

# **Chapter 7**

## **Drone Warfare**

One would imagine that the last place one would find drones is in the military. After all, the life and death of the nation is at stake. But alas poor Yorick, such is not the case. A very clear example of the military drone is that provided by the contending European armies post WWI. Looking at old German military footage one could be forgiven for thinking that the German army was one giant Ministry of Silly Walks but in fact it was the most professional and hence most competent of all the armies of the period. This was because the Treaty of Versailles dictated that the German army was restricted to 100,000 men. At that number the German army could not afford mediocrity, so drones didn't get a look in. Every man in the army had to be competent or better. With the retirement of the old guard, class preferment was jettisoned, so away with the 'chateau generals', who typified the British and French armies. New younger men were more cognizant of new technology, such as the tank and the plane. Most importantly, as it had reformed as a small but highly cohesive and competent group, the German army was the most egalitarian of all the contemporary armies. Junior officers ate with the ranks and indeed some generals, such as Rommel, ate the same rations as the troops, when on the battlefield. As Curzio Malaparte showed in *The Volga Rises In Europe* the German army operated as a team, and team work works because it is egalitarian<sup>35</sup>. By comparison the French went into World War II led by the victors of the last war. Not having to question the past, the old school could not think passed trench warfare and so were incompetent in modern warfare. Unfortunately for the French army, the Germans did not oblige them by playing at trench warfare and attacking their magnificent Maginot line but instead they dusted off their Schlieffenplanen and did pretty much what they did the

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<sup>35</sup> Please do not think I am eulogising the Wehrmacht. The German army was utterly complicit in Nazism and perpetrated all manner of war crimes. I am just saying that they were good at what they did because they were more drone free than other armies. You could take this as a positive for drones but what I am saying is that their success was due to the competition's failure.

previous time, but this time on wheels. The Miracle on the Marne, aided by French taxi drivers ferrying reservists out to meet the invaders from the North could not be repeated, as taxis are no match for tanks.

Speaking of tanks, one has to wonder why the English, having invented tanks during the WWI and whose military theorists had best prefigured tank warfare, went into WWII was nothing but excuses for tanks and with not even a tank division in the British Expeditionary Force. Again it is the drone principle which is responsible for this. It was the British Navy that invented the tank. The British Navy had overwhelming numerical superiority over the German Navy and after the battle of Jutland the German fleet never ventured out of port. This meant that large numbers of British sailors were idle and so they formed land divisions and fought in France. Confronted by the mud and the devastating dominion of the machine gun, the Navy invented the 'land cruiser', which was code-named 'tank'. Importantly the British Navy is the 'senior service'. This meant that of the military men, the Navy got the best and brightest. The mediocre officered the army. After the war the mediocre army officers, largely from the horsey set, resented this Navy invention and developed a distinct dislike for the tank, which was far too industrial for their rural inclinations. I recall reading an article by H G Wells, written after he had attended a public meeting in the 1920's about the future of war, which had been conducted with senior members of the army, whose dismissive attitude to the tank had astonished him. A great example of non-drone behaviour was the decision of a British tank driving instructor to fail the demonstration of a particularly useless death-trap. This so-called tank was to go over an obstacle course, under the watchful eye of the top brass, who were considering whether to commission it or not. The driver purposely failed the course, much to the chagrin of his commanding officer. His explanation was that he could not be responsible for the men that would have died in it. Unfortunately for this brave and competent

man, this particular piece of junk was replaced by other versions which were not much better.

The British disguised their army leadership's mediocrity by praising the enemy. Churchill publicly called Rommel a great general, who said, "thanks very much I always knew I was a superman". Rommel was no doubt a competent general and an honourable soldier, at least in the Middle East. Any claim to greatness though, is belied by his rash decision to commit his troops to the battles at El Alamein. Rommel did this despite being told by Kesselring, the German regional commander, that he could not be properly supplied at that distance. Critically Rommel was without any means to withdraw his non-motorised Italian infantry. Not only did Rommel lose the bulk of his armour but he lost the morale of the Italians, who felt they had been abandoned and who thereafter surrendered at every opportunity.

Rommel's dash had worked wondrously well against the static French and against useless British tanks in the ideal tank warfare terrain of North Africa. At first the British tanks were so inadequate that whereas the gun on the German main battle tank could penetrate the British main battle tank's front armour from 1000 yards and its side armour from 2000 yards, the British tank's gun had no penetrability of the Panzer's armour, at any range. Rommel's forces were crushed at El Alamein where his panzers were up against British tank formations which included the new American Sherman tanks. The Shermans were not much more than mediocre and had a vulnerably high profile. The Americans call them 'Ronsons', as with one strike they were alight. The Germans called them 'Tommy Cookers'. But at least they had a gun on them that did more than scorch a panzer's paint.

The Russian army was not merely drone-ridden. It was almost a drone army. By the mid 1930's the Bolsheviks had exterminated their opponents of the right and left, but the tyrant Dzhugashvili worried that the Red Army could depose

him. In particular Dzhugashvili had a lingering fear that as his arch rival Bronshtein had had initial command of the Red Army, the Army contained elements still loyal to Bronshtein. In 1936 Dzhugashvili conducted a purge which eviscerated the Red Army officer corps, condemning many to the Gulag and executing others, including Marshal Mikhail Tukhachevsky, the Red Army's leading military theorist. Wikipedia provides:

*“In the highest echelons of the Red Army the Purges removed 3 of 5 marshals, 13 of 15 army generals, 8 of 9 admirals, 50 of 57 army corps generals, 154 out of 186 division generals, all 16 army commissars, and 25 of 28 army corps commissars.”.*

The wholesale removal of most of the senior officers meant that inexperienced and drone officers were promoted willy nilly. On top of this chaos was the placement of political cadres at all levels, to oversee the officer corp. This effectively put political drones with no military training in charge of inexperienced officers with little military training. This was drone upon drone and created the great and pervading weakness of the Russian forces; lack of initiative and operational flexibility. In senior positions Dzhugashvili preferred loyal but mediocre officers to professional and competent Red Army officers. Budyonny was a prime example of this. Completely loyal to Stalin, he was made a Marshal of the Red Army. In the late 1930's this idiot went on record to say that the next war would be determined by horse drawn artillery. While in command of the Soviet Southwestern army group, in the battle of Kiev, Marshal Budyonny lost 700,000 Red Army soldiers, including over 400,000 men captured in the biggest encirclement of the war. Hitler called it the greatest battle in history. It was a huge boost for the Germans and for Hitler personally, as he had overridden the German High Command in directing the operation. No less than five Russian field armies were utterly destroyed in this battle and

others severely weakened. Hitler's success in this operation allowed the invaders to march east to take the industrial Don, which was a prime strategic objective of the Barbarossa battle plan. Most importantly it put the Germans on track for securing the Baku oil fields they so badly needed. Dzhugashvili's response was to sack Budyonny but incredibly did not replace him with another Marshal. This sealed the fate of the Southwestern army group, which was left without any central command, but it did mean that Dzhugashvili stayed out of messing with the military, at least until the threat of annihilation was over.

When one looks at the contenders in World War II there is a competent army, the German army, up against serial mediocrity. Initially there was no room in the German army for mediocrity and once it began to grow the competent set the standard. Although in the later stages of the war there was some drone preferment of fanatical Nazis, like General Model, the strong culture of competence within the German army meant that the mediocre were simply ignored. The best example of this is that when Hitler ordered that the German army retreat 'not one step' from Russia, the army actually fought a brilliant retreat all the way back to Berlin. I don't know how historically accurate it is but this same attitude was captured in the film 'A Bridge too far', the story of the failed allied parachute landing at Arnhem, code named 'Market Garden'. At one stage in the film, newly promoted General Field-Marshal Model insists that the bridges to Arnhem not be blown, so that they will be available for the counter attack. The German tank commanders look at him as if he is mad and go off and blow the bridges, sealing the fate of the Arnhem landing.

At the beginning of WWII the French and British armies were commanded by drones. For the French this meant defeat and occupation. The English army was lucky to be able to scuttle back to England. The failure and humiliation of the British drones checked their worst tendencies and gave Churchill the scope to set up the commandos, that archetypal drone free military formation, which

not only became the model of all special services, but also informed the very manner in which modern warfare is gone about. For the Russians the choice was simply ditch the incompetent or die. Some drones, like the commander of the Soviet air force who lost most of his planes on the ground, did the honourable thing and shot himself. Fortunately Dzhugashvili seemed to go into shock and he was hardly seen before General Winter intervened and the German advance ground to a halt. This enabled the senior professional army officers to weed out the mediocre, slowly put their forces under proper command, survive the onslaught and begin the fight-back.

