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IMPORTANT DIFFERENCES BETWEEN SUCCESSFUL AND UNSUCCESSFUL SENIOR ALLIED ARMY COMBAT LEADERS

An Individual Study Project
Intended for Publication

by

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INTRODUCTION

During World War II some senior Allied Army combat leaders, three or four-star generals, were successful while others were relieved of command or disastrously defeated in major battles. Did this happen only because some of them faced more serious disadvantages, especially during the early years of the war, or were their personal qualities and abilities an important factor in their success or failure? I believe that personal qualities and abilities played an important role. During the early years of the war, all of them faced an enemy that was well led, better trained, more experienced in combat, and often better equipped. To be sure, some faced more disadvantageous situations than others; however, some had a balance of qualities and abilities which enabled them to overcome the challenges they faced, while others did not.

This paper discusses some of the important qualities and abilities needed by the senior combat leader. It then presents examples of two successful and two unsuccessful World War II Allied combat leaders, some of the qualities and abilities that appeared to play a role in their success or failure, and some important differences between them.

The methodology used in this paper was to identify key qualities and abilities considered important for senior combat leaders and then examine some successful and unsuccessful leaders to find examples of incidents which indicated if they possessed those qualities and abilities. This paper is an initial and exploratory look at the importance of qualities and abilities to success or failure. It is qualitative and judgmental, not quantitative and empirical. An exploratory look is worthwhile because it can provide some insight into the differences between successful and unsuccessful senior combat leaders.

QUALITIES AND ABILITIES IMPORTANT TO SENIOR COMBAT LEADERS

Senior combat leaders influence the actions of others to impose their will on the enemy. Through a mixture of example, persuasion, and compulsion they get men to do what they want them to do, even if the men don't want to do it themselves.¹ They have a vision of what they want to achieve and how to go about achieving it and are able to successfully communicate their vision to both superiors and subordinates. In 1818, Carl von Clausewitz, probably the most respected military theoretician, wrote that when a military commander has a harmonious combination of the appropriate gifts of intellect and temperament to an outstanding degree and they reveal themselves in exceptional achievements, he is called a military

genius. But what are some of the important gifts of temperament and intellect, or qualities and abilities, needed to help a senior combat leader be successful? Clausewitz said that the first requirement is courage--courage both in the face of physical danger and in the face of opposing viewpoints. He then discussed five other important qualities or abilities which follow.

Coup d'oeil is the ability, even in the darkest hour of combat, to quickly recognize a truth that the mind would ordinarily miss or perceive only after long study and reflection. Determination is a mental quality that limits the agonies of doubt and the perils of hesitation and gives a commander the courage to accept responsibility and to intelligently decide and take bold action quickly in the uncertainty of war. Presence of mind is having a steady nerve and a high capacity to deal with the unexpected immediately. Strength of will is a combination of energy born of ambition, endurance, self-confidence, and strength of character founded in firmness and self-control that will not be unbalanced by the most powerful emotions. It allows the commander to act rationally and with steadiness and consistency, refusing to change his first opinion unless forced to do so by a clear conviction. A sense of locality is the ability born of imagination that allows a

commander to quickly and accurately grasp the topography of any area.²

Other authors have also discussed, in their writings, various qualities and abilities which they considered essential to successful senior combat leaders. However, since Clausewitz is widely accepted, and since others generally list qualities and abilities similar to those he listed, his were used as the qualities and abilities looked for in successful and unsuccessful senior combat leaders. One ability he listed, however, sense of locality, is not specifically discussed for each senior leader studied. This is because the materials on the leaders indicated in general that they all had at least minimal proficiency in this ability, but did not give detailed examples. Additionally, if some quality or ability not listed by Clausewitz appeared important to the success or failure of a studied senior combat leader, it was noted.

SOME SUCCESSFUL AND UNSUCCESSFUL SENIOR COMBAT LEADERS

It would be an immense task to study all the senior Allied Army combat leaders in World War II. However, some differences in qualities and abilities of successful and unsuccessful senior combat leaders might be discernible from studying two from each category. But which four? Military historians at the U.S.

Army War College suggested that available materials might allow discerning some differences between successful and unsuccessful leaders and that this might be achieved by studying available materials on General Robert L. Eichelberger and Field Marshal Sir William Slim as examples of successful senior combat leaders. They suggested Generals Sir Claude Auchinleck and Arthur Percival as examples of unsuccessful senior combat leaders.

Eichelberger--MacArthur's Fireman

Robert L. Eichelberger graduated 68th out of 103 graduates in West Point's class of 1909. As a Second Lieutenant on his regiment's annual 200-mile practice road march, he wore new shoes. With blistered and sore feet, he limped the last 100 miles of the march, refusing to ride in the accompanying ambulance. He believed that to set the example by accepting hardship with the troops, working hard, and being self disciplined, he would earn their respect and increase morale and efficiency. Later, in the Panamanian jungle, he learned that training must be tough and realistic and that soldiers must be pushed to their real limits, which are greater than they think. Caring not only for success but for the troops required this. With the U. S. expedition to Siberia during World War I, he evidenced courage and determination. On one occasion, at danger to his life, he entered partisan lines and

effected the release of one American officer and three enlisted men in exchange for one Russian prisoner. On another occasion, when an American patrol had seriously wounded men, armed with a rifle he covered the platoon's withdrawal. On yet another occasion, when an American column received fire while marching down from a mountain, disregarding his own safety he voluntarily assisted in establishing a firing line and preventing confusion. This raised the morale of the troops to a high pitch.³

In August 1942, Lieutenant General Eichelberger departed for Australia to serve under General Douglas MacArthur. In three major campaigns during World War II, MacArthur suffered initial setbacks from the Japanese--Buna in December 1942, Biak in June 1944, and Manila in January 1945. Each time he called in a fireman, or rescuer, General Eichelberger, to rally the American troops and salvage desperate tactical situations. Each time Eichelberger's combination of personal leadership, commonsense training, and tactical innovation achieved a dramatic result.⁴ Two of these campaigns--Buna and Biak-- offer several examples which demonstrate that Eichelberger had the qualities and abilities important to successful senior combat leadership.

Buna was MacArthur's first offensive of the war. The attack began on 16 November 1942. The insufficiently trained American

division was stymied by the Japanese, however. In the first two weeks of the campaign it had not once penetrated the Japanese positions. Its poor performance was causing the Australians to question the fighting abilities of American soldiers. MacArthur was alarmed. He called Eichelberger in from Australia and on the evening of 30 November 1942 gave him the following verbal orders.

Bob, I'm putting you in command at Buna. Relieve Harding. I am sending you in, Bob, and I want you to remove all officers who won't fight. Relieve Regimental and Battalion commanders; if necessary, put Sergeants in charge of Battalions and Corporals in charge of companies--anyone who will fight. Time is of the essence; the Japs may land reinforcements any nightI want you to take Buna or not come back alive.⁵

When Eichelberger arrived at Buna, he found skeletal-looking starving men at the front. They were dirty, had no sanitation system, and were scrambled like eggs rather than being together in their units. There was no effective chain of command. The men were also tired, demoralized, and not fighting aggressively. Eichelberger relieved General Harding and replaced the regimental commanders and the supply officer. He halted fighting for two days, during which he got the troops cleaned and back in their

units with a clear chain of command. He gave them their first hot meal in ten days. On 5 December 1942, Eichelberger attacked the Japanese on two fronts. He, his subordinate commanders, and his most trusted staff showed courage by leading the battle at the fronts to rally the troops and show them what was expected. The left front, led by Eichelberger, pierced a wedge to the sea between Buna Mission and Buna Village giving the Division its first victory in combat and raising the soldiers' confidence in themselves. Throughout the next month, Eichelberger showed determination and strength of will by continuing to attack the Japanese until on 2 January 1943 Buna was conquered, providing the Allies their first ground victory of the Pacific War.

Throughout the campaign at Buna, Eichelberger showed that he also had qualities and abilities not specifically mentioned by Clausewitz. He truly cared for the troops and he had the ability to raise their morale and dedication. In addition to cleaning and feeding them, he moved among the men passing out cigarettes while praising and flattering them. If this didn't prompt them to attack, he got tough. In one instance, he told a battalion that MacArthur was ashamed of its performance. In another instance, he threatened to execute any officer who disobeyed his order to place snipers in the

trees.⁶

After Buna, Eichelberger did the planning and trained his troops for the amphibious landing and capture of airfields at Hollandia, New Guinea, which began on 22 April 1943. The operations went smoothly and the airfields were captured in five days. General George C. Marshall called the operations "a model of strategic and tactical maneuvers".⁷ Then, on 27 May 1943, MacArthur sent a landing force to capture the airfields on Biak Island. Although the Japanese offered no resistance at the beaches, they counterattacked after the American forces had moved eight miles and were within 1000 yards of the first airfield, driving the troops back two miles and forcing them onto the defensive. Reinforcements were requested and with them the first airfield was taken by 8 June. However, the airfield could not be used because Japanese gunfire from ridges and caves close by completely controlled it. On 15 June, Eichelberger was sent in to Biak to take command. Demonstrating coup d'oeil, determination, and presence of mind, he decided to envelop the Japanese in the caves by taking the high ground to their rear. As a result, he captured all three airfields on the island in five days.⁸

Slim--Stout In Ability

William Slim joined the Birmingham University Officers Training Corps, although he had not attended the university. At the outbreak of World War I, he was commissioned in the Royal Warwickshire Regiment. With the regiment he was involved in an attempt to open the Dardanelles, where he was wounded in battle and then returned to England to recuperate. After recuperation he served with the regiment in Mesopotamia for the remainder of the war, being wounded in the arm during action in Iraq. After the war he served in the Indian Army.

On the outbreak of World War II, Slim was selected to command an Indian infantry brigade. In September 1940, his Indian brigade went to the Sudan. Here, as a Brigadier, Slim sought to capture Gallabat and Metemma. During the battle, an Italian air attack panicked the troops in the British battalion and many of them headed for the rear. Slim set up a roadblock to stop the flight and then headed toward Gallabat on foot. While walking, he managed to stop a truckload of fleeing soldiers and persuaded them to return to Gallabat with him. He captured Gallabat but not Metemma. As a result, he had to evacuate Gallabat that night. Slim later placed the responsibility for failing to accomplish his mission on himself. This was because he had a plan for attacking Metemma from the

rear which he thought was the right course of action to take, but his subordinate commanders opposed it and he accepted their advice. He wrote that when two courses of action were open to him he had not chosen, as a good commander should, the bolder, but rather, had taken counsel of his fears.⁹

In July 1941, Slim began an advance on Deir-Ez-Zor, Syria. He planned to flank it with a motorized force to attack from the north while the remainder of his force attacked simultaneously from the south. However, gas was in short supply. The motorized force had just enough to take the flanking action and then enter Deir-Ez-Zor. On trying this they encountered a dust storm, used too much gas, and had to return to the main force. Slim drained the gas from vehicles in his line of communication, leaving them immobile. This provided enough gas for the motorized force to make one more flanking attempt that night and enter Deir-Ez-Zor if everything went right. Slim's subordinate commander advised against this, stating that an attack from the south and from the more heavily defended west would be less risky. But Slim showed courage, determination, presence of mind, and strength of will and took the risk. It paid off in the capture of Deir-Ez-Zor. The Italians were surprised by the attack from the north and most of them fled. They left behind large amounts of gas, arms,

and ammunition and did not have time to blow up the only bridge across the Euphrates within hundreds of miles.¹⁰

On 19 March 1942, Slim became commander of Burcorps in Burma under General Sir Harold Alexander. The troops in Burma had been unprepared for war and the Japanese had already taken Rangoon. The day after Slim took command of Burcorps the Japanese attacked the Allied airfields in the area, gained complete air superiority, and left Burcorps without air support. Burcorps had suffered heavy casualties in men and material before Slim arrived and reinforcements and replenishments could not be brought in. Morale was low. Also, the Chinese divisions in Burma often could not be counted on to do their part. Whether the Allies would withdraw to India or whether the possibility of a successful counterattack existed had not yet been decided, but Slim was to concentrate Burcorps in a defensive position. Although he did not know his troops, nor they him, when he took command of Burcorps, he projected his calm, confident, humorous personality and increased confidence and morale within the corps to the extent possible in such dire circumstances. A subordinate commander remarked that his personality made the corps feel that someone behind had taken charge of it. Like Eichelberger, Slim had the ability to raise the morale and dedication of the troops.

Over the next two months, the Japanese kicked the Allies, including Slim's Burcorps, which in the latter stages of the campaign was approximately equal to one division, out of Burma. During his retreat to Imphal, India, Slim suffered some major catastrophes. For example, when he was ordered to attack the Japanese 50 miles to his south to relieve pressure on the Chinese, the attack by one of his tired and ill-equipped divisions was not successful, casualties were heavy, and morale suffered. Even in the trying circumstances of defeat by the Japanese and forced retreat from Burma, however, as will be shown below, Slim showed some of the qualities necessary for successful combat leaders.

During the retreat, Slim habitually visited the troops all over the front. One battalion commander noted that, when Slim visited, he was always accessible to talk to and that Slim left him full of confidence and pep. When one of his division's line of withdrawal was cut off by the Japanese for a week and communications were broken, Slim showed presence of mind and strength of will by giving no inkling of depression or worry to his staff or other subordinate commanders. He remained calm and decisive and his dry humor had an inspiring effect, however bad the situation. As soon as the division was withdrawn to safety, he showed determination by planning an offensive attack

westward against a strung-out Japanese division.

When the Japanese attacked Monywa, leaving Slim's headquarters undefended and cut off from its divisions, those present affirm that he appeared quite unshaken. Showing presence of mind and coup d'oeil, he studied the map, quickly assessed the implications of the Japanese threat, and within 15 minutes issued orders to restore the situation. His personality and calm confidence had an electrifying effect on all present. Action was swift and orderly. The panic which might well have set in was averted.

When in the retreat his troops had to cross the Chindwin River at Shwegyin by ferry, Slim, feeling he had done all he could at his headquarters, went to Shwegyin to make any final decisions on the spot. He arrived just as the Japanese appeared on the rim of the river basin. He showed courage by staying all morning at the headquarters of the commander of the basin defenses or at the pier, amid the mortar and machine gun fire of the Japanese attacks. Once it was clear he could do no more there, he spent time on his launch visiting the steamers and organizing one last effort to evacuate the recently wounded. He was among the last to leave Shwegyin that evening.

On 20 May 1942, Slim handed over his troops to IV Corps at Imphal. Although they had suffered defeat in the 1000-mile retreat through Burma, Burcorps never lost cohesion or effectiveness as a fighting unit.¹¹

Slim learned from the Burma retreat and he began training troops based on that experience. Patrolling, to him the master key to jungle fighting, was ordered as training for all units. This was because the jungle didn't really allow for employing divisions or brigades but rather allowed for a war of battalions, platoons, and sections. Also, patrols offered almost the only source of information on enemy movements in the jungle. Additionally, good patrolling skills would give the troops confidence and an offensive outlook. Slim said in the memorandum he issued as a basis for training that there aren't any noncombatants in jungle warfare and that even medical units would be responsible for their own defense and for patrolling their vicinity. He said that the enemy would normally be attacked from a flank or from the rear rather than frontally and never on a narrow front. He also laid great importance on seizing the initiative, since, when the Japanese's plans were upset, they became confused and were easier to kill. Slim also made his headquarters staff train and master the use of infantry weapons.

In October 1943, Slim was selected to command the new 14th Army. On taking command, in order to prepare for an offensive, he began concentrating all his energy on the factors he had learned would be critical to success in the Burma labyrinth of jungle, mountains, and rivers, which had few roads, railways, or airfields--training, supply, transport, and above all, morale. Slim used and picked good senior officers to help him with this, and as a result the number relieved throughout the Burma campaign was remarkably small. He also concentrated on improving the health of the troops and drastically reduced the incidence of malaria. He continually communicated his vision--that 14th Army was not there to merely defend against, but rather to smash the Japanese--and he urged commanders to increase patrolling and stage small attacks on Japanese positions. He also stressed that every assignment was important in achieving the common cause and explained that, until Germany was defeated, Burma was bottom in supplies priority and would not receive all it needed. Slim was always ready to talk to every troop he could as one man to another, never as the great commander to his troops.

Slim required all operations plans to be simple, contain an element of surprise, and be directed toward one aim, the destruction of the Japanese armies in Burma. And once having

adopted a plan, he kept it constantly in mind and showed strength of will by refusing to allow sidetracks, even if attractive, unless they were directly connected to achieving the objective of the plan. He told his troops to expect to have the Japanese in their rear on occasion and to consider in such situations that they had the Japanese surrounded and react accordingly. He also pointed out that formations or units were bound to be cut off by the Japanese from time to time. When this occurred, he said they were to stand fast, be resupplied by air, and become the anvil on which reserves could smash the enemy or force him to withdraw in disarray.

Slim showed coup d'oeil in seeing the potential of air support in the jungle more quickly than most Air Force officers. To him, air superiority, the movement of troops by air, supply dropping, and air landing of supplies would neutralize the Japanese tactics of envelopment and penetration and allow operations in an area without land communications. However, enough silk parachutes just were not available. Slim was convinced, however, that parachutes could be made from jute or paper. He approached the business community in Calcutta and within a month a "parajute" with 85 percent reliability that was adequate for dropping normal supplies was produced.

Slim's ideas on how to defeat the Japanese and his training methods proved correct. In the Arakan campaign from February to May 1944, by using air supply, he was able to dispense with lines of communication temporarily and to disorganize the Japanese plan from the beginning. He recorded that this was the turning point of the Burma campaign because, for the first time, a British force had decisively defeated a major Japanese attack and then driven the enemy out of the strongest possible natural positions that they had been preparing for months and were determined to hold at all costs. The effect of the victory on 14th Army was immense.

During February and early March 1944, the battle of Imphal and Kohima on the Imphal plain was also shaping up. A part of the plan to counter the expected Japanese offensive was to land troops in gliders at three landing sites. Thirty minutes before gliders were to be lifted off for one landing site reconnaissance photographs were developed and showed that it had been partially obstructed by tree trunks. Some felt that the plan had been betrayed and that to continue would result in disaster. The decision was Slim's. He did not believe the Japanese knew of the plan. He thought they had partially obstructed the one site because the Allies had extensively used it in 1943 and that the other two sites could still be used.

As at Deir-Ez-Zor three years earlier, Slim showed determination and presence of mind and went with what he thought was the right and bold course of action. As a result, the first airplane took off only one hour past the scheduled time. 9,000 men and their equipment were successfully landed in the heart of the jungle.

The Japanese began the battle earlier than Slim had expected, and 17th Division's withdrawal to the Imphal plain was cut off. Also, among other problems, the Japanese sent a division against Kohima instead of the one regiment that Slim had thought was all they would be able to send. Slim showed presence of mind and strength of will by taking risks, making quick readjustments, and making improvisations to his plans to overcome the errors in them and the quick advance of the Japanese. By 4 April 1944 this was done and his original plan for the defense of the Imphal plain could be reimposed. Although nearly three months of fighting was necessary before the Japanese were driven back, the battle was won by Slim on 4 April when he imposed his fight on them and seized the initiative of the battle for Burma.

There were other battles in Burma during 1944 and 1945 as Slim advanced to the Irrawaddy River and as he captured Rangoon. Once he had beaten them on the Imphal plain and seized

the initiative, Slim showed determination and strength of will by pursuing the Japanese relentlessly, not giving them time to recover from one blow before he delivered the next. He took considered risks when they contributed to the destruction of the enemy. For example, at Meiktila, he committed his last reserve, even though the Japanese were still full of fight and the battle far from won. Various of his subordinate commanders and troops noted how calm and inspiring he was in the midst of great problems and great battles. He modified his tactics in relation to his enemy and succeeded in winning. Sun Tzu said that he who can do this may be called a Heaven-born Captain.¹²

Throughout the campaign to recapture Burma, Field Marshal Slim had a clear vision and he could convey that vision to both subordinates and superiors. As has been shown, Slim was stout in the qualities and abilities important to senior combat leaders.

Auchinleck--Unable To Get Along With Churchill

John Claude Auchinleck attended the Royal Military College, Sandhurst in 1902. In 1903, he entered the Indian Army because his family could provide him no allowance and the pay was higher and the cost of living lower in India. During World War I,

he went with the 22nd Indian Infantry Brigade to the Middle East and participated in preventing the Turks from crossing the Suez Canal in Egypt. He remembered the first bullet that flew over his head. He said that it made him duck but that he got used to combat quickly. In March 1916, he was fighting the Turks by the Tigris River with the 62nd Punjab Regiment. Auchinleck was then a Major and, when his commander was wounded in combat, he assumed temporary command of the 62nd. By February 1917, he had become acting commander of the 62nd Punjab and took the regiment across the Tigris at night for a morning attack on the Turks. He later recalled that he had been frightened during the night of the river crossing but was calm for the attack the next morning. It is said that Auchinleck was one of those courageous people who are aware that danger exists but who become so inured to it that they can genuinely disregard it. In his military career through World War I, Auchinleck learned the importance of strict but just discipline and exacting training. He also learned that frontal attacks on heavily prepared positions, even when successful, were inordinately costly in casualties and time. After the war, he attended the Staff College at Quetta and the Imperial Defense College in London, and by 1936 was the Deputy Chief of the General Staff, India.¹³

After the outbreak of World War II, Lieutenant General Auchinleck served as Commander of Allied Forces, Norway from early May until early June 1940 when British forces were withdrawn ostensibly for the defense of England. In truth, the Allies were unable to hold Norway against the Germans. In November 1940, he was appointed Commander in Chief, India. While in that position, Auchinleck overturned a revolt in Iraq which had established a pro-German government. Then, in June 1941, he was named Commander in Chief, Middle East.

In the Middle East Auchinleck faced the German Field Marshal Rommel, whom the British press referred to as the Desert Fox. Rommel was intent on conquering Egypt and he had better equipment than Auchinleck. Rommel also had better trained and more experienced troops. Auchinleck was not afraid of Rommel, but he wanted more tanks, which he believed were essential to fight Rommel's armor on the flat desert terrain, and time to train his troops adequately for war in the desert before attacking him. However, in England, Sir Winston Churchill thought Rommel was at a weak point because of intercepted German messages in which Rommel complained about his health, equipment, and troops. Thus, Churchill thought Auchinleck had enough tanks and good enough troops to launch an offensive immediately after taking command and that is what he wanted.¹⁴

In November 1941, later than what Churchill had wanted, Auchinleck launched the Crusader offensive, in which Allied and Axis forces faced each other across the western frontier of Egypt. Auchinleck had trained his troops and imbued them with his vision and intent, to destroy Rommel's army. In the confusion and disorder of the ensuing battle--in other words, in the fog of war--one of Auchinleck's subordinate generals, who was commanding the Eighth Army, because of heavy casualties feared that Rommel was achieving an overwhelming victory. He therefore ordered a withdrawal to prepared defensive positions behind the Egyptian frontier. On being informed of this by one of the Eighth Army commander's subordinates, Auchinleck went to the scene, quickly appraised the situation, and showing presence of mind and determination, decided that the offensive must be continued, that the time was at hand to deliver Rommel a blow. He ordered General Cunningham to continue offensive action by capturing Sidi Rezegh and linking up with the Tobruk garrison. As a result, a few days later, for the first time in his life, Rommel was in retreat. Auchinleck had become the first British general in World War II to defeat a German general. Had he not taken swift and bold action, however, the situation would likely have resulted in his defeat.¹⁵

As Rommel retreated, Auchinleck wanted to pursue and destroy

his army. Because of heavy casualties in the offensive, however, he believed that he needed reinforcements to do so. He did not get them and he did not pursue Rommel. As a consequence, Rommel was able to recover and attack again in January 1942.¹⁶ At least one author, although crediting Auchinleck with steel will and inflexible determination in the Crusader offensive, believed that he could have crushed Rommel's Panzer Army at the end of the offensive when Rommel had brought forward every gun from Benghazi for the last unsuccessful attempt to prevent the relief of Tobruk, if he had retained personal command of the fighting. Two days after countermanding Cunningham's withdrawal order, Auchinleck replaced him with General Ritchie. The author believed that Ritchie failed to act on a situation that Auchinleck would have exploited had he retained personal command.¹⁷

After the Crusader offensive, Churchill wanted Auchinleck to begin another one around March 1942. However, Auchinleck was thinking of beginning his next offensive in June or August. Churchill requested that Auchinleck return to England to discuss the matter; but Auchinleck refused to go, saying that he could not leave at such a critical time. Then a Churchill telegram in May 1942 essentially ordered Auchinleck to attack. Auchinleck, in a return telegram, thanked Churchill for some

suggestions in the May telegram, but left the matter of an attack date open. Churchill replied that he had to know Auchinleck's intentions. Auchinleck replied on 19 May 1942 that he intended to launch a full-scale offensive by the June dark-period at the latest. Rommel settled the matter by attacking on 26 May 1942.

Churchill wanted Auchinleck to personally command his army during the battle. This was probably because, when Auchinleck personally commanded in battle, things went well for him and bad for Rommel. He took advantage of opportunities that subordinate generals might miss. However, Auchinleck felt that he could keep a broader perspective if he was not directly at the front. Therefore, he left Ritchie in command of the fighting. But Ritchie lost the battles at Gazala and Tobruk; so, on 24 June 1942, Auchinleck relieved him and took personal command. This greatly increased the morale and confidence of Eighth Army.¹⁸

After taking command of the fighting, Auchinleck showed coup d'oeil in that he sensed that he could stretch Rommel to his culminating point and halt his advance. Showing determination and strength of will, he acted, fell back to El Alamein, and halted Rommel's advance on 1 July 1942. By July

27, Auchinleck had beat off Rommel's attack in the battle of First Alamein. He had robbed Rommel of his last chance to take Egypt. He had frustrated Rommel at the eleventh hour and sowed the seeds for Rommel's eventual complete defeat. However, having beaten Rommel, again he did not pursue, but rather went back on the defensive, insisting that time was needed to regain Eighth Army's strength. Churchill took the news that Auchinleck was back on the defensive as depressing. Churchill flew from London and met in the desert with Auchinleck on 5 August 1942. Churchill wanted to hear confidence and enthusiasm about a forward offensive in the near future. But Auchinleck did not talk about an offensive in the near future. Churchill viewed him as a foot-dragger, who always had an excuse for not finishing Rommel off. Thus, on 8 August 1942, Auchinleck received a letter from Churchill relieving him of command. Thereafter, he did not have a major role in the war.¹⁹

How did this happen? Like Eichelberger and Slim, Auchinleck demonstrated courage, determination, coup d'oeil, presence of mind, and strength of will. I believe it happened because he had a fatal flaw, an area in which he was so weak that his qualities and abilities as a senior combat leader were overshadowed. The fatal flaw was his insensitivity and inattention to political perspectives and leaders.

When Auchinleck took over as Commander in Chief, Middle East, his commander, Dill, warned him that he would have to explain his plans and positions well. He told Auchinleck that broad political considerations might result in his being asked to take actions that seemed inappropriate militarily. He said that, if Auchinleck were required to take inappropriate actions, he might have to point out that he could not be responsible for the consequences. Then, in August 1941, General Sir Hastings Ismay, Chief of Staff to the British Minister of Defence, advised Auchinleck to use the "public relations" approach to deal with Churchill. But Auchinleck did not follow the advice of either man who had tried to help him. He simply was not diplomatically oriented.

As soon as Auchinleck took command in the Middle East, he began receiving numerous telegrams from Churchill pressing for a quick offensive. Churchill did not understand that in the desert dust much of Auchinleck's equipment did not work well or long and that effective desert fighting required exacting troop training. Perhaps he also did not realize that Rommel, in the intercepted messages, may have been like some other commanders who complained incessantly to their higher command, even when they were in a relatively good position. In any event, Auchinleck did not effectively explain to or convince Churchill

of the need to wait before launching the Crusader offensive. Likewise, he did not do a good job of explaining why he wanted to wait until June or August 1942 to attack, rather than attacking in March. He was undiplomatic in his telegram exchange with Churchill, and he should not have refused to meet with his superior.

Auchinleck's judgment in selecting subordinate generals to command fighting is also subject to question. Both Cunningham and Ritchie had to be relieved of command. Further, some might question his determination and strength of will because he did not pursue the enemy in defeat. I do not believe that judgment appropriate, however, because Auchinleck did not have the abundance and quality of equipment that those who followed him had at their disposal.

Percival--Inadequate, But Have Some Mercy On Percy

Arthur Percival was Chief of Staff, Malaya Command in 1936 and 1937. On 16 May 1941, he became General Officer Commanding, Malaya and commanded Allied ground forces during the Malaya campaign of 7 December 1941 to 15 February 1942. The materials available on the Malaya campaign and Percival did not include many detailed examples of personal actions, as was the case for the previously discussed leaders. This is probably because

many records were lost to the Japanese with Singapore's capture, and the memories of those prisoners who survived lacked freshness.

Malaya is a peninsula about 600 miles long and varying in width from about 200 to 60 miles. The island of Singapore lies about 1000 yards off the tip of the peninsula. A mountain runs down the peninsula separating the eastern and western parts. A railroad coming from Thailand, formerly Siam, branches before entering Malaya, with one branch running down the western side of the peninsula and one branch running down the center. The branches run over two-thirds of the distance down the peninsula and then join at Gemas and one track runs from there to Singapore. In 1941, there were few roads in the eastern part of Malaya. In the western part there was a main road running down the peninsula. There was also a coastal road and a number of lateral roads in the western part, and there are rivers that run from the mountains to the sea.²⁰

On 7 December 1941, the Japanese landed a division of troops in Siam and part of another division right across the border at Kota Baharu, Malaya. They soon had over 26,000 men ashore. For their Malaya Campaign they would shortly have three divisions totaling 62,000 men. They had 183 artillery guns, 228 tanks,

and 551 aircraft. Percival faced them with three divisions, a reserve brigade, and fortress troops for guarding Singapore.²¹ His men totaled about 89,000--37,000 Indian, 20,000 British, 15,000 Australian, and 17,000 locally recruited Asians.²² He had no tanks. Although there was no joint command, the Royal Air Force had 158 aircraft on hand. Percival's troops were inadequately trained to fight in the jungle or to fight Japanese armor. The Japanese gained complete control of the sea when, on 10 December 1942, their aircraft sank the battle cruiser Repulse and the battleship Prince of Wales.

Percival had his troops spread out around Malaya to try to protect the British airfields on the peninsula, even though the Japanese had air superiority and it might have been better to just destroy and deny them to the enemy. The Japanese went down the main road and the railroad tracks, piercing British defenses with their tanks, which were followed by infantry. At the same time they used the sea and rivers and the jungle to envelop the British and attack with infantry from the rear. These tactics drove the British relentlessly down the peninsula. Each time the British had trouble holding the Japanese, Percival authorized withdrawal. If he had a vision of what he wanted to achieve and how to go about achieving it, he did not communicate it to his troops. Unlike Eichelberger, Slim, and

even Auchinleck, there is no indication that Percival went to the front to share danger and hardship with his troops, see firsthand what was happening, and decide what could be done to stop the Japanese. Even before the campaign, he had not gone about amongst his men and talked to them in an effort to raise morale and dedication. They did not know him; they had only heard of him. He may have had courage; but, if so, he did not demonstrate it. In the darkest hours of combat, he did not demonstrate coup d'oeil, determination, or presence of mind that resulted in his taking bold action. He failed to sense how to deal with the Japanese tactics and failed to concentrate his forces and force the enemy into a decisive battle of his choosing.

When driven off the peninsula to Singapore Island, Percival spread out his troops to try to prevent landings and hold the entire coastline instead of keeping a division-size reserve to counterattack successful landings.²³ On 15 February 1942, when the Japanese had gained control of the city's water supply and fighting would be house to house, he accepted the Japanese demand for his surrender. He did not sense that the Japanese had been stretched to their culminating point and use strength of will and determination to resist surrender. In fact, they were out of artillery shells. He wasn't. Even at that point,

had he demonstrated the qualities and abilities important to senior combat leaders he might have held on long enough for more reinforcements to be brought in.

Overall, it appears from the available materials that Percival simply did not demonstrate the qualities and abilities important to successful senior combat leaders. Why then do the words "but have some mercy on Percy" appear in the title of this report section. It is because, even though Percival was inadequate as a senior combat leader, we should still remember that he faced the Japanese early in the war, before Slim and Eichelberger. Some information about tactics the Japanese had used on him would have been available to them. It is also because he could not fight and run away, and then return to fight the Japanese another day. MacArthur went to Australia when the Japanese kicked him out of the Philippines. Slim and his Burcorps retreated from Burma to India. Although, even in defeat, both demonstrated more of the qualities and abilities of successful senior combat leaders, they got a second chance for demonstration. Percival had nowhere to go and no way to get there. He had no second chance at the Japanese.

CONCLUSIONS

Between Buna and Biak, Eichelberger demonstrated courage,

determination, coup d'oeil, presence of mind, and strength of will. He was able to deal effectively with both superiors and subordinates. In Burma, Slim demonstrated courage, determination, coup d'oeil, presence of mind, and strength of will. He also was able to deal effectively with both superiors and subordinates. Both of these successful senior Allied Army combat leaders demonstrated at least a minimum level of proficiency and a balance in qualities and abilities important to senior combat leaders.

In Malaya, Percival, an unsuccessful senior combat leader, failed to demonstrate many of the qualities and abilities important to successful senior combat leaders, such as courage, determination, coup d'oeil, and strength of will. The difference between his qualities and abilities and those demonstrated by the successful leaders was important and may well have contributed to his surrendering in defeat. In the Middle East, Auchinleck demonstrated courage, determination (except, perhaps, in pursuit of the enemy), coup d'oeil, presence of mind, and strength of will, the same qualities and abilities demonstrated by the successful leaders. But he was unsuccessful for a different reason. He had a fatal flaw, and it resulted in his being relieved of command. He was not able to effectively deal with his superiors. He did not take their advice on how to

deal with Churchill and he was not effective in his relationship with Churchill. He also, apparently, was not good at judging and selecting subordinate generals.

This paper did not consider all the senior Allied Army combat leaders, which statistical theory would suggest would be required to generalize any results. Nevertheless, the study suggests that successful senior combat leaders demonstrate a balance of qualities and abilities considered important to success, and that to continue their success, they must not have a fatal flaw. It also suggests that those who lack at least a minimum level of proficiency in the qualities and abilities needed in the situation presented to them may not be successful.

Since the study was an initial exploratory look, however, the author recommends that other researchers expand on it by examining additional senior combat leaders. Should the results of this study prove correct for senior combat leaders in general, then previous demonstration of qualities and abilities Clausewitz considered important could merit important consideration in selecting senior combat leaders.

ENDNOTES

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