From Blitzkrieg to Airland Battle:
The United States Army, the Wehrmacht, and the German origins of modern American military doctrine

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For my mother

All her battles, lost and won
Abstract

In 1984, just two years after the release of the US Army’s Airland Battle doctrine, a West Point officer cadet wrote in *Military Review*: “To understand the philosophy behind [Airland Battle], we must search for its apparent antecedents. A study of military history reveals that the doctrine employed by the German army from 1917 to 1945 and its underlying philosophy bears a strong resemblance to what we are trying to instil in ourselves today.” In his attempt to better understand this new American approach to warfare, this young officer cadet exposed, in a particularly explicit manner, an interesting aspect of the intellectual history of the US military. For throughout the 1980s, *Military Review* became home to dozens of articles written by US officers and civilians discussing the German military tradition. Admiration for the Wehrmacht in particular became so widespread that the phenomenon was simply referred to as “the Wehrmacht mystique.” This thesis traces the origins, spread, and nature of the Wehrmacht mystique in the US Army during the two decades following US withdrawal from Vietnam. It argues that a number of factors contributed to the American fascination with the Wehrmacht and its doctrine during this period, including: a long history of US emulation of German (and before that Prussian) military methods, the similar situational challenges facing the interwar German and post-Vietnam American militaries, and the civilian reform movement, which actively critiqued and influenced US defence reform during the period.
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Introduction

The Origins of American Military Doctrine

In early 1991, the United States (US) undertook Operation Desert Storm as part of a larger United Nations (UN) effort to liberate the Persian Gulf nation of Kuwait from Iraqi military occupation. In the lead-up to the UN Coalition offensive, critics in the media warned of “another Vietnam,” fearing that the US would become embroiled in another costly war of attrition similar to that it had endured in Southeast Asia almost two decades prior.¹ However, such predictions were shown to be unwarranted, as the campaign quickly proved a decisive victory. In only a few days, US forces surged hundreds of kilometres into Southern Iraq and Kuwait, destroying or accepting the surrender of a large segment of the Iraqi armed forces in the process. The Coalition overwhelmed what was then the fourth largest military in the world and sustained negligible casualties to its own forces.² Because of the remarkable success achieved by the operation, historian Omer Bartov categorized it as “a 1991-style Blitzkrieg” similar to that executed by the German Army of the Second World War (the Wehrmacht).³ Bartov went on to contend that the campaign had “contained all the necessary elements of few losses, immense quantities of sophisticated matériel, quick

³ The term “Wehrmacht” originally referred to the German armed forces as a whole, including the army (Heer), navy (Kriegsmarine), and air force (Luftwaffe). Such a distinction is often not made explicit and the word is commonly applied interchangeably to signify the German army or the German armed forces. For ease of expression and unless otherwise stated, the phrase Wehrmacht will be used here to refer specifically to the German army between 1935 and 1945.
results, and massive destruction to the enemy.” Indeed, a comparison of Operation Desert Storm and the Wehrmacht’s *Fall Gelb* (Case Yellow) campaign in May 1940 yields numerous resemblances. Both operations were characterised by surprise, deception, armoured breakthrough, close air-ground cooperation, and each culminated in large flanking encirclements of the enemy’s main body.

A comparison of the combat doctrines utilized by the US Army during the late Cold War period (1973-1991) and the Wehrmacht reveals a similar story of significant resemblance. The doctrine which carried the US Army to victory in Desert Storm was known as “Airland Battle,” and was developed during the 1980s as part of a larger effort to reform the American military. The doctrine was published in the army’s *Field Manual 100-5: Operations* (FM 100-5), first in 1982 and then again in a revised form in 1986. Airland Battle represented a major break from the established US doctrinal style. While the American approach to war had traditionally relied on numerical superiority, firepower, and brute force, Airland Battle instead emphasised manoeuvre, agility, and operational finesse.

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6 The definition of the “late Cold War period” as signifying the era between US withdrawal from Vietnam in 1973 and American involvement in Operation Desert Storm has been made by the author purely as a means of concisely referring to the US Army during the timeframe relevant to this study.
7 The naming of the doctrine is also sometimes expressed with bicapitalisation as “AirLand Battle.” Both editions of the field manual (1982 and 1986) use this internally capitalised form (AirLand Battle), however, within scholarly discussion the lower case variant (Airland Battle) is also common. For the sake of conforming with grammatical convention, the lower case form will be used throughout this work (except when quoting directly from a source that uses the bicapitalised form).
had conventionally emphasised prescriptive tactical procedures for a predetermined list of combat scenarios, the new field manual encouraged American officers to use the study of historical examples, individual initiative, and improvisation to overcome tactical challenges.

A number of these and other aspects of Airland Battle were also central to the doctrine of Blitzkrieg\(^{10}\) utilized by the Wehrmacht during the Second World War.\(^{11}\) German theoretical and doctrinal concepts such as *Schwerpunkt*, *Auftragstaktik*, *Absicht*, *Flächen und Lückentaktik*, and *Fingerspitzengefühl* each appeared to have been incorporated, to varying degrees, into Airland Battle doctrine. The military historian Robert Citino, when analysing the two doctrines has recognised these underlying similarities, and has argued that “it is not an exaggeration to say that the AirLand Battle was nothing less than a call for U.S. ground forces, working in close cooperation with air power, to re-create the German blitzkrieg.”\(^{12}\)

Relatively little has been written regarding the clear similarities between the Wehrmacht, the late Cold War US Army, and the doctrines they espoused. A number of scholarly works have identified certain resemblances and have speculated that the US Army may have made some effort to emulate Blitzkrieg, but none have taken the next step and asked how and why such a relationship developed in the first place.

\(^{10}\)The phrase “Blitzkrieg” in German translates into English as “lightning war,” and has accumulated a number of different meanings since it was first used. Initially, the term was used in German military journals (such as *Militär-Wochenblatt* and *Deutsche Wehr*) during the 1930s. Upon the outbreak of the Second World War, the term Blitzkrieg became used to denote the speed of Germany’s early campaigns and to represent a new tactical and operational style of war the Germans seemed to have implemented. For the etymology of Blitzkrieg, see: K. Frieser, *The Blitzkrieg Legend: The 1940 Campaign in the West*, Annapolis, Naval Institute Press, 2013, pp. 4-11.

\(^{11}\)Blitzkrieg has also been used as a word to refer to the Wehrmacht’s combat doctrine. Unlike the US Army, the German Army did not give individual names to major revisions of its combat doctrine. While different iterations of the US Army doctrine were given names like Active Defense and Airland Battle, the Wehrmacht’s equivalent, *Heeresdienstvorschrift 300: Truppenführung* (HDv 300) had no such label. As a result, the phrase Blitzkrieg has been adopted here as succinct method of referring to the German Army’s doctrine throughout the Second World War.

\(^{12}\)R. Citino, *Blitzkrieg to Desert Storm*, p. 263.
The purpose of this thesis is to do just that: to uncover the extent to which the US Army was influenced by the Wehrmacht, why specifically the Wehrmacht was identified as an organisation worthy of emulation, what motivated the US Army to learn from the Wehrmacht, and find what evidence exists detailing how a transfer of ideas took place between the two militaries. It argues that a “Wehrmacht mystique” existed within the late Cold War US Army, whereby the German Army of the Second World War was viewed not only as a highly effective military force, but one which was deserving of American admiration and emulation. Furthermore, the role of the Wehrmacht mystique will be analysed both as a cultural force actively shaping the nature and extent of US Army reforms, and as a manifestation of the US Army’s need for a suitable model to guide it through a challenging era in its history.

It is important to note that the intention of the current work is not to assess the practical or ethical validity of the US Army’s efforts to emulate the Wehrmacht – as this would warrant a detailed study of its own. Nor will this thesis attempt to establish whether or not the purportedly German doctrinal ideas which found their way into US Army doctrine were true or accurate interpretations of the combat methods and concepts actually used by the Wehrmacht during the Second World War. Rather, what is of greater relevance here is an analysis of how and why the US Army attempted to emulate the Wehrmacht and what impact this emulation (be it genuine or flawed) had on the American approach to war during the late Cold War period.

Before directly addressing the transfer of ideas between the Wehrmacht and the US Army chapter two of this study briefly summarises the state of current scholarship on the subject of intellectual and cultural transfer between military organisations more generally. The existing literature regarding possible transferral mechanisms such as
military intelligence and combat experience are explored, along with that concerning the way militaries innovate and interact with their environment. The status of academic discussions regarding the conceptual origins of Airland Battle doctrine, and the debate regarding the role of the civilian reform movement is also reviewed in chapter two.

Having established the theoretical and historiographical foundations of this study, chapter three will then examine the nature and extent of American interest in the Wehrmacht through an analysis of what was published in the US military’s official journal, *Military Review*. The journal played a key role in the army’s reform process throughout the 1970s and 1980s, providing a forum for US Army officers to discuss and debate important issues. Its pages depict for the reader a US Army deeply fascinated with the Wehrmacht, and one undergoing significant change and grappling with how best to achieve that change. From summaries of Clausewitzian military theory and historical German military campaigns, to in-depth analyses of the Wehrmacht’s recruitment system, doctrine, and unit structure, the official journal of the US military was filled with submitted works relating to the German military. The authors included civilians (both from within and without government) and US Army personnel of almost every rank and specialization. Many of the higher ranking contributors were (or would later go on to be) in a position to directly influence the development of Airland Battle or other aspects of the army’s reforms.

By the mid-1980s the discussion of the Wehrmacht within *Military Review* reached such an extent that it, as a trend in itself, became the topic of debate under the title “Wehrmacht mystique.” The term was first used by Roger Beaumont in an article published in 1986 wherein he criticised the US Army’s infatuation with the
Wehrmacht on both practical and ethical grounds. Beaumont argued that the Wehrmacht was not the epitome of efficiency that it was being made out to be, and even if it were, the dangers of emulating an organisation so closely intertwined with one of the most evil and destructive regimes in history outweighed its possible benefits. Beaumont’s article incited a string of responses in Military Review, with the majority of which attempting to refute his criticisms regarding the value of emulating the Wehrmacht. That Beaumont’s attack on the Wehrmacht mystique invoked such a response from academics and US Army officers alike is, by its very existence, telling evidence of the mystique’s strength. Perhaps of even greater significance is the fact that none of the responders made even a limited attempt to dispute the fundamental assumptions underlying Beaumont’s argument: that the US Army was fascinated by the Wehrmacht and was actively seeking to emulate its doctrine and organisation.

Chapter four analyses the degree to which the US Army’s fascination with the Wehrmacht had a tangible impact on American doctrinal development and the conduct of US forces in Operation Desert Storm. The written doctrinal manuals of the Wehrmacht and US Army are compared in order to uncover their similarities and shared theoretical underpinnings. Such an analysis reveals that the fundamental tenets listed in FM 100-5 – Initiative, Agility, Depth, and Synchronization – were primarily based on doctrinal concepts first utilized by the Wehrmacht. In practice


\[ \text{R. Beaumont, ‘On the Wehrmacht Mystique’, pp. 54-55.} \]

too, the late Cold War US Army and Wehrmacht demonstrated an almost identical operational approach. As previously mentioned, Operation Desert Storm and the Wehrmacht’s *Fall Gelb* campaign both incorporated the use of deception, surprise, an unexpected avenue of attack, close air-ground cooperation, and large flanking envelopments. A more detailed look at the conduct of these campaigns demonstrates that the US Army did much more than transplant a selection of German doctrinal concepts into its own field manual: it effectively recreated the core aspects of Blitzkrieg on the battlefield.

The late Cold War period was, however, far from the first time the US had taken such a keen interest in German military methods and doctrine. Dating back to the very creation of the Continental Army during the War of Independence, Prussian (and later German) military methods have played a defining role in American doctrinal development. The Prussian Baron Friedrich Wilhelm von Steuben’s writing of the first US doctrinal manual, Emory Upton’s calls for Prussian style reform in the late 19th century, the establishment of the Joint Chiefs in emulation of the Prussian General Staff system,\(^\text{16}\) and the direct lifting of entire sentences and concepts from German interwar military doctrine by the US Army in 1940, are but a few of the most prominent examples.\(^\text{17}\) Chapter five explores this extended record of US emulation of the German military across the span of over two centuries. Acknowledging the long history between the American and German armies, alongside the evaluation of their relationship during the late Cold War period, is essential for several reasons. First and foremost, the extensive record of emulation helps to explain why the US Army looked toward the Wehrmacht, and not any other nation’s armed forces, when it needed a model for its post-Vietnam transformation.


The longevity of the American-German military relationship also establishes that the US Army (like most of its European counterparts) had relied upon learning from other successful militaries to quickly and effectively adapt to emerging military trends. And finally, the most recent cases of emulation, particularly those which occurred during and after the Second World War, provide vital historical context for the US Army’s fascination with the Wehrmacht after Vietnam.

The post-Vietnam period was a particularly unique phase in the traditional relationship between the German and American armies. The US Army of the 1970s and 1980s faced a number of major challenges: defeat in Vietnam and its ramifications, the abolition of conscription, preparing to fight outnumbered, and responding to rapid technological change. Similar circumstances had also confronted the German army during the 1920s and 1930s. Chapter six examines these environmental similarities in order to explain what motivated the US Army to so drastically reform itself during the late Cold War period, and why it chose the Wehrmacht as a model for those reforms. It could be argued that the similarities between Airland Battle and Blitzkrieg were the result of their having been developed under similar conditions, rather than being the result of any direct effort on the part of the US Army to emulate the Wehrmacht. However, there is significant evidence that American officers recognised the parallels between the circumstances they faced and those surrounding the development of Blitzkrieg and that they used this fact as a means of justifying their efforts to emulate the Wehrmacht. A synthesis can therefore be found, whereby the similarities between Blitzkrieg and Airland Battle are viewed partly as the result of shared circumstances, and partly because the US Army identified those shared circumstances and actively sought to emulate the Wehrmacht.
Chapter seven analyses the factors which encouraged the popularity of the Wehrmacht mystique in the years leading up to the development of Airland Battle in 1982. One of the most prominent of these was a general push within the US Army to place a greater emphasis on the study of military history following their defeat in Vietnam. As part of this effort, the army formed a military history committee, conducted surveys of officer interest in history, increased the number of compulsory and elective history courses in most major training schools, and created the Combat Studies Institute whose mission statement was to encourage greater attention in “the doctrinal and policy lessons of history.”\textsuperscript{18} Greater awareness of military history helped fuel the spread of the Wehrmacht mystique, as many US officers were now able to satiate a latent curiosity regarding the German military. Beyond the study of military history, the US Army’s continuous presence in West Germany since 1945 as part of its North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) commitment to the defence of Europe exposed generations of American officers to German culture and (after the creation of the \emph{Bundeswehr} in 1955) German military methods and doctrine as well.

The US Army’s first doctrinal manual to be published after Vietnam, “Active Defense,” was written with the explicit purpose of bringing US doctrine more in line with that of its West German ally. However, Active Defense failed to adequately capture the basis of the \emph{Bundeswehr}’s doctrine. The new American doctrine’s emphasis on the defensive and firepower generated a great deal of criticism from within the US Army. The widespread disapproval of the new doctrine became a springboard for the rise of a civilian reform movement devoted to transforming the American military and its approach to warfare. Many of the prominent civilian reformers – such as William Lind, and John Boyd – also happened to be vocal

advocates, directly or indirectly, of emulating the Wehrmacht’s military practices and doctrine. Lind in particular called for the US Army to adopt what he referred to as “manoeuvre warfare” as the basis of their doctrinal approach, but in doing so he utilized terms and concepts taken directly from Wehrmacht doctrine. Lind’s arguments proved quite controversial within the army, and before long Military Review became littered with articles concerning manoeuvre warfare and the German doctrinal terminology it was built upon. The role of Lind and the civilian reform movement in the development of Airland Battle doctrine and US Army reforms during the late Cold War period will also be discussed in chapter seven of this work.

It may at first appear surprising to claim that a comprehensive transfer of ideas really took place between two military organisations that were only recently enemies on the battlefields of Europe; were sworn to protect economically and politically dissimilar states; and whose approach to warfare was historically exceptionally disparate. Nevertheless, as this study will demonstrate, just such a transfer of ideas did in fact take place between the late Cold War US Army and the Wehrmacht. Through a combination of shared circumstances, historical predisposition, pragmatism, and cultural forces, American officers looked towards the Wehrmacht and found a template upon which to base the transformation of the US Army. Given its impact on what was (and has since remained) the most powerful land force on the planet, the Wehrmacht mystique is deserving of a closer examination than it has had up until now. Despite a more recent focus on counterinsurgency warfare, the fundamental concepts first introduced by Airland Battle in the 1980s continue to lie at the very heart of conventional US doctrine to this day. The current state of scholarship is such that the similarities (both in practice and in theory) between Blitzkrieg and Airland Battle have been fairly well delineated. What has so far remained largely neglected, however, is an explanation of how and why these similarities manifested in the first
place. The purpose of this thesis is to fill this gap in the scholarship and look much more closely at such an extraordinary yet significant segment of modern military history.
Literature Review

How a military fights and prepares to fight is the result of complex interactions between a host of political, social, cultural, organisational, and technological factors. In attempting to explain the late Cold War US Army’s development of Airland Battle doctrine scholars have addressed each of these factors. This chapter examines the scholarly literature regarding intellectual transfer between militaries, focusing in particular on the debates surrounding the way militaries learn and develop doctrine, the intellectual origins of Airland Battle, and the role of the civilian reform movement in the army reform process.

Traditionally, military historians have tended to look at military forces as separate, discrete entities rather than as organisations whose interactions with other armed forces play an important role in defining their approach to war. However, a number of scholars have touched on the matter of how militaries learn from and emulate one another as part of broader investigations of associated topics such as military intelligence, military innovation, and the relationship between victors and vanquished. Wolfgang Schivelbusch’s book, The Culture of Defeat: On National Trauma, Mourning, and Recovery, is one such example that explores defeat and its implications through an analysis of how the American South, France, and Germany each responded to military failure during the 19th and early 20th centuries. While many of Schivelbusch’s conclusions are based on the broader cultural and social impacts of defeat, his basic model applies equally well to the military field. As part

of his analysis Schivelbusch identified a recurring process within the conflicts between France and Germany between 1806 and 1918 in which “France and Germany traded off the lead part in their duet… with each side’s cycle of damnation, purgatory, and rebirth alternately setting the tone. The opponent’s latest victory was seen as the direct result of the defeat that had preceded it.”

In this light, the Prussian victory in 1870-71 was the consequence of its defeat in 1806, and the French victory in 1918 was its response to losing in 1870-71. A critical element to the continuation of this cycle was a desire for revenge or retribution on the part of the vanquished. This factor was certainly present in the case of the US Army after Vietnam – with American officers determined to avoid “another Vietnam” and to reinstate the tarnished honour of their organisation.

Defeat, while certainly a powerful force, is not the only factor capable of influencing or creating a situation where a transfer of ideas between one military and another is likely to occur. Thomas Mahnken has investigated the role of military intelligence as one of the most direct links connecting a military to its foreign counterparts. Mahnken’s study focused on the US intelligence system and its ability to “detect the development of innovative technology and doctrine by ally and adversary alike” between 1918 and 1941. He argued that “a good intelligence organization should be able to obtain enough information not only to warn of the existence of new ways of war, but also to develop an appropriate response,” but found that the US did a relatively poor job of acting on the information which it collected during the interwar period. Mahnken contended that intelligence organisations are most likely to recognize foreign military innovation under three conditions: when information fits

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with their predispositions, when innovation has taken place in areas that one’s own services are exploring, and finally that “demonstrations of new [types of] warfare on the battlefield or in realistic war games [are] more convincing than theoretical pronouncements.” An example given by Mahnken was the way interwar US armoured doctrine changed to reflect the firsthand experience amassed by US military attachés sent to Germany before American entry into World War II, and particularly that gathered during the Wehrmacht’s early European campaigns (first in Poland in 1939 and then again in France and the Low Countries in 1940). Mahnken’s analysis shows that military intelligence, at least under the right conditions, can serve as a conduit for the transfer of ideas from one military to another during peacetime. His arguments therefore remain relevant to the US Army’s emulation of German doctrine after Vietnam. As discussed in later chapters of this study, the US Army directly gathered “intelligence” regarding the Wehrmacht through interviews with its former leaders, and indirectly through the close Cold War relationship it had with the Wehrmacht’s successor, the Bundeswehr.

Like many other scholars, Mahnken’s study focused on investigating “military innovation” rather than a transfer of ideas between military organisations. The focus of academic attention has usually been on the development of new concepts and forms of warfare rather than on how these novel ideas are adapted and imitated by others. Williamson Murray, a military historian, has written extensively on the matter

24 T. Mahnken, Uncovering Ways of War, p. 17.
of how and why militaries innovate. His analysis of the issue has centred predominantly on the study of the Axis and Allied powers (Germany, Japan, Great Britain, France, the Soviet Union and the USA) during the Second World War and the interwar period (1918-1939). Murray has drawn a number of conclusions from these case studies, and has explicitly applied his findings to the circumstances surrounding American military innovation in the lead up to the Gulf War. Murray has consistently argued that the study of history is critical to successful innovation, once frankly declaring that “the claim that military institutions fail in battle because they study the last war too closely is a platitude wholly without foundation. The military institutions that successfully innovated between 1919 and 1940 without exception examined recent military events in a careful, thorough, and realistic fashion.”

Applying this argument to the US military of the 1970s and 1980s, Murray has contended that American armed forces “identified and addressed a series of discrete problems that had surfaced during the Vietnam War, from bombing accuracy to the suppression of enemy air defences, the need for operational concepts in ground combat, and the effective use of helicopters to extend the battlespace.”

However, the American armed forces learned from more than just their own past experience. Most accounts of the post-Vietnam era emphasise that there was a general sentiment within the US military (and particularly in the army) wanting to put counterinsurgency behind them in favour of a renewed focus on a possible conventional conflict against the Soviet Union.

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that the US Army chose to look elsewhere for historical lessons. The Wehrmacht’s experience fighting the Red Army from 1941 to 1945 compared closely with that being faced by the US Army and its NATO allies in the late Cold War period and American army officers identified these inherent similarities and actively sought to learn from the Wehrmacht’s experiences of the Eastern Front.30

Approaching the subject of military innovation from a background in political science, Barry Posen has explored the merits of organisation theory in predicting the way militaries develop combat doctrine.31 According to Posen, organisation theory “explains a state’s actions in international politics as the outcome of pulling and hauling among various self-interested, semi-autonomous military and civilian bureaucracies.”32 One of the underlying assumptions behind organisational theory is that bureaucracies are inherently risk averse and resistant to change.33 When applied to military organisations, this explains why military innovation is usually the exception rather than the rule. Under organisation theory, explaining military innovation becomes a matter of understanding how resistance to change was overcome by some bureaucracies but not others. Posen finds that military organisations are most likely to innovate following a significant defeat, or “when civilians with legitimate authority intervene.”34 As an example of this process, Posen uses Adolf Hitler’s encouragement of mechanization in the Wehrmacht during the

31 It is worth noting that Posen also applied balance of power theory to the same circumstances and found that ‘of the two [theories], balance of power theory is the more powerful.” However, Posen by no means discounts the utility of organisation theory in his analysis. Posen’s use of organisation theory is emphasised here mainly because it is more relevant to the case of the Cold War US Army. B. Posen, The Sources of Military Doctrine: France, Britain and Germany Between the World Wars, Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1984, p. 8.
33 B. Posen, The Sources of Military Doctrine, p. 224.
34 B. Posen, The Sources of Military Doctrine, p. 224.
interwar period. Posen’s model fits closely with the realities of the US Army in the late Cold War period. During the 1980s, the Military Reform Caucus (which consisted of senators and congressmen from both parties including Senator Gary Hart, Congressman William Whitehurst, and Congressman Newt Gingrich) advocated strongly for changes in the organisation, provision, and doctrine of all branches of the US military.

Posen has also argued that “mavericks” within the military, aided by civilian political support, have historically been critical to a nation’s ability to successfully innovate. The importance of mavericks originates from the fact that whilst politicians usually have a good grasp of the political and strategic problems faced by their nation, they also tend to suffer from a very limited understanding of the specifics involved in solving these problems militarily. Mavericks serve to bridge this divide, integrating political ends with military means. For instance, Posen considers Blitzkrieg to have been the result of the partnership between Hitler and the mechanization proponent, Heinz Guderian. Similarly, Great Britain’s innovative air defence system is portrayed as the result of the cooperation in the late 1930s between Air Chief Marshall Sir Hugh Dowding and Minister for Coordination of Defence, Thomas Inskip. At first glance, the concept of mavericks is problematic to apply to the situation surrounding the development of Airland Battle, as there simply were no standout maverick officers advocating for reform within the US Army. However, a number of civilian reformers, such as William Lind and John Boyd, fit closely within Posen’s definition of a maverick and the role of acting as an intermediary between political authority and military bureaucracy. Both Lind and Boyd were invited to lecture at army

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35 B. Posen, The Sources of Military Doctrine, pp. 210-211.
37 B. Posen, The Sources of Military Doctrine, pp. 174-175
institutions and were influential within the US Army, each also received significant support from members of the Military Reform Caucus, and both were staunch advocates of manoeuvre warfare.39

A great deal has been written concerning the way militaries innovate and learn from one another.40 Summarizing the full breadth of this discussion would be a major undertaking in and of itself. The few examples reviewed above were selected because of their specific relevance to the central undertaking of this thesis: understanding how and why the US Army emulated the Wehrmacht and its Blitzkrieg doctrine. We now shift to address the specific historiography of the late Cold War US Army and its development of Airland Battle doctrine. In particular, two aspects of the historiography are deemed to be central: the existing literature concerning the foreign origins of Airland Battle’s doctrinal concepts, and the role of civilians in the military reform process.

Scholars have identified two foreign sources of military tradition likely to have provided the conceptual foundations of Airland Battle. On the one hand there are those such as John Erickson, Shimon Naveh and Richard Lock-Pullan who have argued that the US Army was most heavily influenced by the concept of Deep Operations espoused by the Soviet Army.41 On the other, there are scholars who have

argued that the German military tradition (and Blitzkrieg in particular) represents the closest spiritual precursor of Airland Battle.

Mention of the “Germaness” of Airland Battle has come from academics interested in the American military of the post-Vietnam era and historians of the Wehrmacht alike. Omer Bartov’s comparison between the Gulf War and the Wehrmacht’s early campaigns in the Second World War given in the introduction of this study is one such example. Bartov’s account closely mirrored that of American media outlets that, at the time of Desert Storm, frequently used the term “Blitzkrieg” to describe the campaign.42 Martin van Creveld, another historian of the German military, has made similar comments with regards to Blitzkrieg having been used as a model for the creation of Airland Battle. Creveld has even explicitly acknowledged his own role, as well as that of other academics such as Trevor Depuy, in encouraging US military officials to seek out lessons from the Wehrmacht and its doctrine.43 In a Military Review article aimed at rebutting others’ criticisms of the Wehrmacht mystique Creveld categorised himself as: “a military critic who has helped popularize the study of the German military in this country and has had the good fortune of seeing his writings make a concrete contribution in the form of the US Army COHORT (cohesion, operational readiness and training) system.”44 Creveld’s contributions to the debate surrounding the Wehrmacht mystique will be discussed in greater depth later in this work.

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44M. van Creveld, ‘On Learning From the Wehrmacht and Other Things’, p. 63.
The publication of the Wehrmacht’s combat doctrine, *Heeresdienstvorschrift 300: Truppenführung*, in English was also a platform for the discussion of the German origins of Airland Battle. In the editor’s introduction to their translation, Bruce Condell and David Zabecki attempted to underline the general significance of *Truppenführung* by recounting how it has influenced most modern military doctrines, including that of the US Army:

Many of the classical German concepts – both those in *Truppenführung* and those that *Truppenführung* ignored – found their way into the editions of *FM 100-5* that appeared in 1984 [*sic*], 1986, and 1993. These included Clausewitz’s concepts of the political dimension and the operational level of war, and the notion of the decisive point and the center of gravity (*Schwerpunkt*). They also included the *Truppenführung* concepts of the commander’s intent (*Absicht*), initiative and independently thinking leaders, and mission orders. Instructional material used at the US Army Command and General Staff College during the period even used the word *Auftragstaktik*.45

In the foreword to the book, James Corum (a noted German military historian, Lieutenant Colonel in the US Army Reserve, and Professor of Comparative Military Studies at the US Air Force School of Advanced Airpower Studies) echoed the sentiments of the editors, and argued that Airland Battle doctrine was “a doctrine largely based on the German military tradition.”46

Of the “German school” of scholars, Robert Citino has devoted the greatest effort to examining the relationship between Blitzkrieg and Airland Battle. In his book *Blitzkrieg to Desert Storm: The Evolution of Operational Warfare*, Citino referred to a plethora of similarities between Airland Battle and Blitzkrieg, both as written

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45 B. Condell and D. Zabecki, ‘Editors’ Introduction’, p. 11.
doctrines and as they were put into practice on the battlefield. In particular, Citino made a direct comparison between the German invasion of France and the Low Countries in 1940 and the US military’s invasion of Kuwait and Southern Iraq in Operation Desert Storm.\textsuperscript{47} Citino has also highlighted the huge variety of German terminology in use by the US military during the 1970s and 1980s. According to Citino, the use of the German language by the US military reached such an extent that after 1982 “it became difficult to pick up any professional military journal without reading something about the German army. There were occasional complaints that one needed a German-English dictionary to read a typical issue of \textit{Military Review}.”\textsuperscript{48} Citino did not explain how these similarities he pointed out actually came to exist, but overall has provided the most extensive scholarly account of the German elements present in US Army doctrine and practice.

Ingo Trauschweizer’s work on the subject has gone part of the way towards providing an explanation of the similarities between Blitzkrieg and Airland Battle. Trauschweizer’s approach to the German heritage of Airland Battle revolved mainly around examining how the Cold War relationship between the US military and the West German \textit{Bundeswehr} influenced the doctrinal and organisational development of both institutions. He has claimed that Airland Battle was inspired by the “intellectual and operational concepts of the German \textit{Reichswehr} in the 1920s and 1930s that stressed war of movement as a means by which smaller forces could imbalance command and control of superior forces and negate their fundamental advantage.”\textsuperscript{49} But what is of greater importance to this study is the fact that Trauschweizer explicitly identified the mechanism by which these intellectual and operational concepts were transferred. He has argued that ideas were transmitted

\textsuperscript{47}R. Citino, \textit{Blitzkrieg to Desert Storm}, p. 263.
\textsuperscript{48}R. Citino, \textit{Blitzkrieg to Desert Storm}, p. 263.
\textsuperscript{49}I. Trauschweizer, ‘Learning with an Ally’, p. 504.
from the *Reichswehr* and *Wehrmacht*, carried by their former officers, into the *Bundeswehr* in the 1950s and 1960s, and then through their NATO cooperation, from the *Bundeswehr* to the US Army and the creators of Airland Battle (in particular, the US TRADOC commander General Donn Starry). Trauschweizer’s argument is the only academically established explanation of the way in which German military concepts were transplanted, over several decades, from the *Reichswehr* and *Wehrmacht*, onto the pages of Airland Battle doctrine.

In contrast, the discourse concerning the Soviet influence on Airland Battle is relatively abundant with direct discussion of how the transfer of ideas may have taken place. John Erickson was the first historian to identify similarities between Soviet Deep Operations theory (initially developed in the Red Army during the 1920s and 1930s) and the post-Vietnam innovations in US doctrinal thought. Specifically, Erickson contended that the resemblances were so prevalent between the two doctrines that, “General Svechin, G. Isserson and Marshal Tukhachevskii [who each played central roles in the development of Deep Operation doctrine] would at once be impressed and flattered, sufficiently so even to overlook the protracted intrusion upon their copyright.” Shortly after Erickson introduced the notion, Shimon Naveh published a much more detailed analysis of the degree to which Airland Battle was built upon Soviet concepts and the intellectual transferral mechanisms from which this similarity had emanated. Naveh suggested that the particular operational appreciation present in Airland Battle had been transplanted from its Soviet source via a small but extremely vocal group of civilian reformers well read in Deep Operation theory. In particular, Naveh singled out figures such as

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John Boyd, Steven Canby, Bill Lind, Norman Polmar, and Pierre Sprey. According to Naveh these civilian reformers “provided the process [of doctrinal development] with bold conceptual guidelines, a profound discourse and a rich terminological basis.” However, even a cursory investigation of the kind of manoeuvre warfare that these civilian reformers were actually advocating reveals that, especially in terms of terminology, they appeared to be much more influenced by the German tradition than by Soviet operational thought.

Richard Lock-Pullan, another historian who has taken the Soviet side in the debate, has made a similar attempt to associate manoeuvre warfare with the Soviet military tradition. Apparently influenced by Naveh’s interpretation of the subject, Lock-Pullan argued that “the development of [American] operational thought came from the Russian school of manoeuvre thinking,” and that “new operational vistas” were opened up to US Army doctrine when the idea of destruction was replaced “with the idea of operational shock, or system disruption, and the later Soviet concerns with ‘simultaneity, momentum and fragmentation’ rather than simple attrition.” Having highlighted the Soviet origins of manoeuvre warfare, Lock-Pullan proceeded to summarise the arguments made by individual civilian reformers, including those of William Lind. Lock-Pullan quotes Lind’s “three key reference points” for manoeuvre warfare as being “mission-type orders, the focus of effort or Schwerpunkt, and the search for enemy surfaces and gaps.” While only one is explicitly stated in German, all three of Lind’s “reference points” are English translations of German

54 Such contradictions in Naveh’s arguments are remarkably pronounced in relation to his discussion of Lind’s advocacy of the German concept of Auftragstaktik, which Naveh describes as “disclosing a striking similarity to the Soviet concept of operational command of the 1930s.” S. Naveh, In Pursuit of Military Excellence, p. 261.
56R. Lock-Pullan, US Intervention Policy and Army Innovation, p. 82.
doctrinal concepts (the other two refer to Auftragstaktik and Lücken und Flächentaktik respectively).

That the civilian reform movement’s conception of manoeuvre warfare was based on predominantly Soviet rather than German doctrinal thought is doubtful for a number of reasons. Not only was the terminology used by reformers typically German, but there was very little reference to the equivalent Soviet vocabulary. Similarly, civilian reformers used German historical examples to express what a successful manoeuvre warfare campaign or battle should look like more often than they did Soviet (or any other single military throughout history for that matter).  

However, there are two important caveats to these arguments. First, manoeuvre warfare, while predominantly of German origin, was not just a simple translation of a German doctrinal manual. Many of the theories and approaches put forward by the reformers were completely new, or were significant adaptations of a German or Soviet concept (manoeuvre warfare’s focus on dislocation of the enemy rather than its destruction is one such example). Second, and perhaps more importantly, just because manoeuvre warfare was based on German doctrinal principles does not invariably mean AirLand Battle was as well. Such a claim relies on the assumption that the US Army wholeheartedly adopted the approach being put forth by the civilian reform movement, which itself has been the point of some debate for historians.

The standpoint taken by the US Army has been to deny that civilian reformers had any impact on the reform process. The official history of the army in the Gulf War, Certain Victory, makes no mention of the part played by the civilian reform

movement in army doctrinal development. The official history of the US Armored Forces, edited by (then retired) General Donn Starry and Richard Swain, does only a marginally better job of acknowledging the impact of the civilian reform movement. In the section devoted to Airland Battle, Swain explicitly referred to William Lind’s criticism of Active Defense doctrine and even stated that it “informed, if it did not guide, the modifications made in its successor [Airland Battle].” This fleeting mention is, however, the closest the official record comes to admitting the influence of manoeuvre warfare or any of the civilian reform movement on the US Army’s doctrinal development process.

It is unclear why the official stance has ignored the civilian aspect of Airland Battle’s development. However, considering the accolades heaped on those responsible for reform following the success of the Gulf War, it is not unreasonable to assume that the army simply did not want to share credit with civilian outsiders. The actions of the person most often credited with the creation of Airland Battle, General Starry, appear to support such a theory. Indeed, Starry once referred to the civilian reform movement as “amateur military strategic gadflies,” and bemoaned the need for “more sound thinkers in uniform.” Furthermore, throughout Starry’s published works on the subject of Airland Battle, never once did he make direct reference to the role of civilian reformers or manoeuvre warfare. Precisely due to the silence of the official record on the issue, Dennis Driggers has supported the argument that Airland Battle

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58 R. Lock-Pullan, *US Intervention Policy and Army Innovation*, p. 79.
was created completely independently from the civilian reform movement, proclaiming that: “during the author’s year-long research at both the Training and Doctrine Command’s (TRADOC) Combined Arms Center and School of Advanced Military Studies at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, as well as trips to TRADOC Headquarters at Fort Monroe, Virginia, the author was unable to find any evidence the authors of AirLand Battle doctrine reviewed the specific platforms of the military reform movement for inclusion of their ideas into either the 1982 or 1986 editions of Field Manual 100-5.”

However, such a narrow perspective ignores the role of *Military Review* as a forum for debate and as a means of transferring ideas. Moreover, this standpoint overlooks other evidence such as the Army’s creation of a liaison officer to facilitate greater cooperation with the civilian reformers and the direct invitation of key reform figures to visit Army educational centres (both of which will be discussed further in later chapters). Finally, it should be emphasised that Driggers has been the only scholar outside of the employ of the US Army to explicitly take such a stance.

The vast majority of academic discourse associated with the topic has instead concentrated on the matter of just how influential the civilian reformers were, which of their ideas were actually implemented in doctrine, and the internal dynamics of the individuals who together made up the reform movement. As stated earlier, Shimon Naveh and Richard Lock-Pullan have each argued that civilian reformers played a critical part in doctrinal reform, but also insisted that the conceptual basis of manoeuvre warfare lay in the Soviet tradition of Deep Operations rather than German Blitzkrieg. A variety of other historians, including Robert Citino and Ingo Trauschweizer, have merely argued that the civilian reform movement was generally

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64 R. Lock-Pullan, *US Intervention Policy and Army Innovation*, p. 80.
influential in the reform process, but have refrained from commenting on the origins of the concepts they endorsed. One of the major aims of this thesis is to build upon this existing scholarship and show that not only did civilian reformers play a key role, but that their contribution helped to propagate the Wehrmacht mystique and expedited the incorporation of German (rather than Soviet) doctrinal concepts into Airland Battle doctrine. If what American officers were discussing in academic journals is anything to go by, there can be little doubt over the primacy of German influences in guiding US Army reforms.
Military Review and the Wehrmacht Mystique

Andrew Bacevich, an historian of the US military, has commented that Military Review is “ideal for the historian attempting to understand the mind-set of the officer corps at a particular time.” In the case of the late Cold War era, Military Review, and the articles published within it, depict for the reader a US Army deeply engaged in internal reform and eagerly seeking ideas and methods which might aid it in its task. A finer examination of the journal’s content reveals that the army was also captivated by the German military and its approach to war. Throughout the period numerous articles were published, by both US officers and civilians, concerning the Wehrmacht and its doctrine. These articles consequently provide a unique opportunity to develop an understanding of the nature and extent of the intellectual and cultural aspects of the Wehrmacht mystique as it manifested itself in the US Army. The purpose of this chapter is, therefore, to use Military Review to answer the following questions: What evidence is there that the late Cold War US Army was fascinated with the Wehrmacht? If the Wehrmacht mystique did in fact exist, how widespread was it, how did it change over time, and what were its distinguishing features?


Before evaluating individual articles what was published in *Military Review* for years 1965 through to 1995 will be examined as a whole, in a quantitative rather than qualitative manner. Such a quantitative method places the in-depth analysis conducted later in this chapter into its broader context. Furthermore, this chapter will show that *Military Review* became a forum for US officers to discuss, interpret, and try to make sense of the new doctrinal concepts introduced by Airland Battle. Following the publication of *FM 100-5* in 1982 there were a large number of articles – written by everything from officer cadets and non-commissioned ranks up to Generals and members of the doctrinal writing team – which sought to address the matter of how to best implement the new approach outlined in Airland Battle. Many of these articles used German terminology to help explain Airland Battle’s underlying concepts. In short, what was published in *Military Review* appears indicative of an officer corps struggling to understand the nuances and complexity of an unfamiliar doctrinal approach, and one which responded to this situation by utilizing the Wehrmacht and Blitzkrieg as a model for developing that understanding.

Figure One (see next page) charts the number of articles concerning the Wehrmacht published in *Military Review* between 1965 and 1995. Each article was assigned one of four classifications. Each class corresponds with the extent to which an article was related to the German military and its doctrine. Class 1 consists of those articles that explicitly proposed the US Army emulate the Wehrmacht, or otherwise favourably compared (i.e. identified the significant similarities between) Blitzkrieg and Airland Battle. Class 2 denotes articles that were devoted primarily to the Wehrmacht, its history, or its doctrine (articles making a direct comparison between the Wehrmacht and another military, except the US Army, are also included within this classification). Class 3 articles are those which made recurring or significant positive
reference to the Wehrmacht (or Reichswehr), its history, or its doctrine. And finally, Class 4 refers to articles which make only limited or passing mention of the Wehrmacht, its history, or its doctrine; or alternatively, are concerned primarily with modern German military history (from the Napoleonic period onward), its prominent military thinkers (such as Carl von Clausewitz), or its approach to warfare.

![Figure One: Military Review Articles Concerning the Wehrmacht (by classification)](chart)

The data clearly demonstrates that the Wehrmacht mystique was not merely a fleeting peculiarity in the intellectual history of the US Army, with the number of articles concerning the German military published totalling over one hundred.
Interest in the Wehrmacht was greatest between 1984 and 1988, shortly after the publication of Airland Battle doctrine in 1982. Over this period no less than sixteen articles were published devoted primarily to the Wehrmacht and its doctrine. Furthermore, the number of articles concerning the Wehrmacht reached its absolute peak in 1986, directly coinciding with the publication of the second revision of Airland Battle.

When certain articles were published, and in what quantities, is also important in terms of establishing whether what was being said in *Military Review* had a direct impact on the reforms taking place in the army at that time. For instance, if there had been a large swell in the number of officers writing about the Wehrmacht in the years leading up to the release of Airland Battle in 1982, one could conceivably interpret this as evidence of why the US Army chose to incorporate so many features of Blitzkrieg into their doctrine. Conversely, a dearth of articles calling for the emulation of the Wehrmacht before 1982 would indicate that other factors, operating independently from what was published in *Military Review*, were more likely responsible for the German aspects of Airland Battle. However, delineating causality within intellectual history (this case not excepted) is inherently difficult, and for a number of reasons, it is important not to quickly jump to such definitive conclusions about a causal link between army reform and Wehrmacht related articles published in *Military Review*. For instance, there were small numbers of articles calling for the emulation of the Wehrmacht long before Airland Battle was even conceptualized (starting in 1973-74) and long after it had been introduced (in the early 1990s). From such problematic and often contradictory data it is almost impossible to draw any purely quantitative conclusions regarding how the articles being published in *Military Review* influenced army reforms.
While there are certain pitfalls inherent in trying to prove the contents of *Military Review* caused doctrinal change, there are no such limitations when using it to demonstrate the growth and nature of the Wehrmacht mystique as an intellectual trend. By using such an interpretation, articles published in *Military Review* can be viewed less as factors effecting army reform and more as manifestations of the US Army’s fascination with the Wehrmacht. Having already developed a general sense of the raw number of articles published in *Military Review* concerning the Wehrmacht, the rest of this chapter will be devoted to looking more closely at the most relevant of these articles.

In the July 1986 issue of *Military Review* (just two months after the publication of the second revision of Airland Battle doctrine) the historian Roger Beaumont published an article entitled “On the Wehrmacht Mystique.” In so doing, he initiated a passionate debate that lasted several years and drew the involvement of a number of academics and military officials. Beaumont’s fundamental argument was that the then popular trend of admiration and emulation of the Wehrmacht by the US military establishment was both counterproductive and morally dangerous. On a practical basis, he argued that the Wehrmacht was not the “model for efficiency and effectiveness” which it was then being made out to be.67 He supported this claim in a number of ways. First, he pointed to a host of German strategic blunders brought about by the flawed and hyper-competitive upper command structure of the Wehrmacht.68 Second, he contended that “in the first two years of World War II, most armies defeated by the Nazis were second or third rate” and therefore the perception of German superiority was as much generated by the weaknesses of the Allies as it was by the actual strength of the German military.69 And finally,

Beaumont criticised the effectiveness of the Wehrmacht due to its relative technological backwardness compared to the Allies; something which he argued was concealed by the skewed counter-image, created by Nazi propaganda during the war, of advanced German rockets, jet aircraft, and Tiger tanks.70

However, Beaumont’s primary message – and one to which he continually referred – was the ethical danger associated with emulating an organisation as politically and ideologically entangled with Nazism as was the Wehrmacht. Specifically he warned: “gravitation toward the Wehrmacht as a model should generate concern among structuralists who sense how organization, policies and procedures shape behavior and attitude.”71 Comparing the post-Vietnam US military to the Reichswehr, he went on to state: “It may be possible to tease out threads of pure operational-tactical art from the tangle of related fibers of culture and behaviour. But Nazism and militarism flourished in tandem. The West Germans remember it, and so should we.”72

Beaumont’s article demonstrates that the Wehrmacht mystique had reached such esteem within the US Army by the late 1980s that even those external to the organisation could, and did, clearly observe its gathering popularity.

The dialogue which Beaumont’s article went on to incite provides a similarly revealing perspective on the nature of the Wehrmacht mystique. It did not take long for those who had been propagating the Wehrmacht mystique to respond to Beaumont’s scathing critique. Each of these countering articles in some way exposed, in greater detail, the character and extent of the intellectual transfer taking place from the Wehrmacht to the US Army. The first to respond, Daniel Hughes (a command historian at the Army Combined Arms Centre, Fort Leavenworth), spent a

large proportion of an article on the subject merely outlining the variety of ways in which the US military had throughout its history emulated, and was continuing to emulate, the German approach to war. According to Hughes, the light infantry division, the concept of the operational level of war, the principles of mobile warfare, fundamental theories of officer education, and various elements of AirLand Battle doctrine were just some of the fields in which the US had chosen to “draw heavily upon the theory and practice of the German army.”\(^\text{73}\) Compared to the reactions of other Wehrmacht advocates (Martin van Creveld in particular) who later joined the debate, Hughes’ reply to the criticisms waged by Beaumont were relatively reserved and specific. For instance, making a clear reference to Beaumont, Hughes stated: “US officers have perfectly valid reasons for examining the German army’s approach to war. Historians who criticize this interest in the Heer because the overall Nazi military machine was grossly inefficient exhibit little or no understanding of the current operational and tactical concerns of the US Army.”\(^\text{74}\)

Overall, Hughes held an intermediate position in the debate, claiming that much could be learned from the Wehrmacht, but also warning against the abuse and oversimplification of history then present in many attempts to imitate the German example. He took particular exception to the way in which Auftragstaktik and the German approach to mobile warfare had been caricatured and misinterpreted by articles published in Military Review.\(^\text{75}\) As part of this discussion, he listed a variety of other factors which contributed to German success in World War II (unit cohesion, officer selection and training, the general staff system, and a general ability

\(^\text{73}\)D. Hughes, ‘Abuses of German Military History’, p. 67.
\(^\text{74}\)D. Hughes, ‘Abuses of German Military History’, p. 74. Hughes directly footnotes (#39) Beaumont’s article as part of his discussion.
\(^\text{75}\)In relation to Auftragstaktik see: D. Hughes, ‘Abuses of German Military History’, pp. 67-68. And on the ultimate goal of German mobile warfare being that of annihilation of the enemy rather than merely paralysing his command and control see: D. Hughes, ‘Abuses of German Military History’, pp. 69-70.
to improvise) that should be further studied for their applicability to the US Army’s Cold War situation.\footnote{D. Hughes, ‘Abuses of German Military History’, pp. 70-73.} In essence, Hughes appeared to be primarily opposed to the way in which the German art of war was being understood and imitated, rather than holding any reservations about why the US had undertaken the process in the first place or whether the Wehrmacht was worthy of such emulation.

The next major contributor in the debate, Martin van Creveld, played an instrumental role in the propagation of the Wehrmacht mystique in the ranks of the US Army. In contrast to Hughes, he exhibited no interest in heeding any of the criticisms raised by Beaumont. Van Creveld began his rebuttal with an outline of that which he felt was being disputed, as well as an expression of his own position on the issues at stake:

[First] so the argument goes, the differences – historical, institutional, cultural, even linguistic – between the Wehrmacht and the US military are so profound that no true learning is possible. [Second] Learning, even if it were possible, would not be worthwhile because the Wehrmacht was not as good a fighting machine as has sometimes been advertised. [Third] Finally, to the extent that it was militarily effective, that effectiveness was so bound up with National Socialist German Workers’ (Nazi) Party ideology that we would not want to learn from it even if we could. The first of these problems concerns me as a professional historian; the second, as a military critic who has helped popularize the study of the German military in this country and has had the good fortune of seeing his writings make a concrete contribution in the form of the US Army COHORT (cohesion, operational readiness and training) system; and the third, as an Israeli and a Jew, part of whose family was exterminated by the Nazis.\footnote{M. van Creveld, ‘On Learning From the Wehrmacht and Other Things’, p. 63.}
Van Creveld then systematically attempted to justify the US military’s emulation of the Wehrmacht and in so doing exposed the extent of, and some of the primary motivations for, this emulation. Van Creveld’s opinion that history (as an academic discipline) is guided by the primary aim of “understanding the causes of things” was central to his argument concerning the study of the Wehrmacht. He stated that: “History provides us with a guide, perhaps even the only possible guide, as to why things are as they are. It also tells us the way in which various factors relate to each other and, hence, constitutes a map, however unsatisfactory and however difficult to read, of what may happen to one of them if we alter the rest.”78 In this belief, van Creveld exhibited a mentality (popular in the late Cold War US Army and discussed further in chapter seven of this work) of perceiving military history as a repository of “lessons learned” which could, and should, be readily applied in the present.79 Upholding this approach to history, van Creveld concluded that he saw “no reason why the factors that made for [the Wehrmacht’s] excellence cannot, prima facie, be isolated, studied and learned from.”80 By championing such an outlook, he was openly refuting the arguments made by Hughes and Beaumont regarding the practicality of the US Army learning from a culturally, organisationally and chronologically disparate entity like the Wehrmacht.

The other major faults which van Creveld found with criticisms of the Wehrmacht mystique were addressed with similar rigidity. He utterly discounted any notion that

78 M. van Creveld, ‘On Learning From the Wehrmacht’, p. 70.
80 M. van Creveld, ‘On Learning From the Wehrmacht’, p. 69.
the German army was not worthy of US emulation or could be classified as a second-class force. He defended this stance by making reference to those that shared his appreciation for the Wehrmacht: “Not to waste time by a lengthy repetition of a story I and others have told elsewhere, there can be no doubt that, whatever the criterion one cares to apply, the Wehrmacht in World War II certainly fought as well as any force in the 20th century and probably as well as any in history.”81 Continuing his praise, van Creveld alluded to the contemporary Cold War context and argued that “one can only hope that the United States and its NATO allies on the Central Front will fight as tenaciously, and hold out as long, as the Germans did against the same enemy in 1943-45.”82 Van Creveld, therefore, devoted relatively little time establishing the supremacy of the German army, as he most likely felt the plethora of other published material praising its combat prowess (including his own book length study which quantified, statistically, superior German military effectiveness man for man over the Allies) was evidence enough to convince any US military officer likely to peruse Military Review.83

The final point contested by van Creveld related to the importance of Nazi ideology to the military effectiveness of the Wehrmacht. Contrary to Beaumont’s warnings that ideology was a key factor in the Wehrmacht’s battlefield performance, van Creveld argued that “the role of National Socialist ideology in the Wehrmacht’s combat power was probably no greater, or less, than that of democratic ideals in the willingness of the US Army to fight.”84 Van Creveld’s position on the ideological aspects of the Wehrmacht seemed to stir very little criticism from either Beaumont or the readership of Military Review at large. While Beaumont indeed went on to

81M. van Creveld, ‘On Learning From the Wehrmacht’, p. 66.
82M. van Creveld, ‘On Learning From the Wehrmacht’, p. 66.
84M. van Creveld, ‘On Learning From the Wehrmacht’, p. 65.
publish another article contesting van Creveld’s arguments in 1990, Beaumont made little or no mention of the position taken by his opponent in regards to the role of ideology in the Wehrmacht’s combat effectiveness.  

The dispute concerning the Wehrmacht mystique as it appeared in *Military Review* was primarily conducted externally to the US military itself by historians such as Beaumont, Hughes and van Creveld. But when viewed in the wider context of continued calls to emulate the Wehrmacht by US Army officers (both during and after the debate) it becomes clear that the warnings offered by civilian critics received little official notice. Indeed, a whole year before van Creveld published his scathing response to those critical of utilising the German model, Major Samuel Newland of the US Army concluded an article devoted to promoting the imitation of German training and replacement methods by stating: “It is highly regrettable that the ideological aspects and atrocities of the National Socialist regime have caused some to feel that little of constructive use can be learned from the practices used by the World War II German army. The fact remains that its training and replacement system produced one of the better prepared military organizations in modern history. It is deserving of much more study and consideration by the US Army.” The US Army’s reluctance to heed the criticisms raised by the Wehrmacht mystique debate reveals the extent to which many within the organisation had become convinced of the merits and critical of any possible dangers associated with emulating the Wehrmacht.

Furthermore, throughout the debate there was never any doubt cast upon the central notion that the US officer corps held the Wehrmacht and its approach to war in the highest esteem. Such an absence of doubt demonstrates, most convincingly, that the

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US Army was (and perhaps more importantly believed it was) under the influence of a cultural phenomenon then referred to as a “Wehrmacht mystique.” To put it another way, if the US Army was not actively attempting to emulate the Wehrmacht and Blitzkrieg, then why did US officers and civilians feel it necessary to debate the merits of such an intellectual undertaking, and furthermore, why was there never any discussion of whether or not the Wehrmacht mystique even existed? In actuality, it was merely taken as a given fact that the US Army of the period was seeking – in the parlance of Martin van Creveld – “to isolate, study, and learn from the factors” that had established the Wehrmacht’s military excellence.87

Aside from the Wehrmacht mystique debate, Military Review was also the platform used by those both inside and outside the military, to lobby openly for the imitation of German combat methods and doctrine by the US Army. Unlike the very direct discussion of issues by those involved in the Wehrmacht mystique debate, the majority of the articles which advocated for the emulation of the Wehrmacht did so in a much less explicit fashion. Certainly, there were a number of articles that proposed the outright imitation of German methods and doctrine, but by and large the US military’s infatuation with the Wehrmacht emerged onto the pages of Military Review with relative subtlety. The standard article of this genre began as a simple analysis of a particularly successful German campaign or doctrinal principle, went on to express high praise for the way the operation was conducted or the ways in which a doctrinal concept improved German battlefield effectiveness, and then concluded with a short mention of how the campaign or principle continued to be of relevance “for the US Army today,” or that “modern military thinkers” would do well to learn its lessons. The sheer quantity of these describe-praise-learn articles – most of which

87M. van Creveld, ‘On Learning From the Wehrmacht’, p. 69.
written by US Army officers of Captain or above in rank – present a particularly clear picture of how widespread the Wehrmacht mystique became in the US Army.

In early 1983, not even a year after the adoption of Airland Battle, General Donn Starry published his own describe-praise-learn article in *Military Review*, and as a result, initiated a trend which would continue until the early 1990’s. There were, of course, other articles of this type published before 1983, but they were few and far between. In stark contrast, after the adoption of Airland Battle doctrine and Starry’s article, the official journal of the US Army teemed, like never before, with pieces devoted in some way or another to the admiration and imitation of the German military. This is quickly observable by referring back to the distribution of articles over time presented earlier in this chapter (Figure One).

Starry’s article was intended to be a look at the international adoption of tank technology after World War I and a “history of the development of concepts for mobile all-arms warfare to illustrate the challenges that would-be reformers face in trying to introduce new ideas.” In actuality, Starry gave only the briefest mention of British and American inter-war failed attempts to incorporate the tank into their doctrines and instead concentrated on the German approach as a model of “willingness and ability to adapt to change.” Following a short synopsis of the ways in which the Wehrmacht developed its Blitzkrieg doctrine, he extracted what he called “a set of generalized requirements for effecting change” from the German example. These requirements almost perfectly mirrored Starry’s descriptions of what was needed for the US Army going forward. For example, Starry pointed out that “the Germans had a general staff element whose primary function was to

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90 D. Starry, ‘To Change an Army’, p. 23.
examine the need for change and, when change was decided on, to draw up the necessary programs to make it happen.” In his concluding remarks Starry then argued that successful change in the US Army required “an institution or mechanism to identify the need for change, to draw up parameters for change and to describe clearly what is to be done and how that differs from what has been done before.”91 Indeed, each of the seven requirements for change that Starry proposed were delineated earlier in the article as factors which contributed to the successful development of German armoured doctrine.

That General Starry was so impressed with the Wehrmacht and its ability to adapt, and was willing to voice this opinion publicly is significant for a number of reasons. First, although the writing of Airland Battle was in fact conducted by a small group of doctrinal writers, Starry’s role as commander of the Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC) in the years leading up to its publication allowed him to considerably influence its development. When taken in this context, the praise which Starry openly dispensed towards the Wehrmacht in the article is a powerful indication that the similarities between Airland Battle and Blitzkrieg were not mere coincidence, but occurred by design. While neither Starry nor any of the other officers responsible for Airland Battle ever explicitly admitted to directly emulating the Wehrmacht and its doctrine, the kind of praise for the German military apparent in Starry’s writing was also common to many of the other doctrinal writers involved.92 Furthermore, because credit for the development of Airland Battle was generally bestowed upon Starry as the commander of TRADOC, his explicit reverence for the Wehrmacht only served to encourage others to publish similar articles investigating the Wehrmacht and how its historical lessons could be applied.

in US doctrine. Any hesitation to do so, created by ethical or practical questions such as those raised by Beaumont and the Wehrmacht mystique debate, could be quickly dispelled in the knowledge that those at the top were themselves openly advocating the emulation of German ideas and methods.

Some of the earliest *Military Review* articles concerning the Wehrmacht addressed the *Reichswehr*’s involvement (or lack thereof) in the political affairs of Germany during the inter-war period. That this issue was tackled early on should come as little surprise, as the US abolition of the draft following Vietnam had made the discussion of the socio-political links between a nation and its armed forces particularly topical. As popular as it might have been, addressing the political character of the Wehrmacht and the *Reichswehr* was also an attempt to confront the “elephant in the room” by those in the US military openly promoting the emulation of an organisation which had once pledged itself to Hitler and the National Socialist regime.

Two articles, written in the mid-1970s, encapsulate particularly well the careful balancing act of early efforts to encourage US Army interest in the Wehrmacht. The first of these attempts, published in 1974, was composed by Marine Corps Major Kimball Wakefield with the title “Strength and Weakness: The German Generals, 1918-33.” From the very outset, Wakefield presented the German General Staff as an organisation that, despite embodying “all the military virtues we admire,” had within it “fatal flaws” which allowed Hitler to use them as “unwitting tools in obtaining the chancellorship.” He astutely pointed out that “Americans have always

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95 K. Wakefield, ‘Strength and Weakness’, p. 32.
been fascinated by the German General Staff” and that “as [American] awareness of the complexity of civil-military relations has increased, the focus of our interest in the German generals has shifted from their tactical achievements to their relations with the struggling Weimar Republic.”96 Wakefield concluded the article by drawing a number of “lessons for military men” relating to the host of pitfalls exposed by German history.97 He pointed out, for instance, that “they [the German Generals] had confused remaining above politics with refusing support for the democratic ideal of the new constitution.” And, that “some of them had actively engaged in intrigue, attempting to form a government which, while meeting the requirements of the military’s conservative desires, was clearly not acceptable to the German people.”98 But even despite such failings, Wakefield creates a remarkably positive overall picture of the German generals by regularly describing them as “like a rock,” solid, aloof, strong, and loyal “Prussian knights.”99 The cautionary yet apologetic tone of the article suited the circumstances perfectly: publicly acknowledging that US officers were aware of the dangers involved with following the German example too closely, but simultaneously maintaining an image of the Wehrmacht as something worthy of emulation.

Almost exactly two years after Wakefield published his perspective on the civil-military relationship of inter-war Germany, Major Don Holder contributed his stance on the topic. Holder’s overarching argument mirrored very closely that made by Wakefield, but concentrated on Hans von Seeckt’s role in fostering a mentality of political neutrality in the Reichswehr. Holder’s position was again a mixture of praise and criticism. He criticised Seeckt for steering “too far around the danger of political activism” and falling “into the equally dangerous pitfall of total political

96K. Wakefield, ‘Strength and Weakness’, p. 32.
99K. Wakefield, ‘Strength and Weakness’, pp. 32 and 34.
supervision.”

He also argued that “whatever his [Seeckt’s] intentions, he delivered a militarily superior, eminently usable, but morally rudderless armed force to an unscrupulous dictator.”

Holder also highlighted Seeckt’s success in developing the Reichswehr into a highly trained Führerheer – or small “army of leaders” capable of providing the central structure upon which a much larger force could later be built. Holder even mentioned the relevancy of this structural approach to the issues then facing the post-draft US Army: “As a technical accomplishment, this reconstruction of a huge national army from a miniscule self-defense force has long compelled the admiration of professional soldiers. It also offers, at first glance, a particularly tempting set of analogies to those who follow the military profession in the small volunteer army of today.”

Holder’s comment is all the more significant when viewed in the context of his later responsibilities as a member of the doctrinal team involved in writing Airland Battle doctrine (Holder also went on to command the 2nd Armored Cavalry Regiment during Desert Storm).

Holder’s deference for the Führerheer concept implied a similar respect for the “militarily superior, eminently usable, but morally rudderless armed force” which the Reichswehr quickly and efficiently transformed into – the Wehrmacht. It is inferred that if a method of transformation (a Führerheer) is deemed worthy of emulation, then so too, should the finished product of that transformation (the Wehrmacht). Like General Starry afterward, Holder’s admiration for the Wehrmacht – although tempered with a sense of the associated political dangers – gave early encouragement for other US officers to join in the study and praise of the German military and its doctrine.

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100 L. D. Holder, ‘Seeckt and the Führerheer’, p. 78.
As mentioned earlier in this chapter (as part of the quantitative analysis), in terms of the raw number of articles published in *Military Review* concerning the German military, the period between 1984 and 1988 represented the height of the Wehrmacht mystique. Many of these articles introduced another element to the standard describe-praise-learn format by including a doctrinal comparison of Blitzkrieg and Airland Battle. The purpose of such comparison was always based squarely around uncovering close resemblances rather than differences between the two doctrines. The inclination to praise Blitzkrieg and equate it with their own doctrine demonstrates that many US officers were utilizing the Wehrmacht’s approach to warfare as a model to better understand and implement their own doctrinal reforms. Whether or not the writers of Airland Battle actually intended to encourage this kind of imitation when they compiled *FM 100-5* becomes effectively moot when viewed in relation to the overwhelming evidence suggesting that soldiers of varying ranks and specializations openly expressed their understanding that a modern reproduction of Blitzkrieg was precisely what they felt Airland Battle was attempting to achieve.

One of the first authors to highlight the similarities between Blitzkrieg and Airland Battle was an officer cadet still undergoing training in the US Military Academy at West Point. Interestingly, Cadet Stephen Richey chose to catch the eye of *Military Review*’s readers by emblazoning, across the first two pages of his article in large, bold font, the German military terms (turned US Army buzzwords) of *Auftragstaktik*, *Schwerpunkt*, and *Aufrollen*.105 Below these weighted words, and by way of introduction, Richey argued that “a study of military history reveals that the doctrine employed by the German Army from 1917 to 1945 and its underlying philosophy bears a strong resemblance to what we are trying to instil in ourselves today.”106 His

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stated purpose for writing was, furthermore, “to explore the philosophy of the Germans of past years and to make it accessible to Americans to use as a foundation for the AirLand Battle.”107

Richey’s extensive reference to German doctrinal concepts, and his attempts to compare them with their modern US equivalents, illuminates a number of aspects of the Wehrmacht mystique movement and its spread throughout the US Army. That Richey used German terminology to better express what he understood to be Airland Battle’s core concepts demonstrates the degree to which US officers had come to rely on the Wehrmacht’s vocabulary as a common reference point, with its ready-made glossary of buzzwords, to guide them through the process of implementing a new approach to warfare. Moreover, Richey’s extensive understanding of the theoretical underpinnings of Blitzkrieg, even when he had yet to complete officer training, implies that the emphasis being placed on the role of military history in officer education (which began in the 1970s and will be examined in later chapters) was having palpable effects on US officers’ awareness of German military campaigns and theory. When this greater exposure combined with the fascination fostered by the Wehrmacht mystique, it produced a generation of US officers inculcated and captivated with Blitzkrieg, and intent on enacting a “lightning war” of their own.

The allure of the Wehrmacht not only reached those undergoing training, but also down into the regular non-commissioned ranks as well. While it was rare for non-commissioned officers (or cadets for that matter) to submit a paper to Military Review, in the late 1980s two articles of this type were indeed published. The first was written by Private First Class Mark Schmidt of the Army National Guard and

was fittingly entitled “A Private’s Viewpoint on AirLand Battle.”

In an attempt to better describe the army’s new doctrine, Schmidt proclaimed that “a good example of an air-land type of doctrine appears during World War II when German General Heinz Guderian used the blitzkrieg to roll through Poland.” Schmidt goes on to also assert that “the tactics Guderian developed for his very mobile fighting force were based on the works of B. H. Liddell Hart and are similar to portions of current AirLand Battle doctrine.”

Direct comparison between the Wehrmacht and US Army was, similarly, a core aspect of First Sergeant Robert Rush’s contribution to Military Review. Rather than highlighting doctrinal resemblances, Rush compared the table of organisation and equipment (TOE) of the German 1942 Light Infantry Division, the 1944 Volksgrenadier division, and US light infantry divisions of 1944 and 1986. In his article, Rush demonstrated an intricate knowledge of the structural disposition of Wehrmacht units and made use of German conceptual terms like Schwerpunkt. While it was strongest within the officer corps, by the mid-1980s there is substantial evidence (in the form of the articles detailed above) that the Wehrmacht mystique reached well into the rank and file of the US Army to officer cadets, privates and sergeants alike.

The lower ranks were not the only ones in the US Army utilizing German terminology and direct comparison of Blitzkrieg and Airland Battle to form a better understanding of their new combat doctrine. Just a few short months after officer cadet Richey wrote his article inscribed with German buzzwords, Colonel Wallace Franz published an article equally littered with the vocabulary of the Wehrmacht. Franz, choosing to conform to the trend of comparing Blitzkrieg and Airland Battle,

identified similarities between what he referred to as the “operational concepts” of each doctrine. The German terms of *Kesselschlachten, Schwerpunkt, Einheitsprinzip, Auftragstaktik*, and *Beweglichkeit* were all defined, along with their US equivalents, in his article as part of an historical analysis of the Wehrmacht’s campaigns in North Africa and the Crimea.113 Captain Noyes Livingston gave a similarly extensive list of German doctrinal phrases in an article entitled “Blitzkrieg in Europe: Is It Still Possible?” which addressed whether the US Army would be able to recreate the Wehrmacht’s “lightning” successes if it were to clash with the Red Army in the 1980s.114 While Franz and Livingston felt it necessary to actually list and define such a plethora of German phrases, the majority of US officers who made reference to German military concepts did so in a more natural and less systematic fashion.

The manifestation of the Wehrmacht mystique in *Military Review* was not merely limited to the prevalent use of a few German terms or comparisons between Blitzkrieg and Airland Battle. There were, in fact, a number of articles devoted entirely to explaining both why and how the US Army should emulate the Wehrmacht. These kinds of explicit calls for emulation can be found in many of the articles already discussed in this chapter. But by the late 1980s, US Army officers began making more definite appeals to emulate certain aspects of the Wehrmacht and its approach to warfare. The discourse concerning the Wehrmacht’s replacement and training systems was an excellent example of this trend.

Major Samuel Newland (mentioned earlier in relation to his role in the Wehrmacht mystique debate) was one of the most vocal proponents of what he referred to as

“Manning the Force German-Style.” Newland published an article which exchanged the use of German terminology in favour of a host of English adjectives describing the Wehrmacht in a particularly positive light. For instance, he introduced his argument by portraying the Wehrmacht as an “effective fighting force” with “strong fighting capabilities” who despite being at war with “every major power on Earth except Japan and Italy,” remained “a formidable opponent for six years.” He went on to refer to how the German army had continued to fight with “admirable cohesion” despite repeated reverses against it. Newland’s detailed admiration of the Wehrmacht’s cohesion – as opposed to the broad praise usually dispensed by other US officers of the period – proved to be concentrated almost entirely on the way in which its replacement and training procedures maintained the German soldier’s will to fight.

Newland immediately followed his praise for the Wehrmacht with criticism of the training and replacement system then in use by the US Army. He argued that the US method of providing replacements on an individual or “as needed” basis ran counter to the imperative of developing unit cohesion and a soldier’s sense of belonging. Newland stressed this point by reminding the reader that “during World War II, it was not unknown for a [US Army] replacement to arrive at a front-line unit and become a casualty before his peers even knew his name.” Furthermore, under the system “after wounded soldiers recovered, they frequently were not returned to the unit where they had developed strong ties.” By contrast, Newland commended the unit replacement and rotation system utilized by the Wehrmacht. Foremost in his discussion was the role of the Feldersatzbatallion (or field replacement battalion) which functioned as a replacement pool for an affiliated front line division. He

115S. Newland, ‘Manning the Force German Style’, pp. 36-45.
116S. Newland, ‘Manning the Force German Style’, p. 36.
117S. Newland, ‘Manning the Force German Style’, p. 42.
explained how “a cadre from the front-line division was frequently rotated to the field replacement battalion so that officers and Non Commissioned Officers (NCOs) engaged in training would have recent experience in combat tactics” and that “officers of the training unit were acquainted, exchanged visits and corresponded” with their front line counterparts.\textsuperscript{118} Newland also emphasised the importance of a localized system of recruitment, whereby German regiments were drawn from particular geographical regions or provinces, leading to a greater sense of identity between soldiers and their respective unit.\textsuperscript{119}

Newland proposed, quite explicitly, that the US Army implement the German unit replacement and regional recruitment systems in the hope of endowing its units with a similar level of cohesion to that attained by the Wehrmacht. The COHORT reforms which introduced a simplified version of the German unit replacement system (also advocated by van Creveld) were according to Newland “a step in the right direction,” but “only one part of the solution.”\textsuperscript{120} Newland instead claimed that General Ira Wyche of the 79th Infantry Division had successfully applied “a system similar to the German replacement training battalions during World War II” and that this system, rather than COHORT, “should be considered for the entire US Army.”\textsuperscript{121} He likewise argued for the outright emulation of the German geographical recruitment system: “German units had strong ties to specific regions, or regional defense districts, from which troops were recruited... If building regiments with a strong tradition and a sense of history is important, regional recruiting or regional defense districts of some sort should be considered.”\textsuperscript{122} In short, Newland implemented the

\textsuperscript{118}S. Newland, ‘Manning the Force German Style’, p. 40.  
\textsuperscript{119}S. Newland, ‘Manning the Force German Style’, pp. 38-39.  
\textsuperscript{120}S. Newland, ‘Manning the Force German Style’, p. 42. Another Wehrmacht advocate, Christopher Brassford, later echoed this opinion of COHORT: C. Brassford, ‘Cohesion, Personnel Stability and the German Model’, pp. 73-81.  
\textsuperscript{121}S. Newland, ‘Manning the Force German Style’, p. 43.  
\textsuperscript{122}S. Newland, ‘Manning the Force German Style’, p. 43.
describe-praise-learn formula applied by other Wehrmacht emulation advocates, but executed it in a much more straightforward and narrowly focused way towards recruitment and replacement systems.

Newland’s article was published in 1987, during a period when the Wehrmacht mystique was at its most prevalent in *Military Review*. His arguments, along with those of van Creveld and other examples listed above, were among the most deliberate appeals for the emulation of the Wehrmacht and its approach to warfare by the US Army. The degree to which each author openly advocated learning from the German example varied from relatively straightforward historical description with no attempt to propose imitation of any kind, to explicitly outlining specific organisational or training changes that could bring US practice closer in line with that of the Wehrmacht. Yet, all of these articles demonstrate, in some way, the nature and extent of the Wehrmacht mystique. Indeed, the sheer number of articles, coupled with the diversity of their authors (in terms of rank, profession, and background) shows just how widespread the phenomenon became. The following chapter will address the issue of how the Wehrmacht mystique manifested itself in the form of American operational doctrine and its battlefield performance in the Gulf War.

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The Impact of the Wehrmacht Mystique

Having established the existence and nature of the Wehrmacht mystique in the American military, the purpose of this chapter is to determine what effect, if any, this phenomenon had on the doctrine and conduct of the US Army. In order to achieve this end, this chapter compares the approach to war of the Wehrmacht and the late Cold War US Army. There are a number of difficulties inherent in such a comparison, especially considering that the organisations in question were sworn to protect economically and politically dissimilar states, were operating in different eras of military technology, and whose fighting style was traditionally very distinct. In order to overcome these obstacles, Blitzkrieg and Airland Battle will be analysed not only in terms of their theoretical foundations as written doctrines, but also as each was put into practice on the battlefields of the Second World War and the Gulf War respectively. The clear and identifiable similarities between the approach to war implemented by the Wehrmacht and the late Cold War US Army which emerges from such an analysis is of interest in its own right, as well as for its deeper implications as to the role of the Wehrmacht Mystique in modern American military history.

In order to avoid confusion and better explain the complex array of effects the Wehrmacht mystique had on the US Army, the terms “approach to war” and “doctrine” – which have been used interchangeably up until now – will assume different meanings for the purposes of this chapter. Doctrine, while usually used to refer specifically to the written document that formally expresses how a military organisation intends to fight is also often used as a much more general term referring to how an army actually fights in practice, not just on paper. The duplicity of this
definition becomes an issue when one considers that what is formally written or expected from an armed force, and how that force actually performs in practice on the battlefield, can be two very different things. Indeed, throughout history a number of militaries had no written or official guidelines as to the conduct of battles or campaigns. Similarly others, if having a doctrine at all, conceived it to be only a broad expression of principles which could aid commanders, but which should not necessarily dictate specific actions. Even in the case where a military organisation intends absolute compliance with a formal written doctrine, there will more often than not be inherent discrepancies in the way individual commanders interpret and choose to conform to (or not to conform to) official regulations. Hence, the word “doctrine” will for the remainder of this chapter refer only to the official written expression of how an army intends to fight. The phrase “approach to war” will, therefore, fulfil the need for a means of distinguishing between what is written and what is carried out in reality, referring within this chapter to the amalgam of techniques, structures, practices, beliefs, and habits that form together to determine how a military fights an enemy during actual combat.

Making such clear distinctions between theory and practice is critical for understanding the Wehrmacht in particular. The Wehrmacht’s written doctrine, *Heeresdienstvorschrift 300: Truppenführung*, was published in two parts in 1933 and 1934. The document was written principally by Generals Ludwig Beck, Werner von Fritsch, and Otto von Stülpnagel. Despite a later effort on the part of the *Kriegsakademie* to update the manual beginning in 1938, *Truppenführung* would in fact serve as Wehrmacht doctrine throughout the Second World War. *Truppenführung* was originally intended to modernise *Reichswehr* doctrine from the 1920s by addressing recent advances made in the fields of motorized warfare,

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124B. Condell and D. Zabecki, ‘Editors’ Introduction,’ p. 3.
aviation, and communications. While *Truppenführung* included a rudimentary treatment of these new aspects of combat, because it was never updated, a substantial gap developed between the manual and how the Wehrmacht was utilizing these technologies in actuality. In their introduction to an English translation of *Truppenführung*, Bruce Condell and David Zabecki pinpointed a major source of the gap between Wehrmacht theory and practice, stating that the “purpose [of *Truppenführung*] was not to give German military leaders a ‘cookbook’ on how to win battles, but rather it was designed to give them a set of intellectual tools to be applied to complex and ever-unique warfighting situations.” Such a distinctly non-prescriptive approach to doctrinal development allowed the Wehrmacht to continually modify and adapt new techniques as the war progressed.

The relatively autonomous approach to implementing doctrine used by the Wehrmacht also complicates the process of directly comparing Blitzkrieg and any other doctrine (in this case Airland Battle). Analysis of the two doctrines remains viable, but must naturally place a greater emphasis on the comparison of each doctrine’s basic theoretical underpinnings. Numerous historians have broadly recognised similarities between Blitzkrieg and Airland Battle. But as discussed earlier in this thesis, few if any probe very deeply into specifics as to exactly what concepts were shared by the two doctrines. In order to accomplish just such a detailed examination, this chapter will first outline a selection of concepts central to Blitzkrieg – including *Auftragstaktik*, *Absicht*, and *Schwerpunkt* – and then evaluate the extent to which they influenced or mirrored the basic tenets of Airland Battle.

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126 The Wehrmacht did, however, also publish and update a number of smaller manuals pertaining to specific subjects such as armoured warfare, close air support, and combined arms combat. B. Condell and D. Zabecki, ‘Editors’ Introduction,’ p. 10.
Truppenführung was a modernised version of the Reichswehr doctrine Heeresdienstvorschrift 487: Führung und Gefecht der verbundenen Waffen (shortened traditionally to just Das FuG) published between 1921 and 1923. Wehrmacht doctrine shared a number of theoretical concepts with Das FuG. The term Auftragstaktik or “mission orders” was first introduced in Das FuG and was carried forward into Truppenführung. The origins of allowing subordinates a high degree of personal initiative in carrying out their prescribed missions, however, reached much further back into the German past. Indeed, “prior to World War I, the German Army operated under a principle known as Weisungführung (leadership by directive), which was similar to Auftragstaktik, but only entrusted commanders down to the army level – or sometimes the corps – with broad discretionary powers in the execution of their missions.” Looking even further back, the Prussian command system gave a great deal of autonomy to individual unit commanders. This autonomy was an extension of the Junker class system, whereby Junker nobles maintained independent control over their individual units, but were obligated to fight in service of the Prussian king.

Given its long standing in the German military tradition in one form or another, Auftragstaktik formed a fundamental pillar of Wehrmacht doctrine. The decentralization of command gave the Wehrmacht a number of distinct advantages over its centrally controlled adversaries. Even with the advances in communications technology during the early 20th century (radio and telegraph), the amount of time taken for a commander to report and await instructions from his superior limited the

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127 Heeresdienstvorschrift 300:Truppenführung, trans. B. Condell and D. Zabecki, On the German Art of War, p. 23.
speed with which combat units could react to quickly changing battlefield conditions. The experience of the protracted and relatively deliberate combat on the Western Front in the First World War coupled with advancements in communications led other Western militaries towards greater centralized control in order to ensure subordinate units were acting consistent with, and in direct support of, the overarching mission goals. A potential drawback of *Auftragstaktik* was, therefore, the possibility of a discord developing between the actions of commanders in the field and the planned aims of the overseeing commander.

*Truppenführung* addressed this problem by incorporating emphasis on clearly defining and disseminating the commander’s intent, or *Absicht*, amongst subordinates. Through this mechanism the Wehrmacht was able to find a balance between autonomous action and singularity of purpose. Subordinates that thoroughly understood their commander’s intent could not only use this information to guide their own independent actions, but they could also rely on it to develop a better understanding of the actions being taken by their neighbouring units.\(^{130}\) Furthermore, in the event that communications were interrupted, a subordinate’s ability to make effectual and timely decisions was unimpaired.\(^{131}\)

The shared way of thinking imparted by *Absicht* and the German approach to training was complemented by the notion of *Schwerpunkt*. The word *Schwerpunkt*, or centre of gravity, was used interchangeably in *Truppenführung* to refer both to a “decision point,” and a “point of main effort.”\(^{132}\) As its name suggests, the point of main effort is where a force concentrates the greatest proportion of its combat power. So for

\(^{130}\) *Truppenführung*, p. 30.


example, the point of main effort in the Wehrmacht’s May 1940 Fall Gelb campaign was Army Group A’s armoured breakthrough in the Ardennes Region. A decision point, by contrast, is an abstract concept developed by a commander to denote an objective which they believe will grant the most decisive results when attacked. Inherently, a good commander will in an effort to make best use of limited resources, direct the point of main effort of their forces towards what they deem to be a decisive point. This complementary relationship (between the points of main effort and decision) is probably the root cause of the alternate definitions of Schwerpunkt that appeared in Truppenführung.

Each of the aforementioned theoretical underpinnings of Truppenführung (Auftragstaktik, Absicht, and Schwerpunkt) went on to feature prominently in the US Army’s doctrinal reforms in the 1980s. While the 1982 and 1986 editions of Field Manual 100-5 Operations openly credited Clausewitz as the source from which many of its foundational concepts were drawn, there remains significant evidence to suggest that Airland Battle was actually inspired predominantly by the Wehrmacht and Truppenführung. For instance, the definition of centre of gravity in Airland Battle matched that given in Truppenführung much more closely than that which Clausewitz had originally used in On War.133 Furthermore, the version of decentralized command and mission orders adopted by the US Army resembled the Wehrmacht’s system of Auftragstaktik (with its almost universal emphasis on initiative at all levels) much more than that articulated by Clausewitz. In the case of the commander’s intent American doctrine also named Clausewitz as its source. Once again, the complex implementation of Absicht articulated in FM 100-5 was much more thoroughly developed than its Clausewitzian counterpart.

In order to better demonstrate the influence of *Truppenführung* (rather than Clausewitz or any other source) on Airland Battle, the doctrine’s theoretical foundations will be compared with those of Blitzkrieg. Both editions of Airland Battle doctrine (1982 and 1986) shared a common set of what were called “basic tenets” which included: initiative, agility, depth, and synchronization. The tenets were intended to succinctly encapsulate the nature of Airland Battle and to serve as starting points from which US officers could establish an understanding of the new doctrine. Such an effort to compress the spirit of a doctrine down to a short list of tenets was a first in US Army history, but fit well with the radically different approach to doctrine being introduced. At first glance, the tenets appear novel and disconnected from any specific aspects of German or Wehrmacht doctrine. But closer examination reveals that three of the four tenets (initiative, agility, and synchronization) were based on aspects of Blitzkrieg and *Truppenführung*.

The tenet of initiative was described in *FM 100-5* (1986) as “setting or changing the terms of battle by action” and as something which “implies an offensive spirit in the conduct of all operations.” Such a sentiment, while not completely foreign to the general German military tradition which was known for its generally offensive disposition, does not directly mirror anything put forth in *Truppenführung*. However, the American manual went on to state that, as initiative applied to individual soldiers and leaders, it “requires a willingness and ability to act independently within the framework of the higher commander’s intent.” Further, the manual asserted that “in the chaos of battle, it is essential to decentralize decision authority to the lowest

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134 Where concepts are identical (or near identical) between the two doctrinal revisions, the 1986 edition will be used as a reference point as it was the most developed and saw active use in Operation Desert Storm.

135 The US Army had a long tradition of defining “the principles of war,” however, the tenets of Airland Battle were intended to serve a much more specific function. D. Starry, ‘The Principles of War’, *Military Review*, Vol. 61, No. 9, 1981, pp. 2-12.

practical level because over centralization slows action and leads to inertia.” Here the connection to Wehrmacht doctrine, in the form of English translations of *Absicht* and *Auftragstaktik*, are clearly identifiable.

References to the Clausewitzian idea of “friction” and the Wehrmacht’s principle of *Fingerspitzengefühl* (or fingertip feeling) are equally identifiable in the explanation of Agility given in Airland Battle. According to the field manuals, agility was defined as: “the ability of friendly forces to act faster than the enemy.” Given this definition, the link with the German military tradition at first appears tenuous at best. However, *FM 100-5*’s description of Agility goes on to state that: “Friction – the accumulation of chance errors, unexpected difficulties, and the confusion of battle – will impede both sides. To overcome it, leaders must continuously ‘read the battlefield’ decide quickly, and act without hesitation.” The concept of friction featured prominently in Clausewitz’s theory of war, and it was consequently integrated, almost completely unchanged, into *Truppenführung*. To argue whether or not the US Army drew the term from Clausewitz or from the Wehrmacht is therefore moot. However, reference to an ability to “read the battlefield” is much closer to the “fingertip feeling” which former Wehrmacht officers had used to refer to a commander that was imparted with an “instinctive sixth sense for terrain and tactics.” A commander with this gift was said to be able to keep a mental image of the battlefield including the terrain and the changing disposition of his and the enemy’s forces over time. The tenet of Agility, while not a complete reproduction of any one German doctrinal principle, nonetheless was at least partially defined by

traditionally German and Clausewitzian concepts such as *Fingerspitzengefühl* and combat friction.

Another tenet of Airland Battle, synchronization, was a limited but logical extrapolation of the *Schwerpunkt* concept found in *Truppenführung*. *FM 100-5* defined synchronization as “both a process and a result” whereby battlefield activities were synchronized “in time, space and purpose to produce maximum relative combat power at the decisive point.”

Breaking this explanation down into its component parts, there is an evident correlation between the point of main effort and the decision point concepts embodied in *Schwerpunkt*. That US doctrine had adopted the point of main effort concept was further confirmed by its inclusion as one of ten “imperatives” intended to “provide more specific guidance” to commanders executing Airland Battle. However, it is important to note that the American tenet of synchronization specified that activities should be coordinated in “time, space and purpose” – a central qualification absent from the German original. So while the core foundation of the tenet appears to have been drawn from *Schwerpunkt*, synchronization was in fact a novel evolution which added new dimensions to the classical concept.

Just because Airland Battle shared a significant portion of the theoretical underpinnings of Blitzkrieg does not in and of itself prove that the US Army actively emulated the Wehrmacht. There is no doubt that Airland Battle included a whole host of novel doctrinal concepts. Furthermore, many of those aspects which appear closest to their German counterparts were modified to suit the culture and circumstances of the late Cold War US Army. Despite all this, it is difficult to

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143 The imperative of “Designate, sustain, and shift the main effort” as stated in: *Field Manual 100-5* (1986), p. 23.
examine *Truppenführung* and Airland Battle side by side and not identify the strong fundamental similarities. When these similarities are considered within the context of what was happening outside of the limits of written doctrine, the argument concerning the Wehrmacht’s influence on US doctrine only becomes stronger. At the same time as English translations of *Auftragstaktik, Absicht*, and *Schwerpunkt* were making their debut in *FM 100-5*, the US Army Command and General Staff College in Fort Leavenworth used the German versions of concepts as part of course materials for its students.144 As was described in earlier chapters, following the publication of Airland Battle, *Military Review* swelled with articles written by US Army officers addressing the German origins of their new doctrine. In other words, while the evidence of emulation to be found strictly on the pages of each written doctrine is strong but inconclusive, when the scope of comparison is widened to incorporate the broader context, it becomes all the more difficult to dispute the depth and breadth of the Wehrmacht mystique’s influence on the US Army.

Indeed, it is in their general approach to war that similarities between the Wehrmacht and the late Cold War US Army become most clearly apparent. By comparing the conduct of each force in action many of the issues which otherwise hinder written analysis can be overcome. The effects of a cultural phenomenon such as the Wehrmacht mystique are much more likely to become apparent in the actions taken by individual members of the military in question (in this case the US Army), than to surface uninhibited on the pages of official doctrine. In particular, the disparity which progressively developed between what was written in *Truppenführung* and what the Wehrmacht was actually doing on the battlefield becomes irrelevant. Similarly, the supposition that US Army officers were using German concepts to

144B. Condell and D. Zabecki, ‘Editors’ Introduction,’ p. 11.
explain and better understand Airland Battle can only truly be proven through the examination of how those officers conducted themselves during combat.

In order to uncover similarities between each military’s approach to war, the American conduct of the Gulf War in 1991 (Operation Desert Storm) will be compared with that of the Wehrmacht during its invasion of France and the Low Countries in 1940 (Fall Gelb or Case Yellow). American participation in the Gulf War was selected instead of other major late Cold War period US military interventions in Grenada (Operation Urgent Fury) and Panama (Operation Just Cause) because of its large scale and it being the first primarily conventional application of Airland Battle. While Fall Gelb was neither the first, nor the largest implementation of Blitzkrieg, it nonetheless provides the best case for comparison with Airland Battle for a number of reasons. Although the terrain of each campaign differed significantly (between the grassland and forests of Western Europe and the deserts of Southern Iraq and Kuwait), each theatres’ major geographical features, such as the location of natural obstacles and coastline, were relatively similar. Furthermore, the US Army and the Wehrmacht both developed similar operational plans and sought to achieve comparable overall campaign objectives. The success of Fall Gelb and Desert Storm each hinged on an ambitious armoured breakthrough through what the enemy assumed to be an impassable natural obstacle. Both campaigns’ primary objective was to outflank the bulk of the enemy’s force and to encircle him along a coastline, thereby preventing the enemy from achieving an organised withdrawal from the theatre. Even in terms of their implementation, the operations shared features such as deception of the enemy, heavy use of close air

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145 The US invasion of Grenada (Operation Urgent Fury) in late 1983 was not only fairly small in scope (involving fewer than ten thousand US personnel), but it occurred before the US Army had been given sufficient time to fully integrate Airland Battle doctrine into its approach to war. The 1989 US intervention in Panama (Operation Just Cause) while larger in terms of the number of personnel, was a primarily airborne campaign and still failed to compare in scale to the majority of operations executed by the Wehrmacht during the Second World War.
support, a quickening of the originally planned offensive timetable, the use of airborne forces, and a general emphasis on combined arms. In order to more fully explore the similarities between the two campaigns, each of the aforementioned factors – operational planning, objectives, and execution – is covered in greater detail below.

The initial plan for *Fall Gelb* was developed in November 1939 and was much more conservative in its design and objectives than that which eventually guided the campaign in May 1940. The operational plan put forth by the German General Staff was in response to Adolf Hitler’s request that preparations be made for an offensive in the West as soon as possible after the successful conclusion of hostilities in Poland. The proposal which the General Staff submitted to Hitler reflected their reluctance to attempt another campaign so late in the year and so quickly after the Polish campaign. Thus, the objectives outlined by the original *Fall Gelb* plan were relatively limited. The plan sought merely to secure the Channel coast as a basis for future operations, and the defeat of only a limited proportion of Allied forces in Belgium and Holland.\(^{146}\) It called for the simultaneous advance of two Army Groups (A and B) into Belgium (see Figure Two on page 64). The General Staff plan was a basic adaptation of the Schlieffen Plan utilized during the First World War. Indeed, in his opposition to it, Erich von Manstein would later proclaim that the General Staff Plan was one that “our opponents had already rehearsed with us once before.”\(^{147}\) Manstein’s criticism of the plan, and his proposed alternative would prove to be vital to the nature and success of the final campaign. Manstein was not alone in his unfavourable evaluation of the General Staff plan, as Hitler was also dissatisfied with its prospects for attaining victory. Both Hitler and Manstein

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\(^{147}\) E. von Manstein, *Lost Victories*, p. 98.
(through his role as Chief of Staff to General Gerd von Rundstedt’s Army Group A) pressured the General Staff to modify the invasion plan. However, it was not until after the General Staff plan accidentally fell into the hands of the Allies, and a fortuitous meeting took place between Hitler and Manstein, that Fall Gelb took its final shape.

Manstein’s plan, which Hitler implemented almost entirely, was much more risky than that which went before it, but also offered the possibility of a much more decisive result. The new plan hinged on an ambitious armoured breakthrough conducted on Army Group A’s segment of the front, through Luxembourg, Southern Belgium, the Ardennes forest, and eventually across Northern France to the Channel Coast. By conducting this flanking attack, it was hoped that the bulk of Allied forces in Belgium would be encircled, forcing them to either surrender or be destroyed in a large Kesselschlacht (or cauldron battle). In order to achieve this, seven of the Wehrmacht’s ten Panzer divisions would be concentrated in the region (the other three were to be allocated to Army Group B to the North). The success of Manstein’s plan relied on several factors. First and foremost was the ability of the panzer divisions – with their complement of tanks, artillery, motorized infantry, and supporting units – to quickly and safely traverse the winding, narrow, and limited road network of the Ardennes region.\(^{148}\) Even if the limited road network was indeed traversable, the concentration of such a vast force across such a small frontage would leave Army Group A particularly vulnerable to attack from the air.\(^{149}\) The plan required the Luftwaffe to seize and maintain air superiority to prevent Allied air attacks from clogging crucial but narrow supply routes with destroyed and disabled vehicles.

\(^{148}\) R. Citino, *The Path To Blitzkrieg*, p. 249-250; and K. Frieser, *The Blitzkrieg Legend*, pp. 139-144.

\(^{149}\) The traffic jam of advancing German forces at one stage is said to have extended 250 kilometres, from the Meuse to the Rhine. For a detailed examination of Army Group A’s logistical situation during the campaign, see: K. Frieser, *The Blitzkrieg Legend*, pp. 114-118.
Figure Two: The Evolution of *Fall Gelb*  

Air superiority was also of essential importance to another critical factor in the campaign – that of deception. Indeed, by maintaining control of the air, the Wehrmacht would be able to mask the concentration and movement of their primary avenue of attack from the Allies for as long as possible. In addition to the Luftwaffe’s concealment of Army Group A’s advance in the South, the plan further sought to deceive the Allies into believing that the main effort of the German offensive was in the North. As part of the effort to draw attention away from the Ardennes, Army Group B would launch airborne assaults by Fallschirmjäger units on strategically important sites in Belgium and Holland (such as the defensive works at Eden Emael, and key Dutch bridges) as well as panzer thrusts towards Brussels and Antwerp. As it happened, the deception aspect of the Manstein plan worked almost perfectly, with the Allies concentrating the bulk of their forces (including a large proportion of their mechanized units) in opposition to Army Group B’s attack in Northern Belgium.

The effective deception of the Allies, furthermore, helped ensure the success of Fall Gelb by reducing the feasibility of an organised counterattack against the flanks of the Wehrmacht’s breakthrough in the South. According to Manstein’s plan, Army Group A’s dash from the Ardennes forest to the Channel Coast would expose a Southern flank over three hundred kilometres long. The rate of advance of the panzers far outstripped that of the infantry divisions assigned to defend their flanks from counterattack. The growing gap between the two forces led Hitler and the General Staff to order the panzer divisions to halt and wait for their flanks to be secured. German armoured commanders (Guderian and Rommel in particular)

continued their advance regardless.152 Here, once again, the air superiority and close air support of the Luftwaffe proved to be crucial. A number of Allied attempts to mount a counterattack were identified, blunted, or entirely thwarted by aerial reconnaissance and bombardment. The accuracy of Stuka (Ju-87) dive bombers proved particularly effective against enemy troop and vehicle concentrations. In the end, only two Allied attempts to stop the German advance were of any note: one conducted by the British near Arras and the other by the French toward Montcornet.153 Both counterattacks failed to deal enough damage to significantly slow German progress, as they were met with a quick German response from both the air and the ground.

Each of the major aspects of Fall Gelb – from the original disputes during planning, to the goal of encircling the enemy, to the critical use of air superiority to support the ground offensive – were also present in the planning, objectives, and execution of Operation Desert Storm. This is not to say that the campaigns were completely identical in every detail, as the conflicts were inherently divergent in terms of weaponry, strategic environment, and numerous other elements. But from a purely operational perspective, the level of commonality is striking.

The US Army forces which eventually took part in Desert Storm were originally part of a defensive mission to Saudi Arabia, known as Operation Desert Shield, following Iraq’s invasion of Kuwait in early August 1990. US forces, including marine, air force, and airborne units, began arriving in Northern Saudi Arabia just days after Iraqi forces occupied Kuwait.154 Despite the initially defensive deployment, planning soon began for an offensive campaign to seize Kuwait from Iraqi control. In late

154 R. Scales, Certain Victory, pp. 49-51.
September 1990, General Norman Schwarzkopf, Commander-in-Chief of US Central Command (and therefore commander of US forces in the Middle East), assembled a team of officers for planning the operation. The group included Major Greg Eckert, Major Dan Roh, Major Bill Pennypacker, and was led by Lieutenant Colonel Joe Purvis. All members of the group had recently graduated from the School of Advanced Military Studies (SAMS). As part of the academic program they each published articles on a variety of military subjects. Of particular note are two of Major Pennypacker’s articles, entitled “Sequels: Thinking About the Future” and “Automation: The Commander’s Key to Victory in the AirLand Battle or Another Source of Friction.” In both articles, Pennypacker makes extensive reference to Clausewitzian principles (such as centre of gravity and culminating points) as well as to Blitzkrieg (directly quoting Erich von Manstein, using the Wehrmacht’s campaigns as supporting examples, and discussing German concepts such as Auftragstaktik). That a US Army officer demonstrated such a detailed understanding of German doctrinal concepts should, however, come as little surprise when considered in relation to earlier discussions of the Wehrmacht mystique. But within the context of US operational planning for the Gulf War, the fact that officers on the planning team appear to have been influenced by the Wehrmacht mystique is quite significant and may help explain the similarities between Operation Desert Storm and Fall Gelb.

The initial operation plan developed by Purvis’ team was formed under the assumption that the Coalition forces at their disposal would be a single corps in size.

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As such, the plan proved to be fairly conservative in design, calling for a straight forward attack through Western Kuwait, comparable to the time constrained original General Staff plan for *Fall Gelb*. The main objective of the operation was the northern Iraqi-Kuwaiti border and the main north-south highway to Basrah out of Kuwait City. In order to reach its objectives, however, the US forces would clash head on with the bulk of the Iraqi units in Kuwait. The plan had been designed by Purvis under the assumption that a “sweeping end-around move” (like that of *Fall Gelb*) was infeasible due to limited transport capacity and the long distances throughout the theatre of operations.\textsuperscript{157} The US Army’s official history of the war later argued that “Schwarzkopf was not terribly comfortable with the one-corps option, but he recognized that the plan was as good as could be expected with the forces available.”\textsuperscript{158} Once the plan was presented and Schwarzkopf’s concerns were passed on to Secretary of Defense Dick Cheney, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs Colin Powell, and President George H. W. Bush, the possibility of a two corps option quickly took centre stage. VII Corps, then stationed in Germany, was selected to reinforce the theatre. The two-corps plan which Purvis’ planning team created was much more ambitious than its one-corps precedent. Hence, like *Fall Gelb* before it, the operational plan which eventually guided Operation Desert Storm was a bold revision of earlier, more conservative plans.

The new plan called for a sweeping attack by VII Corps through Southern Iraq and into Northern Kuwait (see Figure Three on page 71). Purvis’ planning team based their design for such an audacious movement on a belief that the Iraqi “centre of gravity” was its Republican Guard units stationed in and around Northern Kuwait. Indeed, it is interesting to note the impact of Clausewitzian theory on the group, as it has been reported that they collectively spent “more hours attempting to identify the

\textsuperscript{157} R. Scales, *Certain Victory*, p. 125.
\textsuperscript{158} R. Scales, *Certain Victory*, p. 126.
Iraqi [centre of gravity] than planning how to defeat it.”159 With the Republican
Guard as its main objective, the plan centred on a “great wheel” to be conducted by
VII Corps under the command of General Frederick Franks. After breaking through
Iraqi units stationed on the Iraqi-Saudi border, the plan called for VII Corps to strike
rapidly northward through the desert region just west of Wadi al Batin. Once deep
inside Iraq and parallel with the northern boundary of Kuwait, VII Corps would then
“wheel” to the right, confronting the concentration of Iraqi Republican Guard
divisions and seizing control of the Basrah-Kuwait City highway.

The US Army’s official history of the war later explicitly argued that the ambitious
manoeuvre outlined for VII Corps “conjured up images of great end runs like
Rommel’s sweep around the British 8th Army at Gazala in May 1942 or Guderian’s
XIX Panzer Corps’ brilliant slip through the Ardennes and dash to the English
Channel in May 1940.”160 Certainly, the overall design of the operation closely
resembled that of Fall Gelb – an ambitious flanking attack, through a weakly
defended region, towards a coastline. However, the similarities between the two
campaigns only deepen when one examines the details of each more closely. Just as
Fall Gelb had counted on the Allies not expecting an armoured thrust to come
through the natural obstacle of the Ardennes forest, so too did Desert Storm rely on
the Iraqi belief that the Arabian Desert in southern Iraq would be unsuitable for a
major US armoured attack. The Wehrmacht plan had also utilized a number of
deceptive measures to ensure that the Allies did not recognise that their main effort
would fall on the Ardennes region until it was too late. So too did Schwarzkopf

160 R. Scales, Certain Victory, p. 129.
successfully attempt to deceive the Iraqi military as to where the main US strike would land.

Desert Storm’s deception plan hinged primarily on the complex movement of forces prior to the opening of the ground campaign. Until the very last possible moment, the disposition of VII and XVIII Corps were intended to give the impression that they would attack directly across the Saudi-Kuwaiti border. Starting two weeks before the invasion, each corps would rapidly relocate (crossing over each other in the process) westward so as to fill their assigned starting positions. The manoeuvre would be conducted under the cover of Coalition air superiority and attacks throughout the theatre to prevent the Iraqi leadership from recognising the shift – not unlike the Luftwaffe’s concealment of Army Group A’s advance through the Ardennes. To further divert the enemy’s attention, just prior to the ground campaign, forces in the Persian Gulf feinted an amphibious landing along the Kuwaiti coast.\textsuperscript{161} While there was no such feint during the German invasion of France and the Low Countries, the actual task ascribed to the 1st and 2nd Marine Divisions facing the southern Kuwaiti border closely mirrored that of Army Group B in Fall Gelb. The marine divisions – in a combined effort with a number of other Coalition units from Syria, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and other Middle East nations – were to strike directly into Kuwait in an effort to cause the Iraqi military to interpret this move as the main effort of the entire offensive.\textsuperscript{162}

\textsuperscript{161} R. Citino, \textit{Blitzkrieg to Desert Storm}, p. 280.
\textsuperscript{162} R. Scales, \textit{Certain Victory}, pp. 128-130. The other contributions from the Middle East included remnants of Kuwaiti forces, and contingents from Qatar and the United Arab Emirates.
Figure Three: Two Corps Execution of Operation Desert Storm

The use of close air support and airborne operations were also critical to the success of Operation Desert Storm, just as they had been for the Wehrmacht’s invasion of France in 1940. Not only did the actions of Coalition air units help conceal the movement of Coalition forces (and thus aid in deceiving the enemy) in the weeks leading up to the ground campaign, but as the attack progressed, close air support proved to be vital to the speed and ease with which VII Corps attained its objectives.

In place of the Ju-87 Stuka dive bomber, the US Army made extensive use of the A-10 Thunderbolt ground attack aircraft and the AH-64 Apache attack helicopter to thwart Iraqi counterattacks. During the initial air and artillery bombardment of what was referred to as the breach zone (the Iraqi border defensive region through which VII Corps would enter Iraq) the Iraqi 52nd Armoured Brigade earned the nickname “the go away brigade” due to its selection for total destruction by Schwarzkopf during initial planning. In several days of bombing, the 52nd Armoured Brigade was reduced to only 10 percent of its original combat effectiveness. Many other Iraqi units all across the region would also be decimated by air, missile, and artillery strikes. Close air support was critical to the airborne operations conducted by the 101st and 82nd Airborne Divisions to protect the western flank of VII Corps. Like the German Fallschirmjäger assaults on strategically important defensive works during Fall Gelb, US airborne units were used to capture airfields and to establish roadblocks along critical enemy supply routes.

Airborne operations, coupled with the sheer speed of the US led coalition’s “great wheel” towards the northern approaches of Kuwait effectively blocked the retreat of Iraqi forces. The north-south highways connecting Kuwait with Iraq turned into the modern land-based equivalent of Dunkirk, becoming a graveyard for Iraqi vehicles.

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and heavy equipment. Highway 80 in particular, which ran between Kuwait City and Basrah, became known as “the Highway of Death” because of the sheer number of vehicles destroyed and abandoned on it. Like Dunkirk, however, a surprisingly large number of personnel were able to slip through the encirclement, with somewhere between 70 000 to 80 000 Iraqi troops estimated to have made it to Basrah.166

Operation Desert Storm, like Fall Gelb before it, proved to be a decisive success. In a matter of weeks the US led coalition defeated the bulk of the Iraqi military units stationed in Kuwait and Southern Iraq whilst sustaining negligible losses to their own forces.167 The victory served to vindicate both Airland Battle doctrine and the full spectrum of reforms which had been implemented in the 1970s and 1980s. Far from being “another Vietnam” the Gulf War demonstrated that the new, all volunteer, professional, and technologically advanced American army was just as effective on the conventional battlefield, if not more so, than its conscription based predecessor. Indeed, Airland Battle and success in Desert Storm were the culmination of over two centuries of a relationship between the “colonial” American military and its European forbears.

166 R. Scales, Certain Victory, pp. 314-316.
167 R. Citino, Blitzkrieg to Desert Storm, p. 288.
The German Military Tradition and the US Army

Since its very creation as an organised force during the War of Independence, the US military has relied heavily upon the incorporation of European military ideas and methods to augment and improve its own approach to warfare. In particular, the rapid rise of Prussian-German land-based military strength loomed large over the greater part of the first two hundred years of the American nation’s existence. Several episodes of this American-German interaction will be examined closely throughout this chapter, including: the Prussian drillmaster Baron de Steuben’s writing of the Continental Army’s first doctrinal manual, Emory Upton’s calls for Prussian style reform in the late 19th century, the establishment of the Joint Chiefs in emulation of the Prussian General Staff system,168 and the direct lifting of entire sentences and concepts from German interwar military doctrine by the US Army in 1940. These prominent examples not only reveal the extent of German influence on the US military, but also an American predisposition for emulation. In this context, the Wehrmacht mystique was not an isolated incident of admiration between one military and another, but rather, merely another episode in a long history of inter-military emulation, and the latest phase in a specifically American relationship with foreign military theory and practice.

American interest in Prussian and later German military methods was far from unique or exclusive to the young colonial nation. All the major powers of Europe during the same time period (France, Germany, Britain, Russia, and Austria-Hungary) engaged in similar attempts to extract applicable military lessons from their allies, rivals, and the events of recent conflicts. The system of military attachés

grew directly out of this desire to learn the military structure, technology, and doctrine of one’s rivals. As discussed earlier in chapter two of this study, the system served to provide useful intelligence about enemy capabilities, but also supplied intellectual fodder for domestic innovation.¹⁶⁹ Modern European history is rife with examples of direct emulation between competing military powers: the Grand Coalition which defeated Napoleon utilized a great number of tactics and methods derived from the French military; Britain and France entered the First World War utilizing the offensive doctrine and modern organisational and logistical methods pioneered by Prussia in 1870-71¹⁷⁰; and Germany’s early success in the Second World War was achieved with concepts of mechanized warfare adapted from those first developed by British military theorists.¹⁷¹

In short, the militaries of Europe throughout the 19th and 20th centuries were intertwined in a complex system of innovation, emulation, and adaptation. These relationships were, however, not usually simple bilateral transfers from one military to another. Interest in one or the other military would ebb and flow according to their respective battlefield fortunes and perceived superiority. Due to its continued demonstrations of military efficiency and strength, Prussia and later Germany came to play a central role in this European confluence of military ideas. In the same way as the powers of Europe drew from a variety of foreign sources in the development of doctrine, so too did the US military draw inspiration from a number of military traditions, not just that of Germany. Elements of French, British, German, and later Soviet military doctrine has each, at one time or another, affected the American

¹⁶⁹ T. Mahnken, Uncovering Ways of War.
¹⁷¹ For further examples of the international transfer of military ideas see: W. Murray and A. Millett, Military Innovation in the Interwar Period; and M. Habeck, Storm of Steel.
approach to war. 172 For every von Steuben there was a Lafayette; for every Upton there was a Thayer; for every Martin van Creveld there was a Steven Canby. 173 The relatively brief history of American military emulation given here will concentrate on those instances involving Prussian or German influence. American emulation of non-German European powers is only discussed in relation to how it demonstrated a continuous American propensity to emulate its European counterparts across most of its existence. Furthermore, all of the examples of American emulation of German military methods reviewed below have been noted previously by other historians, but are yet to be all compiled into one comprehensive account of German-American military exchanges. Viewing the issue from such an overarching perspective places the Wehrmacht mystique in its necessary historical context.

The story of German influence on the American military begins during the War of Independence and the establishment of the Continental Army. Early in the war (particularly before the summer of 1777) officers from all over a then peaceful Europe were flocking to the US in search of place and title within the fledgling American military organisation. 174 George Washington’s desire to create “A European army to fight a European war, but in America” encouraged this kind of influx in foreign talent. 175 Officers such as the Frenchman Marquis de Lafayette and the Bavarian Johann de Kalb – both of whom went on to make important contributions to the patriotic cause – were drawn to America during this early search for European talent. The Prussian Freiherr Friedrich Wilhelm von Steuben, or Baron de Steuben as he would be known in America, began his career in the Continental

172 R. Weigley, The American Way of War, pp. 81-84.
173 In reference to the efforts of Stephen Canby to introduce the US Army to the Soviet operational style see: S. Naveh, In Pursuit of Military Excellence, pp. 274-275.
175 P. Lockhart, The Drillmaster of Valley Forge, p. 89.
Army as a European volunteer seeking opportunity then difficult to attain in Europe.\textsuperscript{176}

Steuben’s first contribution to the patriotic cause and American military history was the inculcation of discipline and basic drill into what remained of the Continental Army in Valley Forge during the late winter and early spring of 1778. It was here that he initially earned the epithet of “the Prussian drillmaster of Valley Forge” for the effective drill training he oversaw for the stricken Continentals as well as his animated outbursts of German and French profanities on the parade ground. The image of a blustering Prussian drillmaster has passed into the mythology of American military culture and continues to be popularly remembered during “Steuben day” festivals on his birthday dedicated to German-American relations in New York, Chicago, and Philadelphia.\textsuperscript{177} However, the caricatured representation of Steuben that has passed into memory, while powerful in the one sense, falls short of recognising the depth and breadth of contributions made by the Baron to the Continental Army and US military doctrine thereafter.

Steuben in fact made three major contributions during his time in the Continental Army in the role of Inspector General: training, doctrine, and education. In terms of training, he certainly lived up to the title of Prussian drillmaster – turning the tenacious but relatively amateur Continental Army into an uniform, disciplined, and well-trained force capable of fighting and moving like its European adversary. He did so through the institution of rigorous Prussian style training methods and a variety of reforms such as simplified drill movements and precision marching in large units. The effect of Steuben’s training was clearly evident in the Battles of

\textsuperscript{176} Von Steuben was born Friedrich Wilhelm Ludolf Gerhard Augustin von Steuben on September 17th, 1730 in Magdeburg, Prussia. ‘Baron’ was a translation of the German title ‘Freiherr’ (or free lord). P. Lockhart, \textit{The Drillmaster of Valley Forge}, pp. 1 and 29.
\textsuperscript{177} P. Lockhart, \textit{The Drillmaster of Valley Forge}, pp. 300-301.
Barren Hill and Monmouth, where the American troops’ ability to manoeuvre quickly and precisely prevented their annihilation at the hands of the numerically superior British. The Prussian-like exactitude with which a Continental brigade moved during a review exercise, organised by Steuben in 1782, led the leader of French forces in America, General Rochambeau, to exclaim upon observation: “You must have formed an alliance with the king of Prussia. These troops are Prussians!”178

In 1779, Steuben compiled the teachings of his parade ground reforms into a field manual entitled *Regulations for the Order and Discipline of the Troops of the United States*. The “blue book” as it came to be known, went on to serve as the official regulations of the US Army through to the War of 1812, but “its rationale – that European military practice could be integrated into a uniquely American way of war – would last for much longer.”179 Despite Rochambeau’s remarking to the contrary, Steuben had not merely copied the Prussian manual verbatim for use by the Continentals. Instead he adapted the “best elements from the Prussian and French systems” to suit American conditions and requirements. Although the doctrine itself was a simplified and common sense modification of European methods, it was still perceived by most Continental soldiers (who had no way of knowing that the drill they were learning was Prussian or otherwise) to be the “Prussian exercise.”180 This distinction between perception and reality is a critical point to be made, as it is a persistent theme of the German-American military relationship. Throughout US history, its military begins with an intention to emulate German doctrine, and ends in the belief that it has achieved this end; but in reality the final product of reform differs in some way from its intended German source.

179 P. Lockhart, *The Drillmaster of Valley Forge*, p. 301.
Steuben’s final contribution, and one which resulted in a typical German-American misinterpretation, was his insistence on the creation of the US Military Academy at West Point. Along with proposing the creation of a small professional standing army supplemented by a larger militia contingent, Steuben insisted that the training of capable military leaders was of utmost importance. In 1784, many years before West Point passed out its first graduate, Steuben “laid out the salient characteristics of the American military academy – down to the last detail, including the conduct of cadets in the mess halls” in a document presented to the Secretary at War Benjamin Lincoln. In the end, however, it was not Steuben’s intricate designs for an academy, but the insistent requests of Washington, Henry Knox, and Thomas Jefferson which led to the foundation of West Point.

The academy at West Point, despite Steuben’s role in encouraging its creation, would go on to reflect French rather than Prussian approaches to military education. Indeed, the academy became, under the superintendency of Sylvanus Thayer in the early 19th century, a centre of advocacy for, and the dissemination of, Napoleonic and French military thought. The French influence on West Point was part of a broader American fascination with Napoleon and the military system which carried France to the impressive victories of Austerlitz, Jena, and Auerstädt. An analysis of the US Army’s interest in the French military between 1812 and 1870 reveals a host of similarities with the Wehrmacht mystique of the late 20th century. The significance of this “Napoleon mystique” – within the wider context of this thesis – is, therefore, concerned less with who the US military were emulating and more to do with why and how it did so.

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181 P. Lockhart, The Drillmaster of Valley Forge, p. 290.
Sylvanus Thayer, the so-called father of West Point, played a central role in establishing West Point as a preeminent American military and academic institution, and in propagating interest in French and Napoleonic military theory within the US. Russel Weigley has noted that Thayer himself, as well the faculty whom he brought to West Point, were “extravagantly deferential to Napoleon and to France” and “thoroughly conscious of the colonial relationship of the United States to European military thought and practice.”183 The degree to which a fascination with Napoleon permeated the faculty at West Point was evidenced by a “Napoleon Club” devoted to the study of Bonaparte’s military campaigns and approach to warfare.184 The club’s creator, Dennis Hart Mahan, was the professor of engineering and military science at West Point from 1832 to 1871.185 For almost forty years, US military officers received their introduction to military thought predominantly in Mahan’s classroom where the discussion of Napoleon’s campaigns were a regular feature.186 Of Mahan’s students at West Point, Stephen Ambrose has commented: “Most of them would fight in the Civil War, where they always tried, usually without success, to emulate the Corsican’s moves.”187 The US government under Presidents Madison and Monroe were particularly interested in the way the mass armies of the Napoleonic era had been raised, administered, and brought to bear in combat. As part of this official curiosity, the US instituted a program of sending military observers to Europe and particularly to France. Both Mahan and Thayer travelled to France in an official capacity as part of this effort.188 Between the War of 1812 and the outbreak

183 R. Weigley, The American Way of War, p. 81.
187 S. Ambrose, Duty, Honor, Country, pp. 138-139. For further reference to the influence of Napoleon on US officers during the Civil War see: R. Weigley, The American Way of War, pp. 80 and 89.
of the Civil War “at least 105 US Army officers visited Europe, officially or
unofficially... In all, seventy of these officers eventually served in the Civil War.”189

The Napoleon mystique of the 19th century and the Wehrmacht mystique of the late
20th century share a number of similarities. Both were founded upon the spectacular
battlefield victories of European aggressors who appeared to defy the odds by
defeating, in rapid succession, what had previously been thought of as superior
military powers. The Wehrmacht’s campaigns of 1940-41 and Napoleon’s stunning
string of victories across continental Europe created, for each, a lingering aura of
superiority, which even outlived their eventual defeat. Just as US Army officers in
the First Gulf War sought to recreate the cunning campaigns of manoeuvre like those
implemented by Erwin Rommel and Heinz Guderian, so too did Union and
Confederate officers of the Civil War attempt to imitate Napoleon’s great battles.190

Whilst the US Army successfully recreated the prominent features of Blitzkrieg in
1991, neither the Union Army nor that of the Confederacy ever attained the kind of
Napoleonic decisiveness or “climactic battle” that they so desperately sought.
Instead, the Civil War was fought as a long, drawn out conflict of attrition where the
US military gained its first taste for the raw effectiveness of economic, numerical,
and technological superiority.

The length and indecision of the American Civil War would prove to stand in stark
contrast to the nature of the next major European conflict – the Franco-Prussian War
of 1870-71. What made this conflict stand out, at least in the eyes of contemporaries,
from the other equally quick and decisive Prussian campaigns in the Wars of German
Unification, was the illustrious reputation of Prussia’s freshly vanquished foe –
France. In one stroke the Prussian military usurped France’s position as the model of

189 P. Skirbunt, Prologue to Reform, pp. 18-19.
land based military strength. Accordingly, the conflict marked a new stage in the American military’s long history of emulating European militaries: one in which Prussia (now unified into the German empire), rather than Napoleon and France, became the subject of US emulation.

Just as investigative tours of France and their military education system by US officers (such as Thayer and Mahan) had played a critical role in the perpetuation of the Napoleon mystique, so too did American military observers and visits by high ranking commanders serve a vital function in rallying interest in German military prowess in the late 19th century. Two of the great heroes of the Civil War – Major General Phillip Sheridan and the then Commanding General of the US Army William Sherman – were among the most prominent American observers of the Franco-Prussian conflict and its aftermath.

The two generals made quite different journeys but came to similarly positive conclusions regarding the German military and its approach to warfare. Sheridan arrived in Europe while the war was in full swing and was able to quickly embed himself within the German ranks while the fighting was still taking place. Sheridan “met Bismarck the night before the battle of Gravelotte and stayed in his company for several days. He was able to follow the campaign all the way to Paris and for a time relived some of his experiences from the Civil War: he came under fire, aided in caring for the wounded, observed cavalry and infantry charges, and was allowed some insight into German grand strategy.”\textsuperscript{191} Sheridan, with his prior familiarity with the realities of combat in the era, was wary of the kind of extravagant praise being hastily directed towards the German military.\textsuperscript{192} Despite his restraint, Sheridan still expressed his admiration for the overall quality of German infantry and the raw

\textsuperscript{191} P. Skirbunt, \textit{Prologue to Reform}, pp. 59-60.
\textsuperscript{192} P. Skirbunt, \textit{Prologue to Reform}, p. 60.
efficiency of the German regimental mobilization system. His interest in the regimental system was significant for two reasons: first, as the system would go on to become a recurring idea raised by those in America advocating for the emulation of the German military; and second, because renewed interest in the regimental system would (over a hundred years later, in the 1980s) ultimately induce the introduction of the COHORT (Cohesion, Operational Readiness and Training) system.

Sheridan’s testimony of German professionalism, combined with an administrative impasse preventing domestic reform, induced Sherman to set off on an unofficial European tour of his own in 1871-72. Sherman visited, among a host of other European nations, the military establishments of both France and Germany. Regarding what he saw, Sherman remarked in an interview with The Army Navy Journal in July 1872 that “[the German army] is unquestionably the finest army in the world... It is a perfect machine of war.” Like Sheridan, Sherman also attempted to extract lessons from German methods and organisation. Shortly after his return from Europe, Sherman put a proposal to Congress which would emulate the German routine of periodically rotating officers between staff and line roles. Sherman recognized, as many other line officers had previously, that the departmental staffs had become an exclusive clique too heavily politically and financially invested in maintaining the status quo to allow the kind of organisational reform required to modernize the US military. The proposal was denied by

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193 P. Skirbunt, Prologue to Reform, pp. 60-61.
194 S. Newland, ‘Manning the Force German Style’, pp. 36-45.
196 P. Skirbunt, Prologue to Reform, p. 92.
Secretary of War William Belknap, but the idea remained a central topic of the debate concerning military reform.¹⁹⁷

The high profile efforts of Sheridan and Sherman certainly helped invigorate US interest in the German military. The process of converting interest into tangible change would, however, last decades. Over time a reform movement developed, made up of dozens of officers and politicians advocating for the emulation of German military organisation and methods. Despite repeated attempts at instituting change, it took the shift in public opinion caused by the military blunders of the Spanish-American War in 1898 to create the required impetus and political conditions necessary for meaningful reform.

Probably the most vocal and well known figure among these reformers was Emory Upton. Indeed, Upton’s name has become synonymous with the reform movement of the post-Civil War era, despite his death before witnessing his ideas come to fruition. During the Civil War, Upton earned a reputation as a capable and daring officer.¹⁹⁸ Upton rose in rank from West Point cadet in 1861 to Brevet Major General in just a few short years.¹⁹⁹ Upton’s innovative mind caught the eye of General Sherman, who in August of 1875 selected Upton to undertake a world tour of Asian and European militaries. Upton visited Japan, China, Russia, India, Turkey, Britain, France, Germany, and Austria.²⁰⁰ During the European segment of his tour, Upton noticed that “most European armies had adopted the Prussian system of promotion, the use of military districts to aid in conscription and mobilization, and the rotation of

¹⁹⁷ P. Skirbunt, Prologue to Reform, pp. 67, 165-167.
¹⁹⁹ S. Ambrose, Upton and the Army, pp. 16 and 41.
²⁰⁰ S. Ambrose, Upton and the Army, pp. 87-89.
officers from staff to line duty and back again.”

This realization, along with a desire to “avert unnecessary extravagance, disaster, and bloodshed” in America’s next war, motivated him to outline a variety of German based reforms for the US Army.

Upton formed a list of reforms necessary to modernize the US Army in a manuscript entitled *The Military Policy of the United States*. Alongside a detailed analysis of US military history, Upton proposed five key Prussian-based changes. The first and foremost of Upton’s proposed changes was the replacement of the existing General Staff system, whose primary function was currently administrative, with one built around operational planning like that of Prussia and Germany. Second, in order to accommodate the transformation of the General Staff, the US would need to institute the rotation of officers between staff and line positions (as General Sherman had campaigned for some years prior). Third, Upton proposed an expanded military education system, with specialized schools for each of the major arms and a capstone institution (based on the model of the German *Kriegsakademie*) capable of producing officers of the calibre and depth of training in operational matters required to fill positions in the new General Staff. Fourth, in order to foster a higher level of professionalism and efficiency in the US Army, Upton insisted that the approach to officer promotion – which then offered promotions primarily based on time served and which allowed the appointment of underqualified civilians to high ranking positions – would need to be replaced. The new system of promotion would value proven ability above all else and would determine suitability through Prussian style

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201 P. Skirbunt, *Prologue to Reform*, p. 72.
204 S. Ambrose, *Upton and the Army*, p. 103.
Finally, Upton suggested a National Volunteer Reserve system which, although heavily modified for the American political and social context, was nonetheless inspired by the Prussian Landwehr system.

Upton did not live to see *Military Policy* published, or witness his proposed changes to the US military come to pass. After repeated failures to implement reform (and having fallen ill with severe headaches) Upton committed suicide in 1881. Although the *Military Policy* manuscript would stay unpublished until 1904, it remained influential via its unofficial distribution among American political and military leadership circles in the 1880s and 1890s. The manuscript, and the key reforms Upton outlined within it, became a guiding force behind the transformation of the US military over the next forty years.

Upton was not the first or the last US advocate of German based reform whose calls for change would go unheeded. Numerous army boards and Congressional committees between 1867 and 1897 would attempt, unsuccessfully, to modernise the organisation and doctrine of the army. In a fashion not unlike the spread of the Wehrmacht Mystique onto the pages of *Military Review* in the 1970s and 1980s, the postbellum US interest in Prussian military methods would be expressed through a large number of reformist articles published in *The Army and Navy Journal* (ANJ) and *The Journal of the Military Service Institute*. For instance, in 1866 an editorial in ANJ proclaimed that the Prussian General Staff system was “so sensible and appropriate to the needs of our army, that its adoption – or the adoption of one

209 P. Skribunt, *Prologue to Reform*, p. 73.
212 P. Skribunt, *Prologue to Reform*, pp. 147-152.
substantially like it – should be urged by all who desire [to] see the efficiency of our Army increased.”214

The first steps toward bringing the US Army up to European (and more specifically Prussian) standards were taken in the fields of education and intelligence. By 1885 each of the primary arms of the US Army (infantry, cavalry, artillery, and engineers) had their own specialized school which could properly imbue West Point graduates with the skills and training specific to their chosen profession.215 This system not only closely mirrored that in use by Prussia but also facilitated the spread of German military ideas throughout the US officer corps. At these schools many of the instructors “studied the wars of 1866 and 1870, translated German tactical literature, and diligently applied the German applicatory method of tactical instruction.”216 The Prussian war game, or Kriegspiel, became a popular tool used by US instructors of the period to educate officers about modern tactics.217 The influence of Germany on the US military education system was so profound by the beginning of the 20th century that a Leavenworth lecturer would observe: “Our Field Service regulations unmistakably show the impress of German thought. Moltke teaches us our strategy, Griepenkerl writes our orders, while Von der Goltz tells us how they should be executed.”218

The changes in US military intelligence before 1898 did not bring about the emulation of Germany in as direct a fashion as had educational reform. However, the creation of an official attaché system in 1888 would prove to be an important step

215 In 1868 the Artillery School at Ft. Monroe was revived from disuse. In 1881 the Infantry and Cavalry School at Ft. Leavenworth was established and four years later an Engineer School was founded at Willett’s Point, New York. See: P. Skirbunt, Prologue to Reform, pp. 153-154.
towards legitimizing and sustaining US emulation of German military methods and doctrine. Up until its development, there had existed no single government body responsible for compiling, processing, or incorporating intelligence gathered from American military observers abroad. Instead individual politicians and military officials had, such as in the case of Upton’s tour of Asia and Europe, organised commissions intermittently for a specific purpose. Often there were no official reports or publications of an expedition’s findings at all. Similarly, the lack of an officially endorsed process made it more difficult for individual observers to turn what they had learned overseas – including doctrine, weapons technology, and combat experience – into applicable lessons for the US military. Germany was one of the first nations to receive an American attaché, due to its perceived supremacy in matters of land warfare.\textsuperscript{219} While the establishment of an attaché system had not been among the reforms suggested by Upton, it would nonetheless prove to be a critical movement towards developing support (particularly within the Army itself) for the modernization of the American military along European lines.

Despite the progress made in terms of intelligence and education, it would take the mistakes made and ineptitude exposed during the Spanish-American War of 1898 to fully awaken US policymakers to the prospect of meaningful reform. The failures of US military organisation, administration, equipment, and tactics were so pronounced that they quickly became headlines in what were usually, in time of war, enthusiastically patriotic American newspapers.\textsuperscript{220} The weight of public opinion, the necessities of defending its new colonial possessions in the Pacific, and the realization of its unpreparedness should war with a stronger European power (not one as weak and second rate as the Spanish had been) all combined to motivate a prolonged period of American military reform. The general structure of these

\textsuperscript{219} P. Skirbunt, \textit{Prologue to Reform}, p. 112.
\textsuperscript{220} P. Skirbunt, \textit{Prologue to Reform}, p. 160.
reforms was inspired by the Prussian military and had been outlined by Upton almost two decades earlier.

It is interesting to compare this phase of American military history with that surrounding the late Cold War US Army’s development of Airland Battle. In both cases, long before any change was enacted, a small group of vocal individuals argued that emulating the German approach to war was the best course of action for the US military. Upton, Sherman, and Sheridan fulfilled this role in the late 19th century, while during the Cold War the part was played by civilian reformers and the German generals involved in the German Military History Program who reviewed US Army doctrine during the 1950s and 1960s (an event which will be discussed in greater detail later in this chapter). Again in both instances, it took the realities of failure in battle (the American-Spanish War and the Vietnam War respectively) to stimulate significant reform.

The central actor behind the changes made following the Spanish War debacle was Secretary of War Elihu Root. Shortly after his appointment in 1899, Root had actively sought out and acquired a copy of Upton’s *Military Policy* manuscript. The manuscript would guide Root to introduce a host of changes to the military organisation of the US before leaving office in 1904. In those few short years, Root enlarged the federal army; instituted closer federal supervision of the National Guard; established a “capstone” Army War College for the training of high level officers; introduced the Prussian style three-battalion regiment; began the rotation of service between the staff and line; and last but not least, created a general staff capable of operational planning based on the Prussian model.221 A critical omission made by Root was the National Volunteer system devised by Upton. This too,

221 S. Ambrose, *Upton and the Army*, p. 156.
however, would be introduced during the preparedness crisis of 1916 when the
general staff sponsored a plan that in its essential points was a copy of Upton’s
National Volunteer scheme.222

Due to the efforts of Root and Upton, the US entered the First World War with a
military system broadly modelled on that of Germany. Indeed, Stephen Ambrose
concludes his biography of Upton by stating: “By the second decade of the twentieth
century most of the reforms for which Upton struggled, and which he despaired of
ever achieving, were realities.”223 The critical phrase here being “most of the
reforms,” for even after such a long period of fascination with the Prussian military,
and the efforts of Root to bring Upton’s ideas to life, the US military remained
fundamentally different from that envisaged by Upton or that of Germany. What
emerged was a mixture of German concepts and methods, diluted by American ideals
and adapted to America’s unique social and political structures.

Two important conclusions can be drawn from America’s experience until the end of
its involvement in, World War I. First, the US military was internally aware that the
reforms it implemented were explicitly copied from the German army or at the very
least, were inspired by or adapted from it. The degree to which the US Army
resembled its German counterpart matters less than an understanding that American
politicians and officers believed that the best way to improve its military was through
the emulation of whichever European nation appeared to be worth learning from.
Second, unlike the experience of the Napoleon Mystique during the Civil War –
where commanders on both sides repeatedly failed to achieve decisive results –
efforts to emulate Prussian organisation and tactics had successfully transformed the
US from a nation barely able to attain victory in colonial confrontations with a

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222 S. Ambrose, Upton and the Army, pp. 157-158.
223 S. Ambrose, Upton and the Army, p. 158.
second rate European power in 1898 into a military power ranked equal to the Great Powers of Europe by 1918. Clearly the US army had learned something from the Germans, and whether the success of the American Expeditionary Force should be attributed to pre-war German inspired reforms or not, the process of European emulation was by 1918 as thoroughly ingrained into American military culture as ever.

The interwar period (1918-1941) which followed was, for the US Army, defined by isolationist budgetary cuts on the one hand, and a focussed interest in European military developments on the other. The US military attaché system, which had been formally established in the 1880s and had contributed to the Root reforms, became an increasingly important factor in the evolution of American doctrine and especially armoured development between the World Wars.

The US Army Military Intelligence Division (MID) was, for most of the interwar period, composed of between twenty and thirty attachés spread across the globe. Berlin remained one of the premiere locations (along with Paris) for an American attaché to be posted, due to Germany’s reputation as a “world leader in weapons, tactics, and training.” This reputation is made all the more impressive considering the drastic military limitations placed on Germany by the Versailles Treaty and its recent status as an American enemy during World War One. The enduring respect for the German military on the part of American officers further manifested itself in the incorporation of concepts from the German doctrinal manual into the US Army’s 1923 Field Service Regulations.

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In fact, before 1933 Germany and the US had one of the closest diplomatic relationships between any of the world powers.\textsuperscript{227} The relationship was kindled by a German perception that American isolationist politics would secure its neutrality in European military affairs. The German Army maintained an official list ranking nations according to “diplomatic considerations, tact, and the treatment of German attachés in their country.”\textsuperscript{228} The US fell into the highest category along with countries such as Bulgaria, Hungary, Italy, Japan, Nationalist Spain, Sweden, and Yugoslavia.\textsuperscript{229} As a result, American attachés and officers were allowed special access to German military facilities, manoeuvres, and doctrinal developments.

With Hitler’s rise to power in 1933, diplomatic relations between the two nations cooled slightly, but the groundwork laid by US officers in the 1920s preserved their military affiliation. A central figure responsible for maintaining this relationship was the US Army attaché to Germany from 1935-1939, Truman Smith. Through personal contacts and astute diplomacy, Smith brokered numerous military intelligence exchanges between the US and Germany during a critical period in Blitzkrieg’s development. Smith was able to draw from friendships he had fostered during his original posting as an assistant attaché in the 1920s.\textsuperscript{230} Walther von Reichenau, Walter Warlimont, Werner von Blomberg, Hans Speidel, and Adolf von Schell were all highly placed German Army officers whose personal ties with Smith allowed him to discreetly extract useful intelligence for use by the US military.\textsuperscript{231}

\textsuperscript{228} T. Mahnken, \textit{Uncovering Ways of War}, pp. 89-90.
\textsuperscript{230} R. Cameron, ‘Americanizing the Tank’, p. 300.
\textsuperscript{231} R. Cameron, ‘Americanizing the Tank’, p. 301.
In the realm of German armoured development, Smith’s friendship with von Schell proved vital. Schell served successively as “an instructor at the German General Staff School, the Chief of Staff of the War Ministry’s Motor Inspectorate, and Inspector General of Armor and Army Mobilization.” Smith’s close relationship with Schell therefore allowed the US to receive an unrivalled level of insight into the secretive but rapidly changing domain of German armoured doctrine and organisation. Smith also successfully brokered reciprocal agreements between the US and Germany for industrial visits and a military education exchange program. Beginning in 1935, one US officer per year was invited to study at the German Kriegsakademie, and Wehrmacht officers were similarly invited to study at the US Army War College. “The German practice of experimenting with new unit organizations at the Kriegsakademie prior to their adoption by the field army, including those – like the Panzer division – otherwise inaccessible to the American attaché, further increased the Kriegsakademie’s intelligence value to MID.” The information gathered by MID prior to September 1939 would prove to be of critical importance following the outbreak of the Second World War.

Germany’s quick string of successes in 1939-40 marked the true inception of the Wehrmacht mystique within the US military. During this period, the US (along with all the major European military powers) scrambled to understand and garner valuable lessons from the new form of war which Germany had unleashed to such devastating effect across Europe.

232 Smith arranged for Charles Lindbergh to visit Luftwaffe facilities after German restrictions began to prevent him from gathering sufficient intelligence. Smith also organised a reciprocal agreement whereby German and American officers to visit each other’s tank units and production facilities. See: R. Cameron, ‘Americanizing the Tank’, p. 302.
233 T. Mahnken, Uncovering Ways of War, p. 102.
234 R. Cameron, ‘Americanizing the Tank’, p. 299.
American neutrality played a key role in granting its officers unique access to the German campaign in Poland. US Army officers were allowed (along with those from Finland, Hungary and Japan) to visit the frontlines and see the effectiveness of Blitzkrieg doctrine for themselves. The Military Intelligence Division (MID) quickly became inundated with questions from US Army officers inquiring about every aspect of the German military machine. In order to satiate widespread demand, MID compiled its intelligence findings regarding the combatants into a weekly “Tentative Lessons Learned” booklet and distributed it throughout the army. Unsurprisingly, Germany featured prominently in these booklets – with the majority of the 170 bulletins issued between May 1940 and November 1941 focusing on the Wehrmacht. Of all the combat arms of the US Army, the cavalry had the greatest interest in keeping abreast of doctrinal developments overseas. Additional to MID, the Chief of Cavalry’s Office maintained its own smaller intelligence service for the distribution of information to cavalry units. The mechanization file, as it came to be known, included copies of military attaché reports, interviews with returning American attachés and foreign officers serving in the US, excerpts from MID’s intelligence summaries, articles from the civilian press, and articles published in foreign military journals. The file, along with personal requests for intelligence from cavalry officers, kept the small contingent of US armoured units relatively well informed, compared with other branches of the army, of what was transpiring in Europe.

In late 1939, the Chief of Cavalry, Major General John Herr, sent the US military attaché in Germany a comprehensive list of questions regarding the performance of

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235 T. Mahnken, Uncovering Ways of War, p. 90.
236 T. Mahnken, Uncovering Ways of War, p. 107.
239 R. Cameron, ‘Americanizing the Tank’, p. 270.
German armour in Poland. The attaché at the time, Percy Black, responded by stressing that “the Germans had solved many of the problems that still plagued the US Army’s armored forces.” Shortly thereafter, Herr strongly advocated that the 7th Cavalry Brigade (Mechanized) be immediately converted into a Mechanized Cavalry Division identical to that of the German Panzer Division. The commander of the 7th Cavalry Brigade, General Adna Chaffee, later requested that Black address the staff of his mechanized unit. After Black’s visit, Chaffee wrote to the Army Chief of Staff claiming that Black had “brought to the Mechanized Brigade many ideas concerning the organization, training, and combat of the highly developed German army.”

The German defeat of France in May 1940 induced the US Army to finally heed calls for the adoption of its own armoured divisions. The administration of these divisions would be given to a new organisation within the cavalry, called the Armored Force. Black served as the Armored Force’s first intelligence officer and Chaffee assumed command of 1st Armored Corps. It should come as little surprise, then, that the creation of these divisions was heavily influenced by US intelligence regarding their German counterpart. The Panzer division served as a benchmark for comparison, with the commander of the 3rd Armored Division, Brigadier General Alvan Gillem contending: “Our Armored Division should be organized and equipped to be at least the equal of, but preferably superior to, the German Armored Division.” The Armored Force did its best to reach this goal by utilizing its intelligence on the basic organisational structure of the pre-war Panzer division, and “when the United States received information that the Wehrmacht had changed the infantry and artillery

240 T. Mahnken, Uncovering Ways of War, pp. 107-108.
244 T. Mahnken, Uncovering Ways of War, p. 111-112.
components and supply echelon of the Panzer division, the Army altered the composition of its armored divisions accordingly.”246

Emulation went well beyond organisational structure and into the realms of doctrine and education. In May 1941, Lieutenant Colonel James Crockett (who had been posted to Germany with Truman Smith) provided the Armored Force with a translated copy of a German textbook addressing the tactics and training of a tank platoon. It included a foreword written by Heinz Guderian, lessons learned from the French campaign, and illustrations demonstrating the right and wrong way to apply the tactics presented.247 The translated version was “duplicated, the illustration changed to represent American rather than German vehicles, and the ideas made the basis for an American field manual governing tank platoons.”248

The US Army made every attempt, within a limited timeframe and with imperfect information (supplied predominantly by MID), to enter the Second World War with its own version of a Panzer division. However, this instance of American emulation of the German military ended like so many others before it – in an American failure to accurately capture and replicate the spirit of the German institution being copied. Like von Steuben’s Prussian exercise and Upton’s reforms, the German original somehow became lost in translation.

Over the course of the war, the US would receive firsthand experience of the devastating effectiveness of the Wehrmacht. Yet time and again the US and its allies would, through the use of superior firepower and numbers, succeed in overcoming their German adversary. Indeed, this is precisely the point that historian Martin van

Creveld emphasised in support of the US Army’s emulation of the Wehrmacht in the 1980s. But the US reliance on firepower and numerical superiority during this period also had its own lasting impacts on US Army culture and laid the foundations for the Wehrmacht mystique. First, the difficulty with which Germany was defeated, even despite its significant numerical and economic disadvantage, only served to further develop the aura of superiority (or mystique) which the Wehrmacht had established with its early victories in 1939-40. Second, the difficulty of defeating German units fed into a common inclination to overestimate an enemy’s effectiveness. Ralph Peters would later criticise the Wehrmacht mystique on these grounds in a Military Review article, stating: “glorification of the German generals is in the best traditions of the primitive hunter/warrior, exaggerating the numbers of the foe or the fearsomeness of the wild beast to his own aggrandizement. It was more satisfying when the Germans were 10 feet tall. It glorifies our own accomplishment in defeating them and is a better excuse for our frequent difficulties along the way.”

Finally, because raw numerical superiority had been deemed instrumental to their victory, American defence policy came to view numbers and resources as essential prerequisites for military success. This was particularly evident in the statistical “balance of forces” analyses between the Soviet Union and NATO in terms of conventional and nuclear weapons which became so prevalent throughout the Cold War. The system analyst phenomenon of the Vietnam War, and its associated obsession with body count statistics were also manifestations of the American propensity for quantification.

The notion that US victory over Germany was the result of raw American numerical superiority gained popular recognition during the post-war era. Indeed, the popularization of this concept went hand in hand with the spread of the Wehrmacht

mystique. But as effective as the war had been in restoring the familiar American regard for German military effectiveness, circumstances quickly arose which further intensified this trend. Specifically, the mystique received a healthy boost from former Wehrmacht officers taking part in the German Military History Program (GMHP) conducted by the US Army. The historical program would, in fact, play an equally important role in perpetuating the Wehrmacht mystique as any of the Wehrmacht’s actual battlefield victories.

The German Military History Program began as part of a wider effort to create a “comprehensive and factually correct” narrative of the US Army’s involvement in the Second World War. US efforts to gather information from German prisoners of war commenced with the Shuster Mission in July of 1945, and involved only five American interrogators. Despite its limited and haphazard execution, the mission nonetheless succeeded in spurring official interest in instituting an organised effort to extract a greater depth and breadth of information from German prisoners of war. The start made by the Shuster Mission was quickly built upon by the US Army (European Theater) Historical Division. The Historical Division had, up until that point, been responsible for recording the history of US units in the field and conducting after action interviews with US commanders. But in January of 1946, under the supervision of S. L. A. Marshall, the Historical Division officially added an “Operational History (German) Section.”

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252 Before 1945 the Historical Division was titled the Historical Section, for further details see: K. Hechler, ‘The Enemy Side of the Hill: The 1945 background on Interrogation of German Commanders’, in C. Burdick, D. Detwiler, and J. Rohwer (eds.), World War II German Military Studies, pp. 1-9.
The primary aim of this new section was the gathering and collating of German accounts of operations against American forces. American and German perspectives on events would then be incorporated into the official history of the US Army in World War II. The manuscripts collected during the period 1945-46 are marked by general adherence to the initial historical purpose of the program. The German accounts written during this early timeframe were usually compiled without access to crucial German documents, official reports, or detailed battlefield maps. However, what the program lacked in precision, it made up for in the raw number of accounts collected. By the end of 1946 the US had accumulated over 600 manuscripts written by German prisoners (see Table One below). Indeed, German officers proved to be almost too cooperative, and began to deliver a limited number of unsolicited reports regarding their experiences in other combat theatres not involving the US Army. Most notable among these voluntary recollections were those associated with operations against the Soviet Union.

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The broadening of accepted subject matter quickly accelerated, with accounts concerning German campaigns against US forces in Western Europe making up less than a third of all manuscripts collected in 1947. However, this trend represented more than just a simple eagerness on the part of German officers to share the full range of their wartime combat experiences irrespective of geography or opponent. Rather, the changing composition of manuscripts embodied the transforming political landscape and the deterioration of US-Soviet relations.

For the German officers involved in the program the mounting hostility of the Cold War was just one of many factors encouraging them to cooperate with their US captors. Most former Wehrmacht officers had been staunch anti-communists long before the rise of National Socialism and continued to see the Soviet Union as the primary enemy of both Germany and of Western European civilization. With the US having risen to challenge Soviet expansion, it was unsurprising that some German officers considered aiding their American captors in the task of defeating the “Russian horde.” Franz Halder, former Chief of Staff of the German Army and a prominent figure within the German Military History Program, explicitly expressed his ideological solidarity with the US cause as early as March 1947, stating his willingness “to co-operate [with the Historical Division] in order to support the occupying power, insofar as possible, in its historic mission of combating bolshevism.” In this way, helping the US fight communism was merely a continuation of the task they felt obligated to undertake as members of the German military; be it under the banner of Wilhelmine Germany, the Weimar Republic, the Third Reich, or the Federal Republic of Germany.

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As the purpose of the Historical Division transformed over time, so too did the motivations of the German officers involved in it. While the Historical Division was at first content to allow German officers to produce their own accounts of events and opinions on doctrinal considerations, the process gradually changed to one in which German officers were answering specific questions directed at them regarding matters of practical importance to the US Army in the field. Being asked such questions indicated to the German officers that their knowledge in military affairs was both recognised and in demand. It also offered a group accustomed to being a respected part of society a means of maintaining their sense of pride in their trade. Franz Halder once declared to fellow German General, Günther Blumentritt, regarding his close cooperation with the US Army: “we are in a position to make an intellectual contribution to the western defence potential which no other can give. I will also not deny that the request filled me with a certain satisfaction in so far as it shows that the old German General Staff, which as before is rejected in public, at least behind the scenes is valued as an unrivalled authority.”257

German officers both within and without the German Military History Program also made concerted efforts during the post-war period to formulate a carefully constructed image of the Wehrmacht and the role it played during the war. There were several key aspects of this portrayal of the Wehrmacht. German generals argued that the armed forces and its officers were not responsible for German entry into, and failure in, the war. Instead, the blame for the war and German defeat was placed squarely at the feet of Adolf Hitler and his interventions into the realms of military strategy and operational planning. Robert Citino has wittily noted that criticising Hitler “was a convenient way for former General Staff officers to shift the blame. He

had the perfect credentials. He was dead, first of all, and therefore incapable of defending himself; and second, he was Hitler.”

A number of former Wehrmacht officers made counterfactual arguments stating how Germany could have achieved victory had Hitler not interfered in this or that decision. For example, Heinz Guderian made such a claim regarding Hitler’s decision in August 1941 to send his Panzer Group south to encircle Soviet forces defending Kiev instead of continuing their eastward assault towards Moscow. Similarly, Field Marshal Erich von Manstein lamented in his memoirs of Hitler’s insistence on holding every piece of captured ground after the winter of 1941 and asserted that “Only in mobile operations could the superiority of the German staffs and fighting troops have been turned to account and, perhaps, the forces of the Soviet Union ultimately brought to naught.”

This outlook was particularly important within the context of the Wehrmacht mystique in the US Army, as it made it appear that the German generals knew the key to success against the Soviet Union if only Hitler had listened to them.

Former German officers devoted even greater energy towards creating an image of a “clean Wehrmacht” which was not complicit in the Nazi regime’s campaign of mass-killings and war of annihilation in the East. There were a variety of ways in which this portrayal of the Wehrmacht was achieved. Most of the manuscripts gathered by the Historical Division and individual memoirs published by German officers after the war completely ignored the topic of army involvement in atrocities. If the topic


was raised at all, it was usually to express the author’s ignorance of their having ever taken place, or to declare such brutalities the exclusive purview of the SS death squads (or *Einsatzgruppen*) or other government organisations. In the few instances where specific criminal orders given to military units (such as the infamous Commissar Order in June 1941) were addressed, German commanders almost unanimously denied ever endorsing such actions.\(^{263}\) Field Marshal von Manstein, for instance, stated clearly in his memoirs that “I had no alternative but to inform my superiors that the Commissar Order would not be implemented by anyone under my command” and further declared the order “utterly unsoldierly.”\(^{264}\)

The dissemination of the clean Wehrmacht myth went beyond the renunciations of a few implicated German officers. It has come to light that the British military historian, Liddell Hart, played an instrumental role in providing legitimacy to the claims of former German generals and the clean Wehrmacht myth. Historian John Mearsheimer has argued that Hart sought to “portray the German generals in highly favourable terms” so that he could “then link himself with the most highly regarded among them” and “elevate his standing in the eyes of students of military affairs.”\(^{265}\) In effect a deal was struck between the former German generals and Hart, whereby Hart would favourably portray the Wehrmacht in the West in exchange for the generals’ acknowledgement that they were influenced by Hart’s theoretical writings in their successful execution of Blitzkrieg early in the war. In the process, Hart advocated for the generals not to be prosecuted as war criminals, helped organise better conditions for those held captive by the Allies, and wrote introductions to and

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edited a variety of their memoirs. But most important of all, Hart described the German generals as “essentially technicians” who were “intent on their professional job, and with little idea of things outside it. It is easy to see how Hitler hoodwinked and handled them, and found them good instruments up to a point.” This basic characterization of the German generals as merely professional soldiers would be reproduced by Hart and many other histories of the war for decades afterward. Indeed, Mearsheimer has gone so far as to argue that Hart “probably had more influence than anyone else in shaping the English-speaking world’s conception of the Wehrmacht in World War II.”

The clean Wehrmacht myth was instrumental (along with the increasing tensions of the Cold War) to the release of German officers held captive for war crimes, for American officers to feel comfortable actively learning from the Wehrmacht, and for the US and NATO to approve the creation of the Bundeswehr.

The motivations of the former Wehrmacht officers became noticeably apparent in June of 1947, when all Historical Division prisoners were granted release from compulsory internment. Of the 767 prisoners released, 401 volunteered to remain as either permanent or temporary staff. Those Germans who had been part of the General Staff and were legally forbidden from taking political or military positions (due to their having been part of what was deemed to be a criminal organisation) were also retained as “civilian internees” by the Historical Division. Furthermore, on the 8th of December 1947, “the Historical Division was authorized to receive requests from the Department of the Army and its agencies for special historical studies by former German officers, who would be contracted to prepare the required

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266 J. Mearsheimer, *Liddell Hart and the Weight of History*, p. 185.
268 J. Wood, ‘Captive Historians, Captivated Audience’, p. 139.
Between 1947 and 1954, the Historical Division and the Office of the Chief of Military History distributed a total of 58 pre-publication German manuscripts to US Army units for study. In a strange Cold War twist, the US government was now paying former Wehrmacht officers for their expertise, and these German officers were willingly aiding the military which had conquered their homeland only a few years prior.

By 1948 the primary objective of the Historical Division had shifted from historical study to the gathering of intelligence and lessons learned manuscripts for the US government. The transformation was demonstrated by the creation of a document collection, “the P-Series,” devoted exclusively to “studies dealing with subjects of current, practical military interest.” Because each study was only initiated upon receipt of a specific request, the catalogue of manuscripts for this period directly reflects the kinds of questions which the US Army wanted answered. The P-Series therefore provides a unique perspective into the transfer of ideas between former Wehrmacht officers and the US Army. Topics discussed in the series vary from the very specific (such as studies of technical matters like tank ventilation and river barges) to the very general (such as overall German and Russian strategy). Some of the P-Series content foreshadows later instances of American emulation of the Wehrmacht, such as the US Army’s COHORT recruitment and replacement system.

For example, the collection includes a number of studies commissioned by the US

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272 It is worth noting that after late 1951, all manuscripts collected by the Historical Division were placed in the P-series, meaning that beyond this date not all studies represent direct requests for information from US agencies.
273 The three studies mentioned here, respectively, are: P-002 ‘Tank Ventilation,’ P-014 ‘German Plans for Preventing Allied Use of Barges and Other River Craft,’ and P-001 ‘Answer to ten questions on German and Russian overall policy and strategy, submitted by the US War College.’ For a full listing of P-Series manuscripts see: C. Burdick, D. Detwiler, and J. Rohwer (eds.), World War II German Military Studies.
Army Personnel and Administration Division relating to subjects such as replacement of casualties, training of replacements for field forces, and recruitment systems during peacetime and wartime. Other interesting P-Series manuscripts include a 15 volume, 716 page, instructive treatise regarding “High Command in Future” based on “World War II experience and written by top-ranking German specialists.” This particular document is given explicit endorsement in the official history of the German Military History Program with an added comment that it is “worthy of careful study at high levels.”\textsuperscript{274} It is clear from both its content, and even its very existence, that the P-Series represented an American effort to learn from the Wehrmacht.

The P-Series and its “on request” approach to meeting US demand for information gathered from former Wehrmacht officers was only the beginning of a centralized effort to provide the US Army with German lessons learned. As early as December 1947 the US War Department had placed material written by German officers on their official Army officer reading lists.\textsuperscript{275} Starting in 1950, the US Army took distribution further into its own hands by delivering training pamphlets written by German officers throughout its organisation. The German Report Series, as it was known, produced a total of 16 pamphlets between November 1950 to August of 1954 on a wide variety of topics.\textsuperscript{276}

Because the pamphlets were created for training purposes they reproduced only the most relevant and instructional of German accounts. Examples of such didactic reports included: \textit{German Armored Traffic Control During the Russian Campaign}, \textit{Small Unit Actions During the German Campaign in Russia}, \textit{Rear Area Security in

\textsuperscript{274} The collection refers to documents P-013a to P-013o of the P-Series. See: C. Burdick, D. Detwiler, and J. Rohwer (eds.), \textit{World War II German Military Studies}.


Russia, and Effects of Climate on Combat in European Russia.\textsuperscript{277} US officers above the rank of captain were exposed to the German Report Series, as they were distributed to every unit down to the company level. It is difficult to gauge just how influential the reports were on the attitudes and practices of individual units. Limited evidence of such influence does nonetheless exist. In a foreword to a pamphlet concerned with German night fighting techniques, the US Army Chief of Military History noted that “American training programs had changed to conform to the recommendations made by the German officers.”\textsuperscript{278} The fact that the US Army deemed it necessary to distribute the German Report Series so widely is proof enough that the Wehrmacht mystique was alive and well within the ranks of the US military in the immediate post war period.

The impact of the German Report Series is more readily apparent when the pamphlets are considered in conjunction with the German Military History Program. From such a general perspective, the effects of the Wehrmacht mystique on the tactics and doctrine utilized by the US Army during the late 1940s and 1950s are readily identifiable. The first example of the German Military History Program’s direct influence on US doctrine came in the 1949 edition of the US Army field manual governing armoured divisions. The doctrine incorporated the concept of mobile defence, which represented a radical departure from the traditional positional defence strategy utilized by US units at the time. Mobile defence involved two basic elements: a small screening force (usually made up of infantry outposts) acting as early warning and as a method of funnelling enemy attacking forces into pre-planned killing zones; and a larger highly-mobile force (primarily made up of armour) which could quickly and decisively counterattack at the most opportune time and place. The concept had been utilized heavily by the Wehrmacht on the Eastern Front in 1944-45.

\textsuperscript{277} ‘German Antiguerrilla Operations in the Balkans 1941-1944,’ in The German Report Series, p. ii.
\textsuperscript{278} K. Soutor, ‘To Stem the Red Tide’, p. 675.
and featured prominently throughout a number of Historical Division manuscripts distributed to US Armored Divisions before 1949.\textsuperscript{279} Furthermore, mobile defence theory was widely discussed in \textit{Military Review} throughout the early 1950s, with both current US and former German officers emphasising its applicability to the circumstances then confronting NATO.\textsuperscript{280}

Shortly after the introduction of mobile defence into American armoured doctrine in 1949, the US Army embarked on its most direct and detailed effort to learn from the Wehrmacht since the interwar period. In February of 1952, under the direction of General Franz Halder, six former German General Staff officers were given a copy of contemporary US Army doctrine (\textit{FM 100-5: Operations}, 1949) for analysis and critique.\textsuperscript{281} Just over a year later, in April of 1953, the group submitted their 257-page response to the Historical Division.\textsuperscript{282} In the document, entitled \textit{Analysis of U.S. Field Service Regulations}, the former Wehrmacht officers criticised a number of aspects of US doctrine. First, they argued that the US approach to war was too inflexible and that their command system stifled the initiative of field commanders. Second, US doctrine overemphasised the importance of the offensive and underestimated the usefulness of the defensive. Third, the American primacy of the infantry arm above all others, and particularly armour, received the disapproval of the German officers. Finally, US expectations of attaining material, logistical, and air superiority in a war with the Soviet Union was criticised as unrealistic and dangerous.\textsuperscript{283}

\textsuperscript{281} A. Searle, \textit{Wehrmacht Generals, West German Society}, p. 115.
The criticisms raised in the study were taken and incorporated into the next edition of the US Army’s doctrine in 1954. While the new doctrine failed to completely remedy all of the weaknesses raised by the former German General Staff officers, it made significant progress in adopting critical details of Wehrmacht tactics. Mobile defence, for instance, was given equal importance to the traditional positional defence. Similarly, armour received a greater significance relative to the infantry arm, especially when on the defensive.\textsuperscript{284}

After 1954 the advent of tactical nuclear weapons rapidly redirected the US Army’s interest away from learning from the Wehrmacht and towards the development of the “Pentomic Division” which was intended to better withstand the conditions of limited nuclear war. US involvement in Vietnam, starting in 1961, only further diverted US military attention away from conventional warfare in Europe. The German Military History Program continued in a limited capacity until 1961. Upon retirement, the leader of the program, Franz Halder, would be presented with a Presidential Commendation for his “lasting contribution to the tactical and strategic thinking of the United States Armed Forces.”\textsuperscript{285} The German Military History Program left a lasting impression on the US Army. The program provided a precedent of emulation and learning which would be referenced in the 1970s and 1980s when US Army attention returned to the conventional defence of Central Europe. But perhaps more importantly, the program, or more specifically the German Report Series, served as intellectual fodder for an entire generation of young lieutenants and captains who would emerge from the Vietnam War as Colonels and Generals, eager to reform the US Army.\textsuperscript{286}

\begin{flushleft}\footnotesize\textsuperscript{284} K. Soutor, ‘To Stem the Red Tide’, p. 680.  
\textsuperscript{286} For discussion of this important generation of US Army officers see: J. Kitfield, \textit{Prodigal Soldiers: How the Generation of Officers Born of Vietnam Revolutionized the American Style of War}, New York, Random House, 2013, pp. 13-30.\end{flushleft}
American interest and emulation has always closely followed the victors of European military conflict. Because the emergence of the German nation was founded on its land-based military prowess, it was only logical that it became a focal point for American emulation. Von Steuben had been granted a commission on the back of his credentials received serving under Frederick the Great. Antebellum American fascination with French military theory and practice was founded upon the achievements of Napoleon decades earlier. France was replaced when it was summarily defeated by Prussia in 1870-71. American interest in German military methods similarly flourished in 1939-41 in response to the string of stunning victories being dispensed across Europe by the Wehrmacht. In the aftermath of Vietnam the US Army would be forced once more to take stock of its doctrine and organization, and yet again American officers would turn to their German counterparts for inspiration.

The Vietnam War and the Preconditions for Reform

The 1970s was a tumultuous period in the history of the US Army. The Vietnam War constituted the longest military conflict in US history (and has only recently been exceeded by US involvement in Afghanistan). It was also its first major strategic defeat. Unlike the Korean War in the 1950s which ended in stalemate, US intervention in Vietnam did not prevent the fall of South Vietnam into Communist hands. US involvement in Vietnam was, however, much more than just a humiliating Cold War defeat. The war drastically transformed the domestic political environment in America, and lead former Secretary of State Henry Kissinger to describe the 1970s as “an anti-military orgy.”\textsuperscript{287} In response to public pressure, President Nixon abolished National Service shortly after the last American troops returned from Southeast Asia. Conscription and the concept of the “citizen soldier” had been a fundamental pillar of the US military tradition since its inception, but had now come to an end. Furthermore, the draft and the influx of personnel it could guarantee had been an essential element in American planning for the defence of Europe should war break out with the Soviet Union. As a result, the balance of conventional forces in Central Europe only swung further in the Warsaw Pact’s favour. Further adding to the challenges facing the US Army, the Yom Kippur War of 1973 had demonstrated that new military technologies were transforming the modern conventional battlefield.

Each of these circumstances – defeat in Vietnam, the end of conscription, numerical inferiority, and technological change – are analysed in this chapter in order to better understand how they influenced the nature and extent of the military reforms which

took place in the 1980s. Quite simply, Airland Battle doctrine cannot be understood in isolation from the underlying forces and factors which it was created to respond to. Rather than being demoralized by a wide spectrum of adversities, the US Army set about overcoming them. The resulting period of intellectual, doctrinal, and organisational reform during the late 1970s and 1980s transformed the US Army into the powerful conventional military force which achieved victory in the Gulf War.

The primary purpose of this thesis, however, is not merely an explanation of how Airland Battle was developed, but more specifically an investigation of the Wehrmacht’s influence upon it. Therefore, in the interests of explaining the Blitzkrieg-like aspects of Airland Battle doctrine, the challenges facing the US Army in the 1970s will also be compared with those which confronted the German army between the World Wars. It is argued that a number of similarities existed between the two environments in which each doctrine was developed. Both Germany (in the First World War) and the US (in Vietnam) had recently been defeated in long, attrition-based wars; both militaries had only just recently been forced, by an external authority, from a conscription to a standing army system; both nations were required to prepare their respective armed forces to fight a future war in which they would be drastically outnumbered; and finally, both militaries were dealing with a period of significant military technological change. Establishing such situational resemblances, in turn, offers a possible explanation as to why Airland Battle and Blitzkrieg doctrine share similar theoretical underpinnings.

There are two ways one might attempt to explain the similarities between Blitzkrieg and Airland Battle. The first, and probably most straightforward, would be to argue that because one (Blitzkrieg) preceded the other (AirLand Battle) a conscious or subconscious effort was made by the US to imitate the doctrine of its former German
enemy. The alternative explanation would be to propose that the doctrines developed entirely independent of each other and, therefore, any similarities originated in deeper structural parallels between the circumstances confronting inter-war Germany and the US in the 1970s and 1980s. The latter of these two approaches will form the primary purpose of this chapter. However, both explanations are not necessarily mutually exclusive, as US Army officers recognised the similarities between their late Cold War circumstances and those faced by the German army during the interwar period. Thus, the circumstantial similarities gave the impetus for the US Army to begin the reform process, but the major features of Airland Battle were drawn directly from Blitzkrieg.

The US Army’s defeat in Vietnam left it with a host of lingering internal problems and a tarnished reputation. The army’s standing, both within and without the US, suffered due to its conduct of the war in Vietnam as well as its eventual defeat. Domestically, a 1973 Harris Poll revealed that “the American public ranked the military one above sanitation workers in relative order of respect.” Former Army Chief of Staff, Matthew Ridgeway lamented the army’s declining prestige in a West Point address, stating: “Not before in my lifetime – and I was born into the Army in the nineteenth century – has the Army’s public image suffered so many grievous blows and fallen to such low esteem in such wide areas of our society.” Media coverage of the war had played a significant role in influencing public opinion towards the war and the organisations fighting it. Incidents such as the My Lai Massacre were well publicized and became central to the American public’s

perception of the conflict.\textsuperscript{291} Outside of America, such incidents coupled with the failure to contain the spread of Communism in Southeast Asia, brought into question the US’s position as “leader and protector of the free world.”\textsuperscript{292}

Within the army itself, the after effects of Vietnam were similarly severe. A host of disciplinary issues arose during the 1970s, many of which stemmed from a general lack of faith in commanders at all levels.\textsuperscript{293} This was especially true of senior leaders associated with the war, as in the case of General William Westmoreland. In 1972, after being made the Army Chief of Staff, Westmoreland was booed from the stage by fellow American officers and soldiers, first during an address given at Fort Benning, and then again at the Command and General Staff College.\textsuperscript{294} Internal unrest and discontent found expression in a multitude of other ways. In certain US units deployed to Europe “conditions neared mutiny as soldier gangs established a new order in the barracks through extortion and brutality.” In one instance, conditions had deteriorated to such an extent that West German fire fighters “refused to respond to a fire at an American military base because they feared being attacked by US soldiers.”\textsuperscript{295} Drug use and crime ran rampant, with forty percent of the Army in Europe confessing to drug use, seven percent admitted to heroin use, and at least twelve percent of enlisted soldiers had been charged with serious offences.\textsuperscript{296}

\textsuperscript{291} K. Oliver, \textit{The My Lai Massacre in American History and Memory}, Manchester, Manchester University Press, 2006.
\textsuperscript{294} R. Lock-Pullan, \textit{US Intervention Policy and Army Innovation}, p. 58.
\textsuperscript{296} R. Scales, \textit{Certain Victory}, p. 6.
To make matters worse, at a time when the army was struggling to address these internal problems, it was also expected to undergo the transition from a conscripted to an all volunteer force. President Nixon, following a campaign promise made in 1968, appointed the Gates Commission to investigate the effect ending the draft would have on the US military and its international commitments. The commission’s report, filed in early 1970, argued that adequate military strength could be maintained in the absence of conscription. Despite vocal resistance from within the Department of Defense and Congress, the last National Servicemen reported for duty in June of 1973.297 It is difficult to overstate the impact this decision had upon the organisation, doctrine, and culture of the US Army in the late Cold War period. The shift to an all volunteer force was made all the more challenging by the negative public perception of the military within the US following Vietnam. In order to fill the ranks, induction standards were lowered and the army began its first television advertising campaigns. By 1974, a New York Times study found that forty percent of soldiers “had no high school diploma” and that forty one percent were classified as “Category IV soldiers, a mental aptitude grouping of the lowest order.”298 Even with these recruiting measures, only four out of the army’s thirteen active divisions were considered combat ready in the mid-1970s.299

The move to a volunteer force exacerbated another major challenge facing the post-Vietnam US Army – that of NATO’s numerical inferiority vis-à-vis the Warsaw Pact. From the very outset of the Cold War, the US had been forced to confront the reality of Soviet preponderance in conventional weaponry. This conventional imbalance had traditionally been countered by the deterrent effect of America’s nuclear dominance. Starting in the 1960s, President Kennedy introduced a policy of

flexible response, whereby military action would be met with a corresponding military response (i.e. a conventional attack by the Warsaw Pact would invoke a conventional conflict, but not necessarily a nuclear or tactical nuclear exchange). However, following Vietnam, US military and civilian officials began to identify a discord between US policy and its military capability, especially in terms of its ability to compete on purely conventional terms. NATO’s conventional weakness was made all the more crucial by the fact that by the 1970s, the US no longer held a pronounced nuclear superiority (at strategic and tactical levels) over the Warsaw Pact. Because of this, Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld proclaimed in his Fiscal Year 1978 Posture Statement to Congress that “the burden of deterrence has once again fallen on the conventional forces.”

While NATO exceeded the Warsaw Pact in terms of military budget spent on conventional forces, the Soviet Union fielded a far larger effective force. Robert McNamara and his analysts referred to this phenomenon of higher NATO spending resulting in lower combat strength as the personnel-PEMA paradox. In an article published in *Military Review* in 1974, Robert Komer succinctly pinpoints how this paradox arose: “some 67 percent of the entire US Army budget now goes for personnel. Ten years ago, an American recruit got $78 a month base pay. In 1974, he will get $328. Perhaps the single reason why the Soviet Union seems to be able to buy so much more than the United States in the way of forces and weaponry from

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comparable defense outlays lies in the Russian ability to keep drafting cheap manpower into its armed forces.”

Table Two (below) shows the balance of conventional weapons between the two superpowers in 1980, and is taken from a study conducted by BDM Corporation for the Department of Defense. The significant quantitative gap in weaponry had historically been justified by the relatively higher quality of NATO weapons. However, even the normal stronghold of NATO, technological superiority, seemed under threat during the 1970s and early 1980s. In 1984 a US Department of Defense publication regarding Soviet military strength argued: “While the United States continues to lead the USSR in most basic technologies, the gap continues to narrow in the military application of such technologies. Increasingly, the incorporation of critical Western technologies is permitting the USSR to avoid costly R&D efforts and to produce, at a much earlier date than would otherwise be possible, Soviet weapons comparable to or superior to fielded US weapons.”

| Table Two: NATO’s Military Balance, Central Front, In-Place Weapons, 1980 |
|-------------------|-----------------|----------------|
|                   | NATO            | Warsaw Pact    | Ratio* |
| Tanks             | 6 200           | 18 000         | 2.90   |
| Armoured Vehicles | 14 400          | 18 000         | 1.25   |
| Antitank Weapons  | 5 000           | 7 400          | 1.48   |
| Artillery Pieces  | 2 300           | 6 500          | 2.83   |
| Air Defence Weapons | 2 300        | 5 000          | 2.17   |
| Aircraft          | 3 200           | 1 420          | 0.44   |

* Calculated from original data to two decimal places.

Many of the technologies which became central components of US doctrine in the 1980s first saw service during the late 1960s and early 1970s. Foremost among those technologies was the advent of Precision Guided Munitions (PGMs). Two types of PGMs – Laser Guided Bombs (LGBs) and Anti Tank Guided Missiles (ATGMs) – were used by the US military for the first time in combat during Vietnam. The earliest form of American ATGM, the TOW (Tube-launched, Optically-tracked, Wire command link) missile, was found to be particularly effective against North Vietnamese armour when mounted on both ground vehicles and helicopter gunships.  

Similarly, the US Air Force made extensive use of laser guided bombs (such as the Paveway I) which markedly improved the effectiveness of air campaigns such as Operation Linebacker.

The Yom Kippur War, which took place in 1973 between Israel and a coalition of its Arab neighbours, also showcased the technological transformations of the era. The TOW missile featured prominently in the fighting, especially in the battle for the Golan Heights, where a small but well armed and well trained Israeli force successfully defeated a large Syrian armoured offensive. Surface to Air Missiles (SAMs) were used with notable success by the Egyptians to protect its ground forces (and critical crossing points across the Suez canal) from Israeli air attack. The conflict was of particular interest to both sides of the Cold War, because it was fought with mainly US and Soviet equipment and force structures. A number of articles discussing the conflict appeared in Military Review shortly after its

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The increased effectiveness and lethality of new weapon systems sparked debate regarding the implications for US Army doctrine. Jeffrey Record argued in such an article that the reduced survivability of the tank and aircraft would “bury the Blitzkrieg” by depriving an attacker of two essential sources of offensive mobility. Other American observers predicted a return to a battlefield where firepower and defence reigned supreme, much like that of the First World War.

The issue of technological change, like each of the other major challenges facing the US Army in the 1970s just discussed, was also present when the German army developed Blitzkrieg around half a century earlier. That these situational similarities exist can help explain why Airland Battle doctrine shared so many of the theoretical underpinnings of Blitzkrieg. Each of the four factors – recovery from defeat, the abolition of conscription, addressing numerical inferiority, and technological change – invoked comparable responses from both the US and German armies and guided each towards a similar approach to war. A more exhaustive explanation of the German situation lies outside the focus of this work. As a result, the concise comparisons made below are not intended to be comprehensive accounts of the events leading up to each doctrine’s development.

Both the US (in Vietnam) and Germany (in the First World War) were defeated in long, drawn out, attrition-based conflicts. The experience invoked a similar distaste


for attrition warfare and an urge to fight the next war as one dominated by offensive action and manoeuvre rather than positional defence and firepower. Both armies pursued such an approach to war at a time when many others were convinced by the lessons of the last war that modern weaponry favoured the defensive. The German military, like the US Army after Vietnam, was in a state of disarray following its defeat in 1918; beset by political turmoil, inflation, and the rapid demobilization of field armies. For Germany the “war of position” (or Stellungskrieg) represented by the trench warfare on the Western Front was both foreign to, and incompatible with, their military tradition. In this way, the interwar period was less about the discovery of something completely new, and instead about a search for methods to overcome the defensiveness of the last war and return to a “war of movement” (Bewegungskrieg). For the US after Vietnam, the reverse was true. Attrition and firepower based warfare had been a mainstay of American military campaigns throughout its history. This tradition had carried forward into the Vietnam War, where the tallying of enemy body counts had failed to bring victory. The Vietnam experience, for the first time since the exorbitant bloodshed of the Civil War, “produced an officer corps that was aware of the futility of its recent efforts and determined not to repeat the experience.” The Army’s negative response to Active Defense doctrine and the criticism directed towards its defensive, prescriptive, and attrition based approach demonstrated this change in mentality.

315 Robert Citino has made this point quite convincingly in his broad study of the German way of war. See in particular chapter seven of: R. Citino, The German Way of War.
The interwar Reichswehr and the post-Vietnam US Army each faced and developed similar responses to the issue of restructuring their organisation into an all-volunteer rather than conscription based force. The Versailles Treaty (signed in 1919) and the resultant end of conscription presented the Reichswehr with a significant dilemma. The Treaty of Versailles heavily restricted the size of the German army to a small volunteer force of only 100,000 personnel – thus abolishing conscription much like in the American case.319 The leader of the Reichswehr between 1919 and 1926, Hans von Seeckt, responded to the situation by creating an “army of leaders” or Führerheer.320 The concept relied upon maintaining the highest standards in all aspects of training and education so as to build an experienced cadre which could rapidly form the backbone of a much larger force, should war break out or conscription be reinstated.321 By 1926, over 60 percent of the Reichswehr consisted of NCOs and above.322 The post-Vietnam US Army did not take such extreme measures, but starting with the creation of TRADOC (Training and Doctrine Command) in 1973, placed an unprecedented emphasis on ensuring effective training and education for all its members. Before the 1980s, the US had an unfortunate tradition of entering conflicts relatively unprepared.323 The deputy chief of training and education at TRADOC, General Paul Gorman, during the late 1970s and early 1980s introduced a slew of measures to not only improve the education and training standards of officers, NCOs, and regular soldiers, but also to make exercises and training more realistic. Gorman’s reforms included “the Army Training and Evaluation Program (ARTEP) and Skill Qualification Tests (SQT), which established clear standards for performance of all collective and individual combat

tasks. The National Training Centre at Fort Irwin California was set up for the conduct of large scale realistic war games and exercises (including the creation of a permanent opposing force contingent based on Soviet unit structure, equipment, and tactics).\textsuperscript{324} Gorman also led a revolution in training technology, introducing the army to laser simulations that permitted realistic training engagements in which virtual combat losses could be accurately scored.\textsuperscript{325}

Both the late Cold War US Army and the interwar German Army integrated new technologies and weapons into doctrine more effectively than did most of their contemporaries. The tank, radio, and aircraft were seen by the \textit{Wehrmacht} as crucial elements to reinvigorating Germany’s traditional forte for \textit{Bewegungskrieg}. The Panzer division was developed at a time when debates regarding the best use of the tank were restricting its full adoption and integration into most other major military powers. For the US in the late Cold War, advances in electronics and missile design were perceived as the key to the “extended battlefield” concept underpinning Airland Battle doctrine. The extended battlefield concept, introduced by General Donn Starry, was a means of combating the echeloned organisation of the Warsaw Pact forces. In essence, the technique entailed the use of indirect fire (from artillery or land based conventional tactical missiles) and close air support to interdict and disrupt the depth of enemy formations so that defending NATO frontline units would not be overwhelmed by successive Soviet attacks.\textsuperscript{326} The decision to implement this technique was made at a time when the impact of such new technologies, many of which saw major use in the Yom Kippur War of 1973, was still the matter of debate.

\textsuperscript{326} D. Starry, ‘Extending the Battlefield’, pp. 31-50.
within and without the US Army. Furthermore, many within the US military (and government) believed that technology was an area in which the US, and indeed NATO generally, possessed a competitive advantage over the Soviet Union. Such a competitive advantage was deemed to be worth exploiting, just as the interwar German army had placed its fortunes in the belief that technology could enable it to return to its traditional style of war.

A realisation of numerical inferiority was also at the heart of the military reforms of the interwar German and post-Vietnam US Armies. Indeed, each of their responses to the challenges discussed so far – a newfound determination not to repeat the experience of the last war and the integration of technology into doctrine – were influenced by an overarching ambition to prepare to fight outnumbered. In the most general sense, quality over quantity signified each military’s answer to the problem. Well trained personnel, high tech equipment, and a doctrine which made the most effective use of both were considered essential. The bitter taste of defeat provided the impetus for the kind of radical reforms necessary to achieve the task and also provided the resolve to persist even when it meant offsetting what at first appeared to be insurmountable force ratios. Concentration on high training standards and the development of superior leadership was the first step toward counteracting enemy numbers with smaller, but more capable forces. Superior personnel, manning well designed weapons, and communicating with the latest technology would further even the odds. Before Hitler’s rise to power, the restrictions of Versailles guaranteed Germany’s numerical inferiority, and encouraged a very real fear within the German military of being attacked by its vastly stronger neighbours (particularly some form

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of coalition between France, Poland, or Czechoslovakia).\textsuperscript{328} Even once rearmament progressed unrestricted under Nazi rule, the Wehrmacht was still preparing for the possibility of a multiple front war in which it may have to face the Soviet Union, Great Britain, and France simultaneously. For the late Cold War US Army, the personnel-PEMA paradox, the Warsaw Pact’s steadily increasing strength, and the American commitment to the defence of Western Europe ensured that it would have to prepare to fight outnumbered if conventional war broke out with the Soviet Union. In short, numerical inferiority was an underlying consideration which governed the reactions of Germany and the US to the challenges they respectively faced.

However, an explanation of the similar responses to challenges undertaken by the German and American armies would be incomplete if it failed to take into consideration the fact that Blitzkrieg preceded the development of Airland Battle by several decades. For if doctrine was purely a result of the circumstances faced by its parent military organisation, then why have other militaries before and after these two examples faced similar circumstances but produced very different doctrinal responses?\textsuperscript{329} A purely structuralist approach similarly fails to explain why German terminology became used by US Army officers in their discussions of the theoretical underpinnings of Airland Battle doctrine. Therefore, in order to wholly understand the similarity between Airland Battle and Blitzkrieg, one should also take into account the active role played by American officers who recognised the German military of the interwar period as a model worthy of emulation. Significant evidence in support of this hypothesis exists in the form of the \textit{Military Review} journal articles published by US officers identifying the circumstantial parallels between the \textit{Reichswehr} and the post-Vietnam US Army.

\textsuperscript{328} J. Corum, \textit{The Roots of Blitzkrieg}, p. 63.
\textsuperscript{329} For instance, Italy during the interwar period faced similar circumstances to Germany (with the exception of maintaining a conscription based force) yet it developed a very different approach to warfare.
General Donn Starry – the person most often credited as the creator of Airland Battle due to his role as commander of TRADOC between 1977 and 1981 – explicitly made just such a comparison between the late Cold War US Army and the Wehrmacht. In a reflective piece published in *Military Review* entitled, “To Change an Army,” Starry analysed what he believed were the critical components of conducting meaningful change within a military organisation. The article (also discussed earlier in chapter three of this study) took a very historical approach to the subject, comparing the integration of the tank into American, German British and French doctrine during the interwar period. Within the article Starry appears well read on the topic of the German army, citing the work of historians such as Trevor Dupuy, Albert Seaton, and Kenneth Macksey. From the German example, Starry extracts a list of “generalized requirements for effecting change” and comments on how the US Army’s development of Airland Battle exhibited many of these characteristics. Starry’s article demonstrates that he had an excellent understanding of the circumstances which lead up to the development of Blitzkrieg. Furthermore, the article shows that he analysed those circumstances with the purpose of better understanding how to execute doctrinal change.

US officers outside of the small TRADOC writing team also directly acknowledged that Airland Battle was developed in an era of technological change, just like its Blitzkrieg forebear. In 1984 Major General Woodmansee published a comparison of Blitzkrieg and Airland Battle in *Military Review* which centred around the influence of technology on the development of each doctrine. The article referred to Airland Battle as a “modern-day blitzkrieg,” and went into great detail regarding the types of

weaponry utilized by both doctrines. In the case of Blitzkrieg, Woodmansee identifies the tank, the aircraft, and the radio as all being relatively new technologies crucial to German success. Accordingly, the author argues that “the chip is the technological key to the new [Airland Battle] doctrine – the counterpart to the blitzkrieg’s use of the gasoline engine. In it lies the opportunity for an army, though outnumbered in a strategic sense, to mass superior power against an enemy force in the operational and tactical sense.” He further adds that Airland Battle was developed to integrate a “proliferation of technologies for intelligence systems, command and control devices, and precision munitions.”

The above are just a few of the most detailed efforts of US Army officers to delineate the parallels between Blitzkrieg and Airland Battle’s development. The recognition of their similar position, as discussed earlier in chapter three, was in fact a convention of a wide array of articles published in Military Review during the 1970s and 1980s. A call to emulate the Wehrmacht was almost always accompanied by a direct comparison of their circumstances as justification.

332 J. Woodmansee, ‘Blitzkrieg and the AirLand Battle’, p. 27.
From Active Defense to Airland Battle

It was not just a curious accident that US Army officers recognized the circumstantial similarities between interwar Germany and post-Vietnam America. The realization was, rather, part of a broader trend toward increased interest in the study of military history by the US army after Vietnam. This trend, and a number of other factors present during the 1970s and early 1980s, would lead to radical changes in US Army doctrine, and accompanying it, the flourishing of the Wehrmacht Mystique. A great deal has been written regarding this transformational period for the US military. However, in the interests of addressing the core subject of this thesis, the events of the late Cold War period will be explored only in so far as they influenced the spread of interest in the German military tradition and the Wehrmacht. In particular, the resurgence of interest in military history, the NATO alliance with the *Bundeswehr*, Active Defense doctrine and its aftermath, and the civilian reform movement will each be discussed.

In early 1971, the US Army convened an ad hoc committee on “the army need for the study of military history.” The decision to create the committee had been made by the Army Chief of Staff General William Westmoreland at the behest of Brigadier General Hal Pattison, then Chief of Military History. Pattison had earlier raised his concerns regarding the neglect of history in the army and how it had negatively affected performance in Vietnam. The committee met at the West Point Military Academy and consisted of high ranking members from a number of the US Army’s

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key educational institutions. The resulting four volume report, published in May 1971, included the findings of a detailed questionnaire regarding the interest in military history across a broad spectrum of the US officer corps. The survey found that there was widespread support for increased compulsory military history study in officer training. From these findings, and the discussions of the committee, the report concluded that interest in military history should be fostered in a number of ways. First and foremost, the report argued that military history should play a more central role in the US Army officers’ education. In order to achieve this end, the report suggested initiating a compulsory introductory military history course at West Point. As officers progressed (first to their respective branch schools, then to the Command and General Staff College, and finally to the War College) the report recommended optional, but much more detailed classes in military history. Parallel to these institutional programs, the report called for encouraging the self-study of officers. The committee additionally asserted that individual units should gather and distribute their own military history so as to inculcate greater unit cohesion and a sense of belonging. Over the 1970s and 1980s, the recommendations of the report were gradually put into practice by the Army.

The US Army’s interest in the study of military history also spilled onto the pages of Military Review. From analyses written by commissioned officers regarding the best

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336 Members included the Head of History at West Point, the Chairman of Strategy at the War College, the Chief Historian of the Continental Army, the Director of Doctrine and Training Development at the Army Engineer School, and representatives from the Office of the Chief of Military History and the Command and General Staff College. For the full listing see: Ad Hoc Committee Report, Vol. I, pp. 1-3.

337 For the results of the questionnaire and the committee’s conclusion thereof, see: Ad Hoc Committee Report on the Army Need for the Study of Military History, Vol. IV, Annex C, Military History Questionnaire – Evaluation of Results, Department of the Army, Call Number N-18599.39-D. This document is also available online through the CARL Digital Collection.


way to integrate the study of military history into their profession, to historiographical pieces composed by civilian historians, Military Review published a slew of articles during the 1970s and 1980s concerned with military history’s place in the US Army. The majority of the articles published in the early to mid 1970s addressed the conclusions and reforms proffered by the 1971 committee report. In 1974, for instance, two officers published an article entitled “History and the Professional Soldier” in which they discuss in detail how and why the army should incorporate military history into the professional development of officers. The authors argued that the study of history could sharpen “one’s powers of analysis,” and allowed one to gain knowledge “of societies including those of potential allies and adversaries, as well as [one’s] own.” Incidentally, the main examples used in the article to explain the possible benefits of studying the past were taken from Prussian and German military history – ranging from Frederick the Great to Nazi Germany.

In 1976, the Chief of the Centre of Military History, Colonel James Ransone, published a Military Review piece discussing the state of historical study in the US Army. Ransone’s article was based on the proceedings of a military history workshop held that year at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. The workshop’s findings were by and large positive, assessing that most of the reforms which had been suggested by the committee in 1971 had in fact been put into place, stating that: “Without question, 1976 holds more promise for using military history to [our] advantage than did 1970.” As proof of the ascendancy of military history, Ransone pointed to the fact that the Command and General Staff College had increased its history electives

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from only two in 1971 to sixteen in 1975. Many of these new history courses were concerned, at least partially, with German military history. Ransone concluded the article by arguing that in order to make sufficient progress the army needed a “progressive coordinated history program” involving the Chief of Military History, the TRADOC commander, the commandants at branch schools, the superintendent at West Point, and the commandant of the US Army War College.

There would prove to be no shortage of official support from these higher command levels for the integration of military history into the US Army. In 1976 the Army Chief of Staff, General Frederick Weyand, along with a host of other highly placed army leaders, openly promoted the importance of studying the past for the professional soldier in a series of speeches made at the Command and General Staff College (CGSC). But perhaps military history’s greatest advocate within the army was the commander of TRADOC, General Donn Starry. Evidence of Starry’s attitude towards the study of military history in the army is present within a collection of his official documents and correspondence published in 2009. In multiple letters, to multiple army leaders, Starry attempts to disseminate a need to inculcate “a sense of historical mindedness in the officer corps.” He argued, for instance, that history provides “examples of the logical approach to solving problems and the reasons for and the results of previous solutions. If an officer knows what was attempted in the

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344 Examples of the predominance of German military history in CGSC electives include: ‘German Military History’ (Course A624); ‘Clausewitz for Commanders’ (Course A632); and ‘History of Military Thought’ (Course 5620), which covered, among others, the works of Frederick the Great, Clausewitz, Bismarck, Moltke, and Ludendorff. Course listings and descriptions were retrieved from: The United States Army Command and General Staff College Course Catalog, Academic Years 1975-76 through 1990-91, the Combined Arms Research Library Historical Collection, United States Army Combined Arms Center, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas.
past, the conditions under which it was attempted, and the results achieved, he can deal more positively with his immediate problem.”

However, Starry did more than just advocate and theorize about the benefits of the study of military history, he actively put into place the infrastructure and organisations that brought about change. In 1979 he created the Combat Studies Institute, whose mission statement was to encourage a “more active interest in the doctrinal and policy lessons of history.” Furthermore, during this period the CGSC began inviting military historians to speak on matters of military history which became known as the S. L. A. Marshall lecture series. The renewed interest in military history was also evident in the presentation of the 1982 edition of FM 100-5, Airland Battle. The field manual included a “historical perspective” section relating to major components of doctrine and demonstrating effective implementations of offensive and defensive operations. Furthermore, as was briefly discussed earlier in this study, Starry practiced what he preached when it came to military history: making significant reference to historical analysis in his published works regarding doctrinal development.

But perhaps the most direct effort on the part of the US military to learn the lessons of the past came in 1980 when, under the auspices of the Director of Net Assessment and Office of the Secretary of Defense, two former Wehrmacht generals were invited

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348 D. Starry, ‘Military History’, p. 615.
350 Interestingly, a number of these lectures focused on German military history, covering topics and figures such as Blitzkrieg, Manstein, Kesselring, German operational thought, and the German officer corps between the World Wars. S. L. A. Marshall Lectures, Combined Arms Research Library Historical Collection, United States Army Combined Arms Center, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. A detailed description of CARL’s holdings associated with the lectures is available at: http://usacac.army.mil/cac2/cgsc/carl/resources/archival/slam.pdf (accessed 10 August 2013).
351 See in particular sections 8-1 and 10-1 of: Field Manual 100-5: Operations.
to participate in “a conference on tactical warfare” with high ranking American army
officers. In the cover letter to the final report for the conference, Andrew Marshall,
then head of the Office of Net Assessment, stated that the former German officers
(General Hermann Balck and General Major Friedrich von Mellenthin) who attended
“are two of the world’s most distinguished living commanders of forces in battle.
The lessons they drew from their incomparable experiences in World Wars I and II
against the forces of the Soviet Union, the United States and others have much to
offer by way of insight and example to those who may have comparable
responsibilities today.” The panel of US Army officers who took part in the
conference included the commander of TRADOC when Airland Battle was first
published, Lieutenant General Glenn Otis.

The fifty five page report from the conference leaves little doubt that the American
panel was impressed by what the German generals had to say, and that the
conference served to validate their belief in the possibility of succeeding against the
Warsaw Pact. The conclusion to the report even includes a number of key phrases
which would later appear in *FM 100-5*. For instance, it declares that:

> We were reminded in the most vivid and convincing manner that
small forces skilfully led can win battles against large forces if the small force
is synchronized and the large force is disorganized. Generals Balck and von
Mellenthin made it clear that it was not difficult to create such opportunities –
that the Russians were peculiarly susceptible to disorganization when

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354 Otis was also joined by General William DePuy (the former commander of TRADOC) and
Lieutenant General Paul Gorman, who was responsible for a great deal of the training reforms after
355 These phrases included: references to synchronization (later a fundamental tenet of Airland Battle);
“new and unexpected situations” which was used to explain the essence of the tenet of Agility; and
finally the focus on “individual initiative” which later formed the basis of the American iteration of
mission command.
confronted with new and unexpected situations. Conversely, they expressed confidence that soldiers of the ‘West’ were inherently superior in fast-breaking situations – more apt to take individual initiative – more apt to adjust quickly to opportunities and cope with surprises.\footnote{W. DePuy, ‘Summary Comments’, in W. DePuy, Generals Balck and von Mellenthin on Tactics, p. 54.}

The study of military history, therefore, had a very tangible impact on the military culture of the US Army during the 1970s and 1980s. More important than the inclusion of a few historical examples in FM 100-5 or the beliefs of a few doctrinal writers, was the creation of (to use Starry’s own phrase) “a sense of historical mindedness in the officer corps.”\footnote{D. Starry, ‘Military History,’ p. 615.} The variety of programs put in place during the 1970s provided the basis for the spread of the Wehrmacht mystique throughout the US Army, as officers were being encouraged to take a greater interest in military history. It could of course be argued that the emphasis on the study of military history could have just as easily resulted in a British mystique, a Soviet mystique, or even an American mystique rather than a Wehrmacht mystique. Explaining why US officers, when encouraged to study military history, flocked towards the study of German military history, and even more specifically to that of the Wehrmacht, is a complex question requiring a complex answer. Indeed, the question is almost indistinguishable from that of asking why the Wehrmacht mystique arose at all. The answer lies, in part, in the host of factors discussed in the previous two chapters. Firstly, the circumstantial similarities between interwar Germany and the US after Vietnam played a significant role: as US officers could and did identify such resemblances as reason to investigate what had worked for the Germans in order to acquire applicable lessons for the present. Secondly, the US had a long history of holding the German military tradition in the highest regard, which was all the more
prominent in an era when most high ranking officers had been directly exposed to the German report series in the 1950s.

However, US Army interest in the German military tradition was also invigorated by its close Cold War ties with its West German counterpart. Since 1945, the US Army had consistently deployed a large proportion of its active units (V and VII Corps) to West Germany as part of its commitment to NATO and the defence of Western Europe. Starting with the creation of the *Bundeswehr* in 1955, generations of US officers and men came into direct contact with the modern incarnation of the German military tradition. The *Bundeswehr* had been established with the help of thousands of American trainers and weapons, generating a perfect opportunity for intellectual transfer. As discussed earlier in chapter two of this study, Ingo Trauschweizer has evaluated the relationship between the *Bundeswehr* and the Cold War US Army. Trauschweizer has commented that while initially the *Bundeswehr* was influenced by its US benefactor, it very quickly became its own independent force. Because the majority of its upper ranks were made up of former Wehrmacht officers, the *Bundeswehr* had more in common, doctrinally and organisationally, with its predecessor than its new American ally.\(^{358}\) This is not to say that the West German units were simple reproductions of their Wehrmacht forebears, as there were significant differences between the two. However, the *Bundeswehr* incorporated most of the fundamental aspects of the German military tradition: a general focus on mobility, a strong emphasis on training and realistic exercises, and a command style which encouraged the initiative of individual commanders.\(^{359}\) Through the cumulative effect of joint training, exercises, exchange programs, and even simple proximity, US Army soldiers became directly exposed to this military tradition.


During the 1970s, as part of general reforms, the US Army began to take steps to bring its doctrine into closer correlation with that in use by the Bundeswehr and its other NATO allies. The first commander of TRADOC, General William DePuy, oversaw the development of the doctrinal revision, which was published in 1976 under the title of Active Defense. The doctrine’s attempt at bringing German and American tactics closer together was intended to serve as the “beginning of a NATO-wide tactical review.” 360 During his tenure as TRADOC commander between 1973 and 1977, DePuy worked closely with the Infantry and Armor Schools to revise US Army tactical doctrine to “conform generally with the German concepts of Panzer and Panzergrenadier tactics.” 361 As part of this process, in 1974 he initiated regular consultations between US and German doctrinal planners. 362 It is important to note that DePuy’s main objective was not to completely model the US Army on its German counterpart, but rather, just to synchronise the low level tactics and combined arms techniques used by both armies. Deeper operational and organisational emulation would not take place until the publication of Airland Battle in the 1980s.

Active Defense was also an effort on the part of TRADOC to apply the lessons of the Yom Kippur War to the US Army’s position in the European theatre. In 1973, the US Army Chief of Staff at the time, Creighton Abrams, ordered TRADOC to investigate the Yom Kippur War in order to uncover anything which could be of use to the US Army. 363 General DePuy diligently undertook this task, organising multiple visits to Israel by his staff (including the future commander of TRADOC, Donn Starry) and

was personally involved in detailed discussions and battlefield staff rides with Israeli commanders.\footnote{R. Tomes, \textit{US Defence Strategy from Vietnam to Operation Iraqi Freedom}, p. 73.}

There were a number of lessons which DePuy and the US Army distilled from the Israeli Defence Force’s (IDF) combat experiences as part of the Yom Kippur War. First and foremost among them was an awareness of the increased effectiveness of existing weapon types (such as mobile artillery and main battle tanks) as well as new weapons systems such as Anti-Tank Guided Missiles and Surface-to-Air Missiles.\footnote{W. DePuy, ‘Implications of the Middle East War on US Army Tactics, Doctrine and Systems’, in R. Swain (ed.), \textit{Selected Papers of General William E. DePuy}, p. 85.} As a result, DePuy’s report on the conflict was filled with probability-to-hit tables, weapon range charts, and all manner of weapon statistics.\footnote{W. DePuy, ‘Implications of the Middle East War’, pp. 75-111.} Most of this information would later find its way onto the pages of Active Defense doctrine. TRADOC also recognized that the improved capabilities of weaponry had the flow on effect of radically increasing the lethality of the battlefield. DePuy noted that in 18 days the IDF lost over 700 tanks.\footnote{W. DePuy, ‘Implications of the Middle East War’, p. 79.} The short yet decisive timeframe of the campaign lead to Active Defense’s focus on “winning the first battle.”\footnote{Field Manual 100-5: \textit{Operations}, Washington D.C., Headquarters, Department of the Army, 1 July 1976, Ch. 1, p. 1.}

DePuy’s vision for Active Defense sought to harness the lethality of new technologies in the initial meeting engagement and, in so doing, offset the enemy’s numerical superiority. In order to achieve maximum defensive firepower during the opening battle Active Defense placed the majority of US units in forward positions, with very little in terms of tactical or operational reserves.\footnote{W. DePuy, ‘Implications of the Middle East War’, p. 79.} This style of unit placement, however, would traditionally have deprived the US from the flexibility and ability to respond to Soviet concentrations on particular segments of the front.\footnote{Field Manual (1976), Ch. 5, pp. 3-4.}
The solution proposed by Active Defense was a system of lateral support. The first step in the process was the use of a reconnaissance screen to identify the location and direction of the enemy’s main effort as early as possible. Then, acting upon this information, division commanders would concentrate six to eight battalions at the critical point, while their remaining three or four battalions would take responsibility for screening the remainder of the division’s assigned frontage.\textsuperscript{370}

Active Defense was criticised from within and without the army as being too focused on technology and weaponry, too defensive, too inflexible, and, too attrition-minded. The criticism of the doctrine was so great that it led historian Richard Swain to describe it as “the most read and most attacked doctrinal statement in the history of written doctrine in the US Army.”\textsuperscript{371} The general presentation of the doctrine, with its charts and tables, alienated those American officers who had developed a distrust of those seeking to quantify and systematise combat.\textsuperscript{372} Active Defense’s focus on weapons, technology, and training also received criticism in that it consequently under represented the importance of the intangibles of combat such as leadership, surprise, and morale. Furthermore, the general defensiveness of the doctrine was at odds with the traditional offensive spirit of US Army culture.\textsuperscript{373} It was contended that the doctrine’s emphasis on winning the first battle was misplaced, as Soviet attacks usually consisted of multiple successive waves or echelons.\textsuperscript{374} American focus on defeating the first echelon, it was argued, would leave it unable (or at least no more capable) of defeating the second or third echelon attacks.\textsuperscript{375} Another poorly received aspect of Active Defense was its inflexibility and the associated system of lateral support. On a most basic level, critics identified the difficulties inherent in

\textsuperscript{373}I. Trauschweizer, \textit{The Cold War U.S. Army}, p. 218.
\textsuperscript{374}R. Lock-Pullan, \textit{US Intervention Policy and Army Innovation}, p. 90.
deducing the enemy’s main effort quickly and effectively; especially important because such information would provide the basis of American unit concentration. The enemy (knowing US doctrine and the system of lateral support) could simply feint or make a diversionary attack in one section of the front and wait for the US to weaken its line in order to block what they perceived as the enemy’s main effort, only to unleash a full scale attack in the now weakened area of the US front. Furthermore, even if the US succeeded in accurately selecting the location of the main Soviet attack, it may have to so weaken segments of its front in order to successfully repel it, that limited Soviet forces elsewhere could penetrate the lines of thinly spread US units.376

The controversial nature of Active Defense went on to play a central role in the shaping of Airland Battle doctrine. However, the mechanism by which this occurred was not as direct as might have otherwise been expected. Active Defense did not provide the theoretical foundation or intellectual basis for the development of Airland Battle doctrine. Instead, Airland Battle was intended to address the weaknesses and criticisms levelled at Active Defense. The civilian reform movement played a particularly important role in the negative reception given to Active Defense. Civilian reformers not only authored some of the most detailed critiques of Active Defense, but also, through suggesting possible remedies and reforms, were central to shaping several fundamental characteristics of Airland Battle doctrine. Airland Battle’s inclusion of traditionally German doctrinal concepts is one such characteristic attributable (at least partially) to the influence of the civilian reformers.

Of all the ideas put forth by the civilian reform movement, the concept of manoeuvre warfare was the most important in terms of its influence on US Army doctrine. The

most notable civilian advocate of this concept was William Lind. In 1977, Lind wrote an article for Military Review entitled “Some Doctrinal Questions for the U.S. Army” in which he outlined a critical interpretation of the traditional US approach to war, and Active Defense doctrine in particular.\textsuperscript{377} In the article, Lind contended that the fighting style of modern militaries could be broadly divided into two opposing camps: attrition and manoeuvre. Lind characterized attrition warfare as the straightforward use of firepower and overwhelming strength to attrite an enemy force into submission.\textsuperscript{378} Under this method, movement served mainly as a means of bringing greater firepower to bear on an opponent. Manoeuvre warfare, by contrast, was defined as a polar opposite form of fighting in which firepower was used primarily as a means to allow a force to manoeuvre around or through an opponent. Manoeuvre doctrine also did not necessarily seek the physical destruction of the enemy, but rather sought to defeat him psychologically by targeting intangibles such as their morale, cohesion, and will to resist. Active Defense was branded as an almost pure example of attrition doctrine. The host of criticisms Lind directed towards Active Defense played a central role in the broader reception of the doctrine by the army and its subsequent revision by TRADOC.

Lind’s criticisms of US doctrine, however, were not as important as the changes he suggested be made to it. Lind argued that because the US (and NATO) no longer enjoyed the luxury of numerical superiority over their Soviet opponent, it would not be able to succeed in a conflict utilizing only an attrition approach. To ensure victory the US would have to radically alter its fighting style towards one based on manoeuvre. Lind supported this argument by making reference to the example set by the Wehrmacht, stating: “The German adoption of a maneuver doctrine was based on having quantitatively inferior forces. The Germans realized that a maneuver doctrine

\textsuperscript{377} W. Lind, ‘FM 100-5 Operations’, pp. 54-65.
\textsuperscript{378} W. Lind, ‘FM 100-5 Operations’, pp. 57-58.
applies a psychological multiplier to the forces employing it in that the spirit and will of the opposing high command may be broken by an unexpected action by a comparatively small force. Guderian’s campaign in France was a brilliant example of this.”379 Furthermore, Lind went on to contend that “Some military authorities believe that Germany could have beaten the Soviet Union had the maneuver doctrine not been abandoned after 1941 on Hitler’s orders in favor of a policy of holding ground.”380 Here Lind is clearly echoing the lost cause myth perpetuated by former Wehrmacht generals after the war, discussed earlier in this study.

In many ways, Lind’s use of the term “manoeuvre warfare” was merely a substitute for Blitzkrieg doctrine. In a presentation made as part of a military reform conference held at West Point in 1982, Lind argued that manoeuvre warfare “was rediscovered, developed, and institutionalized by the German army, and it is to the Germans we must turn if we are to flesh out our picture of what it is.”381 Lind goes on to list three doctrinal filters of manoeuvre warfare critical to understanding its theoretical foundation. Each of these filters (along with many other military concepts put forth by Lind) were little more than English versions of longstanding German military concepts. Some terms are presented openly as German, with reference being made to the original German expression, while others are simply given as an English translation.

The first doctrinal filter of manoeuvre warfare identified by Lind was that of “mission-type orders” – otherwise known as Auftragstaktik in German. Auftragstaktik was used in order to allow subordinates to utilize their own initiative

and respond quickly to changing circumstances on the battlefield.\textsuperscript{382} Lind describes the concept as when a “commander does not expect or attempt to control every action of his subordinates.” Rather, the commander “determines his intent – what he wants to have happen to the enemy” and then places his trust in “his subordinates’ abilities to make the best decisions as to how to achieve his intent – within the framework of his guidance and support. In effect, he tells them what result he wants and leaves it up to them [how they] obtain it.”\textsuperscript{383} The US (along with most other Western military forces) had traditionally used a much more rigid, top-down approach to command whereby a superior would give detailed orders as to how and when a mission would be conducted, and subordinates were expected to request authorisation before making significant changes to their commander’s plan.

The “search for surfaces and gaps,” or \textit{Flächen und Lückentaktik}, was Lind’s second doctrinal filter of manoeuvre warfare. The concept involved a force seeking to avoid enemy strengths (surfaces) and to concentrate its efforts on enemy weaknesses (gaps). The concept has also been described as “recon-pull,” whereby fast moving reconnaissance units would probe ahead of larger formations looking for openings or weak points in the enemy line and then figuratively “pull” the rest of the force towards the most favourable avenue of attack. During the Second World War, the Wehrmacht made extensive use of the technique to first select the location of, and then fully exploit, its armoured breakthroughs. The technique worked hand in hand with \textit{Auftragstaktik}, which allowed German commanders to quickly reinforce a neighbouring unit’s success when their own progress was slower or more difficult than expected. Indeed, in describing surfaces and gaps, Lind even made specific

\textsuperscript{383} W. Lind, ‘The Case for Maneuver Doctrine,’” p. 94.
reference to the origins of the technique reaching back to the Von Hutier tactics used by the German army in 1918.\textsuperscript{384}

The final doctrinal filter discussed by Lind related to the importance of “focus of effort” in the execution of manoeuvre warfare. Lind referred explicitly to this filter as “the German concept of \textit{Schwerpunkt},” adding that it was “the conceptual focus of effort which each commander uses to link his actions, through the intent of his superior, to the actions of those around him. It is the ‘glue’ that permits mission orders to allow initiative without losing unity of effort.”\textsuperscript{385} As was discussed earlier in this thesis, each of the aforementioned German doctrinal concepts found their way into Airland Battle doctrine as English translations or as part of the doctrine’s four major tenets.

The doctrinal writers responsible for Airland Battle have nonetheless disputed the importance of civilian reformers (such as Lind) in the formulation of \textit{FM 100-5}. Huba Wass de Czege, a member of the writing team responsible for Airland Battle, has strongly argued that the theoretical foundations of Airland Battle were conceived irrespective of external pressures or reform ideas. Wass de Czege has, for instance, contended that in conceptualizing warfare simply in terms of an attrition-manoeuvre scale, Lind and the civilian reformers had: “created two uniformly unreal, but academically convenient, polar cases. The real world lies between.”\textsuperscript{386} A component of this argument was that, contrary to the common characterisation of Airland Battle as a complete departure from Active Defense, there were actually significant continuities between the two. This was the position taken by the official history of

\textsuperscript{384} W. Lind, ‘The Case for Maneuver Doctrine,’ p. 94.

\textsuperscript{385} W. Lind, ‘The Case for Maneuver Doctrine,’ p. 94.

the US Armored Corps, which Starry co-edited. Starry’s motivations may have been to counteract, in some small way, the strong criticisms which he felt had been unfairly directed at his predecessor at TRADOC, General DePuy. In an interview with historian John Romjue many years after the publication of Airland Battle, Starry repetitively heaped credit for the success of the doctrinal reforms on DePuy more so than himself or other TRADOC members. Starry may also have sought to rehabilitate the image of Active Defense in order to undermine the position taken by civilian reformers that the only logical explanation for the divergence between the two doctrines was the input of ideas from outside the army.

As discussed in chapter two, historians of the period such as Richard Lock-Pullan have taken a very different perspective on the issue. For Lock-Pullan, the only logical explanation for the stark contrast between Active Defense and Airland Battle and the strong correlation between what civilian reformers were advocating and the final form of Airland Battle was that the army’s doctrinal writers were influenced by the manoeuvre warfare concept. In other words, that Airland Battle so closely resembled the kind of doctrine which civilian reformers were advocating was proof, in and of itself, that an intellectual transfer had taken place. Airland Battle was certainly a radical departure from the style and approach of Active Defense, and it was released just after Lind and other civilian reformers had been publically calling for a complete overhaul of the army’s doctrine.

There can be little doubt that the doctrinal team responsible for writing Airland Battle were aware of the civilian reform movement and its ideas. Not only were

civilians reform ideas widely known throughout the army during the period, but many members of the doctrinal team published articles critiquing and responding to points raised by reformers.\textsuperscript{390} Indeed, the doctrinal writers of Airland Battle were not only aware of the civilian reform movement, but encouraged their direct input through invitations to official military events. Lind had taken part (along with a host of other prominent members of the civilian reform movement) in the June-July 1982 West Point Senior Conference on military reform.\textsuperscript{391} Lind was also personally invited to speak at the Command and General Staff College (located in Fort Leavenworth along with TRADOC and its doctrinal writing team).\textsuperscript{392} On one of Lind’s visits to Fort Leavenworth, he had a meeting with the then commander of TRADOC, General Starry, regarding the development of army doctrine.\textsuperscript{393}

Apart from their direct visits to military institutions and conferences, Lind and the civilian reform movement also exercised influence upon doctrinal development through their ties with important political figures. Lind himself had been an aide to Senator Robert Taft Jr. between 1973 and 1977. During that time he helped the senator draft the defence white paper \textit{A Modern Military Strategy for the United States}.\textsuperscript{394} Lind’s influence grew after 1977, while he served in a similar position under Senator Gary Hart, who was a member of the Senate Armed Services Committee.\textsuperscript{395} In order to identify how Lind’s political ties helped give his reform ideas weight within the US Army, one must first understand the dynamics of the


\textsuperscript{392} R. Lock-Pullan, \textit{US Intervention Policy and Army Innovation}, p. 80.


\textsuperscript{394} G. Hart and W. Lind, \textit{America Can Win}, p. x.

\textsuperscript{395} G. Hart and W. Lind, \textit{America Can Win}, p. x.
civilians reform movement and the political landscape during the late 1970s and 1980s.

The civilian reform movement (also known as the military reform movement or defense reform movement) was a diverse group of academics and politicians active during the 1970s and 1980s. They came from a wide variety of backgrounds and were not formally linked together or organised by anything other than the broad goal of improving the effectiveness of the US military. Noted members of the movement outside of William Lind included: John Boyd, Pierre Sprey, Jeffrey Record, Stephen Canby, and Edward Luttwak. The list of specific aims and arguments put forth by the civilian reform movement was extensive. To put the breadth of the civilian reform movement’s goals into perspective, Political scientist Samuel Huntington has listed some of their objectives as:

Increases in the defense budget, higher spending on innovative weapons and programs, re-examination of basic defense doctrine and concepts, building smaller, less expensive carriers in much larger numbers, building more modern diesel-electric submarines, hydrofoils and surface effect ships, shifting the emphasis of land warfare doctrine from attrition dominated by massive firepower to maneuver, changing the military education and promotion system to give officers a chance to think about warfare, placing more stress on military history and theory in military schools, upgrading and revitalizing our military journals, reducing the administrative load on the officer in the field, shifting from a bureaucratic model of organization to a corporative model today found only in the Marine

Starting in the late 1970s, the efforts of reformers and the growing interest of the American public in military matters sparked the formation of a bipartisan “Military Reform Caucus” made up of senators and congressmen bonded by their concern for the state of America’s military. Notable members of the caucus included Senator Gary Hart, Congressman Newt Gingrich, Senator Sam Nunn, and Congressmen William Whitehurst.\footnote{G. Hart and W. Lind, America Can Win, pp. 5-9.} According to Hart, the group was established by himself and Whitehurst when they became disillusioned with the way in which defence issues were being debated by the Armed Services Committee.\footnote{G. Hart and W. Lind, America Can Win, p. xi.} Hart found that the dichotomy between the Republican axiom of “give the generals what they need” and the Democratic position of “reduce the defence budget” was causing both groups to overlook important issues regarding how defence dollars were being spent. The Military Reform Caucus was intended to represent a third position in the debate, in which overall effectiveness rather than budgetary concerns came foremost.\footnote{G. Hart and W. Lind, America Can Win, p. xi.} An important step taken by the military reform caucus was their support for the appointment of General Edward “Shy” Meyer as Army Chief of Staff in 1979. Despite the objections of other senior army leaders, Meyer quickly became known for his enthusiasm for reform.\footnote{D. Driggers, The United States Army’s Long March From Saigon to Baghdad, p. 197.} It was through the military reform caucus, and the increased political interest in military matters, that civilian reformers like Lind prospered during the 1980s.
Indeed, the civilian reform movement gathered support during a time when public opinion towards military spending was in flux. For much of the 1970s many Americans had lost confidence in their government and their military. Historian Robert Tomes has commented that “no single event or action caused this, despite the importance some assign to Vietnam and Watergate as playing a determining role.”

The negative popular attitudes towards the military translated into reductions in the defence budget and the kind of dichotomous budgeting debates recalled by Hart. But by the end of the decade, public opinion began to change, as represented in an opinion poll conducted between 1975 and 1980: In 1975 only 18 percent of Americans believed that the country was spending “too little” on defence; in 1978 the number increased to 29 percent; but by 1980, some 60 percent of those questioned believed their government was not spending enough on the military.

This shift in public opinion was brought about by a combination of increased Soviet aggression, dissatisfaction with President Jimmy Carter’s foreign policy decisions, and the Iranian hostage crisis.

Ronald Reagan won the 1980 presidential election on the promise of restoring America’s belief in itself as a world leader and increasing its military strength. Reagan’s two terms in office “witnessed the largest and most rapid peacetime military expansion in the history of the United States.” Richard Lock-Pullan has noted the effect this unprecedented surge in the military budget had upon the technological developments during the era: “From within the Pentagon the demand for military spending meant that service chiefs were able to submit their programme ‘wish lists’, and as these did not absorb enough of the new budget they moved ‘from their wish lists to their dream lists, pulling out propositions they never expected to...

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see the light of day.”

The Global Positioning System (GPS), M1 Abrams tank, M2 Bradley Infantry Fighting Vehicle, AH-1 Apache attack helicopter, UH-60 Blackhawk helicopter, MIM-104 Patriot surface-to-air missile, Army Tactical Missile System (ATacMS), and the Joint Surveillance and Target Attack Radar System (JSTARS) were all programs made possible by this abundance of military funding which went on to be central to the US Army’s decisive victory in the Gulf War.

Many of these technological projects were influenced directly or indirectly by the civilian reform movement. The Global Positioning System, for instance, was supported by the Office of the Secretary of Defense and other civilian leaders rather than by the military services themselves. Similarly, many of the advanced military programs were overseen by an office of independent and realistic testing setup by the Military Reform Caucus. Public interest in defence, therefore, not only resulted in substantial financial support for military technological development, but it also motivated greater political attention to defence matters. Civilian reform ideas provided intellectual fodder for politicians interested in how increased funding should be allocated and how best to address perceived problems within the military.

By adopting Airland Battle, the army’s doctrinal writers achieved three things: they satisfied those within the army who perceived a need for change, they addressed the criticisms that had been directed at Active Defense by civilian reformers, and they placated the army’s civilian overseers and budgetary gatekeepers in the US government and armed services committee. It is difficult to question the importance

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405 R. Lock-Pullan, *US Intervention Policy and Army Innovation*, p. 66.
of Lind and the civilian reform movement to the development of Airland Battle doctrine in the face of the existing evidence. The only suggestion that Lind did not play a major role has come from the doctrinal writers themselves, who had a number of reasons to downplay his influence. Further, it would seem a convenient coincidence that just a few short years after Lind advocated the adoption of manoeuvre warfare, the US Army chose to radically change its doctrine to one which embodied so many of Lind’s suggested revisions. Furthermore, the invitations extended to Lind and other civilian reformers to present their arguments at leading military institutions similarly indicates that the army was receptive to external guidance. Finally, the links between the civilian reform movement and influential politicians within the US government offered another avenue by which army doctrinal writers were encouraged to consider the merits of manoeuvre warfare and the German doctrinal concepts incorporated within it.

The civilian reform movement and Lind’s explicit advocacy for the adoption of German military concepts was key to the integration of German doctrinal concepts into Airland Battle doctrine. Nonetheless in the broader context, the civilian reform movement was just one of many reasons for the spread of the Wehrmacht mystique in the US Army during the late Cold War period. The army emerged from Vietnam in 1973 defeated and disillusioned. The war spelled the end of a fundamental pillar of the US military system – conscription – and with it any hope that NATO could meet the threat of conventional conflict with the Warsaw Pact from a position of quantitative parity. The 1970s and 1980s were, as a result, a period of self-examination and reflection. The civilian reform movement, the renewed focus on the study of military history, the open debates about doctrine in military journals, and the Wehrmacht mystique were all critical components of the US Army’s late Cold War
intellectual renaissance. The fundamental culture of the organization also changed to one of a small, all-volunteer, and professional force in place of the “citizen army” model. Airland Battle both embodied and helped implement this cultural shift. But more importantly, these doctrinal and cultural changes made during the 1970s and 1980s continue to define the US Army to this day.

409 R. Citino, Blitzkrieg to Desert Storm, p. 260.
Conclusion

The Legacies of the Wehrmacht and Airland Battle

Airland Battle doctrine and the principles that it introduced continue to reside at the foundation of the US Army’s conventional doctrine in use today; and through this continuity, the legacy of the Wehrmacht mystique can still be felt in the modern American approach to war. Since 1986, the army has updated its doctrine four times (in 1993, 2001, 2008, and 2011) and released a dedicated counterinsurgency manual (Field Manual 3-24: Counterinsurgency). Each new revision has carried forward elements of Airland Battle, and German concepts such as Auftragstaktik, Absicht, Fingerspitzengefühl, and Schwerpunkt are still present (albeit in diluted forms) within the US Army’s current doctrine. In practice, the US led invasion of Iraq in 2003 (Operation Iraqi Freedom) was conducted in a similar fashion to Operation Desert Storm, just on a larger scale and followed by an extended counterinsurgency campaign. Yet, even as the US military shifted its focus to stability operations in Afghanistan and Iraq, American commanders have continued to implement and speak of ideas such as centre of gravity, manoeuvre warfare, and mission orders.

For instance, in 2005 a US Army Major undertaking training at the School of Advanced Military Studies submitted a dissertation entitled “After the Blitzkrieg: The German Army’s Transition to Defeat in the East.” In his abstract, the officer recognised that:

Recent experience in Operation Iraqi Freedom suggests that the cause and effect correlation between high-velocity major combat operations and achieving a complex political endstate such as regime change is becoming
less certain in the contemporary strategic environment. The transition to stability operations in a non-linear, dynamic environment is proving more difficult, and perhaps more decisive, than the major combat phase of a campaign. The aim of this study is to examine the difficulty in planning and executing these transitions from the historical perspective of the German invasion of the Soviet Union in June 1941.\footnote{B. Willis, After the Blitzkrieg: The German Army’s Transition to Defeat in the East, Masters Dissertation, School of Advanced Military Studies, United States Army Command and General Staff College, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, 2005, p. ii.}

The significance of the officer’s study is magnified when one considers it within the context of the American-German doctrinal relationship in the latter half of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century. The US Army learned the basics of “high-velocity major combat operations” from the Wehrmacht, and just as Blitzkrieg carried Germany to victory in 1940, so too did Airland Battle enable the decisive American success of 1991. In the same way that the invasion of the Soviet Union (Operation Barbarossa) exposed the weaknesses of Blitzkrieg, Operation Iraqi Freedom has proven that a triumphant “major combat phase of a campaign” does not necessarily guarantee the achievement of a “complex political endstate.” In other words, if \textit{Fall Gelb} was to Blitzkrieg as the Gulf War had been to Airland Battle, then Operation Iraqi Freedom was to the US what Operation Barbarossa had been to Germany – a rude awakening demonstrating the pitfalls of so called “lighting war.” It is also interesting to see that, even by the year 2005, a US Army officer chose to look toward the Wehrmacht for insight into the problems faced by the American military. Clearly the allure of the Wehrmacht did not disappear with the end of the Cold War, and lives on as a cultural phenomenon both inside and outside of the US military. In 2008, two historians, Edward Davies and Ronald Smelser made a significant contribution to understanding the longevity and breadth of the American fascination
with the Wehrmacht when they published *The Myth of the Eastern Front: The Nazi-Soviet War in American Popular Culture*. The book tells the story of:

How the Germans, through a network of former high-ranking Wehrmacht officers and Bundeswehr officers who had served in World War Two, created in the minds of the American military, then journalists and popular writers, an interpretation of World War Two in the East disturbingly similar to that projected by Hitler’s regime during the war itself and that left the Wehrmacht with a largely ‘clean’ reputation as to its conduct of that war. This view, which the Americans gradually absorbed during the 1950s, continues in the popular literature and part of the media to this day, and indeed delineates a broad subculture of general readers, German military enthusiasts, war game aficionados, military paraphernalia collectors, and reenactors.\(^{411}\)

In the preface, Ronald Smelser explains why they undertook the task of writing the book, and in the process, reveals the nature and depth of the Wehrmacht mystique:

“The book began with reminiscences of growing up in Pennsylvania in the 1950s, when the first documentaries began to appear on television. We remembered how boys came to school every morning after these showings full of enthusiasm about German dive-bombers and armored formations. These memories led us to find and investigate the phenomenon of ‘romancing’ the German military in American popular culture from that day to this.”\(^{412}\) Indeed, the myth of a “clean Wehrmacht” and the Wehrmacht mystique appear to be particularly resilient within modern Western culture. A generally positive portrayal of the German military during the Second World War remains a common feature of popular media to this day. Films,

\(^{412}\)R. Smelser and E. Davies, *The Myth of the Eastern Front*, p. xii.
documentaries, and computer games all continue to contribute to the Western fascination with the Wehrmacht.

Smelser and Davies’ discussion of their childish enthusiasm, like their Civil War era forebears playing with tin soldiers of Napoleon’s Grand Armee before them, are exposing a recurring feature of American culture and history involving powerful European militaries. Reaching right back to the creation of the United States as a nation, the American military has been quick to emulate those it felt were superior or particularly effective. It just so happened that for much of the first two hundred years of America’s existence, the prowess of the German military was at its height, thus making the German-American relationship particularly close throughout the period.

Come the late Cold War, circumstances aligned once again to initiate a new era of emulation of the Wehrmacht on the part of the US Army; eventually culminating in the writing of Airland Battle doctrine and American victory in the Gulf War. Defeated in Vietnam, reduced in size due to the abolishment of conscription, outnumbered by their Soviet opponent, and grappling with technological change, the late Cold War US Army recognised the similarities between the challenges it faced and those that the German army had confronted during the interwar period. This realisation, coupled with a renewed interest in military history, the advocacy of civilian reformers, and its close ties with the Bundeswehr, led to the proliferation of the Wehrmacht mystique within the US Army in the 1970s and 1980s. The nature and extent of the US Army’s fascination with the Wehrmacht was captured in, and displayed by, the publication of numerous articles in Military Review. Not only did the journal become home to a range of articles written by active and high ranking officers advocating for the emulation of German military doctrine and structure, but also an explicit debate regarding the ethical and practical implications of emulating
an organisation like the Wehrmacht – giving rise to the term “Wehrmacht mystique.”

Looking back across its pages, there can be little question of the fact that a large segment of the US Army had fallen under the spell of the Wehrmacht.

The 1970s and 1980s represented a tumultuous and transformative period in the history of the US Army. The army had left Vietnam a lumbering and defeated shell of its former self, and emerged as a much smaller but refined and professional fighting force. Or to put it another way, if an officer from the US Army of 1945 had been instantaneously transplanted to that of the 1970s, he would have to acclimatise to only a limited number of technological changes, but on the whole, would find the general structure and doctrine of the newer organisation fairly recognisable. Transplanting an officer in a similar fashion directly from 1970 to 1991, however, would not only confront him or her with a much larger technological leap forward, but also an organisation fundamentally unfamiliar doctrinally and even culturally. The Wehrmacht mystique played a major role in this transformation, guiding both doctrinal and organisational reforms throughout the late Cold War period.

Even though the US Army had spent decades preparing for war against the Warsaw Pact in Europe, it would eventually apply what it had learned to conventional conflict in the Middle East: first in 1991, and then again in 2003. The fundamental German based concepts of Airland Battle have remained the foundation of US Army doctrine whilst it has fought the ensuing counterinsurgency campaigns in Afghanistan and Iraq. But more recently, as American military commitments to these countries wind down, attention has begun to shift back towards the potential for the outbreak of another conventional conflict, particularly within the Pacific region, and with this
shift will come a renewed interest in the doctrinal approach to be applied. 413 If the last update to its doctrine is anything to go by – *Army Doctrinal Publication 3-0: Unified Land Operations* (or *ADP 3-0*) – it seems that German doctrinal concepts will remain at the centre of the American approach to warfare for years to come. 414


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