

## B. H. LIDDELL HART

### Britain's Caustic Military Historian

**S**TANDING aside from the battle, but talking as fast as any ringside radio commentator, is Captain Basil Liddell Hart, a tall, lank, freelance writer on military affairs. For ten years he was military correspondent for the *Daily Telegraph*, then went to *The Times*. Now a prolific freelance, he is more active than ever.

He has produced five war histories, six fighting biographies, eight treatises on military science, and a handful of General Staff manuals — plus translations of military writings from French, Russian, German, Italian, Arabic and 16 other languages. "The Defence of Britain" (1939), was the book which brought him right into the public eye.

A bigger job than this, however, was collaborating with Mr. Hore-Belisha in the 1937-38 re-organisation of the Army. Of his programme, 62 reforms have been adopted.

Famous for his wisecracks, Captain Liddell Hart coined the epigram: "The highest freedom is freedom from prejudice." He should know, for such remarks as "there has been too much wishful thinking in our foreign policy" aroused plenty of prejudice against him in high places.

With so many books to his name, Liddell Hart could hardly escape forecasting successfully many of the tactical techniques used in this war. Between 1919 and 1937, he made a string of suggestions for the British Army. Here is how some of them have worked out:

"That a skilful opponent will choose a line that threatens alternative objectives. And mechanised mobility will give such an opponent the power to mask his direction much longer than before, and to make a last-hour swerve"—written in September, 1930.

The answer: Threatening Holland and France, the Germans kept the Allies guessing about their objective. When they pierced the Sedan section, their advance threatened Paris or the Channel ports, then swerved aside from the capital when only a score of miles away.

He also wrote: "A masked attack, under cover of darkness or fog, natural or artificial, has potentialities that have scarcely been tapped—artificial fog would have special promise as a cloak for armoured fighting vehicles."—November 1935.

Recent history records that darkness covered the German attack which pierced the Allied line south of the Somme. An artificial fog covered subsequent assaults.

He also wrote: "We ought not to overlook the possibility that, if the French were led to advance, either into Belgium or the Saar, the Germans would launch a flank counterstroke through Belgian Luxembourg with their mechanised divisions."—May, 1936.

Four years later, this prophecy was fully fulfilled.

Modern war marches so fast that even Liddell Hart cannot always keep up. For

instance, in his last book "Dynamic Defence," he makes no mention of the guarantee which Britain gave to Greece in April, 1939, and which now gives this country real strategic advantages in the Eastern Mediterranean.

He misses the boat again when he says: "Twelve months' experience of the war at sea has seen the enemy's offensive against our shipping curbed to an extent which is much beyond what might reasonably have been calculated." Actually, September saw British shipping losses reach the second highest peak in this war, although they have since been substantially lowered.

The first need in the second year of war is the defence of Britain and the arteries of Empire — especially in the Mediterranean. "This is an opportunity for reviving the historic British way in warfare in a modern form," Captain Hart proclaims. "Ever since Crecy and Agincourt, Britain has always relied on superiority in quality." The defeat of the Armada was a supreme example. Churchill knew the R.A.F.'s fighters had proved it again when he said: "Never was so much owed by so many to so few."

Here is Liddell Hart's recipe for the revival:

**NAVY:** "There is obvious need for the greatest possible expansion of the flotilla-craft, especially high-speed motor torpedo boats."

## Mine Laying By Air

"One advantage of mine-laying by air is the speed with which a minefield can be sown," said an R.A.F. pilot broadcasting recently. "Once they wanted us to mine a certain enemy channel 600 miles away from our base without delay. We received the order at six o'clock one evening. By midnight that minefield had been laid. Mine-laying has to be dead accurate."

"The aircraft used are Handley-Page Hampden bombers, but instead of the usual bomb load each aircraft carries a single mine. It is a pretty big mine — a long flat cylinder about 10ft. long and weighing close on three-quarters of a ton, and it packs as big a punch in the way of high explosive as a 21-in. naval torpedo. It can do a lot of damage to



CAPTAIN B. H. LIDDELL HART

**AIR:** "Heightened concentration of effort in the production of both fighters and anti-aircraft weapons," and "more flexible liaison arrangements between air and ground forces."

**ARMY:** "Utmost effort to make our forces more mobile, together with the quickest possible expansion of our armoured forces," the main difficulty being to persuade senior 3 m.p.h. officers "to adapt themselves and their habits of thought to the pace of 30 m.p.h. forces."

even the biggest ship; the wrecks of several 10,000-ton supply ships which can still be seen in the Baltic are evidence of that. The mine is stowed away inside the bomb compartment and enclosed by folding doors in the underside of the fuselage. There is a parachute attached to the mine, and if the bomb doors are open and the mine falls clear, this parachute automatically opens. It checks the rate of fall so that the mechanism of the mine won't be damaged by too violent a contact with the water.

"Compared with a bombing raid, a mine-laying trip, of course, is a bit tame from the crew's point of view; almost a rest cure, in fact. Still, the job has its compensations. We are given a couple of consolation prizes each trip, in the form of two high-explosive bombs. After we've planted our mines, we can use these."

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## R.A.F. AT HAMM

### The Dislocation Spreads

**A** BBC expert recently explained why the famous railway marshalling yards at Hamm have been singled out for special attention by the R.A.F. in their bombing attacks in Western Germany. Hamm, at the time of going to press, has just been bombed for the eightieth time.

According to Herr Karl Baedeker, who is the standby of every good peacetime tourist in Germany, Hamm is a town of 53,500 people, with ironworks and coal mines. There is also, says Baedeker, the inevitable Hotel Kaiserhof, with 42 beds at 2½ to 3 marks a night, and even this is not a "starred" hotel. And that is just about the amount of interest Hamm holds for the tourist.

But to the R.A.F., Hamm is the nerve-centre of German rail transport, and consequently, one of the most important targets in Nazi Germany. The vast marshalling yards—you and I called them "goods" yards before Air Ministry communiques taught us the technical name—can receive 10,000 railway trucks and make them into trains every twenty-four hours, and a train of sixty trucks can be broken up and sorted for unloading in less than seven minutes, and that's pretty good going. Through the yards pass—or did before the R.A.F. began its nightly bombing raids—almost all the minerals from the rich Ruhr mines to all the rest of Germany, and most of the manufactured steel from the steel and engineering works of the area, as well as the incoming raw materials for the factories.

You can get some idea of the importance of the yards from their vast size. They cover an area about four miles long by nearly a mile wide.

Seen from the air, two enormously wide sets of parallel tracks, one at either end of the yard, converge to a wasp-waist. There are about forty tracks on one side of the waist, and fifteen on the other. Of these, all but about four tracks converge to pass through the middle of the waist on two lines occupying a width of only about twenty-five feet at one point.

It is not only the destruction of these huge yards that is the object of the R.A.F.'s nightly bombing. Obviously, raids on an enormous scale would be necessary to put it completely out of action, and even then they could be fairly quickly repaired. What the R.A.F. raids aim at is nightly dislocation of traffic.

A single night raid is sufficient to jam up traffic for a time, and the resulting damage to tracks, points, signals and sidings, is enough to hold up the turn-round of the waggons for hours. And the dislocation doesn't end at Hamm. If a train is held up at the yards, it holds up another train farther away, and so the dislocation spreads out along the already heavily over-worked German railway system eastward into industrial Germany, and westward to occupied France and the "invasion ports" from Flushing to Le Havre.