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TWIN AIMS

OF

MILITARY HISTORY

HISTORICAL DIVISION EUROPEAN COMMAND

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Guenther Blumentritt
General der Infanterie

Twin Axis of Military History

Translator: A. Schroeder
Editor: Capt. W. F. Ross
Reviewer: " " " "

HISTORICAL DIVISION
AMERICAN CORPS

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HEADQUARTERS
EUROPEAN COMMAND
Historical Division
Foreign Military Studies Branch
APO 409 US Army

3 April 1952

MEMORANDUM FOR: CHIEF, FOREIGN MILITARY STUDIES BRANCH

SUBJECT: Reviewer's Evaluation of MS # B-710

1. Review of MS # B-710 "The Dual Pace of Military History" by WILLIAM F. BOSS was completed this date. The original title of the manuscript, "Two Aims of Military History" was found to be misleading, and has been changed. Those in charge of manuscript inventories and catalogue revision please note this change.
2. In this manuscript (estimated at 30 pages in final type) the author discusses general history at some length before concentrating on military history. His main theme is the conflicting aims of all history:
 - a. Special pleading for a certain general, unit, army, or nation.
 - b. An attempt to establish the real facts.He develops his thesis entertainingly, with a multitude of specific examples, and offers some hints on source material that a historian should test cautiously before accepting (especially documents), but offers few suggestions on historical methods.
3. This manuscript might be useful to officers newly assigned to Foreign Military Studies Branch. It exhibits many of the good and bad points of German military writing. It would be of some interest to all military historians, but hardly to other officers.
4. Publication of this manuscript in BUCM is not recommended.

WILLIAM F. BOSS
Captain, Military
Assistant Military
Editor

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The Author

Guenter BLUMENTRITT
General der Infanterie
Date of Birth: 10 February 1892
Place of Birth: Munich, Germany

Commissioned as a second lieutenant in 1912 after training in the Danzig Officer Candidate Training School, Blumentritt fought on the west and east fronts in World War I as platoon, company, and Battalion leader. After postwar service in a volunteer corps in Munich, Saxony and Silesia from January to October 1919, he was assigned to the 15th Infantry Regiment of Germany's post-World War I Army. In 1920-22 he attended the War Colleges at Stuttgart and Berlin and in 1932-33 continued his studies on history, political science and national economy at the Berlin University.

Promoted colonel in 1938, Generalmajor in January 1942, Generalleutnant in December of the same year and General der Infanterie in April 1944, Blumentritt held many important assignments during World War II including tours as Operations Officer of Army Groups in Poland and France in 1939 and 1940, Chief of Staff, Fourth Army during the drive on Moscow in 1940-41, First General Staff Officer in Army General Staff in Russia in 1942, Chief of Staff, Ob West in 1942-44, Acting Commander of XII SS Corps* in 1944-45, Commander in Chief of Twenty-Fifth Army in Holland in March 1945, Acting Commander in Chief of First SS Army in April 1945 and of Blumentritt Army in Verden, Hamburg and Luebeck from 8 April to the end of the war. General Blumentritt finally was taken prisoner in Schleswig-Holstein on 31 May 1945.

* During this assignment General Blumentritt was given temporary rank as SS Obergruppenfuhrer and General der Waffen-SS.

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The "Dual Face" of Military History

Chapter I

Introduction

Histories are written by either historiographers or creative historians. Both types of men do useful work, and both of them are necessary. The historiographer represents the professionally trained, diligent and conscientious researcher. He spends years on end, perhaps his whole lifetime, collecting tirelessly document by document, piece by piece, scrutinizing and slowly assembling them into a monumental treatise. Nobody will deny that this type of researcher is entirely indispensable for doing the groundwork of collecting and screening the facts of history and recording them as raw material. Without the laborious and meritorious work of this indispensable type of historiographer and archivist, the work of the creative historian would be unthinkable.

The true historian is that inspired intellectual genius -- not necessarily a trained researcher -- who has the knack of grasping the meaning of an epoch out of the volumes of the historiographers. He strives to bring to the fore the significance, the individuality, the spirit of the era in question. It may often prove an advantage, if this historian is not a professional. He will, in this case, be able to see the essentials with a more open and unburdened mind.

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Specialists and professionals are indeed indispensable, but ideally they should be directed by a gifted amateur, although naturally such a director should have considerable professional experience.

A creative historian will never be able, in spite of all attempts at objectivity, to suppress his own personality, his personal conception of events. Historians should even be allowed to fight for their own opinions. Only then can they be regarded as spiritual leaders and not as laborers with a six or eight-hour working day.

Thus in modern German historical literature we find the names of Sybel, Ranke, Treitschke, and Mommsen, each of whom represents a basic conception of history all his own, no matter whether right or wrong.

Only the creative historian is able to recognize the "usual face" of all history; only the gifted military historian will discover this in war history. The diligent historiographer will not become aware of it, for he is wholly occupied by this thankless, painstaking job of collecting, screening and coordinating.

An artisan who efficiently assembles a string of pearls, pearl by pearl, has certainly done a laudable job. But to estimate the value of the finished string, its artistic profile, the impression it makes — that is the privilege of the art connoisseur, and for performing it he need not, nay should not, be a jeweler-craftsman!

Military history is of course only a small specialized field of general history. It holds its place alongside the history of civilization, of morals, of economics, of religion, and so forth.

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The specialist who sees only his own subject, can never recognize or evaluate the whole, the essential. He will always remain but a respected worker in a special field. Likewise the officer who comprehends only his professional subject, and sees in history only the military element, remains an assiduous, respectable scholar -- but as blind as a bat, an honest professional plodder!

In times of high cultural standing the "general" was conceived as a contrast to the "special." "General" in the proper sense of the word does not imply merely a superior rank, but that its holder represents an intellectual independence of the special. He was to be promoted to "general" only if he possessed the quality to command impartially all military branches. Though he may have been an infantryman for thirty years, with the acquisition of the rank of "general" he was expected to discard not only his infantry uniform, but also the infantry view point, and have an eye only for the whole, the universal, the general -- therefore the title of "General"! But he should, in addition, look far beyond his own profession and form a conception of the whole! One must, however, observe that "many are called, but few are the chosen".

In Germany, however, an ill-conceived egalitarianism, a wrong notion of democracy, has turned this axiom into "many consider themselves called, and many of them were chosen." Our old army before 1918 was much more modest in this respect. To be promoted to General at that time was something tremendous. That is why there were so few of them. The General Staff too

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was supposed to reach this standard of liberal education, this looking beyond the specific, toward an insight into general problems. In this too, we did not quite succeed. But it should be, nevertheless, acknowledged in honor of that former, much admired, dreaded, hated, General Staff, that it had been much more advanced in its thinking than is generally supposed. This also explains the mistrust in which it was held at Supreme Headquarters. But still, it would have been better to direct staff training and education even more towards the generalities, instead of retaining an emphasis on specialized training.

Everywhere in life there is a great demand for many honest, diligent and respected workers, and for only a few farsighted, liberal spirits who can safely afford to be a bit lazy. He who engages in research on major problems should not burden himself with the drudgery of detail. He will do well to keep himself independent. He may indulge in sports, fishing, yachting, hunting or anything else he pleases if he only keeps on producing original ideas and working on over-all problems! The bricks will then be laid efficiently enough by the brick layers -- not by the creative architect.

Only soldiers of this type will be able to understand the "dual face" of military history!

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CHAPTER II

"What is Truth?"

Pontius Pilate was a man of noble character with a high standard of education. But he was a typical Roman of his sceptical age. Hence his question: "Quid est veritas?" -- What is truth?

It is just so with history! Quid est veritas? History is not a special field. It covers all features of human life. That is why the possibilities of error are so abundant. "History" is frequently manufactured. We know the reasons:

a. The willful patriotism of the nations demands only a history that is pleasing to it. Proud and vain, it wants to reflect itself in the mirror of a national history, and this reflection should be one to please. He who attempts to show also the darker sides of the picture is proclaimed a national enemy, and may even face a more unpleasant fate - in correspondence with the racial temperament of the nation concerned.

b. A policy consciously directed towards certain aims has little use for the impartial historian, who is apt to discover the truth. Policy is a sober business, a safeguarding of the interests of the nation and no frivolous undertaking. Policy changes -- the friend of yesterday may be the enemy of tomorrow. Thus the question arises: "Does the truth serve my interests, or hurt them?" Although the immoral Machiavelli is refuted with indignation, his cold principles are

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widely applied. A statesman may well be a respectable man, a gentleman; in the service of his country, however, he must frequently show his "second face."

Every human being has a "second face," the politician even more so, and consequently history has it too. That is no reason for complaint -- it simply is a fact, and an inevitable one.

For our subject it is important to note that history is essentially influenced by policy. Official history writing that is! The admission of mistakes is not tolerated, in order to hide them from public opinion. Statesmen manufacture history in order to prove that they themselves have acted with justification, but their adversaries without it. In this way their own actions are morally or legally justified and explained. Likewise, national policy decides that nations shall become enemies. These nations as such may hardly feel any enmity towards each other. However, the aims of policy differ, and therefore "historical enmities" suddenly arise.

Historical slogans are coined: "Our hereditary enemy is France!" and in France: "Our hereditary enemy is Germany."

In the perspective of history, the French have also fought England bitterly for several centuries. There were many differences between these two states, but nobody spoke of the "hereditary" enemy. As a matter of fact there is no instinctive hatred between the French and German peoples. It was merely fostered for nearly 300 years from both

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sides in an ever-changing game, in order to meet the aims of the current policies. This is the way that entirely wrong conceptions of history are created! The historiographer is not aware of this, but a real historian should be. Policy simply lets inconvenient documents or records disappear, they are suddenly missing. We even find incorrect, that is intentionally faked, documents. We know pre-dated or post-dated documents -- documents and records that have been made after the events! We know much, that clearly shows, with what strange bricks the structure of history is built. The more domineering, the more authoritarian a regime is, the more it acts in this way. However, things in non-authoritarian states are hardly different. But here they are balanced by liberal personalities, who cannot be silenced and who by their criticism from the outside throw light into the historical jungle - which often proves quite embarrassing. In states governed by a dictatorship things are rather easy - inconvenient history writing is simply prohibited. According to the German laws of 1936-45 everybody who publicised historical facts -- no matter how true -- which were damaging to German honor could be sentenced to penal servitude. But French writing of history textbooks for the elementary schools also clearly revealed anti-German tendencies. Impartial historians could contribute a lot towards eliminating these mutual untruths and burying this legend of the "hereditary enemy," in view of the much graver dangers which may well threaten both nations. Quid est veritas?

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c. Especially in monarchies, but also in republics, prestige holds a prominent place. The aristocratic old Moltke once, after 1871, said that prestige was sacrosanct. A very noble idea -- but dangerous. Great men too were human beings and make mistakes. It is by their mistakes that they become really familiar to us. They would not have gained our sympathy, had they been unfailing ideal heroes, for in that case they would not have been human.

d. Fear all too frequently dictates "history." Many are afraid to tell the truth, for egoistical or ideological reasons. They fear criticism, the publication of the less agreeable aspects of historical events. That gives origin to distortions that are remote from actual truth.

These brief indications alone should reveal on what unstable grounds even general history is founded.

e. Add to this the ridiculous! High policies, and their serious, all-important problems, can be decisively influenced by a good dinner, an ailing stomach, a beautiful woman, personal flattery, a good mood or a bad temper. The entire fate of nations may depend on imponderables of this sort. The Congress of Vienna amused itself by dancing, and took a correspondingly pleasant course in its politics. The Congress of Berlin in 1878 did not dance and did not indulge in amusement -- and everybody left unsatisfied! If people today were to reveal more of their human nature in personal associations and were to meet in a gayer atmosphere, agreement would be reached far more easily. The gentle art of helping

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along the settlement of differences by creating a congenial atmosphere seems to have been lost in the Twentieth Century.

Motions of all sorts, play an important part with all those who are making history, but the historian whose job it is to interpret this history must keep aloof of them!

f. Documents are largely dead wood! Their legal value is rather dubious, and their historical even more so. He, who concentrates his research only on documents, will find no truth, and will compose only legends. How do documents originate? Out of what reasons? Why? What were the preceding telephone calls, the discussions which led to their formulation? Where are the innumerable suggestions, the voices from the front, which have influenced the document? The document remains silent on all these points, remains only a dead part of the actual event. A hundred years ago, there were but few documents, for they had to be written by hand. Today we are smothered by papers. Telephones, teletypes, radio, mimeograph and multigraph, all simply spit their orders and documents in a gay sequence of ad lib copies out of the communications machines, as in the printing room of a modern newspaper! "Quid est veritas" in view of these tons of paper? Amid this confusion, who will notice, if inconvenient documents get "lost" or are being destroyed "on orders" to prevent them from falling into the hands of the enemy? Other papers are simply removed later, if no longer needed. Still others are composed on after thought, and pre-dated. All this for the record of "history."

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CHAPTER III

Great Men

1. Biography

Biography is another historical field that betrays the "dual" aspect already described. Great men in historical perspective are statues that slowly revolve upon their pedestals. Every century forms a different conception of them, once white, then black, in accordance with the spirit and ideals of the age, and in accordance with the propagandistic aims of a certain state ideology and its realistic purposes. It is everywhere the same. Here are just a few examples:

a. Alexander the Great is much admired, — his spirit, his daring, his great plans, the incarnation of Hellenism on Asiatic soil. The impartial historian, however, in spite of all praise, will have to concede that this great man was reaching out for the unattainable, that he had lost the proper yardstick for space, time, and human powers, and all due sense of proportion. He will have to admit that Alexander more and more became a semi-Asiatic, and gradually lost his liberal Greek spirit in assimilating the forms of Asiatic despotism. He aimed at achieving everything in youth and thereby forgot the "harmony" professed by his teacher Aristotle.

b. Caesar is the monumental politician and statesman, and the Great Captain as well. But the historian will have to record first,

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that he was unscrupulous - perhaps had to be -, and second, that he too, the sober Roman, lost sight - maybe intentionally - of the proper limits and proportions.

c. Christ, from the Christian point of view needs no interpretation. If true Christianity instead of the empty shells still survived, such would be better in this world of ours. As a historian, however, one has to attempt to understand objectively the struggle of Rome against the Christians. These early Christians were non-political, idealistic communists of a spiritual pattern. Imperial Rome on the other hand was an oligarchy, where besides the Emperor all power rested with a handful of men. In religious matters Rome was very liberal and broadminded toward all subjugated nations. All religions had their temples and their priests in the Eternal City, and none was persecuted - save only the young Christian religion.

The deeper reasons are obvious. Christianity in its original form touched at the very roots of the Roman state. A religion that stood for the poor against the rich had to be considered an interior danger for a state which already had enough social troubles with its Roman proletariat, its impoverished, landless farmers, the restless demobilized legionaries, and the masses of the slaves. Only Christianity introduced a new gospel to these masses, as did none of the other religions, not even the Jewish. Therefore Rome tried to extinguish this movement. Lacking machine guns, the Romans threw the Christians into the arenas -- combining state

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necessity with diversion for the peoples' minds, as so impressively featured in the historical novel Quo Vadis -- written, it should be noted, by a man who was not a historian.

d. The Roman Emperors stand out sometimes as inhuman monsters, and sometimes as gentle, "good" Emperors. Some of them are favorite subjects of condemnation, like Caligula, Nero, and Domitian, others like Marcus Aurelius, Antoninus Pius, Hadrian, and Vespasian are considered as arch-types of good rulers.

Constantine, since the Church owes his much, is viewed as a Christian. From the historical point of view he was a ruthless tyrant! The Roman Imperial Court had its own court historians, who had to glorify their employers. But there were also political parties, and opposition on Palatine Hill. The opposition party -- as long as it continued to exist -- had its own historians, and these wrote history from the opposition point of view. That, indeed, is truth? All these historical portraits of the emperors are rather dubious.

e. Likewise oscillating are the portraits of the great Medieval Emperors, the criticism of their aims, their policies. Constantly new historians come up who present always new aspects of these great men.

f. Charlemagne, viewed from one angle, is the horrible brute who butchered several thousand Saxon hostages at Verdun on the Alier, because these wicked pagans refused to accept the Christian faith.

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and the same Emperor ordered the Bavarian Duke Tassilo to be blinded, because of his secessionist conspiracies. On the other hand, we are taught that this great Emperor had an idea of European unification, and almost succeeded in merging the two most powerful nations of his time, the Fracconians (French) and the Saxons (Germans) into one empire.

g. Luther, on the one hand, naturally stands out as the spiritual and religious liberator from Roman Catholic tyranny. On the other hand, however, as the father of the unfortunate division of the Germans in two religious camps.

h. Charles V, according to one version, is the Emperor under Spanish influence, ally to the Germans, the unrepentable, double-dealing autocrat. But according to the other, a man who by negotiations and good offices incessantly strove for a resolving of the spiritual confusions of his time.

i. The Thirty Years War: Tilly is the hero without fail or reproach for the Catholic side, whereas the Protestants condemn him as a murderer and the incendiary who burned Magdeburg.

Gustavus Adolphus in the opinion of the German Protestants is the saviour, in Catholic opinion, however, the destroyer of Germany.

Wallenstein finally, is considered a traitor by one party, and by the other a faralighted man seeking unification of the Germans and the Czechs.

k. Louis XIV for some people is only a spend-thrift libertine, wasting the resources of his nation, for others the great ruler, leading

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France to the summit of world power.

l. Frederic the Great to some is the world's most outstanding hero and spiritual leader, to others just Frederic II, who started the aggressive First Silesian War without provocation, and who conducted his policies with all the trappings of falsehood and intrigue, until, at the end of his days, his suppressed country was relieved by the death of a disillusioned tyrant!

m. Napoleon is a particularly striking example! Until 1815 the world trembled and was terribly afraid of him. After 1815 -- when he was safely on the island of St. Helena -- it boldly called him "butcherer" and "American-ise." But then, about 1849, a quiet historian appeared with a book which presented this monster in an entirely new light. He was now completely whitewashed and became one of the very great, a man with a vision far in advance of his times. His remains were suddenly transferred to Paris, and buried in the Dome of the Invalids, amidst banners and trophies and the graves of the famous marshals of France. One more speedy transformation, and this very "devil" became a national hero of international stature. The Napoleonic legend, his worship had begun! *quid est veritas?*

n. Bismarck in one presentation is the powerful, brutal man of the iron will, not shrinking from any political expedient -- the forger of the Ems telegram that started the war of 1870, the man who played one power against another and who preferred to be portrayed in his Curassier's uniform. The other opinion holds him an extraordinarily

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considerate man, a political genius who in 1864, 1866, and 1871, after his great victories, displayed great moderation towards the vanquished; the man who brought unification to Germany, which is the right of every nation, and a man who simultaneously knew the limits of German power.

This survey could be endlessly extended - the "dual face" emerges everywhere. Our modern times, the Twentieth Century with its cruel repercussions of 1914-18 and 1939-45, its events, problems, and passions, will certainly appear in a very different light to the people of the year 2000.

All this merely shows how narrow and limited is the human faculty of seeing things in a big way, and how strong, how almost animalic, are the emotions and hatreds that influence the picture. Education, however progressive, has unfortunately proved powerless to alter anything in regard to this primitive, archaic state of affairs. Only time, which is more powerful than man, can change this, and with few exceptions understanding can be achieved and fair judgments passed only by the more distant generations of the future. But this also shows how important it is to record the truth concerning our own time, in order to prevent historical untruths from passing on from generation to generation.

The Great American, Henry Adams, is supposed to have once said: "I have written too much history, to still believe in it. If you are able to raise doubts there, where other people have no inclination for doubting -- then you are really on the road to progress".

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2. The Historical Novel

It is quite obvious that the masses will never be able to understand history in our sense of the word. They lack time and interest, and are also lacking in the necessary prerequisites. For popularizing history, we need the historical novel, the historical play and the historical film. There are very good, and even correct historical novels. They should be welcomed, for they are the only means of familiarizing a broad public with history.

There are, however, also lots of low-quality propaganda novels, of the worst type, which are poison for the naive minds of the masses. They are apt to foster that hatred towards other nations which then comes to the surface in wars. They are to a great extent responsible for the lack of international understanding. International understanding can never be achieved by sentimental nonsense of dubious taste.

The historical play is an even more questionable means of expression, and the historical film the most dubious of them all!

Both must compress complicated historical ideas and movements into a couple of hours. Many historical personalities are misrepresented - often intentionally. Any educated person can feel how imperfect and unsatisfactory this is. But the impression on the uncritical masses is great, because their eyes witness the scenes, their ears hear the speeches of "historical" characters, and because the masses in the theater and movies infect each other by a certain crowd psychology.

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It is not by accident that propaganda and unscrupulous policies make use of such effective but unhistoric media. Whole nations may be infected, may be roused to start wars and to increase the fanaticism of the fight, if fed upon "manufactured" history of this type.

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The best critical works on military history were therefore those by civilians or by retired former officers, who were in a position for writing and judging more independently.

In studying military history one should constantly remind oneself of these facts.

2. The Origin of Military History

The examples cited below are intentionally taken, for the most part, from German war history. However, in order to dispel the erroneous assumption that historical misrepresentations of this sort were a specialty of the Germans, I should like to state expressly that the same holds true also for our adversaries or for wars between other nations. An understanding officer, or historian, who may be reading these lines, will probably remark: "Exactly as with us."

Many examples are known with regard to the other side, but shall intentionally not be mentioned, or mentioned only very discretely. We shall dwell only upon modern times, since the material here is more complete, and upon the most recent times (1914-18 and 1939-45), because here it is enlivened by personal experience.

The War of 1866: Austria-Hungary fought in the south against Italy, in the north against Prussia. In the south Archduke Charles, the victor of Sustozza was in command. The enemy in the north was the military superior. The Imperial court in Vienna forced the bourgeois Marshal Benedek to take the command, which he accepted only out of obedience. When completely defeated within 24 hours at

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Sadow, he naturally fell out of grace -- a scapegoat for many mistakes which were not his responsibility. He had to give his word of honor to remain silent, and did this best loyally. Only his chivalrous adversary Moltke saved his honor to some extent by publishing a small pamphlet. Such things still happened in those times. The "history" of Sadow was mere camouflage!

b. 1670: On 13 August 1870 the battle of Gravelotte-St. Privat, glorified in all German patriotic popular histories, was fought.

In the evening of 17 August, the commander of the First Army, von Steinmetz, had once more requested detailed instructions on the way he and his army should outflank the French position from the south on 18 August. The information supplied by General von Moltke was vague in the extreme. For the real reason one has to go back to 1866. No love was lost between those two men. After the battle Steinmetz was relieved of his command for his "inability to follow the suggestions of General Headquarters".

In the evening of 18 August, the very tired Prussian corps arrived on the battlefield. The situation on the southern flank ceased threatening, since news of the great victory in the north, at St. Privat, had not yet arrived. Night had already set in, and old King William I grew restless and was in a bad temper. In this situation of nervous tension, the 5th Cavalry Division was thrown forward into the unknown, over a single bridge across the deep Wance Ravine, one regiment after another. They received fire, and a panic resulted. All this was observed by the King! At this moment

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the advance guard of the II. Corps arrived. The King ordered its immediate commitment. The more composed Moltke advised the King against this order and suggested that the corps should rest, and be employed only on the morning of 19 August, when it was rested and reorganized. The suggestion was very ungraciously received. Witnesses report that upon this, Moltke's staff cautiously withdrew from him. Moltke was isolated! The corps was thrown into battle - and failed to improve the situation. At midnight came the relieving report of the victory of the Saxons and the Guards Corps at St.Privat.

After the war Moltke, in his first General Staff treatise, mentioned this incident with the famous sentence: "The Chief of the General Staff would have done better to advise against the employment of the II. Corps!" He had done exactly this, but the prestige of the king dictated this sentence to the pen of Count Moltke. Very noble - but contrary to history!

The victorious war of 1870/71 was full of tactical mistakes and serious shortcomings due to obsolete combat methods. But for a long time nothing was heard about it -- prestige should not be injured. Only after most of the veterans were dead was the truth slowly revealed, and criticism offered, still cautiously, but nevertheless a beginning.

During the years 1871-1914 historical writing on the wars of 1866 and 1870-71 was perceptibly characterized by caution. Outsiders were not at all welcome.

c. The First World War 1914-18 shows how orders often originate,

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and how misleading dead documents can be.

There exist copies of orders to the troops which imply situations that never existed. They were designed to forego the risks of a possible failure of an operation! Others were drawn up in order to force the higher command to send more reserves. There were orders for attack, of which one knew, that they would not be carried out - made only for the war diary, that is, for history.

Orders were sometimes issued only for putting the next higher headquarters at ease.

Orders might be sent to Division X, to attack "vigorously," since the adjoining Division Y had already covered much ground and had taken the places A - C. In fact Division Y was still in firing position just in front of towns A - C. The order was merely meant to be a spur.

Reports are almost invariably somewhat edited, for many reasons. One word, or a sentence may have a too unfriendly flavor; and is consequently softened. There is a special prejudice or characteristic of the commander which, of course, is duly considered. Perhaps a division, a corps, and an army want something quite definite, consequently it edits the reports to suit this purpose.

d. 1939-1945: All the features mentioned above are repeated during World War II, but in addition a number of new, hitherto unknown words and sentences creep in, such as "by all means," "ruthlessly," "destroy," "annihilate," "cling fast to the ground," "to the last man," "no inch of ground" and others. Wherever they appear the documents are suspect,

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For those were just empty words!

An amelioration of written orders, usually by telephone was frequent. In order to explain or to soften harsh orders, it had, since approximately 1941, become the fashion, indirectly to recall an order, after it had been forwarded, or to soften it. One said in such cases: "You will soon receive an order, which you should interpret according to its meaning. I hope I am correctly understood?"

Answer: "Yes sir, I know what you meant!"

When early in 1943, it became the rule that nobody could abandon a position except on orders or if "thrown back in combat," the most dramatic-sounding orders came into fashion. But one could still assist the troops in retreating, by saying: "The orders are only to resist to the last cartridge, but not to the last man". This too was well understood by reasonable superiors or subordinates. Or one phoned to a troop commander: "Do we correctly understand that, after heroic resistance, you were forced back into your present line of A - B - C?" Such veiled suggestions were very quickly understood by the troops from 1943 on.

The reports to the higher commands had of course to be framed correspondingly. For instance: "30th Division, attacked by far superior enemy forces with tanks and from the air, was forced back to positions A - B - C with heavy casualties in spite of immediate counterattacks. Countermeasures are on the way."

As a matter of fact the fighting was not as bitter as all that, and the division had simply withdrawn, because it seemed the sensible thing

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to do. Only in this way was it possible to render assistance to the troops under the given conditions.

These few examples prove how very problematic all documents are if not interpreted by people who were witnesses of the events in question. This then, is what we mean by the "dual face" of war history.

e. The other side:

In the whole, conditions among our enemies were similar to our own in both wars. An exception perhaps was the expedients which we were forced to adopt since 1943 for softening orders.

In 1918 a front of the Allies had been pierced by our forces. Reinforcements from another of the Allies arrived to close the gap. Their general who preceded his troops, drew a line on the map, from which the counterattack was to be started. This line, however, had for some time been in German hands. Upon questioning by officers of the other Ally, the general replied that he was taking account of the historical record!

In one of my other studies, mention has been made of the reports of one of the Allied commanders to his parliament, for his own special purposes, and what "measures" were taken in this respect.

Among our enemies also, documents were destroyed or pre-dated, and orders issued dealing with situations that never existed.

We have naturally no examples with regard to the period 1939 - 1945. But if everything that was recorded then was historically true, it would be for the first time.

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CHAPTER VThe Way Out

There seems to be no solution to the problem of historical accuracy. One can only make a reasonable approach to probability.

1. Qualifications of the critical military historian

This is a difficult and demanding task. It should be attempted only by people who are serious about it, and filled with a sense of responsibility.

People who have experienced, felt, witnessed these things, and who know how all that can happen;

People with the courage to call white things white and black, black;

People ready to admit their own mistakes frankly, without just trying to pass the buck to those above them, or even to those below;

People who are able to survey the whole, the universal, the interdependence of many factors, and not just a special sector;

People who are free from prejudices or even personal bias;

People who know that even the greatest of men still remain human beings, and we lesser fellows even more so, and that nobody loses any credit by admitting mistakes that he committed;

People who know that even experts in their special fields are still capable of committing mistakes;

People, prepared to do justice to the enemy, and to willingly admit his superiority in efficiency or intellectual attainments in many fields;

People who notwithstanding their respect for traditions, do not

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hesitate to state clearly when these traditions have led to mistakes.

2. Duties of the military historian

A creative military historian, then, must be a brilliant and forceful person of unusual integrity. He is not concerned merely with errors of detail, but with dangerous fallacies that can distort the policies of nations.

A fake war history is an insult to the former enemy, in considering him so stupid, as not to recognize the falsifications.

A fake war history may, moreover have serious consequences in producing an unjustified complacency, which has quite often backfired in the past.

A fake war history may lead to wrong conclusions, which can harm a nation instead of proving a help.

A fake war history may start a nation and an army on the wrong track, with incalculable consequences.

People may be divided by temperament into two classes:

a. We know people who have made it their supreme rule to remain silent, not to write anything as far as possible, and above all not to sign anything! --

"Si tacuisses, philosophus mansisses". --

Or the German proverb: "Talk is silver, silence is golden."

All these silent men have been respected or feared, because they were enigmas.

He who is familiar with the ways of life, knows that this class of people is certainly playing it safe. They leave no trail of documents, diaries, letters, notes, or signatures behind them. They keep silent in conferences.

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There are no shorthand recordings of their utterances, and witnesses look in vain for any material about them.

Undoubtedly a safe and practical philosophy, but they are hardly fighters for an idea, for a thesis!

b. Others feel urged to record on paper what they think, because they wish to assist in developments. They know that this may cause them inconvenience, especially if they are frank. Not write they must, they feel the urge.

If all people were to remain silent and no one would take to writing the fellowship of man would merely consist of mutual watchfulness and mistrust. There would also be no discussions, no confessions, no assisting one other -- no searching for truth.

Silence is usually considered as something particularly noble and enigmatic.

But I believe that there are already enough enigmas and no special necessity for increasing their number.

Courage is certainly not required for maintaining silence and never writing, but very much so for the opposite.

The "equal face" of history, and of war history in particular, provides us with an idea how difficult it is to reconstruct the events with even a certain degree of probability. That is why we need archivists and professional historiographers on the one hand, to record the facts of military history by diligent preparatory work.

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but we also need creative historians who can look beyond the bare facts and grasp their significance, who use factual data as basis for original ideas, and who attempt to recognize the shape of things to come.

/s/ Guebler Blumenritt