

**MILITARY INTELLIGENCE
SERVICE**

**SPECIAL SERIES
No. 2**

**WAR DEPARTMENT
Washington, August 10, 1942**

MID 461

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OF E.O. 12958

BY 204 Birm ON 13 July 87

CONTENTS

	Page No.
FOREWORD.	1
SECTION I. BASIC PRINCIPLES.....	1
1. Decisive Character of Tank Action.....	1
2. The Tank As a Strategic Rather Than Tactical Weapon.....	1
3. However, the German Theorists Perceived That the Armored Arm Would Succeed Only If It Coop- erated with Other Arms.....	4
4. The Organization of the New Mechanized Division Did Not Bring the Leaders of the Third Reich to Give Up the Conception of a "Nation in Arms".....	5
II. THE TRANSFORMATION OF THE ART OF WAR EFFECTED BY THE ARMORED AND MOTORIZED ARM.....	6
III. THE ARMORED ARM IN ACTION.....	14
1. The High Command.....	14
2. Duties of the Various Echelons.....	15
3. General Characteristics of the Action of the Armored Army in Battle.....	19
4. Combat of the Armored Division.....	25
5. Defense against the Armored Division.....	31

TALPO.IT

FOREWORD

The document here published is based upon a study made by the French General Staff immediately after the armistice. A lost war never permits the leaders of a defeated Army to rest and demands insistent searching for the reason of the defeat, but victory breeds self-confidence and a disposition to rest content with precisely the tactics that once proved successful. The clarity and incisiveness of this document are evidences of its coming from a staff that has learned this lesson, though at tragic cost.

The conclusions to be drawn from the study are obvious and are herein sufficiently underlined. It is worth noting, however, that while the German tactics appeared new, in certain respects they were simply applications to modern conditions of classical battle concepts formulated by the great captains of the past. The Western Front of 1914-18, after the Battle of the Marne, became a sustained struggle of position and attrition; before it could be transformed into a war of movement, the armistice brought the conflict to an end. The French were naturally left with their thoughts committed to a repetition of the methods that had gained them a victory. The theory of maneuver and all the principles based upon centuries of actual combat seemed to be forever obsolete

in 1918. On the other hand by 1940 the Germans had realized the tremendous advantage to be gained by a coordinated use of the air arm, the shock action of armored forces, and the motorized movement of the mass. They made the science of war once more conform to the maxims of long experience.

TALPO.IT

Section I. BASIC PRINCIPLES

1. DECISIVE CHARACTER OF TANK ACTION

At the end of the first World War two German generals,¹ Eimannsberger and Guderian, devoted themselves to developing the theory of the tank. They had been much impressed by the shock, even the panic, that the sudden introduction of the tank had caused among the German troops, but they were convinced also that the Allies had used the new instrument timidly and sparingly. They saw united in the tank the three main elements of decision in a modern battle: (1) surprise, (2) powerful and instantaneous fire, and (3) breadth, flexibility, and relative invulnerability of movement. They perceived that so redoubtable an arm could be employed with much greater effectiveness than the Allies had imagined.

2. THE TANK AS A STRATEGIC RATHER THAN TACTICAL WEAPON

The Allies had used the tank only for the rupture of the enemy front. The German generals conceived a more audacious use of it in the exploitation phase to disorganize the reserves and the enemy rear areas, so that

¹ It should be noted that this discussion is confined to German doctrine and methods only, and does not take into consideration developments in any other countries.

the enemy would be unable to delimit the defeat by establishing himself in new positions. The strategic consequences of such an action might well be incalculable. They drew the following conclusions:

a. Speed and the Radius of Action Must Be Utilized to the Utmost

“The attack by tanks,” wrote Guderian in 1936, “must be conducted with maximum acceleration in order to exploit the advantage of surprise, to penetrate deep into enemy lines, to prevent reserves from intervening, and to extend the tactical success into a strategical victory. Speed, therefore, is what is to be exacted above anything else from the armored weapon.”

Speed makes possible the maximum degree of surprise because it overcomes delay in concentrating forces at chosen points. Speed neutralizes the enemy defense by limiting the possibilities of fire from his antitank weapons.

b. Tanks Will Impose Their Rhythm on the Modern Battle

Infantry and artillery will link their action as closely as possible to that of the tanks. The German standard regulations stated the new law: “In the zone of action of the tanks, the action of other arms is to be based on that of the tanks.” In short, in the German plan of operations the armored weapon became, on the ground, the essential arm of combat and no longer figured, as it had in the French conception, merely as support for infantry and artillery.

c. The Combined Action of the Air and Armored Forces Will Govern the Battle

The decisive factor will no longer be the infantry-artillery team, because the air units, being better qualified to furnish immediate, brutal, and accurate support for the mobile and rapid tanks, will henceforth constitute the "attack artillery."

d. This Association Will Transform Not only the Pace but the Sphere of Application of the Modern Battle

Abandoning the idea of a more or less straight front line, the modern battle will take place throughout the entire depth of the enemy position as well as at all altitudes. The factor of time will play a decisive role. The modern battle will depend on speed multiplied by mass. The most rapid ground and air weapons will participate in it, in numbers never previously imagined.

"War will no longer be the war of airplanes and tanks; it will be the war of thousands of planes and thousands of tanks."

e. The Tank Army Must Be Made Autonomous

The armored Army must be capable of prosecuting war with its own means. Therefore, the German generals rejected the French formula of 1918 which, providing only for the distribution of tanks among the large infantry units, had thus reduced their speed and mobility.

3. HOWEVER, THE GERMAN THEORISTS PERCEIVED THAT THE ARMORED ARM WOULD SUCCEED ONLY IF IT COOPERATED WITH OTHER ARMS

General Guderian analyzed this problem at length in an article which appeared in the "Militär Wissenschaftliche Rundschau," dated October 15, 1936:

"The armored branch will include all other arms. Infantry, artillery, and engineers are necessary to the development of its action, but it will impose upon them its own method of combat by making them dependent on the motor. Supporting infantry, artillery, and engineers will be motorized and partially armored within the framework of the Armored Division² and the Motorized Infantry Division. They will adjust their new tactical program and employment to their new speed.

"An important role will be played by the engineers, who will have abundant matériel for crossing gaps, and who will be trained to use it rapidly and to oppose the action of enemy tanks by the rapid construction of antitank obstacles.

"The desire to protect the armored weapon against the counterattack of its most dangerous enemies, the tank and the plane, will require the incorporation of numerous and powerful antitank and antiaircraft weapons into the panzer division. Thus, the armored arm—minutely trained on the other hand for cooperation with the air arm—will be able to fight its own battle."

² "The German Armored Division," Information Bulletin No. 18, June 15, 1942, Military Intelligence Service, contains a translation of a captured German training manual which describes the principles taught by the Germans for the operation of the armored division.