

Liddell Hart Unveiled

During the 1930s the defence debate in Britain was dominated by Captain Basil Liddell Hart. The most prolific defence journalist, strategic analyst, and military historian of his day, he exerted great influence not only through his publications but also through private connections with leading politicians, particularly Leslie Hore-Belisha, Secretary of State for War, 1937–40. His support was also sought by leading military figures, but it was less often given, because he had his own agenda to pursue, sometimes in flat contradiction to those of the generals.

Liddell Hart's fervour for improved military strategies and tactics, and ultimately for a more stable international system, was kindled by his experience on the Western Front in 1915–16. Service as a platoon commander made him see the gross demands in human lives made by frontal attacks into a hail of artillery and machine-gun fire. Later, recuperating from the effects of the gassing he received on the Somme in 1916, he became extremely critical of the allied commanders who conceived such expensive tactics and dedicated himself to the development of less obvious operational methods. After the war, as military technology evolved, he saw the potential of the tank and, with others such as Colonel J. F. C. Fuller, advocated the form of mobile warfare which, after further development by the Germans, burst on the world in 1939 as blitzkrieg.

A little over sixty years ago Liddell Hart published *Great Captains Unveiled*, his estimates of outstanding military leaders from Genghis Khan to Wolfe. Recently Professor John Mearsheimer has performed the same function for Liddell Hart, but to rather different effect.¹ No 'great captain' emerges from this volume, rather a devious, manipulative publicist, who was wrong on several key issues on which he claimed later to have been right. Far from maintaining his support for blitzkrieg throughout the inter-war period, Mearsheimer points out, Liddell Hart actually argued in the late 1930s that a new war between France and Germany would result in stalemate because of the defensive strength of both armies. In 1939, rather than

¹ John J. Mearsheimer, *Liddell Hart and the Weight of History* (London, 1988).

advocating firmness in dealing with Hitler, Liddell Hart was critical of the British guarantee to Poland and opposed the despatch of a British force to help the French. Even in 1940 Liddell Hart was urging conclusion of a separate peace with Nazi Germany.

Even more serious, in Mearsheimer's view, than these errors of judgement is the alleged deceitfulness which enabled Liddell Hart, after a decent interval in ignominy during the 1940s, to salvage his reputation. Liddell Hart resurrected his good name, Mearsheimer claims, largely by falsifying the record and gulling a younger generation of strategists who were too dazzled by his former prominence to suspect the truth about him.

Altogether, Mearsheimer's book is a formidable indictment of a man whom many experts in his field, both civilian and military, have regarded as the greatest strategic thinker of the twentieth century. It is not a book written in haste or without prodigious research. Mearsheimer has had access to the whole of Liddell Hart's vast collection of personal papers now at the Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives, King's College, London, and has closely studied the principal publications of his subject. Yet on the basis of my own knowledge of Liddell Hart in the 1960s, I have to say that the book fails to do justice to the man as a whole. There is not much that I wish to dispute in what Mearsheimer has written of a factual nature on Liddell Hart. He has done his research carefully and uncovered serious weaknesses in his subject's record, weaknesses which for the most part have already been discussed in Professor Brian Bond's more balanced book on Liddell Hart's military thought.² But in his concentration on Liddell Hart's shortcomings Mearsheimer has written a one-sided account which leaves the reader baffled as to how Liddell Hart achieved anything other than through the force of his expression, persistence, vanity, and deceit. The book is the case for the prosecution rather than an objective appraisal.

The picture of the man that Mearsheimer presents is deficient in several ways. First, it does not attempt to appraise Liddell Hart in terms of what he was trying to achieve in the 1920s and 1930s, and the problems he had to overcome in order to make his way. Secondly, through the primary focus on Liddell Hart's mistakes in the matters of blitzkrieg and British policy towards Nazi Germany, he is given little credit for developing ideas which have stood the test of time for over sixty years. Thirdly, in concentrating on the alleged aspects of deviousness in the way in which Liddell Hart restored his reputation in the 1950s and 1960s, Mearsheimer omits discussion of Hart's contribution to the debate on nuclear strategy in this period. Fourthly, Hart is given no credit for his most scholarly production, the two-volume history of The Royal Tank Regiment, *The Tanks*, which he wrote during the 1950s. And fifthly, the great efforts he made to foster a new generation

² Brian Bond, *Liddell Hart. A Study of his Military Thought* (London, 1977)

of thinkers are portrayed wholly in the sordid light of their utility to Liddell Hart in retrieving his lost reputation.

I. *Liddell Hart's Motivation in the Interwar Years*

To judge Liddell Hart accurately and fairly it is important to have some idea of his motivation. It was rather different to that of academic defence-intellectuals today, with their relatively well recognized roles and secure livelihoods, aiming to produce in the course of a working lifetime a handful of major works, each of them based on several years of research. Rather, he was a military refugee, thrown out of his chosen profession at the age of 28 on medical grounds, with nothing other than his wits to fall back on. He was lucky enough to find in journalism a way of continuing to earn a living through his military expertise. Although he had enjoyed writing while he was in the army, he had not sought, as many military men have done in more recent times, to leave the army in order to become a public commentator or private consultant. What he turned to on his enforced departure was, for him, very much a second choice, and it is not hard to understand why. The life of a military correspondent in the 1920s was both insecure and financially straitened.

The pain and frustration of having to give up the military career that he had wanted so badly were eased by his discovery of the power that can be exercised by a successful columnist. In 1925 Liddell Hart succeeded the famous Colonel Charles à Court Repington as military correspondent of the *Daily Telegraph*. Repington's promising army career had also been terminated prematurely, in 1902 after a minor scandal over his relationship with the wife of a senior diplomat. But through his pen and army connections Repington built a formidable reputation as military correspondent of *The Times* from 1904 to 1918. He acquired great political influence, and was regarded by the British army as a useful private channel of communication, as, for example, when he served as an intermediary in the discussions which led to the consequential staff talks held with the French in 1906. Repington's most dramatic moment came when he revealed to the British public the shell shortage of May 1915, thereby playing a major role in bringing down the first Asquith government, and forcing the Liberals into coalition with the Conservatives. He fell out with *The Times* in 1918 and went via the *Morning Post* to the *Daily Telegraph*. Throughout his twenty-one years as a leading journalist Repington had been sought after by those in power. He had used his considerable influence to fight for implementation of his own ideas and to strengthen his personal position.

Liddell Hart first made Repington's acquaintance on a tour of Territorial Army camps in July and August 1924, during temporary employment by the *Morning Post*. He was heartened by Repington's 'friendly interest' in his

views and through being treated 'as a colleague rather than as a novice'.³ When Repington died in 1925, Liddell Hart stepped into his shoes at the *Telegraph*. In 1934, when *The Times* re-established the position that Repington had held as a full-time military correspondent, Liddell Hart succeeded to it.

Liddell Hart's role model for the most influential period of his life, therefore, was not that of a contemplative scholar or a deep-thinking military philosopher but Repington, the gatherer and exponent of day-to-day influence in the hurly-burly of the defence debates of his country. Liddell Hart had no power base other than that which he could make through his public pen and his private advice to the powerful. He had no money other than what he earned through writing. But he had opportunity and he had the example of Repington to strengthen his confidence that he could make something of it.

In Repington's terms Liddell Hart succeeded splendidly. He swiftly achieved an influential readership, which, while not all agreeing with his views, recognized that he was not to be ignored in the public debate. He soon became the best known defence writer in Britain, and his reputation spread abroad. He not only wrote for his newspaper but also produced a torrent of books. Between 1925 and 1930 he published eight, including three particularly successful and seriously regarded works: *Paris, or the Future of War*, *The Decisive Wars of History* (an early version of his best known work *Strategy, the Indirect Approach*), and *The Real War*, a history of the First World War. He wrote another five before going to *The Times* in 1934, including biographical studies of Foch and T. E. Lawrence, and expanded his history of the First World War.

Once Liddell Hart had achieved the prestige and influence conferred by his new appointment as military correspondent of *The Times*, his advice was sought increasingly by leading politicians, particularly Duff Cooper, Secretary of State for War 1935-7. When Hore-Belisha succeeded Cooper, Liddell Hart's position was elevated to that of personal adviser, and a close working relationship ensued for a year. Liddell Hart's position was reinforced by Chamberlain's high personal regard for him and his writings. Repington himself could not have done better in these years. Liddell Hart finally felt that he had justified himself and that the pain and exertion of the past decade had been worthwhile.

He also felt no small enmity towards those soldiers who, he believed, had rejected him and his ideas. In his zeal for military reform he was not always fair in his appraisals of people with whom he differed, nor did he always use tact in handling them. He was not unjustifiably regarded with suspicion by some senior soldiers, and once they knew that his advice to Hore-Belisha

³ B. H. Liddell Hart, *The Memoirs of Captain Liddell Hart* (London, 1965), p. 74

could have an important influence on their careers, opposition to him within the army mounted. By late 1938 he was on very thin ice both with many of the generals and with Hore-Belisha himself, who, although knowing nothing about strategy, sometimes had ideas which differed markedly from those of his adviser. When Liddell Hart persisted in 1939 in warning against a British commitment to the defence of France, he found himself almost totally isolated, with only Lloyd George and Beaverbrook seeking his views.

The apogee of Liddell Hart's career was of relatively brief duration. By the outbreak of the war he was stranded, without a job and without real influence. He left *The Times*, after major differences with the paper's policy towards Hitler in 1939. Liddell Hart had argued that Chamberlain's policy after the German entry into Prague was too radical a change and would lead Britain into a war for which she was badly prepared. But the British political tide by then had turned strongly in favor of firmness with Hitler, leaving Liddell Hart high and dry. It took him some time to come to terms with his own role in shaping his fate. The impact of his fall was all the harder for him to bear because he had devoted so much of his life as a writer to the gathering of influence in political circles, the army, and the press. He was not a scholar with a ready-made alternative career to pursue when he lost political favour. Shorn of his public influence, he had nothing else to turn his formidable energies to.

In addition to his desire to succeed as a journalist, Liddell Hart was motivated strongly by a crusading determination that war should never again be fought as it had been on the Western Front. His experience of those years had filled him with a deep revulsion, a reaction partly emotive which coloured his reasoning, but one which also gave him a conceptual line to argue in his works, both the long and the short. In the 1920s he stressed offensive methods, penetration, and mobility, and in the 1930s the vital necessity of avoiding another war in which he believed the defensive must reign supreme, killing millions for no real benefit.

The strength of this rejection of the methods of 1914–18 and the intense pressures of his life led him to jump to conclusions and to ignore historical facts which did not suit his theorizing. His works are not to be regarded as objective expositions but rather as strongly didactic, advocating a line with which the reader was welcome to argue. He was used to trading blows and was no mean exponent of the art of verbal fisticuffs. His approach was that if he believed he had a good idea, he would publish without waiting to examine it from all sides. He was highly controversial in his day, but his arguments were convincing to many; even to those who were more critically disposed, his work was regarded as useful in challenging established ideas. In their day, his books were pre-eminent, and in their use of the information gathered by their author during the few months that he spent in writing

most of them, they illuminate their subjects in a remarkably effective and stimulating way. To damn Liddell Hart for failure to achieve the standards of professional scholars, as Mearsheimer does, is to judge him by criteria to which he did not subscribe for the greater part of his work.

Liddell Hart rose rapidly from obscurity in a society which had no secure places in the field of public military analysis for young ex-captains who lacked formal qualifications. He had no foundation grants or research assistants to give him time for detached contemplation. He depended on a forceful pen and a copious output to hold his position. Strong views and a clear position on nearly all of the many defence issues of his day were the requirements of the job. Had he ceased to produce a steady stream of articles and books he would have been eclipsed by other journalists. His works need to be judged against the standards of the time and the circumstances in which they were produced. What was important was their hitting power within days or weeks of their publication: the rate of fire was often as important as the quality of the aim.

II. *Liddell Hart's Ideas in the 1920s and 1930s*

What did Liddell Hart think in his heyday? What was it in his work that made thinking soldiers and politicians want to read him? Why was he judged to be the leading defence writer of the time?

His first essay into the world of military doctrine, on the development of infantry tactics for breaking through fixed defences, was judged successful to the degree that he was appointed to write a new edition of the British army's *Infantry Training Manual* in 1920. His work was not entirely original, for it drew on German and British methods of penetrating fixed defences employed in 1918, but he had a gift for developing vivid and powerful concepts such as that of the expanding torrent of attack, broadening as it flowed after penetrating the enemy's line. These talents were soon recognized by professional colleagues and of the many officers eager to undertake this kind of work, he was the one who was chosen.

As an infantryman his thoughts focused initially on the role of foot soldiers in achieving penetration, but under the tutelage of Colonel Fuller, one of the most powerful thinkers in the British army, he soon came to see the great utility of the tank in this role. Liddell Hart's ideas differed from those of Fuller in that he believed infantry still had an important role on the battlefield, to mask and overcome strongly held enemy points of resistance while the main thrust went swiftly forwards, bypassing anything which threatened to delay it. Fuller, on the other hand, saw the tank in a more ideal sense, totally displacing infantry. Liddell Hart was one of the first to point to the tactical role of aircraft in helping to achieve and exploit a breakthrough, largely taking the place of artillery. He also wrote about the

formidable command and control problems of using tactical air support as mobile firepower for the mechanized spearheads on the ground, and the need for commanders in this form of warfare to show initiative and to seize opportunities without waiting for orders. The later history of the conduct of mechanized warfare showed him to be very prescient in these analyses.

Liddell Hart began to publish his ideas on mechanized warfare in 1924, and was read widely — by, among others, German officers such as the then Captain Guderian, who was to develop the German panzer force to such great effect in the late 1930s and then employ it devastatingly during the Second World War. Most of what Liddell Hart wrote on this theme was published by 1929, and the Germans, once they began to develop their own thinking and practice at secret manœuvre grounds in the Soviet Union, soon went beyond him. However, they stood in debt to him and to other British writers, particularly Fuller and Martel, for stimulus, early guidance in approach, and confirmation of some of their own thinking. It is true, as Mearsheimer states, that Liddell Hart later exaggerated the role that he had played in the Germans' development of blitzkrieg, but nevertheless he did make an important contribution to their thinking in the 1920s. Without any prompting from Liddell Hart, Guderian made this clear in the German edition of his memoirs in 1951. It was foolish of Liddell Hart then to suggest to Guderian that he might write something more fulsome in the English edition to which Liddell Hart was contributing the foreword, but Guderian's original tribute, written without any discussion with Liddell Hart, is significant testimony:

It was principally the books and articles of the Englishmen, Fuller, Liddell Hart, and Martel, that excited my interest and gave me food for thought. These far-sighted soldiers were even then trying to make of the tank something more than just an infantry support weapon. They envisaged it in relationship to the growing motorization of our age, and thus they became the pioneers of a new type of warfare on the largest scale.⁴

In the late 1920s and 1930s Liddell Hart ventured deeply into the much more difficult field of grand strategy. Mearsheimer is quite justified in the critical comments he makes on 'the strategy of the indirect approach', the avoidance of the most obvious moves on the battlefield, which an enemy is always best prepared to meet. Much of the argument underlying that theory was tendentious and in any event ignored the simple truth that in some circumstances a punch on the nose is the best course to take. Liddell Hart's writing on this theme would have been more valuable had he simply drawn attention to the indirect approach as an alternative to the direct, and invited

⁴ Heinz Guderian, *Erinnerungen eines Soldaten* (Heidelberg, 1951), p. 15. This tribute also appeared in the English edition, *Panzer Leader*, translated by Constantine Fitzgibbon (London, 1952), p. 20.

commanders always to identify and compare the respective merits of the two before deciding on a course of action.

It is also easy to dismiss the other principal strand of his advocacy in the 1930s — the need for Britain to avoid another army commitment to the defence of France. This line of policy was mistaken politically at the time when Liddell Hart was enunciating it. Hitler was not to be dissuaded from his plans for eastern conquests by British and French moderation: in believing that he was, Liddell Hart made errors in judging Hitler similar to those of Chamberlain. The policy was also mistaken militarily because the French army was incapable of holding a firm line against the Germans. Yet, given Liddell Hart's determination that British soldiers should not be slaughtered in a vain struggle and the belief he had formed in the late 1930s that the defensive was much the stronger form of warfare, his conclusions were logical. The root of his error in holding that the defensive was much stronger than the offensive was twofold. First, he overrated the effectiveness of the machine gun, the anti-tank gun, and the anti-aircraft gun against the new forms of offensive technology. Secondly, he underestimated the difficulties of conducting defensive manœuvres to obstruct a swiftly advancing enemy who had air superiority.

Liddell Hart was far from alone in thinking this way. A substantial part of the cause in his case was, no doubt, his *modus operandi*, taking a prominent position in the public and expert debates on all these matters, yet having little time for in-depth research. Another source of error lay in his ignorance of Hitler's true nature, understanding neither the nature of Nazi foreign policy goals nor the single-mindedness and determination with which Hitler would pursue them. Liddell Hart's failure to perceive the incapacity of the French army was shared by most expert observers, including many of the German generals. Liddell Hart's personal experience in the First World War no doubt helped to incline him this way. The slow progress made by the British army in developing armoured warfare in the 1930s may also have misled him with regard to German offensive capabilities.

Liddell Hart's record during the 1920s and 1930s is thus very mixed. He produced his best ideas in the 1920s in developing the early expositions of mobile mechanized warfare: his entry into the field of grand strategy was much less successful. His writing had sufficient intellectual power to convince a substantial number of readers, or to reinforce their prejudices, enabling him to retain essential credibility with many political and military leaders until 1938. But from then on his following waned and over the following two years events conclusively proved him wrong. The most that can be said for his books and newspaper articles in this period is that he promoted some useful reforms within the army, helped to improve its state of readiness, and advocated an integration of the three service ministries into a more co-ordinated defence structure.

Despite his mistakes, the fact that he challenged official lines of policy and advocated reforms of many kinds, so forcefully, clearly, and frequently, helped to deepen and broaden a tradition of public discussion of defence matters. In the days before major research institutes had been established in this field, before the building of an international community of analysts, and before the wide availability of information on military forces, Liddell Hart represented an important national resource. He was widely consulted, as his correspondence shows, and he dealt energetically with most of the queries and comments addressed to him by his readers of all levels and backgrounds. This correspondence and consultation was valuable to him too, because it brought him information and critical views from which he sometimes learned. But he also provided a considerable public service, for which he received no payment and little credit. He made mistakes more frequently because he overloaded himself. He worked very long hours and undermined his health, precipitating a serious collapse in 1939. Yet he had enormous stamina and dedication to his field. His solitary style of working had dangers against which those who work in universities and research institutes today are substantially protected. His career has many lessons, both positive and negative, for those who work in his field today.

III. *Liddell Hart after his Fall*

For Liddell Hart the Second World War was a period of eclipse and frustration. He had been wrong in predicting the course of events, and unwise in linking himself too closely with the soon-to-be-falling and fallen stars of Hore-Belisha and Lloyd George. The extent to which Hore-Belisha had relied on his advice had drawn Liddell Hart into vicious currents of personal politics at the highest levels of the British army and it is not surprising that he became the *bête noire* of those whose fortunes he did not favour. He therefore paid a high personal price for his role when his relationship with Hore Belisha deteriorated before the latter fell from office.

Liddell Hart showed poor political judgement in having only Lloyd George and Beaverbrook to fall back on for support. They were, of course, not insubstantial figures, but they did not prove to be the path to power for which Liddell Hart had hoped. But what else was he to do? Lloyd George and Beaverbrook were the only prominent people who sought his advice, so it was with them that he developed his links. It was unfortunate for him that his relationship with Churchill did not flourish in 1939–1940, but Liddell Hart had differed strongly with him on the degree to which Britain should oppose Hitler and there was little basis for a fruitful partnership between them.

Liddell Hart's fall damaged his standing more in the political arena than in the military. He continued to have a substantial degree of access to the

British army, and later to the American, and many of his views continued to command military respect. He was unrepentant in his attitude towards Churchill, arguing during the war years that the Prime Minister was pursuing victory in too bull-headed a way. Liddell Hart characterized the bombing of German cities as barbaric and criticised Roosevelt's hasty adoption of the policy of 'unconditional surrender' as counterproductive. It took some courage to maintain this stance during the war, but he did not flinch from the controversy that his stance engendered. His views were still in public demand and he continued to write for the press, becoming the military correspondent of the *Daily Mail* in 1941 and publishing a further five books during the war. In 1946 he was commissioned by old friends who had served in The Royal Tank Regiment to write its history. This task was an important voyage of discovery in the world of historical method for Liddell Hart. Commenting on the work he put into the project he wrote:

The historical exploration in detail proved to be a much harder and longer task than any of us had reckoned. It has also been much the most impressive lesson I have ever had in the complexity, obscurity, and fallibility of historical evidence — particularly when it is a matter of memory.

I have spent a far longer time on this book than on any previous one, and am still far from content. Any readers who question the facts or conclusions in it will find me very ready to agree that I may be wrong — although not necessarily with their alternate views. After more than forty years' experience in the study of history the nearest I come to being sure about anything is that historians, or witnesses, who are confident of being right are those most likely to be wrong.⁵

Clearly the thirteen years Liddell Hart spent in preparation of the two volumes of *The Tanks* had been an important learning experience in more ways than one. But at least he did learn, and showed that he was capable of producing something that squared with the records and recollections of the men about whom he was writing. Although the work is not his best known, it will probably be his most enduring work of history because he put so much into its writing.

In the postwar years Liddell Hart was also coming to grips with the strategic problems of the nuclear age, arguing that the destructive power of modern weapons had made warfare even more pointless than before. He quickly saw that the atomic bomb had revolutionized the nature of international conflict, making war suicidal for two contending powers, each of which was armed with nuclear weapons. He did not go on to argue that this meant the end of warfare, but rather pointed to the need for careful restraints to be applied in the conduct of hostilities. Long before the Korean War he was writing about limited warfare. Well before the North Atlantic

⁵ Captain B. H. Liddell Hart, *The Tanks* (London, 1959), i, p. xiii.

Alliance was founded he anticipated one of its most enduring themes of debate, pointing to the problems inherent in basing the defence of the West on nuclear retaliation rather than on adequate conventional forces. He also saw that possession of nuclear weapons would not of itself guarantee leverage over states without them, warning of unexpected limitations to American influence in the nuclear age.

During the 1950s he was in the vanguard of those in the West who called for restraint in the conduct of relations with the Soviet Union lest a suicidal war should be provoked. He also criticized Americans who advocated the use of strategic bombing against the Soviets while the United States was clearly superior in nuclear terms. He was strongly opposed to the philosophy behind the 'New Look' of the Eisenhower administration and castigated the policy of massive retaliation as incredible. He also thought about the acute problems of command and control in nuclear war that were to become such an important topic of debate in the 1970s. He had particularly strong objections to the use of tactical nuclear weapons because of the inherent dangers they posed to strategic stability through escalation. Liddell Hart was not alone in publicly expressing these thoughts, but he was certainly one of the leaders in the debate, and his arguments have been shown through the discussions of later years to have been well conceived and well received. In making the transformation from the strategic policy debates of the 1930s to those of the 1950s he showed remarkable acuity, range of competence, and flexibility.

The most damaging part of Mearsheimer's book deals with these years, focusing not on Liddell Hart's contributions to the nuclear debate but on his own portrayal of himself. The picture conveyed is of a massively wounded vanity which led Liddell Hart to scheme, lie, manipulate, flatter, cajole, and exert pressure on everyone who could possibly help restore his reputation. He restored his reputation, it is implied, because many people active in the field of strategic studies, or in senior military positions, fell under his spell, suspended their critical faculties, and obligingly did his bidding.

There is no doubt that Liddell Hart felt deeply and openly about his reputation, to a degree which those who knew him found out of place in a man who had achieved so much. He became defensive about his earlier writings and found it difficult to admit mistakes. This was the sad but understandable reaction of a man who believed himself to have been unfairly damned by politicians opposed to his views, wrongly excluded from influence, and denied credit for his real contributions to thinking on the problems of the war. He was preoccupied by a belief that he had been wronged — but it was not a total obsession. It led him to ask German generals to credit him publicly for some of their better ideas. Manstein, rightly, refused to do so. Liddell Hart did not pursue the point. Guderian obliged him. Was Guderian wrong in doing so? He was wrong in cribbing from Liddell Hart's

letter to him on the subject but, as mentioned above, Guderian had already acknowledged a substantial debt to him.

The restoration of Liddell Hart's reputation owed much more to the respect of those who knew him best than to his pursuit of encomiums of German and Israeli generals to which he was not entitled. If during the postwar years he had shown nothing but injured vanity and desire to be credited for things he had not done, who would have stood him? Certainly not men sensitive to the aura of their own associations like Montgomery, with whom he developed a deep friendship: or rising younger military figures like Hackett or Carver, or the journalists over whom he presided in the Military Commentators' Circle, or those who were making their way successfully in the academic pursuits of military history and strategic studies, or even young graduate students like myself too pressed for time to be bothered with old bores.

Liddell Hart was important to all these people and many, many more because he knew an immense amount, was keen to engage in debate, and had an extremely acute mind and great intellectual vitality. Those who sought his help usually received it in generous proportion. He was a dedicated reviewer of manuscripts, and scholars of all ages were welcome to use his library and vast collection of papers. He enjoyed unfettered debate on a wide range of issues, both historical and current. Graduate students were as welcome to challenge his views as the great of the previous generation. The fertility of his mind was remarkable even in his seventies. He would have been left lonely and lamenting in these years had he nothing but tricks and a wounded ego to offer. On the contrary, the 1950s and 1960s saw a flowering of his work and influence because he related intellectually with people of all levels and ages and gave them help that they could not have obtained from others. This was the real substance of the recovery of Liddell Hart's reputation, not his exercising of a spell-binding effect on the critical faculties of a select few through granting them access to his once-famous presence.

As I have said, he was not without unattractive characteristics, such as vanity. As Mearsheimer has shown, his memoirs are self-serving and he did press a few German generals to give him credit to which he was not entitled. It was not difficult to sense this tendency in the course of personal acquaintance, and it aroused scepticism regarding his own view of himself even among the most junior of those who asked for his help. The general tenor of Mearsheimer's book will not be altogether surprising to those who knew Liddell Hart, however much they may feel dissatisfied with the adequacy of the treatment it offers. Yet for all the new material which this account presents, it does not displace Bond's interpretation of Liddell Hart as the best book from which to study the man in depth. Mearsheimer has produced a severe indictment of him, on the basis of unfettered research into Liddell

Hart's own papers. Those papers also contain much which shows Liddell Hart in a more favourable light. The fact that Liddell Hart destroyed almost nothing that he wrote in a long and extremely active career, and left it all for scholars to sift through after his death, suggests that, anxious as he was about his reputation, he felt that on balance the good in his record would outweigh the bad. From my own standpoint, this is one of the issues on which Liddell Hart's judgement was not wrong.