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CMH Editors’ Introduction: Richard Gilchrist Glover (1909-1985), one of Canada’s first university military historians, became director of the Human History Branch of the National Museum of Canada, forerunner of today’s Canadian Museum of History, for a brief but important period in 1964 to 1967. The first historian to head the branch, which until his appointment had focussed on archaeology and ethnology, he established the History Division. He also integrated into the branch the Canadian War Museum, hitherto a separate institution that mainly displayed artifacts of the two world wars, and oversaw the expansion of its exhibits to tell the history of Canada from its colonial origins to the present through its military experience.

The present article, which originally appeared in The Journal of the History of Ideas (18, no. 1, January 1957) 84-100), is reproduced with the kind permission of the University of Pennsylvania Press. The piece is something of an intellectual autobiography, even though there is no direct reference to the author’s life experiences. Here he makes an appeal for the integration of military history into “general history,” as did several pioneering academic military historians of the 1940s–1960s, and he specifically highlights the need for scholars to acquire technical knowledge of military operations. Only in this way, he argues by reference to shortcomings in leading studies of the Seven Years’ War, French Revolutionary wars and other more ancient conflicts, can historians explain the course and outcome of military events that fundamentally altered the fate of nations.

Glover, who had studied British and European history as an undergraduate at Oxford University in his native England, had then done a PhD thesis at Harvard, in 1933–1936, on the British Army during the
French Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars. Unable to obtain university employment in the midst of the Great Depression, he came to Canada in the latter year as a teacher at Trinity College School in Port Hope, Ontario. He joined the militia in the fall of 1940, and in 1941 was called up for active service. After infantry training he went overseas to England in 1942 as a reinforcement officer for the Stormont, Dundas and Glengarry Highlanders. He received further training as an intelligence officer, and was ultimately assigned to the headquarters of First Canadian Army. He crossed to Normandy with the army headquarters in July 1944, and served throughout the campaign in North-West Europe. Glover thus worked in the heart of a senior headquarters responsible for coordinating all aspects of operations during one of the greatest land campaigns in modern Western history.

In 1946 he obtained a position in the history department at the University of Manitoba. He soon started to revise and expand his thesis, partly on the basis of the operational analysis set forth in the present article, which, as he explained to friends, grew out of his wartime service. The process of revision grew longer when he did not obtain the sort of major grant that would free him of teaching for an extended period, and as he found important opportunities to publish in Canadian history. The present article records the development of his thinking on his major military history study, which he completed six years later: Peninsular Preparation: The Reform of the British Army 1795–1809 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1963). The dedication of the book reads

TO THE MEMORY OF
MY FRIENDS OF ALL RANKS IN THE
STORMONT, DUNDAS AND GLENGARRY HIGHLANDERS,
OF THE NINTH (HIGHLAND) BRIGADE
THIRD CANADIAN INFANTRY DIVISION,
WHO ARE BURIED IN NORTH-WEST EUROPE

SOLDIERS HAVE LONG known their need to study history, but unfortunately few historians seem to pay equal attention to the art of war. Good historians are so frequently at their weakest when they deal with military affairs. Not that they are often guilty of crude errors of fact; such plain statements of military fact as an author may make are perhaps not usually any less accurate than those he makes on other subjects. But the mere ascertaining and statement of fact is not all; the historian has more to do than simply count the casualties left strewn upon a lost field or fix the date of the opening of a siege.
He must evaluate his facts, selecting the important and discarding the trivial; he must likewise interpret his facts and form some judgment on men's handling of their affairs; he should also look beneath the surface, and mark the preparation of events, as well as their mere happening. These are tasks as necessary in military history as in any other branch of our subject, but here a conventional historical education leaves men poorly equipped to perform them. Though most graduate schools of history require their students to have some training in other cognate fields, like Economics and Political Science, the study of war is normally treated as an irrelevance in the training of the historian.

Yet its omission is surely an extraordinary one. The amount of energy mankind has devoted to fighting has been vast, and there are many periods in history of which belligerence seems the most conspicuous characteristic. "During the whole course of the seventeenth century there were only seven complete calendar years in which there was no war between European states" the Oxford scholar, G.N. Clark, has computed.1 Small wonder that life in such a stormy epoch convinced Thomas Hobbes that the very nature of man was war, or that Clark himself should conclude that war was then "as much a normal state of European life as peace." Nor, to give another example, was the next century very much more pacific. Including in my reckoning the years 1726 and 1755, when actual hostilities preceded formal declarations of war, my calculations give the European states in the eighteenth century just twenty-three full years of international peace.2

All this martial activity has been potent in history. The wars men have fought have made empires for some nations, broken the greatness of others and squandered the wealth and the manpower of all. On any broad view war occupies a very large part of the historian's field, and it is much too big a subject to be left to the military historian.

1 But, he continues, if we are to count Russia and Turkey as European powers, this number must be reduced by three. G.N. Clark, The Seventeenth Century (Oxford: Greenwood Press, 1929), 98.
2 Between the Treaty of Nystadt, 1721, and Admiral Hosier's blockade of Portabello, 1726, four full years of peace; from 1727 to 1733, five full years of peace; from 1748 to 1755, six full years of peace; from 1765 to the Russo-Turkish war of 1768, four years; from the treaty of Kutchuk-Kainardji, 1774, to France's declaration against England in 1778, three full years of European peace; the general peace of 1783 is broken by Sweden's war against Russia in 1785.
In fact, a great deal is written on warfare by academic men who have no special military training, yet cannot escape dealing with it. But it is not an easy topic. There is much more to war than mere wasteful slaughter. It is also an art, with its own rules and its own techniques; and no art is to be mastered without study. Therefore, since historians rarely study this one, it is hardly surprising that they often see military affairs in a very distorted focus which does great damage to their interpretation of history.

The nature of some of their errors, and the facility with which they are made, may appear from the following study of some military problems over which scholars of established reputation would seem to have gone astray. My discussion will be confined to war on land, and I shall have little to say of the so-called “Principles of War,” for on them there is little to be said; as Field Marshal Earl Wavell has soundly stated, they “can be apprehended in a very short time by any reasonable intelligence.”\(^3\) “It is,” he continues, “knowledge of the mechanics of war ..., that distinguishes a good leader from a bad”\(^4\) and this is also the knowledge which separates the sheep from the goats among historians who write of war.

One military problem confronting the historian is the difficulty of understanding tactics and tactical doctrine. These are things that require to be understood. If one is to understand how a single day’s fighting at Zama in 204 B.C. ended a 20-year long struggle and left Rome without an effective competitor for the control of the Mediterranean world, how Naseby broke the menace of royal absolutism in England for a generation, or how the Battle of the Nations around Leipzig secured deliverance for the best part of a continent, one must understand how those engagements were fought and won. Tactical doctrine is the basis of a commander’s conduct of a battle; to an historian, who knows nothing of it, the great actions, where questions critical for mankind were decided, can be scarcely more comprehensible than the mysteries of a chess game to the novice who cannot tell a rook’s move from a bishop’s.

The clue to understanding tactical doctrine is provided by a wise civilian who was also a very great historian of war upon the sea. “All systems of tactics,” writes Sir Julian Corbett, “must ultimately rest

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on the dominant weapon in use.” In every age it is the soldier’s task to study his “dominant weapon” and seek that system of employing it which at once makes best use of its strong qualities and most successfully mitigates the effects of its weak qualities. Troops will then be trained in the system of tactics evolved from this study. The historian, who would understand the warfare of his period, has to follow the soldier and begin by studying the weapons of that period and the system of tactics they dictated.

The point that tactical doctrine is the basis of training is important. It imposes an immediate limitation on what a commander can do; he can successfully attempt only those manoeuvres which his troops have been taught to perform with adequate competence, and there are many things that may prevent them from being adequately trained. Want of time is one, for good training requires much time. Want of discipline is another, and discipline in turn is affected by a variety of factors such as the general stability of the government employing the troops, or the regularity of the men’s pay; or again (a new danger of modern times) the efficiency of troops may be damaged by the amount of comfort and sheer, debilitating luxury masquerading as “welfare” which statesmen may think it a political necessity to inflict upon their armies. The commander who is handicapped by any of these weaknesses is not necessarily to be held responsible for the flaw in the tool that failed him.

When the historian has examined all these things, he may still find himself confronted with apparent tactical enigmas. Plenty of instances may be found of commanders failing to do things which their men’s training enabled them to perform and which their weapons, and the general situation, seemed imperiously to dictate. On such occasions it is easy for armchair critics to utter severe pronouncements on the innate stupidity of soldiers. It is wiser to pause before doing so. The aeronautical engineer is trained for, and continuously practices, his


6 On this rather disturbing subject, see Ralph Ingersoll’s thought-provoking remarks, *Battle Is the Payoff* (New York: Popular Library, 1943), 212–217; also Field Marshal Earl Wavell’s pointed comment on a saying of his great opponent: “a dictum of Rommel’s on which it is worthwhile to ponder in these days when lines of communication are loaded with cinemas, concert parties, canteens and so forth is this: ‘the best form of welfare for the troops is a superlative state of training for this saves unnecessary casualties’” (Wavell, *Soldiers and Soldiering*, 77). The point is one to which any student of contemporary war should pay close attention.
profession of designing and building aircraft. But, for all his continuous experience, he never starts to produce a new aircraft directly from his first design; always a prototype must be made and flown first; and almost always the trial of the prototype shows flaws that must be corrected before the new machine is produced in quantity. Merciful interludes of peace deprive the soldier of similar opportunity for the continuous practice of his calling, but he equally needs to correct his systems of tactics by a process of trial and error. Only the event of war offers him a real opportunity for such trial. In periods of peace much is inevitably forgotten as promotion, death or retirement remove experienced men from the ranks and leave only the inexperienced to replace them. The skill or efficiency of any army or any commander cannot therefore be fairly judged without some reference to their battle experience; as examples, one may cite the inexperience Field Marshal Lord Gort observed in British regular battalions sent, after twenty years of peace, to occupy positions in advance of the Maginot Line; or, after 43 years of peace, the unenterprising ineptness of the German cavalry in 1914, as seen through the eyes of an opponent who was also a veteran of the South African War. Likewise, tactics well suited to use of a particular weapon in one set of conditions may fail in another and strange set of conditions, and a good soldier may be led to ruin by conscientiously following the best established practice of his age.

General Edward Braddock’s famous disaster of 1755 offers perhaps as convenient an illustration as any of how these guiding rules of judgment need to be applied to a tactical problem. Everyone knows how that dauntless and luckless officer lost his life, and won immortal ridicule, in the attempt to make troops fight in a regular three-deep line, firing volleys by platoons, in the bush beside the Monongahela. Yet the fact that this method was under normal conditions the sole effective way to use that age’s “dominant weapon,” the smooth-bored, muzzle-loading, slow-firing and dubiously accurate musket then carried by the infantry of all regular armies, was one clear lesson soldiers had learnt from the conflicts of half a century and more.

7 On British troops before the Maginot Line in the winter of 1939–40, Gort wrote, on 23 April, 1940, “The British Army contains today very few regimental officers and other ranks who fought in the last war; much, that was common knowledge and accepted practice then, must therefore be learnt again.” Supplement to the London Gazette, 17 October 1941, 5902. On the German cavalry in 1914, see Sir Hubert Gough, The Fifth Army (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1931), 21.
Braddock was simply following conscientiously the best established practice of his age, and in fact there was no other fashion of fighting which he could have used. The close order drill he endeavoured to employ was the only one known to his troops or taught in Britain. Continental powers, indeed, had learnt that this drill was ill-suited to close country, and had found the essential arm for bush warfare in light infantry, whose dispersed drill in extended order required a much higher standard of training. But there were no such troops for Braddock. In 1755 Britain did not possess a single regular battalion trained in light infantry duties.

There are also the matters of Braddock’s own training and experience. Justice requires the historian to ask what preparation the man had undergone before being sent on a campaign in close country, such as has lately been found, from Malaya and Guadalcanal to the Normandy bocage, as difficult country as any in which soldiers can be asked to fight. Whoever has the fairness to ask this question will learn that Britain in Braddock’s day had no staff college at which to study war’s varied problems, held no large scale war games in time of peace, and so, from blended parsimony and political short-sightedness, confined the peacetime training of the soldier to the routine of the barrack square. One is not far from the truth in saying that nothing short of active service gave the officer of those days any chance to gain any really practical knowledge of his calling at all. But Braddock had served his apprenticeship to war in the long and deadening years of peace that preceded the Austrian Succession; and it has been definitely stated that he saw no recorded action till, at the mature age of 51, he went on an abortive combined operation against L’Orient in 1746.

8 The uselessness of light infantry who were not properly up to their job is illustrated by Henry Lloyd from actual experience in the Seven Years’ War (Henry Lloyd, History of the Late War in Germany [London, 1782], Part I, 149–150); and the fact that the recruit was not ready to begin his light infantry training till he had perfectly mastered his close order drill is firmly stated, with good reason given, on the first page of official British manual Instructions for Riflemen & Light Infantry (London, 1799). In view of what these authorities say, I find it hard to accept the suggestion that the Virginia militia could have served Braddock in a light infantry role. Of a militia not more, but less training, can be expected than of regulars.

9 In these remarks on Braddock’s career I am much embarrassed by the clash between Professor L.H. Gipson, with whom one hates to differ, and The Dictionary of National Biography which is normally trustworthy. In his Great War for the Empire (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1924), 47, Gipson calls the general “James” Braddock, and states that he commanded the Coldstreams at Dettingen in 1743, took part in Fontency and served
Small wonder, then, if Braddock failed, as any plumber's apprentice might fail when denied both the tools and the training required for the job on which he was sent. It does seem a fair matter for wonder, however, that historians, with all the facilities for research at their command, have so commonly found a sufficient cause for Fort Duquesne's survival in that general's personal shortcomings, have so rarely made allowance for the very real difficulty of his task, and have hardly ever, if ever, recognized the inadequacy of the military system Parliament maintained to prepare either troops or commanders to perform such a task.\(^{10}\)

From tactics one may turn to supply, and remark that in every generation, and whatever difficulties it may involve, a commander's first duty is to ensure that his men are fed. This may indeed seem an almost offensively obvious statement, yet the fact is often blandly ignored. Here one pointed example may suffice. Everyone has read how, in May, 1800, Napoleon crossed the Alps with some 60,000 men to win the battle of Marengo and regain northern Italy. His move has been duly lauded; but in what did its genius consist? Hardly in the mere geographical planning; any intelligent school child with an atlas could pick the Mt. Cenis, St. Gotthard, Simplon and St. Bernard passes as the only routes by which French troops could move in the Scottish Highlands in 1745–56. The *DNB* on the other hand calls him Edward, explicitly declares that he was only the second major in the Coldstreams in 1743, and that the abortive L'Orient raid was his first recorded operation. I have preferred the *DNB* because the author of its article was solely concerned with Braddock, is supported at some points by Fortescue and cites a very impressive list of sources, whereas Gipson is only incidentally concerned with Braddock's biography and cites no sources.

\(^{10}\) Much criticism of Braddock is unworthy of notice. It is, however, disappointing to find a writer of Basil Williams' calibre making repeated jeering reference to the general's supposed stupidity (*The Whig Supremacy 1714-1760* [Oxford: Claredon Press, 1939], 208, 210, 328), even if, in a very interesting article, Stanley Pargellis has shown that Braddock neglected approved principles of European war ("Braddock's Defeat," *American Historical Review* XLI, 253–269); for, thanks to sound reliance on Fortescue, Williams is elsewhere able to summarize pretty well the depressing conditions which went far to prevent British troops and commanders from being equal to tasks like those assigned to Braddock (op. cit., 203–11). It is refreshing to turn to L. Gipson's protest against the "unmeasured censure" heaped on Braddock and to follow his careful study of the campaign and examination of Braddock's decisions; it is likewise interesting to see how often he finds Braddock right (*The Great War for the Empire*, 83–85). But even Gipson does not point out the inability of the financially starved British army to provide light infantry, the essential arm for bush warfare (a point which I think Pargellis undervalues). Nor does Gipson note the valid criticism that Braddock committed the blunder of an overeager amateur, when he led his main body against an unknown enemy without any reconnaissance worthy of the name.
southwards into Italy. The real problem — and it was a tremendous one — was how to get an army over the mountains even at these points. The best route was the Gt. St. Bernard, and five leagues even if it were impassable to wheeled traffic. It took infantry most of a week’s marching to get from the Lake of Geneva and over the pass to Aosta; once there the troops were still enclosed in the long and poor Dora Baltea valley, which produced nothing but hay and wine. Several more days’ marching separated them from any lush countryside where an army could live upon the land. Yet 40,000 men went over that barren route. Every one of them naturally required his accustomed 3,000 calories on each day of the march; every horse and mule too needed its adequate ration of fodder on each day of its journey through this steep and rocky waste. What tonnage of food for man and beast did Napoleon have to carry over the mountain tracks, let alone of the ammunition and medical supplies without which no army could open an offensive? And by what means could he shift so vast a bulk of stores over so obstructive a terrain?

These questions of transport and supply were the biggest problems the French staff had to solve; “votre plus grand travail dans tout ceci sera d’assurer vos subsistances,” as Napoleon put it to Berthier. Once they were properly solved, the passage of the Alps was reduced to little more than a mere matter of marching. The solutions found will explain the sudden blight that fell upon Austria’s most promising reconquest of Italy, and reveal the practical working of the First Consul’s genius. But what were the solutions found? Four standard lives of Napoleon lie before me as I write, one by August Fournier of the University of Vienna, one by Holland Rose, Cambridge’s leading Bonapartist, one by Kircheisen, the German scholar, and, lastly, the most recent life by J.M. Thompson of Oxford. Not one of the

12 J.M. Thompson in *Napoleon Bonaparte; His Rise and Fall* (Oxford: B. Blackwell, 1952), 160 indeed says “at Aosta [the troops] would be in a rich country well suited to the needs of a hungry army.” But a glance at the 1:100,000 map makes it almost impossible to believe that there could be space enough in the Dora Baltea valley for farms capable of raising the amount of produce needed by 40,000 men; and there is Napoleon’s direct statement “la vallée d’Aoste où il n’y a que de foin et de vin.” *Correspondance de Napoleon Ier*, Publiee par l’ordre de Napoleon III, 32 vols. (Paris, 1858–70), VI, 300.
13 *Correspondance de Napoleon Ier*, VI, 231.
four provides an answer to our vital questions. Three indeed retell the familiar story of artillery pieces being dragged in hollowed logs, but none mentions ammunition, without which guns are useless and whose bulk is great. None mentions hospital supplies, the number and species of baggage animals needed, or the movement of fodder. Only Holland Rose shows awareness of the fact that at least the human beings involved would need to eat, and even he tells little. The French soldiers, he says, “carried their full ration of biscuit.” But this is far from being an adequate answer even to the question of how the men were fed. It is a hackneyed saying that man does not live by bread alone, and Rose’s sole hint of protein occurs in the bald statement that at the Hospice of St. Bernard the troops received an issue of “bread, cheese and wine which the First Consul had forwarded.”

But when had he forwarded it? By what means? And under what measures of secrecy? Holland Rose does not say.

So the big questions stand unanswered, and if the historian’s task is indeed what we have stated it to be – namely, to evaluate his facts, to select the important and to discard the trivial – these authors have surely failed. They have all retold much that is trivial, but discarded the vital. Historians have made a cliché of the great Corsican’s quip that “an army marches on its stomach.” Therefore they may fairly be required to remember during their researches those three square meals a day which they themselves demand; to remember, too, that every marching soldier needs the same; that the numbers of armies may equal the populations of considerable towns or cities; but armies, unlike cities, have constantly to be upon the move, and movement requires the means of movement, of hauling the great mass of supplies without which great numbers cannot travel. In the present case the authors we criticize might have marked how intimately Bonaparte concerned himself with every facet of the supply and transport problems. As early as 18 February he had been calculating that 2,000 mules could carry 8 days’ rations for 50,000 men. On 1 March he ordered the collection of 1,500,000 rations of biscuit, 100,000 pints of brandy, 100,000 bales of hay, 2,000,000 rounds of small arms ammunition and 5,000 rounds of artillery

Thompson, op. cit.


16 Ibid.

17 *Correspondance de Napoleon Ier*, VI, 137.
ammunition at Geneva, a park of 1000 bullocks at Bourg and the purchase or requisition of 2,000 mules from throughout France. On 24 April he points to the convenience of the Lake of Geneva's shipping as one of the prime reasons for using the St. Bernard pass, and on the same day he orders stores to be ferried from Geneva to Villeneuve at the south-east end of the lake. On 2 May he orders more supplies to be dumped beyond Villeneuve, at St. Pierre and "un village entre St. Pierre et le pied de Saint Bernard." Hospitals are to be established there also. Later again he is requisitioning another 400 mules from the Swiss and the Valais. All these details, and more, have long been printed in the Correspondance de Napoleon Ier, volume vi; so has Napoleon's statement that in attention to them lay "veritablement le succes de la champagne;" also his assertion that everything depended upon means of transport, lack of which "nous exposeront à mourir de faim dans la vallée d'Aoste." It is not for want of source material that these vital questions of supply and transport have remained unanswered in our standard biographies, nor can anyone accuse Napoleon of failing to stress what he considered important. Nor is it easy to accept the suggestion that these logistical matters belong rather in a monograph on the campaign and would be out of place in a biography of the commander. The function of a great man's biographer is surely to reveal his subject's greatness, which the great man himself pre-eminently shows in his manner of mastering difficulties; and since in this campaign the greatest difficulty lay in perfecting the administrative arrangements needed to make the army's march over the mountains possible, those arrangements surely have a higher claim on the biographer's attention than trivialities like the faults of a famous artist's picture, or even the historical fact that Napoleon slid down certain Alpine slopes "sur le derrière."

Next, another matter may claim attention. In war, as in the ring, the unexpected blow is difficult or impossible to parry; the expected

18 Ibid., 155.
19 Ibid., 230.
20 Ibid., 229.
21 Ibid., 249–250.
22 Ibid., 250.
23 Ibid., 250.
24 Ibid., 250.
25 Kirchelsen, Napoleon, 228; Rose, Life of Napoleon I, 228–229; Thompson, Napoleon Bonaparte, 161.
26 Thompson, Napoleon Bonaparte, 161.
one bares its unskilful deliverer to a devastating counter. Therefore “Surprise” is accepted by all military men as one of the great “principles of war,” a force of rare effectiveness if only it can be achieved. It has hardly ever been more notably achieved than in this campaign of 1800. For that campaign was only made possible at all by surprise. Mastering even so slight an obstacle as some 400 stubborn men in Fort Bard imposed on Napoleon an alarming delay and a degree of embarrassment which he was unable to conceal from even the lowest ranks in his army (“here the Consul took many pinches of snuff and had enough to do with all his genius,” commented one grenadier). Given warning, the Austrian commander should have been readily able to make Fort Bard yet stronger and generally to secure the passes with a degree of strength that should have stifled Napoleon’s Italian campaign before it could begin – as Kircheisen concedes. But, instead, the Allies’ hopes were broken in the disaster of Marengo, after the full achievement of surprise had enabled Napoleon to reach Lombardy in force. That surprise was not due to mere luck, nor can one accept the too commonly offered explanation that Napoleon owed it to the senile inertia of the septuagenarian dotard commanding his opponents. General Melas, the Austrian leader in Italy, may have been over seventy, but that he was a very able man, still young in mind and vigour, seems abundantly clear from his recent record.

The merit of Napoleon’s success in achieving strategic surprise in this campaign is heightened, rather than lessened, by the fact that he gained it over such an opponent as Melas. All his biographers recognize at least the fact that he did achieve surprise; and if, as Polybius so forcefully insisted long ago and many moderns may think too, the purpose of history is to learn how things happen, one might expect them to be at some pains to tell by what means he covered


28 Witness the drive, and powers of leadership, he showed in his march of 16–17 June 1799 when he covered 50 miles in 36 hours, bringing his men through it in sufficiently fit condition to defeat Macdonald’s spoiling attack of the 17th and so to prepare for the allied victory of Trebbia on 18 June, 1799; also his sure tactical eye and independent initiative, by which he turned the battle of Novi from seeming defeat into clear-cut victory; and the soundness and promptness of his strategic decisions which Rose praises in an admirably argued justification of the terms he gained at the Convention of Alessandria (Rose, Life of Napoleon I, 237).

his movements in secrecy and earned the advantages that surprise has to bestow upon the skilful. But here again of our four standard authorities Fournier, Kircheisen and Thompson throw hardly any real light on the problem, and Holland Rose's remarks stop just as they are beginning to be interesting.30

So once more the greatness of the master has been obscured, not revealed, by his biographers. It must indeed be conceded that this question of how Napoleon concealed his intentions, until the day came, when as he put it, “le mouvement sera démasqué,”31 is no easy one to answer. But it is too big a question to be evaded, nor is it impossible to produce at least a partial answer.

In any campaign the business of achieving surprise breaks down into two parts. One is the “cover plan,” or “deception programme,” whose purpose is to mislead the enemy; the other is the security screen designed to prevent the enemy from gaining any information that will enable him to see through the cover plan. In this case Napoleon's cover plan was at least fivefold. The more difficult a task, the less is any man normally expected to attempt it, and now the first part of Napoleon's deception was going through Switzerland to Italy, instead of taking the easier coast route along which the Allies apparently expected aid to come to the beleaguered Massena at Genoa.32 Secondly, this part of his programme was strengthened by his concentration at Dijon, where he threatened Germany far more closely than Italy. Third, the mere name of his “Army of Reserve” at Dijon was deceptive, and so, fourthly, was the device of swamping its concentration area with raw conscripts, who could become effective soldiers only after some months of thorough training. Fifthly, while he himself remained ostentatiously in Paris to the last moment, he gave the Army of Reserve, with perhaps a strong suggestion of favoritism, to Berthier, one of the least distinguished of French senior officers, who had never held an independent command in any campaign, and whose talents were merely administrative.

And there are five strands at least in Napoleon's deception programme. While some of our biographers do note some of them, none

31 Correspondance de Napoleon Ier, VI, 234.
32 Ibid., VI, 282. “Les Anglais font tous les jours quelques petits débarquements sur les côtes de Provence;” these sound like reconnaissance patrols probing for information about help on the way to Massena in Genoa.
relates them all together, or sees them as one coherent plan, and none thinks fit to mention their results. Yet those results were momentous. The Austrians were led to conclude, first, that the Army of Reserve’s prime purpose was to reinforce Moreau in Germany; second, that it could not be ready for service before August; third, that while some French troops might indeed be sent through Switzerland to Lombardy, they would be too few to be feared.33 So Melas confidently proceeded with the most calamitous disposition of his troops in Italy and Napoleon’s path remained open. Equally unmentioned in our biographies and hardly less important is the fact that by 2 May French intelligence had learned of the Austrians’ conclusions, through more than one channel, and Napoleon was informed of them.34

Finally, there is the matter of the immediate cover of secrecy needed to screen Napoleon’s actual movement from Dijon southward over the mountains and the numbers with which he was marching. This is the hardest part of the question, but aside from obvious security devices, like entrusting nothing on paper to messengers who might be captured,35 the most illuminating clue may lie in the timetabling of the joint operations of Moreau’s Army of the Rhine and Napoleon’s “Army of Reserve.” For the First Consul directed Moreau’s general strategy as well as his own.36 Moreau was provided with a 2-to-1 superiority over Kray, his opponent in south Germany, and was ordered to move first with the prime object of intercepting the enemy’s “communication directe avec Milan par le lac de Constance et les Grisons”;37 only when that was done was the “Army of Reserve” to sweep southward into Italy. Despite Moreau’s maddening dilatoriness and ever increasing anxiety for Massena, this timetable was in the main adhered to.38 Clearly it had some important purpose; and the

33 Ibid., VI, 249.
34 Ibid.
35 Ibid., VI, 247, 258.
36 Kircheisen indeed says that, for reasons of tact, Moreau “received permission to open the campaign in Germany between April 10th and 20th” (Napoleon, 226). But the word “permission” is misleading. It is scarcely consistent with the sufficiently explicit directive given Moreau and printed in the Correspondance, VI, 203–204; it ignores the timetable therein laid down and relating the Italian to the German campaign; and it overlooks the repeated urgings and orders bidding Moreau to hurry up (ibid., VI, 217, 227, 229).
37 Correspondance de Napoleon Ier, VI, 204.
38 The dates are as follows: Moreau’s four corps cross the Rhine successively at Kehl and Breisach, on 25 April, at Basle on the 27th, and at Schaffhausen on 1 May. Not till 24 April – 4 days after Moreau was originally ordered to move – is Carnot
likeliest purpose of requiring the enemy's direct communication with Milan to be cut before the "Army of Reserve" set out for Italy would probably be to impose delay on the Austrians in passing to Melas any intelligence received of Napoleon's southward march; for in war late news is commonly as useless as no news. If this interpretation is correct, it is not surprising that Napoleon hailed Moreau's triumph at Stokach with a delight unmarred by any trace of jealousy. Moreau had won him the secrecy he needed to cover his own operation; and, as the event proved, "up to May 21st., Melas was ignorant that his distant rear was being assailed."

This last topic leads on to another that must never be forgotten by anyone who would study wars intelligently — namely, the importance of good communications by which to transmit intelligence or coordinate operations. Oversight here can produce strange criticism. In
his very interesting *Hellenistic Military and Naval Developments* Sir William Tarn refers to the campaign of (probably) 221 B.C. in the Peloponnesus, where Cleomenes III of Sparta opposed the combined forces of the Achaean League and Antigonus Doson of Macedonia. Cleomenes, with a 2-to-3 inferiority of numbers, for long maintained an impenetrably skilful defensive; but finally he found himself unable to pay his mercenaries, who amounted to a full quarter of his total strength. Ignorant that, at last, other enemies of Macedon were moving in a way that must have saved him, he then felt bound to seek a decision before his unpaid soldiers of fortune deserted him; so he risked, and lost, all in the disastrous battle of Sellasia. And here Tarn accuses Cleomenes of forgetting “that the Dardanians on Macedonia’s northern border were always ready to invade that country; so they invaded it a fortnight after he (i.e., Cleomenes) fell when he might so easily have hastened them and so saved himself;” and then Tarn proceeds to draw an unfavourable comparison between the supposedly virile Cleomenes III of Sparta, who had not the wit to seek allies and the supposedly decadent Demetrius II of Syria who had.

But Tarn does not show by what practical means Cleomenes could “so easily have hastened” the Dardanians. He implies that he need only have made an alliance with them in the preceding winter. But even supposing Cleomenes had indeed done this, a mere alliance alone would not have served his purpose. To make sure he would really get the results he needed, he would have to coordinate the Dardanians’ operations rather precisely with his own, and that was always a standard difficulty of allies in times which lacked such aids as telephones, radios, airmail or (in this case, perhaps) even one generally accepted and mutually understood calendar. What Cleomenes required, as he faced Antigonus at Sellasia, was some method by which to make the Dardanians aware that crisis hung over the Peloponnesus and action, to be effective, must come fast, or it might as well come never; or, alternatively, he needed means to hear that they were indeed moving, and that he had only to stand fast

for all to be well. But how was he either to receive or to convey such
information? Hardly any part of Europe lends itself less to the swift
carrying of messages than the Balkans, and almost the full length
of that peninsula lay between Cleomenes and the Dardanians; nearly
the whole route of any messenger he might send by land lay through
territory dominated by the hostile power against whom the message
was directed; likewise any letter sent part way by sea could travel,
like St. Paul on his voyage to Rome, only so fast and directly as the
whim of wind and weather permitted. Whoever takes these facts into
his reckoning is likely to ask what could have been less easy than
hastening a Dardanian invasion of Macedonia.

The fate of Cleomenes offers yet another warning to anyone
who would write of war and soldiers with understanding. If, in this
campaign, the Spartan king had only felt able to remain on the
defensive for but “two days more” (says Plutarch), he need never
have fought and lost, for Antigonus must have withdrawn to deliver
Macedonia from the Dardanians, and the reborn power of Sparta
would have been left, unbroken by defeat, to make its own terms with
the Achaean League. “Thus ever is it the way of Fortune to decide the
most weighty causes against rule and reason,” comments Polybius,43
and Cleomenes’ defeat is indeed a cruelly vivid illustration of the
proverbial “fortunes of war.” It is likewise an opportune reminder
that in war fortune counts. For nowadays this fact seems sometimes
to be too easily forgotten. Economic determinists have perhaps
taught some historians to think too readily of historical events as
the “inevitable consequences” of great and uncontrollable forces. This
way of thinking may have a place in the economist’s gloomy science
of trade cycles and vicious circles, and it certainly offers a seductive
escape from the trouble of unravelling the real causes of events, but
it is still very dangerous to the historian of war. For in the nature of
things no war should be expected to have an inevitable outcome. Few
statesmen are so recklessly obstinate as to commit their nations to
war’s horrors in what is sufficiently obviously a lost cause, and, if the
result of conflict appears plain enough, diplomats generally manage
to reach a solution without the aid of soldiers. Yet there remain
among historians incautious fatalists, like the Oxford scholar, H. W.
C. Davis, who could write of Hastings and the Norman conquest of
England: “on any field, and in an engagement on any scale, nothing

43 Polybius, Histories, II, 70.
short of the most desperate odds could have prevented the superiority of Norman tactics and equipment from having their natural effect.\footnote{H.W.C. Davis, \textit{England Under the Normans and Angevins} (London: Methuen and Co. Ltd., 1905), 4. Sir Frank Stenton expresses a very similar view (\textit{Anglo-Saxon England} [Oxford: The Claredon Press, 1943], 576).}

Elsewhere we have examined this opinion, that by due process of nature England must have fallen to the Normans practically whenever they chose to take it, and were led to the conclusion that it had no military basis, because the Normans had apparently no superiority of either tactics or equipment.\footnote{R. Glover, “English Warfare in 1066,” \textit{English Historical Review} (1952), 1–19.} Here we would remark how strange it was of Davis to leave luck out of his explanation of the Norman conquest. For seldom has any commander been so favored by fortune as was Duke William. To name two points, he had no right to expect an unopposed landing or that he would enjoy ample time for secure consolidation on the coast of England. The delays, that held up his sailing till the English fleet had scattered, and till the Scandinavian attack came to divert the English army to the far north, while he peacefully seized and fortified Pevensey and Hastings, seem purely fortuitous; Davis had no reason to suppose that any superiority the Normans possessed in fighting ashore would have helped them at sea, or would necessarily have availed them much if a land force had caught them in the process of disembarkation. Above all, luck shows its hand in this – that when, in that summer, three rivals for the throne of England put great armies in the field, two out of those three were killed in action within twenty days of each other, to the infinite and obvious advantage of the third, who was left with no one to dispute his succession.\footnote{Harold Hardrada at Stamford Bridge on 25 September and Harold Godwinsson at Hastings on 14 October.} Even in the eleventh century the odds against the death in battle of a commander-in-chief were great, and the overthrow of Saxondom and the establishment of a French-speaking domination over England may conveniently emphasize the duty of the historian who writes of war to look, and allow, for the effects of luck.

Finally, it seems necessary to say that the chessboard, on which the commander of an army moves his pieces, is the earth, and, unlike ordinary chessboards, it has a remarkably variable surface. It offers all the diversity of mountain, plain and fen, of desert, prairie and forest; each presents different problems to the soldier. The movements of an
army also depend, like commercial traffic, on passes, roads, bridges, fords, canals and navigable rivers. Cities may offer welcome supplies and shelter, or may stand as obstacles, which must be mastered before any farther move can be made. Therefore, to understand history one must, when the history is military, have a clear picture of the nature of the problems or aids that the terrain presented to the commander. Accordingly, it would seem incredible that any historian should bring out a whole volume of largely military history without a single map; but that is what Kircheisen did, when he published his life of Napoleon; so also did Thompson, with the remarkable plea added that maps are "of little use unless so numerous and detailed as to overweight a book of this scope." It is depressing to find that hardly any reviewers of either work censured this astonishing omission. Yet how can the student, who is referred to these mapless books, be expected to understand any campaigns described there when he is denied the topographical information that explains them? To what purpose will he read books of which so much must remain incomprehensible to him? And how can a book be "overweighted" by the aids required to make it understandable?

To say, as Thompson does, that a student may turn to an atlas is hardly a sufficient answer to this criticism; and it is also a mistake to suppose that maps illustrating military history must necessarily be "detailed." In explaining the operations of armies, two things need to be made clear, strategy and tactics. For the first, charts representing the broad strategic facts of geography without any elaborate detail, are perhaps the most helpful of aids. Tactics are best explained by battle plans, and these should include no detail that is not tactically relevant to what happened. Irrelevant detail is simply confusing, but the maps in general atlases are inevitably plastered with names that have no connection with any one campaign under study; and their scale is also almost invariably too small to be any help with tactics.

47 Napoleon Bonaparte, His Rise and Fall, vi.
49 As Thompson recognizes, for he refers the reader to Holland Rose’s battle plans. But these are not adequate. Of some major actions Rose gives no plans; of others the scale of his plans is too small; in yet others he suppresses elevations, even when the use of concealed ground on reverse slopes was a decisive factor in the battle.
In the field soldiers themselves prefer to work with maps to the scale of one inch to one mile, or in any case of not less than 1:250,000. The historian would do well to do the same, whenever his research gives him a tactical problem to unravel; and, when possible, the best of all aids to understanding what happened is a walk over the actual ground.

Once he has discovered what the topographical facts actually were, the historian of a campaign has still two questions more to ask. First, how far did the opposing commanders know those facts? Second, what means had they of learning them? For it has often been much harder for the soldier than it now is for the scholar to acquire geographical knowledge. Competent and extensive surveying was an eighteenth-century development, and without such surveying there could be no reliable maps. Yet strategy and tactics both can be no better than the commander's knowledge of the ground permits and he cannot know his ground too well. So it is surely a mark of Carlyle's real historical insight that he should digress to tell the story of Feldmarschall Daun reconnoitering an unfamiliar countryside on the morning of Leuthen and asking a peasant "What is that, then?" as he pointed over a fold of rising ground to a church spire beyond. "That," came the mistaken, but disconcerting, reply, "is the hill our King chases the Austrians over when he is reviewing here." And certainly Frederick's advantage in fighting on terrain where he had rehearsed many battles was great. No doubt he was to win this one with the "attack in echelon," of which everyone has heard, but Leuthen is still more a battle distinguished by the victor's uncommonly skilful use of ground. Last, but not least, the subject of terrain brings us back to the subject of supply. For before the invention of modern means of transport and modern methods of wholesomely preserving food, all armies lived largely off the land in which they were campaigning. Then planning had to take account of the land's capacity to support an army, its resources in hoofed stock to provide beef, pork and mutton, in grain to provide biscuit and in mills to grind it. All in all, then, any discussion of military affairs that ignores geography is unlikely to be valuable.

G.M. Trevelyan has somewhere written "We historians are fallible folk and must be charitable to one another."50 The modesty and sense of this utterance are conspicuous, and, as I bring these

50 England under Queen Anne (New York: Longmans, Green and Co., 1934), III, xii.
remarks to a close, I could wish to feel surer that they did not fall short of the charity he prescribes. Yet, if my criticisms should seem pointed, they are not made without provocation. Anyone, I suspect, who has seen something of the operations of armies at first hand, must have been galled on his return to the teaching of history by the lack of realism and want of understanding which civilian scholars too frequently show when they write of military subjects. So often as one reads them one is reminded of Benedetto Croce's terrible sentence, "Historians are usually professors or other simple-minded people!"51 This essay has examined the handling of military problems by a number of very properly respected authors of standard works - men whom no one could call "simple-minded;" yet they have been found capable of oversights or misunderstandings in the military field which any practical soldier would brand as elementary. That it is not good for historians to be so ill-prepared for their task of writing history seems sufficiently evident. A discussion of the kind of syllabus by which graduate schools might prepare their young men better hardly belongs within the limits of the present paper. Here it may be enough to point to the weakness of any system of training historians which leaves them ignorant of the structure and fabric of war; for war is so large a historical subject that any historian who is not equipped to handle it is severely limited in his range of competence.