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Michael Calmeyer: A Dutch Infantry Officer Contemplates Modern War, 1935–1940

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In the 1930s, Michael Calmeyer, a Dutch infantry officer, extensively studied the current military developments of the time and the war of the future. He based his conclusions on thorough analyses of numerous international publications, primarily in French, German and English. He concluded that modern technology, particularly tanks and aircraft, had reintroduced mobility in warfare, while also increasing its speed. Consequently, classical manoeuvre warfare was making a comeback, with the infantry still playing a leading role. While he considered extreme and one-sided views such as those of Douhet, Fuller and Liddell Hart to be impractical, he acknowledged that elements of these views did influence major powers. Calmeyer saw this view confirmed both in contemporary conflicts, and within the professional publications of Morretta and Alléhaut. Notably, Calmeyer was, between 1937 and 1939, the only Dutch officer seconded to Wehrmacht units and the Kriegsakademie in Berlin. He advised the Dutch army leadership to focus primarily on building strong defences against motorised and mechanised attacks, as well as maintaining high morale and commitment among the soldiers. After all, modern warfare would demand the utmost from every individual soldier.

Introduction

Although the Netherlands possessed a vast colonial empire, it was a small power in Europe, and its military and political leaders therefore considered strategic security issues from that perspective. In practice, it meant that the Dutch government based its national

security on both international law – the development of which it emphatically supported – and armed neutrality. The country had come through World War I more or less unscathed, but the chances of such a lucky escape being possible again, in a subsequent European conflict, were low.[1] Nevertheless, armed neutrality remained the cornerstone of Dutch thinking on security, although from 1920 onwards this came within the collective security system of the League of Nations. Only in 1936 did the Dutch government decide to return to its pre-1920 stance of neutrality based only on the Hague Rules (1907)[2]. This gave the Dutch government a great deal of freedom to shape and implement armed neutrality. In practice, it meant that deterrence – guarding neutral borders – was one of the prime tasks of the Dutch armed forces, but so was actively fighting an invader. Moreover, it also gave the government complete freedom to join an alliance. So, if its neutrality was violated, the Dutch armed forces could side with one of the warring parties in order to give the country a voice in any eventual peace negotiations. This way, the government wanted to prevent major powers from being the ones to decide the fate of the Netherlands.

For some, the fact that the major powers had respected Dutch neutrality in 1914–18 was proof of the view that the territory of the Netherlands was so important strategically for the European balance of power that none of the surrounding great powers would allow any of the others to possess this area. Therefore, allowing the Netherlands to survive would be in their interest. This way of thinking, which had developed in the course of the 19th century, seemed to become much less persuasive, especially in the interwar years. The speed and scale of modern warfare made it increasingly unlikely that Dutch

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[1] See for the Netherlands in the WWI: Marc Frey, *Der Erste Weltkrieg und die Niederlande. Ein neutrales Land im politischen und wirtschaftlichen Kalkül der Kriegsgegner* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1998), M. Abbenhuis, *The Art of Staying Neutral* (Amsterdam: AUP, 2006), Wim Klinkert, *Defending Neutrality* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2013) and https://encyclopedia.1914-1918-online.net/regions/western-europe/.

[2] Hague Convention respecting the Rights and Duties of Neutral Powers in case of War on Land.

territory would be respected. As early as 1930, speculations about the next war between Germany and France included the violation of the southern Dutch provinces by the armies of these powers. In the process, Dutch cities would probably be bombed. Given the limited distances, the size and material power of its major neighbours, and the speed of modern warfare by land and air, the Netherlands was highly vulnerable.[3]

Nevertheless, neutrality remained the basic premise, even after German rearmament under Nazi rule began. For the Dutch politicians and military, an alliance with Nazi Germany was unthinkable in any scenario. It went against the traditional thinking on neutrality, in which any of the great powers could be either friend or foe. Nevertheless, even after 1933, making operational arrangements with France or Britain remained a no-go, even in secret. The fear was that it could provoke a German attack, so neutrality was the only option.

This political stance made Dutch military preparations difficult. It prevented the General Staff from working out military cooperation with potential allies in advance and it gave the armed forces the dual task of first deterring large neighbouring states and second resisting an invasion. When allied help would arrive, how substantial that help would be would only become apparent at that moment, while the war was already raging. This would make effective and coordinated efforts with allies highly problematic. The Dutch reluctance to engage in prewar coordination was all the more frustrating because it was clear for all to see that its eastern neighbour posed the only and most imminent threat. A German invasion of the Netherlands could even occur, in the worst case, "out of the blue" through a combination of armour and airplanes. Against this background, Dutch military planners were faced with an almost impossible challenge. Considering the limited operational depth of the Netherlands, time worked to the disadvantage of the Dutch defenders. Therefore, well-prepared inundations, defensive lines and the destruction of bridges and other infrastructure were considered the main means to slow the invader's

[3] Wim Klinkert, *Dutch Military Thought, 1919–1939* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2022), 208–220.

advance.[4] But could they win enough time for Britain and France to come to the rescue?

This chapter will focus on the ideas of one of the most talented Dutch experts on modern land warfare in the 1930s, Michael Calmeyer, who was certainly aware of his country's complicated military situation.[5] It will provide an analysis of Calmeyer's ideas on modern war, gleaned from three sources: first, the series of articles he wrote in 1935–37 in *Militaire Spectator* on the war of the future; second, his reflections on his period in Germany 1937–39, during which he visited the major exercises in Mecklenburg as an observer; and third, his comments on current conflicts in 1935–40. These analyses and comments shed some light on ideas from a small country, a category that is less studied when it comes to the interwar discussion among military professionals.[6]

Michael Calmeyer (1895–1990)

In 1919, as a 24-year-old lieutenant, Calmeyer, the son of a naval officer, published his first article in a professional military journal.[7] He discussed trench warfare and his analysis focused on the interaction between tactics, modern weapons and morale. This triad, in Calmeyer's eyes, reflected the essence of modern warfare: the use of technologically advanced weapons combined with thorough tactical thinking and the realisation that the battlefield of the future would require fighters with high morale. This line of thought would remain a constant in his later writings. It also reflected, in a more

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4 Piet Kamphuis and Herman Amersfoort, *May 1940* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2010), 35–88, and Jeffery Gunsburg, "*La grande illusion*: Belgian and Dutch strategy facing Germany", *The Journal of Military History* 78, no 1 (2014): 101–158.

5 Calmeyer's memoirs were edited and annotated by Jan Hoffenaar and published in 1997 under the title *Herinneringen*.

6 *An der Schwelle zum Totalen Krieg*, edited by Stig Förster (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 2002), and *The Shadows of Total War*, edited by Richard Chickering (Cambridge: CUP, 2003).

7 Michael Calmeyer, "De strijd in de loopgraven", *Mavors* 13 (1919): 107–110.

Captain Calmeyer in 1935. Source: J. Hoffenaar Herinneringen *(1997), 80*

general sense, the lessons that the Dutch officer corps had drawn from the Great War: that technology would continue to develop at an ever-faster pace, and that the future battlefield would be more deadly and complex than ever before. New weapons such as war gases, armour and the airplane would contribute significantly to these developments. How could small states keep up and find answers? In Calmeyer's view, small countries should at least keep up intellectually with the military, technological and tactical developments of the great powers, which could become either allies or enemies. This intellectual challenge would lead to a large number of specialist publications to deal with the rapid and complex developments in the field of land warfare during the interwar period.

Although Calmeyer published his first article in 1919, his intellectual career did not begin until a few years later. At first, the lieutenant wanted to experience military life for himself, and for a Dutch officer, there was only one option: he requested to be posted in the Dutch

East Indies (Indonesia), where military service was constant and often harsh. Hoping that this experience would improve his career prospects, Calmeyer served overseas from 1920 to 1925. He then studied at the Netherlands Hogere Krijgsschool (1926–29) and in 1932 became editor of the *Wetenschappelijk Jaarbericht*, an annual scientific publication on all the latest international developments in warfare, as well as the *Militaire Spectator*, the leading Dutch professional military monthly. In 1935, he was appointed a lecturer at the prestigious Hogere Krijgsschool (War College) in The Hague. All in all, his was a rapid intellectual career. Within a short period, he had become a leading Dutch thinker on modern land warfare. It was no surprise, therefore, that in 1937 he was sent to the Kriegsakademie in Berlin to continue his studies, but also to brief the Dutch General Staff on the German army. His two-year stay included, among other things, several assignments with German units. When the Dutch army was mobilised in August 1939, he returned to the Netherlands. In May 1940, when the German army invaded, Calmeyer served as a captain and company commander. He saw action near Rotterdam, for which he was decorated. Few captains in the Dutch army in 1940 could look back on such a career path and few were as well-versed in international military journals as Calmeyer was. After the war, within a decade, he was a lieutenant general, a member of parliament and secretary of state for defence.[8]

The development of modern war

In November 1935, Calmeyer's first article on tomorrow's war appeared in the *Militaire Spectator*. The publication was probably linked to his recent appointment as lecturer in tactics and staff procedures at the Hogere Krijgsschool. Calmeyer supported a fairly widespread view that the First World War had been a turning point in the

[8] Jan Hoffenaar, *Herinneringen. Memoires van een christen, militair en politicus* (Den Haag: Sdu, 1997), 209–325.

development of warfare. It had made war "total", in the sense that it was a struggle not between armies but between nations, in which the population was both a victim – through air raids or economic blockades, for example – and a force, as long as morale remained high. The weapons system that fascinated Calmeyer the most was the tank. In his eyes, it had been the decisive factor that had both ended static trench warfare and made it highly unlikely that the tactic would be used in the future. The tank brought back movement and manoeuvrability, combined with firepower and protection.

Calmeyer rejected what he saw as radical theories about the nature of modern war developed by thinkers such as Giulio Douhet and J.F.C. Fuller. He found their belief in technology monomaniacal and even threatening. Such thinkers were extreme, and he saw their ideas as dangerous fantasies. What they were advocating was no longer the classical art of warfare, but an irresponsible belief in technology as a panacea. The only comforting thought, he wrote, was that such ideas had not yet been put into practice anywhere in their full extent. Calmeyer considered Douhet's ideas of air supremacy, or the achievement of a decisive strategic victory through air power alone, to be completely unrealistic. While he recognised elements of Douhet's thinking in the air forces of France, Italy, Germany and Russia, he felt that the defences against aircraft were simply too numerous and too effective for Douhet's ideas to succeed in practice. And for small states, Douhet's ideas were of little relevance anyway. Calmeyer therefore recommended an air fleet strong enough to inspire awe and capable of providing substantial support to an ally, so that this potential additional resistance would deter an enemy. Calmeyer rejected the idea of an independent air force. Land and air operations must always be combined, he held.

Fuller's idea of a fully mechanised land army received the same reaction: unworkable in practice. Calmeyer pointed to the many terrain conditions that made mechanised operations impossible. The huge amounts of fuel needed for armoured operations were also an Achilles' heel. How could the units be resupplied if the advance was long and fast? Finally, operating in darkness would be

a problem. The viable war of the future was therefore a combination of a traditional mass army supplemented by mechanised units. He pointed in particular to France, which was developing tanks meant to serve both as armoured artillery and as independently operating armoured units. He saw similar developments in Britain, Germany and Russia. Tanks could restore the historic role of heavy cavalry on the battlefield.

In Calmeyer's view, what applied to tanks and bombers was equally true for chemical weapons: They would be used, but they would not fundamentally change the nature of warfare. Like with airplanes, there were also many effective countermeasures against chemical weapons, both on the battlefield and in cities. But they required continuous training and had to be kept up to date, if only to maintain morale. In addition, the use of war gases was highly dependent on weather conditions, which greatly reduced their effectiveness. If city dwellers had anything to fear, it was conventional bombs and shells that could cause serious and massive suffering.

Calmeyer found support and inspiration for this middle ground on the nature of modern war (mass armies with high-tech additions) from his French colleague and First World War veteran Émile Julien Alléhaut,[9] who, like Calmeyer, was active in military education and also tried to get a sense of the war of the future. He had publications on infantry–artillery cooperation, the role of the tank, motorisation and all sorts of tactical problems, but also on issues of morale and psychology on the battlefield, which were also topics close to Calmeyer's heart. Like Calmeyer, Alléhaut sought to combine new developments with established ideas about warfare, while explicitly taking the human factor into account. And like Calmeyer, he rejected Charles de Gaulle's ideas of professional, high-tech armies as too radical and one-sided. The army of the future would continue to

[9] Bruno Chaix, "Le Général Alléhaut, un théoreticien militaire ignoré de l'entre-deux-guerres", *Guerres mondiales et conflits contemporains* 184 (1996): 69–83; Daniel Marc Segesser, "Nur keine Dummheiten: das französische Offizierskorps und das Konzept des Totalen Krieges", *An der Schwelle zum Totalen Krieg*, edited by Stig Förster (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 2002), 113–178.

rely on conscripts, but they would be better trained and equipped with modern technology.

Another influence on Calmeyer was the Italian officer Rocco Morretta, whose work Calmeyer regularly mentions in positive terms. He probably knew the German translations of books written in Italian. The German translation of *Come sera la guerra di domani* (1932) was even reviewed in several Dutch magazines. Morretta also doubted whether the ideas of the well-known "prophets" of modern war were feasible. Rather, he expected a repetition of a battle similar to 1918, when World War I entered its final phase, involving mobile, motorised and mechanised warfare. And like Calmeyer, he saw the next war as one involving nations and peoples, not high-tech armies. Notwithstanding rapid and impressive technological developments, Calmeyer, like Morretta, thought morale and other psychological factors were of decisive importance in the outcome of a war.[10]

In his articles, Calmeyer also gave his views on a number of other points. He recognised that, due to motorisation, wars in the near future would be fast paced. For the Netherlands, this was a very relevant point. A strategic raid, in which the enemy would launch a surprise, massive attack on Dutch territory without prior mobilisation, seemed an increasingly realistic scenario. It would cripple the Dutch defence capabilities already in the first hours of war and would result in a *fait accompli* in no time. As early as 1934, such an attack was already a "hot topic" in the Dutch press and politics. Only a good information position and continuous high preparedness would give small states any chance of surviving such an attack. But that was easier said than done.

In his final contribution, Calmeyer concluded that modern war would begin with an overwhelming attack by land and air. Infrastructure, along with economic and military targets, faced the greatest risk of destruction. A large state might still survive this, but for a small one, it could be the death knell. Perhaps anti-tank artillery and mines could slow the advance somewhat. Calmeyer substantiated this opinion using articles by Heinz Guderian, but he also pointed

[10] The book is summarised in *Die Umschau* 38 (1934): 665–667.

to statements by Philippe Pétain[11] and Hans von Seeckt about such a "lightning" start to a war. This highly offensive operation would also involve the use of battle gases and all kinds of propaganda designed to weaken the morale of the civilian population. But all things considered, the decision would fall on land during the battle, with air power in a supporting role. Classical manoeuvre forms, executed with modern weapons, would lead to that outcome. Warfare did not undergo revolutionary change, it evolved into a form where the armed forces acted in coherence and attunement, and mass merged with modern firepower and speed. Calmeyer reassured his infantry colleagues that the infantry was and would remain the queen of the battlefield and its quality would determine the final outcome.

Reflections on the German army

On 21 September 1937, under the command of Generalfeldmarschall Werner von Blomberg, large-scale exercises of the German army, navy and air force began in northern Germany and the Baltic Sea. In retrospect, this is considered a breakthrough in terms of the role armoured units played in the German army.[12] The Dutch press reported on them extensively, repeating German assurances that this was not a scenario directed against any particular enemy, but that the main aim was to practise cooperation between all branches of the armed forces. The exercise was to conclude with a grand parade for Hitler and Mussolini. Calmeyer was able to attend the exercise as an observer, along with many other foreign officers. For the Dutch officer, it was an excellent opportunity to test his ideas about the role of tanks and modern infantry action. The following month, he started his studies at the Kriegsakademie.

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[11] Pétain had said in 1934 and again in 1935: "La guerre éclatera comme un coup de foudre", predicting a German surprise attack on France. This had attracted a lot of attention in the Netherlands, where the "attaque brusquée" (strategic raid) was discussed widely in the press. From 1937, the term "Blitzkrieg" also came in use.

[12] *Warfare in Europe, 1918–1938,* edited by Geoffrey Jensen (Abingdon: Routledge, 2006), 34.

Adolf Hitler with Field Marshall Werner von Blomberg and his Adjutant Colonel Hossbach, speaking about manoeuvres of the Wehrmacht in Neustrelitz, Mecklenburg, September 1937. Source: United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, courtesy of Heinrich Hoffmann/Studio of H. Hoffmann

The scale of the exercise was huge, especially from a Dutch perspective. And the joint nature of the exercise, including civil air defence, was also something special. Calmeyer could not have come closer to modern warfare, at least in peacetime. For the first time, he saw the integration of paratroopers and independently acting armoured units in a comprehensive scenario. The large Soviet exercises, especially the one in May 1935, were well known in the Netherlands, but no Dutch observers had actually seen them.

In the German exercise, Red (West) attacked Blue (East), with Berlin more or less on the dividing line. The opening was a major air attack on the German capital by Red, in which Calmeyer recognised the idea that the morale of the population and the troops was also a war objective. In the next phase, the air force was used, mainly in support of the ground forces. Calmeyer praised the flexibility with

which this air support was alternately centralised and decentralised. Red, in turn, deployed an independently operating armoured division on the flank of the main force. The flat terrain of northern Germany lent itself well to mechanised action, but the lakes channelled the attack routes. Calmeyer noted how well-coordinated action by anti-tank artillery, minefield laying and infantry could parry attacks by armoured units. The strengths and weaknesses of such units became clearer, and the losses were considerable. Blue also practised armoured action at night, combined with air support. Calmeyer considered the effect on Red's morale to be very significant.

For Calmeyer, the conclusions were clear: tanks were an indispensable part of modern land warfare and the Netherlands should concentrate on them, but the infantry remained the main weapon – nothing had changed in this regard. With approval, Calmeyer quoted von Blomberg: "Ein Heer ist so gut oder schlecht wie sein Infanterie",[13] but then solid training, preferably for two years, was necessary. In Calmeyer's view, the exercise emphasised the need for longer and more intensive forms of military training, as well as greater attention to mental resilience. Soldiers needed to be better prepared, both physically and mentally, for the rigours of modern warfare, something that was still sorely lacking in the Netherlands. In terms of self-confidence, skill and endurance, there was still a world to be won in the Netherlands.[14]

Calmeyer must surely have hoped that especially the political but also the military leadership in The Hague would take war preparations more actively in hand. There had been hopeful beginnings, but many years of budget cuts had led to a serious neglect of the army. In February 1935, the then chief of the General Staff, General Isaac Reynders (1879–1966), had brought the government's attention to the matter in a detailed memorandum highlighting the dangerous shortcomings

[13] In *Deutsche Infanterie,* 15 November 1937; this quote by von Blomberg could be translated into English as "An army is only as good or as bad as its infantry".

[14] M.R.H. Calmeyer, "De Duitsche Weermachtsmanoeuvres 1937", *Militaire Spectator* 107, no 1 (1938): 2–6.

of the Dutch armed forces: too small, too few modern weapons, and inadequate training of officers, non-commissioned officers and soldiers alike. Now, with Germany rearming underway and reintroducing conscription, this state of affairs had to end quickly, Reynders argued. At the same time, there was growing public awareness of the need for air defence and the possibility of a sudden, overwhelming German attack. The press pointed these dangers out, sometimes in graphic detail, stressing that the country was still far from having the defensive capabilities required in modern war. The military leadership also now expressed unequivocally that a repeat of 1914, when Dutch territory had been respected by the great powers, was highly unlikely.

However, the military felt the steps the government took towards improvement were agonisingly slow. It did not come up with a comprehensive plan to modernise armaments until February 1936. The first investments were mainly defensive in nature, reflecting the neutral stand: an expansion of air defence with anti-aircraft guns (1936) and airplanes, anti-armour guns (from 1937), and different means of protection of bridges and infrastructure against a motorised invasion (1935). Only in 1938 did the government significantly increase the number of conscripts to be called up annually and extend the length of military service. By 1940, these measures would produce an army of about 300,000 men.

But despite this increase and the investment planned by the government, there remained a serious quantitative shortage of weaponry. Money was not the problem, the increase in the defence budget after 1936 was enormous. The problem was how to spend it. As Dutch military production was fairly limited, the country depended on foreign producers. This was a bottleneck, as the arms industry was getting far more orders internationally than it could handle. Buying new weapons systems proved difficult. Additionally, export bans imposed by several countries hampered purchasing opportunities even more. Finally, a lot of money went into building defensive bunker lines, while the development of the Dutch field army, which Calmeyer considered more important, lagged behind. Only small-scale experiments were made with armoured vehicles and only a start was made with building

a partly motorised light division as an operational reconnaissance unit. It was not until the summer of 1936 that 12 Swedish armoured cars (not tracked) were added to this light brigade.[15] In 1938–39, two regiments of Hussar motorcyclists were raised. The result was that the Dutch defences relied heavily on fortified lines. The mobile field army was closely tied to these lines, and operational manoeuvres were out of the question. This was a far cry from what Calmeyer had seen in Germany.

Calmeyer had sent detailed information on German reconnaissance units and panzer divisions to The Hague, but it is not very clear what was done with it.[16] While Calmeyer enthusiastically welcomed the modernisation of the Light Brigade, he disagreed with the reconnaissance role assigned to the motorcyclists. In his view, they should be able to provide rapidly transportable firepower, just as Guderian had advocated in *Achtung Panzer!* and *Die Panzertruppen*[17]. They were too weak for reconnaissance, as they might come under enemy fire. The heavier and faster armoured vehicles (*Panzerspähtruppen*) were primarily for reconnaissance, and their numbers had to be increased, Calmeyer noted. Only a handful of armoured cars of Dutch design were built by the DAF car factory, and a Dutch tank was still on the drawing board when the Germans invaded.[18]

While in Germany, Calmeyer had continued to write for the Dutch *Wetenschappelijk Jaarbericht*, which discussed and interpreted recent military developments on the basis of an analysis of the international literature. In these articles, he further developed his ideas on modern warfare, including its mental and economic components. There was certainly concern within the Dutch army leadership about

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15 In 1939, it turned into a Light Division.

16 Dutch military attaché in Berlin to the General Staff 1938, National Archives, The Hague, 2.13.16 HQ Field Army inv. nr. 1058.

17 Heinz Guderian, *Achtung Panzer! Die Entwicklung der Panzerwaffe, ihre Kampftaktik und ihre operativen Möglichkeiten* (Stuttgart: Union Deutsche Verlagsgesellschaft, 1937) and Heinz Guderian, *Die Panzertruppen und ihr Zusammenwirken mit den anderen Waffen* (Berlin: E.S. Mittler & Sohn, 1939).

18 Piet van der Trappen, "De hedendaagsche stand van de pantserwagentechniek", *Militaire Spectator* 105, no 6 (1936): 241–246; Piet van der Trappen, "Militaire verdedigings-voorbereiding op motortechnisch gebied", *Militaire Spectator* 107, no 1 (1938): 14–21, and no 2 (1938): 55–59.

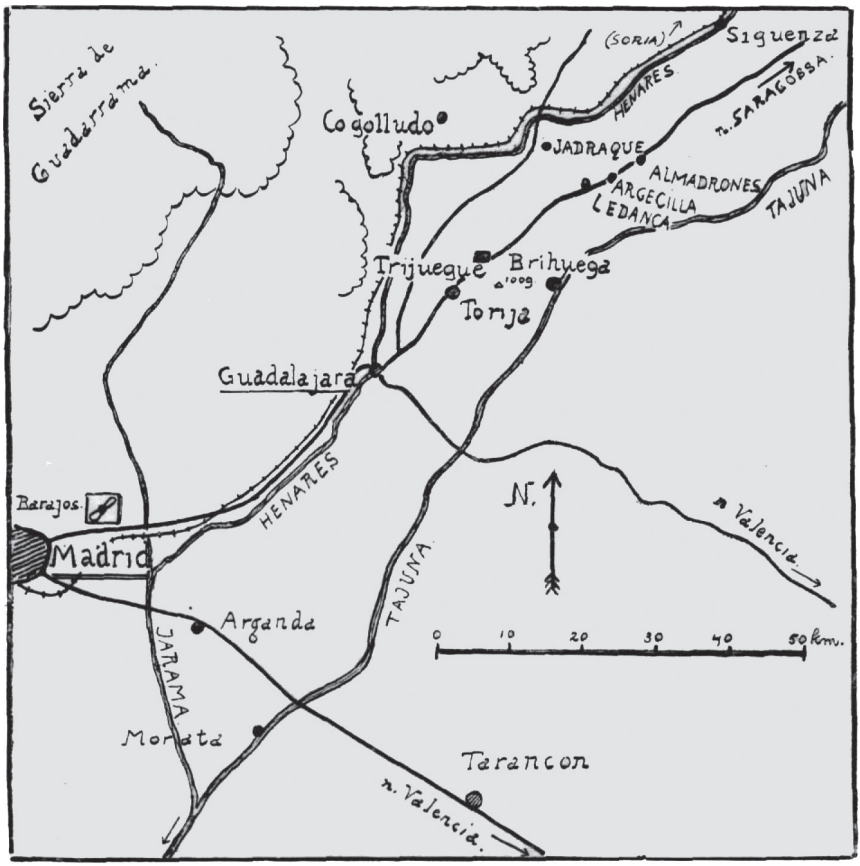
the toughness and morale of the Dutch soldier. In fact, this had been a subject of reflection and concern throughout the interwar period.[19] Would the Dutch soldier withstand the rigours of modern warfare? The rebellion of the conscripts who refused to obey their cancellation of leave in October 1918 was regularly cited. In part, this rebellion was blamed on the poor leadership of the (non-commissioned) officers, many of whom were conscripts themselves. During his posting to a German unit, Calmeyer had seen how things could be different. He pointed to the good relationship and mutual trust between the men and their leaders. Comradeship could go hand-in-hand with discipline in all ranks. Calmeyer wished Dutch officers could receive such German training.

For the Dutch situation, in his opinion, the unifying factor had to be loyalty to the House of Orange. The Dutch-Orange bond was the spiritual foundation on which Dutch society rested. For a conservative Protestant like Calmeyer, this was a logical and natural argument, but it did not apply to everyone. Remarkably, when Calmeyer reflected on the reasons for the Dutch defeat in May 1940, he attributed it primarily to a lack of stamina, morale and physical strength. In the end, the human factor had been crucial. Calmeyer was less clear on economic resilience, but shortly before the outbreak of war, a bureaucratic structure had been built up by the Dutch government that allowed the state to direct the war industry and the supply of the civilian population in mobilisation or wartime. The quick defeat could not be attributed to failed logistical preparations.

Abyssinia, Spain, Poland and Finland

In his analyses of the wars from 1935 onwards, Calmeyer sought to understand the nature of modern warfare, but also, it must be said, to confirm his previously published ideas. According to the Dutch officer, the wars in Ethiopia (1935–36) and Spain (1936–39)

[19] Klinkert, *Dutch Military Thought, 1919–1939*, 66–98.



Map from Calmeyer's article on the war in Spain "De gevechten in Guadalajara 8–23 maart 1937", Militaire Spectator *106, no 6 (1937), 223*

demonstrated the dominant role of technically modern weapons systems, especially armour and air power. On the other hand, both conflicts demonstrated how problematic the terrain could be and how vulnerable modern equipment was to air attack. In Ethiopia, for example, artillery proved to have little mobility, and in Spain the concentrated, large-scale deployment of armour that Guderian had envisioned was hardly possible. In June 1937, Calmeyer published in the *Militaire Spectator* a detailed analysis of the Battle of Guadalajara three months earlier. Drawing on German, French and

English sources,[20] he presented a detailed tactical and terrain analysis, showing how limiting the terrain could be for motorised action and how vulnerable the assault and logistics columns were to air attack. He praised the effective cooperation between the International Brigades and Russian combat vehicles and air support. These heavier fighting vehicles proved more effective than the light Italian ones. The Russians also demonstrated effective coordinated tank–air action. Russian air support proved successful in destroying command posts and equipment. However, it was less effective in the mountainous areas.

The Nationalists operated with motorised divisions, infantry came to the front in trucks, and artillery was motorised. The combat vehicles were dependent on the terrain but provided the infantry with essential fire support for the advance against machine guns. But infantry and artillery proved vulnerable from the air. For Calmeyer, the air force had the power to destroy both morale and material. One additional problem for air power was the availability of nearby landing sites.

Calmeyer's lesson to his colleagues was that being aware of the danger from the air was more important than ever. In addition, the Netherlands needed to acquire its own combat vehicles as soon as possible, if only to gain a better understanding of how they could be used on Dutch terrain. What was clear, however, was that the infantry was the decisive weapon, capable of operating in all weather conditions, day and night. The infantry had, as Calmeyer could not repeat often enough, the hardest but also the most honourable job on the battlefield, "which no other weapon can do". The rhythm of attack and counterattack was set by the infantry; its position determined the outcome of the battle. In essence, the quality of the infantry determined the quality of a military unit. Calmeyer was pleased to see that the Dutch Field Service Regulations also gave the infantry a prime position in combat.

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[20] Including books and articles by Rudolf von Xylander, Otto Welsch, Frédéric Culmann, Raymond Duval and Paul Armengaud.

The German attack on Poland (1939) was, in Calmeyer's eyes, the fulfilment of both his own ideas and those he had acquired during his stay in Berlin. He incorporated them into a lengthy article on panzer divisions published in October 1939, in which he reiterated the limitations (terrain) and the need for good cooperation with the infantry. The German performance had lived up to expectations. Manoeuvre warfare had returned, and with it the classic art of warfare.[21] The secret lay in the combined use of large armoured and motorised units with dive bombers, supplemented in places by paratroopers as a vertical containment weapon. The control of these mobile units had been made possible by the development of radio technology.

The application of these means from the arsenal of modern technology made it possible to revive the ancient principles of the art of war and to increase the power of attack by combining mass and speed. This had given the German leadership the opportunity to surprise the enemy in time and place, to break through the enemy's front, to cut the enemy's links with a deep thrust and to continue the operation until the enemy's destruction was achieved. It was not a new process – the campaigns of the Mongolian cavalry of Gengis Khan in the 13th century used the same strategy – what was new was the development and application of means that once again enabled the rigid martial arts to carry out such operations.

It is worth noting that in both the Polish and the Western (1940) campaigns, non-motorised troops, moving at the speed of a pedestrian, played little part in the actual outcome. Moreover, the Polish troops were far too scattered and still too poorly motorised. Calmeyer said that this proved Morretta's points: First, if the attacker's freedom of movement is not controlled, the attacker wins. Second, it confirmed that the time-honoured principle of concentration of forces, as defined by Jomini and based on Napoleon's battles, still applied in modern warfare. Third, it showed that the Germans had good land–air cooperation, which greatly enhanced the effectiveness of their ground forces.

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[21] M. Calmeyer, "De Pantserdivisie", *Militaire Spectator* 108, 10 (1939): 409–414.

Calmeyer concluded that the Polish defeat was brought about by the Germans using all the right ingredients. For this, he referred to two works by German officers that were published in 1939. Hermann Foertsch argued in wrote *Kriegskunst heute und morgen* that war could never begin "out of the blue" and denied Douhet's idea that the air force could win a war single-handedly.[22] Waldemar Erfurth, known at the time for his analysis of the Finnish–Russian war, wrote *Der Vernichtungssieg*, in which he explained his ideas on surprise attacks (*Die Überraschung im Kriege*) and the fundamentals of joint warfare.[23] Calmeyer stressed that both officers had predicted the German conduct of the war and victory in Poland perfectly. When discussing the Russian advance into Finland (1939–1940), Calmeyer emphasised the use of air strikes to bring down civilian morale and the use of armoured units. According to the Dutchman, the fact that Finland was able to maintain an effective defence for so long, despite its numerical inferiority, was due to "the qualities of the Finnish people". "As the Olympic Games have repeatedly shown, the Finns are one of the most physically developed peoples in the world. Uncontaminated by the luxuries with which the peoples of Western Europe have been able to surround themselves for centuries, they are ideally suited to endure the rigours of a campaign." Physical strength and high morale were essential. In addition, the Finnish terrain, especially in winter, was not conducive to the effective use of armour. According to Calmeyer, the final defeat of Finland was due to Russian superiority in numbers and weapons. However, it was an honourable defeat. Perhaps Calmeyer wanted to express the hope that when German troops overwhelmed the Netherlands, the Dutch would show some of the same toughness that the Finns had done, making the unavoidable honourable, but he could not say so explicitly.

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[22] As Foertsch was head of the press office of the German War Department, some Dutch newspapers concluded that he reflected the official government view.

[23] See *Preemption: Military Action and Moral Justification,* edited by Henry Shue and David Rodin (Oxford: OUP, 2007), 33–35.

Conclusion

Calmeyer's ideas circulated mainly in small military circles. Some of his public lectures were discussed in the press, but that was all. He did not choose to present modern warfare in works aimed at a wider audience. In the Netherlands, this role was played by Basil Liddell Hart (1895–1970), whose books and commentaries were translated from British newspapers and received wide publicity. For the Dutch public, Liddell Hart was by far the most important interpreter of modern war as it unfolded in the late 1930s.

For Calmeyer, modern war had three distinctive elements. The first was the return of tactical and operational manoeuvres to the battlefield, in which the tank played an essential role, but only in combination with massed infantry. In modern war, the classical principles of movement and concentration of force were given new life through the combination of mass, motorisation and mechanisation. He remained convinced that it was the infantry that ultimately decided the outcome of a war. The second element was the speed of modern operations through aircraft and motorised units, and the third was the role of morale, the psychological element. The modern battlefield would test the resilience of soldiers, but also of civilians living in fear of aerial bombardment. Alléhaut and Morretti agreed with Calmeyer on all these points.

But what did this mean for a small country like the Netherlands? Was an honourable defeat the best that could be achieved? Obviously, it was becoming increasingly difficult for small states to respond to rapid technological developments, new weapons systems and a way of waging war that was increasing in speed and scale. On the one hand, the Dutch preparations for the war reflected and even reinforced the country's neutral stance; on the other hand, the Dutch knew exactly who the enemy was and what resources it had at its disposal. The only thing the Dutch army could win was (a little) time. It chose not to follow Calmeyer's suggestion to do this by operational manoeuvres, and instead used static lines of defence, or trenches.

When Calmeyer discussed the Dutch defence, he focused on ways to limit the effects of a "lightning attack". But the operational means he discussed were not available to the Dutch army. They had to come from allies, a subject he could not discuss publicly. He refrained from analysing possible alliances altogether. The strict policy of neutrality did not allow for this discussion, and behind the scenes there was little preparation or coordination with Britain and France in case of an invasion by the German army, the probability of which became clearer as the 1930s progressed. The Dutch government did not want to give the Germans even the slightest pretext to take military action. The strictest neutrality itself had to be its shield against war. It had made neutrality an act of faith, and alternatives were not seriously discussed, either politically or militarily. This made Calmeyer's thinking typical of how Dutch military analysts interpreted modern war: They were well-read, possessing an impressive knowledge of international military developments and they analysed current conflicts professionally, but they did not openly discuss strategic and operational options for Dutch defence. The concern raised by some of them in 1918 that modern war might no longer be feasible for small states was no longer under consideration, maybe because the most likely response would require a fundamental shift in Dutch security policy. The only element almost everyone seemed to agree on, including Calmeyer, was that modern war demanded greater psychological, mental resilience from soldiers and civilians alike. Here, in the end, lay the real Achilles heel of the Dutch defensive strength. Calmeyer was definitely the only one blaming the fast and disastrous defeat of May 1940 on lack of training, warrior spirit, willpower and toughness among not only the soldiers, but also the population at large.

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