



Student Issue Paper

*Center for Strategic Leadership,
U.S. Army War College*



**July 2004
Volume S04-03**

TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP IN WARTIME

By Lieutenant Colonel Steve Eden, United States Army

Strategy Research Paper

Project Advisor: Professor Conrad Crane, MHI

This SRP was submitted 19 March 2004 in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the Master of Strategic Studies Degree. The views expressed in this student academic research paper are those of the author and do not reflect the official policy or position of the Department of Defense, or the U.S. Government.

I found no preparations whatever for defence, not even to the extent of putting the troops in military positions. Not a regiment was properly encamped, not a single avenue of approach guarded...the streets, hotels, and bar-rooms were filled with drunken officers and men absent from their regiments without leave - a perfect pandemonium. Many had even gone to their homes, their flight from Bull Run often terminating in New York, or even in New Hampshire and Maine. There was really nothing to prevent a small cavalry force from riding into the city.

—George B. McClellan

My pilot's navigation had been excellent; he had struck the river just opposite our destination, the airfield at Magwe. We circled, waiting for a signal from the ground, but no lamp flickered, so we landed and taxied up the runway...Darkness was falling rapidly and all around us parked closely together were aircraft. I got out and walked towards some huts, which were evidently the control station...It was an office, but empty; so were the others...I wandered to the road that skirted the airfield, and at last a truck with some Burma Rifles in it came along. I hailed it, got the pilot, and we drove into RAF Wing HQ in Magwe...Although I knew warning had been sent from India, I never discovered whether I had really been expected or not. It was a strange arrival, and not too reassuring as to...the standard of staff work in Burma.

—William Slim

By dawn the next morning I was on my way, by air, to the advanced CP...There is no substitute for personal reconnaissance, so on my order we flew a roundabout route, covering some sixty miles of rugged mountain country. Peering down from three thousand feet, I traced on a map the ridge lines where

later on a reorganized Eighth Army could stand and fight. The sight of this terrain was of little comfort to a soldier commanding a mechanized army...I flew on to Seoul, to the advance CP, to find to my great disappointment only a handful of officers there. The others were back at Taegu, two hundred miles from the front - a situation I resolved to remedy at once.

—Matthew B. Ridgway

Few men are vouchsafed the command of armies; fewer still face the task of rebuilding defeated armies in wartime, and of these only a handful have been successful. Three who assumed command in the midst of defeat were George McClellan, arriving in Washington, D.C., to take over the Army of the Potomac as it licked its wounds after Bull Run; William Slim, coming to Burma as the Japanese drove the British out of Rangoon; and Matthew Ridgway, appointed to lead an Eighth Army reeling back before the Chinese pouring over the Yalu River.

Each one of this trio led forces either recently defeated or in headlong retreat. Each one found himself in a fundamentally changed strategic situation, with armies ill designed for their allotted tasks. Thus, they faced the monumental challenge of averting catastrophe while transforming their commands into instruments of victory.

As will be seen, McClellan, Slim, and Ridgway differed considerably in tactical acumen, command style, personality, and level of combat experience. Each effected the transformation of their respective commands differently. Nevertheless, a close study of their methods reveals remarkably common approaches to the problem, and point the way for an army seeking to 'grow' transformational leaders - leaders who are masters of the science, art, and craft of war. Their ability to use traditional indicators of effectiveness to rapidly assess their commands' condition, and to discern the critical problems vice the transitory within a transformed environment - the science of war - laid the foundation for ultimate success. Building upon that foundation required of each an intuitive grasp of the art of war, allowing them to formulate a vision of future operations based on their prior experience and their understanding of war's basic principles. Finally, each possessed the master craftsman's talent for adapting theory to the material at hand, the capacity to make an abstract vision concrete.

George McClellan took a demoralized army of short-term volunteers run by amateur generals and turned it into the professional force that ultimately (and long after he passed from the scene) became the juggernaut that ground down the Confederacy. He recognized the falsity of expectations that the war would amount to a military promenade to Richmond, and established the logistic, administrative, and qualitative preconditions for victory. It is true that he lacked the ability to lead his creation - though he never lost a battle he was constitutionally

incapable of winning a campaign - but the operational tempo of his times allowed him to employ his considerable organizational talents unmolested by the enemy.

Slim, on the other hand, entered the scene just in time to witness the Battle of the Sittang River, which sealed the fate of the British in Burma. Salvaging what he could from the wreckage, he found temporary refuge in India. There, despite limited resources and the harshest environment of the war, he remolded what had been a colonial peacekeeping army into a modern fighting machine, capable of redeeming Burma from the Japanese.

Matthew Ridgway lacked the luxury of time to reverse the verdict on the battlefield. With no other option save abandoning the Korean peninsula altogether, he had to halt the longest retreat in American history, and adapt an army designed for the plains of Europe to the frozen hills of Korea. Ridgway had to inspire a demoralized Eighth Army, train it in appropriate tactics, and implement a new operational design, all in the crucible of combat. Moreover, he had to accomplish all this in the context of what had become a uniquely limited war.

McClellan the Organizer: Knowing what right looks like

Fresh from a series of minor victories in West Virginia, George Brinton McClellan arrived in Washington, D.C., late on 26 July, 1861. The next day was taken up by interviews with the President and General Winfield Scott, and the numerous formalities of assuming command. Early on the 28th he began an exhausting round of inspections, personal reconnaissance, and reviews. McClellan was not pleased with what he found. His commanders had little idea of what lay just outside their picket lines; other than a few regular regiments, most of his units were untrained and ignorant of the basics of camp life; the few prepared positions were poorly constructed, ill-sited, and isolated. But it was his human material that concerned him the most, "a collection of undisciplined, ill-officered, and uninstructed men, who were, as a rule much demoralized."¹

McClellan was thirty-four years old as he galloped about Washington and its environs. It had been just fourteen years since his graduation from West Point, only four since he had resigned as a captain to take up a career in the railroad industry. However, his ten years of service had been particularly beneficial in preparing him for his new role. As a distinguished young engineer officer during the Mexican War, McClellan had campaigned in an Army part volunteer and part regular. That war left him with a firm understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of volunteer regiments and their green officers. He served on the staff of America's

¹ George B. McClellan, *McClellan's Own Story* (New York: Charles L. Webster & Company, 1887), p.68 (hereafter cited as *MOS*).

greatest general, Winfield Scott, from whom he gained an understanding of army organization and administration. He distilled these lessons through the next seven years of semi-independent command and regimental service. Then, in 1855, the bright young captain was afforded an extraordinary opportunity. Dispatched to Europe to observe the Crimean War, McClellan traveled throughout the continent, a grand tour of the world's most advanced armies. His book-length report, published in 1861, while innocent of any deep theorizing, reflected McClellan's keen insight into the minutiae of military organizations.² Upon his return from Europe, unable to face the stultifying prospect of garrison life, he left the Army.

McClellan was not without his faults. Though vigorous and handsome, the self-confidence he exuded masked a bone-deep indecisiveness. As one of his business associates commented, "he can never make up his mind under two or three weeks on any matter and when he has made it up, is by no means certain about his decision."³ Four years in the railroad business, however, had not dimmed his memory of how a successful army operated, or of the contrast between America's volunteers and the professionals of Europe.

McClellan also brought to Washington a flawed but essentially correct vision of how the Union defeat at Bull Run had changed the strategic situation - and of the type of army required to win the war. In an appreciation submitted to the president, written less than a week after assuming command, McClellan wrote:

We have not only to defeat their armed and organized forces in the field, but to display such an overwhelming strength as will convince all our antagonists...of the utter impossibility of resistance. Our late reverses make this course imperative. Had we been successful in the recent battle (Manassas) it is possible that we might have been spared the labor and expense of a great effort; now we have no alternative...The contest began with a class, now it is with a people...⁴

McClellan estimated that this great task would require an army of 273,000, trained, equipped, and organized along modern lines. Though it may seem unremarkable in hindsight, his proposal envisioned a radical break with American military tradition - an army of volunteers, ten times larger than any yet seen on the continent, trained to the standards of regulars.

Instead of a mammoth army of well-trained soldiers, McClellan possessed perhaps 50,000 men, many with their enlistments about to expire. Thousands more were being mobilized throughout the north, but adding them to a demoralized (and in some cases mutinous) mob

² George B. McClellan, *The Armies of Europe* (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott & Co., 1861), *passim*.

³ Russel H. Beatie, *The Army of the Potomac*, Vol. I (Cambridge, MA: Da Capo Press, 2002), p. 403.

⁴ MOS, p. 101.

would only exacerbate the situation. Fortunately for the Union, the young commander recognized the crux of the problem. The soldiers were demoralized due to their recent defeat, certainly, but the lack of basic discipline and the self-evident incompetence of the chain-of-command prevented the swift recovery from disaster that would become a hallmark of the Army of the Potomac. In other words, the soldiers instinctively understood that they stood no chance against the rebels. The officer corps, trying to educate themselves by poring over fifty-year-old drill manuals, lacked the ability to reestablish the confidence destroyed at Bull Run. In simplest terms, they did not know what right looked like. McClellan did.

Transforming an army, one regiment at a time

His first step was to impose order from above. On 30 July, he appointed Colonel Andrew Porter, a Regular officer, as Provost-Marshal.⁵ Assigned the bulk of the regular units, Porter swept the barrooms and brothels of Washington clean, enforcing a strict pass policy. By 4 August, McClellan was able to write to his wife, "I have Washington perfectly quiet now. You would not know that there was a regiment here. I have restored order very completely already."⁶

With the men fully in hand, McClellan embarked upon a whirlwind program that severely tested his considerable vitality, leading to physical collapse at least twice over the next five months.⁷ First, he withdrew his shakiest regiments from the Virginia side of the Potomac. They entered training camps established in the suburbs of Washington, formed into provisional brigades of four regiments under the tutelage of Brigadier General Fitz-John Porter. Porter was also a career officer, a former tactical instructor at West Point. As fresh units arrived, they also went into camp. There, units drilled, marched, and learned the rudiments of camp life, while the officers studied at night guided by a small cadre of regulars. Boards reviewed the competency and moral character of regimental officers, removing those deemed unworthy of their commissions.⁸ As the provisional brigades reached the desired level of expertise, they were certified for active duty through a series of exercises and reviews, normally observed by McClellan himself. Once certified, the brigades passed over the Potomac, maintaining their unit integrity as they reported for duty.⁹

⁵ *The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*, Series I, Vol II, (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1881), No 769, General Orders No. 2, dated July 30, 1861 (hereafter cited as OR).

⁶ *MOS*, p. 84.

⁷ Stephen W. Sears, *George B. McClellan: The Young Napoleon* (New York: Ticknor & Fields, 1988), p.100.

⁸ *OR*, Series I, Vol V, No 1.

⁹ *ibid.*

Similar camps sprang up for the cavalry and artillery arms, commanded by Brigadier Generals George Stoneman and William Barry respectively. Both were long service veterans, well suited to the task of turning raw material into competent units. The same principles of forming units, keeping them together during training, certifying and forwarding them intact for active service were applied. Barry also had the luxury of teaming one regular battery with three volunteer batteries; the regular battery served as instructors and demonstrators, while the regular battery commander served as the chief of artillery when the four were attached to a division. Barry also rationalized artillery organization. Volunteers arrived in Maryland with a variety of "unusual and unserviceable calibers", but crossed the Potomac with standardized equipment.¹⁰

McClellan did not neglect his supporting or administrative departments. He greatly expanded and rationalized the staff, while creating virtually from scratch a provost marshal, medical department, signal corps, and a bureau of topographical engineers. McClellan energized the quartermaster and ordnance departments by assigning a great number of energetic, competent officers to meet the needs of an army he envisioned as swelling to nearly 300,000 men.

The *modus operandi* in each area was a top-down reorganization, creation of centralized training facilities, and establishment of quality-control boards. The Signal Corps, for instance, gathered in details from each regiment to a camp of instruction in Georgetown. There they were taught techniques of signaling, including such new-fangled innovations as the use of pyrotechnics and the telegraph. Afterwards, officers and men were distributed throughout the Army, from regiment to army headquarters.¹¹ Likewise, the new medical department brought the makeshift and improvised (and wholly inadequate) hospitals, clinics, and aid stations scattered throughout the area under central control. Under the firm hand of Charles S. Tripler, standards of operations were established, estimates made for future needs, and regimental doctors incorporated into a chain-of-command. Professional boards screened the qualifications of all medical officers, eliminating the many "irregular and doubtful appointments" made in the volunteer regiments.¹²

McClellan was astute in his choices of trainers, bureau heads, and staff officers. Men like Stoneman, Barnard, Porter, Tripler, A.A. Humphreys, S. Van Vliet, and Albert Mayer efficiently carried out the monumental task of creating a modern army from a mass of volunteers. Though

¹⁰ OR, Series I, Vol V, No 2.

¹¹ OR, Series I, Vol V, No 3.

¹² OR, Series I, Vol V, No 4.

he never created a truly modern staff along Prussian lines, he formed a team molded in his own image: experienced men, regimental soldiers or civilians whose skills could be translated directly to the military. They tended to be workaholics, authoritarians with an eye for detail, just the type needed to transform the army in the shortest possible time, to establish standards where none existed, and to provide the foundation for future success and development. In other words, they reflected and amplified McClellan's own virtues.

The conscious charismatic

In addition to his formidable organizational skills, the "Young Napoleon" earned his sobriquet. In a romantic age, he consciously strove to inspire his troops. Always immaculately uniformed, the handsome young general took every opportunity to show himself to the army, riding through camps, tracing the picket lines, and holding numerous reviews. These forays, of course, served as a means of inspection, but they also "let the men see me and gain confidence in me."¹³ A superb horseman, McClellan never failed to impress as he galloped past astride his giant steed, hat in hand, stern eagle-eye searching out every fault. To an army of green soldiers, he personified the popular image of the model major general. According to the chaplain of the 1st Minnesota, "his presence is greeted with the enthusiasm that the soldiers of France always exhibited toward Napoleon."¹⁴

McClellan matched his physical gifts with a quiet, gentlemanly demeanor finely attuned to the temper of the age. Though he privately seethed against his enemies, real and imagined, and was often subject to fits of childish pique, he usually confined his feelings to his extensive correspondence with his wife. In camp, he freely encouraged the approach of enlisted men and officers, courteously hearing their complaints and exercising the power of his public persona. As one of his aides recalled, "he knew how to inspire others with an absolute devotion."¹⁵

For the Army of the Potomac, confidence in their leader grew alongside confidence in themselves. McClellan's training program, administrative reforms, and inspirational leadership, synergistically benefited the army's morale. It engendered in them a belief that they possessed the skills and the numbers to gain victory, and that McClellan was the man who could lead them there. This faith remained steadfast through years of defeat, bearing fruit at Gettysburg, in the Wilderness, and beyond; meanwhile, the army's "absolute devotion" to its Young Napoleon long survived his departure from command.

¹³ MOS, p.168.

¹⁴ Sears, p.111.

¹⁵ Philippe, Comte de Paris, "McClellan Organizes the Grand Army", in *Battles and Leaders of the Civil War*, Vol II (Secaucus, N.J.: Castle, n.d.), pp. 112-113.

Some find it remarkable that a man who found the fog of war impenetrable could possess so clear a vision of the future battlefield. Admittedly, McClellan mistook Richmond, as opposed to Lee's army, for the Confederate center of gravity. That flaw (shared by many at that point in the war) notwithstanding, the commander firmly grasped the nature of the instrument required for victory. This comprehension arose from his regimental service, his experience at the feet of Winfield Scott, and his survey of European armies.

McClellan was able to effect the transformation of his army precisely because it required construction from scratch - not in the sense of a hundred flowers blooming, but as an engineer might raise a new building. He was supremely fitted for the task. McClellan's experience gave him the blueprints; his infinite capacity for hard work and his need to personally control the process provided the quality control; finally, his Napoleonic touch resonated perfectly with his men, inspiring their efforts and imbuing the Army with the requisite fighting spirit.

[Slim the Innovator: The School of Hard Knocks](#)

In March 1942, William Slim arrived in Burma to take command of the grandly named BurCorps. His timing was execrable. He assumed command just as the Battle of the Sittang Bridge sealed the fate of the British; his initial campaign would be endless, miserable retreat from Rangoon to the Indian frontier. Only the footsore rump of BurCorps, bereft of heavy equipment, could be salvaged from the wreck. Nevertheless, Slim profited from the ordeal in two ways: first, even as he suffered a string of defeats, he was formulating solutions to the unique tactical and operational challenges in Burma; secondly, he established a warm relationship with his officers and men that not only survived the retreat, but endured the travails of the long road back.

Son of a Birmingham ironmonger, Slim had been directly commissioned in 1914. He spent most of the war in the Near East, fighting at Gallipoli and in Iraq. After the war, he had continued a balanced if unremarkable career in regimental service, staff work, and instructing. Slim was an old India hand, an experienced campaigner in the Northwest Territories who was intimately familiar with the multi-ethnic defenders of Great Britain's imperial crown jewel.¹⁶ Slim's service since 1939 had taken him to the Horn of Africa and the Middle East, fighting Italians, French, and Iraqi insurrectionists. His last assignment had been as the commander of 10th Indian Division, participating in the largely bloodless occupation of Persia. He had compiled a favorable combat record, though largely against mediocre or unenthusiastic

¹⁶ Duncan Anderson, "Slim", in *Churchill's Generals*, John Keegan, ed. (London: Cassell, 1959), pp. 301 - 305.

opposition. But nearly three decades of service had given him an invaluable store of experience to draw on. Most of his fighting career had been spent in colonial expeditions over long distances with ramshackle logistical support (including, significantly, early experiments in air supply). Such campaigns had imbued him with a 'make-do' ethos, a flair for improvisation, an appreciation for the art of the possible, and a firm grasp of the importance of maneuver in a war without fronts.¹⁷

Now he was entering unfamiliar territory. By his own admission, he was ignorant of both Burma and the Japanese, and none too familiar with jungle warfare.¹⁸ It may have been just as well that he did not know what he was getting into. BurCorps had already suffered considerable losses in the war's opening clashes. The headquarters had been, before the war, strictly administrative, and had neither the kit nor the training to properly conduct operations. When Slim found it, it had 60 personnel, four wireless sets, no messing section, rudimentary furnishings, and precious little office equipment. The operations section owned 2 motorcycles, 2 jeeps, and a single truck.¹⁹ There was no intelligence network, amidst a population that was apathetic when not outright hostile, and communications were spotty at best.²⁰

Slim's first act was to move his headquarters close behind the fighting front. This allowed him to visit his units and to somewhat compensate for the poor state of his communications. As one battalion commander recalled, "He habitually visited the formations, scattered all over the front, by jeep or car. He was always accessible and when he was in the offing and I was able to talk to him, I invariably returned full of confidence and pep!"²¹

Despite his inspiring presence, BurCorps' tactical performance was uniformly unsatisfactory. To be fair, Slim's assigned missions consistently spread his divisions far too thinly to offer any hope of even temporarily checking the Japanese advance. Nevertheless, each engagement of the campaign followed a depressingly similar course. The British would establish a blocking position along the route north, flanks anchored in the supposedly impenetrable jungle. The Japanese would appear to their front and be checked; momentary elation soon gave way to despair as an enemy force would suddenly materialize in the British rear. The reserves, positioned too closely to the action, invariably failed to dislodge the Japanese, and the blocking force would have to cut its way out, abandoning its heavy

¹⁷ Field Marshal Sir William Slim, *Unofficial History* (London: Cassell, 1959), passim.

¹⁸ Field Marshal Viscount Slim, *Defeat Into Victory* (London: Pan Books, 1999), pp. 19-20.

¹⁹ Geoffrey Evans, *Slim as Military Commander* (London: B.T. Batsford Ltd., 1969), pp. 64-65.

²⁰ Ronald Lewin, *Slim the Standard Bearer* (Ware, UK: Wordsworth Editions Limited, 1999), pp. 79-80.

²¹ Evans, pp. 66-67.

equipment and its seriously wounded. After a further withdrawal to a subsequent position, the process repeated itself. There was no questioning the resolve of the Commonwealth troops, but inevitably the army began to regard their Japanese opponents as supermen, uniquely fitted to warfare in the jungled hills.

Slim instinctively sought to strike back at the Japanese, but the exhaustion of his troops, the desperate state of his road-bound supply columns, and the press of events frustrated his plans. In some cases Slim probably asked too much of his men. His own assessment of his performance is possibly the frankest ever recorded in a general's memoirs:

For myself, I had little to be proud of; I could not rate my generalship high. The only test of generalship is success, and I had succeeded in nothing I had attempted. Time and again I had tried to pass to the offensive and to regain the initiative and every time I had seen my house of cards fall down as I tried to add its crowning storey...In preparation, in execution, in strategy, and in tactics we had been worsted, and we had paid the penalty - defeat.²²

This self-excoriation is unwarranted. Slim was a talented tactician, learning rapidly in a hopeless situation. On at least three occasions he saved his corps from utter annihilation. At Monywa, for instance, threatened with encirclement by a surprise Japanese advance as BurCorps limped across the Chindwin River, Slim rallied his stunned staff by calmly issuing orders for a series of counterstrokes within 15 minutes. It is safe to say that few men could have done as well, or salvaged as much from disaster. In the judgment of Slim's chief of staff, "...the Angel Gabriel could not have saved Burma in 1942."²³

Little enough was salvaged. On 12 May 1942, just ahead of the monsoon that put an end to all operations, the British crossed into India. Along with the flotsam and jetsam of a wrecked army, only a few thousand men remained capable of resistance. It was a barefoot column, dressed in rags, with little more than small arms and the ammunition carried on the men's backs. Even after reaching sanctuary, the army continued to lose hundreds each day to malaria and dysentery. BurCorps could only muster ten artillery pieces, fourteen mountain guns, four anti-tank guns, 50 trucks and 30 jeeps, all "badly in need of maintenance."²⁴ As for Slim, despite his unflappable demeanor, the strain had been considerable: he abandoned plans to grow a beard when it came out snow white.²⁵

²² Slim, pp. 120-121.

²³ James Lunt, *The Retreat from Burma 1941-1942* (New York: David & Charles Publishers, 1989), p. 276.

²⁴ Combined Inter-Services Historical Section, *Official History of the Indian Armed Forces in the Second World War 1939-45: The Retreat From Burma 1941-42*, Bisheswar Prasad, ed. (Calcutta: Sree Saraswati Press Ltd, 1952), p. 346.

²⁵ Lewin, p. 104.

Transforming on a shoestring

With BurCorps deactivated, Slim was assigned command of its replacement, XV Corps, and eventually rose to command 14th Army, responsible for the bulk of operations in Eastern India and Burma. In the months ahead, despite distractions in the form of civil unrest and minor operations in the Arakan region, Slim remained focused on preparing his command for the eventual liberation of Burma.²⁶ He outlined his assessment of the recent campaign in a 'lessons learned' memorandum issued to XV Corps units:

(i) The individual soldier must learn, by living, moving, and exercising in it, that the jungle is neither impenetrable nor unfriendly...

(ii) Patrolling is the master key to jungle fighting...

(iii) All units must get used to having Japanese parties in their rear, and, when this happens, regard not themselves, but the Japanese, as 'surrounded'.

(iv) In defence, no attempt should be made to hold long continuous lines...

(v) ...Attacks should follow hooks and come in from flank or rear, while pressure holds the enemy in front...

(vii) ...Every unit and sub-unit...is responsible for its own all-round protection, including patrolling, at all times.

(viii) If the Japanese are allowed to hold the initiative they are formidable. When we have it, they are confused and easy to kill. By mobility away from roads, surprise, and offensive action we must regain and keep the initiative.²⁷

In essence, Slim envisioned the type of army needed to defeat the Japanese. It would operate without contiguous fronts, deeply echeloned, and capable of dominating the jungled hills that covered much of Burma. It would not only accept encirclement but would use deep Japanese thrusts as opportunities for inflicting devastating counterstrokes. In order to fulfill this operational design, the army required adequate communications, reliable intelligence, and, above all, tactical and operational mobility.

Unfortunately, Slim's force in late 1942 possessed none of the above. His formations were, for the most part, newly raised and indifferently equipped. One division was scattered in penny-packets across eastern India to suppress civil disturbances. The few veteran units had no experience in jungle warfare, having been transferred from other theaters; only a handful of survivors from BurCorps remained. The new corps headquarters was designed for

²⁶ Michael Hickey, *The Unforgettable Army* (Tunbridge Wells, UK: Spellmount Ltd, 1992), p. 69.

administration, not combat, and much of the staff reflected years of soft garrison duty. Most importantly, Burma was a secondary theater at the far end of a very shaky supply pipeline. Absolutely at the bottom of the Allies' priority list, Slim and his men would largely be left to their own devices as they transformed their way of waging war.

Slim's overhaul of his army aimed at providing his headquarters with the means to command and control dispersed, continuous operations; creating an intelligence network capable of tracking Japanese movements; enabling tactical mobility through mastery of the terrain; and translating tactical to operational mobility by strengthening (or in some cases, creating) the mechanics of resupply. The methods used to achieve these goals ranged from straightforward to strikingly innovative - if somewhat inelegant.

Slim started with his own headquarters. Besides weeding out the unfit, subjecting the remainder to grueling road marches, field problems, and marksmanship training, Slim and his small cadre of veterans worked to make the outfit a true operational headquarters. The emphasis was on mobility. Everything, from furniture to map boards to office supplies, was designed to be packed away in sling-mounted footlockers. These could be transported by truck, plane, boat, mule, or porter. Constant drill and strict adherence to load plans allowed the headquarters to displace in a truly remarkable twenty minutes.²⁸

In order to correct the crippling lack of operational intelligence, Slim borrowed a technique used to good effect throughout Britain's colonial wars. To penetrate the *terra incognita* of Burma's jungles, Slim established what came to be known as the 'Yoma Intelligence Service', a collection of civil servants, traders, and forestry men - pre-war residents familiar with Burma's back trails and enjoying the confidence of the country's tribes. This unorthodox organization moved freely behind the lines, providing invaluable long-range reconnaissance and surveillance.²⁹

Such intelligence, however, could only be exploited through improved mobility. Despite his recent defeat, Slim did not rate his opponent highly. Although the Japanese were brave and tenacious, he judged them to be unimaginative, overly fond of tactical complexity, and slow to react. He had every confidence that Allied soldiers could outfight the Japanese if they could match (or better, surpass) their mobility. Training therefore concentrated less on tactics than on movement, field craft, and simple survival - skills that would allow the allied army to outmaneuver the Japanese. This began with small units working hard at minor tactics and

²⁷ Slim, pp. 142-143.

²⁸ Evans, pp. 91 -93.

²⁹ Lewin, p. 86.

aggressive patrolling. All units, to include volubly protesting rear-echelon formations, trained on these tasks. Slim built on this foundation through a series of increasingly large and complex exercises through division level. Training was supplemented with experimentation, one Special Training brigade testing new organizations and tactics, while using diverse modes of transportation from ponies to jeeps in an effort to "solve the problem of jungle mobility."³⁰ The training produced a four-fold payoff: it familiarized the men with the jungle, making it seem a less mysterious and dangerous environment; it provided the link between operational and tactical intelligence; it induced an offensive spirit in a recently beaten army; and, once that army returned to combat, it countered the infiltration tactics favored by the Japanese.

But tactical proficiency was only one-half the solution. To reclaim Burma, the British would have to penetrate what Slim described as a "wide belt of jungle-clad, precipitous hills, railless, roadless and, for six months of the year during the monsoon rains, almost trackless...Such roads, railways, and navigable rivers as there were stopped abruptly each side of the mountain barrier, a couple of hundred miles apart."³¹ Beyond that barrier, it was another 500 miles to Rangoon. Slim knew that "the campaign in Burma would above all be a supply and transport problem..."³² Prodigies of labor were expended on road and rail communications, but often enough this only kept what there was in barely tolerable condition.

Slim never entirely solved his logistical problem. It remained a source of constant anxiety throughout the war. Nevertheless, he overcame the problems of terrain through a combination of ruthless efficiency, innovation, and improvisation - at least to the point where he had established a relative superiority in operational mobility vis a vis his Japanese counterpart.

As a first step, European standards were quickly abandoned. "We discovered that," Slim wrote later, "instead of the four hundred tons a day not considered excessive to keep a division fighting in more generous theaters, we could maintain our Indian divisions in action for long periods...on one hundred and twenty."³³ As reinforcements arrived, the bulk of their transport was stripped from them and centralized. Any gear not absolutely essential to fighting was relegated to depots in Eastern India. This entailed considerable hardship for the fighting men, especially the English troops, and a reduction in firepower - Slim freely admits that muscle was sliced away with the fat - but it allowed his divisions unparalleled powers of movement across difficult terrain.

³⁰ Slim, pp. 141 -142.

³¹ Slim, pp. 169 - 170.

³² Slim, p. 169.

³³ Slim, p. 540.

The reduced logistical footprint eased, but did not eliminate, the difficulties of resupply. No amount of fiddling with tables of organization could keep formations active in trackless, waterlogged country. For this, Slim turned to water and air transport.

With the Royal Navy unable to provide 'brown water' craft, Slim characteristically created his own river fleet from scratch. At Kalewa on the Chindwin, engineers constructed several hundred barges from teak logs. Motor boats and engines, purchased in India, arrived in parts and were reassembled on the riverbanks. Salvage teams raised and repaired tugs, steamers, and even Japanese landing craft, wrecked in earlier fighting. By the time Slim began his great counteroffensives, his miniature navy was moving 500 tons a day, and allowing limited maneuver of combat forces down the great rivers of north and central Burma.³⁴

But Slim's main contribution to victory came in his daring and original use of air transport. Though he had to beg, borrow, or steal airplanes until very late in the war, air transport provided a vital link in the logistical chain, and allowed for mass movement of units over otherwise impassable terrain. In 1943, air transport was, for the most part, used conventionally - moving critical supplies forward, evacuating casualties, or administratively moving formations from one spot in the rear to another. Over the next year, however, as the supply of transport craft grew more reliable, Slim experimented and improvised. Divisions were reorganized so that one brigade was made entirely air transportable, by replacing all trucks with jeeps, modifying artillery pieces so they could fit in Dakota transports, and scaling down "baggage, supplies, and ammunition...reliance being placed on quick replenishment by air."³⁵ Idle beach master units, designed for amphibious operations, were transformed into Forward Airfield Maintenance Organizations, and typically accompanied leading elements into combat. Slim's troops became masters at the art of cutting a hasty airstrip into the jungle, or of putting a captured airfield back into operation. Standard loads were devised, refined, and tailored for specific operations, so that every planeload delivered supplies with maximum efficiency. By the time of Slim's drive on Rangoon, his army combined ground and air maneuver by hop scotching around and over a confused Japanese foe from one airhead to another - all, it must be added, without the use of specially trained troops or elite airborne formations, or indeed with enough airplanes in hand. As Slim put it:

A feature of our airborne operations and movements was that the troops employed were not of some special kind. No soldiers...were taught to believe there was anything mystic, strange, or unusual about air movements or maintenance; to them, of whatever race, these were normal administrative

³⁴ Slim, pp. 398 - 400.

³⁵ Slim, p. 387.

methods...we were undoubtedly the most air-minded army that ever existed. We had to be.³⁶

Slim's comments on air transport encapsulate the secret of his success in Burma. Hamstrung by insufficient resources, he adapted the tools at hand, improvised when necessary, and accepted risk where he had to. Provided with units that, at best, required extensive acclimatization to a new environment, and, at worst, consisted of raw conscripts, he focused their training on those skills most critical to the Burmese battlefield. As reinforcements trickled in, he indoctrinated them in his idiosyncratic methods and quickly made them contributing members of the team. In short, he formulated a vision of how to beat the Japanese and then refused to allow the multitude of obstacles, shortcomings, and handicaps to divert him from achieving his aims. He tailored his means to his ends, rather than the other way around, as a lesser man might - but a lesser man could not have transformed the army that drove the Japanese out of Burma.

But even allowing for Slim's superb improvisational skills and his keen tactical acumen, perhaps his greatest achievement was in convincing the men who served with him that victory was not only possible, but inevitable. Despite the beating they took in 1942 and the initial impression of the Japanese as jungle-savvy supermen, despite the manifest material shortages, the Rube Goldberg logistical system, and the neglect of a home front focused on other theaters, Slim infused an army that eventually grew to eighteen divisions with the force of his own confidence and enthusiasm. Partly this was the result of hard and relevant training, always a morale booster with men destined for combat. Mostly, though, it was the result of an unconsciously charismatic man conscientiously applying basic tenets of leadership.

The unconscious charismatic

Slim used the hardships of the retreat to forge a remarkable bond with his men - though 'use' perhaps connotes a degree of conscious manipulation foreign to Slim's nature. Certainly Slim understood that a leader must show himself, share the rigors of campaigning, and demonstrate a degree of confidence he may not, in his heart, possess. But he did not purposefully play to his audience in the way McClellan did. Indeed, that was part of his appeal. To his troops, he was the antithesis of the reserved, aristocratic officer who may have earned their respect but rarely their affection. His ability to connect with the common soldier without seeming to pander touched a chord across a great range of ethnicities.

³⁶ Slim, pp. 544-545.

The British soldiers in Burma recognized Slim as one of their own. It was common knowledge that he was from the lower middle class and not a product of Sandhurst; a persistent myth arose that he had enlisted as a private in 1914. The average Tommy of that period gave short shrift to officers who consciously tried to appear common when they were not - it was Slim's great gift to be comfortable in his own skin, and yet able to command respect. One soldier records his first impression of the general:

He was wearing an ordinary army issue topi, without embellishment, an ill-pressed khaki bush-shirt without medal ribbons, and a pair of khaki slacks that looked as if he had slept in them (which he probably had)...He did not have Alex's panache, nor Monty's fire, but he impressed by his evident integrity, the absence of any kind of 'stuffiness', and by the warmth of his personality.³⁷

His experience in India helped, of course. He understood the needs, both physical and emotional, of his multi-national force. He had commanded Gurkha and Indian troops, knew how they had been trained and what they were capable of. He spoke a number of subcontinent languages, allowing him greater familiarity with men of indubitably alien cultures. But it was his human touch that inspired soldiers with that most precious commodity - faith that the commander understood his business and would ask of them what was necessary, but no more.

"When speaking in English, Gurkhali, Urdu, or Pushtu," one officer observed, "it was always as one man to another - never the great commander to his troops...He was human, but never soft - far from it...He was a great leader - true; he was a great commander - true; but to us he was, above all, the well-loved friend of the family."³⁸ A captain on Slim's staff provided an example of the unconscious mannerisms that meant so much to an army in the midst of defeat. "Throughout the retreat, when speaking on the wireless Slim always began 'This is Bill speaking.' To me, at any rate, 'Bill speaking' at a time of crisis was psychologically superb, for it breathed friendship, not necessarily avuncular!"³⁹

Though he tirelessly preached to units, headquarters, and small groups encountered in motor pools, canteens, and along jungle trails, Slim could not spread himself thin enough to reach the entire army. He did press hard - by his own calculation one-third of his time was spent on visits - but he did not exhaust himself. Beset by hemorrhoids, prostate problems, recurring bouts of 'Delhi belly' and malaria, Slim set himself a schedule meant to preserve his physical and mental powers. Except during crises, he rose at 0600, often took a three-hour break at lunchtime or in the afternoon, finished his work in the early evening and retired

³⁷ Lunt, p. 197.

³⁸ Evans, p. 87.

³⁹ Lewin, p. 94.

promptly at 2200.⁴⁰ Thus, he pressed his commanders into service as his proxies, first ensuring to “unite them in a common approach to the problem, in the points that they would stress, and in the action they would take to see that principles became action not merely words.”⁴¹ In modern parlance, he formulated an information campaign, tirelessly prosecuted it, and made sure that his subordinates stayed on message.

The commanders and their staffs found it easy to spread the gospel because they themselves believed it, a result of Slim’s collective approach to problem solving.

Commander’s conferences were not unlike postgraduate university seminars, with Slim as chairman, guiding but not dominating discussion. His technique was to say very little until the end, when he would summarise the discussion, analysing the strengths and weaknesses of the various arguments. He welcomed disagreement, even when he felt the arguments were unsound; the only thing he would not tolerate was mindless, sycophantic agreement with his point of view.⁴²

The simply incompetent or those unable or unwilling to ‘buy in’ were ruthlessly removed, the remainder enjoying Slim’s unwavering trust. “These were officers who could go to Slim informally after a meeting and say ‘Bill, I think you’re making a howling cock of such and such.’”⁴³ In such an environment, it is little wonder that his subordinates could faithfully and honestly reinforce his spiritual exhortations.

Slim also saw to it that the confidence of the army was built by small successes. As units were introduced to the battlefield, its best men and officers were sent out on patrol. The hard training outlined earlier invariably resulted in minor triumphs:

These patrols came back to their regiments with stories of success, of how the Japanese had walked into their ambushes, how they had watched the enemy place their observation posts day after day in the same place, and then had pounced on them, how they had followed their patrols and caught them asleep. Our men brought back a Japanese rifle, an officer’s shoulder-straps, a steel helmet.⁴⁴

New men went out under experienced leaders, reinforcing and spreading “that individual feeling of superiority and that first essential in the fighting man - the desire to close with his enemy.”⁴⁵ Gradually, the confidence cultivated by such operations was translated into (and strengthened by) success at battalion, brigade, and division. Once faith in victory grew, the

⁴⁰ Duncan Anderson, “Slim and the Exercise of High Command in Burma”, in *The Challenges of High Command*, ed. by Gary Sheffield and Geoffrey Till (New York: Palgrave Macmillan Ltd, 2003), p. 76.

⁴¹ Slim, p. 184.

⁴² Anderson, p. 81.

⁴³ Anderson, p. 80.

⁴⁴ Slim, p. 188.

⁴⁵ Slim, p. 189.

material shortcomings and benign neglect so evident to the men became perverse sources of pride, just more evidence of the special prowess of the army in Burma. It was a spirit that survived the desperate battles around Kohima and Imphal in 1944, and carried the army through Japan's finest field army all the way to Rangoon and beyond.

Ridgway the Adapter: Back to the Future

Matthew Ridgway first learned of his appointment to command the Eighth Army on 22 December 1950, at a Washington, D.C., cocktail party. As Deputy Chief of Staff for Operations and Administration he had, of course, followed daily the course of events in Korea, from the initial setbacks through the defense of the Pusan perimeter, to the brilliant landings at Inchon and the subsequent advance to the Yalu. From November on, he pored over the hourly reports of disaster as Chinese intervention initiated the U.S. Army's longest retreat, a bitter withdrawal that seemed destined to end in evacuation of the peninsula. As one scholar later reported, "no one outside the Far East knew more about the Korean War than Ridgway."⁴⁶ Yet he was still stunned by the phone call from Chief of Staff Joseph Collins, informing him that the commander of Eighth Army, Walton Walker, had just been killed, and that Collins wanted him to "get your things together and get out there just as soon as you can."⁴⁷ Five days later he was in Korea.

A 1917 graduate of West Point, Ridgway saw no action in the Great War, spending the last year of that war teaching French at his alma mater. His interwar career was typical enough: command of infantry units in China, Texas, and the Canal Zone; odd jobs such as election supervisor in Nicaragua and military adviser to the Governor-General of the Philippines; stints as a staff officer alternating with schooling at Leavenworth and the Army War College. Ridgway was one of the coterie of young officers who favorably impressed George C. Marshall during those long years, and in 1942 he was appointed as assistant division commander of the 82nd Infantry Division. He took command of the division as it trained for airborne operations and led it during the invasions of Sicily and Normandy. He rose to command XVIIIth Airborne Corps through Operation Market-Garden, the Battle of the Bulge, and the final jump across the Rhine. After the war he held a number of posts, most semi-diplomatic in nature, before being assigned to the Pentagon in 1949.⁴⁸

⁴⁶ George C. Mitchell, *Matthew B. Ridgway: Soldier, Statesman, Scholar, Citizen* (Mechanicsburg, PA: Stackpole Books, 2002), pp. 49 - 50.

⁴⁷ Matthew B. Ridgway, *Soldier: The Memoirs of Matthew B. Ridgway* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1956), p. 195 (Hereafter cited as *Soldier*).

⁴⁸ *Soldier*, passim.

As a leader of elite airborne soldiers, Ridgway's wartime experience (at least until the final months, when his corps became, for all practical purposes, airborne in name only) was unusual compared to his peers. It was, first of all, episodic in nature, with the airborne undergoing severe trials followed by rotation out of the firing line to prepare for the next jump. Secondly, though Ridgway led exceedingly tough, well-trained troops, they were often outclassed by the enemy in terms of firepower, armor, mobility, and supply - certainly a unique situation for most American commanders. Finally, Ridgway learned his trade in the odd rhythm of airborne operations: punctilious, detailed planning followed by utter chaos that the commander could only overcome through personal effort and force of personality. They were lessons that would stand him in good stead in Korea.

From his vantage point in the Pentagon, Ridgway concluded that the entry of Communist Chinese forces into Korea had fundamentally transformed both the strategic and the operational environment. A local intervention against a minor satellite had become a limited conflict with one of the giants of communism, hugely raising the stakes; with his broader perspective, Ridgway viewed the Korean War within a worldwide context that MacArthur could not (or perhaps would not) appreciate. In his opinion, victory in a traditional sense was not only beyond the resources of the free world - there were other, more important ramparts, that had to be manned - but the consequences of victory might be as disastrous as defeat. Operationally, the maneuverist style of MacArthur, reinforced by the slashing armor tactics of Walton Walker (known during World War II, it should be noted, as "Patton's Bulldog"), had led to the current catastrophe. A flood of stolid, veteran infantrymen, carrying what they needed on their backs, was routing a mechanized, road-bound army, scattered by its own reckless maneuvering. As Ridgway flew into Korea, he was determined to turn Eighth Army around, tracing on a map the line where he would consolidate his corps, a position from which he would then rapidly go over to the offensive. The plan did not long survive his arrival at his advanced command post in Seoul.⁴⁹

The dilemma that faced him there was encapsulated by his senior aide, who noted in his diary, "Weather terrible, Chinese ferocious, morale stinko."⁵⁰ The Eighth Army staff officers, spirit shattered, did not impress their new commander. Most fully anticipated being back in the Pusan perimeter within 3 - 5 days.⁵¹ The state of intelligence was summed up by a large red

⁴⁹ *Soldier*, pp. 203 - 204.

⁵⁰ Jonathan M. Soffer, *General Matthew B. Ridgway: From Progressivism to Reaganism 1895 - 1993* (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 1998), p. 117.

⁵¹ Roy E. Appleman, *Ridgway Duels for Korea* (College Station, TX: Texas A & M University Press, 1990), p. 13.

goose egg on the map, with the number 174,000 scrawled inside. Logistical officers had stopped shipping ammunition forward, considering that it was wasted effort in light of further expected withdrawals.⁵²

Ridgway spent the first few days in Korea visiting every U.S. Corps and Division in Eighth Army by light plane, helicopter, and jeep. He found that 'bug out' fever had infected the army from top to bottom. At each command post he visited he discovered "the same sense of lost confidence and lack of spirit."⁵³ The former paratrooper was most dismayed by the funk he perceived in the ranks, an attitude greatly at odds with the army he remembered in the last war. "I could read it in their eyes, in their walk. I could read it in their faces...They were unresponsive, reluctant to talk. I had to drag information out of them."⁵⁴ Even gripes had to be pried loose by direct interrogation, a sure sign to the old soldier of demoralization.

And there was plenty to gripe about. One unit complained they had been abandoned in the rout, another had no winter clothing issue, still others had no envelopes, or had lost their mess tents. The root cause of their distress, however, was clear: a solid month of retreat. They had simultaneously lost faith in the competency of their leaders and grown fearful of the enemy. Many Americans considered the Chinese soldier a superman, inured to the weather, heedless of casualties, master of infiltration and camouflage. For weeks on end Eighth Army had fallen back to one line after another, only to see it turned, penetrated, or bypassed. Few men knew why they were fighting in Korea, anyway; fewer still were prepared to die for it.

Though he never showed it, Ridgway himself was shaken. On 29 December, he supported in writing MacArthur's proposal to use Nationalist Chinese to invade southern China, seeing it as the only way to relieve pressure on the hard-pressed U.N. forces in Korea.⁵⁵ Shortly thereafter, with evidence mounting that the Chinese were about to resume the attack, he "put aside the hope I had entertained before...of offensive action to inflict losses and gain the initiative."⁵⁶ But Ridgway's natural pugnaciousness soon reasserted itself. The ex-paratrooper certainly had fought and won before against uneven odds, and if he grudgingly admired the Chinese as superb infantry, he also instinctively understood their vulnerabilities. Furthermore, guidance from the Joint Chiefs arrived in late December that may have steeled his resolve.

We believe that Korea is not the place to fight a major war. Further, we believe that we should not commit our remaining available ground forces to action

⁵² Appleman, p. 147.

⁵³ Matthew B. Ridgway, *The Korean War* (New York: Da Capo Press, Inc., 1967), pp. 85 – 87 (Hereafter cited as *Korean War*).

⁵⁴ Appleman, p. 13.

⁵⁵ Michael Schaller, *Douglas MacArthur: The Far Eastern General* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), p. 226.

⁵⁶ Appleman, p. 37.

against Chinese Communist forces in Korea in face of the increased threat of general war. However, a successful resistance to Chinese-North Korean aggression at some position in Korea...would be of great importance to our national interest, if [it] could be accomplished without incurring serious losses.⁵⁷

Though he does not refer to this message in his memoirs, it must have crystallized Ridgway's thinking. There would be no reinforcements arriving, and little tolerance for heavy losses - but neither was there any specific territorial goal, beyond sustained resistance "at some position." Ridgway had his mission.

Micromanaging to Victory

With his theoretical understanding of the situation in Korea leavened by an on-the-ground assessment, Ridgway concluded that further withdrawal was unavoidable. For one thing, nearly three-quarters of his divisions were still refitting or in transit from the beating they had taken on the eastern half of the peninsula; for another, the South Koreans on his right flank remained extremely shaky. When the Chinese attacked in early January, Seoul had to be abandoned again, along with most positions north of the Han River. The lull that fell over the front in mid-January resulted more from Chinese physical and logistical exhaustion than from any efforts of Eighth Army.

Throughout those critical two weeks, Ridgway literally camped in I Corps headquarters, the unit bearing the brunt of the fighting as the rest of Eighth Army arrived to firm up the line. In his account of the war, Ridgway charitably claims he did so for "logistical" reasons, but the hard fact was that it was the best place for him to exercise direct control over operations.⁵⁸

He habitually preached a simple gospel to his commanders. He told them to get off the roads and into the hills, maintain physical contact with the units on their left and right, and aggressively patrol to identify enemy build-ups and forestall Chinese infiltrations. If the line could not be held, button up on the high ground, canalize Chinese penetrations, and then grind them up with air, artillery, and armor.⁵⁹ It represented a reversion to classic infantry tactics, a fighting style that the commanders of 1918 would have recognized. Unfortunately, his current crop of leaders could not be weaned from their attachment to mechanized warfare by pep talks. Ridgway was consistently frustrated by plans presented to him that were not in accord with his

⁵⁷ Douglas MacArthur, *Reminiscences* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1964), pp. 377-378.

⁵⁸ *Korean War*, p. 98.

⁵⁹ *Korean War*, pp. 89 -90.

intent, and grew more and more intrusive in operations. He flatly rated most of his Corps and Division commanders during this period as "inadequate."⁶⁰

Consequently, Ridgway reserved to himself tactical decisions normally the prerogative of division or even brigade commanders. He demanded to see minor details such as the layout of minefields, road march tables, passage lanes, and other minutiae of battle. He grilled subordinate staffs unmercifully and often sent them back to the drawing boards when their efforts fell short. He wanted orders so thorough that "each commander knew not only what he might do to cope with sudden disaster but how he might take maximum advantage of sudden success."⁶¹ Once plans were finally (and painfully) approved, he oversaw their progress personally, as far forward as possible. It was not unusual for the general to land close behind the front lines in the rickety AT-6 trainer he habitually flew in, to sort out some snafu observed from the air.⁶²

Execution and reporting also fell short of his expectations. He scathingly instructed "every commander to insist upon the launching of an attack when ordered, and the immediate initiation of reports back thru channels." He would have no tolerance for inordinate delay; nevertheless, commanders would "insure that every report to my headquarters contains the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, negative included."⁶³

Such micromanagement was as unfashionable then as it is today, and it was bitterly resented by many in Eighth Army, but it undoubtedly saved the U.N. in Korea. Crudely put, Ridgway did not trust the competence, judgment, or spirit of his command during those black days of early January. There was no time in the midst of crisis to re-educate the army, or achieve consensus on the validity of his vision, so Ridgway bludgeoned his subordinates into compliance. That he was successful is confirmed by the report of Army Chief of Staff Joseph Collins, who departed from a front-line visit on 17 January firmly convinced that "morale was fine" and that Ridgway's current position was "impregnable."⁶⁴

By that time, Eighth Army had already undertaken a few minor counterattacks. A week later they began a general offensive that Ridgway characterized as "a phased advance under Army control." The purpose of the advance was not to gain ground.

It remained the infliction of maximum damage on the enemy with minimum to ourselves, the maintaining of all major units intact, and a careful avoidance of

⁶⁰ *Korean War*, p. 91.

⁶¹ *Korean War*, pp. 118 - 120.

⁶² Edwin P. Hoyt, *The Day the Chinese Attacked* (New York: Paragon House, 1993), p. 180.

⁶³ Appleman, p. 389.

⁶⁴ William Manchester, *American Caesar* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1978), p. 625.

being sucked into an enemy trap - by ruse or as a result of our own aggressiveness - to be destroyed piecemeal. We were to pursue only to the point where we were still able to provide powerful support or at least manage a timely disengagement and local withdrawal.⁶⁵

Ridgway loosened the reins during the subsequent advance, which continued until April, though marked by local and temporary reverses. That he could do so served as a barometer of rising morale and confidence in his meat grinder tactics. Freed by the nature of the war from the tyranny of gaining or holding ground, Eighth Army could use terrain without being bound to it. This allowed uninhibited reliance on firepower, both directly against the Chinese front and deep behind it along his lines of communication. As the Chinese melted away with the winter snow, the officers and men of Eighth Army had the fidelity of Ridgway's vision demonstrated for them daily. Those who could not adapt were ruthlessly eliminated: Ridgway fired his own G-3 and five division commanders, replacing them with men of his own choosing.⁶⁶ By the time Ridgway was promoted to succeed the disgraced MacArthur on 11 April, Eighth Army had reached a suitable defensive position north of the 38th parallel - a line of no significance other than that it was a good one from which to force the Chinese to the negotiating table. For the next two years they would defend it while the politicians dithered, employing the tactical and operational style imposed on them by the old paratrooper.

Consciously Uncharismatic

There is a picture extant of Ridgway on his first day in Korea. He is seated in an open-topped jeep, wearing a battered fatigue cap, baggy airborne trousers, and his WWII web gear, first aid kit hanging off the left web strap. His trademark grenade, however, is missing. The I Corps commander, Major General Frank Milburn, is shoehorned into the back seat, hunched over to avoid the machine gun on a pintle mount to his left. A photo taken a few days later, with Ridgway glaring at a map held by a clearly uncomfortable Lieutenant Colonel, shows the grenade in its customary place on his right shoulder strap. The fatigue cap has been replaced with the ubiquitous Korean cold weather hat, airborne wings firmly planted beneath a row of three stars on the front flap.⁶⁷ These two photos capture Ridgway's dual approach to what he called "my one over-riding problem...the spiritual awakening of the latent capabilities of this

⁶⁵ *Korean War*, p. 108.

⁶⁶ Hoyt, p. 178.

⁶⁷ *Soldier*. The photos can be found between pages 116 and 117.

command": renewing the faith of the common soldier while challenging the professionalism of his officers.⁶⁸

Ridgway always insisted the first aid pouch and grenade were practical accoutrements, but it is hard to believe that he did not understand their dramatic effect. He liked to roar up in his jeep, dismount before it had stopped rolling, and gather together as many men as he could for an impromptu bitch session. He normally started by "telling them that they had to pull up their socks. There was nothing wrong with them...and no reason they could not win."⁶⁹ He then listened to their complaints, sampled their food, and inspected their positions with a gimlet eye. As soon as he pulled out, he set his aides and staff officers to resolve whatever problems had come to his attention, raising hell himself if necessary. Nor did he confine himself to major issues. Ridgway frankly admits that "I concerned myself with petty matters, too,"⁷⁰ such as ordering the bedsheet muslin and chipped crockery in the general's mess replaced with fine linen and china, or directing the delivery of olive oil to homesick Greek troops.⁷¹

These huddles of freezing men had a magic effect on morale. When, two days after Ridgway promised help, trucks pulled up full of parkas and winter boots for the 24th Infantry, or helicopters landed with stationery for a hospital unit, the soldiers of Eighth Army concluded that they had a commander who not only looked like them but genuinely empathized with their plight, and - a critical point for the modern American soldier - was competent enough to actually deliver on his promises.⁷²

Ridgway's tactical transformation also served as a tonic for low spirits. Harry Sommers, a private in the 21st Infantry in 1951, provided a GI-level appraisal of its effect. He recalled that, after the hardships of the long retreat, "within a week of Ridgway taking over we were on a combat patrol thirty miles behind the Chinese lines...Ridgway knew there was always a great reservoir of squad-level courage in the American army, and that if the frontline soldier was led effectively he would always go out and get the job done." Ridgway's greatest contribution, in Sommers' opinion, was to "disabuse people of the notion that the Chinese were supermen...He did not concentrate as much on capturing territory as he did on killing the enemy. And it worked."⁷³

⁶⁸ Appleman, p. 143.

⁶⁹ Hoyt, p. 177.

⁷⁰ *Korean War*, p. 103.

⁷¹ Soffer, p. 121.

⁷² Appleman, p. 25.

⁷³ Rudy Tomedi, *No Bugles, No Drums* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1993), pp. 105 - 108.

Ridgway's efforts on behalf of the enlisted men were not reflected in his treatment of his officers. He subjected them to a "March or Die" ordeal, browbeat them during briefings, looked over their shoulders during operations, and forced them to comply with his vision of a transformed war. Those who could not or would not measure up were made examples of - sometimes unfairly. When the I Corps G-3 admitted, after a week or so of Ridgway's coaching, that he had no plans drawn up for counter-attacks, Ridgway fired him on the spot.⁷⁴ By most accounts, the contretemps was the fault of the corps commander, not the G-3, who was universally regarded as a fine officer. Nevertheless, the message was effectively delivered throughout Eighth Army: join the team, embrace the vision, or commit professional suicide. It was a brutal but not, given the possibly apocalyptic consequences of a Chinese victory, inappropriate motivational technique. And it worked.

Within one month of his arrival, Ridgway had transformed Eighth Army's tactics and operational doctrine while desperately fending off a massive Chinese offensive. In less than four months he had rolled the enemy back past the 38th parallel, and established an American dominance in the ground war it would never lose. His new method of making war conformed to the requirements of limited war - risk avoidance, maximum punishment inflicted with minimal resources, and appropriately unambitious objectives - while it exploited the peculiar vulnerabilities of the Chinese army. Even more remarkably, he reinvigorated a defeated army. He was able to do so because he personalized for the common soldier the competent, concerned leadership they yearned for; even more importantly, he provided them the victories that reinforced their faith in themselves and their chain-of-command.

That he produced the transformation and the victories through micromanagement, intimidation, and challenges to his officers' professionalism - what might be called 'negative leadership' in a more enlightened time - should not be held against him. Rather, it is a credit to his understanding of soldiers and of men that, in the crisis, he used the means most likely to produce results.

Lessons for the Future

What are the lessons to be learned from these three case studies of transformation under pressure? Can a comparison of McClellan, Slim, and Ridgway indicate what rendered them capable of transforming their armies into instruments of victory, under the worst possible conditions? And if so, are those common characteristics ones that can be cultivated in today's officer corps?

⁷⁴ Soffer, p. 118.

It is obvious that the three generals were strikingly different personalities. McClellan was an aristocrat in a democratic army, a workaholic role player bluffly masking demons of insecurity; Slim was a commoner among aristocrats, a mixture of phlegm and fire, a trusting (and trusted) delegator of tasks; Ridgway, on the other hand, was a showman when he had to be, by turns a ferocious taskmaster and Dutch uncle. The three also used varying command styles, part personality based and part consciously employed due to the exigencies of crisis. Slim patiently steered his subordinates, building consensus but not relying on it, forgiving of error and willing to experiment. Both McClellan and Ridgway were more directive, both from a sense that they alone could accomplish what needed to be done. McClellan centralized, building his army from the top down, but once processes were up and running in the hands of competent men, he left them alone - a military version of the divine clockmaker. Ridgway micromanaged, a tendency not wholly foreign to his nature, but greatly amplified due to the dire straits of his army and the press of events.

Their experience levels also varied considerably. Both Slim and Ridgway were career soldiers, older men with years of combat command behind them; each was stepping up one level of command. McClellan had fought in the Mexican War, but only as a staffer; he was, for all practical purposes, a former company commander assuming responsibility for a theater of war. As far as fighting talent goes, Slim ranks among the great captains of the modern era, while Ridgway was a supremely competent infantryman. McClellan's incapacity on the battlefield is legendary, though he was not without flair as a strategist.

Yet if the contrasts are sharp, there are definite similarities in the skill sets. All three possessed a talent for assessment that verged on the *coup d'oeil*. It should be pointed out that each man was uniquely well prepared by his past to judge his new command. McClellan already knew the structural weakness of volunteer armies from his service in Mexico, and had just completed a book on the great armies of Europe. Moreover, the former West Pointer, regimental officer, and staff paragon, understood the business of basic soldiering. Slim's long service in colonial backwaters and sideshows had honed his knack for innovation, predisposed him to wars of maneuver, and readied him for operations in an extremely austere environment. Ridgway, the lifelong infantryman, spent most of World War II as the light fighter facing mechanized armies, and had the priceless opportunity to follow the fighting in Korea (albeit at a distance) before assuming command there.

Nevertheless, the true key to the accurate and rapid evaluation of their respective situations was their predilection for leaving their headquarters. All three toured the front lines incessantly. They used their time with the troops to inspect, to preach, and to listen. Each in

their own way adjudged what they saw and heard in the light of their own experience, and drew the proper conclusions.

They were also able to formulate a vision of the future, incorporating the unique constraints they had to labor under - limited resources, limited objectives, or limited competence, as the case might have been. Assuredly the stark fact of defeat helped them to recognize that transformation was a prerequisite of victory, but the genius of their visions should not thereby be denigrated. McClellan envisioned nothing less than the creation of America's first modern army; Slim saw amidst deprivation and defeat the elements that he could cobble together into a powerful offensive instrument; Ridgway, product of an army that had perfected total war, not only accepted the necessity of limited war, but understood its implications at the operational and tactical levels.

Finally, each of the trio were master communicators, a skill they consciously and continuously applied at every opportunity. They spread their vision through written directives, formal and informal talks, and by personal example. Each eloquently mastered the vernacular of their men and their times; their leadership techniques and personae resonated perfectly in the minds of their soldiery. McClellan, Slim, and Ridgway all came to personify success for their soldiers as their armies reaped the benefits of transformation.

If one accepts that technological acceleration and the globalization of American interests will create an environment of continual transformation, can we grow transformational leaders - or at least identify those most likely to adapt well to change?

One aspect of the issue, based on the three case studies, seems to be counter-intuitive: to fit or select a leader for transformation, make sure he understands the nuts and bolts of his profession. Unless a leader possesses an intuitive and deep understanding of the machinery of war, he will be unable to reassemble it in useful form, or apply it in innovative ways when circumstances require. Likewise, the necessary skill of rapid and accurate assessment presuppose familiarity with traditional indicators - the metrics of both combat and organizational effectiveness.

Transformational leaders, by definition required to discard conventional (and safe) solutions, require a self-confidence bordering on *hubris*. It is probably not a coincidence that all three of our exemplars served extensively in dusty, isolated garrisons for much of their careers, shouldering heavy responsibilities far from the flagpole. It is true that McClellan's confidence faded quickly on the edge of the battlefield, but the celebrated young general never doubted his organizational abilities.

Finally, the act of transformation requires communication - in many forms - in order to synchronize the efforts of the multitude along a single axis. To do so, the leader must not only be able to express himself clearly - it is no accident that McClellan, Ridgway, and Slim all wrote classic memoirs without the aid of ghostwriters - he must be in touch with the culture of his command, instinctively attuned to the proper motivational strings to tug on in the midst of unsettling change.

The practical implications of these observations seem clear. To widen the pool from which to select transformational leaders, maximize time spent in the modern equivalent of 'regimental service'; create opportunities (even in the information age) for independent command; place heavier responsibilities (and concomitant powers) on junior leaders; and train them to write and speak clearly - no easy task in an age of e-mail and bulletized slides. Promotion should depend on demonstrated skill at problem solving, assessment, and communication; admission to higher military education should be through standardized testing along European lines - perhaps even making it possible to fail once enrolled.

Finally, and perhaps most radically, 360 - degree evaluations should be included in every officer's record to indicate the opinion of that most discerning guardian of military standards - the common soldier. For if the lessons of transformational leadership gleaned above could be reduced to a single statement, it is that the success of transformation depends above all on the enthusiastic support of those who bet their lives on it.

The views expressed in this academic paper are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of the U.S. Government, the Department of Defense, or any of its agencies.

This publication and other CSL publications can be found online at <http://www.carlisle.army.mil/usacsl/index.asp>