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## Options of Command: the Crucial Command Decisions That Could Have Altered the History of World War II

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of the cold war, Kimball seems overly dogmatic. Churchill and Truman are clearly the villains; Stalin's paranoid suspicions usually turn out to have "some basis in fact"; the Poles are reproached for not being realistic enough to smile happily as they handed over their country to the Russians; and of course no notice is taken in the narrative of such minor embarrassments as the Katyn Forest massacre (even though Churchill writes of it at length) or the Poltava affair, when the negligence of the Russian air defense command permitted numerous American strategic bombers to be destroyed on the ground by a Luftwaffe hardly at the top of its form.

Roosevelt, of course, is lauded as appropriately flexible in his management of the prickly Russians. This latter point, by the way, is quite valid. Roosevelt did hope to win over the Russians by fair treatment, and he certainly wished to keep all of his options open in dealing with them. However, as with Lincoln's desire for a policy of leniency toward the South in 1865, this did not mean that this policy was immutable; for just as Lincoln may well have been pushed to harder measures by Southern intransigence, so might FDR have been by Russian intransigence. That, too, is flexibility!

All of these views of Kimball's may or may not be tenable interpretations, but they all do need better documentation than Kimball provides. Basically, Kimball has undertaken two jobs in this work. The first—editor of a massive and defini-

tive volume of important correspondence—he has done superbly well; the second—author of a book about that correspondence—he has done less well. But in attempting both he has aimed high, striving mightily to transcend the usual and dull manner of this genre of scholarly work.

Thus, Kimball must be esteemed for daring something rather different and creative but gently chided for not quite carrying it off.

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Dupuy, Trevor N. *Options of Command: the Crucial Command Decisions That Could Have Altered the History of World War II*. New York: Hippocrene Books, 1984. 303pp. \$19.95

Some historians find it entertaining to contemplate the great "might have beens" of history—the so-called "turning points" where a different course of action might have changed the entire course of history. The temptation to indulge in this kind of activity is even greater for the military historian, who can assume the role of the great generals of the past, rectifying their strategic and tactical errors, with, of course, the assistance of large helpings of hindsight, to change a disastrous defeat into a tremendous victory. Napoleon I at Waterloo and Napoleon III at Sedan are two well-known examples, but the Second World War is an even more fruitful source for this kind of barren speculation. Colonel Trevor N. Dupuy and his colleagues in the Historical Evaluation and Research Organization have

allowed themselves the luxury of analyzing ten of the more important battles of that war and have sought to discover what would have happened if the commanders on one or other of the losing sides had adopted a different set of options or taken an alternative decision to the ones that had led to the disaster in the first place.

The first battle to be so dealt with is an obvious one—that of the Ardennes in May 1940 which sealed the fate of France. Every armchair military buff has reminded the French army commanders since 1940 (as if they needed to be reminded) of the appalling consequences of their failure properly to reinforce the Ardennes front against a possible German armored onslaught. In Colonel Dupuy's account the French actually do realize the importance of that front and take sufficient precautions to stop both Guderian's and Reinhardt's tanks on the Meuse. The ensuing Allied counteroffensive led to the recovery of most of Belgium and the assassination of Hitler by the German General Staff who thereupon initiated peace negotiations. Inevitably this reconstruction, like all the others, necessitates the taking of considerable liberties with the historical record. Daladier has to be replaced as French prime minister in September 1939 by the "sharp, intelligent" Paul Reynaud, who immediately dismisses Gamelin and replaces him by General Weygand as Allied Commander in Chief, who, in turn, appoints de Gaulle as his deputy. This then is Colonel Dupuy's winning

team of May 1940. It all rather lacks conviction, especially as Colonel Dupuy seems to have more confidence in Weygand's military abilities than either his contemporaries, or even Weygand himself, displayed at any time before, during, and after the events of May and June 1940.

The authors next turn to the Battle of Britain, suggesting a possible scenario, for if Goering had ordered the Luftwaffe to continue attacking RAF bases and radar stations after 7 September 1940, leading to the collapse of Fighter Command, Hitler would then have launched *Operation Sea Lion*—the invasion of the United Kingdom. Few will be surprised by the outcome: the Royal Navy, despite sustaining severe losses, sank the bulk of the invading force, leaving the British Army to mop up the few German troops who managed to land on British beaches.

Colonel Dupuy and his associates then turn their attention to the Eastern Front. What would have been the result if, in 1939, Stalin had recognized that Hitler was merely biding his time before attacking the Soviet Union instead of, as actually happened, ignoring all warnings of an impending German assault in 1941? If Stalin had built up in secret in the interior of Russia a Soviet Army armed with modern equipment, this powerful force could have counter-attacked the invading Germans in July 1941, taking them completely by surprise and inflicting a severe defeat on them. Then Hitler would have been murdered by his generals and a cease-fire immediately proclaimed

on all fronts. Moreover Stalin would have “emerged as one of the greatest geniuses of modern times.”

The authors then examine the Battle of Moscow. Would Germany have been more successful against the Soviet Union if Hitler had been forced by his generals to order the main German forces to attack Moscow instead of shifting, as he did, the weight of the German offensive away from the center to the flanks—to the south, and to Leningrad in the north? The generals claimed, after the event, that they had been horrified by the decision, and that had their advice for a massive assault on Moscow been followed, the Soviets would have been decisively defeated. The authors deny that this could have happened. They claim that the Moscow front could have been held by the Soviets even against far stronger German forces than were actually thrown at the city, and think that a check to the Germans here would have enabled the Red army to knock out Germany earlier than was the actual case.

The next essay deals with the hoary old chestnut of a United States which paid heed to the numerous warnings, culled from *Magic* intercepts and other sources that the Japanese were about to attack Pearl Harbor on 7 December 1941. No reader of this book can expect any prizes for guessing the likely outcome in that case. The following case history, that of the Battle of Midway, speculates as to what would have happened if Yamamoto had suspected that the United States had

broken Japan’s naval codes and if he had acted upon that suspicion. In this case, however, the ensuing Japanese victory would not have been decisive. True, it would have prolonged the war, but America’s superior industrial and economic strength would have told in the end.

The rest of the essays in this book follow the same pattern: what if Germany had won the Battle of Stalingrad, thrown back the Allied landing forces on the beaches of Normandy, or succeeded in breaking through the thin Allied defenses during the Ardennes counteroffensive in December 1944? The authors conclude that in all these cases very little would have changed in the long run. Axis successes would have been merely temporary in nature since Germany and Japan had no hope of ultimately defeating the powerful coalition they had raised against themselves. Thus Allied victories would have been decisive and the war would have ended earlier than it did; Axis victories would have made no difference since “sometimes the forces involved—geographical, numerical, industrial, and technological—have so predetermined the outcome that not even the most brilliant or imaginative decisions could change the inevitable outcome.”

If this is true (and it certainly seems to be so in the twentieth century, although perhaps rather more problematical before 1850), one is tempted to ask why bother to write a book devoted to changing defeats into victories if the final

outcome was in any case predetermined by other factors? I am afraid that I do not find this kind of theorizing either rewarding or useful. It seems to me to be both sterile and misleading. It may be, as the authors assert an enjoyable "game," but it is not history.

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Horner, D.M. *High Command: Australia and Allied Strategy 1939-1945*. Winchester, Mass.: Allen and Unwin, 1982. 556pp. \$40

For an American, even one familiar with the history of the Second World War, D.M. Horner's book comes as a revelation. Americans know that Australians fought in the Western Desert, Syria, Greece, Malaya, and the South Pacific, but the problems facing the Australian government and High Command generally elude them.

Australia, Horner points out, had to operate as a small power engaged in coalition warfare with Great Power partners, Great Britain and the United States. In World War I Australia simply sent troops to the Middle East and the Western Front where they operated under British direction. Australia also occupied German holdings in the South Pacific. By contrast in World War II Australia had not only to participate in Imperial defense but also provide for home defense against the Japanese.

This situation created serious problems for the Australian govern-

ment since the British and Americans often regarded Australian concerns as secondary to their own. The Australians therefore had to use a number of techniques to assert their views, including face-to-face meetings with the Great Power leaders, the refusal to commit troops according to allied wishes and the establishment of a good fighting reputation which in turn enhanced the impact of Australian proposals.

The war was not without friction with the allies. The British, for example, often ignored Australian advice and sensibilities. British commanders in the Middle East tried to use Australian divisions as *ad hoc* formations parceling out brigades and even battalions instead of placing them under direct Australian divisional and corps headquarters. In the Pacific MacArthur became Prime Minister Curtin's chief military advisor and like the British avoided the creation of higher echelon Australian commands.

Horner also explodes some of the war myths, so necessary at the time to sustain the nation's morale. General Blamey appears to be at best an average commander whose personal ambition led him to advocate strategic proposals designed as much to enhance his own role in the war as to win it. Prime Minister Curtin lacked the military expertise to deal effectively with MacArthur and was overly diffident in defending Australian interests.

The war, nevertheless, ended in victory and Horner concludes that on the whole Australia played a signifi-