

King's College London
Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives

Annual Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives Lecture

A Public Lecture to mark the twenty-five years of work in the Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives

Liddell Hart and His Legacy

by Professor Robert O'Neill
Chichele Professor of the History of War,
University of Oxford

given Tuesday, 19th May 1988

© November 1988

Copyright in all or part of this text rests with Professor Robert O'Neill, and save by prior consent of Professor Robert O'Neill, no part of parts of this text shall be reproduced in any form or by any means electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, now known or to be devised.

Two reasons led me to accept the invitation to give this lecture, despite a certain shortness of notice. First, I welcome the opportunity to say something publicly about a man to whom I owe a major debt of gratitude for helping to give me a start in the fields of strategic studies and military history. Second, I am particularly honoured by this platform and am very pleased to be back in London for this occasion.

In speaking about Sir Basil Liddell Hart I am aware that there are many others who could do so on the basis of deeper knowledge of him than I have, not least Brian Bond, to whom we are all indebted for his thorough, rigorous study of Liddell Hart's military thought.

My personal association with Liddell Hart was confined to the two years in which I was preparing my doctoral thesis, 1964-65, when I worked a day each week at States House, and four further years of occasional correspondence before his death while I was back in Australia, or in Vietnam. But that personal knowledge, slender though it is, was quite vital to my perception and appreciation of the man. In these more homogenised times when BBC announcers speak with regional accents, successful people rise at 7 not 10, the Tory party is in the hands of middle-class radicals and it really matters very little as to what school one went to or what one's club is, we need to be reminded of the very different challenges that Liddell Hart had to meet in these and other aspects of life in the 1920s and '30s. He made a huge leap in the early 1920s out of a comfortable clergyman's family, but without wealth or political connections, into a fast-moving and unforgiving political and military scene at the heart of the Empire, peopled by leading characters who tended to set little store by former

captains who wrote for newspapers. He became the most prominent military writer of his day and held centre stage in this field for more than ten years.

How easily did Liddell Hart make this leap? What energies did it drain from him? In what ways did it reinforce and stimulate him? What neuroses nagged at him as he stood talking with horse and hounds generals, trying to get them to take him sufficiently seriously to give him an insight into their own thinking? How well did his first marriage equip him to face the tough competition involved in winning a reputation? How did these struggles shape his personality? What were his motivations in writing various works -- the liberating force of giving birth to new ideas which might reform government policies; the cultivation of influence with key people in politics and the Army; the enhancement of his public status as a writer and thinker; or the need to earn a living? They must have all been present, but in what degree and at what time?

Now, I fear there is no way of knowing the answers to these questions. It is probably too late for the sort of 'man and his times' biography that we poor creatures of a different era need to understand and appraise fully a man of a very different social and political era. And this is no fault of Professor Bond. He, very wisely, chose to give us an analysis in depth of Liddell Hart's intellectual contribution. But as a supplement it would be good to have a more intimate personal biography written by someone who knew Liddell Hart well, giving insights into his personality and nature, weaving together the strands of his public and private lives, as they were woven together in reality. Perhaps it is not altogether too late for the book that I want to see but it would need to be written by someone with personal knowledge of London life in the 1930s, unless the available documentary evidence is much better than I think it to be.

But that is another topic for another day. In raising these thoughts for the purposes of this lecture I simply wish to make the point that we, here and now, have to make a major effort in our thinking if we are to assess Liddell Hart thoroughly and fairly. He was not seeking to impress *us* in our research institutes, our specialised university departments or our policy planning staffs in government ministries, buttressed and supported by libraries, research assistants, secretaries and foundation grants, linked together by journals and the multi-tiered international conference circuit that we bustle through Heathrow every few weeks to join. For the greater part of Liddell Hart's career, this network and its infrastructure did not exist. He had to present his ideas to an audience less familiar with security policy analysis and which would have been intolerant of many of our current approaches. And he had to do it without almost the whole of the supporting apparatus that we find vital today, including money to buy his time for detached thought.

To appraise him against our own standards today is to miss much of the point -- not all of it, but a very substantial part thereof. When *we* began to come onto the scene in the late 1950s and early 1960s he recognised that times had changed profoundly and he changed his own role. *Deterrent or Defence* published in 1960 was his final contribution to contemporary policy analysis. But, of course, he did not cease to make other contributions, first as an historian with more time for research than he had in his heyday, and second as an educator and mentor of the next generation of writers in his field.

There are not many photographs or drawings of Liddell Hart which give much feel of his personality. What tends to come through, as in Sava's excellent interpretation of him, is intellectual power and keenness, alertness and sensitivity, but not the force, warmth, gusto and good humour that were so evident to those who knew him. The one photograph I know

which begins to capture this side of him is the splendidly relaxed shot of him with his son Adrian in the second volume of his *Memoirs*. There is another good one on the verso of the jacket of Volume One. That is certainly how I remember him from our first meeting: tall with a fine, distinguished head, well dressed, genial, making little jests, not always comprehensible, enquiring constantly after this and that to see what one knew, and pausing every now and then to shout something to Kathleen, who practiced the art of selective hearing with great accomplishment.

Although his eyes were contemplative, the lower part of his face was mobile, registering both the impact of what one was saying, if it interested him, and his own mental gymnastics as he developed his response. For a person of eminence he could be a remarkably good listener. He had a capacity to pursue replies that I wish our leading television interviewers today would emulate. When he heard one's answer to a question such as "Do you think the British Government should withdraw from bases east of Suez?" he might say "Hmm - you think *that* do you?". Having said it in his presence, it seemed wise to agree that one also thought it, although the novelty of his questions meant that this was not always the situation. "Well, in that case ..." came the pursuit "what about x, y and z?". Then was the time to come clean if the first remark had been off the top of the head. But then was also the time to enjoy the conversation if one had actually done some thinking on the topic before he raised it.

Although he liked to pontificate as much or even more than most of us, he was always keen to gather information and add it to his stock for later use if he thought it good enough. And he had a capacity for putting questions which led to the nub of an issue or set of issues in a very short space of time. They were not the type so frequently encountered which are designed to work the conversation around to an angle from which one's interlocutor can dominate. For someone like myself in 1964, who for the past ten years had been inured to be receptive to the truth as preached by professors and army officers, that two-way traffic was both a demanding and highly agreeable experience.

To judge from his appearance, Liddell Hart was clearly entitled to use a military rank. Tall, straight, with square shoulders he carried his head well back and gave one a very direct look into the eyes that softened as he engaged in conversation. The impact of his well-cut tweed suits tended to be lightened by his choice of tie. A soft yellow silk was a favourite, chosen more to demonstrate flair in dress sense than to accord with conventional ideas on suitable neckwear for a tweed suit.

As one's eye roved around the great study of States House, with its walls mostly hidden by books, one caught glimpses of photographs, paintings and drawings, mostly of his friends in uniform, including Lawrence of Arabia, painted by Eric Kennington. A rather frozen looking Patrick Hobart gazed stoically out from a snow-trimmed tank turret, also painted by Kennington. There was a delightful sketch by Sidney Rogerson of the captain in floppy bush hat, safari shirt, long gaiters and pack, holding his pipe at the port, titled 'Australian Discipline'. Liddell Hart's insouciant pose did not, I thought, entirely fit the title but I knew already how much the British are impressed by external appearances, so I made no protest. There was compensation in the thought that at least the Australian army had made its mark in Liddell Hart's study to *that* extent. The sketch did give rise to a conversation on Monash, about whom he knew a considerable amount, but not enough to have avoided starting a myth in 1931 which ran for 50 years before being nailed by Geoffrey Serle, Monash's biographer.

In his obituary of Monash, Liddell Hart had written:

"He had probably the greatest capacity for command in modern war amongst all who held command ... If that war had lasted another year he almost certainly would have risen from commander of the Australian corps to command of an army; he might even have risen to be Commander-in-Chief."

This observation was based on Lloyd-George's burning desire to be rid of Haig and was confirmed later in Lloyd-George's memoirs. It was entirely reasonable to speculate that Monash might have been given an army, had the war continued for another year. But I doubt that Liddell Hart would really have thought it possible, in Serle's words for a "Jewish colonial militiaman" who had seen no active service before 1914 to have been given command of the British army in France. The exaggeration of Monash's prospects is less important than Liddell Hart's eye for talent and new methods proved by results on the battlefield.

What did not take more than two or three meetings to discover was that Liddell Hart had very firm likes and dislikes as far as senior officers were concerned. His views were not shallowly founded. He knew an immense amount about these men but tended to divide them into good and bad too clearly. His stern appraisals of Haig led me to ask if he was not too critically disposed altogether. Then I read *T. E. Lawrence in Arabia and After* and wondered the converse. When I raised the subject Liddell Hart introduced me to his controversy with Richard Aldington over their interpretations of Lawrence. Liddell Hart's published lecture on Aldington showed the depth of the former's knowledge and feeling on Lawrence. It also showed that Liddell Hart was not short of adrenalin. While not vindictive by nature, he knew how to deal with a critic and could thoroughly enjoy a fight even if he took a few blows himself. As I read more of Liddell Hart's correspondence on Lawrence and other issues that he showed me over the two years, I could see that he knew, as our friends across the Atlantic say, how to pay hardball. If taken in moderation, the exercise did him much good. It also showed that he had learned his lessons in a hard school and knew that he had to put real work into his publications if he was to survive. His strong feelings on people were not based on limited knowledge but on their strength of commitment to approaches and particular ideas that he held dear.

Let me bring you back to Liddell Hart's study. Shifting one's gaze down from the walls one noticed a clutter of desks and tables through which one had to thread a passage in order to reach the main library in the converted stables alongside, where we visitors worked. His desk was in the top left-hand corner as one entered the study from the house and his part-time secretary, Mrs. Bosanquet in my time at States House, worked away busily in the opposite corner, perhaps 30 feet away, but always within range of his call and subject to frequent interruption. In between were piles of books and papers awaiting the master's attention. Dozens of letters or memoranda lay there, many in his crabbed handwriting, its small characters etched with a fine-nibbled pen, making more economic use of the paper than the reader's eyes. Clearly this study was the centre of a major communications network linking him with hundreds, if not thousands, of correspondents of every possible description from politicians to pundits, brigadiers to bishops. Initially, it was Liddell Hart's own information system, bringing *in* news and comment on the many drafts he circulated to others. As time went by it became a very useful resource for *others* who were able to tap his memory and judgement for the benefit of their own policies or writings. Many were those who owed him thanks for providing assistance in the preparation of their books, theses, articles, radio programmes or official papers. In the days before the Department of War Studies and the

IISS existed, Liddell Hart was a very important private as well as public resource for the embryonic community of analysts, writers and commentators of his day. In judging his work we need to bear in mind that he was constantly immersed in a heavy flow of letters and phone calls which consumed a substantial amount of his time. The flow increased in the 1950s and 1960s as he settled more deeply into the role of "The Sage of Medmenham", as Barrie Pitt has called it, but even in the 1930s and 40s, it required a constant commitment of his time and mental energy. The 1,000 boxes of his papers now in the Liddell Hart Centre archive are eloquent testimony to the creativity of this part of his life.

At the end of the room, near the door to the library, stood a bookcase with wooden doors. Turning the key, one could take down and browse amongst most of Liddell Hart's own volumes. The first thing that one noticed was their sheer quantity, some 31 titles in all, without additional allowance for American editions and revisions published under modified titles, or the four volumes of papers and essays by others that he edited. Who of us today could begin to match that record of productivity? Anyone who wants to emulate it would need to start early. Liddell Hart published 12 books in his first eight years as a writer, 1925-33, 18 in 15 years, 22 in 19, 25 in even time and the whole 31 over 45 years. And for the first half of this period he was also producing regular copy for whatever newspaper was employing him, some of which went into his books, but the two activities did not overlap completely.

The second feature of this array of volumes is the centrality of the issues they covered, from the shortcomings of strategy on the Western Front in the Great War, through the development of mechanised warfare in the 1930s, to nuclear strategy in the 1950s. Clearly he not only declined to dodge the great issues of the day: he entered debate on most of them, staking out a clear, strong and often original position and defending it with skill and tenacity. He did not dominate on all fronts. There were those such as Fuller on mechanisation and Brodie and Buchan on nuclear doctrine who were ahead of him in individual issues, but he was in touch with them and traded his thoughts for theirs. It is difficult to think of anyone else who commanded his breadth of expertise, and who sustained such a consistently high level of prominence in the debate on strategic policies over the 40 years of his professional activity in this field. It is striking that the man who wrote *Paris, or the Future of War* in 1924 was also the man of whom Senator John F. Kennedy on reviewing *Deterrent or Defence* was to write in 1960:

"No expert on military affairs has better earned the right to respectful attention than B. H. Liddell Hart".

His works were well received, widely and usually favourably reviewed and many of them sold well. In the public debate, and not only in this country, his was often the opinion first cited by participants whether they agreed with it or not, especially in the 1930s. His views were sought by many leading politicians, servicemen, newspaper editors, scholars and popular writers around the world. The level of demand for his opinions by critical, powerful people who could have sought advice and expertise elsewhere, was high and continued over many years, and it was matched by his own energies and depth of commitment to policy reform.

These factors had much to do with his collapse in 1939, although there was also an element of his own lack of control of his life in that episode. He was never to regain the political impact that he had in the 1930s. To him those years were not a triumphant period: in fact he

tended in 1939 to see them as years of defeat but that may be dismissed as over-reaction. As we can view it now, it was a period of high achievement in terms of sustained and original impact on the public policy debate.

When one takes down *Paris* from the shelf, one sees a fresh, engaging work, almost contemptuously short for the magnitude of its subject, but written with such a force and vividness of imagery that one does not feel cheated by its brevity. He floats the intriguing theory that every nation has its Achilles heel and the way to win wars is to aim skillfully for that seat of weakness, not to clash on the enemy's shield and expose oneself to his sword in frontal assault. What this meant to Liddell Hart was that the way to defeat major states was to attack their industrial base. Wars of the future would be decided by strategic airpower. That idea attracted attention to him in the mid-1920s, although Liddell Hart was not the only writer advocating it. It commands no credibility today unless one is talking of nuclear weapons and we all know the problems in that approach. Liddell Hart did not press this particular strategy for long, although he did continue to over-rate the effectiveness of air attack in the 1930s. But the notion of an Achilles heel is worth keeping in mind as long as one does not gamble entirely on being able to find it. Ho Chi Minh certainly used the idea to good effect in fighting the French and the Americans.

Moving further along the shelf one encounters *Scipio*, *Great Captains Unveiled*, *Reputations* and *Sherman*, all published between 1926 and 1929 and evidence that Liddell Hart was intent on bedding his challenging new theories of strategic penetration and indirection solidly on historical foundations. Unfortunately, he inverted the normal historical process, developing a splendid superstructure of conclusions first and then looking about for suitable historical foundations to slide underneath and carry the load. He was not inept in working this way, *Scipio* and *Sherman* were very successful books and still repay reading. Unlike some strategists today, Liddell Hart was not ignorant of history and knew generally where to look to find evidence to support his theories. But it was not always a successful quest and the more ambitious his designs became the less securely they stood.

Of course, in this approach he was not alone. Ever since men have written history, they have used it, and still use it, for justifying particular lines of policy they wish to see adopted. There is nothing improper in this approach, provided that the conclusions fit the facts on which they are based. At least Liddell Hart did not hide his purpose as do some writers who seek surreptitiously to twist evidence to support this theory or that about how wars were caused, how international tensions have been raised and sustained at a high level or how stupid or criminal various political and military leaders have been.

Liddell Hart's devotion to a line of argument meant that he wrote interesting books - books which give one the pleasure and stimulation of arguing against part of their line as well as the satisfaction of accepting part of it. They should not be read with simple-minded reverence lest the reader take away a view which is not fully-formed, representing only one side of a debate.

I am curious as to how far Liddell Hart expected his books to be read and accepted uncritically. He wrote as an advocate and employed the techniques of advocacy. He was challenging an orthodoxy that he saw as disastrous and all too well-entrenched. Nowadays in the absence of that particular orthodoxy, and with the benefit of historical hindsight, some of his works read poorly, but that is not to say that they lacked merit at their time of publication.

Although he enjoyed favourable comment, he did not expect it all the time. He *was* aware of his own fallibility in many areas. There were a few pet ideas and theories close to his heart, such as those he held on a First World War strategy, where he was entirely inflexible. But he liked, within certain broad limits, to be challenged and he was open to persuasion if the thought his interlocutor knew more about a subject than he did. I discovered in our conversations in 1964 that he had an overly jaundiced view of Fritsch and Beck, dismissing them unfairly as military conservatives who had been to Guderian as obstructive as Field Marshall Sir Cyril Deverell had been to him in his relationship with Hore-Belisha. He came to admit that he had learnt something about them from our discussions and there is evidence in his papers that many others who knew him found him persuadable.

Of course he did not have the flexibility of a writer who simply threw out ideas for the sake of argument. He believed *strongly* in what he wrote, and had his own internal arguments between two sides of his mind before deciding his views on issues. He responded best to comments when they were made directly to him, particularly before publication as I found when working through drafts and the proofs of his *Memoirs* in 1964 and 65. He could, like any writer, be very defensive, even aggressive, when criticised publicly in a way which he felt threatened his reputation or general credibility. He showed in his replies to critics that he did not always practice the indirect approach. He would land his blows sometimes with a smack right in their most sensitive areas. But also, as his extensive private correspondence with other thinkers shows, he would welcome critical comment and learn from it. He did not claim to know the whole truth in military affairs, but believed what he advocated was better than established orthodoxy, and challenged others to produce better ideas. When they did, he was willing to show contrition and humility. How would he have survived and become Britain's leading defence journalist without knowing that not everything he wrote was correct and without being able to learn from criticism?

Let me move a little further along the shelf. You are waiting for me to take down *The Decisive Wars of History*, published in 1929, better known in its revised and expanded version as *Strategy: the Indirect Approach*. I do it with some reluctance. Despite its being one of his most famous books it is not his best. In writing it he fell into a trap that lies before the feet of the most brilliant: the temptation to draw grand conclusions from a universal survey of war in one volume. Lesser mortals usually do not dare to risk treading on the treacherous cover of this pit but once in, they stay in. The bright ones like Liddell Hart find a way out, but the experience leaves both a scar and vulnerability to critics.

The Decisive Wars of History could have been a great book had it had a dialectic structure, had Liddell Hart recognised in concept more what he knew in practice, namely that a *direct* approach is sometimes better than an indirect. The book could have helped us to think about the circumstances in which each is preferable. History has much to tell us on this score, but we do not learn about it from *Strategy: the Indirect Approach*. Perhaps he believed that his readers had all too much evidence of the direct approach before them in their memories of the Western Front, and what they needed was an antidote, and anti- Haig like Marx believed his readers needed an anti-Dühring. Well, all right, maybe. But in that case the book was a tract for the times, not an objective assessment of strategy at large, and with that comment I put it back on the shelf.

This ambitious and widely read book raised both Liddell Hart's reputation and the stakes from which he was now playing in his career. When informed people began to liken the 35-year-old former captain to Clausewitz, it was time to sense danger as well as to register pride

and satisfaction. It would not have helped Clausewitz to keep his balance had he been told at the age of thirty-five that he was Clausewitz. I am not sure that Liddell Hart had the problems brought by prominence as fully in mind as the purpose for which he fought. He did not go off in his late 30s to build castles in the air or indulge in other vain pursuits as successful people sometimes do at that point. He remained engaged in debate and committed to the shaping of better policies for the defence of Britain in an increasingly threatening world. But as opportunities opened, particularly with his move to *The Times*, so pressures mounted, and those pressures undoubtedly impelled him to publish books to maintain, defend and extend his weighty reputation. These pressures also forced him to cut corners in preparing his books, because there was not the time left in his day to do otherwise.

Consequently what one sees in some of these works of the 1930s is repetition of a familiar set of ideas and failure to look closely enough at the arguments against his own line. There remains the same tendency to be highly selective in his use of historical evidence, particularly displayed in *The British Way in Warfare* and *The Ghost of Napoleon*. One sees why Liddell Hart rejected the Continental commitment as a policy for the 1930s and one admires his steely objectivity in appraising the defence worth of a British commitment to France, but it just remains wrongheaded to ignore the political influence Britain gained both during and after the First World War from having shared the French burden.

Sending the British Expeditionary Force to Gallipoli in 1915 is an intriguing idea but what about the problems of supply, command and control, and the formidable operational difficulties that the Peninsula and its resolute defenders posed? Would Constantinople have fallen easily once the Dardanelles had been forced? Those who fought the Turks throughout 1915 did not think so. What would have been the force and logistic requirements for a successful drive through the Balkans into the heartland of the Central Powers and could the Allies have met them? I do not say that these are all insuperable obstacles but Liddell Hart needed to discuss them more fully to make his argument persuasive.

But enough of this academic nit-picking. Much bigger things were happening in Liddell Hart's life in the second half of the 1930s than the putting together of books. When Duff Cooper became Secretary of State for War in late 1935, he sought Liddell Hart out and made it plain that the power of his thinking more than outweighed the effect of his cutting reviews of Cooper's first volume of his biography of Haig. While Liddell Hart was impressed by Cooper's magnanimity, he was less taken by his acuity. On meeting in the bar at Buck's early in 1936, Cooper complained to Liddell Hart about the standard of the *New Statesman*, for which Liddell Hart wrote sometimes. The trouble was, Cooper said, that the things the journal chose to ridicule were the very things that Cooper approved of. "An interesting sidelight on his mental processes," Liddell Hart recorded in his diary for that day.

His relationship with Cooper was not particularly close but they continued to meet over the 18 months of his period of office. With the next incumbent of the post, Hore-Belisha, Liddell Hart had much stronger influence, particularly in the period June 1937 to March 1938. During this time, and later, Liddell Hart worked to useful effect in policy formulation, interesting Hore-Belisha in advocating the establishment of a Ministry of Defence to co-ordinate the three services, increased mechanization of the army, improvement of defence against air attack and the replacement of officers that he regarded as too conservative by others of whom he approved. These were very dangerous currents for an unofficial adviser to swim in, particularly that of personal politics at higher levels, and he soon had many new personal enemies, who blamed him for changes for which he was not responsible, as well as

for those in which his advice *had* been influential. Also, in his eagerness to see the army modernize more rapidly, he failed to see first that there were progressive officers who were implementing reforms and second that his criticisms of the army were complicating rather than easing their task, particularly when it came to prising money out of the Treasury.

More significantly, his advocacy of a strictly limited commitment of the army to the Continent in time of war played straight into the hands of Neville Chamberlain and his policy of appeasement in 1937 and 38. Liddell Hart was identified with this strategy of limited liability in the public mind, even after Munich, when he began to modify his stance. In late 1938 he fell out increasingly with Damson and Barrington-Ward at *The Times*. Believing that Chamberlain's *volte face* after Hitler's entry into Prague was foolish, for most of 1939 he was *The Times'* military correspondent in name rather than in substance. In November of that year he parted company with the paper.

The march of events had dealt his status and reputation a cruel blow. All of a sudden, he appeared to be on the wrong side of the policy debate as the Government and public opinion became increasingly militant towards Hitler, and he remained there in 1940 in his advocacy of a separate peace with the Nazis. His relationship with Hore-Belisha had largely evaporated in 1938. His newspaper took little material from him. Churchill, who had consulted him in 1938, had little time for him (or for Hore-Belisha) in 1939 and none in 1940. Liddell Hart played with the notion of standing for Parliament in early 1939 on the urging of Lord Cecil of Chelwood and that maverick figure Sir Richard Acland but came to see no real hope of winning the seat in question. Despite his prominence, he had gained no effective political support to enable him to make a new transition. His critics in the army, who had already obstructed Hore-Belisha's attempted efforts to make use of him inside the War Office, rejoiced in his plight. Had Lloyd George returned to office he would have brought Liddell Hart with him, at least as an adviser, but this hope was to prove vain.

This fall in his fortunes constituted a crisis in his life. What was he to do? All avenues of significant influence seemed closed to him, and were to remain so for many years. It was a shattering denouement to have his hopes and prospects dashed at the age of forty-four after a period of high expectations and excitement. This was not the full extent of his crisis, however. His first marriage, under strain since 1933, had disintegrated in 1938. Although he was not contributing much copy to *The Times* in 1939, his pen and brain were in heavy demand from a wide miscellany of politicians, publishers, other newspapers and other people deeply concerned at the turn of events and he threw himself into meeting that demand rather than into rebuilding his influence with people who might have made real use of his talents during the war. All the accumulating pressures took toll of his health, and he suffered both a heart attack and a general nervous collapse from which he took two years to recover. And that was the end of his career in positions of high influence.

Fortune did not wholly turn her face from him for in 1938 he began the friendship with Kathleen Nelson which blossomed into their marriage and brought her own wisdom and warm personality into the lives of all his friends. It is an enormous pleasure to see her here today. If we were in Korea she would have been given the status of Living National Treasure, and that is how all who know her think of her. No husband's memory was ever left in better hands.

Let me not forget the open bookcase still in front of me. Apart from five quickly produced books, drawing on his existing ideas, published during the war, there are a further seven to

consider. Of these, five are major works, and the first of them, *The Other Side of the Hill*, based on his interviews with German generals after the war, marked both his return to prominence as an author and a vindication of much of his pre-war thinking about armoured warfare. The German generals were eager to acknowledge the influence of Fuller, Liddell Hart and Martel on their early thinking about armoured warfare, from which they then developed the operational technique that we call *Blitzkrieg*. There was an element of mutual gratification in this post-war relationship between Liddell Hart and the Germans. Both he and they had lost status and each could see that the other might be important in their rehabilitation. But those thoughts are of less importance than the insights Liddell Hart gave us into German military thinking and command decisions before and during the war. We had to wait many a year until teams of scholars with their cumbersome apparatus of documents and footnotes could cover the field spanned so quickly by a single writer through interviews, aided by his own historical knowledge, experience, and standing in the eyes of his sources.

Liddell Hart was also working his way to a new kind of eminence in these years through the preparation of his two-volume history of the Royal Tank Regiment. Commissioned by his old friends in the Regiment in 1946, he accepted that the grinding, time-consuming role of being a war historian accorded with his aspirations for his working life in his 50s and embarked on what was to prove a thirteen-year labour. It is this work above all others which shows that he finally became a serious practising historian, intent on finding out accurately what happened when, and why, rather than using a fusillade of selected facts to impress a particular line of policy into the minds of his readers. He wrote in the preface to Volume One of *The Tanks*:

"...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".

As if that were not enough of an admission to make in introducing what was his twenty-eighth book, he went on to say:

"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 - though not necessarily with their alternative views. After more than 40 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."

What *can* one say to that eloquent realisation of the problems inherent in historical exposition? Nothing except "Amen" and some private words of respect for a man who at the age of 63 could write something which was, in effect, a telling critique of his methods of the 1920s and 30s.

The remaining volumes on the shelf, *Deterrent or Defence*, *The Memoirs* and the *History of the Second World War* you may out of your own curiosity take down and examine at your leisure. Was he true to the standards enunciated in *The Tanks* or did he return to his old ways? The answer I leave to your own researches.

Time slips and I must quickly lock the bookcase. Kathleen has called and the workers are assembling for the best event of the day at States House, lunch in the dining-room with its broad windows well set to catch any sunlight coming across the long sweep of well-kept lawn. Kathleen has left her morning's labours of clipping the newspapers and filing the resulting intelligence that kept Basil so very well-informed on national and international events. He has finally taken his seat at the head of the table, hastened from his desk by a little chivying, fortified by the information he has gathered during the morning, and keen for responses to the ideas that have hatched in his mind. Behind him, to the right, is a superb case holding his collection of books on the history of costume, and it is not beyond the bounds of possibility that the first talking point will come from that field as his eye lights on the spine of a favourite work while on his way to his chair. Or it may be a little badinage with Kathleen. But soon the talk is of substance to strategists, and back and forth the points go, lightened by Liddell Hart's stories and pithy characterisations of people he knows around whom the conversation is turning.

This was the way in which people such as Ronald Lewin and Michael Howard, Michael Carver and Shan Hackett, Corelli Barnett and Barrie Pitt, Jay Luvaas and Don Schurman tested their ideas and strengthened their lines of argument. It was also the way in which much younger scholars - graduate students such as Brian Bond, Paul Kennedy and myself - had whatever spark was within us fanned into flame. He gave us knowledge, practice in argument and, most importantly, confidence, both through his own example of the influence that an individual thinker can exert and through his personal interest in us. He gave us enduring confirmation that strategy and the history of war were fields that he wanted to devote our working lives to learning about.

For me that is the essence of his legacy, but of course it extends much wider. There is the rich lode of his papers in the archives, the thousands of his books on its shelves, and all the other papers which have come to the Liddell Hart Centre because his are at its core. They represent a unique resource of growing value, a resource which will require greater efforts to maintain and extend, but which will bring King's College increasing credit and significance as an international research centre. But that is not what I think primarily of as his legacy. The man is more important than his papers or writings. It is his dedication to improving policies, his faith and demonstrated skill in the power of argument, and his example of what one person without institutional support or infrastructure can achieve in a lifetime. Also in his legacy we can see his shortcomings and learn from them. But let us ask ourselves, with all the resources at our disposal today, "are we using them to as good an effect as Liddell Hart would have used them?".