

# Philosophy of Command: Ten Classical Examples

by BG Yeo See Peng

## Abstract:

Through this essay, BG Yeo See Peng, Commander 6<sup>th</sup> Division (6 Div) shares the ten tenets of his command philosophy which has served as a guide in his leadership of 6 Div. Using classical command examples in history, he hopes to share this philosophy and its applications in practical operational circumstances with a wider audience. In command, it is important to adapt and develop one's own style and philosophy, because in the words of Field Marshall Slim: "command is a completely personal thing ... because no imitation was ever a masterpiece."

*Keywords: Philosophy of Command; 6<sup>th</sup> Division; Professional Excellence; Leadership*

## INTRODUCTION

*"Command is that mixture of example, persuasion, and compulsion by which you get men to do what you want them to do, even if they don't want to do it themselves. If you ask me really to define it, I should say, "Command is the projection of personality—and like all true art, and command is an art, it is exercised by each man in his own way."*<sup>1</sup>

– Field Marshal Sir William Slim

On 18 July 2011, five months after I had taken over command of the 6<sup>th</sup> Singapore Division (6 Div), I published my Command Philosophy. I sent the philosophy to all captains and company sergeant Majors within my Division. The purpose was to inform them about the rationale behind my command decisions and actions. I directed them to communicate it to every commander and man in their units. Since then, the philosophy has served well as a platform to discuss command and leadership issues between my commanders, men and myself. It has also been a good reference to align commandship within my division.

There are ten tenets in my philosophy of command, they are as follows:

- Be mission-focused
- Know the intention of your higher commands,

and be aware of the tasks of your adjacent units

- "Know thy enemy, know thyself," and know your soldiers well
- Mission, demand, support
- Lead by example
- Achieve professional excellence—both technically and tactically
- Care for your soldiers, but be strict with them
- Learn as you lead, and lead as you learn
- Always try your best, to do the best, in order to achieve the best
- Together, strive towards the shared vision

The aim of this essay is to share my command philosophy to a wider audience, and more importantly, to use classical command examples to illustrate the essence of the various tenets.<sup>2</sup> This is to provide the readers practical implementations of the philosophy, so that it can be more easily understood.

## BE MISSION-FOCUSED

*Whatever you and your soldiers do, always keep the focus on the Mission—the bottom line—something that you have to deliver. For 6 Div, our Mission is:*

*In War, 6 Div's mission is to plan and conduct operations as part of our Army's mission to secure a swift and decisive victory.*

*In Peace, 6 Div/Combined Arms Training Centre's (CATC) mission is to maintain the Combined Arms Division (CAD) at a high state of operational readiness for a spectrum of operations, and to train and develop competent brigades, as part of our Army's efforts to deter aggression.*

### General Eisenhower and Operation Overlord

In February 1944, General Eisenhower was designated as Commander of Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Forces (SHAEF). His command was given the mission to lead the Allied invasion of Western Europe—code-named *Operation Overlord*—with the target date being the first week of June 1944. The purpose was clearly to initiate the Allied grand plan to defeat the Germans in Western Europe.

At the Trident Conference, President Roosevelt and Prime Minister Churchill agreed on a major cross-channel invasion of Europe in 1944. A gigantic amphibious operation from southern England to France, with nearly three million men, was planned. About a third of these were combatants (a total of 45 divisions), another third was logistics and administrative support forces, and the last third were supporting naval and air forces. After all possible landing sites were considered, the area east of the Cotentin Peninsula of Normandy was selected.

On the German side, Hitler's "Atlantic Wall" stretched from the North Sea coast to Brittany's Atlantic nose and thence southward to the Spanish border—a network of permanent fortifications laced by strong points and field positions, protected by mine fields and underwater obstacles. With the Luftwaffe already swept from the sky by Allied air forces, and no naval defenses except light torpedo craft and submarines, the German situation was precarious, but far from hopeless. Thus, General Eisenhower's focus was to break through this "Atlantic Wall."

On D Day, 6 June 1944, preceded by the airborne drops—two United States (US) divisions on the west and one British division on the east—the greatest

amphibious assault yet known to history began landing on the Normandy coast with complete tactical surprise. Some 4,000 ships and landing craft carried 176,000 troops and their materiel. Escorting the armada were 600 warships. The Allied air forces had earlier drenched the terrain with bombs, while 7,000 fighters and fighter-bombers continued to comb the area. By nightfall, five divisions were ashore and a comfortable toe-hold had been obtained at all beaches except Omaha.

Hitler's fixation that another Allied attack would come from the *Pas de Calais* area hampered Rundstedt and Rommel in their defensive strategy. Reinforcements came in bits and pieces, and part of the Panzer (tank) strength was frittered away in piecemeal counterattacks. However, the *bocage* (checkerboard of small fields boxed by deep hedgerows) reduced the Allied advance to a crawl. Nevertheless, by the end of July 1944, with the Allied crossing lanes in the Channel established, the port of Cherbourg captured, Caen and St. Lo secured by Montgomery and Bradley respectively, the first phase of the Allied invasion—the mission of Operation Overlord—had been achieved by General Eisenhower and his Command. Throughout the more than one year of planning, preparation, especially the execution of the operation, General Eisenhower's focus was constantly and firmly on the mission of establishing the beachhead for the Allied breakout of the forces to defeat the Germans in the European continent. This was especially necessary given the vast time and space involved, the huge resources required, and the great challenges posed by the Germans. *Focus on the mission* was indeed a key success factor in this instance.

### KNOW THE INTENTION OF YOUR HIGHER COMMANDS, AND BE AWARE OF THE TASKS OF YOUR ADJACENT UNITS

*Knowing your higher commands' intent (two levels up) is very important. This is to ensure that you do not deliver something that your bosses do not want. Be aware of*

*what your buddies are doing can aid teamwork. Always seek ways to make the team stronger and more cohesive.*

### General Moltke and the Prussian Army

In 1857, Helmolt von Moltke was given the post of Chief of the Prussian General Staff, Prussian Army, a position he held over the next 30 years. He would go on to evolve the strategic and tactical methods of the Prussian Army, building up the Prussian General Staff which would go on to be the model for all modern armies. He would also go on to instill the principles of *Auftragstaktik*, whereby subordinates were to act within the guidelines of the superior's intent.

*"Diverse are the situations under which an officer has to act on the basis of his own view of the situation. It would be wrong if he had to wait for orders at times when no orders can be given. But most productive are his actions when he acts within the framework of his senior commander's intent."*<sup>3</sup>

– Field Marshall Helmolt von Moltke

Around 1810, after the battle of Jena where Napoleon achieved a sensational victory over the Prussians, the Prussian generals Scharnhorst and Gneisenau came to the conclusion that the commanders behind the battlefield, due to the "fog of war," were unable to obtain an accurate view of what was really happening at the front amidst chaos of combat. Those who knew what was actually happening were the subordinate commanders and officers in the field.

As a battle was always plagued by uncertainties and characterized by unforeseen situations, the Prussian generals tried to find a concept of planning, and a system of command, that would ensure flexibility. This system would ensure that commanders in the field reacted quickly to the situation at hand and take the initiative *independently and without first consulting higher command* to exploit an unexpected favorable situation or respond immediately to an unfavorable development. The result of this requirement was the *Auftragstaktik*.<sup>4</sup>

Applying *Auftragstaktik* meant that the supreme commander would formulate the broad goals for the officers in the field and that he gave a relatively large amount of latitude in the manner they were to be achieved. In other words, the goals were known, what had to be achieved was known, but *how* they should be achieved was left to the subordinate commanders.

Although it took close to a century for the principles to be deeply embedded in the Prussian General Staff and its soldiers, the actions of the German Army during World War I and II (WWI and WWII), in particular, the actions to capture the Belgian fortress of Eben Emael in 1940, were testament to *Auftragstaktik* and its value in ensuring that soldiers across all levels of command acted in accordance with their superior's intent.<sup>5</sup>

Knowing the intention of higher command was the foundation of the tactics of *Auftragstaktik*, the official doctrine of the Prussian/German Army since the nineteenth century. This is also the basis of Maneuver Warfare, adopted by many modern armed forces, including the Singapore Armed Forces (SAF). However, in the case of the SAF, we emphasize "two levels up," i.e. the battalion commander needs to be clear about the *intentions* of both the brigade and division commanders. In addition, it is also very important for him to know the tasks of his adjacent units, i.e. that of his fellow battalion commanders. Only with this twin sets of knowledge would he and his command be able to execute their mission well.

### "KNOW THY ENEMY, KNOW THYSELF" AND KNOW YOUR SOLDIERS WELL

*Sun Tzu says that you need to know who are against you in peace, and who are opposing you in war. He also says that you need to know yourself well, both strengths and weaknesses. In addition, you also have to know your soldiers well, how to employ and deploy them effectively.*

### Liu Bei and Romance of the Three Kingdoms

In the Eastern world, the *Romance of the Three Kingdoms* (*San Guo Yan Yi*) is a classic piece of military literature, an episodic novel of great length and complexity. It is a story of a divided China at the end of the 3rd Century AD, as the Han Dynasty neared its end and war raged over whether to save or replace it. Liu Bei became the leader of the Shu Kingdom, and he had to counter the Wei and Wu Kingdoms led by Cao Cao and Sun Quan respectively, as each leader sought to unify China and form their own empire. Of note was Liu Bei's relationship with his subordinates, namely Zhuge Liang, his trusted advisor, prime minister and military strategist, and his five Tiger Generals, namely, Zhang Fei, Guan Yu, Zhao Yun, Ma Chao and Huang Zhong.

In the early days leading to the fall of the Han Dynasty and the creation of the three kingdoms, Cao Cao was prime minister and sought to unify China again, under the pretext of re-establishing the dynasty for the emperor. It was during this period that Liu Bei began to gain prominence. Liu Bei inspired loyalty from all that knew and followed him. It first started with the oath of brotherhood at the peach garden, a symbol of loyalty between Liu Bei, Guan Yu and Zhang Fei. He was loved and supported by his subordinates, not only because he recognized their talents, strengths and weaknesses, but also because he showed them respect and cherished them. He did not adopt a top-down approach and adopted a consultative approach with regards to decision making, always keeping his subordinates counsels as part of the decision-making process. He knew that by himself, he could not defeat Cao Cao and that he needed a strong command team, led by able generals such as Guan Yu and Zhang Fei. He would go on to persuade Zhuge Liang and three other generals to aid him in governing the Shu Kingdom.<sup>6</sup>

Liu Bei understood the strengths and weaknesses of all his generals. He knew that Guan Yu and Zhang Fei were extremely loyal to him, and were fierce fighters

who were able to command their troops in battle as they led by example. With the installation of Zhuge Liang as his military counsel and Prime Minister, Liu Bei was able to leverage on his wisdom. Despite wielding less power than Sun Quan and Cao Cao prior to the Battle of the Red Cliffs, he eventually went on to consolidate his empire and even managed to form a temporary alliance with Sun Quan to defeat Cao Cao, despite the combined allies being outnumbered by Cao Cao's army.<sup>7</sup>

As advocated by Sun Tzu, Liu Bei was focused on his two enemies of Cao Cao and Sun Quan. At different times, he even worked for and with the latter two. In this sense, Liu Bei knew his enemies well. Conversely, did Liu Bei know himself well? In a sense, the answer is yes. He knew his strengths and weaknesses. He knew that for him to defeat his enemies, he needed the wise counsel of Zhuge Liang, as well as the military prowess of the Five Tigers. More importantly, he knew that for him to rule well he needed to maintain loyalty and integrity. Finally, it is the knowledge of his soldiers that made Liu Bei a great leader. He not only knew their strengths and weaknesses, he even cared for their well-being and families. This was why he was a respected commander by both his soldiers and the people that he ruled. There is therefore much that we could learn from Liu Bei in this respect.

### MISSION, DEMAND, SUPPORT

*When managing your sub-units, give them clear missions and command planning guidance (CPG). Tell your soldiers clearly what your demands and expectations are. Provide them with generous support and assistance. Communicate, communicate, communicate; so that there is no chance for any misconception and misunderstanding.*

### Field Marshall Slim and Defeat into Victory

In 1956, Field Marshall Slim published his famous book, *Defeat into Victory*, recounting his command experience in Burma during WWII and how he turned defeat of his 14th Army into victory *vis-à-vis* the

Japanese. The retreat from Burma in the first few months of 1942 and the disasters in the Arakan had been a massive defeat for the 14<sup>th</sup> Army. When Slim was appointed to the command of 14<sup>th</sup> Army in October 1943, one of his first tasks was to decide on the *mission* for his army. He had decided that it would be “to turn his army’s defeat into victory against the mighty Japanese.” In 1943, the future of India and the liberation of the occupied territories were at stake. This was subsequently articulated clearly down the chain of command in the form of his CPG.

In terms of *demand*, the main problem was to dispel the legend of Japanese invincibility. Slim decided to build up the 14<sup>th</sup> Army’s confidence starting at the lowest level. At first, the focus was on patrolling, the basis of all minor tactics. Patrolling would assert presence, maintain control and establish relationships with the locals. As a result, self-confidence among the troops and local confidence in the 14<sup>th</sup> Army were both enhanced. Next, Slim demanded a series of well-prepared offensive operations, using battalions against Japanese platoons, and brigades against companies. Slim’s demands and his troops’ actions created the mental foundation that the Japanese could be defeated, and the “superman” myth was destroyed.

In terms of *support*, Slim made a practice of visiting units to speak to the officers and men from the bonnet of his jeep. He also found that in the harsh jungle of Burma, what really interested his men were the “material things.” For instance, Slim focused on making his men feel that they belonged to a worthwhile and efficient organization. As the lines of communication were improved, rations became more varied and the unpalatable and unpopular soya bean ceased to

be the staple diet. By supporting them generously in the physical domain, it would then be both safe and suitable to move on to the moral and spiritual motivation, which was essential to defeating the mighty Japanese. Slim also regarded keeping his men informed of what was happening as essential support.

14<sup>th</sup> Army knew that it was at the bottom of the priority list because victory had to be assured in Europe first. But, in the unfamiliar surroundings, it triumphed. Rangoon fell three days before the end of the war in Europe. A clear mission, decisive demand, and generous support had been the important factors in turning defeat into victory for the 14<sup>th</sup> Army, and the key to that success was Field Marshall Slim.

## LEAD BY EXAMPLE

*Show your soldiers the right ways to do things. Never ask your men to do what you yourself could not or would not do. Leaders make the difference, for there are no bad soldiers, only bad leaders.*

## Alexander the Great and his Leadership

Alexander the Great, the King of Macedonia and conqueror of the Persian Empire, is considered one of the greatest military leaders of all time. When

Alexander began his campaign, the ruling power of the day was the Persian Empire. It controlled a huge area of land and as a result of the many cities it controlled, had a massive army. The two sides finally met

in the massive Battle of Issus. Alexander and his men were at a huge disadvantage from a numbers perspective. However, Alexander was a general with a keen understanding of motivation, who understood the enormous advantage of leading by example. His men admired him as he was a soldier, just like

*His men admired him as he was a soldier, just like them—a better soldier in fact. None could say that any endeavor was too dangerous or demanding, especially if the king himself was doing it.*



them—a better soldier in fact. None could say that any endeavor was too dangerous or demanding, especially if the king himself was doing it. He exercised with his people regularly. Also, despite being a successful king, he dressed like an ordinary citizen.

*“There is no part of my body, but my back, which has not a scar; not a weapon a man may grasp or fling the mark of which I do not carry upon me. I have sword cuts from close fight; arrows have pierced me, missiles from catapults bruised my flesh; again and again I have been struck by stones or clubs—and all for your sakes: for your glory and gain.”<sup>8</sup>*

– Alexander the Great

Beyond the battlefield, Alexander spent a significant amount of time with commanders and soldiers of all ranks. He visited his soldiers regularly in their working areas and talked to them, to get a first-hand opinion of his people’s state of mind, to continue to inspire and build rapport. Although he kept a fine distinction between superior and subordinate, he advocated communication, to foster trust and collaboration.<sup>9</sup>

Alexander consistently led by example. For instance, as the Macedonians were marching toward the region of Gazaba, they experienced torrential rain, lightning and thunder on the third day of their advance. The men could feel their hands beginning to freeze. Exhausted, they broke formation, to guard themselves against the weather. The soldiers were beginning to freeze to death. Alexander was seen continuously walking around, helping soldiers on the ground and encouraging them to fight against the cold. It inspired them to make an effort to keep moving to maintain their body temperature and they went on to cut trees to make fires and build shelters which eventually and gradually warmed their bodies and prevented further casualties. This incident caused the death of 2,000 soldiers, but the number could have been more if not for Alexander.<sup>10</sup> Here, Alexander *led by example* again, and he never

asked his men to do anything he himself could not and would not do.

## ACHIEVE PROFESSIONAL EXCELLENCE – BOTH TECHNICALLY AND TACTICALLY

*Know your core business deeply, and apply the knowledge expertly. Provide a safe and secure environment for your soldiers to train and operate, and always seek to do the right things right.*

### Napoleon and the Art of War

*“Read again and again the campaigns of Hannibal, Caesar, Gustavus Adolphus, Turenne, Eugene, and Frederick. Model yourself upon them. This is the only means of becoming a great captain and of acquiring the secret of the art of war ...”<sup>11</sup>*

– Napoleon Bonaparte

Napoleon was one of the greatest military minds in the art of warfare. He expanded the conquests of France from her revolutionary borders to that of an Empire that stretched from Spain to the steppes of Russia. Napoleon’s genius lay not in revolutionizing of warfare itself, but in the refinement of existing means. He knew his core business well and was able to apply the knowledge expertly, and went on to refine the tenets of warfare to allow him to gain an advantage over his opponents. Napoleon established himself as a great leader of men during the revolutionary period with the siege of Toulon and his triumphs in Italy in 1796. These talents were refined and reached their height during the battles of Ulm, Austerlitz and Jena in the period of 1805-1806.

In tactical organization Napoleon widely introduced the use of the *corps d’avant-garde* or *corps d’armée*. In effect the corps was a miniature army comprised of infantry, artillery, and cavalry numbering anywhere from ten to thirty thousand men, similar to the concept of combined arms division in our current system. Each of these self-contained *corps d’armée* was capable of holding off greatly superior forces for several hours until help arrived. As a consequence, it allowed an army made up of various corps to move in

widely separate units.<sup>12</sup> This allowed greater mobility, confused the enemy, and eased the burden of logistics. As a general rule, Napoleon dispersed his corps on the march so that they were in mutually supporting positions and able to come to the aid of each other in the event of concentration for battle or to ward off superior forces. This emphasized Napoleon's dictum of "march divided, fight united."<sup>13</sup>

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The most outstanding feature of the Napoleonic system of warfare was undoubtedly its flexibility and limitless variation. The insistence on speed and mobility was the basic feature of his campaigns from Italy in 1796 to Waterloo in 1815. It was this emphasis on speed and mobility that also contributed greatly to the confusion and unsettling of his opponents. This was epitomized in the first Italian campaign, when General Algeria's corps marched 50 miles in 36 hours. In 1805 Napoleon moved the whole of the Grand Army, 210,000 men, from its camps at Boulogne to the Rhine. From the Rhine he marched to the Danube and then the outskirts of Ulm in 17 days. Marshal Soult's corps covered 275 miles during a period of 22 days. At Austerlitz, Davout drove his corps 140 kilometers in 48 hours to join the battle and gain a decisive result in favor of the French. Historians including David Chandler regard Napoleon's fusion of battle with maneuver in this way as Napoleon's "greatest contribution to the art of war."<sup>14</sup>

Napoleon, through his famous art of war, had achieved excellence—both technically and tactically. He knew his core business of warfare deeply, and applied the military knowledge innovatively and

expertly. Although not all military strategists would agree that Napoleon did everything right, most of them would agree that in terms of military strategy, he always sought to do the right things right.

## **CARE FOR YOUR SOLDIERS, BUT BE STRICT WITH THEM**

*Always consider the welfare of your soldiers. Train them well so that they can look after themselves and each other in the face of danger. To lead is to serve. Educate, and if necessary, punish them, so that they would learn the lessons in peace, rather than in war. To serve is to lead.*

## **Field Marshal Montgomery and his Command of the 8<sup>th</sup> Army**

Like a classical British officer, Field Marshal Montgomery was cold on the outside but warm in the inside. Outwardly, he was very hard in discipline and strict with his units and soldiers. But inwardly, he always had the morale and welfare of his outfit and men close to his heart; and therefore really cared for his soldiers.

When Montgomery took over the 8<sup>th</sup> Army, he found "the [8<sup>th</sup>] Army was reduced to bits and pieces, and oppressed by a sense of bafflement and uncertainty."<sup>15</sup> In addition, his adversary Rommel had acquired a formidable reputation. Montgomery faced a dilemma. He could not defeat Rommel unless he could restore the morale and welfare of 8th Army, but 8th Army's morale and welfare could not be restored until he could beat Rommel. In the opinion of Professor E. T. Williams, later Montgomery's Head of Intelligence, the new 8<sup>th</sup> Army Commander brought three qualities with him: (1) a flair for creating enthusiasm, (2) an aptitude for analyzing the situation thoroughly and dispassionately, and (3) the ability to reach a decision. Montgomery maintained that if a commander could gain the confidence and trust of his men, and they felt their best interests were safe in his hands, then he had in his possession a priceless asset and the greatest achievements became possible.

Immediately, Montgomery decided to adopt the following tough and strict policies:

- No further withdrawal.
- Divisions would fight as formations of all arms.
- 8<sup>th</sup> Army would build up its strength into a properly balanced force.
- A powerful mobile reserve of three armored divisions and one infantry division would be built up.
- If Rommel attacked at the next full moon, he would be allowed to destroy himself against a system of well dug-in anti-tank guns and hulled-down tanks.
- The army headquarters was to move from its dismal and uncomfortable location at the east end of the Ruweisat Ridge to Burg-el-Arab on the coast.
- Orders were not to be a basis for discussion; they were to be obeyed.
- There would be no more failures.

The effect of his new policies was electrifying, although not always popular. The proof of the pudding was the successful defensive battle of Alam Haifa, which restored the 8<sup>th</sup> Army's confidence. The victory also allowed Montgomery to divert resources to enhance the care and welfare of his soldiers. All these prepared the way for the famous battle of El Alamein. Although the latter did not go according to plan, the 8<sup>th</sup> Army had sufficient confidence to persevere and win. Throughout this journey, Montgomery's concept of command was based on the need to *care* for his soldiers, but be strict with them.

## LEARN AS YOU LEAD, AND LEAD AS YOU LEARN

*Be humble and curious. Learn from the past, learn from others, and learn beyond your domain. Be daring and innovative. Lead into the future, lead the rest, and lead beyond your command.*

### General Patton and his Leadership

In WWII, General George Patton was the general deemed most dangerous by the German High Command. He was a figure so important that the Allies used his name as a diversion, sending out a message on the active radio network outside *Pas de Calais*, letting slip

that Patton would command the Allied forces landing along the Atlantic Wall. General Patton was a great *learner and leader*. He read extensively throughout his career, and would often recall the works of Napoleon, Sherman, Robert E. Lee, quoting at length from the Bible, Homer's *Iliad* and other classics.<sup>16</sup> He showed his great leadership in the Battle of the Bulge. He had prepared his entire career for this campaign through his study of history and of great commanders. His intense study of history and his astute use of talent around him enabled him to become a master of the operational art.

*"My military reactions are correct. Many people do not agree with me ... they are wrong ... I've been studying war for 40 odd years and my decisions are based on knowledge, experience, and training."<sup>17</sup>*

– General George Patton

Patton summarized his beliefs across three basic tenets—inspiration, knowledge and mass. He noted that Napoleon won many battles when outnumbered, but he never lost a battle in which he possessed numerically superior forces. Patton considered Napoleon the epitome of military ability and as such comprehensively studied his career battles.<sup>18</sup> Patton firmly believed that certain lopsided victories of Caesar, Napoleon, and Grant were the primary result of "spiritual" inspiration and motivation, and the secondary result of mental ability. Patton explained that there was a distinction between mental ability and the execution of battle plans. He commented that "Hooker's plan at Chancellorsville was masterly; its execution cost him the battle."

Patton's tactical victories in WWII were characterized by wide flanking maneuver tactics. His march across France was certainly influenced by the conquests of Caesar in Gaul and Napoleon in Italy.<sup>19</sup> Throughout his campaign in WWII, Patton abided by his tenets of inspiration, knowledge and mass. In Sicily, he was forced to utilize mass as a last resort because maneuver was not producing desirable results. On the other hand, he inspired his troops



and utilized superior knowledge to outmaneuver his opponents in his famous march across France. Patton, like Jackson, only resorted to mass when faced by an equally knowledgeable and inspired commander.

All in all, throughout his military command, Patton continuously learned as he led. In fact, whenever he was not fighting battles, he would be leading his staff on rides based on famous battles in the past. He continuously led as he learned, he applied what he had read in his battles, in the most convicted and decisive manner.

### **ALWAYS TRY YOUR BEST, TO DO THE BEST, IN ORDER TO ACHIEVE THE BEST**

*Always put in your best efforts; and it is not what you do, but how you do that matters. Aim high to achieve high; and always hope for the best, but prepared for the worst. Leverage on your IQ, EQ, AQ (Adversity Quotient) and CQ (Creative Quotient) to achieve the best outcome. And, “never, never, never give in.”*

### **Hannibal and his Best**

Hannibal was born in 247 BC in North Africa. Polybius and Livy, whose histories of Rome are the main Latin sources regarding his life, claimed that Hannibal's father, the great Carthaginian general Hamilcar, brought his son to Spain at a young age. Hamilcar died in 229 BC and was succeeded by his son-in-law Hasdrubal, who made the young Hannibal an officer in the Carthaginian army. In 221 BC, Hasdrubal was assassinated, and the army unanimously chose the 26-year-old Hannibal to command Carthage's empire in Spain. Hannibal swiftly consolidated control in the region from the seaport base of Cartagena. It was in his subsequent fight with the mighty Roman Empire that saw Hannibal at his best, especially in the Battle of Cannae.

Hannibal knew that the Romans had control over the seas. He thus derived an *intelligent* and bold plan to take a large army overland from Spain, through southern Gaul across the Alps to the Po Valley. He sent

agents to secure allies in Transalpine and Cisalpine Gaul, thus assuring a line of communications back to Spain and a secure advance base in Northern Italy. He also worked hard to gain an ally in Philip V of Macedonia to force Rome to fight along two fronts. In June 218 BC, he marched a 90,000 strong army across the Pyrenees.<sup>20</sup> The Alpine passes were heavy in snow by the time Hannibal's forces reached it in October. Many of his men and animals perished in the harsh climate, but out of loyalty to their leader, they persevered. They reached Po Valley with 20,000 infantry, 6,000 cavalry and a few elephants. He marched into Central Italy, defeating the Romans at Trebia, Lake Trasimene and eventually the famous Battle of Cannae.<sup>21</sup> This was a great example of the *adversity quotient*. Additionally, Hannibal made unprecedented use of elephants to carry the heavy equipment across the daunting terrain of the Alps. He entered Gaul with about 80 elephants. This was *creativity*.

In 216 BC, the Romans had managed to gather an army of eight Roman and eight allied legions (80,000 infantry and 7,000 cavalry) under the leadership of Aemilius Paulus and Terentius Varro. Hannibal, who had about 40,000 infantry and 10,000 cavalry, sought favorable conditions as he knew that he was disadvantaged in numbers. To force favorable conditions, he made a night march to Cannae, captured a Roman supply depot and gained possession of the grain, which was valuable to the Romans. Both sides set up camp along the Aufidus River.<sup>22</sup> On 2 August 216 BC, Hannibal, knowing that Varro was in command, deliberately positioned himself with the stream on his flank to prevent the Roman envelopment. Varro sought to crush Hannibal by virtue of numbers. Hannibal drew in the heavy mass of Romans through the middle of his formation, under the cover of preliminary skirmishing of light infantry troops, and then signaled his veteran African infantry wings to advance, wheeling inward, and subsequently unleashing the heavy Carthaginian cavalry led by his brother Hasdrubal at the rear of the Roman line. Cries of victory turned to screams of consternation. 60,000

Romans lay dead on the field, with Paulus dead and Varro among the fugitives, while Hannibal only lost 6,000 men.<sup>23</sup> This was Hannibal at his best.

## TOGETHER, STRIVE TOWARDS THE SHARED VISION

*Have a shared vision, and together with your soldiers strive towards it. For 6 Div, our shared vision is:*

### ***A Combined Arms Division of Excellence***

*WE are always operationally ready and capable of achieving mission success.*

*WE are the center of excellence for brigade training.*

*WE strive to achieve the highest standards in all fields of endeavors.*

*WE are a competent, confident, committed and cohesive Cobra Family.*

*And*

*YOU Make the difference!*

## Mao Zedong and the Long March

Mao Zedong and his fellow Chinese Communists had a shared vision to, by means of an arduous trek, outmaneuver and outlast the Chinese Nationalists under the command of Chiang Kai-shek. With soldiers of the Red Army, Mao and the Communists strove towards their shared vision. 370 days and 6,000 miles later, they managed to achieve it. The Long March by the Red Army is an epic feat of great importance in the history of modern China. It established the Red Army as a formidable force and helped the Chinese Communist Revolution

survive a major crisis and enter a new period of development. The Red Army were able to come in contact with the masses, the very people they were championing Communism for, and win their sympathy and cooperation.

In 1928, the Kuomintang leader Chiang Kai-shek began a full scale offensive against Mao and the Communists, who were forced to seek shelter in the mountainous regions of Jiangxi. The Communists held firm and expanded their territories over Fujian, Hunan, Kwantung and Hubei provinces. However In 1930, Chiang Kai-Shek began to launch successive offensives against the Communists, suffering very heavy losses in April 1933. On his fifth major offensive, the Kuomintang was advised by the German General Hans von Seeckt not to launch a full frontal attack on Jiangxi. Instead 500,000 Kuomintang troops surrounded Jiangxi in an attempt to starve out the Communists.<sup>24</sup>

Within 12 months, Mao had lost 50% of the territory the Communists had controlled in 1933 and 60,000 Communist soldier killed. This forced the Communists to leave Jiangxi to take shelter in Shanxi province. The historical Long March started on 16 October 1934 and ended on 20 October 1935. The Red Army struggled for 370 days and covered 6,000 miles on foot. Throughout this period, the Red Army had to fight

*The Long March seemed an impossible feat, but to preserve their ideology and way of life, Mao and his soldiers strived against all odds to achieve the seemingly impossible shared vision, and defeat the Kuomintang.*

15 serious battles and 300 skirmishes, passing through 12 provinces. All equipment was carried by different means of transportation.<sup>25</sup> The Red Army had to cross the Snowy Mountains, some of the highest mountains in the world, and the Chinese grassland, which

was an area of deep marshes and claimed hundreds of lives.

The Long March is considered one of the greatest physical feats of the 20th Century. During this tough period, the Red Army gained the support of the masses. When those who survived the march reached Yunnan, they combined with the Communist troops there to form a fighting strength of 80,000 and established a strong base of operations. The Long March seemed an impossible feat, but to preserve their ideology and way of life, Mao and his soldiers strived against all odds to achieve the seemingly impossible shared vision, and defeat the Kuomintang.

## CONCLUSION

My philosophy of command has served to illuminate my command of 6 Div. It has served as a guide for my subordinates' decisions and actions in their respective units. Together, we strive to make 6 Div a CAD of Excellence. Through this essay, I hope to share my command philosophy with a wider audience in the SAF. I hope to use the various classical examples of past commanders to illustrate the essence of the ten tenets of my philosophy of command, and how to apply them in practical operational circumstances. Finally, I would like to end this essay by reiterating what Field Marshall Slim liked to remind all commanders: "command is a completely personal thing ... because no imitation was ever a masterpiece."<sup>26</sup> So, read this essay, think about the ten tenets of command, assimilate what you need and like, and develop your own style and philosophy of command. This is my intellectual advice and gift to you—the present and future commanders of the SAF.

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## ENDNOTES

1. Field Marshal Sir William Slim, "Higher Command in War" (Kermit Roosevelt Lecture, US Army Command and General Staff College, 1952).
2. I am very fortunate and glad that in the research for the relevant classical examples, I had the assistance of the very capable officer of CPT Mohammad Helmi, previously an Officer Commanding in my Division.
3. Frederick Ernest Whitton, *Moltke* (Freeport, New York: Constable & Company Ltd, 1921).
4. Major General Werner Widder, "Auftragstaktik and Innere Führung: Trademarks of German Leadership," *Military Review* 3, Berlin (2002).
5. Ibid.
6. Moss Roberts, *Three Kingdoms: A Historical Novel* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991).
7. Ibid.
8. Arrian, *The Campaigns of Alexander*, (London: Penguin Classics, 1973).
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20. T. N. Dupuy, "The Era of the Giants," in R. E. Dupuy, *The Harper Encyclopaedia of Military History* (New York: HarperCollins, 1993), 68-75.
21. Ibid.
22. Ibid.
23. Ibid.
24. R. S. Chaurasia, *History of Modern China* (New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers and Distributors, 2004).
25. Ibid.
26. Slim, "Higher Command in War."



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