to our geographical position and to the conditions under which we live, the number of British troops available for employment in any war against a continental Power will almost certainly be inferior to that which can be employed against us. It is of course true that we should never engage in operations on the continent of Europe except in alliance with some other Power; but it is quite possible that the British army might be entrusted with the execution of some definite task which, while part of a general strategical scheme, would involve completely inde­pendent action. It is under such circumstances as these that we must be prepared to encounter troops which in leadership and training will be at least the equal of our own, and in numbers will probably be superior to them. In these circumstances our chances of envelopment will not be great, but this must by no means be taken to mean that our chances of success are to be despaired of. Far from it. In the first place strategy may induce the enemy temporarily to divide his forces, and thus to afford favourable opportunity for an effective blow. Failing this, it remains to be considered how a general may best employ inferior numbers with a reasonable hope of gaining a tactical victory. To this the answer must be that his best, indeed his only, chance of victory lies in the counter-stroke.

In France this fact has received due recognition, and since that country is in the unfortunate position of having to be prepared to encounter superior numbers, the training and organization of her armies differ essentially from those of her most formidable neighbour. Acknowledging that at the outset of a war she must be placed at a grave disadvantage, she strives to develop her power of manoeuvre and of delivering a strategic counter-stroke. With this object her armies move in deep formations on a comparatively narrow front, covered by strong advanced guards. Thus, in the earlier stages, they are much less committed to a definite line of action than are armies moving upon a widely extended front, and, provided intelligence is received in time, they can be massed quickly against the enemy’s flanks. Similarly in the later stages she trusts to the tactical counter-stroke, and hence the corps artillery, which has been abandoned in Germany for reasons which have already been given, is still retained in France.

In the foregoing pages the question was raised as to whether the great tactical counter-strokes of the past are still possible under modern conditions. Unfortunately the battles in Man­churia afford no instance of a successful counter-stroke, for the Sha-ho is more an example of an encounter action than of a carefully conceived counter-attack. In these circumstances we are forced to rely upon theory; hut theory based upon a correct understanding of the past should form no uncertain guide to the practice of the future. What then are the principles upon which our theory is to be based? First, that the defensive battle is only a step towards assuming the offensive. Secondly, that the only means of assuming the offensive with success is the counter-stroke. Thirdly, that the counter-stroke, in at least nine cases out of every ten, should aim at the envelopment of the attack. From these premises it follows that the most effective form of the defensive battle will be that which compels the enemy to deploy his forces and then uses the reserve to envelop one or both of his flanks. Since, however, modern battles are fought over a very wide extent of front, it necessarily follows that the possibility which the defence possesses of successfully enveloping the attack must depend to a very great extent upon the correct disposal of the reserves when drawing up the original line of battle. Just as the chances of making the best use of superior number in the attack depend upon a correct strategical deployment at the commencement of a campaign, so the chances of a successful counter-stroke depend upon a correct distribution of troops at the commencement of an action. Hence we sec that the most important point which a general who finds himself compelled to take up a defensive position has to decide is where to place those troops by whose aid he hopes eventually to seize the offensive. One thing is clear, namely, that the worst place for men who are destined to envelop one or other flank of the attack must be behind the centre of the defensive line. Time alone must render such a position unsuitable, for it must entail a march of many hours, if not of days, before the troops can reach the point from which they are to be launched to the attack. This being so, it would seem that the right place for the general reserve of the defending army under modern conditions must be on one or other of the flanks; and, always bearing in mind that the chief object to be attained is regaining the initiative, we are driven to the con­clusion that the best place is that flank from which an effective blow can he dealt at the assailant’s most vulnerable point, that is to say, at the flank through which his line of communication may be most easily attained. If this theory be correct, yet another point has been established, namely, that the main plan of the decisive counter-stroke must be decided before, and not after, the first shot in the general engagement has been fired. Under the conditions which obtain to-day it is no use waiting for the enemy to make a mistake, for the odds against it being detected are great. A hundred years ago armies manoeuvred in full view of one another, and mistakes could be perceived by every company officer on either side. Now all this is changed, and the difficulties of the defence are increased by the fact that although the attack may make many blunders, it will do so at such a distance from the defence as to render them comparatively secure from detection. Having prepared his counter-stroke, the chief point towards which the commander of the defence must direct his attention after battle has been joined, is the exact moment at which it should be delivered. Needless to say that the chances of success will he enormously increased if the counter-stroke is unexpected, for in war the demands which surprise makes upon moral are quite out of proportion with the physical danger which men are called upon to undergo. If then defence is ever to be converted into attack, it would appear: (1) That the counter-stroke must be carefully planned, and must form an integral part of the *original* scheme of defence. (2) That it must be properly directed. (3) That it must be correctly timed. (4) That if possible it must come as a surprise. Of these conditions, the first three are dependent for their fulfilment upon good information, careful preparation, and correct appreciation of the enemy’s plans; but it is in the fourth that the inspiration of the really great commander will be most conspicuously displayed on the day of battle, and the greater the numbers under his command the more difficult his task must be.

When, as at the Sha-ho and Mukden, the troops on either side are numbered by hundreds of thousands, the commander­in-chief cannot hope to keep the direction of events in his own hands for very long; but when tens of thousands only are engaged, the whole battle can be controlled as well now as in the past. The extent of front will certainly be greater than it was formerly, but against this may be set the fact that improved communications by telegraph and telephone enable the com­mander to keep in touch with events in a manner which until recently was quite impossible. It is for this reason that the earlier and smaller battles of the Russo-Japanese War contain many lessons which are of more use to British soldiers than are those which may he learned from the great struggles which took place later on. But in all battles, whether great or small, the first requirement is a commander who possesses sufficient stead­fastness of character to carry out on the day of battle the plans he has formed beforehand. War is like a game of bridge, for the most successful player is not he who best remembers the fall of the cards or who knows the correct leads by heart, but he who can decide upon and carry out the plan best suited to the strength of his hand. In both cases a bad plan is better than none, and vacillation even between two good plans is fatal. In both cases side issues are constantly arising which tend to obscure the main issue. On the battlefield these side issues take the form of appeals for assist­ance from various quarters, all of which must tempt the supreme commander to weaken the general reserve which has been set aside for his decisive stroke. To such appeals he must turn