

Sandhurst Occasional Papers

No 9



We Have Been Here Before: the
Evolution of the Doctrine of
Decentralised Command in the
British Army 1905-1989

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SANDHURST OCCASIONAL PAPER NO 9

Series Editor: Sean McKnight
(Director of Studies, RMAS)

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ISBN: 978-1-907628-08-5

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‘Modern fighting makes heavy demands on every individual engaged from the highest to the lowest. Not only must the superior officer possess the tactical skill conferred by practice and professional zeal; but the subordinate leader must be so accustomed to responsibility as to be capable, when necessary of using his own judgement to further the general plan...

‘The backbone of a thorough military training is the careful and gradual instruction of the individual, officer or soldier, in every duty he may be called upon to fulfil, and the development to the utmost of his mental and physical powers.

‘But such development is impossible unless free play is given to individual intelligence and initiative.’¹

Field Marshal Lord Roberts, Commander-in-Chief, Preface, Infantry Training 1902.

Contemporary British Military Doctrine

The Chief of General Staff’s preface to *ADP Operations*, published in December 2010, states that this is the ‘British Army’s capstone doctrine, containing the enduring philosophy and principles of our approach to operations’ reflecting both the ‘rapidly evolving dynamics of the contemporary operation environment’, but also the enduring nature of conflict.’² It reminds the reader that the Manoeuvrist Approach and Mission Command, remain the two central tenets of British military doctrine and are as important now as they were when first articulated in 1989.

The introduction of the Manoeuvrist Approach as British military doctrine was due to the influence of American manoeuvre warfare theory and the adoption of the AirLand Doctrine by the United States Armed Forces in the 1980s, which in turn were influenced by German tactical theory from the two world wars.³ The term ‘Manoeuvrist’ was coined by the

¹ . Field Marshal Lord Roberts, Commander-in-Chief, ‘Preface,’ War Office, *Infantry Training (Provisional) 1902*, HMSO, London, 1902, p.2.

² . ‘Foreword, Chief of General Staff,’ DCDC, MOD, *ADP Operations*, Shrivenham, 2010, p. iii.

³ . Hew Strachan, ‘Operational Art and Britain, 1909-2009,’ John Andreas Olsen and Martin van Creveld, *The Evolution of Operational Art: From Napoleon to the Present*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, pp. 96-136. Richard Simkin, ‘Manoeuvre Theory and the Small Army’, *British Army Review*, no. 78, 1984, 5-13.

British doctrinal writing team with the intent of making it clear that the doctrine implied much more than ‘manoeuvre,’ being an ‘indirect approach which emphasises understanding and targeting the conceptual and moral components of an adversary’s fighting power as well as attacking the physical component... It concentrates on seizing the initiative and applying strength against weakness and vulnerability, while protecting the same on our own side. The contemporary Manoeuvrist Approach requires a certain attitude of mind, practical knowledge and a philosophy of command that promotes initiative.’⁴

Key to this are the last three points, an attitude of mind, practical knowledge, and a philosophy of command: – ‘Mission Command’, which is the second core tenet of British military doctrine and is a command philosophy based on ‘centralised intent and decentralised execution.’⁵ This is a basis for action across the continuum of warfare. It sets out the philosophy but requires education, training and practice at individual and collective levels across the spectrum to give it substance.

The introduction of this doctrine in 1989 is hailed as critical moment in the history of the British Army. Professor Gary Sheffield states in *ADP Operations* that the ‘reinvention of the British Army since 1989 as a doctrinally based organisation is as profound a revolution as any experienced in its 350 year history.’⁶ He then goes on to place substantial caveats on that statement and shows that *Field Service Regulations*, first published in 1905, was indeed army doctrine that had a powerful influence on the British Army’s approach to war fighting in the 20th Century. However Sheffield places limits on the influence of published doctrine prior to 1988 as being more honoured in the breach than the observance and that the

Richard Simpkin, *Race to the Swift: Thoughts on Twenty-First Century Warfare*, Brassey’s, London, 1985; Richard Hooker, *Maneuver Warfare: An Anthology*, Presidio, Novato, CA, 1993; William S Lind, *Maneuver Warfare Handbook*, Presidio, Novato, 1993; Robert Leonhard, *The Art of Maneuver: Maneuver Warfare Theory and AirLand Battle*, Presidio, Novato, CA, 1994; Eitan Shamir, *Transforming Command: The pursuit of mission command in the U.S., British, and Israeli Armies*, Stanford Security Studies, Stanford, 2010.

⁴ . *ADP Operations*, p. 5-2.

⁵ . *Ibid.*, p. 5-3.

⁶ . *Ibid.*, p. E-2.

British Army has made a ‘cult of pragmatism, flexibility and an empirical approach’.⁷

This paper takes issue with this. It agrees with my colleague, Dr Paul Latawski’s assessment that the adoption of the Manoeuvrist Approach has led to a case of doctrinal amnesia in the British Army and argues that the ‘cult of pragmatism, flexibility and an empirical approach’ was at the core of the British Army’s *Field Service Regulations*.⁸ What we today see as a product of the British regimental system with each adopting its own methods independent on any central direction, reflects our general ignorance of 20th Century British military doctrine which always espoused a similar spirit of manoeuvre and offensive action.⁹ This written doctrine was based on a command philosophy of centralised intent and decentralised execution, and is no different in intent to contemporary British military doctrine today – what it did not cater for is the operational level of war – the discussion of which is outside the scope of this paper.

The aspiration of military forces throughout the ages has been always to “fight smart;” to move more quickly and apply its combat power more effectively than its enemy. Lord Roberts summarised this at the tactical level in his Preface to *Infantry Training 1902*: ‘the aim of which is to secure at the decisive moment of battle, the greatest development of fire, from the most effective direction, and under the strictest general control.’¹⁰ In essence this incorporates combined arms manoeuvre which to achieve effect is dependent on decentralised command. Today this is at the heart of British Military Doctrine and was also the intent behind the first publication of *Field Service Regulations* in 1905.

⁷ . *Ibid*. This is also the theme of Brian Holden Reid ‘War Fighting Doctrine and the British Army,’ Annex A to Chapter 1, Chief of General Staff, *ADP vol. 1 Operations*, 1994 and it is central to Strachan’s argument in ‘Operational Art and Britain, 1909-2009, pp.96-97.

⁸ . Dr Paul Latawski, ‘The Inherent Tensions in Military Doctrine, *Sandhurst Occasional Papers No.5*, Royal Military Academy Sandhurst 2011; Dr Paul Latawski, ‘Marching to the Drumbeat of Intellectual Fashion: Hybrid Warfare, Military Doctrine and the Absence of Historical Perspective,’ Paper delivered at the Whither Warfare Conference on *Modern Warfare: Past Lessons, Future Conflicts: The Challenge Facing Military Education in the 21st Century*, RMA, 5-6 May 2011.

⁹ . To a degree this can be excused by the direction at the beginning of each new doctrinal publication to destroy its predecessor.

¹⁰ . *Infantry Training (Provisional) 1902*, p.2.

This paper will argue that the British Army introduced a formal doctrine in 1905 which was further consolidated in 1909. The purpose of that doctrine was, as Hew Strachan states, ‘to create common standards and routines’ with the intention ‘to make a large organization function along similar lines and pull towards common goals.’¹¹ What we would today term as the tactics, techniques and procedures (TTP) of the British Army evolved during the First World War and were consolidated into written doctrine in the interwar period. Doctrine was centred at the tactical level at corps and below, with emphasis for training at the divisional-level. Post-1918 British Army doctrine expanded on this and looked at the range of contingencies at what it termed the ‘strategical’ level and produced written doctrine to a set of principles to allow for a ‘war of the first magnitude’ situation as the worst-case scenario. It accepted the reality of a spectrum of warfare and catered for it in published doctrine. In the myriad small wars on the Northwest Frontier of India, in-theatre doctrine was published to reflect the particular circumstances of these campaigns. In each case the aspiration was to achieve ‘mobility’ or manoeuvre through centralised intent and decentralised execution. This was not always realised but was aspired to and remained a constant in the annual cycle of training by which doctrine was disseminated.

The British Army in the Second World War found itself with two distinctively different doctrinal strands in its published tactical doctrine. This distinguished the infantry-tank-artillery combined arms doctrine of the infantry divisions from that of the armoured-centric doctrine of the armoured formations. Each espoused decentralised command, but armoured regiments and brigades rigidly believed that it was doctrinally unsound to integrate with the lorry-borne infantry of the infantry brigades, even when they became part of the organisation of the armoured division. This fissure was not fixed until late 1944 in Northwest Europe and still influenced post-war doctrine.

Post-1945 British doctrine was centred at the tactical-level of corps and below. It lacked a central capstone publication and relied on a series of tactical manuals that reflected the changing circumstances facing Britain and her armed forces. It was pragmatic and accepted that decentralised command was the inevitable reality of the modern battlefield. This was reflected in the

¹¹ . Strachan, ‘Operational Art and Britain, 1909-2009,’ p. 97

training cycle. The introduction of *Design for Military Operations – the British Military Doctrine* in 1989 is radical in its introduction of the operational level of war, but not for what it is often credited most for, as it did not introduce the first formal doctrine into the British Army.¹² It simply re-established a capstone document which had gone into abeyance post-1945.

Establishing a British Army Doctrine 1905-1914

The true revolution in the British Army was the adoption of *Field Service Regulations* in 1905. It was this that turned the British Army into a doctrinally based organisation. The war in South Africa (1899-1902) caused a major re-examination of tactical doctrine in the British Army. It accelerated the pace of the move away from the linear formations that had been the tactical drill adopted by the British Army from the Prussian Army of Frederick the Great in the 18th Century to the use of extended infantry linear formations and the advance under fire by section rushes. It had been first discussed in Colonel (later Field Marshal Sir Garnet) Wolseley's *The Soldier's Pocket-Book for Field Service*, published privately in 1869.¹³ It became the subject of intense debate in British military circles after the Franco-Prussian War of 1870-1871 and gathered further momentum during the war in South Africa.¹⁴ This culminated, at Field Marshal Earl Roberts' direction, in the drafting of *Infantry Training 1902* and its successor *Combined Training 1905*.¹⁵ *Infantry Training 1902* emphasised the need for concentration of fire and speed in manoeuvre to be achieved by the local initiative of commanders. It deliberately scorned standard drills and routines, demanding that every practice be different.

'It is therefore strictly forbidden either to formulate or to practice a normal form of either attack or defence. To the training of troops in movements before the enemy general principles and broad

¹² . Chief of General Staff, *Design for Military Operations – The British Military Doctrine*, 1989.

¹³ . Colonel Wolseley, *The Soldier's Pocket-Book for Field Service*, Spottiswoode, London, 1869.

¹⁴ . Sir Garnet Wolseley, *The Soldier's Pocket-Book*, 1874, quoted in Lloyd, *A Review of the History of the Infantry*, p.231. 'The Training of Infantry for Attack,' (*United Services Journal*, August 1899), published in Colonel GFR Henderson, *The Science of War: A Collection of Essays and Lectures 1891-1903*, Longmans, Green and Co, London, 1908, pp.338-364. General H Langlois, (Late Member of the Superior Council of War), *Lessons from Two Recent Wars [The Russo-Turkish War and the South African War]*, Translated for the General Staff, War Office, from the French, HMSO, London, 1909.

¹⁵ . War Office, *Infantry Training 1902*, HMSO, London 1902. Roberts' role in this is the subject of Lt-General Sir Gerald Ellison, 'Lord Roberts and the General Staff,' *The Nineteenth Century*, Dec 1932, pp. 722-732. I am grateful to John Hussey for bringing this article to my attention.

*rules alone are applicable; and the practical knowledge of these principles and rules can only be instilled by intelligent instruction and constantly diversified exercises on broken ground.*¹⁶

It accepted that effective decentralisation of command was impossible without training and practice and echoed the words of Lord Roberts' preface.

*'Since the conditions of modern warfare render decentralisation of command in action an absolute necessity, no good results are to be expected unless the subordinate leaders have been trained to use their wits, and unless they have been given ample opportunities of acting on their own judgement in attack and defence, and have constantly, in peace practices, been called upon to consider the necessity of departing from their original orders.'*¹⁷

The impact of these reforms was seen in the improved standards of field training and rifle firing. Volley firing was abolished and field firing ranges established throughout the country. Von Lobell's Annual Return on European armies reported in 1904 that British infantry showed great skill in the use of ground, that frontal attacks were not used and that attacks against entrenched positions were not judged to be successful unless a superiority of six to one was achieved.¹⁸ The lessons from field training and annual manoeuvres were incorporated into written doctrine and culminated in *Field Service Regulations Part 1 Combined Training 1905* the first formal doctrinal manual in the British Army.

The first chapter, "Issue of Orders," defines orders and sets out the principle of 'centralised intent and decentralisation of execution' based on the need to achieve mobility and speed of execution through swift and efficient command procedures. It sets out a command philosophy that has generally guided British military doctrine to this day, and is quoted in full.

'It will often happen that local circumstances, impossible to foresee, may render the precise execution of the orders given to subordinate leaders not only unsuitable but impracticable. Moreover, when it is impossible, as must often be the case, to issue more than

¹⁶ *Infantry Training 1902*, p.191.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ . Dunlop, *The Development of the British Army*, p.226.

very general instructions, the attainment of the object aimed at must be left to the initiative and intelligence of these leaders.'

*'Decentralisation of command, and a full recognition of the responsibilities of subordinates in action, are thus absolutely necessary; and leaders must train their subordinates not only to work intelligently and resolutely in accordance with brief and very general instructions, but also to take upon themselves, whenever it may be necessary, the responsibility of departing from, or from varying, the orders they may have received.'*¹⁹

Field Service Regulations Part 1: Combined Training 1905 set out a number of guiding principles. 'A formal order should never be departed from' if it can be referred to the originator 'without losing an opportunity or endangering the command.' However a 'departure from either the letter or the spirit of an order is justified if the subordinate who assumes the responsibility is conscientiously satisfied that he is acting as a superior would order him to act if he were present.' It demanded that officers be proactive so that if a 'subordinate, in the absence of a superior, neglects to depart from the letter of his orders, when such departure is clearly demanded by circumstances and failure ensues, he will be held responsible for such failure.' Having decided to depart from an order the officer should at once inform the issuer of his actions.²⁰

This approach to command was matched by an understanding of the importance of a combined arms approach as encapsulated in the manual's title. 'Each arm of the service possesses a power peculiar to itself; yet is dependent to a greater or lesser degree, upon the aid and co-operation of the other arms.'²¹ This was drawn from the realities of battle experience in South Africa and as we have seen was first articulated in the infantry training manuals issued in 1902. On the formation of the Army General Staff in 1905 it became a central tenant of British Army doctrine.²² Arms manuals were rewritten to reflect the doctrinal principles set out in *Field Service Regulations 1905* with the publication of *Cavalry Training* in 1904, *Infantry*

¹⁹ . War Office, *Field Service Regulations, Part 1. Combined Training*. War Office, London, 1905, p.6.

²⁰ . *Ibid.*, p.6.

²¹ . *Ibid.*, p.99.

²² . The evolution and testing of the Field Service Regulations is detailed in John Gooch, *The Plans of War: The General Staff and British Military Strategy c.1900-1916*, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1974, pp.108-117.

Training in 1905, the *Manual of Engineering* in 1905 and *Field Artillery Training* in 1907.²³ Each emphasised the need for decentralization of command in battle. These publications were superseded with the introduction of *Field Service Regulations 1909* which was issued in two parts.

The 'Introduction' to *Field Service Regulations Part I Operations 1909* confirmed its centrality to British Army doctrine.

*'The principles given in this manual have been evolved by experience as generally applicable to the leading of troops. They are to be regarded by all ranks as authoritative, for their violation in the past has often been followed by mishap, if not by disaster. They should be so thoroughly impressed on the mind of every commander that, whenever he has to come to a decision in the field, he instinctively gives them their full weight.'*²⁴

Field Service Regulations were drafted in two parts by a writing team headed by Major-General Douglas Haig who as Director of Military Training carefully oversaw its introduction through a series of staff rides and conferences as the British Army's core doctrine 'for the training for war, and the organization in war, of the whole British Army.'²⁵

Field Service Regulations Part I 1909 examines 'inter-communication and orders' in much more detail than the 1905 edition, however the guiding command philosophy remains unchanged.²⁶ *Field Service Regulations Part II Organisation and Administration 1909* laid down the preparatory measures, mobilisation procedures and the war organisation, insisting that the 'duties and functions of officers, units and commands in the Lines of Communication and at base should be as clearly defined as those of a Division or a Brigade in the Field Army.'²⁷ This consolidated the major

²³ . Colonel John K Dunlop, *The Development of the British Army 1899-1914*, Methuen, London, 1938, p.226.

²⁴ . General Staff, War Office, *Field Service Regulations, Part I Operations 1909*. War Office, London, Reprinted with Amendments 1914, p.2.

²⁵ . Dunlop, *The Development of the British Army 1899-1914*, p.291. Gooch, *The Plans of War*, pp. 113-115.

²⁶ . *Field Service Regulations Part I 1909*, pp.27-28.

²⁷ . General Staff, War Office, *Field Service Regulations, Part II. Organization and Administration. 1909*. HMSO, London, Reprinted with Amendments 1914; Dunlop, *The Development of the British Army 1899-*

organisational changes occurring in the British Army which saw the establishing of new divisional and corps organisations in anticipation of a major commitment to Empire or to a continental war of a potential British Expeditionary Force of 120,000 men, based on two army corps; numbering six infantry and one cavalry division.²⁸

The divisional organisation became the basis for training and this was reflected in the peacetime organisation of the Army. It established divisional structures in being, which although seriously under strength, conducted annual manoeuvres at formation and Corps level in anticipation of their war role.²⁹ The unit training cycle emphasised the importance of field training in the preparation of the unit for war by using common principles and procedures laid down in *Field Service Regulations*.³⁰

The publication of *Field Service Regulations 1909* led to the publication of a series of revised arms and services manuals including: *Infantry Training 1911*, *Manual of Field Engineering 1911*, *Royal Army Medical Corps Training 1911*, *Field Artillery Training (Provisional) 1912*, and *Cavalry Training 1912*; all of which were cross-referenced to *Field Service Regulations*. Each stressed the ‘combined employment of the various arms’ and examined their respective employment in war within the divisional framework.³¹ A new edition of *Field Artillery Training* was issued in 1914, but the most significant publication in that year was *Infantry Training (4-Company Organization) 1914*. This introduced revolutionary changes in the structure of British infantry battalions with the adoption of four rifle company organisation. This had been the subject of fierce debate between those who wanted to retain the traditional eight infantry companies in the battalion and those led by Brigadier-General Ivor Maxse who

1914, pp. 292-293. John Hussey, “‘Without an Army and Without any Preparation to Equip One’: The Financial and Industrial Background to 1914,” *British Army Review*, 109, April 1995, pp.76-84

²⁸ . Hew Strachan, ‘The British Way in Warfare,’ in David Chandler and Ian Beckett (eds), *The Oxford History of the British Army*, Oxford University Press, Oxford and New York, 1996, p.407; Hew Strachan, ‘The British Army, its General Staff and the Continental Commitment 1904-1914,’ in David French and Brian Holden Reid (eds) *The British General Staff: Reform and Innovation, c1890-1939*, Frank Cass, London, 2002, pp. 75-94.

²⁹ . Dunlop, *The Development of the British Army 1899-1914*, pp. 262-265.

³⁰ . Field-Marshal Sir William Robertson, *From Private to Field-Marshal*, Constable and Co, London, 1921, pp.155-165.

³¹ . General Staff, War Office, *Infantry Training 1911*, HMSO, London, 1911; General Staff, War Office, *Cavalry Training 1912*, HMSO, London 1912; General Staff, War Office, *Field Artillery Training (Provisional) 1912*, HMSO, London, 1912.

recommended the introduction of platoon organisations, commanded by officers, into the infantry company structure, with four companies in each battalion. Maxse considered these changes vital if one was to give full effect to the command and control of fire and movement in infantry tactics.³²

This enshrined the philosophy of decentralisation at the tactical level within units, given weight by the establishment of the infantry platoon-organisation of four sections as the primary tactical infantry subunit under the command of an officer. It stated that a commander in battle influenced the course of any action by the quality of his initial orders and once battle was joined by the employment of his reserve. It repeated a paragraph included in previous publications.

'In view of the importance of decentralization of command, it is essential that superior officers, including battalion commanders, should never trespass on the proper sphere of action of their subordinates. Personal example has undoubtedly an extraordinary influence, especially under heavy fire, and there are times when every other consideration must be sacrificed to leading or steadying the troops. But any attempt to exercise personal control over all portions of the force must inevitably lead to the neglect of other duties'.³³

The key to achieving this confidence in subordinate commanders and disseminating the practical application of this doctrine Army-wide was training. It was only through training that individuals and units could achieve the level of skills that gave them the pragmatism and flexibility to deal confidently with the situations they would face in battle. The annual training cycle for individual, unit and formation training was laid down in *Training and Manoeuvre Regulations* published in 1909 and again in 1913.³⁴

³² . Brigadier-General F I Maxse, GOC 1st Guards Brigade, Aldershot, 'Battalion Organization,' *Journal of the United Services Institute*, Volume LVI, January 1912, No.407, pp.53-86; Lieutenant-Colonel J Campbell, 'Infantry in Battle,' *Journal of the United Services Institute*, Volume LVI, March 1912, No.409, pp. 349-367. Captain RJ Kentish, 'the Case for the Eight Company Battalion,' *Journal of the United Services Institute*, vol. LVI, July 1912, No.413, pp. 891-927. John Baynes, *Far From A Donkey: The Life of General Sir Ivor Maxse, KCB, CVO, DSO*, Brassey's, London, 1995, p. 104.

³³ . General Staff, War Office, *Infantry Training (4-Company Organization) 1914*, HMSO, London, 1914 (Reprinted 1916), p.121.

³⁴ . General Staff, War Office, *Training and Manoeuvre Regulations 1909*, HMSO, London, 1909; General Staff, War Office, *Training and Manoeuvre Regulations 1913*, HMSO, London, 1913. The predecessor volume was Great Britain, Army, *Aids to manoeuvre duties. Corrected up to date and in accordance with*

It cemented in place a cycle of continuous training that because of the introduction of the platoon organisation involved the junior officer in the training of his command to a much greater degree than in the past. Its value was shown in the high level of musketry skills shown by the Regular soldier and his greater ability to manoeuvre in the field in combination with artillery and cavalry, with units, divisions and corps, working to standardised staff procedures and a common tactical doctrine.

In 1914 the British Army was a professional army with reserves sufficient to allow it to make a small but significant contribution to a European campaign, with the staff skills and mobilisation procedures to get there. It was the best equipped and best trained Army that Britain had ever mobilised and it went to war trained to a common doctrine and with an organisational structure designed to put that doctrine into effect.

Putting Doctrine to Practice - First World War

Both parts of *Field Service Regulations 1909* were issued with amendments in 1914 and proved their value with the efficient mobilisation of the British Expeditionary Force (BEF). Its tactical skills at unit and formation-level showed the inherent soundness of the doctrine and the value of the new infantry organisation. It was less effective at divisional and corps but this has to be seen in the context of an organisation that had been training under the new doctrine for less than six years, with mobilised infantry battalions having reservists comprise 50-60% of their strength, and where, in some cases, brigades marching to the BEF assembly area near Maubeuge, worked for the first time under their divisional command and staffs.³⁵

The rapid expansion of the BEF to 60 infantry divisions by the end of 1916, with the absorption of Territorial divisions and Kitchener's New Army divisions, was combined with critical losses in Regular officers and NCOs who should have been the instructional training base for this expanding army

infantry training, combined training, and King's Regulations, Gale & Polden, 1903, republished 1904? 1905. I have not been able to locate and view a copy of this publication.

³⁵ . Brigadier-General A H Hussey and Major D S Inman, *The Fifth Division in the Great War*, Nisbet and Co, London, 1921, p. 2.

made up largely of untrained and inexperienced officers and NCOs.³⁶ This loss of expertise was reflected in loss of skills particularly in infantry and a lack of command and staff expertise at all levels of command from battalion through to army as it grappled with the demands of adapting to trench warfare. This was reflected in the performance of the BEF in battle in 1915 and 1916.

The lessons of the Somme in 1916 saw a renewed emphasis on the importance of infantry fire and manoeuvre. The ability of platoons to provide close-range suppressive fire once artillery supporting fire lifted was enhanced by the introduction of the Lewis light machine-gun within platoon organisations, together with other weapons including a range of hand grenades and the rifle grenade. This was concurrent with improvements in artillery techniques and the refinement of divisional and corps procedures for offensive operations.

In the two and a half years from July 1916 the BEF evolved an effective combined arms tactical doctrine that matched evolving technology in infantry weapons, artillery and armoured warfare built on the principles established in *Field Service Regulations 1909* and its associated arms manuals such as *Infantry Training 1914(4-Company Organization)*. Key to this was an effective empirical approach – learning lessons and disseminating them effectively so that they were rapidly absorbed into doctrine. The General Headquarters of the BEF in France modified the structure of its General Staff to include General Staff Duties in addition to the existing Operations and Intelligence staffs. This provided the staff machinery to oversee the training and integration of the Territorial and New Army divisions arriving in France and evolved into an effective system for overseeing individual and collective training.³⁷

The basis of training in the individual arms and corps manuals was sound. The need was to replicate this system in France. Training was one of the priorities for those formations taken out of the line before a major offensive, but whether this happened or not, varied from corps to corps,

³⁶ . 11 Regular Divisions (1-8, 28-29, Guards), 26 'K' (New Army: 9, 11-12, 14-21, 23-25, 30-41), 14 Territorial Divisions (46-51, 55-59, 61-62 and in Paddy Griffith's words, the 'unique' 63 (RN) Division), 9 Dominion Divisions (1-4 Canadians, 1-2, 4-5 Australian, New Zealand). Griffith omitted the 5th Australian Division from his table. Appendix 3, Paddy Griffith, *Battle Tactics of the Western Front: The British Army's Art of Attack, 1916-1918*, Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 1994, p.218.

³⁷ . Robertson, *From Private to Field-Marshal*, pp.220-221.

army to army depending on the competing needs for large-scale work parties to complete preparations for the offensive. The pattern of preparation was well established by pre-war training and in the words of the 29th Divisional history, all based on the: 'four cardinal principles of instruction – explanation, demonstration, execution, and repetition.'³⁸ The detailed rehearsals and practices carried out before each trench raid, were models for what was then being increasingly done for large-scale operations and became standard practise.

Key to this was the lessons learned process instituted by General Headquarters BEF which took the leading role in the dissemination of lessons learnt and the publication of tactical doctrine. *Notes on Recent Fighting* and revisions to doctrine were circulated to all arms and were distributed down to brigades and units with remarkable speed.³⁹ This was a G-Branch responsibility but was given special impetus with the appointment of Brigadier-General Arthur Solly-Flood to command the new Training Directorate at GHQ on 30 January 1917.⁴⁰ This appointment gave further impetus to a process of dissemination of tactical doctrine that was already well established.

The system of training for the British Armies in France was consolidated with the publication of *SS 152 Instructions for the Training of the British Armies in France* in June 1917. Formation commanders were responsible for the efficiency of units under their command, and Commanding Officers were responsible for the training of 'all Officers, N.C.O.'s and men in their units.'⁴¹ It set out the structure, syllabus and responsibilities for Corps schools, staff training and unit collective training.

³⁸ .Captain Stair Gillon, *The Story of the 29th Division: A Record of Gallant Deeds*, Thomas Nelson and Sons, London, 1925, pp.99-101.

³⁹ See for example 41st Division 'Lessons Learnt From Recent Operations 22 March to 1st April' were distributed to the New Zealand Division on 2nd April 1918 for distribution down to artillery brigades and infantry battalions. WA1, 70, 3/9A, Parts 1 and 2, Archive New Zealand

⁴⁰ . Peter J Palmer, 'Sir Arthur Solly-Flood and Tactical Training in the BEF,' *The Western Front Association*, <http://www.westernfrontassociation.com/great-war-on-land/britain-allies/1039-sir-arthur-solly-flood-tactical-training-bef.html> accessed 4 June 2011. The effectiveness of GHQ is examined in Dan Todman, 'The Grand Lamasery revisited: General Headquarters on the Western Front: 1914-1918, in Gary Sheffield and Dan Todman (eds) *Command and Control on the Western Front: The British Army's Experience 1914-1918*, Spellmount, Staplehurst, 2004, pp.39-70.

⁴¹ . General Staff, *SS 152 Instructions for the Training of the British Armies in France* (Provisional), HMSO, London, June 1917, p.5.

It provided a framework that governed training within the BEF for the rest of the war.

A series of pamphlets and manuals reflecting modifications to tactical doctrine were published. This initially drew on French sources as well as the practical lessons learned from the soldiers in the front line, and driven in the initial stages by certain perceptive commanders at brigade and divisional-level. It rapidly developed the practical details of tactical doctrine at platoon and company-level that was still in embryo in 1914.

Experience on the Somme in early July 1916 led to changes in the practise of those divisions drawn into the five month-long battle and were promulgated with the publication of *SS119 Preliminary Notes of the Tactical Lessons of Recent Operations* in July 1916. This was followed by the first of the tactical pamphlets that emphasised platoon and company-level with the publication of *The Offensive of Small Units*, which was a translation of the French organisation of a company in the attack and which foreshadowed many of the changes incorporated into British doctrine.⁴² More important was the publication of *SS.135 Instructions for the Training of Divisions for Offensive Action* in December 1916.⁴³

This seminal publication set out the parameters for training the infantry division. It consolidated what was already being practiced by some formations. It laid out a sequence of training to be followed from the divisional commander's initial assessment of the tasks given for the next operation. It set out recommended time frames and how training should be carried out. It was built upon the principles of good instruction and covered best practice in the attack including formations and frontages, co-operation with artillery, employment of the various weapon systems including tanks, synchronization of timings, communications.

It emphasized that troops must be practiced over model trenches laid out on the ground so that 'each man knows exactly what he has to do.' It lay down that training had to start with platoons and companies working

⁴² . General Staff, *The Offensive of Small Units* by General Headquarters, Eastern Armies, 27th September, 1916 (Summarized from the French and issued by the General Staff, December, 1916) HMSO, London, 1916.

⁴³ . General Staff, *SS.135 Instructions for the Training of Divisions for Offensive Action*, Harrison and Sons, London, December 1916.

independently and progress to brigades and if possible the division as a whole conducting a practice on the ground. It stressed that even if time was short, battalions needed to be thoroughly trained before attempting to carry out brigade-level exercises. This consolidated practice and ensured a template for training that was used throughout the BEF.

SS.143 Instructions for the Training of Platoons for Offensive Action 1917 set out the new platoon organisations and drills for tactical training and was the first pamphlet published by the British Army that clearly explains the role of the platoon in the attack. It established doctrinal procedures that remain current to the present day. It is the most important pamphlet published in the British Army during the First World War.⁴⁴ This was complemented by *The Organization of an Infantry Battalion and The Normal Formation for the Attack* issued in February 1917, that set out the battalion organisation and suggested platoon, company and battalion formations in 'order to ensure the necessary degree of uniformity of training and tactical method throughout the Army.'⁴⁵ The importance of these tactical pamphlets is emphasised in Ewing's excellent history of the 9th (Scottish) Division.

*'The vast importance of constant training as a primary factor of efficiency had been long neglected in France, but when the start was made, development was continuous. Though belated, the issue of pamphlets which dealt with the action of the platoon (S.S. 143) and of the Division (S.S. 135) in attack, was none the less welcome. Hitherto officers and N.C.O.s had been guided only by the general principles stated in Field Service Regulations, but the pamphlets provided illustrations showing the application of these principles to actual problems. The more junior the commander, the more desirable it was to make things clear to him by concrete cases, and in this respect S.S. 143 was invaluable. The adoption of these pamphlets ensured both a uniformity in training and organisation throughout the army and a practical knowledge of the methods of dealing with the problems of actual warfare.'*⁴⁶

⁴⁴ . General Staff, BEF, SS 143, *Instructions for the Training of Platoons for Offensive Action*, 1917, February 1917;

⁴⁵ . General Staff, War Office, *The Organization of an Infantry Battalion and The Normal Formation for the Attack*, April 1917, p. 2.

⁴⁶ . John Ewing, *The History of the 9th (Scottish) Division 1914-1919*, John Murray, London, 1921, pp. 175-176.

Platoon organisation and tactics continued to evolve throughout the war. In February 1918, infantry battalion organisation and tactics was absorbed into the new edition of *SS.143 The Training and Employment of Platoons 1918*. This was revised and re-issued in August 1918.⁴⁷ In each case the revisions took into account responses to changes in German tactical doctrine. This was complemented at the individual soldier level with the publications of *SS.185 Assault Training* in September 1917 and *SS.195 Scouting and Patrolling* issued in December 1917. In each case the publications consolidated what was already best practice. Read the detail and examine the diagrams and suggested attack options in each and one can recognise the basis of platoon tactical drills that are still in use today.⁴⁸

The issue of *SS.135 The Division in the Attack 1918* in November 1918 consolidated a doctrine that indicated how professional the citizen armies of Britain had become in four years of war. It detailed a tactical doctrine of decentralised formation command and tactics within a divisional framework. By the 100 Days Offensive it also reflected the division's relative freedom of operations within the corps framework and also that of the corps within that of army.⁴⁹ Key to this was the command philosophy of 'centralised intent and decentralised' execution, because the organisation was capable of assessing lessons learned and disseminating them down through the chain of command with suggested drills and procedures down to platoon and section-level. These words from *SS.135 The Division in the Attack – 1918*, have a familiar ring.

'The successful conduct of a battle depends upon the rapidity with which local successes are gained and exploited. As the advance proceeds and the enemy's organized defences are overcome, the actual direction, and to a large extent the control, of operations must necessarily devolve upon the commanders on the spot. It is absolutely essential, therefore, that commanders of all grades should be able

⁴⁷ . General Staff, BEF, *SS. 143 The Training and Employment of Platoons 1918*, February 1918, republished in August 1918.

⁴⁸ . General Staff, War Office, *SS 185. Assault Training*, HMSO, London, September 1917; General Staff, War Office, *SS. 195 Scouting and Patrolling*, HMSO London, December 1917.

⁴⁹ . See the series of chapters relating to Corps, Division and Brigade command in Gary Sheffield and Dan Todman (eds), *Command and Control on the Western Front: The British Army's Experience 1914-1918*, Spellmount, Staplehurst, 2004.

*quickly to grasp the salient features of a tactical situation and to act with boldness and decision.*⁵⁰

The achievements of the five armies of the BEF in 1918 reflected the evolution of a common tactical doctrine built upon that foundations established by *Field Service Regulations 1909* that was flexible enough to match the German defensive response and capable enough of adapting to the German March 1918 Offensive. In 1918 the British Army demonstrated skilled infantry-centred combined arms doctrine that was based on effective tactics with decentralised command at divisional level and below. This was matched by equally growing confidence and skill in mobile operations at corps and army, combining all arms including tank and air support. It was an impressive achievement on a scale and within a comparatively short time frame of three years (1916-1918) that has never been matched since in the British Army. It is a model for the effective evolution and dissemination of doctrine during high intensity operations over a prolonged period.

This achievement is not recognised in the British Army today. Indeed the latest doctrinal primer quotes.

*'The British Army in World War One was characterised by its unsubtle and inflexible approach to battle. Having once adopted this approach, it proved virtually impossible to alter it. This whole system of training produced soldiers and officers unused to independent thought, men unable to develop a more dynamic doctrine or put it into practice. Near catastrophe was the result.'*⁵¹

The selection of this example in the latest handbook reflects the unthinking approach that the British Army has to its own military history in that in any historical example, German tactics must be good, and that of the British, particularly from the First World War, must be bad. This lopsided interpretation has been the consistent theme from a number of American military historians including Gudmundson, Lupfer and Samuels.⁵² It has

⁵⁰ . James Beach (ed) *The Division in the Attack – 1918, SS. 135*, Strategic and Combat Studies Institute Occasional Paper, No. 53, Defence Doctrine and Concepts Centre, Shrivenham, 2008, p. 15.

⁵¹ 'Adapted from Martin Samuels, *Doctrine and Dogma, German and British Infantry Tactics in the First World War*, Greenwood Press, Connecticut, 1992), quoted in Chief of General Staff, MOD, *ADP Army Doctrine Primer*, May 2011, p. 5-6.

⁵² . Bruce I Gudmundsson, *Stormtroop Tactics: Innovation in the German Army, 1914-1918*, Greenwood Press, Connecticut, (new edition), 1995; Timothy T Lupfer, 'The Dynamics of Doctrine: The Change in German Tactical Doctrine During the First World War,' *Leavenworth Paper* No. 4, July 1981, Combat

been refuted by Strachan, Griffith, Sheffield and others, but in an army that does not study its own history and which is preoccupied by easily digestible sound-bite examples, mythology rules.⁵³

The Interwar Years

The lessons of the First World War were immediately assessed and incorporated into post-war British Army doctrine.⁵⁴ *Field Service Regulations Vol 2 Operations 1920* set out for the first time in British doctrine a set of guiding principles of war: Maintenance of the objective, Offensive action, Surprise, Concentration, Economy of Force, Security, Mobility and Co-operation.⁵⁵ *Field Service Regulations 1920* and its successors recognised that the core command philosophy set out in 1905 and 1909 remained unchanged.

*'Once battle is joined, success will depend largely on the tactical skill and initiative of the junior leaders. The wide decentralization necessitated by modern weapons tends ever to increase the responsibility of subordinates; the efficiency of the leaders of the smallest units will often be the measure of an army's success.'*⁵⁶

Decentralised command required that subordinate commanders understood the main effort and their part in its achievement.

'Under all conditions, however, the attacking troops must be given definite objectives by their intermediate commanders and the principle must be remembered that higher commanders allot tasks

Studies Institute, US Army Command and General Staff College, Fort Leavenworth. Samuals, *ibid*. This is also the theme of Shamir, *Transforming Command*, pp. 67-81.

⁵³ . Paddy Griffith, *Battle Tactics of the Western Front: The British Army's Art of Attack 1916-1918*, Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 1994; Gary Sheffield, *Forgotten Victory: The First World War: Myths and Realities*, Headline, London 2001; Gary Sheffield and Dan Todman, *Command and Control on the Western Front: The British Army's Experience 1914-1918*, Spellmount, Staplehurst, 2004; Hew Strachan, *European Armies and the Conduct of War*, Routledge, London, 1983.

⁵⁴ . In this I take issue with the conclusions of Brian Holden Reid, 'War Fighting Doctrine and the British Army,' Annex A to Chapter 1, Chief of General Staff, *ADP Volume 1 Operations*, 1994, pp. 1A-1 – 1A-15.

⁵⁵ . War Office, *Field Service Regulations: Volume II, Operations 1920*, HMSO, London, 1920, p.3, quoted in David French, *Raising Churchill's Army: The British Army and the War against Germany 1919-1939*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2000, pp. 12-47. I have not been able to locate a copy of *Field Service Regulations 1920* in any of the Service Libraries or referenced as having been for sale in the various specialist bookshops.

⁵⁶ War Office, *Field Service Regulations: Vol. II, Operations, 1924*, HMSO, London p.2.

and leave the method of carrying them out to their subordinates, subject always to co-ordination by the former.'⁵⁷

This command philosophy is a constant theme in the interwar years and it is interesting to see how each volume of *Field Service Regulations* approaches it slightly differently in the method of explanation, each highlighting the balance needed between direction and control by commanders; providing clear direction so that their subordinates understand the 'intention which inspires' the order, with subordinates understanding that 'to remain inactive from fear of accepting responsibility is worse than to err in choosing a course of action'.⁵⁸

Field Service Regulations Vol.1: Organization and Administration, (Provisional) 1923 consolidated the lessons learned from the First World War in the staff organisation and command procedures of the General Headquarters of an Expeditionary Force deployed on operations.⁵⁹ It stressed the unique problems facing the British Empire and its army. In the 'face of the greatest military danger' it had to raise a major force as it had done in the First World War. It also had to provide against a degree of military contingencies that were not normally faced by a continental power as it may be called upon to place a force in the field in circumstances that ranged vary from that of a great war or a 'war of first magnitude' as it termed it, to a 'small expedition against an uncivilised enemy.'⁶⁰

It recognised that it was not possible to have a standing army equipped and organised 'to meet the requirements of a great war' and so the policy was to organize the army to be 'suited to average rather than exceptional conditions; that it must be capable of modification to suit the special requirements of any particular campaign, and of rapid expansion to meet the case of a grave emergency.'⁶¹ The largest permanent force would be the division. This was 'a self-contained formation, complete in itself, and

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p.101, emphasis in the original.

⁵⁸ . War Office, *Field Service Regulations Volume II Operations 1929*, HMSO, London 1929, pp.4-6; For variations on this theme see also War Office, *Field Service Regulations Volume II Operations 1924*, HMSO, London, 1924, pp. 9-11.

⁵⁹ War Office, *Field Service Regulations Volume I. Organization and Administration. 1923. Provisional*. HMSO, London, 1923, p.1.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p.3.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p.4.

comprising fighting troops and services in due proportion.’⁶² When two or more divisions were mobilized for a campaign, ‘they shall for the convenience of control and command, be grouped into higher formations as circumstances may require.’⁶³ Depending on size of commitment this would be into corps or if necessary an army under the supreme command of a Commander-in-Chief.

These higher formations would have no fixed composition but were cadre formations ‘capable of controlling as many subordinate formations and units as the situation of the moment may require.’⁶⁴ It was assumed that the dominions and colonies would provide their ‘due share’ of the Imperial army and that this would be to a ‘general standard common throughout the Empire.’⁶⁵ It was a pragmatic approach based on the realities of Empire, there were ongoing small wars and crises requiring the use of military forces and it was the job of the forces in being to deal with them, but one could not ignore the need to have plans in being in case of a ‘war of the first magnitude.’

Field Service Regulations 1923 is important in the evolution of British Army doctrine because it deliberately set out to provide a formal doctrine at the strategic level. It dictated the principles governing the war administration of a British expeditionary force which was based on raising a force equipped and trained for manoeuvre warfare.⁶⁶ This was one capable of defeating an enemy by ‘sustained and vigorous offensive action, which implies a war of movement.’⁶⁷

Various volumes of *Field Service Regulations* were issued in 1920, 1923, 1924, 1929, 1930 and 1935.⁶⁸ Volume I on Organization and

⁶². *Ibid.*, p.7.

⁶³. *Ibid.*, p.4.

⁶⁴. *Ibid.*, p.8.

⁶⁵. *Ibid.*, p.4.

⁶⁶. *Ibid.*, p.2.

⁶⁷. *Ibid.*, p.5.

⁶⁸. War Office, *Field Service Regulations Volume II Operations 1920*, HMSO, London, 1920; War Office, *Field Service Regulations Volume I Organization and Administration 1923 Provisional*, HMSO, London, 1923; *Field Service Regulations Volume II Operations 1924*, HMSO, London 1924; *Field Service Regulations Volume II Operations 1929*, HMSO, London, 1929; War Office, *Field Service Regulations Volume I Organization and Administration 1930*, HMSO, London, 1930; War Office *Field Service*

Administration was issued twice, provisionally in 1923 and again in 1930, and was reprinted with amendments in December 1939 after the outbreak of war.⁶⁹ The frequency reflected the technological changes and the ongoing debate over armoured doctrine, mechanisation, the influence of air power and the organisation of units and formations to give this best effect. Experimentation with brigade and armoured formations were assessed and reflected in the published doctrine. David French's *Raising Churchill's Army* charts the doctrinal tensions over the command and control of higher formations and how it was reflected down the chain of command. His work, and that of my colleague, Dr J P Harris, is essential reading for anyone who wishes to understand the evolution of doctrine in the British Army in this period.⁷⁰

Field Service Regulations 1935 divided the operations volumes into two parts, volumes II and III. Volume III, titled *Operations-Higher Formations*, was an extension of *Volume II Operations*, and went a step further than the 1923 edition by publishing doctrine that looked at the conduct of war at the grand strategic level, covering the employment and command of armed forces and the relationship between the three services in a major war involving the entire resources of the nation.⁷¹

This slim but important volume, on the higher direction in war, reminded the reader of the essential qualities of leadership as laid out in *Training Regulations* and highlighted the higher commander's need to understand the nature of society and the resulting political considerations and their influence on military operations.⁷² It espoused the existing command philosophy of decentralised command stating that a 'commander will allot them definite tasks, clearly explaining his intentions, and will allow them the liberty of action in arranging the methods by which they will

Regulations Volume II Operations 1935, HMSO, London 1935; War Office, *Field Service Regulations Volume III Operations-Higher Direction*, HMSO, London 1935.

⁶⁹ . War Office, *Field Service Regulations Volume I Organization and Administration 1930 (Reprinted with Amendments (Nos. 1-11) 1939)*, HMSO, London 1939.

⁷⁰ . David French, *Raising Churchill's Army: The British Army and the War against Germany 1919-1939*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2000; J P Harris, *Men, ideas and tanks: British military thought and armoured forces, 1903-1939*, Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1995; J P Harris, 'The British General Staff and the Coming of War, 1933-1939,' in French and Holden Reid, *The British General Staff*, pp. 175-191

⁷¹ . War Office, *Field Service Regulations, Vol. III Operations-Higher Formations 1935*, HMSO, London, 1936, p.6.

⁷² . *Ibid.*, pp. 8-9.

carry out these tasks.’ It warned of the dangers of undue centralisation as subordinates ‘are apt either to chafe at excessive control or to become afraid of taking responsibility.’ It is a volume that is very conscious that human nature is the dominant factor in war.⁷³ The volume is also interesting in its inclusion of the section on ‘Manoeuvre and stratagem’ in its discussions on how an enemy may be deceived and misled and then induced or forced into an unfavourable position by our movement. It highlights again the universality of what we now term the Manoeuvrist Approach.⁷⁴ By 1935 *Field Service Regulations* enshrined a formal approach to decentralised command that encompassed the tactical, strategic and grand strategic levels of warfare. In a period when the British Army was under great financial pressure and lowest in priority of all three Services, and with practical training strictly curtailed, doctrinally it was anticipating how it would fight in combination with the RAF and Royal Navy in a global war.

The Arms manuals reflected the ongoing doctrinal debate and were consistent in emphasising the doctrinal philosophy of centralised intent and decentralised command. *Infantry Training Volume II War, Provisional* was issued in 1921 with *Volume I Training* issued in 1922. *Infantry Training*, Volumes I and II were issued in 1926, with a new edition of Volume II in 1931 and Volume I in 1932. *Infantry Training, Training and War 1937* was the manual that took the army to war. Apart from the six pages devoted to ‘Drill’, the manual devotes its attention to training infantry for war with detailed directions for individual, section and platoon, company and battalion training, all of which were cross-referenced to *Field Service Regulations 1935*. The description of how the individual soldier fitted into the bigger picture is particularly striking. It reflects a determination in *Field Service Regulations* and the arms and services manuals that evolved from it to explain as clearly and as practically as possible the meaning of British Army doctrine and how it should be applied.

‘The number of men that can be directly controlled in battle by one commander is limited. The basis of infantry organization is accordingly the section, which is the largest group of men that can be controlled personally by its leader throughout the battle. Sections are grouped into platoons, platoons into companies, companies into battalions, and battalions into infantry brigades. This system known

⁷³ . *Ibid.*

⁷⁴ . *Ibid.*, pp. 21-24.

*as the “chain of command” ensures orderly manoeuvre by any number of units in accordance with a single plan, and enables the section commander to assist in giving practical effort to the plans and instructions of the commander-in-chief.*⁷⁵

Section Leading was first published in 1923 with subsequent editions in 1928 and 1934. It was re-titled *Infantry Section Leading* in 1938.⁷⁶ The change in title reflected the shift from specialist sections within the platoon to a multipurpose section with its integral Bren light machine-gun. It set out the responsibilities of the section commander, the organisation and equipment of a section, and the tactical drills in the phases of war to equip it to perform as part of the platoon.

The 1938 edition, reprinted during the Second World War, positioned these responsibilities in the context of the infantry battalion and supporting arms, stating the infantry section’s role in assisting using supporting arms to best effect. These were prescriptive pamphlets that consolidated the lessons learnt from the SS.143 series of platoon doctrinal pamphlets published during the First World War and adapted them to the introduction of new weapon systems such as the Bren light machine gun and the Boys anti-tank rifle.

*‘The section is the largest unit which can be personally controlled by its leader throughout the battle; after the first stage of the training have been completed, over-centralization of control by company and platoon commanders must be avoided; it is not possible in war and will invariably break down in battle.’*⁷⁷

Training and Manoeuvre Regulations became *Training Regulations* in 1933 but continued to lay down the annual training cycle and sequence of individual and collective training with a ‘war of the first magnitude’ being the ultimate test.⁷⁸

⁷⁵ . War Office, *Infantry Training, Training and War 1937*, HMSO, London, 1937, p.1.

⁷⁶ . War Office, *Section Leading 1928: A Guide for the Training of Non-Commissioned Officers as Commanders of Rifle and Lewis-Gun Sections*, HMSO, London 1928; War Office, *Infantry Section Leading 1938*, HMSO, London, 1938.

⁷⁷ . War Office, *Infantry Training, Volume I, Training*, HMSO, London, 1926, pp.194-195.

⁷⁸ , General Staff, War Office, *Training Regulations 1933*, HMSO, 1933.

‘In all training it is important to recognise the great expansion of our existing forces which a war of the first magnitude will demand. To meet the conditions which would then prevail, it is essential that all commanders and staff officers should be fitted in peace to fill appointments in war considerably higher than those which they normally hold, and that they should be capable of taking their place as efficient instructors in the training of the nation as a whole for war.’⁷⁹

Training officers in the art of command was to be achieved by ‘giving a thorough understanding of the principles of war, and, by practice in their application to concrete cases, both with and without troops, to produce in commanders of every grade throughout the army a sound and uniform method of approaching military problems, and a facility for instinctively applying the principles of war correctly in solving them.’⁸⁰ It was also judged important to look at the impact of technology on the future of war. ‘Senior commanders and staff officers should be continuously looking ahead and considering in what ways scientific and mechanical developments are likely to affect the applications of these principles in future.’⁸¹

Unit training was reinforced by the need for individual officers to pass promotion and Staff College entrance examinations with *Field Service Regulations*, illustrated with historical examples as the doctrinal catechism. This was catered for by a series of publications such as *Questions and Answers on Field Service Regulations* and various editions of *Historical Illustrations to Field Service Regulations*.⁸² This rote method may not have been the most intellectually stimulating of approaches but it did ensure that *Field Service Regulations* remained central to British Army Doctrine.

Small wars also featured. *Field Service Regulations* set out the general principles for warfare against an uncivilised enemy. ‘While the principles of war... remain unchanged... the armament, tactics and characteristics of the

⁷⁹ . *Training and Manoeuvre Regulations 1923*, p.3.

⁸⁰ . War Office, *Training and Manoeuvre Regulations 1923*, HMSO, London, 1923, p.3.

⁸¹ . *Training and Manoeuvre Regulations 1923*, p.3.

⁸² . Captain H R Gall, *Questions and Answers on “Field Service Regulations Part I (Operations) 1909”*, Hugh Rees, London, 1910; Major H G Eady, *Historical Illustrations to Field Service Regulations, “Operations,” 1929*, Sifton Praed & Co, London, 1930.

inhabitants and the nature of the theatre of operations may necessitate considerable modification in the methods of application of those principles'.⁸³

The need to modify principles to theatre resulted in the publication of manuals particular to a theatre of operations. The North-West Frontier of India presented unique tactical challenges which were laid down in the *Manual of Warfare for the North-West Frontier of India*, published by the General Staff, India in 1925. Battalions in India trained on conventional tactics according to *Field Service Regulations*, unless posted to the Northwest Frontier, at which point intensive training in mountain warfare was undertaken.⁸⁴ Subsequent campaign histories such as *Official History of Operations on the N.W. Frontier of India 1936-1937* made a point of crossing referencing lessons learnt to existing published doctrine.⁸⁵ In the 1920s, *Notes on Frontier Warfare* was published for use of the Royal Military College Sandhurst to instruct cadets in the tactics and procedures of 'Hill Warfare.' incorporating extracts from the official history *Operations in Waziristan 1919-1920* which was one of a series of official histories detailing lessons learned in the small wars of the 1920s and 1930s.⁸⁶ Officers bound for the Indian Army also bought General Sir Andrew Skeen's *Passing it on: Short Talks on Tribal Fighting on the North-West Frontier of India*.⁸⁷ This doctrine was consolidated in *Frontier Warfare – India (Army and Royal Air Force)* which is what today one would term a joint publication emphasising 'co-operation between land and air forces' and how that would be achieved in training.⁸⁸ Each of these manuals drew its doctrinal principles from *Field Service Regulations*, stressing the need for initiative and sensible interpretation of orders to achieve a superior commander's intent on the part of subordinate commanders in theatres where he was likely to face a skilled and intelligent enemy on home ground.

⁸³ . War Office, *Field Service Regulations: Volume II, Operations 1924*, HMSO, London, p.212.

⁸⁴ . Tim Moreman, 'Army in India and Frontier Warfare 1914-1939', <http://www.khyber.org/publications/041-045/armyininda.shtml>, accessed 3 May 2011. T R Moreman, *The Army in India and the Development of Frontier Warfare 1849-1947*, Palgrave MacMillan, London, 1998.

⁸⁵ . General Staff, Army Headquarters India, *Official History of Operations on the N.W. Frontier of India 1936-1937*, Government of India Press, New Delhi, 1943, pp.231-239.

⁸⁶ . General Staff Army Headquarters India, *Operations in Waziristan 1919-1920*, Government Printing India, Calcutta, 1921. (Originally classified CONFIDENTIAL)

⁸⁷ . General Sir Andrew Skeen, *Passing It On: Short Talks on Tribal Fighting on the North-West Frontier of India*, Gale & Polden, Aldershot, 1932 (2nd Edition).

⁸⁸ . Government of India, *Frontier Warfare – India (Army and Royal Air Force)*, Government of India Press, Delhi, 1939.

Second World War

The two operations' volumes of *Field Service Regulations 1935* and *Field Service Regulations Volume I Organization and Administration 1930* formed the basis of the BEF doctrine of 1939. It was a sound doctrine based on a combined arms approach and a policy of centralised intent and decentralised command. It was supported by equally sound arms manuals. What it lacked was a BEF trained and rehearsed in its practice. Apart from Major-General B L Montgomery's 3rd Division, little effective Corps and Divisional-level was undertaken in the BEF during the so-called "Phoney War" of early 1940. Both staff and formations were caught out by the speed and intensity of operations in Belgium and France in May-June 1940 and while the evacuation from Dunkirk saved the Army – it became an Army preoccupied with protecting the United Kingdom against invasion and then from 1943 on, preparing itself for the invasion of Northwest Europe. Circumstances dictated that Commonwealth formations, provided by Australia, India and New Zealand, formed the bulk of the infantry divisions that fought with British armoured formations in the land campaigns in the Mediterranean theatre in 1940-1942. The experience gained by Commonwealth divisions, particularly their criticism of British armoured doctrine, tended to be discounted by British corps and army commanders who were usually appointed from the United Kingdom without in-theatre experience.

The critical problem that limited the effectiveness of British doctrine was that the pre-war combined arms doctrine anticipated a level of armoured support that allowed for designated army tank battalions and brigades to support the infantry division in the break-in battle, while tank heavy armoured formations and divisions would carry out the breakthrough and breakout battles. Therefore the most effective combined arms coordination employing armour was envisaged at corps and army level. This did not reflect the paucity of armoured assets available in the early stages of the war.

The pamphlets on operations of the Infantry Division in the various phases of war prescribed in considerable detail the support expected from infantry support tanks.⁸⁹ These were complemented by pamphlets on the

⁸⁹ . Chief of the Imperial General Staff, *Operations, Military Training Pamphlet No.23, Part IX – The Infantry Division in the Attack, 1941*, HMSO, 1941; Chief of the Imperial General Staff, *Operations, Military Training Pamphlet No.23, Part X – The Infantry Division in the Advance, 1941*, HMSO, 1941

tactical handling of Army Tank battalions which detailed how the various sub-units down to section (troop) level would support infantry.⁹⁰ The doctrine is clearly presented in sensible and practical terms. Seizing and maintaining the initiative in battle by controlling the vital components of time and space are stressed as being the commander's key requirements. The philosophy of centralised intent and decentralised command infuses each pamphlet.

*'The most junior commander, rather than wait for orders, must use his initiative to get on to his immediate objective; and in default of that stated objective, devise one for himself. Inaction must be regarded as the one unpardonable crime against the spirit of an army when it takes the offensive.'*⁹¹

The Armoured Regiment pamphlet stresses the same command philosophy. It too, is sensible and practical in terms of use of armour, stressing the best use of ground, that tank fire support is best achieved at the halt, and that the object of the attack is 'to apply fire under the most favourable conditions of ground and with the greatest degree of surprise.'⁹² To achieve this, commanders at all levels must be aware of the general object of the operations, but recognise that there may be little time for a deliberate plan or detailed orders. 'Initiative and "manoeuvre sense" in subordinates is therefore essential.'⁹³

The opening paragraphs also state the importance of combined arms to success in battle. 'The full power of armoured formations can only be developed by the close co-operation of tank, infantry and artillery composing them, together with close and continuous cooperation by aircraft.' However the next sentence reads. 'Armoured formations can only develop their strength when used in mass. The dissipation of these formations immediately reduces their effective strength.'⁹⁴

⁹⁰ . Chief of the Imperial General Staff, War Office, *Tactical Handling of Army Tank Battalions*, Military Training Pamphlet No.22, Part III: - Employment, 1939, HMSO, London, 1939.

⁹¹ . *The Infantry Division in the Attack*, 1941, p.1.

⁹² . Chief of the Imperial General Staff, War Office, *The Armoured Regiment*, Military Training Pamphlet No.41, 1940, HMSO, London, July 1940, p.22.

⁹³ . *Ibid.*, p.23.

⁹⁴ . *Ibid.*, p.1.

It is significant that this is the only mention of infantry in the pamphlet. There is no discussion on how the armoured regiment would cooperate with the integral infantry in the armoured division which initially consisted of a motor rifle battalion in each armoured brigade and a lorry-borne infantry battalion in the Support Group.⁹⁵ The tactical philosophy of British armour saw armour acted in concert with other divisions within a corps framework in the combined arms battle, but it would not surrender any of its own integrity except for attachments from the integral motor rifle battalion within the Armoured Brigade. It was this belief in the use of armour in mass that governed British armoured doctrine throughout the war and limited the willingness to compromise the brigade structure and regroup with infantry, even when in February 1942 the Armoured Division was reorganised with an armoured and a lorried infantry brigade. The revised series of manuals on armoured doctrine issued in 1943 discusses the integration of the motor rifle battalion in with armoured regiments but did not see any similar integration between the armoured and the infantry brigade; they would cooperate but not integrate.⁹⁶

A classic example of the differing doctrines being employed in the same battle is seen at the breakthrough at Tebaga Gap in Tunisia in March 1943. The 2nd New Zealand Division attacked with 8 Armoured Brigade under command working in the infantry tank role with its regiments supporting each of three attacking infantry battalions, preceded by fighter ground attack aircraft and an artillery barrage in a superbly integrated combined arms battle which conformed to infantry tank brigade doctrine, albeit provided by an armoured brigade which had worked up its coordination with the New Zealand Division during its advance into Tunisia. Having broken through 1 Armoured Division then followed through in a moonlit advance into a narrowing defile with 2 Armoured Brigade leading the night advance, followed by 7 Motorised Brigade. The 2 Armoured Brigade advance was held by an ad hoc German anti-tank defence short of El Hamma and because it had already deployed its integral motor rifle battalion to the flanks, it was unable to mount an attack until 7 Motorised Brigade was brought up through the congested column; no provision having been made to anticipate likely anti-tank blocking positions with a regrouping

⁹⁵ . *Ibid.*, p.2.

⁹⁶ . P L Latawski 'The British Doctrinal Template,' unpublished ms on the evolution of British Armoured Doctrine in the Second World War, cited with the author's permission.

of additional infantry resources.⁹⁷ In doctrinal terms, that employed by the New Zealand Division showed the way ahead, while that of 1 Armoured Division reflected existing armoured doctrine that remained current within armoured formations into Northwest Europe until late 1944.

After the fall of France, the Mediterranean Theatre, principally North Africa, became the focus of campaigns conducted by British land forces until Japan entered the war in 1941. British commanders, principally General Sir Claude Auchinleck and his subordinate Army commanders displayed an inability to coordinate corps and army level battles against Rommel's *Deutsches Afrikakorps*. Dispersal of effort and a lack of centralised intent characterised British tactical application in North Africa. This was contrary to accepted doctrine. Central to this was an inability of commanders to bridge the doctrinal divide on the use of armoured formations that saw the need to work with infantry as a liability in desert warfare.

Montgomery asserted centralised control on his arrival in 1942 and ensured tactical proficiency through careful planning, preparation and rehearsals in preparation for the Battle of Alamein. This became the pattern of his command style for the remainder of the war. He was the first British general of the Second World War to fight a co-ordinated army battle and one where he insisted that his infantry and armour fight according to his plan, but even here, his employment of X Corps as his armoured striking force continued the doctrinal divide.

Over-centralisation and template tactics at battalion and formation-level was the inevitable consequence of the army in Britain which did not see operations until June 1944.⁹⁸ The doctrine was sound and the introduction of battle schools and a new series of tactical manuals

⁹⁷ . Major-General W G Stevens, *Bardia to Enfidaville*, Official History of New Zealand in the Second World War 1939-1945, War History Branch, Department of Internal Affairs, Wellington, 1962, pp.198-250.

⁹⁸ . Timothy Harrison Place, *Military Training in the British Army 1940-1944: From Dunkirk to D-Day*, Frank Cass, London, 2000.

endeavoured to overcome the lack of battle experience.⁹⁹ The importance of junior leadership was stressed.

*'The basis of all infantry fighting is the section and the platoon. In this war of wide dispersal it is not an exaggeration to say that any army is as good as its section and platoon commanders.'*¹⁰⁰

However pressure on training areas and a pre-occupation with the tactics and procedures of getting ashore onto the invasion beachhead saw a tendency for units and formations to template drills and solutions in unit and formation training.

Critically the major doctrinal failing was the cumbersome nature of the lessons learnt process. Doctrinal developments became theatre specific, and even when relevant were not necessarily adopted in other theatres.¹⁰¹ A series of *Military Training Pamphlets* were issued throughout the war, amplifying aspects of doctrine, and reflecting changes to organisation and equipments in response to battle experience. These were complemented by *Army Training Memorandum* that reflected lessons learned.¹⁰² These too emphasised the need for decentralised command, arguing against the tendency to put on a "good show" in training for watching generals, but rather to stress the need for action by junior leaders, whose 'initiative, even if wrongly applied, is more praiseworthy than cautious inaction; and any subordinate who, in the exercise of his initiative, is guilty of an honest error of judgement must not be penalised by his superior.'¹⁰³ These publications

⁹⁹ . Two excellent examples are: C-in-C Home Forces, *The Instructors Handbook on Fieldcraft and Battle Drill (Provisional)*, HMSO, London, 1942, and its successor, War Office, *Infantry Training, Part VIII – Fieldcraft, Battle Drill, Section and Platoon Tactics*, HMSO, London, March 1944.

¹⁰⁰ . C-in-C, Home Forces, *The Instructors Handbook on Fieldcraft and Battle Drill, (Provisional)*, HMSO, London, 1942, p.34.

¹⁰¹ . The fate of Lt Col Lionel Wigram, the founder of the battle school system, is instructive in the politics of the Lessons Learnt system. His report from Sicily upset General Montgomery, leading to the report, which contained no criticism of Montgomery, but was concerned with practical aspects of infantry tactics, being suppressed and Wigram being reduced to his substantive rank of Major; the incident also impacted on the support then given to the battle school programme in the UK. See Denis Forman, *To Reason Why*, Andre Deutsch, London, 1991.

¹⁰² . Examples are: Chief of General Staff, War Office, *The Training of an Infantry Battalion, Military Training Pamphlet No.37*, 1940, HMSO, London, June 1940; Chief of Imperial General Staff, War Office, *The Infantry (Rifle) Battalion, Military Training Pamphlet No.39 Part II – the Carrier Platoon 1941*, HMSO, London, January 1941, and Chief of the Imperial General Staff, War Office, *The Officer and Fighting Efficiency (Extracted from Army Training Memoranda)* 1940, HMSO, London, February 1941.

¹⁰³ . 'Part I, 'Responsibility - Its Delegation and Acceptance,' *Army Training Memorandum. No. 43*, 1942, GS Publications, 23 May 1942, p.7.

formed the basis of the training of the Army in Britain in the lead-up to the invasion of Normandy in June 1944.

The tactical skill and decentralised command, evident at unit and brigade and in the better divisions, rarely translated to corps-level. Effective coordination of the corps battle remained problematic in North Africa, was only achieved in the last of the Monte Cassino battles in Italy and fitfully thereafter, and was best practised under Slim in Burma and with the Australian Army in the Southwest Pacific. Speed of execution and swiftness of manoeuvre remained the aspiration but was not seen at corps and army-level in Northwest Europe until late 1944.

By 1944 it was acknowledged that *Field Service Regulations* were out of date and replaced by the various *Military Training Pamphlets* and post-war would need to be replaced with a new edition, embodying the operational lessons of the Second World War.¹⁰⁴

Post-1945

The post war emphasis was on the tactical level of doctrine. *Field Service Regulations* were replaced by *The Conduct of War 1950* which set out the aim of the British Army in war including the handling of armies and corps.¹⁰⁵ Despite a foreword by Field Marshal Slim, Montgomery's influence is evident in the wording and prescriptive nature of this and other tactical manuals covering *Command and Organisation of a Corps Headquarters in War*, 1950 and *The Infantry Division in Battle 1950*. Each stresses the importance of the commanders' personal influence. They allow some latitude in that a commander, having made his plan and issued orders, 'must leave it to his subordinate commanders to work out their plans to fit the divisional plan.'¹⁰⁶ However the section on 'Personal Command' explains how the 'divisional commander can keep a tight grip on the tactical battle.'¹⁰⁷ *The Armoured Division in Battle 1952* allowed a greater degree of latitude, but one is always conscious of Montgomery's desire, hopefully

¹⁰⁴ . 'Field Service Regulations in Wartime,' War Office, *Army Training Memorandum, No. 48 1944*, GS Publications, May 1944, pp.8-9

¹⁰⁵ . War Office, *Conduct of War 1950*, GS Training Publications, 1950. One can see the influence of the pamphlet issued by 21 Army Group, High Command in War, Germany, June 1945

¹⁰⁶ . War Office, *The Infantry Division in Battle 1950*, GS Training Publications, 1950, pp.10-11

¹⁰⁷ . *Ibid.*, p.20.

with the aid of ‘an infallible system of communications’ to keep a grip on the battle.¹⁰⁸ The arms manuals are equally prescriptive with the Infantry Training manuals for platoon and the battalion both emphasising close personal control.¹⁰⁹ This was a National Service Army being raised and trained to fight in the European theatre as part of an anticipated global war against the Soviet Union by the mid-1950s, yet for the first time we have a British tactical doctrine that omits the core components of centralised intent and decentralised execution.

This was counter-balanced by the tactics evolved in the series of counter-insurgency campaigns involving British and Commonwealth forces in Malaya, Kenya, Cyprus, Aden and Oman in the 1950s and 1960s. Theatre-specific doctrine emphasised decentralised command on operations where the skills and initiative of junior officers and NCOs were of critical importance when operating in platoon patrol bases detached from company and battalion for extended periods. This was enhanced by the adoption of in-theatre training programmes such as at the Jungle Warfare School at Kota Tinggi in Malaya and the publication of specific to theatre pamphlets, the most noted of which is the so-called ATOM pamphlet.¹¹⁰

The end of National Service and the challenges presented by the nuclear battlefield and the commitment of 1 British Corps to NATO planning in Germany were addressed in *The Land Battle* series issued in the 1960s. This series covered all aspects of operations by the Army and promulgated a ‘common doctrine for training.’¹¹¹ The series acknowledged that the dispersed nature of the battlefield and the likely dislocation of communications, inevitably forced the decentralisation of command with battle-group and formation commanders being allowed considerable freedom of action.

‘The increased dispersion of the nuclear battlefield has led to subordinate commanders being given relatively greater freedom of

¹⁰⁸ . War Office, *The Armoured Division in Battle 1952*, GS Training Publications, 1952, pp.23-29.

¹⁰⁹ . War Office, *Infantry Training Volume IV Tactics, Infantry Section Leading and Platoon Tactics 1950*, GS Training Publications, 1950, pp. 34-45; War Office, *Infantry Training Volume IV – Tactics, The Infantry Battalion in Battle 1952*, GS Training Publications 1952, pp. 17-18

¹¹⁰ . Director of Operations, Malaya, *The Conduct of Anti-Terrorist Operations in Malaya*, (Third Edition, 1958).

¹¹¹ . Ministry of Defence, *The Land Battle Part 1, Tactics, Nuclear Operations in Europe*, Ministry of Defence, 3 September 1966, p.23.

*action at all levels. Moreover, all communications systems at present in service are liable to disruption by nuclear action, which may result in sub-units becoming cut off from direct control by their commanders. Enemy electronic measures may effectively dislocate all radio communications. For these reasons, increasing use of Operation Instructions is envisaged to provide the direction on which sub-unit commanders can base their subsequent course of action if deprived of all contact with their immediate superiors once battle is joined.*¹¹²

The training cycle was promulgated in the *Training for War* series which replaced *Training Regulations*. Each issue echoes its predecessor with recommendations for individual and collective training that for officers included a pattern first laid down in *Training and Manoeuvre Regulations* in 1909. It is a pattern familiar to all officers who served during the post-war years: lectures, discussions, conferences, debates, essays on training, essays and military writing, practice in ground reconnaissance, tactical exercises without troops at every level, indoor map exercises, war games, attachments to other arms and services, demonstrations within the training cycle; debriefs from unit field exercises, tactical demonstrations, field firing, participating in battalion and formation TEWTS and battlefield studies. It is this cycle of continuous training that has been the method by which doctrine is inculcated within the normal training routine of units and formations.

Training for War provided a focus for training in the context of British Army operations. Priorities were couched in practical terms and the underlying command philosophy remained constant.

*'Nuclear weapons are the normal equipment of modern armies of first class powers. They will change the tempo and pattern of war, and the tactics of formations and to lesser extent units who will be more dispersed, frequently fighting on their own with their sub-units often isolated. Junior leaders will be required to act on a little more than a higher commander's intention, this emphasising the essential requirement for the highest standard of leadership training.'*¹¹³

¹¹² . War Office, *Infantry Training Volume IV – Tactics, The Infantry Battalion in Battle 1963*, War Office, 1963, pp.29-33;

¹¹³ . War Office, *Training for War, Part 1, Organization of Training*, 1962, p.4.

Decentralisation of execution was balanced by a growing awareness of political decisions overtly influencing tactical operations, as expressed in the *Land Operations* series issued in 1969.

*'Political control of operations from the seat of government is much stronger today than it has been before; improved communications and the speed of political reaction to military events make a close control of operations by ministers inevitable, however remote the theatre. Political control may not affect the lower formations directly but it will certainly be an important factor for a higher commander and its effects will be felt throughout his command.'*¹¹⁴

This was balanced by the practical realities on the ground. BAOR and 1 British Corps were preoccupied with survivability of headquarters, decentralisation of command, the manoeuvre of formations, and the role of non-mechanized forces in a potentially adverse air situation on the battlefield. The 1970s and 1980s was a period of experimentation bought about by the financial stringencies from the Thatcher's Government review of Defence. This dictated the removal of a level of command within 1 British Corps resulting in a move away from formal brigade structures to the establishing of a five battle-group division with two task force headquarters.¹¹⁵

Interrogate officers serving at this time with questions on doctrine and their response is likely to mirror that of Lieutenant General (Retired) Sir John Kiszely.

*'To most officers there was no such thing as 'doctrine', only 'pamphlets' and they were, at best a basis for discussion, and for quoting in promotion exams.'*¹¹⁶

¹¹⁴ . Ministry of Defence, *Land Operations. Volume 1 – The Fundamentals. Part 2 –Command and Control*, Ministry of Defence, (Part 2), 28 April 1969, p. 5.

¹¹⁵ . 1 British Corps, *Training Notes*, April 1978, pp. 1-2-3 – 1-2-5. See also outline diagrams in 3rd Armoured Division, *Programme for the visit of The National Defence College Latimer, The Royal Naval Staff College Greenwich, The Staff College Camberley and The Royal Air Force Staff College Bracknell*, 22-23 May 1980, Printing Section, Ordnance Depot, Vierson, 1980, copy in author's possession.

¹¹⁶ . Quoted in Sheffield 'Doctrine and Command in the British Army: An Historical Overview', *ADP Operations*, p. E-20.

Kiszely is right, but this is to miss the point. Doctrine is best taught by practical application in the individual and collective training cycles laid down in *Training for War*. It reflected the Army's response to the training conducted by 1 British Corps and by ongoing operations in Northern Ireland with episodes such as the Falklands campaign ensuring that the Army was tested across the spectrum. The 'pamphlets' infused everything the Army did, and the effectiveness of this doctrine was its ability to adapt to change through the assessment of the lessons learned.

The issue of *Design for Military Operations – The British Military Doctrine* in 1989 echoed the intention of *Field Service Regulations* in 1905.¹¹⁷ It was first issued in 1987 as a Training Note in the *Tactical Doctrine Handbook* with the intention of re-emphasising the importance of manoeuvre to BAOR and in the operations of 1 British Corps:

*'To conduct a battle of manoeuvre successfully, commanders at all levels must react rapidly and decisively to what will be an evolving situation. Initiative and boldness will be at a premium and over-direction by superiors must be avoided. Orders should then be issued as Operational Directives and Tactical Mission, which define the commander's concept and purpose but leave the execution to the commander directly responsible.'*¹¹⁸

This echoed the command philosophy of the first volume of *Field Service Regulations* in 1905. In the same way the publication of *British Military Doctrine* with its purpose 'to establish a framework of understanding the approach to warfare in order to provide the foundation for its practical application' paralleled the intent of *Field Service Regulations 1909*.¹¹⁹ Using current terminology it provided the capstone that had been missing since the publication of *Field Service Regulations 1935*. *British Military Doctrine* was revised again in 1992 to cater for the adoption of NATO terminology in January 1991 and to reflect the 'changing focus from high intensity operations on the Central Front to operations across the whole

¹¹⁷ . Chief of General Staff, *Design for Military Operations – The British Military Doctrine*, 1989.

¹¹⁸ . Army TD Note 8 'Operational Directives and Tactical Missions,' (Revised) Aug 87, p.8-1, Tactical Doctrine and Arms Directorate, *The Army Tactical Doctrine Handbook*, 1985.

¹¹⁹ . Foreword to Chief of General Staff, *Design for Military Operations – The British Military Doctrine*, D/CGS/50/8, 1996.

spectrum of conflict in far less predictable circumstances’¹²⁰ However as this examination shows it is consistent with published doctrine in the British Army over the previous 85 years.

Conclusion

Field Service Regulations provided a published core doctrine for the British Army since 1905. It reflected the determination by the British Army to fight a war of manoeuvre and saw the Army reorganised, equipped and trained to achieve that intent. Formal doctrine at all levels consistently emphasised manoeuvre operations based on a command philosophy of centralised intent and decentralised execution. It evolved with technological changes and the experience gained in higher formations during the First World War but its core philosophy remained unchanged until 1945.

In 1945 the post-war British Army did away with *Field Service Regulations* and replaced them with a tactical-level doctrine that lacked a defining capstone document. Close coordination rather than decentralisation of execution in the early 1950s reflected Montgomery’s centralised command style at the higher command level. However the nature of the threat, the potential nuclear battlefield and the practical realities facing 1 British Corps saw the consolidation of the combined arms approach built on the enduring doctrine of decentralised execution of the commander’s intent. This was reflected in the British Army tactical manuals.

The multiplicity of challenges facing the British Army after 1945 saw it working to a cohesive all arms doctrine in the event of global war with the Soviet Union, while pragmatically adapting the principles of war to a series of counterinsurgency campaigns in Palestine, Malaya, Kenya, Cyprus, Aden, Oman and Northern Ireland. Success in these campaigns demanded a centralised intent at the operational level and decentralised execution with the major challenges being faced at company, platoon and section-level. This complemented the command, staff and tactical skills demanded within 1 British Corps and this level of coordination was a feature at theatre-level in the Malayan Emergency, the Borneo Confrontation and the campaign in Northern Ireland.

¹²⁰ . Army TD Note 8 ‘Command and Control,’ (Revised) July 92, p.8-2, *The Army Tactical Doctrine Handbook*, 1985.

The Bagnall reforms of 1989 were revolutionary in the sense that they introduced the operational level of war into British military doctrine, but this simply added to the existing corpus of doctrine. The British Army had been doctrinally based since 1905 and the Bagnall reforms restored the core doctrinal document that had been the reality with *Field Service Regulations* from 1905 to 1945. At the heart of this doctrine has always been the need for offensive action based on combined arms which to succeed involves a command philosophy of centralised intent and decentralised execution – Mission Command.