RANDOM HOUSE eBOOKS

Intelligence in War

John Keegan

Contents

About the Book

From the earliest times, commanders have sought knowledge of the enemy, his strengths and weaknesses, his dispositions and intentions. But how much effect, in the 'real time' of a battle or a campaign, can this knowledge have?

In this magisterial new study, the author of *A History of Warfare* goes to the heart of a series of important conflicts to develop a powerful argument about intelligence in war. Keegan's narrative sweep is enthralling, whether portraying the dilemmas of Nelson seeking Napoleon's fleet, Stonewall Jackson in the American Civil War, Bletchley as it seeks to crack Ultra during the Battle of the Atlantic, the realities of the secret war in the Falklands or the numerous intelligence issues in the contemporary fight against terrorism.

About the Author

John Keegan is the Defence Editor of the *Daily Telegraph* and Britain's foremost military historian. The Reith Lecturer in 1998, he is the author of many bestselling books including *The Face of Battle, The Mask of Command, Six Armies in Normandy, Battle at Sea, The Second World War, A History of Warfare* (awarded the Duff Cooper Prize), *Warpaths, The Battle for History, The First World War* and, most recently, *The Iraq War*.

For many years John Keegan was the Senior Lecturer in Military History at the Royal Military Academy Sandhurst, and he has been a Fellow of Princeton University and Delmas Distinguished Professor of History at Vassar. He is a Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature. He received the OBE in the Gulf War honours list, and was knighted in the Millennium honours list in 1999.

Also by John Keegan

The Face of Battle
The Nature of War
(*with Joseph Darracott*)
World Armies
Who's Who in Military History
(*with Andrew Wheatcroft*)
Six Armies in Normandy
Soldiers
(*with Richard Holmes*)
The Mask of Command
The Price of Admiralty
The Second World War
A History of Warfare
Warpaths
The Battle for History
War and Our World: *The Reith Lectures 1998*
The First World War
The First World War (*Illustrated Edition*)
Churchill: A Life
The Iraq War

Illustrations

First section

Second section

An Enigma operator aboard a U-boat (*The Art Archive/E.C.P.A., Ivry, France/The Art Archive*)
An Enigma machine team, Army Group Centre, Russia, 1941 (*Bildarchiv Preussischer Kulturbesitz*)
German paratroopers, Crete, 1941 (*Bildarchiv Preussischer Kulturbesitz*)
General Bernard Freyberg VC (*Robert Hunt Library*)
General Kurt Student (*Ullstein Bild*)
USS *Lexington*'s crew abandoning ship (*Robert Hunt Library*)
Admiral Isoroku Yamamoto (*The Art Archive/US Naval Historical Center/The Art Archive*)
Admiral Chester Nimitz (*The Art Archive/Library of Congress/The Art Archive*)
Captain Joseph Rochefort (*The Art Archive/US Naval Historical Center/The Art Archive*)
Kaga circling under attack, Midway, 1942 (*Robert Hunt Library*)
USS *Yorktown* sinking (*Robert Hunt Library*)
Admiral Karl Dönitz with Grand Admiral Raeder (*The Art Archive/E.C.P.A., Ivry, France/The Art Archive*)
USS *Greer* on convoy escort in heavy Atlantic weather (*The Art Archive/National Archives Washington/The Art Archive*)
US Coast Guard Cutter *Spencer* firing a depth charge (*The Art Archive/Library of Congress/The Art Archive*)
Admiral Ernest J. King (*The Art Archive/National Archives Washington/The Art Archive*)
A convoy conference at Derby House, Liverpool (*The Art Archive/Imperial War Museum/The Art Archive*)
Captain F. J. 'Johnny' Walker (*The Art Archive/Imperial War Museum/The Art Archive*)
V–2 rocket at Peenemünde (*Ullstein Bild*)
V–1 flying bomb, France, 1944 (*Ullstein Bild*)
A V–1 about to impact near Drury Lane, London, 1944 (*The Art Archive/Imperial War Museum/The Art Archive*)
General Walter Dornberger with Dr Todt (*Ullstein Bild*)
Wernher von Braun (© *Hulton-Deutsch Collection/Corbis*)

SAS troopers after the helicopter crash on South Georgia, Falklands, 1982 (*The Defence Picture Library*)

Argentinian Pucara ground-attack aircraft destroyed by the SAS (*The Defence Picture Library*)

British anti-tank missile team, Second Gulf War, 2003 (*The Defence Picture Library*)

Maps

To Rose

Intelligence in War

Knowledge of the Enemy from Napoleon to Al-Qaeda

John Keegan

PIMLICO

Introduction

This book sets out to answer a simple question: how useful is intelligence in war? The volume of literature on the subject suggests that it is very important indeed. Shelves groan under the weight of books on the German Enigma machine, on the British code and cipher school at Bletchley Park that attacked Enigma, on the American unlocking of the Japanese ciphers, on the parallel deception operations which sought to delude the enemy, on the agents who risked their lives to help make deception work or to seek to discover the enemy's secrets from within. The literature of fact is exceeded in bulk by that of fiction. The spy story became, in the twentieth century, one of the most popular of literary forms and its masters, from John Buchan to John le Carré, grew rich and famous by their writing.

The climate created by the masters of spy fiction deeply affected popular attitudes to intelligence work. The sheer fascination of the techniques unveiled, in the use of cryptic writing, dead letter boxes, agent running, the 'turning' of agents to become 'doubles', surveillance, interception and a dozen other practices of the secret world, had the effect of representing technique as an end in itself. The 'spy' achieved the status of hero, or sometimes anti-hero, a mysterious and glamorous figure who was made to seem significant because of what he was rather than what he did.

It is notable that very few even of the most celebrated spy stories actually establish a connection between the spy's activities and the purpose for which he presumably risks his life in the field. In *Greenmantle*, for example, John Buchan's wonderful romance of intelligence work in Turkey during the First World War, it becomes impossible for the reader to discern at the end what exactly Sandy, as Greenmantle, has done: has he frustrated a Muslim *jihad* against

Britain and her allies or, contrarily, has he himself become a Muslim prophet? In *The Riddle of the Sands*, the first serious novel of intelligence to appear and still one of the best, Erskine Childers subtly suggests how the Germans may mount an invasion of Britain's east coast through the secret channels around the Friesian Islands, but the dénouement of his tale does not demonstrate that his two patriotic yachtsmen actually cause the Admiralty to take appropriate precautions. In Kipling's marvellous *Kim*, ostensibly an unforgettable panorama of Indian life on the road but essentially a spy story, his hero does, unwittingly, help to frustrate a rising in one of the princely states but the climax results in nothing more than his making fools of some Russian spies on the Himalayan border. In almost none of John le Carré's brilliantly convincing constructions of spy and counter-spy life does he show an objective outcome for what his characters do. They are fighting the Cold War; but, after all their intricate delusions and deceptions, the Cold War goes on.

The author might rightly say that he was representing reality; the Cold War thankfully did not have an outcome, certainly none in military terms, and it was the function of the intelligence services on both sides to see that it should not. They were playing a game, and the point was to keep the game going, not to win. No one would disagree with that or ought to complain, in the absence of a tangible result, that intelligence is a vacuous activity.

The intelligence services of all states originated, nonetheless, in the efforts to avert an enemy's achieving a military advantage but to achieve military advantage in return. In peacetime intelligence services may merely tick over. In war they are supposed to bring victory. How effective are they? How do they – or how do they fail to – do it?

The novelists of intelligence have disseminated an enormous amount of information about intelligence techniques. Some of it is accurate, some is misleading. Few of them, however, even such writers who are as personally experienced in intelligence work as John le Carré, have set out in full the essential components and sequence of effective intelligence operations. That is understandable. Much intelligence practice is mundane and

bureaucratic, unamenable to treatment in readable form. Even the most mundane, however, is essential if intelligence is to be useful. There are five fundamental stages.

1. *Acquisition*. Intelligence has to be found. It may be readily available in published, but overlooked form. A former director of the CIA warned his analysts against what he called the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* factor: do not waste effort in seeking information which may freely be found in newspapers, scholarly journals or academic monographs. Stalin's Russia took precautions to make information as difficult to acquire as possible, by restricting the distribution of such everyday material as telephone directories and street maps. As a general principle, however, it may be taken that information useful to an opponent is what may be called 'secret' and has to be collected by clandestine means. The most usual methods are spying, in all its forms, now technically known as 'human intelligence' or 'humint'; by the interception of an opponent's communication, which will probably require decryption, 'signal intelligence' or 'sigint'; by visual surveillance or imaging, through photographic or sensory reconnaissance by aircraft or satellite.
2. *Delivery*. Intelligence once collected has to be sent to its potential user. Delivery is often the most difficult stage, particularly for the transmitter of humint. The humint agent may be watched, or may rightly fear overhearing or interception, or may be vulnerable to arrest at points of

meeting. Moreover, the sender is always under the pressure of urgency. Intelligence goes stale, or is overtaken by events. Unless sent in timely fashion, preferably in 'real time', which allows it to be acted upon, it loses its value.

3. *Acceptance*. Intelligence has to be believed. Agents who volunteer their services have to establish their credentials; they may be a plant. One's own operatives may have been turned or have fallen under the control of an opponent's counter-espionage service. Even what they honestly offer may be wrong, or only half true. Intercepts appear more dependable but they may be bogus. Even if not, they can tell only part of the truth. Henry Stimson, American Secretary of State, rightly warned of the difference between reading a man's mail and reading his mind.
4. *Interpretation*. Most intelligence comes in scraps. For a complete canvas to be assembled, the scraps have to be pieced together into whole cloth. That often requires the effort of many experts, who will have difficulty in explaining to each other what they understand by individual clues and who will disagree over their relative importance. Ultimately the assembly of a complete picture may require a superior to make an inspired guess, which may or may not be correct.
5. *Implementation*. Intelligence officers work at a subordinate level; just as they have to be convinced of the reliability of their raw material, so also they have to convince the decision-makers, political chiefs and commanders in the field of the reliability of

> their submissions. There is no such thing as the golden secret, the piece of ‘pure intelligence’, which will resolve all doubt and guide a general or admiral to an infallible solution of his operational problem. Not only is all intelligence less than completely accurate; its value is altered by the unrolling of events. As Moltke the elder, architect of Prussia’s brilliant victories over Austria and France in the nineteenth century and perhaps the supreme military intellectual of all time, memorably observed, ‘No plan survives the first five minutes of encounter with the enemy.’ He might as truthfully have said that no intelligence assessment, however solid its foundation, fully survives the test of action.

This book is a collection of case studies, beginning in the age of sail, when the supreme intelligence difficulty was to acquire information of value at any lapse of time which made it useful, and ending in the modern age, when intelligence of all sorts abounds but its volume threatens to overwhelm the power of the human mind to evaluate its worth. Its theme is that intelligence in war, however good, does not point out unerringly the path to victory. Victory is an elusive prize, bought with blood rather than brains. Intelligence is the handmaiden not the mistress of the warrior.

1

Knowledge of the Enemy

Strategic Intelligence

'NO WAR CAN be conducted successfully without early and good intelligence', wrote the great Duke of Marlborough. George Washington agreed: 'The necessity of procuring good intelligence is apparent and need not be further argued.' No sensible soldier or sailor or airman does argue. From the earliest times, military leaders have always sought information of the enemy, his strengths, his weaknesses, his intentions, his dispositions. Alexander the Great, presiding at the Macedonian court as a boy while his father Philip was absent on campaign, was remembered by visitors from the lands he would later conquer for his persistence in questioning them about the size of the population of their territory, the productiveness of the soil, the course of the routes and rivers that crossed it, the location of its towns, harbours and strong places, the identity of the important men. The young Alexander was assembling what today would be called economic, regional or strategic intelligence and the knowledge he accumulated served him well when he began his invasion of the Persian empire, enormous in extent and widely diverse in composition. Alexander triumphed because he brought to his battlefields a ferocious fighting force of tribal warriors personally devoted to the Macedonian monarchy; but he also picked the Persian empire to pieces, attacking at its weak points and exploiting its internal divisions.

The strategy of divide and conquer, usually based on regional intelligence, underlay many of the greatest exploits of empire building. Not all; the Mongols preferred terror, counting on the word of their approach to dissolve resistance. If duplicity enhanced their terrible reputation, so much the better. In 1258, appearing out of the desert, Hulagu promised the Caliph, spiritual leader of Islam, ruler of the Muslim empire, his life if he would surrender Baghdad. As soon as he submitted, he was strangled and the horde moved on. The Mongols, however, as a wide-ranging nomad people, also knew a great deal and, like all nomads, when not on campaign, were always ready to trade. Markets are principal centres for the exchange of information as well as goods and it was often a demand of marauders – by the Huns of the Romans, frequently by the Vikings – that they should be allowed to set up markets on the borders of settled lands. Commerce was commonly the prelude to predation. Trade may follow the flag, as the Victorians comfortably affirmed, but it was quite as often the other way about.

Empires in the ascendant, to whom nomads were an irritation rather than a threat, adopted a different attitude. They gave and withheld permission to trade and hold markets on their borders as a deliberate means of local control.[1] They also pursued active 'forward' policies. The pharaohs of the twelfth dynasty not only constructed a deep belt of forts on the border between settled Egypt and Nubia but also created a frontier force and issued it with standing orders. Its duty was to prevent Nubian incursions into the Nile valley but also to patrol into the desert and report. One report, preserved on papyrus at Thebes, reads, 'We have found the track of 32 men and 3 donkeys'; nearly 4,000 years old, it might have been written yesterday.

Ancient Egypt's border problem was perfectly manageable. The narrowness of the Nile Valley, amid the surrounding desert, necessitated the minimum of protective measures. The Roman empire, by contrast, was encircled on all sides by enemies, who might come by sea as well as land, and needed to be defended by elaborate fixed fortifications as well as mobile armies. At the height of their power, Rome's rulers preferred active to passive defence and

maintained strong striking forces at strategic points generally behind rather than on the frontiers. It was only as their power declined and that of the outsiders grew that the border defences were thickened.

Whether on the decline or in the ascendant, however, Rome devoted great care to the gathering of intelligence. Caesar's conquest of Gaul was as much the result of his superior use of intelligence as the legions' superior fighting power. He took great trouble to assemble economic and regional intelligence, just as Alexander had done, and he was a coldly cynical assessor of the Gauls' ethnic defects, their boastfulness, volatility, unreliability, lack of resilience; he was equally cold in exploiting the advantage his knowledge of their weaknesses afforded. He accumulated a detailed ethnographic knowledge of their tribal characteristics and divisions, which he used ruthlessly to defeat them. Quite apart from this strategic intelligence, however, he also had a highly developed system of tactical intelligence, using short- and medium-range units of scouts to reconnoitre up to thirty kilometres in advance of his main body, to spy out the land and the enemy's dispositions when he proceeded on campaign. It was an important principle that the leaders of these units had immediate and direct access to his person.

Caesar did not invent the Roman system of intelligence. It was the product of several hundred years of military experience. Evidence for that is already given, by the time of the Gallic wars (first century BC), by the existence of established terms for the different categories of reconnaissance troops: *procursatores,* who performed close reconnaissance immediately ahead of the army; *exploratores*, longer-range scouts; and *speculatores*, who spied deeper within enemy territory. The Roman army also made use of local informers (*indices*), prisoners of war, deserters and kidnapped civilians.[2] If not the inventor of the system, Caesar may, nevertheless, be credited with professionalising it and institutionalising some of its most important features, notably the right of direct access by scouts to the commander in person. He also, when necessary, went to see for himself, a dangerous but sometimes essential intervention.

Ultimately, the crisis of the empire in the fourth century required the almost continuous presence of one of the emperors (there were latterly two, sometimes more) with the army, a contingency that, at Adrianople in 378, led to his death on the field, progressive disaster and the empire's collapse. The Emperor Valens had been in close touch with his *exploratores* on the morning of the catastrophe and they had correctly reported the enemy's strength and dispositions. What ensued substantiates a profound and enduring truth, that 'military and political survival does not depend solely on good intelligence'.[3]

Systems do not, however, much change, unless circumstances change, and there was little circumstantial change throughout the five centuries of the Roman empire's greatness (first century BC–fourth century AD). Reconnaissance throughout the period was by hearing and sight, communication by word of mouth or written despatch, speed of transmission at fastest by that of a fleet-footed horse. What was true of Rome remained true of the world for another 1,500 years.

The collapse of imperial government in the west in the fifth century AD entailed also the collapse of organised intelligence services and such ancillary services as the publication of guidebooks and cartography (though Roman maps are strange to us, since they usually took the form of route-charts rather than two-dimensional displays of territorial features, their disappearance was a serious loss to campaigning commanders). Worse by far was the progressive degradation and eventual and complete decay of the road system. The Roman roads were built primarily for the purpose of rapid, all-weather military movement and were maintained by the legions, which were as much engineering as fighting units. The dissolution of the Roman army led rapidly to the cessation of engineering work on such key elements of the Roman transport system as bridges and fords. The road network, of course, had not existed during the period of Roman conquest; Caesar had made his way through Gaul by interrogating merchants and locals and impressing guides. It was the roads, however, that had allowed Rome to defend its empire for

five centuries and the break-up of their solid surfaces made long-range campaigning at speed impossible.

That was not important to the barbarian rulers who succeeded the Romans, since they sought no more than to maintain local authority. When, however, the attempt began again, under the Carolingian emperors, to re-establish wide imperial domains in the eighth and ninth centuries, the absence of roads was a serious impediment to reconquest. Things got even worse with the attempt to penetrate the Germanic regions which lay beyond the old Roman borders. In those wildernesses there were neither roads nor easily obtainable intelligence.

Some picture of the difficulties confronting medieval campaigners is conveyed by the experience of the Teutonic Knights in their effort to conquer and Christianise the Baltic shore in the fourteenth century. The Teutonic Knights, a crusading order dedicated to the conversion of the Prussians and Lithuanians, were wealthy and highly organised. They operated from a chain of strong castles built on the Baltic coast, in which they were secure from attack and could organise crusading expeditions into the hinterland. One of their principal campaigning grounds was a belt of unsettled land a hundred miles wide between East Prussia and Lithuania proper, a maze of marsh, lakes, small rivers, thickets and forest through which it was almost impossible to find a way. Local scouts were recruited by the Knights to blaze trails and report. Their intelligence was collected in a military guidebook, *Die Lithauischen Wegeberichte* (*The Lithuanian Route Guide*), compiled between 1384 and 1402. It explains, for example, that Knights wishing to get to Vandziogala from Samogitia, both near modern Kaunas in Lithuania, a distance of about thirty-five miles by today's roads, had first to cross a patch of scrub, by a track, then a large wood through which they would have to clear their way, then a heath, then another heath, then a second wood, 'the length of a crossbow shot and there you have to clear your way too', then a third heath and a third wood. Beyond lay the true *Wiltnisse* (wilderness). A Prussian scout's letter describing it was copied into the *Wegeberichte*. It reads: 'Take notice in your wisdom that by God's grace Gedutte and his company have

got back in safety and have completed everything you sent us to carry out and have marked the way so far as 4½ miles this side of the Niemen, along a route that crosses the Niemen and leads straight into the country.' The tone of the report recalls that of the Egyptian border patrol from Nubia 3,000 years earlier; the terrain described is that over which the German Army Group North advanced to Leningrad in 1941, encountering obstacles the Teutonic Knights would have found familiar.[4]

Curiously the Holy Land Crusaders faced much less difficulty in getting to Jerusalem in the eleventh century. In 1394, the Grand Master of the Teutonic Knights had answered Duke Philip of Burgundy's enquiry as to whether there would be a Baltic crusade the following year: 'It is impossible to provide a forecast of future contingencies, especially because on our expeditions we are obliged to go across great waters and vast solitudes by dangerous ways . . . on account of which they frequently depend on God's will and disposition, and also on the weather.' In different words, a modern intelligence officer might respond almost exactly similarly. The Holy Land Crusaders, by contrast, had found a much easier way forward, travelling either by sea or along the surviving Roman roads in Italy or inside the dominions of the Eastern Roman (Byzantine) emperor in southern Europe, where the imperial administration kept communications in repair and furnished supplies. Once arrived at Constantinople, they were provided with guides and escorts and were able to travel on the great Roman military roads that led towards the Taurus Mountains. In what is today eastern Turkey, however, already invaded by Seljuk Turkish migrants from central Asia, they found the roads in disrepair and likewise the other conveniences of travel – cisterns destroyed, wells dry, bridges fallen, villages abandoned. It was a foretaste of how a nomadic, horse-riding people ruined a civilised countryside by rapine and neglect. The final stages of the march to Jerusalem were far harder than the departure from Europe.[5]

Campaigning inside Western Europe itself throughout the Middle Ages, the leaders of armies found conditions consistently inimical to conducting effective operations. The main problem was a chronic

shortage of money, in an effectively cashless society, which made the recruitment of armies difficult and their provision with food and supplies often almost impossible. Movement was laborious, because of the absence of an all-weather road system, but the lack of intelligence also impeded the efforts of rulers to deploy such forces as they could raise to the places where they were needed. That difficulty became particularly acute during the crisis of the Viking invasions in the ninth century. The Vikings, who had achieved a revolution in mobility by the development of their superbly fast and seaworthy longships, appeared without warning, overwhelmed local defenders by the ferocity of their assaults and, in the second stage of their terrorisation of the Christian lands, carried violence and pillage deep inland by learning to capture horses in large numbers at their points of debarkation. The antidote to Viking raiding would have been to create navies, but that was beyond medieval kings; another recourse would have been to maintain an intelligence system, to provide early warning, inside Scandinavia. Such sophistication lay even further outside the capabilities of ninth-century kingdoms; moreover, the Viking lands were no place for inquisitive strangers, even with money to loosen tongues. There was much more money to be made by raiding than by selling information and the Vikings took pleasure in cutting throats.[6]

By the fourteenth century, the conditions of warfare in post-Roman Europe had altered greatly to the local rulers' advantage. The overriding need to suppress the aggression of nomadic despoilers – Vikings in the west, Saracens in the south, horse peoples in the east – had stimulated the building of fixed defences, including continuous barriers and chains of castles, which had solidified frontiers, pacified borderlands and restored the possibilities of trade, with beneficial effects on the general prosperity. Kings had money to pay soldiers; they also found the money to buy intelligence and pay agents, who moved with reasonable ease among travelling merchants and, or so at least was suspected by royal governments, under the cloak of international religious orders. It is a mark of how commonplace spying had become during the Hundred Years War between France and England

that heralds, the non-partisan arbiters of propriety on the battlefield, went to great lengths to defend their reputation for impartiality; so too did ambassadors, though they were less often believed.

By the middle of the fourteenth century there were extensive networks of English agents in northern France and the Netherlands, usually foreigners working for money, with French counterparts in England, often identified by the royal government as expatriate monks or travelling friars, how accurately is now difficult to establish. What their information was worth is equally mysterious. Even more than would be the case in later ages of improved communications, messages were difficult to transmit quickly in the Middle Ages. The roads were bad, the hire of horses unreliable, the sea a barrier, particularly to the transmission of messages from France to England. The English kings tried to smooth the path. The port of Wissant in northern France, the nearest to Dover, was a usual point of departure, where crossing fees were fixed by law. On the English side of the Channel, post horses were maintained at royal expense for official messages. One piece of evidence suggests that the money was well spent. On Sunday 15 March 1360, news was brought to the royal council, sitting at Reading, that the French had attacked Winchester, fifty miles distant, that very day. There is no suggestion, however, that intelligence had brought advance warning.[7]

Real-time intelligence, except over very short distances, was inherently difficult to acquire in the medieval world. It simply could not be carried quickly enough ahead of the movement of enemy forces. That would remain so for centuries to come. Sometimes critical information did not travel even within the confined space of a battlefield. At Lützen, for example, on 16 November 1632, one of the most important engagements of the Thirty Years War, the Imperial (Austrian) and Swedish armies both made a tactical retreat at the end of the day. The Swedish king Gustavus Adolphus had been killed and if Wallenstein, the Imperial commander, had renewed the attack, the Swedes would probably have lost. Neither side, however, was aware of the other's movements. Next day the

Swedes returned, captured the Imperial artillery, which had been abandoned for want of horses to drag it off, and so turned what should have been an Imperial victory into a defeat.[8]

The European armies of the eighteenth century had become much more professionalised than those of the Thirty Years War. Even so they found real-time intelligence hard to acquire. Frederick the Great's campaign of Hohenfriedberg in 1745 was exceptional. The Imperial (Austrian) army was concentrating against him to wrest back the province of Silesia, which the Prussian king had illegally seized in 1740. He got general word of its movement but needed to put himself in a favourable position to resist its attack, by tempting it down into the Silesian plain from the surrounding hills. His first move was to use a double agent he had, an Italian clerk, in Imperial headquarters, to spread the word that the Prussians were retreating. He then concealed his army in broken ground and waited for the Austrians to appear. They made no effort to disguise their movements and so he was able to make use of rules of observation (*indices*) which were known to provide rough-and-ready real-time intelligence when the enemy was in view. Dust was an important indicator. 'A generalised cloud of dust usually signified that the enemy foragers were about. The same kind of dust, without any sighting of the foraging parties, suggested that the sutlers and baggage were being sent to the rear and that the enemy was about to move. Dense and isolated towers of dust showed that the columns were already on the march.' There were other signs. The gleam of the sun, on a bright day, on swords and bayonets was open to interpretation at distances of up to a mile. Marshal de Saxe, Frederick's great French contemporary, wrote that 'if the rays are perpendicular, it means that the enemy is coming at you; if they are broken and infrequent, he is retreating'.[9]

Frederick, on 3 June, had positioned himself at a lookout point which commanded the level ground in front of Hohenfriedberg. Towards four o'clock in the afternoon he saw a cloud of dust, through which gradually resolved eight huge Austrian columns advancing towards the Prussian positions, illuminated by bright

sunshine. As darkness fell, Frederick ordered a night march. Next morning the Battle of Hohenfriedberg began.

Despite his enjoyment of advantageous intelligence, Frederick did not win an easy victory. His army was outnumbered and the Austrians and their allies had manoeuvred during the night to outflank him. As so often in war, it was superior fighting power that carried the day; Frederick's preliminary intelligence success was soon negated. It was his own quick thinking in the heat of action and the fierce reaction of his soldiers which turned the tide of battle.[10]

The same would most often prove to be true in wars yet to come. In their wars outside Europe, particularly in the North American forests, where Red Indian allies knew the ground intimately and were masters of the arts of scouting and surprise, European armies were to suffer shocking defeats in the depths of the woods. General Braddock's disaster at the Monongahela, near modern Pittsburgh, where a large British force was wiped out in a few hours in 1755, was entirely the result of walking blind into an ambush prepared by the French, led by their native American allies, in uncharted and unscouted woodland. In what both sides came to call 'American warfare', intelligence remained at a premium and usually provided the basis of victory or defeat. In the familiar campaigning grounds of Europe, during the great wars of the French Revolution and Napoleonic empire (1792–1815), intelligence rarely brought victory solely by its own account. That was true even during the British Peninsular War against the French in Spain and Portugal, 1808–14. Intelligence, however good, moved too slowly to bring a real-time advantage. Indeed, Wellington in the Peninsula depended upon exactly the same means of intelligence as Scipio in his campaign against Nova Carthago (New Carthage) in Spain in the third century BC. Wellington, Caesar and Scipio all operated as intelligence-gatherers in exactly the same way. Their earliest concern was to discover the lie of the land (Wellington was a great collector of maps and almanacs) and the characteristics of the enemy. The collection of tactical intelligence – who was where when, what he

intended and of what he was capable – was left to the month, the week, the day.[11]

Wellington had the population on his side, in both Portugal and Spain. France, the invader, was resented; after the excesses of 1808, hated. Wellington did not have to seek intelligence. It was brought to him by the bucketload. The difficulty was to sort wheat from chaff. Much more illuminating, as an example of intelligence-gathering in the pre-electric age, was the organisation of intelligence during his campaigning days in unconquered India. Wellington (Arthur Wellesley) was in active command of armies in India from 1799 to 1804. Britain, through the East India Company, controlled large enclaves in Bengal, Bombay and Madras but huge areas of the sub-continent were under the rule of local warlords or free-booting hordes. The French, by diplomacy, bribe and direct intervention, sought to bring a majority of anti-British elements to their side. Wellington, operating with small armies of mixed British–Indian composition, was mainly concerned to put down such independents as Tipu Sultan and Hyder Ali, feudatories of the effete Moghul emperor, who were effectively running their own armies and states.

In order to win, Wellington needed a steady stream of up-to-date information, from both far and near, so as to anticipate the movements of his enemies and gain forewarning of shifts of alliances, the gathering of stores, the recruitment of soldiers and other signs of offensives in the making. The conventional means of securing such a supply of intelligence was to form a reconnaissance corps, either of troops already under command or recruited from the population. The British in India had recourse to another method. They took over a pre-existing intelligence system and made it their own.

The *harkara* system seems to have been unique to India. Because of the sub-continent's enormous size, difficult terrain and – until the building of the railways and the trunk roads of the British raj – lack of long-distance routes, power tended to be local. Even when centralised under the Moghul conquerors of the sixteenth century, it remained quite diffuse. The Moghuls in Delhi ruled by devolution,

either to mighty provincial officials or by arrangement with local princes, particularly in western and southern India. The system could only be made to work if the court was supplied with regular reports of events at the lesser courts. It came to be supplied by two groups of news-providers: writers, often scholars of high status in the Indian caste system, and runners, who carried verbal or written messages and reports over long distances at high speed.

Over time the system yielded a peculiarly Indian product: the newsletter, usually written in Persian, the language of the Moghul court, in a highly stylised form and on a regular, typically weekly basis. The letters began as official documents but became, as writers and even runners acquired independence, a sort of private newspaper. Eventually not so private; to whom to distribute the newsletter became a decision of the *harkara,* who himself acquired a blurred identity, part intelligence-gatherer, part distributor. He also acquired odd rights, to be paid, of course, but also to be accepted as a sort of local correspondent at court, known to be working for other powers at a distant centre.

The *harkaras* survived because, through their indispensability to those at both ends of the system, they established their independent status. It was an uneasy independence; flogging or even execution could follow the provision of dubious or misleading news. The punishment, however, was personal; it was not intended to undermine the system itself. The system, by the time the British embarked on their progressive supersession of the Moghuls at the end of the eighteenth century, was deeply entrenched in the processes of Indian political and military life. Indian government could not work without it. The British, who were committed to re-establishing Moghul power on an efficient basis, ruling themselves while leaving the Moghuls nominally in charge, simply took it over. They ‘reconstituted under their [own] control the classic Indian intelligence system which allied the writing skills and knowledge of learned Brahmins with the hard bodies and running skills of tribal and low-caste people’.[12]

Wellington could not have established himself as the leading sepoy general without the *harkaras*, whom he both cultivated and

tyrannised. His successors continued to do so. Not until the arrival of the telegraph and the establishment of printed newspapers in the middle of the nineteenth century did the *harkara* system decline; and even so, training in long-distance message-running persisted into the 1920s, sustained by the Indian appetite for news, uncontrolled by official interference, which is such a distinctive feature of sub-continental life. The reason, it has been suggested, why India has become and remains the largest and only real democracy in the Third World is because of its citizens' insatiable thirst for information.

Real-Time Intelligence: What, How, Where, When?

Who knows what in sufficient time to make effective use of the news – that is as good a definition of 'real-time' intelligence, the gold standard of modern information practice, as is possible – was not often a military consideration in the classical world or even the age of Wellington. Alexander, Caesar, Wellington all operated within the peculiar constraint, to the modern way of thinking, of very slow communication speed over any distance not to be covered by a running man or a galloping horse. The best *harkaras* were credited with a speed of a hundred miles in twenty-four hours, but sceptics thought fifty more realistic. The modern marathon, whose runners achieve twenty-six miles in about three hours, gives a better indication of the nature of real-time intelligence before the coming of electricity. The armies, and navies, of the pre-electricity age operated within an intelligence horizon of considerably less than a hundred miles. Hence the enormous importance attached by the commanders of the past to strategic intelligence: the character of the enemy, the size and capability of his force, its dispositions, the nature of the terrain in his operational area and, more generally, the human and natural resources on which his military organisation depended. It was from guesses based on such factors that generals of the pre-modern world made their plans. 'Real-time' intelligence – where the enemy was yesterday, in which direction his columns were headed, where he might realistically be expected today – was

arcane information, rarely to be collected on a real battlefield. As late as 1914, ten divisions of French cavalry, beating the Franco-German-Belgian border for nearly a fortnight, altogether failed to detect the advance of several million German troops. French reconnaissance forces failed again in the same area in 1940. Strategic intelligence is a desirable commodity. It rarely, however, brings advantage in actual time and space. For that, something else is necessary. What exactly is it? How is it possible to assure that the key questions, what, how, where and when, are answered to our advantage, not the enemy's? That is the theme of this book.

The acquisition of real-time intelligence requires, first of all, that the commander should have access to means of communication that considerably outstrip in speed that of the enemy's movement over the ground, or water. Until the nineteenth century, the margin of superiority was very small. The marching speed of an army, reckoned at three miles per hour, was exceeded by that of a scout's horse perhaps six times; but a scout had to make an outward as well as return journey, so the margin was halved. In the interval between scouts making contact with the enemy and returning, moreover, the enemy might advance, reducing the margin still further. Little wonder that surprise was so difficult to achieve in ancient campaigns. When it was, as spectacularly by the Seljuk Turks at Manzikert in 1071, the reason was often treachery or a total failure to reconnoitre, or both. At Manzikert the Byzantine army's cavalry screen deserted, leaving the commander blind.

Manzikert was an 'encounter' battle, with both armies advancing simultaneously. More typical was the situation in which an advancing army ran into the outposts of an army standing on the defence. They automatically raised the alarm and, not having to go out and back, as in encounter operations, but back only, could give early warning. Wellington, for example, during the Waterloo campaign was, though strategically surprised, not so tactically. The French ran into his outposts, allowed him to fight a delaying battle at Quatre Bras on 16 June and to retire on to a previously reconnoitred main position at Waterloo two days later.