

Military Training in the British Army, 1940–1944

From Dunkirk to D-Day



TIMOTHY HARRISON PLACE

MILITARY TRAINING IN
THE BRITISH ARMY, 1940-1944

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1940–1944
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**For Christine,
Ben and Clara
with love**

Series Editor's Preface

The combat performance of the British Army in North-West Europe from June 1944 until May 1945 has for some time been the subject of much analysis and no little criticism. In comparative terms, it has been measured against that of the German Army and found to be wanting in almost every respect, saved from the embarrassment of its own inadequacies chiefly by the combined weight of Allied superiority in the air and the support of high volumes of artillery fire. The search for the causes of what a goodly number of authors have seen as its relatively undistinguished performance has involved historians in analysing weapons statistics, assessing command performances and considering the cultural propensities of the society which produced the forces that landed in Normandy on D-Day – in a word, in trying to measure and to explain the military effectiveness of Montgomery's army. In these debates – just as in the debates about comparative military performance in the First World War – military doctrine has come to be recognised as a factor of central importance. As the bridge between thought and action, it is the articulating agent which ensures – or should ensure – that everyone knows the right thing to do and that they all do the same things in the same circumstances. In all armies and in every war, doctrine is the glue which holds everything together, and training is the instrument through which it is imparted. A study of these issues is therefore central to the debates about D-Day and its aftermath which still continue. Tim Harrison Place's study of the doctrine and training of the British Army between 1940 and 1944 makes an important contribution to those debates, for it now allows us – for the first time – to understand exactly how and why the invading armies were underprepared for the task which faced them on the morning of 6 June 1944.

The obstacles that faced would-be reformers of infantry training were in some cases well-founded and in others not: on the one hand, the need to ensure that exercises tested particular units in particular problems dictated a degree of control which squeezed out the unplanned and the improvised (and readers may perhaps agree that, as an illustration of this, the feat of Lance-Corporal Higgins (page 26) deserves its note in history), while, on the other hand, objections to the development of battle drill as a standardised solution which would stifle initiative are redolent of a degree of professional conservatism which seems to have characterised the higher levels of the British Army. As the author concludes, too little – not too much – battle drill deprived the infantry of initiative.

The twists and turns in armoured warfare doctrine, patiently and carefully disentangled and recounted here, resulted from a complex concatenation of factors. Prewar doctrine had to adjust to a variety of different experiences whose import was not easy to work out: desert warfare against the Germans produced different lessons from desert warfare against the Italians, fighting in Libya was different from fighting in Tunisia, and new weapons such as the 88 mm anti-tank gun, the anti-tank mine and the hand-held anti-tank Panzerfaust missile produced new problems in tank warfare which had to be accommodated in new doctrine. Working out the most effective way to use tanks against this kaleidoscopic background was difficult enough but, as the pages which follow make clear, it was made much more so by the ways in which the Army as an institution responded to the need to solve these problems. In some cases little or nothing was done, even by senior officers whose job it was to oversee matters of doctrine. In others, junior and middle-ranking officers found their own preferred solutions to the problems, which were not always in harmony with one another. In one notable case, the general picked to command British forces in Normandy intervened four months before the landing to change established doctrine, thereby throwing everything into confusion.

Whether things went wrong after D-Day as far as the British Army's performance is concerned is still an open question. Whether they might have gone better had the pre-invasion preparations been different is no longer a matter for dispute. This account of the shortcomings in both doctrine and training shows us clearly both how difficult is the task of those charged with shaping doctrine and how costly their mistakes may turn out to be. As a case study of the central task which every army must meet and overcome, it will be of as much value to those concerned with the future as it will be to those whose interest is in the past.

John Gooch
Series Co-Editor

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This book started life as my doctoral thesis at the University of Leeds. I owe a huge debt to my doctoral supervisor, Professor John Childs, for his unfailing support and encouragement over a number of years. I must also thank the co-editors of this series, Professor John Gooch and Dr Brian Holden Reid, for their advice in the process of transforming the thesis into a book. I am particularly grateful to John Gooch who has been generous with his time and counsel throughout the time I have known him.

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I have dedicated this book to my wife and my children. A mere dedication at the front of a book is mean recompense for everything Christine has given. As for my children, I do not know what they have done to deserve it.

Any errors of fact or interpretation are of course mine alone.

List of Abbreviations

AFV	armoured fighting vehicle
AORG	Army Operational Research Group
AP	armour-piercing
ATI	<i>Army Training Instruction</i>
ATM	<i>Army Training Memorandum</i>
BEF	British Expeditionary Force
BGS	Brigadier General Staff
BLM	Montgomery Papers
CAB	Cabinet Office documents
C-in-C	Commander-in-Chief
CIGS	Chief of the Imperial General Staff
CO	Commanding Officer
CRAC	Commander, Royal Armoured Corps
CRO	<i>Current Reports from Overseas</i>
DCIGS	Deputy CIGS
DCLI	Duke of Cornwall's Light Infantry
DMT	Director of Military Training
ERY	East Riding Yeomanry
FFY	Fife and Forfar Yeomanry
FOO	Forward Observation Officer
GHQ	General Headquarters
GOC	General Officer Commanding
GOC-in-C	General Officer Commanding-in-Chief
HE	high explosive
HQ	Headquarters
IWM	Imperial War Museum
LAA	light anti-aircraft
LHCMA	Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives, King's College London
LMG	light machine-gun
MG	machine-gun
MTP	<i>Military Training Pamphlet</i>
NAAFI	Navy, Army and Air Force Institutes
NCO	non-commissioned officer

MILITARY TRAINING IN THE BRITISH ARMY

NTW	<i>Notes from Theatres of War</i>
OCTU	Officer Cadet Training Unit
OR	other rank
PRO	Public Record Office
RA	Royal Regiment of Artillery
RAC	Royal Armoured Corps
RE	Royal Engineers
RHA	Royal Horse Artillery
RTR	Royal Tank Regiment
SHAEF	Supreme HQ Allied Expeditionary Force
SP	self-propelled (gun)
TEWT	Tactical Exercise Without Troops
VCIGS	Vice-CIGS
WMWTC	Weapons Museum, Warminster Training Centre
WO	War Office

1

Introduction

It is perhaps the function of historians to split hairs. The backdrop to this work is the highly successful campaign waged by British troops against Germany in North-West Europe, starting on 6 June 1944 and ending with Germany's unconditional surrender 11 months later. The success was not wholly or even mainly Britain's: American troops far outnumbered British for most of the campaign; Canada provided substantial forces, as on a lesser scale did exiled Poles, French, Belgians and Dutch; all served under American supreme command. Nor would the victory have been possible without the hard fighting of Soviet troops against the Germans on the eastern front. None the less, it is with the British contribution to the military forces that overcame Germany that this book is concerned.

For all its success, controversy has roamed the campaign's annals almost since the day it started. Most of it has centred on issues associated with high command, including the very command structure and a host of questions surrounding grand strategy and campaign strategy. None of those issues will be revisited here. Two relatively recent contributions to the campaign's literature, however, have introduced new bones for historians to pick over. The works of D'Este and Hastings, first published in 1983 and 1984 respectively, for the first time went into detail on the frequently poor tactical performance of British troops in Normandy, the three-month-long battle that arguably determined, although it did not actually seal, Germany's fate. Their findings form the point of departure for this study.

Using a variety of sources, both D'Este and Hastings highlight the poor standard of co-operation between tanks and infantry among British troops and the reluctance of the infantry to fight without high volumes of fire-power in support or to continue the struggle when their officers became casualties. D'Este argues that the lacklustre performance of the British Army in Normandy was partly the product of the cautious strategy of attrition by which Montgomery directed the operations of the British and Canadian troops in the eastern sector of the lodgement area.¹ Hastings' interpretation, contrarily, holds that Montgomery's generalship was constrained by the mediocre tactical qualities of his troops.² That the general standard of British troops in the Second World War was mediocre is confirmed by Professor Sir Michael

Howard, a veteran of the Italian campaign as well as a distinguished military historian.³

Numerous reasons have been advanced for the British Army's mediocrity. The parochialism engendered by the regimental system has been cited as a bar to effective co-operation between tanks and infantry.⁴ British weapons and equipment were frequently inferior to those available to the Germans: not only were German tanks better armoured and better armed than their British counterparts, but German infantry weapons, especially anti-tank weapons, were superior.⁵ In Normandy the bocage terrain supposedly favoured the defence. This factor had not been foreseen in training and the three veteran British divisions in Normandy, which had won their spurs in the desert, found the adjustment peculiarly hard.⁶

In his wide-ranging treatment of the British Army's tactical effectiveness during the Second World War, Murray cites the revelations in Hastings' work and numerous other sources of circumstantial evidence relating to other theatres in which the British Army was engaged pointing to a similar malady, before offering the following diagnosis: 'The real cause of such a state of affairs lay in the failure of the army leadership to enunciate a clearly thought-out doctrine and then to institute a thorough training program to insure its acceptance throughout the army.'⁷

The assurance of that sentence belies what is quite properly a rather tentative discussion of the subject, for the evidence that Murray adduces in its support is thin to say the least. None the less, although it offers no hint of the full complexity in which tactical doctrine and training became entangled, Murray's diagnosis is meaningful enough to serve as the text for this study.

Murray's conviction is not only that the British Army was tactically retarded but also that it need not have been. Other commentators have been far more indulgent. Howard suggests that the rather unmilitary ethos of the typical British citizen soldier caused regular officers to lower their expectations of the wartime army.⁸ It is beyond the scope of this study to pursue that theory, although it doubtless has some validity. Bidwell, however, maintains that the British Army of 1939–45, a largely non-professional outfit manned mainly by temporary soldiers drawn from 'civvie street' simply did not have time to become skilled in its business. It therefore resorted extensively to the expedient of sweeping its tactical inadequacies beneath the carpets of fire-power provided by its most effective component, the Royal Regiment of Artillery (RA).⁹ Let us examine that claim, for it is not devoid of truth.

Firstly, the British and Allied Armies' heavy reliance upon artillery fire-power and other forms of metalline force is not a point of historical dispute. Indeed, it has recently been comprehensively catalogued in a study aptly entitled *Brute Force*.¹⁰ Murray agrees with Bidwell that reliance upon fire-power was the 'response to tactical weaknesses (and perhaps partially their cause)'.¹¹ Secondly, of course the British Army was largely a non-regular outfit. Particularly in the early years of the war the large numbers of conscripts, called-up reservists and

territorials could not have received the degree of training that they might have got had strategic conditions been more accommodating of the requirements of military preparedness. Such were the pressures upon the Army at home after Dunkirk, due to the requirements of home defence, non-military commitments, overseas drafting and the shortages of equipment and facilities, that of six armoured and 19 infantry divisions surveyed in April 1942 only three were immediately fit for battle.¹² The process of raising a mass army under pressure of war was undoubtedly fraught with difficulty. Not only should it not be surprising but it should also be forgivable if troops sent into the North African fray in 1941 and 1942 lacked the full range of professional tactical skills one should expect in fully trained career soldiers.

But can one accept such an excuse for the troops sent across the English Channel in June 1944? In the first place, three of the 12 British fighting divisions involved had recent battle experience in the Mediterranean, as did two of the ten independent brigades. Citizen soldiers or no, the troops of those formations could, and undoubtedly did, consider themselves the equals of the many regular soldiers whom fate had confined to the home islands. Secondly, the British Army at home had enjoyed four years of respite since Dunkirk in which to prepare itself for the challenges of Normandy. And since the end of 1942, home defences (given the bare minimum of precautionary attention) had inflicted little diversion from training. The formation under which British troops fought the campaign, 21 Army Group, cannot be compared to Kitchener's New Armies, thrown into battle virtually untrained in 1916, whose troops – those who survived their first battle – had to learn their trade under fire. Their successors of June 1944 might have been unblooded, but there was no excuse if they were untrained.

It simply will not do to put down the lacklustre tactical performance of the British Army in North-West Europe to a lack of opportunity for training. There was no such lack. Murray's hypothesis – for that is all it is – that it was unsuitable doctrine and training that hampered the tactical performance of British arms clearly stands the test of logical reasoning. This book investigates whether it can be sustained by the evidence of what the British Army at home actually did during the four years between Dunkirk and D-Day. That is why the campaign in North-West Europe provides only the backdrop to this study. Its main focus is the hitherto neglected subject of those four tedious years of home service.

Naturally, that renders this study an incomplete test of Murray's hypothesis. Doctrine and training among formations that took part in the Mediterranean and Far East campaigns will not be covered here, although extensive reference will be made to the lessons learned from the former. Nor will there be much reference to training in the prewar or Phoney War periods. This is a Dunkirk to D-Day study. There is also an important conceptual limitation in that the analysis in this work is confined largely to the infantry and armoured arms of the British Army. It is as well to elaborate upon the reasons for this.

The combatant arms of the British Army included not only the Royal Armoured Corps and the infantry but also the Royal Regiment of Artillery, the Royal Corps of Signals, the Corps of Royal Engineers and the Reconnaissance Corps. These were in one sense or another support arms which is why they are not considered in this study. With the exception of the artillery, their primary function was not to fight but to perform some other function that served to facilitate the fighting action of the infantry and armour. That is not to say that the jobs of personnel in those arms were not dangerous – they certainly were – nor that they did not at times have to fight. They did, but only so far as it was necessary to facilitate their main job and, of course, in self defence.

The exclusion of the Royal Artillery might seem perverse. There are two reasons for it. Firstly, chiefly thanks to the labours of Bidwell and Graham,¹³ British artillery doctrine and tactics during the Second World War are well understood. It is also generally accepted that the Royal Artillery was by far the most professionally skilled fighting arm of the British Army during this period.¹⁴ Secondly, the role of the artillery was not to close with and directly effect the enemy's overthrow. On many occasions the enemy closed with the artillery: close-quarters combat was by no means foreign to gunner experience. However, always in theory and usually in practice, the artillery was an arm of remote fire-support that participated in the attack from positions often thousands of yards behind the front line. This book is concerned chiefly with the attack and the actions of the troops who carried out the attack, namely the infantry and armour. Reference will be made, where appropriate, to the function of supporting artillery fire. A minute examination of artillery doctrine and technique is not necessary because it has already been done and close attention to training in artillery units would be mainly technical rather than tactical.

That leads to another important point to be made in defining the object of this study. The chief concern will be with doctrine and training for the minor tactics of the attack. 'Minor tactics' is conventionally defined as single-arm tactics, that is the tactical methods of, for example, infantry, without reference to the input of other arms with which the infantry co-operate in battle.¹⁵ This further explains why artillery is not a central concern of this book: infantry or tanks acting alone can attack and overthrow the enemy but artillery acting alone can only cause a nuisance to him. However, by the war's end it was widely recognised that tanks acting alone were in most circumstances incapable of attacking successfully without infantry in close attendance. Minor tactics by the conventional definition thus came to represent a purely theoretical notion that was meaningless in practice. Necessarily, therefore, this book will consider co-operation between tanks and infantry. Higher tactics, however, the business of divisions and higher formations, are of merely peripheral concern here: operations and strategy, exclusively the business of generals and their staffs, will not be broached at all.

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To restrict the scope of this book to the attack only is to ignore the activity in which most fighting troops on active service spent most of their time: defence. Indeed, every successful attack must rapidly be transformed into defence so that the ground won can be held against enemy efforts to recover it. German defensive tactics made extensive use of prepared counterattack to evict successful attackers from the position they had won before they could consolidate it. Accordingly, British doctrine stressed the need to organise gains for defence without delay.¹⁶ Important though defence was, it was not in defence that the British Army's shortcomings were most obvious, at least not in North-West Europe. Moreover, although the design of a defensive position offered plenty of scope for tactical creativity among the commanders responsible, especially in regard to the achievement of surprise against an attacking enemy, for the troops involved defence was mainly a matter of hard toil digging and concealing positions, staying awake while on guard and obeying orders, particularly in regard to the control of fire, when an attack came. Of course it was rather different when the defensive task of a unit or sub-unit was counterattack, but the minor tactics for such an operation fall into the category of attack rather than defence.

Turning to sources, readers will find in the Bibliography an account of the wide variety of official and unofficial records consulted. A brief introduction to two categories of those records is appropriate here, however. This book compares doctrine for the attack with the training actually carried out in units and formations. Doctrine, a word of which the literal meaning and etymological origin is 'teaching' (as a noun), existed on many different levels. For the purpose of this study it means the officially sanctioned doctrine of the British Army as expressed in the many manuals and pamphlets published by the War Office and other military authorities. Those publications represent a primary source of the first importance in this study. The arrangements for formulating and publicising doctrine are of such interest that Chapter 2 is made over to exploring that very subject.

The main source of evidence on training in practice is the War Diary kept by every unit and formation HQ. Because the quality of such sources is very patchy, to secure a fair picture of training in a particular division demands examination of War Diaries at unit, brigade and divisional level across the period covered by this book. This has been done in the case of three divisions: 43rd Infantry Division, 11th Armoured Division and Guards Armoured Division. Those of one independent brigade, 34th Tank Brigade, have also been covered. The War Diaries of numerous other units and formations have been examined in a more selective manner. The object has been to form a picture of the training of those troops that saw no action before OVERLORD. For that reason the three divisions and two independent armoured brigades repatriated for OVERLORD after fighting in the Mediterranean campaigns have been excluded.

The evolution of doctrine in response to the lessons of battle in the

Mediterranean theatres is an integral feature of the analysis unfolded in the following chapters, especially those concerned with armoured forces. But no work of this nature could be complete without some effort to judge doctrine and training, as informed by such lessons, against the test of battle in North-West Europe. A closer look at the backdrop is necessary. Chapters 5 and 9 answer that need. Contemporary after-action reports are the main sources used. War Diaries and secondary sources have also been used. However, the material on battle experience in North-West Europe included in this book, while allowing some firm conclusions to be drawn on the real quality of doctrine and training before D-Day, represents only a first attempt in this particular field. The recent publication of a comprehensive study of the combat experience of the US Army in North-West Europe¹⁷ merely underlines the need for similar work on the British Army.

Before getting started it will help the reader to know something of the higher organisation of the British Army at home during the war. The head office of the British Army was the War Office, which exercised authority over all British troops everywhere through the commanders-in-chief located in the regions where those troops served. All British troops in Great Britain came under the Commander-in-Chief (C-in-C) of Home Forces, except those detached to form expeditionary formations, such as First Army in 1942 and 21 Army Group in 1943, and those in Anti-Aircraft Command. The office of C-in-C was held firstly by General Sir Walter Kirke, who retired in May 1940. General Sir Edmund Ironside, his successor, lasted only two months and was succeeded by General Sir Alan Brooke who remained in the post until December 1941 when he became Chief of Imperial General Staff (CIGS). General Sir Bernard Paget succeeded Brooke.

The C-in-C was based with his General Headquarters at St Paul's School, Hammersmith, to where it moved from Twickenham during Ironside's tenure. In July 1943, 21 Army Group HQ was formed to control the forces slated for the invasion of Europe. Paget relinquished his Home Forces job to become C-in-C of the new formation which appropriated St Paul's School as its HQ. GHQ Home Forces moved to Hounslow with its new C-in-C, General Sir Harold Franklyn. Before July 1943 GHQ Home Forces was in effect an Army Group HQ and the C-in-C an Army Group Commander. Ranked below GHQ were the five home Commands: Southern, Western, Eastern, Northern and Scottish, joined in 1941 by the new South-Eastern Command, which took over Kent, Sussex and Surrey from Eastern Command. Headed by a GOC-in-C (usually in the rank of lieutenant-general but in some cases a full general) each of the Commands would in the event of active operations in Britain have become an operational army. Indeed GOCs-in-C were styled Army Commanders, the Commands were often referred to as Armies and in some exercises operated as such. The troops within each Command area were organised in corps, divisions and brigades as in any other operational army.¹⁸

With the formation of 21 Army Group in 1943, Home Forces reverted to its

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peacetime functions of home defence, draft-finding and administration. The task of preparing field formations for active operations overseas passed to 21 Army Group. Paget's supersession as C-in-C by General Sir Bernard Montgomery in January 1944 constituted a final destruction of the links with 21 Army Group's Home Forces past. Montgomery sacked many members of Paget's HQ team, bringing in trusted lieutenants from Eighth Army, his previous command, to replace them. He also slimmed down the HQ structure, reducing the training branch, rendering Brigadier Pyman, its head, redundant, and abolishing the infantry branch under Major-General Utterson-Kelso.¹⁹

In the latter case abolition probably made no difference to training. As will be shown, Utterson-Kelso's role at GHQ and 21 Army Group and the new emphasis on the infantry arm dating from Paget's appointment as C-in-C had not prevented a general failure in infantry training. Montgomery's action merely confirmed and compounded that failure. The removal of Pyman had more concrete consequences, especially when linked to the replacement of Major-General Norrie, Paget's Royal Armoured Corps adviser, with Major-General G.W. Richards who had performed the same function in Eighth Army. As will be seen, Montgomery disagreed fundamentally with War Office and Home Forces teaching on the use of tanks. While his position was defensible, indeed even sensible, the new regime at St Paul's made little attempt, and probably had too little time, to resolve the contradictions thus created. Moreover, the new brooms swept away some sound Home Forces doctrine on tank-infantry co-operation and thus laid the foundations for a number of lost battles and many broken British bodies in Normandy.

The Dissemination of Doctrine

All that the unblooded troops training in Britain before D-Day knew about fighting and battle was what they were taught. Having no battle experience on which to make judgements, doctrine was all. Ultimately, doctrine was disseminated by word and deed. In drill-halls, classrooms, parade grounds and training areas, officers and NCOs instructed their men by demonstration, explanation and practice. It is likely that much of what those officers and NCOs taught their men they had themselves learned in much the same way. Yet every large organisation needs some written means of recording the methods and practices by which each individual member should perform his duties. Accordingly, during the Second World War the British Army produced a great deal of printed doctrine.

Aimed at officers and NCOs, rather than private soldiers, this doctrinal literature was at once an *aide-mémoire* of long-forgotten instruction and a substitute for instruction never received. But it was undoubtedly regarded by those who wrote the pamphlets and the authorities who commissioned them primarily as the normative standard. Without it, uniformity of method throughout a three-million-strong army would have been quite impossible. This does not mean that uniformity of method was achieved. It is open to question as to how carefully much of the doctrinal literature was read. In the following chapters, the contents of the manuals and pamphlets published by the War Office and others will be explored and comparisons made with what the troops actually did in training. Indeed, contrasts between doctrine and training are as apparent as comparisons.

This chapter, however, focuses on the publication system. Doctrine did not comprise a single 'bible' of dicta and dogma cast in metaphorical stone. Instead, a great many individual publications constituted the British Army's official teaching and supersessions took place frequently, reflecting tactical and technical developments. Doctrinal publications appeared in a number of different series, each with its own function within the overall purpose of doctrinal dissemination. This chapter is both a general introduction to those publications and a general commentary on their effectiveness.

The main bulk of the British Army's official doctrine during the war appeared in the War Office's *Military Training Pamphlet (MTP)* series. The

titles published in this series covered the vast majority of trades and specialisms practised in the British Army, everything from foot drill to motor-cycling and from minor tactics to divisional handling. Some important specialisms were, however, catered for outside the *MTP* series. So far as tactics are concerned, the most important of these were the *Infantry Training* and *Infantry Section Leading* manuals, the latest prewar editions of which were published in 1937 and 1938 respectively. Both were eventually superseded by a new edition of *Infantry Training* published in multiple volumes in 1943 and 1944.

Who formed the intended readership of these pamphlets? Most pamphlets carried an indication of their intended distribution. Although often rather vague in the first year or so of the war,¹ by 1941 formalised codes denoting scales of distribution had been introduced. Under this system, manuals on higher operations were not distributed below unit commander level, while manuals on minor tactics might be issued down to corporals. There was no provision for lower ranks to receive training literature. The scales were often qualified by the stipulation of certain types of unit where the contents of a particular pamphlet made this appropriate. For example, manuals on armoured tactics did not receive wide distribution among infantry.²

Before the war, training manuals were written by committee and published under the authority of the Army Council. In September 1939 the committees were disbanded and thereafter manuals were written by officers specially employed for the purpose by the Directorate of Military Training. For the duration of the war most training manuals appeared by the authority of the CIGS rather than the full Army Council.³ The prewar system was ponderous and time-consuming, not least because Army Council publications were subject to bureaucratic editorial supervision. But, at least so far as fully official doctrinal material was concerned, the wartime system was hardly fleet. For example, a new manual on the infantry division in defence published in March 1942 had been under preparation for at least 15 months.⁴ Another example was the revised *Infantry Training* manual. This was one of the few manuals published during the war to appear under Army Council (rather than CIGS) authority which affords a glimpse of the impact of that condition upon publication schedules. The officer who wrote Part VIII, *Fieldcraft, Battle Drill, Section and Platoon Tactics*, started work in April 1942. Delayed by the many amendments demanded by War Office departments, he did not complete his part of the process until October 1943 and the pamphlet did not appear until March 1944, little short of two years after work had started.⁵

The 1937 *Infantry Training* manual had been out of date in the crucial matter of platoon organisation within a year of its publication.⁶ The dilatory production of its replacement reflects poorly upon the War Office. None the less, the lack of a valid War Office manual did not leave battalions without a useful pamphlet. GHQ Home Forces had in October 1942 published *The Instructors' Handbook on Fieldcraft and Battle Drill* under the authority of the Commander-in-Chief. At 190 pages, 58 pages longer than *Infantry Training* Part VIII

(which, repeating quite a lot of its contents, superseded it), *The Instructors' Handbook* was written by Lieutenant-Colonel Lionel Wigram and Major R.M.T. Kerr of the School of Infantry, and went from conception to publication in less than ten months. Throughout that time both authors were fully employed at the School.⁷ This shows what could be achieved when writers were freed from the laborious validation processes required if a manual was to enjoy full status as official doctrine.

Recognising that troops in the field should not have to wait so long for the latest tactical advice, the War Office published two other series of pamphlets to promulgate new or revised doctrine on a provisional basis. The first was the *Army Training Memorandum (ATM)* series. *ATMs* were an interwar creation, appearing once or twice a year. In the first year of the war, however, they appeared monthly. Thereafter publication became irregular with up to seven months between issues. Twenty-nine editions appeared during the war. War-time *ATMs*, which were issued to each officer, contained a series of usually short articles on tactical, administrative and training matters variously of interest to all ranks of officer in all arms. They were frequently used to announce changes in tactical doctrine resulting from battle experience. For example, that tank guns should generally be fired at the halt rather than on the move was first ordained in an *ATM*.⁸

Curiously, *ATMs* continued to be issued under Army Council authority until January 1944.⁹ They were, none the less, capable of responding quickly to events. For example, *ATM* No. 33 of June 1940 was devoted largely to the lessons of the British Expeditionary Force's (BEF's) experience in France and Flanders. These were drawn from the report of a committee chaired by General Sir William Bartholomew which had concluded its sittings only on 21 June.¹⁰ No time was allowed for extensive deliberation on the report, for *ATM* No. 33 was distributed just 11 days later. Among other things, it followed Bartholomew in directing that the brigade group (an infantry brigade with field artillery and other supporting arms under command) rather than the division would henceforth be the basic fighting formation of all arms. The absoluteness of this change would later be regretted.¹¹ At a lower level of tactics, *ATM* No. 33 followed Bartholomew in lauding the lightly armoured tracked vehicles used by the infantry known as carriers. Each battalion held ten (later 13) of these vehicles, each armed with a Bren gun, in a designated carrier platoon whose intended function was to provide the battalion with a mobile fire-power reserve. Carriers were not designed as fighting vehicles and crews were expected to fire the Bren gun dismounted except in emergency. Their armour was proof only against normal small-arms fire, not against armour-piercing projectiles. However, the BEF had used carriers for a variety of unauthorised purposes, including reconnaissance, transport of stores up to the front and to carry forward bombers to neutralise an enemy strongpoint. *ATM* No. 33 appeared to endorse this. Someone in the War Office took exception and the very next *ATM* laid down that such uses were 'exceptional

and would often result in heavy losses'.¹² This was a rare and relatively minor example of the War Office embarrassing itself by uncritical regurgitation of the lessons of battle.

Another of the functions *ATMs* served was as a vehicle for the dissemination of good ideas and advice from units and formations, especially but not exclusively those serving in active theatres. For example, in 1943 and 1944 a number of letters from 'Paul', a subaltern on active service in the Mediterranean theatres to his friend 'Tom', stationed in Britain, were published under headings such as 'A Few "Tips" from the Front'. In fact, 'Paul' was no subaltern but Major Paul Bryan of 6th Royal West Kent Regiment, who acquired a fine reputation serving with his battalion in Tunisia and went on to command it in Italy.¹³ *ATMs* were used also to reinforce existing doctrine. In August 1944, the War Office published a series of games suggested by members of a battle-experienced formation (presumably one of those repatriated from the Mediterranean to take part in *OVERLORD*) as the best means of maintaining fieldcraft skills.¹⁴ This was by no means a new idea. The War Office had suggested games of its own in a manual on fieldcraft published in 1940.¹⁵ With fieldcraft skills at a premium in Normandy, it was presumably felt worthwhile reminding those responsible for training replacement drafts, or for organising the training of units during rest periods out of the line in France, of suitable techniques.

ATMs were not used for the promulgation of substantial bodies of new or replacement doctrine. When the War Office wished to publish such material quickly, without going through the lengthy editorial vetting process required for *MTPs* and the like, it published an *Army Training Instruction (ATI)*.¹⁶ The first *ATI* appeared in January 1941 and concerned the tactical effects of recent changes in the organisation of the infantry division.¹⁷ Most of the changes resulted from the recommendations of the Bartholomew Report, which suggests a period of about six months from conception to publication. In fact it is likely that the production of *ATIs* could be accomplished rather more quickly than that. *ATI* No. 3, *Handling of an Armoured Division*, appeared on 19 May 1941. Yet two cloth model exercises at which armoured formation commanders resolved upon the outline doctrine for the employment of armour took place only in January and March.¹⁸ Indeed, a summary of doctrinal preparation work underway in the Directorate of Military Training in November 1940 included nothing recognisable as *ATI* No. 1 published two months later and envisaged only the issue of directives concerning the tactics of the armoured divisions then being raised, not the publication of a pamphlet. Nor did the list include *ATI* No. 2, which appeared in March 1941.¹⁹

The function of *ATIs* was to fill a need for printed doctrine pending the production of an *MTP*. In most cases they were later replaced by an *MTP*. An exception to this rule was *ATI* No. 2, *The Employment of Army Tanks in Co-operation with Infantry*, whose stated purpose was to complement *MTP* No. 22, published on the same subject early in the war. *ATI* No. 2 was prompted by the recognition that infantry tank brigades would sometimes have to be