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# A Very Special Relationship: Basil Liddell Hart, Wehrmacht Generals and the Debate on West German Rearmament, 1945–1953

Alaric Searle

In May 1945, as the Second World War was drawing to a close, the British journalist and military writer Basil Liddell Hart was something of a forlorn figure. At the outbreak of war in 1939 he had been the leading military commentator in Britain, politically well connected and influential, and had also established a formidable reputation as a military theorist and historian; however, the rapid defeat of France had discredited his theories, leaving him isolated and with no role in the war effort.<sup>1</sup> But after the end of the Second World War he managed to establish contact with a group of German generals who found themselves imprisoned in Grizedale Hall in the north of England, and he soon realized that here was a potentially malleable group of individuals who could help him re-establish his reputation as a military authority. The generals themselves also quickly realized that the meetings with Liddell Hart could be employed for their own purposes. That Liddell Hart was more than a little opportunistic in the use he made of his contacts with former Wehrmacht generals has been generally recog-

<sup>1</sup> Although Liddell Hart wrote in his memoirs that the Polish campaign 'was the first triumphant demonstration of the new Blitzkrieg technique – against opponents who had failed to comprehend it', in his book *The Defence of Britain*, published in 1939, he had talked of 'the increasing advantage of the defence over attack' and declared, 'The dream of victory in modern war . . . is faced by the hard fact of the long-proved superiority of the modern tactical defensive', even stating that 'the soldier's dream of the "lightning war" has a decreasing prospect of fulfilment' (B.H. Liddell Hart, *Memoirs* II (London, 1965), p. 256; *The Defence of Britain* (London, 1939), pp. 27, 38, 42).

nized by historians and by his friends,<sup>2</sup> yet the extent and nature of these contacts has not been discussed in the detail which is possible given the extensive source material available. More importantly, the fact that these contacts were to lead to one of the most interesting aspects of Liddell Hart's career – his involvement in the debate on West German rearmament – has been passed over by historians in silence.

At present, we have two studies of Liddell Hart, both of which have examined the writer's relationship to Wehrmacht generals. In his monograph, Brian Bond concentrates on the interest in Liddell Hart's books in the German army between the world wars, but also devotes several pages to Liddell Hart's contact with German generals after the Second World War. As well as discussing the assistance in his historical research which he received from these generals, Bond briefly mentions the efforts made by Liddell Hart on behalf of imprisoned generals, as well as his criticism of the war crimes trials. In his discussion, Bond mainly emphasizes Liddell Hart's sense of fair play and his opposition to a harsh peace for Germany.<sup>3</sup> John Mearsheimer, on the other hand, interprets Liddell Hart's friendly relations with Wehrmacht generals purely in terms of a Machiavellian plot by Liddell Hart to 'resurrect his lost reputation'.<sup>4</sup> Both interpretations contain an element of truth, but neither Bond nor Mearsheimer has made any reference to either the true extent and nature of Liddell Hart's contacts with Wehrmacht generals or the way in which these contacts led to Liddell Hart's involvement in the campaign spearheaded by some generals for a West German 'defence contribution'.

The almost complete lack of attention which this aspect of Liddell Hart's biography has received is, at first glance, surprising given the volume of material relating to it in his papers. However, the nature of the alliance between the writer and the generals only becomes fully comprehensible when one examines German archive materials relating to the rearmament debate,<sup>5</sup> and in particular the files which reveal the involvement of former generals in the moves to create new German armed forces. Moreover, interest among non-German scholars of the social, political and military aspects of the rearmament debate within

<sup>2</sup> Cf. J. Luvaas, 'The Mearsheimer Critique: A Pupil's Retrospective', *Parameters* XX (Mar. 1990), pp. 12 f.; J. Keegan, 'Mounting an Offensive on a Scientist of War', *Daily Telegraph*, 2 Mar. 1989. In the early 1950s Liddell Hart was criticized more generally for 'being lenient and too forgiving [towards the Germans]' (Col. R.J. Icks, 'Liddell Hart: One View', *Armor* LXI (Nov./Dec. 1952), p. 26).

<sup>3</sup> B. Bond, *Liddell Hart: A Study of His Military Thought* (London, 1977), pp. 180–90, 215–37.

<sup>4</sup> J.J. Mearsheimer, *Liddell Hart and the Weight of History* (London, 1988), pp. 184–201.

<sup>5</sup> For further details on the extent of archive material available in Germany, see D. Krüger and D. Ganser, 'Quellen zur Planung des Verteidigungsbeitrages der Bundesrepublik Deutschland 1950 bis 1955 in westdeutschen Archiven', *Militär-geschichtliche Mitteilungen* 49 (1991), pp. 121–46.

Germany has been decidedly low,<sup>6</sup> most English-speaking historians having preferred to see the issue within the rather restrictive framework of the diplomatic negotiations between Germany and the victorious Western powers.<sup>7</sup> Given the central importance of the rearmament debate for the early history of the Federal Republic, predictably this has been in sharp contrast to the extensive scholarly study of rearmament within Germany over the past 15 years or so.<sup>8</sup>

This article aims to fill the aforementioned gap in the research to date on Liddell Hart's career and ideas by relating how he came to be involved in the campaign for West German rearmament, the role this played in his postwar relations with German generals and the extent of his involvement in public debate on the issue not only in Britain but equally in Western Germany. The article cannot attempt to examine all aspects of Liddell Hart's collaboration with Wehrmacht generals, and thus what follows will be more in the nature of an overview of his part in the rearmament debate. In undertaking this overview of his involvement with the generals and the issue of rearmament, four main areas suggest themselves as being particularly important: first, the initial contacts between Liddell Hart and the generals imprisoned at POW Camp No. 1 in 1945/46; second, the role of his book, *The Other Side of the Hill*, in establishing a reputation for him as an authority on the German military leadership during the Second World War and the significance of its publication for the debate on rearmament; third, his active participation in the rearmament debate in West Germany from

<sup>6</sup> The number of monographs on rearmament is limited. Cf. M.J. Lowry, *The Forge of West German Rearmament: Theodor Blank and the Amt Blank* (New York, 1990); D. Abenheim, *Reforging the Iron Cross: The Search for Tradition in the West German Armed Forces* (Princeton, NJ, 1988); G.D. Drummond, *The German Social Democrats in Opposition 1949–1960: The Case Against Rearmament* (Norman, OK, 1982); J. Diehl, *The Thanks of the Fatherland: German Veterans after the Second World War* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1993). Of these works, Diehl's subject-matter is only very generally related to rearmament, Abenheim merely deals with the subject in the opening sections of his monograph, while Lowry and Drummond base their analyses on published sources alone. It is only with the recent publication of D.C. Large, *Germans to the Front: West German Rearmament in the Adenauer Era* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1996) that the English-speaking reader can consult a volume which integrates the social and political aspects of the question into the foreign policy picture.

<sup>7</sup> A recent work is S. Dockrill, *Britain's Policy for West German Rearmament 1950–1955* (London, 1991). A similar approach can be found in R. McGeehan, *The German Rearmament Question: American Diplomacy and European Defense after World War II* (Urbana, IL, 1971), and, to a slightly lesser extent, in Col. S.M. Kanarowski, *The German Army and NATO Strategy* (Washington, DC, 1982), pp. 1–40.

<sup>8</sup> It would be inappropriate to provide a full list of German monographs here, but the following works are particularly noteworthy: D. Wagner, *FDP und Wiederbewaffnung: Die wehrpolitische Orientierung der Liberalen in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland 1949–1955* (Boppard, 1979); A. Doering-Manteuffel, *Katholizismus und Wiederbewaffnung* (Mainz, 1981); MGFA [Militärgeschichtliches Forschungsamt], ed., *Anfänge westdeutscher Sicherheitspolitik 1945–1956*, I: *Von der Kapitulation bis zum Pleven-Plan* (Munich, 1982); II: *Die EVG-Phase* (Munich, 1990); III: *Die NATO-Option* (Munich, 1993); H. Brill, *Bogislaw von Bonin im Spannungsfeld zwischen Wiederbewaffnung – Westintegration – Wiedervereinigung: Ein Beitrag zur Entstehungsgeschichte der Bundeswehr 1952–1955* (Baden-Baden, 1987).

1950 to 1953; and, finally, the differing motives which led the generals and Liddell Hart to cooperate so closely.

## First Discussions in POW Camp No. 1, 1945–1946

In the spring and summer of 1945, No. 1 POW Camp at Grizedale Hall in the north of England began to fill up with captured German generals. Grizedale Hall was apparently a grey, rather unattractive building, and huts built to accommodate the prisoners added to the gloomy impression. However, the location of the camp turned out to be a stroke of luck for Basil Liddell Hart, who lived only five miles away at that time and, equally fortuitously, had a family connection in the Re-education section of the Political Warfare Department, through whom he was able to secure a pass for the camp.<sup>9</sup> To gain access to a top POW camp right after the war had ended was no small feat, and it appears that this was only possible because Liddell Hart was given official clearance by the War Office as a Political Intelligence Department lecturer taking part in the Re-education programme.<sup>10</sup> Liddell Hart was informed on 21 July 1945 that arrangements were being made for visits to Grizedale Hall, and that he would be required to give a talk to a group and then conduct a question-and-answer style discussion, but he insisted that he be allowed 'more individual talks' in which 're-educational ideas' would be subtly implanted into the generals' minds. Soon after, he arranged for his first visit to No. 1 POW Camp, on 9 August 1945.<sup>11</sup> Once inside the camp, however, and while the going was good, he went ahead and conducted his own 'interrogations' at Grizedale.<sup>12</sup>

In all, Liddell Hart seems to have made at least 15 separate visits to No. 1 POW Camp, where he met various generals and conducted his own interviews with 12 of them, including Field Marshal Gerd von Rundstedt, Panzer-Generals Hasso von Manteuffel and Wilhelm Ritter von Thoma and Generals Kurt Student, Gottfried Heinrici and Edgar Röhrich.<sup>13</sup> He was able to meet some generals on several occasions, and conducted three lengthy interviews with von Manteuffel, four with von Rundstedt and seven with Infantry-General Günther Blumentritt.<sup>14</sup> Since Liddell Hart could not speak German, his historical interviews

<sup>9</sup> M.B. Sullivan, *Thresholds of Peace: Four Hundred Thousand German Prisoners of War and the People of Britain 1944–1948* (London, 1977), pp. 231 f.

<sup>10</sup> Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives, King's College London (hereafter LHCMA), Liddell Hart Papers (hereafter LHP) 9/24/90, Wing-Commander N. Roffey (PID, Foreign Office) to Liddell Hart, 31 Jan. 1946.

<sup>11</sup> LHCMA, LHP 9/24/90, Liddell Hart to Wing-Commander N. Roffey, 9 Feb. 1946.

<sup>12</sup> LHCMA, LHP 9/24/90, Barry S. Sullivan to Liddell Hart, 9 Jan. 1946.

<sup>13</sup> Sullivan puts the number of visits at 16 (*Thresholds of Peace*, p. 233). However, after a thorough search of all the relevant files in the Liddell Hart Papers (9/24/90–154), it has only been possible to establish evidence of 15 visits.

<sup>14</sup> Liddell Hart's notes on these interviews are located in the Liddell Hart Papers at: 9/24/93 (Blumentritt), 9/24/125 (von Manteuffel) and 9/24/132 (von Rundstedt).

were carried out with the aid of an interpreter, Captain F.S. Kingston, who later translated some of the generals' notes and memoranda.<sup>15</sup> It is clear from the evidence available that the visits made by Liddell Hart brightened up the dull prison camp routine and were welcomed by the generals at the camp, although the positive reception which he received seems to have been more due to his understanding treatment of Germany's postwar situation in his lectures than any recollections of his interwar writings on the part of the generals. Several visits involved a talk by Liddell Hart followed by discussions which on some occasions dealt with the issues surrounding Germany's political future,<sup>16</sup> with Rear-Admiral S.H. Engel often acting as an interpreter.<sup>17</sup> The visits were particularly appreciated by the ailing Field Marshal von Rundstedt, who was touched by Liddell Hart's kindness in bringing him presents and lending him a mattress which helped him to sleep more easily.<sup>18</sup>

From Liddell Hart's notes on his personal 'interrogations' with some of the generals, it is interesting to note not only how detailed they were but also that the Englishman's questions, and more importantly the generals' comments, were not simply concerned with establishing facts concerning specific campaigns, battles or tactics.<sup>19</sup> Many conversations revolved around future military organization and the threat of the Russians. General von Thoma, for instance, remarked in a conversation of 20 November 1945 that it would be dangerous to draw lessons from the African campaign and apply them to Russia because 'For you in future it is only Russia that matters – not the desert anymore'.<sup>20</sup> Panzer-General Hasso von Manteuffel also seemed to have had his mind on future developments when, during one of his talks with Liddell Hart on the Ardennes offensive, he 'reverted to the question of future army organization', noting that under modern conditions an army needed to create an elite within its structure which received the best equipment and personnel.<sup>21</sup> Moreover, the desire to discuss likely postwar developments did not come solely from the side of the Ger-

<sup>15</sup> LHCMA, LHP 9/24/90, Liddell Hart to Capt. F.S. Kingston, 12 Dec. 1947, and 9 May 1949; B. H. Liddell Hart, *The Other Side of the Hill: Germany's Generals, Their Rise and Fall, with Their Own Account of Military Events 1939–1945* (London, 2nd enlarged edn, 1951), p. 8. Sullivan incorrectly identifies the interpreter as a Capt. Kingsford (*Thresholds of Peace*, p. 233).

<sup>16</sup> LHCMA, LHP 9/24/90, B.H.L.H., Report on Talks at POW Camps, 12 Jan. 1946, pp. 1–3.

<sup>17</sup> LHCMA, LHP 5/15, Liddell Hart to Dr Vermehren, 30 July 1948.

<sup>18</sup> LHCMA, LHP 9/24/132, B.H.L.H., Field-Marshal Gerd von Rundstedt's 70th Birthday, 12 Dec. 1945.

<sup>19</sup> Of course, in many conversations the emphasis was specifically on the conduct of a battle as seen through the eyes of a particular general. See e.g. LHCMA, LHP 9/24/101, (B.H.L.H.) Notes for History. Talk with General Elfeldt, 31 Dec. 1945, in which the Normandy battle was discussed.

<sup>20</sup> LHCMA, LHP 9/24/144, (B.H.L.H.) Notes for History, (2nd) Talk with General von Thoma, 20 Nov. 1945, p. 1.

<sup>21</sup> LHCMA, LHP 9/24/125, (B.H.L.H.) Notes for History, (3rd) Talk with General von Manteuffel, 17 Dec. 1945, Ardennes offensive continued, p. 5.

man generals. Liddell Hart had given one of the generals copies of his articles on 'The Revolution in Warfare' which had appeared in the *World Review* in May and June 1945, and these had been translated and circulated among the high-ranking prisoners. Colonel-General Heinrici was one of those who referred to the articles during a talk with Liddell Hart, noting how interesting he had found the views of his 'interrogator' on the superiority of defence over attack.<sup>22</sup>

Nonetheless, despite the remarkably good relations between Liddell Hart and the generals in the latter half of 1945, the Englishman appeared able to recognize the lack of political understanding on the part of his audience, and this comes through clearly in his report to the War Office describing his visits to Grizedale and another camp at Shap, POW Camp No. 13. During his visit to Grizedale on 1 November 1945, for example, he noted: 'There was particular interest in the idea of a Western European Federation, but few of the group – apart from Tippleskirch – seemed capable of grasping the idea of a federation, as distinct from a league or alliance.'<sup>23</sup> In fact, summing up his general impressions of the visits, he concluded that '60 per cent [of the generals] are apolitical vacuum-men who have hitherto concentrated upon their professional work and have never thought about wider questions'. While he warned of the danger of ascribing Nazi motives to generals who were simply being practical about the military benefits of the regime's attitude to paramilitary training, he also was aware of the opportunistic attitude of many of the German generals towards Hitler's regime – when the going was good, supporting the party line.<sup>24</sup>

But were the generals the 'apolitical vacuum-men' Liddell Hart imagined them to be? And did they see their conversations with Liddell Hart as an informed professional discussion of the history of the war in which they had just fought – or were there other motives behind their statements? One incident reveals much about the generals' attitude towards Liddell Hart. One of the British army officers at the Grizedale Camp, Lieutenant-Colonel Henry Faulk, recalled later that when he had asked the generals on 28 December 1945 whether they wanted to meet with Liddell Hart the following day, several senior generals had huddled together and discussed what 'historical line' they should take in their conversation with their prestigious visitor. Faulk, who had acute hearing as well as a near-perfect knowledge of German, overheard this, and went to see Liddell Hart, reporting what he had heard. But Liddell Hart refused to believe him. Faulk interpreted this reaction as being due to Liddell Hart's belief in an elitist and chival-

<sup>22</sup> LHCMA, LHP 9/24/110, (B.H.L.H.) Notes for History. Talk with Colonel-General Heinrici, 12 Dec. 1945, p. 1. The translated articles are also mentioned in LHP 9/24/132, (B.H.L.H.) Field-Marshal Gerd von Rundstedt's 70th birthday, 12 Dec. 1945.

<sup>23</sup> LHCMA, LHP 9/24/90, B.H.L.H., Report on Talks at P.O.W. Camps, p. 2.

<sup>24</sup> *Op. cit.*, pp. 1 f.

rous form of society in which a general could only be a gentleman.<sup>25</sup> However, did Liddell Hart really believe this? In the winter of 1945/6, with war crimes trials looming on the horizon, he was one of the few allies the Wehrmacht generals had. Moreover, he had taken a keen interest in the subject of war crimes trials as early as September 1945, when he had made contact with Sir Hartley Shawcross, who was in charge of war crimes prosecution for the British.<sup>26</sup> Liddell Hart evidently realized that through his connections in the War Office, and throughout the upper echelons of the British establishment, he could offer assistance to the generals.

In fact, shortly before Liddell Hart's contact with the prisoners at Grizedale ended, he was actually approached by three of the generals – Heinrici, Röhricht and Bechtolsheim – for advice on whether they ought to press for counsel to represent the generals collectively at the Nuremberg Trials. Liddell Hart suggested that 'as Halder had gone to Nuremberg, they might leave it to him to look after the concerns of the General Staff as a whole'. He also told the three generals that they would have to take into consideration the fact that were they to press the issue they might 'attract attention to themselves'. But, on the other hand, if they decided to pursue the matter, it would seem best 'to concentrate on the point that they were exposed to a danger, under the broad terms of the Indictment, of being condemned unheard, through the subsequent application to them of a verdict given against some other members of the military organization with whom they had only a remote connection'.<sup>27</sup> Thus, even though Liddell Hart emphasized that 'they must weigh up the matter for themselves', it is clear that he was well aware of the uncertain situation the generals were in. In short, the conversations on the events of the Second World War at Grizedale had taken place against anything other than a background of detached scholarly enquiry.

In February 1946 Liddell Hart's War Office pass was cancelled, and while he made repeated efforts to try and visit the generals from No. 1 POW Camp who had been moved in January 1946 to No. 11 POW Camp at Island Farm, Bridgend, in Wales, these attempts failed.<sup>28</sup> The War Office dragged its feet and refused to give a clear answer to his repeated requests to be allowed to visit the camp, although in March

<sup>25</sup> Sullivan, *Thresholds of Peace*, pp. 327 f. For biographical details on Faulk, and further information on his work with German POWs, see Imperial War Museum, Dept of Sound Records, Acc. No. 9743/06, transcript of taped interview with Lt. Col. Henry Faulk, n.d.

<sup>26</sup> LHCMA, LHP 9/24/155, Liddell Hart to Sir Hartley Shawcross, 11 Sept. 1945, and B.H.L.H., Notes for History. Talk with Sir Hartley Shawcross (the new Attorney-General), 28 Sept. 1945.

<sup>27</sup> LHCMA, LHP 9/24/130, [B.H.L.H.] Notes for History. Talk with Generals Heinrici, Ro[e]hricht, and Bechtolsheim, 3 Jan. 1946, p. 1.

<sup>28</sup> Sullivan, *Thresholds of Peace*, p. 239. The correspondence between Liddell Hart and the War Office over the former's requests to be allowed to visit the generals ran on into 1947. See LHCMA, LHP 9/24/90, Liddell Hart to Maj. E. Topham (Island Farm, Bridgend), 1 and 11 Apr. 1947.



1946 he was given the opportunity of corresponding with those generals he had known before the war.<sup>29</sup> He had been warned earlier, in January 1946, by his family contact in the Political Intelligence Department that 'The War Office simply must not know that you have been interrogating . . . [the generals], because they are touchy, jealous and scared of publicity'.<sup>30</sup> Another PID contact, Wing Commander Roffey, explained to Liddell Hart that the cause of the trouble was that the colonel in charge of intelligence at POW Camp No. 1 had started to question the authority by which Liddell Hart was being allowed into the camp. Roffey suspected, however, that the real reason for the colonel's objections was that he himself was involved in writing a historical study and was afraid of the competition.<sup>31</sup> Nevertheless, despite the break in personal contact with the generals, the friendships he had made at Grizedale, and the information he had been able to gather, ushered in a new period in Liddell Hart's career.

### *The Other Side of the Hill, 1948–1950*

The most tangible result of Liddell Hart's talks with the generals at Grizedale Hall was the book which resulted from them, *The Other Side of the Hill*. First published in 1948, it not only assisted in reviving Liddell Hart's reputation as a historian in Britain, but also met with wide acclaim in Germany, particularly when the German translation of the second edition was published in 1950 under the title *Jetzt dürfen sie reden* (Now they are allowed to speak).<sup>32</sup> The book aimed to describe the Wehrmacht's successes under Hitler through the eyes of the German generals themselves. This approach of relying principally on the statements of imprisoned generals naturally came in for its fair share of criticism, and a British army brigadier posted to the Cabinet Office, Historical Section, remarked to Liddell Hart: 'Memory is a funny thing and I am afraid that a great many of the statements made now in good faith by the German leaders from Rundstedt downwards are contradicted by their own contemporary records.'<sup>33</sup> However, in replying to the sceptical brigadier, Liddell Hart commented that 'the presentation of their [i.e., the generals'] evidence in my book looks much more simple than the process of obtaining it proved'. He also pointed out that whenever possible he had tried 'to get several checks on any parti-

<sup>29</sup> LHCMA, LHP 9/24/90, Brig. Hirsch (War Office) to Liddell Hart, 12 Mar. 1946.

<sup>30</sup> LHCMA, LHP 9/24/90, Barry S. Sullivan to Liddell Hart, 9 Jan. 1946.

<sup>31</sup> LHCMA, LHP 9/24/90, Wing Commander N. Roffey to Liddell Hart, 20 Feb. 1946.

<sup>32</sup> B.H. Liddell Hart, *Jetzt dürfen sie reden: Hitlers Generale berichten* (Stuttgart, 1950), translated by Generalleutnant a.D. Kurt Dittmar. A German translation of the first edition, also translated by Dittmar, had already been published the previous year in Switzerland under the title *Die Strategie einer Diktatur: Aufstieg und Fall deutscher Generale* (Zürich, 1949). For a typically positive reaction by a former professional soldier, see General der Artillerie a.D. M. Fretter-Pico's review in *Wehrwissenschaftliche Rundschau* 1 (2) (1951), pp. 38 f.

<sup>33</sup> LHCMA, LHP 9/24/16, Brig. H.B. Latham to Liddell Hart, 19 Apr. 1948.

cular statement that came nearest to being generally agreed'.<sup>34</sup> Nevertheless, given the conditions under which he obtained his information, and the lack of deeper knowledge of the events of the Second World War at that time, there is no doubt that the book was a great achievement.

During the course of preparing *The Other Side of the Hill* for publication, Liddell Hart had only very limited contact with the generals he had met at Grizedale, despite a desire on the part of both writer and prisoners that a dialogue should continue. In actual fact, by the end of 1947 many of the generals who had been held in Britain had been shipped back to Germany, where they were either released<sup>35</sup> or detained in other camps. Others had ended up at the US Army Historical Division Camp at Neustadt, near Marburg, in the US zone. From there, Günther Blumentritt was able to write to Liddell Hart in April 1947, informing him that three of the generals who had been at Grizedale, von Manteuffel, von Tippelskirch and Röhricht, were with him in the same camp working on historical projects.<sup>36</sup> By mid-1948, however, the majority of generals had been released from captivity, and Liddell Hart was gradually able to renew old acquaintances by letter, despite the unreliable postal routes which existed at that time in the ruins of postwar Germany. Indeed, publication of *The Other Side of the Hill* came at an opportune moment for Liddell Hart. He was able to send copies to various generals, most of whom wrote back either offering their reactions or simply lavishing praise on the book and its author.<sup>37</sup>

The reception of the book in Britain, Germany and among former generals was in actual fact to have far-reaching consequences for Liddell Hart's career, his reputation and most of all his standing and authority in Germany; as far as his reputation in Germany was concerned, the success of the book was to provide enough publicity to help him play a part in the rearmament debate in West Germany in the early 1950s. Among the many generals who commented on *The Other Side of the Hill* was Panzer-General Frido von Senger und Etterlin, a staunch opponent of the Nazi Party, who wrote from POW Camp No. 11 at Bridgend, 'I think it is quite amazing how you found your way to the other side of the hill – quite alone but carrying of course practically no weight of prejudice. What a change for a historian not to be shackled by such.'<sup>38</sup> It is worth mentioning von Senger's tribute as,

<sup>34</sup> LHCMA, LHP 9/24/16: Liddell Hart to Latham, 1 May 1948.

<sup>35</sup> In Dec. 1947 Generaloberst Gottfried Heinrici reported from the generals' camp at Bridgend in Wales in a letter to Liddell Hart that 'half of us has already gone home' (LHCMA, LHP 9/24/64, Heinrici to Liddell Hart, 31 Dec. 1947).

<sup>36</sup> LHCMA, LHP 9/24/53, Günther Blumentritt to Liddell Hart, 25 Apr. 1947.

<sup>37</sup> LHCMA, LHP 9/24/16, Walther Warlimont to Liddell Hart, 21 Oct. 1948, is a typical example, beginning 'As an old and grateful student of your military writings in pre-war times ...'.

<sup>38</sup> LHCMA, LHP 9/24/16, Frido von Senger und Etterlin to Liddell Hart, 24 Aug. 1948.

given his standing as an opponent of Hitler's regime, not to mention his rare intellectual detachment and objectivity (he had been a Rhodes Scholar in Oxford before the First World War),<sup>39</sup> it serves to highlight the quality of the work which Liddell Hart had produced. There is certainly no doubt that Liddell Hart was able to retain a remarkable degree of objectivity in assessing the German generals he met in 1945, noting that 'Few of them resembled the typical picture of an iron Prussian soldier . . . Many would have looked in their natural place at any conference of bank managers or civil engineers.'<sup>40</sup> Nonetheless, it was his conclusion that 'had they become philosophers they would have ceased to be soldiers'<sup>41</sup> which caused the most controversy.

While the book was inevitably bound to draw criticism in Britain (which indeed it did<sup>42</sup>), in Germany the reaction was much more favourable. Although many reviews did not appear until the German translation of the second edition was published in 1950, nonetheless by 1949 Liddell Hart's name and book had become well known in Germany. And it was not only *The Other Side of the Hill* which attracted attention. An article by Liddell Hart, published in the London *Picture Post* on the subject of the outbreak of war in 1939, for example, was seized upon by the daily newspaper *Kieler Nachrichten*. The Kiel article in many ways sums up the significance of Liddell Hart's writings in early postwar Germany. It pointed out that a 'renowned Englishman', already known as an 'independent theorist', was now seeking to throw light on the question of responsibility 'on the other side' for the outbreak of the Second World War. It also noted that he was 'well known for his efforts for a just judgement on the German war leadership through his book *The Other Side of the Hill* and also in the matter of the Manstein Trial'. In commenting on the *Picture Post* article, the newspaper concluded: 'His contribution to the truth, subjective though it is, and though it ought not to be overrated in its effect, will not be possible to simply push aside.'<sup>43</sup> In other words, there was

<sup>39</sup> For a short but authoritative biography of von Senger, see F. von Senger und Etterlin, 'Senger', in C. Barnett, ed., *Hitler's Generals* (London, 1989), pp. 375–92. Senger was a Rhodes Scholar at St John's College, Oxford, from 1912 to 1914. He impressed one staunch anti-Nazi who had spent the war in America as being a good Christian and devout Catholic when he got to know him after the war (author's interview with Dr Alexander Böker, Munich, 12 Aug. 1996).

<sup>40</sup> 'Preface to the First Edition', in Liddell Hart, *The Other Side of the Hill*, p. 7.

<sup>41</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 471.

<sup>42</sup> Mearsheimer refers to the critical reviews in the British press (Mearsheimer, *Liddell Hart*, pp. 185–7), but without noting that one of the reviewers, Robert Vansittart, was an arch-opponent of Liddell Hart's view of leniency in handling Germany. The review of the book certainly cannot be viewed outside the context of the debate on postwar policy towards Germany. Liddell Hart, writing to a German general in 1949, noted that in Britain there were 'those . . . like Lord Vansittart [who] contend that the Germans are inherently aggressive, and that they regard fairness as a sign of weakness' (Institut für Zeitgeschichte, Munich (hereafter IfZ), Nachlaß Leo Frhr. Geyr von Schweppenburg, ED91/38, Liddell Hart to Geyr, 28 Jan. 1949).

<sup>43</sup> 'Mitschuld auf der anderen Seite. Die Ansichten Liddell Harts – die verhängnisvolle Entwicklung zum September 1939', *Kieler Nachrichten*, 3 Sept. 1949.

clearly capital to be gained for those wishing to follow a line which deviated from the acceptance of collective guilt for the German nation by citing the ‘objective and independent view’ of Liddell Hart.

However, precisely because Liddell Hart was a welcome weapon in the arsenal of those arguing against collective guilt and the ‘guilt of the generals’, *The Other Side of the Hill* also came in for some harsh criticism in Germany. One newspaper article published in January 1949 in the *Neue Zeitung*, entitled ‘The Guilt of the German Generals’,<sup>44</sup> began by informing its readers that an article bearing the title ‘The Innocence of the Generals’ would probably have met with more approval. But, after much consideration, the newspaper had decided to continue to speak of the guilt of the generals, as ‘in England a few months ago a very dubious book appeared’. The article then moved quickly to the offensive, levelling the accusation that the generals had probably gone through the manuscript with the book’s author. As to Liddell Hart’s conclusions that had the generals become philosophers, they would have ceased to have been soldiers, the article retorted, ‘But that is precisely the point! Were Clausewitz and Moltke not soldiers?’ The generals were then accused of betraying their soldiers, short shrift being given to the defence that they had sworn an oath: ‘it is astonishing that the generals always speak of their duty to higher authority, but not of their duty to the soldiers entrusted to them.’ The conclusion was damning, as well as courageous:

There is much that is true in this book; no one would doubt this. But the truth is not to be found here. The German generals dug their own grave. They betrayed their great military tradition themselves. They deserve as a caste neither sympathy nor justification. Those who want mercy should remain silent.

The article had, in effect, taken up a moral position against Liddell Hart’s book, a step seen by some as necessary due to the increasing aggressiveness of sections of the German public towards the propaganda and re-education policies being carried out by the Allied occupation forces.

The imprisonment of generals, and the treatment they were receiving in captivity, was also an issue in which Liddell Hart became involved in the late 1940s, not only endearing him to the generals but further strengthening his reputation in Germany as a representative

<sup>44</sup> Dr H. Lindemann, ‘Die Schuld der deutschen Generale: Eine deutsche Stellungnahme zu Liddell Harts Buch “The Other Side of the Hill”’, *Neue Zeitung*, 29 Jan. 1949. The charge that some generals had collaborated with Liddell Hart in preparing the manuscript of *The Other Side of the Hill* seems well founded. It is clear that Kurt Dittmar, for example, produced a series of notes on one of the chapters (LHCMA, LHP 9/24/90, Sullivan to Liddell Hart, 9 Jan. 1946).

of British 'fairness'.<sup>45</sup> But he was not only involved in public protests against the treatment of the imprisoned generals, he also sought to intervene on their behalf behind the scenes. Thus it was as a result of a conversation with Liddell Hart in the summer of 1948 that the head of information services in the British occupation zone in Germany, General Alexander Bishop, visited Field Marshal Albert Kesselring and other generals at Werl prison and, having seen the poor conditions under which they were being held, did his best to see that their situation was improved, securing – among other things – a regular supply of British and German newspapers.<sup>46</sup>

Liddell Hart was also willing to cooperate with Panzer-General Leo Freiherr Geyr von Schweppenburg in his campaign for the Waffen-SS General Wilhelm Bittrich, who was being held in 1949 by the French military authorities. Bittrich, who had commanded the 9th SS Panzer Division in Normandy in 1944, had been transferred from an American POW camp to France in January 1948 as a witness, and then had been held in captivity on the grounds of unspecified war crimes, without any trial date being set.<sup>47</sup> Geyr sent Liddell Hart a copy of a letter from Bittrich to his wife in which the general described the dismal conditions in the prison. Liddell Hart replied to Geyr in May 1949 that 'he was much shocked on reading it', and he said that he was 'getting copies typed'.<sup>48</sup> A little over two months later Liddell Hart wrote once again to Geyr: 'Through the Bishop of Chichester I have been able to make contact with Pastor Boegner, the President of the French Reform Church, who has promised to take immediate action towards easing Bittrich's situation – through the Chaplain at Marseilles whom he knows well . . .'<sup>49</sup> Liddell Hart's private efforts on behalf of the Waffen-

<sup>45</sup> Here it is worth noting the following lines from the dust-jacket description of *Jetzt dürfen sie reden*: 'The most eminent English military writer, whose books have for years attracted attention in Germany and have enjoyed a high reputation, has presented with his work, ... a gift to the world, in particular to us Germans, which does not only say to each reader something until now unknown and sensationally new, but it has also turned out to be the first objective assessment of the German generals in the Second World War through a former opponent. The German generals and admirals have reported to him, the military specialist, in private discussions how the great struggle of the peoples took its course from their point of view, and Liddell Hart has evaluated their statements critically, but with great fairness and produced an account which is not only exciting, but equally serves the truth' (emphasis added).

<sup>46</sup> LHCMA, Bishop Papers, Maj.-Gen. Sir Alec Bishop, 'Look Back with Pleasure', unpublished memoirs, Jan. 1972, p. 109. Bishop's efforts were mentioned in a tone of gratitude by Kesselring in his memoirs as being the first push which led to the later improvement in conditions. See Generalfeldmarschall a.D. A. Kesselring, *Soldat bis zum letzten Tag* (Bonn, 1953), p. 452.

<sup>47</sup> According to a variety of postwar statements by Geyr, Bittrich was a chivalrous soldier and, moreover, had told Geyr in 1943 that he wanted to leave the Waffen SS, but had been informed by Himmler that he would not do so alive. See IfZ, ED91/14, Geyr von Schweppenburg, Eidesstattliche Erklärung, 9 May 1947 and 11 Sept. 1948. The background to the case can be found in more detail in untitled typewritten notes by Geyr of 1952, and Geyr, 'Der letzte deutsche kommandierende General in Frankreich', n.d. [1952].

<sup>48</sup> IfZ, ED91/38, Liddell Hart to Geyr von Schweppenburg, 31 May 1949.

<sup>49</sup> IfZ, ED91/38, Liddell Hart to Geyr von Schweppenburg, 4 Aug. 1949.

SS General show the close relationship he enjoyed with some of the generals, while Geyr, on the other hand, was quick to realize the positive value of Liddell Hart's name in connection with the later public campaign on behalf of Bittrich.<sup>50</sup>

Liddell Hart's contact with generals became somewhat more intense in 1948 and 1949. He corresponded with Manstein, Guderian, Manteuffel, Blumentritt and Geyr von Schweppenburg, to name but a few. The correspondence was often concerned with historical questions, but views were also exchanged on contemporary military and political problems. Liddell Hart was certainly well informed on the situation in Germany in the late 1940s as his son, Adrian, had taken up a post in the Control Commission in March 1947,<sup>51</sup> while many of his German correspondents informed him in considerable detail of the prevailing social and political conditions at that time.<sup>52</sup> Particularly interesting, however, is an early awareness of the issue of western defence against the Russian threat. In December 1948 Liddell Hart wrote to Günther Blumentritt informing him that he had received two articles by the latter which he had sent to the *New English Review*. However, the journal was unwilling to publish them: 'Since the Russians and their sympathisers are talking so much about Anglo-German cooperation in western defence measures, and spreading so many rumours about what they imagine is being done, there is a natural unwillingness to publish anything here that may forment their suspicions and accusations at this ticklish time . . .'<sup>53</sup> Considering this letter, it would seem unrealistic to imagine Liddell Hart was not aware of the contemporary significance of his historical publications.

During the course of 1949, he was much involved in collecting material for the second edition of *The Other Side of the Hill*. This time, the German generals were far more closely involved, particularly two advocates of a strong military bulwark against the Russians, Guderian and von Manteuffel. In fact, the latter clearly understood the significance of the book for the generals and the emerging campaign for rearmament. Writing to Liddell Hart on receipt of the first edition, he concluded:

Your book *The Other Side of the Hill* really 'gripped' me in every sense of the word. It is true to the facts. Your own conclusions are

<sup>50</sup> Leo Frhr. Geyr von Schweppenburg, 'Der Fall Bittrich', *Deutsche Soldatenzeitung*, 11 June 1953, in which Geyr wrote that 'during the course of Bittrich's years in captivity, old comrades-in-arms had lent their support, as well as former opponents such as Liddel[l] Hart.'

<sup>51</sup> Bundesarchiv-Militärarchiv, Freiburg i.Br. (hereafter BA-MA), Nachlaß Blumentritt, N252/46, Liddell Hart to Blumentritt, 28 Mar. 1947.

<sup>52</sup> See e.g. the correspondence from General der Artillerie Anton von Bechtolsheim on food shortages and war crimes, LHCMA, LHP 9/24/51, von Bechtolsheim to Liddell Hart, 6 June 1948 and 22 July 1949. On the issue of the denial of pensions to former professional soldiers, see the letters from Geyr von Schweppenburg, LHCMA, LHP 9/24/61, Geyr von Schweppenburg to Liddell Hart, 3 and 22 Jan. 1949.

<sup>53</sup> BA-MA, N252/46, Liddell Hart to Blumentritt, 14 Dec. 1948.

especially good and correct. I will shortly write to you on this subject. *Owing to its importance will you please acknowledge receipt of this letter.*<sup>54</sup>

In the light of Manteuffel's letter it is perhaps not surprising that, while the revised and enlarged second edition of the book first appeared in Britain in 1951, the German translation of the second edition, *Jetzt dürfen sie reden*, was published the year before. Indeed, the book took on almost a life of its own in Germany. As not many memoirs had yet appeared, it was the first opportunity for many Germans to discover more about the war from the perspective of their own commanders.<sup>55</sup> Indeed, the book's significance at the time of the outbreak of the Korean War can be best illustrated by an anecdote. A young German with aspirations to enter the diplomatic service, who had begun working in the *Bundeskanzleramt* (Chancellor's Office) in 1949, was sent by Adenauer to sound out discreetly the Socialist leader, Kurt Schumacher, on security questions shortly after the North Korean attack in June 1950. The young intimate of Adenauer found Schumacher to be remarkably well-informed on military questions, and to his surprise saw a pile of military books and biographies on his desk – among them a copy of Liddell Hart's *The Other Side of the Hill*.<sup>56</sup>

## West German Rearmament, 1950–1953

By 1950 the question of West German rearmament was becoming a major issue in Britain, but Liddell Hart had already devoted considerable thought to the issue. The issue had not featured greatly in his correspondence with Wehrmacht generals prior to the Korean War, largely because it was highly sensitive, and the generals knew premature discussions could lead to adverse publicity; what was more, the Allied military authorities opened and read mail throughout their

<sup>54</sup> LHCMA, LHP 9/24/16, von Manteuffel to Liddell Hart, 9 Jan. 1949; emphasis added.

<sup>55</sup> In a review essay on memoirs by former military commanders in the foreign policy journal *Aussenpolitik*, one writer even went so far as to assert: 'Without the book by the Englishman Liddle [sic] Hart, *The Other Side of the Hill*, which has also appeared in German translation, the German people would have, until yesterday, remained in the dark as to the plans and intentions, the deeds, the performance of its military leadership in the Second World War' (H.G. von Studnitz, 'Bücher vom Kriege', *Aussenpolitik: Zeitschrift für internationale Fragen* III (June 1952), p. 405). See also comments to the same effect in G. Kobe, *Wie die Bundeswehr entstand. Erlebnisse mit dem Konzept der Ausbildung* (Osnabrück, 1985), pp. 19 f.

<sup>56</sup> Transcript of author's interview with Dr A. Böker, Munich, 21 Aug. 1995, p. 16, and, for the dating of the meeting, author's interview with Dr Böker, Munich, 12 Aug. 1996. For the concern which the North Korean attack caused the Chancellor, hence making more comprehensible his step in contacting his otherwise arch-rival, Schumacher, see K. Adenauer, *Erinnerungen 1945–1953* (Stuttgart, 1965), pp. 346–9.



three occupation zones.<sup>57</sup> Nonetheless, in 1948 he had already reached the conclusion that Europe was facing a grave danger, posed by the military might of the Soviet Union and the totalitarian nature of communism, and he had begun to take an interest in the tactical, technical and strategic aspects of the problem.<sup>58</sup> In July of that year he had expressed the view in an article in *Picture Post* that a Western Union, to be constructed for the defence of Europe against the Soviet Union, would only be viable if the Germans were 'allowed to share in its defence'.<sup>59</sup> In early 1950 – in other words, before the Korean War had started – he began to concentrate on the military issues of German rearmament.<sup>60</sup> Among the questions which were occupying him were the nature of the German views on the military situation, and of the 'balance of opinion about the question of rearming and about the form of it'.<sup>61</sup>

In order to obtain more first-hand information, he set about organizing a trip to the Continent for June and part of July, and on this trip he made a point of meeting as many German generals as he could. On 21 June he saw Speidel, on 24 June, Geyr von Schweppenburg, on 26 June, Guderian and von Senger und Etterlin, on 28 and 29 June, Halder, Greiffenberg, Müller-Hillebrand, Bayerlein and Blumentritt, while 2 and 3 July were occupied with dinner engagements, first alone with Manteuffel and on the following day with Manteuffel and Westphal together.<sup>62</sup> At his meeting with Lieutenant-General (rtd) Hans Speidel on 21 June, he discovered that Rommel's former chief of staff was wholeheartedly in favour of rearmament and believed most Germans felt the same way,<sup>63</sup> a view more or less diametrically opposed to the one offered by Geyr von Schweppenburg, whom he visited at his home near Munich on 24 June.<sup>64</sup> On 28 and 29 June Liddell Hart visited Halder, Greiffenberg and Müller-Hillebrand at the American Army Historical Division at Königstein, near Frankfurt. He gave his own presentation to a group of former officers there, during which he

<sup>57</sup> For the monitoring of mail, see K. Höfner, *Die Aufrüstung Westdeutschlands: Willensbildung, Entscheidungsprozesse und Spielräume westdeutscher Politik 1945 bis 1950* (Munich, 1990), pp. 51–4. Obviously these security measures did not leave former Wehrmacht generals unaffected. General der Panzertruppe a.D. Hasso von Manteuffel, in a letter to Liddell Hart in April 1950, commented in a matter-of-fact tone, 'my mail is now being checked again by the British occupation authorities' (LHCMA, LHP 9/24/72, von Manteuffel to Liddell Hart, 27 Apr. 1950).

<sup>58</sup> See e.g. the following memoranda in LHCMA, LHP, 11/1948/6, B.H.L.H., The European situation – deeper currents, 7 Mar. 1948; 11/1948/19, B.H.L.H., Notes on the Russian forces (and those that could oppose them), July 1948; 11/1948/7, Notes for History. Talk with Martel. A. The present situation, 29 Mar. 1948.

<sup>59</sup> B.H. Liddell Hart, 'Will There Be War?', *Picture Post*, 24 July 1948.

<sup>60</sup> LHCMA, LHP 11/1950/3, [B.H.L.H.] Note for History – 1 Feb. 1950. German Rearmament.

<sup>61</sup> LHCMA, LHP 11/1950/22: [B.H.L.H.] The European problem, n.d. [1950].

<sup>62</sup> LHCMA, LHP 11/1950/1B, Liddell Hart's continental tour, 1950.

<sup>63</sup> LHCMA, LHP 11/1950/15, Speidel. Freudenstadt. 21 June 1950 [notes on conversation].

<sup>64</sup> LHCMA, LHP 11/1950/15, Geyr von Schweppenburg. Ebenhausen. 24 June 1950 [notes on conversation].



told his German audience that although neither East nor West desired war, Korea had increased the danger of conflict considerably.<sup>65</sup> Halder, for his part, was pessimistic on the chances for rearmament, politically, domestically and internationally. He suggested Germany should have a gendarmerie powerful enough to protect the country from the police force-type formations being equipped in the Soviet occupation zone, but not strong enough for serious offensive operations. Interestingly, Halder was also afraid of the East German press accusing him of conspiring to revive the military, and gave Liddell Hart strict instructions that none of his opinions be attributed to him directly by name.<sup>66</sup> At the end of the German leg of his tour, Liddell Hart dined twice with Manteuffel and his wife at the latter's home in Neuss, near Düsseldorf, where they 'talked at length about current problems'.<sup>67</sup>

Liddell Hart's interest in rearmament appears to have been awakened by his European trip. Not long after returning, he requested lists of the most likely candidates for high command in future Federal German armed forces, writing in turn to Blumentritt and Lieutenant-General (rtd) Kurt Dittmar. At this point the desire of the former generals to maintain a united front when communicating with Liddell Hart becomes more apparent. On 24 October Dittmar replied to questions on 'personalities' from Liddell Hart in detail, but made sure he sent a copy of his letter to Blumentritt. His candidates for the C-in-C were Manteuffel, Guderian, Kesselring and perhaps Speidel, and for Chief of the General Staff, Heusinger, Speidel, Lossberg or Brennecke. He was particularly enthusiastic in his praise for Heusinger.<sup>68</sup> Blumentritt wrote first to Speidel on 9 September before replying to a request for details on the most capable officers. Speidel, who in many ways had taken on the role of an unofficial CGS among former generals, advised Blumentritt to mention only those generals who were generally acceptable to former colleagues.<sup>69</sup> Blumentritt then sent a memorandum to Liddell Hart in which he saw the most promising C-in-Cs as von Manstein, von Manteuffel or Guderian, and the most capable general staff officers as Heusinger, Speidel and Westphal; he also mentioned Joppe, Dittmar, Brennecke and Röttiger as being particularly talented.<sup>70</sup> Speidel also replied to a request by Liddell Hart for suggestions on possible candidates for the top positions in a new German army, naming Heusinger, Foertsch, von Manteuffel, Blumentritt and Brennecke, for the Luftwaffe, Meister and Seidemann, and for the

<sup>65</sup> N. Wiggershaus, 'Die Entscheidung für einen westdeutschen Verteidigungsbeitrag 1950', in MGFA, ed., *Anfänge westdeutscher Sicherheitspolitik 1945–1956* I, p. 343.

<sup>66</sup> LHCMA, LHP 11/1950/15, Halder. Königstein. 29 June 1950 (notes on conversation).

<sup>67</sup> LHCMA, LHP 9/24/72, Liddell Hart to von Manteuffel, 16 Aug. 1950.

<sup>68</sup> BA-MA, N252/4, Dittmar to Liddell Hart, 24 Oct. 1950.

<sup>69</sup> BA-MA, N252/19, Speidel to Blumentritt, 18 Sept. 1950.

<sup>70</sup> LHCMA, LHP, 9/24/93, Blumentritt to Liddell Hart, 19 Sept. 1950, enclosing untitled memorandum of 19 Sept. 1950.

navy, Heye, Ruge and Wagner.<sup>71</sup> Naturally, we can only speculate as to the motivation which lay behind Liddell Hart's strong interest in these questions. However, it may well have been that the English writer was trying to return to his success formula from the 1930s in Britain, a time during which he had enjoyed considerable influence among British politicians because of his inside knowledge of military affairs and personalities.<sup>72</sup>

Significantly, Liddell Hart's interest in West German rearmament was not restricted to private conversations. Already in July 1950, although it did not deal directly with German rearmament, an article of his examining the military capabilities and strength of western European armies had been published in the West German journal *Aussenpolitik*, later to become the country's leading foreign policy journal.<sup>73</sup> Then, in October 1950, a newspaper article by him discussing the pros and cons of rearmament was published in the *Oberhessische Zeitung* under the title 'Soll Deutschland mitkämpfen?' (Should Germany fight as well?). Opening with the assertion that the defence of western Europe would only be possible with German help, Liddell Hart summarized the impressions he had gathered during his trip to Germany in the summer of that year. Noting the effects of Allied occupation measures, he described the anti-militarism of the younger generation and the attitude of politicians and former soldiers. While he acknowledged that the negative attitudes towards rearmament in West Germany were understandable, he remarked that the impact of the attack on South Korea, which had taken place during his visit to Germany, had been clearly discernible: 'One quickly concluded that the same thing could happen to Germany.' And, in the concluding paragraph he made it clear that he was a firm supporter of rearmament, writing: 'It would probably present no great difficulties to find enough volunteers with wartime experience to form 10 to 20 divisions.' The real problem would be to provide the equipment necessary for such divisions. To overcome this difficulty during the first phase of rearmament, he suggested 'the formation of a small "international army" or "European Legion" . . . in which volunteers from all western countries, including Germans, could enter with the same rights'.<sup>74</sup>

Liddell Hart's advocacy of a German defence contribution, with equal rights, went much further than many in Britain were willing to

<sup>71</sup> LHCMA, LHP, 9/24/80, Speidel to Liddell Hart, 27 Sept. 1950.

<sup>72</sup> Evidence of Liddell Hart's influence in personnel questions in the British army can be gleaned from his memoirs. See *The Memoirs of Captain Liddell Hart* (London, 1965), esp. vol. II, pp. 1–124. His influence in personnel matters in the 1930s has also been noted by historians: H. Winton, *To Change an Army: General Sir John Burnett-Stuart and British Armoured Doctrine, 1927–1938* (London, 1988), pp. 192–200; Bond, *Liddell Hart*, pp. 88 f.

<sup>73</sup> B.H. Liddell Hart, 'Zur militärischen Weltlage', *Aussenpolitik: Zeitschrift für internationale Fragen* 1 (1950), pp. 88–95.

<sup>74</sup> Capt. B. H. Liddell Hart, 'Soll Deutschland mitkämpfen? Vorteile und Nachteile auf "alliierte Waage"', *Oberhessische Zeitung*, 18 Oct. 1950.

countenance in 1950, even after the North Korean attack in June. Moreover, his support for German participation 'with the same rights' mirrored the wishes of some of the German generals who had first advocated German involvement in the defence of western Europe.<sup>75</sup> Particularly interesting is Liddell Hart's mention of the bitter feelings among ex-soldiers concerning the trials conducted against former generals, and most notably against Field Marshal von Manstein.<sup>76</sup> For former generals and army officers, the Allies' war crimes trials were seen as 'victor's justice', and among the circle of former generals and general staff officers around Hans Speidel who were attempting to work with the Allies and German politicians towards achieving a public and political consensus on rearmament, reaching 'a solution' on the question of imprisoned former high-ranking officers was seen as a prerequisite for rearmament. Liddell Hart was well aware of this problem, and during the course of 1951 he was especially active in putting his weight behind the campaign for the release of Manstein. Liddell Hart must have been in no doubt as to the importance attached to the issue of perceived miscarriages of justice, since it featured strongly in his correspondence with former generals in 1951.<sup>77</sup> He did his best to undertake a press campaign in support of Manstein, and a letter in support of the Field Marshal was published in *The Times* on 11 January 1950 in reaction to the 18-year sentence passed on Manstein in December the previous year.<sup>78</sup> His support for imprisoned generals was greeted warmly by those generals who were working to achieve agreement with the Allies on the issue, and Speidel wrote to Liddell Hart in April 1951 thanking him for his efforts, but underlining the importance of the matter for the rearmament cause, especially its psychological dimensions.<sup>79</sup>

However, Liddell Hart's campaign in the press against 'victor's jus-

<sup>75</sup> One of the first generals to advocate equal rights for Germany in the defence of western Europe was Hasso von Manteuffel. In a memorandum of 7 May 1950, he called for equal diplomatic status for Germany, for freedom of the seas for German ships and for an end to the defamation of German soldiers by the Allies. Moreover, he was blunt in his call for purely German formations, answerable to a sovereign German state. See BA-MA, Nachlaß von Manteuffel, N617/18, Hasso von Manteuffel, 'Muss Krieg kommen?', TS, 7 May 1950. Manteuffel expressed the same ideas in a newspaper interview a few months later: 'Es ist fünf Minuten vor zwölf. Der frühere General von Manteuffel über eine Wiederaufrüstung Westdeutschlands', *Neuß-Grevenbroicher Zeitung*, 14 Aug. 1950. Liddell Hart got on particularly well with von Manteuffel (notes on author's interview with Gerd von Manteuffel, Munich, 15 July 1993, p. 2), and it is possible he may have been influenced by the General on this point when they met on 2–3 July.

<sup>76</sup> Liddell Hart, 'Soll Deutschland mitkämpfen?': 'with the trial against the Field Marshal von Manstein a turning point on sensitivities is threatening. The stubbornness with which the Allies insist in keeping German officers in prison for actions which they had to carry out, by necessity, against communist partisans, has become the central point of the complaints [in Germany].'

<sup>77</sup> LHCMA, LHP 9/24/72, von Manteuffel to Liddell Hart, 18 Apr. 1951, mentioning in particular the cases of Falkenhausen and Ramcke.

<sup>78</sup> For Liddell Hart's arguments against the war crimes trials, see the treatment in Bond, *Liddell Hart*, pp. 180–88.

<sup>79</sup> LHCMA, LHP 9/24/80, Speidel to Liddell Hart, 10 Apr. 1951.

tice' was not restricted to the imprisoned generals. In September 1951 he provoked considerable correspondence on the issue of the 'honour of the German soldier' in the columns of *The Times* through a letter he wrote replying to an editorial in which it had been stated that 'outside Africa, the German Army earned a terrible reputation which cannot be wiped out by a simple declaration or by releasing persons justly condemned'.<sup>80</sup> Liddell Hart's letter is interesting for, in addition to employing the argument that the Allies had also committed war crimes, he made a direct link between the necessity of revising sentences on generals and the sensibilities of ex-servicemen in Germany. He concluded his letter by arguing: 'Some of the foremost generals now in prison are regarded with deep respect and affection by the "great majority" of decent soldiers, who believe them to have been unjustly sentenced. To continue keeping them imprisoned without chance of retrial under fairer conditions will be a festering sore and is bound to bring serious trouble.'<sup>81</sup> In other words, Liddell Hart's objection to the attack on the honour of the German soldier was less concerned with philosophical, moral or historical details than with the damaging effect of lack of movement on the issue on public opinion in Germany *vis-à-vis* rearmament.

The effect of the war crime sentences on former soldiers and their willingness to participate in Western defence efforts was also mentioned in a book by Liddell Hart, *Gedanken zur Verteidigung Europas* (Thoughts on the defence of Europe), which was published in German in 1951. In this little-known work, which appears to have been written specifically for publication in the German language, he made a careful study of the state of the West's defences and the various arguments of the Allies against rearming Germany. However, he did not shy away from criticizing the lack of concern for Germany's security on the part of the Western allies, and while outlining the fears of German politicians and the population in general of a re-establishment of the military, he presented the differing views of Halder, Manteuffel and Blumentritt on rearmament. Halder, whom he did not mention by name, had put forward the idea of a gendarmerie to protect against a surprise attack by East German paramilitary formations. Manteuffel sought 30 well-equipped divisions, while Blumentritt saw the answer to the problem in a volunteer army.<sup>82</sup> Liddell Hart's book was a clever piece of pro-rearmament publicity in which he was able to lend his support to

<sup>80</sup> 'Editorial: German Opinion', *The Times*, 19 Sept. 1951.

<sup>81</sup> B.H. Liddell Hart, letter to *The Times*, 22 Sept. 1951.

<sup>82</sup> B.H. Liddell Hart, *Gedanken zur Verteidigung Europas* (Coburg, 1951), esp. pp. 48–50. The ideas for a gendarmerie, credited by Liddell Hart to 'a former Chief of the General Staff', can be definitively ascribed to Halder when one consults Liddell Hart's notes on his conversation with the former in 1950, to be found at LHCMA, LHP 11/1950/15, Halder, Königstein, 29 June 1950. The book is not based on any sections of Liddell Hart's 1950 work, *Defence of the West*, and the copyright references to the English original contain no details of publication elsewhere. Neither Bond nor Mearsheimer has made any reference to the book in their monographs on Liddell Hart.

former generals. Moreover, his name was also used in support of the rearmament campaign in an important work also published in 1951 under the title *Armee ohne Pathos* (Army without pathos), in which the views of many former generals were laid out in considerable detail. Liddell Hart was cited on several occasions, appearing once again in the guise of the objective, independent commentator from abroad.<sup>83</sup>

The year 1952 saw Liddell Hart continue his efforts in the press and behind the scenes on behalf of the generals still held in prison. The fact that he was received by the German Chancellor, Konrad Adenauer, on 9 June of that year gives some indication of how significant his role and influence had become in the public and political debate on the question in both Britain and Germany. While his audience with Adenauer was just one appointment during this particular trip to the Continent, it was certainly his most important. Here, it is interesting to compare Liddell Hart's hastily jotted questions, of which there were eight, with his notes on the meeting itself. While his eight questions ranged from Russian policy to when the new divisions were to be ready, with only two questions on the imprisoned generals,<sup>84</sup> at his 'confidential, background talk' with the Chancellor, the question of the release of the generals appears to have been the main subject under discussion. During the conversation, which lasted just under an hour, Adenauer pointed out that the lack of progress on the problem was complicating the ratification of the European Treaty. The Chancellor also stated that he did not favour a general amnesty, but he thought it important that generals such as Kesselring be released in order to 'take the wind out of the sails of the rising public clamour and make it easier to resist the demand that everyone convicted of war crimes should be released'. And he mentioned that, while the plans to form a German contingent had been planned to coincide with the ratification of the European Treaty, the continued imprisonment of Kesselring and Manstein would create recruitment problems.<sup>85</sup>

The following day Liddell Hart wrote to Lord Hankey, outlining the main points made by Adenauer during the interview,<sup>86</sup> and on his

<sup>83</sup> A. Weinstein, *Armee ohne Pathos: Die deutsche Wiederbewaffnung im Urteil ehemaliger Soldaten* (Bonn, 1951), with references to Liddell Hart on pp. 45, 116 f., 130 f. It is interesting to note that on pp. 130 f., a quote from Liddell Hart's *Defence of the West* is used to support the opinion of General der Kavallerie a.D. Siegfried Westphal that 'every idea must proceed from the assumption that a defence has to be formed against red division[s] ... the structure, armament and the size of tactical and operational formations [cannot be conducted according to] ... the wishes of politicians who have to take account of their voters'.

<sup>84</sup> LHCMA, LHP 9/24/48, untitled typewritten note of 8 questions, headed 9 June 1952, Bonn.

<sup>85</sup> LHCMA, LHP 9/24/48, B.H.L.H., Note on talk with the German Chancellor (Dr Adenauer) at the Palais Schaumburg, Bonn, 9 June 1952, n.d. The Chancellor's record of the meeting is much more detailed, and can be consulted in Rudolf Morsey and Hans-Peter Schwarz, eds, *Adenauer: Tagesgespräche 1950-1954* (Rhöndorf, 1984), no. 32, 9 June 1952: Unterredung (Aufzeichnung vom 11. Juni 1952), pp. 315-20.

<sup>86</sup> Public Record Office, Kew, FO371/97979, Liddell Hart to Hankey, 10 June 1952.

return to Britain he set about trying to whip up support for an early release of some of the generals. During the course of a visit to London from 1 to 3 July, he discovered that unwillingness to take any swift steps was based on a fear that an outcry might ensue in France which could lead to the treaty ratification being endangered. He brought up the matter with Reginald Paget, who promised to take it up with Churchill and also mentioned that the government was trying to find a pretext to release Manstein. Liddell Hart also talked at length with Field Marshal Alexander about the Manstein case.<sup>87</sup> He then communicated the results of his discussions to Adenauer in a letter of 5 July, to which the German Chancellor replied about one week later, thanking Liddell Hart for his efforts and asking him to keep up his interest in the matter.<sup>88</sup>

However, Liddell Hart's 1952 'continental tour' had equally been conducted to allow him the opportunity to examine the state of the West's defences. Summarizing his impressions from his June visit in a memorandum, Liddell Hart concluded that the chance of a Russian surprise attack had receded considerably during the course of 1952, but that if an attack were to take place, the lack of reserves could prove fatal to the West. This was one of the reasons why he remained convinced of the absolute necessity of German divisions being created. He phrased the issue succinctly in a single sentence: 'In the argument over German rearmament, the compelling reasons for it have not been brought out clearly – i.e. That the minimum reinforcement required to maintain a prolonged defence can only be provided by tapping a fresh source, and that Western Germany is the only possible source.' However, he could only lament the fact that the 12 German divisions which he thought might allow a defence in front of the Rhine would not be ready until the end of 1954.<sup>89</sup> Thus, once again, Liddell Hart emerges as an unwavering supporter of West German rearmament as a military necessity.

In January the following year, the great efforts made by Liddell Hart and, from among the ranks of the German generals, above all Hans Speidel, finally began to come to fruition. In summarizing the situation in a letter to Liddell Hart, Speidel noted that the news of the release of Kesselring and von Mackensen had been greeted with delight in Germany. He also expressed the wish that Manstein's period of recuperation in a clinic in Kiel would be extended by the British authorities.<sup>90</sup> While Speidel continued to keep up the pressure on the Brit-

<sup>87</sup> LHCMA, LHP 11/1952/9, B.H.L.H., Notes on London visit 1–3 July 1952, n.d.

<sup>88</sup> LHCMA, LHP 9/24/48, Liddell Hart to Adenauer, 5 July 1952, and Adenauer to Liddell Hart, 16 July 1952.

<sup>89</sup> LHCMA, LHP 11/1952/11, B.H.L.H., Impressions from my Continental Tour, July 1952, pp. 1–3.

<sup>90</sup> LHCMA, LHP 9/24/80, Speidel to Liddell Hart, 15 Jan. 1953. Manteuffel also wrote to Liddell Hart in the same month, thanking him for his efforts on behalf of the German soldiers and noting that they had 'found great recognition on behalf of the soldiers here – unfortunately, we cannot thank you enough for this!' (LHCMA, LHP

ish authorities for the release of Falkenhorst in the first part of the year, the problem, in terms of the rearmament campaign, had to all intents and purposes been solved.

January 1953 saw further recognition in Germany of Liddell Hart as an outstanding military authority when his picture appeared on the front cover of the weekly news magazine *Der Spiegel*. The magazine not only published an article by Liddell Hart, 'Wenn ich russischer Generalstabchef wäre' (If I were the Russian Chief of Staff),<sup>91</sup> but also featured an in-depth article examining his career, most notably his post-war involvement with Wehrmacht generals. As well as repeating Liddell Hart's hobby horse that Guderian had been his pupil in questions of tank warfare before the Second World War, and describing the background to the writing of *The Other Side of the Hill*, the article gave considerable space to his theories concerning the defence of Western Europe which were, it was noted, 'largely based on the experiences of German generals'.<sup>92</sup> Despite the sarcastic tone for which *Der Spiegel* has become renowned, the attention devoted to Liddell Hart's assessment of German military problems, in addition to the praise for his military-historical writing, makes clear that his reputation had reached a peak in Germany.<sup>93</sup>

Although Liddell Hart conducted two more of his famed 'continental tours' before the swearing-in of the first Bundeswehr recruits – first in mid-1953 and then subsequently in the autumn of 1955<sup>94</sup> – by the end of 1953 he had become less involved in the German rearmament question. Although the negotiating process was by no means over for the new democratic republic, internationally or domestically, with the disappearance of the war criminals issue, Liddell Hart's influence began to wane. Nonetheless, it must have been satisfying for him to have been invited to a semi-official dinner discussion for members of the Bundestag Defence Committee in mid-November 1955 which was held during the course of a 10-day visit they were making to Britain.

9/24/72, von Manteuffel to Liddell Hart, 2 Jan. 1953).

<sup>91</sup> [B.H.] Liddell Hart, 'Wenn ich russischer Generalstabchef wäre', *Spiegel*, 14 Jan. 1953, pp. 26 f. With minor additions, an English version of the article can be read in B.H. Liddell Hart, *Deterrent or Defence: A Fresh Look at the West's Military Position* (London, 1960), pp. 3–16.

<sup>92</sup> 'Militärkritik. Liddell Hart: Ein Pfund Infanterie', *Spiegel*, 14 Jan. 1953, pp. 22–5.

<sup>93</sup> Liddell Hart was seen notably among former soldiers as a military historian of the highest order, and this led to pieces by him appearing in pages normally reserved for German writers (e.g. 'Rommel's letzter Schlag', *Deutsche Soldaten-Zeitung* II (May 1953), p. 16). He was also frequently cited – e.g. in Generalmajor a.D. Hans Rumpf, 'Luftkrieg über Deutschland', in *Bilanz des zweiten Weltkrieges: Erkenntnisse und Verpflichtung für die Zukunft* (Oldenbourg, 1953), pp. 173f.; Kesselring, *Soldat bis zum letzten Tag*, pp. 455f. The *Deutsche Soldaten-Zeitung*, referenced immediately above, changed its title to *Soldat im Volk*, and should not be confused with the newspaper of the same name cited in n. 50 above.

<sup>94</sup> LHCMA, LHP 11/1953/3, B.H.L.H., Impressions of 1953 Continental Tour, 18 Aug. 1953, and LHP 11/1955/7, B.H.L.H., Conclusions from Continental Tour, 1955, Oct. 1955. The brevity of Liddell Hart's notes on these 2 visits implies that he had largely lost interest in the contemporary military debate in West Germany.



The group, which consisted of Dr Richard Jäger (CSU), Fritz Erler (SPD), Rear-Admiral (rtd) Hellmuth Heye (CDU), Georg Kiesling (CDU), Panzer-General (rtd) Hasso von Manteuffel (FDP) and Helmut Schmidt (SPD), were particularly interested in informing themselves of British practice in parliamentary control of the armed forces.<sup>95</sup> With the foundation of the Bundeswehr by this time having been secured internationally and in the West German parliament, it must have been a poignant moment for Liddell Hart.

## The Generals' View of Liddell Hart

So far, the role of Liddell Hart in the defence of the German generals and the clear interaction between his historical treatment of the war and the rearmament debate has been documented. Liddell Hart's motives in cooperating closely with former Wehrmacht generals can be ascribed to a combination of his desire for 'fair play', the wish to have his version of the development of German armoured forces supported by the generals and a belief in the necessity of West German rearmament. However, the question of the motives of the generals in this very special relationship remains: to what extent were they simply interested in assisting Liddell Hart with his 'historical research'; and were they anxious to manipulate Liddell Hart for their own purposes in the rearmament debate? However, before examining the attitudes of the generals towards Liddell Hart, it is first necessary to provide some indication of the level of involvement of former Wehrmacht generals in the preparatory thinking on rearmament on the eve of Liddell Hart's continental tour in the summer of 1950.

As a result of Allied denazification measures, many generals in 1950 were simply struggling to find their way back into civilian life and, apart from supporting the campaign for their pension rights, had not involved themselves in the rearmament issue beyond discussion circles in public houses.<sup>96</sup> Nonetheless, a small group of generals who had formed round the former Lieutenant-General Hans Speidel during the course of 1949 had begun to consider the possibility of organizing themselves to create the right climate for a rebirth of the German military. In fact, Speidel had already produced memoranda in 1948 and 1949 on West Germany's future security, as had Geyr von Schwepp-

<sup>95</sup> LHCMA, LHP 9/24/88, Alec Bishop to Liddell Hart, 3 Nov. 1955, Liddell Hart to Hans von Herwarth (German embassy, London), 6 Nov. 1955, and, Liddell Hart to L.F. Behrens, 21 Nov. 1955.

<sup>96</sup> For the situation of demobilized German soldiers in the years immediately following the Second World War, see G. Meyer, 'Soldaten ohne Armee: Berufssoldaten im Kampf um Standesehre und Versorgung', in M. Broszat, K.-D. Henke and H. Woller, eds, *Von Stalingrad zur Währungsreform: Zur Sozialgeschichte des Umbruchs in Deutschland* (Munich, 1988), pp.683–750; and 'Zur Situation der deutschen militärischen Führungsschicht im Vorfeld des westdeutschen Verteidigungsbeitrages 1945–1950/51', in MGFA, ed., *Anfänge westdeutscher Sicherheitspolitik 1945–1956* I, pp. 635–52.



enburg,<sup>97</sup> so what had emerged by 1950 was an informal circle of former high-ranking officers who were anxious to engage in a campaign for rearmament measures and also to secure a better deal for Germany at the negotiating table. Thus, although Adenauer announced the appointment of a personal adviser in security questions in mid-1950, the former Panzer-General Gerhard Graf von Schwerin,<sup>98</sup> there were very few bureaucratic structures in place to deal with military questions at this time. Hence, it was not surprising that a loose grouping of officers had emerged, at times cooperating, at times acting independently, who saw it as their duty to involve themselves in the rearmament debate, their participation by necessity leading to the emergence of certain generals as the chief representatives of the former officer corps.<sup>99</sup>

On the eve of Liddell Hart's visit to the Continent in 1950, many former officers in Germany were clearly curious as to what his view of the situation was and to what extent he could be employed in the rearmament debate. One of Günther Blumentritt's correspondents asked on 6 July, 'Does Liddell Hart see the situation as it is, and can he tell the [important] people something which will wake them up a bit?'<sup>100</sup> The conviction of generals and former professional soldiers that rearmament was an urgent necessity, a view based on varying motives and varying degrees of political and military insight, came to be shared by an increasing number of individuals in the wake of the Korean War, and Liddell Hart came to be seen as an important supporter of the rearmament campaign. Speidel, for one, seemed to regard the Englishman's visit in 1950 as noteworthy, writing to Blumentritt as follows: 'We were able to discuss well questions of a military-historical, contemporary and future nature. The visit was pleasing in

<sup>97</sup> Speidel's memoranda are reproduced in his memoirs, *Aus unserer Zeit. Erinnerungen* (Berlin, 1977), pp. 454–96. Memoranda by Geyr von Schweppenburg can be found at IfZ, Nachlaß Dr Dirk Forster, ED134/19, in particular the untitled document of 7 Sept. 1949. For the background to the writing of Speidel and Geyr's memoranda for the Friedensbüro in 1948 and 1949, see R.G. Foerster, 'Innenpolitische Aspekte der Sicherheit Westdeutschlands (1949–1950)', in MGFA, ed., *Anfänge westdeutscher Sicherheitspolitik 1945–1956 I*, pp. 407–17.

<sup>98</sup> For the announcement of Schwerin's appointment, see IfZ, Nachlaß Gerhard Graf von Schwerin, ED337/62, 'Militärische Berater Adenauers: Der ehemalige General Graf von Schwerin als Sicherheitsexperte', *Windhund*, Aug./Sept. 1950, p. 1. On Schwerin's role as security adviser to Adenauer, see D. Krüger, *Das Amt Blank: Die schwierige Gründung des Bundesministeriums für Verteidigung* (Freiburg i.Br., 1993), pp. 17–28; Foerster, 'Innenpolitische Aspekte', pp. 456–82.

<sup>99</sup> The acceptance by former high-ranking officers of the necessity of a 'commanding group' of former generals representing their interests, with Speidel and Heusinger at its head, can be seen in a letter from Alfred Toppe to Blumentritt: 'Our duty is, in my opinion, to produce a clear and unbiased assessment of the situation in terms of its precise military aspects. This can only be done by people of the calibre of Speidel, Brennecke, Heusinger, Blumentritt, who can guarantee objectivity. Other "pleasant" and "additional" personalities – regardless of how great their merits and qualifications are – cannot be trusted with specialized General Staff work' (BA-MA, N252/17, Toppe to Blumentritt, 9 Sept. 1950).

<sup>100</sup> BA-MA, N252/16, Wilhelm Schramm to Blumentritt, 6 July 1950.

every respect.<sup>101</sup> Speidel was not the only one who wrote to Blumentritt to report on his talk with Liddell Hart. Major-General (rtd) Alfred Toppe, employed at the time at the US Army Historical Division in Königstein, near Frankfurt/Main, wrote that he had 'spoken to Liddell Hart himself. We talked in private about problems which concern my previous business. He asked me whether he could send me some written questions on this area to which I could give an opinion as an expert. Where I can be of service I will naturally do so with pleasure.'<sup>102</sup> While there is a danger of overinterpreting statements such as this, it would appear, if one is prepared to read between the lines, that the generals and publicists who supported rearmament had clear plans as to how they could make use of Liddell Hart in their campaign not only for rearmament but also for their own rehabilitation.<sup>103</sup>

On the other hand, one should not assume that Liddell Hart was somehow 'duped' into lending the generals support without realizing how his name was being used in Germany. Indeed, he did his best not only assisting some generals in publishing their memoris but also in the correction of their manuscripts. An interesting example of this latter form of 'support' can be seen in his comments on the manuscript of Günther Blumentritt's biography of Field Marshal von Rundstedt. Blumentritt's biography would appear to have been written with the propagandistic intention of generating 'understanding' for Rundstedt's 'apolitical' stance during the Second World War,<sup>104</sup> and Liddell Hart's notes on the manuscript for the London publisher confirm this initial impression. Liddell Hart began by commenting, 'Von Rundstedt's own Foreword is excellent in tone until the last sentence, which, to judge from reactions of several people to whom I have shown it, is likely to foster prejudice in the minds of reviewers and readers.'<sup>105</sup> It is not clear whether amendments were made here, but when the book was published in 1952, the offending sentence may well have been the one which read, 'this book, in accordance with the express intention

<sup>101</sup> BA-MA, N252/19, Speidel to Blumentritt, 27 June 1950.

<sup>102</sup> BA-MA, N252/17, Toppe to Blumentritt, 26 July 1950.

<sup>103</sup> For evidence to support this thesis, see BA-MA, N252/10, Schramm to Blumentritt, 29 Aug. 1950, in which Schramm discusses writing a feature on Liddell Hart for the Munich daily newspaper *Münchener Merkur*.

<sup>104</sup> Rundstedt had been asked by the British to write his memoirs while he was still a POW, but had consistently refused. The British authorities had then approached Oberst a.D. Dr Kurt Hesse, who had in turn written to Blumentritt, the former suggesting that Desmond Young's Rommel biography ought to be supplemented with a biography of the venerable Field Marshal. See BA-MA, N252/2, Blumentritt (in English) to an unidentified 'Major', 13 Sept. 1950, and N252/8, Hesse to Blumentritt, 31 Mar. 1950. In fact, the Rommel biography provoked from a member of the Rundstedt family the comment that 'the propaganda has turned around completely and Young's Rommel book has received an excellent press' (BA-MA, N252/15, Dr Edith von Rundstedt to Blumentritt, 14 Aug. 1950), highlighting the suspicion that Blumentritt's biography was written with the sole intention of influencing public perceptions in Britain of German generals and the German army.

<sup>105</sup> LHCMA, LHP 9/24/93, B.H.L.H., Comments on General Blumentritt's book on 'von Rundstedt', 11 May 1952, p. 1.

of that of the author, contains no reproach against any nation or particular individual, because we must learn by experience that destiny is mightier than man.'<sup>106</sup> By this time, the notion of 'destiny' having somehow overtaken the surprised generals had become a familiar argument in countless memoranda and memoirs written by German generals, allowing them, of course, to escape from accounting for their actions. Likewise, while Liddell Hart's comment that two sentences referring to von Rundstedt's 'action in executing von Papen's orders to evict the Prussian ministers from office' in 1932 were too vague – in fact, he recommended that his 'action here could be justified by his duty to obey the Chancellor's orders'<sup>107</sup> – was ignored by Blumentritt,<sup>108</sup> it shows Liddell Hart's awareness of the problems involved in marketing an uncritical version of the military's stance during the National Socialist era.

The help Liddell Hart offered to German generals also included other forms of support, for instance sending Generals Günther Blumentritt and Kurt von Tippelskirch character references.<sup>109</sup> He also made enquiries on behalf of a Major Busch in an attempt to secure him a position in the so-called Amt Blank, or Blank Office, the forerunner of the Federal Ministry of Defence.<sup>110</sup> Indeed, by 1952 Liddell Hart's connections with former generals were so well developed that Lieutenant-General (rtd) Fritz Bayerlein wrote to him asking for advice on how he could combat rumours which were being spread about concerning his behaviour in POW camp, and which he feared might be damaging his chances of a return to service.<sup>111</sup> One can speculate that,

<sup>106</sup> G. Blumentritt, *Von Rundstedt: The Soldier and the Man* (London, 1952), p. 10.

<sup>107</sup> LHCMA, LHP 9/24/93, B.H.L.H., Comments on General Blumentritt's book, p. 1.

<sup>108</sup> 'In 1932 a state of emergency was proclaimed by the government (under von Papen and General von Schleicher) whereby Rundstedt was forced against his will into political affairs for a few days in consequence of the position he held in Berlin at that time. He rose to the occasion and mastered the situation in a sphere that was foreign to him with tact and competence' (Blumentritt, *Von Rundstedt*, pp. 26 f.). An accurate historical account of the events surrounding the removal from office of Otto Braun can be found in H. Schulze, *Otto Braun oder Preußens demokratische Sendung: Eine Biographie* (Frankfurt a.M., 1977), pp. 745–62. According to one military biographer, Rundstedt felt uneasy in his position as 'Holder of Plenipotentiary Powers for the Region of Greater Berlin and Brandenburg Province'. See C. Messenger, *The Last Prussian: A Biography of Field Marshal Gerd von Rundstedt 1875–1953* (London, 1991), pp. 56 f.

<sup>109</sup> BA-MA, N252/46, Liddell Hart to Blumentritt, 2 Mar. 1948, enclosing note headed, 'To whom it may concern': 'From my many discussions with General Blumentritt, as well as other enquiries, I formed the opinion that he had an exceptionally liberal and progressive outlook on political issues, and that his understanding of the real meaning of democracy was far in advance of most of those whom I met. I felt that he was one who might play a valuable part in the restoration of Germany on better lines . . .'. A note with identical wording can be found at BA-MA, Nachlaß Kurt von Tippelskirch, N281/7.

<sup>110</sup> BA-MA, BW9/1544, Max Schwedtfeger to Speidel, Bonn, 2 Sept. 1952, in which he refers to the evaluation of Busch given to Speidel by Liddell Hart, noting: 'I don't believe we can fit him into the office at the moment, but later a position will certainly be possible'.

<sup>111</sup> LHCMA, LHP 9/24/50, Bayerlein to Liddell Hart, 28 July 1952, and Liddell Hart to Bayerlein, 1 Aug. 1952.

for Liddell Hart, building up a network among the generals, as well as amassing as much information on personalities as possible, was conducted with the intention of establishing himself as an expert on West German military affairs.

However, his intense interest in personnel questions was, after a time, to raise suspicions. One of the most influential generals of all in the rearmament campaign, Hans Speidel, came to an interesting conclusion on Liddell Hart's motives, following a letter to Günther Blumentritt in June 1952:

I had a very detailed discussion with Liddell Hart, who, for my taste, quizzed me rather too much and noted every word like a little newspaper reporter. He brought English interests very strongly to the fore, above all in the future armaments question. On the issue of the 'war criminals' I was able to score a few points against him concerning his friends Churchill and Eden . . . Besides, isn't it just price-less how L.H. involves himself in German personnel [issues]!<sup>112</sup>

Blumentritt replied to Speidel the following day, suggesting that Liddell Hart's question on German personnel may have stemmed from the British intelligence services.<sup>113</sup> A week later, Speidel wrote once again to Blumentritt, this time remarking that Blumentritt's opinion of Liddell Hart confirmed his own, which had itself been supported by those of others, and he concluded: 'One must be careful after all.'<sup>114</sup> Speidel's suspicions as to Liddell Hart's motives remained, and three years later, in discussing the activities of Geyr von Schweppenburg in the international veterans' movement, Speidel remarked in a letter to Colonel-General (rtd) Hans Reinhardt that Geyr was heavily involved with Liddell Hart, 'without knowing exactly the background to this personality'.<sup>115</sup> Still, it may have been that Speidel was unaware of Liddell Hart's previous 'success formula' with army personalities in Britain and, along with Blumentritt, simply read too much into Liddell Hart's behaviour. Certainly no written evidence has emerged to date in Liddell Hart's papers that he carried out any work for the British secret services. Indeed, for that matter, rather more the opposite situation may have been the case, since Blumentritt made sure that all interesting foreign correspondence he received was sent to the Blank Office on a weekly basis to be combed for interesting information;<sup>116</sup> more than likely, Liddell Hart's letters to Blumentritt also found their way into this rather unusual postbag on occasions.

There would seem to have been, though, a certain cooling off in the relationship between Liddell Hart and some of the generals in the mid-1950s. Apart from the fact that the Englishman was no longer as

<sup>112</sup> BA-MA, N252/19, Speidel to Blumentritt, 19 June 1952.

<sup>113</sup> BA-MA, BW9/1544, Blumentritt to Speidel, 20 June 1952.

<sup>114</sup> BA-MA, N252/19, Speidel to Blumentritt, 26 June 1952.

<sup>115</sup> BA-MA, BW9/3369, Speidel to Generaloberst a.D. Reinhardt, 25 May 1955.

<sup>116</sup> BA-MA, BW9/1544, Blumentritt to Speidel, 27 Nov. 1952.

useful to the generals as he had been in the critical years 1948–52, a measure of resentment emerged due to Liddell Hart's exploitation of his contacts with generals for his own purposes. This resentment can clearly be seen on the part of Geyr von Schweppenburg, who was later to describe Liddell Hart as 'an opportunist',<sup>117</sup> as well as someone willing to deal with former Nazis.<sup>118</sup> Geyr, who had first met Liddell Hart in the mid-1930s,<sup>119</sup> in actual fact had had particularly close contact with the writer during the rearmament debate, and was never reluctant to make use of Liddell Hart's name.<sup>120</sup> But despite his worries that Liddell Hart was not discerning enough in his dealings with former generals, he conceded in 1955, 'I do not in any way deny the exceptional courage, intellectual independence and also far-sighted attitude which my friend Liddell Hart adopted after the war.'<sup>121</sup> The gratitude which many generals felt towards Liddell Hart for his efforts on their behalf in the early postwar period was in most cases genuine.

## Conclusions

Without doubt Liddell Hart's *The Other Side of the Hill* and Desmond Young's Rommel biography, on which Liddell Hart had cooperated,<sup>122</sup> exerted an enormous influence on public opinion in Britain, however hard this might be to measure in retrospect.<sup>123</sup> Indeed, these books

<sup>117</sup> IFZ, ED91/33, Geyr von Schweppenburg to Heye, 24 July 1958.

<sup>118</sup> IFZ, ED91/33, Geyr von Schweppenburg to de Hinterhoff, 22 Dec. 1955. Geyr – who was a fiery anti-Nazi – writing much later, recalled an evening at Liddell Hart's house in the summer of 1954, in which they had sat in his studio until deep into the night, but where he noted with disapproval that there were 'photographs, with dedications, of prominent Nazi generals'. (IFZ, ED91/44, Geyr von Schweppenburg, *Freie Jahre nach dem 2. Weltkrieg*, ch. 19 of planned memoirs, unpublished TS, n.d., p. 42).

<sup>119</sup> Geyr became acquainted with Liddell Hart during his time as military attaché in London, 1933–37. According to Geyr's diary, he first met Liddell Hart on 18 Mar. 1935 (IFZ, ED91/7(2), *Tagebuch für die Militärattachézeit in London, Brüssel und dem Haag*), although it can be inferred from correspondence between the two in Liddell Hart's Papers (LHP 9/24/61) that they may have already met the previous year.

<sup>120</sup> A good example of the use of Liddell Hart's reputation as an impartial authority is the quotation by Geyr of a sentence from the writer's *Why Don't We Learn from History?* in one of his early postwar memoranda. See IFZ, ED134/19, [Geyr] *Gedanken über Neutralisierung Gesamt-Deutschlands*, Irschenhausen, 31 Mar. 1949, which begins, 'It is unrealistic to ignore military principles and conditions in taking political steps.'

<sup>121</sup> IFZ, ED91/33, Geyr von Schweppenburg to de Hinterhoff, 22 Dec. 1955.

<sup>122</sup> Young's biography was first published by Collins in 1950. In addition to Liddell Hart and leading British military personalities, the generals Fritz Bayerlein and Hans Speidel also assisted the author in his research (D. Young, *Rommel* (London, 1953), pp. 5 f.).

<sup>123</sup> While newspaper reporting on former generals was not always positive, it is informative to note an article from the *Manchester Guardian* from Sept. 1950 in which the comment is made that the generals 'like, indeed, men of any profession – have their own trade union, exchanging family news and tactical titbits, scattered far and wide ... but very much alive and abreast of the times'. In fact, in the same positive tone, the correspondent continued, 'Those to whom I have spoken seem to be animated by no special desire for a "comeback", and have little in common with the

prepared the public mind for a more positive reaction to various memoirs by German generals which first began to appear in English in 1951.<sup>124</sup> Moreover, in Germany itself, there can be no doubt of the significance of Liddell Hart's writings in the early 1950s. Some indication of this can be gained from a study by the *Arbeitsgemeinschaft demokratischer Kreise* [Working group of democratic circles], a Bonn-based political information service. In discussing the relations between veterans' organizations from different European countries, the report noted that difficulties had been encountered by German veterans' organizations in working together with groups from the countries of former opponents, and that this had been due to 'the events of the war and public opinion'. Nonetheless, in addition to the change in climate in world politics, 'much was achieved' through a series of memoirs by German soldiers which were published abroad. Further, 'before the English coronation, the Rommel biography by the Englishman Young dominated the book shops more than the picture of Queen Elizabeth.' Finally, the author of the report noted that, in assisting those abroad to consider the spirit of the German people and its soldiers, 'Particular understanding was awakened by the English military writers Liddle [*sic*] Hart and Fuller.'<sup>125</sup>

As we have seen, the call for 'increased understanding' of the generals' viewpoint was part of a campaign to influence public opinion in Germany and Britain, not to mention other European countries. Liddell Hart was a willing participant in this campaign. The failure of some historians to understand the German generals' motives in working with Liddell Hart stems essentially from a lack of understanding of propaganda during the Cold War, and more specifically during the debate on West German rearmament in Germany and Britain in the

conventional picture of martial men plotting darkly to return to power' ('Rearming Germany: What the ex-Generals Think', *Manchester Guardian*, 19 July 1950). The portrayal of the generals as men from just another normal profession strongly recalls comments from Liddell Hart's *The Other Side of the Hill*.

<sup>124</sup> Of course, reviews of generals' memoirs in Britain were often used as a platform for advocating German rearmament. See e.g., 'German Generals as They See Themselves', *Economist*, 14 and 21 Apr. 1951. In a review of Hans Speidel's *We defended Normandy*, Lt-Gen. Sir Brian Horrocks went as far as to state, 'I laid down this interesting book with two thoughts uppermost in my mind. First – amazement, that the Germans . . . should have been so incredibly inefficient . . . Second – relief, that a man of Speidel's calibre should be available to help forge such German armed forces as will be integrated into Western defence' ('Man Behind Rommel', *Sunday Times*, 22 Apr. 1951).

<sup>125</sup> H. Bohn, 'Internationale Beziehungen zwischen den Organisationen der ehemaligen Soldaten', *Arbeitsgemeinschaft demokratischer Kreise* II, 7/53, pp. 21 f. As to the effect of the writings of Liddell Hart and Fuller on former high-ranking officers, here it is also worth mentioning the observation of Hans Speier: 'When, in the early fifties, the subject of the bombing of German cities was mentioned by German generals, they cited unfailingly British professional criticism of its wastefulness and cruelty, hiding their own condemnation of strategic air war behind the opinions of such writers as J.F.C. Fuller and Liddell Hart' (*German Rearmament and Atomic War: The Views of German Military and Political Leaders* (White Plains, NY, 1957), p. 34).

early 1950s.<sup>126</sup> In other words, one cannot understand the tributes of German generals to the prescience of Liddell Hart's interwar theories without taking into account the way in which they worked together with him for the rearmament cause. Of course, to a degree he was interested in fair treatment of the generals, as his attitude to the treatment of Germany as a whole after the war demonstrates, while he also undoubtedly relished his contacts with them on a personal and professional level. Supporting their cause not only fitted in with his advocacy of rearmament, his conversations and correspondence with them also gave him considerable original material for his books.<sup>127</sup> The motives of the leading German generals were for their part more cynical: they sought to use Liddell Hart's name in the selling of their version of the history of the war, which was itself intended to create a different image of the German general to that peddled by the Allies immediately after Germany's defeat. Satiating Liddell Hart's craving for recognition with attestations to his 'influence' on German armour doctrine must have seemed a cheap price to pay for his support in underwriting their portrayal of events. Although for countless 'nameless' generals who had disappeared into the obscurity of civilian life after the war demanding a more positive image of their profession and its leading representatives was often an end in itself, for those generals campaigning with Liddell Hart for rearmament it was equally a means to an end.

By way of conclusion, if one seeks to put the very special relationship which existed between Liddell Hart and Wehrmacht generals into the overall context of the former's career, a number of observations can be made. First of all, undoubtedly Liddell Hart benefited greatly as a writer from his contacts with the generals; on the one hand as a source of information for his historical writing and on the other for support in the efforts he was making to advertise the 'influence' of his theories in Germany in the interwar period. However, the central motivating force in the alliance between Liddell Hart and the most prominent German generals was not historical research, but rather the exigencies of the campaign for rearmament; a rehabilitation of the top generals was seen as a crucial component of the public relations campaign which had to be waged. Indeed, the degree of Liddell Hart's involvement with former Wehrmacht generals in the campaign for rearmament, and his considerable reliance on their views, goes a long way to explaining much of his – and indeed others' – historical writing on the Second World War. Finally, *The Other Side of the Hill* represents the

<sup>126</sup> John Keegan, for example, referring to Liddell Hart's efforts to extract statements from generals as to his influence on the German army, asks in a puzzled tone, if Liddell Hart 'was already a busted flush, however, why should Guderian – "the father of Blitzkrieg" – and Rommel's son and widow have yielded?' ('Mounting an Offensive').

<sup>127</sup> See e.g. the frequent references to generals in B.H. Liddell Hart, *The Defence of the West: Some Riddles of War and Peace* (London, 1950), esp. to Guderian and von Manteuffel.

greatest paradox of his career. Intellectually and historically it was highly tendentious. But as a work of skilful propaganda in the service of the campaign for West German rearmament it may well have been the book by which he achieved his greatest influence on the course of history, with its subtle, yet ultimately far-reaching, effect on West German attitudes towards the Wehrmacht generals in the 1950s, thus crucially influencing public opinion on the remarmament issue.

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