and that his orders from his Government are to '*cover Paris at all costs*'. On the other hand, to keep in touch with British Army is no longer the basic principle of French strategy. In my opinion, our Army's existence in France depends on keeping the British and French Armies united. So I hurried back to my Headquarters at Beaurepaire Château to report the serious change in *French strategy* to the C.I.G.S. and Secretary of State for War, and ask them to come to France.
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> *Monday, March 25.* Lawrence at once left me to telegraph to Wilson (C.I.G.S London) requesting him and Lord Milner to come to France

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[135] Herwig, *The First World War*, 406.

> at once in order to arrange that General Foch or some other determined General who would fight, should be given supreme control of the operations in France. I knew Foch's strategical ideas were in conformity with the orders given me by Lord Kitchener when I became C. in C. and that he was a man of great courage and decision as shown during the fighting at Ypres in October and November 1914.[136]

On Tuesday, 26 March, the allies gathered for a conference in Doullens, to discuss the serious situation. The conference was attended for the French by President Raymond Poincaré, who presided, Prime Minister Georges Clemenceau, Louis Loucheur, the French Minister of Armaments, Foch, Pétain and Foch's Chief of Staff, General Maxime Weygand. And on the British side: Lord Milner, member of the War Cabinet, Haig, Wilson, General Sir Herbert Lawrence, and General Archibald Montgomery-Massingberd, representing General Henry Rawlinson, the British Military Member at Versailles. The proceedings began by Haig explaining his actions on the British front, and he concluded by saying that he had placed the Fifth Army under 'the orders of Pétain', who at once broke in with 'Alas, it no longer really exists, it is broken'.[137] Then Pétain continued, after a heated intermezzo with Wilson over the state of the British Army, to account for his actions. He agreed that Amiens should be held, but refused to make any guarantees, allegedly causing Foch to add: 'We must fight in front of Amiens, we must fight where we are now. As we have not been able to stop the Germans on the Somme, we must not now retire a single inch.'[138] Then something remarkable happened as Haig replied: 'If General Foch will consent to give me his advice, I will gladly follow it.'[139] This Milner and Clemenceau took as their cue, and they retired into a corner, consequently breaking the meeting up into small groups. Clemenceau drafted and proposed a formal agreement, entrusting to Foch: 'the co-ordination of the action of the British and French Armies in front of Amiens'.[140] Again Haig amazed his auditors by refusing to accept the proposal. 'This proposal seemed to me quite worthless as Foch would be in a subordinate position to Pétain and myself. In my opinion, it was essential to success that Foch should control Pétain; so I at once

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[136] Blake, *Haig*, 297 (24-25 March 1918).
[137] Maurice, *Lessons of Allied Co-operation*, 132.
[138] Quoted in Terraine, *Haig*, 423.
[139] Ibid. 423.
[140] Ibid. 423.

recommended that Foch should *co-ordinate the action of all the Allied Armies on the Western front.*'[141] Both Governments consented, and with a stroke Haig had made Foch virtually Generalissimo.

One of the most fateful hours of the war was over.[142] The crisis was solved by Haig's unexpected feat of valour. Haig was no great admirer of either French generals or the principle of unity of command under any other general than himself, but Pétain's defeatism had convinced him that he had to sacrifice some principles to get the Alliance a French general that would actually fight. In a letter to Foch after the war, he was quite frank: 'Lord Milner and General Wilson arrived on the 25th, and it was then agreed that in order to prevent the separation of the French and British Armies it was essential that you should be appointed at once to the Supreme Command. I personally pressed for this.[...] On these facts, I think I can fairly claim that the initiative in the matter was mine! It was a privilege the credit for which I cannot abandon to anyone.'[143] According to John Terraine Haig's claim was warranted; 'Haig's role in the appointment of Foch was crucial[.]'[144]

The story above is the one we find if we read Haig's diary, Edmonds' official accounts, or the books by such modern historians as John Terraine and William Philpott.[145] The problem, though, is that this story is pure fiction, based on conceit, blatant lies and national pride. Haig's account not only misrepresents, as most memoirs probably do, it is also flatly false. In Lloyd George's words: '[I]t is only human that he [Haig] should search out apologies which cover up his own mistakes. But he has gone beyond, outside and often right across the facts.' [146] It is a harsh conclusion, but if we take a closer look at the files, there is no other to draw. In the following I will try to reveal what actually happened, I

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[141] Blake *Haig*, 298 (26 March 1918).
[142] Historians, knowing what happened after Doullens, often designate The Second Battle of Marne, in mid-July, as the turning point of the war. From then on it was one-way traffic towards the German border, even if the casualties on both sides remained high throughout.
[143] Letter to Foch 2nd September 1919. NLS, ACC 3155 No.216h (correspondence about British-French relations)
[144] Terraine *Haig*, 424.
[145] 'Now Haig exposed the better side of his nature. At the moment of greatest danger he was willing to sacrifice his own personal interests to ensure the cohesion of the alliance. To ensure co-ordination he willingly subordinated himself to General Foch's overall strategic direction at the Doullens conference on 26 March[...] Since Pétain had shown himself 'upset, almost unbalanced and anxious' in the face of the crisis, and Foch was 'sound and sensible ...[and] has brought great energy to bear on the situation', it was 'essential to success that Foch should control Pétain'. If it meant that he had to control Haig as well, that was a sacrifice worth making in the greater allied cause.' Philpott 'Haig and Britain's European Allies' in Bond and Cave *Haig, A Reappraisal 70 Years On*, 136.
[146] David Lloyd George, *War Memoirs* (London, 1938), vol II, 2026.

show where Haig is bluffing, and indicate why he told untruths. But before I do so, we have to look a bit closer at the meeting's historiography.

4.3.1 'A fable agreed upon'

General Montgomery-Massingberd was probably the only one who actually took notes during the conference. But the notes he took, which eventually became O.A.D. 795, are of dubious value. As soon as the conference was over he distributed a typewritten summary of the meeting in the G.H.Q. for the other participants to comment on. The original typewritten note ended like this: 'After much private discussion between Ministers and Generals concerned, a Resolution by M. Clemenceau was drawn up and [handed] out. This amounted to a decision that General Foch would be placed in a position to co-operate the action of the two Commanders-in-Chief.'[147] This account Haig could not accept and corrected it with pencil to: 'After private discussion between Minister and Generals concerned, a Resolution by M. Clemenceau was drawn up proposing that General Foch be appointed to 'co-ordinate the operations of the Allied Armies about AMIENS' to cover that place. The Field-Marshal pointed out the difficulty of such a task, unless General Foch had full authority over all the operations on the Western front. M. Clemenceau agreed, and this proposal was unanimously adopted by the representatives of the French and British Governments.'[148] This eventually became the wording of the O.A.D.795. Montgomery-Massingberd also stated in a response to Edmonds in 1925, that the O.A.D.795 was unreliable since much of the conference was in French, and most of it took place in small groups. As a consequence, O.A.D.795 is a disingenuous historical source.

Lord Milner and Louis Loucheur published their memories of the conference, as such, after the war. The others around the table also wrote about the conference in their memoirs or diaries, but not as encapsulated narratives as Milner and Loucheur did.[149] The most important of them is Sir Douglas Haig's.

The authenticity of Haig's diary, or diaries, is dubious. In this work I have used both the hand-written version and the typed version in 38 volumes (which Robert Blake

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[147] Letter from Montgomery-Massingberd to Edmonds dated 23 May 1928. CAB 45/177 'Doullens'
[148] Montgomery-Massingberd's papers 7/19, Liddell Hart centre For Military Archives, King's College .
[149] 'There are four accounts of the Doullens conference from those who were present. The fullest is that of M. Loucheur published in *L'Illustration* of 24 March 1928. Lord Milner's account was published in *The New Statesman* of 23 April 1921. Lord Haig's is in Duff Cooper, *Haig*, vol. ii, p.258'. Maurice, *Lessons of Allied Co-operation*, 133 (The fourth is probably Montgomery–Massingberd's)

abridged for *The Private Papers of Douglas Haig 1914-1919*), both in the National Library of Scotland. The problem is that they paint a completely different picture of the days leading up to the Conference, and the Conference itself. Robert Blake asserts in his preface that: '[Haig] did not, when revising [and typing] his diary, make any important changes in what he had originally written. He does not appear to have deleted anything, but he did sometimes add a sentence or a paragraph. On the very few occasions when such additions occur in the extracts of this book I have indicated them by brackets and a explanatory footnote.'[150] In general, this seems to be true, and the greater part of *The Private Papers of Douglas Haig* can be accepted at face value. But in the section dealing with the Doullens conference, either Blake's assurance is a blatant lie, both because Haig actually removed sections of his hand-written diary, and Blake does not indicate a single one of Haig's numerous and extensive additions in the section covering the Doullens meeting, or Blake had simply not read the hand-written version.

The problem of a spurious diary is reinforced by the fact that most of the secondary literature in Britain about Doullens is based on Haig's typed diary or Blake's abridgement. The only exception is Denis Winter's 'March 1918: The German Offensive' in his own *Haig's Command, A reassessment.*[151] Winter's book is not enjoyable reading, as things always seem a bit easier for the armchair strategist, armed with hindsight and moral contempt. But Winter's chapter about the Doullens Conference, which is based on the hand-written version of the diary, is nearer the truth than Sir James Edmonds's, John Terraine's and William Philpott's accounts in respectively *History of the Great War, Douglas Haig - The Educated Soldier,* and *Anglo-French Relations and Strategy on the Western Front, 1914-18.* All are based on Haig's typewritten diary. But it turns out that the hand-written version, as opposed to the typed version, fits fairly with all the other available material on the case, such as cipher books, minutes and the French sources.

Haig's letters to his wife Dorothy and to his sister Henrietta, are according to Colm McLaughlin, some of the most revealing Great War papers.[152] Haig's letters to his wife, concerning Doullens, are not surprisingly in accordance with his hand-written diary, as they

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[150] Blake, *Haig*, 13.
[151] According to Colm McLaughlin (Senior Assistant, Manuscripts Division National Library of Scotland) there has been no 'in-depth research undertaken thus far as to Haig's doctoring of the truth in his Great War papers, other than that undertaken by Denis Winter'. E-mail 21 June 2001
[152] Ibid.

were written almost simultaneously and sent to the same person. Haig wrote quite freely, but in our case we have to be aware that his wife had borne a dearly wanted son on 15 March, just days before the German attack. Douglas tried probably to appear a bit more careless in his letters to his wife and in his diary than the situation actually warranted, knowing that she was especially fragile in those days.[153] In the gloomiest hours, on the 24th and 25th, his letters and diary entries are significantly more light-hearted than his official minutes and reports.

It is impossible within the scope of this thesis to do any research, as such, on the French side of the table. I have therefore only used readily available French sources, including Loucheur's article in *L'Illustration* in 1928 and the book by Paul Carpentier and Paul Rudet from 1933,[154] even if their value in this context is rather limited, as both are memorabilia of the war, and not analytic in any way. The most comprehensive book I've used from the French side is from 1929 and written by the head of Clemenceau's military secretariat, General Mordacq.[155] Mordacq was close to the happenings, but his book is still an eyewitness' narrative more than a critical analysis of the generic inconvenience of command and control in coalition warfare. Besides them, I have used biographies of the most central persons on the French side, and the French official history of the war. Obviously some of the French participants at the meeting later found Haig's revised history rather embarrassing, and some of their correspondence with Haig after the war, is also used in this thesis.

Now, as I have showed my hand, we are ready to reveal my account.

4.4 The meeting - reconsidered

The discrepancies start early, already in how the meeting actually came about, and continue all the way to its conclusion and aftermath. Let's start with the beginning.

4.4.1 The calling – a supersonic General

Sir Henry Wilson actually turned up at G.H.Q as early as 11 a.m., 25 March, which was extraordinarily early, given that the request for his presence had been sent after 3 a.m. the

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[153] On Haig's letter of 21st starting with 'I am glad that the attack has begun at last', Lady Haig has attached a note reading: 'Douglas writes optimistacly (sic) because remember I am in bed. He really looked terribly anxious when he was at home. Note was he says about the reserves' NLS, ACC 3155/164 'Extracts of letters to Lady Haig March 1st 1918 – May 1st 1918.'

[154] Paul Carpentier and Paul Rudet, *Un Important Événement de la Grande Guerre La Conférence de Doullens du 26 Mars 1918 et la Réalisation du Commandement Unique* (Paris, 1933)

same morning.[156] For purely physical reasons, Wilson must have started the preparations for his journey to France *before* Haig's meeting with Pétain at 11 p.m., 24 March. According to Wilson's own diary, Foch had telephoned him about 5:30 p.m. on the 24th, 'asking what I thought of situation', and Wilson had said that he would 'come over and see him'.[157] In fact Haig *did* ask Wilson to come over, but long before the meeting with Pétain.

According to documents in the PRO, Haig had decided to ask Wilson to come over somewhere between 5 p.m. and 6.30 p.m., and sent a telegram:

> Situation is serious. Enemy have captured Morval Ridge to-day and separated 3rd and 5th Armies. 5th Army which is tired is being pressed back from the Somme south of Peronne. 3rd Army is withdrawing to line of the Ancre. The line of the Somme from the south is being taken over by the French with six divisions, and they are sending six divisions south east of Amiens, but these movements will not be completed until 29th March. We must expect the enemy to press his success with vigour and without delay westward down the Somme Valley. Between the Bapaume – Cambrai Road and Peronne he has large reserves. I am opinion that the junction with French Army can only be re-established by vigorous offensive action of French while I do all I can from the north in combination with them. To-night I shall meet Petain. I hope General Wilson will come to France to confer with me regarding situation. [158]

On this occasion Blake's editing of Haig's diary is more misleading than Haig's own account. According to Haig's diary, both the type- and hand-written versions, he dined with General Byng, commander of 3rd Army, at Beaurepaire at 20:30. At this meeting he 'told Byng to *hold on with his left at all costs to the right of the First Army near Arras* and if forced to give ground, to do so by throwing back his right on to our old trench system from Arras via Ransart and along our old defence line'.[159] During the day Haig had apparently

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[155] Général H. Mordacq, *La Vérité sur le Commandement Unique* (Paris, 1934; 1st pub. 1929).
[156] According to Terraine, Haig returned to G.H.Q 3 o'clock (after his meeting with Pétain) and 'Lawrence immediately telegraphed to Wilson.' Terraine *Haig*, 421.
[157] The 'notebook', attached to *The Diaries of Field Marshal Sir Henry Wilson*, IWM, DS/MISC/80. According to Liddell Hart, Foch had called Wilson after an abortive argument with Clemenceau over the unity of command, as 'Battles are not directed over the luncheon table'. Foch to Clemenceau on the 24th, quoted in Liddell Hart *Foch, The Man of Orleans* (London, 1931) vol. 2, 291.
[158] WO 33/920 European War, Secret telegrams (2nd July, 1917 – 3rd May, 1918) No. 7734 (No.O.B.C. 7865) 24th March. 'From Field –Marshal Commanding-in-Chief, France, to Chief of the Imperial General Staff.' There is a copy of the cipher in WO 158/25 'Correspondence', as well, with several hand-written remarks: 'Telephoned to WO 6p.m.', 'Copy No 5 to Lord Milner.' (When Copy No 5 was issued to Milner is unclear), and 'Written at 5 p.m. in CinC's room 24/3' (Signed J.H.Davidson (M.G., G.S.)
[159] Haig's diary, Sunday 24th March. NLS, Haig's papers ACC. 3155/124 Diary no 26, March 1918. (underlined in the original)

decided to leave Gough's 5th Army high and dry in the lion's den, and prepare a counterattack from the north.[160] Remember that Haig had deliberately made his right wing weak, and now he had lost it completely. To keep Britain's 3rd Army connected with its 1st Army was regarded as more important than keeping the connections with French and the British 5th Army. This was indeed a severe change of strategy, but it was Haig who made it on the 24th, not Pétain. Hence the telephone message from Haig, asking Wilson to come over, which arrived at about 7 p.m. during Wilson's stay at Downing Street, was not caused by Pétain at all, as Haig and Blake later wanted us to believe.[161]

The fate of the Secretary of State for War is also odd. According to Haig he wanted to ask the Secretary of State for War, who at the time was Lord Derby, to come to France with the C.I.G.S. However, two lines below Haig states in his diary that Lawrence called Lord Milner, without offering any explanation as to why he apparently had changed his mind.[162] In fact Milner was already in France when Haig had his meeting with Pétain: 'The Prime Minister having asked me to run over to France in order to report to the Cabinet personally on the position of affairs there, I left Charing Cross at 12-50 on Sunday, March 24th'.[163] Could the reason for Haig's change of mind be that Haig knew that Milner already was in France? But why should he then ask for him in London? Or could it be that Haig just *pretended* that he had called Milner as he pretended that he had called Wilson to curb Pétain? Would it have been too embarrassing for him to face the fact that a high-ranking official was in France apparently to clean up the mess? Wouldn't it look better if Milner were there on his invitation? And why did he refer in his diary to Milner as Secretary of State for War?[164] Could it be that Haig 'polished' his diary *after* Milner became Secretary

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[160] In his hand-written diary Haig wrote: 'My intention being to concentrate all reserves I can by thinning my line in the North. With these Reserves to strike Southwards when the enemy has penetrated to Amiens.' (NLS, ACC. 3155/97) In his typed version, written with the knowledge of the outcome, he changes the *when* to *'if* the enemy penetrates'. (NLS, ACC. 3155/124).

[161] To make matters even more suspicious, it is even attached to the memo of the meeting with Pétain: 'N.B. On this C.-in-C. wired to C.I.G.S., War Office, requesting him to come to France.' The person who added the 'N.B' had obviously 'forgotten' about Haig's earlier telegram, or did not know about it.

[162] Blake, *Haig*, 297 (24-25 March 1918).

[163] Milner's Minute, 27 March 1918, CAB 21/41.

[164] In his diary Haig writes about a meeting with Poincare in April 1919. In the typed version he says that they started to discuss the appointment of Foch, and started to hark back. 'I saw that there was nothing more to be got out of Pétain, so I motored as quickly as possibly from Dury to my H.Qrs. at Montreuil and telegraphed to London asking Lord Milner (S. of S. for War) and the C.I.G.S. to come at once to France to discuss this grave change in French Strategy' NLS, ACC 3155-136 Volume 38, 3 April 1919.

of State for War in mid-April, momentarily forgetting that Milner had changed hats since the actual meeting?

The conclusion is that Haig made up a sequence of events that did not took place, in order to appear to be in control of the situation, a prerequisite for the mightiest general in a mighty empire. The way the conference actually came about is quite simple. Milner started his journey with a meeting with Poincaré, Clemenceau, Foch and Pétain, in Pétain's headquarters at Compiégne, which Haig and Wilson could not manage to attend. Milner was asked how the 'co-operation between the allied armies could best be established', and answered that he had to consult Haig before he could express any opinion.[165] Then they arranged for a meeting on 26 March with Haig, at Doullens, since Haig had already arranged to meet his commanders there. In fact Haig joined three conferences in Doullens during the 26th. The main topic of the first one, between him and his army commanders, was how many divisions Plumer, Horne and Byng could spare for the battle around Amiens.[166] The second meeting was a short encounter mainly between Lord Milner and the British generals.[167] Milner was anxious to know whether Haig actually had ordered his troops to withdraw towards the Channel Ports, which a despatch to Weygand the day before indicated. [168] He was also anxious to see Haig's reaction to the idea of authorising a general to co-ordinate the actions of the two Cs-in-C. He was surprised to see how eager Haig was on the solution. The famous conference, which is our concern in this essay, was in fact the third and last meeting of the day.

If Haig's 'creativity' seems too inventive on this occasion, his claim for credit for 'promoting' Foch is probably even more so.

4.4.2 The perfidious castling

As seen above, Haig allegedly lost his faith in Pétain during the meeting at Dury, on the night of 24th. There he had learned, he says, that Pétain had orders from the French Government to *'cover Paris at all costs'*. If we read the British minute from the meeting

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[165] Milner's Minute, 27 March 1918, CAB 21/41.
[166] WO 158/25 O.A.D. 793.
[167] WO 158/25 O.A.D. 794.
[168] 'The progress made by the enemy on our right and along the valley of the SOMME makes it evident that it can only be a question of time when the French and English Armies are driven apart. It becomes necessary to take immediate steps to restore the situation, and this is only possible by concentrating immediately astride the SOMME west of AMIENS at least 20 French divisions to operate on the flank of the German movement

we find no such ominous phrases as, 'French Government', 'Paris' or 'all costs'.[169] What Pétain did, according to Haig's own notes, was to point out 'how difficult the situation would be for the British Army if it were cut from the French. His Army would have all France to retire back into, but the British would be very unfortunately situated'.[170] Pétain continued to say that he still feared a German attack in Champagne, and that his divisions in the Montidier area 'had been given orders to fall back (in case of necessity) south-westwards!'[171] He would, however, give Fayolle all the troops he could to close the gap in the Somme valley. Hence, Pétain's considerations were not especially suited to cause the anguish that Haig later describes. Thus, Haig concludes the 24th in his hand-written diary with: 'I went from Beauquesne to Dury. Gen Pétain met me there at 11 p.m. I explained my plans as above and asked him to concentrate as large a force [as possible] near Abbeville astride the Somme to co-operate on my right. He said he expected to be attacked in Champagne, but would give Fayolle all his available troops. I got back to [Beauquesne] about 3 a.m. (Monday). *Situation seems better*, but we must expect the great attacks to continue.'[172] There is nothing at all about any panicking on Pétain's part or any late night calls to London.

But bad news continued to pour down, and, when Wilson arrived at Haig's headquarters on Monday 25 March, Haig was apparently knocked off balance: 'D.H. is cowed. He said that unless the 'whole French army came up we were beaten' and 'it would be better to make peace on any terms we could'.[173] Wilson realised that someone had to put things back on track again, and suggested the possibility of an Allied supreme commander, whereupon Haig in fact nominated Pétain for the post. This Wilson could not agree to, and he actually had to talk Haig into accepting Foch's candidature.[174] Would Haig have promoted Pétain for the post if he had been deeply concerned about Pétain's will to fight?

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against the English Army which must fight its way slowly back covering the Channel ports.' From a message handed to Gen. Weygand at Abbeville at 4 p.m. 25 March, WO 158/20 (General staff notes on operations.)

[169] Not even French historians have managed to trace such a decision. 'Il est impossible de faire dire cela à l'Instruction du 24 mars où l'expression 'couvrir Paris' n'est employée nulle part.' Guy Pedroncini, *Pétain Le soldat et la gloire 1856-1918* (Paris, 1989), 352.

[170] WO 158/48 'Conference at DURY at 11.p.m., Sunday 24th March '.

[171] Ibid.

[172] NLS, ACC.3155, 97 (Italics added) According to Major General Clive, Pétain was also satisfied by the meeting's outcome, 'saying that he would sleep better that night than for many nights.' Quoted in Tim Travers, *How the War Was Won, Command and Technology in the British Army on the Western Front, 1917-1918* (London, 1992), 67.

[173] *The Diaries of Field Marshal Sir Henry Wilson* IWM, DS/MISC/80 (25 March.)

Obviously Haig had not lost his faith in Pétain after all, as he later claimed. Not surprisingly, Pétain was a bit annoyed with Haig's revised account when it leaked to the press after the war.

Just after the war, Stéphane Lauzanne wrote a book called *Les Hommes que j'ai vus,* where he divulged a conversation between Poincaré and Haig, on the latter's departure from France in April 1919. Poincaré had apparently told Lauzanne that Haig had revealed that he had realised on 24 March that Pétain had given a fatal order of withdrawal, and that a new commander was imperative to save the situation.[175] When reading Lauzanne's account Pétain could not understand where Haig had got the impression that he had ordered a withdrawal, and asked him in a letter of 15 December 1920: 'Les déclarations de Mr. Stéphane LAUZANNE doivent elles être tenues pour conformes á la verité? Dans le cas de l'affirmative, je vous serais obligé de me faire connâitre quels sont les ordres communiqués par mon Etat-Major qui ont pu vous faire croire, le 24, que mes intentions étaient de replier l'Armée Francaise sur PARIS, alors que le [24] Mars, à 11 heures du soir, dans notre rencontre à DURY, je venais vous dire 'de ne pas lâcher la main que je vous tendais'.[176] In his answer, of 25 December, Haig rather unconsciously exposed how weak his case was. 'From this discussion [with Pétain on the 24th] I reached the conclusion that while you were prepared loyally to help us to the greatest extent possible, you retained the view that the main German attack was yet to be delivered, that it would be delivered against the French front, probably in Champagne, that in such an eventuality you might be obliged to make dispositions to cover Paris as that would be your primary care, and that should the Germans continue to advance successfully on Amiens, the French forces which were at that time collecting about Montidier, would be given a South Westerly direction for their

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[174] Travers. *How the War Was Won*, 68.

[175] 'Lorsque à la fin de la campagne, le maréchal Haig vint officiellement prendre congé de M. Raymond Poincaré, il lui déclara spontanément; 'C'est le 24 mars que j'ai été convainou de la nécessité d'avoir un commandant en chef unique, qui nous fut superposé à Pétain et à moi lorsque je reçus communication des ordres de repliement du général Pétain. Je compris alors que nous ne nous entendions pas et que nous marchions à la perte de nos deux armées. La seule facon de tout sauver était d'avoir au-dessus de nous un homme auquel nous serions tous deux subordonnés C'est pourquoi j'avais demandé a Londres d'envoyer un membre du gouvernement anglais s'entendre avec le gouvernement franqais pour la nomination du général Foch, comme commandant en chef des armées allieées. ' Extract from Mr. Lauzanne's book enclosed with Maréchal Petain's letter of 15 Décember. NLS, ACC 3155 No.216h, correspondence about British-French relations.

[176] Ibid. Pétain probably mixed the dates as he originally wrote, '...alors que le 23 Mars à 11 heures du soir... '. The late night meeting was on the 24th.

retreat.'[177] The conclusion of this line of reasoning is not convincing, even if the premises were correct.[178] Haig did not believe in any major German attack in Champagne, hence that eventuality would probably not materialise. Furthermore, the troops at Montdidier would move south west only if the Germans advanced 'successfully on Amiens', but the *entente's* sole aim was to impede that very movement, even if Haig doubted they could manage it. As a consequence, the contingency plans that Pétain most likely had revealed at their meeting were reasonable *if* the mentioned situations arose, but, and that is the main point, they probably would not. That's why Haig actually was comforted by the plans when he heard about them on the 24th, as his comment in his hand-written diary exposed. In his personal apologias after the war Haig simply transformed French contingency plans to actual operational plans. To this Pétain made his objection, and Haig in fact pleaded guilty in his letter to Pétain, hoping probably that no one would notice.[179]

If Haig was humble towards Pétain personally, he was venomous behind his back. In November 1920 he sent a confidential note to *The Times* stating: 'Between 21st March and 15th April the French did practically nothing and took little part in the fighting. For 21 days the British sustained the whole weight of the German attack made by 106 Divisions.'[180] If that was the case, why was Pétain on his way to Paris with his troops?

If Haig's disavowal of Pétain is unwarranted, the panegyric bestowed on Foch is in fact even more so.

General Sir A. Montgomery-Massingberd wrote something noteworthy in a paper, probably to Edmonds, dated 19 November 1925: 'One thing it is most important to

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[177] Letter from Haig to Pétain 25th December 1920. NLS, ACC 3155 No.216h, correspondence about British-French relations.

[178] It is probably the case that Clemenceau and Pétain had agreed that 'if it came to a choice the French armies should cover Paris in preference to Calais.' Stephen Ryan, *Pétain the Soldier* (London, 1969), 161. Pétain probably told Haig about their priority, but the eventualities had not been reached.

[179] Despite Pétain's protest, Haig's version of the story was presented in George Dewar's *Sir Douglas Haig's Comman* (London, 1922), xxxi, under the heading 'Some significant events between December 19, 1915, and November 1918, hitherto suppressed or overlooked'. And in the main body of the book, which is entertainingly biased in Haig's favour, we find: 'The British public has hitherto known nothing about this. It has remained a profound secret in this country except to a few people. Thus the real and immediate cause of the appointment of Foch to the supreme command was unknown', Vol II,135. The reason why it was unknown, even to Milner, was that it was unreal; it did not happen the way Haig and Dewar later described it. Not even Lawrence, who was present and later used by Haig as 'witness' could support Haig's revised version of what happened at the meeting. See Travers, *How The War Was Won*, 68.

[180] Haig 'Memo on events which occurred between 21 March and 15th April 1918 with reference to Conference and 'Pages d'histoire' recently discussed in 'Le Matin' of Paris.' 18th November 1920, NLS Acc 3155 228a

remember about this Conference and about Foch's position at that time, which is now completely forgotten and I doubt ever realized. That is, that the Foch we knew later and the Foch the world now knows is a very different man to the Foch of the Doullens Conference. His reputation was then very much under a cloud. He had been more or less Stellenbosched ever since the Somme, and he had had a bad car accident which had caused severe injuries to his head. No one could say how he would turn out, or how he would do in charge of the Western Front. Many Frenchmen were doubtful.[...] Foch was not then the one great general of the war, as most people think of him now, but a general who had been 'dégommé', and whom quite a lot of people thought to be a bit off his head.'[181] Lloyd George had the same doubts: 'When a man of over 65 has been violently flung on to a windscreen you may well doubt his fitness to command in the field armies numbering in millions at a critical stage in the history of the greatest war ever waged.'[182] What reason should Haig have for preferring a general of Foch's dubious reputation, at the cost of the only French C.-in-C. that Haig in fact had had a rather good relationship with?[183]

Haig's relationship with Foch was not good at all. Lloyd George, certainly not a great admirer of Haig, commented on it in his memoirs: 'But as to Foch, whom he also met in this company of exceptional gentlemen and fine soldiers, all he has to record in his Diary is:- 'As to Foch, he is a 'méridional' and a great talker.' It represents his general attitude towards Foch. He always referred to him in any conversation I had with him during the War with amused contempt.' [184] How could this great talker, a quality Haig disgusted, suddenly turn into a 'man of great courage and decision'? The answer is probably quite simple – he did not. Again Haig is inventing a sequence of events that suits his self-image. There are no signs of any telegram going to London, suggesting Foch as supreme commander. There is not even a sign that Haig liked the idea of promoting Foch at all! If we read Wilson's diary we find a completely different story. Haig had in fact to be 'talked over'.[185] Foch was personally much closer to Wilson than he ever was with Haig. There

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[181] CAB 45/177 'Doullens'
[182] Lloyd George, *War Memoirs*, vol II, 1752.
[183] 'Haig and Pétain functioned well together. Theirs was the most sympathetic and effective working relationship of the war, being one of equals.' William Philpott 'Britain and France go to War: Anglo-French Relations on the Western Front 1914-1918' *War in History* 2(1) (1995), 57.
[184] Lloyd George, *War Memoirs*, vol II, 2018.
[185] Wilson describes in his diary how he had to 'brush' Haig's resistance against Foch 'to the side' when he proposed the idea of a supreme commander to Haig 25 March. *The Diaries of Field Marshal Sir Henry Wilson* IWM, DS/MISC/80

were several reasons to pick Foch as the supreme commander, none of them as devious as Haig's later construction.

As we've seen, almost immediately after the attack the British had understood that the outcome of the crisis depended on the French ability to release and move enough reserves to fill the gap in Gough's Fifth Army.[186] The Prime Minister saw the situation as a proof of the soundness of the much-wanted General Reserve.[187] Hence, Foch's name, as the nominated head of the Executive Committee presiding the Allied General Reserve, would easily come to mind when searching for someone to command a 'general reserve', if created. In fact Foch himself regarded his candidature as supreme commander in this light.[188]

The British, i.e. Wilson and Milner, also discussed another solution on the evening of the 25th. Wilson proposed to entrust Clemenceau with the 'supreme control of the situation, with Foch acting as his technical adviser'.[189] As Milner reports: 'We [he and Wilson] discussed the personal difficulties of effecting such co-operation, and Wilson made the suggestion – which seemed to me a good one – that both countries might agree to leave it to Clemenceau, in whom the British generals a well as the French had confidence, to take any decision necessary to bring about the better co-operation of the Armies and the best use of all available reserves. He was on the spot. His country was at stake, and he would no doubt be guided by the military opinion of Foch, who appeared the most likely man to take bold and prompt decisions, and to see the struggle as a whole without taking a specially French view.'[190] Wilson's idea could have been a response to Haig's misgivings about Foch. It sounds reasonable that the 'personal difficulties of effecting such co-operation' refers to Haig's personal difficulties with the French generals. That could also be why

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[186] 'The Chief of the Imperial General Staff pointed out that the British Army was now attacked by a large proportion of the German Army, and was menaced with a possible attack by the whole. It was clear that the size of our army was not sufficient to enable us to cope with so heavy an attack whatever measures might be taken in regard to man-power, and that French assistance was indispensable.' CAB 23, War Cabinet 371 (23 March)

[187] 'The Prime Minister pointed out that if the Versailles scheme for the constitution and control of the Allied General Reserve had only been brought into full operation it would not have been necessary to have this bargaining process with the French, but that the Executive War Board would have decided immediately as to the disposition of the forces.' Ibid.

[188] ' „„puis me faisent attribuer le Commandement des reserves généralés, me preparent en un brot aux yeux de tout le monde, á prendre, le commandement des Armies Alliées au moment que vous avez si settlement fixé vous même des le 24 Mars.'(sic) Foch to Haig in a letter 16.9.19. NLS, ACC 3155 No.216h, correspondence about British-French relations.

[189] Liddell Hart, *Foch*, vol 2, 293.

Milner was highly surprised when he experienced Haig's willingness to accept Foch at the Doullens conference.

According to Foch though, Wilson's proposal was not a good idea. When Wilson saw him about the matter, he responded: 'That won't work. Clemenceau knows nothing of leading armies or directing battles. Who, then, will take charge of affairs? There will be decisions to take – who will take them? Clemenceau will say: 'I agree with Haig and Pétain. But it is not a matter of agreeing with them. He must command. Who will assume the responsibility?...No, it won't work'. [191] Foch and Wilson agreed that Wilson should suggest to Milner, 'that Foch should be commissioned by both Governments to co-ordinate the military action of the two Commander-in-Chief.'[192] Hence, when Foch pulled up by the Hôtel de Ville at Doullens, he knew that great things could happen to his career. In Liddell Hart's words; 'Like Napoleon at Notre Dame, he was about to crown himself.'[193] In Foch's own opinion the crisis was not a result of a lack of man-power, but a lack of will-power, and he undoubtedly saw himself as the man to provide it.[194]

Foch had originally not been Clemenceau's favourite, but already before the conference took place Pétain's notorious pessimism started to irritate Clemenceau: 'Pétain est agacant á force de pessimisme'.[195] Pétain had admitted before the meeting that he expected that the British army would be defeated totally, and that he had given orders for the retirement of the French left.[196] Clemenceau found Pétain's attitude disgraceful, and his outspoken defeatism, or realism, later gave Haig the straw to cling to, as it promised,

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[190] Milner's Minute, CAB 21/41.

[191] Liddell Hart, *Foch*, vol 2, 293. Wilson's proposal for Clemenceau as generalissimo provoked headlines when it after the war leaked to the press via Milner's memorandum. *Sunday Express* had an article on 28 November 1920, called 'The untold story of how Foch took command. Lord Milner's inspired proposal at a Critical Moment in the History of the War. CLEMENCEAU AS GENERALISSIMO!', where we find: 'The news that the appointment [of Clemenceau] was seriously proposed and discussed is not the least of the sensations of the great war' NLS, ACC 3155 228a.

[192] Liddell Hart, *Foch*, vol 2, 293. Foch had on his own part proposed a unified command to Clemenceau on the 24th, without any success. David S. Newhall *Clemenceau, A Life at War* (Lewiston, 1991), 393.

[193] Liddell Hart, *Foch*, vol 2, 294.

[194] 'With the means at our disposal, the question of stopping the enemy was in the first place a matter of will power on the part of the High command.' Ferdinand Foch, *The Memoir of Marshal Foch* (London, 1931), 298. The British government also reckoned that the Germans did not have any numerical superiority. 'The Chief of the Imperial General Staff considered that, for the purpose of calculation, the present forces might be reckoned as approximately equal.' CAB 23 War Cabinet 370 (22 March)

[195] From Poincaré's *Au service de la France*. Quoted in Terraine, *Haig*, 424.

[196] Maurice *Lessons of Allied Co-operation*, 132. Pétain was allegedly convinced that the war had to be ended by negotiations, and not weapons, already before the attack on the 21st. David Robin Watson, *Georges Clemenceau A Political Biography* (Plymouth, 1974), 302.

almost inevitably, to expose the pessimistic Pétain as the scapegoat. But the 'relegation' of Pétain should not be seen in the light only of differing personalities. Pétain's military philosophy, which put its emphasis on a strong defence, had apparently been bankrupted by the swift success of Ludendorff on the first days of the assault. The choice of Foch, 'the French general whose commitment to the pursuit of victory and refusal to admit defeat bordered on the irrational', at the cost of Pétain, was as much a bid for a more offensive and aggressive conduct of the war as the want of a 'new' face.[197]

To sum up: both London and Paris appreciated the imminent danger of a German breakout through the junction between the British and French troops. They also realised that Pétain's and Haig's previous agreement to cooperate was insufficient. In Lloyd George's words: 'The fact that we were two armies and not one meant that on a vital part of the line – Somme to Moreil- it was not clear for days who was in command of it. That shows what lack of unity has meant to us.'[198] What they needed was someone who could grab the reins, and the person they found was Clemenceau. As Montgomery-Massingberd wrote: '[Clemenceau] undoubtedly dwarfed all the others – Milner, D.H., Wilson and Foch, and continued to do so till he had Foch safe in the saddle and it was going very well. D.H., like all of us, was, I believe, very fond of and a great admirer of Clemenceau.'[199] For reasons of efficiency, and the haughtiness of the military profession, Foch was appointed the *de jure* co-ordinator, *de facto* on behalf of Clemenceau.

Who should have the credit, then, for appointing the 'stellenboshed' general? Lloyd George's claim is dubious, though he gets some points for the overall drive towards unity of command, but not for the actual realisation of it. He was not as keen as he later wanted us to believe, and he could not have given Milner directions as to what to do beforehand. Haig's scramble for credit borders on disgrace, as we have seen. To use Milner's words: 'I never said anything about it myself, because I hate the scramble for credit which is going on, in which I must say some of the soldiers are the worst offenders. '[200] Milner's own indirect and more modest claim is more credit-worthy, but he has to share some of the

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[197] The quotation is from Strachan, *Politics of the British Army*, 136.
[198] He continued: 'A good deal of this is, perhaps, inevitable when two armies are fighting together. No doubt the Germans and Austrians suffered from a lack of unity on the Eastern front, and the Russians took full advantage of it. I hope, at last, that the evil has been cured on our front.' CAB 23, WC, 385, 6 April, 1918.
[199] CAB 45/177
[200] Milner in a letter of 12.2.21, in Milner's papers 374, Memoranda and letters, mainly relating to the conference at Doullens, March 1917 – Jan. 1919. Bodleian Library, Oxford.

honour with Wilson, on the British side. The *Sunday Express's* theory of 1920 is still the most convincing: 'Here was the crisis, the moment in which great opportunities are seized or missed. The chance was seized, and Lord Milner seized it. Taking M. Clemenceau aside, he proposed directly to him the appointment of General Foch as generalissimo of the French and British armies. Clemenceau, whose mind had worked towards the same conclusion, agreed.'[201] As a shrewd politician, Clemenceau appreciated the value of having London proposing Foch. Nevertheless, Montgomery – Massingberd's advice to Edmonds is undoubtedly sobering, and may stand as the ultimate warning to all similar quests for personal or national glory: 'In my experience, it is very hard to say who was the real originator of a proposal such as this. If you could really trace it out, you would probably find it was someone quite different to what you think – e.g. a junior staff officer, or two or three of the chief people came to the same conclusion at the same time, as the result of the obvious impossibility of any other course of action.'[202]

As a conclusion, the initiative in the Alliance had undoubtedly gone to Paris for a while. Haig had been defeated in the field by the Germans, and had probably forfeited any vestige of confidence he had left in London. At the Conference he tried to save his reputation, career and situation by tying his own destiny to the 'talker' Foch, and probably hoped that Foch could save him from the mess he and Pétain had got into. Later on, with some distance from it all, he conducted a shrewd and perfidious recasting, by betraying Pétain and grovelling before Foch.

4.4.3 Extended Authority – the master of the obvious.

Haig's offer, that Foch should co-ordinate the action of 'all the Allied Armies on the Western Front' instead of just around Amiens, is also controversial. Denis Winter, for instance, claims that Haig's last offer, the extension of Foch's authority, is pure fiction.[203] On this occasion Winter thinks too little of Haig, as Haig appears to be in the right, but for all the wrong reasons.

According to Milner, Clemenceau first handed him a note reading: 'Le Général Foch est chargé par les gouvernments britanniques et français de coordonner l'action des armées britanniques et francais sur le front ouest. Il s'entendra à cet effet avec les généraux

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[201] NLS, ACC 3155/228a, correspondence concerning the appointment of Foch.
[202] Montgomery-Massingberd to Edmonds 19. November 1925, CAB 45/177.
[203] Winter *Haig's Command*, 188.

en chef, qui sont invités à lui fournir tous les renseignments necessaires.'[204] He gave the note to Haig who 'readily accepted it but suggested that it should be extended to cover the other Armies – Belgian, American, and possibly Italian – that might be employed on the present Franco-British front'.[205] Then the phrase 'des armées alliées' substituted 'des armées britanniques et francais'.

When Sir James Edmonds reached 1918 in his *History of the Great War* he was bewildered by the discrepancies between Milner's account and the General Staff Record of the meeting, that conveyed Haig's version that he demanded a greater geographical extension of Foch's authority, and not an organisational, as Milner assumed. In a letter to Sir Maurice Hankey, on 17 May 1928, Edmonds admitted that he thought the 'G.S. version is the correct one and should be accepted; not Milner's'.[206] And the reason was; 'I find that the British General Staff record O.A.D.795 of 26th March, initialled by Haig confirms completely what he told me'.[207] Further on, Haig's amendment, as recorded by Milner, did not amount to much: '[Haig] would, had he suggested it, have mentioned Portuguese (who were with and under him) and not bothered about the Americans and Italians (with the French), whom the conference could not commit.'[208] The problem though, is that Edmonds' proof is circular, for, as seen above, Haig himself was the 'editor' of O.A.D.795.

Edmonds could not have been that sure, for, on the same day that he sent his letter to Maurice Hankey, he sent another one to General Herbert Lawrence, stating : 'Of the British representatives of the Doullens Conference (26th March 1918) only you and Archie Montgomery survive. Montgomery says that he stood in a corner and gathered very little about what was happening, so I must appeal to you. Milner's version of what occurred and the G.S. record O.A.D.795 of 26th March, initialled by Haig, differ. Can you say at this length of time by whom the G.S. record was drawn up.'[209]

Lawrence's answer of 21 May 1928, starts by confessing: 'I cannot say who drew up the G.S, record to which you [refer]. Montgomery came with us because Davidson was

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[204] CAB 21/41, Milner's Minute, 27 March 1918.
[205] Ibid. According to Denis Winter, Haig had originally asserted that he would 'take orders only from his sovereign', *Haig's Command*, 188. Given Haig's relation to the king, Winter's account is convincing.
[206] CAB 45/177 'Doullens', Letter from Edmonds to Lieut.-Colonel Sir Maurice Hankey, dated 17 May 1928
[207] Ibid.
[208] Ibid. Haig was obviously not particularly amused by Milner's heresy. On a copy of Milner's report, provided to him by The Times, Haig has written: 'Is this Milner? The document is written by a conceited person who would have us believe that he won the War!' NLS, Acc 3155 228a.
[209] CAB 45/177 'Doullens', Letter from Edmonds to General Herbert Lawrence dated 17 May 1928

occupied elsewhere.'[210] Then he says something about the background of the meeting, corresponding with Haig's version, and continues: 'After all the whole point was that the French would fight or help in any way. Haig was prepared to make any sacrifice to force them to take a hand in the battle. Even with Foch's good will, he had difficulty in getting them to do anything and the utmost he succeeded in doing at the time was to put four divisions taking the Arras front where they did nothing but interfere with our lines of communications – Later on they took over [Kemmel] and lost it when the Germans attacked. I don't know whether the time has come to say all this and you will [use] your own judgement. On reflection I am almost certain that Montgomery drew up the G.S. record on my instructions.'[211] Then Edmonds went back to Montgomery again, who confessed that his rough notes from the conference were the source for the O.A.D., and not much to be trusted.[212] But what about the French accounts of the meeting? Could they help Edmonds?

The official French history does not say much about the meeting as such, only: 'Après un rapide échange de vues, ces représentants décident de confier au général Foch la mission de diriger la bataille[.]'[213] Apparently, the consequences of the meeting, that unity of command was finally reached, seemed more important to them than the actual exchange of words around the table.

One of the French participants at the meeting, Louis Loucheur wrote an article in L'Illustration on 24 March 1928 to commemorate the famous meeting, and he actually gave Haig some support. Clemenceau drafted the first note with the phrase, *devant Amiens*, and Loucheur writes: 'Cela est évidement insuffisant, et M. Clemenceau, sur l'observation du maréchal Haig, appuyé par le général Pétain, corrige et remplace les mots *devant Amiens* par : *sur le front occidental.*'[214] Haig was at least given credit for stating the obvious. In 1933 Paul Carpentier and Paul Rudet published a book about the Conference, and they stated: 'Le général Foch, le maréchal Haig et le général Petain sont unanimes pour demander que l'expression "sur le front occidental" soit substituée à celle "en avant d'Amiens" et le maréchal Haig propose que la désignation "des armées alliées" remplace

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[210] CAB 45/177 'Doullens', Letter from Lawrence to Edmonds dated 21 May 1928.
[211] Ibid.
[212] CAB 45/177 'Doullens', Letter from Montgomery-Massingberd to Edmonds dated 23 May 1928.
[213] Ministère de la guerre, *Les Armées Francaises dans La Grande Guerre,* Tome VI: L'Hiver 1917-1918. – L'Offensive Allemande (Paris, 1931) Premier Volume, 324.

"des armées britanniques et francais". Un des assistants demande aussi que le mot "occidental" soit remplacé par "ouest".'[215] This book, although a secondary source, which also cites Milner's accounts, in fact supports both Haig and Milner. General Mordacq complicates it a bit further by claiming: 'Le général Foch demanda que l'on substituât l'expression "sur le front occidental" à celle "en avant d'Amiens"; le général Haig, celle "d'armées alliées" aux termes "britannique et francaise".'[216] If we really want to go into details, Loucheur attached a copy of Clemenceau's first draft to his article, and there *'avant d'Amiens'* is overwritten with *'sur le front occidental'*, and with *'ouest'* in the margin. In the Milner papers, in the Bodleian Library in Oxford, there is attached another version of Clemenceau's draft, signed by G. Clemenceau and Milner. In these notes, which are duplicated by hand, the phrase *'alliées sur le front ouest'* is present, hence these notes are based on the one in Loucheur's article. But this time the phrase *'armées britanniques et françaises'* is overwritten by *'des armées alliées'*. Hence, this change came late, after the assistants had started to copy Clemenceau's proposal. That's probably why Milner remembered the last change, because then the signed notes had to be corrected, or he signed a corrected note. Milner was dead when Edmonds started his investigation, and could not comment on the minor details that suddenly became important and that he had left out of his minute. The reason why Montgomery-Massingberd did not remember Haig's change is probably that it happened in one of the small groups the conference disintegrated into, which he did not attend.

What about Haig's own unsullied account, the one in his hand-written diary? Here he says: ' It was proposed [originally: 'We also decided'] that Foch should be appointed to co-ordinate the operations at Amiens. I at once recommended that he should co-ordinate the action of all [the word 'all' is inserted] the Allied Armies on the Western Front. Both Governments agreed to this.'[217] This seems to be a fairly good description of what actually happened. Haig, probably together with the other generals, found Amiens too narrow, and

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[214] Louis Loucheur, 'Le Commandement Unique' *L'Illustration* (24 March 1928), 277.
[215] Paul Carpentier and Paul Rudet, *Un Important Événement de la Grande Guerre*, 69 .
[216] Mordacq, *La Vérité sur le Commandement Unique*, 91.
[217] NLS, Haig's papers ACC. 3155/124

he proposed to expand Foch's authority over other allies as well, perhaps because Haig's need for reserves was urgent, and especially as the Americans had manpower to 'spare'.[218]

The conclusion is that Haig was probably right in his claim that he asked for the whole western front to be included, *and* that he asked for the agreement to include the other Allies after Clemenceau and Milner had signed the agreement, which he later denied. When Haig after the war had figured out the grand narrative of how he alone saved the situation by 'sacking' Pétain, the 'little story' of how he extended Foch's authority probably seemed less important.[219] Given that this was the case, the most intriguing questions still remain. Why did Clemenceau originally focus on Amiens? He must obviously have known that the problem was not Amiens, but how to get enough reserves to that area, and they evidently had to be taken from elsewhere, hence the co-ordinating commander also needed authority elsewhere. And the second question is: why was Haig so eager to take credit for the discovery of the obvious, and Edmonds so keen on giving it to him?

The answer to the first question is probably straightforward. Britain was on the run in the field, and was about to lose 'the little war' against France. They had to choose between whether to surrender to Ludendorff or to Clemenceau, so to speak.[220] Therefore, giving the British a feeling of reciprocity was a matter of courtesy. Clemenceau obviously knew that his first proposal was militarily meaningless but he judiciously used a trick of the political trade, praised by Abraham Lincoln, that important decisions should be made to look like the decisions of a committee. Haig especially, who had fought a fierce battle for more than two years over his independence, ought to have appreciated the French *savoir faire*. The fact that Haig soon, and long before he 'found out' that the whole conference

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[218] 'It is absurd to see in Haig's advocacy of an extension of Foch's authority a supreme stroke of magnanimity, as it has often been represented. Haig was a practical Scot, not given to such gestures. In accepting a superior authority, his ruling idea was to obtain an ample flow of French reserves to cope with both the immediate danger and with the further German attack that he anticipated in Flanders. Under the prevailing circumstances he had nothing to give and all to gain. The further that Foch's authority was extended the larger, naturally, would be the sources from which the reserves could be drawn.' Liddell Hart, *Foch*, 297.

[219] It is not an issue in this thesis to figure out exactly *when* Haig created his revised story about the Doullens meeting, but it seems that he had the story more or less ready when he returned to Britain in 1919.

[220] 'The French saw [in the Doullens agreement] the realisation of a dream– their long-cherished project of a French Supreme Command. As they left the town hall Clemenceau delightedly declared to the head of his military secretariat, general Mordacq: 'That's almost worth a victory over the Germans.' And Mordacq, in retrospect, made the comment; 'It certainly was, in effect, a victory – but over the English.' Liddell Hart, *Foch*, 297.

was *his* master plan, insisted on at least an active participation proved that French courtesy was well founded. General Herbert Lawrence's repugnance for his French brothers in arms, which had only a faint root in reality, probably shows that he also felt that the dignity of British generalship was besmirched at Doullens. This is the reason why Edmonds was much more occupied by the question of who said what, at the meeting, than his French counterparts. Edmonds preferred Haig's version of events for parochial reasons, not for its veracity. It was important to give the impression that the act resulted in a *unity* of command, not British subordination in an hour of despair. Probably most British accounts of the meeting are more or less coloured by the understandable desire to disguise the defeat. Lloyd George's rather dubious claim to the fatherhood of the agreement points in the same direction.

If it were not for the 'sacrifices' of Haig or the foresightedness of the Prime Minister, the history of Doullens, regarding Britain, would sound like this, in the voice of 'The Tiger': 'Well boys, this has gone too far, we take over from here'. Not too much for the British to be proud of.

4.4.4 God's own commander

So far I have not looked into Haig's 'heart and kidneys'. Much has been said about his motives, traits and personality elsewhere, and the prospect of a psychological 'screening' of a man long gone is not promising.[221] Nevertheless, I will briefly try to answer two questions that keep lingering when reading Haig's papers. Why did he bother to antagonise his friends over minor details, after such a great victory? And why did he allow later generations to look through his web of lies by keeping his archives relatively intact? Why did he not burn 'the evidence'?

It is easy for our post-modern generation to forget how important religion was for Sir Douglas Haig. For him God was the major strategist of the war, the ultimate C.-in-C. so to speak.[222] The fact that Haig was near the top of the Army when the Great War broke out seemed to him further proof of God's great plan, which he also revealed to his wife after

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[221] I subscribe fully to Prior and Wilson's warning: 'Let it be said bluntly. We need no more books devoted exclusively to Sir Douglas Haig – and least of all to trivialities such as his spitefulness or noble character, his callousness or grim forbearance, his sexual deviance or martial uprightness.' Review of Winter's *Haig's Command* in *Journal of the Australian War Memorial,* 23 (October 1993).

[222] 'Religion made things simple for Haig: it provided life with order, meaning and justice, and left no room for self doubt.' Gerard J. DeGroot 'Introduction' to The Reverend George S. Duncan's papers in Guy, Thomas and DeGroot (eds.) *Military Miscellany I* (The Army Records Society, 1997), 270.

taking over as Commander-in-Chief in 1915: 'all seem to expect success as the result of my arrival, and somehow give me the idea that they think I am "meant to win" by some superior Power.'[223]

Given that Haig saw himself as a commander with a mission from God, the fateful day of 24 March 1918, when he realised that the BEF was on the verge of a catastrophe, must have been a day of real anguish. The futility of Haig's desperate prayer to Wilson on the 25th that the entire French Army had to come to his rescue, or else they would have to sue for peace, indicates that Haig saw himself as fallen from grace.[224] The anguish of the crucified Jesus shouting in despair: 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?' was figuratively speaking present when Wilson found the 'cowed' Haig on the 25th. Was God actually on the German side? Hence, the crisis of March 1918 was not only a national crisis for Britain it was also a personal and existential crisis for Haig.

Haig knew perfectly well when he arrived Doullens that both London and Paris were bent on some sort of unity of command, and he knew that Foch was certain to become the supreme commander. What he did not know was whether *he* would survive the meeting. He knew that the last time he had resisted subordination, at Calais, he had nearly lost his job. Now, after Passchendaele, he knew that he would not be able to withstand an open 'vote of confidence'. He probably also knew that strong forces, especially Sir John French, wanted to remove him immediately after the German 'walkover'.[225]

In his letters to his wife, Haig was deeply concerned about the government's witch-hunt after the 'unexplainable' breakdown of the British forces at the 21st. On 6 April he wrote to his wife: 'Gough goes home today and is to call and see you. I have done all I can to stick up for him, but the Cabinet want to divert criticism from themselves on to someone else! I expect that they would like to attack me only my case is so very strong. I have repeatedly told them that they were running 'unjustifiable risks' by continuing the war without making adequate arrangements for keeping Divisions up to strength.'[226] This apologia indicates both that he was afraid of being removed, and that he had not yet 'realised' that Pétain was to blame, and not the British Government. It is worth noting that

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[223] Haig to Lady Haig, 27 December 1915. Ibid. 270.
[224] DeGroot claims that Haig never lost his spirit: 'Confident of God's help, Haig never doubted that the British Army would eventually win', Ibid. 275. I think, on the contrary, that Haig was very much in doubt on the 24th.
[225] The Diaries of Field Marshal Sir Henry Wilson, IWM, DS/MISC/80 (24 March 1918).

Lloyd George had another view on how well Haig 'stuck up' for his comrade: '[W]hen Gough had been beaten owing to conditions for which Haig alone was responsible, Haig, instead of accepting that responsibility as an 'officer and a gentleman' removed Gough from the command and left the Government to infer that the *dégommé* General was alone to blame.'[227]

On 11 April Haig issued the famous Order of the Day containing 'With our backs to the wall and believing in the justice of our cause each one of us must fight on to the end.'[228] On the same day he wrote to his wife: 'If one has full confidence that everything is being directed from above *on the best lines,* then there is no reason for fussing'.[229] The problem is that *fussing* was what Haig had done. His decision to fight his way back to the Channel ports, and his suggestion to Wilson that 'it would be better to make peace on any terms we could' unless the whole French army came up, were nothing other than 'fussing'. When Haig's ordeals were over, he again saw evidence that he was God's own commander. '[I] scarcely feel that I deserve this gratitude, for as the Old Testament says 'the battle is not yours but God's', and I feel that I have only been the instrument to carry out the Almighty's intentions.'[230]

The answer as to why Haig took the time to fight futile battles over minor details after the war is probably that there was nothing minor about God's instruments. To criticise Haig's ability as a leader, or to suggest that he had lost his nerve, was in fact to criticise God himself. Haig had passed the test, he had been worthy of the grace of God and played his part in God's plan accordingly. To say something else was no minor detail! As He did to Abraham, God had given Haig a tremendous test, and he had passed.

The reason why he did not burn his papers is probably that he actually believed his own story. Some of Haig's 'creations', as for instance the time of his call to Wilson, were so far-fetched that it is hard to believe that he consciously fabricated such a hoax. The cognitive dissonance between his altruistic self-image and the forgery was probably too much to handle. If he had physically destroyed his papers, what would that have said about him? Haig's evasive answer to Pétain's accusations after the war showed that he had not

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[226] NLS, ACC 3155/164.
[227] Lloyd George, *War Memoirs*, vol II, 2019. Liddell Hart, on the other side, claimed that Wilson 'had raised the question of removing Gough'. Liddell Hart, *Foch*, 299.
[228] Quoted in Sheffield, *Forgotten Victory*, 192.
[229] Haig to Lady Haig 11 April 1918, quoted in DeGroot, 'Introduction', 402.

lost his grip on the reality as such, but his self image had not room for both a military failure and a world saviour, and he chose more or less unconsciously to be the last.

4.5 Doullens and beyond

We have seen what the British authority over distance looked like in the days preceding the crisis of March 1918, and we have seen how the disaster around Amiens broke down the long-standing obstacles against unity of command. In what follows, we will look at the impact the outcome of the conference at Doullens had on British command and control.

4.5.1 Authority

Long before the Great War Bismarck had put his finger on the main difficulty of any military alliance: 'Within an alliance there is always a horse and a rider.'[231] The persistent and intriguing question was: who should be the horse, and who should be the rider? It is especially tricky to find the answer if the coalition partners are of the same size and military importance. The question had frustrated the *entente* for almost four years of war. After Doullens, Foch was eventually acknowledged as the rider, but who was the horse?

4.5.1.1 Whose intentions?

The agreement at Doullens had only been a defensive means against a 'battle imposed upon us by the enemy'.[232] But soon, as the German troops reached their culmination point, Foch wanted power to *create* action, or 'powers for the infusion of an idea of action'.[233] He wanted to have his own *intentions*, and not just the right to respond to German moves: 'Now to plan this offensive action, to inspire and direct it, to ensure its being carried out by the Commander in Chief, and also to arrive at an equitable distribution of forces, the powers conferred upon me by the Doullens Agreement were plainly inadequate[...]The simple role of co-ordinating was not sufficient[...]It gave far too little play to the initiative of the officer who filled it [...]The role should be changed into one of direction.'[234]

The British Government also felt that the Doullens agreement was insufficient. The War Cabinet was especially concerned by the fact that the French C.-in.-C., Pétain, did not seem to follow the spirit of Doullens. 'It was pointed out that co-ordinating between

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[230] Haig to Lady Haig 17 November 1918, quoted in DeGroot, 'Introduction', 407.
[231] Neilson and Prete, *Coalition Warfare*, vii.
[232] Hankey, *The Supreme Command*, vol 2, 791.
[233] Ibid.
[234] Foch, *Memoirs*, 313.

General Foch and the French Higher Command was no less important than between him and the British Higher Command, and that the former might be more difficult to secure[.]'[235]

Consequently, on 3 April the allies had another meeting about the command and control relationship, this time at Beauvais. The circumstances were completely different from Doullens, as both Lloyd George and the Americans were present, and all parties had had the opportunity to prepare for the conference. They reached the following agreement:

> General Foch is charged by the British, French, and American Governments with the co-ordination of the action of the Allied armies on the Western front. To this end all powers necessary to secure effective realisation are conferred upon him. The British, French, and American Governments for this purpose entrust to General Foch the strategic direction of military operations. The Commanders-in-Chief of the British, French, and American armies have full control of the tactical employment of their forces. Each Commander-in-Chief will have the right to appeal to his Government if, in his opinion, the safety of his army is compromised by any order received from General Foch.[236]

Paris had initially opted for 'Commander-in-Chief', but that would have expelled the King from the British chain of command, and Mordacq instead coined the term 'strategic direction', acceptable to all. [237] But mostly for semantic reasons on 14 April Lloyd George did in fact accept that Foch's title should be 'Commander-in-Chief of the Allied Armies in France', as it was assumed to be important to signal to President Wilson that Foch actually orchestrated the war on the Western front.[238]

The agreement was deliberately vague and ambiguous, a classic within coalition warfare. The treaty should mean different things to different people. When, for instance, Wilson interposed with the objection that one 'never knows where strategy exactly begins and ends'. Foch replied: 'in France one knows it perfectly.' [239]

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[235] CAB 23, WC 380, (2 April, 1918)
[236] Co-ordination of Allied Operations on the Western Front. Agreement reached at Beauvais, 3 April 1918. Signed by Mr. Lloyd George, Field-Marshal Sir D. Haig, General Sir H. Wilson, M. Clemenceau, General Foch, General Pétain, General Pershing, General Bliss. CAB 23 WC 382, (4 April, 1918)
[237] Liddell Hart, *Foch*, 306.
[238] 'Je tiens essentiellement, me dit-il, à ménager les susceptibilités de Américans, et surtout de M. Wilson, qui, dans cette question de l'unité de commandement, s'est toujors rangé de nitre côté': Clemenceau quoted in Mordacq, *La Vérité sur le Commandement Unique*, 187. Foch was created *Maréchal de France* on 6 August 1918.
[239] Liddell Hart, *Foch*, 307.

Originally Foch had asked for more authority, as he was 'compelled to use persuasion instead of giving directions. A power of supreme direction seems to me indispensable for the achievement of success.'[240] Foch was not quite satisfied with the Beauvais agreement, but it had at least given him the possibility to 'conduct the battle on the French front'.[241]

The conclusion is that Foch apparently got the power to overrule Pétain's and Haig's intentions with his own at Beauvais. But the Allied Governments did not entrust him with the power that normally follows supreme command. His junior officers had the right of veto, at least to delay his actions. Within a national command structure, no commander would accept any such right to subvert legal operational decisions. Foch had no choice, he was not appointed a *de jure* supreme commander.[242] More important, he did not become the *de facto* supreme commander either.

4.5.1.2 Political dirigibility

An intriguing question arose when the Allies bestowed the strategic direction on Foch. Would Foch still be a French general with Clemenceau as his political head, or would he be some sort of international Generalissimo with no obligation to any national bodies, except the Allies as such?

Apparently Foch started to behave as a general aloof from national policy, much to the irritation of Clemenceau. In the translated words of the 'Tiger' himself: 'Do you know', the Marshal said to me one day, 'that I am not your subordinate?' 'No, I don't' I replied with a laugh. 'I don't even want to know who put that notion into your head. You know that I am your friend. I strongly advise you not to try to act on this idea, for it would never do.'[243] Clemenceau's *de facto* power over Foch was effectively unquestioned, irrespective

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[240] Foch to Clemenceau on 2 April, quoted in Liddell Hart, *Foch*, 306.

[241] 'The Beauvais agreement did not entirely meet my proposition, since it did not extend my authority over the whole of the Western Front from the North Sea to the Adriatic, or over all the Allied troops fighting there. Nevertheless, it did contain the essence of what was necessary for conducting the battle on the French front (which was the main theatre of operations) with the American, British and French Armies, the principal forces of the Entente' Foch, *Memoirs*, 315.

[242] The absence of the prerogatives of a commanding general in a pure national context, as for instance the right to promote and discipline subordinates, does not in itself exclude 'unity of command'. The purpose of 'unity of command' is simply to bestow on one person the power to compel subordinates, within the frame of the laws of war, irrespective of nationality.

[243] Quoted in Newhall, *Clemenceau*, 397.

of Foch's opinion, even if they continued to squabble throughout the war.[244] But were Clemenceau's instructions also superior to Lloyd George's on the Western Front, as a consequence of his power over the Generalissimo? According to Lord Derby, then the British ambassador in Paris, Clemenceau apparently thought he could 'run' the war, as the Generalissimo's superior.[245] In practice though, such a grandiose project was beyond reach.

Napoleon once said: 'It would be better to have one poor general than two good ones.'[246] Now Lloyd George had two generals of dubious reputation, instead of one, where one of them took his instructions from Paris. A game of 'divide and rule' was perhaps tempting but could not be played too far. The game could be played both ways. According to Haig, the British government's understanding of the Beauvais treaty was ambivalent: 'I note that the Government now tells me 'to use my judgement' in obeying *orders* given me by 'the Generalissimo of the Allied Armies'[...] This is a case of 'heads you win and tails I lose.' If things go well, the Government take credit to themselves and the Generalissimo; if badly, the Field-Marshal will be blamed!'[247] To ask Haig to use 'his judgement' could be dangerous. He had probably used it both at the Somme in 1916 and at Ypres in 1917. After Beauvais, Lloyd George's room for manoeuvre was truly thorny.

4.5.2 Intention

Foch's contemporaries lacked a proper word for his new assignment, as modern alliances still were in the infancy.[248] As head co-ordinator of generals with conflicting loyalties and under different masters, his title of 'strategic director' was misleading. In our times, with a century of coalition warfare behind us, a new word has been coined for an old concept. In NATO nomenclature it is called 'co-ordinating authority', and is defined as:

> The authority granted to a commander or individual assigned responsibility for coordinating specific functions or activities involving forces of two or more countries or commands, or two or more services or two or more forces of the same service. He has the authority to require consultation between the agencies involved or

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[244] 'It seems that Clemenceau and Foch are not on good terms. Foch is suffering from a swollen head, and thinks himself another Napoleon! So Clemenceau has great difficulties with him now.' Blake, *Haig*, 337 (27 October 1918)

[245] 'What amuses me is Clemenceau's open contempt of our P[rime] M[inister]. He evidently thinks he can do what he wants with him.' Lord Derby to Foreign Secretary Balfour in April 1918. Ibid. 395.

[246] Napoleon to Carnot 1796, quoted in Jay Luvaas, *Napoleon on the Art of War* (New York, 1999), 65.

[247] Blake, *Haig*, 318. (15 July 1918)

[248] The Austro-German alliance of 1879 is sometimes held up as the first modern alliance. See for instance Paul Kennedy in 'Military coalitions and coalition warfare over the past century', 4.

> their representatives, but does not have the authority to compel agreement. In case of disagreement between the agencies involved, he should attempt to obtain essential agreement by discussion. In the event he is unable to obtain essential agreement he shall refer the matter to the appropriate authority.[249]

The definition above covers Foch's *de facto* authority quite well. His ability to order men into fire was limited. But his authority as the 'firm's chief barrister' was more substantial, and more important. What Pétain and Haig needed was not a new general, but an 'honest broker', that could bring them out of their mutual and interlocking suspicions. Here Foch, the talker, could play his historical part.

4.5.2.1 Conflicting Perspectives

Foch explained his role during the crisis in March to Loucheur: 'The situation can be likened to a double door; each of these generals [Haig and Pétain] is behind his half of the door without knowing who should push first to close the door. I quite understand their hesitation; the one who pushes first risks having his right or left wing turned...What should I do in their place? You know my method; I stick a wafer here, another there, a third at the side...The Germans can scarcely make any further progress. A fourth wafer, and they will stop altogether.'[250] Hence: Foch's mission was to unlock Haig and Pétain from the prisoner's dilemma.[251]

Foch's British liaison officer, General Sir John Du Cane, observed perspicaciously after the allied counter-offensive had begun: 'our greatest danger now lies in the trouble between ourselves. If we can stick together and avoid friction and rows we now have a sitter but whereas adversity forced us to be friends success is likely to make for trouble between the allied nations.' [252] Du Cane's worries were not unwarranted. When the crisis had passed no one really liked to have Foch around.

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[249] NATO, *Allied Administrative Publications* (AAP- 6) (V) modified version, August 2000.
[250] Foch to Loucheur on the 24th, quoted in Liddell Hart, *Foch*, 291.
[251] *Prisoner's dilemma* : 'the options and outcomes are so constructed that it is rational for each person, when deciding in isolation, to pursue a course which each finds to be against his interest and therefore irrational' Ted Honderich (ed.) *The Oxford Companion to Philosophy* (Oxford, 1995), 719.
[252] Rawlinson diary (21 Aug. 1918). Quoted in Philpott, *Anglo-French Relations*, 160.

4.5.2.2 Plan Fetishism

Haig's main problem with the concept of 'unity of command' was not that the supreme commander could make dangerous mistakes, but that he, as second in command, would have to take all the blame. Haig's concern is spelled out in George Dewar's *Sir Douglas Haig's Command*: 'If the supreme head orders the commander-in-chief of the Ally to undertake an operation which turns out disastrous and leads to a great loss of life, on whom will the responsibility fall- who will be called to account and punished for the blunder? Inevitably, if any one is called to account, it will be the commander-in-chief who obeys the order. There is no way out of this dilemma. It is the second in command who is responsible. It is he who is punishable in regard to the lives and safety of the army under him; not the first in command – except in regard to troops of his own nation.'[253] Hence in June Haig asked for a 'letter of indulgence': 'The effect of the Beauvais Agreement is now becoming clear in practice. This effect I had realised from the beginning, namely, that the responsibility for the safety of the British Army in France could no longer rest with me because the 'Generalissimo' can do what *he* thinks right with *my* troops. On the other hand, the British Government is only now beginning to understand what Foch's powers as Generalissimo amount to. This delegation of power to Foch is inevitable, but I intend to ask that the British Government should in a document modify my responsibilities for the safety of the British Army under these altered conditions.'[254]

What about the chaps in the trenches, at the other end of the wire? Could they ask to be revealed of their responsibilities? Would it be entirely all right for a British lieutenant to order his men into the torment of German *Maschinengewehr* knowing that the head of his nation's army had asked to be exempt of responsibility? If Haig was off the hook, who could eventually be hanged?

Consequently, the decapitation of the British chain of command was totally unacceptable for many of Haig's subordinates. General Gough, who had not been at Doullens, was stunned when Foch arrived at his headquarters directly after the meeting and

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[253] Dewar, *Sir Douglas Haig's Command*, vol 2, 149.
[254] Blake, *Haig*, 314. (7 June 1918). Haig got his letter 'Instructions of the Secretary of State for War to the Field-Marshall Commander-in-Chief British Armies in France' from Milner 21 June 1918, which gave him the 'liberty to appeal to the British Government' before executing wide-ranging orders from the supreme commander. See Edmonds, *Military operations in France and Belgium 1918* (London, 1935), Vol III, Appendix IX, 351.

started to boss him around: 'It can be imagined how surprised I was at this outburst on Foch's part. Surprise rather than indignation was my first impression. I now ask myself, how was it that a British General was placed in such a position? How could it arise that he was exposed to such rudeness from an Allied officer? How could Foch be so amazingly ignorant of the situation as not to realise the splendid fight the Fifth Army had put up?'[255] Gough was soon relieved of his command, and we can only speculate about how well Gough would have served under a French general, who had 'suffered a continuous series of reverses'.[256]

As a conclusion, it was not irrelevant to the subordinates where the orders came from. The forgotten part of plan fetishism severely restricts the creativity of the command and control layout. Therefore it was important to keep Haig in the chain of command. [257]

4.5.3 Dissemination

Haig's first reaction to the Beauvais meeting was that the agreement did not mean anything: 'I was in full agreement and explained that this new arrangement did not in any way alter my attitude towards Foch, or C. in C. French Army. I had always in accordance with Lord Kitchener's orders to me regarded the latter as being responsible for indicating *the general strategical policy*, and, as far as possible, I tried to fall in with his strategical plan of operation.'[258] But when Foch did more than just *indicating* the strategic policy Haig became furious.

In June Haig had enough, and 'rang the bell', or in Milner's words (then the Secretary of State for War): 'In consequence of an objection taken by Field Marshal Haig to orders received from Foch about the disposition of the British reserves, with regard to which the Field Marshal appealed to the British Government under the terms of the Beauvais Agreement, the C.I.G.S. and I left London at mid-day on Thursday June 6th, in order to attend a meeting arranged at the Ministry of War, Paris, on the following day, at

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[255] General Sir Hubert Gough, *The Fifth Army*, (London, 1941), 306.
[256] Ibid. 308 .
[257] In Washington President Wilson congratulated of Foch on his new appointment at Doullens. The War Cabinet decided that 'President Wilson's message should be kept back from publication and that the Foreign Office should inform the French Government that we are going to make an announcement immediately in our press.' CAB 23 WC 378, (30 March 1918).
[258] Blake, *Haig*, 300. (3 April 1918)

which Clemenceau, Foch and the Field Marshal were to be present.'[259] Milner's mission was difficult. For the British Government it was important to stand by the agreement of Beauvais, but at the same time the British manpower situation did not allow any recklessness from Foch.[260] When Milner met Haig in Paris he was struck by the latter's pessimism and bad temper. The situation seemed delicate indeed.[261] But when the meeting actually started Milner heaved a sigh of relief, as the generals' opinions were not irreconcilable after all: '[Foch and Haig] always seem to get on quite well together when brought face to face.'[262]

This way of doing business eventually became Foch's *modus operandi*. Haig was not willing to follow orders as such, and Foch had to talk him into his decisions. 'It was tacitly admitted, I think, by all of us that, given such due notice and a chance of having his views fully considered, he [Haig] would have to obey Foch as Commander-in-Chief if the latter insisted on overruling his objections.'[263] Consequently Foch had not the power superveniently to influence Haig, as Haig expected to have the opportunity to influence Foch reciprocally. As Foch himself lucidly stated: 'What later on was known by the term 'unified command' gives a false idea of the powers exercised by the individual in question – that is, if it is meant that he commanded in the military sense of the word, as he would do, for example, in the French Army. His orders to Allied troops could not have the same characteristic of absolutism, for these troops were not his...But by persuasion he could stimulate or restrain their Commanders-in-Chief[.]'[264]

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[259] 'Record of a Visit to Paris, June 6 – 8, 1918.' Milner's papers 374, Memoranda and letters, mainly relating to the conference at Doullens, March 1917 – Jan. 1919. Bodleian Library, Oxford.
[260] 'I have received no definite instructions, but I think I rightly interpret the mind of the Government when I say that they are most anxious to give all possible assistance to the French in their present straits, and not to impair Foch's authority as C-in-C. at the same time, if, in your opinion, Foch insists on something which recklessly exposes the British Army to destruction, they will support you in resenting it.' Memorandum to D.Haig 7/6/18. Milner's papers 374, Bodleian Library, Oxford.
[261] 'After dinner the C.I.G.S. and I had a long conversation with the Field Marshal and General Lawrence about the military position, and the conversation we were to have with Clemenceau and Foch the following day. We found them both very pessimistic as to the outlook. The French troops were, in their opinion, not fighting well.' Record of a visit to Paris, 6 – 8 June, 1918. Milner's papers 374, Bodleian Library, Oxford.
[262] Ibid. We have to remember though, that Haig's lack of fluency made him prone to gloss over dissension, and Milner's observation may be a bit too wishful. '[H]aving no dialectical proficiency, [Haig] felt no inclination to seek debate. One detects in him a certain gaucheness in relations with those who were his superiors or equals in rank[.]' Terraine, *Haig*, 55 .
[263] Milner's papers 374, Bodleian Library, Oxford.
[264] Quoted in Terraine, *Haig*, 426.

In August General Rawlinson questioned the chain of command: 'Are you commanding the British Army or is Marshal Foch?'[265] Haig gave his answer to Foch the same day, still with Rawlinson present: 'I spoke to Foch quite straightly and let him understand that *I was responsible to my Government and fellow citizens for the handling of the British forces.*'[266] If Haig had admitted to Rawlinson that he was only Foch's subordinate, he had reached a dead end in his generalship. Foch chose not to stand up and fight, and continued the only feasible style of leadership, the art of persuasion.

General Pershing had a similar attitude towards Foch. In August 1918 Pershing made the supreme commander 'pale and exhausted': 'I was provoked to say: 'Marshal Foch, you have no authority as Allied Commander-in-Chief to call upon me to yield up my command of the American Army and have it scattered among the Allied forces where it will not be an American army at all.' He was apparently surprised at my remark, and said, 'I must insist upon the arrangement,' to which I replied, as we both rose from the table where we sat, 'Marshal Foch, you may insist all you please, but I decline absolutely to agree to your plan. While our army will fight wherever you may decide, it will not fight except as a independent American army'...'[267] Not even Pershing's superior, President Wilson, esteemed Foch's pontificals. Foch was in fact, as the supreme military commander of the alliance, informed of the German armistice note to President Wilson through the newspapers, and nobody asked his opinion.[268]

Pétain also had difficulties with Foch's role as superior: 'Foch and Pétain did not give exactly the same orders; the difficulties of a commander-in-chief of the French army having over him a supreme generalissimo were already [27 March] showing themselves[.]'[269]Pétain was weakened further by the appalling French loss of Chemin des Dames in June 1918, where the French leadership was in disarray, and Haig started to gain stature again after the disasters in March.[270]

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[265] Rawlinson asking Haig at a meeting 14 August 1918. Terraine, *To Win a War*, 118.
[266] Blake *Haig*, 323. Haig's italics. (14 August 14 1918).
[267] Pershing, quoted in Terraine, *To Win a War*, 134. '[I]t says much for his temper and his manners that relations with his powerful subordinates were generally quickly repaired after such scenes.' Ibid.
[268] Terraine, *Haig*, 474.
[269] Griffiths, *Marshal Pétain*, 72.
[270] 'Pétain was in semi-disgrace; General Guillaumat was recalled from Salonika to replace him, and though this extreme step was not in fact taken Pétain and the French Army were now placed directly under Foch.' Terraine, *To Win a War*, 72.

Haig had scorned Foch for his loquacity, but Foch's ability to talk became his greatest, and only, asset. Clemenceau had trouble accepting this fact: 'Foch could not simply 'command' Pershing (or Haig, or Diaz of Italy, whose government had adhered only to the Doullens formula of 'coordination'), and Clemenceau's pressing of a moot point fatefully damaged their relationship.'[271] As a persuader, the tongue-tied Haig would have been absolutely useless.

4.5.3.1 Isomorphic actions

According to John Terraine one of the wonders of the war was how well the Allies coped with the 'platoon commander's war' that subsisted in the last 100 days of the war.[272] After their tactical sense had ossified in timetabled and trench warfare, the flexibility of the last 100 days was amazing, but not within the scope of this thesis. In my opinion, the Doullens conference had little impact on the troop's ability to adapt to a new or, more strictly, old kind of warfare. The changes at the very summit of the military hierarchy did not have much influence on the ability to carry out isomorphic actions, and are therefore left aside.

4.5.3.2 A gamut in harmony?

As we have seen 'the gamut' was not completely in harmony in the period leading up to March 1918. For instance, the failure to defend the marshy Oise region, had its origin in the mismatch between the demand for command and control, and what could be delivered. On 21 March the gamut was blown completely off balance. As 'chaos and confusion gripped British headquarters', the troops, used to detailed orders, were paralysed, as old plans suddenly became useless.[273] Foch's energy and access to allied troops gave the BEF an indispensable respite. And during the following months the BEF once more regained poise over the gamut.[274]

Micro-management of a moving battle was impossible given the information technology available in 1918. The command and control layout had simply not got the capacity to carry battlefield intelligence all the way up to Haig before it became obsolete,

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[271] Newhall, *Clemenceau*, 397.

[272] Terraine, *To Win a War*, 202. The resuming fighting spirit provided by the more 'adolescent' Dominion troops probably goes a long way to explain the BEF's rather astonishing ability to cope with moving battles. However, the British troops' ability to cope with a new reality was still tremendous.

[273] The citation is from Herwig *The First World War*, 407.

[274] 'The British army, having initially been confused by the new conditions of warfare, had by July 1918 tamed the new technology and worked out effective ways of harnessing it. The BEF proved highly adaptive and innovative in mastering a Revolution in Military Affairs.' Sheffield, *Forgotten Victory*, 198.

and bring his decisions down again before they became outdated.[275] Haig was gradually squeezed out of the OODA-loop, and the 'decision threshold' was inevitably pushed downwards.[276] A statement of General Monash indicates how the practice had changed: 'It has come to be an article of faith that the whole of the successive stages of the great closing offensive of the war had been the subject of most careful timing, and of minute organisation on the part of the Allied High Command, and of our own G.H.Q. Much eulogistic writing has been devoted to an attempted analysis of the comprehensive and far-reaching plans which resulted in the delivery of blow upon blow, in a prescribed order of time and for the achievement of definite strategical and tactical ends. All who played any part in these great events will know that it was nothing of the kind[.]'[277] Still the BEF's battalions had not been freewheeling improvisers waging war ad-lib on a large scale. The same Monash's ideas of a battle plan were still rather rigid: 'The battle plan having been...crystallised, no subsequent alterations were permissible, under any circumstances, no matter how tempting.'[278] The point is that the initiative was pushed down. Britain's two mutually contradictory command systems, 'umpiring' and 'restrictive control', coped rather well with this, even if reluctantly. When Haig in October wrote in his diary: 'They [Byng and Rawlinson] agreed that no further orders from me were necessary, and both would be able to carry on without difficulty', it was a late acknowledgement of an already established practice.[279] Even his Army commanders' ability to micro-manage was questionable.[280] As a consequence, Haig like his senior subordinates, 'proved far more effective as a commander once the sphere of his activities began to diminish to an extent that brought them within the limits of his capabilities.'[281]

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[275] 'In fact it sometimes appeared in 1918 that Haig's command of the BEF had achieved a certain symbolic quality, while power in the BEF continued to shift to the army commanders, in particular to the experienced Rawlinson.' Travers, *How The War Was Won*, 177.

[276] OODA is an acronym for Observe, Orient, Decide and Act. The OODA Loop is essentially a process by which one focuses on observing an event and acting on it faster than the enemy. The concept is developed by a former fighter pilot in the US Air Force, John Boyd.

[277] Quoted in Terraine, *Haig*, 425.

[278] Quoted in Terraine, *Haig*, 347.

[279] Blake, Haig, 329. (1 October 1918).

[280] 'As Robin Prior and Trevor Wilson have perceptively observed, the role of Haig and the Army commanders diminished and became less relevant as the forces under their direction 'grew in expertise and complexity'. Simkins, 'Haig and his Army Commanders' ,96.

[281] Robin Prior and Trevor Wilson *Command on the Western Front.* Quoted in Simkins 'Haig and his Army Commanders', 97.

BEF's gamut, i.e. the harmony between needs and possibilities in command and control, became quite good in the last stage of the war, in fact sufficient to win a world war. But it was Foch who had given them time to tune in again, after the cacophony of March 1918.

4.6 Conclusion - *-que le mieux, est l'ennemi du bien.*

The idea of 'unity of command' is one of the *fixed ideas* of the military profession, and one of Napoleon's maxims underscores the apparent obviousness of that idea: 'Unity of command is of the first necessity in war. You must keep the army united, concentrate as many of your troops as possible on the battlefield, and take advantage of every opportunity, for fortune is a woman: if you miss her today, do not expect to find her tomorrow.'[282] But after seeing the *entente cordiale* in action some started to doubt the usefulness of Napoleon's maxims: 'Since I have seen Alliances at work, I have lost something of my admiration for Napoleon.'[283]

In the twentieth century, when coalition warfare became the western way of war, General Wesley K. Clark, the most recent supreme commander in combat, was apparently surprised that NATO could do military business at all in a coalition environment: 'In practice almost every nation had special teams monitoring its forces, ready to cry foul at the least deviation from expectations. It was a miracle we had made it as far as this, I thought, without a major blowup.'[284]

Clark points at problems arising from *national* coalitions. I think he is wrong. The evaluation of coalition warfare has been misdirected. It is easy to explain why generals and academics have concentrated on national boundaries, as fighting wars have for long been the prerogatives of the nation-state. My point is that the frustration of command and control, as described above, is only spuriously connected to multinationality. The problem is *not* multinationality as such, but the dissonance of what I have called 'the gamut'. Frustrations like Clark's can also arise *within* a single-nation operation.

A modern battlefield is characterised by the high numbers of participants on *each* side of the conflict, where all of them could be from the same nation. If for instance the U.S.A. had started a war against a South-American state to stop the flow of narcotics, the

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[282] Napoleon 'Notes sur l'art de la guerre', quoted in Luvaas, *Napoleon on the Art of War*, 64.
[283] General Maurice Sarrail to Clemenceau in 1918. Quoted in Neilson and Prete, *Coalition Warfare*, vii.

U.S. State Department, U.S. Defence Department, Central Intelligence Agency and the Drug Enforcement Agency could all participate without any 'unity of command' as such. Add to this the Red Cross, Doctors without Borders, and numerous private volunteer organisations, many without any other cohesion than a similar T-shirt, unity of command would be a deceitful dream, even if everyone present in the field was an American. In Robert R. Leonhard's words: 'To attempt to apply the aged principle of unity of command within this vast cast of characters is not only unrealistic, it is illegal.'[285] In fact one of Wesley Clark's major challenges during the Kosovo operation was to sort out 'friends and foes' *within* the U.S. Administration. On one occasion Secretary of Defence William S. Cohen told Clark, with a 'voice like ice': 'I've told you before, you don't give military advice to Holbrooke.'[286] Napoleon required unity of thought – 'military, diplomatic, and financial'.[287] That was a delusion, even for him.

Even within the armed forces itself, 'unity of command' is a dream, and not even a 'beautiful one'. Artillery and air support, the logistical apparatus and the engineer support are seldom under the command of a single commander. A classic statement by General Paul X. Kelley, then Commandant of the Marine Corps, sums up the difficulties of inter-service cooperation, and hence of 'unity of command': 'Asking a man to be as loyal to the other services as he is to his own is like asking him to be as loyal to his girlfriends as he is to his wife.'[288]

To orchestrate the multi-participant battlefield of our own days, and not only the military part of it, talking and persuasion are the *only* way, as both legal and procedural connections can be absent. The frustration of Clark and Foch occurs when the dissonance between their expectations or image of proper generalship collides with the given reality. Foch expected to be a C.-in. C, but none of his subordinates let him find comfort in that

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[284] Wesley K. Clark, *Waging Modern War, Bosnia, Kosovo and the Future of Combat* (New York, 2001), 399.
[285] Leonhard, *The Principles of War for the Information Age*, 202.
[286] Clarke, *Waging Modern War*, 113. Clark's rather reasonable apology goes like this: '[A]s a regional commander in chief I couldn't very well do my job without sometimes exchanging ideas with other members of the U.S. government travelling in my region.' Ibid.
[287] Luvaas, *Napoleon on the Art of War*, 65.
[288] Quoted in Kenneth Allard, *Command, Control, and the Common Defense* (Washington, 1996), 7.

illusion for long. Clark's comparison with Eisenhower, the first SACEUR, was also misplaced.[289]

The question as to *why* officers still cling to the myth of the all-powerful commander falls outside the scope of this thesis. But Haig's mind-boggling falsification of his accounts, in spite of the overwhelming probability of being exposed, and General Clark's attempt to 'pull his rank' against a foreign officer, indicate how deep-rooted the image of the Great General is.[290] The counter-forces against 'unity of command' are profound and thought-provoking. The only thing that tend to diminish those counter-forces is the 'sound of guns' – the enemy's guns, that is, or alliances bordering on imperialism, a master-vassal relationship. As the presence of the Red Army provided the cohesion of NATO during the Cold War, Ludendorff's troops on the Somme provided the cohesion of the *entente cordiale.*[291] When the 'glue', or the presence of a strong Germany, disappeared in November 1918, any shadow of 'unity' vanished fast, as the peace conference at Versailles would prove.

The struggle for the romanticised 'unity of command' will crumble the much more important 'unity of effort.' The affection for fetching military principles exposed on the drawing-board blunts our ability to appreciate boring but feasible heuristics. Lacking a 'fifth service', or non-national military entrepreneurs, without any preferences at all to a mother service or nation, the challenge is to reap the fruit of military collaboration without subordination. The first step towards that direction is to kill the real 'ghost of Napoleon' – the dream of 'unity of command.'

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[289] 'I looked over at the picture on the wall of the first Supreme Allied Commander, General Dwight D. Eisenhower. I looked down at my desk, the same desk he had used to sign the activation orders of our command almost fifty years ago. I was the first of his successors to have to lead NATO to war, and I wasn't going to lose.' Clark, *Waging Modern War*, xxii.

[290] 'Mike, I'm a four-star general, and I can tell you these things.' From General Clark's dispute with Lieutenant-General Mike Jackson, British Army, over Pristina airfield in 1999. Ibid. 394.

[291] The 'prototype of all alliances', the Grand Alliance of 1813-1815, was deeply dependent on pressure from without to keep their cohesion within: 'The pressure exerted by the mere knowledge that Bonaparte was still at large, reinforced as it was by his sudden and dreadful appearances, was enough to hold the alliance together in moments of crisis and eventually to persuade it to consolidate its resources in such a way that victory became impossible.' Gordon A. Craig *Problems of Coalition Warfare: the Military Alliance Against Napoleon, 1813-1814* (Colorado, 1965), 21.

5 Case 2: The strategic colonel

We are never deceived, we deceive ourselves.
- Goethe

The German military band, belonging to the infantry regiment 307, that had rehearsed and polished their instruments for the parade in Oslo, waited rather impatiently on the crowded ship that would bring them to the party in Norway. Suddenly, with a crack, they found themselves in a place more horrible than Dante's inferno. They who still lived could choose between burning or freezing to death. Some did both. The brand-new German cruiser *Blücher* had been on her way to Oslo to capture the Norwegian Royal Family and take control of the Norwegian government. No one had expected the Norwegians to try to stop her; hence the flagship herself was in the van of the formation that sailed up the narrow Oslo fjord that cold April night.[292]

At Oscarsborg, a mid-nineteenth century fortress, and the last obstacle for the Germans, just 30 km south of Oslo, a grey-haired colonel, close to retirement, decided to turn the German musicians' lives into a real hell. Without any declaration of war, bending his rules of engagement, and totally at odds with Norwegian military traditions, the old colonel gave his orders. About one thousand German sailors and infantry were killed, and Norway found itself *de facto* at war for the first time in 125 years.

How could it happen that the old and almost outdated Colonel Birger Eriksen (1875-1958) made the arguably most fateful decision in the modern history of Norway?

5.1 The preface

At the outbreak of the war between Germany and Poland, Norway declared herself neutral. That declaration was repeated on 3 September, when Great Britain and France declared war on Germany. Since both the Germans and the British knew that a war of economic

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[292] Admiral Kummetz inferred from the feeble resistance from the coastal batteries at Rauøy, that the Norwegians had orders not to stop them, just to demonstrate a protest against the German violation of Norwegian neutrality. Frank Binder, and Hans Schlünz, *Krysseren Blücher* [Schwerer Kreuzer Blücher] (Oslo, 1991), 81. General Major Engelbrecht (163. Infantry division) who also was on Blücher, protested fervently against the decision to have the flagship in front, but was brushed aside by Kummets: 'Oscarsborg will never open fire!' Quoted in Sven T. Arneberg and Kristian Hosar *Vi dro mot Nord. Felttoget i Norge*

blockade was bound to follow, the question of Norwegian neutrality was important. For Germany Norwegian territorial waters would be an important breathing tube, and an effective Norwegian neutrality would give German shipping much better protection than the *Kriegsmarine* could against the Royal Navy. For the Royal Navy, the neutral corridor along the Norwegian coast constituted a major gap in the blockade of Germany. There was also a growing belief in London that Swedish iron ore, which during winter was shipped through the Norwegian port of Narvik, was the 'Achilles' heel of the German war economy'.[293] Consequently, Germany accepted the Norwegian decision immediately, and endorsed Norwegian neutrality on 2 September. The Allies did not respond, and only after a direct question from the Norwegian Foreign Minister did Great Britain, on 22 September, guarantee Norwegian neutrality.[294]

France knew how devastating it was to fight a war on its own soil, and it was not unreasonable to think that this time France would like to fight elsewhere. Furthermore it would be a major advantage for Great Britain if the main theatre of war was situated overseas. If the Wehrmacht had to bring their armoured forces by ship, the Royal Navy would decide the outcome, or at least that was what conventional military wisdom would dictate.[295] The problem was, of course, that the maturity of the air arm had outdated certain parts of conventional military wisdom. Churchill, among others, learned this the hard way, in the Norwegian waters.[296]

On 8 April, by coincidence the day before Weserübung, four destroyers of the Royal Navy laid 234 mines close inshore in the southern approaches to Narvik.[297] During the

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april 1940, skildret av tyske soldater og offiserer [The Norwegian Campaign, told by German servicemen] (Oslo, 1989), 42.

[293] Patrick, Salmon, 'British strategy and Norway 1939-40' in Patrick Salmon (ed.), *Britain and Norway in the Second World War* (London, 1995), 3.

[294] Steen, E.A *Norges sjøkrig. Volume 1 Sjøforsvarets nøytralitetsvern 1939-1940 Tysklands og Vestmaktens planer og forberedelser for en Norgesaksjon.* [Norway's naval war, Vol 1] (Oslo, 1954), 13.

[295] When Laurence Collier (Chief of the Northern Department in Foreign Office) heard rumours about a German action in Norway in March 1940 he responded: 'I wish I could believe this story. German intervention in Scandinavia is just what we want!' Quoted in the forthcoming *Norges forsvarshistorie Volume 3* [Norway's military history] by Tom Kristiansen and Rolf Hobson.

[296] 'But it soon became clear that the Admiralty – from fear of German air attack – was not willing to send anything except submarines into the Skagerrak. Such caution revealed a realisation of the effect of air power on sea power that the Admiralty had never shown before the war. But it reflected badly on Churchill's judgement in seeking to spread the war to Scandinavia'. Liddell Hart, *History of the Second World War* (New York, 1971), 61.

[297] Some people have found it a bit too coincidental that the Royal Navy laid mines almost at the same moment as the Germans approached Norwegian waters. F.H. Hinsley who had free access to official

previous winter there had been numbers of violations of Norwegian neutrality, allegedly from all four parties, the Norwegians, the Germans, the Allies, and the Soviets.[298] Nevertheless, the Royal Navy committed the first flagrantly hostile act against Norway. The key problem, though, with the mine-laying operation was not the mines, but that the operation disturbed both the Norwegian and the British appreciation of the huge German threat that materialised at the same moment. The Norwegians looked in the wrong direction,[299] and the Royal Navy was caught off its guard, fancying it was the only stalker that night.

5.1.1 Weserübung

In December 1939 the leader of the small and inconsequential Norwegian nationalistic National Union Party, Vidkun Quisling, was twice granted an audience with Hitler, arranged by Admiral Raeder, who wanted to improve the strategic situation of the naval forces by seizing Norwegian ports. Hitler told Quisling that it was vital for Germany that Norway showed strict impartiality towards the belligerents. If Norway consented to British needs Germany had to take actions accordingly.[300] Quisling, on his side, had already indicated that the Norwegian government was 'pro-British' and that the government had decided not to respond by force, if invaded by any of the belligerents.[301] On 14 December, the same day he had had the last meeting with Quisling, Hitler ordered an investigation for an invasion of Norway, called *Studie Nord.*

Studie Nord was a contingency plan, and not a plan for an actual operation. But on 16 February, the planning gained a new degree of seriousness and urgency. On this day the

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documents is nevertheless unequivocal in his conclusion: 'The Germans achieved total surprise by their invasion of Norway.' F.H. Hinsley, *British Intelligence in the Second World War* (London, 1979), Vol 1, 127. Until further investigation proves otherwise, we have to accept that the actual date for the mine-laying operations has to be seen in an intra-France and an inter-France-UK context, and not as much in the German-UK-Norway framework. See for instance Michael Tamelanderd and Niklas Zetterling, *Den nionde april, Nazityskands invasion av Norge 1940* [9th April, The German invasion](Lund, 2000), 36.

[298] I will not cover the Norwegian-Soviet relationship in any length in this essay, as the existence of the Red Army did not influence Norwegian policy in any significant degree during the spring of 1940. Nils Ørvik, *Vern eller vakt? Norsk sikkerhetspolitikk 1920-1939 Vol II* [Guard, or watch? Norwegian security policy 1920-1939 Vol II] (Oslo, 1961), 327.

[299] 'It is clear that the vigilance in the Foreign Office was more westward than southward. It is from the west that the pressure seemed more dangerous to the Norwegian neutrality.' The civilian investigation committee of 1945. (Tilråding frå protokollkomiteen om 'Innstilling fra Undersøkelseskommisjonen av 1945 [Innst.O.IX A] Oslo: 1947), 17.

[300] Hans Fredrik Dahl, *Vidkun Quisling. En fører for fall* (Oslo, 1992), 42.

[301] Tamelander and Zetterling, *Den nionde april*, 23.

Royal Navy had demonstrated to the whole world that it did not respect Norwegian neutrality, by boarding a German vessel, the *Altmark*, inside Norwegian waters. And the Norwegians had demonstrated, by neither inspecting *Altmark* thoroughly, nor fending off *HMS Cossack*, that they where unable to safeguard their neutrality.[302] A couple of days later (21 February) General von Falkenhorst was appointed commanding general of the operation *Weserübung*. On 3 March, Hitler decided to secure the northern flank before he started the offensive in the west: *Weserübung* should be launched before *Fall Gelb*.

Operation *Weserübung* was hazardous, at best. Assault groups should capture the most strategic locations simultaneously at 04.15 in the morning of 9 April, at Oslo, Horten, Arendal, Kristiansand, Egersund, Stavanger, Bergen, Trondheim and Narvik.[303] A total of about 60 naval vessels and about 10 000 soldiers, would present the Norwegians with a *fait accompli*.[304] The war in the north should end before it had started, by capturing the Royal Family and taking control of the Government and Parliament.

Just after 4 o'clock Admiral Kummetz on the bridge of *Blücher* breathed a sigh of relief. He had almost passed the last obstacle to the most important and most difficult part of the whole operation. *Blücher* was well inside the range of Oscarborg's artillery and nothing had happen, not even a searchlight had been seen from the citadel. The assumption that the Norwegians would meet the invasion by warning bursts only seemed justified.[305]

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[302] Raeder claimed '[T]his incident proved beyond a doubt that Norway was completely helpless to defend its neutrality... now at last the necessity of moving into Norway had to be strongly considered.' From Michael Salewski *Die deutsche Seekriegsleitung 1935-1945* [1970]. Quoted in Major Timothy F. Lindemann's 'Joint Operations Case Study *Weserübung Nord*: Germany's Invasion of Norway, 1940', a research paper presented to the research department, Air Command and Staff College USAF, 1997.

[303] A story by Derry reveals how hazardous this operation was. As late as 4 p.m. 9 April Chamberlain informed the House of Commons that: 'it was 'very possible' to believe that the landing in question was at Larvik, not Narvik, though the distance between the two ports is nearly a thousand miles.' T.K. Derry, *The Campaign in Norway* (London, 1952), 66. Narvik seemed at bit too far.

[304] One of the reasons why the British intelligence did not anticipate *Weserübung* was that the forces that were concentrated in German harbours were deemed too small to be of any danger. Hinsley, *British Intelligence in the Second World War*, Vol 1, 117.

[305] In a meeting with Hitler in late December 1939 Admiral Erich Raeder assured Hitler that they should not expect serious resistance from the Norwegians. (Kristiansen and Hobson, *Norges forsvarshistorie,* chapter 19). That assumption underpinned the whole operation, and was an opinion widely held in Europe. Hence, the Swedes refused to assist Norway against the German attack because: 'Norway had no army and was already practically in German hands.' From Minister Mallet to Foreign Office 02:20 10.4.1940. Quoted in Kristiansen and Hobson, *Norges forsvarshistorie,* chapter 18.

5.1.2 Norwegian neutrality

In the period between 1895 and 1905, the Norwegian Armed Forces went through a tremendous rearmament process. The tension between Sweden and Norway increased until it reached its peak in 1905, when both countries mobilised troops and thousands of them faced each other across the border.[306] But the Norwegians did not back down despite the overwhelming military power of Sweden, and consequently Norway won the brinkmanship crises that eventually resulted in the Norwegian act of independence. The Armed Forces got their part of the glory, even if the Swedes had been persuaded more by the great powers of Europe than by Norwegian *mitrailleuses*.

The fate of Belgium during the Great War made a tremendous impact on Norwegian politicians. It was considered utterly foolhardy of the Belgian government to resist the German avalanche that poured into their country in August 1914. According to Norwegian calculations, the only responsible thing to do would have been a symbolic resistance to demonstrate that the German armies were violating Belgian neutrality. Thereafter Belgium should have waited for the peace conference. The Belgians did not achieve anything more by the gun, than they did at the peace talks; they only caused needless destruction.[307] By arming with insufficient weapons of only small-bores Norwegian politicians intended to reduce the risk that some trigger-happy individual or units would misunderstand the strategy, and start a fatal battle: 'Not a single shot should be fired!'[308] Patriotism, military enthusiasm, and a feeling of 'we can do it' regarding the defence against major powers, were all dangerous sentiments that the politicians had to repress, or else the politicians could be forced by a popular movement into a war they did not want.[309] As the socialist Kristian Gleditsch wrote in 1935; 'If the Belgian forces had been in disorder, if they had allowed the German troops to march through, the Belgian

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[306] The Norwegian mobilisation in 1905 was partial and silent, or 'as little sensational as possible by personal order to each man, without the use of church-bells, placards or advertisement.' Terje H. Holm *Forsvaret og 1905* [The Defence and 1905] (Akershus festning: 1980), 27. In 1905 this line of action made perfect sense, in 1940 it did not, as we will see later.

[307] According to William Philpott, it seems that King Albert came to the same conclusion during the Great War. 'Any offensive, King Albert thought, should take place in France, while Belgium itself should be liberated by diplomacy rather than force.' Philpott, 'Britain and France go to War' *War in History* 2(1) (1995), 45.

[308] Mowinckel (liberal) quoted in Nils Ørvik, *Norsk sikkerhetspolitikk 1920-1939* (Sammendrag av 'Sikkerhetspolitikken 1920-1939') (Oslo, 1962), 79. Both the Norwegian Labour party and the Liberals warned against playing 'Belgium's role' if a new war broke out.

[309] Ørvik *Norsk sikkerhetspolitikk 1920-1939*, 82.

population would probably have got off the war more easily. During a modern war between major powers, a functioning defence is a danger to a small nation, not a security. It is paramount not to play the role of Belgium in 1914.'[310] This strategy had to be secret both to the fellow Norwegians and to foreigners as it rested on the *illusion* that Norway would defend its dependency. If anyone doubted the Norwegian *will* to resist, one of the criteria of a free nation would vanish, and that could cost dearly at a peace conference. Hence, Norway had to strike a delicate balance between the ability to guard its neutrality, and its ability to fight a real war, which could become a dangerous temptation.[311]

This tacit strategy caused a tremendous amount of friction. Given the formal tasks of the Norwegian Armed Forces: to deter aggression, and to resist if deterrence failed, Norwegian defence ought to be as strong as the purse allowed and the external threat demanded. The politicians did the contrary; they made the defence as *weak* as possible. Without the secret premise of trying to avoid Belgium's fate, their actions seemed almost irrational. After the war, it was common to excuse the low pre-war budget allocation by referring to a general 'public poverty'.[312] Norway was certainly not a wealthy nation, but there was no financial crisis in Norway in the years leading up to 1940, and the growth in the GNP was substantial.[313] Had the politicians chosen to give priority to military measures, more money could have been available.

With hindsight, the idea of not defending the country seems almost unbelievable, given what we know about the German occupation during the Second World War. But the brutality of the Nazi regime was unimaginable for Norwegian politicians, at least until the occupation of Czechoslovakia. If someone attacked Norway, and in the 1920's and early 1930's the only power that could do so was Great Britain, the operations would probably be temporary and limited. *Status quo ante bellum* was, according to the attitude, bound to follow for any 'innocent' nation that demonstrably had protested against the violation.[314] In

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[310] Kristian Gledisch, *Foran en ny verdenskrig* [Facing a new world war] (Oslo, 1935) 91-104. Paraphrased in Ørvik, *Norsk sikkerhetspolitikk 1920-1939*, 79.
[311] Terje H. Holm *1940 – igjen?*[1940 - again?] (Oslo, 1987), 11.
[312] See for instance the recommendations from the civilian investigation committee of 1945. (Tilråding frå protokollkomiteen om 'Innstilling fra Undersøkelseskommisjonen av 1945' [Innst.O.IX A] Oslo: 1947. p,6)
[313] The Norwegian GNP rose with 25% in the period between 1934-39. Ørvik, *Vern eller vakt?*, 78.
[314] Ørvik, *Norsk sikkerhetspolitikk 1920-1939*, 87.

other words, the *constitutive rules* of foreign affairs were taken for granted.[315] Accordingly, it would be pure recklessness to endanger everything Norway had achieved since 1905 by a 'Belgian war', caused by thoughtless military pride.

Finally, Norway relied on an implicit 'guarantee' from the Royal Navy. As long as Britain ruled the waves, no one would dare to attack Norway, except Britain, but why should she? The Norwegian Commanding Admiral, Henry Edvard Diesen, had an almost bullet-proof syllogism that took the shape of a dogma for the Norwegian Navy: 'The one who wants to conduct a landing here – whether in the south or elsewhere – has to be the master of the seas. And the one, who is the master, has no need for a landing. – In my opinion this scare is highly exaggerated.'[316] The threat that the 'hawks' envisaged, against which Diesen directed his polemics, was not an assault on the *whole* of Norway, but a geographically limited occupation of ports for supplying naval forces, and of bases for air operations. A large-scale occupation of the whole, or of greater parts of Norway, was not imaginable, not even for the military alarmists.[317]

In the First World War Norway had from the first day of the war mobilised the navy and the coastal artillery, in addition to a number of army units.[318] When the war broke out in 1939 Norway was unable to take the same precautionary measures because it did not have the personnel required. Colonel Eriksen at Oscarsborg had for instance to use people from the kitchen to man his pre-1900 cannons, and even then he had only crew for two of the three 28 cm Krupp-cannons in the main battery.[319] Due to the lack of experienced personnel the two guns could not be reloaded once fired, and to optimise the hit-probability they had to wait until the vessel was at minimum firing range, before opening fire. In addition to this, his searchlights were out of order, which together with the fog made it

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[315] See chapter 3. The Draconian Treaty of Brest-Litovsk, which demonstrated to the whole world that might was right, could not have made much impression on the Norwegians.
[316] Admiral Diesen, in the newspaper *Dagbladet* 14 Jan. 1939. Quoted in Odd-Bjørn Fure, *Mellomkrigstid 1920-1940. Volume 3 i Norsk utenrikspolitisk historie* [The history of Norway's Foreign Policy] (Oslo, 1996), 305. Diesen ought to have said: 'The one has to be the master of the *air*'. But given that not even the British Government had grasped the significance of air power yet, he may probably be excused.
[317] See for Captain Øivinn Øi's speech in March 1939, quoted in Terje Baalsrud *Politikken mot forsvaret – frem mot 1940.* [Politics against defence, up to 1940] (Oslo, 1985), 117.
[318] Steen, *Norges sjøkrig,* 13.
[319] Tamelander and Zetterling, *Den nionde april,* 84.

difficult to measure the distance to the target.[320] Several of Eriksen's less bellicose colleagues would undoubtedly have found the gloomy conditions at Oscarsborg an excellent excuse for doing nothing.[321]

At 4.21 the old colonel fired his guns in anger, for the first time in his whole career. Both shells hit the cruiser and had a devastating effect.[322] *Blücher* lost her steering, and drifted towards the torpedo batteries at Kaholmen, where the retired captain Andreas Anderssen had just arrived. Eriksen had called him up when he had received messages of unknown intruders in the fjord, as the regular chief for the battery was off sick.[323] Eriksen ordered two torpedoes launched, and *Blücher* was doomed. The German flagship, already late for the *Weserzeit*, would not come at all. She came to rest on the ocean floor at 06.22. A shot had after all been fired!

5.2 Oscarsborg and beyond

In Oslo, the German envoy Curt Bräuer demanded to meet the Norwegian Foreign Minister, Halvdan Koht, at 4.20. At this meeting Bräuer handed over a memorandum of 19 pages, containing the German claims. The original plan was that Bräuer should bring a big stick to the meeting, in the drapery of German marching bands in the streets, and the huge shining *Blücher, Emden* and *Lützow* at the harbour. But now he had only empty threats, and it was not difficult for the Norwegian government, which was gathered at Koht's office, to call the bluff.[324]

One might have imagined that the Norwegians would surrender immediately, given what is been said above about the neglected putrefaction of Norwegian military power. But the Norwegian government did not know the scale of the German assault, though they

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[320] Eriksen stated in a newspaper article in *Aftenposten* 6 June 1945, that the searchlights were just operational again after maintenance but not used. (Microfilm at the National Library, Oslo)

[321] In a remark as to why the coastal artillery at Måkerøy, further south in the Oslofjord, had remained silent during the German invasion, the investigation committee that was established after the war added: 'Here as in many other places one got the impression that they concentrated on finding a reasonable excuse to give in.' NOU 1979:47 *Rapport fra Den Militære Undersøkelseskommisjonen av 1946.*, 36.

[322] The overwhelming effect of the shelling was partly due to the fact that the Germans had not prepared the ship for operations in a war zone. Eriksen's article in *Aftenposten* 6 June 1945.

[323] Eriksen had received a message that the ships where German, but he distrusted the identification, due to the restricted visibility. Ibid.

[324] Had Germany demonstrated her power with troops, ships or bomber aircraft, the Norwegian government would probably have done as their colleagues in Copenhagen. But the remaining German ships had turned south, and due to the weather no aircraft showed up in time. Ole Kristian Grimnes, *Veien inn i krigen. Regjeringen Nygaardsvolds krigsvedtak i 1940.* [The road to war, the government's decision for war] (Oslo, 1987), 17.

knew that there had been sporadic fighting in several other parts of Norway. It is not unthinkable that Bräuer's message came almost as a relief. By explicitly offering Norway a 'deal', Bräuer unwittingly gave Koht the opportunity overtly to refuse it, and by that to give the crucial signal of Norwegian *will* to stay independent.[325] Norway's *ability* to fight was much less important. Furthermore, by accepting Bräuer's ultimatum, Norway would have joined the war on the 'wrong side'. In addition, a war on Norwegian soil could follow irrespective of the Norwegian answer to Bräuer.[326]

When later on the seriousness of the situation dawned upon Koht, he was no longer so sure what to do. He and several of his colleagues in the government were interested in an 'understanding' with the Germans when they saw more of the whole picture, and got the impression that Hitler really had presented them with a *fait accompli*, despite the minor hiccups. The reason why Norway finally got the courage to pick a war with the strongest military land-power in Europe, was that Germany added a new demand, that the Norwegian King should appoint Quisling Prime Minister in Norway.[327] The King refused, and maintained that he would abdicate if he was forced to do such a thing. The royal rebuttal was not decisive though. What frightened and embittered the Norwegians was that the new claim of Germany made clear that the whole operation was something more than just a military precautionary measure. Now it was obvious that Hitler wanted a political and ideological reorientation of Norway. That was too much to ask for.[328] This was clearly not a 'Belgian' war, it was a war of conquest.

The sinking of *Blücher* and the campaign that followed were maybe insignificant in military terms, but Eriksen's resoluteness in this sub-Arctic night had in fact a major impact on the following world war. By giving the government a breathing space, the Allies gained a very substantial benefit from the Norwegian mercantile fleet, 'which was

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[325] When Koht rejected the German ultimatum he said: 'I remember what your Führer said recently; a people that without resistance give in to an assaulter is not worthy of life.' Bjørn Bjørnsen, *Det utrolige døgnet* [The unbelievable day] (Oslo, 1977), 86. It was apparently important to demonstrate a *will* to live, not to win the war.

[326] The Norwegian Minister of Justice, Terje Wold, writes in his unpublished memoirs that since Norway probably would be a theatre of war anyhow, it was paramount that Norway joined the right side. Cited in Grimnes, *Veien inn i krigen*, 28.

[327] The guarantee from Britain that they had 'decided forthwith to extend their full aid to Norway and will fight the war in full association with them', was important for the decision to take the war, but not sufficient. The message quoted is from a telegram from Foreign Office to Cecil Dormer, dated 12:55 9.4.1940. Cited in Kristiansen and Hobson, *Norges forsvarshistorie,* chapter 18

subsequently profitably employed in the Atlantic convoys and elsewhere'.[329] But the most important consequence of Eriksen's action was that he saved the skin of Churchill. As First Lord of the Admiralty, Churchill bore the responsibility for the fumbling of the Royal Navy.[330] But Chamberlain, as Prime Minister, had later to take the political blame for the disastrous intervention in Norway, and the poor performance of the British Army that followed. Churchill had been wrong in Norway, but Chamberlain apparently even more. In other words, the shot from Oscarsborg deserves to be heard around the world:

> Of course, Churchill might have risen to the top without the stimulus of the Norwegian campaign, but it was by no means an inevitable outcome. It was perhaps the single most significant event for Britain in the course of the war; for who would claim, whatever his faults, that any other leader could have sustained the nation so successfully in the dark days ahead?[331]

In the pages above I have drawn the broad scene behind Eriksen's decision to commit an act of war. In the following I will look closer into the *authority over distance* that surrounded him.

5.3 The Norwegian *Authority over distance* in April 1940

5.3.1 Authority

Despite the fact that Norway is governed by the parliamentary system, and that the government did not have a majority in the parliament, foreign affairs in Norway were virtually handled by one man only, Halvdan Koht. The speaker of the parliament, Carl J. Hambro, and the liberal, Johan L. Mowinckel, also had great knowledge and interest in foreign affairs, but, even if Hambro's contribution bolstered the government in the first days of the war, their ability to influence the secretive Koht was modest. A sign of Koht's high-handed attitude in foreign affairs is revealed in Hambro's biography. On 6 April the Prime Minister, Nygaardsvold, called Hambro, a conservative, to ask him whether he had

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[328] Grimnes in Jo Benkow and Ole Kristian Grimnes *Vendepunkt – 9. april i vår bevissthet.* [Turning point – 9 April in our conscious] (Oslo, 1990), 38.
[329] Maurice Harvey 'The balance sheet of the Norwegian campaign' in Salmon (ed.) *Britain and Norway in the Second World War,* 21.
[330] In a letter to General Ismay after the war, Churchill admitted: 'I certainly bore an exceptional measure of responsibility for the brief and disastrous Norwegian campaign - if campaign it can be called'. Quoted in John Lukacs, *The Duel* (New York, 1991), 32.
[331] Maurice Harvey 'The balance sheet of the Norwegian campaign', 23.

heard any news from Koht. Hambro gave a negative reply, and was instead asked to call Koht to find out whether he had any more information about reported German naval movements. Nygaardsvold's reason to beg a politician from an opposition party to plead for information from a member of his own party and cabinet was, according to Hambro, that: 'Koht does not speak to us, but he tells you something, once and a while.'[332] Hence, Koht was almost the incarnation of the civilian authority in Norway's foreign affairs. Consequently we will meet him again in the pages that follow.

The decision to mobilise on the morning of 9 April, and the 'declaration' of war that implicitly followed the refusal of Bräuer's ultimatum, were political decisions with military consequences, but there was practically no one around who possessed the appropriate military grip.

The general staff evacuated to a hotel on the outskirts of Oslo, when the headquarters lost its power supply during an air-raid warning at about 04.30.[333] Much to their surprise, they found the hotel crowded with guests, and of no use for military staff work. Hence, the general staff was literally on the run, and about to fall apart. The department responsible for the physical writing of the mobilisation orders actually ended up around Lieutenant-Colonel Roscher Nielsen's private dining table, where the crucial orders where put to print.[334] When the commanding general, Kristian Laake, who had gone home for his toiletries, eventually arrived at the hotel he could not find anyone, and no message telling him where to find his staff. What made matters even worse was that he couldn't get a car from the hotel. Hence the general wasted the most crucial hours, when *Weserübung*, due to bad weather and the resistance from Oscarsborg and the coastal artillery at Kristiansand,[335] was about to collapse, walking in the streets of Oslo searching for the general staff.[336]

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[332] Johan Hambro, *CJ Hambro, Liv og Drøm.* (Oslo, 1984), 208.
[333] Lars Borgersrud, *Konspirasjon og kapitulasjon. Nytt lys på forsvarshistorien fra 1814 til 1940* [Conspiracy and capitulation, a new light in Norway's military history] (Oslo, 2000), 219.
[334] Ibid. 220.
[335] The coastal artillery at Odderøya, outside the city of Kristiansand, in the southern part of Norway, initially withstood the German task force no IV. It took several hours, with bombardment from sea and air, before the Norwegian forces, under suspicious circumstances, gave in. It is important to notice that even if the resistance from the remaining coastal batteries was feeble in comparison with Oscarsborg, their contributions were above average, compared with their fellow services.
[336] Bjørnsen, *Det utrolige døgnet*, 159.

The conclusion is that the legal authority in Norway, the civilian, which was also evacuated hurly-burly out of Oslo in morning, and the military, were both in disarray in the crucial hours of the 9 April. The question is: who took then the lead, if any?

5.3.1.1 Whose intentions?

A fact that complicated the mobilisation for war even further was that the relationship between the Norwegian Labour Party, which took office in 1935, and the officers was disastrous. The party had declared itself as a revolutionary class party in 1918, and had during the early thirties tried to disband the armed forces, the sword of the bourgeoisie. Apparently there was almost a civil war between them.[337] As a curiosity, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Oscar Torp, who became Minister of Defence in the Norwegian exile government in London during the war, had in fact been imprisoned for five months for anti-military agitation in 1924, and had lost the right to serve in the Norwegian Armed forces.[338] Labour was not pacifist *per se*, but anti-militarist. They wanted a new army with the 'best sons of the working class' as officers.[339] The Labour politicians were not deaf to the gale warnings that poured in from Europe in the years preceding the Second World War. [340] But the party rhetoric and personal antipathies were hard to overcome and precluded foreign policy consensus, even in the face of a grave external threat.[341] By insisting on party politics, by refusing numerous proposals for a coalition government, and by estranging the officers, Labour impeded its own crisis management environment. One of the most serious crimes of omission was that Minister of Defence Fredrik Monsen refused

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[337] Nils Ørvik, *Solidaritet eller nøytralitet. Norsk sikkerhetspolitikk 1920-1939, Vol 1* [Solidarity or neutrality, Norwegian security policy 1920-1939 Vol I] (Oslo, 1960), 127.

[338] Einar Gerhardsen, who after the war became the longest serving Prime Minister in Norwegian history, was sentence to 75 days in prison in the same trial. Egil Helle, *Oscar Torp –arbeidergutt og statsmann.* (Oslo, 1982), 82-92 .

[339] Martin Tranmæl at Labour party's national congress in 1936. Quoted in Ørvik, *Vern eller vakt?*, 103.

[340] One of the main Labourite protagonists, chief editor Martin Tranmæl, stated in a speech in April 1939: 'We are up against a stormy night, which can cause a catastrophe. Today we have the responsibility for a whole population. Our party and our government have realised this[.]' Quoted in Baalsrud, *Politikken mot forsvaret*, 112.

[341] 'French politics in the thirties is a case in point. Class antagonism so dominated politics that the cry of the Right became 'Better Hitler than Blum' and French national interests in Europe were sacrificed to the domestic interests of political coalition.' Lebow *Between War and Peace*, 71. The Norwegian case is not identical, but we recognise the same mechanism.

to call the *Defence counsel* after 1937.[342] Consequently, Labour's arrogant pre-crisis decisions made the crisis even more difficult to handle.[343]

The distrust between Labour politicians and the officers worked both ways. In the cold early morning of 9 April, Birger Eriksen did not know anything about Curt Bräuer or about the Norwegian refusal. But he feared that the politicians would not dare to stand up if pushed. When Eriksen gathered his officers after he had learned that there had been gunfire further south, some of them suggested that he should ask for pre-orders from higher authorities.[344] But Eriksen refused: he had the orders he needed, and he was afraid that someone above him in the hierarchy would get cold feet and not allow him to open fire, with the possibility of sinking a foreign ship and actually killing people.[345] Eriksen had talked to his superior officer, Admiral Smith-Johansen, in Horten at 23:55 on 8 April. As indicated by the log, it seems that he only got a situation report.[346] But according to the former commandant at Oscarsborg, Magnar Torvaldsen, this is not the whole truth. Torvaldsen says that Eriksen actually asked the Admiral for orders, but the Admiral did not dare to give him any. Eriksen was frustrated but chose to keep the Admiral's vacillation off the record.[347] Colonel Eriksen did not leave any diary or memoirs that reveal his real intentions. But a more famous Norwegian officer, Otto Ruge, did. Ruge's action in the chaotic morning may shed some light on Eriksen's decision.

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[342] In 1934 the *Defence counsel* (Forsvarsrådet), was established to enhance the cooperation between civil and military authorities. The Minister of Foreign Affairs, Minister of Defence and Commanding General, Commanding Admiral were its most distinguished members. The counsel did not manage to bridge the gap, something the general staff found problematic during the thirties. The counsel did not meet after 1937.

[343] 'It follows that leaders must also be evaluated in terms of their precrises decisions, that is, the extent to which they were effective in creating a policymaking environment conducive to successful crisis management within the limitations imposed by the political culture in which they operated.'Lebow, *Between War and Peace*, 335.

[344] A small patrol boat, 'Pol III', was the first Norwegian unit in contact with the intruders in the Oslofjord. It fired warning bursts about 23.00 8 April, and was subsequently destroyed by the Germans. Hence, its captain, Leif Welding Olsen, became the first Norwegian officer killed in action during the Second World War.

[345] Sten Wahlström og Jörgen Weibull, *Historia på plats.* (Malmö, 1990), 102. It has not been possible to verify this allegation in any written materiel. Sten Wahlström states that the assertion is based on 'coalesced interpretation of different sources', and is unable to give any specific reference. (Wahlström in a letter to the author, dated 27 March 2001.)

[346] 'Admiral Smith-Johansen reported personally that Oslofjord fought intruding naval units.' *Rapport fra sjefen for S.F.D.I Kontreadmiral J.Smith-Johansen p,4* National Archives *Krigen i Norge Box 180* [The war in Norway]

[347] A telephone conversation with Captain Magnar Torvaldsen (retired), former commandant at Oscarsborg, 15.02.01.

At the outbreak of war Ruge was the inspector of the infantry, and therefore had no position in the operational chain of command.[348] Nevertheless, when the evacuating Norwegian government by coincidence passed through the town where he was posted during mobilisation, he decided to show up on his own initiative. He had talked to the commanding general and the chief of staff and got the impression that they wanted to surrender. Turning a blind eye to the chain of command, and its traditional procedures in civil and military relationships, he seized the opportunity to get in touch with an 'old friend', the Minister of Defence, Birger Ljungberg himself, to ensure that the government was determined to fight. Ruge did not find Ljungberg in the school building that served as the temporary parliament of Norway. While waiting for Ljungberg he was fortuitously asked by the Minister of Justice, Terje Wold, what he as an officer thought about the situation. Ruge told him that he was there to tell his old friend Ljungberg that the government could not give in now. Wold was exhilarated and said that apart from himself, Ljungberg and the Minister of Supply, Trygve Lie, the whole government was wavering. After that encounter Ruge was occasionally in touch with several of the cabinet members. The day after, Ruge was formally appointed commanding general as an answer to General Kristian Laake's obvious inadequacy as a wartime leader. In essence it was only a rubber-stamping of the decision he himself had taken the day before.

Ruge's act of 'disobedience' gave him one of the most prominent places in the scantily populated pantheon of Norwegian war heroes. Under different circumstances, raising his voice in political circles, where he had no business at all, would have cost him not only his job, but also his reputation. Birger Eriksen had the right to speak, so to speak, with his guns. But he decided to say something *else* than was expected of him. He was expected to give the intruders a lesson, not to kill them.

5.3.1.2 Political dirigibility

A consequence of Labour's distaste for officers, was a severe alienation from the whole business of war-fighting. They lacked elementary military knowledge, and did not ask for any assistance from officers, even after Bräuer's visit. The fumbling that followed was disastrous and inevitable.

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[348]This section is based on Otto Ruge, *Felttoget. Erindringer fra kampene april - juni 1940.* [The Campaign, memoirs] (Oslo, 1989), 13-28.

When Koht informed Parliament, in the late afternoon of 9 April, of the government's decisions so far, he said that it had mobilised the four southernmost 'brigades'. Later he was criticised for this, because his phrasing gave the impression that it was only the brigades, and not the entire military force in the Southern Norway that had been mobilised. In his memoirs Koht blamed his lack of military knowledge for his inaccuracy.[349] And he continued his apologia by saying that, in front of among others the Minister of Defence, he had informed a journalist that Norway had 'fully mobilised'. In other words, there should not have been any reason for doubt. In fact, the encounter with the journalist provoked even more confusion, in ways that were far beyond Koht's expertise to foresee.

At the crack of dawn on 9 April, the editor from the Norwegian Press Agency, S.A. Friid, showed up on his own initiative, at the train station where the government, parliament and the royal family were about to leave Oslo. Friid managed to get a word with the Foreign Minister. Koht said that the government had refused to accept the German ultimatum, and that it had given the military order of a general mobilisation, but *not* that Norway was at war with Germany. Moreover it was simply not true that the cabinet had ordered general mobilisation, a fact that we will return to later, and it was utterly unwise to say so. The government had decided upon a *silent* mobilisation, and consequently the troops were called up by mail.

There was already a latent confusion about when the reservists should meet on mobilisation. In accordance with the regulations of 1935 the troops were meant to meet the day after the order had gone out. But as late as 2 April 1940 the commanding general announced that the troops should meet on the fourth day after the order had been issued.[350] In itself, such a change was bound to cause confusion, as it preceded the real mobilisation by only seven days. In addition, when the chief of the General Staff, Colonel Rasmus

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[349] 'I was not that educated in the technical military expressions, and I spoke without preparations.' Halvdan Koht, *Frå skanse til skanse, Minne frå krigsmånadene i Norge* [The war in Norway, memoirs] (Oslo, 1947), 19

[350] The rather strange reason for this was that he feared that the politicians would wait too long to 'pull the trigger' and the army therefore needed the three extra days to get on their feet. Magne Skodvin, *Norsk historie 1939-1945* (Oslo, 1991), 18. In fact it was no reason to think that the enemy would give them three days respite.

Hatledal, finally got permission to mobilise he cut down the time lapse by two days, and set 11 April as the first day of mobilisation.[351]

Back to Koht: what should reservists who heard the message from the Foreign Minister on the radio believe? Should they start to count days from Koht's message, or start counting from the day the letter from the mobilisation office arrived? Whatever decision they took, many of those who had the guts to join for a war met a closed door or a message that they should go home and come back later, on Thursday, 11 April as the quartermasters and commandants would not, or could not, just hand out weapons and ammunitions to people that wanted to shoot at the Germans. This did not improve fighting spirit.[352]

That Koht lacked education in 'technical military expressions' is explicable, his inability to ask for help less so. Trygve Lie blames the commanding general for not *demanding* a conference with the government, on the morning of 9 April. This is utterly unfair to General Laake. Constitutional custom prohibits officers from giving a politician any order, qua politician - it was the other way around.[353] Koht's *modus operandi,* though, was even more deplorable: 'We need, I guess, the courage to wait to take decisions until the occasion arises. For situations usually do not materialise the way you have anticipated them, they usually show up quite differently than expected, and it is *then* that you have to make the decision that that situation asks for.'[354] This seems like political prudence, but it shows no concerns for the complexity of military operations. When the threat has materialised it is too late. It is when the plans were drawn and the decisions made that steadfastness is important. The pivotal moment was when Captain Vian on the destroyer *H.M.S. Cossack* smashed into the German freighter *Altmark* in February, not when Bräuer knocked on Koht's door in April.

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[351] The chief of the General Staff had no executive power, he was only the administrative manager of the staff. On mobilisation the commanding general would turn into commander in chief, and the general staff into Army Headquarter. Borgersrud, *Konspirasjon og kapitulasjon*, 218.

[352] Tamelander & Zetterling, *Den nionde april*, 94. Hatledal himself said afterwards to the investigation committee that Koht's slip of the lip was fortunate. At least some got an early start by meeting immediately. (Undersøkelseskommisjonen av 1945 bilag nr 7 'Aprildagene' box no. 3, p,83)

[353] Trygve Lie, *Leve eller dø. Norge i krig* [Norway at War](Oslo, 1955), 21 The Prime Minister meant that the Minister of Defence would ensure the liaison with the armed forces, and that a meeting with the commanding admiral and general would be superfluous. Undersøkelseskommisjonen av 1945 bilag nr 7 'Aprildagene 1940' box no. 3, page 78

[354] Koht, Halvdan. Quoted in Grimnes, *Veien inn i krigen*, 111.

The Norwegian commanding admiral had given *Altmark* exemption from the neutrality regulations, by letting it through restricted area, as he was afraid that a 'ticklish' situation could occur if the Royal Navy benefited from a Norwegian ejection of the ship.[355] Admiral Diesen made his decision in consultation with the under-secretary of State at the Foreign Office, Jens Bull. Koht was in Trondheim and cannot be blamed for the actual decision to let *Altmark* continue the journey in Norwegian waters. The Norwegian gunboats *Kjell* and *Skarv* were on the spot when *Cossack* opened fire upon the *Altmark* to liberate assumed British captives. The Norwegian vessels observed the blatant violation of Norwegian neutrality, just as Norwegian regulations ordered them to do, given the violator's superior armament. Then Koht made a capital mistake. Both in letters of apology to Germany and in a speech in the parliament, Koht underlined that Norway could not do anything when it met superior force. It was in fact an invitation to all the bullies in the world. Let us instead imagine that the Norwegians had put up a fierce fight, and had been blown to bits by the intruder, or if Koht had foamed with anger on the Parliament's rostrum and promised a beating to the next rowdy. If the Norwegians had signalled a credible willingness to defend their independence, none of the belligerents could have gamble'd on an occupation as a mere side-show to the 'real' conflict. Norway was not that important for any of them.[356] Instead Norway did the opposite.

Koht and Fredrik Monsen, the Minister of Defence from 1935 to 1939, seemed to relate only to the types of crisis that later got the name *brinkmanship*. Like a conflict one could deliberately refuse to participate in.[357] In 1933 Fredrik Monsen explained that Norway had managed to stay out of the Great War because Norway had a 'leadership that refrained from the use of force even against fairly serious violations of the neutrality regulations[...]our military apparatus was not used as an instrument of war'.[358] The problem of course was that by doing this the likelihood of being drawn into a *spin-off* crisis increased drastically, but neither Koht nor Monsen had any notion of such a crisis. Colonel

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[355] This section is based on National Archives Undersøkelseskommisjonen av 1945 bilag nr 4 'Altmarksaken' in box no. 3

[356] A tempting 'what if': What if a captain with Colonel Eriksen's dispositions had commanded *Kjell*?

[357] Major J.N. Kirkman (M.I.2.b), an officer from Great Britain, made in July 1939 a tour of Norway, Sweden and Denmark. In his report to Laurence Collier at the Foreign Office, dated 15 August 1939, (70371/23662), he reported of Norwegian belief in isolationism. 'There seemed to be a general atmosphere that there would probably not be a war, but that if there was, Norway would retire into her shell and keep clear of it.'. (Kindly handed to me by lecturer Nils Naastad at the Royal Norwegian Airforce Academy.)

Otto Ruge, then chief of staff, knew the reality of spin-off crises: 'By its [the neutrality guard's] very existence, it will make clear that the violation of Norwegian neutrality will cause more pain than gain – that it will not be profitable to try it.'[359] This had been common military sense for thousands of years: '*Qui desiderat pacem, praeparet bellum.*'[360] Koht had the nerve to defy it: 'If you want peace, you have to prepare for peace.'[361] This statement must be read in the light of the Norwegian fear of being turned into a new 'Belgium', as noted above. If not attacked, Norway would retain peace; if attacked Norway would still retain peace, by refusing to fight. The problem was, as we have seen, that the second option undermined the first. The irony is that Koht was right: the Germans came allegedly with peace, as aggressors always do,[362] but Hitler's concept of peace was at odds with Koht's.

The conclusion is that the Norwegian politicians' long-standing ignorance of military affairs had given them a poor direction of military matters. They did not know which words to use in their command and control function. Likewise, their lack of understanding fooled them into believing that the 'moment of truth' would be clearly visible. Apparently Koht and Monsen believed that all belligerents in a war join voluntarily. It seemingly did not occur to them that 'war could be interested in Norway, even if Norway was not interested in war', as the harder they tried to hide, the more tempting it became to find them.

5.3.2 Intention

In this chapter we will see that command and control is not only a question of eloquence and of political *coup d'oeil.* We saw in chapter 2 that there can be a tension between perspectives, and a 'tension between actions that appear to be most militarily prudent to

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[358] Fredrik Monsen in parliament March 1933, quoted in Ørvik,*Vern eller Vakt* p,106.
[359] Otto Ruge, 'Norges stilling under en europeisk krig' *Vår Hær* 7. (1936) Quoted in Ørvik, *Vern eller Vakt*, 324.
[360] Flavius Vegetius Renatus (If you want peace, prepare for war.)
[361] Koht in a parliament meeting March 1936. Quoted in Ørvik, *Vern eller Vakt*, 125. Monsen worked the same logic as Koht: 'We cannot rely on cannons, if we go for that option we can be sure that one day will come when we no longer can be called free and independent.' Monsen in the Parliament 10. June 1937. Quoted in Ørvik, *Vern eller Vakt*, 155.
[362] 'The aggressor is always peace-loving (as Bonaparte always claimed to be); he would prefer to take over our country unopposed. To prevent his doing so one must be willing to make war and be prepared for it. In other words it is the weak, those likely to need defence, who should always be armed in order not to be overwhelmed. Thus decrees the art of war.' Clausewitz, *On War*, 370

officers in the field and those that are considered diplomatically appropriate by senior political officials'. In the Norwegian case this tension was acute.

5.3.2.1 Conflicting perspectives

Even if Norway was neutral in accordance with the Hague convention of 1907, it was not indifferent to the war itself. The leading Norwegian politicians were in no doubt that it was the Allies who held the moral high ground. To join the war on the German side would not only be a moral catastrophe for Norway, but also an economic and strategic disaster. With Norway's long coast, and its dependence on fishing and imported victuals, the Royal Navy could literally strangle her, as it had done the last time Norway was at war, during the reign of Napoleon.[363] But you cannot *both* be neutral *and* have a strong preference towards one of the sides. Then you're not neutral. At least, you cannot *say* it to anyone. Koht showed no regret about this tacit double game: 'We had never said it in plain words; we would not nail it down as an official policy; it would feel like we disentangled us from the neutrality. But we understand each other all right, everyone agreed tacitly when I used my manner of speaking about the 'wrong side'.'[364] What he didn't say anything about was how the command and control apparatus could carry such a feeble notion to the military commanders who were scattered around the entire country, unsure of what to do if someone got too close.

Obviously, the regulations that the neutrality guard followed did not say anything about a 'wrong side'. But the watch crews along the coast had a pattern of earlier actions to cling to. Norway had very rarely used weapons against violators of its neutrality.[365] In other words, the use of force was an almost unseen exception to the practice of spectating. It made no difference whether the violator was German or British. *If* the practical enforcement of the neutrality regulations revealed any 'wrong side', the wrong side was British. Koht was afraid that Royal Navy's harassment of German vessels in Norwegian

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[363] As a professor in history, Koht was not unaware of this historical parallel. In a parliament meeting on 31 August 1939, he reminded the audience of the Norwegian road to war in 1807 and concluded: 'I think that experience could be a warning to us all.' Grimnes, Veien inn i krigen, 25.

[364] Koht, *Frå skanse til skanse*, 24.

[365] Borgersrud clams that it happened against Soviet planes, *Konspirasjon og kapitulasjon*, 234, while Magne Skodvin notes an incident where warning bursts was approved against two British aircraft over Bergen, *Norsk historie 1939-1945*, 32

waters could force Hitler to take precautionary measures.[366] Hence, it was important to show Berlin that there were no velvet gloves involved in the dealings with London and Paris. Hence, all actions that had preceded 9 April emphasised neutrality *watch*, not guard, with a bias against the perfidious Albion. In other words, what was self-evident in the political corridors was counter-intuitive to anyone outside the small circle of trust.

Koht did not make the guesswork any easier by his constant intervention in operational decisions. On 8 April Koht was asked by the commanding admiral what he should to do if the mine-laying vessels from the Royal Navy seized the opportunity to enter Narvik harbour and attack German cargo ships there. The admiral suggested that he should tell the Norwegian naval vessels in the area to stop them. Koht rather hesitantly gave his approval, which in fact was well outside his prerogatives as Foreign Minister.[367] Later the same day, amidst exhausting and seemingly endless meetings in the Parliament,[368] Koht received a message that German naval vessels were observed out in the North Sea, and that they were probably heading for Narvik. Koht found some comfort in the fact that this message came from London, so the Royal Navy obviously knew about the movement, and he hoped that they would 'catch the Germans' before they could do any harm.[369] Again Admiral Diesen called the Foreign Minister, and suggested that he should give new orders to his vessels at Narvik, that they should engage the Germans but let the British pass, since they came to Norway's assistance. 'Of course I gave him my approval.'[370] Such an involvement by the Foreign Minister in military matters could be a source of confusion. The grapevine can run hot in dangerous times, and the truth is certainly the first victim of war. In his memoirs Koht attacks a rumour that said that he had sent a telegram that said that no one should resist the Germans. The authenticity of the telegram, and even the existence of the telegram itself, has never been proved, and Koht blamed the rumourmongers that flourished. Anyway he said something strange, given his conversations with Diesen: 'The Foreign Minister had obviously no right to give military orders, and no sane officer would think of following an 'order' from me.'[371] In fact, most

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[366] Koht, *Frå skanse til skanse*, 8
[367] Ibid. 10.
[368] Koht's frustration over his colleague's verbosity in the parliament is a striking evidence of the totally lack of any idea of crisis management and of the importance of vigilance and swiftness in tense situations. Ibid. 15.
[369] Ibid. 13.
[370] Ibid.
[371] Ibid. 18.

officers would probably follow the orders from a Foreign Minister, but luckily some refused. On the evening of the 9th, Koht forbade the Norwegian troops at Midtskogen from stopping the German paratroops that chased the King and his government. This skirmish became in fact the 'second Oscarsborg' of the Norwegian campaign: without it the King had probably been captured. Otto Ruge says in his memoirs that he had talked to Koht on the telephone and refused to follow his orders, without a formal order from the government itself. Koht had asked him: 'Do you actually mean we should fight?' 'Yes' the colonel answered, and Koht had thanked him, on the verge of his tears.[372]

The discrepancy between Koht's bird's-eye view and the perspectives of the military worms was further increased by the fact that the Norwegian Armed forces were rich in Nazi-sympathisers and members of Quisling's political party. The commander of Infantry regiment 15 in Narvik, Colonel Konrad Sundlo, was a party veteran in Quisling's *Nasjonal Samling*. He was an unreliable person to have in charge of the land forces around Narvik, which had been the 'hot spot' during the winter. In fact, the speaker of the parliament in Oslo, Carl J Hambro, had himself unsuccessfully tried to remove him.[373] The result on the 9th was as expected. Not a shot was fired by the ground forces at Narvik, despite the fact that the Germans had sunk two of Norway's main naval vessels on their way in, and consequently killed hundreds of Norwegian sailors. Sundlo was sentenced to imprisonment for life after the war for collaboration with the occupant during the war, but strangely not for treachery.[374] Sundlo was not alone. Even the general staff itself was crammed with officers sympathising with Hitler and Germany. The chief of the mobilisation section, Major A.F. Munthe, was in fact one of the founders of Quisling's party, and a close personal friend. It was a rather delicate situation, and the chief of the general staff, Colonel Hatledal, got a rather nasty feeling when he learned that it was German ships that

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[372] Ruge, *Felttoget*, 20. In 1949 the Norwegian government issued a directive which is still valid (*Kgl res 10 Juni 1949*), that gave a striking example of a lesson learned that was too hard to state explicitly, but too important to overlook. The directive pronounced that in the event of an armed attack, officers were to mobilise regardless of whether the government issued the order. Orders of discontinuance issued in the name of the government were to be assumed to be false. Likewise, resistance was to continue irrespective of enemy threats of retaliatory bombing. This directive was designed as a measure against potential 'Quislings'. Hence, the directive was a safeguard against psychological operations and black propaganda. But it is not unreasonable to think that the directive also was an attempt by the politicians to ward against defeatists among themselves and the officers. Just as Odysseus had himself tied to the mast, the Norwegian politicians had automatically suspending their own authority in case of war.

[373] Bjørnsen, *Det utrolige døgnet*, 54.

[374] Borgersrud, *Konspirasjon og kapitulasjon*, 331.

penetrated his perimeters, knowing the preferences of some of his key personnel.[375] Ironically, Quisling himself should have done his military service at the general staff when mobilised, but he had got higher ambitions.

To sum up, even if it was paramount not to end up on the 'wrong side' of the war, the way to put that strategy into practice was unknown to any of those assigned to transform that attitude into physical actions. Furthermore, orders and counter-orders flourished, without much coordination and impact assessment. On top of that, important figures in the military supported Hitler in the ongoing European war, which, given Norway's neutrality, was not any bigger crime than cheering on the British. Officially, there was no such thing as a 'wrong side'! Consequently, in the maelstrom of orders, 'opinions' and messages that poured out - some authorized, some unauthorised, some untrue and some blatantly treacherous, - the lieutenants and captains had to make their decisions about life and death. The perspective in the governmental corridors, where everybody 'understood' who the good chap was, was radically different from the perspectives created in the field by the neutrality baloney.

5.3.2.2 Plan Fetishism

Plans are, as said earlier, an important device in command and control, but they have a nasty proclivity to autonomy. As an example of this phenomenon we will look into a much debated incident, that we have touched already: the decision to implement a *silent* mobilisation when the enemy was already in shore. How could the government decide on a secret enrolment when the war was well on its way? And how could the foreign minister as a matter of course broadcast to the entire world that Norway had mobilised, if it was secret? This seems like military madness and has been a subject of much controversy ever since.

The reason for this seemingly irrational decision was that both the General Staff and the government were 'hijacked' by old plans. The current procedure was utterly inadequate, but no one managed to disentangle himself from the procedures.

To understand the difficulties we can draw a simple matrix:

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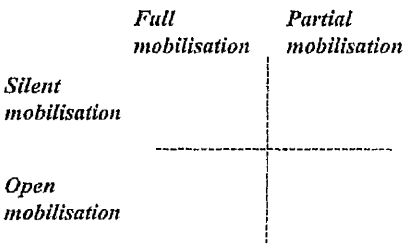
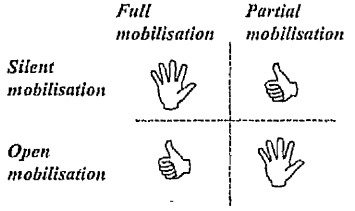
[375] Ibid. 216.

Figure 5-1 The mobilisation matrix



The politicians could originally 'mix' the matrix in ways that corresponded to military needs and the international situation. A full mobilisation could be silent, or open, partial mobilisation likewise. But in 1940 two of the options were gone:



In 1940 a partial mobilisation *had* to be silent, and a full mobilisation had to be open, by regulation. A partial mobilisation was all the politicians needed. Forces in the north of Norway were already mobilised, as a precautionary measure during the Winter War, and there was no point in doing anything there.[376] In addition to that, the Norwegian Army was so full of paper tigers that the Minister of Defence, Colonel Ljungberg, hesitated to scramble thousands of troops to units which either did not exist, or had no fighting value. That would only add to an already chaotic situation.[377] Hence, it made sense to go for the

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[376] Koht, *Frå skanse til skanse*, 19.

[377] In a document from the Parliament (St. meld. Nr.4) submitted on 7 September 1939 about neutrality watch, it is stated: 'Given the prevalent situation concerning the combat readiness, an instant full mobilisation of the Navy will be troublesome. Especially the question of personnel will induce problems for the Navy. For the coastal artillery, extensive arrangements have to be done in order to be able to receive the crews.' (Cited in Odd Fjell, (ed.), *Klar til strid. Kystartilleriet gjennom århundrene* (Oslo, 1999), 169.) This was a peacetime assessment of the situation in the Navy, and no wonder that Ljungberg hesitated to go for the all-embracing option in the chaos that characterised 9 April. In a conversation he had with the Commanding General about the mobilisation, he referred to the forces that it was possible or 'practical' to raise. See Undersøkelseskommisjonen av 1945 bilag nr 7 'Aprildagene' box no. 3, p,89

partial solution, but still not for the silent one. When the Norwegian Chief of Staff, Colonel Hatledal, got the order from Ljungberg to execute a partial mobilisation he burst out: 'Are you out of your mind, Ljungberg?'[378] He asked whether the minister, himself an officer, realised that such an order had to go by mail? Ljungberg confirmed his order and left the General Staff.[379]

After the war many tried to explain the apparently odd decision to use the postal administration to gather the troops when the war was in progress and every hour counted.[380] Colonel Birger Ljungberg, the Minister of Defence, was held responsible for this gaffe after the war, because he was the specialist in the government and he should have known better.[381] His colleagues in the cabinet were excused for their ignorance of technical military hair-splitting. Trygve Lie claimed, for instance, that the Government had decided upon a full mobilisation 'as fast as possible', and left it to the Minister of Defence to find the right wording as: 'We did not have any copy of the mobilisation regulation at hand.' [382]

Lars Borgersrud maintains that Ljungberg became a scapegoat after the war, because the real reason for the weird connection between the dimension and the calling of the mobilisation was too embarrassing for the establishment to admit. Borgersrud's main line of reasoning is that there had existed a secret military network, containing politically reliable troops for riot control and potential counter-revolution warfare. In the new political situation following the Labour party's rise to power in 1935 it was excessive to have two complicated mobilisation systems, one against an external enemy, and one against an internal enemy, given that the old 'enemy' now had gained legal power through the ballot

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[378] Quoted in Borgersrud, *Konspirasjon og kapitulasjon*, 217.

[379] In the investigation that followed the war, Ljungberg claims that he later gave the order for a general mobilisation, but he did not remember to whom he gave the order, and no one at the general staff remembered having received any. See the civilian investigation committee of 1945. (Tilråding frå protokollkomiteen om 'Innstilling fra Undersøkelseskommisjonen av 1945'[Innst.O.IX A] Oslo: 1947, 19.)

[380] Many wiseacres after the war criticised Ljungberg for picking the wrong option of the two available. He should have gone for the full/open option. That suggestion misses the point, as both alternatives were 'wrong'.

[381] Birger Ljungberg had been appointed Minister of Defence only three months before the outbreak of the war. He was not a politician or a member of the Labour party. When Minister of Defence Fredrik Monsen had to leave the cabinet in the winter due to illness, the government appointed an officer to signal military awareness. Ljungberg was at the time commander of Infantry Regiment No. 1, and no expert on politico-military affairs. His main qualifications were allegedly his modesty and diplomatic virtues. Lars Borgersrud 'Militære veivalg 1940-45' in Stein Ugelvik Larsen, (ed.) *I krigens kjølvann* (Oslo, 1999), 165. Colonel Otto Ruge was a hot candidate but both Monsen and Nygaardsvold found him too stubborn, with a one-track military mind. Hambro, *Liv og Drøm*, 165.

[382] Lie, *Leve eller dø*, 17.

box. Hence, in 1938 the anti-revolution enrolment of conscripts was integrated with the system of neutrality guard. The enrolment of loyal conscripts in a tense internal situation had for obvious reasons *both* to be silent (not to give the rioters the possibility to sabotage the enrolment) *and* partial (they had to avoid the syndicalists.) Hence, the connection between the means and the scale of mobilisation made sense in counter-revolution operations, but *not* in a war with an external power. The important point is though that: 'the new system was formally organised so that neither of its two original functions were to be excluded. In effect, the secret "silent" mobilisation was to become the only alternative at the level of partial mobilisation of the army.'[383] No one foresaw that this could have serious consequences in a given, and at this moment unimaginable, situation.

According to Borgersrud, this fatal fusion of two regulations was kept secret after the war. The reason is that the secret networks were re-established after the war as an answer to the communist scare.[384] Too much attention devoted to the old hidden agenda could endanger the creation of a new secret 'Stay Behind'- force after 1945, against Soviet and Norwegian fifth columnists.

The tragedy of plan fetishism was spelled out during an accidental encounter between the Minister of Justice, Terje Wold, and the General Staff on 10 April. Wold asked General Laake, still the Commanding General: 'What have you done until now, General? Where are your orders to the troops? And what is this I hear: our country has been at war since yesterday, and the first day of mobilisation is to be tomorrow? Was there really no other way of handling this matter?'[385] Lieutenant-Colonel Wrede-Holm intervened: 'Well, actually...Yes, there was. We could have ordered an open mobilisation.' 'And why was this not done?' Wold asked, and got the answer from the general: 'The government ordered otherwise'. Wold called attention to the 'fact' that the government had decided upon a general mobilisation and that it was up to the general to 'settle technical details'.[386] The minister obviously did not understand the flavour of military words, and the consequences of using them wrongly. It is strange though, that none of the cabinet members commented on the complete lack of preparations for war in the streets of Oslo

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[383] Lars Borgersrud, 'Er du blitt gær'n Ljungberg?' *Historisk Tidsskrift* Volume 75, no 3 (1996).
[384] 'The largest scandal in 1940 was the secret mobilisation, and the largest scandal for the Norwegian military historians is that they have no interest of it.' Borgersrud , *Konspirasjon og kapitulasjon*, 208.
[385] Francois Kersaudy, *Norway 1940* (London, 1990), 101.

and Hamar through which they travelled, which ought to have followed an open and general mobilisation.

Some words on a couple of sheets of paper had become a straightjacket that seriously inhibited the war effort. The only officer that could legally break the chain was the commanding general, Kristian Laake. But he was handpicked for his job in 1931 just because of his willingness to serve as a humble bureaucrat.[387] The next in line, Hatledal, protested rather undiplomatically as we have seen, but he did not, quite understandably, have the nerve to disobey a direct order from the minister without the backing of his boss. [388] The way out of the problem would have been for the Prime Minister, or even the King in person, to broadcast that Norway was in a state of war over the public radio, to leapfrog all military gibberish and drown the swarm of gossip that lives by uncertainty. The fact that the authorities never used the word *war* in their parsimonious addresses to the public in the early stages caused tremendous friction.[389] A lot of prepared and probably essential countermoves, such as the demolition of threatened equipment, were not executed because they were meant for a state of emergency that did not formally exist at the crucial moment.[390] It is too much to expect that officers, who lived by 'red tape', should blow up their own equipment on their own initiative. Much of this equipment, as for instance the coastal batteries in Trondheimsfjord, became later essential in the Germans' fight against the British expeditionary force.

The reason why nobody, except Quisling in his attempted coup d'état, jumped to the microphone, is rather complicated. Trygve Lie claimed in his memoirs that the government actually had discussed the option of using radio to inform the population, but had discarded

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[386] Ibid.

[387] 'As it was, the appointment of Laake was a blatant attempt to hinder the expert authorities to establish viewpoints that would disturb the governments proposal [of military cutbacks]' Odd Lindbäck-Larsen, *Veien til katastrofen. 1941: Tilbakeblikk fra en fengselscelle. 1973: Veimerker i dag.* [The road to disaster, retrospection from a prison cell.] (Oslo, 1973), 62.

[388] The fate of the chief of the general staff, Rasmus Hatledal, was rather unfortunate. He himself had the moral fibre requested to shout load when necessary, and the investigation committee actually gave him credit for his 'insubordination' by calling up more troops than authorised from Minister of Defence. (Kreyberg p,123) But the battle against Laake and Ljungberg had totally worn him out, and Ruge had much to his regret to replace him ('undoubtedly one of the best officers in the Army') Ruge, *Felttoget*, 41.

[389] Eriksen tells a striking story in his article 'The dramatic battle at Oscarsborg 9 April 1940' in *Aftenposten* 6 June 1945: 'A German officer asked me a while after 9 April: 'Tell me Colonel, when did you get the declaration of war?' He was flabbergasted and refused for a long period to believe that no such declaration was submitted before the arrival of the naval unit.' (Microfilm at the National Library, Oslo)

[390] I am indebted to Tom Kristiansen at the Norwegian Institute for Defence Studies for these observations.

it because they did not want to trigger panic. With hindsight, he said, they should have used the radio, but it would not have had made any difference.[391] One of Lie's colleagues in the cabinet, Nils Hjelmtveit, in fact afterwards criticised the military for *not* going on public radio with the mobilisation order.[392] This demonstrates both that Hjelmtveit did not know much about the mobilisation regulations and an inconsistency between Lie and Hjelmtveit. Lieutenant-Colonel Ole Berg tried in fact on 9 April to get in touch with the broadcasting company, but was hampered by some Clausewitzian friction. He or the representative from the broadcaster misunderstood where to meet, and consequently he never saw anybody from the broadcasting company.[393] The reasons why the radio remained silent were probably the combination of crisis-imposed stress and strain on the leaders, ignorance concerning the complexity of command and control, and the 'Belgian ghost'. In contrast to what Lie said, it could have made a big difference if the government had broadcast a declaration of war. The German troops that were washed ashore seasick in Norway on 9 April, were vulnerable indeed. If too many Norwegian troops had start to shoot at them they might have been upset and turned Norway into another Belgium by indiscriminate bombing.[394] An overt declaration of war could destroy the basis for negotiation with the Germans.

5.3.3 Dissemination

The practical consequence of Norway's preference for Great Britain was a secret that could not even be spoken about in secret parliamentary meetings.[395] How could such an attitude be disseminated to the officers? It could not be done by *reciprocal influence*. Koht could not possible travel around and hint at his unspeakable truth to any officer who needed to know. He could not even do it by *supervenient influence*. His intentions could absolutely not be put down in words, nor broadcast by circular letters. Many of those who would

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[391] Lie, *Leve eller dø*, 24.
[392] Undersøkelseskommisjonen av 1945 bilag nr 7 'Aprildagene' box no. 3, 81
[393] Ibid. 83.
[394] The armed forces were required to *watch* the borders, not *guard* them. (Koht in a meeting in the Defence counsel on the 12th of December 1936. Ørvik, *Vern eller Vakt*, 155.), Hence no mass of force where available anywhere in Norway, except in the northern part of the country. But the German troops were fragile, without heavy weapons, when they arrived.
[395] Not until 8 April 1940, after the mine-laying operations, did parliament speak in plain words. Johan L. Mowinckel, broke the spell: 'Already in September, we were aware, that whatever happened – and now I speak behind absolutely closed doors - we could not end up at war with Great-Britain.' Grimnes, *Veien inn i krigen*, 26.

have been on such a mailing list had preferences for Berlin, and, if Germany had known how biased Norwegian neutrality was, it would have had reason to act.[396] The only hope that Norway had was that the soldiers should *guess* what to do; their actions had to be *isomorphic;* the troops had to make up their own minds.

5.3.3.1 Isomorphic actions

A military investigation committee was established in 1946 to examine the course of the campaign in Norway, and to serve as a 'fact finding' committee. Public opinion after the war found that the officers especially had shown a degree of incompetence and a lack of fighting spirit that bordered on cowardice and even treachery. Some of the committee's findings led to prosecution, but the report in itself was not declassified until 1979.

In the report we find an indication of the conditions in the armed forces at the outbreak of the war:

> The defeatism that overwhelmed this country in the last ten years before the war, in connection with the disarmament that started in the twenties, had made the military rather unpopular. It was generally looked upon as a necessary evil. The dismissive attitude the administration and the politicians showed in opposition to even modest proposals to strengthen defence, had to give the military leaders the impression that there was no serious political support to resistance. Hence, the attitude towards the military worked strongly against the military leaders' crucial self-confidence and reliance. The officer-corps was gradually demilitarised, so to speak. In addition, they knew that the material they had was utterly inadequate due to lack of budget allocation, and that the conscripts' training were poorer than in any other country. The politico-military position the politicians had taken was also confusing. It was constantly repeated that Norway should stay neutral under all circumstances. We **should** not enter the war. This could easily lead to the outlook that the defence should restrict itself to a mere formal rejection of any isolated violation of the neutrality regulations. No unambiguous statement that one should resist an assault by all available means was issued from any head offices, and the lack of precaution after the outbreak of the war in 1939 indicated the opposite.[397]

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[396] Some claim that Koht's practise did give Germany a *legal right* to take military actions against Norway. See for instance A.E. Eidem, *Der norske nøytralitetsbrudd* (Larvik, 1953)

[397] NOU 1979:47 *Rapport fra Den Militære Undersøkelseskommisjonen av 1946*,[report form the military investigation committee], 30.

The above interpretation, points to the 'demilitarisation' of Norwegian officers as an explanation of their poor performance, and explains why most of them in retrospect 'guessed wrong'. But Norwegian officers have never been 'militarised'. The Norwegian armed forces have always stressed domesticity and amateurism, with an emphasis on physical fitness, sobriety and the spirit of self-sacrifice.[398] Physical exercise, marksmanship and nation building via general education have been the *raison d'être* of Norwegian military education. Military questions have never been high on the agenda. Military dilettantism was nothing new in the 1930's. The word that best describes the situation the 1930's is *deprofessionalisation.*

In the first two decades of the twentieth century, military officers had constituted a strong profession, almost without being militaristic in any sense of the word.[399] But during the 1920's and –30's the attitude described in the statement from the investigation committee cited above, combined with the military's own shortcomings, had ruined it. It was the professionalism of the German soldiers that proved superior in the first crucial days of their attack, not the scarce weaponry at their disposal. Over the first nine days of the operations, the Germans felt physically inferior to the Norwegians, thanks to very high losses of supplies due to Allied sinking of cargo ships and to pure military friction.[400] But they felt battlewise, battle-worthy and battlesome; they did not expect the Norwegians to be any of these. The Norwegian forces that met the Germans in 1940 had no professionalism left; they had 'no unity, no focus, no theory, and no system'.[401]

Unity was effectively destroyed by a vicious pincer, formed by the severely reduced field exercises and the reformation of the officer corps. Virtually no exercises were performed for a large number of conscripts for almost 20 years.[402] Hence, one of the most vital parts in any effective military organisation, small group cohesion, had no possibility of developing. The Norwegians had no time for indispensable teambuilding. Not even a

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[398] See for instance Karsten Friis, *Forsvar og identitet. De norske friskusverdier.* [The military and identity] NUPI-notat nr.591, 1998.
[399] Hans P. Hosar, *Kunnskap, Dannelse og Krigens Krav – Krigsskolen 1750-2000* (Oslo, 2000), 202 .
[400] As many as five, out of seven, supply vessels designated for Narvik, Trondheim and Stavanger were sunk. See Holm, *1940 - igjen?*, 48.
[401] Samuel P. Huntington claims that preprofessional thinking has 'no unity, no focus, no theory, and no system.' Samuel P. Huntington, *The Soldier and the State. The Theory and Politics of Civil-Military Relations* (Cambridge, Mass., 1957), 28.
[402] Kristiansen and Hobson, *Norges forsvarshistorie*, Chapter 18. Exercises on regimental level and above were not held after 1922. Torkel Hovland, *General Carl Gustav Fleischer. Storhet og fall* (Oslo, 2000), 41

sense of duty to the unit's colours, usually a prerequisite of martial ethos, had time to develop. The Norwegian units that had served together during the neutrality watch along the northern borders during the Winter War, or those who at least had some days between enrolment and active duty, did a considerably better job than the units in the south, that had be enrolled, be apportioned and be assigned, and fight on the same day.[403] Hence, most of the Norwegian military units were 'rotten', so to speak; they did not contain any unity. Even if the men were individually brave and well educated, they did not comprise a fighting force. Later in the war, Norwegian airmen, sailors, the members of the resistance movement, and special operation units showed that even Norwegians knew 'how to die', but then they had something to die *for*.

On top of that, on 1 January 1930, non-commissioned officers were by an administrative measure made officers.[404] Before that date the average age of lieutenants was twenty-something, now it became almost 50.[405] As a consequence, the competition for positions became fierce, as the number of competitors had exploded. *Esprit de corps* was dangerously battered. General Odd Lindbäck-Larsen wrote about this a generation later: 'The famous gulf between officers and non-commissioned officers did not disappear. It was drawn in to the officers' mess itself and became smaller but considerably more dangerous.'[406] The resulting *esprit du corps* was at best feeble.

Furthermore, Koht's double-dealing and cover-ups blurred the *focus*. No 'beacon' was established in the case of fog and friction in war. The forces had no places to look and nothing to stick to, other than the delusive hogwash from the administration. Some feared the Russians, some the Germans, and some the Norwegian working class.

Theory has never been an asset for Norwegian forces, but the arms race had made Norwegians' lack of enthusiasm for military theory even more dangerous. In 1905 Norway's inferiority compared to Sweden was a question of quantity, of numbers. Norway had the equipment and troops to do the same operations as any European power, on a smaller scale. In 1940 this was absolutely no longer the case. The Norwegians were both

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[403] Holm, *1940 - igjen?*, 65.
[404] 'The new arrangement was unpopular in both camps, and a typical example of the many half-measures that followed the cutbacks.' Ørvik, *Solidaritet eller nøytralitet*, 67.
[405] Lindbäck-Larsen, *Veien til katastrofen*, 52.

quantitatively and qualitatively inferior to almost any European country. They had no tank units, virtually no anti-tank defence, and an insufficient number of anti-aircraft guns. Still the Norwegian officers continued to read foreign doctrine, and tried to adapt it to Norwegian conditions. But as the gap widened between the Norwegians and the major powers, this method caused serious self-delusions. Officers, like the later generals Ruge and Fleischer, obviously spent much time contemplating military theory. The point is, though, that Norway lacked any system and tradition to systemise, approve and authorise military ideas. While it is possible to deduce a doctrine from the plans for mobilisation and operations, no explicit doctrine was available in 1940.[407] Major Gudmund Schnitler's book on strategy from 1914 remained the source of military wisdom in Norway well into the Second World War. Consequently, the Norwegians operated in April 1940 'as if tanks and war planes had not been invented'.[408]

The Norwegian *system* was severely undermined by years of political and military neglect. The Norwegian order of battle looked formidable on paper, but paper was all it was. 66 infantry battalions could be a match for anyone, especially in deep snow, in Norwegian mountains and deep valleys. But the paper tigers was usable for nothing else than as a sleeping pillow for weary politicians.[409] In peacetime, only the neutrality guard could be mobilised ('1st stage mobilisation'), which contained 6 small brigades in addition to a small number of specialised units. If the international situation became blurred and unpredictable, Norway should according to the plan start rearmament and build a real army.[410] Provided that materiel were available, and lines of communications open, the Commanding General stated that the army could manage the transformation in 6 months, through a state of emergency, though he doubted whether the Norwegians would accept

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[406] Lindbäck-Larsen, *Veien til katastrofen,* 54. Major Kirkman's report to Collier: '[I]t means that officers generally retire to their rooms after meals rather than stay in the mess.'

[407] The introduction to the Army's tactical directive of 1938 ([Felttjeneste II], signed by Kristian Laake and Otto Ruge), bear a resemblance to a doctrine, and was in fact quite modern. It emphasised the importance of low level initiative: 'The non-commissioned officers have to use their own initiative and seek responsibility, and not waste time waiting on, or ask for new orders each time the situation change.' (Pt.4) The modern history of Norway would probably have looked different if that attitude actually had characterised the Norwegian soldier.

[408] Tom Kristiansen at the Norwegian Institute for Defence Studies, in a private conversation 19 March 2001.

[409] Eventually, the peak of the Norwegian resistance did only involve about 20% of the planned man-power. In addition, many of the units did not manage to get their equipment before it was lost to the Germans. (See Holm, 1940 – igjen?), 63

[410] St.prp. nr. 6 1933,*Om ny forsvarsordning*, 21.

such a burden in peacetime.[411] In other words this plan provided foresight. Major Odd Lindbäck-Larsen writes: '10:30 p.m. [8 April] we received a message from an obviously resentful General Staff: "There will not be any more messages to night. The Government will tomorrow consider whether to call up more troops" Well! 10:30 p.m. the 8th of April 1940. It was well over an hour till the war broke out, our foresighted leadership of foreign affairs had heaps of time.'[412]

To sum up: the problem in Norway was the scarcity of *professional* soldiers, in the 'Huntingtonian' sense of the word.[413] The Norwegian armed forces were more like a heterogeneous heap of wage earners and bureaucrats, who had ended up in the ranks for almost every other reason than a martial one. When the black silhouettes approached the Norwegian coastal batteries in the dead of the night, the *isomorphic* actions of the Norwegian officers were reasonable congruent. They varied between doing nothing, shooting warning shots, and shooting at long range. Given what is been said above, these were the reasonable, responsible and expected things to do. Actually to sink an unknown vessel with the risk of killing people and to put the whole nation's destiny at stake, by 'asking' for reprisals, were far beyond the *modus operandi* of the Norwegian Armed forces.

5.3.3.2 A gamut in harmony?

All belligerents, Germany, Great Britain and Norway, grasped quickly the importance of King Haakon. Both the Germans, via leaflets, and Quisling, via radio broadcasting, competed with the government's privilege to command and control the armed forces. Both managed quite well. A lot of Norwegians for instance joined the Germans to prepare airfields for air operations against Norwegian troops.[414] But the king was the ace in the battle for the 'hearts and minds' of the majority of the Norwegians. If Haakon had gone on the radio and proclaimed a cease-fire, a great majority of the Norwegian troops would have followed suit. There were simply not enough focus, unity and cohesion to establish a

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[411] Ibid. 21.
[412] Lindbäck-Larsen, *Veien til katastrofen,* 105.
[413] 'The distinguishing characteristics of a profession as a special type of vocation are its expertise, responsibility, and corporateness.' Huntington, *The Soldier and the State,* 8
[414] Norwegian workers repaired the runway at Fornebu near Oslo, after attacks from the RAF in mid April. As many as 2000 Norwegians worked at the airfields of Værnes and Lade in the Trondheim area during the campaign, when the front was in the neighbouring county. Without operational airfields in this area there would have been no air support to Dietle's troops in the Narvik area. It is very hard to imagine that the

Norwegian variant to the Republican Government of National Defence that popped up in Paris after the Napoleon's defeat in 1870.

In the situation that occurred on 9 April the Norwegian troops were in desperate need of *intense* command and control. Hence it had to be done by reciprocal influence, i.e. someone had to actually persuade them, or force them. Traditions, regulations, directives, and training – none of them had the power to overcome the deep-rooted defeatism. The vague intention of the government could not just be 'stove-piped' down to the troops. There were too much confusion, contradictions and even bitterness around. Someone had actually to convince them. And there were not many around who had the integrity and the authority to 'kick-start' command and control on their own behalf. Birger Eriksen was one of them, Otto Ruge another.

When it dawned upon Eriksen that something really serious was about to happen, he called his senior officers to a 'council of war', where they probably scrutinised the regulation of neutrality, and considered what to do if anyone tried to penetrate their perimeters.[415] The regulation for the neutrality guard of 29 August 1939 prohibited any use of force without a direct order from the Commanding Admiral, except in self-defence. If the opposition was overwhelming one should withdraw.[416] This was plain nonsense: to withdraw a fortress was obviously impossible. However the instruction also said: 'Vessels which despite protest try to intrude harbours of war, or the areas of the coastal artillery, shall be obstructed by all available means.'[417] Hence, Eriksen should presumably have been safe, or maybe not.

The manager at the museum at Oscarsborg, Commander Fjørtoft, argues that something significant happened in 1934, when the coastal artillery was transferred from the Army and organised together with the Navy.[418] The Naval attitude towards rules of engagement was substantially different from the Army's. Naval vessels could sail outside

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German troops could have withstood the allies without that support. See for instance Major O.H. Langeland, *Dømmer ikke,* [No condemnation] (Oslo, 1948), 59.

[415] Commander Jan Egil Fjørtoft, chief of the Museum at Oscarsborg, on telephone 13th of February 2001. John Høgevold states that Eriksen deliberated upon the regulation of neutrality with Captain Th. Unneberg before the engagement. John Høgevold, *Vår militære innsats hjemme og ute 1940-45.* (Oslo, 1984).

[416] *Instruks for Sjøforsvarets sjefer gitt av Admiralstaben 29. august 1939* National Archives, Militære undersøkelseskommisjonen av 1946 box 2519 (shelf 1B09265)

[417] Ibid. pt.10.

[418] Conversation with Commander Jan Egil Fjørtoft, on telephone 13th of February 2001.

Norwegian territorial waters, they could hide or seek out opponents. Coastal artillery could not do much, just shoot. Fjørtoft's argument is that most of the officers at Oscarsborg were coloured by the Navy attitude to the rules of engagement. That is, they saw 'hiding' or waiting for orders as an option, something they probably urged Eriksen to do also. One of the excuses used to explain why the coastal artillery at Måkerøy, some miles south of Oscarsborg, did not shoot at all was that they avoided 'needlessly shooting, not to betray the positions of the battery'. The military investigation committee could not believe such an explanation. It is simply not possible to 'hide away' two 301/2-cm howitzers moulded in concrete.[419] But the secrecy of his position would be a primary concern for a naval officer, aboard a ship, and such an imperative probably unconsciously slipped over to the coastal artillery. Captain Sødem, who fought at Oscarsborg, had a conversation with a German officer, just after Eriksen had surrendered Oscarsborg, that highlights the difference further. The officers had asked him: 'Why did you shoot at us?' Sødem answered: 'I'm just a soldier, the government commands.' The German continued: 'You did not shoot at Cossack'. 'No, I said, that was the navy, I was not there.'[420] Consequently, the rules of engagement were confused, even on paper. And, as said earlier, Eriksen's superior, Admiral Smith-Johansen had refused to take a stand.

Eriksen himself could not quite believe that his nation was on the brink of war. He released half the crew as late as 03:00, because he thought that the ships that had been observed further south were stragglers after a naval battle. Consequently, some of his officers criticised him afterwards for the tranquillising effect his calmness had on fellow officers.[421] Furthermore, a comment Eriksen later claimed to have made after the engagement, reveals that he did not expect a war: 'Well, we have not destroyed too many, but we absolutely maintained our neutrality.'[422] Moreover, according to a former commandant at Oscarsborg, Magnar Torvaldsen, Eriksen picked out a second lieutenant to walk in his footsteps after he had alarmed the fortress. The reason was probably that Eriksen wanted a witness in case of a court-martial. Even if Eriksen had to struggle with

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[419]NOU 1979:47 *Rapport fra Den Militære Undersøkelseskommisjonen av 1946.*, 36.
[420] See Sødems report of 20.12.41 in Den Militære Undersøkelseskommiteen av 1946 *Krigsoperasjoner i 1940 Kystartilleriet*, National Archives, Box 2509 (shelf 1B 092 55)
[421] Unpublished memoirs, still not to be disclosed, at the Museum at Oscarsborg.
[422] Letter of 14th of July 1950 to the Armed Force's history department in. National Archives *Krigen i Norge* Box 193.

his own uncertainty and qualms he still had the determination to resist the baffling from above and fight against his *own* subordinates before he took on the Germans.

At about 4 o'clock Eriksen definitely 'heard the drums of war', when the lookout at Filtvedt, 11 kilometres south of Oscarsborg, reported several naval intruders. He went to the main signal office.[423] There he gave an order to the main battery to load their cannons, via the telephone operator. Captain Sødem, at the main battery, requested a direct order from the colonel himself before loading any gun. Eriksen left the main signal room enraged, without even buttoning his coat, something unseen before.[424] He had personally to take charge and to give the order to load.[425] In other words, Eriksen was not only indirectly undermining spineless and pusillanimous politicians, he was also fighting faint-hearted and stubborn officers. Captain (of the Navy) Anderssen, who commanded the torpedoes, demanded written orders of engagement when he manned his position. He had never imagined that he actually was going to use them in battle.[426] When the burning *Blücher* actually appeared in his line of sight, he asked Eriksen again whether he really was going to launch his torpedoes.[427] Rumour has it that Eriksen now lost his temper and answered Anderssen's question with the f-word.

In the midst of this internal friction Eriksen's situational awareness was rather poor as well, as he later stated in a newspaper article: 'There was no declaration of war, only a feeble neutrality watch. Nevertheless [I] had to take the responsibility, without hesitation, conferences or questions, to engage a fleet that approached in a completely peaceful formation.'[428] He knew that the formation had passed the naval base in Horten without any interference, he knew that the mines were not activated, and that the Admiral was unwilling to give him any orders. In other words, not much pointed towards a war, or towards a politically endorsed decision to resist the intruders. On top of this he had, as we have seen, to leave the signal room and personally direct the operations of the main battery, probably because he feared that captain Sødem did not have the moral fibre actually to

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[423] The operation-centre was on another island and totally unfit for Eriksen's need at this moment.
[424] Captain Torvaldsen in a telephone conversation 15.02.01.
[425] Eriksen stated in a newspaper article from 1945: 'It was the commandant who had to order the loading, since the cannons were not loaded when I arrived about 4 o'clock.' *Arbeiderbladet* 4 August 1945. A rather polite description of the situation.
[426] Othar Lislegaard, og Torbjørn Børte, *Skuddene som reddet Norge? Senkningen av 'Blücher' 9. april 1940* [The salvo that saved Norway] (Oslo, 1975), 35.
[427] Eriksen in *Aftenposten* 6 June 1945.
[428] Eriksen in *Arbeiderbladet* 4 August 1945.

shoot.[429] This assumption is supported by the fact that Lieutenant Bonsak, who was second in command to Sødem, reports that Eriksen gave orders direct to him, a description Sødem refutes in his comments to Bonsak's report: 'I do not know anything about the order Bonsak mentions. Presumably it was delivered when he and the commandant were chatting by the battery.' Sødem even asked Eriksen when he turned up by the cannons if they actually were going to shoot, something that probably soured Eriksen's temper even more.[430] Eriksen had also in fact personally to advise the main battery's rangefinders. Again Eriksen description after the war is rather favourable to his subordinates: 'The small and barely trained crews made it mandatory for the commander to be in the main battery, which is normally not his place.'[431] Sødem, among others, needed very *intense* command and control, and Eriksen had to be there in person to convince him, something that deprived Eriksen of the ability to control the rest of his batteries. The *extension* of Eriksen's authority over distance was severely reduced in order to produce sufficient *intensity*.[432] Fjørtoft at the museum at Oscarsborg concludes rather eloquently: 'If one of the younger officers at Oscarsborg had been in charge, he probably still would have been searching for a telephone number to call to be told what to do by a senior officer.'[433]

Eriksen never became a hero in the armed forces after the war. He was in fact on the brink of being court-martialled for surrendering Oscarsborg on 10 April, after hours of bombardment, and after more battering than any of his colleagues.[434] The author of the history of the Norwegian coastal artillery, Captain Odd T. Fjeld, explain this odd close call by the fact that the 'underbrush looks more impressive if you cut down the big trees'.[435]

Eriksen and Ruge were not by any means unique, but their postings and personality gave them an advantage over the military 'entrepreneurs' that popped up elsewhere in Norway.

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[429] An assumption by Fjørtoft at the museum at Oscarsborg revealed to me in a telephone conversation 15 February 2001.
[430] See Den Militære Undersøkelseskommiteen av 1946 *Krigsoperasjoner i 1940 Kystartilleriet* National Archives Box 2509
[431] *Arbeiderbladet* 4 August 1945
[432] Eriksen took a position in the main battery with no telephone, and was dependent on an orderly with about ½ minute's running time. See Captain Unneberg's report of 17.07.41 in Den Militære Undersøkelseskommiteen av 1946 *Krigsoperasjoner i 1940 Kystartilleriet* National Archives Box 2509
[433] Conversation with Commander Jan Egil Fjørtoft, on telephone 13 February 2001
[434] The fortress was so battered after 10 hours of bombardment from sea and air that it had no fighting value left, and was completely isolated.
[435] In a telephone conversation with Captain Fjeld 13 February 2001.

In a television interview after the war, General Ruge explained:

> Among those who could not bear the responsibility, there are surely men who would have done well if they've had a clear order to stick to. And vice versa, I know men with a high national esteem who also had their weak moments, but were saved because they got an early message of what was expected. And thereafter commanded their units firmly, because the overwhelming pressure of self-determined decisions was lifted. That's the way most of us are, we need something firm to cling to if we are 'squeezed', an unambiguous instruction to follow. For most subordinates this means everything: they get bigger, or smaller, according to the leadership.[436]

Ruge himself was one of those exceptional men, who had the ability to make exceptional decisions, against others' better judgement.[437] After Ruge had shown at Midtskogen that it was possible to fight back, the confidence and hastily-imposed military structure allowed more *supervenient-* and *isomorphic influence* to take place.[438] The troops could thereafter do well without *intensive* command and control for a greater amount of time. This is illustrated in the figure below. In the early hours the Norwegian military machinery was nothing more than a frustrated bundle of individuals. During the 62 days campaign they grew into a more determined body of fighting soldiers. Without the vigorous courage of people like Otto Ruge, Carl Gustav Fleischer and Birger Eriksen, the troops would never have got the opportunity to improve.

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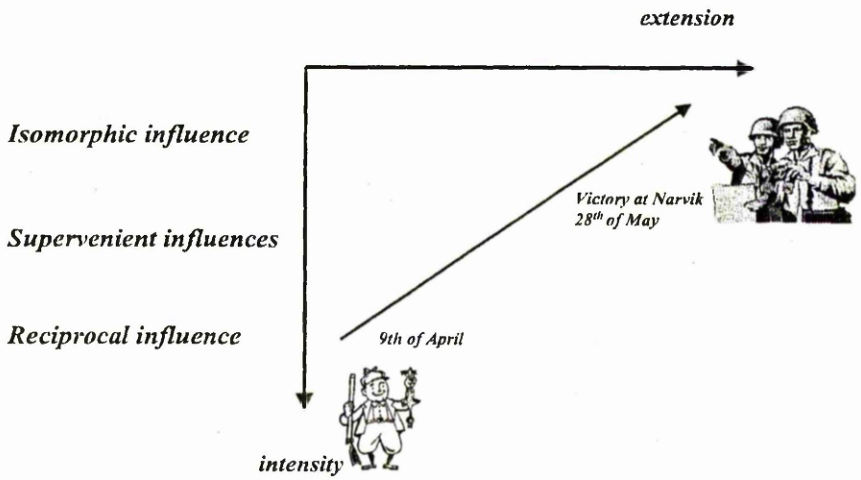
[436] *Norge i krig*, program 3, overfall og motstand. [Norway at war.]

[437] Ruge quotes William of Orange in his memoirs: 'Je n'ai pas besoin d'espérer pour entreprendre, ni réussir pour persévérer.' Ruge, *Felttoget*, 206.

[438] The almost mythical skirmish at Midtskogen was not Ruge's achievement alone. Colonel Hatledal and Major Olaf Helset played more important roles than Ruge, but the 'masterstroke' was soon to be associated with Ruge's name. See Borgersrud, *Konspirasjon og kapitulasjon*, 247.

Figur 5-2 The Norwegian gamut.



One could of course speculate about what would have happened if either the Commanding General or the Minister of Defence had been more like Ruge. That's a futile effort. Both General Laake and Minister Ljungberg were, as mentioned earlier, handpicked for their positions, due to their willingness to serve humbly the current power structure, not to rise above it. When the First War broke out the Norwegian government did the opposite of what Nygaardsvold did. The Prime Minister, Gunnar Knudsen, appointed Major General Christian Holtfodt, a strong and wilful officer, as Minister of Defence. This ensured an effective coordination between the political and military aspects of Norwegian security policy, a coordination that was totally absent during the regime of the Labour party.[439] The Norwegian hamstring is unique only in degree; a career in a hierarchical organisation is always dependent on some kind of adaptability, 'as officers who express too openly their desire to innovate or to criticise are not likely to survive'.[440]

It is impossible to give a definite answer as to why 'the few', like Eriksen and Ruge, actually rise to the occasion. What Eriksen, Ruge, Hatledal and Fleischer all had in common, though, was that they had experienced 1905. Eriksen had in fact been in the very same place looking for the Swedes, as he was 35 years later. In 1905 Birger Eriksen was

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[439] Hovland, *General Carl Gustav Fleischer*, 24.
[440] Morris Janowitz, *The Professional Soldier: A Social and Political Portrait* (1971) Quoted in Lawrence Freedman (ed.), *War* (Oxford, 1994), 126.

gunnery officer at the main battery at Søndre Kaholmen, Oscarsborg. In 1940 he was commandant for all Oscarsborg, with four batteries, in addition to a torpedo-battery, mines and air defence. Amazingly, as we saw above, he found himself as gunnery officer again, at the main battery at Søndre Kaholmen, 35 years later. To understand what happened in 1940 we have to understand that the persons who distinguished themselves had experienced a totally different *Weltanschauung*. They had joined the force in days when military affairs really mattered; they had won their country its independence. 'For the Norwegians in that time there was no doubt. The events in 1905 were the completion of ten years of struggle for independence. The political gambling of 1905 was secured by a strong national defence.'[441] The coastal artillery, where Eriksen served, had in fact a particularly strong position in the first 20 years of his career.[442] The experience from vigorous neutrality service during the Great War was not insignificant either, but we have to go all the way back to 1905 to find a situation where both the politicians and the officers were determined to defend against an unambiguous threat, at all costs. Norway's undisputed greatest national hero, the arctic explorer Fridtjof Nansen, wrote several newspaper articles in the anxious spring of 1905. In one of them he said something that again became extremely relevant: 'A people who is satisfied with big words when their rights and sovereignty is violated, expose itself to ridicule for the entire world, and what is even worse; the people became demoralised; but a people who to the utmost defends its independence will thrive, even if they lose.'[443] Hence, 'the few' had seen better days, and in the Indian summer of their careers they were again called upon, maybe not by their fellow citizens but by idols of the past. The 'gamut', as I have called it, was not adapted to the acute need for intensive command and control in 1940, but the generation of 1905 did not need much. They had 'been there before'. While the younger generation, which had been brought up to be bureaucrats, was in desperate need of supervision.

5.4 Conclusion - a deserved victory?

It will obviously be too easy to explain Eriksen's behaviour as reminiscent of 1905. Why did not all of the 'lieutenants of 1905' perform outstandingly? And a lot of those who

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[441] Holm *Forsvaret og 1905*, 32.
[442] Odd Fjell, (ed.) *Klar til strid*, 89.
[443] Øystein Sørensen, *Kampen om Norges sjel* Norsk idéhistorie Vol III [Norway's history of ideas] (Oslo, 2001), 415.

distinguished themselves locally obviously had no memory of 1905. The experience of 1905 is therefore not a sufficient explanation, but a partial one. To be in a position in 1940 where your actions could have considerable consequences you had to be of a certain age. Hence you had to be born in the 1880's or earlier. Furthermore the ability to counterbalance the *deprofessionalisation* that shattered the force in the 1930's was partly dependent on some personal experience – a mental ballast for stormy waters. General Torkel Hovland writes about General Fleischer: 'This spectacular event [the crisis management of Prime Minister Christian Michelsen in the summer of 1905] aroused a patriotism and devotion in Fleicher that lasted all his life. It created a deeper understanding for the Armed Forces function in national crises.' [444] Robert Jervis supports such a view:

> [Dramatic historical events, especially wars and revolutions] have a particularly strong impact upon the thinking of younger people whose opinions about the world are still highly impressionable. Images formed by adolescents and young adults can still shape their approach to international problems years later when they may occupy important positions of authority.[445]

Eriksen, the 'hero', and Laake, the 'failure', were actually born in the same year, 1875, and consequently they had went through the same tumultuous events. Why did one end up with foreign and national decorations, while the other disappeared into oblivion? Why did Eriksen shoot, while another silently pretended that he did not see? I cannot tell. The experience of 1905 is of itself insufficient to explain Eriksen's actions. But it is reasonable to think that the sentiment of 1905 saved at least some of the military vigour through the upheavals of the 1930's, which someone with an inexplicable *virtue* could use in the moment of truth.

The only way to find the answer as to why Birger Eriksen sank the Blücher might have been to ask him, but Eriksen died in 1958. It is impossible to ask him now, and even if we could it is not clear that he himself had the answer. Eriksen did not leave any memoirs behind. But he wrote a statement in a newspaper in August 1945, as a response to

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[444] Hovland, *General Carl Gustav Fleischer*, 18

[445] Lebow paraphrasing Robert Jervis *Perception and Misperception in International Politics* in *Between Peace and War*, 104.

all the boasting and bragging that followed the victory.[446] Not even there did he say *why* he did it.[447] He affirmed that he was responsible for bending the rules of engagement by skipping the required warning bursts. He shot 'to kill' immediately, though he knew that the formation had passed the main naval base at Horten without any opposition.[448] He also violated the order that Commanding Admiral Diesen had issued after his conversation with Koht. Eriksen did not know for sure that the ship was German, not until he heard 'Deutschland über alles' from the burning ship.[449] Worthy of note, he ends his statement by a greeting to the 'old chaps' who where stationed with him at Oscarsborg in 1905 - 'When we all were young'.[450]

In the euphoria that followed the victory, a question such as this would probably not be decent, as it could make an isolated heroic action the personal achievement of certain officers, and not a feat of the whole military establishment. 'In the many liberty speeches that were held the first year after 1945, it was often stated that we had managed so well not because of luck or coincidences. It was 'effort', a conscious achievement of idealistic goals. In other words, it was a deserved victory.' [451]

Until this day, nobody has seriously asked the question, why did he shoot? Apparently it is common sense that military officers are there to protect the country. Maybe it is still too painful or embarrassing to look into this almost uniform helplessness and impotence. Or maybe the reason is that by focusing on the wrongdoers all the others go free. A process of 'scapegoating' needs scapegoats, not heroes

As a conclusion, the Norwegian government before 1940 was not politically 'unconscious'. It obviously knew that something unpleasant could happen. But strong counterforces worked against them. The antagonism between the labour politicians and the officers precluded any constructive cooperation. Additionally, Halvdan Koht's and Fredrik

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[446] The one-upmanship started almost immediately after the incident and apparently created some hard feelings between brothers in arms.
[447] *Arbeiderbladet* 4 August 1945
[448] Ibid. He suspected that the composition of the formation, with the flagship in front, was done to give the impression of a friendly visit of naval units. See Eriksen's report, 5 August 1940. National Archives *Krigen i Norge* box 180
[449] Ibid. Eriksen himself claims that he never got the order that only German ships should be engaged. *Aftenposten* 6 June 1945. (Microfilm at the National Library, Oslo)
[450] *Arbeiderbladet* 4 August 1945
[451] Hans Fredrik Dahl, *De store ideologoienes tid.* Norsk idéhistorie Vol V [Norway's history of ideas] (Oslo, 2001), 269.

Monsen's image of crisis dynamics told them that the best way to cope with the difficulties was to stay out of the way. If Norway managed to be almost politically 'invisible', the great powers might forget all about it. But if Norway made a big fuss about a minor violation of its neutrality, or rearmed heavily, the great powers could unwarrantedly start to treat it as a competitor.[452] Sparse state funding also restricted Norway's freedom of action, but it was not decisive. If the relationship between the officers and the politicians had been a bit more congenial, the extra money that actually became available in the late 1930's could have been put to a much better use. In the background the fate of Belgium continued to linger: would not it be better to accept some infringements than to risk everything in a futile military escapism?

All this, put together, made a *cognitive consistency* that worked against all those signs of hostile intentions that poured into Oslo in early April. With the benefit of hindsight, it is almost unbelievable that the government could miss the danger signals invoked by intelligence reports, the international press, the Norwegian chief of staff, shipwrecked German soldiers allegedly on their way to Bergen, etc. However, to prepare for war would cause a severe *cognitive dissonance* by people who had used the better part of their life to ridicule the warmongers and turn the armed forces into a joke. In Lebow's words: 'This means that policy-makers are more responsive to information that supports their existing beliefs than they are to information that challenges them. When confronted with critical information, they tend to misunderstand it, twist its meaning to make it consistent, explain it away, deny it, or simply ignore it [...] Under these conditions even the most negative feedback may have little impact upon the policy-maker.'[453]

Had the Norwegian command and control structure been any 'better', if it had provided Koht with a situational awareness, and enabled him to micromanage, which is the usual response of any politician in any crisis, *Blücher* would probably have survived the meeting with Oscarsborg. Due to an almost non-existent command and control structure, the Norwegian Government did not manage to extend their wobbly authority over distance.

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[452] A statement in the military committee in the Parliament indicates the view: 'Our country's location outside the military main stream will in itself ensure a low probability of been drawn into a war, if we ourselves are not foolish enough to invoke the danger of war by keeping military forces that under a certain situation could be tempting for one power to use against the other'. *Innst S. . nr 2. 1933* Quoted in Ørvik, *Solidaritet eller nøytralitet*, 93 .

[453] Lebow, *Between War and Peace*, 105 and 114.

For instance, there were so few telephones in the Foreign Office that the ministers who were gathered there on the morning of 9 April had to queue up and wait their turn before calling their respective departments to tell them that a war had broken out. Trygve Lie went over to the General Staff with the Minister of Defence, to call his wife, finding it a bit embarrassing to elbow his way with such a profane errand. Symptomatically, there was no hurry there.[454]

What eventually saved the day was that poor command and control equipment left an open breach in the miserable and accidental leadership, where an almost forgotten inspiration, the birth of a nation in 1905, could unfold.

[454] Bjørnsen, *Det utrolige døgnet*, 68. (Lie himself turns this story around, saying that he primarily wanted to 'help' the Minister of Defence in the General staff, and occasionally phoned home. Lie, *Leve eller dø*, 20)

6 Conclusion

'The major causes of all types of surprise are rigid concepts and closed perceptions."
- Michael Handel

Sir John Monash, the commander of the Australian Corps, quite naturally disliked the bad reputation of his soldiers, and produced a statement about command and control that still stands out as an important reminder to everyone dealing with it, even if that phrase was not yet invented.

> Very much and very stupid comment has been made upon the discipline of the Australian soldier. That was because the very conception and purpose of discipline have been misunderstood. It is, after all, only *a means to an end, and that end is the power to secure co-ordinated action among a large number of individuals for the achievement of a definite purpose.* It does not mean lip service, nor obsequious homage to superiors, nor servile observance of forms and customs, nor a suppression of individuality...the Australian Army is a proof that individualism is the best and not the worst foundation upon which to build up collective discipline.[455]

'A means to an end, and that end is the power to secure co-ordinated action among a large number of individuals for the achievement of a definite purpose', is as a good definition of 'command and control' as any. The problem is that it is wrong.

There is an anecdote about General Bernard Law Montgomery when he dined at Buckingham Palace with the Prime Minister and King George VI. The bellicose general dominated the conversation, delivering a lecture on politics, and how Britain should be governed in peacetime. Churchill was not amused, and the story wants us to believe that the following words where uttered: 'I think he's after my job,' Churchill rumbled. 'Oh, th-thank heavens,' the King replied, 'I th-th-thought he was after mine.'[456] Whether the story is true or not, is not important. It demonstrates the archetypal quandary of command and control: how to enjoy the advantages of division of labour 'for the achievement of a

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[455] Monash quoted in Terraine, *Haig*, 218. (Italics added)
[456] Quoted in Gerald Suster, *Generals, The Best and Worst Military Commanders* (London, 1997), 233. Geoffrey Regan has a similar story in his *Great Military Blunders,* but now it is the Chief of the Imperial General Staff, Sir Alan Brooke, who confides his worries about Monty's ambitions to the king. Geoffrey Regan, *Great Military Blunders* (London, 2000), 103.

definite purpose' and still keep the political hierarchy intact. Consequently, command and control must serve two masters, which sometimes pull in two different directions. One direction, brilliantly indicated by Monash, goes towards military *effectiveness*, or the organisation's ability to reach goals. The other is towards *preservation* of the organisation itself.

6.1 Squaring the circle

According to the sociologist Jon Elster, the main task of institutions is to 'keep society from falling apart'.[457] An institution is a rule-enforcing mechanism that 'govern[s] the behaviour of a well-defined group of persons, by means of external, formal sanctions'.[458] The rules change over time, as people's expectations change, and under some conditions sudden substantial changes rupture the whole social fabric, as the French revolution. But sometimes outsiders try to change the *constitutive rules* by the use of force, as when in 1940 invasion turned Norway into a German protectorate. Norwegians were to follow different rules. In order to defend the institution, as for instance the state itself, the institution sometimes has deliberately to change its own rules, in order to enhance its *efficiency*. The losing side in the Great War, for instance, did not manage to change internal rules fast and adequately enough, and the state eventually collapsed.[459] But you cannot sacrifice all rules without sacrificing the institution itself. The agility and resilience of a swarm of bees is truly impressive. However, even if their 'doctrine' were technically viable, soldiers could not adopt it. If Britain had turned into an anarchy in 1918, the word 'winning' would have lost much of its meaning. If a soldier explicitly refuses to abide by the hierarchy by not following legal orders, he will be convicted, regardless of his military efficiency. Hence: the tension between *efficiency* and *preservation* is a generic feature of command and control, and in both our two cases there was an acute imbalance between the efforts spent on efficiency and the efforts spent on preservation.

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[457] Jon Elster, *Nuts and Bolts for the Social Sciences* (Cambridge Mass., 1989), 147.
[458] Ibid.
[459] 'While the British and French governments held out to their populations the enticements of civilian democracy and reform, all that the German leadership offered was military dictatorship and 'patriotic instruction'. The failure to offer a carrot in the form of political reform contributed to the German crisis in moral, which in 1918 played a significant role in determining the result of the war.' Sheffield, *Forgotten Victory*, 47.

6.1.1 Haig and Eriksen reconsidered.

The Norwegian Labour party was predominantly concerned with conserving its domestic political power. When it suddenly realised that the most dangerous threat to its mounting hegemony did not come from the bourgeoisie and middle-class officers, but from abroad, the derelict and dilapidated armed forces had virtually no efficiency left, other than in the bones of some old soldiers, on the verge of oblivion. Colonel Eriksen at Oscarsborg disregarded the conventions almost completely by turning a blind eye to the government's tacit strategy, by bending the admiral's instruction, and by virtually acting as a subaltern on the parapet. He vigorously traded preservation of order with efficiency. Even General Fleischer and Colonel Ruge broke long-standing rules by virtually usurping power by unauthorised decentralising from below. It caused tremendous friction when the government, on solid ground in Great Britain, restored business as usual.[460]

Haig cautiously watched any attempts to tear him down from the military summit. The king himself, George V, was, for instance, Haig's main bulwark against Lloyd George. During the fume of the Calais Conference in 1917, Haig addressed the King: 'At this great crisis in our History, my sole object is to serve my King and Country wherever I can be of most use, and with full confidence I leave myself in You Majesty's hands to decide what is best for me to do at this juncture.'[461] By duping the king into making a commitment on his behalf, Haig would be immune to politicians.[462] When Ludendorff's sledgehammer eventually struck him in March 1918, those around Haig suddenly realised that his autocratic generalship had come with a price. The way out of the quagmire was to 'usurp' his power from above. Milner and Clemenceau went outside the established rules when they placed the king's general under supervision of a foreigner, to enhance the common effort. Neither Haig nor the Norwegian government had found the right balance between effectiveness and preservation of the hierarchy before it was too late. Others had to step in

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[460] In fact General Fleischer committed suicide in 1942, allegedly because the Labour Government in exile chose to appoint Major Wilhelm Hansteen to Norwegian Chief of Defence, instead of him. Fleischer was then a member of a very exclusive 'club' of allied generals, who had actually defeated German forces on the ground, however strategically insignificant.

[461] Haig to George V quoted in Terraine, *Haig*, 273.

[462] After the armistice Haig suggested that he publish George V's telegram of congratulation together with his own reply. Buckingham Palace, though, advised against it: '[Stamfordham] is afraid that the Government, and Lloyd George in particular, might object to such a wire as the King's being sent to a Commander-in-Chief in the field as unconstitutional.' Blake, *Haig*, 344 (16 November 1918).

and save them. Furthermore, it is perhaps only in a genuine crisis that people have the ability to let go of the acquired privilege of interests vital to them, as Haig eventually did.

6.2 A little learning

It is a dangerous self-delusion to treat the tension between *efficiency* and *preservation* as a malfunction of command and control; it is an immanent feature of the phenomenon. Furthermore, it is not only kings and generals that want to preserve the pecking order. Even at the platoon level lieutenants will guard their prerogatives, possibly at the expense of the platoon's efficiency. Moreover, it is difficult, and sometimes impossible, to tell whether an action aims at enhanced efficiency or the preservation of the structure. For instance, when Haig told Birdwood in 1918 that 'I won't have anyone criticising my orders', did he do it to enhance efficiency or to preserve his own position?[463]

Richard Ned Lebow warned against wishful theoretical thinking within crisis management: 'Our evidence indicates that those interested in crisis resolution have probably paid too much attention to crisis management.'[464] The point is that the underlying conditions for good decision-making, as for instance a consensus with respect to fundamental political values within the policy-making elite, and a freedom from compelling pressure, are beyond the control of the decision-makers, as 'they are almost invariably the result of fortuitous historical and political circumstances'.[465] In my opinion the same is true of the current theoretical thinking about command and control. Users of buzzwords like 'unity of command', 'OODA-loops' and 'C^{4}ISR' habitually overlook the 'underlying conditions' of command and control. In this thesis I have merely demonstrated that there is more to command and control than meets the eye.

A little learning is a dangerous thing;
Drink deep, or taste not the Pierian spring:
There shallow draughts intoxicate the brain,
And drinking largely sobers us again.[466]

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[463] Haig quoted in Simkins 'Haig and the Army Commanders' in Bond and Cave (ed.) *Haig*, 95.
[464] Lebow, *Between War and Peace*, 305.
[465] Ibid. 305.
[466] Alexander Pope, *An Essay on Criticism* (1711)

Note on Sources

This thesis is largely based on documentary collections in the Public Record Office (Kew), the National Library of Scotland (Edinburgh) and the National Archives of Norway (Oslo). In addition, I have got invaluable help, first and foremost from my supervisor at the University, Professor Hew Strachan. I have also gathered information, connected to the Norwegian case, from Commander Jan Egil Fjørtoft, manager at the museum at Oscarsborg, who also kindly gave me access to the museum's archives, Tom Kristiansen at the Norwegian Institute for Defence Studies, Captain Odd T. Fjeld (Retired) editor of the Norwegian coastal artilleries history (*Klar til strid: Kystartilleriet gjennom århundrene*) and Captain Magnar Torvaldsen (Retired), former commandant at Oscarsborg.

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