

University of Reading

On Supreme Command:

The Characteristics of Successful American Generals at War

PhD

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Declaration: I confirm that this is my own work and the use of all material from other sources has been properly and fully acknowledged.

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Abstract

Supreme command matters to a country at war. The supreme commander, typically a military general, is charged with ultimate judgment authority and responsibility for a community's strategic performance in a conflict.¹ Despite this clear importance, as Harvard's Sarah Sewall has remarked, "we lack the tools to judge military leadership."² Aside from uncritical biographies and battle-focused military histories, the supreme commander's role has evaded serious academic scrutiny.

This historical study seeks to illuminate patterns in exemplary supreme command. It first considers the topic's importance, then consults the characteristics associated with superlative supreme command, with particular focus on military theorist Carl von Clausewitz's "military genius" as an ideal type.³ It then tests the assembled characteristics through three in-depth case studies using primary source records (e.g. dispatches and memoranda) as direct artifacts of judgment to quantify and qualify contrasts between opposing supreme commanders. Later on, it looks to formal, observable characteristics to enable comparisons among high-achieving supreme commanders. This dissertation finds superior judgment, attended by a distinct sense of empathy and grit, and accompanied by several other common characteristics, is what drives successful supreme command. This finding held true across different conflicts, strategies, and other comparative measures. This work concludes by thinking through the finding's utility as well as pondering the extent to which these traits can be learned through experience or education.

¹ Colin S. Gray, *The Strategy Bridge: Theory for Practice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 205-208.

² Sarah Sewall, "Soldiers and Citizens: The Military, Politics, and Society in 21st Century America," November 7, 2009, in *Massachusetts Foundation for the Humanities at Boston College*, video, at 14 minutes, accessed January 2, 2016, <http://masshumanities.org/showcase/soldiers-citizens-military-and-civic-culture-in-america/>.

³ Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, ed. and trans. by Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1976), 110.

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There were also many libraries and learning opportunities that enabled this degree. West Point's Jefferson Library must be considered one of the finest in the world on war, and over the course of 34 months there, I checked out so many books I lost count (the library, of course, ran the numbers for me: 234). I was fortunate to visit the Dwight D. Eisenhower Presidential Library in Kansas, the George Washington Presidential Library in Virginia, the University of Utah Library, and the Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives in London. I also benefitted greatly from a U.S. Army War College military staff ride covering the Overland Campaign through Virginia. Additionally, simply living at West Point for nearly three years, amid the ghosts of graduates past and the cadets of conflict's future, was personally motivating.

I must thank, profusely, Professor Emeritus Colin Gray for taking me on as a student. As an active duty Army officer, I was destined to be a distant pupil; he ought to be commended for sponsoring such a hard case. And especially when Professor Gray fell ill, Professor Beatrice Heuser stepped in to catch me when I tripped over my own mistakes. I am deeply indebted to both.

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While my parents, Barbara and Peter Cavanaugh, gathered the kindling, my wife Rachel, and daughters Grace and Georgina, fuel the fire to finish this degree every day. Simply put, they make me want to know more and more, and even more, if for no other reason than to be a better husband and father.

Finally, my first time at war, I was a confused, twenty-four-year-old junior officer. I have struggled to understand conflict ever since. This dissertation has been my best effort to help the next batch of confused, twenty-four-year-olds to understand their wars a little better. If anyone, this was for them.

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1. Introduction: Charting Course

1.1 *Setting the Stage*

To a country at war, supreme command matters.

Most would accept this plain statement as accurate, even if it might be difficult to arrive at a specific set of criteria or common understanding of this highest level of military command. Therein lies the problem. British major general and military theorist J.F.C. Fuller once wrote of generalship that “greatness is not a thing which can be weighed and measured.”⁴ While this is true regarding specific precision, it is equally correct to point out that there are enough objective data (and sound reason) available to determine many of the qualities which distinguish truly exceptional supreme commanders. Unlike the dark matter that plagues physicists, researchers can grasp how supreme command works.⁵

As with many military subjects, readers reflexively reach for Prussian general officer Carl von Clausewitz’s treatment of the subject in his classic *On War*. Clausewitz described “military genius,” which, from today’s perspective appears synonymous with superlative military leadership. It might also be that it is an ideal description of supreme command. Clausewitz subjected his study of military genius to “scientific analysis in order to ascertain its principal characteristics.” While he was not after the “specific rules used by genius,” he instead sought the “underlying causal linkages that make those rules, and others, possible.”⁶ Clausewitz wrote,

A true quality of genius belongs to every level of command, from lowest to highest, though history and posterity reserve the title of genius only for those who have served at the highest position—that of commander in chief—for here the demands on understanding and psychological makeup are much greater...

Bringing an entire war or its great acts, its campaigns, to a brilliant end requires exceptional insight into the higher relations of the state. The conduct of war and political intercourse here become one, the military commander is simultaneously the statesman...

We say: the military commander becomes the statesman, but he must not stop being the commander; from his perspective he grasps the entire political situation on the one hand,

⁴ J.F.C. Fuller, *The Generalship of Ulysses S. Grant* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1929; second edition 1958), xi.

⁵ Neil deGrasse Tyson, “Neil deGrasse Tyson with Robert Krulwich,” February 1, 2007, in *92Y Talks Episode 64*, audio, accessed January 2, 2016, <http://92yondemand.org/neil-degrasse-tyson-with-robert-krulwich-92y-talks-episode-64>.

⁶ Antulio J. Echevarria II, *Clausewitz and Contemporary War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 102, 111.

while on the other he is precisely aware of what he can accomplish with the means at his disposal.⁷

Clausewitz further described that “great [military] genius” is characterized by “superior insights,” “superior intellect,” “power of judgment,” and the ability to bring a war to a “successful close.” Clausewitz also wrote about several other characteristics in military geniuses, including “determination, firmness, staunchness, and strength of character,” and acknowledged these would be difficult to measure with any objective validity.⁸

Clausewitz’s list of vaunted characteristics begs the basic question: What is supreme command? Clausewitz employed the term “commander-in-chief,” which might incorrectly lead some to mistake the role for a political one (i.e. presidents and prime ministers). But Clausewitz intended the German term *Feldherr*, which meant supreme military commander, akin to what modern audiences might know as a “combatant commander.”⁹ Moreover, modern military doctrine prescribes that such command “includes the authority and responsibility” for using resources to achieve specified goals.¹⁰ Such authority enables decision-making, which is the act of “selecting a course of action as the one most favorable to accomplish the mission.”¹¹ So at the highest level, the supreme commander is the “person with the responsibility for making, or conducting, military strategy or strategies designed for the course and outcome of an entire conflict,” because “subject to political control, [this person] has duty of care over the entire competitive performance of his security community.”¹² The supreme commander holds ultimate security responsibility and authority for a society. While some might prefer to reserve that title for politicians and heads of state, the term “supreme commander” is marked by its explicitly martial function, and for the purposes of this dissertation will mean the senior-most person making military and strategic decisions in a particular security community, which typically means a military officer. Besides, according to Clausewitz’s definition, this is the only person eligible, by position, to hold the lofty title of “military genius.”

⁷ Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, ed. and trans. by Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1976), 111-112.

⁸ Clausewitz, *On War*, 111-112.

⁹ Beatrice Heuser, *Reading Clausewitz* (London: Pimlico, 2002), 73.

¹⁰ Department of the Army, *ADP 6-0: Mission Command* (Washington, DC: Department of the Army, 2012), 5.

¹¹ Department of the Army, *Field Manual 6-0, Mission Command: Command and Control of Army Forces* (Washington, DC: Department of the Army, 2003), 1-6. Cited in Eitan Shamir, *Transforming Command: The Pursuit of Mission Command in the U.S., British, and Israeli Armies* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2011), 9.

¹² Gray, *The Strategy Bridge*, 205, 207.

But how does supreme command work? Can supreme commanders actually be said to win wars? If so, how? What guides their decisions? What experiences and education support exemplary performance, and to what extent is this driven by some innate ability? Unfortunately, as Harvard's Sarah Sewall has remarked, "we lack the tools to judge military leadership."¹³

The primary object of the current study is to explore supreme command in extreme circumstances at war, upholding the principle that "to study the finest steel, best to search for the hottest furnace."¹⁴ In suit, this research considers three case studies which were to have far-reaching impact on the United States: General George Washington, fighting in the summer of 1776 through the early winter of 1777, Lieutenant General Ulysses S. Grant from the late spring of 1864 through President Abraham Lincoln's re-election in November of that year, and General Dwight D. Eisenhower's effort to break onto the European continent in 1944 and on until his forces reached the German border. These individuals were immersed in conflicts that defined the United States in terms of existence, continued unity, and physical security. These three cases offer unique aspects and military situations.

General George Washington was a materially and organizationally inferior insurgent in 1776, fighting against a vastly superior expeditionary British invasion force under General William Howe. Broadly speaking, Washington employed an exhaustion strategy; his aim was the "gradual erosion of the enemy nation's will or means to resist."¹⁵ His policy objective was simple and direct: survival for a fledgling state, which did not even exist at the moment he took command of his ragtag army.

By 1864, Lieutenant General Ulysses S. Grant had risen in rank to command all Union forces against the Confederacy. If not quite as formal by position, the de facto supreme commander of all Confederate forces, and Grant's opponent, was General Robert E. Lee. This was a tough fight, primarily on land, yet with an important brown-water component, to put down and pacify a conventionally-armed, widespread terrain-holding insurgency. Because the combatants were so familiar, the war was fought between two sides that likely knew more about one another than any other opponent, fitting Sun Tzu's proscription to "know" one's enemy.¹⁶ Though most attention

¹³ Sewall, "Soldiers and Citizens: The Military, Politics, and Society in 21st Century America," at 14 minutes.

¹⁴ Eliot A. Cohen, *Supreme Command: Soldiers, Statesmen, and Leadership in Wartime* (New York: The Free Press, 2002), xiv.

¹⁵ Robert Bateman, "There Are Three (And Only Three) Types of Military Strategy," *Esquire* (November 30, 2015).

¹⁶ Sun Tzu, "Chapter 1: Estimates," and "Chapter 3: Offensive Strategy," in *The Art of War*, trans. Samuel Griffith (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1963), 84.

centers on the Grant versus Lee narrative, the wider war was where Grant truly made his attrition strategy work in his effort to “gradually erode the combat power” of the Confederacy.¹⁷

General Dwight D. Eisenhower’s forcible entry onto the European continent was part of an annihilation strategy aimed at the “immediate destruction of the combat power of the enemy’s armed forces.”¹⁸ Despite Eisenhower’s having “held only one command, a stateside training post for less than a year in 1918,” historian Stephen Ambrose has called Eisenhower “the most successful general of the greatest war ever fought.”¹⁹ The character of this industrial warfare was enormous: global, total war, with significant joint and multinational cooperation at all levels.

The objective is to explore the judgment of these three successful supreme commanders, the way their minds worked in dialectic with the enemy as part of the lethal choices they had to make, and ultimately how they came out on top. By doing so, this research also examines the broader issue of understanding the margin between success and failure at war. Judgment and decision-making is at the core of this study, as well as leadership’s “process of influencing people.”²⁰

The available literature on supreme command is quite limited. Even a casual observer would notice the gap. Colin Gray has called this lack of “careful and deep [study] of the role of the [supreme] commander a “prominent” weakness in “modern Western strategic theory.”²¹ There is significant academic value in spending time reflecting on Clausewitz’s “military genius,” especially as a stand-in for superlative military leadership.²²

Supreme commanders matter as a particular class of individuals that “play a central role in shaping international relations,” a pivotal part of “first image” international relations theories that argue “the behavior of nations springs from the behavior of individuals.”²³ Kenneth Pollack and Daniel Byman have found that “International relations cannot be understood if the role of the individual is ignored” and even if critics contend this is to focus on “exceptions,” it is important to note that “such exceptional individuals knit the tapestry of history.”²⁴ Eliot Cohen has made a similar point, that “the experience of exceptional persons make some uneasy,” but “war for the most essential national interests, enable us to see more clearly what great leaders do and of what they are made.”²⁵

¹⁷ Bateman, “There Are Three.”

¹⁸ Bateman, “There Are Three.”

¹⁹ Stephen E. Ambrose, “Eisenhower’s Generalship,” *Parameters* (June 1990), 90, 98.

²⁰ Department of the Army, *ADP 6-0*, 6.

²¹ Gray, *Strategy Bridge*, 199.

²² Echevarria, *Clausewitz and Contemporary War*, 102-103.

²³ Daniel L. Byman and Kenneth M. Pollack, “Let Us Now Praise Great Men: Bringing the Statesmen Back In,” *International Security* Vol. 25, No. 4 (Spring 2001), 111, 114.

²⁴ Byman and Pollack, “Let Us Now Praise Great Men: Bringing the Statesmen Back In,” 145.

²⁵ Cohen, *Supreme Command*, xiv.

At certain pivotal moments, individuals matter. Though focused on the role of the individual, it is important to also acknowledge some limits imposed by reality, which ought to be considered in balance.²⁶

There is a tradition in international relations that embraces such a duality, neoclassical realism, which balances systemic considerations with individually constructed ones, where, for example, as Gideon Rose has pointed out, “perceptions of relative power...matter, not simply [as] relative quantities of physical resources or forces in being.” The “neoclassical realist archetype is Thucydides’ *History of the Peloponnesian War*,” which posited the “real cause of the war was the ‘growth of power in Athens, and the alarm which this inspired in Sparta,’ and then describes how systemic incentives were translated through unit-level variables into the foreign policies of the various Greek city-states.”²⁷ In sum, while academic literature leaves a specific gap with respect to supreme command, there is a suitable base of intellectual support on which to conduct research.

1.2 *Aims and Arguments*

The central research question is: *What are the characteristics of successful wartime American supreme commanders?* Such a study is valuable, as British military theorist Basil H. Liddell Hart has noted: “Can we find any quality, or qualities, so marked in all of [history’s supreme commanders] as to represent a common denominator, and provide a key to their outstanding performance?”²⁸

This dissertation identifies a pattern. In the three case studies, three principal characteristics of successful American wartime supreme commanders stood out: judgment, empathy, and grit. Superior judgment was particularly important. If one compares the relative, cumulative judgments of adversary supreme commanders in the military campaigns that exercised the greatest influence over these three war outcomes, the supreme commander that demonstrated superior judgment tended to generate greater relative positive strategic effect on the path to the achievement of policy objectives.²⁹ This was true across all three case studies, which featured different strategies (e.g. Washington: exhaustion; Grant: attrition; Eisenhower: annihilation), different characters of conflict,

²⁶ Paul Kennedy, “The Kaiser and German *Weltpolitik*: reflections on Wilhelm II’s place in the making of German foreign policy,” in *Kaiser Wilhelm II New Interpretations: The Corfu Papers* ed. John C. G. Rohl, Niclaus Sombart (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 165.

²⁷ Gideon Rose, “Neoclassical Realism and Theories of Foreign Policy,” *World Politics* Vol. 51, No. 1 (October 1998), 147, 153-154.

²⁸ Basil H. Liddell Hart, “What Is Military Genius?” *Strand Magazine* (October 1941), 48. Liddell Hart Center for Military Archives, Reference 10/1941/25b, 50.

²⁹ Roger J. Spiller, “Six Propositions,” in *Between War and Peace: How America Ends Its Wars*, ed. Matthew Moten (New York: Free Press, 2011), 18.

time periods, and war aims. All these characteristics changed while superior judgment remained a constantly important, objective factor.

This pattern, and the importance of judgment, empathy, and grit, is also useful in understanding the concept of strategy. Colin Gray popularized the “bridge” as a metaphor for strategy, and explained, “The strategists who hold the bridge are tasked with the generally inordinately complex and difficult mission of translating political purpose, or policy, into feasible military, and other, plans.” Gray wrote the objective is to turn “one currency” (i.e. power) into “desired political consequences.” In this telling, the metaphorical strategy bridge is static. Later in the same book, Gray asked rhetorically, “But who practices strategy? Exactly who holds the strategy bridge?—and how do they hold it?”³⁰

This dissertation confronts Gray’s questions. In each of the previously mentioned case studies, a successful “bridge” was constructed: Washington, Grant, and Eisenhower all built strategy bridges and prevented their opponents from the same. This dissertation returns to the crucial point at which Washington, Grant, and Eisenhower’s keystone and adjacent bricks were put into place. By studying these moments, just before each strategy was a fully assembled “bridge,” provides a window into how the key judgments (e.g. keystones) were fit into place. To do so is a way of understanding strategy as a dynamic process, in addition to its role as a finished product.

To begin to understand supreme command, one must set some conditions or frameworks for an organizing philosophy. In this case, there are two: the relative nature of war and the criticality of focusing on conflict as a judgment-centric endeavor.

1.3 Framework One: War is a Duel

All war is relative and measured against the opponent. The enemy sets the bar. Put another way, the tortoise did not win for being objectively fast; the tortoise won for being relatively faster than the hare at reaching the specified finish line. For another illustration, Emile Simpson has called strategy an individual “dialogue between desire and possibility.”³¹ While poetic, Simpson left out the critical second “dialogue,” the struggle against the opponent. Even as early as 1817, August Ruehle von Lilienstern, wrote in his book, *On Engagements*: “An engagement...presupposes the existence and interaction of two inimical parties” in which both interact with and influence each other.³² Not long

³⁰ Gray, *The Strategy Bridge*, 7, 197.

³¹ Emile Simpson, *War from the Ground Up: Twenty-First Century Combat as Politics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 116.

³² Ruehle von Lilienstern’s handbook was structured around the hierarchy of conflict, starting with smaller engagements, then larger groups, and finally states locked in combat. August Ruehle von

after, Carl von Clausewitz recognized this particular dimension was so important that it featured prominently in his book, *On War*:

I shall not begin by expounding a pedantic, literary definition of war, but go straight to the heart of the matter, to the duel. War is nothing but a duel on a larger scale. Countless duels go to make up war, but a picture of it as a whole can be formed by imagining a pair of wrestlers.³³

War is waged against a living, willed opponent. Frank Hoffman has acknowledged this point, that strategy is “developed and deployed in a competitive context relative to an adversary,” and this setting “reflect[s] the simple reality that war involves an interactive series of action, response, and counteraction.”³⁴

So war and competition encapsulate at least two perspectives, both of which are required to understand the other in context. Or as Michael Horowitz and his co-authors have recently written, an

in-depth study of [senior leaders] of any single country, gives only a partial view of their personalities and decision-making processes. For example, any study of John F. Kennedy would be incomplete without a discussion of his relationship with Nikita Khrushchev. We cannot fully understand Ronald Reagan’s foreign policy without understanding Mikhail Gorbachev.³⁵

It may be helpful to explain two alternate perspectives this research will conscientiously avoid. One is Emile Simpson’s *War From the Ground Up*, which adopts a view of conflict from the tactical perspective, looking upwards.³⁶ This is useful for junior military officers who so often are the implementers of military strategy. Alternately, there is the top-down view. Journalist Bob Woodward is the most prolific practitioner in this genre, who has written many books about the highest part of the national security hierarchical chain, notably during the American wars in Iraq and

Lilienstern, *On Engagements* (Berlin: G. Reimer, 1817), 3. Cited in Beatrice Heuser, *The Strategy Makers: Thoughts on War and Society from Machiavelli to Clausewitz* (Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger Security International, 2010), 175.

³³ Clausewitz, *On War*, 75.

³⁴ Frank Hoffman, “On Strategy: Building the Whole House,” January 16, 2014, *War on the Rocks*, text, accessed January 2, 2016, <http://warontherocks.com/2014/01/on-strategy-building-the-whole-house/>.

³⁵ Michael C. Horowitz, Allan C. Stam, Cali M. Ellis, *Why Leaders Fight* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 20-21.

³⁶ Simpson, *War From the Ground Up*.

Afghanistan.³⁷ Both Simpson and Woodward see war with vertical, latitudinal perspectives. While these may be useful for some scholarship, this dissertation instead pursues a more horizontal approach by evaluating supreme commanders' performance across the front lines from one another.

Supreme commanders occupy a privileged position between the "centurion's tactical acumen" and positions at the top of military hierarchy, requiring both political and "strategic ability."³⁸ This is because the supreme commander, as the senior military strategist, "has obligations reaching both higher and lower, neither of which can be performed in isolation from each other."³⁹ The supreme commander connects to policy and the political sphere while at the same time overseeing tactical efforts for the friendly cause. As one interpretation of Clausewitz puts it, this is war from the center of the "storm," the duel between supreme commanders.⁴⁰

This duel is relevant today, apparent in a lecture by retired General Stanley McChrystal, former commander of all coalition forces in Afghanistan, who acknowledged his enemy had the greatest influence on McChrystal because "he forced me to think about how to fight."⁴¹

This perspective is useful even in modern warfare, in which it is often said "there is no front line," and so there may not be a linear frontier between two combatants. However, anywhere there is a contested space between two combatants, even if it is not necessarily being contested in the physical realm (i.e. ideas), there is value in studying such engagements. Provided there is violent intent and action directed between two combatants, the "duel" perspective helps understand the utility of supreme command. Consider, for example, the U.S. war effort in Iraq, which often featured no set front line. There were, additionally, multiple combatants fighting against the U.S.-led coalition, such as: Al Qaeda terrorists, Sunni tribes, Shi'a militias, and Kurdish separatist groups. Even these multiple armed factions and forces, with separate political grievances, typically shared a common military objective to harm and eject Western militaries from Iraq and the greater Middle

³⁷ Bob Woodward, *Plan of Attack: The Definitive Account of the Decision to Invade Iraq* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2004). See also Bob Woodward, *The War Within: A Secret White House History 2006-2008* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2008). See also Bob Woodward, *Obama's Wars* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2010).

³⁸ Jason W. Warren, "The Centurion Mindset and the Army's Strategic Leader Paradigm," *Parameters* 45:3 (Autumn 2015), 29.

³⁹ Francis Park, "A Framework for Developing Military Strategists," *Infinity Journal* Vol. 5, Issue 1, (Fall 2015), 11.

⁴⁰ Note: In at least one translation, Clausewitz analogizes command in war to command of a "storm-tossed ship." See John E. Tashjean, "Talking Point: The Ideal General of General von Clausewitz," *RUSI Journal* 131:4 (1986), 76.

⁴¹ Stanley McChrystal, "Public Lecture: My Share of the Task," February 25, 2015, in *Pritzker Military Library*, video, accessed January 2, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M7k9hZDCj8I>.

East. The duel still applies when warfare features one actor against many, provided the many seek common strategic goals.

This perspective is important because, as the opponent is always a willed one, performance in war must be measured relative to the opponent. Retired British Royal Navy officer Steven Jermy has raised this point, “the term ‘good strategy’ is a poor term. Strategy, generally speaking, is about a dialectic, it’s about a confrontation, so that’s why ‘superior’ is the much better term, because strategy can only be gauged in terms of confrontation.”⁴² Moreover, Correlli Barnett’s observation that “most British defeats have been caused by stupidity,” can only be true in a relative sense, measured against the opponent.⁴³ This standard is inherently subjective, because the enemy’s efforts are the pre-conflict unknown standard against which success is measured. A combatant will not know how “good” he or she has to be until the day of the contest; Colin Gray has reinforced this point, that the strategist “need only be good enough” to be better than the enemy.⁴⁴

This subjective standard can be objectively measured, but only after-the-fact, which is to say, post-conflict. Only then can one compare the relative, cumulative performance of two supreme commanders to understand and explain the result. This dissertation adopts as its lens that war is a duel and will focus research on the temporal part of the duel that mattered most in the eventual result.

1.4 Framework Two: Judgments and Decisions Drive War

Judgment is critical to the conduct of war. Thinking comes before fighting as the mind guides the fist. Doctor and author Atul Gawande has noted a mentor used to say, “Most surgery is done in your head,” leading Gawande to derive that “performance is not determined by where you stand or where your elbow goes. It’s determined by where you decide to stand, where you decide to put your elbow.”⁴⁵ Actions begin with thought, and so the ability to deconstruct thought which precedes action is key to understanding outcomes. This is true even more so with military judgment. Whereas a doctor’s decision is often for a narrow audience (i.e. the patient), the nature of military conflict is

⁴² Steven Jermy, “Strategy for Action: Using Force Wisely in the 21st Century,” October 26, 2011, in *Ethics, Law and Armed Conflict Programme, Oxford University*, audio, accessed January 2, 2016, <http://podcasts.ox.ac.uk/strategy-action-using-force-wisely-21st-century>.

⁴³ Correlli Barnett, *The Desert Generals*, quoted in Norman Dixon, *On the Psychology of Military Incompetence* (London: Pimlico, 1976), 157.

⁴⁴ Colin S. Gray, “The Strategist as Hero,” *Joint Force Quarterly* 62, 3rd Quarter (July 2011), 45.

⁴⁵ Atul Gawande, “Personal Best,” in *Leadership: Essential Writings By Our Greatest Thinkers* ed. Elizabeth D. Samet (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2015), 155. Originally published in *The New Yorker* (October 3, 2011).

that a great many individuals must work in concert to achieve some mission or aim. Because of this need to coordinate widely, we have dispatches and military records which provide insight into these judgments.

The philosopher John Locke once explained “an act of knowledge is based upon certain understanding, while an act of judgment occurs when knowledge is uncertain or incomplete, and the shortfall in knowledge must be made good by presumption.”⁴⁶ This uncertainty is endemic to military operations because they always take place against a living, willed opponent. The presence of a dynamic enemy means one must necessarily deal with uncertainty. Theorist Alfred Thayer Mahan also wrote extensively on teaching military command and that such circumstances are dependent upon “the large play of contingency.”⁴⁷ (He also considered the quest for military certainty a crippling mistake.⁴⁸) British Field Marshal Archibald Wavell agreed, stating “the mind of the general in war is buried, not merely for 48 hours but for days and weeks, in the mud and sand of unreliable information and uncertain factors.”⁴⁹ War literally cannot continue absent judgment and decision because they are what enable war to proceed through such uncertainty. Even if an opponent forestalls a particular judgment or commits to strategic patience, these non-judgments still register a strategic effect with the opponent just as an active judgment might.

As strategic judgment always takes place under uncertainty, it is often paired with another factor in order to counteract this uncertainty. Antulio Echevarria has described this pair as “sense” and “sensibility.”⁵⁰ This is both the judgment itself (e.g. “sense”) paired with the internal strength (e.g. “sensibility”) to carry it out. Furthermore, historian Jon Sumida finds,

The synthesis of judgment and will was intelligent emotion—or, in a word, intuition. When the degrees of uncertainty and danger were extremely high as they were likely to be at a time of crisis during a battle or campaign, extraordinary intuition was required to promote rapid and decisive command that transcended mere assertion of judgment to become creative performance, or in other words, an artistic act.⁵¹

⁴⁶ Jon Tetsuro Sumida, *Inventing Grand Strategy and Teaching Command: The Classic Works of Alfred Thayer Mahan Reconsidered* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), 104. Quotes John Locke, “Book Four: Of Knowledge and Opinion,” in *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, abridged and ed. A.D. Woozley (Cleveland, OH: Meridian, 1964; first published 1690), 403.

⁴⁷ Sumida, *Inventing Grand Strategy*, 52.

⁴⁸ A. T. Mahan, *The Life of Nelson: The Embodiment of the Sea Power of Great Britain, Volume I* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1968), 125.

⁴⁹ Archibald Wavell, *Generals and Generalship: The Lees Knowles Lectures delivered at Trinity College, Cambridge, in 1939* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1941), 4.

⁵⁰ Echevarria, *Clausewitz and Contemporary War*, 108.

⁵¹ Sumida, *Inventing Grand Strategy*, 104.

Admittedly, there are difficulties in studying matters that are internal, psychological, and temporal, something this dissertation will take on. But while challenging, this dissertation will lean as much as possible on objective judgments that are verifiable in the historical record.

Lastly, how does the modern military conceive of these war judgments? Don Snider has written extensively on the military as a profession, and finds, “Professions deal in expert knowledge. Systematized, scientific body of knowledge theoretical and practical, it takes years to learn, it takes longer to practice.”⁵² Snider concludes this description of distinct expertise with a focus on judgment: “If we define ‘moral’ as meaning influencing the life of another human being” then “the practice of the military professional...[is] the repetitive exercise of discretionary judgment...[with] high moral content.”⁵³

Judgment and decisions are necessary at war to overcome the uncertainty inherent to an activity defined by the constant presence of a living, willed enemy. Judgment and decisions are what propel war forward, and at the core of all military endeavors. War may be a clash of wills, but it is equally a clash of judgments.

1.5 Research Process

In light of these two frameworks, this dissertation does four basic things. First, it asks whether supreme commanders can affect war outcomes. This preliminary hurdle must be crossed, and will engage with some of the different scholarly fields that provide input on the topic. Second, this dissertation will ask what characteristics make supreme commanders exemplary. Due to the relative lack of literature on supreme commanders, this dissertation will consider a wider class of writing that discusses the broader (related) subject of generalship.

After the preliminary question of whether supreme commanders can affect outcomes is addressed, and a set of successful characteristics is developed, the dissertation then moves on to case studies. The three case studies will compare this set of exemplary characteristics to three successful supreme commanders (Washington, Grant, and Eisenhower), and search for patterns that transcend time. Finally, this dissertation will conclude by discussing the findings, their utility, and to what extent these traits can be learned through education or experience.

⁵² Don Snider, "Public Lecture: Future Trends in American Civil-Military Relations," April 2, 2011, in *Foreign Policy Research Institute*, audio, accessed January 2, 2016, <http://www.fpri.org/multimedia/2011/04/future-trends-american-civil-military-relations-audio-video>.

⁵³ Snider, “Future Trends.”

This dissertation is restricted to cases in which a successful supreme commander guided a war to successful conclusion. The case studies in this dissertation represent the most meaningful and high consequence conflicts for the United States: the Revolutionary War, the Civil War, and World War II. Generals Washington, Grant, and Eisenhower all successfully concluded these major wars as supreme commander.

From the broadest perspective, this dissertation employs John Stuart Mill's "method of difference" which identifies similar general variables (e.g. war, context) and "different values on the study variable" (e.g. adversary supreme commanders).⁵⁴ This is important for a reason identified by J.F.C. Fuller:

Comparisons are often waste of time, and more especially so when they are made out of place and out of date. Thus, to compare Alexander the Great with Napoleon would not be a profitable task...Grant we can, however, compare with Lee, and Lee with Grant; for though in so many ways these two men were different, they were of the same nation, they fought at the same date and in the same war.⁵⁵

This dissertation specifically evaluates successful supreme commanders in context against the enemy and in the environment against which they had to contend. It evaluates this performance and how it contributed to a war's successful conclusion.

Through process tracing, this dissertation backtracks from the war's outcome to the war's most consequential campaign. Some would call this the "decisive" campaign, in that it exercised a "decisive" impact on the war; other historians prefer to call it a "terminal" campaign, to denote a "strategically important" campaign that exercised the greatest influence on the war's ultimate outcome. This dissertation will adopt the term "terminal" campaign to indicate that the campaign in question had the most sway over the war's termination and result.⁵⁶

This dissertation employs process tracing "by identifying intervening steps" between a war's successful military conclusion (i.e. Confederate surrender at Appomattox Court House in the

⁵⁴ Stephen Van Evera, *Guide to Methods for Students of Political Science* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997), 57.

⁵⁵ J.F.C. Fuller, *Grant and Lee: A Study of Personality and Generalship* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1957; reprint First Midland Book Edition, 1982), 242.

⁵⁶ In doing so, this dissertation takes no strong position on the distinction between "decisive" and "terminal." In this case, what matters most is that the campaign was the most consequential. Spiller, "Six Propositions," 18.

American Civil War) and its terminal campaign (i.e. Union offensive, spring-fall 1864).⁵⁷ In these cases, the objective is to logically walk backwards in time from a successful war's conclusion to the terminal campaign. This campaign's outcome is linked to the successful end of the war through strategic effect, which is the ability of one side to "generate desired effect upon the future course of events."⁵⁸

In most wars guided to successful conclusion by one side's strategic efforts, one side generated net positive strategic effect during the terminal campaign, which led to the war's outcome. Strategic effect is "the cumulative and sequential impact of strategic performance upon the course of events." More broadly, "the immediate product of strategy is strategic effect. This effect is registered in the willingness or ability of the enemy to begin or continue the struggle." Though strategic effect is "one among those mysterious qualities that cannot be observed and measured directly," we are able to "find material evidence of its recent and current presence."⁵⁹ After supreme commanders make judgments and then execute military strategy, their actions, or inactions, generate strategic effect. In sum: positive, neutral, and negative strategic effect comes as a result of relative judgments, which accumulate to influence policy accomplishment (or failure).

Another point to consider is to eliminate structural (i.e. "guns, germs, or steel") causes.⁶⁰ The researcher ought to show that both belligerents, particularly the losing side, had the ability and willingness to fight, important because "wars begin [and continue] not by accident, but with an agreement to fight, deliberately and with purpose."⁶¹ At the beginning of the terminal campaign, both sides must be said to have had an opportunity, to prove that neither the war's outcome or the terminal campaign was a forgone conclusion.

"Opportunity" is defined here as a plausible way for one supreme commander to achieve a sustainable political outcome consistent with vital or survival national interests.⁶² This is important because this dissertation should demonstrate that the losers still had viable ways to some form of victory when entering the terminal campaign.

⁵⁷ Alexander George, "Case Studies and Theory Development: The Method of Structured, Focused Comparison," in Paul Gordon Lauren, ed., *Diplomacy: New Approaches in History, Theory, and Policy* (New York: Free Press, 1979), 40.

⁵⁸ Gray, *The Strategy Bridge*, 251.

⁵⁹ Gray, *The Strategy Bridge*, 18, 81, 251.

⁶⁰ See Jared Diamond, *Guns, Germs, and Steel: The Fates of Human Societies* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1997).

⁶¹ Spiller, "Six Propositions," 10.

⁶² Using Sherman Kent's probability scale devised for the early Central Intelligence Agency, "plausible" in this case is defined as odds greater than "almost certainly not," mathematically starting at a range of 7-12%, and likely higher. See Philip E. Tetlock and Dan Gardner, *Superforecasting: The Art and Science of Prediction* (New York: Crown Publishing, 2015), 56.

To disprove any notion that the successful supreme commanders were “destined” to win, this dissertation will also engage in counterfactual historical work in an effort to consider how those losing supreme commanders might have won.⁶³ Specifically, are there credible, scholarly historians that have advanced the argument that the outcome of the terminal campaign could have gone another way? If so, this means the losing supreme commander might have obtained a different outcome with another set of judgments. In short, the losing side could be said to have had “opportunity.” Of course, this opportunity must be in balance with another quality: fighting power.

“Fighting power,” sometimes called “combat effectiveness,” can be either a broad or a narrow concept.⁶⁴ Martin van Creveld has narrowly defined fighting power as the “sum total of mental qualities that make armies fight.” Alternately, this dissertation takes the term more broadly, in line with what van Creveld called the sum of an “army’s worth as a military instrument” which is “the quality and quantity of its equipment multiplied by those total mental qualities that make armies fight.”⁶⁵ Thus, one might consider fighting power to be the sum total of combat ability: the entire physical, mental, and moral prowess of one side’s fighting forces. While numbers on either side might not be exactly equal, what matters most is that a combatant has the requisite fighting power for an opportunity to achieve victory. The object is sufficient capability and capacity to meet requirements and objectives, not necessarily some numerical figure equal to or matching the opponent’s material strength.

The next step in studying a supreme commander’s efficacy is to determine precisely which judgments mattered most. Philip Tetlock has described such a method, which he calls Bayesian question clustering. Tetlock described a challenge with strategic prediction: often what gets asked is the “big question, but the big question can’t be scored. The little question doesn’t matter [as much] but it *can* be scored.”⁶⁶ For example, if one wanted to know if there would be another Korean War next year, it would be incredibly difficult to determine, owing to the natural ambiguity of such a multifaceted problem. However, one could make relatively smaller predictions and judgments about North Korean intentions to go to war in the short term (i.e. will North Korea launch cyber-attacks in the next three months?). The advantage to the relatively smaller questions is they are objectively answerable. Tetlock compares Bayesian question clustering to the painting technique of pointillism: “dabbing tiny dots on the canvas, nothing more. Each dot alone adds little. But as the dots collect,

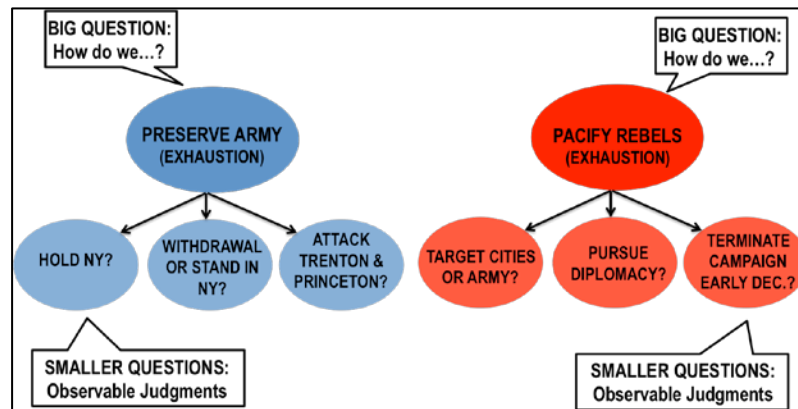
⁶³ See *What If? The World’s Foremost Military Historians Imagine What Might Have Been* ed. Robert Cowley (New York: Berkley Books, 2000). See also *What Ifs? of American History: Eminent Historians Imagine What Might Have Been* ed. Robert Cowley (New York: G.P. Putnam’s Sons, 2003).

⁶⁴ Gray, *The Strategy Bridge*, 214.

⁶⁵ Martin van Creveld, *Fighting Power: German and U.S. Army Performance, 1939-1945* (Wesport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1982), 3.

⁶⁶ Tetlock and Gardner, *Superforecasting*, 263, 262.

patterns emerge. With enough dots, an artist can produce anything from a vivid portrait to a sweeping landscape.”⁶⁷



Above, one can see an example of Bayesian question clustering with respect to the overarching challenges and strategies in 1776 faced by the Continental Army and British Army, underpinned by the key judgments and decisions each supreme commander had to make about how to succeed in their chosen approach.

Once the critical judgments in the terminal campaign are identified, the dissertation uses focused, structured questions and process tracing to detect patterns.⁶⁸ Each integral judgment first raised itself as a challenge; next, a choice was made; and finally, the clash of forces, which led to another set of challenges, repeating the cycle. This is the cycle of supreme command at war.

By focusing on this process, we can evaluate the strategic effect of each supreme commander’s judgments and how they interacted, discerning, on balance against the other, whose judgment was superior, as well as other characteristics at play in these intense interactions.

These judgments are available for review in the written record. The research focuses on quantifiable, falsifiable data to be found in primary source records (i.e. dispatches and memoranda). These are direct artifacts of judgment, which may be used to quantify and qualify how different supreme commanders thought about strategic judgments. As J.F.C. Fuller advised: What was “the governing reason for an action?”⁶⁹ There were other individuals involved in the war effort who were facing the same questions and came to different conclusions. Thus, we know we are putting these supreme commanders in the context of their time because we can observe that others came to

⁶⁷ Tetlock and Gardner, *Superforecasting*, 263

⁶⁸ George, “Case Studies and Theory Development: The Method of Structured, Focused Comparison.”

⁶⁹ J.F.C. Fuller, *Generalship: Its Diseases and Their Cure* (Harrisburg, PA: Military Service Publishing Company, 1936), 78.

different judgment having witnessed the same situation. These were real choices with alternate options for the case study supreme commanders.

Moreover, “in war against a competitive foe,” one side’s leadership must “outthink that foe...to be successful in outfighting him.”⁷⁰ The fundamental point is that thought precedes action. The thoughts and judgments are recorded in the dispatches, then action follows, which produces observable results. Process tracing works because one can immediately observe the supreme commander’s judgments and results. This militates against the arguments of some international relations scholars, who claim, “there are no clear metrics to assess the costs and benefits of a particular [strategic] course of action, even in retrospect.”⁷¹ And yet, this is often how war works, as American Civil War General William T. Sherman wrote, quoting a friend, “Of course knowledge is power, we all know that: but mere knowledge is *not* power, it is simply possibility. *Action* is power, and its highest manifestation is action with knowledge.”⁷² Moreover, for supreme commanders, this “action” is undertaken with wide strategic considerations, as Aleksandr Svechin described the military “choice between two alternatives” as requiring a “rise to a strategic level of thinking.”⁷³

Within these cases, having identified the key judgments for each case, the dissertation then interrogates the judgments of each of the supreme commanders using primary source documents supplemented when necessary by appropriate secondary sources.

These cases and findings are subject to limits. First, they are all high profile, pre-nuclear era, American, and likely will never be predictive until science finds a way into a person’s thoughts in real time. These cases are small-*n* and certainly not exhaustive and should be viewed as a starting point for further investigation of the supreme commanders’ important role and position.

A second issue is this research is linguistically limited; the researcher speaks only one language and scholarly resources in German in the Eisenhower case study were inaccessible, though it must be noted that this did not pose a critical problem as the most important work for this particular research has been translated into English.

George Reed, in his book on “toxic” leadership, has also pointed to another challenge in research, that of “leadership attribution bias.” The problem is that without care, researchers can “place unwarranted emphasis on individual characteristics to explain behavior rather than

⁷⁰ Lloyd J. Matthews, “The Uniformed Intellectual And His Place in American Arms; Part I: Anti-intellectualism In the Army Yesterday and Today,” *Army Magazine* (July 2002), 20.

⁷¹ David M. Edelstein and Ronald R. Krebs, “Delusions of Grand Strategy: The Problem With Washington’s Planning Obsession” *Foreign Affairs* Vol. 94, No. 6 (November/December 2015), 111.

⁷² William T. Sherman, “The Grand Strategy of the War of the Rebellion,” *The Century Magazine* (February 1888), 597.

⁷³ Aleksandr A. Svechin, *Strategy*, ed. Kent D. Lee (Minneapolis, MN: East View Publications, 1992), 73.

considering external factors.”⁷⁴ As this dissertation argues simply that supreme command matters as one factor among others, and not as a single causal factor in war outcomes, this potential pitfall seems reasonably mitigated.

One other objection to studying a war’s outcome is “luck.” Though eliminating this real world variable cannot ever be complete, the structure of this particular dissertation should allay concerns that luck might have been the principal cause in these strategically successful outcomes. Luck in war occasionally provides temporary, tactical advantage, but the critical determinant remains the judgment to take advantage of short-term favorable circumstances. While luck may nudge battlefield outcomes somewhat, it does not win wars or bring about strategic success.

Specifically, this dissertation considers relatively lengthy periods of time such that any temporary tactical advantage gained through luck or fortunate circumstance could not explain the outcome of a campaign or war.⁷⁵

⁷⁴ George E. Reed, *Tarnished: Toxic Leadership in the U.S. Military* (Lincoln, NE: Potomac Books, 2015), 9.

⁷⁵ Tetlock and Gardner, *Superforecasting*, 99.

2. The Characteristics of Exemplary Supreme Commanders

2.1 *The Supreme Commander's Quest for Victory*

The supreme commander's core objective is to achieve the state's desires, or some better version of peace, which is most commonly translated as a quest for military victory. Multiple academic and military literature traditions have attempted to explain the attainment of successful war outcomes, several of which will be discussed in this chapter. This chapter finds supreme commanders' can affect war outcomes, perhaps not in an independently causal way, yet this role is a major factor to consider in scholarly thinking about conflicts, which is why the supreme command position is merits study in international relations and beyond.

2.2 *What Causes Victory?*

To lay important groundwork, linguistically, "strategy" derives from the Greek word *strategos* (or *strategoi*) for "general."⁷⁶ Generals and supreme commanders are the functional agents of military strategy in an effort to generate favorable war outcomes. Supreme commanders employ strategies to achieve victory, or some other aim of the state. This links the term "strategy" with supreme command.

An examination of supreme command begins with a larger class of literature that includes multiple fields of inquiry, like international relations, history, strategy, generalship, and senior military leadership. This is because, as Lawrence Freedman has written, a supreme commander must simultaneously consider factors as diverse as politics, engineering, sociology, psychology, geography, history, and economics to get the "best out of one's own side," and to defeat an adversary.⁷⁷ So when evaluating supreme command, it is helpful to start with a single question that unites several disparate ideas on the subject: What causes victory?

Some doubt it is even possible to guide a war to successful conclusion. Richard Betts wrote as much in a provocative article asking whether strategy is an "illusion." Betts found "strategies cannot be evaluated because there are no agreed criteria for which are good or bad."⁷⁸

⁷⁶ Robert Ayson, "Strategic Studies," in *The Oxford Handbook of International Relations*, eds. Chris Reut-Smit and Duncan Snidal (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 559.

⁷⁷ Lawrence Freedman, "Does Strategic Studies have a Future?" in *Strategy in the Contemporary World, 4th Edition*, eds. John Baylis, James J. Wirtz, and Colin S. Gray (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 384-385.

⁷⁸ Richard K. Betts, "Is Strategy an Illusion?" *International Security* Vol. 25, No. 2 (Fall 2000), 5.

Historian John Keegan goes even farther and has openly questioned if the same concept holds any value “at all.”⁷⁹

Moreover, others have argued the practice of military strategy today is effectively paralyzed owing to fear of “complexity.”⁸⁰ David Kilcullen has admitted to “days in the field” when he’s “felt a sense of dissonance about our reliance on ‘pure’ or binary theories.”⁸¹ These sentiments suggest war transcends a rational approach, a position that has deep roots.

Eliot Cohen describes this as “strategic nihilism,” characterized by Leo Tolstoy’s classic *War and Peace*. Cohen relays principal character Prince Andrei Bolkonsky’s declaration that “there was not and could not be a science of war, and consequently no such thing as military genius.” Tolstoy, again speaking through Prince Andrei, states, “The best generals I have known were, in fact, stupid or absent-minded men.”⁸² The common theme amongst these several sources is that they find wars too chaotic for the purposeful employment of force to achieve policy goals. The problems are too complex, or simply too big and the means too small for supreme commanders to have an impact. And so, in this telling, supreme commanders would be unworthy of study.

But others, across several disciplines, are not entirely convinced. Pulled together, they are a wide and varied group. Each has a different explanation for success: historians focus on leadership, international relations scholars point to structural causes, strategists often advise practical techniques for dealing with the enemy, and professional military literature offers qualitative description of the ways military leaders exert distinct influence. Properly harnessed, these different lines of literature can help us think through what causes victory and whether the supreme commander plays a significant role at war.

Historians prefer personal, human explanations for successful war outcomes. To put it bluntly: people make choices and choices win wars. This argument proceeds by shining a spotlight on individuals’ ability to shape battles and wars. Biographies and autobiographies of military commanders and battle histories are popular. Another approach seeks out wisdom from the experience of senior military officers through either direct interviews or historical research. Two such examples include *American Generalship: Character is Everything* by Edgar Puryear and the

⁷⁹ John Keegan, *The Mask of Command* (New York: Penguin Books, 1987), 7.

⁸⁰ Michael J. Gallagher, Joshua A. Geltzer, Sebastian L. v. Gorka, “The Complexity Trap,” *Parameters* Vol. 15, No. 1 (Spring 2012), 5.

⁸¹ David Kilcullen, *Out of the Mountains: The Coming Age of the Urban Guerilla* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 15.

⁸² Cohen, *Supreme Command*, 235.

emphasis on personal “temperament” by T. Harry Williams in *McClellan, Sherman and Grant*.⁸³ An offshoot of this class of literature is the “Great Captain” or “Great Man” approach, which focuses entirely on the subjective characteristics of senior general officers.⁸⁴ This approach finds that great victories spring from, in British Field Marshal Bernard L. Montgomery’s telling, the alchemic combination of “a man” and “a plan.”⁸⁵ Historian Jeremy Black, in a public lecture titled, “How Washington Won,” ultimately provided a one-word answer: “leadership.”⁸⁶

In a Stanford University, Hoover Institution essay, the classicist Victor Davis Hanson penned:

What factors decide wars? Luck? Fervent ideology? Preponderance of material resources? Or is advantage achieved by superior manpower and morale? In modern times, is victory found largely in lethal cutting-edge technology?⁸⁷

Hanson’s follow-on book, *The Savior Generals*, answers these questions and makes the argument that on “rare occasions, generals and the leadership of single individuals can still matter more than...seemingly inanimate forces.” Moreover, “when the planets line up,” some general officers “by their own genius or lack of it, themselves either win or lose wars.”⁸⁸ Historians often believe maximum agency resides with the supreme commander.

One of the strongest cases for this comes from Eliot Cohen, who has written much about the role of strategic leaders in achieving successful war outcomes. For example, Cohen has noted that British Field Marshal Sir William Slim’s battlefield excellence came from his

⁸³ Edgar F. Puryear Jr., *American Generalship, Character is Everything: The Art of Command* (New York: Presidio Press, 2000). T. Harry Williams, *McClellan Sherman and Grant* (Chicago: Elephant Paperbacks, 1991).

⁸⁴ Margaret MacMillan, “History’s People: Personalities and the Past,” November 6, 2015, in *The CBC Massey Lectures: Lecture 5, Observers*, audio, at 49 minutes, accessed January 2, 2016, <http://www.cbc.ca/radio/ideas/history-s-people-personalities-the-past-lecture-5-1.3306171>.

⁸⁵ Max Boot, *Invisible Armies: An Epic History of Guerilla Warfare from Ancient Times to the Present* (New York: Liveright Publishing, 2013), 381.

⁸⁶ Jeremy Black, “How Washington Won,” October 3, 2015, at *The New York Historical Society*, audio, at 53 minutes, accessed January 2, 2016, <http://www.nyhistory.org/programs/how-washington-won>.

⁸⁷ Victor Davis Hanson, “Victory and the Savior Generals,” February 8, 2011, in *Hoover Institution: Defining Ideas*, text, accessed July 16, 2013, <http://www.hoover.org/publications/defining-ideas/article/66111>.

⁸⁸ Victor Davis Hanson, *The Savior Generals: How Five Great Commanders Saved Wars That Were Lost – from Ancient Greece to Iraq* (New York: Bloomsbury Press, 2013), Kindle edition, Locations 46-47.

“fortitude, strength of character, and sheer intellectual capacity.”⁸⁹ In another book, Cohen wrote that war outcomes do not come “as a product of masses of forces, strategic concepts, and technology,” and instead, Cohen argued, “it is personalities that often dictate outcomes.”⁹⁰ He took this argument farther in yet another book, finding that four civilian leaders in particular were notable for their “active, harassing, interventionist probing of their military leaders about military matters,” which “did make the difference. Take away each leader, and one can easily imagine a very different outcome to ‘his’ conflict.”⁹¹ The limitation in this argument is that it is entirely subjective. What was the proper level of intervention? At what point might this help (or harassment) become harm? Cohen’s assessment is entirely reliant on an external, distant interpretation of the relationship, which is methodologically challenging at best. And what about the enemy? Does it seem logical that war’s outcome should only come about as the result of one side’s actions, particularly a president or prime minister heckling a military supreme commander?

Cohen’s argument is subjective and therefore hard to scrutinize. Yet his analysis is equally intuitively valuable. The challenge is how to assess leadership in a more objective, yet still meaningful way.

There have also been many attempts to apply social science rigor to determining war outcomes, especially understanding the role command plays. Martin van Creveld has written, “[f]rom Plato to NATO, the history of command in war consists essentially of an endless quest for certainty.”⁹² Social scientists similarly seek certainty of another kind. While the challenge to historians is often objectivity, the social scientist’s blind spot is human agency. The principal way social scientists attempt to study war in society is to use explicitly measurable characteristics. One example would be Ian Morris’s book, *The Measure of Civilization*.⁹³ Morris uses “war-making capacity” as his way of determining war outcomes. He finds,

comparisons of war-making capacity must come down to measuring the destructive power available to societies. By “destructive power” I mean the number of fighters they can field,

⁸⁹ Eliot A. Cohen and John Gooch, *Military Misfortunes: The Anatomy of Failure in War* (New York: Free Press, 2006; first edition 1990), 245.

⁹⁰ Eliot A. Cohen, *Conquered Into Liberty: Two Centuries of Battles Along the Great Warpath That Made the American Way of War* (New York: Free Press, 2011), 265-266.

⁹¹ Cohen, *Supreme Command*, 174.

⁹² Martin van Creveld, *Command In War* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1985), 264.

⁹³ Ian Morris, *The Measure of Civilization: How Social Development Decides the Fate of Nations* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2013).

modified by the range and force of their weapons, the mass and speed with which they can deploy them, their defensive power, and their logistical capabilities.⁹⁴

Thus, the simple ability to destroy matters most. Supreme command does not matter, or, it only matters inasmuch as the supreme commander is a very minor part of the data, algorithms, and formulas for optimal destruction. In this way, social science shrinks supreme command to a meaningless measure.

Morris refers to retired military officer Trevor N. Dupuy's development of the "Quantified Judgment Model," a theory of combat that "employ[ed] no fewer than seventy-three variables."⁹⁵ Dupuy had an eclectic, catholic set of interests, including the subject of military genius.⁹⁶ Yet, the core of Dupuy's academic work was to develop a "theory of combat," which he defined as "the embodiment of a set of fundamental principles governing or explaining military combat, whose purpose is...to assist military commanders and planners to engage successfully in combat at any level."⁹⁷ As with Morris, this theory was quantitative, yet it went to a lower level of analysis and focused exclusively on tactical outcomes. Dupuy found that mass at the decisive point was the path to victory, as was counseled by Antoine de Jomini, the Swiss military officer that served under and wrote prolifically on Napoleon.⁹⁸

Morris, Dupuy, and Jomini all provide different variants on the broader preponderance claim, "that numerical superiority determines capability," which has been well described by Stephen Biddle, and is worth considering in full:

Many believe that states with larger populations, larger or more industrialized economies, larger militaries, or greater military expenditures should prevail in battle. This association of victory with material preponderance underlies the widespread perception that economic strength is a necessary precondition for military strength; that economic and military power are fungible; that economic decline leads to military weakness; and that economic policies merit co-equal treatment with political and military considerations in national strategy making. These perceptions are fundamental to the orthodox treatment of power in

⁹⁴ Morris, *The Measure of Civilization*, 175.

⁹⁵ Morris, *The Measure of Civilization*, 174.

⁹⁶ Trevor N. Dupuy, *A Genius for War – the German Army and General Staff, 1807-1945* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1977).

⁹⁷ Trevor N. Dupuy, *Understanding War: History and Theory of Combat* (London: Leo Cooper, 1992), 79.

⁹⁸ Antoine de Jomini, "Selection from *Summary of the Art of War*," in *The Sword and The Pen: Selections from the World's Greatest Military Writings* ed. Adrian Liddell Hart, prepared by Basil Liddell Hart (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1976), 145.

international relations theory. They are at the heart of hegemonic transition theory and the debate over relative gains stemming from international cooperation, and they define much of the realist/mercantilist position in international political economy. These beliefs also hold powerful policy implications for debates over the defense budget, the trade deficit, competitiveness, and long-range threat assessment for states like China, India, Russia, Germany, or Japan.⁹⁹

John Mearsheimer's "offensive realism" represents this view, focusing solely on structural factors like material balances of national power which roundly exclude the role of the individual.¹⁰⁰ Mearsheimer would not consider actor choice a significant variable worth study.

There is an important corollary to preponderance: technology. One view holds the technology available to the entire system of nation states shifts the advantage to either offensive or defensive action. Separately, a dyadic approach finds that technology determines who wins, regardless of attack or defense.¹⁰¹

Yet being bigger or more technologically advanced does not equate to better war outcomes. The United States was a larger, more powerful state than Vietnam or post-9/11 opponents in Afghanistan or Iraq. Neither conflict demonstrates that raw material size or technological superiority cleanly translated to victory. While material factors are important, they are not sufficient to guarantee strategic success.

Other international relations theories include Patricia Sullivan's argument that war aims are the critical independent variable which cause war victories.¹⁰² Sullivan charges that selecting appropriate and achievable war aims is what distinguishes victory from defeat. But this explanation ignores the shifting nature of war aims over time. And Sullivan's argument ignores enemy action, a clear limitation in a dynamic contest like war.

Ivan Arreguin-Toft's "Theory of Asymmetric Conflict" addresses the interaction of strategies, but is limited to cases of severely imbalanced forces (where one opponent was over five times materially stronger than the opponent). Arreguin-Toft's model considers military strategy a single, inflexible binary choice as opposed to reality's messier moving mosaic of

⁹⁹ Stephen Biddle, *Military Power: Explaining Victory and Defeat in Modern Battle* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004), 14.

¹⁰⁰ John J. Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2001).

¹⁰¹ Biddle, *Military Power*, 15, 16-17.

¹⁰² Patricia L. Sullivan, *Who Wins? Predicting Strategic Success and Failure in Armed Conflict* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 12-13.

military and political decisions.¹⁰³ This model only partially considers enemy interaction. An entire war's strategy is simply coded either "0" or "1." Such restrictive coding is unhelpful at understanding the key judgments within the conflict, not to mention those that changed over time.

Strategists that bridge the gap between historical and social science scholarship have also tried tackling the thorny problem of studying and manufacturing successful war outcomes. Their common lens is the consideration of the enemy and how this interaction impacts strategy. Edward Luttwak has described strategy's essential "paradox," in which a bad road becomes a good road because it is bad and therefore the enemy does not expect the other side to use it.¹⁰⁴ Basil H. Liddell Hart counsels the "indirect" method.¹⁰⁵ Hart's "core philosophy" is that the aim should be to "bypass the enemy's strengths" and win through "surprise and deception."¹⁰⁶

The objection here is a devolution into a predictable game of unpredictability. To continually do what the enemy does not expect becomes, over time, a formula the enemy might learn to anticipate.

Bevin Alexander has written two books on the subject: *How Great Generals Win* and *Sun Tzu at Gettysburg: Ancient Military Wisdom in the Modern World*. In *How Great Generals Win*, particularly, Alexander associates himself with Hart's ideas.¹⁰⁷ Against all foes, no matter what the challenge, this school of thought counsels to deceive, dislocate, and disarm to bring about victory.

Similarly, military strategist John Boyd's Observe-Orient-Decide-Act (OODA) Loop is a "time-based theory of conflict" in which commanders select the "least-expected" action.¹⁰⁸ The OODA Loop is a speedier version of Hart's indirect approach, and so the same criticism applies: it is predictable because it prescribes action. More important, the speed with which one undertakes action does not matter if one has made the wrong decision. Also, while the OODA

¹⁰³ Ivan Arreguin-Toft, "How the Weak Win Wars: A Theory of Asymmetric Conflict." *International Security* Vol. 26, No. 1 (Summer 2001): 93-128.

¹⁰⁴ Edward N. Luttwak, *Strategy: The Logic of War and Peace* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1987).

¹⁰⁵ Basil H. Liddell Hart, *Strategy, 2nd Revised Edition* (New York: Meridian, 1991; originally published London: Faber & Faber, 1954).

¹⁰⁶ Patrick Porter, *Military Orientalism: Eastern War Through Western Eyes* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), 123.

¹⁰⁷ Bevin Alexander, *How Great Generals Win* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1993), 23. See also Bevin Alexander, *Sun Tzu at Gettysburg: Ancient Military Wisdom in the Modern World* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2011).

¹⁰⁸ Robert Coram, *Boyd: The Fighter Pilot Who Changed the Art of War* (Boston: Back Bay Books, 2002), 328, 336.

Loop may be helpful at describing tactical effectiveness under certain circumstances, as it was inspired by one-on-one aerial combat, it cannot explain strategic gains because the OODA Loop is oriented to short and not strategic timeframes.

In the same vein, Jeremy Black has described the critical distinction between tactical “output” and strategic “outcome.” Black notes the German army has been cited as statistically the most efficient army of the twentieth century (i.e. ratio of casualties inflicted versus sustained), yet was the same army that lost the two biggest wars of the 20th century.¹⁰⁹ Tactical excellence does not necessarily win wars and so specifically tactical formulas would not seem helpful in determining strategic success.

When considering these different approaches to understanding war outcomes, three broad categorical headings emerge: stuff, people, and ideas.

There are flaws in each of these. Regarding “stuff” as causing war outcomes, this explanation clearly neglects the role of strategic choice, enemy will, and the endless interaction between the two sides that often generates yet-unknown opportunities for each side. Not to mention that more and better “stuff” has not resulted in desired outcomes for the United States in quite some time. “Ideas” also matter, but disembodied from arms and individuals with the wits and will to put them to use seems limited. And to proscribe a strategic approach, such as the OODA Loop, without tailored specificity to a particular enemy and conflict, likely cannot be what generates successful war outcomes. War outcomes generally do not turn out favorably for those with one-size-fits-all strategies.

The least flawed of the three paths to understanding war outcomes is through “people.” There is always a human being with responsibility and authority for a particular war effort. This individual faces difficult decisions that are not made by anyone else. Of course, those that argue “people” are what causes war outcomes generally fall victim to criticism for subjectivity. Even the commonly used expression that classifies this type of explanation, or causal factor, the “Great Captain,” hints at the problem. If they were truly “Great,” then what is there to criticize?

The challenge is to find methods of scholarly inquiry that focus on the role of the individual in a more objective way. Two recent books provide such a path.

¹⁰⁹ Jeremy Black, “A Century of Conflict: War, 1914-2014,” April 11, 2015, at *The New York Historical Society*, audio, at 20 minutes, accessed January 2, 2016, <http://www.nyhistory.org/programs/century-conflict-war-1914-2014>. See also van Creveld, *Fighting Power*. U.S. Army databases from the Second World War have been made publicly available, and scholarly websites (e.g. <http://ww2-weapons.com/fighting-power-of-the-wehrmacht/>) have utilized them for great benefit. In general, these sources reveal the German *Wehrmacht* was roughly 20-30% more effective than the Allies, and the Germans fared even better against the Soviets.

The first explains how nuanced decisions by tactical leaders can have an impact on battles. In order to explain the “relationship between force employment and combat outcomes,” Stephen Biddle set out to prove the value of force employment as the chief independent variable in explaining battlefield victories.¹¹⁰ His hybrid methodological approach came about because “it seemed intuitive that force employment should matter, and subjective assessments have long incorporated it” so he went about welding this to more objective measures so his work would be “more systematic and theoretically rigorous.”¹¹¹ Essentially, Biddle took the arguments of historians and grafted them onto a falsifiable social science framework. Biddle found preponderance and technological superiority were not predictive; instead, how one engaged in force employment mattered greatly.

The result was what Biddle described as the “modern system” of tactical and operational force employment.¹¹² Biddle showed the modern system’s way of organizing, equipping, training, and using forces often determined battlefield victory. Biddle’s work shows the importance of incorporating human agency in studying combat outcomes. Of course, Biddle’s work focused on battle and tactical outcomes, while this dissertation’s aim is the study of supreme commanders and broader war outcomes.

The second book is about how the unique attributes of individuals’ can impact war. Social scientists Michael Horowitz, Allan Stam, and Cali Ellis, in their book *Why Leaders Fight*, blend formal psychological variables, as observed in biographical data, with strategic decisions and outcomes at war, to generate an empirical theory about which international political leaders might more quickly resort to the use of force. Horowitz and his team argue powerfully that the “inclusion of psychological variables” for the leaders they study, including traits like age, military service, and family history, has value alongside more traditional measures like “material power.”¹¹³

Leaders matter at war. In particular, supreme commanders matter because they are the single individual on one side of the war effort that has the greatest impact on how the military effort turns out. Supreme commanders may not be the single cause that determines strategic outcomes, yet, they merit scrutiny as one important factor among others in what happens at war. Supreme commanders often decide the biggest battlefield questions: how to fight, when to fight, who will fight, and, critically, where to fight.

¹¹⁰ Stephen Biddle, “*Military Power: A Reply*,” *The Journal of Strategic Studies* Vol. 28, No. 3 (June 2005), 454.

¹¹¹ Biddle, *Military Power*, 17.

¹¹² Biddle, *Military Power*, 3.

¹¹³ Horowitz et al, *Why Leaders Fight*, 20, 21.

The challenge of studying supreme command in a more rigorous, objective way is a tough one. Because there are so few cases to pick from, especially with enough available scholarly material available to study in any reasonable depth, it is inevitable that such an approach will face criticism for being small-*n* and therefore holding no claim to universal applicability.

However, any charge of selection bias might also be balanced by the advantages of detailed context; rich, robust, objective data, readily available in archives for any researcher willing to put forth the intellectual effort.

Every explanation for what causes wartime success comes with attendant limitations. None is perfect. But it is sensible to consider the supreme commanders' value as having a distinctly important influence on the outcome of wars. To do so will expand scholarship in a meaningful and useful way.

2.3 How Should We Judge Supreme Commanders?

Almost everyone has a favorite general, especially when it comes to great wars and big battles. As T. Harry Williams has written, rating "generals is a favorite American pastime" in which most people have "at least one candidate for greatness." Yet, Williams laments,

in all the din hardly ever do the contestants attempt to set up any standards by which to measure generalship. If we are ever to understand anything about the subject of military leadership in the Civil War, or in any war, we need to ask ourselves some questions about the qualities that go to make up generalship. Just how do you recognize a great general? Exactly what is it that makes a general great?¹¹⁴

Williams writes, while there can be no "objective finality" and no "absolute standards,"

Still we should ask the questions, and we should attempt to identify some of the qualities that mark the great general. It is probable that most people make the business of evaluation too simple or too complex. They make it too simple if they judge only by results: it is possible for a general to win a battle or campaign without himself being directly responsible for the outcome. They make it too complex if they decide on the basis of education, experience, and technical skill: these are important but never determining factors.¹¹⁵

¹¹⁴ Williams, *McClellan, Sherman and Grant*, 3-4.

¹¹⁵ Williams, 4.

This attempt to identify great generals is certainly why there have been so many efforts to better understand generalship.¹¹⁶

The historian Barbara Tuchman gave a lecture to the students at the U.S. Army War College in 1972. As she saw it, generalship could be broken into two categories: “personal leadership” and “professional capacity.” This second category “encompasses the ability to decide the objective, to plan, to organize, to direct, to draw on experience and to deploy all the knowledge and techniques in which the professional has been trained.”¹¹⁷ To Tuchman, there was a broad component, common to all leaders, as well as a specific component, limited only to generals.

British military officers, often in short books written in the interwar period, seem to have been particularly interested in the study of supreme command and senior military figures. Major General J.F.C. Fuller’s *Generalship: Its Diseases and Their Cure* contended that youthfulness in a commander is desirable due to age’s impact on mental rigidity (i.e. he found younger supreme commanders, in their 40s, were best), and a few years later, Field Marshal Archibald Wavell’s *Generals and Generalship* reads like pushback in the other direction.¹¹⁸

More recently, “Strategic Leadership of the Army Profession,” by Leonard Wong and Don M. Snider, described what the authors considered to be the six “Army strategic leader [meta]competencies”: identity, mental agility, cross-cultural savvy, interpersonal maturity, world-class warrior, and professional astuteness.¹¹⁹ While these six characteristics state what a strategic leader should be, it makes no mention of what a strategic leader should specifically know and actually do while in command. And absent the word “warrior,” this list could apply to any successful human endeavor. It is too general to be of use.

One might also find more of the same in the list from Mark Moyar’s *A Question of Command: Counterinsurgency from the Civil War to Iraq*. Moyar’s book, about generalship and strategic leadership in counterinsurgency, includes a list of the “Ten Attributes of Effective Counterinsurgency Leaders.”¹²⁰

¹¹⁶ For this chapter’s purposes, because the literature on supreme command is so thin, the broader heading of “generalship” will be reviewed and considered applicable.

¹¹⁷ Barbara W. Tuchman, “Generalship,” *Parameters* (1972).

¹¹⁸ See Fuller, *Generalship*. See also Archibald Wavell, *Generals and Generalship*.

¹¹⁹ Leonard Wong and Don M. Snider, “Strategic Leadership of the Army Profession,” in *The Future of the Army Profession, Revised & Expanded, Second Edition*, ed. Lloyd J. Matthews, proj. dir. Don M. Snider (New York: McGraw Hill Custom Publishing, 2005), 611.

¹²⁰ Mark Moyar, *A Question of Command: Counterinsurgency from the Civil War to Iraq* (New Haven, CT, Yale University Press, 2009), 8-11.

1. Initiative
2. Flexibility
3. Creativity
4. Judgment
5. Empathy
6. Charisma
7. Sociability
8. Dedication
9. Integrity
10. Organization

Milan Vego of the U.S. Naval War College, does the same for a similar topic on senior military leadership:

Personality traits of [senior military commanders] include strong character, personal integrity, high intellect, sound judgment, courage, boldness, creativity, presence of mind, healthy ambition, humility, mental flexibility, foresight, mental agility, decisiveness, understanding of human nature, and the ability to communicate ideas clearly and succinctly.¹²¹

Military literature on the senior-most officers and supreme commanders often involves lists of characteristics. The challenge becomes figuring out what differentiates these lists from successful traits in any other human endeavor, like business or child rearing. All these traits, to some extent, are subjective measures: How would one ever know if they are creative or flexible enough? Is the mere presence of some characteristic enough to satisfy the criteria and notch a victory?

One other issue is that none of the above address or account for the presence of a willed opponent, in some ways the only marker that matters in a competition like war. And if one does not distinguish the particularities of war from other human activity, the result is mischaracterization. Consider retired general Stanley McChrystal's suggestion on turning business executives into senior general officers:

¹²¹ Milan Vego, "On Operational Leadership," *Joint Forces Quarterly* No. 77, (2nd Quarter 2015), 61.

I've dealt with a lot of chief executive officers who could walk in and be general officers in the military tomorrow. All we'd have to do is get them a uniform and a rank. They'd step in and it would be seamless—because they solve problems and they lead people.¹²²

McChrystal seems to believe generalship, and maybe even supreme command, is essentially a sort of universal and undifferentiated leadership. Interestingly, Milan Vego would likely disagree, having separately written that “the conduct of war is largely an art and not a science akin to a business activity.”¹²³ It is safe to say Vego would not see a business-executive-turned-general as likely to succeed.

Edgar F. Puryear, Jr., has written an impressive account of generalship in which he conducted over one hundred “one-on-one personal interviews with four-star generals.” His objective was to “determine why these generals thought they were successful leaders” and he “concluded that there is a pattern to successful leadership.” Puryear found one theory of military strategic leadership to be the

quality or trait approach, listing professional knowledge, decision, equity, humanity, loyalty, courage, consideration, integrity, selflessness, and character. But listing these qualities is not enough to describe a successful approach to leadership. These qualities need to be given life and meaning by describing them around the careers of men who have proven themselves as successful leaders in the greatest test of all, war.¹²⁴

So Puryear would add a sense of context to these lists of characteristics. Specifically, this considers how well these individuals functioned in action; he found one quality in particular stood out, described to him in an interview with General (and later president) Dwight D. Eisenhower: “making decisions is of the essence in leadership”¹²⁵

This echoes what stands out in Puryear's research: judgment and decisions. Importantly, judgment is a relatively objective measure because after some event has concluded, one can backtrack and determine the relative judgment and how outcomes flowed from decisions.

¹²² Lillian Cunningham, “Stanley McChrystal on how to shake up the military,” *Washington Post* (May 15, 2015), text, accessed January 2, 2016, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/on-leadership/wp/2015/05/15/gen-stanley-mcchrystal-on-shaking-up-the-military/>.

¹²³ Vego, “On Operational Leadership,” 61.

¹²⁴ Edgar F. Puryear Jr., *American Generalship, Character is Everything: The Art of Command* (New York: Presidio Press, 2000), 338.

¹²⁵ Puryear Jr., *American Generalship*, 44.

Eliot Cohen has conducted similar research, yet with a deeper and narrower set of subjects. His book, *Supreme Command*, focused on politicians, presidents, and prime ministers at war, a separate but related field of inquiry because wartime political leaders must be so well connected to their military supreme commanders. These two roles operate in parallel and so Cohen's material can be useful for this dissertation.

Cohen found that "extreme circumstances" give us a window to better see the inner workings of supreme command.¹²⁶ In short, tough times are as revealing to scholarship as they are dangerous to societies.

Cohen highlighted the importance and value of communication. As "nations are led and ruled by words," all Cohen's case study subjects were experts at deploying "speech and writing beyond all but the most gifted orators and authors." He found they also had physical courage, as well as the moral courage to "see things as they are, and not as one would like them to be," and the ability to "persevere despite disappointments."¹²⁷

In a passing reference on generalship, he found "no uniform standard for the selection of generals," because "leadership is contextual" and so "much of the art of civilian leadership in wartime resides in the ability to judge context, and not only context but character."¹²⁸ This indicates the importance with which Cohen views human interactions and that those with exceptional interpersonal skills can often excel.

Another strength, empathy, Cohen points to in a variety of ways. He mentions the ability to "intuit when others are even more wrong than oneself." This in addition to "integrating" tactical and operational details into a war's "grand themes." Cohen also points to the importance of emotional equanimity, a "moderation," and his study subjects "ability to discipline" their "passions" and their "understanding of when and how to counteract a trend." Additionally, they had a "ruthlessness," not just with enemies, but a "hardness" to contend with "wavering allies or internal opposition."¹²⁹

Eliot Cohen's work on political leadership in war may not translate equivalently to the military supreme commander's challenge. However, the two activities are closely related, and at the top these two figures, one political and the other military, are often so closely joined that their personal characteristics may, at times, be almost indistinguishable from one another.

¹²⁶ Cohen, *Supreme Command*, xiv.

¹²⁷ Cohen, *Supreme Command*, 218, 224.

¹²⁸ Cohen, *Supreme Command*, 217.

¹²⁹ Cohen, *Supreme Command*, 211, 212, 222, 220, 223.

Alfred Thayer Mahan focused on another interpersonal trait. He once wrote that famed British Admiral Horatio Nelson owed his greatness as a military commander to “Faith,” but then walked this phrase back owing to the suggestion of a theological meaning, and instead opted to use “confidence” or “conviction.” This he called the “bed-rock” on which military action is performed, the “solid substance of things which the man cannot see with his eyes, nor know by ordinary knowledge.” Mahan contrasted the average person’s “hesitations” with the “value and power of a faculty which reaches such certainty, reaches conviction, by processes which, indeed, are not irrational, but yet in their influence transcend reason.”¹³⁰

Mahan stands out for writing so firmly on behalf of a characteristic that might translate to something we know today as grit or focused determination. He counseled preparedness at war, the “sagacious appreciation of well-known facts,” yet was even more focused on a leader’s grittiness. While it was useful to have an “intellectual grasp and insight” in combat, Mahan thought that what matters at least as much is to “trust the inner light—to have faith—a power which dominates hesitation, and sustains action, in the most tremendous emergencies.”¹³¹

2.4 Military Genius

The phrase “military genius” is a definitional trap, a wicked problem in that there is no single, common definition of the term, and yet most can see its importance as one way of describing ideal supreme commanders. Even if disputed, few would dispute military genius’s importance as a concept.

It can even be seductively dangerous. As an eighteen-year-old, Paraguayan leader Francisco Solano Lopez thought of himself as a military genius; the result was that his war against the much larger Triple Alliance of Brazil, Argentina, and Uruguay “decimated Paraguay, its infrastructure, and its people,” and “resulted in the death of almost 60 percent of its population and nine out of every ten males.”¹³²

It might also be one way to better understand supreme command. If the supreme commander’s core objective is to achieve victory for the state, whatever that might entail, then military genius is the superlative, ideal-type, highest achieving version of supreme command.

¹³⁰ Alfred Thayer Mahan, “The Strength of Nelson,” in *Naval Administration and Warfare: Some General Principles* (Boston, MA: Little, Brown, and Company, 1918), 349. In *21st Century Mahan: Sound Military Conclusions for the Modern Era* Ed. Benjamin F. Armstrong (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2013), 137, 138.

¹³¹ Sumida, *Inventing Grand Strategy and Teaching Command*, 51, 52-53.

¹³² Horowitz et al, *Why Leaders Fight*, 2.

This section traces the origins of genius, to Napoleon's exceptional performance and Clausewitz's subsequent description, to the modern military conception and how the term is used today.

Harold Bloom has written about the distinction between "genius" and "talent." Bloom tells readers, "A 'talent' classically was a weight or sum of money, and as such...necessarily limited. But 'genius', even in its linguistic origins, has no limits."¹³³ The term was first used by the Roman author Plautus, more than two millennia ago.¹³⁴ Darrin McMahon reminds us,

The word itself is Latin, and for the ancient Romans who first used it and then bequeathed the term to us, a *genius* was a guardian spirit, a god of one's birth who accompanied individuals throughout life, connecting them to the divine.¹³⁵

Socrates and his ancient Greek contemporaries "believed in spirits hidden and unseen."¹³⁶ They called these *daimones*, which today would be considered an akin to "demons," an expression that had not yet taken on a negative connotation. Bloom described them as an "attendant spirit for each person or place," that "strongly influence[d]" each person for good or bad at different moments.¹³⁷ Everyone had access to these inspirational forces, which were considered separate from the person, yet serving the individual by providing the gift of new ideas.

Two hundred years on, Napoleon is still known as the "prime illustration of the type" and "provides a working definition of the 'Romantic genius.'"¹³⁸ Napoleon himself defined military genius as "the man who can do the average thing when all those around him are going crazy."¹³⁹ Darrin McMahon describes Napoleon as a new occurrence, because

Napoleon overthrew centuries-old customs, traditions, and laws. A destroyer, he abolished kingdoms. A creator, he made them anew. Here was the basis of a powerful Romantic myth that was at once heir to the original genius of the eighteenth century and a genuine original.

¹³³ Harold Bloom, *Genius: A Mosaic of One Hundred Exemplary Creative Minds* (New York: Warner Books, 2002), 7.

¹³⁴ Darrin McMahon, *Divine Fury: A History of Genius* (New York: Basic Books, 2013), xi.

¹³⁵ McMahon, *Divine Fury*, xiv.

¹³⁶ McMahon, *Divine Fury*, 7.

¹³⁷ Bloom, *Genius*, 7.

¹³⁸ McMahon, *Divine Fury*, 115.

¹³⁹ Rick Atkinson, *The Guns at Last Light: The War In Western Europe, 1944-1945, Volume Three of the Liberation Trilogy* (New York: Henry Holt, 2013), 17.

Combining creativity with action, originality with deeds, the genius could be a poet of the political, remaking the world in his image. The genius could be a legislator of the world.¹⁴⁰

For these reasons, in a recent U.S. Naval War College lecture, Professor Kevin McCranie remarked that Carl von Clausewitz “patterned many of his ideas of genius on Napoleon.”¹⁴¹

Modern popular historians continue to regularly comment on Napoleon’s success. Max Hastings recently cited Napoleon’s record of command as that of a “military genius,” and Andrew Roberts delves into statistics: “He got defeated [seven times]...but he won 46 of his 60 battles” which Roberts called “an astounding achievement for anyone.”¹⁴²

It was not just the numbers that earned him acclaim, there was another factor at work. The concept of genius is often dependent on other people recognizing an individual as a “genius.” This is the “social dimension of the construction of genius.” Moreover, it seems on some level there is a human desire to believe in greatness, that “endowing others with genius” often “fills a need” in the masses.¹⁴³

Sometimes individuals and governments exploit this public neediness. Napoleon, for example, in 1797 while in command of the French army in Italy, used propaganda to present himself as a man who “flies like lightning and strikes like thunder,” and who was “everywhere and who sees everything.”¹⁴⁴

Basil H. Liddell Hart has written about this difference which he assessed as “determining the nature of genius, as distinct from fame.” Hart found “the imagination of mankind” is often “more impressed by the flash of a meteor than by the more permanent radiance of a star that stays remotely in the sky. The career that ends with a sudden descent to earth...has a more human appeal.” Moreover, “to ensure such fame, it is more important for a general to win victories than to gain the victory. As with an artist, his ultimate standing depends not on whether success crowned his career, but on the masterpieces he produced in practising his art.” This

¹⁴⁰ McMahan, *Divine Fury*, 123.

¹⁴¹ Kevin McCranie, “Lecture on Napoleon,” March 20, 2008, at *U.S. Naval War College*, audio, accessed March 15, 2018. Note: this audio lecture was given as a disk to the researcher; the disk is part of the Naval War College distance study program and therefore not available in the public domain.

¹⁴² Max Hastings, “Everything Is Owed to Glory: Review of *Napoleon: A Life* by Andrew Roberts,” *Wall Street Journal* (Nov 1-2, 2014), C5. Andrew Roberts, “Napoleon the Great? A debate with Andrew Roberts, Adam Zamoyski and Jeremy Paxman,” October 9, 2014, in *Intelligence Squared Debates*, audio, at 37 minutes, accessed January 2, 2016, <http://www.intelligencesquared.com/events/napoleon-the-great-andrew-roberts-adam-zamoyski/>.

¹⁴³ McMahan, *A History of Genius*, 238-239.

¹⁴⁴ McMahan, *A History of Genius*, 117.

battle-winning flash and flair is why Hart finds in the American Civil War the generals Robert E. Lee, William T. Sherman, and Nathan Bedford Forrest are so often considered military geniuses.¹⁴⁵

Hart's argument, unfortunately, did not finish with much to use in the way of study. He did not go beyond identification of the difference between genius and fame. While limited, Hart's essay is still helpful in thinking through some of the underlying reasons why we see such a variance in who is considered a military genius.

Carl von Clausewitz had much to write on the subject of military genius in Chapter Three, Book One of *On War*.¹⁴⁶ There are several intellectual guideposts here that scholars might use to better understand exemplary military leadership, particularly because Clausewitz believed effective performance “especially at the level of strategic decision—is the product of genius.”¹⁴⁷ It is worth mention, again, that “military genius” here functions as a stand-in term for superlative supreme command.

Clausewitz began this chapter by laying out the terms of his discussion: in “any complex activity,” if one is “outstanding” and makes “exceptional achievements,” they might be called a “genius.” He instructed, “we cannot restrict our discussion to *genius* proper, as a superlative degree of talent.” Instead we must “survey all those gifts of mind and temperament that in combination bear on military activity.” Clausewitz viewed military genius as an exception that “rarely occur[s] in an army.”¹⁴⁸

Clausewitz sketched out six characteristics that describe the ideal military genius. He assessed a military genius would be civilized, possess superior judgment, determination, sense for terrain and geography, would be the military supreme commander, and hold in mind a constant dual vision which simultaneously considers the interaction of policy and military forces. This section considers each of these characteristics in order.

First, Clausewitz stated military genius would come from a “civilized society.” He wrote, these societies

possess a warlike character to greater or lesser degree, and the more they develop it, the greater will be the number of men with military spirit in their armies. Possession of military

¹⁴⁵ Hart, “What is Military Genius?”, 48-51.

¹⁴⁶ Clausewitz, *On War*, 100-112.

¹⁴⁷ Jon Tetsuro Sumida, “The Clausewitz Problem,” *Army History* (Fall 2009), 18.

¹⁴⁸ Clausewitz, *On War*, 100.

genius coincides with the higher degrees of civilization: the most highly developed societies produce the most brilliant soldiers, as the Romans and the French have shown us.¹⁴⁹

This dissertation focuses analysis on American supreme commanders, as historical and modern American society provides an ample supply of cases and, therefore, likely future utility. Clausewitz also crucially provides a description of the military genius's judgment:

If the mind is to emerge unscathed from this relentless struggle with the unforeseen, two qualities are indispensable: *first, an intellect that, even in the darkest hour, retains some glimmerings of the inner light which leads to truth; and second, the courage to follow this faint light wherever it may lead.* The first of these qualities is described by the French term, *coup d'oeil*, the second is *determination*.¹⁵⁰

In one lengthy sentence, Clausewitz lays out two tenets of military genius. The first is “a sensitive and discriminating judgment” that “can scent out the truth.” In the same chapter, in nearby passages, Clausewitz expounded on this characteristic as the possession of “superior insights,” “superior intellect,” and the “power of judgment,” which brings war to a “successful close.”¹⁵¹ Cumulatively, this can be summed up as superior judgment (relative to an opponent).

A determined will supports this superior judgment. Such “determination proceeds from a special type of mind, from a strong rather than a brilliant one.” Clausewitz augments this by remarking on balance, that a “strong spirit is not one that is simply capable of strong emotions, but one which retains its balance even in the presence of the strongest emotions, so that, despite the storms in the breast, insight and conviction are allowed the most subtle play, like the needle of the compass on a storm-tossed ship.” Raw mental horsepower is not enough, military genius is as much about conviction and balance than pure cognitive ability. This particular description provides a methodological challenge because it is subjective; Clausewitz acknowledges as much: “No matter how superbly a great commander operates, there is always a subjective element in his work.”¹⁵²

The next feature of military genius is the “relationship between warfare and terrain” which Clausewitz calls a “*permanent factor*.” Clausewitz wrote that mastery comes from “*a sense of*

¹⁴⁹ Clausewitz, *On War*, 101.

¹⁵⁰ Clausewitz, *On War*, 102.

¹⁵¹ Clausewitz, *On War*, 101, 111-112.

¹⁵² Clausewitz, *On War*, 101. Tashjean, “Talking Point: The Ideal General of General von Clausewitz,” 76. Clausewitz, *On War*, 154.

locality,” or, the “faculty of *quickly and accurately grasping the topography of any area* which enables a man to find his way about any time.” This gift comes from “*imagination*,” similar to a “poet or painter.” Years on, famous British wartime prime minister Winston Churchill would write, “painting a picture is like fighting a battle,” and that, “there must be that all-embracing view which presents the beginning and the end, the whole and each part, as one instantaneous impression retentively and untiringly held in the mind.”¹⁵³ This is the ability to take distant, disparate parts and pieces and draw them all together in mind to form a comprehensive whole.

On an even larger stage, a supreme commander “must aim at acquiring an overall knowledge of the configuration of a province, of an entire country. His mind must hold a vivid picture of the road-network, the river-lines and the mountain ranges, without ever losing a sense of his immediate surroundings.”¹⁵⁴ Mental-spatial imagination, related to terrain, was clearly important to Clausewitz’s sense of military genius.

Clausewitz also wrote there is a “major gulf” between “a general who leads the army as a whole” and the “senior generals immediately subordinate to him.”¹⁵⁵ Due to this fact,

Appropriate talent is needed at all levels if distinguished service is to be performed. But history and prosperity reserve the name of “genius” for those who have excelled in the highest positions—as [supreme commanders]—since here the demands for intellectual and moral powers are vastly greater.¹⁵⁶

Thus, Clausewitz believed military genius is for the supreme commander alone, while military talent describes aptitude and skill at the lower military ranks, because the challenges are so different.

The higher the rank, the more the problems multiply, reaching their highest point in the supreme Commander. At this level, almost all solutions must be left to the imaginative intellect...when one comes to the *effect* of the engagement, where material successes turn into motives for further action, the intellect alone is decisive.¹⁵⁷

¹⁵³ Clausewitz, *On War*, 109. Winston S. Churchill, *Painting as a Pastime* (Unicorn Press Ltd, 2013; originally published 1932), 46, 47.

¹⁵⁴ Clausewitz, *On War*, 110.

¹⁵⁵ Clausewitz, *On War*, 110.

¹⁵⁶ Clausewitz, *On War*, 110.

¹⁵⁷ Clausewitz, *On War*, 140-141.

Simultaneous consideration of the policy realm and military reality is the next characteristic. This duality functions simultaneously on dual tracks of policy awareness and the direction of strategic means. In Clausewitz's conception, the military genius must be able to do both at the same time, possessing the "ability to see things simply, to identify the whole business of war... Only if the mind works in this comprehensive fashion can it achieve the freedom it needs to dominate events and not be dominated by them."¹⁵⁸

To reiterate, these are the six characteristics Clausewitz used to describe military genius: the person would come from a civilized society, wield superior judgment, would be calmed by a steely determination, have an intuition for terrain, would be the supreme commander of a polity's military effort, and could keep a persistent focus on the twin considerations of policy desires and military realities.

In his writing, Clausewitz was inconclusive on whether or not these six were either the result of education and experience, or some gift handed down from the heavens.

At least one retired modern military general has advanced his own theory on military genius, Bob Scales, the former commandant of the U.S. Army War College. He finds four types of "strategic genius" in general officers. Scales considered George Patton and Stanley McChrystal "combat genius[es]," or, those "who fight beyond the plan" and "stay well ahead of the enemy in imaginative application of combat power." Next, "political genius[es]" include Generals Colin Powell and David Petraeus, those who "know how to wield and meld the elements of military power with allies, coalition partners, and politicians." Third, "institutional genius[es]" are those like Generals Peter Chiarelli and Creighton Abrams, leaders "brilliant" in their "ability to manage a very large institution and represent its equities in tune with the needs of the nation." And lastly, "anticipatory genius[es]" are those gifted with "the unique ability to think in time, to imagine conceptually where the nature and character of war is headed." This ability, according to Scales, "seems to be inherited rather than learned" and "is the most rare and precious of all four attributes and the one least likely to be developed through any predictable pattern."¹⁵⁹

Scales' list is helpful, but these stove-piped categories are open to charges that these are merely different contexts in which commanders might display genius. Sometimes, generals and supreme commanders fit different descriptions at different times. For example, Washington had to possess some institutional ability to develop the Continental Army as it was being fought in an

¹⁵⁸ Clausewitz, *On War*, 111, 578.

¹⁵⁹ Bob Scales, *Scales on War: The Future of America's Military at Risk* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2016), 189-191.

active war. He also required the ability to anticipate his enemy to survive. Washington exchanged orders and messages with a great variety of political leaders while on campaign, including the leadership of the Continental Congress, powerful state governors, and Native American tribes that if handled poorly, would have had a disastrous impact on his war effort. Lastly, he was close to the fighting at times and certainly demonstrated his combat abilities at several pivotal moments. The development of rigid criteria may be more suited to a modern context, but for a project that seeks to better understand successful supreme command, such an artificial division of the functions of a supreme commander would be a distraction from the other, more important criteria (i.e. how well they did against their opponent and whether they secured their war aims).

2.5 The Characteristics of Exemplary Supreme Commanders

It seems appropriate to return to historian T. Harry Williams's key question, "Just how do you recognize a great general?"¹⁶⁰ It is important to develop some characteristics and apply some criteria to use in better understanding supreme commanders.

In suit, historian Thomas Goss has suggested the best approach is to consider a supreme commander's "*overall* impact on the war effort—a balanced assessment of the consequences of his service, command decisions, and leadership on the achievement of the nation's war aims."¹⁶¹ In this rendering, supreme command is best seen as a broad strategic nudge, a contribution to a larger enterprise, as opposed to narrower tactical measures that focus on battlefield wins.

Another, much older writer, who addressed the same is August Rühle von Lilienstern, who wrote in 1818:

Every war and every [military] operation is based on Wherefore? And Why?, a purpose and a cause, which will give a specific character and a definite direction to each of its actions.

The individual operations have military purposes, the war as a whole always has a final political purpose, i.e. the war is engaged and carried out in order to achieve the political purposes which the State power has decided upon, according to its internal and external national conditions. The operations only serve to make possible the final purpose of the war. Whatever is achieved in these individual operations is not the ultimate purpose in itself, but only a means or a step towards the final purpose, a condition for the possibility of

¹⁶⁰ Williams, *McClellan, Sherman and Grant*, 3.

¹⁶¹ Thomas J. Goss, *The War Within The Union High Command: Politics and Generalship during the Civil War* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2003), 211.

attaining this final purpose. If the success of these operations does not lead to the [realization] of the political purposes, if indeed they clash with them, or do not further their attainment, they are pointless, however brilliant and exemplary their achievement may [otherwise] have been.¹⁶²

This description points to the fact that the duel against an opponent is an important part of war, but it is not necessarily the same as the pursuit of the war's purpose. For example, a war's purpose may be to achieve a new, more defensible border with another country, which is not the same as the fighting the adversary's army. As such, though performance in the duel matters, it is better to judge actions at war in relation to both the supreme commander's contest against an enemy and the supreme commander's ability to bring about the desired result.

The issue with Gross and von Lillienstern is that they provide measures so big that we may be unable to distinguish them from other factors. So the goal is to find measures that look more directly at the process that would logically lead to these outcomes.

After considering all this chapter's previous ideas, there are several characteristics this dissertation will focus on to judge the supreme commanders in the case study. To harness these ideas, this dissertation will look to the U.S. Army's manual on leadership, which business author Peter Drucker reportedly once called the "single best document written" on the subject.¹⁶³

Today, the U.S. Army's manual on leadership includes three key attributes of a leader: character, presence, and intellect. (It also includes three outputs, or competencies: a leader leads others, develops people, and achieves objectives.)¹⁶⁴

First, the intellect is the "mental tendencies or resources," which go to making a leader "mentally agile" and "good at judgment."¹⁶⁵ Eisenhower, Clausewitz, and Puryear confirm the importance of judgment, which might be represented by one's "mind."

Second, character comprises the "factors internal and central to a leader," including "demonstration of values" such as: loyalty, duty, respect, honor, empathy for others, and discipline.¹⁶⁶ Researcher Daniel Goleman has found that all effective leaders "have a high degree

¹⁶² August Rühle von Lillienstern, *On Small War* (Berlin: G. Reimer, 1818), 8. Translated in Beatrice Heuser, *The Strategy Makers: Thoughts on War and Society from Machiavelli to Clausewitz* (Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger Security International, 2010), 178.

¹⁶³ Reed, *Tarnished*, 9.

¹⁶⁴ Department of the Army, *Field Manual 6-22* (30 June 2015), 6-1.

¹⁶⁵ Department of the Army, *Field Manual 6-22*, 6-4.

¹⁶⁶ Department of the Army, *Field Manual 6-22*, 6-2.

of what has come to be known as emotional intelligence.”¹⁶⁷ This includes “social skills” for navigating interpersonal relationships, which he says can be strengthened over time through “practice” and “feedback from colleagues or coaches.”¹⁶⁸ These skills can be summed up under the umbrella term “empathy” (or, put another way, “heart”). Mahan wrote that this individual tact and diplomacy was important in a senior officer.¹⁶⁹

Third, presence is a “leader’s appearance” and “demeanor,” including the demonstration of “military and professional bearing, fitness, confidence, and resilience.”¹⁷⁰ Modern psychologist and researcher Angela Duckworth has written extensively on this as “grit.” She has found

no matter the domain, the highly successful had a kind of ferocious determination that played out in two ways. First, these exemplars were usually resilient and hardworking. Second, they knew in a very, very deep way what it was they wanted. They not only had determination, they had direction...It was this combination of passion and perseverance that made high achievers special. In a word, they had grit.¹⁷¹

Her test, graded on a “Grit Scale,” has been an “astoundingly reliable predictor” of those that complete West Point basic training, U.S. Army Special Forces qualification, and those “who were more likely to get further in their formal schooling.”¹⁷² Thus, “grit,” a directional determination, as opposed to a more general-purpose determination, is a useful shorthand for several of the characteristics under “presence.”

Judgment, empathy, and grit: these are the three key characteristics, representative of a wider set of important factors, of exemplary generalship and supreme command. These are what will be used to evaluate the supreme commander in action, by blending formal characteristics observed from biographical data with observed judgments and behaviors evidenced contemporaneously.¹⁷³

¹⁶⁷ Daniel Goleman, “What Makes a Leader?” in *On Emotional Intelligence* (Boston, MA: Harvard Business Review Press, 2015), 1.

¹⁶⁸ Goleman, “What Makes a Leader?” 3.

¹⁶⁹ Sumida, *Inventing Grand Strategy and Teaching Command*, 52-53.

¹⁷⁰ Department of the Army, *Field Manual 6-22*, 6-3.

¹⁷¹ Angela Duckworth, *Grit: The Power of Passion and Perseverance* (New York: Scribner, 2016), 8.

¹⁷² Duckworth, *Grit*, 10-12.

¹⁷³ Horowitz et al, *Why Leaders Fight*, 62. This technique is supported by Horowitz et al. For example, it is useful to look for formal characteristics in biographical data, like military background and upbringing, contemporary family and occupation.

3. George Washington

3.1 *Strategic Context in 1776*

How did General George Washington defeat the materially superior British army, led by General William Howe, in the early years of the American War of Independence? Particularly when the British held nearly every military, monetary, and political advantage possible?¹⁷⁴ Even more impressive, Washington's colonists had to start completely from scratch, with nothing, to take on perhaps the best trained military force in the world at the time.¹⁷⁵

1776 was a particularly difficult year for the American side, punctuated by Thomas Paine's immortal opening line from his pamphlet, *The Crisis*: "These are the times that try men's souls."¹⁷⁶ Paine penned these in late November 1776, while with the Continental Army, as they faced much more experienced British soldiers, whose average age was twenty-eight, with seven years under his ammunition belt; an American troop was roughly twenty and had less than six months of soldiering.¹⁷⁷ The sheer size of the British invasion force was overwhelming: 32,000 soldiers, 10,000 sailors, and 400 ships—larger than the biggest city in America at the time.¹⁷⁸ That same month, Washington's units reported a total of just over 16,000 effectives in the region.¹⁷⁹

How did Washington survive 1776 to ultimately succeed in the war? Considering such a material imbalance, this case demonstrates that while traditional head-to-head material strength matters, it is not a sufficient condition for success. Having more guns is useful and occasionally overwhelming, yet what matters more is if one side has enough guns to deal with the enemy and still obtain their policy aim. This case showcases this material sufficiency, as Washington commanded far fewer resources than Howe.

The British supreme commander in the American War of Independence in 1776 was General William Howe. A career military officer, he and his principal subordinates (Generals

¹⁷⁴ Jeremy Black, "How Washington Won," October 3, 2015, at *The New York Historical Society*, audio, at 36 minutes, accessed January 2, 2016, <http://www.nyhistory.org/programs/how-washington-won>.

¹⁷⁵ Edmund S. Morgan, *The Genius of George Washington* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1980), 3.

¹⁷⁶ David McCullough, *1776* (New York: Simon & Schuster Paperbacks, 2005), 251.

¹⁷⁷ Joseph J. Ellis, *Revolutionary Summer: The Birth of American Independence* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2013), 70.

¹⁷⁸ Andrew Jackson O'Shaughnessy, *The Men Who Lost America: British Leadership, the American Revolution, and the Fate of the Empire* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2013), 92.

¹⁷⁹ David Hackett Fischer, *Washington's Crossing* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 381.

Henry Clinton and John Burgoyne) were considered three of the finest officers in the British army, selected from among 119 candidates. To put a finer point on it, General Howe was selected for command over 110 senior officers, in part owing to his service in North America during the French and Indian War (also known as the Seven Years War). At the time, General Burgoyne wrote that the American war command required “a genius of the first class,” fitting, because some contemporaries described General Howe as a “military genius.”¹⁸⁰

The British king also dispatched Howe’s brother, Admiral Richard Howe, to command the naval part of this joint command. With such a close personal relationship, this meant the operations between the army and navy would be much more seamless and promised a great advantage in strategic mobility and amphibious assaults along the great eastern seaboard.¹⁸¹ Even General George Washington respected Howe as an opponent, and wrote in a letter to a friend on December 26, 1775: “[Howe is the] most formidable enemy America has.”¹⁸²

General George Washington took command of the Americans on June 16, 1775, at the age of 43, having fought with the British as a lieutenant colonel in the French and Indian War and with years of experience in managing a large plantation in Virginia.¹⁸³ He had been considered by many a top-notch soldier in his home state of Virginia during this earlier conflict, while others considered Washington’s earlier performance poor and deemed him inexperienced.¹⁸⁴

The American war effort presented a difficult task, to create an entire military while fighting a superior adversary.¹⁸⁵ For this reason, Washington had to function at all levels of war, even more so than perhaps any other general in American history (including the other supreme commanders in this study).¹⁸⁶ While he was certainly imperfect, he did possess a broad vision, understood the wider, strategic ramifications of the conflict, and worked exceedingly hard to maintain alliances while at war. Washington scholar Edward Lengel has written that “without

¹⁸⁰ O’Shaughnessy, *The Men Who Lost America*, 83, 86, 89.

¹⁸¹ O’Shaughnessy, *The Men Who Lost America*, 88.

¹⁸² Washington, quoted in O’Shaughnessy, *The Men Who Lost America*, 89.

¹⁸³ Ron Chernow, *Washington: A Life* (New York: Penguin Press, 2010), 38.

¹⁸⁴ Robert K. Faulkner, “The First American: Book Review of *Washington’s Revolution: The Making of America’s First Leader* by Robert Middlekauff,” *Claremont Review of Books* (Fall 2015), 57. Chernow, *Washington: A Life*, 49.

¹⁸⁵ Donald Stoker and Michael W. Jones, “Colonial military strategy,” in *Strategy in the American War of Independence: A global approach*, eds. Donald Stoker, Kenneth J. Hagan and Michael T. McMaster, (New York: Routledge, 2010), 6.

¹⁸⁶ Thomas A. Rider II, “George Washington: America’s First Soldier,” *A Companion to George Washington*, ed. Edward G. Lengel (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 379.

George Washington there could have been no victory in the Revolutionary War, no United States.”¹⁸⁷ As a supreme commander, Washington could hardly have faced a more difficult task.

The war’s geography was a challenge for both sides.

Roads, the few there were, were mere trails snaking torturously through the forests. Rivers were not bridged...all the large towns were seaports... perhaps the single most significant geographical factor in George III’s rebellious New World provinces was the sparseness of population.¹⁸⁸

While Philadelphia was the British empire’s second largest city to London itself, “Only three others (Boston, New York, Charleston) had populations of over 10,000.” The total American population was 2.5 million people, spread out over an 1100-mile range.¹⁸⁹ Waging war across such a large area, without adequate road networks, was a significant challenge for both sides, and ultimately provided a distinct advantage in strategic mobility to British seapower.

On October 26, 1775, following initial battles at Lexington and Bunker Hill, British King George III outlined his intentions at Parliament for bringing his American colonial subjects back into line:

The rebellious war...is manifestly carried on for the purpose of establishing an independent empire. I need not dwell upon the fatal effects of the success of such a plan. The object is too important, the spirit of the British nation too high, the resources with which God hath blessed her too numerous, to give up so many colonies which she has planted with great industry, nursed with great tenderness, encouraged with many commercial advantages, and protected and defended at much expense of blood and treasure.¹⁹⁰

King George III believed it wise “to put a speedy end” to the conflict by increasing his military forces in the colonies, and, “When the unhappy and deluded multitude, against whom this force will be directed, shall become sensible of their error, I shall be ready to receive the misled with tenderness and mercy.” Thus he offered a promise to authorize “certain persons” to

¹⁸⁷ Edward G. Lengel *General George Washington: A Military Life* (New York: Random House, 2005), 368, 370.

¹⁸⁸ Dave R. Palmer, “General George Washington: Grand Strategist or Mere Fabian?” *Parameters* (No. 1, 1974), 2. Text, <http://strategicstudiesinstitute.army.mil/pubs/parameters/Articles/1974/palmer.pdf>, accessed October 25, 2017.

¹⁸⁹ Palmer, “General George Washington: Grand Strategist or Mere Fabian?,” 2.

¹⁹⁰ King George III quoted in McCullough, *1776*, 11.

grant pardons “upon the spot” in America.¹⁹¹ His minister in charge of the war effort in America, Lord George Germain, concurred that a “decisive blow” was necessary.¹⁹²

Britain aimed for a negotiated accommodation, a settlement, and would achieve it by applying pressure and coercive measures to get the colonists to return to their previous political relationship with the government in London.¹⁹³ This pacification through pressure strategy posed a tricky calculation: how to calibrate the pressure correctly?

The British considered several strategies. First there was a blockade, but Admiral Richard Howe had advised against it because it would be beyond the scope of even the world’s mightiest navy. Another was a deliberate scheme of terror, which had been used in previous pacification efforts in Scotland and Ireland, but this went against General Howe’s sense of honor, and he thought it would ultimately not succeed. Third was an approach second-in-command General Henry Clinton advised, which was a continuous pursuit of the rebels, to seek the Continental Army’s destruction. General Howe disapproved, because he thought to do so would offer only a pyrrhic victory, tactical success at the cost of complete strategic consumption. Another was an ink-spot strategy, or the selection and seizure of key terrain, followed by a gradual expansion until it meant the end of the rebellion. This was a problematic option because it would take such a long time.¹⁹⁴

The most promising option was to take hold of the key river lines, in particular the Hudson River, because to do so would deny mobility to the rebels and it would cut off the most rebellious colonies from the rest of the country, which might create an opportunity to defeat the rebels piece by piece.¹⁹⁵ This option seemed to offer the best choice, particularly when paired with General Howe’s belief that to support British loyalists in America would promise great dividends. Consider an assessment Howe wrote to his constituents: “I may safely assert that the insurgents are very few, in comparison of the whole people.”¹⁹⁶

On April 23, 1776, General Howe wrote to Lord Germain to lay out his strategic vision for the campaign: “the army at the opening of the campaign, being in force, would probably by rapid movements bring the rebels to an action upon equal terms, before they could cover themselves by works of any significance.” Howe desired a rapid, overwhelming strike in order to

¹⁹¹ King George III quoted in McCullough, *1776*, 11-12.

¹⁹² Lord George Germain quoted in Piers Mackesy, *The War for America: 1775-1783* (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1964), 46.

¹⁹³ Palmer, “General George Washington: Grand Strategist or Mere Fabian?,” 3.

¹⁹⁴ Palmer, “General George Washington: Grand Strategist or Mere Fabian?,” 3. Fischer, *Washington’s Crossing*, 75-77.

¹⁹⁵ Fischer, *Washington’s Crossing*, 77.

¹⁹⁶ Howe quoted in Fischer, *Washington’s Crossing*, 77.

gain what he ultimately wanted: “a decisive action...as the most effectual means to terminate this expensive war.”¹⁹⁷ His greatest worry was that the Americans would be able to completely avoid battle and deny the British the opportunity to end the war quickly.¹⁹⁸

Howe’s campaign ideas nested well with Lord Germain’s vision for the war effort: “As there is not common sense in protracting a war of this sort, I should be for exerting the utmost force of this Kingdom to finish the rebellion in one campaign.”¹⁹⁹

Just two days later, on April 25, 1776, Howe wrote again to Germain explaining more on his views of the coming campaign.

New York being the greater object of the two [compared to Rhode Island], and the possession of it more extensive in its consequences...[therefore, New York] will be my principal aim when enabled to proceed thither by a sufficient supply of provisions, since both services cannot be undertaken with the present force, and it is become highly necessary that the first exertion of the army should be directed to the most important purposes, to check the spirit which the evacuation of Boston will naturally raise among the rebels.²⁰⁰

New York was Howe’s “principal aim” in the 1776 campaign. He reasoned that speed and maneuver were of the essence, and predicted that his opponent would attempt to protract the war by using extensive defensive positions.

In January 1776, Howe assessed he needed 20,000 soldiers.²⁰¹ His request was granted and nearly doubled: Howe received 32,000 soldiers and 10,000 sailors in the summer of 1776.²⁰² Several months later, on June 8, 1776, in writing to Lord Germain, Howe showed deep gratitude for these resources: “I cannot take my leave from your Lordship without expressing my utter amazement at the decisive and masterly strokes for carrying such extensive plans into immediate execution.”²⁰³ Howe himself judged he had received sufficient resources to meet his needs for the 1776 campaign.

¹⁹⁷ Howe quoted in Fischer, *Washington’s Crossing*, 77-78.

¹⁹⁸ Troyer Steele Anderson, *The Command of the Howe Brothers During the American Revolution* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1972; reprint of 1936 edition), 121.

¹⁹⁹ Germain quoted in Ellis, *Revolutionary Summer*, 35. Also quoted in Mackesy, *The War for America*, 55.

²⁰⁰ Howe quoted in Anderson, *The Command of the Howe Brothers During the American Revolution*, 121.

²⁰¹ Anderson, *The Command of the Howe Brothers During the American Revolution*, 116.

²⁰² O’Shaughnessy, *The Men Who Lost America*, 92.

²⁰³ Howe quoted in Anderson, *The Command of the Howe Brothers During the American Revolution*, 123.

By comparison, the American policy goal seemed less difficult, as mere survival is always somewhat easier than for another country, Britain in this case, to entirely conquer another society.²⁰⁴ The American bar was somewhat lower than the British objective.

To achieve this, the Americans considered a number of different strategies. The first was a privateer war, to use economic strikes to deter the British, but this was unlikely to succeed on a scale necessary to influence London. The second, favored by Major General Horatio Gates, was a deep Fabian retreat, to tire and wear out British ground forces. Theoretically appealing, this option was politically unworkable because it left civilian colonists completely unprotected. Yet another was Major General Charles Lee's irregular fighting units, independently operating in many units, each with small numbers. For a time, General George Washington wrote favorably about a "war of posts," which was an effort to use favorable, static defensive terrain to deny the British a fair fight on common ground. A variant of this was the offensive-defensive, which meant targeted tactical offensives paired with a strategic orientation toward defense. Last was the option to defend everywhere, every bit of the American colonies, which was as impossible militarily as it was favored politically. In the end, Washington employed parts of all these strategies at different times in different situations; he tailored his strategies and choices to fit the constantly evolving scenarios.²⁰⁵

3.2 The 1776 Campaign's Strategic Effect

The 1776 fighting season that ran from the summer of 1776 and into early 1777 was the terminal campaign of the American War of Independence. Simply put, the British never had another opportunity to militarily or strategically defeat the Americans. This was the moment of maximum danger for the American side. The British would never again have as many resources in terms of men or materiel, and they never would have the same opportunity to defeat General George Washington's Continental Army.

1776 proved the Continental Army was a viable military force and could deny British military success and terrain. Insurgencies often succeed by denying success to others. Washington's survival and battle victories at Trenton and Princeton (in New Jersey) in this terminal campaign enabled several other positive strategic effects which had a sudden and

²⁰⁴ Fischer, *Washington's Crossing*, 78-79.

²⁰⁵ Fischer, *Washington's Crossing*, 78-80. Palmer, "General George Washington: Grand Strategist or Mere Fabian?," 4.

strategic impact on the war.²⁰⁶ From this point on, the war changed. The British could no longer try to convince the colonists to come back; they now had to conquer the colonies.²⁰⁷

There were several consequential strategic effects that came as the result of this campaign that registered an impact on the British ability and willingness to keep up the fight. First, the victories had an immense psychological impact: the Loyalist Nicholas Cresswell wrote that before Washington's two victories in New Jersey, the colonists "had given up the cause for lost," but then "their late successes have turned the scale and now they are all liberty mad again."²⁰⁸

Second, Washington was able to use his enhanced credibility to appeal to state governors, who were the key gatekeepers in getting soldiers, to request more troops for the Continental Army.²⁰⁹

Washington's victories also enabled him to continue momentum with the soldiers who remained and those motivated by victories to take part in guerilla operations. Washington had considered such "Partizan" operations as early as a Council of War on July 12, 1776.²¹⁰ And he had been acquainted with the French Capitaine de Jeney's book, *The Partisan: or, the Art of Making War in Detachment*.²¹¹ Following his victories at Trenton and Princeton, Washington waged war in small detachment against the British and wrote to Major General Philip Schuyler on February 23, 1777, about these operations and their place in the wider war effort: "I do not apprehend however that this Petit Guerre will be continued long. I think Matters will be transacted upon a larger Scale."²¹²

In short, Washington counseled that guerilla operations were useful, but would have limits. Yet, he did use them to success and by winter's end, the cumulative impact was that Howe had lost half his forces in the area.²¹³ One illustrative example: for the British commander at Trenton to get a letter to his comrades in Princeton, he had to send fifty guards to protect the

²⁰⁶ Ira D. Gruber, *The Howe Brothers and the American Revolution* (New York: Atheneum, 1972), 154.

²⁰⁷ Chernow, *Washington: A Life*, 282.

²⁰⁸ Nicholas Cresswell quoted in Chernow, *Washington: A Life*, 283.

²⁰⁹ From George Washington to Nicholas Cooke, 20 January 1777," Founders Online, National Archives (<http://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/03-08-02-0121> [last update: 2015-06-29]). Source: *The Papers of George Washington*, Revolutionary War Series, vol. 8, *6 January 1777–27 March 1777*, ed. Frank E. Grizzard, Jr. Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1998 [Hereafter *Washington Papers*], 113–114.

²¹⁰ "Council of War, 12 July 1776," *Washington Papers* vol. 5, 280.

²¹¹ Stoker and Jones, "Colonial military strategy," 14-15.

²¹² "From George Washington to Major General Philip Schuyler, 23 February 1777," *Washington Papers* vol. 8, 433–434.

²¹³ O'Shaughnessy, *The Men Who Lost America*, 103.

message. With such a hostile environment, the British and their German allies were at an information and intelligence disadvantage. Then, later that summer, the British effort finally ended in New Jersey: on June 25, 1777, General Howe withdrew all his troops from New Jersey, which ceded the colony to the rebels.²¹⁴

Washington then generated a proclamation which pardoned all those colonists that had declared allegiance to the British, which caused New Jersey to renounce the British and support the rebellion.²¹⁵ In essence, by surviving and winning battles in New Jersey, Washington ended the widespread belief in British dominant strength and restored the rebellion's credibility with the colonists.²¹⁶

The strategic effect from Washington's 1776 victories had immense negative impact on British planning for the following year. Howe's response to the losses in New Jersey doomed the British northern force, under General John Burgoyne, in 1777.²¹⁷

Before Trenton and Princeton, on November 30, 1776, Howe outlined to Lord George Germain a plan that envisioned a significant force marching north from New York-New Jersey to link up with another British force moving south from Canada led by General John Burgoyne. This original plan included a sequel which was to be a winter campaign in the south (Georgia and South Carolina). Howe's plan reached London on December 30, 1776 and was designed to cooperate with Burgoyne's force.²¹⁸ Howe's plan of record with the British government was in place, as of late December 1776, which was, again, before the battles of Trenton and Princeton.

However, after the defeats at Trenton and Princeton, Howe suddenly changed his plan completely, and now aimed to capture Philadelphia, the seat of the Continental Congress.²¹⁹ Howe informed Germain that he did not think his previously planned approach was viable after the winter defeats in New Jersey:

²¹⁴ Williamson Murray, "The American Revolution: Hybrid War in America's Past," in *Hybrid Warfare: Fighting Complex Opponents from the Ancient World to the Present*, eds. Williamson Murray and Peter R. Mansoor (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 91.

²¹⁵ Charles Stedman, *The History of the Origin, Progress, and Termination of the American War, Volume 1* (Dublin: P. Wogan, P. Byrne, J. Moore, and W. Jones, 1794), 270. Text, accessed February 26, 2016, https://archive.org/details/gri_33125010928733. Robert A. Doughty and Ira D. Gruber, eds., *Warfare in the Western World, Vol. 1: Military Operations from 1600 to 1871* (Lexington, MA: D.C. Heath and Company, 1996), 148.

²¹⁶ Gruber, *The Howe Brothers*, 157.

²¹⁷ Doughty and Gruber, *Warfare in the Western World, Vol. 1*, 146-147.

²¹⁸ Jeremy Black, "British military strategy," in *Strategy in the American War of Independence: A global approach*, eds. Donald Stoker, Kenneth J. Hagan and Michael T. McMaster, (New York: Routledge, 2010), 62-63.

²¹⁹ O'Shaughnessy, *The Men Who Lost America*, 105.

I do not now see a prospect of terminating the war but by a general action, and I am aware of the difficulties in our way to obtain it, as the Enemy moves with so much more celerity than we possibly can with our foreign troops who are too much attached to their baggage.²²⁰

Yet Howe's letter of January 20, 1777, with the radical change in plan, did not arrive in London until February 23, 1777. On February 28, 1777, Burgoyne, while in London, sent Germain a plan that proposed he move south from Canada into New York, eventually to link up with other British forces.²²¹

On this point Germain merits blame, because on February 23, he read Howe's changed plan for the 1777 campaign season, and on February 28, Germain read a dispatch from Burgoyne which clearly indicated serious disharmony between the two plans. German had ordered Howe to work with Burgoyne, yet, at this point in late February, Germain failed to coordinate the actions of the two major British forces in the colonies.²²²

Instead of one unified campaign, the British fought two entirely separate, disconnected campaigns in 1777. Had British forces operated in conjunction with one another, with such mighty resources, and the bulk of the navy at their disposal, Howe and Burgoyne might have defeated the rebels one piece at a time.²²³ Washington's victories at Trenton and Princeton forced this disunity on the British campaign for 1777.

In reading about this forced miscommunication, one is struck by the strategic challenge inherent in distant British communications. One historian found that dispatches across the ocean were habitually a month or more out of date upon receipt.²²⁴ Another uncovered that in one period during the war, the bulk of 63 dispatches between senior commanders in America and political leaders in London took between two and three months.²²⁵ Washington took advantage of this distance and generated positive strategic effect when he forced Howe to significantly change his plans for 1777, which led to miscommunication and a seriously disjointed British campaign.

Neutralized in New Jersey, in 1777, Howe, who knew such vast war resources would quickly dry up, was desperate for a speedy victory and so lunged at the opportunity to take

²²⁰ Howe quoted in Gruber, *The Howe Brothers*, 156-157.

²²¹ Black, "British military strategy," 64.

²²² Black, "British military strategy," 63, 65.

²²³ Black, "British military strategy," 66.

²²⁴ Gruber, *The Howe Brothers*, 158.

²²⁵ Murray, "The American Revolution: Hybrid War in America's Past," 74.

Philadelphia.²²⁶ By going it alone, and not supporting Burgoyne, Howe condemned Burgoyne to lose his entire force at Saratoga.²²⁷

Most importantly, the British loss at Saratoga brought the French into the war on the side of the Americans and Continental Army. Charles Gravier, the Comte de Vergennes, French minister and secretary of state, provided material assistance to the Americans as early as May 1776. After the American victory at Saratoga, the French decided to extend diplomatic recognition and a formal alliance.²²⁸ French support to the Americans later expanded to include Spain in 1779 and the Netherlands in 1781.²²⁹

Here, one can see the causal link between the terminal campaign and the war's outcome. Washington guided the Continental Army to survival, forced this chain of events on his adversary, and earned the international support that ultimately enabled victory. Washington's 1776-1777 campaign was successful both in the near term and long term effort toward ultimate victory in the war.

3.3 Could the British have won?

Was the outcome per-ordained? Could General Howe have won this campaign? Could the British have won this war?

Historians Piers Mackesy, James Scudieri, and Jeremy Black all agree there was no inevitability to the American victory.²³⁰

Moreover, if there ever was a chance at British victory, it would have come during the summer and fall of 1776; looking backward, we can see that Howe never had another opportunity to destroy the Continental Army.²³¹

Historian Dave Palmer has found that there were several potential outcomes to the contest,

²²⁶ William Anthony Hay, "Redcoat Leaders Weren't All Dolts," *The National Interest* (July/August 2013), 88.

²²⁷ Palmer, "General George Washington: Grand Strategist or Mere Fabian?," 11.

²²⁸ James Pritchard, "French strategy and the American Revolution: A reappraisal," in *Strategy in the American War of Independence: A global approach*, eds. Donald Stoker, Kenneth J. Hagan and Michael T. McMaster, (New York: Routledge, 2010), 144, 146.

²²⁹ O'Shaughnessy, *The Men Who Lost America*, 13.

²³⁰ James D. Scudieri, "Review: *The Men Who Lost America: British Leadership, the American Revolution, and the Fate of the Empire* by Andrew Jackson O'Shaughnessy," *Parameters* 43(4) (Winter 2013-14), 156.

²³¹ Ellis, *Revolutionary Summer*, xi.

Had British leadership been better or American leadership less astute, the war could well have ended differently. Who can guess what might have happened? Perhaps Britain would have held onto portions of the provinces. Maybe rebel diehards, defeated in the colonies, would have carved out a redoubt in the forest vastness beyond the Appalachians. One can imagine the colonies' accepting semi-independent dominion status or, having lost their unity, breaking up into several small countries across a Balkanized North America, squabbling among themselves and unable to resist European meddling. It is entirely conceivable that the patriots might not have achieved either of their two goals. Indeed, at several points in the struggle they should have expected to achieve far less than they eventually did.²³²

Multiple historians testify there was no inevitability in this contest; particularly in the 1776 to early 1777-time period, the best bet would have been on the British.²³³ Moreover, the British commanders, especially Howe, were competent, sharp leaders, wholly different from the blunderers that occasionally show up in popular media and film.²³⁴

So to believe the war's outcome was inevitable, as well as the 1776 campaign, is to do so against the weight of historical evidence (as well as the 140,000 documents in the George Washington Papers).²³⁵

The participants themselves were unconfident of the campaign and war's result. Washington's subordinate, Major General Nathanael Greene, wrote to John Adams of the Continental Congress on June 2, 1776 about his personal sense the war's outcome was "very uncertain."²³⁶

This comment pales in comparison to what Washington himself wrote to his aide, Lieutenant Colonel Joseph Reed, in January 1776: "the reflection upon my Situation, & that of

²³² Dave R. Palmer, *George Washington's Military Genius* (Washington: Regnery History, 2012; originally published as *The Way of the Fox*, Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1975), 227.

²³³ O'Shaughnessy, *The Men Who Lost America*, 4. "Had Washington lost this battle in December 1776, the defeat almost certainly would have spelled the end of the revolutionary army and therefore the revolution itself, leaving Britain in control of the North American colonies for an indeterminate period in the future, perhaps as a dependent dominion like Canada." Paul K. Davis, *100 Decisive Battles: From Ancient Times to the Present* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), xi.

²³⁴ O'Shaughnessy, *The Men Who Lost America*, 5.

²³⁵ Edward Lengel, "Introduction," in *A Companion to George Washington*, ed. Edward G. Lengel (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), xvi.

²³⁶ "To John Adams from Nathanael Greene, 2 June 1776," Founders Online, National Archives (<http://founders.archives.gov/documents/Adams/06-04-02-0100> [last update: 2015-06-29]). Source: *The Adams Papers*, Papers of John Adams, vol. 4, *February–August 1776*, ed. Robert J. Taylor. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1979, 227–231.

this Army, produces many an uneasy hour when all around me are wrapped in Sleep. Few People know the Predicament we are In, on a thousand Accts.”²³⁷

Or on September 30, 1776, when Washington wrote: “such is my situation that if I were to wish the bitterest curse to an enemy on this side of the grave, I should put him in stead with my feelings.”²³⁸ And on December 17, 1776, after Washington decided on the attack on Trenton, he wrote to his cousin and estate manager to “have my Papers in such a Situation as to remove as a short notice,” so unsure was Washington of the attack’s outcome.²³⁹ Washington himself was not confident of the outcome.

Sometimes wars are won because they are not lost. Washington avoided defeat at the point at which it was most likely to happen and kept the American war effort alive with victories in New Jersey. The strategic effect from this campaign caused the French entry into the war. While there was still much fighting left after this campaign, this was the last British opportunity to secure their policy aims. By studying this critical period of time, we can see the important impact that superior judgments from a supreme commander can have.

3.4 Washington: defend New York? versus Howe: attack armies or cities?

Washington: defend New York?

This section identifies the 1776 campaign’s most important judgments on both sides, as well as the thinking behind each decision, which brought on the strategic effect and the war’s ultimate outcome. The 1776 campaign included no single silver bullet, but several judgments reviewed in pairs and in context can help better understand what differentiates the successful supreme commander from an unsuccessful adversary. A researcher can learn what was on the mind of each supreme commander by studying available primary source documents (i.e. dispatches, memoranda).

The first consequential decisions surrounded New York: should the Continental Army attempt to hold the city with such an enormous British expeditionary force approaching the harbor? For Howe, the initial decision was broader: should his large invasion force target rebel

²³⁷ “From George Washington to Lieutenant Colonel Joseph Reed, 14 January 1776,” *Washington Papers* vol. 3, 87–92.

²³⁸ “From George Washington to Lund Washington, 30 September 1776,” *Washington Papers* vol. 6, 440–443.

²³⁹ “From George Washington to Lund Washington, 10–17 December 1776,” *Washington Papers* vol. 7, 289–292.

armies or key cities (e.g. New York)? These two decisions can be paired together, in part for temporal reasons. The pairing of these judgments determined there would be a Battle of Long Island (alternatively referred to by some historians as the Battle of Brooklyn), as well as how it would turn out. By choosing to attack Long Island instead of using his overwhelming seapower to cut off the rebels at multiple chokepoints around the city (particularly the northern part of modern-day Manhattan), the British enabled Washington to evacuate a significant portion of his force from encirclement.

The bulk of the Continental Army was in New York in the late spring of 1776. The Americans had not yet declared independence from Britain, and fear of the coming British invasion of New York drove the speed of the political movement toward independence.²⁴⁰ John Adams called New York the “nexus of the Northern and Southern Colonies,” noting it was “key to the whole Continent, as it is a Passage to Canada, to the Great Lakes, and to all the Indian Nations.”²⁴¹ As such, Washington and the Congress agreed this location must be defended. While there were clear difficulties to defending this key terrain, Washington made his military disagreements in an agreeable manner which fit one who saw himself as subordinate to the Continental Congress. By doing so, Washington legitimized the government he sought to protect.²⁴² By working well with and keeping his political leadership in the Continental Congress informed, Washington helped to develop a sense of coherence and unity in the fledgling government.

Major General Charles Lee had been sent ahead to supervise New York’s defensive preparations, and wrote on February 19, 1776 to Washington: “what to do with the City, I own puzzles me, it is so encircle’d with deep navigable water, that whoever commands the Sea must command the Town”²⁴³ Moreover, ten days later, Lee wrote again to Washington of his struggles making any progress on the city’s defenses:

[Our] force including the Minute Men, amounts to about seventeen hundred Men as to the Town, having few hands and the necessary duty being hard—I have been able to effect little...it was absolutely impossible to be moulded into any thing which could annoy their

²⁴⁰ Ellis, *Revolutionary Summer*, x.

²⁴¹ “John Adams to George Washington, January 1776,” quoted in Fischer, *Washington’s Crossing*, 80.

²⁴² Rider, “George Washington: America’s First Soldier,” 380-381.

²⁴³ “To George Washington from Major General Charles Lee, 19 February 1776,” *Washington Papers* vol. 3, 339–341.

Ships—as We are surrounded by navigable Waters, I consider enclos'd Works as rather dangerous.²⁴⁴

Despite this concern, defending New York was never a real question. In late May and early June, the Continental Congress called Washington to Philadelphia for a conference on military strategy. Unfortunately, the defense of New York was such a given that it was never even discussed.²⁴⁵

The British sent an immense armada across the sea, landing on June 29 and July 12, 1776:

[It was] the largest British expedition ever sent across the Atlantic. Two-thirds of the total British army and 45 percent of the Royal Navy were serving in America and the Caribbean. There were some four hundred ships of varying sizes in New York. The combined invading force was greater than the estimated 30,000 population of Philadelphia, the largest city in America. A seventy-four-gun ship alone had at least 600 crew members and larger vessels had even more.²⁴⁶

The total British force numbered over 42,000.²⁴⁷ This was enormous by the standards of the day, larger than New York City itself.

With his decision to hold New York, George Washington's strategy was tailored to fit political needs, as well as military concerns.²⁴⁸ His 16,000 effective soldiers were organized in five divisions: three divisions defending what's today known as Manhattan, a fourth at the northern tip of modern Manhattan (at Fort Mifflin), and a fifth to the south east on Long Island and Brooklyn Heights.²⁴⁹

So why stay? If defensive positions held, he might bleed British attackers; Washington also considered this might be a pivotal battle; and to meet American political and morale needs.²⁵⁰

²⁴⁴ "To George Washington from Major General Charles Lee, 29 February 1776," *Washington Papers* vol. 3, 389–393.

²⁴⁵ Ellis, *Revolutionary Summer*, 44, 46.

²⁴⁶ O'Shaughnessy, *The Men Who Lost America*, 92.

²⁴⁷ Ellis, *Revolutionary Summer*, 84.

²⁴⁸ Doughty and Gruber, *Warfare in the Western World Vol. 1*, 140.

²⁴⁹ Fischer, *Washington's Crossing*, 381.

²⁵⁰ Stoker and Jones, "Colonial military strategy," 9-10.

Washington believed deeply in the cause, with a particularly stirring set of General Orders on the impending British attack on July 2, 1776:

The time is now near at hand which must probably determine, whether Americans are to be, Freemen, or Slaves; whether they are to have any property they can call their own; whether their Houses, and Farms, are to be pillaged and destroyed, and they consigned to a State of Wretchedness from which no human efforts will probably deliver them. The fate of unborn Millions will now depend, under God, on the Courage and Conduct of this army—Our cruel and unrelenting Enemy leaves us no choice but a brave resistance, or the most abject submission; this is all we can expect—We have therefore to resolve to conquer or die: Our own Country’s Honor, all call upon us for a vigorous and manly exertion, and if we now shamefully fail, we shall become infamous to the whole world—Let us therefore rely upon the goodness of the Cause, and the aid of the supreme Being, in whose hands Victory is, to animate and encourage us to great and noble Actions—The Eyes of all our Countrymen are now upon us, and we shall have their blessings, and praises, if happily we are the instruments of saving them from the Tyranny meditated against them. Let us therefore animate and encourage each other, and shew the whole world, that a Freeman contending for Liberty on his own ground is superior to any slavish mercenary on earth.²⁵¹

One week later, on July 9, 1776, Washington received from the Continental Congress the formal Declaration of Independence, to be read aloud to all troops.²⁵² This finally signified the separate existence of an American government, which arrived at nearly the same moment the military threat arrived in the form of an enormous British invasion force. The following day, on July 10, 1776, Washington wrote to John Hancock positively about the prospects for New York’s defense:

If our Troops will behave well, which I hope will be the case, having every thing to contend for that Freemen hold dear, they will have to wade through much blood & Slaughter before they can carry any part of our Works, If they carry ’em at all, and at best be in possession of a melancholy and mournfull victory.²⁵³

²⁵¹ “General Orders, 2 July 1776,” *Washington Papers* vol. 5, 179–182.

²⁵² “From George Washington to Major General Artemas Ward, 9 July 1776,” *Washington Papers* vol. 5, 254–256.

²⁵³ “From George Washington to John Hancock, 10 July 1776,” *Washington Papers* vol. 5, 258–261.

Washington knew the British were coming and his initial assessment was a victory through a defense designed to grind the enemy down, though he considered a pre-emptive attack. On July 12 Washington called a Council of War to consider “a general Attack upon the Enemy’s Quarters” on Staten Island, which was rejected unanimously.²⁵⁴ The waiting continued, and Washington wrote to Hancock on August 12, 1776 that he was without knowledge or “any further Intelligence of [British invasion] designs.”²⁵⁵ However, this lack of knowledge did not unnerve Washington enough to withdrawal, and he stayed in position to fight. Then, on August 27, the British decisively defeated the Continental Army at the Battle of Long Island, which was the largest battle ever in North America at that point. The British lost 59 soldiers killed, 267 wounded, and 31 missing, with 5 Hessians killed and 26 Hessians wounded; the Americans lost 300 killed and over one thousand captured (including three general officers).²⁵⁶

Howe: attack armies or cities?

The major question facing General William Howe was whether the priority was to destroy the Continental Army, or to take key American terrain?²⁵⁷ This challenge would play itself out over the issue of how to approach New York.

From Howe’s perspective, New York was a Loyalist hotbed and therefore a location where it would be relatively easier to secure local support. Howe also knew that the end of the rebellion would necessarily meant a political accommodation, and a return to some form of loyalty. So, instead of aiming to end the Continental Army, Howe opted to seize cities and terrain.²⁵⁸

This issue formed the basis for the disagreement between Howe and his second-in-command, General Henry Clinton. Clinton believed the British could trap and annihilate the Continental Army. Howe believed this was the wrong course of action, that instead the better move was to defeat but not completely destroy the Continental Army. And so the strategic objective became New York and not Washington’s army.²⁵⁹

²⁵⁴ “Council of War, 12 July 1776,” Founders Online, *Washington Papers*, vol. 5, 280.

²⁵⁵ “From George Washington to John Hancock, 12 August 1776,” *Washington Papers* vol. 5, 677–680.

²⁵⁶ McCullough, *1776*, 178, 179-180.

²⁵⁷ Black, “British military strategy,” 60.

²⁵⁸ Murray, “The American Revolution: Hybrid War in America’s Past,” 87. Black, “British military strategy,” 61, 62.

²⁵⁹ Ellis, *Revolutionary Summer*, 110-111.

Howe then avoided aggressive action against the Continental Army, a judgment that was criticized immediately. Continental Army Major General Israel Putnam said of Howe at the time: “General Howe is either our friend or no general...[Howe] had our whole army in his power...Had he instantly followed up his victory [at Long Island] the consequences to the cause of liberty must have been dreadful.”²⁶⁰

Clinton firmly believed the center of the rebellion was Washington’s army itself. In his post war writings he described three moments in this time period when Howe disregarded this advice.²⁶¹

Clinton’s views, as the British second-in-command, are important. Just after the war, Clinton wrote about his preference to seal the Continental Army off on York Island (modern day Manhattan) after the victory at Long Island, by cutting off the Continental’s only escape route (to the north), in September 1776.²⁶²

Observing that summer was passing away fast...[I] propose[d] to the Commander in Chief the landing of a sufficient corps at Spuyten Duyvil in order to lay hold of the strong eminence adjoining, for the purpose of commanding the important pass of Kings Bridge and thereby embarrassing the rebel operations. It might also, with the assistance of our armed vessels, have possibly put it in our power to cut off the retreat of many of the enemy on the attack of York Island...he afterward told me he had no intention of acting offensively before the arrival of the Hessians, nor did he think it advisable to stir a day’s march from his cantonments before the troops had their camp equipage.²⁶³

Clinton favored far more aggressive action than Howe. After the encounter described above, and having taken Fort Washington (the farthest northern tip of modern Manhattan), on November 16, 1776 Clinton said he “received orders” to take “command of an expedition against Rhode Island.”²⁶⁴ This was at precisely the moment when the Continental Army was down to their lowest total in the campaign, with less than 3,000 effective men.²⁶⁵ While Howe judged it was time to reallocate resources to take another port city, an action that affirms Howe’s

²⁶⁰ Putnam quoted in Ellis, *Revolutionary Summer*, 119.

²⁶¹ Ellis, *Revolutionary Summer*, 173, 183.

²⁶² Henry Clinton, *The American Rebellion: Sir Henry Clinton’s Narrative of His Campaigns, 1775-1782, With An Appendix of Original Documents* Ed. William B. Willcox (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1954), ix.

²⁶³ Clinton, *The American Rebellion*, 40.

²⁶⁴ Clinton, *The American Rebellion*, 54.

²⁶⁵ Fischer, *Washington’s Crossing*, 381.

preference for positions, Clinton said he “never approved” of such a side effort because Clinton wanted to go after Washington’s remaining army. However, according to Clinton, the navy “wanted a winter station,” and so “every other consideration must give way.” On November 26, Clinton left from the main force in New York-New Jersey, to take Newport, Rhode Island.²⁶⁶

Though no smoking gun exists regarding Howe’s relative passivity, his own 1779 testimony records his view that his “most essential duty” was to carefully commit his troops because a loss by his army “could not speedily, nor easily, be repaired.”²⁶⁷ Moreover, we can see Howe’s thoughts on the limits of British military efforts in correspondence with Lord Germain on April 26, 1776:

[I]here not being the least prospect of conciliating this continent unless its armies are roughly dealt with; and I confess my apprehensions that such an event will not readily be brought about, the rebels get on apace, and knowing their advantages, in having the whole country, as it were, at their disposal, they will not readily be brought into a situation where the King’s troops can meet them upon equal terms. Their armies retiring a few miles back from the navigable rivers, ours cannot follow them.²⁶⁸

While Howe believed it was important to be hard on the Continental Army, he did not believe he could bring the bulk of the Continental Army to battle. Yet there was one serious gap. General Howe, through his brother’s fleet, had a massive naval advantage over the rebels, and New York was dominated by navigable waterways on all sides. This meant whoever commanded the sea commanded the land. British Royal Navy Captain George Collier, commander of the *Rainbow* in the armada just outside New York harbor, believed Howe had missed such an opportunity to trap the Americans after the Battle of Long Island. Collier wondered why the British navy had not been positioned in the East River to cut off the American retreat, which Collier wrote he was “in constant expectation of being ordered to do” because it would have meant that “not a man would have escaped from Long Island.” Moreover, by failing to have done so, Collier predicted, the Americans would “protract the war, Heaven knows how long.”²⁶⁹

²⁶⁶ Clinton, *The American Rebellion*, 55, 56-57.

²⁶⁷ William Howe, *The Narrative of Lieut. Gen. Sir William Howe, In A Committee of the House of Commons, on the 29th of April, 1779, Relative to His Conduct, During His Late Command of the King’s Troops in North America, Third Edition* (London: H. Baldwin, 1779), 5. Text, accessed February 26, 2016, https://archive.org/details/cihm_20614.

²⁶⁸ Howe quoted in Fischer, *Washington’s Crossing*, 76-77.

²⁶⁹ Collier quoted in Ellis, *Revolutionary Summer*, 125-126.

Collier was not the only person who saw this as a mistake. Charles Stedman, a British military officer, who after the war wrote a history of these events, believed that to have trapped the Americans on Long Island was both possible and would have been “a most decisive victory.”²⁷⁰ Stedman made a simple, yet powerful critical statement: “Had any armed ships been stationed there, it would have been impossible for [the Continental Army] to have made their escape...had only a single frigate been stationed in the East River, they [the Continentals] must have surrendered.”²⁷¹ It is hard to escape the verdict that Howe could have pinned and wiped out the Continental Army in August 1776, and that he missed this opportunity.

In Summary

In considering the above, Washington exercised relatively poor judgment related to the use of force. His challenge was to defend New York against a vastly superior British invasion force. Congress ordered him to hold the position, while Major General Charles Lee had advised against it for geographic considerations. The more correct military decision would have been withdrawal. Because he did not take this option, Washington lost a significant amount of troops at the Battle of Long Island.

Yet, Washington’s choice also privileged respect for and dedication to unity with the rebellion’s political arm, the Continental Congress, which can be seen in his dispatches. In carrying on such correspondence, and in light of his deferential attitude toward the political leadership, he enhanced the trust relationship between the vital political and military organs of the rebellion.

Howe’s moves were tactically successful but strategically incomplete. General Clinton advised that Howe should pursue the entrapment and destruction of the Continental Army, while Howe was skeptical he would ever get the chance and made judgments that privileged the pursuit of territorial objectives (e.g. key cities). While Howe achieved his tactical aim to defeat Continental Army forces in New York’s approaches, he missed an opportunity to secure the strategically significant degradation or destruction of the Continental Army.²⁷²

3.5 Washington’s withdrawal from New York versus Howe’s conduct of pardon offers

²⁷⁰ Stedman, *The History of the Origin, Progress, and Termination of the American War, Volume 1*, 220.

²⁷¹ Stedman, *The History of the Origin, Progress, and Termination of the American War, Volume 1*, 223.

²⁷² Stoker and Jones, “Colonial military strategy,” 10.

Washington's withdrawal from New York

General Howe believed his show of supremacy at the Battle of Long Island would cow the rebels into negotiation. Through his brother and naval commander, Admiral Richard Howe, General Howe pursued diplomacy through a July 13, 1776 letter to Washington, and a peace conference on September 11, 1776. Neither bore fruit, and Washington used this prolonged period of fruitless peace attempts to consider and ultimately decide to leave New York in September with the Continental Congress's blessing. Washington withdrew from New York and then across New Jersey.

The loss at the Battle of Long Island forced Washington to call a Council of War on August 29, 1776, during which it was asked whether the Americans should “leave Long Island [and Brooklyn]” and “remove the Army to New York” (modern day Manhattan), which was agreed to unanimously.²⁷³

But the movement from Brooklyn and Long Island to modern day Manhattan still left open the question of broader withdrawal from New York; Washington wrote to John Hancock, leader of the Continental Congress, on September 2, 1776:

Our situation is truly distressing...The Militia...almost by whole Regiments and by Companies at a time are running away when fronted by a well appointed Enemy, superior in number to our whole collected force...I am obliged to confess my want of confidence in the Generality of the Troops.

[We must have a] permanent, standing Army I mean One to exist during the War...Men who have been free and subject to no control cannot be reduced to order in an Instant...Our number of men at present fit for duty are under 20,000—they were so by the last returns and best accounts I could get after the Engagement on Long Island—since which Numbers have deserted..

It is painfull and extremely grating to me to give such unfavourable accounts, but It would be criminal to conceal the truth at so critical a juncture—Every power I possess shall be exerted to serve the Cause, & my first wish is, that whatever may be the event, the Congress will do me the Justice to think so. If we should be obliged to abandon this Town, ought It to stand as Winter Quarters for the Enemy? They would derive great conveniences from It on the one hand—and much property would be destroyed on the other—It is an important question, but will admit of but little time for deliberation—At present I dare say the Enemy mean to preserve It if they can—If Congress therefore should resolve upon the

²⁷³ “Council of War, 29 August 1776,” *Washington Papers* vol. 6, 153–155.

destruction of It, the Resolution should be a profound secret as the knowledge of It will make a Capital change in their plans.²⁷⁴

Washington, plainly and respectfully, put the challenge of holding New York to his civilian leadership. First, he explained, militiamen were running away and the army must have better trained soldiers. Second, he described the purely military difficulties in holding New York. And last, most important, he prepared his leadership for the potential loss of New York, while at the same time he intimated he understood the political risks of rendering the city uninhabitable to the British. Washington subordinated himself to the Congress, all while expressing the military situation.

Hancock wrote back the next day, on September 3, 1776, “that Congress having taken your Letter” into “Consideration, came to a Resolution, in a Committee of the whole House, that no Damage should be done to the City of New York.”²⁷⁵ This no-burn decision was likely made for political reasons, but did not specifically address Washington’s potential military withdrawal from the city.

Continental Army Major General Nathanael Greene wrote a long memorandum to General Washington on September 5, 1776, which addressed all these issues:

The Object under consideration, is whether a General and speedy retreat from this Island is Necessary or not. to me it appears the only Eligible plan to oppose the Enemy successfully and secure our selves from disgrace...It has been agreed that the City of Newyork would not be Tenable if the Enimy got possession of Long Island & Govenors Island. they are now in possession of both these places...

The City and Island of Newyork, are no Objects for us, we are not to bring them in Competition with the General Interest of America. Part of the Army already has met with a defeat, the Country is struck with a pannick, any Cappital loss at this time may ruin the cause. Tis our business to study to avoid any considerable misfortune. And to take post where the Enemy will be Obligd to fight us and not we them...

I give it as my Oppinion that a General and speedy Retreat is absolutely necessary and that the honor and Interest of America requires it. I would burn the City & suburbs—and that for the following Reasons—If the Enemy gets possession of the City, we never can Recover the Possession, without a superior Naval force to theirs. It will

²⁷⁴ “From George Washington to John Hancock, 2 September 1776,” *Washington Papers* vol. 6, 199–201.

²⁷⁵ “To George Washington from John Hancock, 3 September 1776,” *Washington Papers* vol. 6, 207.

deprive the Enemy of An Opportunity of Barracking their whole Army together which if they could do would be a very great security. It will deprive them of a general Market. the price of things would prove a temptation to our people to supply them for the sake of the gain, in direct violation of the Laws of their Country. All these Advantages would Result from the destruction of the City.²⁷⁶

Greene pointed out an ugly truth: to defend New York would jeopardize the entire army.²⁷⁷ Greene's reason for the advantages of leaving and burning the city were local and military in nature. This judgment would privilege military effectiveness, which considers only what is proximately best for the army and the fighting forces. But Greene did not interact with political figures as much, nor was he beholden to Congress the same way as Washington.

Washington had stark dilemma: Greene's military argument balanced against Hancock's political judgment that represented Congress's will. To burn the city might provide military advantage, but it would also have political repercussions that would reverberate beyond New York. What would the people of Philadelphia feel as the British army approached that city? Would Philadelphians cast their loyalty away from the Continental Congress and to the British if they believed they would be put to the torch like those in New York? If the battle was for the people, then burning cities, though invariably helpful in the short term, might not be a war-winning strategy.

Following Greene's letter, Washington convened a Council of War on September 7, 1776, and reported the results in a dispatch to John Hancock on September 8, 1776 (this being the only public record of the event).²⁷⁸

It is now extremely obvious from all Intelligence...they mean to inclose us on the Island of New York...Having therefore their System unfolded to us, It became an important consideration how It could be most successfully opposed—On every side there is a choice of difficulties, & every measure on our part, (however painfull the reflection is from experience) to be formed with some apprehension that all our Troops will not do their duty. In deliberating on this great Question, it was impossible to forget that History—our own experience—the advice of our ablest Friends in Europe—The fears of the Enemy, and even the Declarations of Congress demonstrate that on our side the War should be defensive, It

²⁷⁶ "To George Washington from Nathanael Greene, 5 September 1776," *Washington Papers* vol. 6, 222-224.

²⁷⁷ Ellis, *Revolutionary Summer*, 137.

²⁷⁸ "From George Washington to John Hancock, 8 September 1776," *Washington Papers* vol. 6, 248-254.

has been even called a War of posts, that we should on all occasions avoid a general Action or put anything to the risque unless compelled by a necessity into which we ought never to be drawn. The Arguments on which such a System was founded were deemed unanswerable & experience has given her sanction—With these views & being fully persuaded that It would be presumption to draw out our young Troops into open Ground against their superiors both in number and discipline, I have never spared the Spade & Pickax: I confess I have not found that readiness to defend even strong posts at all hazards which is necessary to derive the greatest benefit from them.²⁷⁹

In this passage, Washington described his belief the British had landed to trap the Continental Army. Of course, hindsight makes clear Howe had a more nuanced objective. But from this logic Washington balanced his understanding of the situation against his knowledge of the Continental soldiers' inability to face the British in a fight, which counseled a defensive posture would be preferable. However, Washington wrote that defense was not a good option in this specific position:

The honour of making a brave defence does not seem to be a sufficient stimulus when the success is very doubtfull and the falling into the Enemy's hands probable: But I doubt not this will be gradually attained. We are now in a strong post but not an Impregnable one, nay acknowledged by every man of Judgement to be untenable unless the Enemy will make the Attack upon Lines when they can avoid It...

...[to fight here would put the Army's fate] on the Hazard of making a successfull defence in the City or the issue of an Engagement out of It—On the other hand to abandon a City which has been by some deemed defensible and on whose Works much Labor has been bestowed has a tendency to dispirit the Troops and enfeeble our Cause: It has also been considered as the Key to the Northern Country.²⁸⁰

Washington hedged his bet and acknowledged how important the city was to the Continental Congress, but he also explained the serious problems with holding the city. He charted a middle course to offset the two prevailing considerations, military and political, and kept one boot in the city and one out, seemingly in an effort to balance the two opposing challenges:

²⁷⁹ "From George Washington to John Hancock, 8 September 1776," *Washington Papers* vol. 6, 248–254.

²⁸⁰ "From George Washington to John Hancock, 8 September 1776," *Washington Papers* vol. 6, 248–254.

I have also removed from the City All the Stores & Ammunition except what was absolutely necessary for Its defence and made every Other disposition that did not essentially interfere with that Object, carefully keeping in view untill It should be absolutely determined on full consideration, how far the City was to be defended at all events...

All agreed the Town would not be tenable If the Enemy resolved to bombard & cannonade It—But the difficulty attending a removal operated so strongly, that a course was taken between abandoning It totally & concentrating our whole strength for Its defence...

It was concluded to Arrange the Army under Three Divisions, 5000 to remain for the defence of the City, 9000 to Kingsbridge & Its dependancies as well to possess & secure those posts as to be ready to attack the Enemy who are moving Eastward on Long Island, If they should attempt to land on this side—The remainder to occupy the intermediate space & support either—That the Sick should be immediately removed to Orange Town, and Barracks prepared at Kingsbridge with all expedition to cover the Troops.²⁸¹

Washington laid the groundwork for a prepared withdrawal. Lastly, in the same dispatch, Washington delicately explained his subordinates' opposition arguments, including Major General Nathanael Greene's, to abandon the city.

There were some Genl Officers in whose Judgement and opinion much confidence is to be reposed, that were for a total and immediate removal from the City, urging the great danger of One part of the Army being cut off before the other can support It, the Extremities being at least Sixteen miles apart—that our Army when collected is inferior to the Enemy's—that they can move with their whole force to any point of attack & consequently must succeed by weight of Numbers if they have only a part to oppose them—That by removing from hence we deprive the Enemy of the Advantage of their Ships which will make at least one half of the force to attack the Town—That we should keep the Enemy at Bay—put nothing to the hazard but at all events keep the Army together which may be recruited another Year, that the unspent Stores will also be preserved & in this case the heavy Artillery can also be secured—But they were overruled by a Majority who thought for the present a part of our force might be kept here and attempt to maintain the City a while longer.²⁸²

²⁸¹ “From George Washington to John Hancock, 8 September 1776,” *Washington Papers* vol. 6, 248–254.

²⁸² “From George Washington to John Hancock, 8 September 1776,” *Washington Papers* vol. 6, 248–254.

Washington recorded the minority view starkly, but clearly mentions in closing that these views were overruled by the Council of War. Then, at the end of the dispatch, Washington offered what appeared to be his own personal sense of the matter.

I am sensible a retreating Army is encircled with difficulties, that the declining an Engagement subjects a General to reproach and that the Common cause may be affected by the discouragement It may throw over the minds of many. Nor am I insensible of the contrary Effects if a brilliant stroke could be made with any probability of Success, especially after our Loss upon Long Island—But when the Fate of America may be at Stake on the Issue, when the wisdom of Cooler moments & experienced men have decided that we should protract the War, if possible, I cannot think it safe or wise to adopt a different System when the Season for Action draws so near a Close—That the Enemy mean to winter in New York there can be no doubt—that with such an Armament they can drive us out is equally clear. The Congress having resolved that It should not be destroyed nothing seems to remain but to determine the time of their taking possession—It is our Interest & wish to prolong It as much as possible provided the delay does not affect our future measures.²⁸³

Washington's words, particularly the last few sentences, were meant to prepare the Congress for an evacuation of New York. If Washington could not hold New York, he would relinquish it in such a way as to maintain Congress's trust and confidence, as well as that of his general officer subordinates. This manner of judgment promoted internal cohesion and unity.

On September 11, 1776, the same day Admiral Richard Howe met with representatives from the Continental Congress, a group of Washington's subordinate generals called for a reconsideration of the finding from the previous Council of War (from September 7, 1776) in which the decision had been to keep some troops in the city while others left.²⁸⁴ This Council of War on September 12, 1776 rescinded the previous decision, and approved the "city's evacuation."²⁸⁵ On September 14, 1776, Washington wrote to Hancock on his decision:

I have been duly honored with your favor of the 10th with the Resolution of Congress which accompanied It, and thank them for the confidence they repose in my Judgement

²⁸³ "From George Washington to John Hancock, 8 September 1776," *Washington Papers* vol. 6, 248–254.

²⁸⁴ "To George Washington from Certain General Officers, 11 September 1776," *Washington Papers* vol. 6, 279–280.

²⁸⁵ "Council of War, 12 September 1776," *Washington Papers* vol. 6, 288–289.

respecting the evacuation of the City. I could wish to maintain It, Because I know It to be of Importance, But I am fully convinced that It cannot be done, and that an attempt for that purpose if persevered in, might & most certainly would, be attended with consequences the most fatal and alarming in their nature. Sensible of this, Several of the Genl Officers since the determination of the Council mentioned in my last, petitioned that a Second Council might be called to reconsider the propositions which had been before them upon the Subject. accordingly I called One on the 12th when a large Majority not only determined a removal of the Army prudent but absolutely necessary.²⁸⁶

From September 8 to 14, 1776, Washington amended his judgment from a partial hold on New York to a decision to leave the city. Washington left behind some officers to spy in the soon-to-be British-occupied territory. This included the young Yale graduate, Captain Nathan Hale, who disguised himself as a Dutch schoolteacher, was quickly caught as a spy, and executed without trial on September 24, 1776.²⁸⁷ This shows how quickly the British had full control of New York; within days, the British were able to find, identify, and execute a spy among the population. By the end of September, even with reinforcements, Washington was down to just under 15,000 men fit for duty, while Howe still had well over 40,000 men.²⁸⁸

Howe's conduct of pardon offers

The British estimate of opposition was that the rebellion's epicenter was Massachusetts.²⁸⁹ By instead focusing on New York, and efforts at pardons, such conciliatory measures fit the assessment in British Major General James Robertson's comment: "I never had the idea of subduing the Americans, I meant to assist the good Americans to subdue the bad ones."²⁹⁰ The major British strategic effort was to aid the Loyalists in defeating the rebels. It was an estimate General William Howe surely agreed with, having written the non-loyalists were "very few, in comparison of the whole people."²⁹¹

²⁸⁶ "From George Washington to John Hancock, 14 September 1776," *Washington Papers* vol. 6, 308–309.

²⁸⁷ Fischer, *Washington's Crossing*, 108.

²⁸⁸ Fischer, *Washington's Crossing*, 108.

²⁸⁹ Black, "British military strategy," 60.

²⁹⁰ Robertson quoted in Anderson, *The Command of the Howe Brothers During the American Revolution*, 145.

²⁹¹ Howe quoted in Fischer, *Washington's Crossing*, 77.

The Howe brothers had received the authority to negotiate peace with the Colonials (and records reflect that Admiral Richard Howe forwarded King George III's written instructions for peace negotiations to General William Howe on June 22, 1776).²⁹² Admiral Richard Howe,

wanted the peace commission to have wide-ranging powers to grant pardons and to offer concessions as well as to consist solely of himself and his brother. He was opposed by the secretary of state for the American Department, Lord George Germain, who threatened resignation rather than allow such discretionary authority to the Howe brothers and wanted pardons restricted to those who swore oaths of allegiance, with no additional concessions.²⁹³

There were two encounters that provide evidence of the importance General Howe's command placed in this approach. The first came on July 13, 1776, when the British, shortly after landing in New York, attempted contact with General Washington. However, the British refused to refer to Washington by his formal title (e.g. "General") as doing so would legitimize him as an actual combatant instead of a traitorous criminal.²⁹⁴ The Americans refused to accept diplomatic correspondence addressed to "Mister Washington" or "Geo. Washington etc. etc. etc." on the grounds that to accept would deny the Continental claim to legitimacy.²⁹⁵

As Washington wrote to John Hancock and the Continental Congress of the incident, "I would not upon any occasion sacrifice Essentials to Punctilio, but in this Instance, the Opinion of Others concurring with my own, I deemed It a duty to my Country and my appointment to insist upon that respect which in any other than a public view I would willingly have waived."²⁹⁶

The couriers met in rowboats, but this first attempt at a meaningful dialogue between the combatants never got past a visual encounter and they never talked.²⁹⁷ Germain's instructions had forbidden talks that treated the rebels as equal, as well to hold off until the Continental Army put down their weapons.²⁹⁸ This meant negotiations could only happen after the Continental Army was entirely defeated, a condition that undercut any meaningful effort at negotiation.

²⁹² "Henry Strachey Papers: The James S. Copley Library," *Sotheby's* (October 15, 2010). Text, accessed February 26, 2016, <http://www.sothebys.com/en/auctions/2010/the-james-s-copley-library-the-henry-strachey-papers-n08700.html>.

²⁹³ O'Shaughnessy, *The Men Who Lost America*, 91.

²⁹⁴ Edward G. Lengel, *This Glorious Struggle: George Washington's Revolutionary War Letters*, ed. Edward G. Lengel (New York: HarperCollins, 2007), 53.

²⁹⁵ Lengel, *This Glorious Struggle*, 53.

²⁹⁶ George Washington quoted in Lengel, *This Glorious Struggle*, 53-54.

²⁹⁷ Ellis, *Revolutionary Summer*, 78.

²⁹⁸ Ellis, *Revolutionary Summer*, 78.

In between pardon attempts, Henry Strachey, secretary to both General William Howe and Admiral Richard Howe for matters pertaining to American pardons, wrote to a friend on September 3, 1776, following the Battle of Long Island, in which he provided a vision of a Continental Army's fracture:

As their Regiments are from almost every Province on the Continent, it is probable that many of them may begin to look towards their respective homes, and contend for the Recovery of those Liberties which have been most grievously invaded by the Tyranny of their own Countrymen, under the Pretext of preserving them from the imaginary Apprehensions of ours. Of New Jersey (which Your Map will tell you is close upon our left) we know little ... but as we are so near them, and the superiority of the King's Forces is now beyond a doubt with them, it is hardly to be supposed that these People will leave their own Province, and go to the Protection of the Neighbours...I should conjecture that a very few Weeks will afford us great light into future Events.²⁹⁹

With such an assumption present at the highest levels of the British command, it is understandable why General Howe continued to offer pardons. He thought the end was near.

On September 11, 1776, the only official gathering, before the end of the war, between the two adversaries occurred.³⁰⁰ However, the newly signed Declaration of Independence blocked all discussion, as it was not recognized by King George III, the document kept negotiations from meaningful progress. The American party included Benjamin Franklin, John Adams, and John Rutledge (of South Carolina), who were all met by Admiral Richard Howe.³⁰¹ Admiral Howe told the three men: "When an American falls, England feels it. Is there no way of trading back this step of Independency, and opening the door to a full discussion?"³⁰² However, such peace was unlikely, as the guidance from Britain was the pardons were only to be issued "to such of our subjects as shall deserve our Royal Mercy," and the Declaration of Independence put any and all rebels outside that particular calculation.³⁰³

Howe's theory was that the loss and withdrawal of the Continental Army from Long Island would provide incentive to cut a deal with the British.³⁰⁴ Of course, even with that as the prevailing belief, there was some doubt the Americans would take the deal, as Strachey wrote on

²⁹⁹ Henry Strachey, "The Henry Strachey Papers."

³⁰⁰ Black, "British military strategy," 62.

³⁰¹ O'Shaughnessy, *The Men Who Lost America*, 99.

³⁰² Admiral Richard Howe quoted in Henry Strachey, "The Henry Strachey Papers."

³⁰³ Henry Strachey, "The Henry Strachey Papers."

³⁰⁴ Ellis, *Revolutionary Summer*, 134.

September 3, “[The Americans] might at this moment have peace and happiness, but they insist upon having their brains knocked out first.”³⁰⁵

Strachey was right: the American delegation considered the loss at Long Island a temporary setback, even as General Washington evacuated New York. Howe wrote on September 25, 1776, his assessment that the negotiation was not likely to work: “I must here add, that I found the Americans not so well disposed to join us, and to serve us as I had been taught to expect; that I thought our farther progress for the present, precarious.”³⁰⁶

The British attempt to use dominant terrain-taking to encourage pardons and peace continued with one more dramatic move.³⁰⁷ On November 30, 1776, Admiral Richard Howe offered a sixty-day period where he would pardon those who swore obedience to King George III. On December 28, 1776, in a letter to his wife, Strachey described the pardons progress: “The Proclamation of the 30th. of last Month has reformed a Croud of Culprits, and I cannot deliver out of the King's Pardons so fast as they are claimed. But till the Time is expired (60 Days) we cannot know fully the Effect of that Measure.”³⁰⁸ While initially, roughly 5,000 signed the pardon, ultimately, after the victories at Trenton and Princeton, the Americans renounced this forced oath. Upon hearing the news of the Continental victories in New Jersey, Strachey issued a verdict on the pardon process: “the completion of the work of peace appears still at an unmeasurable distance... [the Americans] still continue obstinate.”³⁰⁹

In Summary

Washington’s challenge was to manage the fallout from the defeat at the Battle of Long Island. Specifically, should the Continental Army stand in New York, conduct a strategic withdrawal, or even burn the city to deny it to the British? Washington hedged for several days; he took in the opinions of his chief subordinates as well as the wishes of Congress. Ultimately, Washington’s judgment on the use of force to achieve his policy goal was accurate in this case, in that the strategic withdrawal kept the Continental Army in the war and avoided being trapped on Manhattan and in New York. Additionally, with respect to his ability to find coherence amongst several different political and military considerations, between Major General Nathanael Greene’s desire to burn New York and the Continental Congress desiring the opposite,

³⁰⁵ Henry Strachey, “The Henry Strachey Papers.”

³⁰⁶ Howe, *The Narrative of Lieut. Gen. Sir William Howe*, 6.

³⁰⁷ Doughty and Gruber, *Warfare in the Western World Vol. 1*, 144.

³⁰⁸ Henry Strachey, “The Henry Strachey Papers.”

³⁰⁹ Henry Strachey, “The Henry Strachey Papers.”

Washington was able to connect with all parties and compromise in a way as to make the withdrawal from New York palatable to them all.

Considering initial success, Howe's challenge was to determine whether to press the military campaign or focus on political negotiation. In contrast to Clinton's desire for aggressive pursuit, Howe's strategy attempted to persuade, and was ultimately unsuccessful.³¹⁰ He assumed the opposition was smaller than it was; Howe underestimated the size of the rebellion and Washington's ability to convince others to join.³¹¹ In sum, Howe's judgment to pursue political negotiation and peace agreements over other available alternatives had no impact on the military contest or the balance of political and military forces. Of course, it could be said the November 30, 1776 proclamation showed promise for a time in New Jersey, but was quickly reversed with Washington's gains in late 1776 and early 1777. In the final analysis, the effort bore no strategic fruit and cost time and effort which could have been allocated elsewhere.

3.6 Howe's campaign culmination versus Washington's attack at Trenton and Princeton

Howe's campaign culmination

In late October and November, General Howe enjoyed battlefield victories at White Plains (north of modern New York City) and Fort Mifflin (the immediate northern approach to New York City). At White Plains, Howe held the field and caused the Continental Army to expedite their retreat from New York and into New Jersey. Howe explained:

On the 28th of October the engagement at the White-Plains took place. It has been asserted, that, by my not attacking the lines on the day of action, I lost an opportunity of destroying the rebel army...

The committee must give me credit when I assure them, that I have political reasons, and no other, for declining to explain why that assault was not made. Upon a minute enquiry those reasons might, if necessary, be brought out in evidence at the bar. If, however, the assault had been made, and the lines carried, the enemy would have got off without much loss, and no way had we, that I could ever learn, of cutting off their retreat by the Croton Bridge. I cannot conceive the foundation of such an idea. By forcing the lines we should undoubtedly have gained a more brilliant advantage, some baggage, and some provisions; but we had no reason to suppose that the rebel army could have been destroyed.

³¹⁰ Doughty and Gruber, *Warfare in the Western World Vol. 1*, 144.

³¹¹ Anderson, *The Command of the Howe Brothers During the American Revolution*, 26.

The ground in their rear was such that they could with, for securing their retreat, which indeed seemed to be their principal object. And, Sir, I do not hesitate to confess, that if I could by manoeuvre remove an enemy from a very advantageous position, without hazarding the consequences of an attack, where the point to be carried was not adequate to the loss of men to be expected from the enterprise, I should certainly adopt that cautionary conduct, in the hopes of meeting my adversary upon more equal terms.³¹²

Howe consistently argued that gradual pressure was the key to victory. Particularly in this case, he believed that to push the Continental Army too hard would result in negative blowback to his own forces and the wider effort. In short, by investing more soldiers than the situation called for, his sense was he would have risked more than he could hope to gain. Instead, Howe preferred maneuver to chase the Continental Army into submission. In this limited objective he was successful; for example, he took over 2,800 American prisoners of war at Fort Mifflin on November 16, 1776.³¹³ Numerically damaging, this event also had a psychological impact on the supreme commander as he helplessly watched his enemy bayonet and bludgeon to death many American soldiers from across the river at Fort Mifflin (on the modern New Jersey Palisades).³¹⁴ Washington was so devastated he turned from his subordinates and wept.³¹⁵

By mid-December, Howe had Washington on the run and chose to culminate the campaign and sent his troops to winter quarters in villages across New Jersey, in addition to New York City and Newport.³¹⁶ This decision went directly against his second-in-command's advice, General Henry Clinton, who wrote: "upon [Howe's] hinting to me his intention of running a chain of posts across east Jersey, I took the liberty of cautioning him against the possibility of its being broken in upon in the winter...I even advised him, after having pushed Washington to the utmost, if he could not succeed in taking his army, to evacuate the Jerseys altogether."³¹⁷ Recorded after the war as this was, it ought to raise some skepticism. But Howe's own testimony corroborates Clinton's characterization. Howe wrote:

³¹² Howe, *The Narrative of Lieut. Gen. Sir William Howe*, 6-7.

³¹³ Fischer, *Washington's Crossing*, 113.

³¹⁴ Chernow, *Washington: A Life*, 262.

³¹⁵ Fischer, *Washington's Crossing*, 113-114. See Chernow, *Washington: A Life*, 262. See also Washington Irving, *The Life of George Washington* (New York: William L. Allison Co., 1859), 274. Irving claimed he heard the story from an eyewitness: the loss "was said so completely to have overcome him that he wept with the tenderness of a child."

³¹⁶ Doughty and Gruber, *Warfare in the Western World Vol. 1*, 144.

³¹⁷ Clinton, *The American Rebellion*, 56.

But it has been objected to me that I ought not to have intrusted the important part of Trenton to the Hessian troops. My answer to this, if clearly understood, will I think be satisfactory, Military men will certainly understand it. The left, Sir, was the post of the Hessians in the line, and had I changed it upon this occasion it must have been considered a disgrace, since the same situation held in the cantonments as in the camp. And it probably would have created jealousies between the Hessian and British troops, which it was my duty carefully to prevent.

[The Hessian commanders, Colonel Donop and Colonel Rall] both had timely information of the intended attack: The numbers of the enemy, I was credibly informed, did not exceed 3000, and if Colonel Rall had obeyed the orders I sent to him for the erecting of redoubts, I am confident his post would not have been taken.

I would ask those who object to this part of the distribution, where could the Hessian troops have been better employed than in the defence of a post? In the last war they were esteemed not unequal to any troops in Prince Ferdinands's army, and I should do them much injustice were I not to say they were in very high order in America.³¹⁸

My principal object in so great an extension of the cantonments was to afford protection to the inhabitants, that they might experience the difference between his majesty's government, and that to which they were subject from the rebel leaders. For, Sir, although some persons condemn me for having endeavored to conciliate his majesty's rebellious subjects, by taking every means to prevent the destruction of the country, instead of irritating them by a contrary mode of proceeding, yet am I, from many reasons, satisfied in my own mind that I acted in that particular for the benefit of the king's service.

[While others wanted me to conduct] acts of great severity [, such is not the proper conduct of a] commander in chief.³¹⁹

One can see an effort at coherence in Howe's priorities. His thoughts prioritized the preservation of an international coalition in a forward deployed area. He trusted the Hessians in his formation, although, we can see that others (e.g. Clinton) second-guessed this decision. Also, Howe judged this was the most prudent course of action to assist the local population in nudging the fence-sitting Americans back into loyalty to the British. He sought to demonstrate the superiority of the British government to the local population.

On December 1, when the Continental Army made its way out of Newark, New Jersey southward, Lieutenant (later president) James Monroe counted three thousand men left in

³¹⁸ Howe, *The Narrative of Lieut. Gen. Sir William Howe*, 8.

³¹⁹ Howe, *The Narrative of Lieut. Gen. Sir William Howe*, 9.

Washington's ranks.³²⁰ Washington worried the British might corner his forces against the Delaware River as he withdrew to the south. At one point, the pursuit was extremely close, with Washington's rear elements leaving merely one hour before British forces arrived in Princeton on the afternoon of December 7, 1776.³²¹

On December 8, 1776, next to the Delaware River, Howe ended his pursuit. Then on December 13, 1776, Howe drafted winter orders to garrison his troops. Howe personally chose the sites, and placed three brigades in towns approximately six miles apart, to maximize forage and minimize time for mutual reinforcement. Colonel Johann Rall's three Hessian regiments that had fought well in the campaign were placed closest to enemy forces. Howe judged the campaign over for the winter and the Americans were done fighting until the weather improved.³²²

Contemporary British military officer Charles Stedman found fault not just in the decision to suspend the campaign, but also the judgment on the apportionment of British and Hessian forces. Stedman argued "the chain of communication" for the British side, from the Delaware River back to Hackensack, "was too extensive, and the cantonments too remote from each other." Next, and crucially, "foreign troops ought not to have been stationed either at Trenton or Bordenton" as "they lay nearest to the enemy." Stedman stated the problem with the Hessian troops in this location was they understood "nothing of the language" and therefore "were unable to obtain proper intelligence, and instead of conciliating the affections, made themselves particularly disagreeable to the natives, by pillaging them."³²³

Broadly, plundering was common in New Jersey, and according to British Major General James Robertson, the result was "the people of New Jersey took up their weapons and began to fight back."³²⁴

In sum, Stedman levied strong criticism against Howe:

Men of plain sense could not understand why the [supreme commander], at the head of thirty thousand veteran troops, should suffer an undisciplined army, not amounting to a sixth part of his own numbers, to remain in a province so lately in his firm possession; and not only to remain there, but to compel him to abandon that province.³²⁵

³²⁰ Fischer, *Washington's Crossing*, 129.

³²¹ Fischer, *Washington's Crossing*, 132.

³²² Fischer, *Washington's Crossing*, 135, 184, 185.

³²³ Stedman, *The History of the Origin, Progress, and Termination of the American War, Volume 1*, 251-252.

³²⁴ Robertson quoted in Fischer, *Washington's Crossing*, 174, 179.

³²⁵ Stedman, *The History of the Origin, Progress, and Termination of the American War, Volume 1*, 268.

Though one can see Howe's reasonableness at work, one can also see the limits in his judgments in not finishing the Continental Army when he had the ability and resources to do so. The decision to suspend the campaign and to station his forces in such close proximity to the remnants of Washington's main body were judgments that are questionable.

To be sure, Howe had limitations and mitigating circumstances: he had to attack an enemy far from his home base of supply over tough terrain.³²⁶ However, while this rationale may be suitable for explaining the general challenge Howe faced, it does not absolve him of responsibility for the disastrous results that came from his choice to culminate the pursuit (and Washington's subsequent counterattack).

It helps to numerically specify the culmination point. Over time, the American force was bled down significantly. The Continental Army had roughly 19,000 effective soldiers on August 27, 1776, and by November 28 had fewer than 3,000.³²⁷ At the same time, the British fielded roughly 32,000 in their ground forces on August 27, and in early January (the closest in time a credible estimate is available), despite strategic consumption to hold newly taken territory, the British had roughly 14,000 soldiers in the vicinity of New Jersey.³²⁸

Howe's forces, having been within one hour of the withered Continental Army on December 7, 1776, allowed the Continental Army to reconnect with militias and other forces to bring its strength up from 3,000 to 6,500 on the eve of the attack on Trenton, and by the follow-on attack at Princeton, Washington had 7,500 effective soldiers.³²⁹

For approximately two months, in November and December 1776, Howe had a better than four-to-one advantage in troop strength; Washington picked up some militia to lower the gap to two-and-a-half-to-one in early January 1777. However, Howe negated his own numerical advantage through his use of small, separate garrisons in New Jersey, which made an exceptional opportunity for Washington. This also shows the period of maximal danger, running from late November to early December, when Howe's British forces had significantly superior numbers and the ability to run down, find, and finish the Continental Army.

Washington's attack at Trenton and Princeton

³²⁶ Stedman, *The History of the Origin, Progress, and Termination of the American War, Volume 1*, 269.

³²⁷ Fischer, *Washington's Crossing*, 381-382.

³²⁸ Fischer, *Washington's Crossing*, 383.

³²⁹ Fischer, *Washington's Crossing*, 382.

On September 30, 1776, General George Washington wrote to his cousin and home manager, Lund Washington, on the status of his forces and summed up his growing sense of despair: “In confidence I tell you that I never was in such an unhappy, divided state since I was born.”³³⁰

In the Washington archive, there are records for 44 separate Councils of War which Washington convened in the course of his military career, one of which occurred after a defeat in the Battle of White Plains, on November 6, 1776, which “unanimously agreed” to “throw a Body of Troops into the Jerseys immediately.”³³¹ Having withdrawn from New York, this was the step Washington’s forces took to move into New Jersey.

At this point Washington wrote to his brother, John Augustine Washington, on November 6 and November 19, 1776; the earlier part of the letter, begun on November 6, described General Washington’s assessment of what happened at White Plains, that the loss occurred was not of great significance.³³²

Then, on November 19, Washington continued the same letter from Hackensack, New Jersey. He described the loss of Fort Mifflin, which Washington felt badly about as he had disagreed with the decision, which he had allowed his subordinate, Major General Nathanael Greene, to make; Washington ended the letter with a noteworthy, somber line, “I am wearied almost to death with the retrogr[ade] Motions of things.”³³³

On December 10, 1776, Washington again described the strategic situation to his cousin and estate manager, Lund Washington:

I wish to Heaven it was in my power to give you a more favourable Acct of our situation ... My numbers, till joined by the Philadelphia Militia did not exceed 3000 Men fit for duty— now we may be about 5000 to oppose Howes whole Army, that part of it excepted which said under the Comd. of General Clinton. I tremble for Philadelphia, nothing in my opinion but General Lee’s speedy arrival, who has been long expected, tho still at a distance (with about 3000 Men) can save it. We have brought over, and destroyed, all the Boats we could lay our hands on, upon the Jersey Shore for many Miles above and below this place; but it is next to impossible to guard a Shore for 60 Miles with less than half the Enemys numbers;

³³⁰ “From George Washington to Lund Washington, 30 September 1776,” *Washington Papers* vol. 6, 440–443.

³³¹ “Council of War, 6 November 1776,” *Washington Papers* vol. 7, 92–93.

³³² “From George Washington to John Augustine Washington, 6–19 November 1776,” *Washington Papers* vol. 7, 102–106.

³³³ “From George Washington to John Augustine Washington, 6–19 November 1776,” *Washington Papers* vol. 7, 102–106.

when by force, or Stratagem they may suddenly attempt a passage in many different places.³³⁴

If this was not bleak enough, on December 13, one of Washington's subordinates reported Major General Charles Lee, widely considered the most capable general in the Continental Army, was captured by the British.³³⁵

On December 14, Washington raised the potential for attack for the first time, as part of a description of his military predicament to Connecticut Governor Jonathan Trumbull.

[The enemy across from us] want of means of transportation has hitherto hindered the Enemy from making any attempt to cross the Delaware, and I hope, unless the course of the seasons entirely changes, that the weather will soon prevent their making use of Boats, if they should build them.

Whereas by coming on they may, in conjunction with my present Forces and that under Genl Lee enable us to attempt a stroke upon the Forces of the Enemy, who lay a good deal scattered, and to all appearance, in a state of security. A lucky blow in this Quarter would be fatal to them, and would most certainly raise the spirits of the People, which are quite sunk by our late misfortunes.³³⁶ [Note: Though Lee was captured, his forces were not and continued to move to support Washington's main body of troops.]

This is the first written evidence of Washington's decision to attack British forces. On December 7, British forces were within one hour of Washington's retreating columns. On December 8, Howe decided to suspend the campaign for the season, and put his order out to garrison for the winter on December 13. On the same day, Washington learned of Lee's capture, and on December 14, 1776, Washington wrote to Governor Trumbull and assessed the enemy as "scattered" and a "blow... would be fatal" to the British.

Even if Washington assessed it was time "to attempt a stroke upon the Forces of the Enemy," he also wrote to Lund Washington on December 17, 1776, with a pessimistic message:

³³⁴ "From George Washington to Lund Washington, 10–17 December 1776," *Washington Papers* vol. 7, 289–292.

³³⁵ "To George Washington from Major General John Sullivan, 13 December 1776," *Washington Papers* vol. 7, 328.

³³⁶ "From George Washington to Jonathan Trumbull, Sr., 14 December 1776," *Washington Papers* vol. 7, 340–341.

Our Cause has also received a severe blow in the Captivity of General Lee—Unhappy Man! taken by his own Imprudence!

[Y]our imagination can scarce extend to a situation more distressing than mine— Our only dependance now, is upon the Speedy Inlistment of a New Army; if this fails us, I think the game will be pretty well up, as from disaffection, and want of spirit & fortitude, the Inhabitants instead of resistance, are offering Submission, & taking protections from Genl Howe in Jersey.³³⁷

In this, Washington presented the doubts he had not shown to Governor Trumbull. This was a message Washington repeated, in near desperation for more authority to build a larger army, to John Hancock on December 20, 1776:

[T]en days more will put an end to the existence of our Army... [we have made] a mistaken dependance upon Militia, [and they] have been the Origin of all our misfortunes, and the great accumulation of our Debt...

[T]he Enemy are daily gathering strength from the disaffected; This strength, like a Snowball by rolling, will increase... could any thing but the River Delaware have saved Philadelphia?...

[The militia] leave [us] at last at a critical moment. These Sir, are the men, I am to depend upon, Ten days hence... In my judgement this is not a time to stand upon expence — our funds are the only Objects of consideration.³³⁸

Washington stated he required the authority to reenlist soldiers with financial bonuses. In the end, the twin victories at Trenton and Princeton helped propel the Continental Congress to give Washington the power to build the army he had requested.³³⁹ The reasoned arguments Washington put to in writing had their desired effect in maintaining the Continental Army as an able fighting force. The two efforts reinforced one another: military wins brought political support; political support brought soldiers; soldiers brought military wins. At the same time, Washington dealt with the next course of action against the British at Trenton, he concerned himself with force structure issues that later became crucial to the continued existence of the Continental Army.

³³⁷ “From George Washington to Lund Washington, 10–17 December 1776,” *Washington Papers* vol. 7, 289–292.

³³⁸ “From George Washington to John Hancock, 20 December 1776,” *Washington Papers* vol. 7, 381–389.

³³⁹ Stoker and Jones, “Colonial military strategy,” 15.

On December 21, 1776, Pennsylvania Governor Robert Morris wrote a secretive, veiled expression of support for Washington's impending attack against Trenton and offered "Joyfull tidings," as well as "sincere prayers for Success."³⁴⁰

Not privy to the plan for attack yet, Washington's aide Lieutenant Colonel Joseph Reed wrote to Washington on December 22, 1776, and independently made the case for some attack, which by then, unbeknownst to Reed, had already been determined:

[S]omething must be attempted to revive our expiring Credit give our Cause some Degree of Reputation... the scattered divided State of the Enemy affords us a fair Oppy of trying what our Men will do when called to an offensive Attack...Something must be attempted before the 60 Days expires which the Commissioners have allowed.³⁴¹

This message makes clear the British sixty-day pardon deadline had an impact on Continental Army decisions and was likely a factor in the decision to act. Washington responded to Reed the next day, on December 23, and informed him of the attack:

The bearer is sent...to inform you that Christmas day at Night, one hour before day is the time fixed upon for our Attempt on Trenton. For heaven's sake keep this to yourself, as the discovery of it may prove fatal to us, our numbers, sorry I am to say, being less than I had any conception of—but necessity, dire necessity will—nay must justify any Attempt.

If I had not been fully convinced before of the Enemys designs I have now ample testimony of their Intentions to attack Philadelphia so soon as the Ice will afford the means of conveyance.

P.S. I have orderd our Men to be provided with three days Provisions ready Cook'd; with which, and their Blankets they are to March, for if we are successful which heaven grant & other Circumstances favour we may push on.³⁴²

Washington acknowledged the attack was necessary; but also in the post script he stated clearly that he was prepared to continue the attack beyond Trenton, foreshadowing his next move on Princeton.

³⁴⁰ "To George Washington from Robert Morris, 21 December 1776," *Washington Papers* vol. 7, 403–404.

³⁴¹ "To George Washington from Colonel Joseph Reed, 22 December 1776," *Washington Papers* vol. 7, 414–417.

³⁴² "From George Washington to Colonel Joseph Reed, 23 December 1776," *Washington Papers* vol. 7, 423–424.

On December 24, Washington wrote to commanders in the Connecticut and Massachusetts militias to “press” and “march forward with as much expedition as possible to this place or wherever my Head Quarters may be.”³⁴³ Washington anticipated he would be on the move, even post-Trenton, as otherwise he would simply have given them a single specific location. This provides further evidence Washington planned a follow-on attack.

The same day, December 24, 1776, Washington wrote to John Hancock in what must have been by then a familiar caustic tone:

That I should dwell upon the subject of our distresses cannot be more disagreeable to Congress than it is painfull to myself.

[V]ery few of the men have inlisted...amounting in the whole at this time from Fourteen to Fifteen hundred effective men. This handfull and such Militia as may chuse to join me will then compose our Army...

Genl Howe has a number of Troops cantoned in the Towns bordering on & near the Delaware, his intentions to pass as soon as the ice is sufficiently formed—to invade Pennsylvania and possess himself of Philadelphia if possible. To guard against his designs & the execution of them shall employ my every exertion, but how is this to be done?...

The inclosed Letter from the Paymaster Genl will shew the state of the military Chest and the necessity of a large and immediate supply of Cash. The advances to the Officers for bounty and the recruiting service are great, besides the Regiments at the expiration of this Month, will require payment of their claims.³⁴⁴

Again, this speaks to Washington’s great, continual concern: the development of a sustainable, capable, professional military force. At the same time, Washington was also concerned about diplomacy, in this case, with Native American tribes; he wrote on December 24, 1776:

Our Enemy the King of Great Britain endeavoured to Stir up all the Indians from Canada to South Carolina Against Us, But our Bretheren of the Six Nations and their Allies the Shawanese and Delewares would not hearken to the Advice of the Messengers sent among them but kept fast hold of our Ancient Covenant Chain; The Cherokees and the Southern Tribes were foolish enough to listen to them, and to take up the Hatchet Against us, Upon

³⁴³ “From George Washington to the Commanders of the Connecticut and Massachusetts Militias Marching to Peekskill, 24 December 1776,” *Washington Papers* vol. 7, 426.

³⁴⁴ “From George Washington to John Hancock, 24 December 1776,” *Washington Papers* vol. 7, 429–432.

this our Warriours went into their Country, burnt their Houses, destroyed their Corn, and Obliged them to sue for peace and give Hostages for their future Good Behaviour.

Now Brothers never lett the Kings Wicked Councillors turn your Hearts Against Me and your Bretheren of this Country...³⁴⁵

This was defense diplomacy, deterrence through threat, and international relations; Washington policed up potentially wayward allies and ensured his organization kept coherent unity and suffered no fallouts to the British.

On December 25, the day of execution, Washington wrote in his General Orders: “Each Brigade to be furnish’d with two good Guides” and they ought to be prepared to spike artillery pieces and drag off cannon. Advance guards were to “make prisoners of all going in or coming out of Town.” And, above all, “a profound silence to be enjoyn’d & no man to quit his Ranks on the pain of Death.”³⁴⁶ The same day Washington wrote to Colonel John Cadwalader at 6:00 p.m., “Notwithstanding the discouraging Accounts I have received from Col Reed of what might be expected from the Operations below, I am determined, as the night is favourable, to cross the River, & make the attack upon Trenton in the Morning. If you can do nothing real, at least create as great a diversion as possible.”³⁴⁷

Washington’s week-and-a-half from December 25, 1776 to January 4, 1777, is rightly considered one of the most successful in all of recorded military history. On December 25, he led 1,400 men to attack the 1,400 Hessians in garrison at Trenton. The other intended American support columns were held back by weather, but Washington’s force did hit the garrison from two sides, the Hessians were caught off guard; Washington’s men sustained only four wounded, and captured 948 Hessians and killed or wounded another 114. The following week Washington attacked and defeated the enemy’s garrison at Princeton, where Washington took thirty soldiers and fourteen officers as casualties, and believed he captured or killed 500 to 600, against losses Howe estimated at 276.³⁴⁸

3.7 Campaign Judgments, 1776

³⁴⁵ “From George Washington to the Chiefs of the Passamaquoddy Indians, 24 December 1776,” *Washington Papers* vol. 7, 433–434.

³⁴⁶ “General Orders, 25 December 1776,” *Washington Papers* vol. 7, 434–438.

³⁴⁷ “From George Washington to Colonel John Cadwalader, 25 December 1776,” *Washington Papers* vol. 7, 439.

³⁴⁸ Palmer, “General George Washington: Grand Strategist or Mere Fabian?,” 9. Doughty and Gruber, *Warfare in the Western World Vol. 1*, 145. O’Shaughnessy, *The Men Who Lost America*, 102.

General Howe's challenge was to build on tactical military success from August to November 1776, and determine the best way to terminate the war. General Clinton counseled continued pursuit, or at least to consolidate forces to avoid distributed attacks designed to defeat the British in detail. From these options, Howe's choice was to culminate and garrison his forces in relatively small detachments across New Jersey to show the Americans the extent of British control over the land. This choice was shown to be inaccurate through the twin losses at Trenton and Princeton. Moreover, this judgment ultimately degraded British unity of effort in the 1777 campaign, and resulted in French entry into the war which ended British sea supremacy.³⁴⁹

Washington's challenge was to determine what course of action to pursue, having lost multiple battles from August to November 1776. Considering the Continental Army's relative resource imbalance when compared to the British, Washington could have culminated his campaign as Howe did. Yet he attacked. Washington's choice to attack at Trenton and Princeton was correct and immensely significant as a military success. In addition, he executed the judgment and action while maintaining a wide lens, as shown in his dispatches leading up to the twin attacks, which ensured the political and military aspects to the campaign were in harmony.

3.8 Final Assessment and Formal Characteristics

This section considers two critical aspects of Washington's observed characteristics: his judgment and the thinking that underpinned his decisions; and the formal characteristics that can be observed from his life that likely had an impact on his judgment (i.e. education, experiences, personal characteristics, and post-war life).

While General George Washington certainly was not perfect, as previous material shows, there is no shortage of writers and historians that have concluded his performance in supreme command displayed military genius.³⁵⁰

But why? What accounts for this lofty characterization? Some believe it comes from his instinct for power, and how to use it.³⁵¹ Others argue it was a judgment that was not clouded by

³⁴⁹ Dudley W. Knox, *The Naval Genius of George Washington* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1932), 124.

³⁵⁰ Palmer, *George Washington's Military Genius*. Morgan, *The Genius of George Washington*. Knox, *The Naval Genius of George Washington*.

³⁵¹ Morgan, *The Genius of George Washington*, 6.

extraneous concepts and ideas.³⁵² Still others might believe it was more than judgment, rather, it was a keen sense of decision when given a perplexing problem by others.³⁵³

So what can be learned from Washington's thinking in terms of this judgment, as well as his empathy and grit?

It is helpful to review Howe's judgments and decisions, as they are they are the standard against which we might judge Washington. From the campaign's opening moments, Howe believed the rebels were few in number and could be convinced by a show of strength to submit. Howe did not seek to annihilate the Continental Army, or even a direct attack to reduce their material resources (though he did capture a good amount of terrain during the campaign, particularly in New York). Howe sought instead to exhaust the rebels' willingness to fight and prosecute the war; to show them they had no avenue to win against such an enormous and professional army and navy. So even when Howe had an opportunity to encircle and destroy the Continental Army, he did not take it, and his preferred course of action was three attempts at pardons and peace offers. These judgments reveal Howe's larger war strategy, and, importantly, the critical conditions against which Washington had to fight.

Washington prioritized survival for his force; in that, a strategy of exhaustion was his only real option. His best course was to try to convince the British forces and government that their efforts in America would come to no avail or at such a high price it would not be worth the effort.

The nearness of the Continental Congress meant Washington had to trade daily messages with his own key political figures, and so he had to navigate their needs and desires. This engagement was a significant part of his decision-making with respect to New York; both to stay in and defend the city in July and August 1776, and when, and how, to leave in September 1776. He also had to manage hard feelings from key subordinates, as when some of Washington's best generals argued for the destruction of the city as a way of indirectly harming the British war effort. Navigating this issue was difficult for Washington for both political and military command reasons, but paid dividends in both ways because he gained the trust and confidence of the Continental Congress, as well as maintained the loyalty of his key subordinates.

In evaluating Washington's judgment, historian Jeremy Black adopts a fairly narrow view, calling Washington "a good political general, rather like Eisenhower. We're not talking about the most astute reader of terrain or topography, and indeed as a battlefield commander he gets it

³⁵² Ellis, *His Excellency: George Washington*, 271.

³⁵³ Chernow, *Washington: A Life*, 292.

wrong at Long Island.”³⁵⁴ Criticisms like this divide and conquer; they derisively dismiss the importance of working within a democratic political system as a senior military figure and simultaneously hammer away at a single tactical flaw. But supreme command is broader than either of these; supreme command is both about the ability to make correct judgments about the use of force, as well as coherent judgments with respect to maintaining political-military unity of effort. And the only measure that truly matters when in supreme command is cumulative, relative performance. In this case, the ledger speaks for itself: Washington bested Howe in the 1776 campaign and into the early days of 1777, survived the greatest threat to the fledgling American war effort, and ultimately won the war. And the twin intangible traits Washington displayed the most in this effort, empathy and grit, can be seen in several of the campaign’s important moments.

Exemplary supreme command demands an exceptional sense of empathy. This manifests itself in several ways: externally toward opponents, but also internally, amongst allies, peers, subordinates, and political elites. Washington showed this trait many times over.

His defense of New York was a decision made specifically in support of his republican government and in appropriate deference to political figures.³⁵⁵ Washington’s initial decision to stay and hold New York as well as his thoughtful dispatches explaining his position and looming threats, show a supreme commander with an superior sense of emotional intelligence in holding onto the trust of his political leadership.

Then, though possessing a natural orientation toward aggressive action, Washington withdrew his forces from New York when the circumstances changed. He listened to his subordinate generals and others, evidenced by his numerous councils of war. He presented opposing and dissenting subordinate views as an honest broker. He never held back from those that disagreed with him, and early in the war he told a key staff officer: “I can bear to hear of imputed or real errors” and “the man who wishes to stand well in the opinion of others must do this, because he is thereby enabled to correct his faults or remove his prejudices.”³⁵⁶ Washington listened to others, which benefitted his campaign and war efforts.

Washington was empathetic on several levels, sometimes at once. During this campaign, he showed himself able to hold an omni-directional perspective, which can be seen in his dispatches not just to members of Congress, but also state governors, Native American chiefs,

³⁵⁴ Black, “How Washington Won,” quote at 1 minute.

³⁵⁵ Morgan, *The Genius of George Washington*, 10, 13.

³⁵⁶ Washington quoted in Chernow, *Washington: A Life*, 292.

militia leaders, in addition to the normal variety of subordinate generals and military commanders. He was clearly concerned with many issues beyond the battlefield.

While Washington wrote that it would give him “infinite pleasure to afford protection to every individual and to every Spot of Ground in the whole of the United States,” he knew full-well he could not due to resource constraints and instead often took pains to courteously explain why he was unable to meet such requests.³⁵⁷ He spoke plainly and politely with politicians of all types, and earned their trust.

Empathy is an important characteristic in supreme command, but so is grit. And grit manifests itself differently; it has two parts as a personal dedication to a broad course of action, as well as commitment to specific decisions even against withering criticism and opposition.

We can see these both with Washington in this campaign. As to his personal dedication despite doubts, Washington’s decision to attack at Trenton and Princeton in spite of his immense personal uncertainty shows his grit. Reading the flurry of dispatches shows just how concerned he was that the effort would not succeed, yet he kept these worries to himself and projected confidence. Second, his decision to withdraw from New York, while supported by many of his subordinate generals, was an action that he took despite knowing the reputational costs for such a decision. And, his insistence that the British use his formal title in their peace negotiations in July 1776 punctuated his personal commitment to the cause of American independence. Above all else, he maintained his focus on the goal of a separate and independent country.³⁵⁸

There were also moments of grit in his decision-making with respect to specific choices. On assuming position in New York, Major General Charles Lee had informed Washington about how difficult it would be to defend a peninsula surrounded by navigable waters against the British navy. Yet, at that point, Washington’s guidance from Congress was clear: hold New York. And so he stuck to that decision. Also, similarly difficult, when Washington decided to leave New York, the Congress asked him not to burn it, against the wishes of a large contingent of his subordinates. Again, Washington held to a tough decision.

Formal Characteristics

What might researchers take from Washington’s formal life characteristics?

³⁵⁷ Washington quoted in Morgan, *The Genius of George Washington*, 10.

³⁵⁸ Palmer, *George Washington’s Military Genius*, 226.

First, Washington was self-educated to a degree hard to comprehend in the modern era. As a wealthy person said to be one of the richest in America at the time, his personal library was vast and diverse.³⁵⁹ Though not exhaustive, a short list of the books and general subjects there at the time of his death helpfully provides a glimpse into his effort in understanding the world around him:

An Encyclopedia, *Principles of Taxation*, a book on animal husbandry, *Langley on Gardening*, a book on horse diseases, Edward Gibbon's *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, books of poetry, Georges Louis Leclerc Buffon's *Natural History*, histories of Louisiana, Spain and Ireland, Shakespeare, *Don Quixote*, a book on projectiles, Walter Minto's *Theory of Planets*, Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*, a book on arithmetic, a Bible, a book on architecture, a book on Native American tribes in America, a book on international commerce, a book on international and several on domestic and criminal law, a book on geography and several atlases, on Seneca the Roman philosopher, on agriculture.³⁶⁰

Washington was also well-read when it came to military subjects (again, not a full list, but enough to make a point):

A book on the French Marshal Maurice de Saxe on a new model for the French army, a book on national defense, a book on the French Revolution, *An Essay on the Art of War* by the French Count Turpin (translated by Captain Joseph Otway), Walter Harte's history of Swedish King Gustavus Adolphus, a book by John Muller on fortifications, essays on field artillery by John Anderson, and a treatise on military discipline.³⁶¹

Perhaps most important and interesting, Washington had a lot of books and library entries related to his British opponents, including:

General Henry Clinton's book *The American Rebellion: Sir Henry Clinton's Narrative of His Campaigns, 1775-1782*, a book on the reign of George III, an entry titled a "List of Military officers British & Irish in 1777," another was "Advice of Officers of the British Army," and another "List of Officers under Sr. Wm. Howe in America."³⁶²

³⁵⁹ Eugene E. Prussing, *The Estate of George Washington, Deceased* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1927), 418-433.

³⁶⁰ Prussing, *The Estate of George Washington, Deceased*.

³⁶¹ Prussing, *The Estate of George Washington, Deceased*.

³⁶² Prussing, *The Estate of George Washington, Deceased*.

In surveying such intellectual width and depth, one cannot help but be struck by Washington's commitment to self-study.³⁶³ In amplifying this point, in the very last political letter he wrote before his death, Washington advocated that building an American military academy was "of primary importance to this country."³⁶⁴

Of course, Washington's life and military experiences include his uneven performance as a 22-year-old officer on his mission into the American frontier in 1754, from which his journal entries would be published for public consumption.³⁶⁵ Beyond this early publication, Washington was a prolific writer, both for professional reasons and due to his personal ability to communicate with the written word. Multiple historians have attested that for Washington, letter writing and distant communication was a key part of his command.³⁶⁶

As to specifics, Washington received command of the Continental Army at age 43, and was 44 during the campaign in this study. Compared with modern times, this seems very young, as military officer's today take much longer to ascend to such a rank. As to his temperament, several historians mentioned his aloofness.³⁶⁷ Washington has also been described as having an enormous temper, a distinct streak of pessimism, was occasionally disposed to tears, though he held all these in with a remarkable degree of self-control.³⁶⁸

After the war, of course, he was to become the first president of the United States, an honor that spoke to his interpersonal skills as well as the honor his countrymen afforded him in the wake of his military victory that safeguarded the country's birth.

In the end, Washington was never simply one thing. Objectively, his judgment was superior to General William Howe's. And, evaluating Washington more generally, Edward Lengel has said it best in pointing out that Washington's success came,

not so much because he excelled in any particular area—there were better strategists, tacticians, administrators, and politicians among his contemporaries—but because he possessed all of the qualities his country required, and in perfect combination. To survive its

³⁶³ Chernow, *Washington: A Life*, 812.

³⁶⁴ Washington quoted in Chernow, *Washington: A Life*, 805.

³⁶⁵ George Washington, *The Journal of Major George Washington* (1754). Text, accessed November 17, 2017, available from *Electronic Texts in American Studies*, <http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/etas/33>.

³⁶⁶ Morgan, *The Genius of George Washington*, 28. See also Chernow, *Washington: A Life*, 289.

³⁶⁷ Ellis, *His Excellency: George Washington*, 273. See also Morgan, *The Genius of George Washington*, 7. See also Chernow, *Washington: A Life*, xx.

³⁶⁸ Chernow, *Washington: A Life*, xix-xx.

difficult birth, America did not just need a courageous soldier, a savvy politician, a hard-working manager, a charismatic leader, a principled believer in democracy, or an intelligent general; it needed all of these things, *and in one man*. George Washington was that man. No one else could have taken his place.³⁶⁹

³⁶⁹ Lengel, *General George Washington*, xii.

4. Ulysses S. Grant

4.1 *Strategic Context in 1864*

Just weeks before the American Civil War's beginning, president-elect Abraham Lincoln gave a speech to the New Jersey state legislature in Trenton in February 1861, the site of General George Washington's great victory in December 1776. Reflecting on the Revolutionary War, Lincoln said,

There must have been something more than common that those men struggled for...something even more than National Independence...something that held out a great promise to all the people of the world for all time to come. I am exceedingly anxious that the Union, the Constitution, and the liberties of the people shall be perpetuated in accordance with the original idea for which that struggle was made.³⁷⁰

Both sides in the American Civil War, North and South, invoked the Revolutionary War's spirit, as well as the exploits of the nation's patriot forefathers.

The stakes in the Civil War were certainly as high. Without Lincoln's reelection in 1864, and a potential war-ending compromise, some have observed the United States modernity knows would have devolved into at least two, and maybe more, separate countries.³⁷¹ To depict such factionalism, a modern geographer has depicted the logical extension of disunion with a map that lists all state partition and secession proposals, which would have resulted in an ungovernable 124 "states."³⁷²

Why did the United States stay intact? The Northern victory in the war, certainly; but what specific reasons helped put the war on course to turn out as it did? One important consideration must be the Union's successful military campaign waged in 1864. And the judgments and decisions made by the supreme commander of that military force: Ulysses S. Grant.

³⁷⁰ Lincoln quoted in James McPherson, *Tried By War: Abraham Lincoln As Commander In Chief* (New York: The Penguin Press, 2008), 1-2. Abraham Lincoln, *The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln*, ed. Roy P. Basler (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1953), 1:509-510.

³⁷¹ David Allan Johnson, *Decided on the Battlefield: Grant, Sherman, Lincoln and the Election of 1864* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2012), 261.

³⁷² Andrew Shears, "From Absaroka to Yazoo: The United States That Could Have been," (December 8, 2011). Text and graphic, accessed February 26, 2015, <http://andrewshears.com/2011/12/08/the-united-states-that-couldve-been/>.

Before Lieutenant General Ulysses S. Grant took supreme command of all Union armies, there had been eight men in key Union Army military leadership roles: Winfield Scott, George McClellan, and Henry Halleck as generals-in-chief; in addition, there were five commanders in critical roles leading the bulk of forces in the primary eastern theater: Irvin McDowell, Ambrose Burnside, John Pope, Joseph Hooker, and George Meade. With varying opportunities, some more and some less, none of these generals were able to secure strategic victory. As Lincoln wrote, “No general yet found can face the arithmetic, but the end of the war will be at hand when he shall be discovered.”³⁷³

By 1864, the Confederates held a large, contiguous piece of terrain in the American South, including all the South’s major cities except the Mississippi port cities of New Orleans and Vicksburg. In part, the South was still intact because these eight Union military commanders did not make significant inroads against the Confederacy.

How was it that Grant succeeded when so many before had failed? At the beginning of 1864, Grant recalled that in the principal eastern theater of the war, “the opposing forces stood in substantially the same relations towards each other” as in 1861.³⁷⁴ As Assistant Secretary of War Charles Dana put it, after he was placed in supreme command, “Grant in eleven months secured the prize with less loss than his predecessors suffered in failing to win it during a struggle of three years.”³⁷⁵ Grant stopped Lee’s army and held it at bay, enabled other Union commanders to aggressively pursue gains, and brought unity to the Union war effort that ultimately earned the victory in under a single year.³⁷⁶

Not only that, but over the course of the war, Grant as a military commander forced three Confederate armies to surrender: at Fort Donelson (1862), Vicksburg (1863), and at Appomattox (1865).³⁷⁷ Grant was, if nothing else, effective.

Yet popular culture tells a different story, that of the butcher that merely had more men to sacrifice to gain victory.³⁷⁸ Or, more recently, from a popular television series: “Do you know

³⁷³ Geoffrey Ward, Ric Burns, and Ken Burns, *The Civil War* (New York: Vintage Books, 1990), 174.

³⁷⁴ Ulysses S. Grant, *The Personal Memoirs of Ulysses S. Grant: The Complete Annotated Edition*, ed. by John F. Marszalek, with David S. Nolen and Louie P. Gallo (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2017), 476.

³⁷⁵ Charles A. Dana, *Recollections of the Civil War* (New York: D. Appleton and Co., 1902), 210-211. Text, accessed February 26, 2016, <https://archive.org/details/recollecionsofc00danach>.

³⁷⁶ Gordon Rhea, “Who Were the Top Ten Generals?” *North & South* Vol. 6, No. 4 (May 2003), 16.

³⁷⁷ Ward et al, *The Civil War*, 85, 197, 306.

³⁷⁸ T. Harry Williams, *McClellan, Sherman and Grant* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1991, reprint 1962 by Rutgers University Press), 81.

how Grant defeated Lee? He had more men. That's all. He was willing to let them die. It was butchery, not strategy, which won the war."³⁷⁹ This argument, advanced in different forms by messengers as diverse as President Lincoln's wife, Mary Todd Lincoln, and the purveyors of the famous "Lost Cause" myth, in sympathy with the South, who advanced the "momentum of numbers" explanation for the South's loss as early as 1866.³⁸⁰ In this telling, Grant did nothing. Numbers determined the result, plain and simple.

Of course, numbers did matter. Grant's 1864 campaign features a relatively superior opponent in material terms, struggling to compel an abnormally powerful, large landholding insurgency into acquiescence. In the end, the United States accomplished the two pillars of its war policy: preserve the Union and purge slavery. This result was accomplished by military action. The real question is how Grant was able to secure it.

Both sides had advantages and disadvantages. The Union comprised twenty states with approximately twenty-two million people, 500,000 of whom were slaves at the war's outset.³⁸¹ Nine million people lived in the eleven Confederate states that seceded, roughly one-third of which were slaves. Approximately two million men fought for the Union, about half of all citizens that were of military age and available to serve; some three-fourths of all white Southern males served in the Confederate military, for a total of approximately one million in arms. This distinct Union manpower advantage carried over into material resources, and they enjoyed advantages in nearly all resources needed for making war.³⁸²

While the Union had a large industrial resource base and greater depth for recruiting soldiers, it also kept hold of a functioning political party system that could make national decisions. Parties apportioned power and made decisions, while the Confederacy had yet to create and develop a system to make judgments on political and strategic matters. Despite all these advantages, of course, the war's outcome was never to be decided by an accounting of supplies.³⁸³ People matter, as do the decisions they make.

³⁷⁹ See "Vice President Francis Underwood" (played by Kevin Spacey), created by Beau Willimon, "House of Cards," *Netflix* (Season 2, Episode 5, 2014). Dialogue takes place in the woods near Spotsylvania, Virginia, supposedly at the 150th Anniversary of the Overland Campaign.

³⁸⁰ Mark Grimsley, *And Keep Moving On: The Virginia Campaign, May-June 1864* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2002), 236.

³⁸¹ This figure rose to twenty-two over the course of the war with the official admission of West Virginia and Nevada to the United States; note also, these figures deliberately set aside the border states of Delaware, Kentucky, and Missouri.

³⁸² Louis P. Masur, *The Civil War: A Concise History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 24-25.

³⁸³ Masur, *The Civil War*, 25.

Grant's opponent was Confederate General Robert E. Lee, a West Point graduate, second in his Class of 1829. While there he was famously studious, never having earned a demerit for bad or improper behavior, and was a regular visitor at the library. While a cadet, he checked out:

Bland's *Algebraical Problems*, Bonnycastle's *Elements of Geometry*, [Machiavelli's] *Art of War*, Moliere, Duane's *Military Dictionary*, Atkinson's *Epitome of Navigation*, Chastelleux's *Travels in North America in 1780, 1781, and 1782*, Garden's *Anecdotes of the Revolutionary War in America*, Dufour's *Memorial pour les Travaux de Guerre*, the *North American Review*, Vols. 21, 12, 18, Voltaire's *Ses Oeuvres Complete*, Vols. 3, 4, 6, 10, 14, 16, the *Westminster Review*, Vols. 1, 2, Hamilton's *Works*, Vol 2, Martin's *Elements of Optics*, Pemberton's *View of Newton's Philosophy*, Ferguson's *Astronomy*, Vols. 1 & 2, Bullet's *Architecture Pratique*, Bonaparte's *Ses Mémoires écrits par Montholon et Gourgard*, Vol. 2, 3, Segur, Phillipe de, *Histoire de Napoleon de la Grande Armée pendant 1812*, Sherburne's *Life and Character of Paul Jones*³⁸⁴

Lee served in the Mexican War and had other important commands before the Civil War. Famously, as the war began, he turned down a senior Union Army command to avoid raising his sword against his home state of Virginia. Lee's life represented a passion and dedication to his state.³⁸⁵

While Jefferson Davis was the Confederacy's president, Robert E. Lee was its supreme commander. After a stint advising President Jefferson Davis from Confederate headquarters in Richmond, Lee took command of the Army of Northern Virginia on June 1, 1862 and held the position until the end of the war. While technically Lee did not become the Confederacy's "general-in-chief" (the term used in those days for a supreme commander) until late in the war, this was merely an after-the-fact affirmation of a widely agreed upon truth: Lee was the most important military decision-maker in the Confederacy from 1862 until the war's end in 1865.³⁸⁶

³⁸⁴ Obtained from Susan Lintelman, Manuscripts Curator, United States Military Academy Library Circulation Records, *United States Military Academy Library at West Point*, email exchange (May 13, 2015). Note: list is not exhaustive, and does not indicate the number of times the book was renewed.

³⁸⁵ William C. Davis, *Crucible of Command: Ulysses S. Grant and Robert E. Lee – The War They Fought, The Peace They Forged* (Boston, Da Capo Press, 2014), 394.

³⁸⁶ Brian Holden Reid, *Robert E. Lee: Icon for a Nation* (Amherst, New York: Prometheus Books, 2007), 231.

Writers have professed the “genius” of Robert E. Lee.³⁸⁷ Historians rate his performance in the Overland Campaign well, equal parts aggressive and competent in a tough situation.³⁸⁸ Moreover, at the height of the campaign, he was venerated. This can be seen in the diary of one of the senior surgeons that served under Lee, who called Lee a “genius” while fighting in Virginia on July 30, 1864, and that “No man on this continent or any other now fills so large an important a place to so many people.”³⁸⁹ Moreover, an Irish visitor to Richmond wrote in early 1865 that Lee was “the idol of his soldiers & the Hope of His Country... [T]he prestige which surrounds his person & the almost fanatical belief in his judgement & capacity... is the one idea of an entire people.”³⁹⁰ Lee was well regarded at the time, and still is today.

Grant was a more national figure. Born in Ohio, he grew up in Missouri and Illinois, and felt at home anywhere in the United States his wife was.³⁹¹ Grant attended West Point, and graduated in the middle of his Class of 1843.³⁹² After fighting in the Mexican War, and service in remote Northern California, Grant left the army in the 1850s and he re-enlisted when the war began. His early service in the American Civil War was characterized by success in the Western Theater: he forced a Confederate Army to surrender at Fort Donelson in 1862, was surprised at, and ultimately fought to a draw at Shiloh in Tennessee, and forced a second Confederate Army to surrender at Vicksburg, Mississippi, on July 4, 1863.

In March, 1864, following a political argument in Washington over revival of the rank of “lieutenant general,” Grant was elevated to this rank and the supreme command of all Union armies.³⁹³ This title was necessary for Grant to outrank the other major generals in the Union

³⁸⁷ Al Kaltman, *The Genius of Robert E. Lee: Leadership Lessons for the Outgunned, Outnumbered and Underfinanced* (Paramus, NJ: Prentice Hall Press, 2000).

³⁸⁸ Gary W. Gallagher, “A Great General Is So Rare’: Robert E. Lee and the Confederacy,” in *Leaders of the Lost Cause: New Perspectives on the Confederate High Command*, eds. Gary W. Gallagher and Joseph T. Glatthaar (Mechanicsburg, PA: Stackpole Books, 2004), 34.

³⁸⁹ John H. Claiborne quoted in Gallagher, “A Great General Is So Rare’,” 35. See John H. Claiborne, “To My Dear Wife,” July 30, 1864, “Letters of John Herbert Claiborne.”

³⁹⁰ Thomas Connolly quoted in Gallagher, “A Great General Is So Rare’,” 35. See Thomas Connolly, *An Irishman in Dixie: Thomas Conolly’s Diary of the Fall of the Confederacy*, ed. Nelson D. Lankford (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1988), 52.

³⁹¹ Davis, *Crucible of Command*, 394.

³⁹² He graduated twenty-first of thirty-nine, a misleading figure when one considers the class started with eighty-two cadets, of which over half never made it to graduation, which would actually put him closer to the top twenty-five percent of his class. Ron Chernow, *Grant* (New York: Penguin Press, 2017), 23, 27.

³⁹³ The issue was that the last person to hold the rank of lieutenant general was George Washington, and a number of politicians were uncomfortable with any other officer holding this title. Brooks Simpson, *Let Us Have Peace: Ulysses S. Grant and the Politics of War and Reconstruction, 1861-1868* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1991), 51.

Army who had been senior by date of rank (i.e. they had reached the rank of major general earlier and therefore technically outranked him). Though President Abraham Lincoln conferred the honor on Grant in March, the political posturing gave Grant time in January and February 1864 to consider plans for the upcoming year's campaign.

During the first months of 1864, Grant thought about how he would achieve the North's war aims to keep the Union and end the practice of slavery. The Union's military strategies to achieve these two aims had changed over time. The first was colloquially referred to as the "Anaconda Plan," in which Mexican War hero and general-in-chief, Brevet Lieutenant General Winfield Scott advised the president to blockade the entire South from the Atlantic Ocean and Mississippi River, to be followed by a methodical, southward-rolling, ground campaign. This was rejected early, owing to its slowness and political infeasibility. Next, Major General George B. McClellan followed Scott in supreme command, and thrust his support behind a campaign to take the enemy's capital at Richmond, Virginia, in which McClellan would build up a massive army to seize the Confederate capitol in 1862. But while McClellan stuck to this strategic concept into 1863, it was never fully activated, and so never achieved its aim. Grant would opt for a different strategy.

Over time, some have deliberately diminished Grant's abilities as a supreme commander due to his close proximity to the well-regarded President Abraham Lincoln and the brilliant Major General William T. Sherman. But there are two episodes from this campaign that demonstrate Grant's ultimate judgment authority on strategic and military matters.

While Lincoln was involved in strategic matters, he deferred judgment to Grant on nearly every major issue relating to the military campaign. Later in life, when asked about a visit Lincoln made to Grant's headquarters' toward the end of the war, and whether or not Lincoln was actually the one directing the army at that time, Grant said he had been the one to invite Lincoln, and that, habitually, "I merely told [Lincoln] what I had done, not what I meant to do."³⁹⁴

One example from the campaign is that when Grant wanted to remove Major General Nathaniel Banks from command, who was a friend and political ally of Lincoln's, Lincoln allowed Grant the leeway to make the final determination with regard to Banks. And, with tact, Grant came up with a

³⁹⁴ Grant quoted in John Russell Young, *Around the World with General Grant, Vol. 2* (New York: The American News Company, 1879), 356, 358. Text, accessed January 30, 2018, <https://archive.org/details/aroundworldgrant02younuoft>.

compromise that would leave Banks in administrative command of the Department of the Gulf but would place Maj. Gen. Edward R.S. Canby in field command of the army. Lincoln was agreeable—especially since he needed Banks to carry out his reconstruction policy in Louisiana.³⁹⁵

In this, Lincoln allowed Grant the ultimate decision, and Grant showed a deft understanding of political realities in an election year, and both came to better know the other's style of leadership.

This mattered in October 1864, when Grant approved Sherman's march from the recently-taken Atlanta to the coast (the "March to the Sea"); Grant wrote to Sherman: "If you are satisfied the trip to the sea-coast can be made...you may make it, destroying all the railroad south of Dalton or Chattanooga, as you think best."³⁹⁶

Lincoln disagreed with the move, but let Grant decide. Over the course of the next month, Grant and Sherman conducted dispatches that further refined their objectives. Sherman wrote to Grant on November 6, 1864, just days before Lincoln's re-election:

I propose to act in such a manner against the material resources of the South as utterly to negative [sic] Davis boasted threat and promises of protection...If we can march a well-appointed army right through his territory, it is a demonstration to the world, foreign and domestic, that we have a power which Davis cannot resist. This may not be war, but rather statesmanship.

Importantly, Sherman's efforts were always in support of Grant's larger effort, and Sherman wrote to Grant that his own efforts "would have a material effect upon [Grant's] campaign in Virginia."³⁹⁷ This cooperation was invaluable.

The long 1864 campaign, running from May into the late fall, encompasses the narrower time period that most historians consider the "Overland Campaign" (which ran from May to

³⁹⁵ McPherson, *Tried By War*, 216-217. Cites Grant to Halleck, April 22, 25, 29, 30, 1864. Cites Halleck to Grant, April 23, 26, 29, May 3, 1864. Cites Halleck to Canby, May 7, 1864, *Official Records of the War of the Rebellion* [Hereafter "O.R."] 34, iii: 252-53, 331, 357, 293, 331-32, 409-410. See also "Important Change of Commanders, Gen. Canby Supersedes Gen. Banks" By Telegraph, May 7, *Boston Daily Advertiser* (Boston, Massachusetts, May 9, 1864). See also "The Removal of Gen. Banks" By Telegraph, May 9, *Boston Daily Advertiser* (Boston, Massachusetts, May 10, 1864).

³⁹⁶ Grant quoted in Donald Stoker, *The Grand Design: Strategy and the U.S. Civil War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 380-381. Cites Grant to Sherman, Oct. 11, 1864, O.R., 39, iii: 202. Cites Stanton to Grant, Oct. 12, 1864, O.R. 39, iii: 222.

³⁹⁷ Stoker, *The Grand Design*, 380-381. Cites Sherman to Grant, Nov. 6, 1864, O.R., 39, iii: 658-661.

June 1864).³⁹⁸ The two forces grappled over this entire period, and when viewed all the way through Lincoln's re-election in November, this longer time horizon provides a more comprehensive view into understanding why the war turned out as it did.

During this time, Grant held a material advantage over Lee. But Lee had the benefit of acting on the defensive, and had local knowledge of the terrain which favored his objectives, particularly several rivers that forced Grant's Union to ford and cross.³⁹⁹ Lee knew his men, having already spent two years at the helm of the Army of Northern Virginia. Grant was new to the Eastern Theater, with all his prior service having come in the West.

The Union had a much more difficult military and political objective to achieve: a victorious Union had to seize and hold territory in the South, and the Confederacy was enormous (750,000 square miles). The tactical and operational geography favored the defenders, and the defenders had a deeper military tradition than the North, particularly in its seven state-level military academies.⁴⁰⁰

With respect to tactical and operational military measurements, the Union was stronger in the Eastern Theater. In 1864, in the Army of the Potomac, Grant enjoyed a "significant, if not overwhelming, numerical advantage, fielding 95,583 infantry, 15,298 cavalry, 8,000 artillerymen and 274 guns. Putting aside [the] sick and those used up in garrisons, Grant had an 'effective' force of 101,895."⁴⁰¹ And yet, large as this was, it was smaller than the Union force Major General Joseph Hooker had put in the field the previous year. Hooker's Army of the Potomac held a greater than two-to-one advantage in May 1863, yet was defeated by Lee's Army of Northern Virginia at Chancellorsville.⁴⁰²

This time, roughly one year later with Chancellorsville behind him, in May 1864, "Lee could count on 57,811 infantry and gunners and 8,543 cavalry, plus 200 guns, giving him an 'effective' strength of 61,025 men."⁴⁰³ Lee was outnumbered one-and-two-thirds-to-one in 1864, which was not as bad as it had been the year prior when he had beaten Hooker at Chancellorsville.

Lee was the condition that Grant had to contend with as he fought in 1864, and he was indeed a formidable opponent.⁴⁰⁴ The greatest divergence between the two was age and health.

³⁹⁸ See Grimsley, *And Keep Moving On*.

³⁹⁹ Davis, *Crucible of Command*, 393.

⁴⁰⁰ Masur, *The Civil War*, 25.

⁴⁰¹ Reid, *Robert E. Lee*, 198.

⁴⁰² Ward ed al, *The Civil War*, 171-173.

⁴⁰³ Reid, *Robert E. Lee*, 198.

⁴⁰⁴ Davis, *Crucible of Command*, 393.

Grant was younger, at age 42, while Lee was 57.⁴⁰⁵ Health-wise, Grant was in better shape after several years at war, while the conflict was starting to take a toll on Lee.⁴⁰⁶ Though both continued in supreme command to the end of the war, Lee was affected, physically, by the hard campaigning and took ill at one point during the fighting at the Battle of the North Anna (River), in late May 1864.⁴⁰⁷

Confederate States of America President Jefferson Davis set the opposition's policy objectives. Davis's government was determined to secede from the United States to form several independently sovereign republics to maintain the institution of slavery beyond the writ of the U.S. government.⁴⁰⁸ As such, the Confederate military objective was merely to survive, a lower bar than the one the Union would have to clear. A Confederate defensive war on home terrain was hardly an easy victory for the Union.⁴⁰⁹ At the war's beginning, the Confederate military strategy was a cordon defense, an attempt to ring the entirety of Confederate territory in an effort to deny completely Union access to Southern land. This quickly fell of its own weight, because it was impossible for Confederate military resources to defend everywhere. This cordon strategy was adopted for political purposes, and subsequently discarded for military ones.

What emerged later during Lee's command was the "offensive defensive" strategy: tactically offensive thrusts designed to support a wider strategic defensive.⁴¹⁰ The challenge was timing, precisely when to assume the offensive and when to adopt the defensive. For example, when Lee took command in June 1862 with the Union Army of the Potomac at the gates of Richmond, Lee attacked Union Major General George McClellan's forces in the Seven Days Battles and pushed the Army of the Potomac out of the Richmond area. From there, Lee attacked north and defeated Major General John Pope's force at the Second Battle of Bull Run in August 1862, and continued to strike north until ultimately being fought to a stalemate at Antietam, Maryland, in September 1862. Beginning in 1862 and all the way until 1864, Lee fought several offensive tactical raids, designed to strike the opponent into abandoning the Union's pro-Union and anti-slavery policy, which was a strategically defensive objective.

4.2 The 1864 Campaign's Strategic Effect

⁴⁰⁵ Interestingly, both passed away at age 63. Lee in 1870 and Grant in 1885.

⁴⁰⁶ Davis, *Crucible of Command*, 393.

⁴⁰⁷ Grimsley, *And Keep Moving On*, 145.

⁴⁰⁸ Stoker, *The Grand Design*, 25.

⁴⁰⁹ Masur, *The Civil War*, 25.

⁴¹⁰ Stoker, *The Grand Design*, 10.

In May 1864, both the Union and Confederacy still had the opportunity to achieve their version of victory. The Confederates had control over nearly all their territory; the Union had yet to reestablish significant control over the South. By mid-November 1864, with Lee pinned down, Atlanta and the Shenandoah Valley in Union possession, all of which supported President Lincoln's election victory and second term ahead, there was no more potential for a Confederate victory. Grant's successful campaign in 1864 caused this change in the war.

The campaign in 1864 was the war's terminal campaign because it denied the Confederates their last opportunity at victory. Never again did the Confederacy have a chance to secure its war aims. All that remained in 1865 was the Battle of Five Forks and a few minor skirmishes on the periphery on the way to the Confederate surrender at Appomattox Court House in April 1865.

At the beginning of the campaign, things had not improved much over the course of the war for the United States, and by 1864's spring, the Union had lost nearly 150,000 casualties in Virginia in fighting the Confederates to a draw.⁴¹¹

By the end of the campaign, Grant denied Lee the ability to fight offensively by holding Lee's forces down in Richmond and Petersburg, Virginia.⁴¹² Lee could no longer pursue his preferred strategy, the offensive-defensive, because Grant removed Lee's ability to fight offensively. Moreover, Grant's extreme, continuous pressure forced Lee into tough, unappealing choices on the road to Confederate defeat.⁴¹³

Grant's effort also imposed significant costs on the Army of Northern Virginia that were simply impossible to replace, which Lee knew. Lee wrote to Confederate Secretary of War James Seddon, on August 23, 1864, on the impact of Grant's attrition:

The subject of recruiting the ranks of our army is growing in importance and has occupied much of my attention. Unless some measures can be devised to replace our losses, the consequences may be disastrous...Our numbers [are] daily decreasing...Without some increase in our strength, I cannot see how we are to escape the natural military consequences of the enemy's numerical superiority.⁴¹⁴

⁴¹¹ Gordon C. Rhea, "Butcher' Grant and the Overland Campaign," *North & South* Vol. 4, No. 1 (Nov 2000), 45.

⁴¹² Rhea, "Butcher' Grant and the Overland Campaign," 55.

⁴¹³ Grimsley, *And Keep Moving On*, 224.

⁴¹⁴ "Robert E. Lee to James Seddon, August 23, 1864," in *The Wartime Papers of R.E. Lee*, ed. Clifford Dowdey (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1961), 843-844.

This was written in late August, after the heavy fighting in May and June, and well into the summer stalemate in the trenches around Petersburg and Richmond. Shortly thereafter, Lee wrote to President Davis, on September 2, 1864:

I beg leave to call your attention to the importance of...vigorous measures to increase the strength of our armies...As matters now stand, we have no troops disposable to meet movements of the enemy or strike where opportunity presents, without taking them from the trenches or exposing some important point.⁴¹⁵

Second, Grant's judgment for broad, simultaneous action enabled Major General William T. Sherman to operate with impunity in the wider South, and Major General Philip Sheridan to bring havoc to the Shenandoah Valley. Grant's choices directly enabled both Sherman's taking of Atlanta on September 2, 1864, as well as Sheridan's having shut down the Shenandoah Valley as a great source of Confederacy's supply and strength, as well as their highway for invasion of the North.⁴¹⁶ Sherman and Sheridan wrested the initiative from the South.⁴¹⁷ Grant's efforts also fit within the political realities of the time, the requirement to defend Washington and to squeeze Lee with the right amount of pressure that would harm the Confederates while sufficiently sustaining the morale of the Northern public so they would reelect Lincoln to a second term.⁴¹⁸

4.3 Could the Confederates have won?

Could this 1864 campaign have gone the other way? Moreover, was the outcome materially pre-ordained? Was the South doomed to lose?

⁴¹⁵ "Robert E. Lee to Jefferson Davis, September 2, 1864," in *The Wartime Papers of R.E. Lee*, 847.

⁴¹⁶ Sherman and Sheridan's campaigns in 1864 have been called the first instance of modern total war, and criticized for being appallingly destructive. While these criticisms may have merit in small, isolated incidents, and Grant's, Sherman's, and Sheridan's rhetoric was fairly rough, the reality is these were largely discriminate campaigns exercised with appropriate discipline. See John B. Walters, *Merchant of Terror: General Sherman and Total War* (Bobbs-Merrill Co., 1973). John F. Marszalek, "Sherman's March and Destructive War," September 18, 2015, at *The New York Historical Society*, audio, at 32 minutes, <https://itunes.apple.com/us/podcast/ending-a-mighty-conflict-the-civil-war-in-1864-65-and-beyond/id1043985664?mt=2>. Jeffrey Wert, "About Played Out: The 1864 Shenandoah Valley Campaign and Its Military and Political Significance," April 8, 2016, at "Atlanta, the Shenandoah, and the Turn to Total War" Conference, video, <https://www.c-span.org/video/?407815-3/1864-shenandoah-valley-campaign>.

⁴¹⁷ Grimsley, *And Keep Moving On*, 224, 237.

⁴¹⁸ Grimsley, *And Keep Moving On*, 225

Some make this argument that it was just numbers. In short, because the North had a numerical advantage, they were destined to win. These arguments are typically made by those that charge Grant was a “butcher” because of the amount of soldiers the Union lost in the course of the campaign, which did indeed cause morale to drop in the North.⁴¹⁹

Grant’s immediate critics, such as Edward Pollard, author of 1866’s *The Lost Cause*, wrote that Grant “contained no spark of military genius,” had “no strategy,” and that Grant “proposed to decide it by mere competition in the sacrifice of human life.” This echoed Southerners confidence in Grant’s ineptitude during the campaign: On May 10, 1864, the *Richmond Examiner* opined if Grant ever got to Richmond, he would command the mere “ruins of an army,” while Lee’s adjutant wrote at the time that Grant was “beating his head against a wall.”⁴²⁰ These criticisms of Grant suggest his efforts were more about math than strategy. Some also go so far as to explain this numerical imbalance was the entire cause of Northern victory.⁴²¹

In short, the Union’s resources overwhelmed the Confederates. Material strength won the day; might made right. Fortunately, this is not the only recorded judgment on the American Civil War; others have looked into causes for victory and defeat and come to different conclusions.

A panel of six award-winning historians convened in 2006 to discuss the question, “Could the Confederacy Have Won the Civil War?”⁴²² All six answered in the affirmative. Pulitzer Prize-winning Civil War historian James McPherson wrote, “The odds in favor of Confederate victory were greater than those in favor of American victory over Britain in 1776.”⁴²³ Another stated that Confederate defeat was certain only after Lincoln’s re-election.⁴²⁴ What reasons do these historians have to make such claims?

First, the Confederacy might have won if they could have worn down the will of the Northern people; specifically, this would have manifested itself in the Northern voters rejecting Lincoln in the election of 1864.⁴²⁵

⁴¹⁹ Rhea, “Butcher’ Grant and the Overland Campaign,” 46. Grimsley, *And Keep Moving On*, 224.

⁴²⁰ Grimsley, *And Keep Moving On*, 236-237.

⁴²¹ Terry L. Jones, “Could the South Have Won the War?” *New York Times* (March 16, 2015).

⁴²² William W. Freehling, Allen C. Guelzo, Bruce Levine, Richard M. McMurray, James M. McPherson, and Stephen W. Sears, “Could the Confederacy Have Won the Civil War?” *North & South* Vol. 9, No. 2 (May 2006), 13-19.

⁴²³ McPherson, “Could the Confederacy Have Won the Civil War?” 17.

⁴²⁴ McMurray, “Could the Confederacy Have Won the Civil War?” 17.

⁴²⁵ James McPherson, “After Words – Embattled Rebel: Jefferson Davis as Commander in Chief,” November 2, 2014, *C-SPAN*, video and audio, at 56 minutes, accessed February 26, 2016, <http://www.c-span.org/video/?321903-1/words-james-mcpherson>.

Another important moment that could have gone for the Confederates was Confederate Lieutenant General Jubal Early's raid on Washington in July 1864, which might have frightened the Northern people and government more if the raid had been successful.⁴²⁶

Perhaps the most compelling counterpoint to the inevitability of the Confederacy's loss comes from Lincoln's own assessment. After the Army of the Potomac's tactical defeat at Cold Harbor in early June 1864, Lincoln's many political rivals, some inside his own cabinet, started pushing to unseat him as the Republican nomination.⁴²⁷ Through July and into August, this fact sat with Lincoln, until he prepared a memorandum for his cabinet on August 23:

This morning, and for some days past, it seems exceedingly probable that this Administration will not be re-elected. Then it will be my duty to co-operate with the President elect, as to save the Union between the election and the inauguration; as he will have secured his election on such ground that he can not possibly save it afterwards.⁴²⁸

Lincoln himself thought he would lose the coming election, despite the advantages that came along with being the larger power. What made Lincoln so fearful the Confederacy might win?

At the time, he knew there were several reasons the Confederates had a chance to win. The first was that the Confederacy was still optimistic, which Lincoln would have known through various forms of intelligence, and at this point in the war, there was still a strong Southern faith in Robert E. Lee's battlefield skill.⁴²⁹ Lee's Army of Northern Virginia's morale was as high as it had been when it fought at the Battle of Gettysburg in July, 1863.⁴³⁰ This, despite the fact that the Army of Northern Virginia was rationed to "1/4 pound of meat and 1 1/8 pounds of flour per day" in the period leading up to the campaign.⁴³¹ While bleak to modern eyes, it was common for food to be rationed during war. Yet, an important fact remains that

⁴²⁶ B. Franklin Cooling, "The Campaign That Could Have Changed the War – And Did: Jubal Early's 1864 Raid on Washington, D.C.," *North & South* Vol. 7, No. 5 (August 2004), 14.

⁴²⁷ Masur, *The Civil War*, 65-66.

⁴²⁸ Lincoln quoted in Masur, *The Civil War*, 68. Abraham Lincoln, "Memorandum, August 23, 1864," in *The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln*, 7:514.

⁴²⁹ Gary W. Gallagher, "Our Hearts Are Full of Hope: The Army of Northern Virginia in the Spring of 1864," in *The Wilderness Campaign*, ed. Gary W. Gallagher (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 36.

⁴³⁰ Gallagher, "Our Hearts Are Full of Hope," 36.

⁴³¹ Gallagher, "Our Hearts Are Full of Hope," 42.

Confederate supply never failed during the entire course of the war.⁴³² Confederate forces in the field never ran out of food or bullets.

By fighting on friendly territory, Lee also enjoyed an intelligence advantage on his adversary.⁴³³ The Confederates other positives, like the defense.⁴³⁴ Owing to the imbalance in firepower over maneuver and communications during the Civil War, defense was typically much stronger. The Confederates built their strategy around this fact. Confederate Lieutenant General James Longstreet predicted, “if we can break up the enemy’s arrangements early, and throw him back, he will not be able to recover his position or his morale until the Presidential election is over, and then we shall have a new President to treat with.”⁴³⁵

The United States government, and Ulysses S. Grant, had an advantage in 1864, if for no other reason than they had an established government. However, it must be said that while the North had greater resources, they also had the greater burden to attack into the South to militarily defeat the insurgency and recapture enemy-held territory. The critical question is whether the Confederates possessed the wherewithal to convert their military ability, or fighting power, into the outcome they sought.

In such an assessment, simple head-to-head number counts focus on the measurable to the exclusion of the important. The Confederacy was never prepared to simply give in because their cause paled in paper comparison to the Union. While Lee’s forces were numerically inferior to Grant’s, Lee and the Confederates had enough fighting strength to achieve their desired result (i.e. survival). More importantly, Lee had opportunities to strike to achieve his objectives. And, in the longer view, numbers do not decide wars⁴³⁶

4.4 Grant: Simultaneous Pressure versus Lee: Offensive Defensive

Grant: Simultaneous Pressure

⁴³² Richard E. Beringer et al, *Why the South Lost the Civil War* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1986), 432-433.

⁴³³ Reid, *Robert E. Lee*, 199.

⁴³⁴ Beringer et al, *Why the South Lost the Civil War*, 424.

⁴³⁵ Longstreet quoted in McPherson, *Tried By War*, 233. Cites “Entry of June 11, 1864,” in *A Rebel War Clerk’s Diary at the Confederate States Capital* ed. Henry Swiggett (New York: Old Hickory Bookshop, 1935), 2:229. Also cites James Longstreet to Alexander R. Lawton, O.R. 32 (March 5, 1864), iii:588.

⁴³⁶ James McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom, The Civil War Era* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 855.

Lieutenant General Ulysses Grant's first key judgment, at the campaign's beginning, was to apply simultaneous concentric pressure and attack the Confederates on all fronts until the end of the war. He said his "general plan" was for all Union armies, "acting as a unit," to "concentrate all the force possible against the Confederate armies in the field."⁴³⁷ He used the largest Union force in the field to tie down the largest Confederate force, which was Lee's army. Grant assessed this force to be the Confederacy's central source of strength. While Grant appreciated his opponent, he was not awestruck by Robert E. Lee as other Union officers were.⁴³⁸

In addition to direct attack, Grant brought an indirect fight to the Confederates. Grant used Major General George G. Meade's Army of the Potomac to pave the way for Major General William T. Sherman and Major General Philip Sheridan, among others, to strike at the rest of the Confederate's ability to make war.⁴³⁹ In contrast, Lee continued to focus his defensive efforts at protecting Richmond as a Confederate source of strength.

Just before assuming his role as supreme commander of the Union Army, Lieutenant General Grant engaged in dialogue with Major General Henry Halleck on war plans as Halleck acted as the president's military aide. From the initial concept phase, Grant advocated for maneuver against the Confederacy through North Carolina. The initial concept Grant proposed to Halleck in January 1864 was to abandon a direct move on Richmond, instead, "I would suggest Raleigh, [North Carolina], as the objective point and Suffolk [Virginia] as the starting point." Grant provided several reasons to support a strike on North Carolina as opposed to a direct move on Richmond. First, it would "force an evacuation of Virginia." Secondly, the armies "could live upon the country and would reduce the stores of the enemy." Most important, it would seize the initiative from the Confederates and "blockade Wilmington, the port now of more value to the enemy than all the balance of their sea-coast."⁴⁴⁰ This plan looked to broaden the Eastern Theater to get around Lee's advantages in Virginia.⁴⁴¹ However, despite its military value, political challenges doomed the North Carolina option.⁴⁴²

When Major General Henry Halleck responded, Halleck concurred that he had "never considered Richmond as the necessary objective point of the Army of the Potomac; that point is Lee's army." However, Halleck assessed that if Grant were to

⁴³⁷ Grant, *Memoirs*, 478, 491.

⁴³⁸ Simpson, *Let Us Have Peace*, 54.

⁴³⁹ Simpson, *Let Us Have Peace*, 54.

⁴⁴⁰ Grant to Halleck, January 19, 1864, *O.R. Vol. 33*, 394.

⁴⁴¹ Simpson, *Let Us Have Peace*, 54.

⁴⁴² Simpson, *Let Us Have Peace*, 54-55.

uncover Washington and the Potomac River, and all the force which Lee can collect will be moved north, and the popular sentiment will compel the Government to bring back the army in North Carolina to defend Washington, Baltimore, Harrisburg, and Philadelphia. I think Lee would tomorrow exchange Richmond, Raleigh, and Wilmington for the possession of either of the aforementioned cities.⁴⁴³

Halleck anticipated Lee's desire to take the offense. However, as shown later in this chapter, Halleck was incorrect about Lee's willingness to trade Richmond for Washington. Over and over during the campaign, Lee stated his personal dread at the potential of losing Richmond, as Lee wrote mid-campaign in a letter to his wife: "I begrudge every step [Grant] makes towards Richmond."⁴⁴⁴ This statement, along with others like it, suggests Lee would not have traded Richmond for Washington.

Then Halleck raised the central question for Grant: "The overthrow of Lee's army being the object of operations, here, the question arises, how can we best attain it?"

Halleck argued for a direct assault on Lee; his logic:

all our available forces in the east should be concentrated against Lee's army... We can here, or between here and Richmond, concentrate against him more men than anywhere else. If we cannot defeat him here with our combined force, we cannot hope to do so elsewhere with a divided army.⁴⁴⁵

Halleck called for a concentrated attack against Lee's army with all the forces available in the Eastern Theater. This was the difference between Halleck and Grant's strategic approach. Grant wanted everything moving, swarming, from all angles and positions, while Halleck wanted a single effort in a single theater. Broad attrition versus focused attack.

The telling exchange between Halleck and Grant continued; Halleck acted as a trusted agent to President Lincoln, as Halleck was in Washington with the president and Grant was in the field with the army. Grant presented Halleck a second plan: simultaneous pressure on all Confederate forces. As Grant explained, "It is my design, if the enemy keep quiet and allow me to take the initiative in the spring campaign, to work all parts of the army together and somewhat toward a common center."⁴⁴⁶

⁴⁴³ Halleck to Grant, February 17, 1864, O.R. *Vol.* 32/2, 411-414.

⁴⁴⁴ Robert E. Lee to Mary Lee, May 23 1864, in *The Wartime Papers*, 748.

⁴⁴⁵ Halleck to Grant, February 17, 1864, O.R. *Vol.* 32/2, 411-414.

⁴⁴⁶ Grant to Sherman, April 4, 1864, O.R. *Vol.* 32/3, 827.

More specifically, in a dispatch which described this to Major General William T. Sherman, Grant set forth his plans: Major General Nathaniel Banks would move against Mobile, Alabama (this was one month prior to Banks being sacked for not moving fast enough on Mobile); Major General Benjamin Butler would head to attack Richmond via Virginia's peninsula; Grant was to accompany Major General George G. Meade's Army of the Potomac (with Major General Ambrose Burnside's Corps attached) to "operate directly against Lee's army wherever it may be found"; Major General Franz Sigel and Brigadier General George Crook were to clear the Shenandoah Valley; and finally, to Sherman, Grant wrote: "You I propose to move against Johnston's army, to break it up and to get into the interior of the enemy's country as far as you can, inflicting all the damage you can against their war resources."⁴⁴⁷ Grant's orders ended with a command similar to his earlier conceptual discussion: "So far as practicable, all the Armies are to move together and towards one common center."⁴⁴⁸

Grant worked within the political constraints and context. This plan for simultaneous concentric pressure responded to two critical concerns, those related to troop strength and political factors. Grant's plan depended on the North's superior manpower and resource edge over the Confederacy by using synchronized offensives designed to grind Confederate resources down and denying the Confederates the ability to reinforce their armies.⁴⁴⁹

Grant sought to balance military actions with political imperatives. Military victories had to sustain a war weary Northern electorate, while at the same time avoid horrifying the same electorate to the degree they might support a negotiated peace, and so Grant walked a tightrope between military and political gains.⁴⁵⁰ Grant could not tilt too far in one direction, because to do so would jeopardize the other, and vice versa. Grant had to strike a coherent balance between the military and political fronts.

When the campaign began with the first fighting in the Battle of the Wilderness on May 4, 1864, Lee had developed his own philosophy about how to move forward, which was characteristically offensive. As early as February 3, 1864, Lee described taking "the initiative," to

⁴⁴⁷ Grant to Sherman, April 4, 1864, *O.R. Vol. 32/3*, 827.

⁴⁴⁸ Grant to Meade, April 9, 1864, in John Y. Simon, et al., eds., *The Papers of Ulysses S. Grant* [Hereafter *PUSG*] (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 1967-2009), 122: 394-395. Note: Some readers will note this plan's similarities to a Jominian approach to warfare. While it is true that Grant studied Jomini under Dennis Hart Mahan (Alfred Thayer Mahan's father) while a cadet at West Point, Grant also strongly cautioned that slavish observance to military rules was the downfall of many general officers. Therefore, it seems unlikely that Jomini influenced Grant's thought process on this campaign. See Chernow, *Grant*, 23. See also Grant quoted in Young, *Around the World with General Grant*, 351-353.

⁴⁴⁹ Simpson, *Let Us Have Peace*, 56-57.

⁴⁵⁰ Simpson, *Let Us Have Peace*, 56.

“derange [Union] plans & embarrass them.”⁴⁵¹ This was Lee’s first strategic decision in the campaign: to accept the fight Grant desired. Lee felt, in March 1864, that his best option was to “concentrate wherever they are going to attack us.”⁴⁵² Lee chose to fight in the Wilderness and engage in the campaign on terms that Grant dictated. When the battle was over, Lee’s casualties were around 11,125, while “Grant sustained much heavier losses, of 17,666.”⁴⁵³

Despite this tactical setback, Grant chose to use Meade’s Army of the Potomac to continue to grind down Lee’s Army of Northern Virginia. In addition to the decision to employ simultaneous concentric pressure in the broader campaign, there was one addendum: the attack must also be persistent. Perhaps the most eloquent description of this decision comes from Grant’s contemporary, Major General William T. Sherman:

On the night of May 7th [1864] both parties paused, appalled by the fearful slaughter; but General Grant commanded “Forward by the left flank.” That was, in my judgment, the supreme moment of his life: undismayed, with a full comprehension of the importance of the work in which he was engaged, feeling as keen a sympathy for his dead and wounded as any one, and without stopping to count his numbers, he gave his orders calmly, specifically, and absolutely – “Forward to Spotsylvania.”⁴⁵⁴

Knowing what to do is one thing; the act of doing is another. That same morning, Grant had spoken to a reporter, and said, “If you see the President, tell him, from me, that, whatever happens, there will be no turning back.”⁴⁵⁵

At the conclusion of the Battle of the Wilderness, it is important to observe Grant was in nearly the exact situation Major General Joseph Hooker was in one year earlier on the same terrain, yet

Hooker had treated his loss in the Wilderness as a defeat. Grant lost more troops in the Wilderness, but rather than retreat he pushed on. Defensively-minded commanders such as McClellan, Burnside, Hooker, and Meade considered as defeats setbacks that Grant shrugged off as mere tactical reverses. It was this new way of thinking that got the Army of

⁴⁵¹ Robert E. Lee to Jefferson Davis, February 3, 1864, *The Wartime Papers*, 666-667.

⁴⁵² Lee quoted in Reid, *Robert E. Lee*, 197.

⁴⁵³ “Casualties” refers to total numbers of killed, wounded, and missing. Grimsley, *And Keep Moving On*, 226. Reid, *Robert E. Lee*, 205.

⁴⁵⁴ W.T. Sherman, “The Grand Strategy of the War of the Rebellion,” *Century Magazine* (February 1888), 591-592.

⁴⁵⁵ Grant quoted in Shelby Foote, *The Civil War: A Narrative, Vol. 3 Red River to Appomattox* (New York: Vintage Books, 1986, first edition 1974), 186.

the Potomac through stalemates at the Wilderness, Spotsylvania, North Anna, and Cold Harbor, and on to victory.⁴⁵⁶

Hooker's Army of the Potomac had outnumbered Lee by a full two-to-one margin, and still, Lee defeated Hooker on nearly the same soil at the Battle of Chancellorsville in May 1863. Hooker's casualty figures were roughly the same as Grant's in the Battle of the Wilderness, but Hooker chose instead to end his offensive, while Grant persisted in 1864. Even Lincoln, to his personal secretary, admired Grant's fortitude: "I believe if any other general had been at the head of that army it would now have been on this side of the Rapidan. It is the dogged pertinacity of Grant that wins."⁴⁵⁷

Yet, this was not the last time the campaign would stall. In fact, the campaign ground to a halt at the Battle of Cold Harbor in early June, where "Grant suffered slightly more than 6,000 casualties, while Lee took about 1,000 to 1,500."⁴⁵⁸ Grant hit a wall and he wrote, "without a greater sacrifice of human life than I am willing to make all cannot be accomplished" that he had originally hoped for.⁴⁵⁹

When this roadblock in June 1864 stopped progress, Grant rethought the campaign. There was no way to continue in the same manner, partially because, as Grant wrote to his father, the Confederates were "always on the defensive and strongly intrenched."⁴⁶⁰ Grant turned back to his original plan, the attempt to strike at the Confederate center of gravity from an indirect approach.⁴⁶¹ Grant wrote to Halleck:

My idea from the start has been to beat Lee's Army, if possible, North of Richmond, then after destroying his lines of communication North of the James river to transfer the Army to the South side and besiege Lee in Richmond, or follow him South if he should retreat...

⁴⁵⁶ Edward H. Bonekemper, III, *Grant and Lee: Victorious American and Vanquished Virginian* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2008), 184.

⁴⁵⁷ Lincoln quoted in Brooks D. Simpson, "Great Expectations: Ulysses S. Grant, the Northern Press, and the Opening of the Wilderness Campaign," in *The Wilderness Campaign*, ed. Gary W. Gallagher (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 19.

⁴⁵⁸ Bonekemper, *Grant and Lee*, 192. Cites Gordon C. Rhea, *Cold Harbor: Grant and Lee, May 26 – June 3, 1864* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 2002), 382, 386.

⁴⁵⁹ Grant to Halleck, June 5, 1864, *PUSG*, 11:19.

⁴⁶⁰ Grant to Jesse R. Grant, September 5, 1864, *PUSG*, 12:130.

⁴⁶¹ Brooks D. Simpson, "Campaign Promise," *The Civil War Monitor* (Winter 2014), 35.

They act purely on the defensive, behind breast works, or feebly on the offensive immediately in front of them and where, in case of repulse, they can instantly retire behind them.⁴⁶²

Grant's new objective, as he wrote after crossing to the south side of the James River, was to "cut off all sources of supply to the enemy except what is furnished by [their water-borne logistical lines]."⁴⁶³ Attrition would continue, but if he could not whittle away Confederate soldiers in their main army while they were in defensive positions surrounding Richmond and Petersburg, he would do so against the rail and supply networks that fed those two Southern stronghold cities.

At the same time, Grant employed Major General William T. Sherman and Major General Philip Sheridan in key supporting efforts. Grant used Sherman and Sheridan to raid and harass, a full-press on all sides and from all directions that forced the Confederates into a strategic bind. On May 9, 1864, Grant supported (against Army of the Potomac commander Major General George G. Meade's desires) a mission that sent Sheridan and over 10,000 cavalrymen on a raid against Confederate cavalry and Richmond.⁴⁶⁴ The object of this move, in Grant's words, was "three-fold,"

First, if successfully executed, and it was, he would annoy the enemy by cutting off his line of supplies and telegraphic communications, and destroy or get for his own use supplies in store in the rear and coming up. Second, he would draw the enemy's cavalry after him, and thus better protect our flanks, rear and trains than by remaining with the army. Third, his absence would save the trains drawing his forage and other supplies from Fredericksburg, which had now become our base.⁴⁶⁵

Importantly, Sheridan's attack resulted in the death of celebrated Confederate cavalry commander, Major General J.E.B. Stuart. Sheridan's cavalry had such an effect on Confederate forces that Lee wrote to Confederate President Jefferson Davis on July 5, 1864, on the impact of losing so much cavalry: "The subject of recruiting and keeping up our cavalry force, has occupied much of my thoughts, especially since the opening of the present campaign...[because

⁴⁶² Grant to Halleck, June 5, 1864, *PUSG*, 11:19.

⁴⁶³ Grant to Halleck, June 5, 1864, *PUSG*, 11:20.

⁴⁶⁴ Reid, *Robert E. Lee*, 205-206.

⁴⁶⁵ Grant, *Memoirs*, 495.

of this,] I cannot but entertain serious apprehensions about the safety of our southern communications.”⁴⁶⁶

Sheridan’s success provided another opportunity after Grant met with President Abraham Lincoln on July 31, 1864. Grant ordered Sheridan “to put himself south of the enemy and follow [the Confederates] to the death. Wherever the enemy goes let ou[r] troops go also.”⁴⁶⁷ Sheridan now became the commander of a new army, including about 45,000 soldiers, which consisted of the “Sixth Corps, Hunter’s Eighth Corps, two divisions of the Nineteenth Corps lately from Louisiana, and three divisions of cavalry.”⁴⁶⁸ While Halleck did not support this decision, Lincoln thought it “exactly right,” and wrote as much to Grant on August 3, 1864, yet, Lincoln noted that “it will neither be done nor attempted unless you watch it every day, and hour, and force it.”⁴⁶⁹ Lincoln supported the aggressive instincts of his supreme commander. During September and October, Sheridan’s forces tore apart the Shenandoah Valley.⁴⁷⁰ When he was finished cleaning out the Shenandoah Valley, Sheridan had done as he had promised, and there was “little in it for man or beast.”⁴⁷¹ These raids were important supporting efforts to the main effort in Virginia and the broader continuous pressure on all Confederate forces.

Sherman, of course, also brought chaos to Georgia, and cut a path of destruction that was sixty miles wide at some points. Sherman attacked the Confederate desire to wage ware. Ultimately, mere days after the former Union commander George McClellan accepted the Democratic Party’s nomination to run for president against Lincoln, Sherman took Atlanta on September 2, 1864.⁴⁷²

The Union public viewed cities as important markers on the road to victory. Sherman’s tactical triumph in Atlanta was perceived as strategic success for Grant’s plan and the Lincoln administration. The specifics of where the Confederacy had fallen was not as important as the fact that it had fallen somewhere. Of course, this did not satisfy Grant, who sent a dispatch to Sherman one week later: “We want to keep the enemy continually pressed to the end of the war...the end cannot be distant.”⁴⁷³ Consistent as ever, Grant wanted persistent, simultaneous, concentric pressure.

⁴⁶⁶ Lee to Davis, July 5, 1864, *The Wartime Papers*, 814-815.

⁴⁶⁷ Grant to Halleck, August 1, 1864, *PUSG*, 11:358.

⁴⁶⁸ McPherson, *Tried By War*, 229.

⁴⁶⁹ Lincoln to Grant, August 3, 1864, *PUSG*, 11:360n.

⁴⁷⁰ Masur, *The Civil War*, 70.

⁴⁷¹ Sheridan quoted in Ward et al, *The Civil War*, 271.

⁴⁷² Simpson, “Campaign Promise,” 39.

⁴⁷³ Grant to Sherman, September 10, 1864, *PUSG*, 12:144.

Two of Grant's dispatches, one to Sherman and one to Sheridan, show how Grant viewed these supporting efforts. The first, Grant wrote to Sherman in October 1864: "In case you go south I would not propose holding any thing south of Chattanooga...Destroy in such case all of military value in Atlanta."⁴⁷⁴ The same month, Grant wrote to Sheridan: "What I want is for you to threate[n] the Va. Central rail-road & Canal...If you make the enemy hold a force equal to your own for the protection of those thoroughfares it will accomplish nearly as much as their destruction."⁴⁷⁵ The two messages show how Grant's central strategic concept was to aim not for territory, but to erode and attrit the enemy's willingness and ability to continue the fight.

Grant's judgment for simultaneous concentric pressure imposed several strategically important issues on Lee. First, it forced Lee to request and draw reinforcements from other Confederate armies. Lee's casualties were "so significant that units from elsewhere totaling 24,495 men had come to reinforce him. These reinforcements to Lee weakened critical areas to which Sherman would be heading, and the South was now essentially out of reinforcements."⁴⁷⁶ Significant numbers of irreplaceable Confederate soldiers in South Carolina, Georgia, Florida, and in the Shenandoah Valley were shipped off to resupply Lee.⁴⁷⁷ Lee played into Grant's attrition strategy. The more forces Lee requested, the more Lee consumed, the closer the Confederacy was to the end.

Not only did Grant's campaign judgment consume Lee's forces, Grant's effort also consumed Lee's key subordinates. Lee lost cavalry commander and close confidant Major General J.E.B. Stuart in the campaign (killed, May 12, 1864), along with Lieutenant General James Longstreet (severely wounded, May 6), Lieutenant General A.P. Hill (illness, May 8), and Lieutenant General Richard Ewell (forced out of command, May 27) and in the end, Lee seemed to be fighting on his own.⁴⁷⁸ It happened fast, and in only the first eight days of fighting in early May, the Army of Northern Virginia had lost "better than one-third of its corps, division, and brigade commanders...while its adversary [had lost] barely half as many, 10 out of 69."⁴⁷⁹ This was a direct result of Grant's judgment.

⁴⁷⁴ Grant to Sherman, October 17, 1864, *PUSG*, 12: 318.

⁴⁷⁵ Grant to Sheridan, October 14, 1864, *PUSG*, 12:312.

⁴⁷⁶ Bonekemper, *Grant and Lee*, 196-197. Cites Alfred C. Young, "Numbers and Losses in the Army of Northern Virginia," *North & South* Vol. 3, No. 3 (March 2000), 19-21.

⁴⁷⁷ Bonekemper, *Grant and Lee*, 188.

⁴⁷⁸ Foote, *The Civil War: A Narrative*, 223, 179, 193, 277. Grimsley, *And Keep Moving On*, 71. Reid, *Robert E. Lee*, 211.

⁴⁷⁹ Foote, *The Civil War: A Narrative*, 223.

Starting with the Battle of the Wilderness, Grant quickly accomplished the pinning of Lee's army.⁴⁸⁰ Beyond that, Grant threatened the last bargaining chip the Confederacy had for compelling the Union into some negotiated settlement, its field armies.⁴⁸¹ This imperative forced Lee into a defensive at Petersburg, and Lee was forced to protect both his government and two key communications hubs. After Grant's several offensives played out, Lee was left to hold onto his last railroad network.⁴⁸² Lee's twin imperatives, to protect his army and protect the Confederacy's critical infrastructure, meant that the Confederacy and Lee had no offensive capability after this point of the war. Grant's attrition campaign had been successful against the Confederates.

It must be acknowledged that Grant lost roughly 55,000 soldiers from May through early June 1864 (called by some "The Forty Days" of the Overland Campaign), which is a limited time period with the most intense casualties from 1864.⁴⁸³ Lee over that same period lost 33,000. However, in relative comparison, Grant's losses were only about 45 percent of the force he crossed the Rapidan with, while Lee lost over 50 percent of his men.⁴⁸⁴

Another scholar charges 47 percent losses to Lee's Army of Northern Virginia and losses of 22 of its 58 generals; compared to a "militarily tolerable" 43 percent losses for the Army of the Potomac, under Grant, in the head-to-head with Lee.⁴⁸⁵ Yet even this match is misleading, because it does not account for the broader strategic picture. But in just this tactical exchange, we can see Grant's ruthless military efficiency. More specifically, to look to the impact on a single unit, "Grant's attacks just about wrecked Ewell's Second Corps" who "started the campaign with 17,000 troops and had only 6,000 left after the first two battles [of the Wilderness and Spotsylvania]."⁴⁸⁶ Ewell was relieved of command shortly thereafter.

At the same time, Northern civilians assessed the military campaign, and planned their political votes accordingly for 1864's election. This political reality forced an uncomfortable

⁴⁸⁰ Stoker, *The Grand Design*, 364-365.

⁴⁸¹ Noah Andre Trudeau, "'A Mere Question of Time': Robert E. Lee from the Wilderness to Appomattox Court House," in *Lee: The Soldier*, ed. Gary W. Gallagher (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1996), 538.

⁴⁸² Reid, *Robert E. Lee*, 219-220.

⁴⁸³ References to "losses" or "casualties" means the sum total of killed, wounded, and missing (unless otherwise specified). Foote, *The Civil War: A Narrative*, 146.

⁴⁸⁴ Gordon C. Rhea, "'Butcher' Grant and the Overland Campaign," 55.

⁴⁸⁵ Bonekemper, *Grant and Lee*, 193. Note: these figures are isolated to the limited period and geographically bounded Overland Campaign, May-June 1864.

⁴⁸⁶ Bonekemper, *Grant and Lee*, 189.

scrutiny on Grant's campaign, as Americans had never seen such casualties in such a short period of time.⁴⁸⁷

Aware of the severity of the campaign's casualty figures, Grant himself wrote,

[The defeat of the Confederates] was not to be accomplished, however, without as desperate fighting as the world has ever witnessed; not to be consummated in a day, a week, a month, or a single season. The losses inflicted, and endured, were destined to be severe; but the armies now confronting each other had already been in deadly conflict for a period of three years, with immense losses...and neither had made any real progress toward accomplishing the final end...[this campaign] was destined to result in heavier losses, to both armies, in a given time, than any previously suffered; but the carnage was to be limited to a single year, and to accomplish all that had been anticipated or desired at the beginning in that time.⁴⁸⁸

Grant was aware of the campaign's cost, and deemed it worthwhile to achieve the result. And while it is clear Grant's casualties stretched the limits of political tolerability, in hindsight, the final ledger tilts toward Grant. This was more than just an attritional campaign; it denied Lee his favored strategy and his last chance at achieving his war aim.⁴⁸⁹ This should not be forgotten. Grant himself described his "plan" was "to take the initiative" from Lee, and to dictate the terms of the engagement, to hold the initiative, was quite an accomplishment against a commander as talented as Lee.⁴⁹⁰

Lee: Offensive Defensive

General Robert E. Lee's role has always been the most written about part of the Confederate war effort. He was revered on the same high plateau as America's earliest patriot founders, as revered by some as George Washington.⁴⁹¹ And at the end of the war, one of Lee's generals assessed Lee had essentially been the animating figure behind the Confederate cause: Henry A. Wise told Lee on April 6, 1865, there "has been no country, general, for a year or more. You are

⁴⁸⁷ Simpson, "Great Expectations," 4-5.

⁴⁸⁸ Grant, *Memoirs*, 510.

⁴⁸⁹ Bonekemper, *Grant and Lee*, 197.

⁴⁹⁰ Grant, *Memoirs*, 523.

⁴⁹¹ Gary W. Gallagher, "Another Look" in *Lee: The Soldier* ed. Gary W. Gallagher (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1996), 280.

the country to these men. They have fought for you.”⁴⁹² To some, Lee was something even more than a supreme commander.

This star power came at a strategic cost. Lee’s Army of Northern Virginia became a symbol, a focus for the Union war in the East, a target for the Army of the Potomac to strike at, while Lee himself considered the city of Richmond the enemy’s primary target. By the end of the war, Lee had soaked up the lion’s share of resources as the main Confederate effort, yet he was still wedded to the notion he ought to fight offensively to defend Richmond from the Union’s Army of the Potomac.

Lee placed great faith in his ability to erode the North’s will to fight. One example is the letter he wrote to his wife from Fredericksburg, Virginia, just prior to the Battle of Chancellorsville on April 19, 1863:

If we can baffle them in their various designs this year & our people are true to our cause & not so devoted to themselves & their own aggrandizement, I think our success will be certain...If successful this year, next fall there will be a great change in public opinion at the North. The Republicans will be destroyed & I think the friends of peace will become so strong as that the next administration will go in on that basis. We have only therefore to resist manfully.⁴⁹³

This passage represents the theoretical core of his offensive-defensive strategy: limited tactical and operational offensive raids, designed to strike the Northern will to fight, which would also go to enable a successful strategic defensive. Though Lee wrote about this earlier in the war and executed this during the Battles of Antietam (in Maryland, September 1862) and Gettysburg (through Virginia and into Pennsylvania, in May-July 1863) raids, he maintained it was the proper course into 1864, and wrote as much to President Jefferson Davis on February 3, 1864,

The approach of spring causes me to consider with anxiety the probable action of the enemy and the possible operations of ours in the ensuing campaign. If we could take the initiative & fall upon them unexpectedly we might derange their plans & embarrass them the whole summer. ...If I could draw Longstreet secretly & rapidly to me I might succeed in forcing Genl Meade back to Washington, & exciting sufficient apprehension, at least for

⁴⁹² Gallagher, “Another Look,” 281. Cites John Sergeant Wise, *The End of an Era* (New York: Thomas Yoseloff, 1965, reprint 1899), 434.

⁴⁹³ Robert E. Lee to Mary Lee, April 19, 1863, *The Wartime Papers*, 437-438.

their own position, to weaken any movement against ours...We are not in a condition & never have been, in my opinion, to invade the enemy's country with a prospect of permanent benefit. But we can alarm & embarrass him to some extent & thus prevent his undertaking anything of magnitude against us.⁴⁹⁴

Lee requested more Confederate assets because he believed he could spoil any Northern attack, no matter the size, and by beating the North on the battlefield, win the strategic victory. Lee's fundamental instinct in the campaign was "aggressive."⁴⁹⁵

Lee also harbored an assumption about Northern capabilities, seen in Lee's dispatch to Confederate President Jefferson Davis, just before the Battle of the Wilderness, on April 5, 1864:

All the information I receive tends to show that the great effort of the enemy in this campaign will be made in Virginia. Nothing as yet has been discovered to develop their plan...The tone of the Northern papers, as well as the impression prevailing in their armies, go to show that Grant with a large force is to move against Richmond. One of their correspondents at Harrisburg stated, upon the occasion of the visit of Genls Burnside & Hancock, that it was certain that the former would go to North Carolina. They cannot collect the large force they mention for their operations against Richmond without reducing their other armies. This ought to be discovered & taken advantage of by our respective commanders...Longstreet's corps...I would recommend that it be returned to this army...But all the information that reaches me goes to strengthen the belief that Genl Grant is preparing to move against Richmond.⁴⁹⁶

Lee assumed that because Grant was assembling a large military force, this action would weaken Union forces elsewhere. This assumption proved false, and Grant was able to continue to generate more field forces. Ultimately, the Union's main eastern force, the Army of the Potomac, continued to absorb casualties without significantly drawing on or weakening any other Union forces, particularly those under Sherman and Sheridan. And because of this, the Army of the Potomac remained intact and effective, enabling Sherman and Sheridan's major breakthroughs.

⁴⁹⁴ Lee to Davis, February 3, 1864, *The Wartime Papers*, 666-667.

⁴⁹⁵ Trudeau, "A Mere Question of Time," 523. Cites Robert E. Lee, *The Wartime Papers*, 666-667, 700.

⁴⁹⁶ Lee to Davis, April 5, 1864, in *The Wartime Papers*, 691.

Lee wanted to strike, but the question was when; certainly not before Confederate ground forces were massed.⁴⁹⁷ As the engagement approached, Lieutenant General James Longstreet's corps was dozens of miles away in western Virginia foraging for supplies.⁴⁹⁸ Yet Lee wrote to another corps commander, Lieutenant General Richard Ewell, on May 4 at 8pm, that he desired to bring the enemy to battle, "as soon now as possible."⁴⁹⁹ And so Lee began the initial engagement of the 1864 campaign at the Battle of the Wilderness on the back foot. Lee fought before he had all his troops in place.

Lee's offensive mindset continued through the entire campaign. On May 11, 1864, Lee wrote to Brigadier General Henry Heth: "My opinion is the enemy are preparing to retreat tonight to Fredericksburg... We must attack those people if they retreat."⁵⁰⁰ Lee even desired an offensive when he was sick and bedridden. In late May, at the Battle of the North Anna (River), while sick in bed, Lee's chief aide reported Lee as saying, "We must strike them a blow—We must never let them pass again."⁵⁰¹

On May 23, Lee wrote to Davis: "It seems to me our best policy [is] to unite upon [Grant's army] and endeavor to crush it."⁵⁰² Lee wanted to strike when the balance of forces were closest, after the Battle of Spotsylvania in mid-May 1864, when the most reliable modern estimate of the strengths of the two armies was 51,000 to 53,000 in the Army of Northern Virginia to 67,000 in the Army of the Potomac.⁵⁰³ Even though at the outset of the campaign, Grant had a nearly two-to-one advantage, at critical moments during the campaign the ratio was not so decisive or anywhere near what modern military doctrine proscribes (i.e. a three-to-one ratio of attackers to defenders). This relatively close margin tempted Lee into keeping up his offensive mindset.

This continued into June, when Lee wrote to Lieutenant General Richard Anderson on June 4, 1864 (Anderson had taken command for the wounded Lieutenant General James Longstreet):

I apprehend from the quietude the enemy has preserved today that he is preparing to leave us tonight, and I fear will cross the Chickahominy. In that event the best course for us to

⁴⁹⁷ Trudeau, "A Mere Question of Time," 526.

⁴⁹⁸ Bonekemper, *Grant and Lee*, 179.

⁴⁹⁹ Lee quoted in Trudeau, "A Mere Question of Time," 526. Cites *O.R. Vol. 36/2*, 948.

⁵⁰⁰ Lee quoted in Bonekemper, *Grant and Lee*, 187. Cites Gordon C. Rhea, "Robert E. Lee, Prescience, and the Overland Campaign," *North & South* Vol. 3, No. 5 (June 2000), 45.

⁵⁰¹ Lee quoted in Trudeau, "A Mere Question of Time," 533.

⁵⁰² Lee quoted in Grimsley, *And Keep Moving On*, 138.

⁵⁰³ Grimsley, *And Keep Moving On*, 138.

pursue in my opinion, would be to move down and attack him with our whole force, provided we could catch him in the act of crossing.⁵⁰⁴

In addition to his offensive disposition, Lee also focused on Richmond, and fully assumed Grant's aim was Richmond.⁵⁰⁵ When asked to shore up the Confederates armies in the West, Lee, wanting to stay in the war's principal theater and near his home of Virginia, turned down President Davis's offer to lead in the West on December 7, 1863.⁵⁰⁶

Lee was broadly correct by weighting the Eastern Theater over the West. Abraham Lincoln had done so, and noted how much the Eastern Theater overshadowed the Western Theater after a Union victory out west in August 1862: "Yet it seems unreasonable that a series of successes, extending through half-a-year, and clearing more than a hundred thousand square miles of country, should help us so little, while a single half-defeat should hurt us so much."⁵⁰⁷ While there were important things happening in the Western Theater, the world watched the Eastern Theater.

Lee's actions reflected this fact. On April 15, 1864, Lee dispatched to Davis his case for reinforcements to defend Richmond, which Lee considered Grant's primary target:

I think it certain that the enemy is organizing a large army...the former is intended to move directly on Richmond, while the latter is intended to take it in flank or rear...If Richmond could be held secure against the attack from the east, I would propose that I draw Longstreet to me & move right against the enemy on the Rappahannock. Should God give us a crowning victory there, all their plans would be dissipated...I however see no better plan for the defense of Richmond than that I have proposed.⁵⁰⁸

Lee believed that the Army of the Potomac's primary mission was to take Richmond, as can be seen again in his May 4 dispatch to Davis: "[I]t is apparent that the long threatened effort to take Richmond has begun, and that the enemy has collected all his available force to accomplish it."⁵⁰⁹

⁵⁰⁴ Lee to Richard H. Anderson, June 4, 1864, *The Wartime Papers*, 765.

⁵⁰⁵ Grimsley, *And Keep Moving On*, 138.

⁵⁰⁶ Trudeau, "A Mere Question of Time," 524. Cites Lee to Davis, December 7, 1863, *The Wartime Papers*, 642.

⁵⁰⁷ Lincoln quoted in Gallagher, "Another Look," 278. Cites Abraham Lincoln, *The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln*, ed. Roy P. Basler et al. (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1953), 5:355-56.

⁵⁰⁸ Lee to Davis, April 15, 1864, *The Wartime Papers*, 699-700.

⁵⁰⁹ Lee to Davis, May 4, 1864, *The Wartime Papers*, 719.

Even more, Lee had a personal fear of the advance on Richmond.⁵¹⁰ As Lee was boxed in towards Richmond, and on May 30, 1864, he wrote to Davis his assessment that he thought it “very important to strengthen this army as much as possible.” Moreover, Lee assessed: “If this army is unable to resist Grant, the troops [assigned to] the city will be unable to defend [Richmond alone].”⁵¹¹

Some have defended Lee, and argued that he was not an old fashioned general (as opposed to more a modern-thinking supreme commander). Others argue that, in actuality, Lee supported national over local ideology, to push back against criticism that Lee was too provincial in his strategic thinking.⁵¹²

Even if one grants that, Lee was a key reason the Confederates lasted so long in the war, we should also observe that Lee, in his own words, exhibited a laser focus on the conduct of offensive operations to protect Richmond, and persisted in the mistaken assumption that Grant’s strength necessarily meant Union weakness elsewhere.⁵¹³ Beyond that, though the offensive may have been popular in the Southern press and with the people, it was not always the correct choice. Lee’s actions played into his opponent’s efforts, which can be seen in his assessment of his own campaign concerns, when he fretted about “scarcity of our supplies” just before the 1864 campaign.⁵¹⁴

In Summary

In considering the above, Grant’s judgment on the use of force to obtain his goals was accurate in this case. His challenge was to design, determine, and decide on a plan for Union forces to organize for the 1864 campaign, and then move as one against Confederate forces. Grant initially desired maneuver through North Carolina, and then Halleck and Lincoln asked Grant to amend his plans to ensure Washington was always covered from attack. Grant then selected simultaneous, concentric, persistent pressure on all Confederate forces in all places.

Lee’s challenge was to determine how to organize Confederate forces for 1864: Where should the Confederates defend and where should they choose to fight? Lee opted for an offensive-defensive strategy, and to choose to fight offensively against Union forces in Virginia

⁵¹⁰ Robert E. Lee to Mary Lee, May 23, 1864, *The Wartime Papers*, 748.

⁵¹¹ Lee to Davis, May 30, 1864, *The Wartime Papers*, 757.

⁵¹² Gallagher, “Another Look,” 285, 286, 278.

⁵¹³ Gallagher, “Another Look,” 286.

⁵¹⁴ Lee to Braxton Bragg, April 16, 1864, *The Wartime Papers*, 701.

in the Battle of the Wilderness and for the rest of the campaign. He aimed to throw off the Union's plans to deny Lincoln's re-election.

When the dust settled from the fighting that followed these choices, Grant's offensive had consumed Confederate forces, denied them any further offensive actions, and held the Confederates into place. Confederate newspapers called the opening month of the campaign "bloody May," for the "terrible and unprecedented carnage" Grant's campaign inflicted on the Confederacy.⁵¹⁵

And Lee did not have to fight the campaign as offensively as he did. By being more conservative, Lee might have preserved a greater force to send north to strike Washington. Lee's commitment to hold Richmond at high cost also went against the Confederacy's longer term strategic survival. Granted, Richmond's maintenance as the Confederate capitol was important owing to its symbolism. However, it was not entirely necessary; the Confederacy could survive without Richmond. In fact, the Confederate capital had been in another location (Mobile, Alabama) earlier in the war.

Of course, Grant's willingness to accept casualties strained political unity in the North. But he also showed a willingness to create military plans within political realities and constraints.

4.5 Lee: Raid Washington versus Grant: Defend Washington

Lee: Raid Washington

While Grant was on the strategic offensive, Lee took the tactical offensive in a raid on Washington. In mid-June 1864, Lee dispatched newly installed corps commander Lieutenant General Jubal Early through Virginia's Shenandoah Valley toward Washington.

This target shook Washington's political confidence in President Lincoln's administration. Even more important was the raid's timing, at a moment when it seemed possible to throw the North's election in 1864.⁵¹⁶ Newspaper headlines shouted "THE CAPITAL SERIOUSLY THREATENED" and reported a "very large force of rebels" approached the capital city.⁵¹⁷

⁵¹⁵ "The Campaign in Virginia," *Fayetteville Observer*, (June 6, 1864).

⁵¹⁶ Larry E. Nelson, *Bullets, Ballots, and Rhetoric: Confederate Policy for the United States Presidential Contest of 1864* (Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press, 1980), 1.

⁵¹⁷ "By Telegraph for the American & Gazette," *North American and United States Gazette*, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania (July 12, 1864).

This was the effect Lee hoped for when he commanded Early, on June 12, 1864, to mount a raid on Washington.⁵¹⁸ This raid might have had the potential to gain outsized military dividends, because at this point in the Virginia campaign, Lee's defense of Richmond was stretched very thin over 35 miles.⁵¹⁹ To strike Washington might spell relief because it might distract the Union army in addition to delivering a direct blow against Northern war morale. The idea for the raid first appears in a dispatch from Lee to Lieutenant General A.P. Hill in May, 1864:

The time has arrived, in my opinion, when something more is necessary than adhering to lines and defensive positions. We shall be obliged to go out and prevent the enemy from selecting such positions as he chooses. If he is allowed to continue that course we shall at last be obliged to take refuge behind the works of Richmond and stand a siege, which would be but a work of time.⁵²⁰

After Grant had pushed Lee back into defensive positions around Richmond and Petersburg, Lee saw that absent action the Confederates would be on the path to siege that would hurt the Confederates more than it would hurt the Union. In early June, General Braxton Bragg recommended to Jefferson Davis an option to "driv[e] the Union forces out of the Shenandoah Valley, thus opening the road to Washington."⁵²¹ The day before Early's departure, on June 11, Lee wrote a dispatch to President Jefferson Davis to express his assessment of the raid's costs and benefits:

I acknowledge the advantage of expelling enemy from the Valley. The only difficulty with me is the means. It would [take] one corps of this army. If it is deemed prudent to hazard the defense of Richmond, the interests involved by...diminishing the force here, I will do so. I think this is what the enemy would desire.⁵²²

At this point, Lee was lukewarm in his support for the raid. He perceived that Grant might gain by sending Early on the raid because it would mean a reduction of Richmond's defenses. However, Lee's opinion shifted later in the dispatch:

⁵¹⁸ Reid, *Robert E. Lee*, 222.

⁵¹⁹ Reid, *Robert E. Lee*, 227.

⁵²⁰ Lee to A.P. Hill, unrecorded date, May, 1864, *The Wartime Papers*, 759-760.

⁵²¹ Bragg quoted in Stoker, *The Grand Design*, 370.

⁵²² Lee to Davis, June 11, 1864, *The Wartime Papers*, 774-775.

A victory over General Grant would also relieve our difficulties. I see no indications of his attacking me in his present position. Think he is strengthening his defenses to withdraw a portion of his force, and with the other move to the James River. To attack him here I must assault a very strong line of intrenchments and run great risk to the safety of the army.⁵²³

Lee reasoned that one option was that he could attack in place against Grant and Meade's Army of the Potomac, but that such an effort would be risky; in contrast, Early's raid seemed the better option.

Early departed on June 15, 1864, and Lee wrote: "Genl Early was in motion this morning at 3 o'clock & by daylight was clear of our camps...His troops would make us more secure here, but success in the Valley would relieve our difficulties that at present press heavily upon us."⁵²⁴ In the end, Lee blessed off on the raid, albeit with reservations.

Early recorded his orders from Lee were "to strike" and "if possible, destroy" Union forces in the Valley, and then "threaten Washington City." Early's corps "numbered a little over 8,000 musket for duty." While in the Valley, Early was joined by another unit, and the total Confederate force that marched on Washington totaled 12,000.⁵²⁵

After Early won an initial battle in the Shenandoah Valley on the way to Washington, on June 26, 1864, Lee wrote to Davis on the continuance of Early's campaign:

If circumstances favor, I should also recommend his crossing the Potomac. I think I can maintain lines here against Genl Grant. He does not seem disposed to attack, and has thrown himself strictly on the defensive. I am less uneasy about holding our position than about our ability to procure supplies for the army.⁵²⁶

Early continued to move toward Washington through Fredericksburg, Maryland, where he picked up supplies and confiscated \$200,000 from the citizens there. Then he met with a relatively small blocking force sent from Washington.⁵²⁷ Union Major General Lew Wallace moved out from Washington with a scant force of 6,300 lightly trained new recruits. Numbering half the Confederates, Wallace's forces engaged Early's corps on July 9, 1864, at the Battle of the

⁵²³ Lee to Davis, June 11, 1864, *The Wartime Papers*, 774-775.

⁵²⁴ Lee to Davis, June 15, 1864, *The Wartime Papers*, 782-783.

⁵²⁵ Jubal A. Early, *A Memoir of the Last Year of the War for Independence in the Confederate States of America* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2001), 42, 43, 52.

⁵²⁶ Lee to Davis, June 26, 1864, *The Wartime Papers*, 806-807.

⁵²⁷ Early, *A Memoir of the Last Year of the War*, 59.

Monocacy, and Wallace was driven back into Baltimore, Maryland, having sustained roughly 1,300 casualties to Early's losses of 800. Early resumed his movement to Washington, and on the next day, was within site of Fort Stevens, a defensive outpost on the edge of Washington.⁵²⁸ While Wallace's force had been defeated, it delayed Early long enough to ensure the capital was prepared for Early's assault.⁵²⁹

At this stage of the war, Washington was likely the most heavily fortified capital in the world, with an interlocking defense system of

68 enclosed forts boasted 807 mounted cannon and 93 mortars in 1,120 emplacements, 93 unarmed batteries for field guns with 401 emplacements and 20 miles of rifle trenches plus three blockhouses.⁵³⁰

As Early approached the ramparts outside Washington, Early received a dispatch from Lee late on July 11 that Grant had sent a corps to Washington, and so Lee left the decision to attack up to Early, to "be guided by the circumstances."⁵³¹ Waiting until the last moment, Grant had, in fact, sent a corps with an extra division to counter Early's raid.⁵³² Wallace's holding action provided time for these Union forces, sent by Grant, to reinforce the capital.

This atmosphere was bad for the Union, and felt like the war was turning for the Confederates.⁵³³ This was a shaky moment for the Union war effort. And it almost got worse, as President Abraham Lincoln went personally to see the fighting:

The six-foot-four-inch president wearing his top hat made a large target as he peered over the parapet at enemy sharpshooters. As John Hay recorded the incident, "A soldier roughly ordered him to get down or he would have his head knocked off." By tradition this soldier was Capt. Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr., a thrice-wounded veteran who was serving as a staff officer for Sixth Corps commander Gen. Horatio Wright. "Get down, you fool," Holmes reportedly said, not realizing in the excitement of the moment that he was speaking to the president. There is no definitive evidence either for or against the story that Holmes was the

⁵²⁸ Doug Coleman, "Early's Raid on Washington: Monocacy, Fort Stevens and Retaliation in Chambersburg," *Alexandria, Virginia Old Town Crier* (July 2014), 9.

⁵²⁹ B. Franklin Cooling, "Washington's Civil War Defenses and the Battle of Fort Stevens," *The Sentinel – Washington Attacked: The 1864 Invasion & Shenandoah Valley Campaign*, U.S. National Park Service Publication, 2014, 28-29.

⁵³⁰ Cooling, "Washington's Civil War Defenses and the Battle of Fort Stevens," 28.

⁵³¹ Lee to Early, July 11, 1864, *The Wartime Papers*, 819.

⁵³² McPherson, *Tried By War*, 226-27.

⁵³³ McPherson, *Tried By War*, 224-225.

man who ordered Lincoln to get down. The next day, as the Sixth Corps was preparing to drive Early away, Lincoln returned to Fort Stevens. A Union officer was shot while standing close to the president.⁵³⁴

The officer who took the bullet so near to Lincoln was a medical officer from the 102nd Pennsylvania.⁵³⁵ It is of course possible that Lincoln's death at this point may have thrown the Union war effort into disarray, not to mention what might have happened in the political struggle to come in early 1865 over the extension of full legal rights for black citizens.

Militarily, on all sides, there were about 1,000 casualties from the Battle of Fort Stevens.⁵³⁶ Early's raid successfully frightened Lincoln on his political future, as it came a mere five weeks before Lincoln's famous cabinet letter in which he predicted his own loss in the upcoming 1864 election.

Confederate news reports had an impact on the Southern assessment of the campaign. Confederate supporters thought it might increase the Northern desire for peace. Yet, there were Confederate dissenters that thought the raid would actually strengthen Northern resolve.⁵³⁷

Grant: Defend Washington

Grant saw Early's raid as an opportunity to strike enemy forces as they left their prepared defenses. On July 5, 1864, Grant wrote to Halleck, with full knowledge of Early's movement toward Washington: "We want now to crush out & destroy any force the enemy dares send north. Force enough can be spared from here to do it."⁵³⁸

Lincoln was more concerned with what the newspapers were calling "the Rebel Invasion," and requested that Grant leave some sufficient minimum amount of troops to siege Richmond and Petersburg, and bring the bulk of his forces back to Washington to defend the capital and turn the raid back.⁵³⁹

Grant did not view it as a threat worth distraction from his primary objective, to continually tie down all Confederate military forces, as he wrote to Lincoln on July 10: "I think

⁵³⁴ McPherson, *Tried By War*, 226.

⁵³⁵ Cooling, "Washington's Civil War Defenses and the Battle of Fort Stevens," 30.

⁵³⁶ Cooling, "Washington's Civil War Defenses and the Battle of Fort Stevens," 30.

⁵³⁷ Nelson, *Bullets, Ballots, and Rhetoric*, 60.

⁵³⁸ Grant to Halleck, July 5, 1864, *PUSG*, 11:170.

⁵³⁹ "Sunday Night's Dispatches," *Milwaukee Daily Sentinel*, Milwaukee, Wisconsin (August 1, 1864). McPherson, *Tried By War*, 225.

on reflection it would have a bad effect for me to leave here...I have great faith that the enemy will never be able to get back with much of his force.”⁵⁴⁰

So Grant sent one corps plus one division to Washington. Grant personally judged the force Lee sent against Washington unable to make a meaningful, significant attack on the city that would alter the course of the war. Grant had Lee’s Army of Northern Virginia tied down in Richmond and Petersburg, and all other forces were engaged simultaneously on a wide arc against all Confederate forces. Grant decided it would be best to send a smaller detachment to support Washington’s defense, despite the fact he was under great pressure to get back to Washington to protect the capital.⁵⁴¹

This was how Grant rode out Early’s raid on Washington. The raid bent, but did not break, Washington’s defenses. Grant’s judgment proved accurate. By mid-July, just after Early’s raid, two major Confederate forces were completely tied down in Richmond and Atlanta.⁵⁴² Grant’s assessment on July 5, 1864: “If the rebellion is not perfectly and thoroughly crushed, it will be the fault and through the weakness of the people [of the] North. Be of good cheer and rest assured that all will come out right.”⁵⁴³

Grant’s assessment held through August, when Major General Henry Halleck wanted to end the Union offensive, because the Union had suffered so many casualties and he perceived the Union was not making sufficiently speedy progress.⁵⁴⁴ Grant disagreed with this finding, and wrote on August 16, 1864 to Elihu Washburne with his own separate assessment of the Confederate war effort:

The rebels have now in their ranks their last man...A man lost by them cannot be replaced. They have robbed the cradle and the grave equally to get their present force. Besides what they lose in frequent skirmishes and battles they are now losing from desertions and other causes at least one regiment per day. With this drain upon them the end is visible if we will but be true to ourselves. Their only hope now is in a divided North. This might give them reinforcements from Tenn. Ky. Maryland and Mo. whilst it would weaken us. With the draft quietly enforced the enemy would become despondent and would make little resistance.

I have no doubt but the enemy are exceedingly anxious to hold out until after the Presidential election. They have many hopes from its effects. They hope a counter

⁵⁴⁰ Grant to Lincoln, July 10, 1864, *PUSG*, 11:203

⁵⁴¹ Reid, *Robert E. Lee*, 222-223.

⁵⁴² Simpson, “Campaign Promise,” 36.

⁵⁴³ Grant to J. Russell Jones, July 5, 1864, *PUSG*, 11:176.

⁵⁴⁴ Grant to Stanton, August 15, 1864, *PUSG*, 11: 421-422.

revolution. They hope the election of the peace candidate. In fact, like McCawber, they hope *something* to turn up.⁵⁴⁵

In Summary

Lee's choice was to respond to initial campaign setbacks in May and June in order to, as he judged, best defend Richmond from attack. His options were between hardening the approaches to Richmond and Petersburg, and sending a force to raid Washington. Lee chose to support a raid through the Shenandoah Valley and on to Washington. While Lee was initially lukewarm on the operation, he did support the decision and the raid was a moderate tactical success, yet did not fundamentally change the conflict.

In contrast, Grant's challenge was to determine the proper response to Early's raid through the Shenandoah Valley and on Washington. President Lincoln requested Grant's personal presence in the defense, and Grant, instead, chose to remain in place as he sent a Union corps and a division instead. His assessment was correct; Grant sent an appropriate force to parry Early's raid. While there was a political scare, it did not sink the Union war effort and they stayed on the path to victory.

4.6 Lee: Prisoner Parole Request versus Grant: Prisoner Response/Vote Support

Lee: Prisoner Parole Request

As the long 1864 campaign wore on, Lee was short of men for his Army of Northern Virginia, and requested from Grant a return of all the prisoners that had been taken to that point of the war. Lee wrote, on October 1, 1864:

With a view of alleviating the sufferings of our soldiers, I have the honour to propose an exchange of the prisoners of war belonging to the armies operating in Virginia man for man, or upon the basis established by the [mutually-agreed upon approval authority for prisoner exchanges].⁵⁴⁶

⁵⁴⁵ Grant to Elihu Washburne, August 16, 1864, *PUSG*, 11: 423.

⁵⁴⁶ Note: In the dispatches that follow, there are a great many written inaccuracies, by the hand of each supreme commander; so many, that to include notation for each would significantly increase the size of each entry. As such, they have been left as originally written, without notation. Lee to Grant, October 1, 1864, *PUSG*, 12: 258.

Grant responded the next day, October 2, 1864:

Your letter of yesterday proposing to exchange prisoners of War belonging to the Armies operating in Va. is received. I could not of a right accept your proposition further than to exchange those prisoners captured within the last three days and who have not yet been delivered to the [commanding] Gen. of Prisoners. Among those lost by the Armies operating against Richmond were a number of Colored troops. Before further negotiations are had upon the subject I would ask if you propose delivering these men the same as White soldiers.⁵⁴⁷

Grant's response revealed Lee's true agenda. Lee recognized the Northern election was one month away, and he desired to make the Union publicly acknowledge it would not exchange prisoners because the Confederates were unwilling treat black prisoners the same as white prisoners (which would force the Union to treat black and white soldiers as fully equal). This was a sore political subject for border state Unionists, who had been allowed to keep their slaves after Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation (and who generally supported slavery). Lee sought to exploit this political friction in the Union, and to make the Union Army to admit it was leaving white soldiers in captivity out of solidarity with black soldiers. Lee's intended message to the North was that *white soldiers are suffering for black soldiers*.

Grant's military policy response, to turn down this offered prisoner exchange, was consistent with his overall strategy. He sought to deny Lee the benefit of additional manpower, even if it would have meant gains in Union manpower. Grant also pushed back on the proposed exchange for political purposes, only for him the issue was less domestic and more to generate further international alienation and isolation of the Confederate cause.

On October 3, 1864, Lee responded:

In my proposition of ~~yesterday~~ of the 1st Inst: to exchange the prisoners of War belonging to the armies operating in Viga I intended to include all captured soldiers of the U.S. of whatever nation Colour under my Control – Deserters from our Service, & negroes belonging to our Citizens ~~are were~~ are not Considered Subjects of exchange & ~~are~~ were not included in my proposition. If there are any Such among those stated by you to have been Captured around Richmond, & they ~~will~~ can not be ~~exchanged~~ returned.⁵⁴⁸

⁵⁴⁷ Grant to Lee, October 2, 1864, *PUSG*, 12: 258.

⁵⁴⁸ Lee to Grant, October 3, 1864, *PUSG*, 12:263.

In this, Lee explicitly stated any black prisoner was subject to be withheld if that captive was determined to have been a runaway slave (with intentionally ambiguous, exploitable criteria). Grant replied the same day:

Your letter of this date is received. In answer I have to state that the Government is bound to secure all persons received into her Armies the rights due to soldiers. This being denied by you in the persons of such men as have escaped from Southern Masters induces me to decline making the exchanges you ask. The whole matter however will be referred to the proper authority for their decision and whatever it may be will be adhered to.⁵⁴⁹

Grant held firm and did not allow the prisoner release. This deliberate and consistent part of his strategic approach can be seen in his previous dispatch to Secretary of War Edwin Stanton on September 13, 1864:

Prompt action in filling our Armies will have more effect upon the enemy than a victory over them. They profess to believe, and make their men believe, there is such a party North in favor of recognizing southern independence that the draft can not be enforced. ~~Undeceive them and you gain a great triumph~~ Let them be undeceived. Deserters come into our lines daily who tell us that the men are nearly universally tired of the War and that desertions would be much more frequent but they believe peace will be negotiated after the fall elections. The enforcement of the draft and prompt filling ~~of~~ up of our Armies will save the shedding of bloods to an immense degree.⁵⁵⁰

The pursuit of numerical attrition was core to his approach, and Grant had the patience and perseverance to see it through. As Grant had written to Major General Benjamin Butler, “Every man released, on parole or otherwise, becomes an active soldier against us at once either directly or indirectly.”⁵⁵¹

Grant was the no-exchange policy’s greatest champion.⁵⁵² Though Grant was aware of the political cost, he also saw its benefits: “It is hard on our men held in Southern prisons not to

⁵⁴⁹ Grant to Lee, October 3, 1864, *PUSG*, 12:263.

⁵⁵⁰ Grant to Stanton, September 13, 1864, *PUSG*, 12:158-159.

⁵⁵¹ Grant quoted in Simpson, “Campaign Promise,” 39. Grant to Butler, August 18, 1864, *PUSG*, 12:27.

⁵⁵² Simpson, *Let Us Have Peace*, 59.

exchange them, but it is humanity to those left in our ranks to fight in our battles.”⁵⁵³ And Grant wrote the same to Secretary of State William H. Seward: “We have got to fight until the Military power of the South is exhausted and if we release or exchange prisoners captured it simply becomes a War of extermination.”⁵⁵⁴

Grant: Prisoner Response/Vote Support

Grant was well aware the war was both a political and military contest. Beyond fending off Lee’s attempts at prisoner exchange, Grant used military policy in his own way to support the incumbent candidate for the presidency, Abraham Lincoln.

Grant had nuanced views on the interplay between war, politics, and policy. He called politics an “ever-present consideration,” and that while he had his “views on all these subjects, as decided as any man,” he “took no open part in politics” and “never allowed” himself to be influenced by them. He felt that “political bias” was “fatal to a soldier,” and that a soldier had “no right” to interfere in the political process.⁵⁵⁵

While did not personally vote in the election of 1864, Grant made every other effort within legal and moral bounds to secure Lincoln’s re-election, because without it he felt there would be no Union.⁵⁵⁶

Congressional elections in 1862 ran against Lincoln’s Republican Party, and they lost 23 House of Representative seats, “lowering their percentage of seats from 59 percent to 46 percent, which meant that they also lost control of the House.” For the next two years, newspapers focused on Lee’s successes against a succession of several Union generals. On top of that, a faction of the Republican Party had openly broken from Lincoln, calling itself the Radical Republicans, and argued that Lincoln was not hard enough on the Confederacy or strong enough an abolitionist.⁵⁵⁷ Lincoln’s election was far from guaranteed; Grant recognized this fact.

Grant knew how important the election victory would be to secure the war’s outcome, and supported his soldiers’ opportunity to vote. Without polling and easy access to election data,

⁵⁵³ Grant to Butler, August 18, 1864, *PUSG*, 12:27.

⁵⁵⁴ Grant to Seward, August 19, 1864, *PUSG*, 12:38.

⁵⁵⁵ Grant quoted in Young, *Around the World with General Grant*, 447-447, 615-616.

⁵⁵⁶ Email exchange with Louis P. Gallo, Publications Editor, *Ulysses S. Grant Library and Association, Mississippi State University* (September 27, 2016). Grant quoted in Young, *Around the World with General Grant*, 615-616.

⁵⁵⁷ Johnson, *Decided on the Battlefield*, 18-19.

Grant had no way to know what the election might bring. While he never openly campaigned for President Lincoln, Grant did allow the president to use his official dispatches in support of the administration's public messaging (for example, it became common to issue Grant's situation reports on the state of the war to show progress). On this, Grant wrote to Elihu Washburne:

I have no objection to the President using any thing I have ever written to him as he sees fit—I think however for him to attempt to answer all the charges the opposition will bring against him will be like setting a maiden to work to prove her chastity.⁵⁵⁸

In late September 1864, in anticipation of the November vote, Grant wrote to Secretary of War Edwin Stanton about the soldier vote. Grant suggested soldier suffrage “is a novel thing” and “generally been considered dangerous to constitutional liberty and subversive of Military discipline.”⁵⁵⁹ However, Grant wrote, the

circumstances are novel and exceptional. A very large proportion of the legal voters of the United States, are now either under arms in the field, or in hospitals, or otherwise engaged in the Military service of the United States...they are American Citizens, having still their homes and social and political ties, binding them to the States and Districts, from which they come, and to which they expect to return. They have left their homes temporarily, to sustain the cause of their country, in the hour of its trial. In performing this sacred duty, they should not be deprived of a most precious privilege. They have as much right to demand that their votes shall be counted, in the choice of their rulers, as those citizens, who remain at home; Nay more, for they have sacrificed more for their country.⁵⁶⁰

Grant supported the soldier vote. He was careful not to actively campaign or directly support Lincoln, and described the apolitical manner in which he allowed the vote to occur:

I state these reasons in full for the unusual thing of allowing Armies in the field to vote, that I may urge on the other hand, that *nothing more*, than the fullest exercise of this right, should be allowed; for any thing not absolutely necessary to this exercise cannot but be dangerous to the discipline of the Armies, and dangerous to the liberties of the country. The Officers and Soldiers, have every means of understanding the questions before the country. The

⁵⁵⁸ Grant to Washburne, September 21, 1864, *PUSG*, 12: 185.

⁵⁵⁹ Grant to Stanton, September 27, 1864, *PUSG*, 12: 212-213.

⁵⁶⁰ Grant to Stanton, September 27, 1864, *PUSG*, 12: 212-213.

newspapers are freely circulated, and so, I believe, are the documents prepared by both parties, to set forth the merits and claims of their candidates.

Beyond this nothing whatever should be allowed. No political meetings, no harangues from soldiers or citizens and no canvassing of camps or regiments for votes.⁵⁶¹

In mid-October, Grant directed Halleck to propagate a “general order...directing all officers and men [on recruiting duty] to cease recruiting at once and return immediately to their respective commands.”⁵⁶² The intent was to enable them to get from distant duty to their home districts in time to vote in the election.

Grant also viewed the election in tactical terms. To Major General George G. Meade on November 5, 1864, he wrote of his concern, “the enemy may make an attack expecting to find us unprepared and to prevent as far as possible the holding of elections.”⁵⁶³ Two days later, Grant wrote to Brevet Major General Alfred Terry, commanding the Army of the James (River, stationed in Virginia), that the Northern press had written that significant numbers of the Union Army returned home to vote and this information had likely already passed to the Confederates. This increased the likelihood the Confederates might attack, which prompted Grant to advise:

I think there is sufficient probability of you being attacked to justify requiring the greatest vigilance on the part of every Division and Brigade commander and the most perfect readiness to form and move their commands. If the enemy should attack and be repulsed he should be followed up at once and no officer should hold back for orders to do so.⁵⁶⁴

Grant prepared to use the election to draw out the Confederates from their entrenched positions. The political contest was important bait, potentially to be put in the service of Grant’s attrition strategy.

On October 23, Stanton requested Grant’s support to secure the election in New York City for “the security of the forts in the harbor of New York, the defence of the lake frontier from invasion, and the preservation of the public peace, as and for the purity of the ballot-box from rebels imported from Canada.”⁵⁶⁵ Stanton noted these soldiers would be back in time for regular duty by mid-November. The next day Grant responded that while he did not favor this

⁵⁶¹ Grant to Stanton, September 27, 1864, *PUSG*, 12: 212-213.

⁵⁶² Grant to Halleck, October, 1864, *PUSG*, 12:317.

⁵⁶³ Grant to Meade, November 5, 1864, *PUSG*, 12:382.

⁵⁶⁴ Grant to Alfred H. Terry, November 7, 1864, *PUSG*, 12: 394-395.

⁵⁶⁵ Stanton to Grant, October 23, 1864, *PUSG*, 12: 340.

option, he saw “the absolute necessity of further reinforcing [New York], and it must be done. I do not like the idea of sending troops from here, but if they can not be spared from elsewhere, they must go from here.”⁵⁶⁶

Stanton requested Grant send three regiments of Delaware soldiers to vote, because their state was crucial:

The first, third, and fourth regiments of Delaware Volunteers are now near Petersburg – two of them numbering about one hundred each – one numbering about four hundred. They are in the Fifth Corps. The vote of the State will depend on them. If it be possible, please give them leave of absence to go home for the election. One transport can carry them to Baltimore, and they can return the day after the election.⁵⁶⁷

Grant replied, “if possible I will give the furloughs you ask. Will telegraph you again in the course of the day tomorrow.”⁵⁶⁸ On November 1, Grant sent the three regiments to vote.⁵⁶⁹

On election day, as the election results began to come in, Grant sent his own internal Army of the Potomac poll results to Stanton which showed Lincoln was ahead.⁵⁷⁰

After he had won, Lincoln reflected, “The election has exhibited another fact not less valuable to be known—the fact that we do not approach exhaustion in the most important branch of national resources, that of living men.”⁵⁷¹ This was the nail in the Confederacy’s coffin; Lee’s strategy of defeating the will of the North had failed.

In review, the election of 1864 was closer than it might appear. At first glance, out of roughly four million votes cast, Lincoln received a little less than 55 percent to George McClellan’s 45 percent, which translated to a 212 to 21 Electoral College win. Moreover, Lincoln handily won the soldier vote (receiving 78 percent of about 150,000 votes), which can be seen by looking to the twelve states where those votes were tallied separately, compared to the 53 percent of the vote Lincoln received from the civilians of those states.⁵⁷² So Lincoln won by a solid margin.

⁵⁶⁶ Grant to Stanton, October 24, 1864, *PUSG*, 12:339-340.

⁵⁶⁷ Stanton to Grant, October 27, 1864, *PUSG*, 12:353.

⁵⁶⁸ Grant to Stanton, October 27, 1864, *PUSG*, 12:353.

⁵⁶⁹ Grant to Stanton, November 1, 1864, *PUSG*, 12:353.

⁵⁷⁰ Grant to Stanton, November 9, 1864, *PUSG*, 12:395.

⁵⁷¹ Abraham Lincoln, “Fourth Annual Message to Congress, December 6, 1864, text, accessed February 26, 2016, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=29505>.

⁵⁷² Bone Edward H. Bonekemper III, “Appendix III – The Critical Election of 1864: How Close Was It?” in *Ulysses S. Grant: A Victor, Not a Butcher: The Military Genius of the Man Who Won the Civil War* (Washington: Regnery, 2004), Kindle Edition, Locations 5538, 5541.

But the American Electoral College system can be misleading; McClellan still had a chance for victory. Edward Bonekemper has found, “a shift of less than one percent of the popular vote (29,935 out of 4,031,195 [votes cast]) could have given McClellan an additional 97 electoral votes—just enough to provide him with the total 118 electoral votes he needed to win the election.” McClellan was close in the large states of New York and Pennsylvania, and had he picked up a few other small states (i.e. Connecticut, Illinois, Indiana, and Oregon) he would have won.⁵⁷³ So the soldier vote mattered, as did the supportive actions of the Union’s supreme commander.

On the election result, Charles Francis Adams, Jr., from his position in a Union cavalry unit, wrote to his brother: “this election has relieved us of the fire in the rear and now we can devote an undivided attention to the remnants of the Confederacy.”⁵⁷⁴ Lee described the downfall on November 18, 1864: “desertion is increasing in the army despite all my efforts to stop it.”⁵⁷⁵ The political war was won, and the military fight was close to the same.

Grant wrote to congratulate Lincoln (via Secretary of War Stanton), on election day, November 10, 1864: “Congratulate the President for me for the double victory. The election having passed off quietly, no bloodshed or riot throughout the land, is a victory worth more to the country than a battle won. Rebeldom and Europe ~~both will feel it~~ will so construe it.”⁵⁷⁶

Grant distinguished himself as a strategist here; he understood the political victory mattered at least as much as pure military victory. He was aware of the international connections and linkages, that those international and domestic audiences mattered, and such insight is likely at least one factor that propelled him to victory.

In Summary

Lee chose to push against Union military policy to divide the separate political parts of the Union war effort. His request for a prisoner exchange, and subsequent decision to deny that any black Union soldiers were eligible for parole, was calculated to drive a strategic wedge into his enemy’s efforts. Lee’s choice, from available options, was to request prisoner exchange directly from Grant.

⁵⁷³ Bonekemper, *Ulysses S. Grant: A Victor, Not a Butcher*, Kindle Location 5614.

⁵⁷⁴ Adams, Jr. quoted in Masur, *The Civil War*, 72. Cites John C. Waugh, *Reelecting Lincoln: The Battle for the 1864 Presidency* (Cambridge, MA: DaCapo Press, 2001), 357.

⁵⁷⁵ Lee quoted in Masur, *The Civil War*, 73. Cites Joseph T. Glatthaar, *General Lee’s Army: From Victory to Collapse* (New York: Free Press, 2008), 408.

⁵⁷⁶ Grant to Stanton, November 10, 1864, *PUSG*, 12: 398.

Grant's challenge was to find a way to use military policy to support the Union war effort effectively and in such a way as to ensure the Confederate defeat. He strongly backed the "no exchange" policy, and found every opportunity to support the soldier vote in what could have been a close election.

Lee's attempt did not work; the Confederacy did not catalyze a rupture in the Union war effort, and did not gain any manpower through prisoner exchange. On the other hand, Grant's judgment about what political fallout the Union could tolerate resulting from his hardline military policy on prisoner exchange, as well as his support to the soldier vote in a close election, helped steady the Union on the path to victory.

4.7 Campaign Judgments, 1864

This section looks comprehensively at the 1864 campaign's most important judgments. And, just as there is no strategic silver bullet, there is no single judgment which caused Grant to display superior judgment over Lee.

And before assessing the value of Lieutenant General Grant's judgment during the campaign, it is helpful to first consider General Lee's judgments as the standard against which Grant was forced to compete. In review, Lee opted for an offense-defensive strategic approach, with limited tactical offensives in Virginia and in a raid on Washington itself, as well as a parole effort designed to split the Union war effort. Taken together, Lee was an offensive-minded commander that burned his forces down while attacking Grant.

Grant, for his part, judged that what was lacking was for all Union armies to come into common movement. He also determined that the Union would be better able to handle high casualty figures, and, politically, would accept such high casualty figures in order to gain strategic victory. This was the recognition that a war of attrition would harm the South more (and faster) than war weariness would grip the North. Grant accurately assessed the relative severity of Early's raid on Washington, and parried it with an appropriately-sized force designed to keep maximum pressure on the Richmond Confederate government and Lee's Army of Northern Virginia. Grant deftly refused Lee's prisoner exchanges as part of his overall attrition strategy, and judged the politics of the matter would not seriously undermine the war effort. Lastly, Grant supported the administration and election without harming the non-partisan norms of his military profession. It would have been easy to stuff the ballot or cheat to gain the outcome he wanted, but Grant conducted himself and the election within the boundaries of ethical behavior, important in a democracy, especially one at war.

Cumulatively, these judgments interacted and all impacted the outcome. And at the end of 1864, particularly after Lincoln's re-election, the Confederates never had another chance to achieve their policy objectives in the war.

In assessing each commander's relative performance, one can see that Grant's judgments were cumulatively more militarily correct and politically coherent than Lee's. Whether it was the broad decision for simultaneous pressure, the precise parry of Early's raid on Washington, his sense for what the Union could tolerate in his rejection of Lee's prisoner request, or his nuanced approach to politics and the election, each of Grant's judgments supported a successful Union attrition strategy. Each of Lee's judgments attempted to exhaust the Union's will and forces. Both supreme commanders made reasonable judgments, and they were certainly qualified, intelligent supreme commanders. Both had sufficient material resources to contest their enemy and secure their aim. However, one was ultimately superior, and one was inferior. By evaluating these judgments, we can determine the former from the latter. Grant's objectively superior performance is one reason why the Union was successful, ultimately, against the Confederacy.

4.8 Final Assessment and Formal Characteristics

This section considers two critical aspects of Grant's observed characteristics: his judgment and the thinking that underpinned his decisions; and the formal characteristics that can be observed from his life that likely had an impact on his judgment (i.e. education, experiences, personal characteristics, and post-war life).

After the war, General William T. Sherman said there was "never anything like" Grant's military genius.⁵⁷⁷ British Major General J.F.C. Fuller has written Grant was "the greatest general of his age, and one of the greatest strategists of any age."⁵⁷⁸

Not just military officers, but professional historians agree with this finding. When a prestigious American Civil War magazine gathered six top scholars to determine who the war's top general was, five picked Grant (the sixth broke format and placed Lincoln in first, Grant second).⁵⁷⁹ All six of these historians placed Lee precisely one spot behind Grant, a strong

⁵⁷⁷ Sherman quoted in Chernow, *Grant*, 958.

⁵⁷⁸ Fuller, *Grant and Lee*, 93.

⁵⁷⁹ Steven E. Woodworth, Reid Mitchell, Gordon C. Rhea, John Y. Simon, Steven H. Newton, and Keith Poulter, "Who Were the Top Ten Generals?" *North & South* Vol. 6, No. 4 (May 2003), 12-22.

message that was punctuated by one roundtable military historian's comment: "Ulysses S. Grant was unquestionably the greatest general of the Civil War."⁵⁸⁰

Five years later, a similar gathering convened to rate Civil War commanders based on eleven categories: physical courage, moral courage, *coup d'oeil*, logistics, political skill, charisma, coordination, administrative skill, killer instinct, maneuver, and people skills. Grant again won top billing by a wide margin, scoring perfect in all categories except those of "charisma" and "coordination."⁵⁸¹

Grant has been called the "towering military genius of the Civil War" and that he "would have excelled at any time in any army."⁵⁸² With such a degree of support, it's no wonder one historian has written that "No general could do what [Grant] did because of accident or luck."⁵⁸³

Explaining the confidence some contemporaries felt for Grant, Charles Francis Adams, Jr., assessed that "in a crisis he is one against whom all around" tended to "instinctively lean," owing to Grant's "most exquisite judgment and tact."⁵⁸⁴

The irony was that Grant could appear as if he was unstudied when it came to warfare and strategy, but his focus on the destruction of the enemy's army, and avoidance of strict observance of rules, gave him something of an advantage on the battlefield.⁵⁸⁵

In this campaign, and before, Grant displayed a human empathy that likely augmented his ability as a military commander. After the end of the opening days of the campaign in the Battle of the Wilderness, Grant wept over the knowledge that finishing the war would mean the end of so many lives, and that he would be the one driving that tragic result. One staff officer describing the incident wrote, "When proper measures had been taken, Grant went into his tent, threw himself face down upon his cot, and gave way to the greatest emotion." The staff officer asserted he had "never before seen [Grant] so deeply moved" and that "nothing could be more certain than that he was stirred to the very depths of his soul." Writing separately, Charles F. Adams Jr. confirmed that he "never saw a man so agitated in my life." And, just like that, it

⁵⁸⁰ Steven E. Woodworth, "Who Were the Top Ten Generals?" *North & South* Vol. 6, No. 4 (May 2003), 14.

⁵⁸¹ Steven H. Newton, Keith Poulter, John Y. Simon, Craig L. Symonds, and Steven H. Woodworth, "Command in the Civil War," *North & South* Vol. 10, No. 4 (January 2008), 19.

⁵⁸² John Keegan, *The American Civil War* (New York: Knopf, 2009), 124, 328. See also Chernow, *Grant*, xxi.

⁵⁸³ Williams, *McClellan, Sherman and Grant*, 109.

⁵⁸⁴ Charles Francis Adams, Jr., quoted in Williams, *McClellan, Sherman and Grant*, 82-83.

⁵⁸⁵ Williams, *McClellan, Sherman and Grant*, 104-105.

passed, and shortly thereafter, another staff officer wrote, “I looked in his tent, and found him sleeping as soundly and as peacefully as an infant.”⁵⁸⁶

This burst of empathy was not the only time Grant was moved to tears during a Civil War campaign. His son, Frederick, in a post-war memoir, recalled a similar occurrence during the Vicksburg campaign in 1863:

A small boy, with blood streaming from a wound in his leg, came running to where father and [William T.] Sherman stood, and reported that his regiment was out of ammunition. Sherman was directing some attention to be paid to his wound, when the little fellow, finding himself fainting from loss of blood, gasped out, “Calibre 56,” as he was carried off to the rear. At this moment I observed that my father’s eyes were filled with tears.⁵⁸⁷

During the 1864 campaign itself, Grant showed another sort of compassion, for animals, when he saw a Union worker flogging some horses. Grant called the man a “scoundrel,” and punished him by having him tied to a tree for six hours for “brutality.”⁵⁸⁸

This empathy was not limited to emotional outbursts. These were just outward manifestations of what was Grant’s ability to intuit the needs of others. For example, as previously described, his compromise with Lincoln on Major General Nathaniel Banks’s demotion. Or his sense that the Union could tolerate such high casualty figures in order to end the war and secure both of Lincoln’s aims, to preserve the Union and to end the practice of slavery. His sense of empathy helped him understand the perspective and viewpoint of others, to sense the pain felt by those that endured the war’s horrifying costs, which profited Grant because this ability helped attune him to brutally difficult decisions.

And once he decided to do something, Grant stuck to it. He was, in a word, gritty. As one contemporary officer described Grant at work, “there was no nonsense” because “the one single purpose” was the military task at hand.⁵⁸⁹ All throughout 1864, Grant conducted himself this way, and kept up the strategic pressure on Lee, despite the streams of Union bodies piling up and being sent back to Washington.

⁵⁸⁶ John Rawlins and Charles Francie Adams, Jr., quoted in Foote, *The Civil War: A Narrative*, 185-186. Horace Porter, *Campaigning with Grant* (New York: The Century Company, 1897), 71.

⁵⁸⁷ Frederick D. Grant, “A Boy’s Experience at Vicksburg,” in A. Noel Blakeman, ed., *Personal Recollections of the War of the Rebellion, Third Series* (New York: G.P. Putnam’s Sons, 1907), 96.

⁵⁸⁸ Grant quoted in Chernow, *Grant*, 402.

⁵⁸⁹ Unnamed Union officer quoted in Williams, *McClellan, Sherman and Grant*, 84.

Of Grant's past, from before the 1864 campaign, we can observe several characteristics that would have impacted his ability to effectively make judgments on war. He was formally educated for military service at West Point, and Dennis Hart Mahan (the father of Alfred Thayer Mahan, also a standout figure in his own right), taught Grant about Antoine-Henri Jomini and the campaigns of Napoleon while he was a cadet, recalled Grant fondly said Grant's "mental machine is of the powerful low-pressure class...which pushes steadily forward and drives all obstacles before it."⁵⁹⁰

While a cadet, Grant was also greatly interested in fiction, led a literary society, and reported that he enjoyed the novels of Sir Walter Scott, Washington Irving, and James Fenimore Cooper. He did well in drawing class at West Point, and was known as the best horseman at West Point.⁵⁹¹

His relatively small size likely helped along his love for horses. Grant reported to West Point at five feet, two inches tall, and 117 pounds. By the time he graduated, he had grown to five feet, eight inches tall, and had put on some weight (though in his last year an illness had dropped him back to his entry weight; during the 1864 campaign, Grant's weight was around 145 pounds). He could be brave. When a horse was feared by most other cadets, Grant would still ride him. This prompted a classmate to tell Grant, "That horse will kill you some day," to which Grant said, "Well, I can't die but once."⁵⁹²

Before the Civil War, Grant fought in the Mexican War a few years after his graduation from West Point, a conflict during which he gained military experience. Grant described learning by watching General Winfield Scott (later to become the Union's first supreme commander) and Brigadier General Zachary Taylor (later to become an American president):

In their modes of expressing thought, these two generals contrasted quite as strongly as in their other characteristics. General Scott was precise in language, cultivated a style peculiarly his own; was proud of his rhetoric; not averse to speaking of himself, often in the third person, and he could bestow praise upon the person he was talking about without the least embarrassment. Taylor was not a conversationalist, but on paper he could put his meaning so plainly that there would be no mistaking it. He knew how to express what he wanted to say in the fewest well-chosen words, but would not sacrifice meaning to the construction of

⁵⁹⁰ Dennis Hart Mahan quoted in Chernow, *Grant*, 23.

⁵⁹¹ Chernow, *Grant*, 23-24.

⁵⁹² Grant quoted in Chernow, *Grant*, 19, 26, 27.

high-sounding sentences. But with their opposite characteristics both were great and successful soldiers; both were true, patriotic and upright in all their dealings.⁵⁹³

Moreover, Grant critiqued Scott's performance in command,

General Scott's successes are an answer to all criticism. He invaded a populous country, penetrating two hundred and sixty miles into the interior, with a force at no time equal to one-half of that opposed to him; he was without a base; the enemy was always intrenched, always on the defensive; yet he won every battle, he captured the capital, and conquered the government. Credit is due to the troops engaged, it is true, but the plans and the strategy were the general's.⁵⁹⁴

From Grant's early wartime experience, he gained understanding of the responsibilities and requirements of high command. He learned a sense of perspective, and wrote during the Mexican War that he was "willing to believe that the opinion of a lieutenant, where it differs from that of his commanding General, *must* be founded on the *ignorance* of the situation."⁵⁹⁵

Ely Parker served alongside Grant for several years during the American Civil War, and found he was

personally fearless and brave, often going or riding into unnecessarily close proximity to the enemy to make his own observations. I never heard him use a profane word or utter an indelicate expression in the whole time of my association with him; but I have often heard him good-naturedly remonstrate with his chief of staff for using too vigorous and sulphurous language.⁵⁹⁶

In his *Memoirs*, Grant affirmed Parker's hunch, and Grant himself wrote he was "not aware of ever having used a profane expletive in my life," but, after he had described the difficulty Grant had during the Mexican War with some unruly military transport donkeys, he "would have the

⁵⁹³ Grant, *Memoirs*, 93.

⁵⁹⁴ Grant, *Memoirs*, 114.

⁵⁹⁵ H. W. Brands, *The Man Who Saved the Union: Ulysses Grant in War and Peace* (New York: Doubleday, 2012), 50. Citing Grant letter to unknown addresses (Sept. 12, 1847) *PUSG*, 145, text, accessed February 10, 2018, http://digital.library.msstate.edu/cdm/compoundobject/collection/USG_volume/id/15878/rec/1.

⁵⁹⁶ Ely S. Parker, "The Character of Grant," in A. Noel Blakeman, ed., *Personal Recollections of the War of the Rebellion, Third Series* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1907), 347.

charity to excuse those who may have [used curse words], if they were in charge of a train of Mexican pack mules at the time.”⁵⁹⁷

Grant possessed a strong guiding compass when it came to command philosophy. Once, in describing his anticipation that those in Washington would oppose a military move of his that some felt would be a “violation of all the principles of the art of war,” Grant

felt that in every war I knew anything about had made laws for itself, and early in our contest I was impressed with the idea that success with us would depend upon our taking advantage of new conditions. No two wars are alike, because they are generally fought at different periods, under different phases of civilization.⁵⁹⁸

Grant understood the political nature of the American Civil War.⁵⁹⁹ When Sherman disagreed with Grant and argued that Grant should not move on Vicksburg as Grant planned, Sherman wrote that “the politicians in Washington should take care of their affairs and we would take care of ours.” Grant replied that, “In a popular war we had to consider political exigencies.”⁶⁰⁰

But even if Grant understood politics, he did not intervene in the political process.⁶⁰¹ In this way he was the only Union supreme commander not to push the Lincoln government for more resources than what the political climate would allow. “The greater number of men we have, the shorter and less sanguinary will be the war,” wrote Grant to Lincoln, “I give this entirely as my view and not in any spirit of dictation—always holding myself in readiness to use the material given me to the best advantage I know how.”⁶⁰²

Grant’s personal philosophy related to command was also well-developed. He said, “I do not believe in luck in war any more than luck in business. Luck is a small matter, may affect a battle or a movement, but not a campaign or a career.”⁶⁰³

As to the characteristics of successful generalship, Grant remarked at how “it is difficult to know what constitutes a great general.” At the core, he placed “health and youth and energy,” that he “should not like to put a general in the field over fifty.” He called attention to “the

⁵⁹⁷ Grant, *Memoirs*, 69.

⁵⁹⁸ Grant quoted in Young, *Around the World with General Grant*, 615.

⁵⁹⁹ Williams, *McClellan, Sherman and Grant*, 101-102.

⁶⁰⁰ William T. Sherman’s views characterized by Grant, quoted in Young, *Around the World with General Grant*, 616.

⁶⁰¹ Williams, *McClellan, Sherman and Grant*, 102.

⁶⁰² Grant quoted in Williams, *McClellan, Sherman and Grant*, 97.

⁶⁰³ Grant quoted in Young, *Around the World with General Grant*, 353.

power to endure,” and that “the only eyes a general can trust are his own,” and that a general must know the difference between the map and the terrain: “There is nothing ideal in war.”⁶⁰⁴

Grant also dismissed the “popular estimate of generals.” Grant believed there was “no greater mistake” than to assume “that because generals failed in the field they lacked in high qualities.” He assessed that such a characterization was unfair, that some of those in the American Civil War were merely “unfortunate” and that some were those he still had “perfect confidence” in, those that Grant “would not be afraid to trust with important commands.”⁶⁰⁵

Some generals, Grant felt, “failed because they worked out everything by rule. They knew what Frederick did at one place, and Napoleon at another. They were always thinking about what Napoleon would do.” But such consideration meant they were thinking less about present realities and their immediate opponent. Grant said he did not “underrate the value of military knowledge,” but that “if men make war in slavish observance to rules, they will fail.” To do so meant that, too often, “practical facts were neglected” which, strictly in this case, Grant considered

remembrances of old campaigns a disadvantage. Even Napoleon showed that, for my impression is that his first success came because he made war in his own way, and not in imitation of others. War is progressive, because all the instruments and elements of war are progressive.⁶⁰⁶

Grant was in fact a student of war, both imagined and real. Just before the war, he was said to have studied Napoleon III’s Italian campaign in 1859, and read the contemporary accounts, studied the maps, and would say “This movement was a mistake. If I commanded the army, I would do thus and so.” Even before that, when stationed in the Pacific Northwest of the fledgling United States in 1853, in discussing the Mexican War with his peers, Grant would be so specific and vivid in his description, that his colleagues would say, “How clear-headed Sam Grant is in describing battle! He seems to have the whole thing in his head.”⁶⁰⁷ After the Civil War, Grant said that he often went “over our war campaigns” to

critic[z]e what I did, and see where I made mistakes. Information now and then coming to light for the first time shows me frequently where I could have done better. I don’t think

⁶⁰⁴ Grant quoted in Young, *Around the World with General Grant*, 352-353.

⁶⁰⁵ Grant quoted in Young, *Around the World with General Grant*, 352-353.

⁶⁰⁶ Grant quoted in Young, *Around the World with General Grant*, 351-353.

⁶⁰⁷ Fuller, *Grant and Lee*, 66-67.

there is any one of my campaigns with which I have not some fault to find, and which, as I see now, I could have improved, except perhaps Vicksburg.⁶⁰⁸

While certainly not a pacifist, and capable of imposing devastating blows, Grant did not like war.⁶⁰⁹ Later in life, Grant said he “was never more delighted at anything than the close of the war” and that he had never gone “into a battle willingly or with enthusiasm.” Moreover, he took “no interest in armies” and that he never again wanted “to command another army.” Not only that, he said he had not wanted to go to West Point, and remarked, “If I could have escaped West Point without bringing myself into disgrace at home, I would have done so.”⁶¹⁰

His last physician, who cared for Grant in his final months before death, reinforced the same, that “the carnage in some of his engagements was a positive horror” to Grant only made tolerable by the “awful necessity of the situation.” Grant told his doctor, “It was always the idea to do it with the least suffering, on the same principle as the performance of a severe and necessary surgical operation.” In observing Grant’s sentiments, the doctor noted that, “Paradoxical as it may appear, he had an almost abnormally sensitive abhorrence to the infliction of pain or injury to others.”⁶¹¹

Grant was an excellent writer. Major General George Meade observed “one striking feature” of Grant’s command, that “no matter how hurriedly he may write [orders] on the field, no one ever has the slightest doubt as to their meaning, or ever has to read them over a second time to understand them.”⁶¹² Another officer close to Grant’s command, Ely Parker, affirmed Grant “was a ready writer.”⁶¹³ One historian has testified to his concentration while in the act of writing, that Grant

would be working at his desk, bent over writing, and he would need something across the room, a document or something. He would get up and never get out of that crouched position and go over there and pick up the document and he’d come back to his desk and sit down again without ever having straightened up.⁶¹⁴

⁶⁰⁸ Grant quoted in Young, *Around the World with General Grant*, 615.

⁶⁰⁹ Williams, *McClellan, Sherman and Grant*, 99.

⁶¹⁰ Grant quoted in Young, *Around the World with General Grant*, 450-451.

⁶¹¹ George F. Shrady, “General Grant’s Last Days,” *Century Magazine* 76 (May 1908), 107.

⁶¹² Meade quoted in Fuller, *Grant and Lee*, 73.

⁶¹³ Parker, “The Character of Grant,” 347.

⁶¹⁴ Shelby Foote quoted in Ward et al, *The Civil War*, 232.

This can be seen in Grant's effort to write his *Memoirs*. He was proud to note that he had written (or, in some cases, dictated) all his own dispatches as supreme commander during the Civil War and all his own speeches as president.⁶¹⁵ We can see this point reinforced through a bitter missive to a former staff officer, Adam Badeau, who had an ugly falling out with Grant over Badeau's role as a researcher for Grant's *Memoirs*. Badeau wrote and accused Grant of being a poor writer, to which Grant replied with a self-assessment of his own writing:

I have only to say that for the last twenty-four years I have been very much employed in writing. As a soldier I wrote my own orders, directions and reports. They were not edited nor assistance rendered. As President I wrote every official document, I believe, bearing my name...All these have been published and widely circulated. The public has become accustomed to them and my style of writing. They know that it is not even an attempt to imitate either a literary [or classical style] and that it is just what is pure and simple and nothing else.⁶¹⁶

Grant went on to spend the last year of his life writing through the tremendous pain of throat cancer, for several hours each day. Quiet as Grant was known to be, he was able to write, in one year, 336,000 total words for a book that was to be about 275,000 words in final form.⁶¹⁷

Grant's *Memoirs* were received as "one of the greatest pieces of nonfiction in American literary history." Of course, the publisher Mark Twain, and Grant's friend William T. Sherman praised the book. But literary luminaries such as Gertrude Stein, Sinclair Lewis, and Robert Frost held him in the highest regard; Stein even went so far as to place him as superior to Lincoln in her book *Four in America*. Modern literary critics have agreed; Edmund Wilson thought it was on par with Walt Whitman's *Leaves of Grass*, while Gore Vidal called the book a "classic."⁶¹⁸

There were many factors in Grant's development that likely aided his success in the American Civil War's brutal campaign of 1864. It seems the core component to that success must be ascribed to his judgment. While it might be fair to acknowledge that Lee was an

⁶¹⁵ Ron Chernow, "Q & A with Ron Chernow," October 23, 2017, on *Q & A, C-SPAN*, audio and video, at 16 and 32 minutes, accessed February 2, 2018, <https://www.c-span.org/video/?436112-1/qa-ron-chernow>.

⁶¹⁶ Grant quoted in Chernow, *Grant*, 944.

⁶¹⁷ Chernow, *Grant*, xix.

⁶¹⁸ John Marszalek, "Introduction" in Ulysses S. Grant, *The Personal Memoirs of Ulysses S. Grant: The Complete Annotated Edition*, ed. by John F. Marszalek, with David S. Nolen and Louie P. Gallo (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2017), xxv-xxvi.

excellent and perhaps better tactician, Grant clearly held the wider view of the war, and his strategic sense was superior to Lee's.⁶¹⁹

In the end, it may be that no person has had a better understanding of Grant's supreme command than his closest comrade in command, William T. Sherman.

Not quite two years after Grant's death, Sherman penned an essay in *The North American Review* to rebut an article written by British General Lord Wolseley in Macmillan's Magazine in March 1887. Wolesley had read Robert E. Lee's memoirs, and found that

General Lee towered far above all men on either side in that struggle. I believe he will be regarded, not only as the most prominent figure of the Confederacy, but as the great American of the nineteenth century, whose statue is well worthy to stand on an equal pedestal with that of Washington, and whose memory is equally worthy to be enshrined in the hearts of all his countrymen.⁶²⁰

Sherman opposed Wolseley's characterization of Lee, and wrote that Lee's

sphere of action was, however, local. He never rose to the grand problem which involved a continent and future generations. His Virginia was to him the world. Though familiar with the geography of the interior of this great continent, he stood like a stone wall to defend Virginia against the 'Huns and Goths' of the North, and he did it like a valiant knight as he was. He stood at the front porch battling with the flames whilst the kitchen and house were burning, sure in the end to consume the whole.

Sherman also found that Lee was too "aggressive" and fundamentally "not a success." Sherman said Lee spent too much time "defending Virginia and Richmond," but that myopic focus was detrimental, because this allowed "the Northern armies" to gain everywhere else. In sum,

Grant's "strategy" embraced a continent, Lee's a small State; Grant's "logistics" were to supply and transport armies thousands of miles, where Lee was limited to hundreds. Grant had to conquer natural obstacles as well as hostile armies, and a hostile people; his "tactics" were to fight wherever and whenever he could capture or cripple his adversary and his

⁶¹⁹ Williams, *McClellan, Sherman and Grant*, 109.

⁶²⁰ Wolesley quoted in W.T. Sherman, "Grant, Thomas, Lee," *The North American Review* Vol. 144, No. 366 (May 1887).

resources; and when Lee laid down his arms and surrendered, Grant, by the stroke of his pen, on the instant gave him and his men terms so liberal as to disarm all criticism.

Sherman finished, “Between these two men as generals [Lee and Grant] I will not institute a comparison, for the mere statement of the case establishes a contrast.”⁶²¹

⁶²¹ W.T. Sherman, “Grant, Thomas, Lee,” *The North American Review* Vol. 144, No. 366 (May 1887), 437, 442, 444.

5. Dwight D. Eisenhower

5.1 *Strategic Context in 1944*

Historian Jean Smith has written about both generals Ulysses S. Grant and Dwight D. Eisenhower, and spoken about the similarities between the two as military leaders.

[T]here are many parallels. They were both professional soldiers, both educated at West Point. Commanded victorious armies in wars of unprecedented magnitude. Were elected and reelected president by overwhelming majorities and left office at the height of their popularity. They also suffered significant erosions in their reputations in the years following, and they're both now experiencing renewed appreciation.⁶²²

Moreover, Eisenhower's military victory was just as convincing to the Nazis as Grant's victory was over the Confederates.⁶²³ Grant and Eisenhower lived similar experiences and faced similar struggles as American supreme commanders in high-stakes wars.

When he had achieved his aim, Eisenhower simply and concisely wrote to inform higher headquarters of the victory: "The mission of this Allied Force was fulfilled at 0241, local time, May 7th, 1945. Signed Eisenhower."⁶²⁴

Yet, eleven months earlier, on D-Day, when Operation OVERLORD, the invasion of Nazi-occupied France, was to commence, the same Eisenhower said to his driver, "I hope to God I know what I'm doing."⁶²⁵ He also scribbled a note, apparently so nervous it was misdated:

Our landings in the Cherbourg-Havre area have failed to gain a satisfactory foothold and I have withdrawn the troops. My decision to attack at this time and place was based upon the

⁶²² Jean E. Smith, "Great Generals: General Ulysses S. Grant and the Way We Look at War," December 14, 2013, at *The New York Historical Society*, audio, at 4 minutes, accessed February 26, 2016, <http://www.nyhistory.org/audio-video-programs/great-generals—general-ulysses-s-grant-and-way-we-look-war>.

⁶²³ Jean E. Smith, "Great Generals," at 8 minutes.

⁶²⁴ Douglas Brinkley, "Overlord's Overlord," *New York Times Book Review* of Michael Korda, *Ike: An American Hero* (September 30, 2007). Text, accessed February 26, 2016, http://www.nytimes.com/2007/09/30/books/review/Brinkley-t.html?_r=0.

⁶²⁵ Rick Atkinson, "The Road to D-Day: Behind the Battle that Won the War," *Foreign Affairs* Vol. 92, No. 4 (July/August 2013), 75.

best information available. The troops, the air and the Navy did all that Bravery and devotion to duty could do. If any blame or fault attaches to the attempt it is mine alone.⁶²⁶

Such a contrast in statements invites several questions: How did success come about? Why did Eisenhower display such concern in June 1944, only to be followed by a confident statement of victory in May 1945? What made this an allied victory?⁶²⁷

This campaign was immense; as Supreme Allied Commander in Europe, Eisenhower had overall control of 4.5 million American and 1 million Allied troops, 91 troop divisions, 28,000 aircraft, 470,000 vehicles, and 18 million tons of supplies.⁶²⁸ Specifically engaged in frontline combat, “about 2.9 million men fought in Normandy for the Allies.”⁶²⁹

This case features global, industrial, total war, combined and joint military operations, expeditionary and coalition warfare, all hallmarks of the modern era in American military operations. This war’s United Nations alliance itself is a distinguishing, if challenging feature, as the Allies famously fought nearly as much within the alliance as they did against their Axis adversaries.⁶³⁰ It encompasses a precise, complex, amphibious assault that was difficult to plan and harder to execute, against a well-entrenched and fortified enemy with years to prepare. One historian has called it “easily the largest and most complicated multi-national, tri-service amphibious landings in the history of mankind.”⁶³¹ Indeed, the Germans enjoyed the advantages of the defense and held a manpower advantage on the beach for at least a week at the point of assault, and longer in the wider French region. Moreover, the German war machine had the psychological advantage of deep strike technology that shocked and befuddled the Allies.⁶³² There were reasons to doubt the possibility of Allied victory in France.

⁶²⁶ Dwight D. Eisenhower, “[Entry] 1734, June 5, 1944, Note” in *The Papers of Dwight David Eisenhower, The War Years* [Hereafter “*Eisenhower Papers*”]: III ed. Alfred D. Chandler et al (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1970), 1908.

⁶²⁷ Dennis Showalter, “‘Throw them back,’ German planning and command,” in *The D-Day Companion: Leading historians explore history’s greatest amphibious assault*, ed. Jane Penrose (London: Osprey Publishing, 2004), 78.

⁶²⁸ Andrew Roberts, “Leaders in War: Dwight D. Eisenhower,” March 6, 2017, at *The New York Historical Society*, audio, at 20 minutes, accessed February 21, 2018, <http://www.nyhistory.org/audio-video-programs/leaders-war-dwight-eisenhower>.

⁶²⁹ Max Hastings, *Overlord: D-Day and the Battle for Normandy* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1984), 348.

⁶³⁰ Walter R. Borneman, “The Battle Before the Battles,” *Wall Street Journal Book Review* of Jonathan Jordan *American Warlords: How Roosevelt’s High Command Led America to Victory in World War II* (23-24 May, 2015), C9.

⁶³¹ Roberts, “Leaders in War: Dwight D. Eisenhower,” at 37 minutes.

⁶³² Rick Atkinson, *The Guns at Last Light: The War in Western Europe, 1944-1945, Volume Three of The Liberation Trilogy* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2013), 85, 105, 107.

By 1944 the German offensive to the east had stalled. Soviet campaigns to take back Crimea, Ukraine, and the “territory between Leningrad and Estonia chewed up German strength.” From the broadest perspective, the Germans had 193 divisions in the east, 28 in Italy, 18 in Scandinavia, and 59 in France, Holland, and Belgium. Those German divisions on the Western Front, nearly 60, formed the Atlantic Wall that the Allies had to breach; while at a numerical disadvantage on the ground in France, the Allies air and naval forces commanded the sea and sky.⁶³³

In a conflict as vast as the Second World War, there were many things happening in many places all across the globe that had distant, strategic impact on other theaters. The Imperial Japanese Army tied down approximately 30 U.S. Army divisions in the Pacific (as well as all six Marine divisions), reducing the available American troop supply for the European Theater.⁶³⁴ The Soviets did the same to the German Army on the Eastern Front; in one case during the Allied invasion of Normandy, for example, when the Soviets launched Operation Bagration on June 22, 1944 as a second front for the Germans to contend with. The Soviets ultimately ground down 28 German divisions in that effort.⁶³⁵ Both distant opponents, Imperial Japan and Soviet Russia, stressed available resources for the American and German forces fighting in France. Of course these had an impact on both countries in the campaign and the war, yet, what mattered most was that each combatant in France, the Allies and the Nazis, had the military and strategic resources to achieve some form of victory.

In this context, Dwight Eisenhower commanded all Allied forces. Eisenhower’s effort in this undertaking, and his reputation more generally, has suffered at the hands of a few distinguished critics. His immediate subordinate, British General Sir Bernard Montgomery, wrote to a colleague: “When it comes to war Ike doesn’t know the difference between Christmas and Easter.” Another British contemporary, Field Marshal Sir Alan Brooke, commented in his diary about Eisenhower’s performance at a major staff briefing on the eve of the Normandy invasion in May 1944: “No real director of thought, plans, energy, or direction! Just a coordinator—a good mixer, a champion of inter-allied cooperation, and in those respects few

⁶³³ Atkinson, *The Guns at Last Light*, 5.

⁶³⁴ Rick Atkinson, “Ten Things Every American Student Should Know About Our Army in World War II,” *Foreign Policy Research Institute: Wachman Center for Civic and International Literacy* (August 2012). Text, accessed February 26, 2016, <http://www.fpri.org/article/2012/08/ten-things-every-american-student-should-know-about-our-army-in-world-war-ii/>.

⁶³⁵ Heinz Linge, *The Hitler Book* eds. Henrik Eberle and Matthias Uhl (New York: Bristol Park Books, 2005), 149n.

can hold a candle to him. But is that enough? Or can we not find all the qualities of a commander in one man?”⁶³⁶

This is a common line of criticism toward Eisenhower. Critics typically accept minor, mostly interpersonal success, and then sharply dismiss his strategic successes or withhold praise for his performance as supreme commander. This can be seen in one historian’s comment that “Eisenhower’s most significant contribution” to Operation OVERLORD’s success “was his historic decision to launch D-Day despite the bad weather.”⁶³⁷ Such a statement reduces Eisenhower to a mere passive observer, that he only really got one tactical judgment right, but otherwise was an unengaged supreme commander.

More broadly, some historians have essentially written out the role of the supreme commander in World War II. In *Why the Allies Won*, Richard Overy argued that in the Allied victory in France, “two explanations stand out above the rest. The first is the inestimable value of air power to the invading armies” and the second was “deception.”⁶³⁸ Historian Paul Kennedy’s book, *Engineers of Victory*, like Overy’s, was an “investigation of how the war was won.” Kennedy reported the following as decisive characteristics in France: “command and control,” “command of the air, command of the sea, and well-handled deception and intelligence,” and “the weather in the English Channel and the nature of the German military positioning and response.”⁶³⁹

These explanations bypass a subtle but critical issue: *how* to use these instruments of military power to obtain victory. For example, *how* should the Allies use their airpower advantage? *How* should the Germans arrange their coastal defenses: at the beach, in fixed, entrenched positions, or positioned farther back as a flexible, mobile response force? In the way Overy and Kennedy present their cases, these issues are brushed aside as unimportant. Such a view ignores the real debates within the Allied high command about the multiple ways to use available airpower resources, such as the heated debate over whether to use sustained bombing against French rail and transportation networks (e.g. the “Transportation Plan”), or to strike more distant and deep strategic bombing targets, or to limit bombing to the days immediately

⁶³⁶ Montgomery and Brooke quoted in Atkinson, “The Road to D-Day,” 64.

⁶³⁷ Stephen A. Hart, “‘A very lofty perch’: Allied high command,” in *The D-Day Companion: Leading historians explore history’s greatest amphibious assault*, ed. Jane Penrose (London: Osprey Publishing, 2004), 60.

⁶³⁸ Richard Overy, *Why The Allies Won* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1995), 178-79.

⁶³⁹ Paul Kennedy, *Engineers of Victory: The Problem Solvers Who Turned the Tide in the Second World War* (New York: Random House, 2013), 365, 252.

preceding the invasion. Overy and Kennedy overlook these decisions, and in doing so, they miss the importance of Eisenhower's key role as supreme commander.

This chapter will assess supreme command decisions because by looking at the options available at the time, we can see why a particular action was chosen. Moreover,

A decision implies there were choices to be made, alternatives available. To the actors concerned, even the most ideologically committed (or blinkered), vital considerations were at stake, crucial assessments to be made, big risks to be taken. There was no inexorable path to be followed.⁶⁴⁰

Assessments that skip ahead to a generalizable strategic effect miss the several options available at the time, and, by extension, the importance of military judgment and the decisions that come from a supreme commander.

There was disagreement on nearly every major Allied decision with respect to the Normandy attack and invasion to retake France. Senior military and political officials involved in the planning often disagreed mightily over the proper course of action, and these opinions did not neatly overlap. "Why are we trying to do this?" worried British Prime Minister Winston Churchill in February 1944.⁶⁴¹ Eisenhower's Chief of Staff, Lieutenant General Walter B. Smith also shared the following about Churchill's concern over the impending invasion:

Mr. Churchill told an American general in April 1944 that if *he* had been planning OVERLORD, he would have waited until we could have recovered Norway, taken some Aegean islands and got Turkey into the war on our side.⁶⁴²

On the day before the landings, General Sir Alan Brooke, British Chief of the Imperial General Staff, wrote "I am very uneasy about the whole operation. At the best, it will come very far short of the expectations of the bulk of the people, namely all those who know nothing about its difficulties. At its worst, it may well be the most ghastly disaster of the war."⁶⁴³

⁶⁴⁰ Ian Kershaw, *Fateful Choices: Ten Decisions That Changed the World, 1940-1941* (New York: Penguin Press, 2007), 6.

⁶⁴¹ Churchill quoted in Hastings, *Overlord*, 19.

⁶⁴² Smith quoted in Samuel Eliot Morison, *Strategy and Compromise: A Reappraisal of the Crucial Decisions Confronting the Allies in the Hazardous Years, 1940-1945* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1958), 51-52.

⁶⁴³ Brooke quoted in Hastings, *Overlord*, 19.

The stakes were high and as such there were many different views and courses of action on offer. Headquarters correspondence and official dispatches verify this point.⁶⁴⁴ Yet only one Allied officer could make final decisions: Eisenhower.

With only a distant martial heritage, a relative having fought for General George Washington at the Battle of Long Island in 1776, Dwight D. Eisenhower attended and graduated from the United States Military Academy at West Point's in 1915.⁶⁴⁵ He was a gifted athlete, just under six feet tall, and although he arrived at the school at 152 pounds, later on, his college football playing weight was 190 pounds.⁶⁴⁶ His final year at the academy, he "collected precisely one hundred demerits and stood one hundred and twenty-fifth in conduct among a class of 164" cadets in his year. He graduated sixty-first, a little behind the upper-third of his graduating class, and a friend said that if "he had not indulged in so many extra-curricular activities he could easily have led his class scholastically. Everyone was his friend—but with no loss of dignity or respect."⁶⁴⁷

Eisenhower went on to a diverse, varied military career, spanning from the development of the first U.S. Army tank doctrine, to Panama, to the post-World War I American Battle Monuments Commission in France, then a stint in Washington, and the Philippines.⁶⁴⁸ While Eisenhower was stuck at the rank of major for sixteen years, as the American entry into World War II approached, he rocketed "from lieutenant colonel to five-star [general] in 42 months, an average of six months between promotions."⁶⁴⁹

Just weeks after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor in December 1941, American and British military leaders met to discuss strategy, and agreed on a coordination group, the Combined Chiefs of Staff, to provide bi-national direction for the war. To support this alliance

⁶⁴⁴ See Dwight D. Eisenhower, *The Eisenhower Diaries*, ed. Robert H. Ferrell (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1981), 123-125. See also Michael R. Matheny, *Carrying the War to the Enemy: American Operational Art to 1945* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 2011), 192.

⁶⁴⁵ "In 1776, a Frederick Eisenhauer [different family name spelling then, which had changed to the modern usage by 1790]...was a private in Captain Peter Grubb Jr.'s company of Miles Regiment, which suffered such severe losses in the Battle of Long Island on August 27 that General Washington ordered its reorganization." Kenneth S. Davis, *Soldier of Democracy: A Biography of Dwight Eisenhower* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, Doran & Company, Inc., 1945), 12.

⁶⁴⁶ Dwight D. Eisenhower, *At Ease: Stories I Tell to Friends* (Washington, DC: Eastern National, 2000, reprint 1967), 7. Kenneth S. Davis, *Soldier of Democracy: A Biography of Dwight Eisenhower* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, Doran & Company, Inc., 1945), 135.

⁶⁴⁷ Davis, *Soldier of Democracy*, 146-147.

⁶⁴⁸ Eisenhower, *At Ease*, 173, 185, 207, 231, 225.

⁶⁴⁹ Rick Atkinson, "Eisenhower Rising: The Ascent of an Uncommon Man," *Harmon Memorial Lecture, U.S. Air Force Academy* (March 5, 2013), 2.

framework, the Americans developed their own Joint Chiefs of Staff.⁶⁵⁰ In February 1942, with Eisenhower part of the War Plans Division, an important U.S. War Department planning organization, his office wrote a memorandum to Army Chief of Staff General George Marshall insisting that an “attack through Western Europe” was the best course of action as it involved the “shortest possible sea routes,” would prevent German concentration against Russia, and “attack our principal enemy while he is engaged on several fronts.”⁶⁵¹ Soon thereafter, on March 9, 1942, Major General Dwight D. Eisenhower became the chief of that War Plans Division.⁶⁵²

The Americans immediately began to work on BOLERO, a plan for attack across the English Channel. The plan had two variants: SLEDGEHAMMER and ROUNDUP. SLEDGEHAMMER was a “diversionary strike of up to two divisions in 1942,” conceived as a “desperate contingency plan in case the Soviet Union appeared on the verge of defeat.” ROUNDUP was the “main event projected for 1943,” closer in vision to what was eventually executed. At this point in early 1942, Major General Eisenhower wrote to General Marshall, “the principal target for our first major offensive should be Germany, to be attacked through Western Europe.”⁶⁵³

Early on, acknowledging the difficulty of alliance operations, the Allies determined there must be unity of command, as British General Sir Alan Brooke wrote on March 11, 1942, “there should always be a Supreme Commander in a theatre where active operations are in progress.”⁶⁵⁴ In suit, Eisenhower was raised in rank to General and named commander of the European Theater of Operations U.S. Army (ETOUSA) on June 24, 1942. He was informed he would command the invasion of North Africa. This command was granted despite Eisenhower’s lack of previous combat as he had missed fighting in World War I and had never held a wartime command, or any command at all above the battalion.⁶⁵⁵

Later, while Eisenhower was in North Africa, preparing to strike Italy, at a conference in Casablanca in January 1943 the Allies agreed to set up a bi-national planning staff for the attack into France.⁶⁵⁶ Further, at this conference, the Allies selected a Chief of Staff to the Supreme

⁶⁵⁰ Matheny, *Carrying the War to the Enemy*, 161.

⁶⁵¹ Dwight D. Eisenhower, “[Entry] 160, February, 1942, *Subject File BOLERO*, To George Catlett Marshall,” *Eisenhower Papers: I*, 146.

⁶⁵² Matheny, *Carrying the War to the Enemy*, 162.

⁶⁵³ Matheny, *Carrying the War to the Enemy*, 162, 184. Dwight D. Eisenhower, “[Entry] 207, March 25, 1942, *OPD 381 BOLERO*, To George Catlett Marshall, *Secret*,” *Eisenhower Papers: I*, 205-208.

⁶⁵⁴ Alan Brooke, “Appointment of Supreme Commanders (Reference C.C.S. (42) 150), Note by the Chief of the Imperial General Staff.” See J. Kennedy, 4/6 in *Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives*, King’s College, London.

⁶⁵⁵ Matheny, *Carrying the War to the Enemy*, 163, 164.

⁶⁵⁶ Matheny, *Carrying the War to the Enemy*, 188.

Allied Commander (COSSAC) and directed him to build a staff and start basic planning for the invasion of France.⁶⁵⁷ British Lieutenant General Frederick Morgan was selected for the task. The COSSAC planning tackled issues about the general location for the landings, as well as the general purpose, but important details had yet to be settled.⁶⁵⁸ While several issues had been considered by COSSAC, Eisenhower still had many important gaps to fill.

Eisenhower was named to command the Normandy invasion at the Allied conference in Tehran in late November 1943, and the announcement was made public on December 24, 1943.⁶⁵⁹ Eisenhower's military chief of staff noted that, "As Supreme Commander, General Eisenhower was in direct command of the forces dedicated to the conquest of Hitler's armies." The Allies fixed "responsibility" on Eisenhower, and "left to him to decide" how to defeat the German ability to make war.⁶⁶⁰

Not only that, but Eisenhower selected, with Marshall's blessing, nearly every senior military commander in the European Theater.⁶⁶¹ Moreover, in the twenty-two documented decisions in which American President Franklin D. Roosevelt overruled his military commanders, Roosevelt never once overturned a decision by Eisenhower.⁶⁶² Even in a more nuanced democratic system, Eisenhower was the supreme commander.

Eisenhower's opposite supreme commander was Adolf Hitler. Hitler appointed himself "Supreme Commander of the armed forces" in February 1938, and took this role very seriously. He himself decided upon strategies and operations, and Hitler did not delegate away his supreme command authority.⁶⁶³

While some academics have tried to sort out the blame between Hitler and his generals, ultimately, Hitler was the only individual with full authority and responsibility for the German war effort in France. Strategic issues were often discussed by German generals, but Hitler always decided. In the end, Hitler was clearly responsible for all aspects of German strategic

⁶⁵⁷ Note: "The title COSSAC was used to indicate both the headquarters and its head." Forrest C. Pogue, *United States Army in World War II, The European Theater of Operations: The Supreme Command* (Washington: Chief of Military History, Department of the Army, 1954), 23.

⁶⁵⁸ Matheny, *Carrying the War to the Enemy*, 189.

⁶⁵⁹ Hart, "A very lofty perch?: Allied high command," 51.

⁶⁶⁰ Walter Bedell Smith, *Eisenhower's Six Great Decisions: Europe 1944-1945* (New York: Longmans, Green and Co., 1956), 12, 15.

⁶⁶¹ Stephen R. Taaffe, *Marshall and His Generals: U.S. Army Commanders in World War II* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 2011), 320.

⁶⁶² Kent Roberts Greenfield, *American Strategy in World War II: A Reconsideration* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins Press, 1963; reprint Malabar, FL: Robert E. Krieger Publishing, 1982), 80-83.

⁶⁶³ Overy, *Why The Allies Won*, 274.

performance. Of the 650 major orders issued in the German war effort, all but 72 were issued by Hitler.⁶⁶⁴

Some might object to any comparison between a military officer and a political figure, an argument that might proceed to explain that one was a mere theater commander and the other the leader of an entire nation (and then some). Of course, it must be acknowledged that Hitler had full command of German national resources, while Eisenhower's control was specific to a particular geographic domain, and subject to some checks and oversight by others.

Countries are never exact mirror images. Even the United States and Confederate States in the American Civil War established different norms, procedures, and decision-making structures. To insist on precise title and position equality would make it impossible to compare many of the chief military strategists of warring parties.

Sometimes that person is a king, a Kaiser, a chief, or a general, but one definition always applies: "the executive military strategist is a person with responsibility for making, or for conducting, military strategy or strategies designed to shape the course and outcome of an entire conflict." Further, Colin Gray has found this is applicable in this case, "While the military strategist can function as general, witness Adolf Hitler's exciting brief career as sole strategist and supreme operational military commander, so also he can perform as grand strategist."⁶⁶⁵

Even though he was not a professional soldier, Hitler had fought on the line during World War I, and one German general pointed out that "Hitler had read a lot of military literature, and was also fond of listening to military lectures."⁶⁶⁶

While not a mirror image, in this case, Eisenhower did have an adversary supreme commander in Adolph Hitler. Hitler was the elected political leader of Nazi Germany, while General Dwight Eisenhower was the appointed leader of a multi-national allied military force. Though the two rose from separate circumstances and derived authority from different sources, they are to be considered opponents in this strategic engagement.

Some other more extreme objections might consider Hitler insane or an imbecile, claims that let moral considerations consume any objective analysis of Hitler's strategic performance. Such characterizations also avoid appropriate credit for Hitler's previous strategic successes, as

⁶⁶⁴ Williamson Murray, "Who Lost World War II? Was it Hitler? Or the Overrated German General Staff?," *Military History Quarterly* Vol. 26, No. 4 (Summer 2014), 80. Andrew Roberts, *The Storm of War: A New History of the Second World War* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2011), 594, 585.

⁶⁶⁵ Gray, *The Strategy Bridge*, 205, 208.

⁶⁶⁶ German general quoted in Basil H. Liddell Hart, *The German Generals Talk* (New York: William Morrow & Co., 1948), 296-297.

one must allow that he did conquer all of Western Europe for a limited time. If Hitler was a lunatic or a simpleton, it is doubtful he could have mobilized all of Germany's resources to accomplish such a feat. Even contemporary assessments acknowledged as much at the time. Edward Meade Earle wrote in 1943, "Hitler deserves credit for astute conduct of the war."⁶⁶⁷ Basil H. Liddell Hart found, "Hitler had a natural flair for strategy and tactics" that was "characteristic of genius." Even further, Hart wrote:

Hitler was quicker to spot the value of new ideas, new weapons, and new talent. He recognized the potentialities of mobile armoured forces sooner than the General Staff did, and the way he backed [General Heinz] Guderian, Germany's leading exponent of this new instrument, proved the most decisive factor in the opening victories...though [this was] accompanied by liability to make elementary mistakes, both in calculation and action.⁶⁶⁸

Considering these comments, and that Hitler did temporarily achieve some of his policy objectives, one can consider him a competent supreme commander as part of the strategic environment against which General Dwight Eisenhower had to contend.

Hitler's Germany desired to create and build a "Thousand-Year Reich." Hitler told the German Reichstag in 1942: "This war is one of those elemental conflicts which usher in a new millennium and which shake the world." More specifically, Hitler wanted a to build living space for his Aryan people.⁶⁶⁹ This living space was to be gained through the conquest over all of Europe, including, Russia, and beyond.⁶⁷⁰ Hitler's war aim was to be attained through military annihilation.

Additionally, Hitler laid out specific objectives for the defense of France in his "Fuehrer Directive Number 51," of November 3, 1943. This document provided explicit military guidance to German forces in the Western theater. Hitler wrote that France was where "the decisive landing battles will be fought."⁶⁷¹ In it, Hitler correctly assessed the Allies would make an amphibious assault on the Normandy coastline. Later, at a meeting in December 1943, he also

⁶⁶⁷ Edward Mead Earle, "Hitler: The Nazi Concept of War," in *Makers of Modern Strategy: Military Thought from Machiavelli to Hitler*, ed. Edward Mead Earle (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1943), 515.

⁶⁶⁸ Liddell Hart, *The German Generals Talk*, 297-300.

⁶⁶⁹ Hitler quoted in Roberts, *The Storm of War*, 578-579.

⁶⁷⁰ Robert A. Doughty and Ira D. Gruber, eds. *Warfare in the Western World, Volume II: Military Operations Since 1871* (Lexington, MA: D.C. Heath and Company, 1996), 649.

⁶⁷¹ Adolf Hitler, "Fuehrer Directive No. 51" (November 3, 1943). Text, accessed February 26, 2016, <http://ww2db.com/doc.php?q=331>.

anticipated the invasion was soon to come: “There’s no doubt that the attack in the West will come in the spring; it is beyond all doubt.”⁶⁷² He considered this attack would be decisive. Hitler said, “If this attack is driven back, the whole affair will be over.” From these statements, one can see the high value Hitler placed on this Western defense. On the Western Front, in 1944, his military objective was to defeat the Allied cross-channel invasion. Hitler was aware of the impending 1944 American presidential election and entertained the thought that President Franklin D. Roosevelt might lose, which he hoped would end the American war effort.⁶⁷³ While his ultimate policy objective was to expand the German sphere to the maximum extent and spread what he believed were superior German values across the globe through Nazi domination, his immediate concern in France was to hold his position and drive back the Allies and Americans.

American and Allied strategy in the war was based on several important tenets. First, the Americans, fighting from a distance, would use their economic heft to wage war as an “Arsenal of Democracy.” This distance dictated the Americans would rely on expeditionary forces, underpinned by logistics and firepower. Most importantly, the Americans recognized the challenge was too great for any one nation’s resources, and so American strategy was oriented on an alliance system. The Americans developed a particularly close relationship with the British and a necessary relationship with the Soviets. British survival was critical, as was the agreement to target Germany first (instead of Japan).⁶⁷⁴

Within this context, on February 12, 1944, General Eisenhower received his directive to command OVERLORD, an order which Eisenhower’s chief of staff wrote, established the “broad latitude given to the commander.”⁶⁷⁵ A thirty-word order focused Eisenhower’s actions: “You will enter the continent of Europe and, in conjunction with the other united nations, undertake operations aimed at the heart of Germany and the destruction of her armed forces.”⁶⁷⁶ Later, Eisenhower himself wrote that his objective was “to bring all our strength against [the enemy], all of it mobile, and all of it contributing directly to the complete annihilation of [Germany’s] field forces.”⁶⁷⁷

⁶⁷² Adolf Hitler, “Evening Situation Report, Probably December 20, 1943,” in *Hitler and His Generals: Military Conferences 1942-1945, The First Complete Stenographic Record of the Military Situation Conferences, from Stalingrad to Berlin* eds. Helmut Heiber and David M. Glantz (New York: Enigma Books, 2003), 314.

⁶⁷³ Adolf Hitler, “Evening Situation Report, Probably December 20, 1943,” 314, 317.

⁶⁷⁴ Greenfield, *American Strategy in World War II*, 72, 3, 5.

⁶⁷⁵ Smith, *Eisenhower’s Six Great Decisions*, 15.

⁶⁷⁶ Atkinson, “The Road to D-Day,” 63.

⁶⁷⁷ Dwight D. Eisenhower, *Crusade in Europe* (Garden City, NY: Garden City Books, 1948), 228.

This required a foothold on the European continent. General Eisenhower first met with his key subordinate, British General Bernard Montgomery, in London during January 1944. At this point the campaign's key judgment was the invasion force's numerical strength. Eisenhower was unhappy with the COSSAC staff plan's feasibility because the attack was planned with a thin, three-division front (with two divisions in close reserve). When he met with Montgomery, General Eisenhower stated he "was convinced that the plan, unless it had been changed since I had seen it, did not emphasize sufficiently the early need for major ports and for rapid build-up."⁶⁷⁸ General Montgomery also wrote a separate official report for British Prime Minister Churchill which concurred with Eisenhower that the "initial landing is on too narrow a front and is confined [sic] to too small an area," and the plan was "too impracticable," while the "initial landings must be made on the widest possible front."⁶⁷⁹

The product of the meeting with General Montgomery was a January 23, 1944 cable from Eisenhower to the Combined Chiefs of Staff and British Chiefs of Staff, essentially a list of Eisenhower's official first impressions regarding OVERLORD strength and his assessment in support of a necessary second landing in the south of France (ANVIL):

We are convinced...this operation marks the crisis of the European war. Every obstacle must be overcome, every inconvenience suffered and every risk run to ensure that our blow is decisive. We cannot afford to fail...

To ensure success we consider it essential to increase the assault force to five divisions. Nothing less will give us an adequate margin to ensure success...

Our reasons for this view are that an operation of this type must be designed to obtain an adequate bridgehead quickly and to retain the initiative...It will be essential to extend the front to give us a greater opportunity of finding a weak spot through which to exploit success...

I regard "ANVIL" as an important contribution to "OVERLORD" as I feel that an assault will contain more enemy forces in southern France than a threat. The forces of both US and French are in any case available; and the actual landing of these forces will increase the cooperation from resistance elements in France.

"OVERLORD" and "ANVIL" must be viewed as one whole. If sufficient forces could be made available the ideal would be a five divisional "OVERLORD" and a three divisional "ANVIL" or, at worst, a two divisional "ANVIL." If insufficient forces are

⁶⁷⁸ Eisenhower, *Crusade in Europe*, 217.

⁶⁷⁹ Bernard L. Montgomery, "First Impressions of Operation OVERLORD," See J. Kennedy, 4/6 in *Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives*, King's College, London.

available for this, however, I am driven to the conclusion that we should adopt a five divisional "OVERLORD" and a one divisional "ANVIL," the latter being maintained as a threat until enemy weakness justifies its active employment. This solution should be adopted only as a last resort and after all other means and alternatives have failed to provide the necessary strength by the end of May for a five divisional "OVERLORD" and a two divisional "ANVIL."⁶⁸⁰

In this memorandum, we can see the importance Eisenhower attached to the increased landing force and the connection between OVERLORD and ANVIL (which was to be bitterly contested later in the campaign).

The Germans readied their positions on the Atlantic Wall, as their immediate military objective was to deny the Allies a foothold in Europe. Naval advisor and principal subordinate to German Field Marshal Erwin Rommel, Vice Admiral Friedrich Ruge, has noted that the early war campaigns of 1940 "doubled the territory under German control and increased the length of defended coastline to approximately 3,500 miles (smaller islands excluded), all open to direct attack from the sea." An earlier Allied raid attempt had taught the Germans that the Allies would not directly attack ports, but instead land on the beach first, and then attack ports from the rear.⁶⁸¹

Field Marshal Gerd von Rundstedt was German Commander-in-Chief in the West; he believed the Allies would invade at the shortest point between Britain and France, and he expected the attack sometime after March.⁶⁸² On October 25, 1943, Rundstedt submitted a memorandum that predicted the Allies would land in the Pas de Calais, followed by Normandy and Brittany, because these offered the most direct invasion routes. Rundstedt argued that it would be advantageous for the Germans to fight to hold the coast, and also made the case that the best way to either defeat the Allies at the water or force the Allies into a negotiated settlement, was for the Germans to employ targeted counterattacks with a large reserve to push back early Allied landings into the sea.⁶⁸³ So Rundstedt wanted to use a mobile, massed reserve.

⁶⁸⁰ Dwight D. Eisenhower, "[Entry] 1497, January 23, 1944, To Combined Chiefs of Staff and British Chiefs of Staff," *Eisenhower Papers: III*, 1673-1676.

⁶⁸¹ Friedrich Ruge, "The Invasion of Normandy" in *Decisive Battles of World War II: The German View* ed. by H.A. Jacobsen and J. Rohwer, trans. by Edward Fitzgerald (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1965), 317, 319. Note: From November 1943 to August 1944, Ruge served as naval advisor to Field Marshal Rommel.

⁶⁸² Ruge, "The Invasion of Normandy," 321, 323.

⁶⁸³ Showalter, "'Throw them back,' German planning and command," 68-70.

At the same time, Adolf Hitler prepared Fuehrer Directive 51, the key document that guided German strategic thinking on the military challenge ahead. Specifically, Hitler assessed that:

The threat from the East remains, but an even greater danger looms in the West: the Anglo-American landing! In the East, the vastness of the space will, as a last resort, permit a loss of territory even on a major scale, without suffering a mortal blow to Germany's chance for survival.

Not so in the West! If the enemy here succeeds in penetrating our defenses on a wide front, consequences of staggering proportions will follow within a short time. All signs point to an offensive against the Western Front of Europe no later than spring, and perhaps earlier.

For that reason, I can no longer justify the further weakening of the West in favor of other theaters of war. I have therefore decided to strengthen the defenses in the West, particularly at places from which we shall launch our long-range war against England.

As to invasion specifics, Hitler believed that in the first encounter at the beach,

Only an all-out effort in the construction of fortifications, an unsurpassed effort that will enlist all available manpower and physical resources of Germany and the occupied areas, will be able to strengthen our defenses along the coasts within the short time that still appears to be left to us.

Hitler believed that if the Allies were to land, they

must be hit by the full fury of our counterattack. For this mission ample and speedy reinforcements of men and material, as well as intensive training reserves suitable for offensive operations. The counterattack of these units will prevent the enlargement of the beachhead, and throw the enemy back into the sea.⁶⁸⁴

The same month, in November 1943, having received Rundstedt's report, Hitler dispatched Field Marshal Erwin Rommel and his "entire staff" with "over 200 officers" to determine the best way to beat back an Allied invasion. So Rommel studied the military problem to develop the most effective defense, and in the process was given a command as part of the

⁶⁸⁴ Hitler, "Fuehrer Directive 51."

defense of the Atlantic Wall. Then, on December 30, 1943, perhaps to co-opt Rommel, Rundstedt formally proposed placing Rommel's "Army Group B under [Rundstedt's] High Command West, with direct responsibility for command of the garrison of the Netherlands and of the Fifteenth and Seventeenth Armies in the Pas de Calais and Normandy."⁶⁸⁵ Hitler agreed with Rundstedt's suggestion and put Rommel in charge of preparing the tactical defense of the Atlantic Wall.

While Hitler identified the need to prepare to fight in France, and sent one of his best generals there, he had yet to specify the utilization and implementation of these newly-focused forces. Normandy and France were valuable objectives for Hitler and the German war effort, even compared to the Eastern Front. By both word (Fuehrer Directive 51) and deed (Rommel's commitment), Hitler showed this theater mattered greatly to him as a defensive objective.

5.2 The 1944 Campaign's Strategic Effect

In May of 1944 both the Germans and the Allies still had the ability to achieve some version of victory. The Germans still held France, defended by a robust set of forces and fortifications, with some of the Reich's most talented military commanders, and were hard at work on improving their striking power in the form of a new missile (e.g. the V-weapons).

Yet by the fall of 1944, the Allies had taken Paris and France, on the way to the German border, and had forced the Nazis into the close-in, two-front war they had so dreaded. This 1944 fighting season was the European Theater's terminal campaign, and Normandy was the "decisive western battle" of the war, and so this time period had the greatest impact on the way the war was to turn out.⁶⁸⁶

It all went to the Allies great advantage, as the frantic withdrawal of German forces toward the German border "yielded unmistakable evidence of massive positive strategic effect achieved by Allied command performance."⁶⁸⁷

Beyond a general positive sense, there are several specific gains the Allies made as the result of this campaign. First, prior to the invasion, the Allies had no foothold which enabled them to directly attack Germany on land, secure or otherwise, on the European Continent. The Normandy invasion put the Allies physically on the Continent in sufficient size and effective

⁶⁸⁵ Showalter, "Throw them back," German planning and command," 70-71.

⁶⁸⁶ Hastings, *Overlord*, 11.

⁶⁸⁷ Gray, *The Strategy Bridge*, 251.

position to project force against the heart of Germany. Without this posture, there was no way to militarily defeat the Germans in a way beneficial to the United States and Allies.

Second, the Soviets required a second front in order to maximize their efficacy, something Soviet leader Joseph Stalin had requested of his Allied partners since 1942. Certainly there was a titanic struggle on the Eastern Front, yet, activity is not necessarily the same as progress. Stalin's Red Army had done well despite immense casualties, yet nonetheless required a second front in the West.

Additionally, Allied gains in France denied the Germans the ability to launch V-weapons (their newly developed crude ballistic missiles) with impunity against war-weary Britain. This had real impact on civilian morale in Britain, and when the Allies denied these weapons and launching positions in France, it cut down one of Hitler's primary theories of victory, as he had expected the British to be terrorized into defeat.⁶⁸⁸

Practically, the Allied ground gains in France also meant that the German navy lost their best, most convenient and effective Atlantic bases. Also, the Allies advance across France cut the German land bridge to Spain and Portugal, which meant "critical raw materials, especially wolfram and chrome, could no longer be imported or smuggled out" of the Iberian Peninsula.⁶⁸⁹

Because the Allies accomplished these positive strategic effects in taking France from the German Army, by the end of the 1944 campaign, the Germans faced a two-front war on their home borders, without long-range strike capability, and the Allies had secured multiple ports with which to support further strategic advances. Without Allied success at Normandy and in France, the war's outcome might have been significantly different.

5.3 Could the Germans have won?

The next issue is whether Hitler had an opportunity to accomplish his objectives. Did the Germans have the potential to achieve their objectives at Normandy on the road to their grand strategic goal in the war? Counterfactuals can help understand the answer to this question. This not the same as asking broader questions about whether the rest of the 20th Century would have looked different without Hitler.⁶⁹⁰ Such deep and distant questions are not necessary to envision

⁶⁸⁸ Atkinson, *The Guns at Last Light*, 110, 107.

⁶⁸⁹ Gerhard L. Weinberg, *A World At Arms: A Global History of World War II* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 697.

⁶⁹⁰ Timothy W. Ryback, "History Without Hitler?" *New York Times* (October 26, 2014). Text, accessed February 26, 2016, <http://www.nytimes.com/2014/10/27/opinion/history-without-hitler.html>.

the challenges that might have led to German gains, and maybe even strategic advantage, at Normandy. Because Normandy was the last time the German armed forces might have kept Hitler from strategic defeat.⁶⁹¹

The Allies were not destined to victory at Normandy. Despite a massive advantage in airpower (11,590 Allied planes to 319 German planes), the initial American bombardment of 1,745 tons of munitions killed not a single German defender on Normandy's crucial Omaha Beach largely due to effective German defensive positions made of steel rebar reinforced concrete bunkers. In the invasion's initial stages, the German defensive advantage was real. For example, the average American landing soldier's pack weighed 75 pounds, and as a result many soldiers drowned in the clumsy movement from the landing craft to the beach.⁶⁹² Expeditionary warfare is costly; the act of moving mountains of supply to a tenuous beachhead, and beyond, was an incredible challenge. Between these defensive advantages and the problems of supply alone, researchers are forced to admit there was real reason to believe Allied failure was plausible.

Several historians have taken seriously German success at Normandy.⁶⁹³ Some have wondered what might have happened if the Allied landings had failed, and considered the potential use of the atomic weapon in Europe (instead of Japan), largely because there was no backup plan and such a failure would have threatened the Churchill government. Also,

Failure on D-Day would not have spared Hitler the problems of a two-front war, because of the Allied forces still intact in Britain, always posing a threat. Still, he would have been free to transfer at least some of his army in France to his Eastern front. Perhaps more important, he could have used the D-Day failure to split the strange alliance of West and East. How hard would it have been for Goebbels and the Nazi propaganda machine to convince Stalin that the capitalists were ready to fight to the last Russian? It is not

⁶⁹¹ Hastings, *Overlord*, 11.

⁶⁹² *D-Day 360*, directed by Ian Duncan (U.S. Public Broadcasting Service, 2014), video, at 4, 24, and 25 minutes, accessed February 26, 2016, <http://www.pbs.org/program/d-day-360/>.

⁶⁹³ See Robert Cowley, *What If? The World's Foremost Military Historians Imagine What Might Have Been* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1999). David Fromkin, "Triumph of the Dictators," in Robert Cowley, *What If? The World's Foremost Military Historians Imagine What Might Have Been* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1999), 308. John Keegan, "How Hitler Could Have Won The War," in Robert Cowley, *What If? The World's Foremost Military Historians Imagine What Might Have Been* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1999), 295.

inconceivable that Hitler and Stalin would have groped their way back to 1939, when they were partners, and reinstated the Nazi-Soviet pact.⁶⁹⁴

Another considered the consequences if Field Marshal Erwin Rommel delivered a successful stalemate with his Atlantic Wall; that a favorable, negotiated peace was possible for the Germans.⁶⁹⁵ Even at the time, in July 1943, British strategist Basil H. Liddell Hart wondered in *The Daily Mail* whether

a logically calculating German strategist might be inclined to welcome invasion as the most likely chance of an “honourable peace” now that his offensive ambitions have been foiled...in a vivid demonstration of the strength of the “Fortress of Europe,” by inflicting a disastrous repulse on its would-be invaders, he might attain the best chance, and perhaps the only chance, of curbing the Allies’ appetite for complete victory and making them modify their demand for Germany’s unconditional surrender.⁶⁹⁶

This reflects the great Anglo-American concern from 1941 to 1943, that Stalin would make a separate peace to get out of the war against Germany, a fear which traded on rumors of Stalin-directed peace overtures to Germany via Soviet diplomats in Stockholm.⁶⁹⁷

Separately, another historian has noted the residual missile threat that would result from invasion failure:

[I]f we had not invaded Northern Europe in the summer of 1944, London would have been laid flat by the V-1 bombs and V-2 rockets. For no defense at that time had been worked out against the V-2, and without an invasion of Northern Europe its launching sites would have remained intact. Nobody has more respect for the fortitude of the English people than I have; yet could they, after all their previous sufferings and sacrifices, have withstood an accelerated and intensified V-2 offensive?⁶⁹⁸

⁶⁹⁴ Stephen E. Ambrose, “D-Day Fails: Atomic Alternatives in Europe,” in Robert Cowley, *What If? The World’s Foremost Military Historians Imagine What Might Have Been* (New York: G.P. Putnam’s Sons, 1999), 341, 346, 347.

⁶⁹⁵ Showalter, “‘Throw them back,’ German planning and command,” 73.

⁶⁹⁶ Basil H. Liddell Hart, “What are Hitler’s generals thinking?” *The Daily Mail* (July 5, 1943). *Liddell Hart Military Archives*, in 10/1943/30b.

⁶⁹⁷ Ken Maurer, “U.S. Naval War College Lecture,” December 16, 2013, at *The U.S. Naval War College*, audio, at 24 minutes, accessed February 26, 2016, not publicly available.

⁶⁹⁸ Morison, *Strategy and Compromise*, 59-60.

Failure in the D-Day landings and in the contest to retake France had two potentially devastating outcomes for the Allied war effort. First, there would have been a distinctly negative political effect. Germany might have forged another agreement with the Soviet Union, two opportunistic, totalitarian countries.⁶⁹⁹ A second deal was possible, especially if the Allies failed in the West and Stalin lost confidence as a result.

Next on the political front, a military failure would have had a chilling effect on the Allies, and brought on grave strategic threats. The V-1 and V-2 weapons Hitler launched on London from Normandy, known at the time as “pilotless planes” or “buzz bombs,” would have continued to wreak havoc on the British people, who, though they had already shouldered the psychological shock and burden of the Battle of Britain, could not be expected to fight off such indiscriminate devastation indefinitely. The principal supreme commanders knew the stakes. Eisenhower certainly did, as did Hitler when he acknowledged in December 1943: “If they attack in the West, [then] this attack will decide the war.”⁷⁰⁰ Thus, there were several strategic pathways to success for Hitler and the Germans.

5.4 Eisenhower: Airpower versus Hitler: Coastal versus Mobile

Eisenhower: Airpower

Upon arrival for command, in January 1944, General Eisenhower wrote to U.S. Army Air Force General Carl Spaatz that Spaatz’s headquarters’ would now work alongside British Bomber Command, “under [the] general direction of the Supreme Commander.”⁷⁰¹ A few months later, both Spaatz and the British Bomber Command opposed Eisenhower’s major plan for invasion airpower as well as more generally “submitting to Eisenhower’s control.” In addition, both the chief of the British Royal Air Force and prime minister agreed.⁷⁰² The ground-air command relationship became so acrimonious that Eisenhower wrote about the “air problem” on March 22, 1944, that “the British had a great fear that the American idea was to seize all the air in Great Britain and apply it very locally in preparation of OVERLORD.” Moreover, in the same

⁶⁹⁹ Brendan Simms, “Comrades In Arms: Book Review of *The Devils’ Alliance* by Roger Moorhouse,” *The Wall Street Journal* (December 1, 2014), A15. Text, accessed February 26, 2016, <http://www.wsj.com/articles/book-review-the-devils-alliance-by-roger-moorhouse-1417387043>.

⁷⁰⁰ Adolf Hitler, “Evening Situation Report, Probably December 20, 1943,” 314.

⁷⁰¹ Dwight D. Eisenhower, “[Entry] 1474, January 5, 1944, To Carl Spaatz, *Secret*,” *Eisenhower Papers: III*, 1654.

⁷⁰² Matheny, *Carrying the War to the Enemy*, 193.

dispatch, Eisenhower threatened self-relief over the matter, and wrote, “If a satisfactory answer is not reached I am going to take drastic action and inform the Combined Chiefs of Staff that unless the matter is settled at once I will request relief from this Command.”⁷⁰³

What drove Eisenhower to the point of resignation? Despite appearances, it was not a personal or personnel issue, and instead better cast as a “protracted” military and political problem. The Allies needed to cripple the railway system in France to the point where the Germans could not reinforce on the ground as quickly as the Allies came ashore.⁷⁰⁴ On March 27, 1944, Eisenhower aide Harry Butcher succinctly put the matter, “whether strategic bombers on oil or transportation as the best means of helping OVERLORD is a question for Ike to determine.”⁷⁰⁵ Eisenhower listened intently to both proposals. It proved a difficult decision.

There were two options to isolate Normandy from German reinforcements using airpower. The first, which had been assumed in the earlier COSSAC plan, was “interdiction: line-cutting, strafing, bridge-breaking, and the destruction of a few rail focal points.”⁷⁰⁶ However, this interdiction bombing was meant to be short and sharp, immediately to precede the amphibious assault. Another choice, as the invasion neared, Air Marshal Trafford Leigh-Mallory proposed a longer-term attrition campaign to strike the entirety of the rail networks in France and even Belgium. This was to include the rails themselves, but also repair facilities and trains.⁷⁰⁷

The contrast was clear: short-term interdiction versus long-term attrition (the latter was more commonly known at the time as the “Transportation Plan”). Advocates for interdiction estimated that whatever traffic was left could be struck and neutralized. Leigh-Mallory argued long-term attrition was preferable, because interdiction was too dependent on good weather to reveal enemy rail reinforcements in the run-up to D-Day. Moreover, an AEF [American Expeditionary Air Forces] study from February 12, 1944, suggested the Transportation Plan was superior because it showed that fully two-thirds of all rail traffic was German military equipment. Therefore, any significant degradation of the rail system would register a direct impact on the German war effort in France. The Transportation Plan was resource heavy;

⁷⁰³ Dwight D. Eisenhower, “[Entry] 1601, March 22, 1944, Memorandum, *Secret*,” *Eisenhower Papers: III*, 1782-1787.

⁷⁰⁴ John E. Fagg, “Plan for OVERLORD” in *The Army Air Forces In World War II, Vol. 3, EUROPE: ARGUMENT TO V-E DAY, JANUARY 1944 TO MAY 1945* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951), 72-73.

⁷⁰⁵ Harry C. Butcher, *My Three Years with Eisenhower: The Personal Diary of Captain Harry C. Butcher, USNR, Naval Aide to General Eisenhower, 1942 to 1945* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1946), 507.

⁷⁰⁶ Fagg, “Plan for OVERLORD,” 73.

⁷⁰⁷ Fagg, “Plan for OVERLORD,” 73.

tactical air forces could not undertake such a sustained air campaign on their own, and would require support from strategic bomber assets, and pull the bombers away from their deeper attacks on German war materiel.⁷⁰⁸

On February 15, 1944, General Spaatz and British Air Chief Marshal Harris met with Leigh-Mallory to oppose the Transportation Plan. Spaatz stated the Transportation Plan would pull heavy bombers from more important missions. Harris supported Spaatz, and argued the Transportation Plan was based on the flawed assumption that interdiction would not work. Spaatz and Harris were also supported by Prime Minister Winston Churchill, General Sir Alan Brooke, British Chief of the Air Staff Marshal Charles Portal, the Joint Intelligence Committee, and the British Ministry of Economic Warfare. They argued interdiction was superior to attrition in attacking rail systems, and believed the Transportation Plan would harm the French population too much, which might hamper follow-on Allied operations in France. The U.S. Embassy in London even pulled together an ad hoc research committee of rails experts in Britain which favored interdiction because they estimated only one-fifth of the French rails were used by the German military. This contrasted with the two-thirds figure previously arrived at (as well as the post-war estimate that the correct percentage of German military rail use in France was one-third). Which figure one accepted would have an important role in determining which use of airpower was best, as well as the amount of harm to come to French civilians.⁷⁰⁹

Spaatz's alternate proposal on March 5, 1944 was titled "Plan for the Completion of the Combined Bomber Offensive," which promised to "reduce German gasoline supplies by 50 percent in six months." Spaatz pointed out "only fourteen plants were turning out 80 per cent of Germany's synthetic petroleum, most of which was used for gasoline" and "the loss of fourteen synthetic oil plants might be catastrophic to the Germans, who could easily spare fourteen rail centers."⁷¹⁰

Leigh-Mallory rebutted, and raised the risk of waiting to use airpower until close to D-Day; doing so would subject the operation to the whims of the weather. Eventually, Air Chief Marshal Harris changed his mind and put his support behind the Transportation Plan, perhaps persuaded by the Deputy Supreme Commander, Air Chief Marshal Tedder. Tedder opposed Spaatz's oil targeting plan because he did not believe there was enough time prior to the invasion

⁷⁰⁸ Fagg, "Plan for OVERLORD," 73-74.

⁷⁰⁹ Fagg, "Plan for OVERLORD," 75-76.

⁷¹⁰ Spaatz plan quoted in Fagg, "Plan for OVERLORD," 75-76, 78.

to make a difference in German oil production, while there would be sufficient time to dislodge French rail networks before the Allied landing.⁷¹¹

General Eisenhower considered both arguments, and decided in favor of what he perceived to be the most critical task, to secure lodgment for the invasion's ground forces in France. At an Allied conference on March 25, 1944, Eisenhower announced he had selected the Transportation Plan as the course of action as it would contribute the most to OVERLORD's amphibious assault. On April 14, Eisenhower ordered the Transportation Plan to commence.⁷¹²

Eisenhower's reasons for the decision are instructive. In continued discussion with important political stakeholders, we can see Eisenhower's thinking and judgment in action. On April 5, 1944, just before he gave the order, Eisenhower wrote to Prime Minister Churchill:

After long study, [we]...decided that the only preparatory field in which our air force could be profitably employed...was against the enemy's transportation system...

I and my military advisors have become convinced that the bombing of these centers will increase our chances for success in the critical battle.

The French people are now slaves. Only a successful OVERLORD can free them. No one has a greater stake in the success of that operation than have the French.

As a consequence of all these considerations I am convinced that while we must do everything possible to avoid loss of life among our friends I think it would be sheer folly to abstain from doing anything that can increase any measure our chances for success in OVERLORD...

[The] French people would accept these bombings as a necessary sacrifice incident to [the Germans] earlier defeat.⁷¹³

In this point on French acceptance, Eisenhower was undoubtedly correct. The French commander of the French Forces of the Interior in Britain initially protested the decision, but when briefed in full, he agreed with the bombing plan. Eisenhower's chief of staff recorded the French general's response: "'C'est la guerre' was never used with deeper feeling."⁷¹⁴ On April 29, 1944, as Churchill and the British high command continued to disagree with his decision, Eisenhower wrote to General George Marshall:

⁷¹¹ Fagg, "Plan for OVERLORD," 77.

⁷¹² Matheny, *Carrying the War to the Enemy*, 193. Fagg, "Plan for OVERLORD," 78.

⁷¹³ Dwight D. Eisenhower, "[Entry] 1630, April 5, 1944, To Winston Spencer Churchill, *Top secret*," *Eisenhower Papers: III*, 1809-1810.

⁷¹⁴ Smith, *Eisenhower's Six Great Decisions*, 38.

The British Government has been trying to induce me to change my bombing program against the transportation systems, so as to avoid the killing of any Frenchmen. I have stuck to my guns because there is no other way in which this tremendous air force can help us, during the preparatory period, to get ashore and stay there. The Prime Minister talked to me about bombing “bases, troop concentrations and dumps.” The fact is that any large dumps are obviously located near marshaling yards while troop concentrations are by battalion in little villages. Any immediate attempt to bomb the German troop units throughout France would probably kill four Frenchmen for every German.⁷¹⁵

These were the tough tradeoffs between military effectiveness and political compromise, as can be seen in Eisenhower’s note to Prime Minister Churchill on May 2, 1944:

I have throughout realized the political considerations arising from the inevitable casualties to French civilian personnel caused by the attack on the enemy’s Rail Transport system...Subsequent to my meeting with you on the 28th, I further directed that the remaining Railway targets involving the greatest risk of civilian casualties will, as far as possible, be attacked at a later stage in the Operation. Although this postponement does inevitably affect the full efficacy of the Plan, since some of the targets involving heavy casualties are, from a railway point of view, some of the most important, I feel this handicap can be accepted in view of the weighty political considerations put forward by the British Cabinet.

I must point out that casualties to civilian personnel are inherent in any plan for the full use of Air power to prepare for our assault...

It is stated that attack on the Railway system involves the killing of 10,000 to 15,000 Frenchmen. This is an estimate made after careful examination of each target, and assuming that there would be no evacuation despite the warnings which have been given, and despite the series of attacks which have already been made. Experience has, however, shown that in fact the casualties, even if we accept Vichy figures, have been in the aggregate considerably less than the estimate.⁷¹⁶

⁷¹⁵ Dwight D. Eisenhower, “[Entry] 1658, April 29, 1944, To George Catlett Marshall, *Secret*,” *Eisenhower Papers: III*, 1838-1839.

⁷¹⁶ Dwight D. Eisenhower, “[Entry] 1662, May 2, 1944, To Winston Spencer Churchill, *Top secret*,” *Eisenhower Papers: III*, 1842-1845.

Eisenhower's memorandum showed regard for critical political sensitivities and provided a view into his thoughts on casualties. Eisenhower continued, and stated his specific military objectives in his final judgment and decision.

I fear that there is still considerable misunderstanding regarding the nature of the object of my operations against enemy Rail transportation. It has never been suggested that these Operations by themselves will *stop* essential military movement. The object of the whole Operation is so to weaken and disorganize the Railway system as a whole that, at the critical time of the assault, German rail movements can be effectively delayed, and the rapid concentration of their forces against the lodgment area prevented. Time is the vital factor during the period immediately following the assault. The delay which would be involved by enforced use of Motor Transport in place of Railway Transport would, in itself, be of inestimable value...

As regards alternative plans, at my Meeting...at which all authoritative military and expert opinion was represented, it was clear...to me...that there is no effective alternative plan...[The other options] do not, themselves, however, in any way constitute a plan by which our Air power can, in the final stages, effectively delay and disrupt enemy concentrations.⁷¹⁷

As a military proposition, Eisenhower was clear that his use of airpower was the only effective way to ensure disruption of a German counterattack. He also wrote more on the balance between military effectiveness on political considerations:

As I said at the beginning of this note, I fully appreciate the gravity of the issues raised. I have modified my plan as far as possible without vitiating its value. If it is still considered that the political considerations are such as to limit the Operations [any more severely], such a modification would emasculate the whole plan...

The "OVERLORD" concept was based on the assumption that our overwhelming Air power would be able to prepare the way for the assault. If its hands are to be tied, the perils of an already hazardous undertaking will be greatly enhanced.⁷¹⁸

⁷¹⁷ Eisenhower, "[Entry] 1662, May 2, 1944, To Winston Spencer Churchill, *Top secret*," *Eisenhower Papers: III*, 1842-1845.

⁷¹⁸ Eisenhower, "[Entry] 1662, May 2, 1944, To Winston Spencer Churchill, *Top secret*," *Eisenhower Papers: III*, 1842-1845.

In this judgment and decision, Eisenhower exercised choice from amongst alternate options voiced by effective, powerful advocates, and considered military effectiveness balanced against political coherence. One historian assessed the result, and found Eisenhower's decision here "was one of the single most important policy calls in the entire war" and as such, "by June 6, 1944, French rail traffic was a mere 30 percent what it had been in January; by early July, it was only 10 percent."⁷¹⁹ Eisenhower's judgment had been militarily effective. Also, while there was much argument over what the political ramifications would be if the Transportation Plan killed many French civilians (pre-invasion estimates were as high as 160,000 casualties; 25% of those would be deaths); in the end, the total was approximately 10,000.⁷²⁰ While still high, this was nowhere near the feared potential figures.

Hitler: Coastal versus Mobile

When a subordinate reported the June 6, 1944 landings to Hitler, he replied, "I am glad that the Anglo-Americans have finally decided to land in France, and exactly where they were expected. Now we know where we are. We will see how things go from now on."⁷²¹ For the Germans, this was the one missing part of the puzzle, because at the time they did not know where or when the Allies would land.⁷²² This was the great challenge in the preparation for the Allied landing. Absent specific knowledge about location, how best to prepare a response?

The German campaigns in 1940 had massively expanded Germany's frontiers to defend.⁷²³ This large coastline was a benefit, but also a challenge:

The Fifteenth Army in the Pas de Calais sector eventually grew to a strength of 18 infantry and two panzer divisions, responsible for about 340 miles of coastline. The Seventh Army, responsible for Normandy and Brittany, had 14 infantry divisions and a single panzer division. It was responsible for 995 miles of coast. One of its divisions had a defensive sector of 62 miles; another was expected to secure no fewer than 167 miles.⁷²⁴

⁷¹⁹ Kennedy, *Engineers of Victory*, 134.

⁷²⁰ See "Note" at Dwight D. Eisenhower, "[Entry] 1630, April 5, 1944, To Winston Spencer Churchill, *Top secret*," *Eisenhower Papers: III*, 1809-1810.

⁷²¹ Hitler quoted in Linge, *The Hitler Book*, 148-149.

⁷²² Kennedy, *Engineers of Victory*, 258.

⁷²³ Ruge, "The Invasion of Normandy," 317.

⁷²⁴ Showalter, "'Throw them back,' German planning and command," 77-78.

With such a large geographical and military problem, different officers provided multiple approaches to the challenge. In March 1942, Field Marshal Gerd von Rundstedt became the German commander in France and the other German-occupied countries in the West. Later, to signal the theater's importance, Hitler put Field Marshal Erwin Rommel in command of Army Group B (to include the 15th and 7th Armies in Normandy), both of which were later placed under Rundstedt's command in the West.⁷²⁵ The command relationships at that point became complicated:

Rommel's Army Group B was given the right to command any formations of Panzer Group West in its operational area as part of its preparation for the invasion. Rommel also received the right to recommend sector assignments and command appointments for the mobile formations directly to von Rundstedt, thus bypassing [General Leo] Geyr [von Schweppenburg]. The result was an increase in friction among the senior officers that led Hitler to intervene directly.⁷²⁶

Rommel's view was to fight the Allies at the beach, in relatively smaller detachments, and not to let them ever establish a beachhead. Rommel envisioned German counterattacks very near the beach to take advantages of vulnerable troops making an amphibious landing.⁷²⁷

Rommel's ideas on the defense were not just opposed by Rundstedt, but also General Leo Geyr von Schweppenburg, who in July 1943 was given command of Panzer Troops West. Geyr advocated much larger counterattacks (i.e. division-size) from farther back inland. Rommel rebutted that such large forces would never make it to the beach in time because Allied airstrikes would pound the rail and road networks. Rommel stuck to his belief that the Germans should hold the invaders at the water line.⁷²⁸

Hitler made the ultimate decision. With ten mechanized divisions available for a reserve, he first moved three mechanized divisions to southern France, which left seven mechanized divisions to allocate. If they had been organized as a cohesive body, they might have been large enough to influence or determine the battle. Instead, Hitler gave three divisions to Rommel for his direct control in Army Group B, and then four divisions to stay with Panzer Group West, only to be released on Hitler's personal command. Hitler's compromise left the German

⁷²⁵ Showalter, "Throw them back," German planning and command," 66, 68-71.

⁷²⁶ Showalter, "Throw them back," German planning and command," 75.

⁷²⁷ Showalter, "Throw them back," German planning and command," 72-73.

⁷²⁸ Showalter, "Throw them back," German planning and command," 73-74. Kennedy, *Engineers of Victory*, 262.

counterattack thin everywhere and so not powerful enough to make a difference when the fight came. One historian believes that if at least four of these divisions had been placed nearer Normandy, with more appropriate tactical release authority, then these German units might have made a big difference in the invasion result.⁷²⁹ Hitler's indecision between Rommel and Rundstedt was costly.⁷³⁰

There is much testimony from contemporary German commanders on this mistake. Vice Admiral Friedrich Ruge assessed there was "no uniform defence plan."⁷³¹ Rundstedt's Chief of Staff, General Gunther Blumentritt, found the "chain of command was very complicated and muddled" and that on June 6, German forces "freedom of action...was impossible."⁷³² Both Rundstedt and Rommel requested the employment of the mechanized reserve; both were denied.⁷³³ Ruge found the core reason the German defense failed was "lack of a single, clear-cut plan, carried out under the responsibility of a single, experienced commander."⁷³⁴

In Summary, Eisenhower: Airpower versus Hitler: Coastal versus Mobile

Hitler's challenge was to determine how the German Army should best defend the Atlantic Wall. There were multiple choices available, including Rommel's belief the invaders should be confronted at the beach, and Rundstedt's faith in German mobile counterattack. Hitler's choice was poor in that he decided to break his reserve into three parts, diminishing its punching power and ability to make a difference in the fight.

Eisenhower's judgment and decision on the use of force was correct in this case. His challenge was how to employ Allied airpower in such a way as to enable a successful landing. General Spaatz counseled in favor of strategic bombing; Churchill and other members of the British high command were concerned over potentially high French civilian casualties in the Transportation Plan. Nevertheless, Eisenhower chose the Transportation Plan, while deftly modifying it to suit political considerations and maintain Alliance unity, a decision that

⁷²⁹ Kennedy, *Engineers of Victory*, 76, 262-263.

⁷³⁰ Roberts, *The Storm of War*, 594.

⁷³¹ Ruge, "The Invasion of Normandy," 323, 472.

⁷³² Gunther Blumentritt, "Report of the Chief of Staff," in *Fighting the Invasion: The German Army at D-Day* by Gunther Blumentritt, Wilhelm Keitel, Alfred Jodl, Walter Warlimont, Freiherr von Luttwitz et al ed. David C. Isby (Mechanicsburg, PA: Stackpole Books, 2000), 19.

⁷³³ Ruge, "The Invasion of Normandy," 336-337. Blumentritt, "Report of the Chief of Staff," 29.

⁷³⁴ Ruge, "The Invasion of Normandy," 337.

effectively halted German resupply and counterattack, and ultimately aided the Allies landing effort.

5.5 *Eisenhower: Airborne versus Hitler: V-weapons*

Eisenhower: Airborne

Early on, the Combined Chiefs of Staff allocated COSSAC planners two American airborne divisions for use in the invasion.⁷³⁵ The trouble was specifically where to drop them, an issue which caused considerable disagreement. There were two radically divergent military opinions on offer from two respected figures in the senior command structure: Air Chief Marshal Trafford Leigh-Mallory and General George Marshall.

On February 10, 1944, Marshall sent Eisenhower a message:

My dear Eisenhower: Up to the present time I have not felt that we have properly exploited air power as regards its combination with ground troops. We have lacked planes, of course, in which to transport men and supplies, but our most serious deficiency I think has been a lack in conception. Our procedure has been a piecemeal proposition with each commander grabbing at a piece to assist his particular phase of the operation, very much as they did with tanks and as they tried to do with the airplane itself. It is my opinion that we now possess the means to give a proper application to this phase of air power in a combined operation.

I might say that it was my determination in the event I went to England to do this, even to the extent that should the British be in opposition I would carry it out exclusively with American troops. I am not mentioning this as pressure on you but merely to give you the idea of my own conclusions in the matter.⁷³⁶

As he had originally been the top contender to command the invasion, Marshall's thoughts on the subject likely carried heavy significance with Eisenhower. Marshall felt so strongly on the matter that he assigned three officers from his personal staff to study the issue, who generated three options for employment of airborne troops at Normandy. Of the three, Marshall supported "Plan C," which

⁷³⁵ Matheny, *Carrying the War to the Enemy*, 190.

⁷³⁶ George C. Marshall, "To Dwight D. Eisenhower, February 10, 1944," in *The Papers of George Catlett Marshall* [Hereafter "*Marshall Papers*"], *Volume 4: "Aggressive and Determined Leadership," June 1, 1943-December 31, 1944* eds. Larry I. Bland and Sharon Ritenour Stevens (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1996), 282.

Establishes an air-head in keeping with my ideas on the subject, one that can be quickly established and developed to great strength in forty-eight hours. The area generally south of Evreux [200km inland from Normandy and 100km to Paris] has been selected because of four excellent airfields.

This plan appeals to me because I feel that it is a true vertical envelopment and would create such a strategic threat to the Germans that it would call for a major revision of their defensive plans. It should be a complete surprise, an invaluable asset of any such plan. It would directly threaten the crossings of the Seine as well as the city of Paris. It should serve as a rallying point for considerable elements of the French underground.

In effect, we would be opening another front in France and your build-up would be tremendously increased in rapidity. The trouble with this plan is that we have never done anything like this before, and frankly, that reaction makes me tired. Therefore I should like you to give these young men an opportunity to present the matter to you personally before your Staff tears it to ribbons. Please believe that, as usual, I do not want to embarrass you with undue pressure. I merely wish to be certain that you have viewed this possibility on a definite planning basis.⁷³⁷

This vision for airborne drops was to be two-thirds of the way to Paris. U.S. Army Air Force Commander General Hap Arnold concurred with General Marshall on this plan to threaten Paris directly. However, on both counts, the objective and placement of the airborne drops, Eisenhower disagreed and considered the option ill-advised.⁷³⁸

Nine days after Marshall's memorandum was signed, Eisenhower responded with polite, yet firm, disagreement:

My initial reaction to the specific proposal is that I agree thoroughly with the conception but disagree with the timing. Mass in vertical envelopments is sound—but since this kind of an enveloping force is *immobile on the ground*, the collaborating force must be strategically and tactically mobile. So the time for mass vertical envelopment is *after* the beach-head has been gained and a striking force built up...

As I see it, the first requisite is for the Expeditionary Force to gain a firm and solid footing on the Continent and to secure at least one really good sheltered harbor...

[T]he initial crisis of the Campaign will be the struggle to break through beach defenses, exploit quickly to include a port and be solidly based for further operations. To

⁷³⁷ Marshall, "To Dwight D. Eisenhower, February 10, 1944," *Marshall Papers, Vol. 4*, 283.

⁷³⁸ Matheny, *Carrying the War to the Enemy*, 190-191.

meet this *first tactical crisis* I intend to devote everything that can be profitably used, including airborne troops...

The second consideration that enters my thinking on this problem is expressed in the very first sentence of your letter, in the phrase 'air power as regards its *combination* with ground troops'...

Whatever the conditions in other Theaters of War, the one here that we must never forget is the enemy's highly efficient facilities for concentration of ground troops at any particular point. This is especially true in the whole of France and in the Low Countries. Our bombers will delay movement, but I cannot conceive of enough air power to prohibit movement on the network of roads throughout northwest France...We must arrange all our operations so that no significant part of our forces can be isolated and defeated in detail...

An airborne landing carried out at too great a distance from other forces which will also be immobile for some time, will result in a much worse situation...

All of the above factors tend to compel the visualization of airborne operations as an immediate tactical rather than a long-range strategical adjunct of landing operations.⁷³⁹

In this response, readers can see Eisenhower's judgment in operation. His priority was to gain a solid foothold in Europe. To that end, he described a concentrated effort to achieve that goal, and determined that Marshall's advice would result in immobile, isolated targets for German mobile reserves. In sum, Eisenhower determined the airborne troops in this operation were to be used in support of, and not a separate independent effort from, the landings in Normandy.

Another challenge, one week before the Allied landings, Eisenhower's personal aide Navy Captain Harry Butcher wrote an entry in his journal titled, "Misgivings About the Airborne Operation." Butcher wrote on May 30, 1944 that Eisenhower had a "tough one today" because "Air Chief Marshal Leigh-Mallory, who has been lukewarm to the paratroop phase of OVERLORD, has 'gone on record' in a letter emphasizing his fear of colossal losses in the American paratroop operation."⁷⁴⁰

Eisenhower acknowledged in his command diary entry on May 22, 1944, "In contemplating airborne operations...we have run into a great deal of difficulty because of the almost universal coverage of the European continent by strong flak," a scenario with the likely

⁷³⁹ Dwight D. Eisenhower, "[Entry] 1558, February 19, 1944, To George Catlett Marshall, *Secret*," *Eisenhower Papers: III*, 1736-1740.

⁷⁴⁰ Butcher, *My Three Years with Eisenhower*, 551.

result being “the Eighty-second Airborne Division will have a most sticky time of it.”⁷⁴¹

Eisenhower knew the decision was risky due to the paratroopers’ relatively slow descent.

Leigh-Mallory thought the airborne troopers would be a colossal failure.⁷⁴² Specifically, Leigh-Mallory penned a letter, one week before the invasion, which outlined his concerns that the airborne operation would “yield results so far short of what the Army C.-in-C. expects and requires, that, if the success of the seaborne assault in this area depends on the airborne, it will be seriously prejudiced.”⁷⁴³ Later, Eisenhower recalled Leigh-Mallory estimated the two American airborne divisions would suffer losses of up to 70 percent, which would render them combat ineffective.⁷⁴⁴ Eisenhower’s chief of staff’s recollection was that Leigh-Mallory’s estimate was even higher, 75-80 percent casualties in the airborne force.⁷⁴⁵ Eisenhower responded to Leigh-Mallory’s letter:

Thank you very much for your letter of the 29th [May, 1944] on the subject of airborne operations. You are quite right in communicating to me your convictions as to the hazards involved and I must say that I agree with you as to the character of these risks. However, a strong airborne attack in the region indicated is essential to the whole operation and it must go on. Consequently, there is nothing for it but for you, the Army Commander, and the Troop Carrier Commander to work out to the last detail every single thing that may diminish these hazards...

I am, of course, hopeful that our percentage losses will not approximate your estimates because it is quite certain that I expect to need these forces very badly later in the campaign.⁷⁴⁶

This was a difficult decision, one that weighed heavily on Eisenhower, even after the Allied operation. In *Crusade in Europe*, written just after the war’s end from his in-war diary notes, Eisenhower reflected at great length on the decision:

⁷⁴¹ Eisenhower, *The Eisenhower Diaries*, 117.

⁷⁴² Allan R. Millett, “Blood Upon the Risers: ‘Airborne,’” in *The D-Day Companion: Leading historians explore history’s greatest amphibious assault* ed. Jane Penrose (Oxford: Osprey Publishing, 2004), 126.

⁷⁴³ Trafford Leigh-Mallory quoted in “Note,” Dwight D. Eisenhower, “[Entry] 1720, May 30, 1944, To Trafford Leigh-Mallory, *Top secret*,” *Eisenhower Papers: III*, 1895.

⁷⁴⁴ Eisenhower, *Crusade in Europe*, 246.

⁷⁴⁵ Smith, *Eisenhower’s Six Great Decisions*, 18, 35.

⁷⁴⁶ Eisenhower, *Crusade in Europe*, 246.

[The] old question of the wisdom of the airborne operation into the Cherbourg peninsula was not yet fully settled in Air Chief Marshal Leigh-Mallory's mind. Later, on May 30, he came to me to protest once more against what he termed the "futile slaughter" of two fine divisions. He believed that the combination of unsuitable landing grounds and anticipated resistance was too great a hazard to overcome. This dangerous combination was not present in the area on the left where the British airborne division would be dropped and casualties there were not expected to be abnormally severe, but he estimated that among the American outfits we would suffer some seventy per cent losses and glider strength and at least fifty per cent in paratroop strength before the airborne troops could land. Consequently the divisions would have no remaining tactical power and the attack would not only result in the sacrifice of many thousand men but would be helpless to effect the outcome of the general assault.

Leigh-Mallory was, of course, earnestly sincere. He was noted for personal courage and was merely giving me, as was his duty, his frank convictions.⁷⁴⁷

At this point, Eisenhower turned to his own thought process, and wrote in stark terms:

It would be difficult to conceive of a more soul-racking problem. If my technical expert was correct, then the planned operation was worse than stubborn folly, because even at the enormous cost predicted we would not gain the principal object of the drop. Moreover, if he was right, it appeared that the attack on Utah Beach was probably hopeless, and this meant that the whole operation suddenly acquired a degree of risk, even foolhardiness, that presaged a gigantic failure, possibly Allied defeat in Europe.

To protect him in case his advice was disregarded, I instructed the air commander to put his recommendations in a letter and informed him he would have my answer in a few hours. I took the problem to no one else. Professional advice and counsel could do no more.

I went to my tent alone and sat down to think. Over and over I reviewed each step, somewhat in the sequence set down here, but more thoroughly and exhaustively. I realized, of course, that if I deliberately disregarded the advice of my technical expert on the subject, and his predictions should prove accurate, then I would carry to my grave the unbearable burden of a conscience justly accusing me of the stupid, blind sacrifice of thousands of the flower of our youth. Outweighing any personal burden, however, was the possibility that if he were right the effect of the disaster would be far more than local: it would be likely to spread to the entire force.

⁷⁴⁷ Eisenhower, *Crusade in Europe*, 246.

Nevertheless, my review of the matter finally narrowed the critical points to these:

If I should cancel the airborne operation, then I had either to cancel the attack on Utah Beach or I would condemn the assaulting forces there to even greater probability of disaster than was predicted for the airborne divisions. If I should cancel the Utah attack I would so badly disarrange elaborate plans as to diminish chances for success elsewhere and to make later maintenances perhaps impossible. Moreover, in long and calm consideration of the whole great scheme we had agreed that the Utah attack was an essential factor in prospects for success. To abandon it really meant to abandon a plan in which I had held explicit confidence for more than two years.

Finally, Leigh-Mallory's estimate was just an estimate, nothing more, and our experience in Sicily and Italy did not, by any means, support his degree of pessimism. Bradley, with Ridgway and other airborne commanders, had always supported me and the staff in the matter, and I was encouraged to persist in the belief that Leigh-Mallory was wrong!

I telephoned him that the attack would go as planned and that I would confirm this at once in writing.⁷⁴⁸

In the end, though the drops were scattered, they ultimately provided successful support to the invasion.⁷⁴⁹ Eisenhower later said the airborne casualty figures were about eight percent.⁷⁵⁰ Eisenhower recorded that when the beachhead was secure, Leigh-Mallory "was the first to call me to voice his delight and to express his regret the he had found it necessary to add to my personal burdens during the final tense days before D-day."⁷⁵¹

Hitler: V-weapons

On July 28, 1943, having absorbed the British bombing of Hamburg, Germany, Hitler was furious and quickly approved of the V-weapon deployment in France. While the German Army

⁷⁴⁸ Eisenhower, *Crusade in Europe*, 246-247.

⁷⁴⁹ Dwight D. Eisenhower, "[Entry] 1720, May 30, 1944, To Trafford Leigh-Mallory, *Top secret*," *Eisenhower Papers: III*, 1894-1895.

⁷⁵⁰ Val Lauder, "Eisenhower's 'soul-racking' D-Day decision," *CNN* (June 6, 2014). Text, accessed February 28, 2018, <http://edition.cnn.com/2014/06/05/opinion/lauder-eisenhower-d-day-anguish/>.

⁷⁵¹ Eisenhower, *Crusade in Europe*, 247.

had sponsored a ballistic missile program in the 1930s, it was stepped up during World War II.⁷⁵² On December 24, 1943, Hitler announced high hopes for the V-1 and V-2 flying bombs designed to provide long range strike on London. Hitler's strategy with the V-weapons was to bomb London into submission before the Allies could advance on Germany. The Germans planned eventually to even fire V-2s on America from specially-designed naval vessels. Hitler laid out his thinking on the V-weapons at a military conference in July 1943:

The English will only stop when their towns are destroyed, nothing else will do it... He'll stop when his towns are destroyed, that much is clear. I can only win the war by destroying more on the enemy's side than he does on ours – by inflicting on his the horror of war. It has always been that way and it's the same in the air.⁷⁵³

What were these weapons that Hitler put so much stock in? After all, Hitler spent “about \$3 billion, or triple the cost of the US atomic bomb program” on the V-weapons (roughly equivalent to 24,000 fighter aircraft).⁷⁵⁴ The V-1 was “essentially an aerial torpedo with wings,” and “25 feet 4 inches long with a 16-foot wingspan, and it weighed 4,750 pounds,” “launched up 125-foot concrete ramps stationed right across Occupied France” and “flew up to 360mph.” The V-1's range was 130 miles, which made all of Britain's southeast a target. Roughly 80 percent of V-1s landed in an 8-mile radius of their intended mark.⁷⁵⁵

The V-2 was “ground-breaking rocket technology.” The V-2 was a “supersonic ballistic missile” that “flew at 3,600mph,” carried a 1-ton warhead, and was “by far the biggest weapon of its kind.” The V-2 was “launched from an upright position from vehicles that simply drove off after firing,” and so “it did not even have launch-pad installations... that the Allies could bomb and overrun.” The V-2's first combat strike was on “a suburb of Paris on 8 September 1944; the second struck London a few hours later.”⁷⁵⁶

The V-1s began their assault during the Normandy campaign. On June 13, 1944, one week after the first landings on Normandy, a V-1 struck a rail bridge in London.⁷⁵⁷ Eisenhower's

⁷⁵² Steven J. Zaloga, *German V-Weapon Sites, 1943-45* (New York: Osprey Publishing, 2007), 18, 9.

⁷⁵³ “V-weapon,” *Vergeltungswaffe* in German, means “reprisal weapon.” Hitler quoted in Roberts, *The Storm of War*, 514-518. See also *Hitler and His Generals*, eds. Heiber and Glantz, 188.

⁷⁵⁴ Zaloga, *German V-Weapon Sites*, 58-59.

⁷⁵⁵ Joseph W. Angell, “CROSSBOW,” in *The Army Air Forces In World War II, Vol. 3, EUROPE: ARGUMENT TO V-E DAY, JANUARY 1944 TO MAY 1945* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951), 84. Roberts, *The Storm of War*, 515.

⁷⁵⁶ Roberts, *The Storm of War*, 516-517. Angell, “CROSSBOW,” 84.

⁷⁵⁷ Angell, “CROSSBOW,” 84.

aide, Harry Butcher, wrote on June 13, "About twenty-five pilotless aircraft came across the Channel last night and nineteen are known to have hit land, four in the London area. Ike went ashore in France yesterday for the first time." On Saturday, June 17, 1944, Butcher wrote:

The pilotless craft, dubbed "divers" in an Air Force report, continued coming last night. The first alert sounded at the cottage just after dinner, while the General, John [Eisenhower's son, a West Point cadet], and I were seeing a movie of the assault landings in OVERLORD. There were alerts until after dawn. The Bomber Command was out in strength against sites in the Pas de Calais, the radar disclosing. Now to bomb a new site, we have to destroy the surrounding village, which further impairs our deteriorating relationship with the French.⁷⁵⁸

This military problem clearly came with political and social challenges. On Tuesday, June 20, 1944, Butcher continued:

Ike and John spent Saturday night at the Advance [Command Post in newly-taken France]. During the last three days we have had fairly continuous arrivals of Hitler's secret weapon, variously called "Diver," "Pilotless Aircraft," "Buzz Bomb," "Doodle Bug," or "Robot." Perhaps "Junebug" or "Jitterbug" would be appropriate. Certainly, most of the people I know are semidazed from loss of sleep and have the jitters, which they show when a door bangs or the sounds of motors, from motorcycles to aircraft, are heard.

[Eisenhower's Chief of Staff Lieutenant General Walter B. Smith] has been ominously predicting that the Germans will start using their next secret weapon, the rocket, said to contain ten tons of explosive in a fifty-ton projectile, which is skyrocketed from a hole in the ground like a giant sunken stovepipe and encased by heavy concrete. There are seven known sites for launching rockets, five in the Pas de Calais and two in the Cherbourg Peninsula. Fortunately, the latter either have been or soon will be captured by our rapidly advancing American troops, and crews of experts are awaiting opportunity to examine them. One crew was reported to have been en route to a supply site for the "Junebugs" yesterday, shortly after news reached us that Bradley's army had made a rapid advance northward toward Cherbourg...

The Prime Minister is having daily meetings to consider defense measures against the flying bombs. On Sunday, all anti-aircraft fire in the London area was ordered stopped because when they are hit, they plummet to earth and explode. They have to be shot down in relatively non-populated areas. Barrage balloons supplemented by kites have been placed

⁷⁵⁸ Butcher, *My Three Years with Eisenhower*, 578, 584.

along the line of flight and in depth. There is a fifteen-mile band of anti-aircraft between London and the coast. The fighters were given one day to show their effectiveness and scored forty-eight per cent knockout out of all that crossed the coast, but still leaving a considerable number of them to wreak physical and mental havoc in Greater London. The fighters claim their advantage of speed over that of the flying bomb is so slight that practically all the distance from the Channel to London is required to catch and destroy the winged projectile. Consequently, anti-aircraft fire hinders their efforts.⁷⁵⁹

The V-1 flying bombs were a challenging military and technical problem. Butcher also wrote about this campaign's strategic effect.

Meanwhile Goebbels' press and radio are cackling with glee, the story being so ravenously sought by the German public that newspapers which had been permitted to publish only semi-weekly are now given sufficient paper to print daily. They picture London in flames and the people rushing to evacuate the city. Most of which, of course, is untrue.

To go back to the flying bombs, which most of us do nowadays, the PM called on Ike Sunday afternoon at our headquarters preliminary to his meeting of the Cabinet to consider defensive measures. Ike, having control of all air operations for the battle, has a definite but unforeseen responsibility. He has wholeheartedly agreed, and has so directed Tedder, who attends the PM's meetings, that these targets [V-1 and V-2 firing points in France], called CROSSBOW, are to take first priority over everything except the urgent requirements of battle, and that this priority is to continue until we can be certain that we definitely have the upper hand over this particular menace.⁷⁶⁰

In all, from June 13, 1944 to April 1945, the "German missile campaign against British and Belgian cities in 1944-45 was the first large-scale use of guided missiles in history with some 23,172 V-1 and 3,172 V-2 missiles launched."⁷⁶¹ There was significant damage:

[M]ore than 24,000 Britons were casualties of the Fuehrer's vicious "secret weapon," with 5,475 of them dying... At one point during the initial assault in July and August 1944 10,000 homes were damaged every day. By late August over 1.5 million children had been evacuated from [Britain's] south-east.⁷⁶²

⁷⁵⁹ Butcher, *My Three Years with Eisenhower*, 586.

⁷⁶⁰ Butcher, *My Three Years with Eisenhower*, 587-588.

⁷⁶¹ Zaloga, *German V-Weapon Sites*, 58.

⁷⁶² Roberts, *The Storm of War*, 516.

There was massive devastation, but the Allies adapted and responded with measures that were moderately successful, and from June to September 1944 “3,912 [V-1s] were brought down by anti-aircraft fire, RAF fighters and barrage balloons.” Hitler hoped these weapons would upend the British war effort; he was wrong.⁷⁶³ The V-weapons did not decide the war’s outcome, and, in April 1945, even Hitler acknowledged they were unsuccessful.⁷⁶⁴

In Summary, Eisenhower: Airborne versus Hitler: V-weapons

Hitler’s challenge was to determine how best to employ his available technologically advanced weaponry to halt or slow the Allies amphibious assault (or even knock one of the Allies out of the war). Hitler’s V-weapons had a limited tactical and psychological impact on the Allies. In part, this was due to Hitler’s early basing choices for the missiles; he decided in favor of bunkers as opposed to lighter, road-mobile launch platforms, which in hindsight significantly reduced their efficacy.⁷⁶⁵ In the end, Hitler’s faith in these weapons was misplaced; he believed too much in a weapon that provided little strategic gain that also sapped much-needed strategic resources.

Eisenhower’s judgment and decision on the use of force was correct in this case. His choice was how to employ airborne forces in support of the amphibious landings at Normandy. Leigh-Mallory and Marshall, both important military figures, had strong opinions about this part of the operation. Marshall desired a deep, vertical envelopment, while Leigh-Mallory believed the airborne drops would be completely unsuccessful. Eisenhower’s decision reasonably batted away both alternate suggestions. In the end, the airborne drops were successful and aided the amphibious landings. The Allies secured the beach and were able to continue operations from a position of strength.

5.6 *Eisenhower: ANVIL versus Hitler: Fight or Withdrawal?*

Eisenhower: ANVIL

On August 15, 1944, an American-led invasion force landed on the south coast of France, just east of Toulon. Lieutenant General Alexander Patch and his 7th Army, comprised of forces

⁷⁶³ Roberts, *The Storm of War*, 516-517.

⁷⁶⁴ Zaloga, *German V-Weapon Sites*, 58.

⁷⁶⁵ Zaloga, *German V-Weapon Sites*, 58.

reallocated from the Mediterranean Theater, easily took the beach moved inland, and after a single day, 66,000 Allied troops were ashore with few casualties. Hitler would later declare August 15 “the worst day of my life.”⁷⁶⁶ Nearly flawless in execution, in a single month the landing had secured vital ports, taken more than 100,000 German prisoners, destroyed a German army, and liberated the south of France.⁷⁶⁷

Despite all that, the landing was hotly contested amongst the Allies. British Prime Minister Winston Churchill disagreed wholeheartedly with the decision to land in southern France. In addition to Churchill, Chief of the Imperial General Staff General Alan Brooke wrote to the American Chiefs of Staff to voice his dissent and willingness to subordinate these concerns: “If you insist on being damned fools, sooner than falling out with you, which would be fatal, we shall be damned fools with you.”⁷⁶⁸ There was significant disagreement over this landing. What caused such a row? Why and how did Eisenhower’s judgment and decision meet such disfavor with the British command?

Originally code-named ANVIL (and later known as DRAGOON), the landing in southern France was intended mostly for supply reasons, but also in part to be a diversionary attack for the OVERLORD landings. While Eisenhower and the Americans wanted to undertake ANVIL, the British were never keen. Following OVERLORD’s initial foothold, the Combined Chiefs of Staff met in London from June 11-13, 1944 to “review grand strategy, particularly the relationship of OVERLORD to operations in the Mediterranean in the light of the success of OVERLORD.”⁷⁶⁹

There were three amphibious courses of action discussed by Allied planners at this conference: an operation in France’s south to take a port (ANVIL), an assault aimed at western France to open a port city, or a separate operation directed at the “head of the Adriatic.”⁷⁷⁰ The Combined Chiefs believed this decision hinged on multiple factors: OVERLORD’s progress, the next Russian offensive, and German responses to both. Either way, the Combined Chiefs advised three divisions for the assault, wherever it was to be directed, and the

⁷⁶⁶ Atkinson, *The Guns at Last Light*, 196, 199.

⁷⁶⁷ William B. Breuer, *Operation Dragoon: The Allied Invasion of the South of France* (Novato, CA: Presidio Press, 1987), 249.

⁷⁶⁸ Brooke quoted in Atkinson, *The Guns at Last Light*, 192.

⁷⁶⁹ Atkinson, *The Guns at Last Light*, 192. Dwight D. Eisenhower, “[Entry] 1755, June 16, 1944, To Henry Maitland Wilson, *Top secret*,” *Eisenhower Papers: III*, 1930-1931.

⁷⁷⁰ Eisenhower, “[Entry] 1755, June 16, 1944, To Henry Maitland Wilson, *Top secret*,” *Eisenhower Papers: III*, 1931.

lift would come from craft already in the Mediterranean, whatever craft Eisenhower could release without prejudice to OVERLORD, and such additional assistance as could come from the United States.⁷⁷¹

Eisenhower wrote to the commander of the Mediterranean Theater, British General Sir Henry Wilson, on June 16, 1944:

My conviction is that the German is sorely pressed, that many of his divisions in France are not of first quality and that the over-riding consideration is to strike without delay...

My belief is that we would keep more Germans away from the decisive area of northern France by landing in southern France rather than the Adriatic. Moreover, we would reap the full benefit of French resistance, which is yielding results beyond my expectations and which is particularly strong in the south of France...Time is the vital factor and the over-riding consideration is to launch an operation in France which holds out a reasonable prospect of success at the earliest possible date.⁷⁷²

Wilson had advocated for the option to land at the head of the Adriatic for a push into the Balkans. Eisenhower characterized Wilson's views in a memorandum to General Marshall on June 20, 1944:

[Wilson] seems to discount the fact that the Combined Chiefs of Staff have long ago decided to make Western Europe the base from which to conduct decisive operations against Germany. To authorize any departure from this sound decision seems to me ill advised and potentially dangerous. In my opinion, to contemplate wandering off overland via Trieste to Ljubljana repeat Ljubljana is to indulge in conjecture to an unwarrantable degree at the present time. Certainly it involves dispersion of our effort and resources. Even granted successful achievement of this objective by autumn, I am unable repeat unable to see how the over riding necessity for exploiting the early success of OVERLORD is thereby assisted. The fundamental factor...[is] the necessity for seizing ports quickly in France through which the weight of our forces can be poured. We must concentrate our forces to

⁷⁷¹ Eisenhower, "[Entry] 1755, June 16, 1944, To Henry Maitland Wilson, *Top secret*," *Eisenhower Papers: III*, 1931.

⁷⁷² Eisenhower, "[Entry] 1755, June 16, 1944, To Henry Maitland Wilson, *Top secret*," *Eisenhower Papers: III*, 1931.

the greatest possible degree and put them into battle in the decisive theater. To do so they must all land in France and work toward a common center.⁷⁷³

One factor which weighed heavily on Eisenhower was the knowledge that the United States had nearly 50 divisions in the United States and Britain, organized for combat, which required port capacity beyond what OVERLORD could provide.⁷⁷⁴ These forces needed port access to get into the war.

On June 23, 1944, Eisenhower wrote to the Combined Chiefs of Staff on the matter at considerable length:

For reasons which General Wilson explains in his [memorandum] of 19 June, amphibious operations against western France cannot be launched in time to be of use to OVERLORD, and, therefore, can be eliminated. Likewise, General Wilson says that there is no possibility of launching any major amphibious operations in the Adriatic before September. As an alternative to ANVIL and to either of these above operations, he recommends an advance to the Ljubljana Gap and Trieste, combined with amphibious operations against Trieste at a later date.

2. The following are the factors which emerge from our conversations:

a. OVERLORD is the decisive campaign of 1944. A stalemate in the OVERLORD area would be recognized by the world as a defeat, and the result on Russia might be far reaching. It is imperative that we concentrate our forces in direct support of the decisive area of northern France.

b. ANVIL, with an invasion in the Bay of Biscay precluded, then provides the most direct route to northern France where the battles for the Ruhr will be fought. Moreover, ANVIL initially will contain an appreciable number of German divisions, will give us a port through which reinforcements from the US can be deployed, and will open a route for an advance to the north where these reinforcements can fight on the main battlefield of France.

⁷⁷³ Dwight D. Eisenhower, “[Entry] 1765, June 20, 1944, To George Catlett Marshall, *Top secret*,” *Eisenhower Papers: III*, 1938.

⁷⁷⁴ Eisenhower, “[Entry] 1765, June 20, 1944, To George Catlett Marshall, *Top secret*,” *Eisenhower Papers: III*, 1938.

c. Assistance from the French Forces of the Interior in the ANVIL area is likely to be more effective than at any other place in France.

d. Although the port of Marseilles is less desirable than Bordeaux from the standpoint of distance from the US and proximity to the OVERLORD area, yet the time factor is so important that the Bordeaux operation can be rejected in favor of ANVIL.

e. Our forces in Italy do not directly threaten any area vital to the enemy who, therefore, has the initiative in deciding whether or not to withdraw out of Italy.

f. An advance on Ljubljana and Trieste would probably contain a considerable amount of German strength, but there would be no guarantee that it would divert any appreciable number of German divisions from France. Neither would it give us an additional port which could be used to assist in the deployment of divisions from the US, and this we believe to be one of the most important considerations. It is believed that it would have little positive effect until 1945.

3. I, therefore, recommend ANVIL. General Wilson is fully prepared to carry out ANVIL if the decision is made to do so [through the release of the tactical force for the invasion]. This opens up another gateway into France, which, if not the best in geographical location, is the best we can hope to obtain at an early date. The possession of such a gateway I consider vital.

4. As regards the means of mounting ANVIL against the present scale of resistance, General Wilson considers that for the operation to have a reasonable chance of success, he must have a lift for three assault divisions, shore to shore, together with three preloaded followup divisions, one of which will be ship to shore. This will require fifty LST's over and above the fifty-five now allocated.⁷⁷⁵

To punctuate his argument, Eisenhower reiterated to the Combined Chiefs of Staff that France was "the decisive theater" and "the resources of Great Britain and the US will not permit us to maintain two major theaters in the European war, each with decisive missions." In this

⁷⁷⁵ Dwight D. Eisenhower, "[Entry] 1770, June 23, 1944, To Combined Chiefs of Staff, *Top secret*," *Eisenhower Papers: III*, 1943-1946.

assessment, the U.S. Chiefs of Staff, including Marshall, backed Eisenhower; they determined “Wilson’s proposal to go into northern Italy and the Balkans was unacceptable.”⁷⁷⁶

While the US Chiefs of Staff accepted Eisenhower’s position, the British still disagreed and wanted to use the divisions apportioned to ANVIL for continuance of OVERLORD and to widen the war against German forces in the Mediterranean. On June 28, the British Chiefs of Staff wrote to the U.S. Chiefs of Staff and asked them to reconsider the decision. Churchill went over Eisenhower and the Combined Chiefs and wrote directly to U.S. President Franklin D. Roosevelt; Churchill called Eisenhower’s decision “arbitrary,” and asked Roosevelt to “consent to hear both sides.” Churchill felt this decision would come at the ruin “of all our great affairs in the Mediterranean, and we take it hard that this should be demanded of us.” Churchill believed Eisenhower was overly focused on France at the expense of the wider war, criticized ANVIL as “bleak and sterile,” and questioned

Whether we should ruin all hopes of a major victory in Italy and all its fronts and condemn ourselves to a passive role in that theatre, after having broken up the fine Allied army which is advancing so rapidly through that peninsula, for the sake of ANVIL with all its limitations, is indeed a grave question for His Majesty’s Government and the President, with the Combined Chiefs of Staff, to decide.⁷⁷⁷

Roosevelt deferred to Eisenhower. In his initial response to Churchill, Roosevelt wrote: “I think we should support the views of the Supreme Allied Commander. He is definitely for ANVIL and wants action in the field by August 30th preferably earlier.”⁷⁷⁸ On June 29, Roosevelt went further:

At Tehran we agreed upon a definite plan of attack. That plan has gone well so far. Nothing has occurred to require any change. Now that we are fully involved in our major blow history will never forgive us if we lost precious time and lives in indecision and debate. My dear friend, I beg you to let us go ahead with our plan. For purely political reasons over

⁷⁷⁶ Eisenhower, “[Entry] 1770, June 23, 1944, To Combined Chiefs of Staff, *Top secret*,” *Eisenhower Papers: III*, 1943-1946.

⁷⁷⁷ Churchill quoted in note in Dwight D. Eisenhower, “[Entry] 1785, June 29, 1944, To George Catlett Marshall, *Top secret*,” *Eisenhower Papers: III*, 1959-1960.

⁷⁷⁸ Roosevelt quoted in note in Eisenhower, “[Entry] 1785, June 29, 1944, To George Catlett Marshall, *Top secret*,” *Eisenhower Papers: III*, 1959-1960.

here, I should never survive even a slight setback in OVERLORD if it were known that fairly large forces had been diverted to the Balkans.⁷⁷⁹

On the same day, Eisenhower wrote to Marshall:

It is my belief that the Prime Minister and his Chiefs of Staff are honestly convinced that greater results in support of OVERLORD would be achieved by a drive toward Trieste rather than to mount ANVIL. They are aware, of course, of the definite purpose of the United States Chief of Staff to mount an ANVIL and I have been even more emphatic in my support of this operation than have your telegrams on the subject. I have the further impression that although the British Chiefs of Staff may make one more effort to convince you of the value of the Trieste move, they will not repeat not permit an impasse to arise, and will, consequently, agree to ANVIL...All the above is fact tinged with conjecture but does represent the impressions gained by me and by General Smith in separate conversations with the Prime Minister.⁷⁸⁰

The Combined Chiefs and President Roosevelt supported Eisenhower's decision on ANVIL. In further reflection on the matter, one week before the early August landing, Eisenhower wrote in his diary the issue had still not been settled as there was still resistance:

1. The prime minister and the British chiefs of staff became interested, several days ago, in abandoning Anvil in favor of bringing additional forces into Brittany. A quick study of the proposition showed that (a) there was no assurance that we would have the Brittany ports working during the next several weeks; (b) even when we do get them working, we are counting upon them to support troops already here and scheduled for arrival; (c) if additional troops should be brought in, there is no reason why two or three extra divisions could not come from the United States; (d) to abandon Anvil would, at the best, give us in the first lift only the initial follow-up elements of Anvil, short a great deal of equipment and some personnel. The arrivals in Brittany would, therefore, be piecemeal and slow.

2. Nevertheless, the British felt this was a better proposition than to go on with Anvil.

⁷⁷⁹ Roosevelt quoted in note in Eisenhower, "[Entry] 1785, June 29, 1944, To George Catlett Marshall, *Top secret*," *Eisenhower Papers: III*, 1959-1960. See also Winston S. Churchill, "Appendix D, Book One," *The Second World War, Volume 6: Triumph and Tragedy* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company), 716-723.

⁷⁸⁰ Eisenhower, "[Entry] 1785, June 29, 1944, To George Catlett Marshall, *Top secret*," *Eisenhower Papers: III*, 1958-1959.

3. I disagreed. I informed both the United States chiefs of staff and the prime minister of my flat disagreement.

4. This morning, August 8, a message from the United States chiefs of staff indicates that I am supported by Washington and that Anvil will go on as planned.⁷⁸¹

Despite Eisenhower's hardest fought judgment of the war, in which Churchill decried Eisenhower and his American partners as domineering, the invasion went on as Eisenhower planned. In nearly every respect, ANVIL/DRAGOON was successful. The invasion opened up the port cities of Marseille and Toulon. Moreover, in terms of supply, by September 1944, the newly opened French ports made the largest contribution to the Allied armies moving toward the German border. The Allies defeated a large German force, and took significant German casualties. This decision also enabled the French forces of General Philippe Leclerc to be the first Allied forces to enter Paris on August 24, 1944. Eisenhower shrewdly employed this single French division (of the 39 assigned to the campaign) to enable the French to recapture their own capital.⁷⁸² These were all the fruits of the successful ANVIL landing.

Hitler: Fight or Withdrawal?

By the time the Allies built a solid lodgment, the war moved from an amphibious phase to a campaign on the ground and in the air.⁷⁸³ On June 17, 1944 in northern France, and then on June 29, 1944 in the Bavarian Alps, Hitler met his top two generals in France: Rommel and Rundstedt.⁷⁸⁴ Both commanders counseled strategic withdrawal. At the earlier meeting, Rommel explained the situation was dire,

The Allies had landed at least twenty divisions in Normandy—half a million men with 77,000 vehicles. The German Seventh Army opposed them with the equivalent of fourteen

⁷⁸¹ Eisenhower, *The Eisenhower Diaries*, 123-125.

⁷⁸² Atkinson, *The Guns at Last Light*, 194, 216, 213, 192, 219, 175. Weinberg, *A World At Arms*, 761n. Pogue, *United States Army in World War II, The European Theater of Operations: The Supreme Command*, 226. Andrew Roberts, "Leaders in War: Charles de Gaulle," January 19, 2016, at *The New York Historical Society*, audio, at 26 minutes, accessed March 10, 2016, <http://www.nyhistory.org/audio-video-programs/leaders-war-charles-de-gaulle>.

⁷⁸³ Kennedy, *Engineers of Victory*, 277.

⁷⁸⁴ Alan F. Wilt, *The Atlantic Wall, 1941-1944: Hitler's Defenses for D-Day* (New York: Enigma Books, 2004), 137.

divisions, and those depleted units averaged under 11,000 men, compared with almost 17,000 a few years earlier. German casualties had reached 26,000, including more than 50 senior commanders.⁷⁸⁵

The Allies had grown from eight divisions, with significant casualties, on D-Day to twenty divisions in the course of eleven days' time.⁷⁸⁶ It is worth reflecting for a moment on the three key elements to a successful amphibious assault:

First, an attacker should achieve air superiority. Second, the attacker should use maneuver, surprise, and strength to land forces in a place where they locally outnumber defenders in troops and firepower. Third, it should try to strengthen its initial lodgment faster than the defender can bring additional troops and equipment to bear.⁷⁸⁷

The American lodgment had built a local, numerical advantage by June 17, 1944. However, on that same day, the German Fifteenth Army had only sent one of its twenty-one divisions to Normandy from the Pas de Calais.⁷⁸⁸ So the Germans held sufficient resources to counter the Allied assault in France. The Allies plan for deception (Operation FORTITUDE) was successful at pinning down many German units that otherwise could have been used to attack the landing beaches at Normandy. Even later, one full month into the invasion, on July 3, 1944, one of Hitler's key generals in Berlin told the Japanese naval attaché that an Allied army group led by General George Patton, with twenty-nine total divisions was soon to land in France.⁷⁸⁹ Hitler and the Germans did not read the Allied attack well, yet these intelligence failures are best seen as failed judgments, and there was another, more important judgment to come.

Hitler had a choice remaining on the Allied landing: fight or withdrawal. His commanders made their argument for withdrawal, and the decision was left to the supreme commander to make. So Hitler decided; his order was for German forces in France to stand and

⁷⁸⁵ Rommel's views represented by Atkinson, *The Guns at Last Light*, 105-106.

⁷⁸⁶ Atkinson, *The Guns at Last Light*, 85.

⁷⁸⁷ Michael O'Hanlon, "Why China Cannot Conquer Taiwan," *International Security* Vol. 25, No. 2 (Autumn 2000), 54.

⁷⁸⁸ Atkinson, *The Guns at Last Light*, 106.

⁷⁸⁹ Kennedy, *Engineers of Victory*, 277.

fight.⁷⁹⁰ Hitler believed there was no need to retreat since the V-weapons would soon change the course of the war, and even intimated that troops that wanted to withdrawal were cowards.⁷⁹¹

There is an available window into Hitler's decision-making process, why he made the decision to stay and fight, which came through a meeting with a key subordinate on July 31:

We must be clear with each other Jodl. Which places do we want to hold under all circumstances because they provide additional supply possibilities for the enemy? We cannot throw away the harbors that keep the enemy from having unlimited manpower and material at his disposal. Thus, if the enemy is no longer able to get a number of the productive ports, then that is about the only brake we can put on his already almost unlimited possibilities for movement...we must therefore make up our minds that a certain number of troops are simply going to have to be sacrificed to save others.⁷⁹²

Hitler judged the time provided by denying the Allies ports was worth the sacrifice, which was a logical and brutal decision.⁷⁹³ This meant a great number of troops would be left isolated from the main body of German troops, but also that the Allies would be forced to expend more resources securing necessary ports, a partly sound decision for Hitler, considering that an Allied soldier landing at Normandy required one ton of supplies per month.⁷⁹⁴ And it did hold for some time: Cherbourg fell on June 27, 1944, but after that it took the Allies until September, when three other ports were captured (although one of those ports, Antwerp, was not fully cleared until November 1944).⁷⁹⁵ The Atlantic Wall held for some time.

It was a militarily defensible judgment. Strategic affairs in wartime is often to decide where one must accept losses. A U.S. Army War College professor has remarked, "Military commanders sell the lives of their soldiers dearly to buy things: to buy advantage; to buy opportunity; to buy victory; to buy an objective. It is a hard thing for a commander to make that rationale and yet it has to be done."⁷⁹⁶

While the military logic may have been sound, Hitler's relationship with his senior general officers had turned sour. The contentious nature of the two meetings in June meant

⁷⁹⁰ Atkinson, *The Guns at Last Light*, 106.

⁷⁹¹ Roberts, *The Storm of War*, 595.

⁷⁹² Hitler quoted in Wilt, *The Atlantic Wall*, 138-139.

⁷⁹³ Wilt, *The Atlantic Wall*, 139.

⁷⁹⁴ *D-Day 360*, at 44 minutes.

⁷⁹⁵ Wilt, *The Atlantic Wall*, 138-139.

⁷⁹⁶ Len Fullenkamp quoted in *D-Day 360*, at 27 minutes.

both generals expected to be fired.⁷⁹⁷ Rundstedt was relieved on July 2, 1944, while Rommel was injured in an Allied air strafing run on July 17, 1944, and subsequently implicated in the July 20, 1944 plot to assassinate Hitler, and ultimately made to drink poison by other Nazi generals on October 14, 1944.⁷⁹⁸

More broadly, this was a high turnover period for the German high command. The firings and purges demoralized senior generals as well as subordinate troops.⁷⁹⁹ Hitler believed he was the only one that could save the Germans from the coming danger.⁸⁰⁰ The infamous July 20, 1944 plot to kill Hitler failed, and resulted in more than just Rommel's death:

More than 7,000 people were arrested and 4,980 of them killed over the next few months. Sixty officers were executed in the OKH, OKW and the General Staff, twenty generals were executed and another thirty-six were condemned by the court for opposition to the regime; forty-nine committed suicide to escape the verdict of the courts. At the fronts another 700 soldiers were executed.⁸⁰¹

The crackup in command structure was significant and widespread. At the same time, after a period of stalemate when the Germans held fairly well into July, the British took Caen on July 8⁸⁰² Toward the end of July, 1944, American forces pierced German lines near St. Lo and moved quickly on the Seine River, toward Paris.⁸⁰³ The German loss, according to Fritz Bayerlein, a German commander and at one time, Rommel's chief of staff, compared the German defeat to Cannae, and said none other "can approach the battle of annihilation in France in 1944 in the magnitude of planning, the logic of execution, the collaboration of sea, air, and ground forces, the bulk of the booty, or the hordes of prisoners," and, its "greatest strategic effect" was to cement the "foundation for the subsequent final and complete annihilation of the greatest military state on earth."⁸⁰⁴

⁷⁹⁷ Wilt, *The Atlantic Wall*, 138.

⁷⁹⁸ Wilt, *The Atlantic Wall*, 137-138. See also Linge, *The Hitler Book*, 161.

⁷⁹⁹ Roberts, *The Storm of War*, 595.

⁸⁰⁰ Margaret MacMillan, "History's People: Personalities and the Past, Lecture Two: Hubris," released November 2, 2015, in *The CBC Massey Lectures*, text, accessed February 26, 2016, <http://www.cbc.ca/radio/ideas/masseys>.

⁸⁰¹ Sungmin Cho, "Anticipating and Preparing for the Potential Assassination of Kim Jong-Un," *International Journal of Korean Studies*, Vol. XIX, No. 1 (Spring/Summer 2015), 179-180. Linge, *The Hitler Book*, 161n.

⁸⁰² Wilt, *The Atlantic Wall*, 137-138.

⁸⁰³ Wilt, *The Atlantic Wall*, 138.

⁸⁰⁴ Bayerlein quoted in Atkinson, *The Guns at Last Light*, 181.

German casualties from June 6, 1944, until late August, were above 400,000, 200,000 of whom were prisoners. American casualties were 134,000; Allied casualties were approximately 91,000.⁸⁰⁵

In Summary, Eisenhower: ANVIL versus Hitler: Fight or Withdrawal?

Hitler's challenge was how to handle initial Allied success in establishing a beachhead in Normandy. When the Allies made the landing, both Hitler's key subordinates advised him to conduct a strategic withdrawal. Instead, Hitler chose to stand and fight at the French ports, which was useful in slowing Allied supply. However, while this choice had tactical and operational upside, in the end, the large German army that fell to capture or casualty in France could have been used in other places for later objectives, and so the decision harmed Germany strategically. Moreover, the turbulent and difficult relationship Hitler put upon his senior commanders was clearly a negative and disjointed one, which can be seen in his multiple command changes and even the July 20, 1944 assassination attempt.

Eisenhower's challenge was to determine where the Allies would place a second amphibious landing to best support the Allied mission and war effort. Several important British stakeholders strongly supported a landing in either western France or to enable a drive on the Balkans. Eisenhower's choice, instead, amidst heavy institutional resistance within the high command, opened critical ports in France, poured a great deal more Allied troops into France, and enabled French forces to take part in and symbolically lead the recapture of Paris. Eisenhower's judgment was accurate, militarily, in that it meaningfully contributed to ultimate Allied success, and he sought to balance this decision with political considerations as he took a strong but respectful approach to those with disagreements.

5.7 Campaign Judgments, 1944

Prior to assessing the value of General Dwight Eisenhower's judgment during this campaign, it is useful to review Adolph Hitler's judgments as the competitor against which Eisenhower had to fight.

Hitler made two judgments prior to the Allied landings that impacted the Germans ability to hold the beach. The first was the basic apportionment of forces and release authority

⁸⁰⁵ Atkinson, *The Guns at Last Light*, 182.

for counterattack. Hitler had to choose between Rommel's preference for a fixed defense at the beach of the Atlantic Wall, and Rundstedt's determination for a strong mobile counterattack from farther back. Hitler went a third way, instead, and split the available reserve in multiple ways, diminishing its value as a reserve. Hitler also put significant faith in the V-weapons ability to coerce the British into surrender, so much that he spent more on the V-weapon than any other German military program. Both these decisions were proven wrong, strategically. And while Hitler's decision to hold port cities until the last man did achieve tactical objectives for a time, in the end, the choice consumed his forces in western France entirely. His decisions weakened Germany's position in the war's final stages.

Some attest that Hitler lost because he placed ideology above all else when making decisions. Moreover, that Hitler had succumbed to belief in his own "Fuehrer principle," that he could never be wrong in the pursuit of his deliberate terror strategy.⁸⁰⁶ Others castigate Hitler for waging war without any strategy at all.⁸⁰⁷

In the end, when Hitler's performance as a dueling supreme commander in the summer and fall of 1944 is assessed, it was as Edward Meade Earle observed in 1943: "history will not speak any too well of him."⁸⁰⁸

Particularly compared to Eisenhower. Eisenhower's judgments were objectively superior, even if one sets aside his important decision to launch the invasion. (In that decision alone, Eisenhower pushed aside Montgomery's judgment first, because Montgomery wanted to cross the English Channel a day earlier on June 5th, despite very bad weather; then, Eisenhower had to contend with Leigh-Mallory's counsel against launching the invasion on June 6th, and Eisenhower had to bypass Tedder's indecision to send the invasion on June 6th.)⁸⁰⁹

Eisenhower's early campaign decisions centered on two issues: the direction of airpower resources and the location of airborne drops. The impact of these judgments is not to be understated, as the result did no less than significantly impact the Allies ability to establish a firm lodgment on the Normandy's coast. Eisenhower faced steep resistance in his determination that the French rail network was to be the primary target for available Allied airpower resources. In opposition, the bulk of the airpower community and the formidable British Prime Minister Winston Churchill disagreed with this course of action. A similarly intense decision came when

⁸⁰⁶ Andrew Roberts, "Why Hitler Lost," June 15, 2011, *Foreign Policy Research Institute*, audio, at 6 and 10 minutes, accessed February 26, 2016, <http://www.fpri.org/multimedia/2013/01/why-hitler-lost/>. Earle, "Hitler: The Nazi Concept of War," 514.

⁸⁰⁷ Weinberg, *A World At Arms*, 691.

⁸⁰⁸ Earle, "Hitler: The Nazi Concept of War," 515.

⁸⁰⁹ Hastings, *Overlord*, 70.

the landing's air component commander assessed that the airborne drops would be militarily ineffective. Influential General George Marshall advised the airborne drops should go as deep strike envelopments roughly two-thirds of the way to Paris. Eisenhower overruled both and chose to go ahead with the drops close to the beach.

Eisenhower's decisions on both the Transportation Plan for airpower and to go ahead with the airborne drops as planned were important to the Allies ability to get ashore on June 6th and press on to retake France in the campaign.

Then again, as the campaign continued, Eisenhower had to make another command decision to open a second port for supply purposes in the face of stiff resistance from several crucial Allied partners.

Collectively, several of these judgments interacted and impacted the outcome. And by the end of this campaign, the Allies had retaken France, the Germans were in a two-front war on their home borders, and the Nazis never had another opportunity to seize their war aims.

In review, objectively, Eisenhower's supreme command judgments and decisions were superior to Hitler's. This was a campaign in which both sides sought to impose a strategy of annihilation to compel their opponent to surrender. Both supreme commanders had adequate resources to address the threat posed by the enemy and achieve their aims. Yet, in the end, one was superior. Eisenhower's better judgment was one reason why the Allies retook France and ultimately won the war against Nazi Germany.

5.8 Final Assessment and Formal Characteristics

This section considers two critical aspects of General Eisenhower's observed characteristics: his judgment as well as the thinking that underpinned his decisions during the campaign; and the formal characteristics that can be observed from his life that likely had an impact on his judgment (i.e. education, experiences, personal characteristics, and post-war life).

It is helpful to consider the context. World War II was a unique military moment. Eisenhower rose in a rising army. While in 1939, the US Army had just 190,000 troops and 15,000 officers, it eventually grew to 8.3 million soldiers and 1,300 generals.⁸¹⁰

It has been said that Eisenhower was not great when it came to tactics and battle. But that was not his job as a supreme commander. He commanded an extraordinarily large, ambitious, Allied enterprise. In this respect, according to E.J. Kingston McCloughry, a British air

⁸¹⁰ Atkinson, "Eisenhower Rising," 2.

vice marshal who worked at SHAEF, Eisenhower “had a genius of getting along with most people, combing the art of persuasion and of inspiring good will.”⁸¹¹

Eisenhower received accolades even retrospectively. After the war, Basil H. Liddell Hart reached out to Eisenhower after reading Eisenhower’s memoir *Crusade in Europe*, and wrote that he considered it the “most fair-minded book that any great soldier of any country has written about either of the last two wars.” Moreover, Hart wrote to Eisenhower,

Such impressive evidence of your understanding of other people’s points of view goes far to explain how and why you succeeded so well as Supreme Commander of a combination of Allied armies—better, indeed, than Foch...

Beyond these qualities, the book provides its own evidence that you were far more than a harmonizer—through the many passages which show a deeper understanding of strategic and psychological factors than one has found in the writings of, or in contact with, most other high commanders of recent times.⁸¹²

Eisenhower was not a self-promoter. His tangible accomplishments built his reputation, a glimpse of which can be seen in what British Prime Minister Winston Churchill wrote to Eisenhower just before the invasion,

If by Christmas you have succeeded in liberating our beloved Paris, if she can by the time regain her life of freedom and take her accustomed place as a center of Western European culture and beauty, then I will proclaim that this operation is the most grandly conceived and best conducted known to the history of warfare.

Eisenhower, in reply, simply recorded an accurate prediction: “Mr. Prime Minister, we expect to be on the borders of Germany by Christmas, pounding away at her defenses.”⁸¹³ And they were.

Perhaps the greatest compliment that has been paid Eisenhower’s command, by Max Hastings, was that “he could not have been matched as Supreme Commander,” particularly when looked at in comparison to the German high command effort. Eisenhower’s “behavior at

⁸¹¹ McCloughry quoted in Atkinson, “Eisenhower Rising,” 3-4.

⁸¹² Basil H. Liddell Hart, letter to General Dwight D. Eisenhower (January 3, 1949). *Liddell Hart Military Archives*, in LH 1/261/1.

⁸¹³ Churchill quoted in Eisenhower, *At Ease*, 274.

moments of Anglo-American tension, his extraordinary generosity of spirit to his difficult subordinates, proved his greatness as Supreme Commander.”⁸¹⁴

In seeking some sense for what underpinned this superlative effort, a deeper look at Eisenhower’s power of judgment is instructive. His chief of staff, Lt. Gen. Walter B. Smith, later wrote that in watching Eisenhower, Smith had “never realized before the loneliness and isolation of a commander at a time when such a momentous decision has to be taken, with full knowledge that failure or success rests on his judgment alone.”⁸¹⁵ In spite of this burden, Eisenhower showed exceptional judgment.⁸¹⁶ It was never that Eisenhower got everything right. It was that he got most things right, consistently, and that when placed into a cumulative comparison with his adversary, his judgment was better.

Reading Eisenhower’s own wartime dispatches and diary entries, is a record of this good sense and judgment. Having done so, as Corelli Barnett has said, “it is impossible” to not be “impressed with the good sense, energy, and all-round capacity and capability with which he applied to problems ranging widely from inter-Allied policy to inter-Allied relations to military discipline, training, and tactics, and to logistics.”⁸¹⁷

One way that can be seen is in Eisenhower’s public image. In December 1943, just when Eisenhower was selected as supreme commander and the rest of the invasion’s command was set, both Montgomery and Eisenhower were interviewed in a British newspaper. In his write-up, Montgomery chose to talk about tactical concerns, including his “seven-point plan” for generalship, testifying that, “If you can knit the power of the Army on land and the power of the Air in the sky, then nothing will stand up against you and you will never lose a battle.” Eisenhower’s concerns were more strategic, that his “own and personal job” is to “wield the directing team together in such a way that no friction ever develops, so that people trust each other, work in unison, and go into this thing with their full weight.”⁸¹⁸

A revealing exchange of cables from May 1945, between Eisenhower and Marshall, is useful for understanding Eisenhower’s judgment. It was clear that he owed his assertiveness, in part, to Marshall’s support: “the strongest weapon that I have always had in my hand was a

⁸¹⁴ Hastings, *Overlord*, 28.

⁸¹⁵ Smith, *Eisenhower’s Six Great Decisions*, 55.

⁸¹⁶ Roberts, “Leaders in War: Dwight D. Eisenhower,” at 35 minutes.

⁸¹⁷ See Correlli Barnett, *Leadership in War: From Lincoln to Churchill* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2014; revised edition). Cited in Roberts, “Leaders in War: Dwight D. Eisenhower,” at 35 minutes.

⁸¹⁸ “Montgomery Tells How to Win a Battle—and a War,” *The Daily Mail* (December 23, 1943). “Victory in 1944, Eisenhower,” *The Daily Mail* (December 28, 1943). *Liddell Hart Military Archives*, in 10/1943.

confident feeling that you trusted my judgment.” Marshall, in reply, affirmed this: “since the day of your arrival in England three years ago, you have been selfless in your actions, always sound and tolerant in your judgments and altogether admirable in the courage and wisdom of your military decisions.”⁸¹⁹

Not only were Eisenhower’s judgments solid and objectively better than his opponent, but he had an intuitive understanding of the requirements of supreme command that transcended military problems alone.

Eisenhower was able to understand decisions better than most because he had a well-developed sense of empathy. President Franklin Roosevelt recognized Eisenhower as a “natural leader,” but this was amplified by his interpersonal skills and “exceptional political instincts.”⁸²⁰ Eisenhower could make a joke, to lighten the load, even as he concluded a final OVERLORD brief to all the Allied high command on May 15, 1944, Eisenhower said: “In half an hour, Hitler will have missed his one and only chance of destroying with a single well-aimed bomb, the entire high command of the Allied forces.”⁸²¹

Everyone trusted Eisenhower, from the highest part of the command to the lowest ranking private. Even Montgomery, often a rival, wrote: “his real strength lies in his human qualities... He has the power of drawing the hearts of men towards him as a magnet attracts the bits of metal. He merely has to smile at you, and you trust him at once. He is the very incarnation of sincerity.”⁸²²

While he could be just as hard and indifferent to casualties as a supreme commander needed to be, and Eisenhower wrote that “sometimes it just gets down to the dirty job of killing until one side or the other cracks,” he clearly never lost his grip on humanity. Perhaps because he had a soldier-age son, Eisenhower knew the war’s costs very well. In spring of 1944, Eisenhower wrote to his wife: “How many youngsters are gone forever. A man must develop a veneer of callousness that lets him consider such things dispassionately.”⁸²³

Having met with those about to jump into Normandy, the very unit his air component commander had advised would suffer such horrific casualties, Eisenhower reportedly stood on a nearby headquarters rooftop, “barely holding back his tears,” as he saluted every plane that departed for the invasion.⁸²⁴ Moreover, in 1947, at an event for young journalists, a girl asked

⁸¹⁹ Eisenhower and Marshall quoted in Ambrose, *The Supreme Commander*, 666-667.

⁸²⁰ Roosevelt quoted in Atkinson, “Eisenhower Rising,” 4.

⁸²¹ Eisenhower quoted in Roberts, “Leaders in War: Dwight D. Eisenhower,” at 10 minutes.

⁸²² Montgomery quoted in Ambrose, *The Supreme Commander*, 325.

⁸²³ Eisenhower quoted in Atkinson, “Eisenhower Rising,” 4.

⁸²⁴ Michael Korda, *Ike: An American Hero* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2007), 477.

Eisenhower what his greatest decision of the war was; Eisenhower replied it was the decision to go ahead with the airborne drops. A few years later, in the summer of 1952, Eisenhower went to the Congress Hotel in Chicago for a reunion of the World War II-era U.S. 82nd Airborne Division. This was the same unit that had jumped in to Normandy, that Eisenhower thought might suffer extreme casualties. In front of those men, on live television, Eisenhower openly wept (images of which are still publicly available).⁸²⁵ Emotions, like tears, indicate a genuine sense of empathy, which Eisenhower undoubtedly possessed.

More importantly, his ability to work so well and smoothly with others was key to his success. One officer noted that “within twenty minutes of Eisenhower’s walking into a room full of strangers, a good many of them would be calling him by his nickname.”⁸²⁶ Eisenhower could connect with other people because he understood them.

Another characteristic that guided Eisenhower’s success was his grit. There must have been some natural bit of determination in staying in the army despite many years without promotion. Or the price the war cost him in health, as he smoked four packs of cigarettes each day during the war that resulted in “his blood pressure in July 1944 was 176 over 110,” which, in today’s health terms, is “high-risk, stage 2 hypertension.”⁸²⁷

Marshall worried about the Eisenhower’s long work hours, which was probably correct because Eisenhower never took a day off, had a hard time relaxing, and slept a mere five hours per night during the war. Eisenhower was known to possess great energy and was deeply committed to whatever he engaged himself in.⁸²⁸

Eisenhower had a terrible temper that he found difficult to control, mostly owing to the pressure he placed upon himself. Despite this, in September 1943, Eisenhower wrote, “My optimism never deserts me,” which echoed a typical cheery expression of his often heard around headquarters’.⁸²⁹

Eisenhower was also said to have been committed to simplification of problems, in that he would break them down into smaller, more manageable parts, in order to best pick a priority with which to solve the issue.⁸³⁰

⁸²⁵ Lauder, “Eisenhower’s ‘soul-racking’ D-Day decision.”

⁸²⁶ Unnamed officer quoted in Taaffe, *Marshall and His Generals*, 55.

⁸²⁷ Atkinson, “Eisenhower Rising,” 7.

⁸²⁸ Taaffe, *Marshall and His Generals*, 54. Ambrose, *The Supreme Commander*, 319.

⁸²⁹ Taaffe, *Marshall and His Generals*, 55. Eisenhower quoted in Stephen E. Ambrose, *The Supreme Commander: The War Years of General Dwight D. Eisenhower* (New York: Anchor Books, 2012; reprint 1969), 55, 271.

⁸³⁰ Ambrose, *The Supreme Commander*, 251.

Eisenhower's education also had an impact on his development as a military officer. Growing up, he loved to read newspapers because, as he told a friend, he wanted to know "what is going on outside of Kansas" which made him "realize that Kansas isn't all the world."⁸³¹

Eisenhower was relatively indifferent to a military career, and was motivated to attend West Point mostly for the "hope" he could "continue an athletic career." Once there, he often asked himself, "What am I doing here?"⁸³² His military career was filled with important experiences and meaningful mentors. Eisenhower had gone on a transcontinental road trip across the United States in 1919, to better understand and test out national mobilization, and when he returned he was stationed with then-Colonel George S. Patton, who Eisenhower "got along famously" with. They worked on a "comprehensive tank doctrine" together with the "enthusiasm of zealots."⁸³³

In January 1922, after the death of an infant son, Eisenhower arrived in Panama for the "most interesting and constructive of my life. The main reason was the presence of one man, General Fox Conner." Conner jumpstarted Eisenhower's interest in the military profession, and put him on a successful course of self-education.

In asking me a casual question, General Conner discovered that I had little or no interest left in military history. My aversion was a result of its treatment at West Point as an out-and-out memory course. In the case of the Battle of Gettysburg, for instance, each student was instructed to memorize the names of every brigadier in the opposing armies and to know exactly where his unit was stationed at every hour during the three days of the battle. Little attempt was made to explain the meaning of the battle, why it came about, what the commanders hoped to accomplish, and the real reason why Lee invaded the North the second time. If this was military history, I wanted no part of it.

General Conner made no comment. I found myself invited to his quarters in the evening and I saw that he had made an extraordinary library, especially in military affairs. We talked for a time and he went through the library and picked out two or three historical novels. 'You might be interested in these,' he said quietly. I remember that one of them was *The Long Roll* by Mary Johnston, and another *The Exploits of Brigadier Gerard* in the Napoleonic Wars. A third was *The Crisis* by the American Winston Churchill.

They were stirring stories and I liked them. When I returned the books, the General asked me what I thought. As we talked about them, he said, "Wouldn't you like to

⁸³¹ Eisenhower quoted in Davis, *Soldier of Democracy*, 94.

⁸³² Eisenhower, *At Ease*, 7, 26.

⁸³³ Eisenhower, *At Ease*, 168, 173.

know something of what the armies were actually doing during the period of the novels you've just read?"

Well, that seemed logical enough and I expressed an interest. He took down a few books on the military history of those periods.

The upshot was that I found myself becoming fascinated with the subject. But fascination wasn't enough. After I read the first of these books, General Conner questioned me closely about the decisions made—why they were made and under what conditions. 'What do you think would have been the outcome if this decision had been just the opposite?' 'What were the alternatives?' And so I read Grant's and Sheridan's memoirs, and a good deal of John Codman Ropes on the Civil War. I read Clausewitz's *On War* three times and a volume that was the Comte de Paris' *Army of the Potomac* narrative. The General did not urge me to read the Comte de Paris in its entirety but only certain chapters that bore upon the campaigns we were discussing. He had me read Fremantle's account of the Battle of Gettysburg, as well as that of Haskell. The best outline or summarized history of the Civil War, he thought, was *Steele's Campaigns*. As I began to absorb the material of these books, I became even more interested in our Civil War and we spent many hours in analyzing its campaigns.⁸³⁴

Eisenhower's unofficial professional development, directed by Conner's guidance, and through novels, theory, and history, was key to building a military imagination that would be critical later on. Moreover, it gave him a knowledge baseline that enabled him to graduate at the top of his 1926 Army Command and General Staff class at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, a prestigious mid-career marker for potential future success.

In the summer of 1928, while Eisenhower desired a different assignment, his wife convinced him to take on a second stint with the American Battle Monuments Commission in France. While there, Eisenhower traveled extensively and learned a great deal about the French military, geography, culture, and politics.⁸³⁵ This could only have aided his performance in 1944.

In 1936, Eisenhower accompanied General Douglas MacArthur as part of a military liaison team to the newly independent Philippines. While there, Eisenhower's writing documents his thinking through security problems with a broad geostrategic and geopolitical lens. Moreover, while there, Eisenhower got his pilot's license, with about 350 hours flying experience, which would have been helpful in understanding aspects of military airpower years later.

⁸³⁴ Eisenhower, *At Ease*, 185-186.

⁸³⁵ Davis, *Soldier of Democracy*, 225-226.

Also while in the Philippines, the Philippine president asked for Eisenhower's counsel "more and more," and Eisenhower would "frequently" advise him on "broader and deeper" issues beyond defense, including "taxes, education, honesty in government."⁸³⁶

During the war, prior to Normandy, Eisenhower also had the experience of dealing with military-political problems like the surrender of a Vichy-French admiral. That decision, taken in 1942, had to be made quickly, but Eisenhower knew and wrote at the time that there would be political blowback in the Allied capitals.

The military advantages of an immediate cease fire are so overwhelming [that we must take the offer, but]...none of this should be under any misapprehensions as to what the consequences of this action may be. In both our nations, [Vichy French Admiral] Darlan is a deep-dyed villain. When public opinion raises its outcry our two governments will be embarrassed. Because of this, we'll act so quickly that reports to our governments will be on the basis of action *taken*...If public opinion becomes too inflamed because we seem guilty of dealing with the enemy, the governments must be free to disavow us and indeed remove us from our posts.⁸³⁷

In navigating the consequences, Eisenhower revealed his willingness to be held accountable for his own strategic decisions, a quality that could only earn him trust with his political superiors.

On a military-specific issue from before Normandy, Eisenhower's judgment to take Pantelleria, a miniscule island in the Mediterranean, is instructive.

Halfway between the northern tip of Tunisia and the island of Sicily, Pantelleria was heavily garrisoned by Italians. Popularly, it was said to be the "Gibraltar of the Central Mediterranean." The coastline was rocky, with no beaches, and the only approach was by sea through a narrow harbor perhaps three hundred yards wide. The interior was hilly, cut up into small plots by stone walls. Its capture would be a difficult feat of arms if the place were garrisoned by good, sturdy troops. It was almost out of question to attack by airborne method; descending soldiers, blown up against the stone walls by prevailing winds, would be almost 100 percent casualties. In the circumstances, some thought that the island was unassailable and that it would be foolish to try to take it.

There were other elements to consider, I thought. One was the fact that with the landing strip on the top of the island in possession of the enemy, our convoys going across

⁸³⁶ Eisenhower, *At Ease*, 225, 227-228.

⁸³⁷ Eisenhower, *At Ease*, 255.

from Africa to Sicily would be subject to strafing and dive-bomber attack. We would be denied the use of the field for both defense and offensive operations. My belief was that the officers and men of the Italian Army were sick of the war and wanted to get out of it. We knew that Mussolini had given orders that if any of the Italian garrisons surrendered, their families at home would pay the penalty. But with the theory that morale is the telling factor in war and suspecting that Italian morale was at a low ebb, I insisted on attempting the island's capture.

While Eisenhower's personal staff agreed with him, opposition came from some of the British ground commanders who were concerned about risking "failure." In the end, when the attack on the little island commenced, "the men in the landing ships had not even completed getting into their landing craft when white flags began to appear all over the island."⁸³⁸

War provided lessons for Eisenhower, which he acknowledged in a personal note written on December 10, 1942: "I am learning many things." Two in particular stand out, the first being that waiting on others to produce "is one of the hardest things a commander has to do." And the second was that, due to the enormity of the modern military, organizational experience and "an orderly, logical mind are absolutely essential to success."⁸³⁹

Eisenhower also understood the nexus between war and politics, his role in it, and compromise. He had worked for General Douglas MacArthur and seen how inappropriately MacArthur had crossed onto the wrong side of the "line between the military and the political." On active duty, Eisenhower did not vote or "meddle with politics." Just after the war, when many sought to draw Eisenhower into politics, he dismissed the rumors. In August 1945, when a friend excitedly wrote that he was "ready and anxious to organize an 'Eisenhower for President' Club," Eisenhower gently brushed it aside, then wrote, "I must tell you, with all the emphasis I can command, that nothing could be so distasteful to me as to engage in political activity of any kind. I trust that no friend of mine will ever attempt to put me in the position where I would even be called upon to deny political ambitions." Then, on the subject, Eisenhower wrote to his wife, "Many people seem astounded that I'd have no slightest interest in politics. I can't understand *them*."⁸⁴⁰ Eisenhower knew his role as a supreme commander in a democracy, and stuck to it, which, again, likely aided in the bond of trust with his country's political leadership.

⁸³⁸ Eisenhower, *At Ease*, 264-265.

⁸³⁹ Eisenhower quoted in Ambrose, *The Supreme Commander*, 145.

⁸⁴⁰ Atkinson, "Eisenhower Rising," 4. Eisenhower, *At Ease*, 213. Eisenhower quoted in Davis, *Soldier of Democracy*, 191. Eisenhower quoted in Ambrose, *Eisenhower: Soldier and President*, 208-209.

That self-awareness did not preclude him from dealing deftly with the politicians of Allied nations, and he once told a British officer how he dealt with French politicians:

I immediately started a personal campaign to establish for myself a reputation for the most straightforward, brutal talk that could be imagined...I refused to put anything in diplomatic or suave terminology, and carefully cultivated the manner and reputation of complete bluntness and honesty—just a man too simple-minded to indulge in circumlocution.⁸⁴¹

And he embodied, in every way, what he said. His devotion to the Allied cause was so great, he carried three lucky coins with him during the war: one French, one British, and an American.⁸⁴²

Eisenhower had a philosophy of high command. In a note in the spring of 1943, Eisenhower wrote, “It is not the man who is so brilliant [who] delivers in time of stress and strain, but rather the man who can keep on going indefinitely, doing a good straightforward job.”⁸⁴³ In August 1942, Eisenhower also wrote,

The men that can do things are going to be sought out just as surely as the sun rises in the morning. Fake reputations, habits of glib and clever speech, and glittering surface performance are going to be discovered and kicked overboard. Solid, sound leadership, with inexhaustible nervous energy to spur on the efforts of lesser men, and iron-clad determination to face discouragement, risk and increasing work without flinching, will always characterize the man who has a sure-enough, bang-up fighting unit. Added to this he must have a darned strong tinge of imagination—I am continuously astounded by the utter lack of imaginative thinking among so many of our people that have reputations for being really good officers. Finally, the man has to be able to forget himself and personal fortunes. I’ve relieved two seniors here because they got worrying about “injustice,” “unfairness,” “prestige,” and—oh, what the hell!⁸⁴⁴

Eisenhower was well-positioned through experience to pull together a sharp organization. He joked he “had been a chief of staff, either to a division, corps, or army, longer than anyone else in the U.S. Army.” His athletic background seems to have influenced his thought that “War has become so comprehensive and so complicated that teamwork seems to

⁸⁴¹ Eisenhower quoted in Ambrose, *The Supreme Commander*, 325.

⁸⁴² Davis, *Soldier of Democracy*, 1.

⁸⁴³ Eisenhower quoted in Atkinson, “Eisenhower Rising,” 3.

⁸⁴⁴ Eisenhower, August 1942 letter to a friend, quoted in Taafe, *Marshall and His Generals*, 57.

me to be the essence of all success...Each bureau, each section, each office...has to be part of a well-coordinated team.”⁸⁴⁵

Eisenhower’s judgment as a military leader was also influenced, early-on, by an American baseball scandal when he was a young officer in 1919. From that, Eisenhower learned that

stark facts and objective reports could not give the whole story...In the passage of years, whether because of the Black Sox scandal or not, I grew increasingly cautious about making judgments based solely on reports. Behind every human action, the truth may be hidden. But the truth may also lie behind some other action or arrangement, far off in time and place. Unless circumstances and responsibility demanded an instant judgment I learned to reserve mine until the last proper moment. This was not always popular.⁸⁴⁶

Winston Churchill, himself lauded for his way with words, once observed about Eisenhower: “Good generals do not usually have such good powers of expression as he has.”⁸⁴⁷ Eisenhower was an excellent communicator, in the most formal occasion or the least formal, off-the-cuff remarks.⁸⁴⁸

As a young officer, Eisenhower had written for military journals about new ideas applied to emerging tank warfare doctrine (despite a serious threat of court-martial from the Chief of Infantry).⁸⁴⁹ While in his first tour with the American Battle Monuments Commission, Eisenhower had worked directly for General John (“Black Jack”) Pershing, who had commanded the American Expeditionary Force in World War I. This time period happened to be when Pershing was writing his World War I memoirs, and he asked Eisenhower to “read the parts of the book” that pertained to campaigns in Saint Mihiel and the Argonne. Eisenhower read them, and recommended Pershing “abandon the diary form for two chapters and instead tell the story of each battle as seen from his position as the commander of the American Expeditionary Forces.” Pershing “listened and seemed to be enthused” and told Eisenhower to “take the two chapters and draft them” as Eisenhower “thought they should be.” Eisenhower did so, “with considerable effort,” but, in the end, Eisenhower’s counsel was overruled by

⁸⁴⁵ Eisenhower quoted in Ambrose, *The Supreme Commander*, 55.

⁸⁴⁶ Eisenhower, *At Ease*, 167-168.

⁸⁴⁷ Churchill quoted in Atkinson, “Eisenhower Rising,” 3.

⁸⁴⁸ Stephen E. Ambrose, *Eisenhower: Soldier and President* (New York: Simon & Schuster, revised edition 2014), 208.

⁸⁴⁹ Eisenhower, *At Ease*, 173.

counter-advice to Pershing from George Marshall (which was the first meeting between Eisenhower and Marshall).⁸⁵⁰

In 1935, Eisenhower nearly resigned from the army because a newspaper wanted to hire him, for much greater pay than his military salary, as a military editor. Eisenhower's reputation for solid prose preceded him and so he was asked; in the end, though, Eisenhower decided to stick with his military career.⁸⁵¹

When the war was over, perhaps Eisenhower's most notable speaking engagement was when he was honored by the City of London, at the Guildhall, on June 12, 1945. On the award, Eisenhower himself "worked on a text" with a "yellow pad and started to write with pencil in the evenings" after each day's grind of military occupation duty in Germany. While "weary" from occupation paper-work, "immediately after supper" Eisenhower crawled "into bed each evening" and work on his speech until he fell asleep. He "labored at it mightily, never satisfied with a single paragraph." When the speech was given, Eisenhower used words that were later to be etched on his tombstone: "Humility must always be the portion of any many who receives acclaim earned in the blood of his followers and the sacrifices of his friends." The day after the speech, Eisenhower wrote, "the London papers greeted the talk warmly—and even, in an excess of friendly misjudgment, boxed it on the front page with the Gettysburg Address."⁸⁵²

In a recent lecture at the U.S. Air Force Academy, historian Rick Atkinson sought to "isolate some of the characteristics" that made Eisenhower a "successful general, a war-winning general, and a character who...seems to have relevance for us today."⁸⁵³

This is not as easy as it might seem. Eisenhower's own grandson has even struggled to describe what made Eisenhower successful, choosing mostly to stick to a series of anecdotes.⁸⁵⁴ The same was true for a journalist in the fall of 1944 who was assigned to Eisenhower's headquarters' for several weeks to write something for the Office of War Information. After leaving, the journalist spoke about the experience in an informal talk at the American Embassy in London. The journalist said Eisenhower "is in a heroic position without himself being a hero." He said Eisenhower has none of the "moody grandeur" or "depth" or "creative will" that

⁸⁵⁰ Eisenhower, *At Ease*, 207-208.

⁸⁵¹ Davis, *Soldier of Democracy*, 239.

⁸⁵² Eisenhower, *At Ease*, 298, 300. Atkinson, "Eisenhower Rising," 8.

⁸⁵³ Atkinson, "Eisenhower Rising," 1.

⁸⁵⁴ David Eisenhower, "The Great Captains in American History—Eisenhower," April 21, 2013, at the *Foreign Policy Research Institute*, audio, accessed February 28, 2018, <https://www.fpri.org/multimedia/2013/04/the-great-captains-in-american-history-eisenhower/>.

inspires “men to be better than themselves.” The journalist could not see Eisenhower “leading a great historic movement.”⁸⁵⁵

But, the journalist continued, “SHAEF is perhaps the greatest fact of this war, and SHAEF is certainly [Eisenhower’s] creature. It didn’t exist before him and it couldn’t have existed without him.” The journalist felt this suggested Eisenhower’s greatest strength was in “co-operation” and “tolerance,” that, “in a world of such vast destructive forces, a world of such close-knit interdependencies, egotism is more than a mistake—it’s a crime. That’s one thing one learns from Eisenhower.” The journalist concluded, “history is a by-product of ordinary workaday effort, and you have to stand a long way back from Eisenhower to realize what an immense and truly creative job he’s done in a situation where, one would have thought, only vast killing and destruction were possible.”⁸⁵⁶

Another contemporary biographer, writing in 1945, was struck with Eisenhower’s lack of “willful egotism,” that, unlike Hitler, Eisenhower would never “regard power as having its source *in* him, belonging to him personally; always he would regard it as something distinct from himself, a kind of stream to which he must submit in the very process of controlling it.”⁸⁵⁷

There was a unique quality to Eisenhower’s humility, even if some historians have questioned its authenticity.⁸⁵⁸ Two of Eisenhower’s personal memoranda, which bookend this campaign, might provide insight into his exceptional humility and willingness to accept personal responsibility.

Recall the invasion’s never-used failure note, jotted in the hours approaching D-Day. In his own self-edit, Eisenhower intentionally crossed out passive lines in favor of active voice. So, “the troops have been withdrawn,” in his draft, when edited, became “I have withdrawn the troops.” Eisenhower was willing to take full personal responsibility for failure if it ever came to pass.⁸⁵⁹

Then, when it was over, Eisenhower deliberately chose not to gloat or dwell on the victory. After the surrender was signed, his chief of staff recalled,

⁸⁵⁵ Unnamed journalist quoted in Davis, *Soldier of Democracy*, 541-542.

⁸⁵⁶ Unnamed journalist quoted in Davis, *Soldier of Democracy*, 541-542.

⁸⁵⁷ Davis, *Soldier of Democracy*, 104.

⁸⁵⁸ Brinkley, “Overlord’s Overlord.” Brinkley wrote, “false humility... was Eisenhower’s greatest stratagem,” and Brinkley advised readers to disregard the “cartoonish image of the ‘nice guy’ general,” that “Eisenhower was always ready to cut down anybody who got in his way.”

⁸⁵⁹ Andrew Carroll, “My Fellow Soldiers,” August 11, 2017, at the *Pritzker Military Museum and Library*, audio and text, at 52 minutes, accessed February 28, 2018, https://www.pritzkermilitary.org/files/4715/0151/2317/Andrew_Carroll_Transcription.pdf.

the staff prepared various drafts of a victory message appropriate to the historic event. I tried one myself and, like all my associates, groped for resounding phrases as fitting accolades to the Great Crusade and indicative of our dedication to the great task just completed. General Eisenhower rejected them all, with thanks but without other comment, and wrote his own. It read: "The mission of this Allied force was fulfilled at 0241 local time, May 7, 1945."⁸⁶⁰

Humility can take many forms. But, considering all the hard judgments and difficult decisions Eisenhower had to navigate, and the enormity of the war, the fact that he was so willing to stand in failure's breach, and so humble in success's spotlight, must meet at least one version of superlative humility.

⁸⁶⁰ Smith, *Eisenhower's Six Great Decisions*, 229.

6. Conclusion: Thinking Theoretically About Supreme Command

6.1 *Observations and Findings*

In Rear Admiral J.C. Wylie's classic, *Military Strategy: A General Theory of Power Control*, he wrote that while the term "Military Mind" was something of a "catch phrase," he reminded readers there are, in fact, some "very real military minds" that "will, sooner or later, as they have in the past, have a profound effect on our nation and on our society and its civilization." But, unfortunately, while several "other fields of human activities" like politics and economics have been exhaustively researched,

only the tremendous social upheaval of war itself has never really been studied with a fundamental and systematic objectivity that would lead the student (and the practitioner) to recognize and better understand a basic pattern of thought, a theory, that did or could influence the conduct of war, influence the basic matter of whether or not a people or a nation might survive.⁸⁶¹

Wylie dismissed the "automatic rebuttal," that thinkers like Clausewitz and Mahan had covered such terrain before. "In one fashion or another," Wylie acknowledged these previous theorists had "studied and juggled around the detailed specifics or statistics of war," yet, he countered, "none of them has set himself the task of trying to make a little clearer why wars are managed the way they are." Wylie's goal, then, was to "understand a little better the paths that are followed by the strategic mind at work," to "examine some of the patterns of thought that the military mind does use, and to speculate on some that perhaps it might use."⁸⁶²

Wylie's approach was to focus not on fighting, but on war: "It is warfare, not battles, and strategy, not tactics or techniques, that should properly be the social science." This meant studying the "whole of the thing," instead of "counting the bullets or tracing the route of the *n*th division on a large-scale map."⁸⁶³

Wylie then contextualized his work, and the ways in which war might best be studied:

⁸⁶¹ J.C. Wylie, *Military Strategy: A General Theory of Power Control* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1989, originally published 1967), 8-9.

⁸⁶² Wylie, *Military Strategy*, 8-9.

⁸⁶³ Wylie, *Military Strategy*, 12.

I do not claim that strategy is or can be a “science” in the sense of the physical sciences. It can and should be an intellectual discipline of the highest order, and the strategist should prepare himself to manage ideas with precision and clarity and imagination in order that his manipulation of the physical realities, the tools of war, may rise above the pedestrian plane of mediocrity. Thus, while strategy itself may not be a science, strategic judgment can be scientific to the extent that it is orderly, rational, objective, inclusive, discriminatory, and perceptive.⁸⁶⁴

This dissertation follows directly in Wylie’s tradition. The research results that follow are a product of the same principles that Wylie spelled out a little over fifty years ago.

To review, this dissertation’s central research question was: *What are the characteristics of successful wartime American supreme commanders?*

This research identified a pattern. In the three case studies, several characteristics of successful American wartime supreme commanders stood out: judgment in particular, accompanied by a distinct quality of empathy and grit in each, as well as a number of other associated traits the successful supreme commanders held in common in terms of schooling and self-study, communication skills, post-war presidencies, and a distinct resilience developed in younger years.

This dissertation finds that the superior judgment of a nation’s supreme commander at war matters as a factor in determining which combatant wins’ crucial campaigns and, ultimately, wars. This does not mean superior judgment in a supreme commander is itself a sufficient condition for victory, but, in these cases, where both adversaries had an opportunity to fulfill their war aims, it would appear that the supreme commander’s superior judgment was a necessary condition for securing critical campaign advantages on the road to strategic victory.

This chapter considers the cumulative findings of the three case studies, draws out observable patterns, and confronts the study’s limitations. Then, the chapter connects with deeper theoretical currents, and moves on to the areas which seem likely to be impacted by the findings: international relations, supreme command and the practice of strategy, military history and the concept of military genius, and the potential impact on other academic disciplines.

Superior Judgment was a Key Factor in Successful Supreme Command

⁸⁶⁴ Wylie, *Military Strategy*, 13.

There was an identifiable historical pattern to successful supreme command. By comparing the relative, cumulative judgments and decisions of adversary supreme commanders during pivotal moments at war, the supreme commander that demonstrated superior judgment tended to generate greater positive strategic effects on the path to the achievement of their country's war aims.

This superior judgment finding held true across all three case studies, each of which featured different strategies (Washington: exhaustion; Grant: attrition; Eisenhower: annihilation), different material and manpower balances (Washington: inferior; Grant: superior; Eisenhower: initially inferior, then superior over time), and different characters of conflict, time periods, and war aims. All these factors shifted over time and geography, while superior judgment remained an objectively constant, important factor.

Not only did the successful supreme commanders make better judgments than their opponents, but they also did more to maintain unity of strategic effort in their respective commands. For example, both Howe and Hitler lost strategic unity of effort. Howe's command came apart for two reasons: he fell victim to the slow communications inherent in such a distant, 18th-century campaign, but this was made significantly worse by his ill-preparedness for Washington's devastating attacks in December 1776 and January 1777, which discombobulated and forced Howe and his political masters in London to fail to coordinate, and resulted in an incoherent British campaign in 1777.⁸⁶⁵ Oppositely, Washington was able to keep multiple parties, military, political, and external (e.g. Native American tribes), in synchronization with his operations, despite the grim situation his Continental Army faced in late 1776.⁸⁶⁶

For Hitler it was the purges and fear he created at the highest levels of command, and the resulting lack of trust.⁸⁶⁷ This was in stark contrast to Eisenhower's ability to navigate complex and challenging decisions within an often fractious Allied command.⁸⁶⁸

One other major theme from the research was the give-and-take between military effectiveness and political compromise. At one moment or another, each supreme commander was pulled in a certain direction for political reasons, a direction that often appeared like an option that

⁸⁶⁵ Doughty and Gruber, *Warfare in the Western World, Vol. 1*, 146.

⁸⁶⁶ "From George Washington to the Chiefs of the Passamaquoddy Indians, 24 December 1776," *Washington Papers* vol. 7, 433–434.

⁸⁶⁷ Linge, *The Hitler Book*, 161n.

⁸⁶⁸ Atkinson, *The Guns at Last Light*, 192.

promised suboptimal military results. In short, political needs threatened to reduce military effectiveness. The successful supreme commanders were those that balanced, appropriately, these real political imperatives with military imperatives in fair-minded ways that both achieved objectives against the adversary and maintained unity of effort.

Several examples from the research hold up this finding. Consider Washington's choice whether or not to burn New York City, which would have been the most militarily effective way to deny the British a winter garrison and a strategically important logistical base for the winter of 1776-1777. Yet, for Washington, political considerations, as well as a deference to political authority, outweighed the let-it-burn tactical approach advocated by his key military subordinates. At the same time, when Washington was convinced it was time to withdraw from New York for military reasons, against political guidance, he did so in a respectful, gradual manner that preserved his authority with the Continental Congress.⁸⁶⁹ Washington disagreed with both his military subordinates and political superiors, and still managed to hold these two ends of the rebellion together.

Initially, in the winter preceding the campaign of 1864, Grant wanted to send an indirect offensive through North Carolina against the Confederates, to use maneuver to force Lee away from his Lee's home terrain advantage in Virginia. Grant had to adjust this original concept to accommodate a political reality, namely, that the Lincoln administration could not allow the capital to go unprotected in an election year. Grant's resulting plan of simultaneous offensive operations set all Union armies in motion, and still achieved both his country's political and military needs.⁸⁷⁰

Eisenhower's air campaign to strike French rail networks deeply stressed the Allied command, to the point that the extent of this bombing, as well as the sheer number and variety of targets, was altered somewhat to meet the British high command's concern for French civilians.⁸⁷¹

In these cases, as well as others in each chapter, these successful supreme commanders all encountered challenges that pitted military effectiveness against political considerations. In confronting these challenges with an appropriate sense of balance and personal tact, each supreme commander gained support as a result of their sound compromises and judgments.

Common Characteristics of Successful Supreme Commanders

⁸⁶⁹ "Washington to Hancock, 8 September 1776," *Washington Papers* vol. 6, 248–254.

⁸⁷⁰ Grant to Sherman, April 4, 1864, *O.R. Vol. 32/3*, 827.

⁸⁷¹ Eisenhower, "[Entry] 1662, May 2, 1944, To Winston Spencer Churchill, *Top secret*," *Eisenhower Papers: III*, 1842-1845.

In reading about George Washington, Ulysses Grant, and Dwight Eisenhower, one learns they were not exactly alike. Washington and Eisenhower both about six feet in height, while Grant was around five feet, eight inches tall.⁸⁷² Their demeanors differed: Eisenhower was outwardly optimistic, Grant seemed more realistic and stoic, and while Washington was a rock most of the time, he could be incredibly pessimistic in his private correspondence.⁸⁷³ Washington grew tobacco at Mount Vernon, yet there is no historical evidence he used it during his war; Grant constantly smoked cigars and Eisenhower smoked four packs of cigarettes per day in 1944.⁸⁷⁴

From a modern perspective, they were relatively young supreme commanders. British military theorist and major general J.F.C. Fuller took seriously the impact of age on generalship. In an appendix to his book, *Generalship*, he listed the ages of one hundred well-known and well-regarded historical generals up to the year 1866 (a date after which he believed “generalship becomes senile”). Fuller noted the average age on his list was just over 40 years old, and that 74 percent were 45 or younger. From this, Fuller theorized that the “period of most efficient generalship lies between the years thirty and forty-nine,” with peak performance occurring “between the years thirty-five and forty-five” (for his part, Grant said he would never “put a general in the field over fifty”).⁸⁷⁵ On balance, Fuller believed that youth in generalship was an asset and an advantage.

More recently, Fuller’s theory has received some support: In 2005, when the U.S. National Bureau of Economic Research studied over 2,000 Noble Prize winners, they found the bulk of recipients came up with the idea that earned them the Nobel occurred between the ages of 35-39.⁸⁷⁶ This would seem to support Fuller’s belief that important ideas tend to percolate in this age-range.

This dissertation’s findings generally support Fuller’s hypothesis. During the campaigns evaluated, Washington was 44 (his opponent, Howe, turned 47 that summer), Grant was 42 (Lee was 57), and Eisenhower was 53 for most of the 1944 campaign (while Hitler was roughly one-and-a-half-years older at 54). While not perfectly consistent with Fuller, two out of three successful supreme commanders were in Fuller’s age range for peak performance, and all three successful supreme commanders were younger, if not by much, than their unsuccessful adversaries. This is not

⁸⁷² Chernow, *Washington: A Life*, 29. Chernow, *Grant*, 19, 26, 27. Eisenhower, *At Ease*, 7.

⁸⁷³ Ambrose, *The Supreme Commander*, 55, 271. “From George Washington to Lund Washington, 10–17 December 1776,” *Washington Papers* vol. 7, 289–292.

⁸⁷⁴ Atkinson, “Eisenhower Rising,” 7.

⁸⁷⁵ Fuller, *Generalship*, 97-98. Grant quoted in Young, *Around the World with General Grant*, 352-353.

⁸⁷⁶ Andy Harris, “Young, Brilliant and Underfunded,” *New York Times* (October 2, 2014).

to suggest that age alone is a discriminating feature, but, that relative youth may be another important characteristic in successful supreme command.

More specific to their habits in command, and regarding the assistance they received in arriving at their decisions, Washington regularly consulted Councils of War that included diverse views from many other senior officers in the Continental Army as well as civilians who had knowledge on particular strategic issues; Grant kept a small, informal staff, and exchanged personal dispatches to a few trusted agents for advice and counsel (e.g. Sherman and Halleck); Eisenhower had a full, formal staff, with wire diagrams indicating appropriate chains of command and authority.⁸⁷⁷

All three supreme commanders sat on top of potentially volcanic tempers, which by accounts never impacted their decision-making ability, and they were mostly able to hold these in check while at war.⁸⁷⁸

They shared a particular strength in empathy, which each exhibited in the course of making key judgments. First, this can be seen in the accommodations they made and relationships they managed in keeping unity of effort.

But also, there is the documented evidence of each supreme commander shedding actual tears during these campaigns. For Washington it occurred on November 16, 1776, while he helplessly watched the Continental Army's tragic loss at Fort Mifflin.⁸⁷⁹ For Grant it was near the beginning of the campaign, on May 6, 1864, after fighting the bloody Battle of the Wilderness (the next day he would turn Union forces to continue to press on against the Confederates).⁸⁸⁰ For Eisenhower it was on June 5, 1944, while watching airborne troops depart for Normandy (and then he wept again for the same group of airborne veterans at a post-war reunion in 1952).⁸⁸¹ Some might dismiss these tears as minor bursts of emotion from human beings in dark times, but, they do seem

⁸⁷⁷ David Hackett Fischer, "Washington's Crossing," November 3, 2017, at *The Pritzker Military Museum and Library*, audio and transcript, at 28 minutes, accessed March 8, 2018, https://www.pritzkermilitary.org/whats_on/pritzker-military-presents/david-hackett-fischer-washingtons-crossing/.

⁸⁷⁸ Chernow, *Washington: A Life*, xix-xx. Chernow, *Grant*, 402. Taaffe, *Marshall and His Generals*, 55

⁸⁷⁹ Fischer, *Washington's Crossing*, 114.

⁸⁸⁰ Foote, *The Civil War, Vol. 3: A Narrative*, 184-185.

⁸⁸¹ Michael Korda, *Ike: An American Hero* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2008), 467. Val Lauder, "Eisenhower's 'soul-racking' D-Day decision," *CNN* (June 6, 2014), Text, <http://edition.cnn.com/2014/06/05/opinion/lauder-eisenhower-d-day-anguish/>, accessed May 28, 2016.

to reveal something. As observable instances, these emotional moments support the notion that these supreme commanders felt a true, genuine sense of empathy toward their troops.

Why does empathy matter? The ability to connect emotionally to other people may indicate the ability to more deeply connect to another person's goals and objectives. Hew Strachan has noted that often the greatest challenge at war is the connection between statesmen and soldiers, the intersection between the "two spheres" critical to wartime command.⁸⁸² If a supreme commander has a natural affinity for understanding other people, empathetically, then it is reasonable that this supreme commander would also be better able to intuit a political leader's goals and objectives, and, in turn, adjust strategic course to stay in step with them. Or in certain cases, go in a direction unexpected by the political leadership that actually better serves a country's strategic ends. Such empathy might also help a supreme commander to better understand the enemy's mind.⁸⁸³

Empathy also appears to be the quality in a supreme commander that helps smooth out the rough edges of wartime alliances. While it is true that "the sensible application of superior resources tends to be successful," it should also be said that there must be significant effort expended to manage the internal competitions and petty jealousies on one's own side in order to achieve such a "sensible application."⁸⁸⁴

More broadly, Amy Chua has theorized that every world power that has "achieved global hegemony" was demonstrably tolerant relative to its rivals.⁸⁸⁵ To achieve such dominance, these societies had to "motivate the world's best and brightest, regardless of ethnicity, religion, or background."⁸⁸⁶ The key challenge, she wrote, was to "glue" people together in a "common identity" to achieve some degree of loyalty and unity.⁸⁸⁷

If one accepts this theory, then to some extent a nation's power derives from its ability to bring diverse people together in strategically-important ways. The empathy demonstrated by the successful supreme commanders in this study would seem to embody this pattern of national

⁸⁸² Hew Strachan, *The Direction of War: Contemporary Strategy in Historical Perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 20-21.

⁸⁸³ Nicholas Epley, *Mindwise: Why We Misunderstand What Others Think, Believe, Feel, and Want* (New York: Vintage Books, 2014), 38.

⁸⁸⁴ Lawrence Freedman, *Strategy: A History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), xii.

⁸⁸⁵ Amy Chua, *Day of Empire: How Hyperpowers Rise to Global Dominance—And Why They Fall* (New York: Doubleday, 2007), xxi, xxiv.

⁸⁸⁶ Chua, xxiii

⁸⁸⁷ Chua, 330, 336.

dominance: Washington, Grant, and Eisenhower each served as the “glue” that stuck important coalitions together at war.

As a characteristic, empathy’s value seems to stem from keeping a supreme commander’s ears and eyes and senses open, to listen and understand the motivations and viewpoints of others (including the enemy). It also acts as a funnel, ensuring the best ideas surface and get through to the supreme commander.

Grit, a hard-driven sense of direction and purposeful determination, can be seen in several ways in these case studies. Among other examples explicitly stated in each case’s chapter, certainly Washington exemplified grit in holding on to attack twice in December 1776 and January 1777 after his forces were down to a tiny fraction of what they had been mere months before, and despite his own personal fear that the war was effectively over.⁸⁸⁸ For Grant it was the decision to continue to press the attack, to grind Lee’s Confederates down, after a tough few days in the Battle of the Wilderness in May 1864 (notwithstanding the fortitude it took to keep the pressure on all the way through Lincoln’s re-election).⁸⁸⁹ And there was Eisenhower’s wherewithal in sticking to his decision on the airborne drops to complement the Normandy landings, despite dire warnings against this particular course of action.⁸⁹⁰

In each of these, the successful supreme commander had a difficult decision to make, and, even with others of goodwill and high position counseling alternate options, we can see the successful supreme commanders held on to their selected course of action. This, perhaps, is where we can see objective evidence of the supreme commander’s greatest value. There can be only one decision-maker and so grit is enormously important because this quality is what enables a successful supreme commander to hold and bind and grip on a particular decision amidst a storm of other opinions.

Grit seems to be about having a firm stomach for tough judgments and decisions; an iron gut to stay steady when others argue otherwise, sometimes incessantly. These three successful supreme commanders all possessed this quality.

It also seems that the mere possession of empathy and grit are not enough, but, instead, the ability to use them wisely and appropriately. They often work in contrast with one another: empathy is about connecting with others and listening to other ideas and seeing through another person’s

⁸⁸⁸ Palmer, “General George Washington: Grand Strategist or Mere Fabian?,” 9.

⁸⁸⁹ Sherman, “The Grand Strategy of the War of the Rebellion,” 591-592.

⁸⁹⁰ Eisenhower, *Crusade in Europe*, 246-247.

lens; grit is about closing out others and halting the flow of new ideas to hold fast to a final decision. Knowing when to use one, and when to engage the other, is also important to a supreme commander's performance.

All three also went on to be two-term American presidents, a correlation that may indicate at least two things. It would first seem to reinforce the notion that, at the highest level, generals must possess deft political skills, that in turn serve use after they take the uniform off. Interestingly, all three showed significant deference to their political superiors, as well as a complete disinterest in politics while still in uniform.⁸⁹¹ This non-politically-threatening stance must have gone some way to earning the trust of their political superiors.

Additionally, their presidencies were all, to one degree or another, mostly about consolidating the gains from the wars they did so much to win. When Washington became president, he had to pull together a sprawling new country of four million people that had no sense of the states as a single unified entity.⁸⁹² The Revolutionary War had been about breaking ties with Britain; Washington's presidency formed an entirely new country. In destroying slavery and the Confederate bid to secede, Grant had an important role in preserving the Union.⁸⁹³ After the Civil War, Grant re-built ties to the South and protected new lives for former slaves through his support for Reconstruction. And, having defeated Nazi Germany, Eisenhower turned his presidential energies toward building a new post-war world order, and "safely guided the free world through one of the most dangerous decades of the Cold War."⁸⁹⁴

Famously, George Washington was eulogized for having been both "first in war" and "first in peace," a formulation which may go some way to explaining why these supreme commanders were so successful. Having won their wars as military leaders, they then went on to exercise personal political leadership in consolidating the peace that followed. This is not to suggest that every successful American supreme commander must or even should follow Washington, Grant, and Eisenhower into the Oval Office, but it does imply that personal involvement in a conflict might energize post-war political leadership to prioritize the consolidation of wartime strategic gains. Thus, these three successful supreme commanders held in peace what they had seized at war.

⁸⁹¹ Morgan, *The Genius of George Washington*, 10, 13. Grant quoted in Young, *Around the World with General Grant*, 447-447, 615-616. Davis, *Soldier of Democracy*, 191. Ambrose, *Eisenhower: Soldier and President*, 208-209.

⁸⁹² Joseph J. Ellis, *His Excellency: George Washington* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2004), 188.

⁸⁹³ Brands, *The Man Who Saved the Union*, 636.

⁸⁹⁴ Ambrose, *Eisenhower: Soldier and President*, 12.

Theoretically, this would seem to connect to the dual-definition of “war” Carl von Clausewitz wrote about in *On War*. Clausewitz defined war two ways: first, he wrote that war is “an act of force to compel our enemy to do our will,” and second, war is “a continuation of political intercourse.”⁸⁹⁵ This way of thinking sees two aspects of war: one “negative,” “coercive,” and mostly about combat; the other is “positive,” “constructive,” and centers on “politics.”⁸⁹⁶ Those that look upon war in a similarly comprehensive way are likely to see that Washington, Grant, and Eisenhower may have been successful, in part, because they fulfilled both parts of Clausewitz’s theoretical vision of war, first as military leaders and then as political leaders.

All three were excellent communicators. Having consumed too many dispatches, memorandums, and primary source documents to count, so many of which were written in unpleasant, dangerous circumstances, one can only come away impressed with Washington’s, Grant’s, and Eisenhower’s correspondence. They were able to clearly and concisely make their wishes, arguments, and commands known with the written word. One classicist has said much the same of Julius Caesar, that Caesar was “the rare person in history who’s a great general, and a great politician, and also a great author. We don’t see that very often.”⁸⁹⁷ The same laudatory remark would also reasonably be applied to these successful supreme commanders.

This writing-ability is evident in Eisenhower’s straightforward, direct language in official documents during the war, as well as his Guidhall Address in London, not to mention his multiple books written after the war; Grant went on to pen what has often been called the best military memoir of all time.⁸⁹⁸ Washington, though possessing the least formal education of the three, was also a gifted and prodigious wordsmith, with thousands upon thousands of well-written letters in his personal papers that reveal an extraordinary mind at work.⁸⁹⁹

In variable amounts, all three showed an indifference for official education, or non-attendance at formal schooling. Yet they all displayed a passion for self-study, and all had some

⁸⁹⁵ Clausewitz, *On War*, 75, 605.

⁸⁹⁶ Gideon Rose, *How Wars End: Why We Always Fight the Last Battle* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2010), 3.

⁸⁹⁷ Barry Strauss, “America 2016: What does the world think?” *CNN Global Public Square with Fareed Zakaria*, March 13, 2016, audio, at 27 minutes, accessed May 20, 2016, <http://podcast.cnn.com/fareed-zakaria-gps/episode/all/92r991/gps-2016-03-13.html>.

⁸⁹⁸ John Marszalek, “Introduction” in Ulysses S. Grant, *The Personal Memoirs of Ulysses S. Grant*, xxv-xxvi.

⁸⁹⁹ William M. Ferraro, “George Washington’s Mind,” In *A Companion to George Washington* Ed. Edward G. Lengel (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 548.

meaningful military experience prior to the wars in which they served in supreme command. Washington had little in the way of an education, but his desire to learn is on display with one quick look at his personal library, with subjects ranging from veterinary care to books on poetry, to religion, philosophy, geography, and law; importantly, he had a clear interest in military subjects, particularly his British adversaries.⁹⁰⁰ And as a younger man, he did benefit from some military experience as a colonial British officer. Grant never liked his education at West Point, but did enjoy some individual subjects like mathematics.⁹⁰¹ After university, however, Grant was an excellent reader that even demonstrated the ability to put himself into the place and mind of other military commanders.⁹⁰² He also had combat experience in the Mexican War. Eisenhower was a similarly unfocused student at West Point, but while there he did gain in the way of his experience on athletic teams and in the skills that likely contribute to interpersonal leadership.⁹⁰³ While Eisenhower's pre-supreme command military experience was not in combat, it was significant. Eisenhower had his interest in self-study jumpstarted by a mentor, General Fox Conner, and he went on to succeed in military mid-career education. Eisenhower learned much through peers and mentors, like George Patton and Fox Conner, and in his pre-World War II assignments on tank warfare and doctrine, in Panama, in Washington, and in France and the Philippines under General Douglas MacArthur.

All three faced significant setbacks in their younger years. George Washington's early life was the most tragic, having sustained the death of his father at age eleven, and then, at age twenty, the loss of his half-brother Lawrence who had become a "surrogate father." Washington also always felt educationally deficient, having only finished grade-school.⁹⁰⁴ Grant had a domineering father who smothered and attempted to manipulate and live through Ulysses, so much that, without telling Ulysses, his father essentially single-handedly pushed Ulysses into West Point.⁹⁰⁵ Eisenhower's family was poor in his early years, the result of a father who was repeatedly swindled and suffered business disasters.⁹⁰⁶

⁹⁰⁰ Prussing, *The Estate of George Washington, Deceased*, 418-433.

⁹⁰¹ Grant quoted in Young, *Around the World with General Grant*, 450-451.

⁹⁰² Fuller, *Grant and Lee*, 66-67.

⁹⁰³ Ambrose, *The Supreme Commander*, 55.

⁹⁰⁴ Ellis, *His Excellency*, 8-10.

⁹⁰⁵ Chernow, *Grant*, 18, 12, 17.

⁹⁰⁶ Victor Geortzel et al, *Cradles of Eminence, 2nd Edition: Childhoods of more than 700 famous men and women* (Scottsdale, AZ: Great Potential Press, Inc., 2004, originally published 1962), 64-65.

Childhood resilience, learned through difficulty, seems to be an important distinguishing characteristic. In 1962, two researchers published the findings of their work on the childhoods of several hundred well-regarded individuals:

these 400 eminent people did have many childhood experiences in common. They grew up in homes where excitement and love of learning were present, though they often disliked formal schooling and some were schooled at home. The homes they grew up in were full of books and stimulating conversation and strong opinions, so that as children, they learned to think and express themselves clearly. They had at least one strong parent, usually the mother, who believed in them.⁹⁰⁷

More specifically, the study's key trends were that in over 90 percent of the eminent individuals studied, "there was a love for learning in one or both parents, often accompanied by a physical exuberance and a persistent drive towards goals." About 60 percent had trouble with formal schooling (as separate from a love for self-learning). Over 75 percent had a troubled childhood, for a variety of reasons: "by poverty; by a broken home; by rejecting, overpossessive, estranged, or dominating parents; by financial ups and downs; by physical handicaps; or by parental dissatisfaction over the children's school failures or vocational choices."⁹⁰⁸ These findings would seem to affirm that a challenge in childhood builds a sense of resiliency in high-performing individuals.⁹⁰⁹ More importantly, the early life experiences of these three successful supreme commanders (and five of the six total studied, the only outlier being Howe) would fit into the descriptions from the Geortzel study, especially their difficult childhoods. Winston Churchill once affirmed the same: "Solitary trees, if they grow at all, grow strong: and a boy deprived of a father's care often develops, if he escapes the perils of youth, an independence and a vigor of thought which may restore in afterlife the heavy loss of early days."⁹¹⁰ It might be that difficulty endured in early years aided later-life success in supreme command.

⁹⁰⁷ Geortzel et al, *Cradles of Eminence*, vii.

⁹⁰⁸ Geortzel et al, *Cradles of Eminence*, 282-283.

⁹⁰⁹ Meg Jay, "The Secrets of Resilience," *Wall Street Journal* (Saturday/Sunday, November 11-12, 2017), C1.

⁹¹⁰ Winston Churchill, *The River War: An Historical Account of the Reconquest of the Soudan* (1899), cited by Andrew Roberts, "Winston Churchill: Walking with Destiny," January 16, 2018, at *The New York Historical Society*, audio, at 19 minutes, accessed March 8, 2018, <http://www.nyhistory.org/programs/winston-churchill-walking-destiny>.

6.2 *Limitations*

These cases and findings, of course, are subject to limits. First, while this dissertation did begin by comparing opposing supreme commanders competing against one another, in the same era, the dissertation then pivoted to compare the characteristics of the three successful supreme commanders. While they share similarities in that they all achieved their political and strategic aims, it must be acknowledged that it is hard to compare their strategic accomplishments because these three fought on different terrain, in different eras, against wildly different opponents.⁹¹¹ To mitigate this problem, the analysis focused mostly on judgments and decisions, as well as their observable habits of mind and characteristics, which minimizes somewhat these other considerations.

These are also all high profile, high stakes conflicts, and as such there is apt to be political deference to military judgment that might not otherwise be on offer in wars of lesser intensity. Because these wars mattered so much, the symmetry of viewpoint between political and military leadership is likely to be greater, or at least more deferential to military considerations.⁹¹² This observation lessens the applicability of these findings in relatively limited wars that are more constrained by political leadership for one reason or another.

All three successful supreme commanders fought for democratic political systems. All three had relatively supportive political leaders' (though Washington had multiple partners in the Continental Congress he answered to). This is important because the relationship between the political effort and military effort overlaps, and so cooperation, friendly or tacit, would seem to be critical. Logic suggests that absent the presence of supportive, sharp political leadership, these three successful supreme commanders might not have achieved nearly so much. The fact, also, that these were all in a democracy limits applicability to other political systems.

These cases are pre-nuclear era, and this makes it more difficult to apply lessons from before the bomb to after the bomb. Put another way, this all might be historically correct, but still difficult to apply to the nuclear age. Moreover, the post-war changes in American defense structure arguably dissipate the importance of a supreme commander in a theater of war. Today, presidential authority, a much larger White House staff, the Office of the Secretary of Defense, the Geographical

⁹¹¹ Taafe, *Marshall and his Generals*, 322-323.

⁹¹² Strachan, *The Direction of War*, 207.

Combatant Commanders and their on-the-ground operational commands in theaters of war, these features are all different than the command structures in this dissertation's three case studies, which again, somewhat limits applicability.

Also, the knowledge gained from this research will almost certainly never be predictive (at least until modern science finds a way into a person's thoughts in real-time). While we can observe, using the historical record and primary source documents, that superior judgment made a difference in these three campaigns and wars, because there are only three cases, this small-*n* work makes no claim for universal applicability and it is unlikely that this knowledge can be applied to a current or coming conflict. Yet, despite not being predictive, this research methodology still holds explanatory power and so does provide academic value.

This dissertation's method of studying successful supreme commanders is useful because it helps us understand military supreme command's role in war. Supreme command as a function is constant; both sides at war have supreme commanders, formal or informal; but we cannot explain a variable effect from a constant cause. Therefore, in addition to other factors like material and technology, what is *not* constant is superior judgment and decision in a supreme commander; each supreme commander makes decisions that can be observed objectively in hindsight. Often, one judgment is relatively better than the adversary's when evaluated using primary sources. Even if the inferior decision was "reasonable" it can still be labeled inferior when compared to an adversary's superior judgment.⁹¹³ By making explicit this analysis of judgment and decision, researchers can better recognize and scrutinize the role supreme commanders play at war.

6.3 Implications

For International Relations and Political Science

These results demonstrate that a nation's war-making material alone ought not be considered the sole driving force that determines war outcomes. Of the three losing sides in these cases, two enjoyed distinct material advantages. Howe's British forces held a significant advantage as part of the largest invasion force the British Empire had ever mustered; the Continental Army was much smaller and weaker. Also, Hitler held a material advantage in men, fortifications, and arguably

⁹¹³ Robert Jervis quoted in Tetlock and Gardner, *Superforecasting*, 83.

weapons technology in the initial stages of the Allied amphibious landing. Of the three cases, the only ultimate victor to hold an absolute numerical advantage over his competitor was Grant. But even then, Lee fought on home soil, with favorable defensive terrain, and the technology of the day that favored such a defense. And, not to be forgotten, Lee had defeated a Union force with nearly the precise numerical advantage one year prior. Traditional social science theories that rely exclusively on material or technological differences must find ways to account for supreme command (or at least important human) decisions at war.

Moreover, this research serves a “larger question, which is the relationship of victory in this battle to victory in the war.”⁹¹⁴ By working from a from a known strategic result which has been observed (i.e. the Allied victory in World War II), this dissertation traced backwards in time to a point at which the war’s result was not settled. This method sought to meaningfully link battlefield outcomes to campaign outcomes and then campaign outcomes to strategic victories in war (i.e. the decisions that went into the taking of Normandy, then the seizure of Paris and France, to the inevitable defeat of Nazi Germany). The military supreme commander’s position is the best place to observe this conversion from tactical gains to strategic effect.

International relations literature prominently features the Melian Dialogue’s precept “that the strong do what they will, and the weak can but submit.”⁹¹⁵ This classic formulation of international relations can be alternately summed up, pithily, as “might makes right.” The present research counters this slogan because it found that resources do not necessarily drive outcomes. (In fact, the role of judgment would seem to reverse the saying: for the successful supreme commander, “right makes might.”) Resources are necessary to fight, but are never sufficient and hardly determinative.

In November and December 1776, Washington was roughly at a four-to-one disadvantage to his British adversary (so desperate was the situation that on December, 17, 1776, Washington wrote to his property manager to “get my papers in order” for rapid escape).⁹¹⁶ Yet, using maneuver to gain surprise and local numerical advantage, though not much more than parity, Washington won at Trenton and Princeton and was able to generate sufficient strategic effect to bring the French into the war on the American side in 1777. In the American Civil War, the Union had spent three years

⁹¹⁴ Freedman, “A Theory of Battle or a Theory of War?,” 434.

⁹¹⁵ Harold W. Rood, “Win A Few, Lose A Few: WWII Remembered,” *Claremont Review of Books*, Vol. IV, No. 2 (Summer 1985).

⁹¹⁶ Fischer, *Washington’s Crossing*, 381-382, 383. “From George Washington to Lund Washington, 10–17 December 1776,” *Washington Papers* vol. 7, 289–292.

and 144,000 casualties in Virginia alone, without much progress, against an industrial-sized insurgency.⁹¹⁷ They had gone through three generals-in-chief and four commanders of the Army of the Potomac.⁹¹⁸ Put in supreme command, Grant ended the war in under a year. Lastly, Eisenhower's forces at the beach were initially at a numerical disadvantage to German resources in France.⁹¹⁹ Eisenhower also had only one opportunity to make the European Theater of Operations a two-front war and the Germans had the advantage of defense. In each of these cases, numbers alone cannot explain victory satisfactorily.

This research also supports a nuanced view of American civilian-military relations. The first major modern American theory on civil-military relations came from Samuel Huntington's thesis in *The Soldier and the State*, which counseled a relatively "sharp separation" between military professionals and civilian politicians.⁹²⁰ Eliot Cohen, in his book, *Supreme Command*, pushed back in the other direction, and argued that the relationship between presidents and prime ministers on the one hand, and their generals on the other, is much more mixed and messy.

While Cohen is undoubtedly correct that the better wartime political leaders take an active role in managing military subordinates, he carries his argument a bit too far. In one of his case studies on the American Civil War, Cohen found that American President Abraham Lincoln "did not merely find his generals; he controlled them."⁹²¹ This claims too much, particularly in that Grant habitually would only tell Lincoln after-the-fact about many strategic judgments and orders, and that Lincoln explicitly empowered Grant to take on other important decisions.⁹²²

Cohen's model is an important step away from Huntington's hard division between the military and politics. But Cohen's singular focus on engaged, shrewd, meddling presidents and prime ministers is only half the picture. Particularly in democratic systems, political leaders and military commanders are forced to work together to achieve war aims.

⁹¹⁷ Rhea, "Butcher' Grant and the Overland Campaign," 45.

⁹¹⁸ Ward, et al, *The Civil War*, 174.

⁹¹⁹ Atkinson, *The Guns at Last Light*, 5, 85.

⁹²⁰ Cohen, *Supreme Command*, 228. See Samuel P. Huntington, *The Soldier and the State: The Theory and Politics of Civil-Military Relations* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1967).

⁹²¹ Cohen, *Supreme Command*, 49, 18.

⁹²² Grant, quoted in Young, *Around the World with General Grant*, 356, 358. McPherson, *Tried By War*, 216-217. Citing Grant to Halleck, April 22, 25, 29, 30, 1864, Halleck to Grant, April 23, 26, 29, May 3, 1864, Halleck to Canby, May 7, 1864, O.R. 34, iii: 252-53, 331, 357, 293, 331-32, 409-410. See "Important Change of Commanders, Gen. Canby Supersedes Gen. Banks" By Telegraph, May 7, *Boston Daily Advertiser* (Boston, Massachusetts, May 9, 1864). See also "The Removal of Gen. Banks" By Telegraph, May 9, *Boston Daily Advertiser* (Boston, Massachusetts, May 10, 1864).

The two function in parallel, with overlapping, yet different attentions. If political leaders look to maximize the outcomes of political decisions, and accept sufficiency, or satisfice, on decisions related to military operations, then the supreme commander seeks to maximize the outcomes of military decisions, and satisfices when it comes to decisions related to politics and military unity. In this way, each has an impact on the other. A political decision might do harm to a military operation, and vice versa. What matters is whether or not the two function together, somewhat better than their adversaries. This is not to argue the two are fully equal. In Western democracies at least, as Cohen observes, the political master always ultimately trumps a military subordinate (hence Cohen's description of the relationship as an "unequal dialogue"). Yet, due to proximity and focus and experience, the military supreme commander will necessarily exercise some subordinate independent judgment while at war. It may be that Washington, Grant, and Eisenhower earned their political leadership's trust by so thoroughly and completely eschewing politics while in uniform, which allowed them such strategically important, limited autonomy.⁹²³

For Supreme Command and the Practice of Strategy

One important area of study in this dissertation is to make explicit the relationship between strategic choices and strategic victories in campaigns and wars. While military and political aims are somewhat different, they are "not separate," as Basil H. Liddell Hart wrote, "Nations do not wage war for war's sake, but in pursuance of policy. The military objective is only the means to a political end."⁹²⁴

This dissertation described how sound and superior choices from supreme commanders making decisions about important strategic issues, relative to an adversary, can cumulatively generate strategic advantage that can put a war on course to a successful conclusion.

For example, while he was perilously close to defeat at one point, by the end of Washington's campaign in early 1777, the Continental Army was still intact; had denied New Jersey to the British and their Hessians allies; had reinvigorated the cause; and had caused Howe to change his plans for 1777 which led to Burgoyne's defeat at Saratoga and the French entry into the war.

⁹²³ Morgan, *The Genius of George Washington*, 10, 13. Grant quoted in Young, *Around the World with General Grant*, 447-447, 615-616. Davis, *Soldier of Democracy*, 191. Ambrose, *Eisenhower: Soldier and President*, 208-209.

⁹²⁴ Hart, *Strategy*, 351. Cited in Lawrence Freedman, "The Meaning of Strategy, Part II: The Objectives," *Texas National Security Review* (January 31, 2018), Text, accessed March 12, 2018, <https://tnsr.org/2018/01/meaning-strategy-part-ii-objectives/>.

While the Confederates held the South and had maintained at least a stalemate against a series of Union commanders, by the end of Grant's 1864 campaign, the simultaneous advance of the Union armies forced Lee into a defensive position from which he could not escape; the Shenandoah Valley, the three-time Confederate invasion route to the North, was closed for good; Atlanta fell to the Union; and the South's ability to make war lay in ruin; all of which served to convince the Union electorate that Lincoln merited a second term, even if many in the North still had reservations about granting rights to former slaves.

Lastly, while Hitler's forces held the Atlantic Wall with significant resources and leadership talent (including the likes of Rommel), by the end of Eisenhower's campaign in France in 1944, the Allies were still united, despite bitter disagreements about major decisions; had destroyed the German army and taken hundreds of thousands of German prisoners; neutralized the V-weapon sites; opened up a critical second port to offset Hitler's decision to hold other German-held French ports; on the way to the recapture of Paris and the Allied advance on the western German border, which forced Hitler into a two-front war on home soil.

The judgments and decisions of Washington, Grant, and Eisenhower, all had a major impact on those strategic gains.

There are other unavoidable implications for military supreme command in specific and the practice of strategy in general. For instance, what standards should a country use to judge military supreme command?⁹²⁵ A better understanding of how supreme commanders think, when successful, might impact how a military selects and promotes general officers.⁹²⁶ Today, there are about 900 active duty generals and admirals in the American military, and it is likely that at least a few will rise in rank and be selected for supreme command in a time of war.⁹²⁷ This dissertation's findings should shed some light on such an important decision.

The wars in Iraq and Afghanistan have forced some recent attention on the selection of senior commanders, as Steven Metz has written, "It is time for Americans to think deeply about the skills their senior military leaders must have, otherwise we risk identifying those skills through the

⁹²⁵ Cohen, *Supreme Command*, 174.

⁹²⁶ Eliot A. Cohen, "Global challenges, U.S. national security strategy, and defense organization," *U.S. Senate Armed Services Committee* (October 22, 2015). Text, accessed January 2, 2016, http://www.armed-services.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/Cohen_10-22-15.pdf.

⁹²⁷ Lawrence Kapp, "General and Flag Officers in the U.S. Armed Forces: Background and Considerations for Congress," *Congressional Research Service Report* 7-5700 (February 18, 2016).

failures of military leaders who lack them.”⁹²⁸ Some of this discussion was activated by U.S. Army officer Paul Yingling’s criticism of commanders in Iraq, which he called “a failure in generalship.” Yingling pointed out that a survey of Army senior generals showed that only 25 percent held advanced social science or humanity degrees, which he charged left them lacking in cultural understanding and ultimately failing at the “estimation of strategic probabilities” required by senior leaders at war.⁹²⁹ The critique continued and grew to book form with Thomas Ricks’ argument that successful American generalship is dependent upon strict accountability for performance and swift relief for battlefield failure.⁹³⁰

The focus on accountability based on a simple, Darwinian method of relief has been around for quite some time. When Thucydides was taken by surprise by the Spartan Brasidas at Amphipolis in the Peloponnesian War, the Athenians held Thucydides responsible and exiled him for twenty years.⁹³¹ Or consider John Adams, effectively the American secretary of war during the Revolutionary War, who wrote to his wife in mid-August 1777: “I think we shall never defend a Post, until we shoot a general. After that we shall defend posts...We must trifle no more.”⁹³² So there is certainly a historical lineage to strict accountability measures for generals.

But accountability through relief cannot be the best way to find talented generals and supreme commanders. What of commanders who stumble early in their military careers, only to learn from those mistakes and use them to grow to future successes? (Which was the case in all three of these successful supreme commanders; all survived less-than-stellar starts to their lives in military leadership, yet went on to great success in supreme command.) This dissertation’s results show that to understand exemplary military leadership, one must look at both outcome and process.

Developing a finer sense for what drives success in supreme command is important because such a finding would help to discard the myths that currently persist about senior generals, such as this recent description,

⁹²⁸ Steven Metz, “Strategic Horizons: For U.S. Military, ‘Strategic Leadership’ Easier Said Than Done,” *World Politics Review* (24 October 2012), text, accessed October 30, 2012, <http://www.worldpoliticsreview.com/articles/12443/strategic-horizons-for-u-s-military-strategic-leadership-easier-said-than-done>.

⁹²⁹ Paul Yingling, “A failure in generalship,” *Armed Forces Journal* (May 1, 2007) Text, accessed January 2, 2016, <http://www.armedforcesjournal.com/a-failure-in-generalship/>.

⁹³⁰ Thomas E. Ricks, *The Generals: American Military Command from World War II to Today* (New York: The Penguin Press, 2012).

⁹³¹ Donald Kagan, *Thucydides: The Reinvention of History* (New York: Penguin Books, 2009), 8.

⁹³² Adams quoted in Cohen, *Conquered Into Liberty*, 222.

True generalship is an ability to borrow elements of Patton’s technical military competence and the moral pureness of Gandhi, mixed with Bill Clinton’s artful communication, Ryan Crocker’s diplomatic savvy, and George Kennan’s strategic acumen – in other words, to approximate a fraction of the soul of George Marshall.⁹³³

Absent a realistic understanding of competency in strategic leadership, extreme views proliferate. Which leaves us with the over-positive, near deification narrative shown above, and the super-negative, “lions led by donkeys,” post-World War I British variant.⁹³⁴ The upshot is that it seems right now, the lack of literature on exemplary supreme command and senior leadership has left us without a guiding light in the selection of senior military leaders. By evaluating successful cases, the processes, the outcomes, their judgments and decisions, in context against an adversary, we may better understand how to choose more wisely.

In general, this dissertation seems to validate some military thinking on the subject of leadership development, particularly the three-part model that places importance on education and training, on-the-job experience, and self-development.⁹³⁵ But this dissertation goes farther than most military literature in that it specifies that competence in a supreme commander (or senior military leader) should be defined as superior strategic judgment, supported by a character marked by empathy and grit, and underpinned by a series of other observable behaviors.

This dissertation also refutes the assertion, by Richard Betts, that “strategies cannot be evaluated because there are no agreed criteria for which are good or bad.”⁹³⁶ While it is undoubtedly true that strategies cannot and should not be assessed with absolute terms like “good” or “bad,” they can, in hindsight, be revealed as objectively better or worse than an adversary. In this way, strategies can be assessed. This is because war, and battle, often function as a “formal trial by combat.”⁹³⁷ For the most part, both sides on a battlefield chose to engage willfully and with full

⁹³³ Robert Bracknell, “Book Review,” *Joint Forces Quarterly*, Issue 69 (2nd Quarter 2013), 99-100.

⁹³⁴ Gary Sheffield, *The Chief: Douglas Haig and the British Army* (London: Aurum Press, 2012), 3.

⁹³⁵ Sullivan and Harper, *Hope is Not a Method: What Business Leaders Can Learn From America’s Army* (New York: Broadway Books, 1996), 215, 222.

⁹³⁶ Betts, “Is Strategy an Illusion?,” 5.

⁹³⁷ James Q. Whitman, “Winning the Field, but Not the War,” *New York Times* (May 3, 2013), text, accessed May 28, 2016, <http://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2013/05/03/winning-the-field-but-not-the-war/>.

opportunity for withdrawal. In this type of contest, supreme commanders exercise choice. And, using the historical record, these choices can be assessed.

Also, importantly, supreme commanders act on theory. “No matter how pragmatic a general may believe himself to be,” Colin Gray has written, “he cannot help but act upon some theory, singular or plural, of strategy.”⁹³⁸ Some have even expressed this with something approaching a mathematical equation,

[S]trategy demands a theory—a proposed causal explanation—that must stand up to rigorous analysis. A theory, in its most basic form, can be expressed as “if x, then y.” Thus, the strategist must be able to defend the statement, “If we use resource X, then we will achieve objective Y” (“or at least move in the direction of achieving objective Y”).⁹³⁹

Even if strategies are somewhat imprecise, and built upon human factors well beyond the control of any one person, these theories can be evaluated, in context and after-the-fact.

This dissertation also found that supreme command is about much more than pure military issues. The role of the supreme commander seems to include an important persuasive component that somewhat upends the stereotype of the commander barking orders.

Supreme commanders often transcend the different levels of war. In military circles, there are three levels of war: tactical, or where the fighting occurs; operational, or large groupings of tactical actions, organized and sequenced in campaigns; and strategic, where military actions are translated into political gains.⁹⁴⁰ The term “levels,” indicates a separateness, like hierarchical floors in a building.

Yet, in studying supreme commanders, the levels seem more permeable and interconnected than they might otherwise appear. Smoke on one floor is always apt to rise and influence another. After the war, Eisenhower said if it was not for the flat-bottomed boats used in the amphibious

⁹³⁸ Gray, *The Strategy Bridge*, 198.

⁹³⁹ Tami Davis Biddle, “Strategy and Grand Strategy: What Students and Practitioners Need to Know,” *Strategic Studies Institute and U.S. Army War College Press* (December 2015), text, accessed May 28, 2016, <http://www.strategicstudiesinstitute.army.mil/pubs/display.cfm?pubID=1305>.

⁹⁴⁰ Some might include a “political” level of war situated above the “strategic” level.

assaults, “we never could have landed over an open beach. The whole strategy of the war would have been different.”⁹⁴¹

For Military History and the Concept of Military Genius

Military historians have long written about the importance of a decisive battle, when a major, significant change in political or social affairs comes about as the result of a single day of fighting.⁹⁴² Such smashing, decisive victories are often the province of the Great Captains, akin to Thomas Carlyle’s great man theory of history, that certain individuals like Napoleon have been “the soul of the world’s history.”⁹⁴³

Historian Cathal Nolan has pointed out that this “allure of battle,” the pursuit of such great victories, has prodded too many military thinkers to believe in “an elusive military genius, that rare general who sees through to the essence of war and leads armies to decisive victory.”⁹⁴⁴ Instead of one-day triumphs, Nolan points out that most wars ultimately end from “exhaustion of morale and material.” Further,

Winning the day of battle is not enough. You have to win the campaign, then the year, then the decade. Victory must usher in political permanence. If it does not, after a pause to recover and rearm the war will continue.⁹⁴⁵

This much is correct; wars extend well beyond active fighting into peacetime. And, in this, Nolan does well to re-contextualize how we ought to think about military genius.

Actual military genius in the modern era, the kind that creates lasting societal or political change, should be less about the single battles of Great Captains than it is about the superior

⁹⁴¹ Dwight D. Eisenhower quoted by Eric Roberts, “The Higgins Boat,” *Stanford University Computer Science Department*, Text, accessed May 28, 2016, <http://cs.stanford.edu/people/eroberts/courses/ww2/projects/fighting-vehicles/higgins-boat.htm>.

⁹⁴² Paul K. Davis, *100 Decisive Battles: From Ancient Times to the Present* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), xi.

⁹⁴³ Thomas Carlyle, *On Heroes, Hero-Worship, and the Heroic in History* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1840), 2.

⁹⁴⁴ Cathal J. Nolan, *The Allure of Battle: A History of How Wars Have Been Won and Lost* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 7.

⁹⁴⁵ Nolan, *The Allure of Battle*, 2-4.

campaigns and sustained gains of supreme commanders. Today, what some would call “military genius” is not superhero-like, not flashy, and does not deliver instant knockouts; rather, a military genius for the modern age seems much more about patience and persuasion, consensus-building, and about “grinding rather than genius.”⁹⁴⁶ Real strategic change takes time. Instead of a single, perfect kill-shot to an adversary, it seems longer-term victories are earned in the modern era through a string of superior judgments over time, that, looked at cumulatively and comprehensively, are better than an opponent. In the end, it may be that Nolan was wrong to doubt the concept of military genius entirely. Instead, it might be that we have all simply misunderstood and mischaracterized the concept. Perhaps it is time for a new definition of “military genius.”

This dissertation does not argue that supreme commanders win wars on their own with some brilliant, lightning-strike idea that instantly ends an enemy’s efforts. But it does argue that there are some cases where a supreme commander’s judgment can make a difference, in part because, as Eliot Cohen has written, “now and again, one comes across generals with the stuff of greatness in them.”⁹⁴⁷ Of course, even the best and most famous generals get beaten.⁹⁴⁸ And there is no precise formula that can be developed from these past greats.⁹⁴⁹ What we are left with, then, as this dissertation has attempted to determine, is to improve the way we understand how supreme commanders succeed.

For other Academic Disciplines

Some phenomena, like successful supreme commanders, are incredibly difficult to understand.⁹⁵⁰ Edgar Puryear, Jr., conducted personal interviews with over one hundred senior general officers.⁹⁵¹ His work makes a significant contribution to the literature on senior military officers in the way of width. Yet at the same time, because these were in-person interviews, the subjects themselves were

⁹⁴⁶ Nolan, *The Allure of Battle*, 9-10.

⁹⁴⁷ Eliot A. Cohen, “Book Review: *Fighting the Cold War: A Soldier’s Memoir* by John R. Galvin” in *Foreign Affairs* Vol. 95, No. 1 (January/February 2016), 173.

⁹⁴⁸ Luttwak, *Strategy*, 258.

⁹⁴⁹ F. Constantin von Lossau quoted in Beatrice Heuser, *Reading Clausewitz* (London: Pimlico, 2002), 73.

⁹⁵⁰ Robert M. Gates, *A Passion for Leadership: Lessons on Change and Reform from Fifty Years of Public Service* (New York: Knopf, 2016), 17.

⁹⁵¹ Puryear Jr., *American Generalship, Character is Everything*, 338.

likely limited in how objective they can possibly be about themselves and their performance in military command.

This dissertation, owing to the depth it provides in the study of successful supreme commanders, offers social psychologists, and those that study leadership, deeper research into senior military leadership. This contributes to the body of literature on an enduring societal role: those charged with leading military forces. There would appear to be follow-on research opportunities that come from studying such a class of individuals. Of the six supreme commanders looked at in this dissertation, five would have been considered to have had a troubled youth.⁹⁵² The same might be said for several modern-era American commanders from the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.⁹⁵³ Social psychologists would do well to study these senior officers, their childhood difficulties, the likely personal resilience gained, and these effects on later-life military career success.

Business literature is often closely associated with leadership studies and organizational psychology. Research in these fields has found that “secondary skills,” like an individual’s ability to work well with others beyond formal education, are often key determinants in latter-career success.⁹⁵⁴ The findings from this dissertation, applied to organizational psychology, would support such a thesis.

This dissertation’s findings would also contribute to the robust and well-studied role of the chief executive officer in business. While research has found that the leader of a particular company matters quite a bit, the problem is that there is no settled understanding of what qualities matter the most in this particular leader.⁹⁵⁵ This dissertation’s findings would seem to apply indirectly to the role of the leader in a business environment.

⁹⁵² As previously covered in this chapter, all three successful supreme commanders had difficulties in youth. Additionally, while Howe’s childhood appears relatively normal (if aristocratic), Lee had a disgraced American Revolutionary War cavalryman for a father, and Hitler had a suffocating mother.

⁹⁵³ General George Casey’s father died when he was 22; General John Abizaid’s father was hobbled by terrible emphysema and nearly died when Abizaid was 16; Generals Peter Chiarelli and David Petraeus were the sons of new immigrants. David Cloud and Greg Jaffe, *The Fourth Star: Four Generals and the Epic Struggle for the Future of the United States Army* (New York: Three Rivers Press, 2009), 3, 10, 13, 16.

⁹⁵⁴ Michael S. Malone, “The Secret to Midcareer Success,” *Wall Street Journal* (February 12, 2018), A17.

⁹⁵⁵ Nicholas Bloom, professor of economics at Stanford University, quoted in Stephen Dubner, “What does a C.E.O. Actually Do?” *Freakonomics* (January 17, 2018), text, accessed March 8, 2018, <http://freakonomics.com/podcast/c-e-o-actually/>.

There is also some applicability in this dissertation to behavioral economics and the study of judgments and decisions. Judgments are formed when a person assigns odds as to the likelihood or risk in a particular course of action. Decision-making is the next step, which is the action taken as a result of a judgment.⁹⁵⁶ For example, while many others form judgments, only the supreme commander makes both a judgment and then a decision. Today, much of this research is gathered in mathematical labs and with “hypothetical gambles” where odds are “explicitly stated.”⁹⁵⁷ Because this dissertation studied the judgments made and decisions taken by supreme commanders in depth, it is poised to make a contribution to this sort of academic study.

There is one other avenue of continued study that may be of value. The last collaborative project of Israeli psychologists Daniel Kahneman and Amos Tversky was into what they called the “simulation heuristic,” which they considered the human susceptibility to let imagined future scenarios impact real-world decisions.⁹⁵⁸ This sort of thinking would certainly impact supreme commanders at war, and a researcher would find powerful examples in this dissertation’s case studies. Historian and strategist Donald Stoker has commented on such an occurrence in those charged with fighting a limited war, who often let “the fear of what might potentially happen in the future cloud their ability to actually deal with the problem that they have on their hands.”⁹⁵⁹

6.4 *Final Thoughts*

Twenty years later, when J.C. Wylie came back to evaluate *Military Strategy*, he reconsidered the book. His chief accomplishment, he thought, was in having developed a theory, “a pattern of relationships designed to account for events that have already happened with the expectation that this pattern will allow us to predict or foresee what will come to pass when comparable events take place in the future.” As with Wylie’s work, this dissertation identified a pattern in the “military mind.”⁹⁶⁰

⁹⁵⁶ Michael Lewis, *The Undoing Project: A Friendship that Changed our Minds* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2017), 252.

⁹⁵⁷ Lewis, *The Undoing Project*, 252.

⁹⁵⁸ Lewis, *The Undoing Project*, 300.

⁹⁵⁹ Donald Stoker, “How To Think About Limited War (Without Limiting Your Thinking),” *Changing Character of War, Oxford University* (January 24, 2018). Audio, at 24 minutes, accessed March 8, 2018, <http://www.cw.ox.ac.uk/events/2018/1/23/how-to-think-about-limited-war-without-limiting-your-thinking-by-professor-don-stoker-vienna-diplomatic-academy>.

⁹⁶⁰ Wylie, *Military Strategy*, 96, 8-9.

While not predictive, this research has made a contribution. In campaigns where both sides had an opportunity to achieve their aims, the successful supreme commanders exercised superior judgment and decisions relative to their adversaries, which translated to critical campaign gains and eventually led to victories in war. Those superior judgments were accompanied by a distinct sense of empathy as well as grit, and the successful supreme commanders shared several characteristics in common: they possessed sharp political instincts as all were two-term presidents, they were writers and effective communicators, they had mixed records with formal education but were all lifelong self-students, and each overcame childhood challenges.

These findings may not surprise or stun academics; much will have been familiar to military historians. However, it is equally true that all readers should find in this research a fresh perspective and a new way of thinking about the study of supreme command. This is the only such work exclusively about the mind and the role of the supreme commander at war. Hopefully, it will not be the last.

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