

## **The Evolution of German Military Strategy and Tactics: 1914-1945**

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When the statesmen of Europe declared war in 1914, they all shared several assumptions. They all believed that they had a better than even chance of winning. Germany was no different. In making this assumption they relied on their military advisors. Those advisors regarded war not as an unpleasant necessity but as a test of manhood and of national fitness for survival. The German military advisors all shared the belief that war was inevitable. The statement made by General Helmuth von Moltke at the 'Council of War' in December 1912 illustrates this point. He said, "I hold war to be inevitable, and the sooner the better."

The second assumption shared by European statesmen was that war would be short. It required exceptional perceptiveness to visualize anything else. Ivan Bloch, in his work *La Guerre Future*, published in 1898, had forecast with amazing accuracy that the power of modern weapons would produce deadlock on the battlefield and that the resulting attrition would destroy the fabric of the belligerent societies. Bloch's thesis was widely known and much discussed in military periodicals. But since he was saying in effect that the military was now faced with a problem it could not solve, it was unlikely that many soldiers would agree with him.

The retreat behind the Marne in 1914 buried all hope for a swift end to the war that had been begun with such self-confidence. It raised doubts about the principles of war as they had been taught to each new generation of German officers since the rise of the professional education system in the nineteenth century. When victory eluded the general staff, a world of military certainties fell apart. It exposed serious shortcomings in the strategic thought of the prewar years and required German military strategy and tactics to change. By 1945, a radically different notion of strategy, a transformed officer corps, and a transformed nation had come into existence.

On August 1, 1914, a crowd gathered in the Odeonsplatz in Munich, capital of the German kingdom of Bavaria, to hear the proclamation of mobilization. In the crowd was Adolf Hitler who later said he was not ashamed to acknowledge that he was carried away by enthusiasm of the moment. He said, "I sank down upon my knees and thanked Heaven out of the fullness of my heart for the favor of having been permitted to live in such times." In Berlin the Kaiser appeared on his balcony to address a tumultuous crowd. Dressed in field-grey uniform he proclaimed, "A fateful hour has fallen upon Germany. Envious people on all sides are compelling us to resort to a just defense. The sword is being forced into our hands and now I command you all to go to church, kneel before God and pray to him to help our gallant army."

Trains were to fill the memories of all who went to war in 1914. The railway section of the German Great General Staff timetabled the movement of 11,000 trains in the mobilization period, and no less than 2,150 fifty-four wagon trains crossed the Hohenzollern Bridge over the Rhine alone between August 2 and August 18. Once disembarking from the trains, the army relied on horses who, like men, were mustering in hundreds of thousands all over Europe in the first week of August. The Austrian army mobilized 600,000 horses while the German army mustered 715,000. The armies of 1914 remained Napoleonic in their dependence on the horse. Staff officers calculated the proportion between horses and men at 1:3.

In 1914, Germany was the most modern and efficient of Europe's industrial giants. It could mobilize with a speed that was dazzling by comparison with either Russia or Austria-

Hungary. Its planners were convinced that in case of war the country's survival would depend on that speed. Ever since 1894, when France and Russia had first become allies, the Germans had been faced with the likelihood that war with either would entail war with both. They also assumed that they could not expect to win a protracted war against both. For this reason their mobilization plan was focused on a single overriding objective. The plan, created by Marshal Count Alfred von Schlieffen, was to knock France out of action in the west in no more than six weeks, before Russia could launch a major attack from the east. Germany's plans included the start of a drive to Paris. Once started, such a drive would be nearly impossible to stop or even significantly modify without reducing all the arrangements to chaos. For Germany alone, mobilization equaled war.

As war began in August 1914, the responsibility for winning the war and for the plans lay in the hands of Helmuth von Moltke who had served the previous nine years as the head of the German high command. Moltke adopted Schlieffen's plan upon succeeding him. The plan bet everything on an overwhelming right wing made up of seven out of eight soldiers available for the fight with France. This massed force was to punch like a fist through the neutral countries of Holland, Belgium and Luxembourg on its way into France. It would swing clockwise in a great wheeling motion, first to the west and then southward into France, overrunning whatever enemy forces confronted it, encircling and cutting off Paris, and finally swinging back to the east to take whatever remained of the French army in the rear and destroy it.

In his book *A World Undone: The Story of the Great War, 1914 to 1918*, G. J. Myer describes the plan as, "majestic in conception and breathtakingly bold but also fraught with problem not all of which were military." From a narrowly military standpoint the invasion of the three neutral countries was sensible. It would enable the Germans to move across northern Europe's flat and open coastal plain, avoiding the powerful fortresses that the French had constructed in the rough hill country just west of their long border with Germany. The plan, however, gave no weight to the possibility that a violation of the treaties guaranteeing the neutrality of Belgium and Holland might provoke Britain to intervene. It was believed that if Germany could wrap up the war in the west on Schlieffen's timetable, the British would have little opportunity to become a factor. The assumption in Germany was that their enemies were intent not just on her defeat but on her destruction, and that as a result she was justified in doing things that under less harrowing circumstances would not have been thinkable. The seizure of the Dutch and Belgian roads and railways became not only desirable but imperative. It was felt that nothing less could save Germany and anything else would increase Germany's peril.

One of the objectives of the Schlieffen Plan was to lure the French to attack on the Rhine while the German armies on the right were sweeping around to accomplish encirclement. However, General von Moltke, fearing that a French invasion in Lorraine might cut his communications and that the railways could not support the full attack on his right side, strengthened his center. Furthermore, the rapid advance of the German armies beyond their railheads led to confusion and loss of contact which no staff planning had foreseen. An unexpected early Russian offensive caused von Moltke to draw divisions from the West for use against the Russians. The German invasion was halted at the battle of the River Marne in September 1914, and the invaders withdrew to Aisne to dig in for a long war.

Tactics on the Western Front were reduced to suicidal infantry assaults in formations which were theoretically skirmish order but which were sometimes so thick as to be almost the shoulder-to-shoulder lines of the eighteenth century, though without their drilled rigidity. The chief variations of these tactics included preliminary artillery barrages to achieve surprise, creeping barrages behind which infantry advanced, box barrages which isolated

sections of enemy trenches, and saturation barrages which concentrated the fire of all available arms on a small area to obliterate it. Some attempts were made to achieve tactical surprise and the desired breakthrough by the introduction of new weapons. The Germans used poison gas shells in Poland in 1915, but with little success. On April 22, 1915, they tore a great hole in the allied front at Ypres by the use of chlorine gas discharged from cylinders against French colonial troops. They failed, however, to take advantage of the breach and the Canadians quickly sealed it. Gas, although improved during the course of the war, failed to be a war-winning weapon because, surprise being lost, protective measures were introduced, and the prevailing winds being westerly, the Allies had an advantage for retaliation.

By 1915, German leaders were divided between "Westerners" and "Easterners." Falkenhayn, Chief of the General Staff, was a "Westerner" who believed that German strength should continue to be concentrated primarily against Allies on the Western Front. He recognized Russia's material weaknesses, but he also believed that an extensive invasion of Russia would be a prolonged affair. He therefore favored a concentrated effort to knock France out of the war first. In contrast, Hindenburg and Ludendorff, the leading "Easterners" and in supreme command on the Eastern Front by 1915, favored an early concentration of effort against Russia to knock it out of the war before giving predominance to eliminating France. The Kaiser finally decided that forces should be transferred to the Eastern Front and that German armies in the East would be permitted to try to force Russia from the war by the end of the year. The reduced German forces in the West would launch only local offensives and stand mainly on the defensive. The German effort in the East was only partially successful. The Germans took Warsaw and nearly all of the rest of Poland not occupied during 1914. By October 1915, when the effort was called off, the battle line ran from just west of Dvinsk south through the Pripet Marches. Left with only limited forces in the West during 1915, Falkenhayn confined the German armies there to local offensives around Ypres. At sea, sixty-eight new German U-boats were added to the Kaiser's submarine fleet during 1915, against a loss of twenty-three, U-boats sank an impressive million tons of Allied shipping in the War Zone.

Falkenhayn's faith in victory over France was given full influence in February 1916, when the biggest German offensive of the war to that time was unleashed against the French lines around Verdun. Falkenhayn hoped for either a breakthrough or a battle of attrition that would hurt the French army more than the German. In the battle of Verdun, in 1916, artillery dominated the battlefield and the infantry's function was only to take or to hold ground cleared by shells. The ammunition required by the artillery for this kind of warfare was on a scale which no one previously had contemplated. Stopped by the French, Falkenhayn admitted his failure to the Kaiser in August, who appointed Hindenburg to succeed him as Chief of the General Staff and Ludendorff to serve as Hindenburg's deputy.

During 1916, German U-boats sank two million tons of Allied shipping and the German High Seas Fleet ventured into the North Sea. After the battle of Jutland, while the German navy scored more points against the British, they went back to port, where they remained. It was clear to the Germans that a victory at sea would have to be accomplished by the submarine.

Though both the airship and the airplane began their careers in World War I as observation and scouting craft, they made the transition to weapons-platforms in a remarkably short time. In January 1915 German zeppelins based in Belgium began a strategic bombing campaign against the British Isles and especially against London. The typical airship could carry 5,000 lbs. of bombs, but accuracy of bombing was poor and the craft was vulnerable to bad weather. In the span of two and a half years, zeppelins made 208 sorties against England, dropped 196 tons of bombs, killed 557 Britons and injured 1,360 more. Eighty

zeppelins and 1,600 crewmen were lost in these raids. In June 1917, twin-engine Gotha and Giant airplanes took over the strategic air war. Each airplane was capable of carrying 1,000 lbs. of bombs, and by November 1918 seventy-three tons of bombs had been dropped on England. The main effort of the German strategic bombing was to lower civilian morale, already weakened by food shortages and the horrendous casualties suffered by the British armies on the Western Front.

The German tactics at the beginning of 1917 was little altered from the way it was at the beginning of 1915. The trench lines had divided Europe into two armed camps. The hopes of the German General Staff had been long dashed. In the east the course of the trench line moved 300 miles and its southern shoulder now rested on the Black Sea instead of the Carpathians. In the north it still touched the Baltic. There was a new entrenched front on Italy's border with Austria and on the Greek border with Bulgaria. In Caucasia a front of outposts and strong points sprawled between the Black Sea and northern Persia. In the Sinai an uneasy no man's land divided the British defenders of the Suez Canal from the Turkish garrison of Palestine. The situation showed little change from 1915. In France there was no change whatsoever. The trench lines were now thickened by extensive digging, wiring and excavation. The Germans had sought to secure trenches against assaults by the embellishment of their positions. By 1917, the system was usually three belts deep and reinforced by concrete pillboxes.

The arrival of the Americans in 1917 had no immediate effect of the situation. By the end of the year the Germans were overstretched as they had been throughout 1915 and 1916 by the need to prop up their Austrian allies, by the losses incurred at Verdun and on the Somme, and by the unanticipated recovery of the Russians in 1916, had turned a corner. The political collapse of Russia had released from the Eastern Front fifty divisions on infantry which could be brought to the west to attempt a final, war-winning offensive. The German high command, which had for so long been compelled to sustain defensive strategy in the west, had given great thought and preparation to perfecting the offensive methods to be employed by the attack force. The German army had no tanks although a clumsy prototype was under development. Hindenburg and Ludendorff counted, in its absence, on a refinement of artillery and infantry tactics, practiced in the last stages of the Russian campaign. The infantry had been equipped with large numbers of stripped-down machine guns and had been trained to infiltrate enemy positions and by-passing centers of resistance, rather than stopping to fight when held up directly to their front. Each attacking division, in addition, had been ordered to form specialized "storm" battalions of lightly equipped infantry which, with grenade and carbine, were to drive deep but narrow cavities through the crust of the enemy positions, breaking it into isolated sections to be overcome by following waves of conventional infantry at a slower pace. The emphasis of the German attack plan was on speed.

New methods of fighting were developed for German assault detachments and taught to other units. These new methods constituted a radical departure from the tactics of 1914. Columns and skirmish lines were done away with. Squads were treated like tactical entities in their own right, moving as individual units toward their predestinated objectives. The personal equipment of the men of the Assault Detachment was modified to meet the requirements of their new methods of fighting. The hobnailed heavy leather jackboots long associated with the German infantry was replaced by lace-up half-boots and puttees of the kind used by Austrian mountain troops. To facilitate crawling, the field uniform was reinforced with leather patches on the knees and elbows. The leather belt and shoulder harness that had supported the rifle ammunition pouches were discarded in favor of a pair of over-the-shoulder bags to carry hand grenades. The rifle was replaced with a Mauser carbine which was lighter and easier to handle.

In 1916, unlike the French and British generals, who sought to use their guns to create an opportunity to resume maneuver at the operational level, Erich von Falkenhayn, the German Chief of Staff, planned to use his artillery as a strategic weapon that would free him from the need to conduct war at the operational level. His guns and howitzers were to strike directly at what he saw as the weak point of the Anglo-French alliance, the unwillingness of conscripted Frenchmen to go on dying indefinitely for what Falkenhayn considered the interests of Great Britain. In order for this policy of attrition to work, Falkenhayn would need the cooperation of the French. He needed to find a place that the French would not give up easily, a magnet that would draw the French infantry within the range of the German guns. The place would have to have great military or symbolic value, preferably both. It would, moreover, have to be suitable to the employment of large amounts of artillery. The best location that Falkenhayn could find for his battle of attrition was the fortress of Verdun.

The artillery part that Falkenhayn concentrated at Verdun was unmatched by any in the history of the German Army up to that point. In a horseshoe around Verdun, the Germans packed 1612 artillery pieces. The division of labor between the various indirect fire weapons was based on their particular characteristics. Trench mortars, light field guns, and light howitzers, because of their short range and their subordination to divisions, were generally detailed to fire on the first French trench. Heavy mortars were also assigned targets in the first line. The heavier howitzers were assigned targets in the second line. They were also joined by the heavier guns in counter-battery work and what the Germans called special missions, the shelling of villages, forts, roads, railroads, and the town of Verdun itself.

Nine infantry divisions were detailed for the operation at Verdun. In Falkenhayn's conception, the role of the infantry regiments of these divisions was to be subsidiary to that of the artillery. Their main job was to present a sufficiently credible threat so that the French would feed as many troops as possible into the killing zone. The attacks conducted by the German infantry at Verdun therefore were attacks with limited objectives, seizures of little pieces so that the French would try to recapture regardless of the cost in lives.

The German offensive at Verdun began on the morning of February 21. With the exception of a few pauses to allow patrols to ascertain the damage, the bombardment lasted all day. On the second day, the mission of the artillery changed from destruction to suppression. The hand grenade squads and stormtroops of the first wave often moved right up to the barrage, risking the occasional casualty from a short shell in order to be able to fully exploit the effects of the fire. On the third day of the battle, the German attacks began to acquire characteristics that were not in keeping with Falkenhayn's strategy. Forgetting that the goal of the attack was the killing of as many Frenchmen as possible while economizing on German lives, the commanding general of the 6<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division ordered his infantry regiments to attack the French positions in a woods known as the Herbois "without regard to casualties."

As the Germans pushed farther into the woods, they met stiffer resistance. With no trenches to provide certain boundaries between opposing forces and with the skeletons of trees hindering the observation of artillery liaison officers, the German infantry found itself relying more and more on its own resources the further it pushed into the woods. In this sort of fighting, the qualities fostered by the Assault Detachment, initiative on the part of individual soldiers and ferocity in close combat, were at a premium. The steady pressure of the German attacks at Verdun, the advance of a few hundred meters each day, made it increasingly difficult for the French to build proper trenches. The longer the battle continued, the more the French relied on a more or less ad hoc defense of forests, shell-torn fields, and the basements of ruined houses. Small groups of riflemen and machine gunners, while physically isolated from each other, created a zone wherein an attacker would be

faced by fire from all directions. In doing this, the French created a much stronger defense than they had at the beginning of the battle when their infantry defended carefully prepared positions. This informal "defense in depth" proved quite resistant to attacks by infantry battalions in skirmish lines, even if it was preceded by a wave of grenade-throwing storm troops.

In the larger scheme of things, Verdun must be counted as a German defeat. Although France might take two generations to recover culturally from the losses suffered at Verdun, its military recovery was almost immediate. The French and British Empires provided more than enough replacements for those lost at Verdun whereas the German soldiers that fell at Verdun could be replaced by the marginally fit, the very young, and slackers combed from previously exempted occupations. After Verdun, the German Army in the West returned to the defensive posture of 1915. A noteworthy innovation was the "assault group" technique.

The experience of the Assault Detachment during the early part of the battle of Verdun not only demonstrated the value of the tactics that it had developed but also underlined the inherent difficulty of the unit's double assignment. The answer was the conversion of *Jager* Battalions. The *Jager* Battalions had a natural pre-disposition toward stormtroop tactics. They had their home garrisons in the mountainous and wooded areas of Germany. The impetus for the formation of separate special units seems initially to have come from the view that the hand grenade was a specialist's weapon. A typical special unit consisted of a six-man hand grenade team in each platoon. These men, who were "courageous and expert hand grenade throwers," were given a distinctive badge top wear.

The stormtrooper became an almost romantic figure. Like the fighter pilot or the U-boat sailor he could raise himself above the seemingly purposeless suffering of the trenches to strike directly at the enemy. Some commanders formed stormtroop units on their own initiative as well as the enthusiasm with which many commanders executed the orders from higher echelons for form additional elite assault units. Guidelines for the new assault battalions and lower echelon elite assault units were available in the form of a short manual published on May 16, 1916. The instructions stated that an assault battalion would habitually support infantry attacks by attaching assault teams consisting of four to eight stormtroopers under the command of an NCO, to infantry regiments and battalions. The task of each assault team was to lead the infantry platoons and companies across "no man's land" and through the enemy wire, break into the enemy trench, roll it with hand grenades, and destroy bunkers and machine gun nests with "ball charges." The conditions that led to the formation of elite assault units were not unique to the Germans. Of all the countries allied against Germany, the Italians went the furthest to develop elite assault troops. While the enemies of Germany were often forced to discover for themselves the techniques of the German stormtroopers, Germany's allies benefited from more direct guidance.

German infantry tactics changed during World War I. One answer for the change may be in the fact that the German Army was a highly decentralized, mission-oriented organization that placed a great deal of trust in its officers. The German Army had entered World War I with the expectation that the conflict would be won at the operational level, which the fighting of battles was of secondary importance to the winning of campaigns. The failure of German operational art to defeat the Western Allies, led to the destruction of the faith of many influential German officers in the wisdom of concentrating their attention on the operational level.

In 1918, the German infantry could use stormtroop tactics to tear gaps in the enemy's defenses. Given a sufficient number of battalions, those gaps could be turned into gaping holes scores of kilometers wide. As long as the following formations depended on muscle

power for mobility those holes could not be turned into war-winning victories. The German army was not able to capitalize on the initial breaches. In the absence of suitable transport, the stormtrooper and his tactics remained Germany's desperate hope. As thousands of trench raids and attacks with limited objectives, as well as successful breaking through of heavily fortified positions at Caporetto and during the great offensives on 1918, proved, stormtroop tactics were an efficient way of releasing the German Army from being pined down in their trenches by the machine gun. No tactical system could solve the fundamental operational problem that the German Army faced in the west. The enemy's railroads and motor transport columns could always bring up more fresh troops. The means of dealing with this problem would have to wait until the next war. Beginning in 1939, the fully motorized and partially armored *Panzer* division gave the German Army the means to move troops toward, across, and around the battlefield faster than Germany's enemies could move troops behind it.

The years between the world wars saw the greatest effort to that time to control armaments and to discourage war through treaty. The approach varied in form all the way from the dictated armament clauses in the Treaty of Versailles with Germany to the voluntary renunciation of war as an instrument of national policy under the Paris Peace Pact of 1928. In June 1919 a German delegation was summoned to the Palace of Versailles outside Paris to sign a treaty of peace that saddled Germany with heavy war reparations. The treaty placed limitations on the German armed forces. The army was reduced to professional soldiers serving long-term enlistments. All German military service had to be voluntary, and neither an army reserve nor any paramilitary organizations were permitted. The army was denied tanks, poison gas, heavy artillery, and air forces. It was not supposed to have any form of traditional General Staff. The German navy was limited to 15,000 sailors, six old pre-dreadnought battleships, six light cruisers, twelve destroyers, and twelve torpedo boats. The remainder of the Germany Navy was to be divided among the Allies.

The primary concern of German military planners in the interwar years was to limit war in order to make it, once again, a purposeful and instrumental use of force on the basis of elite control of strategy. The planners labored under a particularly restrictive set of conditions. Germany was disarmed and much weaker than any of its potential enemies. At the same time, the planners insisted that they alone were capable of organizing national defense and ensuring Germany security, a prerequisite for restoring Germany's status in Europe. The officer corps and the civilian leadership of the Weimer Republic were convinced that military force was necessary, even vital for the survival of the nation. It was up to the general staff to rebuild the army. This effort was closely associated with Hans von Seeckt, Chief of the Army Command to 1926.

Seeckt sought to reestablish formal authority and discipline in a hierarchical military organization through expansion and modernization. Discipline and clear lines of command and control, subordination of the independent senior commanders, and skill-oriented training became the hallmark of Seeckt's tenure. At the same time, he revived theoretical and practical training in grand strategy and tactics for a large army. He generally favored modernization and mechanization, but subordinated these elements to a professional approach in the German military tradition. While much debate occurred between factions within the military, it was only after a series of very tense internal and political conflicts that the *Reichswehr* (National Defense Organization) began to pursue a radically different course of planning for present contingencies and future war. It was during this time that operational planning and strategic thinking made a quantum leap, first by embracing the possibilities of a people's war as well as mobile warfare with tanks and subsequently by developing notions of strategic deterrence. The new idea of a people's war was to be fulfilled

in by desperate means, in a desperate situation, which virtually extinguished the difference between civilians and soldiers and turned all people and all means into tools of war.

Military nostalgia replaced realistic efforts to come to grips with the postwar situation. The return to war as an exclusively military domain coincided with the breakup of domestic and international stability caused by the world economic crisis. While the international crisis opened up new possibilities for reordering national and international society, in Germany it strengthened the militant and authoritarian parts of society. These shaped the German response in favor of military revisionism. Military nostalgia was given an additional aggressive edge with the National Socialist rise to power. The marriage of convenience between the military and National Socialist leadership occurred, first, because Hitler promised to fulfill the military dream of a "large army." Most of the senior officers did not particularly like Hitler's populism or, for that matter, the self-confidence of the paramilitary SA leaders and the rowdy style of their rank and file, but Hitler guaranteed rearmament and the new government immediately began to fulfill this promise. Little more was required to convince officers that the new government was good for them and thus good for Germany.

There is some irony in the fact that Germany, denied armored fighting vehicles by the Treaty of Versailles, and without them until after 1933, should have developed the most advanced ideas in armored, motorized warfare of any army on the European continent by 1939. Actually, the Treaty of Versailles stimulated Germany's interest in mobile forces by denying it fixed fortifications on its western frontiers and a traditional mass army. General Hans von Seeckt encouraged experiments with infantry carried by motor trucks and using trucks to tow artillery. After his retirement, the Troop Office (General Staff) set up a special section in 1928 to study the theoretical possibilities in armored warfare. Major Heinz Guderian, formerly an officer of light infantry, became familiar with the ideas of Fuller and Liddell Hart through their books and articles, and in 1929 he hit upon his own conception of an armored or panzer division.

Essentially, Guderian's panzer division was an armored-mechanized-motorized task force, in which mobile infantry, artillery, engineers, and supply units were combined with a brigade of tanks in order to allow the tanks to fight with full effect. Guderian recognized that such a panzer division might serve to revive the traditional German doctrine of encirclement and annihilation, and thus lend decisiveness to ground warfare of the future. He also grasped the importance of radio for command and control of rapidly moving forces. In addition to the panzer divisions, the German army had two other types of all-motorized divisions by 1939. The four light divisions combined regiments of motorized infantry with a light tank battalion per division. Six motorized infantry divisions completed the German mass army of slightly more than a hundred divisions on the eve of World War II. The German infantry divisions, which made up the vast majority of the German divisions of all types, were not greatly different in organization and capacities from those of 1918. Although, with the close air support of the *Luftwaffe* (Germany air force), this combination of new and old style forces constituted the essence of the *Blitzkrieg* (Lightning War).

The first *Blitzkrieg* of World War II got underway about dawn on September 1, 1939. A German air assault on Polish airfields, heralding the ground attacks, was only partially carried out because fog kept part of the *Luftwaffe* grounded in the early hours of the campaign, but within three days some 2,000 German warplanes had destroyed most of the Polish air force of a thousand aircraft. German armored-motorized forces broke through the weak Polish frontier defenses at many points, spearheading the drives of Army Group North consisting of two armies and 23 divisions. Included was Army Group South, composed of three armies and 39 divisions. By September 9, when German motorized forces reached the defenses of Warsaw, battles of encirclement and annihilation were fast eliminating the

trapped enemy forces in western Poland. The speed with which a nation of 30 million people had been brought to its knees led newsmen to dub the German method "lightning war," although it was really an updated version of the battle of encirclement and annihilation doctrine dating back to the nineteenth century.

The Blitzkrieg advocates stressed mobility and speed over firepower, although in the form of the tank, the dive bomber, and high-velocity anti-tank or anti-aircraft gun it aimed for great firepower at decisive points. Blitzkrieg welcomed encounter battles. It employed concentrated air power offensively and defensively, to prepare the way for advancing armor. Like German doctrine at the end of World War I, Blitzkrieg stressed infiltration tactics and flanking movements for both infantry and armor. As in the classic pre-World War I German doctrine, the new doctrine sought single and double envelopments. Unlike the earlier doctrine, it aimed as much at the disorientation and dislocation of the enemy command system as it did at the annihilation of enemy forces. This was to be achieved by deep penetrations into rear areas of the enemy army. It was believed that if dislocation could be achieved, the battle of annihilation might be avoided, or at least easier.

While the Allies were establishing a blockade of Germany trade, Hitler also relied on economic warfare. Following the precedent of 1914-18, he proclaimed a submarine blockade of the British Isles and backed it by dropping a secret weapon, new magnetic mines, in shallow approaches to the ports. German aircraft sorties for this purpose were the approaches to those great aerial attacks on enemy territory which the prophets had long declared would herald a new war. In the first winter of the war, the Nazi aerial onslaught in the West was strictly limited to reconnaissance. Blitzkrieg was soon renewed with attacks on Denmark, Norway, Holland, Luxembourg, Belgium, and France in the spring of 1940. Denmark fell without a blow, Luxembourg in a day, Holland in five days, Belgium in less than three weeks, and France in six weeks.

The German victories in the West were won by the use of new tactics and weapons against armies which were inadequately prepared for war whose strategy and tactics were faulty. The Nazis used specially trained parachute troops to clear difficult obstacles, Stuka dive bombers to give close support, and tanks to probe, pierce, and fan out behind the Allied lines. They were superior in training, and they exploited surprise as a psychological weapon to give them an advantage in morale. The Nazis had originally planned to repeat the Schlieffen Plan, a thrust on the right. Instead, acting on a plan developed by General von Manstein which turned the Schlieffen Plan inside out, they thrust their armored columns through the Ardennes, which were regarded by the French as unsuitable tank country and were therefore only lightly defended. French tanks were dissipated along the whole front, and when the front was breached, the Allies possessed no mass of maneuver to throw against the German forces. The Allied air forces were unable to prevent the Luftwaffe from dominating the field of battle. Although the war had been limited thus far, there were ominous signs that it was moving into a new phase of intensity. Five of the victims in 1940 were neutral states which had vainly striven to keep out of the conflict but had been struck down without warning. Neutrality had been ignored because it stood in the way of the Germans. In the First World War, when neutrality had been infringed upon, it was only after formal warnings. Now it was breached in the night.

After the victories in the West, the Nazi leadership began to focus on a strategy of defeating Russia. According to the final directive for Operation Barbarossa, the planners hoped to defeat the Soviet army by the second stage of the campaign and thus render the nation defenseless, making further military progress only a matter of exploiting the defeat. The decisive stage of the advance was to defeat Soviet Russia in a quick campaign. This was to be achieved by large-scale pincer movements involving swift and deep thrusts to tear open

the front on the mass of the Russian army. The enemy groups separated by these penetrations will then be destroyed in cauldron battles that were to take place west of the rivers Dnjepr and Dvina. This was the main and only truly operational goal of the campaign, because it assumed that the decisive first blows would ensure the freedom of movement for further tasks.

The first stage of the campaign was a success beyond anyone's expectations. Everybody agreed that the war was virtually won, and so it was, at least in the eyes of almost all Germans and non-Germans. This assumption was more than reasonable if we consider the fact that the main forces of the Soviet Union were annihilated or captured in the first weeks and that Stalin's rule was thrown into disarray. However, it soon became obvious that the Soviet Union was not defeated. The freedom of movement that the German side expected to gain was never achieved. The Soviet leadership continued the war desperately and with tremendous brutality against its own people as well as against the German enemy. The Soviet Union would not surrender. At this point space and time truly begin to matter, not because there was a mud season with a winter to follow, but because every square mile had to be taken from a defiant enemy and held against the resistance of the occupied.

The German strategy in the East ran straight into Russian strategy that frustrated the German High Command and Hitler. German forces found their limits not in the industrial capacity of the Soviet Union, but in the ability of the Soviet leadership not only to keep factories going but also to send wave upon wave of recruits into battle. The German defeat in the East had many sources, and it is not enough to regard only the military ones. Others were the concept of hegemonic order that the Third Reich began to impose and the way in which the war was fought. It was a war of ruthless starvation and decimation of all "Slavic" peoples. The strategy of racist war permeated every aspect of the struggle in the East, strengthening the resolve of the Soviet people, making it possible to unite them under an all-Russian banner. In the West, the German Army could not replace the losses faster than the Allies streamed men and supplies on the European continent. Squeezed from all directions and depleted of men and material, Germany could no longer continue the war.

In conclusion, the German strategic and tactical revolution that eventuated in the blitzkrieg techniques used World War II began with that nation's experience in the First World War. The Imperial army's operational designs unraveled at the Marne and again at Verdun. Goals of mass war began to shape the options in 1916. Shocked and bewildered by the horror of the trench warfare that prevailed all along the western front, each participant sought for a solution to the deadlock. The Allied solution was basically a technological one, the tank. The German solution was a doctrinal one, infiltration tactics. As the Germanys army developed the revolutionary tactics they used in World War II, they drew on these two solutions and integrated them. Tank warfare and infiltration tactics were only part of the encompassing process in which the unified approach to German strategy developed in two directions, the effective use of new technologies and weapons and the mobilization of society for war. When the capabilities of the two were fused into a single effort between 1938 and 1941, they propelled Germany into World War II.

The evolution of German military strategy and tactics from 1914 to 1945 was not formulated by the military alone. It was first of all the German intellectuals who expressed this fateful strategic choice for Germany in the twentieth century. Germany, they argued, could only survive if it controlled its own destiny. German sovereignty and social and cultural integrity depended on expansion. The marriage of convenience between the military and National Socialist leadership created a doctrine different from that of 1914 that transformed military strategy and tactics and, by 1945, permeated every segment of German society.

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