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# Marlborough as a Military Commander

A lecture given at the RUSI on 1st November 1972 by  
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General Sir JAMES MARSHALL-CORNWALL in the Chair

*THE CHAIRMAN: We are fortunate this afternoon in having Mr David Chandler to talk to us on the subject of the great Duke of Marlborough. Marlborough, I think we are all agreed, was one of the most eminent of military commanders of all time, although Napoleon did not include him in his list of Great Captains whose campaigns he recommended us to read and re-read. I think myself that was a bit of chauvinism on the part of Napoleon. You will remember that he would not even admit that Wellington was a good general. Napoleon, however, made a carbon copy of Marlborough's Blenheim campaign when, in the autumn of 1805, he marched Seven Army Corps of his Grand Army from the English Channel to the Danube to achieve his resounding victory at Ulm over General Mack.*

*The lecture today is a microcosm of a book which David Chandler has just completed for Messrs Batsford, in their well-known series of biographies of military commanders. I am glad to welcome in the audience today Mr Sam Carr, Messrs Batsford's general manager.*

*Marlborough, of course, has not lacked previous biographers. The most notable of them, I suppose, was Winston Churchill. Churchill viewed Marlborough's character and campaigns through the euphoric haze of family pride. David Chandler will give us a more objective appreciation. He is well qualified to do so. Since 1960 he has been teaching military history at the Royal Military Academy, Sandhurst, and six years ago he wrote an outstanding book on the Campaigns of Napoleon.*

*I think he needs no further introduction to this audience.*

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On one occasion as his long life drew towards its close, Marlborough is reputed to have paused before his portrait by Kneller, painted when he was still a young soldier, and to have made the rather sad remark: "That was once a man".

For his physical appearance we have only to glance at this somewhat later portrait by Kneller, painted in 1706, and to supplement it with Colonel Goslinga's description, written a few years later. The Duke, he wrote "is a man of birth; about the middle height, and the best figure in the world: his features without fault, fine sparkling eyes, good teeth, and his complexion such a mixture of white and red as the fairer sex might envy; in brief, except for his legs, which are too thin, one of the handsomest men ever seen".

The impact of his deeds and personality proved even more irresistible to his contemporaries, both for good and ill, than did his personable presence. His first major biographer, Thomas Lediard, recorded with wonderment (and a little exaggeration, but only a little) "that in twenty campaigns, ten of which were successive, he passed all the rivers and lines he attempted, took all the towns he invested, won all the battles he fought (this often with inferior, rarely with superior force) was never surpriz'd by his enemy, nor charg'd with one action of cruelty, was ever below'd by his own soldiers, and dreaded by those of his Enemy". To his rank and file, he was "the Old Corporal". One of them, Corporal Matthew Bishop, of what would later become the "King's Regiment", enthused that "the known world could not produce a man capable of more humanity, and all honour was due to him, for

what he promised he would perform". As was the case with Erwin Rommel in the Western Desert, 1942, this respectful admiration was not restricted to his own side alone. Marshal Vendôme, for example, summoned to take over command from Villeroi after the disaster of Ramillies in 1706, noted with disquiet at Franco-Spanish Headquarters at Valenciennes that "everybody here is only too ready to raise their hats at the mention of Marlborough's name". The fact that the French army paid the Duke the oblique honour of adapting an earlier folk song dating back to the days of Simon de Monfort and the Albigensian Crusade, and marched to war singing somewhat ruefully, "*Malbrook se va t'en guerre, Mironton, Mironton, Mironton*", provides a further indication of his pervasive prestige.

Duke John's charisma extended far beyond the purely military environment which witnessed his greatest achievements. Anne Stuart, as both Princess and Queen, had the utmost faith in her "Mr Freeman"—the mode in which she preferred to address him in private correspondence, signing herself with the *nom-de-plume* of "Mrs Morley"—over a period of some forty years, and only latterly did her disillusion with the waspish Duchess Sarah and the increasing influence of Marlborough's High Tory opponents over a lonely, ageing and ailing woman come to mar the relationship. Emperors, Margraves and Princes hastened to pay him compliments, and—the younger ones at least—to seek positions in his entourage. Electress Sophia "the Old Strumpet" as history has slightly unkindly dubbed her, recalled of his visit to Hanover in late 1704, that she "... never met anyone pleasanter, nor

more courteous and obliging. He is as good a courtier as he is a brave soldier", although this encomium promptly aroused Sarah's jealousy of "that ridiculous creature" as she thereafter called poor Sophia.

Of course his political foes in England had other, less flattering names for him, including "King John II", a reference to his repeated but vain efforts to be appointed Captain-General for life. But even one of the most bitter of his critics, his erstwhile protégé, Henry St John, later Viscount Bolingbroke, is reputed to have said of him that "He was so great a man that I forget that fault", and the same political foe was also secretly commissioned by Duchess Sarah, years after her husband's death, to compose the celebrated panegyric describing Marlborough's martial achievements that is carved on the pediment of the Column of Victory at Blenheim Palace—a masterpiece of concise and beautifully expressed Augustan English, which, Sir Winston Churchill has avowed, "would serve as a history in itself were all other records lost".

Any attempt to assess or summarise John Churchill's standing as a military commander must necessarily take as its starting point the man himself. A commander's character and personality, as well as being influenced by the strains of warfare, equally place a stamp on his particular brand of generalship, and this was particularly true under the conditions of early 18th century warfare when a Commander-in-Chief habitually issued orders direct to his regimental colonels.

If the behavioural scientists are to be believed, the essential nature of a man is largely formed in childhood and adolescence. The genteel poverty and confused political atmosphere of his earliest years at Asche House in Devon indubitably left their mark. His father's social pretensions and strong Royalist sympathies were clearly passed on to his eldest son, born in 1650 sixteen months after the execution of King Charles I. From his father, the young Churchill learnt to revere the established church of the realm and the House of Stuart, to conceal his personal political feelings, and to be extremely careful in all matters pertaining to money. Several of these traits we shall in due course return to.

We know relatively little about his mother's influence. Apart from the fact that she opposed her son's proposed marriage to Sarah (largely on financial grounds), and that she was decidedly "peevish" when her daughter-in-law lived under her and Sir Winston's roof in 1680 (though Sarah must have been a redoubtable member of the family, even in youth), Elizabeth Churchill remains in the shadows. John's maternal grandmother, on the other hand, was evidently of the strongest character and puritanical in outlook, and doubtless applied the rod of discipline to the young boy when his father was lost in his genealogical research and his mother was wholly absorbed with the care of the rest of the family. There seems to have been little softness in Lady Eleanor Drake.

His schooling appears to have been conventional for the day if somewhat dislocated by the family's frequent moves. However, the transition from the strict penury of Asche House and the intellectual discipline of St Paul's School to the "jovial times" and permissive atmosphere of the Court of Charles II

must have been a considerable shock to the adolescent youth's system. Certainly he seems to have made the most of his opportunities, both courtly and amorous. His long liaison with Barbara Villiers, Duchess of Cleveland, whose "langorous eye bespoke the melting soul", and whose favours he riskily shared with his monarch on what seems to have been a "shift and shift about" basis, gained him no little experience of life, several exciting adventures, and some not inconsiderable gifts of money. The fact that he was not wholly transformed into a voluptuary courtier must be in large measure ascribed to his earlier up-bringing. He had learnt from the earliest years to keep his own counsel and not to be taken in by appearances, and these qualities were to serve him well on many a long campaign in later years.

Two reasons may be suggested for his choice of a military career. First, the influence of Sir Winston Churchill, the sometime Captain of Royalist Horse, probably provided the original incentive. Secondly, the continued poverty of both John and his family after the Restoration must also have played a part. A young courtier with no money and even slenderer prospects could hope for no better way to improve his fortunes than to adopt the profession of arms—and earn preferment and possibly an heiress by gallant behaviour at the cannon's mouth. Of his poverty there can be no question: he relied on the gifts of the Duchess of Cleveland, to procure his early steps in the army, and it was only after five years of marriage to Sarah that he could afford to buy a house of his own.

Thus by his early twenties we have a young man already worldly-wise and experienced by the standards of his day, with two duels behind him, yet also noticed for his basic common-sense, willingness to learn, confidence in his own judgment, and his general good humour (rather than sense of humour, for to his life's end John Churchill seems to have been of a rather staid and serious temperament). His marriage to Sarah Jennings in 1678 proved a genuine love-match, and although it can be argued that his tempestuous and opinionated spouse did his career more harm than good in the end, there can be no doubting how much store he placed on his family life and home. His qualities as a husband and father were severely tested over the years—but some of the most likeable aspects of the man are those that relate to his life-long love for both Sarah and their children. It is clear that not all his frustrations on active service stemmed from ineffective allies and obstructive Dutch deputies when we read, of one return from the wars, that "My Lord pleased me twice with his boots on". And in 1702 he wrote from the seat of war that her letters were "so welcome to me that I could not forebear to read them . . . even if I was expecting the enemy to charge me". The family story held sadness as well as joy. The death of his son and heir in 1703 left a lasting scar, and that of his favourite daughter Anne, in 1716, hastened the collapse of his own health. His last years were also overcast by Sarah's devastating wars with her surviving and equally contentious daughters.

From these general points drawn from his early life, we must pass to consider specific character traits which affected his skills as a general. First we must examine his ambition, for Churchill was driven by a ruthless



Detail from Blenheim Tapestries of John Churchill, Duke of Marlborough, and Staff at the Battle of Oudenarde 1708.

demon from earliest manhood. He was avid throughout his life for wealth, power and social position. Fortunately for both himself and his country, his dreams were to a great degree matched by his talents, and although he suffered many disappointments and setbacks, and had to wait until his middle years for the realisation of most of his ambitions (he was 53 before he secured international recognition as a soldier), he was tireless throughout his life (until the last decade, perhaps, when ill-health and a touch of disillusion appeared) in his quest for fame, rank and riches. In pursuit of his personal interests he could be unscrupulous—as his desertion of James II in 1688 bears evidence. Long years of close association with the convolutions of Stuart politics inevitably bred a complex personality with a strong instinct for personal survival. His continued contacts with the court-in-exile of James and his son were as much a matter of insurance as one of convenience. It made him a hard man to trust. On the other hand he could also display a strong streak of altruism and unselfishness—as his long loyalty to Queen Anne, which survived the cooling of their friendship until 1713, or his refusal of the twice proffered position of Viceroy of the Spanish Netherlands in his genuine concern for the interests of the Second Grand Alliance, provide incontrovertible evidence. He became both a Duke and a Prince of the Holy Roman Empire, yet the passion for pre-eminent position (as well as political stability) could move him to press repeatedly and ill-advisedly for the award of the Captain-Generacy for life during the years between 1709 and 1712.

This ambition was often concealed behind an urbane

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and polished exterior. His charm and outward gentleness were legendary in his own time. On occasion he could revert to straightforward flattery—as during his visit to Altranstadt in 1707 when he assured Charles XII of Sweden of his desire to serve under his command to learn the last refinements in the military arts. It is recorded of him that he never issued a harsher rebuke than to send a message to the culprit to the effect that “My Lord Duke is surprised . . .”. The published correspondence, however, does occasionally give a sharper expression of phrase, and his private letters to Heinsius often reveal his unadorned feelings. Yet he could refuse a request with considerably more grace than many another could muster to confer a favour. His consideration for Tallard, captured at Blenheim, is only one of many examples of his courtesy to his enemies, especially when vanquished or wounded as after Malplaquet. His gentleness extended to the rank and file; he would give occasional lifts to tired and sweaty foot-soldiers in his coach; he was ever concerned for their welfare, and yet was genuinely surprised and elated when they responded with marks of affection—as at Elixhem in 1705 when he was cheered by his cavalry. “. . . This gave occasion to the troops with me to make me very kind expressions, even in the heat of the action, which I own to you gives me great pleasure, and makes me resolve to endure anything for their sakes.” This mutual confidence and esteem formed one vital ingredient of victory.

When occasion demanded it, however, he could be utterly ruthless. On 16th July 1704 he coolly wrote to Godolphin as his army ravaged Bavaria: “We are doing all the mischief we can to this country, in order

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to make the Elector think of saving what he cannot reach; for as we advance we burn and destroy; but if this should not make him come to a treaty, I am afraid it may at last do ourselves hurt for want of what we destroy." However, he wrote to Sarah at much the same time that the destruction "... is so uneasy to my nature that nothing but an absolute necessity would have obliged me to consent to it". Yet as a general he was prepared to burn 400 villages in the name of "cruel necessity".

This aspect of his personality contrasts markedly with the image of the solicitous and cosmopolitan Milord who could ease his path through matters personal, diplomatic or military with the same patience, deft courtesy, and smooth urbanity—whether he was dealing with the touchy Wurttemberg in 1690, the cantakerous Baden in 1704 and 1705, the critical Col Goslinga or the mercurial Charles XII. A few were wholly untouched by his charm—including General Slangenberg; others refused to let it sway their judgment or ambitions—such as Robert Harley, and (latterly) the unscrupulous Henry St John. The majority of men, however, and not a few women, were deeply impressed by his manifest courtesy, poise and sound common sense. Yet it is possible that he was—his soldiers apart—rather admired than loved. As Professor Trevelyan aptly described it, "the flame of his spirit served for light not warmth".

And yet this same commanding figure also had the reputation of being the meanest of men where money was concerned. One reason for this has already been suggested in the impecunious circumstances of his youth, but whatever the explanation there is no doubting that this meanness existed. Not all the stories can have been apocryphal, and there was no lack of them, whether pertaining to his military or private life. In an age when generals were expected to keep open house for their subordinates, the Duke avoided entertaining in the field whenever possible. It is true that he was a man of simple habits, but he went to some pains to arrange to "drop-by" his general's quarters at appropriate times of day. "There in my presence they were regulating the marches," wrote Lord Ailesbury of a visit to headquarters in early 1704, "and my lord asking what general officer would be, of the day, as they term. And then asked if such and such had a good cook, as that they should treat him at supper after the marches..." He was similarly averse to spending good guineas on hiring suitable accommodation for part of the winter season, if an alternative could be discovered. Early in 1709 he persuaded a Dutch general to take a modish and sizeable residence at the Hague, and then moved into half of it with his suite as a largely uninvited and certainly non-paying guest. All great men have their quirks of character, and Duke John was no exception. But if he hoarded his guineas he was equally careful with his men's lives—a trait of which they thoroughly approved. And he could be generous—with Sarah and the family always—and occasionally he is known to have paid for the promotion of some deserving but impecunious junior officer.

His personal courage—both moral and physical—was also firmly established from at least the Maastricht episode of 1672 if not earlier. Yet he was certainly never over-confident or unduly sanguine. We see him

set out for almost every campaign "with a heavy heart", burdened with the sense of responsibility and strain that are the inescapable concomitants of high command. He was frequently very depressed and even physically ill over the days immediately preceding battle—as before both Blenheim and Oudenarde. His comments after the latter battle reveal how aware he was of the risks he undertook in crossing the Scheldt that July day—but he was aware that "nothing else would make the Queen's business go well. This only made me venture the battle yesterday; otherwise we did give them too much advantage." His personal interventions, sword in hand, in the cavalry engagements at both Ramillies and Elixhem, stand testimony to his continued gallantry in action.

Given his age on first assuming high command Marlborough must have been endowed with a remarkably strong constitution to have survived so well the rigours of ten successive campaigns with barely a break. We know that he relied upon hard riding every day to keep himself fit, and the abstemious side of his character and his preference for simple living on campaign were undoubtedly of assistance. By any standards he was remarkably tough for a middle-aged man. At Ramillies he spent 15 hours in the saddle planning and controlling the battle; he led at least two charges, was "rid over" and almost captured once, and narrowly avoided being killed by a cannon-ball—and yet was still capable of pursuing the enemy for 12 miles before at last snatching a few hours sleep on the bare ground, wrapped in his general's cloak, which with typical thoughtfulness (and perhaps a cunning awareness of the opportunity for a theatrical gesture) he invited the critical Dutchman, Colonel Goslinga, to share.

On the other hand he was frequently the victim of severe migraines and "dizziness in my head". It is clear that these attacks were often brought on by the relentless strains of politics and war, and always lurked in the background at times of maximum crisis and stress—as, for instance, before Oudenarde. In the end these headaches may have led to the series of strokes that killed him in 1722. There is also some evidence that on occasion he suffered from insomnia; the utterly calm and composed aspect of the Duke on days of battle—so admired by his soldiers—was partly a deliberate act and reveals his great degree of self-control. He appears never to have vented his rage on any human being, but most probably his bottled-up emotions, suspicions and "silent rage", were a major contributory factor to his migraines. His chaplain, Dr Hare, noted that "The Duke does not say much, but no-one's countenance speaks more". By 1710 he was becoming "sensible of the inconvenience of old age", and during his last campaign he was mentioning "frequent and sensible remembrances of my growing old". By that time he was over 60, and it is notable that his capabilities, both mental and physical, were still so unimpaired.

It seems distinctly improbable that he was venal—as his enemies so often strove to prove. He certainly took pleasure in the legitimate perquisites attached to his high rank and station (it is estimated that in his hey-day he was worth £60,000 a year in the values of the time), and indubitably collected every penny he considered his fair due from the percentage on the sale

of commissions and other offices in his gift; but it is nonsense to assert that he sought "to prolong the war in order to further his advantage". He and his Duchess were the victims of "scurrilous pamphlets and malicious invectives" (Parker); the "little mercenary scribblers" and even the great Jonathan Swift certainly did their best to sully his name and bring him down.

On the other hand, there was a little fire beneath all the smoke of party and factional vituperation. As we have seen, he was fully aware of the value of his services to Queen and country, and was determined to gain his fair share of recognition, honours and monetary rewards. This is understandable. But it was one thing to maintain a clandestine correspondence with St Germain and Versailles as a means of gaining political and military intelligence and of dispensing a little fallacious or out-dated information in return, and yet quite another to make use of these channels to make it clear that he expected a *douceur* of several million gold *livres* in return for good offices in helping secure an amelioration of peace terms at the conference table—as happened in 1708 and 1709—or again to seek Louis XIV's personal guarantee for the security of the Marlborough fortune—as happened in 1713.

Indeed it is clear that his sense of pride and personal integrity were capable of adjustment to meet the needs of the hour. If a little flattery and sinuosity are acceptable and even amusing in his handling of Charles XII in 1707, it is difficult to reconcile the scourge of the French army with the abject lordling who could plead on his knees for his wife's continued employment about the Queen in 1710. But then Sarah was as redoubtable in defeat as in victory, and her spouse had to write to her from the seat of war that same year, "I beg you will not remove any of the chimney pieces"—as the fiery Duchess set about vacating her grace and favour apartments at St James's palace. Yet this same man was capable of long and genuine friendships with such men as Godolphin and Cadogan, and was in his wife's view tolerant and forgiving to a fault where others were concerned. As the Duke wrote to Godolphin, he had a great belief in "patience that overcomes all things". In sum, here was a most complex and multi-sided personality that in effect baffles final analysis. If, as was most certainly the case, there was both good and bad in the man, all that we can say is that the good far outweighed the dross.

As a general, Marlborough proved equally skilled in waging conventional and unconventional 18th century warfare. He proved adept at forcing four major battles and two important actions on evasive foes and unwilling Allies alike, but on fully 12 other occasions for one reason or another he found himself thwarted of determinant action. For this was an age when governments frowned upon the losses inseparable from a major battle. Little daunted by royal or republican limitations (the States-General placed Field Deputies at his side with power to veto the employment of Dutch troops), the Duke proved equally skilled at the more acceptable but infinitely more tedious business based upon wars of sieges and elaborate chess-board manoeuvring—forcing strong lines a number of times with great finesse and minimal loss of life, and captur-

ing over 30 major fortresses including Lille (1708), Mons and Tournai (both 1709), not to forget Bouchain, perhaps his masterpiece as a manager of siege warfare as well as his swansong as a commander in the field. Like Prince Eugene, he firmly believed in the importance of forcing major battles as the most direct means to reduce the foe's military capacity and thus his will to resist. As he wrote in 1703, a single battle was worth many sieges. At the same time he was acutely conscious of the political problems underlying the vast and rather unwieldy Alliance he had been called upon to lead, and in the interests of international unity and amity he refrained from pressing his views to the uttermost. With Napoleon, he was aware that "war, like government, is a matter of tact".

These strictures notwithstanding, his achievement was remarkable by any standard. To bring off so much required a full mastery of the perennial problems affecting 17th and 18th century warfare: the seasonal nature of campaigning, their "stop-go" nature dictated by the atrocious roads of late autumn, winter and early spring, and the eternal problem of finding sufficient food and forage for man and beast. There were also immense financial and recruiting difficulties to overcome, governments proving very chary at finding gold, and populations regarding the military profession as only slightly preferable as a calling to that of public hangman. Somehow all these pitfalls were circumvented, and year after year Marlborough was able to lead his multi-national armies (for native-born Englishmen and Scotsmen formed but a small proportion of his commands) to success after success.

This military achievement is all the more amazing when we consider the all-embracing nature of Marlborough's responsibilities and activities. Besides commanding the Grand Alliance's largest army in the field for ten campaigns, he was virtually "manager" of the Queen (through the medium of the termagant Sarah) and the inspiration and sometimes controller of a number of her ministries (through the agency of his staunch friend, Sidney Godolphin, Lord Treasurer). At the military level, he bore grave responsibilities for all levels of activity from grand strategy to minor tactics and logistics, and it is to his showing in these respects that I wish to devote my remaining time.

At the level of national policy formulation, he had to contend with often selfish and clashing interests of politicians, statesmen and nations, but with little more official standing, to cite Sir Winston Churchill's apt description, than an "informal chairman of a discordant committee". Working through the "Winter Committee" at home and his ceaseless visits to Allied courts abroad, somehow he managed to maintain the common cause, whose main aims were to curb the seemingly insatiable ambitions of Louis XIV and gain a fair division of the Spanish inheritance and thus maintain some semblance of a European balance of power. As "grand strategist" he also had to dissuade possible new-comers from entering the struggle—hence the rapid dash to Altranstadt in 1707. All things considered, Duke John kept the original objectives well in view, but in one respect he committed a crucial error, by lending active if largely tacit consent to the Austrian Emperor's and the Whig party's insistence that it was possible and desirable "to conquer France through

Spain", he doomed the Grand Alliance to the maintenance of as costly and ultimately as futile a war as that faced by Napoleon in the Peninsular War a century later.

Marlborough too, had early hopes of achieving peace through Spain and Italy. Following the disasters of 1707, however, the chances of victory in Spain became increasingly remote, and Marlborough stands charged with not pressing his private grave doubts on this subject. The Allies would have been wise to cut their losses after Almanza, and close down the Spanish front. Instead, they insisted on reinforcing failure. Marlborough—for understandable political and diplomatic reasons—never spoke out, and to that extent he must bear a measure of responsibility. The Spanish front proved a devastating drain on Allied resources of men, material and money, and was largely responsible (indirectly at least) for enabling the Bourbons, against all the odds, to weather the last years of the war in Flanders and thereafter win a more favourable peace at Utrecht and Rastadt than had seemed conceivable four years earlier.

In assessing Marlborough as a strategist, we find a man with a rare grasp of the broad issues and problems involved. From the start of the war, he could see the struggle as a whole, and if his judgment of the Spanish front was blurred after 1707, he proved remarkably prescient and competent in other areas. Few, if any, contemporaries shared this attribute, and so non-existent was the general appreciation of the rudiments of strategy that in 1704 it was possible for serious politicians at Westminster to declare that he had "stolen the army" when he left the Netherlands for the Danube. Marlborough's "over-view" (if such it may be termed) is well exemplified that same spring by his willingness to detach four prized English battalions from his army in Flanders for service with Rooke's fleet in the Mediterranean on the very eve of his own risk-taking march.

As a strategist—or planner of campaigns to achieve the declared aims—Marlborough generally proved far-sighted and inspired. In 1704, despite all the attendant difficulties he appreciated the importance of transferring aid to Austria if the Alliance was to survive. Thereafter he appreciated that ceaseless pressure exerted against the strongest sector of the French frontiers in the Netherlands and Flanders area would serve to bleed France white (in much the same way as the Germans planned to use the Verdun offensive of 1916), and thus compel Versailles to accept a dictated peace. By late 1711, this object had all but been achieved when circumstances—and the skill of Marshal Villars—intervened.

Passing his ten campaigns in review—eight of which were wholly waged in the "Cockpit of Europe"—it is difficult to escape the conclusion that the Duke was often at his best in a strategically defensive role. His first two campaigns, together with those of 1704 and 1708, were largely fought to neutralise enemy gains and retrieve lost ground. His offensives—as in 1705, 1707, 1709 and 1710—tended to lead to less dramatic results, but that of 1706 reveals his greatness in exploiting an un-anticipated battle success to the very limit. Unfortunately a similar opportunity after Oudenarde had to be abandoned in favour of a more

prosaic and conventional approach—namely the siege of Lille. But in judging Marlborough's showing it cannot be stressed too much that he never enjoyed true freedom of action. His Allies proved late in reporting—as was the case with Baden in 1705—or insisted on mounting irrelevant campaigns—for example the Austrian attack on Naples in 1707.

The French problem was diametrically opposite to his own. If the Duke had to carry his Allies with him and frequently accept compromises in order to ensure their cooperation, the proud marshals rarely dared to change or even vary a plan without time-consuming reference to Versailles.

The Duke was also unique in his appreciation (for his time) of the strategic significance of sea-power in support of a continental war. He never subscribed to the emerging "blue water" school of thought, but adhered to William III's concept of a continental approach to European and naval strategy. His experiences aboard the fleet in his early career, and the influence of William III, had convinced him of the value of a navy deployed in support of a large native army fighting in Europe, employing such operations as coastal raids, the capture of bases (particularly in the Mediterranean) and the threat of landings to distract enemy resources. If this policy had its failures (Cadiz in 1702 and Toulon in 1707), it also had its successes with the fortuitous capture of Gibraltar (1704) and the deliberate taking of Minorca five years later, which firmly established Allied naval control over the Western Mediterranean. His abortive plan for exploiting Oudenarde in late 1708 further demonstrates his ability to marry up naval and military forces in single enterprises, and so do the emergency arrangements made to support the siege of Lille. His influence over naval matters was exercised for many years through his friendship with Prince George of Denmark, Lord High Admiral.

In the realm of "grand tactics"—or the planning and general control of engagements once a genuine battle situation had been procured—Marlborough had few contemporary peers. After discovering the foe's circumstances with the aid of his spy network, Marlborough used forced marches and surprise to confound their schemes time after time. "If they are there, the Devil must have carried them—such marching is impossible!" was Marshal Vendôme's reaction to news of the Allied approach to Oudenarde from Lessines in July 1708. The Duke also had a sure eye for ground, and on a number of occasions he used concealed valleys and re-entrants to spring tactical surprises on his opponents. He was capable of devising unusual orders of battle, massing strengths on certain sectors and denuding others, and he proved highly skilled at controlling the fluid encounter-type of battle represented by Oudenarde as well as set-piece engagements such as Blenheim. At all stages of a battle, the Duke was insistent that infantry, cavalry and cannon should cooperate closely in what today would be termed combat groups. At the same time, he invariably made a point of keeping a strong force of cavalry in reserve ready to deliver the *coup de grâce*, or (if never proved necessary) cover a retreat. The action developed from probing attacks to stronger onslaughts on selected points—designed by means of relentless pressure to

draw in the remaining enemy reserves, and, ideally, to induce the foe to weaken the sector chosen for the main attack. Then, after containing the induced amalgamations of enemy troops with a minimum of his own forces, the Captain-General would assemble a decisive superiority of force opposite the predetermined point, and unleash his devastating blow. The enemy line once sundered, the battle was *ipso facto* won, but it still remained to convert the foe's defeat into rout. Marlborough was unusual in his belief in immediate pursuit when feasible. After Ramillies the follow-through was relentless; after Blenheim, however, the pursuit was delayed for a day by the need to cope with the mass of wounded and prisoners; after Malplaquet there were no fresh troops available.

A major problem was the imposition of overall control over a battle area that might be several miles in extent, with the scene almost wholly obliterated by the dense clouds of black-powder smoke. Marlborough was famed for his ability to overcome the problems of distance and obscurity, and for his knack at appearing at critical points to rally the men as if guided by superhuman knowledge. His secret was the use of carefully selected *aides-de-camp*, and running footmen, who were trained to report on what was taking place on every sector using their own judgment. These "eyes" served the Captain-General well on many an occasion. If he had a fault as a grand tactician, it was that he became a trifle predictable in his general preference for delivering the *coup de grâce* against the enemy centre, although on three occasions he attempted out-flanking manoeuvres, as at Oudenarde with success. Using this knowledge, Villars was able to make the Allied victory at Malplaquet exorbitantly costly, although he proved incapable of averting a defeat.

Marlborough's interest and skill also extended to minor tactics. He insisted upon the use of cavalry as a shock-force, and employed massed squadrons, advancing at a fast trot, to clinch all of his victories. For the "poor Foot", he imposed a strict training programme carried through during the winter months, and standardised the earlier platoon-firing system in three-deep battalion formations, a method which conferred advantages of fire-control, preparedness and continuity over the more antiquated French concepts, which were based on five-deep formations, firing rank after rank or in massed (and often inaccurate) volleys. He thus encouraged the adoption of the basic modern infantry tactics of "fire and movement", a significant development based upon the Duke's appreciation of the changes wrought by the replacement of pike and matchlock by the more deadly and flexible combination of socket-bayonet and flintlock musket. Similarly, as Master-General of the Ordnance he paid special heed to the siting of his guns, awkward monsters of up to three-tons deadweight apiece, and even encouraged his perspiring Ordnance officers to resite them in the heat of battle, as at Blenheim. The fortunate coincidence of his two posts—Captain-General of Horse and Foot and Master-General of the Ordnance, made possible a unique degree of cooperation between all arms on the battlefield—another major factor in achieving victory.

The Duke also lavished especial attention on all

matters appertaining to military administration and supply. These aspects were often the greatest source of weakness in 18th century armies, the former being paid scant attention, the latter entrusted to hard-pressed (and sometimes corrupt) contractors. Marlborough instituted few innovations (although he did introduce a light, two-wheeled cart for the supply trains), but by rigid supervision he made the system work as well as could be expected. During his period of command, the troops in Flanders rarely went hungry or unpaid, and such administrative masterpieces as the march to the Danube in 1704, in which he brought an army of eventually 40,000 men over a distance of 250 miles and produced them before Donauworth fit to fight an immediate, gory engagement, bear testimony to his skills in this respect. Whether the situation required a complete switch of lines of communication, or the issue of spare boots or of hand-mills to the infantry, no detail was too insignificant for the Captain-General's attention. The result was a gratified and trusting army, ready to make exceptional exertions at the Duke's request. They regarded him as "ever watchful, ever right" and endowed with a "peculiar excellency" as a general. "The Duke of Marlborough's attention and care was over all of us", recorded Matthew Bishop.

Marlborough's basic strengths as an administrator were the following. First, he was ever aware that wars are concerned with human beings. His humane attitudes have frequently been mentioned, and need no further elaboration here. Second, he was able to distinguish the essentials in an administrative problem. At the same time, and thirdly, he had a minute eye for detail. Fourthly, he had a distinct gift for making existing systems work well or at least adequately; he on the whole eschewed innovations, and thus avoided much confusion. It is true that the administrative systems he inherited were often inefficient and extremely rudimentary, but close supervision of the responsible authorities kept such bread contractors as Solomon and Moses Medina and Vanderkaa up to the mark, or revealed the fraudulent practices of the less scrupulous who included Mechado and Solomon Abraham. At the same time, he tried to gain them a fair deal in terms of government payments of contracted sums—not always successfully, however. Fifthly, he appreciated the importance of well-trained and well-disciplined officers as the very basis of an efficient and battle-worthy army.

Little of all this would have been possible had not Marlborough developed a sure gift for choosing reliable subordinates. A handful of men enjoyed his unbounded trust: William Cadogan, Quartermaster-General, unofficial chief of staff, was the vital *eminence grise*. When he fell into French hands in 1706, an exchange was arranged with record speed, and when he sustained a serious neck-wound in 1710, the Duke wrote to Sarah: "I hope in God he will do well for I entirely depend upon him", adding, on a slightly more prosaic but heartfelt tone: "His wounding will oblige me to do many things by which I shall have but little rest". Others included Adam Cardonnel, the Duke's secretary, who conducted much of the crippling load of diplomatic correspondence which pursued his master, both in campaign and out; and Henry Dave-

nant, his financial agent. He was equally well served by his heads of arms and services, who included such men as Holcroft Blood, senior gunner, and William Armstrong, senior engineer; not to forget such aides as the remarkable Richards brothers.

He was equally fortunate in the great majority of his subordinate generals, both English and foreign. Lords Cutts and Orkney, and Generals Overkirk, Fagel and Goor represent these two categories. But above all it was the special relationship with Prince Eugene of Savoy, who shared four of the ten campaigns with him and played a vital part in three of the four great battles, that underlay so many shared successes. They knew each other's minds exactly, shared most tenets as to how wars should be waged, and accorded each other an absolute trust which no slanders or friction could undermine. Contemporaries likened them to the "Castor and Pollux" of mythology. Well might Marlborough declare, "I love that Prince". It was no more than the truth. On the other hand the Duke also had to bear the hesitant Baden and jealously obstructive Slangenberg, who proved resistant to his acclaimed charm and courtesy and effectively compromised several major operations.

I opened this lecture with some indications of Marlborough's contemporary standing. I close it with a few remarks on posterity's reaction. Marlborough has attracted much criticism. According to Sir John Creasey, "There are few successful commanders on whom fame has shone so unwillingly". This was particularly true of the Victorian era, when Lord Macaulay unleashed his righteousness to indict the Duke on serious charges of moral turpitude—stressing his youthful indiscretions, the desertion of James II, his reputed betrayal of plans in 1694, and above all his alleged venality. More recent historians, Sir Winston Churchill, G. M. Trevelyan and C. T. Atkinson, not to forget Major R. E. Scouller and Dr Ivor Burton, have sprung to Marlborough's defence, but inevitably some stain has remained on his reputation. It is only just to judge a man within the context of his times, and if Milord Duke occasionally stooped to unscrupulous practices, he was no worse than the great majority of his contemporaries, and few of the world's great men of action have ever enjoyed wholly unimpeachable reputations. Today, the moral atmosphere perhaps makes it easier to reach a more balanced judgment than was possible either in the 19th century, or even in the 1930s of the 20th. Sir Winston's celebrated volumes remain unsurpassed—and possibly unsurpassable—as the overall biography of his great ancestor, but he makes no attempt to conceal his family loyalty. Wholly objective history makes for dull reading, but in certain respects it is necessary to be as wary of Churchill's warm eulogies as of Macaulay's strident denunciations.

Military men have had fewer doubts about his standing. We know that Napoleon although he never included the Duke's name in his list of the seven greatest commanders of all time, studied the campaign of 1704 with admiration. Later, at St Helena, he described Marlborough to Surgeon Arnott of the 20th Foot as follows: "He began talking about English armies, and particularly praised the Duke of Marlborough whom he described as 'a man whose mind

was not narrowly confined to the field of battle; he fought and negotiated; he was at once a captain and a diplomatist'."

Equally interesting is the Duke of Wellington's reply, when asked "whether he thought Napoleon or Marlborough the greater general. 'It is difficult to answer that,' he replied, 'I used to say that the presence of Napoleon at a battle was equal to a reinforcement of 40,000 men. But I can conceive of nothing greater than Marlborough at the head of an English army. He had greater difficulties than I with his allies; the Dutch were worse to manage than the Spaniards or the Portuguese. But, on the other hand, I think I had most difficulties at home'."

More recently, Field Marshal Montgomery has described the Duke as "a military genius, capable, when given the chance, of transcending the contemporary limitations of warfare . . . Marlborough absorbs the attention of the military historian as the giant of his times."

The two and a half centuries since Marlborough's passing have seen immense changes in both world and military affairs, and yet in certain respects the present day has more in common with his generation than with the more immediate past. Both periods have been typified by a limited rather than a total approach to the conduct of warfare, although for vastly different reasons, but both share basic humane considerations. How Marlborough faced up to the limitations imposed upon his conduct of war, and still achieved a notable degree of success, is one fruitful field for study. Another, equally significant, is his failure to "win the peace" by dint of military achievement alone. A third relevant field for reflection is the problems Great Britain—and above all the Duke, faced in keeping the members of the Second Grand Alliance in some form of concert—for no period has been more influenced by the convoluted problems of international agreements and associations than our own. Marlborough's skill at first creating, and then preserving the Alliance until his dismissal was a great achievement by any standards of diplomacy. And above all we can learn a great deal from the Duke's superb skill, of leadership and of man-management, his power to inspire and, to borrow Napoleon's phrase, "speak to the soul".

What, then, should we conclude was the achievement of Marlborough? His reputation rests more on his record as soldier and statesman than as a politician or courtier—that much is evident. His wholly unsupported burden of responsibility—military, diplomatic and domestic—eventually led to his personal eclipse and downfall. Indeed, his fall was in large measure due to his failure to secure his political base. As a commander, he was an experienced and dedicated professional rather than a brilliant amateur. He was the product of half a century of military experience—the pupil, successively, of Turenne, Prince Waldeck, and William III—rather than a human phenomenon of the type of Napoleon. For ten consecutive campaigns he had produced "the constant display at their highest of those qualities which are necessary to victory", with the occasional brief lapse caused by illness or fatigue. In the process, he raised the reputation of British arms to a level which had not been known since the Middle Ages, and inaugurated a period of



British prominence, both in Europe and overseas. It is fitting to turn to Captain of Grenadiers Robert Parker for a last salute and tribute to this commanding figure. "... As to the Duke of Marlborough (for I cannot forbear giving him the precedence) it was allowed by all men, nay even by France itself, that he was more than a match for all the generals of that nation. This he made appear beyond contradiction, in the ten campaigns he made against them; during all of which time it cannot be said that he ever slipped

an opportunity of fighting, when there was any probability of coming at his enemy: and upon all occasions he concerted matters with so much judgment and forecast, that he never fought a battle which he did not gain, nor laid siege to a town which he did not take." It is therefore fitting, ladies and gentlemen, that we should do honour to Duke John's memory in this, the 250th anniversary of his death, for England has never produced a greater soldier.

## DISCUSSION

LORD MORPETH: I find your last comment very controversial. You said England has never produced a greater soldier. In fact, I have always been of the opinion that Marlborough was a very lucky man. He never faced really first-rate opponents. He always got what he wanted, largely from St John, the Secretary of State for War, and he was extremely well served by his subordinates, although, admittedly, he chose them. Someone once asked the Great Duke of Wellington who was the greatest general, Napoleon or Marlborough. That great man answered "Marlborough, but then he never faced Napoleon".

MR CHANDLER: This is an interesting point of view. I would take issue with your point about "inferior opponents" in terms of two of the four marshals he came mainly into conflict with. First of all, Marshal Vendôme who, in the Oudenarde campaign of 1708, was far from being a soldier of inferior quality. I think the way he handled the Spanish front in 1710-11, in particular, and the several earlier campaigns in North Italy against Prince Eugene, is indicative of his general standing.

Secondly, there was Villars. Although he was a braggart, to say the least, he, too, undoubtedly had ability of great commander level. As you said, Marlborough certainly chose his subordinates, and I would say that one great measure of his success as a commander was his ability to choose loyal, able and gifted subordinates. Because he had the system running for him, in the sense of good connections at court and in the government, does not reduce his standing as a great soldier. I was careful to say England did not produce a *greater* soldier. I would even say he was better than anyone else we ever had. I still hold that view pretty firmly. I feel you would have difficulty in finding a rival candidate, *pace* the admirers of the Duke of Wellington.

MR R. H. I. GRAY: I would like to ask what chances you think Marlborough had of reaching Paris if he had had another two campaigns. It is always said that after the fall of Bouchain there were only two or three small fortresses in his path. Which fortresses were these?

MR CHANDLER: The main one was Cambrai, which would not have been an easy one to take by any means. I think the question should rather be how long French resistance could have continued had it become absolutely apparent that no fortresses stood in between the north-east frontier, Marlborough's army, and Paris. When you consider the type of peace terms Louis XIV was prepared to accept in early 1710, which were rejected largely through Allied greed and incompetence, you will appreciate how near defeat France had been, certainly in 1709, and even 1710. However great Villars's achievement in obtaining a moral victory at Malplaquet, I feel there is no doubt that had the remaining resources of France been thrown into the breach, and had Marlborough enjoyed rather greater

freedom of action in 1710 and 1711, the outcome would have been an entirely different matter with France totally defeated.

One of Marlborough's strategic ideas which never came off was that of bypassing what was left of the fortress barrier zone using the fleet. His suggested plan in late 1708 was to march the army down the coast, ignoring fortresses and being supplied from the sea, as a means of bypassing the whole frontier barrier zone. I do not know if this would have worked, but he had enough imagination to conceive such a scheme. It was too bold for the Dutch and, above all, for Prince Eugene, but in my opinion it could have taken him to Paris and a victorious peace.

LIEUTENANT COLONEL CANTLIE: I wonder if it is the speaker's opinion that both Marlborough and Wellington gained considerable advantage because they were as much politicians as soldiers? I think both of them started as junior politicians before they really became soldiers. It seems to me that both of them knew when a victory would be of the most political gain, in Wellington's case for the government, in Marlborough's case for the opposition. I wonder if the speaker could enlarge on that, if he agrees with what I say?

I do not know whether he quite brought out what I think was a perfectly brilliant battle, Marlborough's best battle, the Battle of Ramillies. He attacked with his British soldiers, knowing that their victory at Blenheim had given them a great prestige in the eyes of the French Army. He pushed through by attacking with his right wing and using his British troops there because he would be most likely to get the French marshal to move very strongly to the French left, and when the British soldiers began to retire the French marshal must at once have decided that the battle was practically won and have taken all his reserves and push them in there, thus opening his right flank to Marlborough's sudden attack. It does seem to me that the politician and the general were almost equally balanced in that he must have had insight into the French mentality. Do you think so?

MR CHANDLER: Being a political general, I think, worked as much to Marlborough's disadvantage as to his advantage because it made the matter of victory or defeat into a political issue and he was not, therefore, independent or above politics. I suppose no commander has ever been wholly independent in terms of responsibility, but because he was so closely tied to the political machine at home (although he did not really like this; again and again you find him walking the knife edge between the Whigs and the Tories trying not to be branded as "their" general) I feel this worked to his disadvantage. Certainly there were advantages in having the governmental machine more or less operating on his behalf, and one slightly discreditable aspect of Marlborough's use of this advantage was the way in which Flanders received the lion's share whereas Spain

got very much the remnants of supply, money and of reinforcement. Thus in a way he may be charged with using his political supremacy to build up his own theatre of war to the disadvantage of others.

Thank you very much for bringing up the point about Ramillies. I am not personally convinced, after studying his campaigns for some time now, that Marlborough ever went into battle with a preconceived plan of action. I think your point is absolutely valid; Villeroi certainly went into action at Ramillies with specific instructions from Louis XIV "to pay special attention to that part of the line which will receive the first shock of the English troops", but I do not think it is fair or right to ascribe a definite battle plan to Marlborough at the outset of any of his engagements. All you can safely assert is that he had a broad underlying scheme which tended to repeat itself. I think the advance by Orkney's battalions on the right must be represented as probing attacks to see if those sectors were capable of development into the major battle zone. It was only after the discovery that there were difficult marshes in the area that Marlborough decided finally that the battle was not going to be won on the right wing. Not only the British infantry, but also the cavalry squadrons were drawn up on that sector. Therefore, we can fairly claim that the Duke displayed real skill in playing the battle in the way he wished it to develop. Certainly he was aware of the moral predominance of the English and Scottish battalions in view of their fine reputations earned at Blenheim, but I do not think we should read too much into this as regards battlefield planning because these battles were extremely difficult to control or supervise. I would not say that he possessed a preconceived idea of when to lure enemy reserves into action on any particular sector, but rather played the joined battle by ear with amazing skill. However, this is only my opinion.

MAJOR GENERAL B. T. WILSON: I have often wondered whether Marlborough was not rather lucky in the fact that Louis XIV, who used to direct the operations of his generals quite a lot, rather lost his skills as he got older. William of Orange, later King of England, never succeeded in beating the French generals, but Marlborough, meeting the lesser skill of the ageing Louis XIV never lost one battle. I wonder what you think of that theory?

MR CHANDLER: That is a very important and valid point. Do not underestimate, though, the amount of influence Louis XIV still continued to exert over his marshals. I would not put the setbacks down to Louis XIV's personal deterioration. What I would say had deteriorated was the value of the key advisers who were at his right hand. Chamillart or Voisin, for instance, were no replacement for the great Louvois. Louis XIV's influence on warfare diminishes more in terms of the validity of the advice he was receiving rather than from any marked deterioration in his own personal grasp of these matters. He was never really a *grand chef*, but always relied on his advisers.

As far as the generalship of the French commanders is concerned, I would agree with the first speaker to a point; there was no Marshal Turenne or Luxembourg amongst the team of four I mentioned earlier. I think the latter-day senior administrators, and certainly the later generals (even though some of them were men of considerable talent) were the main reason for this drop in performance rather than Louis XIV's own qualities.

Lucky? Certainly Marlborough was lucky; but any general has to have a degree of good fortune, as Napoleon was the first to recognise. But Marlborough was also an extremely talented soldier at every level of generalship.

MAJOR GENERAL H. ESSAME: Can you tell us anything about his intelligence service? He always seems to have known about the decisions of the French court on military matters long before the French generals at the front.

MR CHANDLER: One of the most interesting features, and still one of the least explored because it is not very well documented, is this matter of the Duke's military intelligence system. We do know a certain amount. First of all, his defence when charged in 1712 with misusing the 24 per cent taken from the pay of foreign auxiliaries was that this money had been spent largely on secret service requirements. Secondly, we know from such correspondence as exists that he used this money to build up a network of very well-placed French correspondents. The reports he received in 1709 before the campaign of Malplaquet about the discussions in the French Royal High Council are absolutely amazing in their accuracy. There must have been some very highly placed Frenchmen on Marlborough's payroll. Of course, this is not untypical of the period, I did not have occasion to mention in my lecture how the Duke strove to ensure his own position at court by using underground contacts, particularly his nephew Marshal Berwick serving in the French army. In this secret correspondence, Marlborough signed himself "OO". Fore-shadowing James Bond perhaps! A lot of this sort of clandestine interchange was typical of this period. Marlborough's methods, though, were, I think, more effective than those of the French because he would spend money on it, and money was one thing in those days that Britain had sufficient resources to provide. This is a very important aspect of his success. Of course, all the period of his early life spent amidst court intrigue under the Stuarts was ideal preparation for his future need to out-think and infiltrate enemy circles. Never forget the experiences he had as a very young officer serving in the French forces alongside Villars and Boufflers. He also met Tallard before the war. He knew these individuals as persons and this was another form of assistance in making his plans to defeat them. He could judge the value of the information he was receiving, and I think the combination of these two factors is very important. As regards British "special agents" there was Matthew Prior and various other key subordinates reporting from the various courts of Europe. The people who received this information transmitted it to Cadogan who served as Marlborough's chief of intelligence and collated the various sources of information.

MR R. C. SAXBY: At the time of William III's landing Marlborough advocated that James should advance and attack William as soon as possible. This was obviously the soundest thing James could have done, but one wonders exactly what Marlborough was proposing to do if his advice was followed.

MR CHANDLER: I wondered about this particular point myself. This, I am afraid, reinforces my opinion about the sinuosity of Marlborough. On the one hand he was advising James to take a course of action and go and fight, and at the same time he was presumably making preparations for his own desertion. Also, it has been suggested by certain writers, including Professor Baxter, that in order to get a chance for a clean break from James II's court at Windsor Marlborough had to somehow sell a dummy in a big way. He was definitely under suspicion. There is plenty of evidence from contemporary memoirs that James was being pressed to put Marlborough under arrest immediately prior to this particular episode because rumours had leaked out about his correspondence with William, and so forth. Therefore, he had to make the right noises until preparations were ready for him to make his move. That is one aspect.

Secondly, I think he was carefully assessing the situation and he was not going to commit himself until he saw which way the cat was going to jump. He was hedging his bets, in my opinion.

Those historians who say he was betraying James II in order to make sure of an acceptable constitutional and

religious settlement are, I think, reading far too much into this. Marlborough was very much an opportunist, a politician, a man of his day. They all had to play this game from the Civil War onwards to survive. I think he was a religious man with Protestant leanings and that he was also loyal to the House of Stuart in most respects. Of course, William III was directly linked with the House of Stuart through his wife, Mary II. Nevertheless, we must never rule out the personal angle in Marlborough's actions. Like the "Vicar of Bray" he was at least partly concerned with his own survival, come what may.

MR A. D. FRANCIS: I agree with the speaker that Marlborough was able to send his rather tiresome generals off to the Peninsular War, but I think he had strong reasons for doing so. They were bound by treaty to place King Charles on the throne of Spain. They might have disregarded the treaty but they had very strong reasons for keeping it. The first one was a political one. Both political parties were interested in trade and they hoped that by keeping that treaty they could trade both with Spain and Portugal.

The next consideration was that we were constantly under pressure from the Emperor to send our fleet to the Mediterranean. We did not want to do so, but though the emperor had no money, he had lots of men and these we could not do without. Therefore, we had to go to the Mediterranean.

MR CHANDLER: All the wars of the 17th and early 18th century in my opinion were fought with one great aim in

mind, and that was compromise; the idea of a compromise solution which would be acceptable to both sides and redress the balance of power one way or the other. In my opinion, the decision to press for the actual physical replacement of Philip V on the Spanish throne, and the ever more extreme means employed in the attempt to achieve this, almost amount to "total war" aims. At the outset of the struggle other aims were very much to the fore. I believe that, given the ethos of the period, this was playing the game according to a set of rules which had not been known for a considerable period; and the extension of the war aims from 1703 onwards vastly complicated the nature of the extent of the war, and the final implication was to rule out any hope of a compromise settlement whilst Philip's exclusion remained a vital consideration. That is to attempt an answer to only one point of your question, but I think it is significant. Trade interests, I also agree, were of paramount importance to all parties in Parliament, especially the merchant interests. Yet the deep involvement in Spain proved the Achilles' heel of the Second Grand Alliance, and in my view robbed Marlborough of the triumphant peace his victories seemed to have merited. Incidentally, this issue also ended his active career.

THE CHAIRMAN: I would like to thank our lecturer for his admirable talk to us, and also for the clear, full and precise way in which he has answered the various searching questions that have been put to him. I would now ask you to express your appreciation in the usual manner.

(Applause)

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## The Defence of the Northern Flank

A lecture given at the RUSI on 21st February 1973 by  
General Sir WALTER WALKER, KCB, CBE, DSO

Vice-Admiral Sir PETER GRETTON, KCB, DSO, OBE, DSC, in the Chair

*THE CHAIRMAN: I first met General Sir Walter Walker in 1960. Since then he has had an extremely distinguished career, including his magnificent work in Borneo during Confrontation. Today we are to hear him on the northern flank. This is of tremendous strategic importance to NATO. My only contribution to thought on this recently has been that perhaps the oil fields and natural gas fields of the North Sea might affect this issue considerably.*

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It is a great honour to speak at the RUSI. The last time I did so was in March 1970, some seven months after becoming C-in-C of Northern Europe. I am grateful to the Director-General for inviting me to speak again on the defence of the northern flank—a vital area which seems to receive less in the way of attention and resources than it should.

It is almost a year since I relinquished my appointment. Fortunately, I have been able to keep in contact with my friends in the United States, Norway, Denmark and Germany, so I am fairly confident that I am in touch with current events.

When I spoke here almost three years ago I was naturally restricted in what I said by political and military considerations (although much of what I had hoped to say was already public and had already been mentioned by NATO politicians in office).

Today I propose to speak more frankly and with less inhibitions.

If the countries of the northern flank are to survive in a free society, there is a massive job for them and us to do in educating their people in the need for defence. This is the first problem affecting the northern flank which I want to put before you this afternoon. Call it the information battle or the information gap, or whatever you like.

In my tenure of command of two and a half years, there were no fewer than nine different ministers of defence—three in Norway, three in Denmark, two in Germany and two in this country. Some were more clued up than others—some were initially ignorant of defence matters. Ministers are, after all, only temporarily in office, whereas modern defence is now so complex, and so swift has been the advance of technology in the defence field, that it has become an art—a science—too serious a matter to be in the hands of anyone unless he is absolutely *au fait* with the technical side and with NATO strategy.