

Blitzkrieg

by

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The blitz way of making war is not new. It means the employment of forces with suddenness and speed so directed as to destroy the enemy's will and ability to fight. It was used in one form or another in the campaigns of the ancients and in the wars of the Middle Ages. Forrest, of Confederate Cavalry fame, demonstrated its effectiveness at Brice's Cross Roads, Miss., in 1864, and Sherman, in his march to the sea, gave the South a touch of it and labeled it by its true name—hell.

However, the Germans really initiated and developed the technique for this type of warfare in 1866 when Prussia defeated Austria in six weeks, and later in the war of 1870-71 when France was crushed in a six months' campaign. And in 1914, the blitz strategy was again attempted in the smash through Belgium, which all but succeeded.

In September 1939 a new version was designed for the Polish campaign, and from that proving ground came the 1940 models used against Norway, the Low Countries, and France. And, in this springtime, across the mountains of Yugoslavia and Greece, again has come the thunder and lightning of the streamlined model.

Modern blitz technique, however, presupposes war in certain theaters of operation for which definite preparation has been made well in advance. The first step is attained by propaganda, peaceful penetration, and fifth-column activities. But, in the case of Yugoslavia and Greece, these methods failed, so the Germans employed the blitz technique, remodeled to meet the mountainous character of these regions.

Although this presented a more difficult terrain than that encountered in the German campaigns of 1940, it did not stop the Nazi legions. Once reconnaissance has shown the sector of the defense position best suited for the attack, the bombers go to work in the first phase (Plate I). In the opening of the battle, they tackle the enemy targets that are most dangerous to the infantry. That means the pill-boxes and strong points of the position itself, reserve troop locations, villages and terrain sites where they may be screened; railroads, roads, and bridges

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over which supplies and troops may reach the front line, and communication and command centers. The bombing attack is supplemented, or soon followed, by fire from the heavy artillery on targets selected by the artillery air observers and radioed to the gunners.

During the first phase, the troops assigned are shoved up to a position-in-readiness for the attack (Plate II). At the signal for the forward, the aviation and artillery barrages lift from the front target to join in pounding enemy activities to the rear, while the heavy tanks (70 tons) plunge at the line, followed by the lighter vehicles and the engineers with demolition material. It is about this time that the parachute troops, if used, are dropped to hold or destroy some key point.

After the enemy position is penetrated (Plate III), the mechanized units push on to centers of resistance and pill-boxes behind the first line and to zones occupied by enemy reserves. Into the gap created are now thrown the motorized infantry or troops brought up in trucks to fight on foot, and field artillery. These join in the local attacks against positions still held by the enemy. And, in the mountains of Greece, specialized infantry troops were pushed in with, and at times ahead of, the tanks.

When the penetration has been won, the motorized infantrymen climb into their trucks again and move forward to hold key points gained by the mechanized units. Now, the slow-moving foot troops and horse artillery come up for the break-through (Plate IV)—the exploitation of the position and the job of holding and consolidating the ground gains. And so the blitz moves on.

Lightning warfare suggests initiative and the spirit of the offensive; it carries with it the element of surprise, not so much in the happening as in the speed and force with which the attack is launched and delivered. It is not founded on new weapons but on the coordinated team employment of available weapons. It envisages all-out war, and is the antithesis of stabilized warfare. It is the very embodiment of the two fundamentals of attack—fire and movement.

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