



By: The Editors at the [Wavell Room](#)

We've teamed up with *From the Green Notebook* for a leadership exercise: A General Exchange. The idea is simple. Just put forward 5 British generals that are worthy of study by our American cousins. [In return we get 5 American Generals worthy of study.](#) The execution is less simple.

Where do you even begin? We could go back as far as Oliver Cromwell and the New Model Army in the English Civil War. Or maybe dwell on any of the many generals who defeated the French... Army Generals from the First and Second World War spring immediately to mind; Haig, French, Monty, Slim, Carver, Alexander, I could go on. And what should the criteria be? The Generals who delivered the biggest victories? The Generals who overcame

the greatest odds? Or perhaps the less exciting ones? The reformers. Those who generated the biggest changes in the force?

We've made our pick. The Wavell Room is a tri-service organisation, so we have an Admiral, an Air Marshal and 3 Generals for your consideration. Starting, Of course, with the man behind the name:

General Sir Archibald Wavell (1883-1950)

General Wavell's career spanned multiple conflicts and several changes in the character of warfare. He was a Regimental soldier first and foremost, with his early medals for service in the Boer War and Afghan Frontier. He passed out top of his class from Staff College in 1910. Then spent a year in Tsarist Russia learning Russian.

He started the Great War on the General Staff, where he was tasked with forming the British Army's Intelligence Corps. Even though this was a significant undertaking, he yearned for frontline service. He finally got his chance in time for the second battle of Ypres, where he lost an eye. After only a few months in recovery, he deployed again, spending the rest of the Great War in Russia and in Palestine. In 1917 he walked with General Allenby into Jerusalem and flew into Damascus two days after T E Lawrence And Chauvel's Light Horse of Australia.

Following the Great War, he stood at the forefront of innovation. General Wavell served on the staff of the Experimental Mechanised Brigade in the 1920s. Instead of focusing on one arm of combat, he believed in all arms training. He believed that training shouldn't include only infantry, armour, artillery and some engineers, but also Navy, shipping, logistics, air, and irregulars. Truly forward thinking for his generation.

As Commander-in-Chief in the Second World War, he took two Italian armies prisoner and

stopped Rommel in his tracks at Tobruk in 1941. He also liberated Ethiopia, opening up the shipping lanes for US munitions into theatre.

Wavell became First Allied Supreme Commander of the war (commanding units from 20 different nations), though only for six doomed weeks. Malaya, Singapore, Java, Burma were all lost in one long ignominious retreat. Sadly he was deprived of the chance to repeat his early victories. But when the tide had turned, Wavell was given an even harder task, to rule as Viceroy 400 million Indians.

As with all 5 of our Generals, there is not enough space to adequately summarise such a career. But the points above highlight why General Wavell is particularly relevant for study today. His career spanned significant change in the character of war. From Afghanistan, to the western front, to north Africa, He was an officer who was comfortable with change.

Wavell understood what modern military commanders would call a Combined, Joint, Interagency, Intergovernmental, Multinational environment, with a career that spanned command of multiple nationalities, and high government office. General Wavell truly understood combined arms manoeuvre, which he displayed through holding Rommel back early in the Second World War. And finally, General Wavell was a true Soldier Scholar. He wrote prolifically and had an extensive library, which still exists today.

There are several books on General Wavell Career, but to read his own words, try [Generals and Generalship](#)

Admiral Sir Bertram Home Ramsay, KCB, KBE, MVO (1883 -1945)

Sir Bertram who?

Bertram Ramsay is something of a 'forgotten man' amongst the pantheon of Supreme Allied Command legends that emerged from World War Two. Why? Well, firstly he was not a war-

fighting Fleet commander, such as Admirals Cunningham, Somerville or Fraser. More pertinently, he died before the war's end when the aircraft in which he was traveling crashed just south of Paris, only months before the end of hostilities in Europe.

Few allied commanders though, showed Ramsay's flair for large-scale, intricate and logistically terrifying operations. As Vice Admiral Dover he was the mastermind behind Op *DYNAMO*, the evacuation of more than 330,000 British and French troops from Dunkirk in 1940. That alone should have secured his legacy, but he forged an even more illustrious career as an amphibious operations planner, designing the invasions of both North Africa (Op *TORCH*, November 1942) and Sicily (Op *HUSKY*, July 1943). Promoted to full Admiral in April 1944, he was appointed Naval C-in-C, Allied Expeditionary Force and created the plan for Op *NEPTUNE* - the invasion of Normandy in Jun 1944. Described by historian Correlli Barnett as a "never surpassed masterpiece of planning", he delivered over 160,000 men onto the beaches on D-Day, with more than 800,000 more joining them in the following weeks. With some 7,000 vessels, from mighty battleships and cruisers, to flanking submarines, mine-sweepers and landing craft under his command, he delivered one of the most complex and remarkable events in military history, all with his trademark Scottish coolness and self-effacing dignity. No Montgomery-esque ego on parade here!

To find out more about Admiral Bertram Ramsey in his own words, try: [The Year of D-Day the 1944 diary of Sir Bertram Ramsey.](#)

Marshal of the Royal Air Force, 1st Baron Arthur Tedder GCB (1890-1967)

Another 'forgotten man', Tedder made a pivotal contribution to Allied victory in the Second World War, directing Air operations in the Middle East and Mediterranean then acting as Deputy to Eisenhower for the invasion of Europe. A master of Joint and Combined operations, he drove Air-Land integration during the North Africa campaign working with the notoriously difficult Montgomery. After victory at El Alamein (for which Monty took all

the credit) and the Allied landings in Sicily and Italy, he was appointed Deputy Supreme Allied Commander.

He designed the air strategy and forged a close relationship with Eisenhower, smoothing coalition frictions during the Normandy campaign - no easy task with egos like Churchill and Monty (again) involved. Tedder is a study in leadership and personal resilience. His exemplary command was conducted against a background of personal tragedy; his son was killed fighting in France in 1940 and his wife in an aircraft crash in 1943. Churchill disliked him and tried to sack him (he later admitted his judgment had been flawed) and was only prevented from doing so when the Air Secretary and Chief of Air Staff threatened to resign. A modest man and a thinker (he wrote widely on air power),

Tedder was most at home sitting on the desert floor with his airmen. Unlike his nemesis Monty, he was uncomfortable with publicity; something that comes across in probably the best-known [photo of him](#)- sitting with his commanders before D-Day. After the war, he successfully led his Service as CAS, but it is for his contributions to air power strategy, Joint and Combined operations that he should be studied.

[Tedder: Quietly in command](#), offers a fantastic overview of his time in command.

Field Marshal Lord Alanbrooke (1883-1963)

Speaking truth to power is at the forefront of current leadership discussions. That it seems so hard for so many to do is why Field Marshall Alanbrooke, the professional head of the British forces during World War 2, should be on your list of leaders worth emulating.

Alanbrooke's contribution to World War II is best captured by the plinth on his statue that reads 'Master of Strategy'. He drove the allied grand strategic debate during World War 2, ensuring that Churchill did not get bogged down in too much detail and that operational commanders were given the time and the freedom they required. Alanbrooke's convinced

the allied high command to delay the opening of the Western front until the allies had built up the combined strength and resources to prevail. His relationship with Churchill was fractious difficult and sometimes led to major arguments. However, Churchill never ignored Alanbrooke's advice, making Alanbrooke an example in providing advice on contentious decisions.

If you want an insight into the challenges Alanbrooke faced, his excellent [war diaries are the right place to start your study.](#)

General Sir Nicholas Carter (b. 1959)

General Sir Nicholas Carter was the British Army's modernising General. He did not just preside over enormous change during his tenure as Chief of the General Staff, but was the architect and driving force behind the most significant alterations to the Army in its history.

General Carter had what most would call a traditional career. A Rifleman by profession, he commanded an infantry battalion, an Armoured Brigade, and a Division (as Commander ISAF Regional Command South in Afghanistan). A veteran of numerous operational tours, General Carter was also Commander Land Forces 2011 and Deputy Commander ISAF in 2012, and yet there was nothing to suggest he was a reformer in waiting. When the Strategic Defence and Security Review 2010 demanded a more streamlined, and thus financially viable Armed Forces, General Peter Wall, then Chief of the General Staff saw an opportunity to reinvent the purpose and scope of the Army, selecting General Carter as the officer to do it.

Since General Carter designed the Army 2020 plan in 2012, the Army has changed into a different sort of organisation. Inclusivity, diversity and tolerance have been ordered, he has relentlessly supported minorities such as LGBT, female and Muslim soldiers. Like a hammer, he smashed through the stalwart walls of Army life revamping policies on alcohol use, women in ground close combat, created programs for funding PhDs. These are

uncomfortable changes, but necessitated by the society the Army serves. Unlike many Generals before him, General Carter will not be remembered for a great wartime victory, but instead for bringing the Army into the 21st Century. Now Chief of the Defence Staff, he may be looking to reform the entirety of British defence, but by ruthlessly demanding change, instigating a singular vision of a different sort of Army, General Carter forged a relevant Army for the future, at a time, post Afghanistan and Iraq when it could have faded away.

As he is still serving, there is little written about General Carter. However [Thinking the unthinkable](#) offers interesting commentary on his reforms.

So there you have it. Some you will have heard of, some you will not. As we remarked at the beginning, it's difficult to choose. But hopefully we've provided you with some food for thought, and some ideas about where you could look when studying British military leaders.

Share this:

- [Email](#)
- [Twitter](#)
- [Facebook](#)
- [LinkedIn](#)
- [Pinterest](#)