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ONCE IN A BLUE MOON:  
AIRMEN IN THEATER COMMAND

LAURIS NORSTAD, ALBRECHT KESSELRING,  
AND THEIR RELEVANCE TO THE  
TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY AIR FORCE

BY

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Major Belote is a distinguished graduate of both Squadron Officer School and the Air Command and Staff College, Maxwell AFB, Alabama. His article, “Paralyze or Pulverize: Liddell Hart, Clausewitz, and Their Influence on Air Power Theory” has been published in *Strategic Review*. He is married to the former Pamela Rosenow; the Belotes have three sons, Drew, Michael, and Matthew.

## *Acknowledgments*

I would like to thank Dr. Hal Winton and Col Steve Chiabotti for their advice and encouragement throughout this project. They challenged me and kept me focused on the pertinent issues as I explored the experiences of airmen and soldiers who have held coalition command. Dr. Winton ensured I stayed on target; thanks to him, I was “sipping a mint julep” a few days *before* graduation.

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and kids almost every morning. Thanks, y'all, for making this the most balanced and fulfilling year of my life.

## *Abstract*

In the 52-year history of the United States Air Force (USAF), only one airman has risen to serve as a regional commander in chief (CINC). In the same period, 74 soldiers, sailors, and Marines have filled CINC billets. To determine if, and perhaps how, airmen could become geographic CINCs in the near future, this paper examines the root of the issue through historical analysis and asks “what are the qualities necessary for airmen to perform effectively as war-fighting commanders in chief?”

The study uses the careers of two early theater CINCs, Generals Dwight Eisenhower and Jacob Devers, to establish a baseline for analysis. Relying heavily on primary sources from the Air Force Historical Research Agency, it then conducts biographical case studies on General Lauris Norstad, the only USAF theater CINC, and German Field-Marshal Albrecht Kesselring, the only airman ever to command a theater during war. The paper also examines the present-day relevance of the issue through interviews with senior Defense Department officials and a review of contemporary literature on joint command. Every source consulted in this study concurred: to perform effectively as war-fighting commanders in chief, airmen—indeed, all officers—need comprehensive joint military proficiency; an incisive geostrategic-political-military vision; and strong, but nuanced and deft, skills in leadership and interpersonal relations.

The paper concludes with a discussion of how airman CINC's could contribute to the national defense and of the cultural obstacles that work against Air Force officers in the CINC selection process. The interview subjects unanimously contended that would-be airman CINC's face a self-imposed burden: their career tracks focus almost exclusively on Air Force-specific jobs, with relatively little time in joint staff, unified/combined command staff, or civilian agency billets that provide the breadth and exposure vital to a CINC's joint understanding and political-military awareness. As a remedy, the paper recommends a "joint warfighter" career track based on a synthesis of the interviewees' experience.

## Chapter 1

### Introduction

*The first requirement for any commander is leadership. . . .It doesn't matter if one is air-, land-, sea-, or space-trained. . . . It is important that one understand the strengths, weaknesses, and doctrines of each and how to blend them in battle.*

—General Charles A. Horner  
3 February 1999

In 1947, the National Defense Act established positions for regional commanders in chief (CINCs). Nine years later, when General Lauris Norstad took command of allied forces in Europe, he became the first geographic CINC from the young United States Air Force. He served as Supreme Allied Commander, Europe (SACEUR) and as the first head of the United States European Command for more than six years, designing cold war strategies and force structures to contain the Soviet Union. News accounts from the period suggest Norstad commanded joint and combined forces effectively, blending a broad knowledge of service capabilities with consummate diplomatic skill and understanding of European politics.

In January 1963, Norstad retired as the Air Force's *last* geographic CINC. To be sure, 12 Air Force officers served as CINCALASKAs between 1947 and 1974, and Generals Truman Landon and Harry Goodall filled in as CINCs for 5

weeks and 10 days, respectively—but for all intents and purposes, the Air Force has filled only one theater CINC billet since World War II. In the same period of time, 36 Army officers, 34 Navy officers, and 4 Marines have headed the Atlantic, Pacific, European, Southern, and Central Commands.<sup>1</sup>

Does it matter that the Air Force has produced only one CINC in its 50-year existence? More and more, the answer must be “yes.” No matter what one believes about the “decisiveness” or “centrality” of aerospace power, one must concede that over the past 50 years that element of power has become an increasingly significant component of military might. Whether used to influence significantly the terms of land battle as at Khafji, to transport supplies to refugees as in Kurdistan or Somalia, to enforce international agreements through surveillance and shows of force as in the Iraqi no-fly zone, or to punish non-compliance with international agreements such as the Dayton accords, airpower has tended to be the first arrow pulled from a commander in chief’s quiver. Furthermore, recent history suggests that this trend of airpower use in a wide variety of political and military circumstances will continue. America and its allies responded to various crises in late 1998 and early 1999 with cruise missile attacks in Afghanistan and the Sudan, the Desert Fox bombing campaign in Iraq,

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<sup>1</sup> Roger R. Trask and Alfred Goldberg, *The Department of Defense 1947-1997: Organization and Leaders* (Washington, DC: Historical Office, Office of the Secretary of Defense, 1997), Appendix II; I am indebted to Maj Tom Ehrhard for this count. I have ignored the air-defense-oriented Alaskan Command in this study. Although a unified commander, CINCAL had no operational control of his components until 1958, and then only over air defense forces as a deputy to CINCNOAD. Not until 1965 did a CINCAL direct an exercise with all three components. See Truman R. Strobridge, *Strength in the North: The Alaskan Command 1947-1967* (Elmendorf AFB, Alaska: 1966) and Maj Henry J. Bishop, “A Study in the Feasibility of Inactivating the Alaskan Command,” Research Report 0245-73 (Maxwell AFB, Ala.: Air Command and Staff College, 1973).

and Operation Allied Force in Kosovo. In other words, control and exploitation of air and space have become central to both modern war fighting and coercive diplomacy.

This being the case, how does the Air Force's failure to produce a theater CINC affect the national defense? Put simply, while the dearth of Air Force CINCs has not dramatically degraded the nation's military security, it does reflect a potential misuse of resources. Although it is possible for a non-airman to employ airpower effectively, common sense argues that when airpower is central to a campaign or operation, an airman would bring greater familiarity with its capabilities and limitations into his command decisions. World War II Chief of Staff General George C. Marshall would have agreed. In 1941, his office accepted the proposition "that the employment of air power called for more intensive knowledge of air power's capacities . . . than was possessed by the most enlightened of ground-trained officers."<sup>2</sup> In the present, such knowledge should allow the airman to blend aerospace capabilities into a joint campaign more effectively than his non-air counterpart. However, as indicated by the parameters cited above, airmen have not been afforded the opportunity to demonstrate their joint war-fighting abilities at the most senior level.

Why? Part of the answer may stem from parochialism and inter-Service rivalries. It is only a part of the human condition to identify with one's own experiences and fail to understand and integrate those of others. By tradition, Army and Navy officers have owned the geographic CINCDoms, see no reason to

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<sup>2</sup> Mark Skinner Watson, *Chief of Staff: Prewar Plans and Preparations* (Washington, D. C., U.S. Army Historical Division, 1950), 282.



change the status quo, and have convinced civilian leaders to maintain things as they are. Furthermore, Graham Allison's bureaucratic politics model illuminates the natural tendency to protect turf and thereby suggests why some leaders could distrust Air Force officers with command of Army, Navy, and Marine Corps formations.<sup>3</sup> Hinting at that kind of distrust, General Horner suggested that "you can't be a regional CINC unless you're a gravel cruncher. Why? Because that's how it is."<sup>4</sup> Echoing General Horner's point, three retired four-star generals—two from the Air Force and one from the Army—conceded that senior army officers opposed the continuation of an admiral as commander of NATO's southern region when ground troops were deployed to Bosnia.<sup>5</sup> There is, however, very little the Air Force can do directly to influence the attitudes of senior officers from other services.

There is, however, a different perspective on the subject. Three of the nation's most senior retired defense officials insist that personal qualification for the position is the sole consideration in the choice of a CINC. Former Secretary of Defense Dick Cheney does not "think there's any conscious effort to push the Air Force out."<sup>6</sup> Cheney's selectee as Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (CJCS), General Colin L. Powell, noted that

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<sup>3</sup> Graham Allison, *Essence of Decision: Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Co., 1970), describes the interpersonal and organizational interplay that shapes the decision making of senior political and military leaders.

<sup>4</sup> Gen Charles A. Horner, e-mail to author, 3 Feb 99.

<sup>5</sup> Remarks given by guest speakers at the School of Advanced Airpower Studies and Air Command and Staff College, Maxwell AFB, Ala., during 1998-99. Senior leaders speak at Air University under a policy of non-attribution.

<sup>6</sup> Hon. Dick Cheney, interview with author, 23 Feb 99.

during my tenure as Chairman, all, I repeat all, of the CINC positions were offered to all of the Services. . . .Frankly, I wasn't going to recommend an Air Force officer to the SecDef just to make the Air Force happy. That would be reverse parochialism. It had to make sense.<sup>7</sup>

Finally, Powell's successor as CJCS, General John Shalikashvili, declared "the system will break unless we pick the number one officer available [to serve as a CINC]. It should not be 'it's our turn.' The game starts all over each time."<sup>8</sup>

Those views—from men responsible for filling the country's most important military positions—suggest another possibility to explain the low number of Air Force geographic CINCs. The now-36-year exclusion of airmen from such a role could indicate either that airmen lack certain necessary qualities to command joint forces or that they fail to demonstrate those qualities to the proper audience. Could it be that airmen fail to groom themselves to wield joint power? Indeed, one Air Staff officer noted that

at a recent meeting with general officers, I was amazed at how they answered the questions affecting the way the CINCs used aerospace power. They *always* answered in terms of being a JFACC [joint force air component commander], not a JTF [joint task force] Commander.<sup>9</sup>

General Charles G. Boyd, former Deputy CINC, US European Command, concurred, saying "we're obsessed by JFACC because of our precious airplanes and a psychology that says we're [only] support forces."<sup>10</sup> Whether or not this phenomenon indicates a failure on the part of the Air Force, it is the only part of the regional CINC equation that the Air Force can directly influence. General

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<sup>7</sup> Gen Colin L. Powell, e-mail to author, 20 Feb 99.

<sup>8</sup> Gen John M. D. Shalikashvili, interview with author, 22 Feb 99.

<sup>9</sup> Col Jim Callard, HQ AF/XPXS, e-mail to author, 24 Jan 99.

Boyd continued: “Make no bones that [parochialism] exists and must be overcome. But don’t waste time on a cause célèbre. Make political [leaders] understand the logical arguments [for airman CINCs].”<sup>11</sup> Before arguing that an airman can command joint and combined forces, however, one must investigate what joint commanders do.

Knowing what CINCs must contribute is relevant for two reasons. First, if the Air Force wants to make its greatest possible contribution to the nation—if it wants its senior officers to ascend to the pinnacle of joint war-fighting competence as regional CINCs—it has to know what it is after and must produce an obviously qualified pool of candidates. Second, and more importantly, the question of CINC qualifications relates directly to the overall national defense, as the nation’s shrinking forces must be employed in the most effective possible manner. Airpower has simply become too important to overall military capability to be permanently relegated to a supporting role. As suggested above, America’s predisposition toward involvement in humanitarian operations and smaller-scale contingencies brings airpower in all its forms ever closer to center stage. This tendency could make appointment of an Air Force CINC a significant national defense issue.

To meet the national need for military readiness, then, the armed forces need CINCs who can employ forces as effectively as possible. For those political and military situations where airpower is central—as the late 1990s indicate, that could be the majority of international situations—the ultimate example of an air-

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<sup>10</sup> Gen Charles G. Boyd, interview with author, 26 Feb 99.

minded joint force commander would be an Air Force general officer who can prove to the nation that airmen understand and can employ all facets of joint power. Before that can happen, though, both the leaders who appoint commanders in chief and the sister-Service members whose forces would serve under such CINCs must be convinced that airmen can effectively command joint and combined forces. To that end, this thesis poses the following question: what are the qualities necessary for airmen to perform effectively as war-fighting commanders in chief?

### **Evidence and Methodology**

The thesis identifies those necessary qualities of knowledge, insight, and skill through three methods. First, it reviews theoretical and historical literature on command. An examination of the writings of Allied joint and combined force commanders from World War II and the military historians who studied them will lead inductively to a composite picture of a successful CINC and create a baseline for further analysis.

This conceptually derived characterization of CINCs is then tested against the experience of the only prominent airmen to serve as commanders in chief, the aforementioned General Norstad and German Field-Marshal Albrecht Kesselring. During a period of great international turbulence, Norstad focused NATO on the Soviet threat in spite of competing nationalist agendas promoted by the Americans, British, French, and Germans. However, because he was successful in deterring war in Europe, Norstad's case lacks a significant component of CINC

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<sup>11</sup> Boyd interview.

performance: the conduct of active hostilities. To assess an airman's performance as a CINC in war, one must turn to the German World War II experience. Kesselring—who started World War II as the commander of the air fleets that supported the invasion of Poland and played a central role in the Battle of Britain—assumed joint command of the Mediterranean theater in September, 1942. Through diplomatic skill, political insight, and operational expertise, he covered Rommel's escape from North Africa and conducted an effective defense in the face of the Allied invasion. By examining oral histories, post-war interviews, personal memoirs, and contemporary sources, the study highlights the qualities these two commanders in chief used to succeed in coalition command.

The thesis then brings the issue of war-fighting command into the present through interviews with recently retired senior leaders. By comparing the historical lessons with the experiences of CINCs, deputy CINCs, chairmen of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and a defense secretary, a composite of qualities for the modern coalition commander should develop. The synthesis of historical and recent evidence will answer the thesis question and describe the skills and insights airmen must develop to compete for regional CINC billets.

Of course, developing such abilities is but the first step in the journey to find a successor to Lauris Norstad. To that end, the paper will conclude with thoughts to guide future research. Working from the evidence developed through the interviews, the study will suggest possible answers to follow-on questions about the institutional impediments to an airman's appointment. It will describe the CINC selection process and highlight the attributes necessary to overcome the

inertia of tradition and culture. Finally, to address the bottom line—what the Air Force can do to produce potential CINCs—the thesis will offer suggestions to inculcate those attributes in airmen.

## Chapter 2

### Early Perspectives on Joint/Coalition Command

*Generalship is, in short, much more than command of armies in the field.*

—John Keegan  
*The Mask of Command*

What personal qualities enable an officer to command large, complex, multinational forces effectively? The pat answer would probably be “courage and soldiering skills,” and without a doubt, both are components of successful command. Such an answer, however, only scratches the surface. Achieving unity of effort inside a multicultural force requires vision and ability above and beyond military decision-making skills.

Such skills have been particularly necessary in this century of world wars fought by coalitions of representative democracies.<sup>12</sup> Indeed, coalition command was instituted in desperation at the end of World War I, when the allied powers turned to Marshal Foch to direct the offensive that they hoped would end the war. However, Foch was as much a “first among equals” as he was a commander; and leaders such as Haig and Pershing enjoyed a great deal of autonomy even after Foch’s appointment as commander in chief. Therefore, to examine the roots of

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<sup>12</sup> For this study, even the Axis coalition counts as a “democratic” coalition, as military failure led to collapse of the Italian government and withdrawal from the alliance.

supreme command as it exists today—to create a baseline for further analysis of coalition command—one must look to the theater commanders of World War II. Through the writings of both practitioners and observers of joint command in World War II—the birthplace of the modern joint and coalition command system—a picture of CINCs emerges that includes broad joint professional competence; deep geostrategic understanding; and several personality traits that define leaders, i.e., intelligence, persuasiveness, integrity, and team-building skills.

## **Participants**

One notably successful commander, General Jacob L. Devers, who commanded the North African theater, the European theater, and Sixth Army Group in World War II, described the foundations for coalition command in his post-war speeches and writings. In a 1947 speech reprinted in *Military Review*, Devers argued that a coalition commander's problems “tax his native ability, professional skill, and patience to an unbelievable degree,” requiring therefore “unquestioned ingenuity, professional skill, tact, good judgment, and patience.”<sup>13</sup> The general listed several problems facing top-level joint and combined commanders, including lack of clarity of higher headquarters' directives; conflicting political, economic, and military problems and objectives of each of the allied powers; and “probably the most important of all . . . the personalities of

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<sup>13</sup> Gen Jacob L. Devers, “Major Problems Confronting a Theater Commander in Combined Operations,” *Military Review* 27, no. 7 (October 1947): 3.



the senior commanders of each of the armed services of the allied powers under command.”<sup>14</sup> He then provided solutions to those problems:

In determining his appropriate course of action under a directive received, the Theater Commander must bear in mind that he has under command professional soldiers and experienced commanders of several nations other than his own, who owe their first allegiance to their own governments. . . . it is unreasonable to expect that the military representatives of nations who are serving under unified command in combined operations will subordinate promptly and freely their own views to those of a commander of another nationality, unless the commander, through professional skill, good judgment, tact, and patience, has convinced them that it is to their national interests individually and collectively.

Hence, the Theater Commander must first know the several national problems and aspirations in detail before he can hope to deal with his commanders.<sup>15</sup>

In other words, the general suggested themes of comprehensive professional knowledge, political/strategic understanding, and interpersonal skills—themes that recur throughout the writings of World War II observers and participants.

Devers’s superior in Europe—the Supreme Commander, Allied Expeditionary Forces, General of the Army Dwight D. Eisenhower—cited the same factors of political insight, personality, and competence. Early in his command, he had but an inkling of the importance of politics, writing in 1942 to General Marshall: “The sooner I can get rid of all these questions that are outside the military scope, the happier I will be. Sometimes I think I live ten years each week, of which at least nine are absorbed in political and economic matters.”<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>16</sup> Robert S. Jordan, *Generals in International Politics* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1987), 175. Quoted in William R. Swarm, “Impact of the Proconsular Experience on Civil Affairs Organization and Doctrine, in Robert Wolfe, ed., *Americans and Proconsuls: United*

The future SACEUR and president quickly worked international insights into his leadership style, however. Writing after World War II, he noted that

personalities of senior commanders and staff officers are of special importance. . . . The high commander must . . . be calm, clear, and determined—and in all commands, especially allied organizations, his success will be measured more by his ability to lead and persuade than by his adherence to fixed notions of arbitrary command practices.<sup>17</sup>

For Eisenhower, that persuasive ability was rooted in an ability to see his subordinates' points of view:

You must work in every way you know to develop the confidence of your subordinates in the commander, in his common sense, straight-forward thinking, and absolute refusal to touch a problem on a nationalistic ground. . . .

[Y]ou have to let the people of the opposite nationality see that in everything you do, in every move you make, you are preserving strict impartiality. Literally you had to refuse in such a position to be wholly a citizen of your own country. You were half one and half the other. You had to recall that and keep it in the forefront of your conscious mind every single minute of the day. . . .

[Finally], you must be prepared . . . to accept minor inefficiencies as long as that is promoting the great and common purpose. You should not try to change ideas and concepts on the part of some subordinate of a different nationality because you disagree with him. If you can achieve the great overall unity of purpose that inspires loyalty, inspires teamwork, never bother your heads about seeking perfection.<sup>18</sup>

Eisenhower also relied on broad professional development, noting “that in the higher positions of a modern Army, Navy, and Air Force, rich organizational

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*States Military Government in Germany and Japan, 1944-1952* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois Univ. Press, 1984), 400.

<sup>17</sup> Dwight D. Eisenhower, *Crusade in Europe* (1948; reprint, Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), 75.

<sup>18</sup> Eisenhower, “Problems of Combined Command,” address to National War College, Washington, D.C., 18 Jun 48. Available on-line from the Dwight D. Eisenhower Library, Abilene, Kans., <http://www.eisenhower.utexas.edu>; e-mail: [Library@eisenhower.nara.gov](mailto:Library@eisenhower.nara.gov).

experience and an orderly, logical mind are absolutely essential to success,” as was “an inexhaustible fund of nervous energy. [The commander] is called upon night and day to absorb the disappointments, the discouragements and the doubts of his subordinates and to force them on to accomplishments, which they regard as impossible.”<sup>19</sup> The supreme allied commander fired that nervous energy with a driving but not-too-obvious personal ambition that he subsumed in a deep commitment to the ideals of the military profession and sense of purpose, and demanded the same of those close to him. “Combat commanders,” he insisted, “must be selected from among those who preferred a battle-line position to any other, regardless of lesser considerations.”<sup>20</sup> Eisenhower, like Devers, credited his success to broad military skills, an understanding of international realities, and the personal ability to communicate them to a diverse audience.

## Observers

In the intervening years, historical analysis has confirmed the impressions and recollections of the World War II commanders. In 1986, Col Richard W. Anderschat analyzed theater command requirements in a monograph for the US Army War College entitled “Factors Affecting Success in Coalition Command.” Anderschat used studies of General Devers and his contemporaries, Generals Mark Clark and Joseph W. Stilwell, “to determine those factors which contributed to their success or failure in combined command in various theaters” of World

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<sup>19</sup> Eisenhower, letter to Harry Cecil Butcher, 10 Dec 42; in Alfred D. Chandler, ed., *The Papers of Dwight David Eisenhower, The War Years: II* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1970), 824.

<sup>20</sup> Eisenhower, *Crusade in Europe*, 41.

War II.<sup>21</sup> The colonel concluded that a successful coalition commander must “be a consummate professional. He must be experienced and knowledgeable of the art of war and must understand the capabilities” of all the component forces at his command.<sup>22</sup> Anderschat continued that the commander “has to be able to think on the political and strategic levels,” understanding his country’s policy, alliance policy, and the national policies of each coalition member, and then be sensitive to each.<sup>23</sup> He finished with the observation that “the most important factor” in his study of Devers, Clark, and Stilwell was “personality. Strong interpersonal skills are absolutely essential to the success of a coalition commander.”<sup>24</sup>

To frame his analysis of command success, Anderschat relied on an in-depth, sophisticated study by professors Martin Blumenson and James L. Stokesbury, *Masters of the Art of Command*. While most of their chapters dealt with individual military leaders, Blumenson and Stokesbury assessed also the peculiarities of coalition warfare. They described the broad insights and abilities demanded of theater commanders thus:

In a coalition effort, the commanders at the top of the scale are in a never-never land between the political and military realities. Below them military forces are usually organized in separate national armies. Above them are the civilian politicians who have their own domestic interests and their own interpretations of foreign policy. The military high command is the point of contact between political and military aspirations and activities; because of this, the coalition commanders must function as superb artists. . . .

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<sup>21</sup> Col Richard W. Anderschat, “Factors Affecting Success in Coalition Command,” Research Report (Carlisle Barracks, Pa.: Army War College, 31 Mar 86), ii.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 34.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 35.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 37.

The soldier who can run a coalition is a rare figure. To reach that stratospheric position and remain there, he must be aggressive, bold, ruthless, and enterprising—in short, he has to possess all the traditional military virtues. He is then told to do a job that requires tact, tolerance, forbearance, and patience—qualities that had little to do with his previous advancement. . . .

The coalition soldier . . . who can do so successfully is one who has indeed proved his versatility. Defeating one’s enemies while placating one’s allies calls for the remarkable characteristics of the soldier-statesman.<sup>25</sup>

The two historians followed those observations with descriptions of various coalition commanders and situations, then finished the section with a discussion of Eisenhower—in their mind, the prototypical supreme commander.

Quick and bright, Eisenhower had a capacity for learning, an ability for assessing complicated situations, a facility for striking to the heart of a problem. . . . Add an ability to get along with people and you have a rare person—sharp, smart, and persuasive, one fitted by intelligence and temperament for high command.<sup>26</sup>

Eisenhower, they argued, “made the coalition work” by having “precisely the qualities—of character, selflessness, and good sense—to knit the staff officers of two nations into an integrated organization in which national differences and jealousies were forgotten.”<sup>27</sup> Furthermore, Eisenhower had an

intimate knowledge of politico-military problems on the highest level and a breadth of outlook unusual in a regular soldier. . . .nobody else revealed Eisenhower’s remarkable capacity for integrating the efforts of different allies and rival services and for creating harmony between individuals with varied backgrounds and temperaments.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>25</sup>Martin Blumenson and James L. Stokesbury, *Masters of the Art of Command* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1975), 243-5.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 294.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 299; attributed to Arthur Bryant, *The Turn of the Tide*.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 302; attributed without further citation to Chester Wilmot.

In short, Blumenson and Stokesbury praised Eisenhower for the same qualities the general himself had highlighted: deep professional competence, political-strategic insight, and the intellect and personal skills to lead a disparate team.

## **Summary**

This snapshot of World War II experience highlights certain qualities that prominent coalition commanders and subsequent analysts found vital to success, and thereby provides a framework for further examination of the attributes of effective commanders in chief. Devers and Eisenhower alluded to, but did not dwell on, basic military proficiency. Perhaps they took such proficiency for granted—it was, after all, what got them promoted in the first place—and the success of the combined campaigns they led is ample testimony to their broad joint expertise. Instead, they and later observers insisted that two additional capabilities had to join with comprehensive knowledge to ensure coalition success: understanding of international political-military realities and the personal skills to blend multiple services and nationalities into a coherent whole. Does the experience of other CINCs—specifically airmen—lend weight to these assertions about command?

## Chapter 3

### An Airman CINC: Lauris Norstad

*Everything Norstad does in NATO he equates in the political atmosphere. His job is more diplomatic than anything else. Like a doctor, he is rushing around to fix this crisis here, iron out that difficulty there. It's a helluva job, but the guy's got what it takes to do it.*

—General Nathan Twining, CJCS  
*Time*, 16 December 1957

United States Air Force experience provides but one test case for the qualities of coalition command outlined in the preceding chapter: General Lauris Norstad, Supreme Allied Commander, Europe and Commander in chief, United States European Command from 20 November 1956 to 2 January 1963.<sup>29</sup> Praised as the “most brilliant air strategist . . . in any air force” by *Newsweek*, Norstad rose from a mediocre finish in the West Point Class of 1930 to become a full general in 1952.<sup>30</sup> Along the way, Norstad used his considerable intellect; a foundation of airpower competence; and an interest in history, economics, and politics to develop a broad understanding of the role of military power in international

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<sup>29</sup> Norstad actually relinquished command of EUCOM to Gen Lyman Lemnitzer on 1 November 1962; at Secretary Robert S. McNamara’s request, he extended his tour as SACEUR two months to lessen international tensions resulting from the Cuban missile crisis.

<sup>30</sup> “General Norstad: Guardian of Western Europe’s Air,” *Newsweek* 38, no. 14 (1 October 1951): 26. The article reports that Norstad, who finished 139<sup>th</sup> in a class of 241, “was a first lieutenant when the Nazis overran Poland. By the end of the war, he was a major general [and permanent] brigadier.”

relations. A study of General Norstad's exceptional career and performance as SACEUR reveals the command qualities of comprehensive professional expertise, broad strategic vision, and personal leadership ability suggested by Norstad's mentor Eisenhower.

## Background

After graduation from West Point and commissioning as a cavalry officer, Norstad transferred to the fledgling Air Corps in 1931. He spent a decade in a variety of flying, staff, and schools assignments, and, in the words of historian Phillip Meilinger, "quickly impressed his superiors with his meticulous staff work and incisive intellect."<sup>31</sup> Noticed at the Air Corps Tactical School (ACTS)—Norstad believed that ACTS commandant "Mif" Harmon personally told Hap Arnold about his performance there<sup>32</sup>—Norstad moved to staff jobs at Langley Air Force Base and in Washington. Shortly after the United States entered World War II, General Arnold put then Major Norstad on his special advisory council, telling him simply "your job is to do my thinking for me."<sup>33</sup> Arnold put his young protégé in positions to earn the regard of General George Marshall and

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<sup>31</sup> Phillip S. Meilinger, "US Air Force leaders: A Biographical Tour," *The Journal of Military History* 62, no. 4 (October 1998): 860.

<sup>32</sup> Gen Lauris Norstad, transcript of oral history interview by Dr. Edgar F. Puryear, Jr., 22 August 1977, Air Force Historical Research Agency (AFHRA) file K239.0512-1473, Maxwell AFB, Ala., tape 2, p. 5. According to Norstad, Harmon knew that "older [officers] would arrange to see me the night before a test to find out my solution and talk about it"—an early indication of the then-first lieutenant's abilities.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, tape 3, side 2, p. 7 (hereafter 3-2, p. 7).



orchestrated Norstad's rapid rise through the ranks, at one point directing a personnel officer to "see he's a full colonel by sundown."<sup>34</sup>

Both to take advantage of and further develop the colonel's war-fighting abilities, Arnold sent Norstad to London as an air planner in early 1942. Norstad worked on cross-channel invasion plans, then became the lead air planner for Operation Torch, the allied invasion of North Africa—and there gained the confidence of General Eisenhower. As assistant chief of staff for operations of Twelfth Air Force, then as director of operations of the Mediterranean Allied Air Forces (MAAF), Brigadier General Norstad directed air operations over North Africa and Italy and planned the air portion of Operation Anvil, the allied landing in southern France. Norstad returned to Washington in 1944 to oversee strategic air operations in the Pacific as chief of staff of Twentieth Air Force, General Arnold's D.C.-based strategic force.

After the war, Norstad helped organize the new Defense Department and Air Force, first as the War Department's director of plans and operations, then as Air Force deputy chief of staff for operations and acting vice chief of staff. From these positions, Norstad helped write the 1947 National Security Act and the Key West agreement on service roles and missions, and developed the force structure for the post-war Air Force. In October 1950, then-Lieutenant General Norstad became the Commander in chief, United States Air Forces in Europe (CINCUSAFE, then a specified command billet). He followed his mentor

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid. See also Norstad, transcript of oral history interview by Hugh N. Ahmann, 13-16 February and 22-25 October 1979, AFHRA file K239.0512-1116. For summaries of Norstad's career, see Meilinger (cited above), the finding aid to the papers of Lauris Norstad, Dwight D.

Eisenhower to NATO headquarters in April 1951. There, he wore dual hats as CINCUSAFE and Commander, Allied Air Forces Central Europe until July 1953, when he took over as Air Deputy to SACEUR. After three years as General Alfred M. Gruenther's deputy, Norstad rose to NATO's top military job—turning down more than one offer to become Air Force chief of staff to do so.<sup>35</sup>

As SACEUR, Norstad fulfilled his military and political responsibilities with equal adroitness. He created the cold war strategy of forward defense backed by a US/UK nuclear deterrent—a doctrine known as “Shield and Sword”—and personally negotiated with European leaders for basing rights and national force structure contributions. He handled difficult issues of troop reductions, nuclear control, and West German rearmament as an international spokesman, earning the respect of figures throughout the NATO alliance. News accounts of the early 1960s credited Norstad with great success. General Thomas White, who followed a turn as Air Force chief of staff with a stint as a contributing editor for *Newsweek*, cited European and American praises such as “shrewd and understanding friend” to all the Allies and “one of the most remarkable public servants of his time,” and concluded that “Norstad had the brilliance and intimate grasp of the situation to represent NATO and America, together with the moral stamina and nerve to stand up to both.”<sup>36</sup> White's comment echoes the

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Eisenhower Library, Abilene, Kans., and “An Airman Boss for NATO,” *Time* 67, no. 17 (23 April 1956) 29.

<sup>35</sup> Both the Puryear and Ahmann oral histories contain similar accounts. Norstad felt the NATO position was more important to national security and more suited to his own abilities and desires.

<sup>36</sup> Gen Thomas D. White, “New Era in NATO,” *Newsweek* 60, no. 18 (29 October 1962): 27. White's draft of the column, found in his personal papers in AFHRA file 168.7004-49, cites the *Washington Post*, 12 August 1962, E1, and the *Manchester Guardian Weekly*, 26 July 1962, 2A, as sources.

requirements for coalition command outlined by Eisenhower and others. Did Norstad rely on a similar foundation of skills, and if so, what does that suggest about joint/coalition commanders in general?



*Source: Newsweek, 1 Oct 51. AP photo.*

**Figure 1. Eisenhower and Norstad**

## **Comprehensive Professional Knowledge**

As argued above, Norstad developed a reputation for airpower knowledge early in his career, and Hap Arnold put that ability to use in the European theater of operations. In 1942, Norstad

went to London to be a planner. At that time, of course, both the British and we were thinking of every possibility of getting into the action because we were on the receiving end and had not been able to take the initiative at all. . . . people even then were thinking in terms of a possible cross-channel landing. Then the African landing was also actively considered.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Norstad/Ahmann, 499.

[When] Torch was accepted . . . I was Plans and Operations for the Twelfth Air Force so I did most of the planning for the air part—essentially all of the air part of the Torch landing.<sup>38</sup>

Because he “had written the plans and was in charge of operations anyway,” Norstad was the first American airman ashore in North Africa.<sup>39</sup> He established the first forward airbase at Tafaraoui, set up Twelfth Air Force’s forward headquarters, and caught the eye of the man who would ultimately appoint him as SACEUR:

When I transferred headquarters from Gibraltar to Algiers on November 23, I took advantage of the journey to begin inspections of our troops and facilities. At the Oran airfield I came squarely up against conditions that were to plague us throughout that bitter winter. . . . Tactical operations were at a standstill so I spent the morning inquiring into problems of supply, housing, and food. It was on that occasion that I first met Lieutenant Colonel Lauris Norstad, a young air officer who so impressed me by his alertness, grasp of problems, and personality that I never thereafter lost sight of him. He was and is one of those rare men whose capacity knows no limit.<sup>40</sup>

Over the next two years, Norstad planned and executed a number of the most significant air operations in the Mediterranean; thereafter, he focused his abilities on the Pacific air war. In his own words, he “really developed and directed the tactical air operations in North Africa and all the way up Italy. Operation Strangle, for instance [the air interdiction campaign to weaken German defenders of Rome, Anzio, and the Gustav Line through Cassino], was my baby.”<sup>41</sup> Dr. Eduard Mark of the Center for Air Force History has supported Norstad’s claims

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 280.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 500. See pp. 506-515 for Norstad’s account of his MacArthur-style landing and battles with the Vichy French forces that opposed the American invasion.

<sup>40</sup> Dwight D. Eisenhower, *Crusade in Europe* (1948; reprint, Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1997), 118-9.

<sup>41</sup> Norstad/Ahmann, 267.

of responsibility, citing several memos from the MAAF director of operations to Lieutenant General Ira Eaker and Air Marshal Sir John Slessor, the commander and deputy commander, that outline Norstad's influence on targeting decisions in Italy.<sup>42</sup> After laying the groundwork for air operations in southern France, Norstad helped set the stage for airpower success in the Pacific. Perceiving that Arnold had lost faith in Maj Gen Haywood Hansell's handling of Pacific strategic operations, Norstad personally orchestrated Maj Gen Curtis LeMay's assumption of command in the theater.<sup>43</sup> Norstad was also part of the small circle of Air Corps leaders involved with the Manhattan Project.

After the war, Norstad immediately funneled his operational airpower expertise and wartime experience into a broad understanding of joint matters. After Eisenhower took over as Army chief of staff in 1946, he made his former air planner the chief of War Department plans and operations. Air Corps commanding general "Tooeey" Spaatz called the appointment a breakthrough and marveled that Eisenhower wanted an airman in the key policy job at the center of the War Department's General Staff.<sup>44</sup> From that position, Norstad worked the "great reorganization efforts [of] the Defense Act of '47, which [he] helped draft and negotiated up on [Capitol] Hill, [with] the President and with the Navy."<sup>45</sup> Norstad developed a close personal relationship with Admiral Forrest Sherman and used those ties to overcome turbulent interservice squabbles; together, the two

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<sup>42</sup> Eduard Mark, *Aerial Interdiction in Three Wars* (Washington, D. C.: Center for Air Force History, 1994), 143-78. See especially notes 15, 16, 18, 25, and 39. Mark also cites a "candid" post-war report on Strangle's deficiencies that was written by Norstad, 192.

<sup>43</sup> Norstad/Ahmann, 546.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 101.

officers facilitated the Key West and Newport agreements and set the course for early Defense Department budgetary policy.<sup>46</sup> While Norstad's careful tilling of joint middle ground did not win universal applause—the retired Hap Arnold charged Norstad with having “sold [the Air Force] down the river” in the aforementioned agreements—it did garner him widespread respect for his military competence. Deadlocked over MacArthur's proposal for the Inchon landing in the summer of 1950, the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) dispatched Norstad (who asked Gen Matthew Ridgway and Ambassador Averell Harriman to accompany him) on a fact-finding mission to Korea. After personally reviewing the ground situation and interviewing General MacArthur and General Walton Walker, commander of the forces holding the Pusan perimeter, Norstad recommended approval of the Inchon plan.<sup>47</sup> Norstad's endorsement helped convince a skeptical JCS of the feasibility of MacArthur's audacious plan, notwithstanding the considerable risks it entailed.

Shortly thereafter, General Norstad put his understanding of American joint roles and missions, as well as his bureaucratic savvy, to work for the new North Atlantic Treaty Organization. While Norstad's titles suggested an emphasis on air, his wide-ranging efforts encompassed a much broader focus. Norstad had written a paper for the joint chiefs in 1949 arguing “that there should be some meat on the bones of NATO,” something tangible for the Europeans who believed that “ ‘a treaty and a statement of good intentions are fine, but we have been

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<sup>45</sup> Norstad/Puryear, tape 2, p.4.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., tape 4-1, p. 10.

<sup>47</sup> Norstad/Ahmann, 383-89.

overrun so many times that words aren't good enough. We have to have something that we can see and something we can feel.”<sup>48</sup> Norstad delegated the running of USAFE to his chief of staff, Maj Gen Truman Landon, and focused on “building this Allied organization [from a] grassroots basis” for his supreme commander, Eisenhower.<sup>49</sup> As he built the NATO organizational structure, he also took over as the Alliance’s premier joint strategist, especially after rising to the air deputy position. Norstad—never one for false humility—remembered that “if you asked anybody who was working at SHAPE in my time who made the NATO strategy for Western Europe, they would say I did. And they would be right.”<sup>50</sup> Air Force General Richard H. Ellis, a SHAPE planner in the mid-‘50s, remembered that “Norstad was the heart of [cold war planning]. Gruenther, the SACEUR, turned all of the strategy and nuclear planning over to Norstad, . . . [who], in my opinion, was the father of the flexible response.”<sup>51</sup>

Significantly, Norstad rejected the seemingly “easy” solution of “let Strategic Air Command handle it” and instead worked for a true combined-arms strategy. In fact, he clashed with CINCSAC LeMay to prevent SAC from encroaching on the SACEUR’s turf<sup>52</sup> and focused on building effective conventional and nuclear

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 276, 216.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 263.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 434.

<sup>51</sup> Gen Richard H. Ellis, transcript of oral history interview by Lt Col Maurice Maryanow, 17-21 August 1987, AFHRA file K238.0512-1764, Maxwell AFB, Ala., 78-79. Ellis, chief of air plans and operations at SHAPE during Norstad’s time, served as Vice CSAF, CINCUSAFE, and CINCSAC before retiring.

<sup>52</sup> See Ellis, 80-82, for an account of his service (while a colonel) as a go-between for the headstrong four-stars. Norstad dispatched Ellis to Omaha to “tell Curt I said . . . ‘knock off this crap about SAC owning the world. We’ve got our responsibilities over here, and we are not going to delegate them to anybody.’” Face to face with LeMay, Ellis paraphrased: “[Norstad] just asked

ground forces to serve as the “shield” in his shield-and-sword strategy. For Norstad, the ground forces could not simply be a tripwire—they had to prevent accidental incursions and be capable of halting a deliberate attack long enough to force the Soviets to commit their operational reserve. This would allow the Allies to discern Soviet intent while affording the enemy a chance to back off prior to a nuclear exchange. Norstad explained the strategy to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee on 7 June 1957:

The shield was developed for the purpose of defending NATO territory for the limited period between the outbreak of hostilities and . . . our retaliatory attack. . . . If this line were lightly defended, or not defended at all, it would not be impossible for the Soviets or satellites by accident to cross that line. . . . On the other hand, if this line were held with some substantial force, and if there were an incident where someone moved in by accident through ignorance and error, he would be stopped.

Then there would be at least a momentary pause, and by ‘momentary’ I mean minutes, hours, maybe days. Someone would have to think about the problem of bringing up more force, and he would have to weigh the consequences of doing that. I would like to suggest that, during this time, the persons who have to make this decision would have to consider the consequences of the full employment of our retaliatory forces. They would have to consider the probability of starting their own destruction.<sup>53</sup>

[The Soviet planner] must always face the decision: ‘If I deliberately start a war, I will be destroyed.’<sup>54</sup>

To ensure NATO’s shield capability, the SACEUR concentrated on building international ground forces. Immediately after assuming command, Norstad publicly opposed a British plan to withdraw one-third of the Army of the Rhine

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that if you’ve got any coordination problems on anything, let him know,” to which LeMay replied, “tell Norstad to keep the hell out of my business.”

<sup>53</sup> “We Can Destroy Anything Military in Russia,” excerpted congressional testimony in *US News and World Report* 43, no. 1 (5 July 1957): 58-60.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 59.



from the continent. According to political scientist Robert S. Jordan, “Norstad took a leading role in the discussions among the Allies. . . . In speeches on both sides of the Atlantic, in press releases, . . . and in his formal report to the Council of the Western European Union, Norstad sought to forestall the British move.” Norstad emerged from this “thorny policy thicket” with a compromise that left the “adequate minimum” of 30 divisions on the continent.<sup>55</sup> To strengthen that minimum force, he strongly advocated nuclear-equipped armies. Norstad oversaw the deployment of Thor, Jupiter, Matador, and Nike missiles, favored the army’s atomic cannon, and suggested a land-based, mobile short-range nuclear force 20 years before the mobile (but long-range) MX missile was developed.<sup>56</sup> The general understood the threat, recognized Allied capabilities, and constructed a broad-based coalition solution to meet NATO’s requirements. Clearly, Norstad possessed on a deep understanding of the employment of joint force to achieve political objectives.

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<sup>55</sup> Robert S. Jordan, *Generals in International Politics* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1987), 74-76.

<sup>56</sup> See Norstad/Ahmann, 339, 400, and 406 for details. Norstad considered himself “father of the MX.”



*Source: Newsweek, 17 Dec 56. International photo.*

**Figure 2. General Lauris Norstad**

### **Strategic Vision/Political-military Understanding**

Such understanding, while necessary, was not in itself sufficient for the SACEUR to create NATO force structure and operational plans. An intricate concept such as the shield-and-sword doctrine also requires geostrategic insight—an awareness of international political realities, a feel for the cultures of friend and foe alike—to come to fruition. Examination of Norstad’s career and education shows that he developed that strategic vision early. He came to understand political-military interconnections, then honed the ability to manipulate those linkages masterfully—and therein lay much of his success as a coalition commander.

Norstad cited his interests in the political-military field as being the “decisive factor” in his career and credited a West Point professor of economics and history for the foundation of his success:

Colonel [Beukema] got more young guys thinking than anybody I've ever known. . . . this was really the first effort, I think, to teach people to think in terms of real political-military objectives and means. . . . History became more important to us because of [him] and added a tremendous influence [on my ability as a decision maker.]<sup>57</sup>

Prevented by circumstances from attending graduate or professional military education—six years after attending ACTS as a first lieutenant, he was a major general—Norstad continued his study of history and politics on his own time. Evidently, his self-education was broad and effective. As *Time* magazine reported,

In a profession not noted for breadth of reading, Norstad quickly became conspicuous as one airman who read voraciously, ranging from *The Federalist* to the memoirs of the Aga Khan. In later Washington days, he liked to argue law with Supreme Court Justice Felix Frankfurter, who was so impressed that he offered to recommend him for a professorship at Harvard Law School.<sup>58</sup>

Norstad's personal reading program produced an understanding of international politics and culture that guided his actions as SACEUR—he noted that “grand strategy involves everything political, military, economic, and social. To be a Supreme Commander . . . has almost the same brea[d]th.”<sup>59</sup> This philosophy also guided his instruction of other officers. In a 1947 speech written for the Air War College, Norstad catalogued many historical instances of “great gaps between foreign policy and military policy” and declared it “imperative . . .

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<sup>57</sup> Norstad/Puryear, tape 1, p. 23. The transcriber could not understand the professor's name, giving it as “Colonel Meu-----.” A comparison of *The Howitzer 1930*, the West Point yearbook, the *Official Register of Officers and Cadets* for 1930, and *General Cullum's Biographical Register of Officers and Graduates* suggests Norstad spoke of Herman Beukema. During Norstad's first-class year, then-Major Beukema was an instructor of economics and government; the following year he was promoted to lieutenant colonel and made full professor of the Department of Economics, Government, and History.

<sup>58</sup> “NATO: The View at the Summit,” *Time* 70, no. 25 (16 December 1957): 19.

that we should maintain strategic plans reflecting completely integrated political, economic, and psychological factors along with our military potentialities.”<sup>60</sup>

Norstad reached that conclusion because

in the late war we failed to realize the extent to which chaotic conditions would be created in Europe and the Far East by the defeat of our enemies. Soviet Russia recognized and quickly took advantage of our early demobilization and . . . spread her influence throughout war-weary Europe, the Balkans, the middle, and Far East. The Anglo-American members of the Allied team lacked truly integrated political guidance. . . . Without this political guidance they unquestionably lost hard-earned opportunities to supplant the Nazi-created system by one based on Western democratic ideas of constitutional government.

Our broad strategy was defective in that it was incomplete. We entered the war and fought valiantly without establishing our long-range objectives, political and economic. The military victory was achieved, but today we find that the combined national aims for which we fought are jeopardized by the very conditions of victory. We liberated most of Europe from one totalitarian system only to let it be threatened by another.<sup>61</sup>

Interestingly, Norstad had been one of the few American officers who spoke out during the war against the Stalinist threat to eastern Europe. He remembered “catching hell” for opposing the Anvil plan to invade southern France, preferring instead (with the British) to “go up the northeast of Italy, up through the Ljubljana Gap, up to Vienna, and cut off the Russians. . . . so [they] wouldn’t have [eastern Europe] all to themselves.”<sup>62</sup> Norstad may have let his geostrategic beliefs override his military judgment, for there were strong logistical arguments against

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<sup>59</sup> Norstad/Ahmann, 398.

<sup>60</sup> Gen Lauris Norstad, “The Role of the Armed Forces in Implementing National Policy,” text prepared for Air War College, Maxwell AFB, Ala., 19 May 47, n.p. AFHRA file K239.716247-62. Col C. E. Combs presented the lecture for Norstad.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., n.p.

<sup>62</sup> Norstad/Ahmann, 533.

the eastern plan and in favor of Anvil. Still, backed by Gen Mark Clark, he argued his case all the way up to presidential advisor Harry Hopkins. However, he declined Hopkins's invitation to brief the president after the American military leaders came out in favor of Anvil, telling Hopkins "there is some merit in the British thinking here. Other than that, I do not wish to interject myself between the American Chiefs of Staff and the President of the United States. That would be wrong and terribly unproductive."<sup>63</sup> Ever the good soldier, Norstad wrote the air plan for Anvil—then Arnold brought him back to Washington and turned his attention to the Pacific.

Norstad returned to Europe six years later, convinced of the necessity to shape and strengthen the North Atlantic alliance. In the interim, the time he spent in Washington prepared him well for multinational diplomacy. He developed a close relationship with Dean Acheson and spent so much time in political-military consultation with State Department leaders that Secretary of Defense Johnson—perhaps jealous of Norstad's influence—ordered him to stop.<sup>64</sup> The time he spent negotiating with the army and navy and shepherding bills and budgets through Congress also helped prepare the future SACEUR to navigate NATO's political maze. As he told historian Edgar Puryear,

I studied the countries . . . I knew the governments, but I also knew the opposition people and I spent almost as much time with the opposition people as I did with the government. . . . I felt that was

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<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 534. See also "The Partners," *Newsweek* 48, no. 25 (17 December 1958): 30. While the incident shows Norstad's prescient feel for the post-war world, School of Advanced Airpower Studies professor James Corum argues that the eastern plan could have been an operational disaster. Because Montgomery failed to clear the estuaries leading to Antwerp until November 1944, Allied success in France depended on the port of Marseilles—captured intact during Anvil.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 138.

my forte. . . . I'd become an expert in . . . the field of relationships between countries as well and I knew I had their support.<sup>65</sup>

Norstad demonstrated that expertise throughout his tenure as Supreme Commander. As mentioned above, the first test he faced as SACEUR was in limiting planned British troop withdrawals; *Time* magazine marveled that Norstad responded not with acquiescence, but was able to call “for a buildup of NATO ground forces in the central sector of Western Europe alone (‘the most sensitive and critical line in the world’) from the present 18 divisions to about 30.”<sup>66</sup> Most important to NATO cohesion, though, was Norstad’s deft handling of West German rearmament and integration into the NATO command structure. Believing that American interests were best served by helping create a politically, economically, and militarily stable Western Europe to balance the Soviet Union, Norstad identified West Germany as a geostrategic center of gravity and worked to facilitate its reentry into the European politico-military structure. He recognized that German chancellor Konrad Adenauer, a “wise and courageous man” who “understood the apprehension of all Europe to Germany,” needed to answer German concerns over having the largest troop contribution to NATO while being denied any command positions. To satisfy both Adenauer’s domestic needs and other European countries’ uneasiness, Norstad personally chose the German officer he thought most acceptable to the whole coalition, Lieutenant General Hans Speidel. He then orchestrated Speidel’s appointment as

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<sup>65</sup> Norstad/Puryear, tape 3-1 p. 8; tape 4, p. 19.

<sup>66</sup> “NATO: The View at the Summit,” *Time* 70, no. 25 (16 December 1957): 20.

commander of allied ground forces in the central region—a command held by Germans to this day.<sup>67</sup>

Norstad's feel for international politics helped him avoid becoming a mere mouthpiece for American policy in the eyes of European statesmen, and this favorable perception greatly increased his effectiveness. In fact, he opposed US policy proposals that he thought might weaken NATO. When Senator Homer E. Capehart of Indiana suggested withdrawing from European bases and relying on US-based strategic airpower, Norstad was adamant: "Such action by the United States would destroy the confidence of all European countries in the United States, and it would destroy the NATO alliance. . . . this would undermine . . . everything that has been built up in 10 years' time."<sup>68</sup> Over his years at SHAPE, Norstad moved farthest away from American nuclear policy, opposing American reluctance to give alliance members a voice—not necessarily a veto, however—in their own nuclear defense. With his predecessor Gruenther, he at first lobbied for a NATO atomic stockpile with US control of warheads but NATO control of delivery systems. In 1959, fearing that American intransigence might weaken the alliance and play into Soviet hands, he "proposed making NATO the 'fourth nuclear power' through the creation of a multinational atomic authority."<sup>69</sup> His development of this idea along with the NATO-controlled mobile missile force discussed above created a rift between himself and Kennedy administration

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<sup>67</sup> Norstad/Ahmann, 270, 441-443. Adenauer wanted to keep Speidel for a different position and offered a different general, but acquiesced to Norstad's reading of the situation.

<sup>68</sup> "We Can Destroy Anything Military in Russia," *US News and World Report* 43, no. 1 (5 July 1957): 63.

<sup>69</sup> Jordan, 80.

leaders—notably Robert S. McNamara and Dean Rusk—and ultimately precipitated Norstad’s retirement, as will be demonstrated below.

Although Norstad never toed a strictly American line, neither was he an apologist for European concerns. Always attuned to alliance interrelationships, he recognized clearly where national policies could fracture the coalition, and opposed a number of national demands, both nuclear and conventional. Early in his tenure, he publicly rejected German defense minister Franz-Josef Strauss’s calls for a German nuclear role because NATO could not yet accept it; he also prevented a proposed German-Spanish military exchange because it recalled for alliance members the pre-war Nazi-Franco relationship.<sup>70</sup> His most serious policy disagreement occurred when French president Charles de Gaulle vetoed (through the NATO budget) an American plan to build intermediate-range missile bases, withdrew French ships from NATO Mediterranean forces, then, in December 1959, demanded control over American warheads in France. In response, Norstad withdrew eight fighter-bomber squadrons from France and repositioned them—with their nuclear capability—in West Germany, while still maintaining NATO headquarters in France.<sup>71</sup> Above all, Norstad thought of himself as an international commander. Believing that he best served America by serving NATO, he always sought an even-handed, international solution to alliance problems.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> Norstad/Ahmann, 341. Norstad describes in detail the sumptuous lunch he set up to smooth relations with Strauss, a voracious eater who strongly influenced German defense policy for three decades.

<sup>71</sup> Jordan, 87-88; Norstad/Ahmann 298-301.

<sup>72</sup> Norstad/Ahmann, 309.



Nowhere was Norstad's international insight more evident than in his handling of European tensions in a time of continual East-West confrontation. Writing for *Newsweek*, General White commented that "in consideration of [conflicting US and NATO guidance] particularly, . . . the changes in governments, . . . the revolution in weapon technology, and the recurring crises affecting NATO such as Hungary, Suez, Algeria, and the Congo it is high tribute indeed that Norstad survived them all."<sup>73</sup> To be sure, White soft-pedaled his praise, for he omitted the most tense confrontations of Norstad's time: Khrushchev's pressure on Berlin and the Cuban missile crisis. The SACEUR was peripherally involved in the Cuban tension because of the missiles stationed in Turkey, and Norstad postponed his retirement in October 1962 to avoid fanning those flames, but the SACEUR's major concern was Berlin. Soviet demands for the city precipitated Norstad's redeployment of fighter-bombers from France, providing NATO a quick nuclear response capability free of French control—because the NATO Council had approved three different resolutions to go to war for the city. Norstad was clear: "we would have fought over Berlin. The Russians always knew that."<sup>74</sup>

Part of the credit for not going to war over Berlin has to go to the NATO commander's comprehension of East/West relations. He knew that even America's allies were "damn wary," telling an Air War College audience that

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<sup>73</sup> White, 4.

<sup>74</sup> Norstad/Ahmann, 431. See *ibid.*, 297-299 on de Gaulle's use of the crisis as a nuclear bargaining chip.

“our best friends feel we are a little headstrong at times.”<sup>75</sup> Therefore, feeling that “there was one thing that always frightened me a great deal, the chip-on-the-shoulder attitude that governments had,” and that “you can’t maintain the peace by having a mad-dog approach,” Norstad chose to

pray three times a day, ‘God give me the strength to be weak. God, give me strength not to just jump and be tough.’ Because toughness is a dangerous thing, every American, and if a commander wants to be applauded by the American public, all he has to do is be tough, but he’ll probably get you into war in the meantime.<sup>76</sup>

At the same time, he wanted the Russians “to know that I have patience, that I can outlast them . . . I will never blow up. If I decide to do something I am going to do it, it will succeed. I am not just going to huff and puff.”<sup>77</sup> Therefore, Norstad eschewed bluster and saber rattling—anything designed for the American public that might cloud the issues: “There was periodic pressure from the US government to make those demonstration trips to Berlin, which I always resisted. But I would move troops to their battle stations, because battle stations were obvious.”<sup>78</sup> Being cautious, Norstad made sure his troops knew the rules of engagement—“governments think they make great decisions, but sometimes it’s the private leading a convoy who makes the decision. So they were well briefed”<sup>79</sup>—and he was convinced that his careful handling of relations with the Russians set the stage for success:

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<sup>75</sup> Gen Lauris Norstad, “Allied Military Tasks,” address to Air War College, Maxwell AFB, Ala., 2 December 1954, transcript of question-and-answer period, 4. AFHRA file K239.716254-87.

<sup>76</sup> Norstad/Ahmann, 282-283.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, 430.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, 282-283.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, 428.

I think if you get into the history of the confrontations, we damned well impressed the Soviets because our moves were deliberate and were always to put ourselves in a better position. We did that, indicating the pressure was on, that if they pushed, we would fight.<sup>80</sup>

The SACEUR used his knowledge of political-military interconnections; his relationships in Congress and the NATO Council; and his feel for American, European, and Soviet history, economics, culture, and politics to inform his decision making under pressure. That the cold war never boiled over into hot conflict in Europe during the tense 1950s and 1960s is perhaps the best indicator of Norstad's strategic acumen.



*Source: US News & World Report, 5 Jul 57.*

**Figure 3. Norstad before Congress**

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<sup>80</sup> Ibid., 282.

## Leadership and Personal Diplomacy

Norstad's extensive joint competence and broad international vision would have had little impact, however, had they not been joined with an impressive set of personal attributes. Indeed, his performance during crises like Berlin in 1961—holding a fractious alliance together while facing down a powerful foe—demonstrated self-control and an ability to convince a large, diverse coalition to follow his lead. Like his mentor, Eisenhower, and a handful of other successful commanders, Lauris Norstad had the blend of disciplined intellect, charm, articulate persuasive ability, and selflessness that inspired trust in friends and foes alike. Through the words of the popular press and contemporary international leaders, and in the final act of Norstad's military career, a portrait emerges of an exceptional leader.

While the American and European press never hesitated to disagree with Norstad's positions—the SACEUR once boasted that he was the most criticized man in Europe—news clippings of the day are almost uniformly in favor of Norstad, the man. A *Newsweek* column from 5 September 1960 reported British frustrations with Norstad's 30-division plan—the London *Daily Telegraph* called his shield-and-sword doctrine “a collection of unplausible assumptions about the behavior of an enemy”—but juxtaposed the criticism with praise from Britain's *Economist*: “[Norstad's] ‘remarkable combination of military and political talent’ would be difficult to replace and ‘was ever more needful.’ A highly ranked general said: ‘If Lauris Norstad were running for President of the US, the whole

British defense staff would—if they could—vote for him.”<sup>81</sup> Often, Norstad’s press coverage was far less balanced. *Time* called him a “philosopher in uniform,” and after describing NATO’s somewhat convoluted organization, opined that “one reason it [works] is Norstad himself.”<sup>82</sup> *Newsweek* gushed even more:

Most associates consider . . . Norstad a highly complex individual whose main characteristics are brains, vast curiosity, tremendous will power, uncanny memory, and brains again. One SHAPE officer said: ‘You seldom meet Air Force generals who are such experts, and yet so uncompromisingly intellectual.’ One astonished Frenchman said: ‘I didn’t know they made such Americans.’<sup>83</sup>

More significant than the impressions of contemporary pundits, however, is the high regard in which political and military leaders held him; the esteem he enjoyed despite his open opposition to various leaders’ nationalistic fervor clearly demonstrates Norstad’s personal abilities. Geostrategic vision would count for little were it not joined to a capacity for engendering trust, and Norstad consistently demonstrated skill in international team-building. Despite intra-alliance tensions over the Suez crisis, Cyprus, and French conflict in Algeria,

Norstad built up a tremendously loyal following . . . The French respect his behind-the-scenes efforts to encourage a better understanding of French problems in North Africa. Turks, Britons, and Greeks, for example, function smoothly at SHAPE. Most of

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<sup>81</sup> “NATO: Change in the Making,” *Newsweek* 56, no. 10 (5 September 1960): 30-31. The column’s speculation about Norstad’s impending retirement—and that of a simultaneous column in *US News and World Report* 49, no. 10 (5 September 1960): 10—was more than two years premature.

<sup>82</sup> “NATO: The View at the Summit,” *Time* 70, no. 25 (16 December 1957): 18.

<sup>83</sup> “The Partners,” *Newsweek* 48, no. 25 (17 December 1956): 29. Norstad acknowledged that his press clippings were more than generous: “I got great press. . . . I deserved a good press, but I got better than I deserved.” Norstad/Ahmann, 428.

all, the NATO nations implicitly trust the skill and judgment of Norstad and his staff.<sup>84</sup>

That trust—in Norstad’s intellect, motivations, and discipline—was probably most important during crises such as those involving Berlin. Norstad thought it

important to realize that crises and crisis management take on the characteristics of the individual who’s doing it. If he has a tendency to flap and get semihysterical, it is going to be a wild and hysterical, potentially dangerous situation. If he is strong, confident, and calm, the crisis will be handled in that way, and it will remain contained.<sup>85</sup>

As described above, the SACEUR calmly reacted on behalf of the alliance in times of heightened tension and kept NATO members focused on a common goal. Additionally, respect for the commander in chief permeated the coalition’s everyday operations. German chancellor Adenauer was so close to Norstad that he called to warn the general about Defense Secretary McNamara’s machinations to oust him.<sup>86</sup> Despite Norstad’s displeasure with British defense policy, Admiral Lord Louis Mountbatten, the senior Briton in the NATO military apparatus, believed that “Norstad did an almost impossible job with exemplary skill.”<sup>87</sup> Finally, Charles de Gaulle, whose demands for nuclear autonomy and French prestige may have been Norstad’s heaviest burden, paid the outgoing SACEUR the following compliment: “The fact remains that, in six years, you have done everything that could and should be done on behalf of the Atlantic Alliance. I wish to render you my very sincere recognition of this.”<sup>88</sup>

The ultimate example of Norstad’s leadership—his subordination of his personal position to what he believed was right—happened, paradoxically, when he was unable to persuade political leaders to follow his recommendations.

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<sup>84</sup> “The Partners,” *Newsweek* 48, no. 25 (17 December 1958): 30.

<sup>85</sup> Norstad/Ahmann, 430.

<sup>86</sup> Norstad/Ahmann, 307, 343.

<sup>87</sup> Jordan, 92.

<sup>88</sup> Charles de Gaulle, transcript of luncheon address, 20 December 1962, NATO Public Information Division. Cited in Jordan, 92.

Norstad's relations with the key members of the Kennedy administration were strained from the outset; between disagreements over nuclear policy proposals and the handling of Soviet confrontations described above, Norstad found himself increasingly alienated from Robert S. McNamara and Dean Rusk. When the Secretaries of Defense and State pressed the general to toe their line, he refused to roll over, saying "I'm quite aware of the role a major commander, particularly a supreme commander, is given by history. He can't just be a mouthpiece . . . he is to follow his own judgment in the light of what he knows at the time."<sup>89</sup> When McNamara and Rusk questioned his loyalty for not uncritically following their policy lead, he responded that he served his "country best by serving [the alliance]" and resigned.<sup>90</sup> Dedicated to a cohesive North Atlantic alliance to the end, Norstad's final act was to convince de Gaulle not to block his successor's confirmation; the French president detested the administration's arrogant refusal to consult with NATO leaders prior to the appointment, which "convey[ed] great insensitivity of your government to anything European."<sup>91</sup> By setting up a last-minute courtesy call for General Lyman Lemnitzer, Norstad assuaged French irritation and helped Lemnitzer start his own lengthy tenure as SACEUR on a positive note.

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<sup>89</sup> Norstad/Ahmann, 323.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid., 309.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid., 317.



Source: Robert S. Jordan, *Generals in International Politics* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1987). *SHAPE* photo.

**Figure 4. De Gaulle and Norstad**

### Summary

By no means can one suggest that Lauris Norstad was the sole architect or executor of Western containment policy. By the same token, no one can deny that Norstad was an insightful, effective leader who exerted great influence on world events. In the words of Dutch political scientist Frans A. M. Alting von Geusau and Robert S. Jordan,

‘With respect to the need to maintain allied cohesion, national governments have failed in at least two areas. They have failed in many instances in the task to inform their electorates adequately about the reality of the international situation and the dilemmas of allied security. They have equally failed in their understanding of the psychology of mutual confidence in allied relations.’ Without a doubt, Norstad attempted to make up for these two failures, which made him one of the most influential as well as one of the most controversial of the distinguished occupants of this vitally important—and unique—position [SACEUR].<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>92</sup> Jordan, 92. The interior citation comes from Frans A. M. Alting von Geusau, *Allies in a Turbulent World: Challenges to US and Western European Cooperation* (Lexington, Mass.: Lexington Books, 1982), 163.



Clearly, Norstad brought an impressive list of personal qualities to bear on his command tasks. His success in all aspects of military planning, his understanding of the international situation, and his ability to influence the leaders of the world powers—seen in the esteem in which Eisenhower, Adenauer, de Gaulle, and others held him—highlight the same qualities his successful predecessors brought to coalition command: comprehensive professional competence; broad strategic, political-military vision; and genuine personal leadership ability. Airmen—and all soldiers, sailors, and Marines—would do well to emulate General Norstad’s example.

## Chapter 4

### **An Airman CINC at War: Albrecht Kesselring**

*Results will demonstrate an officer's fitness to be a Field-Marshal, and no one will then ask about his origins, whether he came from the army or the Luftwaffe. But one piece of advice I give to all Air Field-Marshals: do not become a one-sided technician, but learn to think and lead in terms of all three services.*

—Field-Marshal Albrecht Kesselring  
*Soldat bis zum letzten Tag [Memoirs]*

Despite his cold war success and impressive personal abilities, General Norstad's experience lacked one aspect vital to this exploration of airmen as commanders in chief: he never led joint or combined forces during active conflict. Indeed, it appears that only one airman has ever commanded a theater of operations during war—German Field-Marshal Albrecht Kesselring, who as CINC South (later South-West) directed German and Italian air, land, and naval forces in the Mediterranean throughout 1942, 1943, and 1944. Originally tasked only to protect the supply lines to Erwin Rommel's *Afrikakorps*, Kesselring was soon orchestrating the over-extended Desert Fox's retreat. Thereafter, according to his biographer, "he fought a virtually incessant delaying action against desperate odds, managed to impose his will upon strong- minded and sceptical [*sic*] subordinates, and yet emerged unscathed by serious rout, leading his men in

fighting to the last gasp.”<sup>93</sup> Kesselring’s success led a prominent German chief of staff to rate him, along with Rommel and Guderian, as one of the top three German officers “with a hold on the troops.”<sup>94</sup>

Before using Kesselring as the lone example of the airman CINC at war, one must concede the field-marshal is a special case: he was an army officer for twenty-nine years before becoming an airman as a colonel in 1933 (due to Versailles restrictions, he was officially a civilian in the Air Ministry). As the following pages will show, Kesselring was brave and decisive under fire in World War I, was intimately involved as a staff officer in rebuilding the post-Versailles *Wehrmacht*, and understood land warfare well enough to command an artillery regiment. After 1933, however, he immersed himself completely in air matters; significantly, all his war-fighting commands prior to CINC South were air-related. It is probably most accurate to say Kesselring cultivated the joint middle ground, always placing “the welfare of State and *Wehrmacht* above sectional considerations [and] thus receiving more than his share of disapproval from ex-Army and ex-Luftwaffe colleagues whenever they felt he had betrayed their interest.”<sup>95</sup> Perhaps the Americans most like Kesselring were General Frank Andrews and Rear Admiral William A. Moffett—officers who understood both

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<sup>93</sup> Kenneth Macksey, *Kesselring: German Master Strategist of the Second World War* (Mechanicsburg, Pa.: Stackpole Books, 1996), 249.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, 11. Macksey rarely footnotes and does not identify the “prominent chief of staff.”

<sup>95</sup> Macksey, in the foreword to *The Memoirs of Field-Marshal Kesselring* (Mechanicsburg, Pa.: Stackpole Books, 1988), 10. In *Kesselring*, Macksey notes that certain “‘Old Eagles’ . . . denigrated Kesselring because . . . he was ignorant of the subtleties of aviation” while later, soldiers from North Africa and Italy persisted “in vilifying Kesselring’s soldierly talents on the grounds that he was only an airman” (250). Chief among the post-war detractors was General Eberhard von Mackensen, whom Kesselring relieved as Fourteenth Army commander in June 1944. See von Mackensen, Air Historical Branch Translation VII/99, “The Campaign in Italy,” Chapter XIII, AFHRA, Maxwell AFB, Ala., file no. K512.621 VII/99.

surface and air warfare well enough to succeed at either, but were regarded with some skepticism by their fellow airmen. In any case, an examination of Field-Marshal Kesselring's career reveals an airpower expert who, despite an unfortunate loyalty to the charismatic Adolf Hitler, clearly demonstrated the command attributes of broad professional competence, political-strategic insight, and personal leadership ability.

## Background

Born to a Bavarian schoolmaster in 1885, Kesselring joined the 2<sup>nd</sup> Foot Artillery Regiment as a *Fahnenjunker*, or volunteer potential officer, and attended the Military Academy in 1905-06. His earliest performance reports described an energetic, tactful, and skilled officer—the 1909 report concluded “Kesselring is by far the best of my officers”—and by 1914, recommended the lieutenant for duty as the regimental adjutant.<sup>96</sup> Service in the First World War proved his mettle; at Arras in April 1917, his commander credited him with halting an Allied breakthrough “with quick comprehension and great power of decision” and “by his indefatigable industry while compiling clear and concise orders.”<sup>97</sup> In 1918, Kesselring was appointed to the General Staff despite never having taken the *Generalstab* course, and saw action on both fronts as General Staff Officer to the 1<sup>st</sup> Bavarian *Landwehr* Division and to the II and III Bavarian Army Corps.<sup>98</sup>

After post-war service as a battery commander, Kesselring helped guide the reconstruction of the German armed forces, first as senior staff officer in the Army Training Department (T4) of the *Reichswehr* Ministry in Berlin. There, Kesselring “was busily occupied with questions of economy and administration, national and international law, [and] the problems of the Interallied Military

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<sup>96</sup> Macksey, 19-21.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, 24-25.

Control Commission.”<sup>99</sup> Macksey notes that “across his desk came every mite of essential information and through him passed the Chief’s instructions to the rest of the army as well [about both land and air warfare].”<sup>100</sup> After directing a reorganization of the *Reichswehr* staff and releasing “thousands” of soldiers for field duty, Kesselring ended his army service with command of the 4<sup>th</sup> Artillery Regiment in Dresden.<sup>101</sup>

In October 1933, Kesselring became the head of administration in the *Luftfahrt* Commissariat, the forerunner of the *Luftwaffe*. Realizing that “a man who is not an airman cannot build an air force, any more than a man who is not a horseman can form and command a cavalry division,” Kesselring and contemporaries such as Walther Wever and Ehrhard Milch took flying lessons, then set to work designing an air force.<sup>102</sup> After Wever’s death in June 1936, Kesselring became Chief of Staff of the *Luftwaffe*, where he made the decisions that shaped the force with which Germany went to war. Following disagreements with State Secretary Milch, Kesselring left the staff to command *Luftflotte* (Air Fleet) I. By then a full general, Kesselring commanded air fleets in action over Poland, over the low countries, during the Battle of Britain, and during the initial attack into Russia in the summer and fall of 1941.

In November 1941, now-Field-Marshal Kesselring was ordered to Italy to assume command of the Mediterranean theater. At first, he was a CINC in name

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<sup>98</sup> Kesselring, *Memoirs*, 17-18.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, 19

<sup>100</sup> Macksey, 35.

<sup>101</sup> Kesselring, 23-25.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, 31, 33.

only because Hitler gave him command of only German air forces, and the Italians balked at any explicit subordination to a German.<sup>103</sup> In September 1942, because of concerns over an Allied landing somewhere in the Mediterranean, Kesselring “was entrusted with the command of all German forces (Army, Navy, and *Luftwaffe*)” in the theater, except for Rommel’s *Afrikakorps*.<sup>104</sup> The Operation Torch landings two months later “plunged [Kesselring] into a cauldron of political intrigue, strategic dilemma, and tactical improvisation;” the CINC fought a bitter two-front war against the Allies and Rommel, who wanted to be CINC in Kesselring’s place.<sup>105</sup> After a year of watching the CINC orchestrate a fighting withdrawal through Tunis, Sicily, and southern Italy—despite overwhelming odds (and the fact that Kesselring’s order of battle and plans were known to the Allies through Ultra intercepts<sup>106</sup>)—Hitler broke the stalemate and moved Rommel to France. With complete authority in his theater, the renamed CINC SouthWest and commander of Army Group C forced the Allies to take another year to fight their way past Rome to the Alps. Kesselring’s final service to the *Reich* was to take over from von Rundstedt as CINC West following the Allied capture of the Remagen bridgehead. Likening himself to “a concert pianist, who is asked to play a Beethoven sonata before a large audience on an

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<sup>103</sup> Macksey, 107.

<sup>104</sup> Lt Gen (*General der Flieger*) Hellmuth Felmy, “The German Air Force in the Mediterranean Theater of War” (Air Historical Division, 1955), AFHRA file K113.107-161, Maxwell AFB, Ala., 534. Macksey (127) reports that Kesselring was thus the *only* German to control all three services in joint command.

<sup>105</sup> Macksey, 130. Macksey weaves the conflict with Rommel throughout the biography, see, for example, 175-186.

<sup>106</sup> For example, Norstad, who faced Kesselring for two years, reported that he “lived on Ultra” and read it several times a day. See Norstad/Ahmann, 519-21.

ancient, rickety, and out-of-tune instrument,”<sup>107</sup> Kesselring could do little to stem the Allied advance, but refused to betray his oath to *Führer* and Fatherland. After Hitler’s death, however, Kesselring moved quickly as the German plenipotentiary in the south (Admiral Karl Dönitz, Hitler’s legal successor, filled the same role in Berlin) to surrender all forces in southern and Western Europe.<sup>108</sup>

Friend and foe alike praised Field-Marshal Kesselring for his wartime accomplishments. General Heinrich von Vietinghoff, commander of the 10<sup>th</sup> Army under Kesselring and his successor as CINC South-West, called his former superior “highly gifted, versatile, a great organizer in varied fields, extremely skillful in dealing with people, [and] a commanding, brilliant personality.”<sup>109</sup> He further noted that under Kesselring’s command, “the fighting men acquired an [*sic*] unity unachieved on any other front.”<sup>110</sup> General Mark Clark, who faced him in Italy, said Kesselring was

one of the ablest officers in the Hitler armies . . . Kesselring was well qualified, both as a commander and an administrator, and he conducted the Axis operations in Italy with great skill for two years . . . I was glad to see him go.<sup>111</sup>

Reflecting intelligence assessments of the period, the British Official History called Kesselring “a formidable commander” with “a strong mind in assessing tactical facts, a deep understanding of tactical detail, an unfaltering spirit and a

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<sup>107</sup> Kesselring, 259.

<sup>108</sup> Macksey, 229-230; Kesselring, 288-290.

<sup>109</sup> General Heinrich von Vietinghoff, *The Campaign in Italy*, Chapter VI (Air Historical Branch: December 1947), AFHRA file 512.621 VII/97, Maxwell AFB, Ala., 4.

<sup>110</sup> von Vietinghoff, Preface to *Campaign in Italy*, in “High Level Luftwaffe Policy in the Mediterranean, May-June 1943,” AFHRA file 512.621 VII/94, Maxwell AFB, Ala., n.p.

<sup>111</sup> Gen Mark Clark, *Calculated Risk* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1950), 184. Cited in Capt Teddy D. Bitner, “Kesselring: An Analysis of the German Commander at Anzio” (Ft. Leavenworth, Kans.: Command and General Staff College, 1983), 29.

stern hold on his troops.”<sup>112</sup> Such words certainly suggest broad and deep military competence; further analysis will show that like his fellow airman Norstad, Kesselring relied on that competence plus strategic, political-military vision and personal leadership.



*Source: Kenneth Macksey, Kesselring (London: Greenhill Books, 1996).*

**Figure 5. Kesselring in 1940**

## **Comprehensive Professional Knowledge**

This chapter cannot begin to recount all the ways in which Kesselring demonstrated his expansive military competence; a few significant examples will

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<sup>112</sup> Cited in Macksey, 194.



have to suffice to describe his well-rounded military genius. As suggested above, he displayed exceptional administrative talents in the *Truppenamt*—the shadow General Staff—in Berlin in the 1920s. Simply being there, in an elite of about sixty cream-of-the-crop officers hand-picked by General Hans von Seeckt to rejuvenate the German military, argues that the then-captain’s military skill was well known.<sup>113</sup> Most importantly, Kesselring blended his military vision and organizational talents to build the German air force from scratch. As Chief of Staff, Kesselring created the “tactical” *Luftwaffe* that facilitated the *blitzkrieg* operations early in the war. After pragmatically comparing German industrial conditions, wargame results, and Hitler’s political demands for fast action, Kesselring canceled plans for a heavy bomber and concentrated the *Luftwaffe* on smaller aircraft and combined-arms tactics—although he would later lament the lack of a heavy bomber.<sup>114</sup> In Macksey’s words,

the *Luftwaffe* reflected Kesselring’s image to a truer extent than those of his principal collaborators, for although Wever and Milch were pre-eminent in its initial creation, it was Kesselring, through the decisions forced on him as Chief of Staff by a rapidly changing political situation of 1936 and 1937, who fixed upon the actual nature of the instrument that went to war in 1939 and enabled the *Wehrmacht* to win so many outstanding victories.<sup>115</sup>

Kesselring had much more than a creator’s or force provider’s share of those early victories, however—having already left the staff, he commanded *Luftflotte I*

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<sup>113</sup> Macksey, 34. The author includes an impressive list of the personalities surrounding Kesselring at the time, including Joachim von Stülpnagel, Kurt von Schleicher, Walter von Brauchitsch, Heinz Guderian, and Kurt Student.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*, 47, 52. See also Kesselring, “US Strategic Bombing Survey Interview No. 61, 28 June 1945,” AFHRA file 137.315-61, Maxwell AFB, Ala., 4. In this interview, and at his post-war trial, the field-marshal regretted canceling the bomber, the lack of which prevented the *Luftwaffe* from threatening the Allied landings in North Africa.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*, 248.

over Poland in 1939. Kesselring divided his time between personal flights to reconnoiter the front lines and visit the troops, and face-to-face coordination with General Fedor von Bock, the Army Group Commander. In his memoirs, Kesselring noted

I understood the needs and worries of the army too well not to reach complete agreement with [von Bock] in brief talks. I was not subordinate to von Bock, but . . . even in cases where air considerations had priority I sought ways and means to satisfy the army. Bock and I both knew we could rely on each other.<sup>116</sup>

After the victory in Poland, Kesselring took over *Luftflotte* II from Lieutenant General Hellmuth Felmy, who was sacked after a security breach, and found himself again collaborating with von Bock for the invasion of Holland. Again adamant about close collaboration, Kesselring orchestrated both Major General Kurt Student's airborne troop insertions and the air support that helped capture Rotterdam. The Dutch campaign was, however, "the last complete victory Kesselring was to win outright, the high water mark of his success."<sup>117</sup> Misled by false intelligence and his own optimism, Kesselring would concur in shifting the emphasis of the Battle of Britain from RAF airfields to London, and thereby lose a battle he might have won. Subsequently deploying with *Luftflotte* II to Russia, Kesselring designed a dawn knock-out blow on 22 June 1941 that "within 24 hours, had demolished the Russian Air Force on almost every airfield within a 185-mile radius of the front,"<sup>118</sup> but ultimately could not overcome the logistical

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<sup>116</sup> Kesselring, *Memoirs*, 44.

<sup>117</sup> Macksey, 73; see 68-73 for a description of the Dutch campaign. Macksey notes this campaign "was also the last in which his communications were secure"—for the British were soon to exploit Ultra.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*, 94; some 2500 aircraft were destroyed against negligible losses.

problems that bedeviled Operation Barbarossa. Then, in light of Rommel's difficulties supplying his tank corps in Africa, Kesselring was sent to the Mediterranean to consolidate and protect Axis sea lines of communication.<sup>119</sup>

In Macksey's words, the man who assumed the mantle of theater command in the Mediterranean was already "the epitome of the ideal modern commander, who shrewdly and unselfishly balances the demands of co-operation between the services and forswears service prejudices;"<sup>120</sup> over the next three years he would prove time and again that he melded that joint mindset to deep military understanding. Kesselring started by focusing his air effort on reducing Malta, a British air and naval bastion just south of Sicily, ordering construction of over 1,000 small barges and ferries, and persuading "the Duce to employ the carefully preserved Italian battle fleet for securing convoys. On 17 December [1941] the first convoy in several months reached the North African coast, and the vessels were unloaded in Tripoli and Benghazi."<sup>121</sup> Emboldened by his reestablished supply lines, Rommel began to clamor for another offensive; Kesselring proved for the first of many times his superior comprehension of the entire theater by demanding (from Hitler and the German High Command, or *OKW*) a takeover of Malta first to ensure logistic success. When Rommel declared in June 1942 his armies could be in Cairo in ten days, Kesselring warned he could supply neither logistical nor air support:

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<sup>119</sup> Felmy, 208. General Felmy cites Directive no. 38, whose "most important point was that [Kesselring] obtain air and naval superiority in the area between southern Italy and North Africa."

<sup>120</sup> Macksey, 89.

<sup>121</sup> Felmy, 210. See Kesselring, *Memoirs*, 109, about Malta, and 112, about his naval program.

I agree, of course, that the beaten enemy should be pursued to the limits of possibility . . . But if the advance is continued, even with a minimum of fighting . . . replacements to the requisite amount cannot be expected for a long time.

[Speaking for the Luftwaffe], my airmen will land near the Nile completely exhausted . . . yet with totally inadequate supplies. . . . As an airman, I consider it madness to attack [the intact British air forces]. In view of the decisive importance of air co-operation, from this standpoint alone I must reject the proposal to continue our advance with the objective Cairo.<sup>122</sup>

Events proved Kesselring right; after Hitler decided in favor of Rommel's plan, "only twenty per cent of the supplies required reached North Africa and the British Air Force, virtually unopposed by an exhausted *Luftwaffe*, tore the Axis lines of communication to pieces."<sup>123</sup>

Thereafter, Kesselring—now, by Hitler's decree, a joint force commander in fact as well as name—turned his attention to repulsing an expected Allied landing in the western Mediterranean,<sup>124</sup> and began to display impressive feats of generalship. General Paul Deichmann, then the chief of staff to Kesselring's air commander, recalled the manner in which the CINC synthesized early reports of blacked-out ships sailing the straits of Gibraltar into a picture of Allied landings and directed U-boats to intercept the convoys before receiving confirmation of the Torch operations.<sup>125</sup> "Lacking both a plan and the forces to support strong intervention," Macksey has argued, "the manner in which Kesselring improvised

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<sup>122</sup> Kesselring, *Memoirs*, 123; the field-marshal made the same point in his 1945 USSBS interview (11) but stressed that Rommel "was the best Army commander." Macksey (122) notes that General Walther Nehring, a corps commander for Rommel, "has confirmed to me Kesselring's objections—and adds the opinion that he was right."

<sup>123</sup> Macksey, 123. Macksey points out that every convoy's sailing was betrayed by Ultra.

<sup>124</sup> Felmy, 539.

<sup>125</sup> Cited in Macksey, 133.

to stabilise the situation and create a strong German bridgehead in Tunisia is all the more impressive.”<sup>126</sup> According to the biographer, Kesselring discerned Montgomery’s methodical nature in the east, stiffened German resolve by ordering retreating forces to counterattack when American tanks threatened Tunis on 25 November, stole the initiative from Eisenhower in the west, and personally “produced the master plan which was to lead to the infamous American debacle at Kasserine.”<sup>127</sup> To be sure, Kesselring made mistakes, such as nearly ordering a disastrous counterattack on 24 March 1942,<sup>128</sup> but on the whole performed well under pressure. Unable to convince Hitler to permit a withdrawal, however, the CINC watched from Sicily as the Allies captured Tunisia on 12 May.

From that point on, Kesselring proved himself a master of defensive warfare. In Sicily, Kesselring overturned existing *Wehrmacht* doctrine by stripping the *Luftwaffe* of all its flak guns; ringed the straits of Messina with torpedo boats, submarines, and 500 anti-aircraft and coastal artillery pieces; and ordered the evacuation of the island without waiting for *OKW* approval—thereby saving 60,000 Germans, 75,000 Italians, and nearly all their tanks and guns.<sup>129</sup> After containing the Allied landings at Salerno, Kesselring gave up the toe and heel of

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<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*, 134.

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*, 135-148; citation on 148. Citing a 1943 *OKW* report, “Der Kampf um Tunisien [The Struggle for Tunisia],” Felmy also describes Kesselring’s central role in orchestrating the counterattack, 616.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*, 155.

<sup>129</sup> General Walter Fries, “The Battle for Sicily,” in Kesselring, “The Invasion of Sicily, 1943,” Air Historical Branch translation VII/93, AFHRA file 512.621 VII/93, Maxwell AFB, Ala., 1. See also Macksey 171-172, who notes “it was typical of the man’s ingrained modesty that he abstained from boasting about this masterpiece . . . the credit largely belongs to him . . . It was Kesselring who had authorised the plan, which Rommel had declared to be impossible, and he who had thoroughly imposed his will on the planners, above all on von Richtofen [the *Luftwaffe* commander who resented losing his organic flak].”

Italy, consolidated his forces, and began constructing fall-back defensive positions up the Italian boot. As the US Fifth and British Eighth Armies slowly advanced, Kesselring developed five contingency plans for possible Allied landings in Italy, and “because a commander without reserves is unable to exert any influence over the course of a battle,” pulled divisions from the Tenth and Fourteenth Armies to create an Army Group reserve in Rome.<sup>130</sup> On 18 January 1944, Kesselring committed those reserve divisions to prevent a British breakthrough in central Italy, then had to implement contingency plan “Richard” (for Rome) without reserves as the US VI Corps landed at Anzio on 22 January.<sup>131</sup> Reacting quickly despite being caught off-guard, Kesselring ignored the Tenth Army’s request to withdraw in central Italy and shifted forces to contain the Anzio-Nettuno beachhead.<sup>132</sup> Kesselring and General Eberhard von Mackensen, the Fourteenth Army commander, planned a counterattack that failed to eject the Allies due to lack of supplies and Hitler’s insistence on using a training regiment (the Infantry *Lehr*, or demonstration, Regiment) that broke and ran under fire.<sup>133</sup> Despite the failure, Kesselring’s forces prevented the British and Americans from linking up and created “a strategic stalemate which was

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<sup>130</sup> General Siegfried Westphal, “Army Group’s Comments,” *The Campaign in Italy*, Chapter XIII, AFHRA file 512.621 VII/99, 29-30. By this time, Rommel had moved to the Western Front and Kesselring was Commander of Army Group C as well as CINC South-West. About the five contingency plans, see HQ CINC South-West Order to Chief of Staff, *Luftflotte II*, dated 12 January 1944, in AFHRA file 512.621 VII/82, “High Level Reports and Directives Dealing with the Italian Campaign,” 1-2.

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*, 31-32; Bitner, 48-53.

<sup>132</sup> Bitner, 52.

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.*, 58-62; Kesselring, *Memoirs*, 193-96. Bitner cites artillery expenditure averages (60) that indicate the VI Corps fired 25,000 rounds/day to the Fourteenth Army’s 1500. See also Mark, 109-209.

actually a victory for the Germans.”<sup>134</sup> It would take another four months before the Allies, who knew the Germans’ weak spots and seams through Ultra, would threaten Rome—and Clark’s success was in large part because von Mackensen mal-deployed his troops and refused to release the reserves Kesselring directed into western and central Italy.<sup>135</sup> Then, even after the loss of Rome, Kesselring’s final defensive line—the Gothic Line in northern Italy—held until Spring 1945.

From the foregoing, Kesselring’s comprehensive military ability should be evident, even though a number of German generals denigrated Kesselring’s decisions both during and after the war. Rommel spent the better part of two years insisting that Kesselring’s strategy could not work, suggested giving up all of Italy south of the Alps in early 1943, and nearly convinced Hitler to transfer the CINC to Norway; the sacked von Mackensen blamed Kesselring for his defeat.<sup>136</sup> Even von Vietinghoff, who generally agreed with Kesselring, accused his CINC of sometimes misunderstanding defensive land warfare.<sup>137</sup> In a detailed analysis of Kesselring’s decision making, however, US Army Captain Teddy D. Bitner concluded that the field-marshal’s reactions were swift, logical, and sound.<sup>138</sup> Macksey opined that the “massacre” of the 36<sup>th</sup> American Division in central Italy in January 1944 was due to Kesselring’s decision to deploy his reserves, and

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<sup>134</sup> Bitner, 63. Capt Bitner emphasizes that Kesselring fulfilled his prediction to Hitler “that he could hold the Allies south of Rome through the winter.”

<sup>135</sup> Macksey, 207-211. In response, Kesselring shifted the inter-Army boundary to make von Mackensen responsible for the area endangered by an Allied breakthrough and afterwards fired him.

<sup>136</sup> Ibid., 161-63 and 185-86; von Mackensen, supplement to Chapter XII, *The Campaign in Italy*, AFHRA file 512.621 VII/99, 27-28; von Vietinghoff, “Chapter VI,” 3.

<sup>137</sup> von Vietinghoff, “Chapter VI,” 4; Macksey, 210.

<sup>138</sup> Bitner, 75-78.

General Siegfried Westphal, who served as first Rommel's, then Kesselring's chief of staff, believed an Allied breakthrough at that time would have been "irreparable."<sup>139</sup> After the war, General von Vietinghoff provided a worthwhile summary of Kesselring's military skill:

Having been called in by our Italian ally to assist them, the few German divisions in southern and central Italy were confronted with an apparently hopeless situation on the conclusion of the Italian armistice in September 1943. Contrary to all expectations, the divisions scattered between the Strait of Messina and northwards of Rome were successfully assembled in time and put up such a resistance to the Allied armies, which were superior in every respect, that it was only broken after twenty months of very severe fighting.<sup>140</sup>



Source: Thomas E. Griess, ed., *Atlas for the Second World War: Europe and the Mediterranean* (Wayne, N.J.: Avery Publishing Group). Adapted by Maj Howard D. Belote.

**Figure 6. Allied Advances in Italy, 1943-1944**

<sup>139</sup> Macksey, 196-97; Westphal, 30.

<sup>140</sup> von Vietinghoff, "Preface."



## Strategic Vision/Political-military Understanding

Von Vietinghoff's allusion to the Italian armistice hints at the "situations of exacting political and diplomatic complexity" in which Kesselring was embroiled.<sup>141</sup> More than perhaps any other German, and in stark contrast to Rommel, Kesselring understood both the military and geopolitical value of the Mediterranean theater. For almost two years, he strove diplomatically to keep the Italians in the war; he spent another year cajoling the Italians into neutrality so he could focus his meager forces against the advancing British and Americans. Armed with insight into the differing cultures, personalities, and motivations of Axis leaders—most notably Hitler, Mussolini, and the Italian King—Kesselring walked a diplomatic tightrope not unlike the one Norstad would walk in NATO a decade later.

As did Norstad, Kesselring appears to have developed his political insights through self-study. The field marshal skipped the professional military education his contemporaries received; he moved straight from the Western Front's trenches into service as a General Staff officer, without the requisite extensive schooling. While the available sources fail to mention what or how much Kesselring read, they do suggest he sought and received a broad-based strategic education through personal contacts. As general staff officer to the II and III Bavarian Army Corps, Kesselring noted, "I came into frequent personal contact with the C.-in-C. [*sic*], Crown Prince Rupprecht of Bavaria. We were invited to his table in turn, where the Crown Prince dominated the conversation. Whether the topic was politics,

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<sup>141</sup> Macksey, 248.

art, geography, history or statecraft, he had a mastery of it.”<sup>142</sup> At Rupprecht’s table, the lieutenant learned about diplomacy and “the necessity of a civilising influence” from “a prince and soldier of deep and wide-ranging education whose insight into statecraft far out-reached that of the Kaiser . . . nothing was to be wasted in this schooling of his intellect.”<sup>143</sup> The future CINC continued his education during his service in Berlin. According to Macksey, Kesselring gravitated toward the “urbane, cosmopolitan and artistic” Hans von Seeckt, who

held Kesselring in high esteem among the bright young men he gathered around him in the inner circle of the *Truppenamt*. It was in Kesselring’s rooms that they frequently met for informal discussions which covered a multitude of subjects outside the military curriculum, and here that the *Hauptmann* of ‘good all-round knowledge’ and ‘excellent powers of expression’ sharpened his intellect upon the hone of his general’s vast experience. . . . The liberal-minded von Seeckt relished such sophisticated company as this and here Kesselring put a gloss upon his techniques of diplomacy and organising. . . . These were the tricks of a trade which he learnt to perfection in equipping himself for a task which, with trained foresight, he may even dimly have visualised.<sup>144</sup>

Whether through foresight or not, Kesselring developed an international awareness generally lacking among World War II German leaders.

Throughout his memoirs, and in nearly all of the post-war interviews he gave and studies he wrote, Kesselring complained that Hitler’s thoughts and the *OKW*’s strategies were rooted in the Continent and that the Mediterranean theater was treated as an afterthought.<sup>145</sup> The German commander in chief, on the other hand,

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<sup>142</sup> Kesselring, *Memoirs*, 18.

<sup>143</sup> Macksey, 26.

<sup>144</sup> *Ibid.*, 34.

<sup>145</sup> See, for example, Kesselring’s *Memoirs*, 124. Kesselring argued that the *OKW* “failed altogether to understand the importance of the Mediterranean and the inherent difficulties of the war in Africa” and “Hitler’s personal fondness for Mussolini [led to] disastrous results. The slogan was ‘Mussolini in Cairo.’”

saw a great deal of political and military value in the theater. He told the US Strategic Bombing Survey that the Germans should have made “it a main theater of operations, knowing how important the Mediterranean was for the British;”<sup>146</sup> elsewhere, he and his chief subordinates outlined why North Africa and Italy were important to the Axis powers. Von Vietinghoff, Kesselring’s Tenth Army commander, summarized his CINC’s reasoning as having

(a) A purely military aspect: To keep the front, and also enemy airfields, as far away from the southern frontier of Germany as possible; [and]

(b) A political aspect: To maintain the newly formed Italian Fascist Republic under Mussolini with Rome as capital and City of the Holy See and thereby give it an important moral boost in the eyes of the Italian people and of world opinion.<sup>147</sup>

To those ends, Kesselring designed all his strategies to keep Germany and Italy engaged together against the Allies—first in Libya and Tunisia, then Sicily, and finally during the fighting withdrawal up the Italian peninsula.

In contrast with Kesselring’s comprehension of the theater’s military and political nuances, Rommel appears to have seen only the military side of the theater equation—and he disagreed even then with Kesselring’s judgment. Once his armies had been repulsed in Egypt, Rommel advocated an immediate withdrawal, not only from Africa, but from all of Italy. He wanted to retreat to the Alps, thereby consolidating German defenses on interior lines and denying the Allies opportunities to attack along the Italian coastline. Von Vietinghoff dismissed the Rommel plan, which would have meant the loss of considerable

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<sup>146</sup> Kesselring, USSBS interview no. 61, 10.

<sup>147</sup> von Vietinghoff, “Chapter VI,” 30.

political prestige; “the very important contribution made by Italian war industries and agriculture to the Axis potential;” the Po valley, “where the Allied Air Force could assemble in any strength required;” and would have caused “the complete reversal of the German overall situation in the Balkans and in France.”<sup>148</sup>

Kesselring recalled his appreciation of the situation thus:

I condemned at the time Rommel’s hurry to get out of Tripolitania and Tunis as quickly as possible, and to give up Italy, since it would influence the conduct and outcome of the war. Rommel and Bonin [Rommel’s chief of staff] think as Army men. I recollect that I strove to keep the war as long as possible and as far as possible away from the home area so that effective air warfare could not be carried into Germany. . . . Therefore I fought for my idea by argument and action.<sup>149</sup>

Convinced that “the state of public opinion in Italy demanded that Tunisia be held at all costs,” otherwise “sooner or later Italy would withdraw from the war,”<sup>150</sup> Kesselring worked to shore up his coalition’s will to fight. He moved his headquarters to Frascati (near Rome) to maintain personal contact with the Italian High Command, acted as intermediary between the Italians and Vichy French to lay the political groundwork for the defense of Tunisia, and personally directed that six-month-long defense.<sup>151</sup> After losing that battle, the CINC “accomplished a quite remarkable feat of solo diplomacy in overcoming Italian obstruction” and assembled a force of 12 Italian and 2 mobile German divisions for the defense of

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<sup>148</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.

<sup>149</sup> Kesselring, “The Invasion of Sicily, 1943,” 15. Arguing that Kesselring was not a compromiser, as some (Gen Westphal, for example) have suggested, but a decisive strategist in his own right, Macksey notes Kesselring rejected Rommel’s plan out-of-hand. See Macksey, 162.

<sup>150</sup> Felmy, 608. See also Bitner, 18.

<sup>151</sup> Felmy, 546, 550-55.

Sicily.<sup>152</sup> As Macksey has noted, “it was politics and diplomacy that governed the flow of military reinforcement,”<sup>153</sup> and Kesselring understood both well enough to acquire the forces he needed to effect military action.

In keeping the Italians in the war, Kesselring had to rely on his political-military understanding of both the Italians and the Germans, for leaders on both sides were often at cross-purposes. Macksey, for one, has highlighted the “environment of international intrigue and deceit” in which Kesselring had to re-cement “the alliance upon which the defence of Germany’s southern flank depended.”<sup>154</sup> The field-marshal had not only to move carefully among Mussolini, the King, and General Ambrosio, the anti-German chief of the *Comando Supremo*; he had to execute his strategy as Rommel undercut his position with Hitler. In fact, Hitler concocted a plan (Operation Axis) to disarm the Italians and place Rommel in overall command.<sup>155</sup> Kesselring merely persevered with his plans and persuaded the Italians to accept four divisions and a Panzer Corps that had earlier been declined by Mussolini, frustrated Hitler’s scheme to kidnap the King, and convinced the German hierarchy to continue the dialogue with the war-weary Italians. “Crude military intervention,” he argued, “would immediately initiate a confrontation that would cut communications with the south and also overstretch the German forces.”<sup>156</sup> In his biographer’s words,

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<sup>152</sup> Macksey, 163.

<sup>153</sup> Ibid.

<sup>154</sup> Macksey, 159.

<sup>155</sup> von Vietinghoff, “Chapter VI,” 3; Macksey, 164. After the war, Kesselring realized “with a shock, how much Adolf Hitler tried, by means of certain parallel organisations and other dealings, to maintain reciprocal control. It was the same old story of distrust (‘Sicily,’ 13).”

<sup>156</sup> Macksey, 169.

It is a tribute to Kesselring's perception and dominating ability that . . . he could steer a consistent course through a maze of contradictions and emerge at the centre with his integrity and aims virtually intact. . . . Eventually, 'by seduction, not rape,' as the US Official History puts it, the Brenner Pass fell peacefully into German hands. At once a flood of German troops was poured into Italy.<sup>157</sup>

Almost alone among German military men, Kesselring demonstrated a keen understanding of coalition psychology and manipulated that understanding to his benefit.

Events would soon force the theater commander to spend as much effort keeping the Italians out of the war as he previously had keeping them in it; as before, he would realize considerable diplomatic success. On 8 September 1943, Allied air forces bombed Rome, and Italian morale collapsed. "Crawling from beneath the rubble" of his bombed-out headquarters, Kesselring immediately activated contingency plan "Axis" to secure Rome and "capitalise on the Italians' shock to prevent their collaboration with the approaching Allied invasion."<sup>158</sup> Through bluff and hard bargaining—Kesselring threatened to bomb Rome and destroy the aqueducts if the Italian negotiators refused his terms—the Germans in southern Italy engineered the surrender of a large number of Italian troops and their weapons. The terms, however, were not draconian—Kesselring ignored a telegram from Rommel instructing him to "send all Italian soldiers to Germany as prisoners of war."<sup>159</sup> Instead, Rome would remain an open city, Italian troops would be allowed to work for Germans as long as they laid down their arms, and

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<sup>157</sup> Ibid., 168-69.

<sup>158</sup> Ibid., 175-76.

<sup>159</sup> Kesselring, *Memoirs*, 185.

Italian troops would maintain order in the city.<sup>160</sup> Although he complained that “the work of disarming the Italians and storing away arms, munitions, and material in safety occupied more time and men than I liked in view of the tactical developments at Salerno,” Kesselring “had won another truly remarkable diplomatic victory with the minimum of force.”<sup>161</sup> He followed that with a similar success, convincing the Italians to assist in the extensive demolition program that accompanied the German withdrawal from Sardinia.<sup>162</sup> Clearly, Kesselring’s political, diplomatic, and strategic insights facilitated his defensive military successes.

In his memoirs, the imprisoned field-marshal summarized his beliefs about commanders and politics. Emphasizing that he did not refer to “the special case of the Third Reich,” Kesselring wrote

I require of every senior officer in a high position of authority the political discernment which will help him to obtain a deep and proper insight into events of political life within and without his own country. This perception should enable such an officer to play his part as responsible adviser to the head of the state with full knowledge of his responsibility, to foresee military requirements, and at the same time to accommodate them to political circumstances. This delicate but indispensable collaboration may, of course, lead to serious conflicts of conscience and to external disputes in which the military leader must take into consideration the effects of his attitude on foreign policy. . . .

In the above I [want] to emphasise that an officer, above all a high-ranking officer, stands above parties, but also that every soldier owes obedience to the legal government and the legal form of state. . . .

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<sup>160</sup> Macksey, 177. In one of his very few footnotes, Macksey says his account of the negotiations “is largely based on the version printed in the Official US History by A. Garland as amplified by Westphal’s recently published [1975] Memoirs.”

<sup>161</sup> Kesselring, *Memoirs*, 186; Macksey, 178.

<sup>162</sup> Macksey, 179.

One more point: there is an inner contradiction between politics and soldiering. Only exceptional persons can combine the two. . . . A division of power seems to me the sound solution. The fact, however, remains that troops are as good or as bad as their commander. The age of enlightenment we live in demands an officer who can grasp the interrelations of politics and explain them to his men.<sup>163</sup>

Even if one discounts the middle paragraph as an attempt by a condemned man to mollify his captors—and Macksey, the biographer, would not, pointing to Kesselring’s ramrod-straight, unyielding testimony at his court-martial—Kesselring’s own incisive “political discernment” permeates his argument. Certainly, he was one of those “exceptional persons” who could combine politics and military art.

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<sup>163</sup> Kesselring, *Memoirs*, 292-93.





*Source: Albrecht Kesselring, The Memoirs of Field-Marshal Kesselring (Mechanicsburg, Pa.: Stackpole Books, 1988).*

**Figure 7. Kesselring in his FW-189**

### **Leadership and Personal Diplomacy**

As did all the successful commanders examined thus far, Albrecht Kesselring joined an impressive set of personal leadership skills to his military competence and strategic vision. In conjunction with his reading of the political situation, Kesselring had the self-confidence and talent to subordinate himself and achieve his aims with the Italians through conciliation, not command. Ever present at the front lines, he used his considerable energy and charisma to buoy often-demoralized soldiers and airmen. Finally, Kesselring passed the ultimate test of leadership. On a number of occasions, the CINC risked his career by defying Hitler's explicit instructions. In so doing, he saved many German and Italian lives and contributed positively to the post-war peace.

Where Kesselring's political-military insight helped him understand the Italian reluctance to have a German commander in chief, his personal diplomatic

skills allowed him to subordinate whatever selfish desires for command he may have had and install a liaison system which indirectly achieved his command objectives. Immediately after arriving in theater, Kesselring

found out the difficulties of a coalition command. . . . Count Cavallero, the Italian chief of staff, could not swallow the pill of handing over to me all the Italian military, naval, and air formations. . . . He protested that this arrangement was tantamount to giving up an independent command. . . .

Half-measures would get us nowhere; so, ignoring Hitler's instructions, I waived my claims to an over-all command, but insisted in return on an even closer and more confidential cooperation on the Italian side than had originally been contemplated. Cavallero gave me his word that no operational orders should be issued for the Italy-Africa war zone by the *Comando Supremo* without my oral or written agreement—a promise that was kept.<sup>164</sup>

Kesselring safeguarded his concession and ultimately dominated the Italian command by placing a German operations section within the *Comando Supremo* and then “staffing it with so many men that the original Italian establishment was outnumbered.”<sup>165</sup> Still, it was the field-marshal's personal diplomacy that kept the coalition operating for nearly two years. After the war, Kesselring opined “that this concession, affecting the national prestige and highly cultivated pride of the Italians, was the prime factor in the success of our collaboration. I have always preferred a voluntary collaboration based on mutual trust to a constrained submission.”<sup>166</sup>

To illustrate Kesselring's broad personal abilities, the contrast with Rommel is again instructive. Not only did the *Panzer* commander fail to see the strategic

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<sup>164</sup> Ibid., 104.

<sup>165</sup> Macksey, 144.

<sup>166</sup> Kesselring, *Memoirs*, 104.

value of the theater, he was unable to overcome his own ego and the German army had to pay the price. Kesselring noted that “Rommel was unwilling to budge an inch to avoid treading on the corns of the susceptible Italians;” his intransigence, along with secretive, distrustful behavior added to “the difficulties of the coalition command—Rommel was, after all, subordinate to . . . the *Comando Supremo*.”<sup>167</sup> Macksey has described the penalty the Germans paid for the hard line Rommel adopted in northern Italy as the Italians withdrew from the war:

Forsaking any pretence at negotiation with the Italians, he ruthlessly took prisoner and transported to Germany those who would not at once join with the Germans, and thereby incited an antagonism which was to reverberate into the future. Those Italians who were not captured cached their arms or fled with them into the hills. When the partisan war later broke out on a large scale it was in the north that it was most severe, where Rommel had failed to collect arms, rather than in the centre and south, where Kesselring and Westphal had persuaded the Italians to hand them in.<sup>168</sup>

With characteristic understatement, Kesselring remarked simply “Rommel, too, would have been better advised if he had demobilised the Italians in the north, instead of letting them desert *en masse* to form the nucleus of the partisan guerilla bands.”<sup>169</sup>

In addition to a “constructive negotiating ability dextrously mixed with firmness and humanity,”<sup>170</sup> Kesselring possessed nearly limitless reserves of optimism, and he strove constantly to spread that optimism to his men. “Hope

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<sup>167</sup> Ibid., 104, 120.

<sup>168</sup> Macksey, 178.

<sup>169</sup> Kesselring, *Memoirs*, 185-86.

<sup>170</sup> Macksey, 161.

was about the only luxury remaining to the Axis and nobody attempted to inject it more than Kesselring;” the CINC steadied his coalition partners and flew his personal aircraft on frequent front-line visits until uncontested Allied air supremacy—Kesselring was shot down five times—made him stop.<sup>171</sup> Much as his opponent Eisenhower had to absorb his subordinates’ disappointments and doubts “to force them on to accomplishments, which they regard as impossible,” Kesselring encouraged “the commanders in the field with acts of undiluted optimism in which he did not entirely believe [but had to] constantly play [to] do his duty.”<sup>172</sup> Kesselring’s operations chief, Colonel Dietrich Beelitz, reported that “at least three days a week, and sometimes more, the Field-Marshal went to visit units at the front . . . at dawn.”<sup>173</sup> Macksey elaborated further: 70 percent of the CINC’s time was spent visiting division headquarters in turn, “encouraging the men under training, assessing their fighting spirit and endeavouring to make his command self-sufficient by harmonising consumption with the limited resources to be obtained from Germany.”<sup>174</sup> Indeed, one of Kesselring’s inspection trips nearly cost him his life. On 25 October 1944, Kesselring’s car collided with a long-barreled gun; his convalescence for a severe concussion put him out of action for three months.<sup>175</sup>

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<sup>171</sup> Ibid., 151. About the shoot-downs Kesselring mentioned at his court-martial, see 16, 62, 158, and 197. Although Macksey could only corroborate two of the five through outside sources, the biographer concludes they happened; in support, he cites congratulatory messages from Hitler for a “fortunate escape” and from Göring for his “courage in making 100 operational flights over the Mediterranean.”

<sup>172</sup> Ibid., 152. For Eisenhower’s citation, see note 18, above.

<sup>173</sup> Ibid., 190.

<sup>174</sup> Ibid.

<sup>175</sup> Kesselring, *Memoirs*, 218-19.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, Kesselring consistently placed moral considerations at the forefront of his decision-making and was frequently able to counter Mussolini's and Hitler's immoral excesses, for example, Hitler's plan to kidnap the Italian King.<sup>176</sup> Significantly, the CINC blocked nearly all of the *Führer's* orders for troops to stand and die. Von Vietinghoff characterized Hitler's "strategic theory" as "wherever the German soldier has set foot he will remain;"<sup>177</sup> Kesselring first opposed one of Hitler's die-in-place orders during Rommel's retreat from El Alamein. Westphal, then Rommel's chief of staff, recalled that Kesselring appeared "as the rescuing angel" and assumed full responsibility for recommencing the retreat *before* cabling Hitler for a change of orders, allowing the *Afrikakorps* to "[escape] destruction in the nick of time."<sup>178</sup> Blaming himself for waiting too long to evacuate Tunisia (again in the face of a stand-and-fight order), Kesselring ordered the Sicilian withdrawal without informing Hitler or the *OKW*.<sup>179</sup> In June 1944, as the Allies advanced on Rome, Kesselring met Hitler personally to press for a free hand in conducting his mobile defense; after guaranteeing "to delay the Allied advance appreciably, to halt it at latest in the Apennines" and thereby prolong the war into 1945, Kesselring earned Hitler's acquiescence.<sup>180</sup> According to Macksey, "to no other commander, not

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<sup>176</sup> Macksey, 168.

<sup>177</sup> von Vietinghoff, "Chapter VI," 2.

<sup>178</sup> Cited in Macksey, 130. See also Kesselring, *Memoirs*, 135-36.

<sup>179</sup> General Walter Fries, "The Battle for Sicily," in "Invasion of Sicily, 1943," AFHRA file 512.621 VII/93, 1. Fries wrote that "OKW was not informed of the evacuation plan. When the evacuation began, the Operations Staff asked on whose order and with whose permission it was executed. The Chief of Staff C. in C. South answered that Field-Marshal Kesselring had given the order and accepted all responsibility for it. Thereupon there were no further queries or interference from OKW."

<sup>180</sup> Kesselring, *Memoirs*, 207.

even to favourites such as Göring, Guderian, or Rommel, did Hitler make such concessions at this stage of the war.”<sup>181</sup> At the same time, Kesselring issued orders to protect Rome and Italy’s ancient works of art, forbidding, for example, German soldiers from entering the Monte Cassino monastery.<sup>182</sup> Finally, Kesselring defied the most despicable orders from the Nazi regime. Because it would have caused widespread starvation, Kesselring refused an SS proposal to evacuate the population of Rome. And despite being told “you wait until after the war. Then we will deal with the General Staff,” the commander in chief prevented SS chief Heinrich Himmler’s order to arrest 800 Jews by simple inertia. At his trial, Kesselring remarked “we did not detail any troops for the order . . . and therefore this order was not carried out and he could not arrest these people.”<sup>183</sup> Kesselring’s leadership example is tainted by his association with the Nazi regime, for he remained loyal enough to Hitler to call him a genius in an interview immediately following the German surrender.<sup>184</sup> However, he performed far more admirably than most of his contemporaries, and “came as near as did anybody to solving the dilemma of survival in resistance to Hitler without fatally sacrificing integrity.”<sup>185</sup>

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<sup>181</sup> Macksey, 215.

<sup>182</sup> Order dated 4 June 1944, CINC South-West to G.O.C. Luftwaffe in Central Italy, in “High Level Reports and Directives Dealing with the Italian Campaign,” AFHRA file 512.621 VII/82, 5-8.

<sup>183</sup> Macksey, 189.

<sup>184</sup> Interviews by Pierre Huss of the International News Service, 9 May 1945, and Richard Johnston of the *New York Times*, 10 May 1945, in AFHRA file 520.056-219, n.p.

<sup>185</sup> Macksey, 251.



*Source: Albrecht Kesselring, The Memoirs of Field-Marshal Kesselring (Mechanicsburg, Pa.: Stackpole Books, 1988).*

### **Figure 8. Rommel and Kesselring**

#### **Summary**

In his memoirs, Kesselring declared himself “both an army and an air-force officer.” Having held both air and Army Group commands, he believed himself “in a position to appreciate the tasks of individual commanders in both services” and demanded of all commanders “a high degree of knowledge and understanding of the rudiments of all three arms.”<sup>186</sup> In a post-war interrogation on 17 September 1945, Field-Marshal Kesselring recapitulated all the skills required of theater commanders in chief. Alluding to comprehensive military knowledge, Kesselring recommended “General Staff officers who have if possible had experience in administering and controlling all three branches.” Of strategic acumen, the former CINC suggested “the Supreme Commander would not have to

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<sup>186</sup> Kesselring, *Memoirs*, 64.

be an airman, although airmen in [my] opinion most often have the global view of strategy which is necessary for modern war.” Of leadership, he stated simply “more important requisites for the Supreme Commander would be character, humbleness, and integrity.”<sup>187</sup> Kesselring’s experience suggests that an airman can excel in theater command and highlights the qualities any officer—soldier, sailor, airman, or Marine—must have to succeed as a CINC. Although he fought on the wrong side in World War II, Albrecht Kesselring is, along with his contemporaries Dwight Eisenhower, Jacob Devers, and Lauris Norstad, worthy of further study and emulation by the American military professional.

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<sup>187</sup> “Notes on the Interrogation of *Generalfeldmarschall* Kesselring on USAFE *OKW* Questionnaire of 17 September 1945, at Military Intelligence Service Center, USFET, Oberursel, Germany, 24 September 1945,” AFHRA file 570.619-1, 5-6.



## Chapter 5

### Contemporary Perspectives

*If you constrain yourself to military thinking and military learning, you're going to be fairly narrow. More and more, senior officers have to be a blend of diplomat, statesman, humanitarian.*

—General Anthony Zinni, USCINCCENT  
*Montgomery Advertiser*, 27 December 1998

The World War II and cold war experiences discussed thus far are consistent in their definitions of CINC qualities. But are those qualities relevant to the present? Late twentieth-century experience provides a number of perspectives on the requirements for theater commanders in chief; significantly, those perspectives mirror the ones from forty-to-fifty years ago. Almost unanimously, more recent holders of high command, as well as a number of analysts who have studied CINC performance, echo the qualities of competence, strategic insight, and leadership described thus far. If anything, they give greater emphasis to the understanding of political-military interrelations. As Robert S. Jordan has stated,

the nature of the international economic system has undergone a radical transformation, creating new forms of interdependence and rivalries. . . . International institutions have, as a consequence, undergone both rapid proliferation and diversification in the military and nonmilitary realms alike, and the distinction between the two, in terms of conceptions of national security and national interest as such, is diminishing. The [CINCs], in other words, have had to adapt in their respective leadership roles to larger political, technological, and economic circumstances over which they have had, to a greater or lesser degree, little or no direct control.<sup>188</sup>

How, then, have recent leaders and their observers depicted the attributes they relied on to adapt to modern circumstances?

### **Command Perspectives**

One richly experienced officer, former joint task force commander, SACEUR, and CJCS, General John M. D. Shalikashvili, used words that could have been spoken by his predecessors Eisenhower and Norstad to describe the requirements for joint and coalition command. When asked what a geographic CINC does, General Shalikashvili responded

I think we principally select CINCs to be able to function in war . . . the principal reason [is] his ability to conduct strategic/operational level war in his theater. In reality, he does relatively little of that. Most of what he does is in the political-military field. . . . but the first thing that [the CJCS and SecDef] asked was 'if war broke out in [a given theater], who would be the best guy of those available to conduct combat operations.'

[To be effective], he needs an ability to conduct combat ops, to understand joint operations. Close on the heels of that, he needs an ability to swim in political-military waters. He has to have personality and understand strategic issues.<sup>189</sup>

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<sup>188</sup> Jordan, x. The author wrote specifically of SACEURs; his comments apply equally to all regional CINCs.

<sup>189</sup> Shalikashvili interview.

While the general touched on political savvy and personal skills, he emphasized broad professional expertise, noting that even though a CINC's outlook is strategic, he has to be well grounded operationally. Referring to his NATO experience, Shalikashvili described a command structure wherein his major subordinate commands were each joint, and asked:

So where does the CINC get his air, naval, [or ground] component advice? The staff? He doesn't call the four-stars in and say 'what do we do.' That says the CINC has to be competent on his own . . . that's where the benefit of [having held] senior component command is vital.<sup>190</sup>

Finally, Shalikashvili insisted that comprehensive knowledge of one's own service had to be accompanied by broad knowledge of sister service capabilities. He cautioned airmen to remember the Army's "cultural perception that you must be really grounded in doctrine to lead."<sup>191</sup> To command joint forces, one must be able to communicate effectively with members of each component. Effective communication requires a broad understanding of each component's doctrine and tactical/operational outlook.

It is ironic that Shalikashvili, a former NATO supreme commander, hammered home the theme of joint expertise, for most commentators see SACEUR as being a primarily political position. From Norstad's time on, dual-hatted SACEUR/USCINCEURs have delegated day-to-day supervision of their American forces to their deputies. General Powell, for example, argued "that DCINCEUR, a four-star officer, is a CINC for all practical purposes even though

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<sup>190</sup> Ibid.

<sup>191</sup> Ibid.

subordinate to SACEUR.”<sup>192</sup> Three former DCINCEURs identified the same CINC attributes as Shalikashvili, but two of them reversed their former boss’s order and stressed the political elements of the position. General Charles G. Boyd highlighted political-military understanding and personal qualities, saying “most CINCs have risen through [strategic] vision, great intellect, and understanding of how to meld resources to political-military objectives.”<sup>193</sup> Similarly, General James L. Jamerson, Boyd’s successor, believed that “a CINC is mostly a political animal. . . . He tracks US interests, and works with allies and ambassadors.”<sup>194</sup>

Boyd’s predecessor, General James P. McCarthy, gave a balanced assessment of a commander’s need of strategic insight and joint competence in an article for the *Naval War College Review*, “Commanding Joint and Coalition Operations.” McCarthy, who outlined requirements for both theater-level coalition commanders and their subordinates, demanded broad joint knowledge to ensure optimal use of military resources:

the major impediment to a commander using the best forces available is the absence of knowledge about the capabilities offered by sister services and special operating forces (SOF). . . . Therefore, it is essential to educate those leaders on the capabilities offered by the full spectrum of forces to enable them to . . . combine unique capabilities in a complementary fashion.<sup>195</sup>

The DCINC then turned to national and international political understanding. In Clausewitzian fashion, he observed that “there is no military operation of any

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<sup>192</sup> Powell e-mail.

<sup>193</sup> Boyd interview.

<sup>194</sup> Gen James L. Jamerson, interview with author, 19 Feb 99.

<sup>195</sup> General James P. McCarthy, “Commanding Joint and Coalition Operations,” *Naval War College Review* 46, no. 1 (Winter 1993): 15. The general re-emphasized this requirement in a telephone interview with the author on 17 Feb 99, calling lack of exposure to sister services his “greatest limitation.”

significance that does not have political consequences. . . . commanders must be constantly aware of the political impact of the actions in the United States and around the world.”<sup>196</sup> He also echoed Eisenhower’s ideas on coalition command. Multinational operations, argued McCarthy, represent both the “toughest” and “most essential” military endeavors; therefore, commanders must emphasize “international political support, occasionally at some expense to operational efficiency.”<sup>197</sup> Finally, he focused on American policy and noted that a commander “must be sensitive to the perspectives and concerns of [his superiors] and where the consensus is going in Washington on strategic policy issues.”<sup>198</sup> The general suggested constant communication with a number of Pentagon leaders, from Joint Staff directors through the secretary of defense, to maintain a feel for “the Pentagon’s perspective”, because “as operations unfold, circumstances change, and political objectives shift, neither the mission nor the tasks are likely to remain constant.”<sup>199</sup> In McCarthy’s view, the CINC must combine his knowledge of world and Washington politics to be able to discern his mission.

General Charles A. Horner, who experienced the national and international interplay of coalition operations firsthand during the Gulf War, agreed with McCarthy’s take on political insight. The Desert Storm air commander and later USCINCSpace phrased it thus:

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<sup>196</sup> Ibid., 16.

<sup>197</sup> Ibid., 20.

<sup>198</sup> Ibid., 13.

<sup>199</sup> Ibid.

I think it is vital for a CINC to understand the role of the unified command vis-à-vis his boss, the SecDef, and his component commanders. Here is [a quote] to keep, from General George Crist: ‘The role of the unified command is to create the environment needed for the components to prosecute the war.’ Of course, the war may be nothing more than humanitarian relief, it may be getting other nations to work with the US in security policy matters, or it may be a coalition in wartime.

[To create that environment, the CINC] must trust and promote harmony among his components, . . . [and] know how to work Washington, e.g. the pitfalls in the Joint and Service staffs and more importantly with the SecDef and Chairman. . . He will [go] before the President—and you don’t get two chances to screw that up so he must be deliberate and thoughtful—but at the end of the day he better have the strength of character to say ‘no’ when appropriate. Yes-men are of little value to anyone.<sup>200</sup>

In other words, the CINC has the responsibility not only to carry out Washington’s policy directives, but to use his knowledge of the US and theater political situations to help guide American policy decisions.

General Fred F. Woerner, CINC of the US Southern Command in the late 1980s, reiterated the foregoing evaluation of high command, observing that “area [strategic] competence, professional competence, and diplomacy in its broadest context—call it leadership, call it personnel skills”<sup>201</sup>—are the core requirements for successful CINCs. He considered the “duality of [his] career central to effectiveness as a CINC,” and achieved that “by balancing two careers: one pol/mil, one straight military.”<sup>202</sup> Starting as a captain, the general “followed politics, economics, culture, and religion” to develop a broad-based expertise but

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<sup>200</sup> Horner e-mail, 2 Feb 99.

<sup>201</sup> Gen Fred F. Woerner, interview with author, 19 Feb 99. General Woerner cautioned the author not to generalize his SOUTHCOM experience with that of other commands, because he discounted the possibility of major war in his theater—then he described his job in precisely the terms used by the CINCs from Eisenhower on who did contend with the threat of war.

<sup>202</sup> Ibid.

stayed “damn proficient in the core elements of the military profession. I tried not to be a [regional politics] scholar who dabbles in the military, but a great soldier who’s also a profound student of [regional politics].”<sup>203</sup> Woerner combined that blend of skills with personal diplomatic ability, noting the importance and difficulty of communicating with a CINC’s counterparts, both foreign and American:

When you get down to it, [the CINC must always ask] ‘how do I advance US foreign policy?’ Diplomacy and tactfulness play [a big role] in dealing with . . . ambassadors, all of whom are cognizant they’re the senior American in country. Without a rapport, you cannot implement policy, and you put all military members of the country team in jeopardy. . .

So, you talk to the Chairman, to the other CINCs, and the service chiefs. . . . You’re in constant communication with the State Department and Congress, and you write a little. [What really counts] is the personal relations you develop.<sup>204</sup>

Finally, General Woerner explained in detail the problems of ambiguous top-level guidance at which Generals Devers and McCarthy had hinted:

The CINC is not just at the strategic level of policy—he’s at an ephemeral, philosophical level. . . . He must understand the amorphous nature of policy. It doesn’t come from the top down, really; it comes from the interaction of the ambassadors, and from requests for direction. . . . No one ever handed me a Presidential paper from which I got my mission. . . . I got direction when I asked [national leaders] ‘please order me to do this.’<sup>205</sup>

In short, CINC credibility and effectiveness in the often-hazy world political arena demands a robust combination of skills in the three broad categories of military proficiency, strategic vision, and personality.

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<sup>203</sup> Ibid.

<sup>204</sup> Ibid.

<sup>205</sup> Ibid.

## Observer Perspectives

Scholarly analysis of the problems faced by top-level commanders has, on the whole, concurred with the preceding viewpoints; if anything, outside analysts have emphasized even more strongly the political-military aspects of high command. For example, in *Beyond the Battlefield*, a 1981 study of both military leadership and civil-military relations, Sam C. Sarkesian rejected Samuel Huntington's contention that military leaders should strive to be apolitical. Instead, he agreed with sociologist Morris Janowitz—and leaders like General Woerner—that the military professional must “develop political-social insights to deal with political-military issues and the ambiguous nature of the security environment.”<sup>206</sup> Sarkesian acknowledged “that battlefield skills and technology remain important ingredients of military professionalism” but demanded that military leaders “develop the intellectual tools and insights to appreciate the interdependence between war and politics.”<sup>207</sup> Furthermore, he argued, military leaders must understand “the nature of the environment in which the leadership role must be performed,”<sup>208</sup> and realize that

to lead, therefore, means the art of influencing people, both military and civilian, to accomplish a particular goal in a [particular] political-cultural setting. . . .[This requires] political

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<sup>206</sup> Sam C. Sarkesian, *Beyond the Battlefield: The New Military Professionalism* (New York: Pergamon Press, Inc., 1981), 43. Here, Sarkesian contrasts Janowitz's *The Professional Soldier: A Social and Political Portrait* (New York: The Free Press, 1971) with Samuel P. Huntington's *The Soldier and the State: The Theory and Politics of Civil-Military Relations* (New York: Vintage Books, 1957). Huntington acknowledges that American military leaders play a political role but argues that role should not be substantive.

<sup>207</sup> Sarkesian, 52, 132.

<sup>208</sup> *Ibid.*, 219.



astuteness, imagination, [and] a mind sensitive to and experienced in the essentials of human behavior and human motivation.<sup>209</sup>

Even though Sarkesian was more concerned with domestic than international political insights—he wrote as much to describe the military’s role in society as to advise future leaders—he nevertheless described precisely the qualities prescribed by and for multinational commanders.

Analysis of a number of recent multi-service and multinational operations has focused on joint and combined task forces (J/CTFs), one level below commanders in chief, but the lessons found therein correspond almost directly with the experiences of theater commanders. US Atlantic Command’s after-action report from Operation Uphold Democracy, the effort to restore the popularly elected government of Jean Bertrand Aristide to Haiti, sounded once again the themes of jointness and strategic acumen. It recommended revamped training and Service school education for JTF commanders and staffs, who “lacked sufficient knowledge of . . . interoperability” and cautioned that “the MNF [multinational force] commander has extensive political military responsibilities.”<sup>210</sup> Those responsibilities included maintaining the “fragile” MNF cohesion, which “varied with changes in the political and economic factors affecting [the participants’] motivations.”<sup>211</sup> Major John Metz, who studied the humanitarian relief operations Provide Comfort and Restore Hope, agreed, saying “consensus is the most critical

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<sup>209</sup> Ibid., 228.

<sup>210</sup> “Operation Uphold Democracy Joint After Action Report” (Norfolk, Va.: United States Atlantic Command, 1995), 61, 53.

<sup>211</sup> Ibid., 55.

element for sustaining multilateral action.”<sup>212</sup> “To better prepare himself and his organization,” Metz declared, “the commander must understand both the military and civilian factors influencing operations within his region of the world” and must communicate effectively with civilian and military superiors and a range of governmental and civilian organizations.<sup>213</sup> Examining Operation Provide Comfort, State Department employee Robert E. Sorenson acknowledged the problem of synchronizing “many agencies’ activities at the strategic, operational, and tactical levels,” and wrote of the commander’s need “to shape the ‘political’ area of operations.”<sup>214</sup> He stressed that “the skills demanded of the military commander were uniquely ‘political’ in nature and required substantial courage . . . [because] field initiatives often superseded Washington instructions as to the best course of action” and highlighted consensus building, coordination, and flexibility.<sup>215</sup> Navy Captain Terry J. Pudas summed it up simply: “Understanding the complexities of coalitions and successfully executing coalition warfare requires a unique combination of political and military prowess.”<sup>216</sup>

Army Lieutenant General John H. Cushman has provided a succinct yet comprehensive analysis of command at JTF level and above. Cushman, who

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<sup>212</sup> Maj John M. Metz, “Humanitarian Assistance Operations: A Command and Control Dilemma,” (Fort Leavenworth, Kans.: US Army Command and General Staff College, 2 June 1995), 1.

<sup>213</sup> *Ibid.*, 6, 38.

<sup>214</sup> Robert E. Sorenson, “Operational Leadership Challenges in Emergency Humanitarian Assistance Operations” (Newport, R. I.: Naval War College, 19 May 1997), 2, 17.

<sup>215</sup> *Ibid.*, 16. For similar conclusions about the centrality of political understanding and consensus to coalition operations, see Col Donald G. Goff, “Operation Provide Comfort” (Carlisle Barracks, Pa.: US Army War College, May 1992), 44-46, and Lt Col John P. Cavanaugh, “Operation Provide Comfort: A Model for Future NATO Operations” (Fort Leavenworth, Kans.: School of Advanced Military Studies, May 1992), 34-40.

retired in 1978 after serving as commandant of the Army Command and General Staff College and commanding a combined corps group in Korea, explored the categories of military, interpersonal, and political talent in his handbook *Thoughts for Joint Commanders*. Joint commanders, the general suggested, require “objectivity reflecting broad multiservice professional competence” to reach correct decisions and develop *fingerspitzengefühl*, a German term denoting acute awareness of the entire battlespace.<sup>217</sup> To achieve that competence, he recommended starting “early in life to study other-Service forces, their ways of operating, and their cultures.”<sup>218</sup> He also discussed the personal skills necessary to meld joint and multinational forces into cohesive teams, calling for “genuine empathy for national sensitivities and pride, leading by understanding persuasion, sound thinking, and . . . a steady hand, robust liaison, and adept use of team-building techniques.”<sup>219</sup> Finally, Cushman acknowledged the need for strategic vision capable of discerning, when necessary, developing, and accomplishing the mission:

Political and strategic direction to the multinational force will likely be the ambiguous product of negotiation and compromise, augmented for its US commander by guidance from his US-only chain of command and perhaps by policy input from a local American ambassador or other US authority. Authorities at each nation’s seat of government will be giving their own instructions to their national forces, thereby complicating operational and tactical direction by the field commander, who must work out, *probably on*

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<sup>216</sup> Capt Terry J. Pudas, “Preparing Future Coalition Commanders,” *Joint Forces Quarterly* no. 3 (Winter 1993-94): 43.

<sup>217</sup> John H. Cushman, *Thoughts for Joint Commanders* (Annapolis: Whitmore Printing, 1993), 52, 10. Literally translated, *fingerspitzengefühl* means “fingertip feel.”

<sup>218</sup> *Ibid.*, 18.

<sup>219</sup> *Ibid.*, 53-54.

*his own*, ways to weave together the myriad and diverse national contributions in a common effort.

Agreement on the multinational force's basic objectives is the bedrock requirement; this may not, however, produce a clear statement of the desired operational end-conditions. In that case, the commander considers his guidance, *makes his own assessment of the situation, and formulates the desired end-conditions in the necessary detail*. He communicates these to his superiors and to his colleagues . . . directs operations accordingly, and revises them as the situation and his instructions change.<sup>220</sup>

## Summary

Clearly, modern commanders in chief must rely on attributes consistent with those of their predecessors. According to a variety of military leaders and scholars, CINCs still depend upon abilities in three major categories: military prowess, strategic-political-military vision, and leadership skills. Very little seems to have changed in fifty years: with the exception of a minor emphasis on interagency coordination, modern leaders describe command problems and solutions almost exactly as commanders did after World War II. For the last word on the subject, consider the views of the current CJCS, General Henry H. Shelton. Penned in February 1999, they represent but an up-to-date version of Eisenhower's thoughts from the mid-1940s:

Based on the position under consideration and the individuals nominated, the selection for each CINC is different; however, there are some general characteristics that joint force commanders must possess. First, the individual must be capable of leading complex organizations and be widely recognized as a good leader. There are different leadership styles and hundreds of books have been written on the subject, but a short definition of a good leader is an ethically grounded individual who can empower people and create a team capable of getting the job done no matter how difficult the

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<sup>220</sup> Ibid., 52-53. Emphasis added.

circumstances. In addition to being highly successful leaders, prospective CINCs must be an expert within their own Service. Airmen, for example, must thoroughly understand airpower and employ those capabilities in different environments.

Being an accomplished leader and a Service expert is only part of the equation. CINCs must be truly 'joint' and possess a working knowledge of the capabilities of all the Services and how they can be used both individually and in concert to handle any mission, from high intensity combat to peacekeeping operations. To be effective in applying military force, CINCs must also understand the challenges our Nation faces in the current strategic environment and appreciate how all instruments of power—economic, political, and military—can be used to achieve national objectives. In today's complex, interconnected world, CINCs must also possess the ability to think at the strategic, operational, and tactical levels nearly simultaneously. Every CINC must also understand the inter-agency policy process and their role in that process.<sup>221</sup>

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<sup>221</sup> Gen Henry H. Shelton, letter to author, 24 Feb 99.

## Chapter 6

### Conclusions

*[A young officer should] take General de Gaulle's advice . . . the education of a general should be directed to any subject except the military, because by the time he's considered for high leadership position it should be assumed he's professionally qualified—but in this world a general can't make a decision unless he's aware of the political, economic, and social factors which also influence his decision. So he should broaden the field that he's studying.*

—General Lauris Norstad  
22 August 1977

In the end, the evidence about the qualities of successful commanders in chief appears overwhelming. Throughout the fifty-year period studied herein, commander after commander and observer after observer have repeated the same conclusions about joint and multinational command. Eisenhower and Devers discussed problems of coalition cohesion and unclear top-level guidance and outlined the skills and mindset they used to cope with those problems; historians have confirmed the generals' ingredients of command success. Lauris Norstad, a savvy airman, used skill, grace, and a sure hand to help build the North Atlantic Alliance during six turbulent years of East-West confrontation. According to the *Washington Post*, “this required a NATO commander with a sophisticated understanding of European politics and a deft diplomatic hand as well as the

military skill to direct the defense of Western Europe along a 4,000-mile front.”<sup>222</sup> Another remarkable airman, Albrecht Kesselring, used similar insights and skills to conduct a two-year-long fighting withdrawal from Tunisia to the Alps as his coalition collapsed around him. In the thirty years between Norstad’s tenure as SACEUR and that of General John Shalikashvili, little of consequence seemed to change. Commanders and their observers in the 1980s and 1990s described the same problems of supreme command and called for similar CINC qualities. Every source consulted in this study concurred: to perform effectively as war-fighting commanders in chief, airmen—indeed, all officers—need comprehensive military proficiency, an incisive geostrategic-political-military vision, and strong, but nuanced and deft skills in leadership and interpersonal relations.

The categories of leadership and military competence should come as no surprise to any student of military affairs. Professional libraries contain countless volumes about the great military leaders of the past; most of those leaders relied on exceptional personal skills—charm, intellect, integrity, and persuasiveness—to reach the pinnacle of success. Additionally, no top commander would have achieved greatness without a well-recognized ability to employ his service’s forces. As General Woerner remarked, “you only get there as a competent military man;” General McCarthy argued that airmen “must understand the JFACC business—it’s the logical prerequisite for CINCDoms.”<sup>223</sup> Furthermore, in the last half-century, few leaders would have succeeded without a great facility

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<sup>222</sup> Bart Barnes, “Obituaries: Gen Lauris Norstad, 81, Military Strategist, Dies,” *Washington Post*, 14 September 1988, B6.

<sup>223</sup> Woerner, McCarthy interviews.

for employing joint forces; and in this day and age, the Goldwater/Nichols Act mandates it. Presumably, all recent leaders have also had the ability to direct large, complex organizations—but they appear to take this talent for granted. Only General Shelton, backed by a few civilian analysts, explicitly described a need for organizational expertise.

While leadership and military ability may have been considered as “givens,” military thinkers have occasionally overlooked the CINCs’ demand for extensive political-military acumen. Most likely everyone realizes the requirement is there; professional military colleges include generous helpings of Clausewitz and the interrelationships of the national instruments of power in their curricula, and *Air Force Basic Doctrine* starts with a discussion of strategy and policy.<sup>224</sup> To use General Shalikashvili’s metaphor, however, few seem to realize just how deep the political waters run. Former Air Force chief of staff (CSAF) Ronald R. Fogleman believes a cultural bias exists against service in Washington, and many military officers seem to identify with Eisenhower’s early wish to “get rid of all these questions that are outside the military scope.”<sup>225</sup> Unfortunately, such a narrow military focus contradicts the experience of theater commanders. Eisenhower’s post-war speeches reflect clear political understanding, and senior leaders from Devers to McCarthy and Woerner imply that CINCs may never fail to include political considerations in their advice. In fact, CINC experience suggests strongly that theater commanders in chief are not just executors of

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<sup>224</sup> Air Force Doctrine Document 1, *Air Force Basic Doctrine* (Maxwell AFB, Ala.: Headquarters Air Force Doctrine Center, 1997), 4-6.

<sup>225</sup> Gen Ronald R. Fogleman, interview with author, 22 April 1999. On Eisenhower, see Chap. 2, note 5.



policy, but policymakers in their own right. Circumstances have often forced on-scene CINCs to craft American foreign policy with ambiguous guidance at best, and observers such as Lt Gen Cushman suggest that trend will continue. The responsibility to formulate policy and strategy demands extensive domestic and international political-military understanding.

There are, to be sure, viewpoints that oppose “political” generals. As described above, Harvard political scientist Samuel Huntington’s 1957 work *The Soldier and the State* advocated an apolitical mentality, arguing that an officer corps “immune to politics and respected for its military character would be a steady balance wheel in the conduct of policy.”<sup>226</sup> Significantly, some of the politically savvy CINCs described above have risked overstepping their political bounds. General Woerner conceded that his critics considered him “an apologist for the area.”<sup>227</sup> Furthermore, some of Norstad’s contemporaries viewed the SACEUR as overly political. Indeed, Norstad’s deputy at USAFE, then-Maj Gen Truman H. Landon, mixed admiration and disdain:

I am a close personal friend, and I have a great deal of admiration and respect for Larry, but I don’t think much of Larry as an *Air Force* officer, I mean as an *Air Force* general. . . . Larry is too ‘global.’ . . . He was very fond of saying, ‘I am not a nuts-and-bolts general.’ Well, I am a nuts-and-bolts general, and a lot of the generals in the Air Force are. . . .

[However], as an Air Force general officer, he did a very beautiful job of at least fronting for USAFE and for running the Allied Air Forces. He did a good job of setting them up because he had an

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<sup>226</sup> Huntington, 464. On the same page, though, Huntington allows that top American military leaders have been almost uniformly successful: “The leadership produced by the American officer corps has so far been extraordinary. Only a small handful of the hundreds of general and flag officers have proved incapable in battle, and the top commanders in all three twentieth-century wars have been men of exceptional ability.”

<sup>227</sup> Woerner interview.

appreciation of the other air forces that some of the rest of us wouldn't have had at the time. And then as SACEUR, he was really *magnifico*.<sup>228</sup>

Landon's criticism wisely counsels caution to the officers who might overplay their political hand—but Huntington's must be discounted, given the balance of evidence. As a political scientist, Huntington was concerned with the theory of civil-military relations; the experiences of the CINCS cited herein suggest, however, that Huntington's desire for apolitical generals at best represents wishful thinking and at worst ignores political realities. Indeed, one general universally renowned for battlefield prowess lasted only a year as SACEUR because he lacked a deft political touch. As General Omar Bradley, the CJCS, explained, “[General Matthew] Ridgway was not proving to be the ideal choice for NATO. Matt was a field commander without peer but not a diplomat. . . . in his zeal, Ridgway had antagonized many politicians among our allies.”<sup>229</sup> Norstad thought simply that Ridgway “just did not grasp the length and breadth of the problem.”<sup>230</sup> General officers who would be CINCs must acknowledge the danger of being too political, but must also develop considerable international and domestic political expertise to complement their military competence and leadership skills.

To recapitulate, threads of broad professional knowledge, political-military insight, and leadership are woven throughout the histories of successful regional

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<sup>228</sup> Gen Truman H. Landon, transcript of oral history interview by Hugh N. Ahmann, 31 May-3 June 1977, AFHRA file K239.0512-949, Maxwell AFB, Ala.

<sup>229</sup> Omar N. Bradley and Clay Blair, *A General's Life* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1983), 659-60, cited in Jordan, 51.

<sup>230</sup> Norstad/Ahmann, 398.

commanders in chief. In World War II, supreme allied commander Dwight Eisenhower and his subordinate Jacob Devers, among others, set the stage for their successors by figuring out why and how to put together militarily viable, politically cohesive international forces. Lauris Norstad had the military skill to plan the air portions of Mediterranean Theater joint campaigns for two years, and to help construct the unified Department of Defense. At the height of the cold war, he melded that expertise to a deep understanding of international politics and cultures, developed the combined-arms sword-and-shield containment strategy, and handled crises and Soviet threats with aplomb. Similarly, Albrecht Kesselring served with valor in World War I, was instrumental in organizing both the *Wehrmacht* and the *Luftwaffe*, and commanded air forces in all of Germany's early World War II victories. He then deftly walked a political and military tightrope as he cajoled both Italian and German leaders during a slow, effective withdrawal up the Italian boot. Finally, recent CINCs and DCINCs all described their jobs as requiring extensive military, political, and interpersonal skills. In sum, the evidence suggests that success as a geographic CINC rests on joint competence, geostrategic vision, and leadership ability—and the cases of Norstad and Kesselring demonstrate that airmen who possess these qualities can excel in theater command.

## Chapter 7

### Implications and Recommendations

*So, let the best person get the job. The Air Force, as do all the Services, has to make sure it is raising officers not just in the model of Douhet, but in the model of Douhet, Mahan, Clausewitz, Marshall, Arnold, and Eisenhower. If it produces 10 Air Force CINCs, fine. If it produces none, so what. The only thing that counts is what's best for the nation, the mission, and the troops.*

—General Colin L. Powell  
20 February 1999

Even if Norstad and Kesselring have proved that airmen can be exceptionally effective CINCs, significant questions remain unanswered. Put most bluntly, the first is, so what? Does the nation really need airman CINCs? If so, as General Boyd argued in chapter 1, airmen must articulate the reasons to the national political leadership—and, as the citation above indicates, the reasons must relate to American security, not just Air Force institutional prerogatives. Second, if the nation would benefit from airmen in theater command, can the Air Force overcome the cultural and traditional impediments that have prevented anyone from succeeding Norstad? Third, has the Air Force adequately prepared its officers for major theater command, and has it demonstrated that preparation to civilian leaders? Finally, what can the USAF do to develop potential regional commanders in chief?

## National Defense Perspective

Ultimately, the arguments for or against airman CINCs turn on the role of airpower in future conflicts. Describing the bias that has worked against airmen since Norstad's day, General Shalikashvili highlighted a prevalent belief "that someone who has spent 30 years living ground operations is the right guy for a theater with a preponderance of ground forces," although the general personally discounted that argument. He then worked "all the way around to the primary issue" and asked "is the Air Force a primary arm or a supporting arm?" As an artillery officer, the former CJCS appeared at ease with a view of airpower as support, as suggested by the following admonition:

Be careful. We have the best Air Force in the world. When you begin to change your emphasis, understand the cost of that. Ask first what a change in focus will do—*it's kind of like surgeons complaining 'we're not hospital administrators.'* I wouldn't turn the Air Force around [just] to grow more CINCs [Emphasis added].<sup>231</sup>

Recent history seems to counter the general's inference that the Air Force will remain a supporting arm, however. Instead, as a number of analysts have noted, airpower may often assume a central role in military action. Air Vice-Marshal Tony Mason has described "a new era of optional warfare" in which "air power is the instrument of least commitment," able to "reach into a conflict zone from outside, either for direct air attack independently of ground forces, or in support of them."<sup>232</sup> Highlighting airpower's versatility, he opined that

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<sup>231</sup> Shalikashvili interview.

<sup>232</sup> AVM Tony Mason, *Air Power: A Centennial Appraisal* (London: Brassey's Ltd., 1994), 242-43.

air power is likely to become a favourite instrument in optional warfare, minimising friendly casualties, providing a wide range of offensive options, capitalising on technological superiority, susceptible to the fine tuning of volume and duration, and able to be started, interrupted, and halted without concern for ‘in-country’ logistic support or protection.<sup>233</sup>

In contrast, Edward N. Luttwak, Senior Fellow at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, has suggested that ground forces, although versatile “across the entire spectrum of conflict,” face “political restraints [that] greatly restrict their availability.”<sup>234</sup> He argued that “the prospect of high casualties, which can rapidly undermine domestic support for any military operation,” is the key restraint, and in “a first approximation of what might be called a casualty exposure index,” ranked Army and Marine ground forces as the “least usable” components of military policy.<sup>235</sup> Indeed, 1999 witnessed an American president explicitly ruling out ground power at the beginning of a military campaign.

If airpower may be the first or only politically acceptable policy option in a conflict, it stands to reason that an air-minded theater commander would be the most effective officer to employ it. Along those lines, General Charles Boyd eloquently provided counterpoints to General Shalikashvili’s concerns, and highlighted reasons why airmen CINC’s are, in fact, important to national security. He dismissed the idea that a wider focus would reduce Air Force effectiveness, saying “look at the Navy. They’re the greatest Navy and TACAIR piece the

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<sup>233</sup> Ibid., 244.

<sup>234</sup> Edward N. Luttwak, “A Post-Heroic Military Policy,” *Foreign Affairs* 75, no. 4 (July/August 1996): 38.

<sup>235</sup> Ibid., 36, 41, 42.

world has ever seen . . . [and] their aviators can compete well for CINC slots.”<sup>236</sup>

He also spoke forcefully about the issue of primary versus supporting roles for airpower, and that debate’s influence on national power:

The reason it is important for airmen to be routinely considered for regional CINC positions [is that, if they aren’t], that makes the Air Force—in people’s subconscious—inferior to those services that do provide leadership to regions. . . . That relegates the Air Force to slightly diminished status, which works all the way down to company grade officers.

If the Air Force never sees its role models as number one in command, that hurts its self-perception. An Air Force CINC would alter the self-perception that airpower is just for support. Airpower [must be seen as] co-equal, and sometimes primary. The attitude of subordination of air has truncated its development in its fullest horizons as an element of military power. If you only think of it as support, its flourishing as a form of military power can never be complete.

The truth of the matter is that it is not as routine for [airmen] to develop broad-gauged military thinkers, but the ones we develop are as effective as any. The climate just doesn’t produce many. That absence hurts the whole country’s military power . . . and affects the Air Force psyche down to the lowest levels. We must overcome that or airpower cannot develop in its most grand and effective form.<sup>237</sup>

By inference, if airpower is to be at its most effective in the myriad crises and contingencies, in which it is employed today, airmen must at least sometimes be the theater commanders who integrate it into joint, multinational military power.

Few would deny that a bias still exists against calling airpower a coequal component of military power—despite the fact that the 1943 version of Army Field Manual 100-20 declared that land- and airpower were independent and coequal. Many officers—soldiers and airmen alike—accept the superficial

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<sup>236</sup> Boyd interview.

<sup>237</sup> Ibid.

argument that “if there are ground troops involved, command must go to the ground component.” General Boyd demonstrated that the argument does not stand on logic: “I’ve never known an Army officer who didn’t think he could command a force including airmen and never met one who thought airmen could command soldiers. The pure psychology defies logic, but it’s pervasive.”<sup>238</sup> Instead of logic, the argument reflects what Harvard professor Yuen Foong Khong calls *schema theory*. Human beings, according to behavioral and cognitive scientists, truly understand only what they have lived and tend to discount everything else.<sup>239</sup> Therefore, ground-trained officers identify with their ground experience and generally reject the notion that any other perspective could be equally valid. More than simply parochialism, then, it is a lack of a common frame of reference that separates the soldiers and airmen who must meld the forces of the future.

Unfortunately, that lack of a common framework can have disastrous consequences—consequences that a joint-minded airman CINC might avoid. General McCarthy, former DCINCEUR, argued that lack of appreciation of sister-service capabilities was the greatest impediment to effective combined operations.<sup>240</sup> General Fogleman, former CSAF and CINC of US Transportation Command, emphasized the high costs of a lack of airpower understanding:

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<sup>238</sup> Ibid.

<sup>239</sup> Yuen Foong Khong, *Analogies at War* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1992), provides an insightful explanation of cognitive processing theory and how it affects military decision making.

<sup>240</sup> See Chapter 5, note 8.



The entire nation loses out. As chief of staff and CINCTrans, I saw gross misapplications of force—CINCs who briefed contingencies using only what they knew. The deaths in Mogadishu [on 3 October 1993] were senseless. AC-130s [gunships] were accessible in theater, but not used because a green-suiter wanted to use green-suit assets. . . .

We lose lives because we don't make full use of airpower—commanders don't fully understand it. Everybody thinks they're great [air] campaign planners, that it's easy somehow. But if it's an airshow, it's easier for an airman to visualize and explain.<sup>241</sup>

Certainly, airmen must explain the limitations of airpower as well; arguably, an airman CINC would understand and express both capabilities and limitations to political leaders better than a surface-trained CINC. In Air Vice-Marshal Mason's words, "the application of air power is now a profession of considerable complexity, demanding technological mastery, a sense of command, structure, speed, time, distance and impact in proportions quite different from those applicable on land or sea. Not greater, nor lesser, but different."<sup>242</sup> In view of airpower's likely role in future conflict, and the potential costs of misuse of airpower, national security would indeed benefit from the "not greater, nor lesser, but different" abilities and worldviews of airman commanders in chief.

## **Cultural Obstacles**

If the Air Force is to produce officers able to contribute to the national defense as CINCs, it must first understand the hurdles such officers must face and

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<sup>241</sup> Fogleman interview. A 1996 RAND study, "Preparing the US Air Force for Military Operations Other Than War," echoed Gen Fogleman's contention about AC-130s and Mogadishu: "The endurance, precision, and shock effect of fixed-wing fire support might have suppressed Somali fire sufficiently so that the Rangers could be extracted by helicopters. At the least, it would have significantly increased the fire support available to US soldiers and probably would have saved some lives in the process (61)."

<sup>242</sup> Mason, 275.

overcome. Secretary Cheney highlighted the domestic cultural obstacles facing Air Force regional CINCs by averring “there’s something about the culture that identifies the Air Force with specific positions rather than joint command” despite insisting he had worked with “some very talented [airmen]. . .superb officers who could have done it.”<sup>243</sup> That cultural obstacle stems from the ground-centric mindset to which Gen Shalikashvili alluded, and can be seen vividly in the command changeover that occurred between then-Maj Gen Jamerson and Lt Gen Shalikashvili at the beginning of Operation Provide Comfort. OPC started as an aerial operation, under Jamerson’s command, but when the mission grew to include on-ground protection of humanitarian convoys and refugee camps, the SACEUR, General Galvin, installed Shalikashvili as task force commander. To a man, Generals Jamerson, Shalikashvili, and McCarthy—actively involved as DCINCEUR—insisted there was nothing “sinister” or overtly parochial about the replacement; Jamerson said “don’t read too much into it—General Galvin had to be comfortable, and ‘Shali’ made him more comfortable.”<sup>244</sup> At the same time, Shalikashvili characterized the command change as “just one of those knee-jerk reactions,” and admitted that his own contributions to OPC success lay not in operational ground expertise. Rather, they involved political and strategic issues like negotiations with coalition partners and, most importantly, with Iraqi military leaders—activities in which an airman, specifically General Jamerson, could have succeeded if given the chance.<sup>245</sup> Because it was a joint task force, the Provide

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<sup>243</sup> Cheney interview.

<sup>244</sup> Jamerson interview.

<sup>245</sup> Shalikashvili interview.

Comfort example represents the step below theater CINC concerns—but the experience is indicative of the ground-centric bias airman commanders must overcome by demonstrating joint proficiency and strategic insight.

Would-be airman commanders in chief face similar—perhaps even larger—cultural hurdles in the international arena as well. In 1954, then-SHAPE Air Deputy Norstad expressed “the major regret that damn few countries have the Air Force as their first service” because such a lack complicated military-to-military relations with US forces,<sup>246</sup> and the more recently retired CINCs characterized the US Air Force’s unique position as a similar detriment in the present. General McCarthy repeated Norstad’s lament: “the interface in Europe has always been between ground force commanders . . . talking the language of the Army,”<sup>247</sup> and General Woerner’s SOUTHCOS experience provided similar evidence. “Military outside of our own,” he believed, “have a single-Service orientation that is, by far, ground-based. . . . There is a greater facility for soldier-to-soldier war stories than [soldier-to-airman]. I don’t talk with my hands, I do foxholes.”<sup>248</sup> Finally, General Shalikashvili provided two telling examples of international military bias.

For the first, he noted “when we proposed [USMC General John] Sheehan as CINCUSACOM, I had to make countless trips to London to placate the British, who said ‘over our dead bodies will we have a Marine in command of UK naval

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<sup>246</sup> Norstad, “Allied Military Tasks,” 13.

<sup>247</sup> McCarthy interview.

<sup>248</sup> Woerner interview.

forces.”<sup>249</sup> For the second, he described his attempts to install an airman as Commander, US Forces Korea and Commander, Combined Forces Command that failed because the Koreans could not accept the appointment. “Because the preponderance of forces are Korean—the number of US forces are insignificant—you cannot be cavalier with how the Koreans feel,” and the large number of Korean full generals subordinate to the combined commander objected to serving under an airman.<sup>250</sup> Political acceptability derailed the airman’s chance to command multinational forces.

In spite of these cultural obstacles, however, this study’s correspondents concluded that the time was nearly ripe for an Air Force regional CINC. General Jamerson cited “many barriers to break down” but said “it’s not inconceivable. [Secretary] Cohen could decide [to appoint an airman].”<sup>251</sup> General Woerner insisted that “in principle, any CINCDom could be non-Service specific” and that service background was “not a disqualifier. Soldier stories [lose value] after the initial icebreaking and don’t outweigh other skills—as evidenced by the current CINCSOUTH [Marine General Wilhelm].”<sup>252</sup> General Boyd noted that other services “have used the ‘influential service in the country’ argument to justify defense attaché billets for years. In truth, the host nation deals with the appointee. Success depends on his skills, not his service background.”<sup>253</sup> General Horner put

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<sup>249</sup> Shalikashvili interview. The British objected despite General Powell’s having persuaded his “colleagues on the NATO Military Committee to accept whatever service we put in as NATO CINCLANT,” Powell e-mail.

<sup>250</sup> Shalikashvili interview.

<sup>251</sup> Jamerson interview.

<sup>252</sup> Woerner interview.

<sup>253</sup> Boyd interview.

it perhaps most colorfully, declaring “an Air Force officer can drink tea with Arabs as well as a grunt. An airman can brief Congress as well as a grunt. An airman can do [everything] CINCs do . . . so why not an airman?”<sup>254</sup>

Most significantly, the three leaders most closely involved with CINC selection suggest the obstacles can soon be overcome. Regarding inter-Service misunderstandings, General Shalikashvili noted that the Army’s internal prejudice against “supporting” arms is fading—three artillery officers, himself, General Peay, and General Reimer, had risen to serve as CJCS, USCINCCENT, and Army chief of staff—and suggested one could extrapolate that to the Army/Air Force relationship. Since Desert Storm, he argued, “ground commanders understand better how to maximize air’s role, and that will put future Air Force officers in better position to command.”<sup>255</sup> He also pointed out that the situation has changed in Korea, where, despite the ground forces’ predominance, a Korean airman has become chairman of Korea’s Joint Chiefs of Staff. General Powell went through the list of geographic commands one by one and declared an airman could command any one of them. Given the prestige and air of impartiality Powell enjoys in this country, one doubts he could have said anything else, but he said it bluntly enough to indicate the day will soon come when Norstad will see a successor. An airman, he suggested, could have SOUTHCOM or USACOM “tomorrow,” and

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<sup>254</sup> Horner e-mail, 4 February 1999.

<sup>255</sup> Shalikashvili interview.

CENTCOM could be air or ground. We'll be fighting an AirLand battle. I would accept an airman who has a clear record of knowing and understanding ground maneuver warfare. . . .

PACOM could be an airman, but PACOM is really a naval theater. . . . For an airman to get this job, he has to have strong joint qualifications.

[Finally], in the current environment, I would have no reservations about an airman as SACEUR. . . . Norstad returns!<sup>256</sup>

Secretary Cheney summed everything up simply for his erstwhile CJCS and the other defense officials: "I don't think an airman's appointment as a CINC would break any china."<sup>257</sup>

### **Air Force Institutional Perspective**

A changing domestic and international climate is not sufficient to produce such a radical change as an Air Force theater CINC, however. For an airman to be appointed to regional command his service has to make that an institutional priority; at first blush, it is not at all clear that senior Air Force leaders are so motivated. As noted above, General Shalikashvili counseled caution to those who might change the Air Force's focus, and a few retired Air Force general officers agreed with him. General McCarthy, for one, professed little concern over the dearth of Air Force regional CINCs.<sup>258</sup> A senior visitor to Air University shared McCarthy's view, and explained why: "The fact that there are no USAF geographic CINCs doesn't bother me very much. There is no entitlement here. . . . Four star counts [not specific billets] are [the] indices of power to the services. . . .

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<sup>256</sup> Powell e-mail, 20 February 1999.

<sup>257</sup> Cheney interview.

<sup>258</sup> McCarthy interview.

. For the most part, we do pretty well.”<sup>259</sup> General Woerner seconded that view, noting how any service chief would seek to maximize his cohorts’ opportunities rather than give up four-star billets.<sup>260</sup> Secretary Cheney stressed that “the number of four-stars per service is jealously guarded” as he described a “cumulative, iterative” process of assigning four-star officers in consultation with the CJCS:

I thought in terms of a whole universe of four-star billets . . . of a puzzle with multiple choices and solutions. I might postpone [a promotion] if I thought a more appropriate slot was opening later. It doesn’t mean I downgraded [airmen] because I didn’t assign [them] to geographic CINC positions.<sup>261</sup>

For those who accept box scores as indicators of service influence and prestige, the Air Force is in good shape, and probably should not change its focus. Indeed, counting all CINC appointments since 1947—including Strategic Air Command when it was a specified command and a number of now-obscure commands—the Air Force leads all services.<sup>262</sup>

In the end, however, each of the officials cited above rejected “bean counting” and provided additional arguments for the Air Force to seek regional command opportunities. General McCarthy opined that “as a Service, [the Air Force has] more to gain from improved joint opportunities.”<sup>263</sup> The Air University guest predicted that regional commands “are going to get increasingly important over time. . . . we are eventually going to grant CINCs resource

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<sup>259</sup> Remarks given under Air University’s non-attribution policy.

<sup>260</sup> Woerner interview.

<sup>261</sup> Cheney interview.

<sup>262</sup> Trask and Goldberg, appendix II. Since 1947, the Air Force has filled 62 CINC billets; the Army, 60; the Navy, 46, and the Marine Corps, 4.

allocation authority, if not all, at least a significant fraction. When that happens, we had better be ready.”<sup>264</sup> Finally, General Shalikashvili echoed part of General Boyd’s argument in favor of airman CINCs. “The issue *is* worthwhile—but make the bias ‘who is the best, most qualified officer’—the uniform ought to be secondary. Still, young Air Force officers should ask, ‘how can I maximize my chances [for joint command]’—it’s important for morale.”<sup>265</sup>

If the institutional Air Force accepts any of the foregoing arguments—about Air Force self-perception, about a seat at the resource allocation table, about morale in the officer corps, or most importantly, about airpower’s fullest development and its impact on national security—then it should make gaining a geographic CINCDom a service priority. In that case, Secretary Cheney’s description of the four-star officer assignment process suggests the Air Force must give up a valuable general officer position to gain a CINC position—and that may prove difficult. One possibility would have been DCINCEUR; another, US Strategic Command—but admirals currently fill both positions. That leaves US Space Command and US Transportation Command as possibilities, but many senior leaders believe those should stay in Air Force hands. General Powell, for example, wrote that “airmen should continue to command TRANSCOM and SPACECOM because you get a two-fer . . . the incumbent is also a major service command commander.”<sup>266</sup> General Horner, a former CINCSPACE, disagreed strongly, however, calling the Air Force’s hold on those positions “a Pyrrhic

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<sup>263</sup> McCarthy interview.

<sup>264</sup> Remarks given under Air University’s non-attribution policy.

<sup>265</sup> Shalikashvili interview.



victory.”<sup>267</sup> By inference, Horner supported the contention that failure to place airmen in regional command billets hurts airpower and American security, and that geographic CINCDoms should be a service priority.

In any event, if airmen are to take a place as coequal integrators of joint force, the Air Force has to argue its case effectively to the proper leaders—which it apparently has not done. General Woerner, for example, was quite surprised to discover the Air Force had produced only one regional CINC—and, significantly, so was Secretary Cheney. Cheney said bluntly, “if the Air Force ever made an argument for a regional CINC slot, I didn’t hear it.”<sup>268</sup> That must change if the nation is to find a successor to Norstad and help airpower achieve its fullest potential as a source of international security.

To make that argument effectively, the Air Force must change the perception—one shared by high-ranking airmen and non-airmen alike—that it has not prepared its officers as well as possible to be regional commanders in chief, and produce indisputably well-qualified potential CINCs. General Shalikashvili spoke for most interviewees when he observed that “few [top-notch] Air Force officers have served on [joint or regional] staffs; the ‘hotshots’ all went to Air Force Headquarters;”<sup>269</sup> indeed, Air Force culture seems to rank Air Staff experience above similar joint experience. Shalikashvili continued,

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<sup>266</sup> Powell e-mail, 20 February 1999.

<sup>267</sup> Horner e-mail, 3 February 1999.

<sup>268</sup> Cheney interview.

<sup>269</sup> Shalikashvili interview.

it becomes incumbent on the Service to have a longer-range view [and ask] ‘What must I do to create an officer more qualified than anyone?’ . . . Don’t ask if Air Force officers are qualified to be regional CINCs—they are. The question should be—on the day the decision is made—is [the airman] . . . the best of the nominees?

The Air Force must make joint war fighters—seek positions for its frontrunners to grow them as joint war fighters. Later on, it must start thinking about area-specific expertise.<sup>270</sup>

According to those interviewed, it appears that the Air Force has not given its officers a political-military grounding sufficient to create a pool of qualified CINC candidates. General Jamerson remarked that “we don’t raise people like the Army, with a growth pattern of global political-military jobs. We’re a specialist service—we fly—and don’t get out of our box enough.”<sup>271</sup> General Boyd concurred, and credited former CSAF General Michael Dugan with the observation that

the Air Force attracts technologically oriented young men and women, gives them the niftiest gadgets in the world, and says ‘go to it.’ Then at a certain point—major or lieutenant colonel—we say ‘put away those gadgets. We want you to be a sophisticated geostrategic thinker, planner, articulate with Congress.’ . . . The question is, how do we provide the necessary technical competence and skill, but at the same time broaden thinking about the connections of military force and diplomacy? It’s a challenge for the whole institution.<sup>272</sup>

General McCarthy lamented that “the issue, primarily, is we haven’t prepared. There’s no organized plan, no group of people to put through the [joint preparation] program;” another retired general said simply, “we don’t even want many of the preparatory jobs that would prepare someone to compete for CINC. .

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<sup>270</sup> Shalikhvili interview.

<sup>271</sup> Jamerson interview.

<sup>272</sup> Boyd interview.

. . . That is what has to change before we can expect to merit a better shot at a CINCDom.”<sup>273</sup> General Fogleman agreed, noting that “world-class guys tend to pick their own service” and “part of the problem is to convince airmen to go to D.C. The Air Force must understand there is value in the people who gain exposure” to the Washington political process.<sup>274</sup> His observation fits neatly with this study’s conclusion that CINCs need an in-depth understanding of both national and international politics.

The interviewees were unanimous in their perception that the Air Force’s “best and brightest” migrate to Air Force jobs and tend to avoid the Joint Staff, unified commands, and service within civilian agencies. Such anecdotal evidence begs an important question, however. Do available data support their observations of how the Air Force may be failing to groom its officers for high-level joint and international command? A cursory comparison of 10 CINCs’ careers with 10 Air Force generals’ careers suggests the observations are accurate. The sample of 20 careers, detailed in Appendix A, indicates that the airmen spent more than twice the amount of career time in service-specific staff jobs than did their army, navy, and Marine counterparts, whose careers included far more service on joint and civilian agency staffs. Quite simply, airmen appear to have a narrower upbringing and less exposure to the political process than other service members. Because civilian players in that process appoint the CINCs, airmen may be cheating themselves out of vital opportunities by spending minimum time in joint or civilian agency billets.

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<sup>273</sup> McCarthy interview; further remarks given under Air University’s non-attribution policy.

## Recommendations

How, then, should the Air Force improve its preparation of potential theater commanders? General Boyd suggested taking the “tool kit” of a commander in chief—in other words, the geostrategic, military, and leadership-related capabilities necessary for CINC success—and figuring out how to develop those skills; he also recommended “finding out who the really good CINCs were, and what made them so.”<sup>275</sup> General Jamerson suggested a similar “look at where CINCs came from.”<sup>276</sup> An in-depth analysis of recent (especially post-Goldwater/Nichols) CINC careers, through interviews, comparisons of job progression, etc., would provide valuable data for those who would develop their joint and international command capabilities. Airmen interested in the CINC issue might conduct or commission such research, perhaps using appendix A as a starting point.

More practically, airmen should focus their development in two broad areas: professional education and career progression that blend airpower expertise with broad joint competence. Education is vital because CINC billets demand expansive knowledge and understanding of domestic and international politics, economics, and culture; Norstad and Kesselring both grew through extensive self-study. General Boyd—once the Air University commander—suggested that major geostrategic issues “must be part of the education process at every level,”<sup>277</sup>

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<sup>274</sup> Fogleman interview.

<sup>275</sup> Boyd interview.

<sup>276</sup> Jamerson interview.

<sup>277</sup> Boyd interview.

and Air University is currently providing airmen a firm educational foundation. General Powell commented “the Air Force has an excellent education process. I attended National War College with Chuck Horner, H. T. Johnson, and a number of other great airmen, and their joint/combined education was equivalent to mine.”<sup>278</sup> Air University must ensure that Air Force PME retains its quality—but the current attempt to make PME more egalitarian unwittingly risks undermining a good resident program and may inhibit the grooming of future leaders. The 22 March 1999 issue of *Air Force Times* reported that AU officials want to “change a culture that equates attendance in residence with career success” and instill equity for correspondence students.<sup>279</sup> Do those officials really believe that a 10-month resident program where education is an officer’s sole professional focus is equivalent to a program that crams compact discs and “dirty purples” in between 12- to 14-hour work days? Probably not, nor should they. Therefore, they must continue to emphasize the educational depth possible only in a resident program, and continue to reward those officers most likely to benefit from attendance. If the Air Force wants to make sure the admission process is fair, it can base attendance on promotion board ranking *and* an entrance exam—which would emphasize to every officer the importance of continuing self-study.<sup>280</sup> In any case, Air University cannot risk “dumbing down” its product. As General de

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<sup>278</sup> Powell e-mail, 3 Mar 99.

<sup>279</sup> John Pulley, “Relaunching PME: A Whole New Approach to Educating Airmen,” *Air Force Times* 59, no. 33 (22 March 1999): 17.

<sup>280</sup> When questioned on this issue, General Boyd doubted that such an exam would pass muster; “it could be too large a cultural shock to an otherwise anti-intellectual institution,” and hurt retention.

Gaulle suggested to Norstad, future generals must demand a broad education in all facets of national power.

In addition to emphasizing education, the Air Force should create General Shalikashvili's "joint war fighter" career track and reward the officers who excel in joint and multinational planning and command. Joint experience, specifically the type of experience gained on unified command staffs, is vital to earn credibility with sister service members. In Lt Gen Cushman's words, if air and land commanders "are ever to harmonize and reconcile . . . the airman must adopt the land commander's way of looking at the dynamics of the battle—and the land commander must understand how the airman must operate in his own medium, the air."<sup>281</sup> Because the ground perspective has dominated military thought for so long, the airmen who would command theater forces must master that perspective as well as their own, and demonstrate their mastery to sister-service audiences. General McCarthy concurred with the need for a great deal of joint experience, and cautioned "it takes years to develop that experience. [A prospective CINC] would need to be joint as a lieutenant colonel and probably come back as a one- or two-star to be able to return as CINC."<sup>282</sup>

Would-be CINCs must seek broad international experience, as well. Political scientist and coalition researcher Robert S. Jordan has argued that coalition commanders

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<sup>281</sup> Cushman, 39.

<sup>282</sup> McCarthy interview.

should have extensive professional exposure to international political conditions, including serving on international staffs and, if possible, commanding multinational military forces. They should also be proven planners because . . . in peacetime, planning for war must never cease, and good planners are not easy to find. The member-states, especially the United States, should make every effort to reward generously those officers willing to devote a significant portion of their careers outside the normal national military career channels in order to serve on international planning staffs or commands.<sup>283</sup>

In the same vein, General Jamerson noted that “we ought to broaden our skill base” and highlighted the nascent Foreign Area Officer program as a worthwhile beginning for company-grade officers; General Woerner credited his personal success to his involvement in the Army’s similar Foreign Area Specialist program.<sup>284</sup> Secretary Cheney underscored the need for area expertise, noting that the Army and Navy usually have “people coming along who’ve worked their way up” in a given theater. Along those lines, General Jamerson contrasted an Air Force tendency to move around the globe with the biography of his former boss, General George Joulwan—who held command and staff jobs at almost every level in Europe, from company commander to SACEUR.<sup>285</sup>

Finally, a CINC must work in Washington to gain both breadth and exposure. General Shelton wrote of the need to understand the interagency process; General Fogleman regretted the Air Force’s institutional bias against working in the Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD) or National Security Council (NSC) and believed those jobs should carry equal weight with *wing command* for promotion

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<sup>283</sup> Jordan, 192-93.

<sup>284</sup> Jamerson interview, Woerner interview. Information on the Air Force’s new Foreign Area Officer program is available at <http://www.hq.af.mil/af/saf/ia/afaa/fao>.

<sup>285</sup> Cheney interview, Jamerson interview.

consideration.<sup>286</sup> Similarly, Secretary Cheney called service on the Pentagon Joint Staff

crucial. That's clearly what was intended by Goldwater-Nichols, and I would have been hard put to hire or appoint anyone without extensive Joint Staff experience. Civilian leaders need officers who understand how the system works, and the Joint Staff is their major contact with those officers. That's also where I got my military assistants—I overlooked the guys nominated by the services and picked them off the staff.<sup>287</sup>

The Air Force's only CINC to date, Lauris Norstad, used his Washington experience to develop close contacts throughout the Defense and State Departments. Evidently, future airman CINCs must do the same.

Combining the aforementioned factors, a representative job progression for an airman might entail early experience as a numbered air force (NAF) planner, a later J-3 or J-5 assignment on a unified command staff, a tour on the Joint Staff or civilian agency, and experience as a J-3 or J-5 director—all interspersed with operational (air or space-focused) and command tours from squadron level to NAF. To develop area knowledge, the potential CINC could specialize in a theater after making O-6 or O-7. Creating this new career emphasis could require a significant change in Air Force culture, which would demand public backing from current Air Force general officers.<sup>288</sup> For example, one high-ranking Air Staff officer recruited members of this year's School of Advanced Airpower

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<sup>286</sup> Shelton letter (see Chapter 5, note 34), Fogleman interview.

<sup>287</sup> Cheney interview.

<sup>288</sup> See Stephen Peter Rosen, *Winning the Next War: Innovation and the Modern Military* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1991), 251: "Peacetime innovation has been possible when senior military officers with traditional credentials, reacting . . . to a structural change in the security environment, have acted to create a new promotion pathway for junior officers practicing a new way of war." Surely these conditions obtain in the post-cold-war, post-Goldwater-Nichols USAF.



Studies class with the advice “to get ahead, you’ve got to do your duty at corporate headquarters.” Why not de-emphasize “corporateness,” promote airpower expertise, jointness, and war-fighting knowledge, and put at least a significant fraction of the Air Force’s best and brightest on component and joint command staffs? The necessary inside-the-Beltway experience can come later, after the officer has built a firm foundation of operational war-fighting knowledge. Finally, in the near term, the Air Force should identify those officers who have already achieved a degree of joint and international political-military expertise, and place those officers in positions that strengthen that expertise while highlighting their abilities to the joint establishment and the national leadership. If effectively executed airpower is indeed vital to international security, airmen should direct its execution as theater commanders soon.

### **Final Thoughts**

So the question remains: can an airman command joint and multinational forces? An impressive cross section of retired senior officials thinks so. Will an airman command such forces? Only if the Air Force makes such command an institutional priority, argues its case to the nation, and ensures it produces a corps of candidates with impeccable joint and multinational war-fighting pedigrees. *Every* senior official consulted for this study—civilian or military, Air Force or Army—described significant cultural impediments to the appointment of an Air Force regional commander in chief; backed by career data, *every* one of them suggested the Air Force could do a better job of preparing its general officers for CINC billets. At the same time, *every* one insisted that airmen are up to the task now. The following quote from General Powell encapsulates the lingering cultural barriers airmen face along with the demands CINCs face, but at the same time suggests an airman can overcome them:

The integration of allied ground forces and the ground battle plan [for Desert Storm] was, in my view, a more demanding political, diplomatic, and military task than the air war. I'm not shorting the complexity and demands of the air war. Far from it, I give it the game ball. But I think it was more appropriate having an Army CINC organizing the effort with allies in this case than had it been an airman. But *could a Chuck Horner have done it? Sure.*<sup>289</sup>

In conclusion, the former Chairman's words suggest the most important reason why airman CINCs may prove vital to international security in the future. Few observers anywhere in the world—General Powell included—expect to see the decisive, Clausewitzian, mass-on-mass ground battle. Rather, many of those who foresee a conventional battle project fast-moving, maneuver-based operations wherein airpower may be central. Regarding current threats in the Pacific, General Shalikashvili called air “crucial,” and General Powell declared emphatically that airpower “will defeat the North Koreans.”<sup>290</sup> Alternatively, airpower may be used as a tool of coercive diplomacy, either synergistically with other components, or for political reasons, alone, as has been the recent case in the Balkans. If, as General Powell indicated, airpower is to have the game ball, should not someone who has devoted a career to airpower quarterback some of the games—especially the games wherein airpower is central? More importantly, should not the Air Force aggressively and systematically prepare its leaders to carry the ball?

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<sup>289</sup> Powell e-mail, 3 March 1999. Emphasis added.

<sup>290</sup> Shalikashvili interview; Powell e-mail, 20 February 1999.

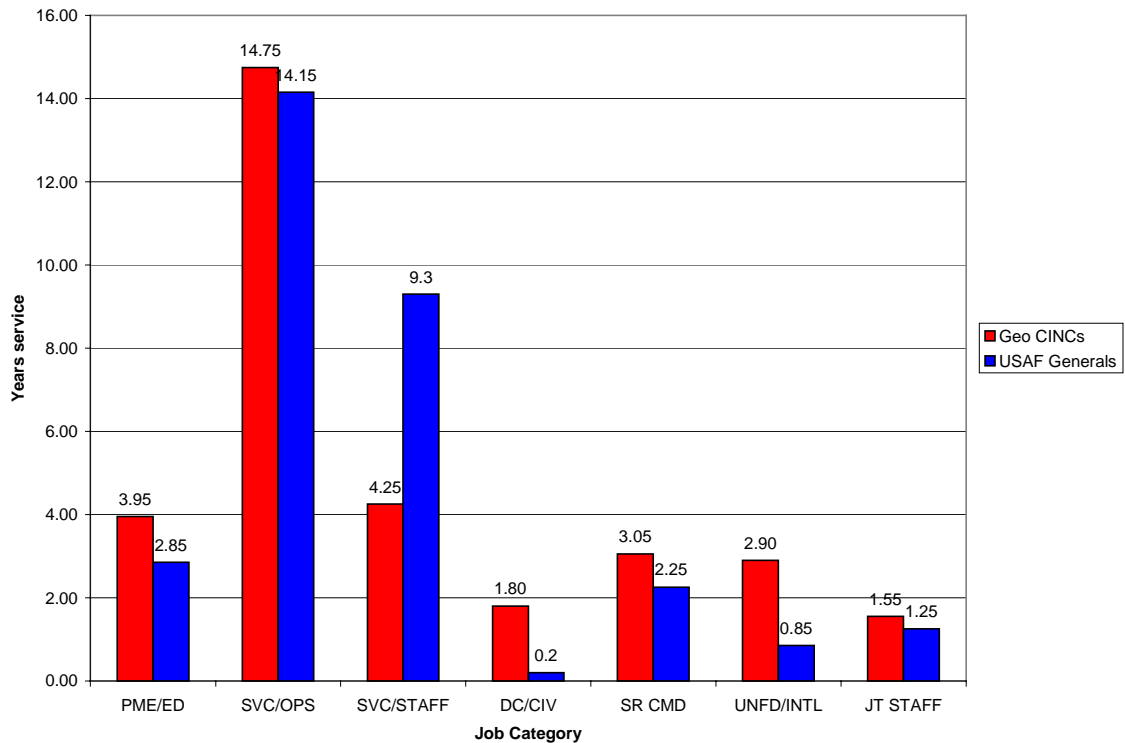
## **Appendix A**

### **Career Comparison of Regional CINCs and USAF Generals**

To check the validity of interview evidence about airmen's lack of "CINC preparation," this researcher conducted a cursory comparison of the careers of 10 active or recently retired geographic CINCs and 10 active or recently retired Air Force four-star generals. Using unclassified assignment histories from the Internet and service general/flag officer matters offices in the Pentagon, this researcher rounded each officer's tours of duty to the nearest half-year and assigned them to one of seven categories: PME/education (as student or teacher); service-specific operations; service-specific staff; D.C. civilian agency job (White House Fellow, aide to civilian secretary, legislative liaison, OSD, or NSC); command above brigade-, ship-, or wing level; unified or combined command staff; or Pentagon Joint Staff. Figure 9 below depicts the average number of years each group spent in each category of job and suggests that the interviewees' impressions are, in fact, valid.

The reader should note that the survey is unscientific. The CINC sample consists of three SACEURs, two CINCCENTs, three CINCPACs, and two CINCUSACOMs whose biographies were readily available. By the same token, the USAF sample represents the first ten rated four-star officers (in alphabetical

order) who had detailed assignment histories on the Air Force Link web page. Specifically, Figure 9 reflects the careers of US Army Generals John M. D. Shalikashvili, George A. Joulwan, Wesley K. Clark, H. Norman Schwarzkopf, US Marine Corps General Anthony C. Zinni, and Admirals Dennis C. Blair, Joseph W. Prueher, Richard C. Macke, Paul D. Miller, and Harold W. Gehman. The Air Force group consists of Generals Joseph W. Ashy, Charles G. Boyd, Ralph E. Eberhart, Howell M. Estes III, Ronald R. Fogleman, Patrick K. Gamble, Eugene E. Habiger, Richard E. Hawley, James L. Jamerson, and John P. Jumper.



*Source: Maj Howard D. Belote.*

**Figure 9. CINC vs. USAF General Careers**

The most significant deltas on the chart support the proposition that rising Air Force leaders focus almost exclusively on service-specific staff jobs, while the CINCs' résumés included significant time on unified/combined command staffs

and in government agency jobs in Washington. Arguably, such breadth helped provide the CINCs with the joint competence and political/military awareness demanded by the position. The experience with civilians is most noteworthy; Gen Fogleman alluded to the need for airmen to overcome their cultural reluctance and gain exposure to government officials—but only one of the Air Force generals served in such a position (Gen Jumper was Secretary Cheney’s senior military assistant). Did a combination of political understanding and networking, derived in part from their interagency experience, give the CINCs the edge when the defense secretary made his selection? Additionally, the comparison highlights the value of broad education. The USAF generals had more PME than the admirals, but far less than the Army generals—almost all of whom had PME, in-residence graduate education, and a teaching tour (at West Point or ROTC). Did such an education increase their geostrategic awareness? Again, this survey is too imprecise to draw conclusions; but it seems to support the thesis’s major findings. Perhaps, as suggested in Chapter 7, it can serve as a starting point for a more precise analysis of Air Force officer development for those interested in developing potential theater commanders in chief.

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