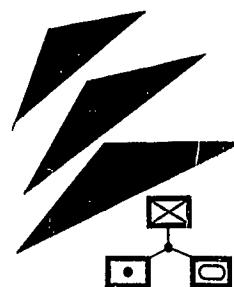


In a future war dominating areas is going to count more than capturing or maintaining positions. We should not talk about fighting the “main battle” on some river line.

The “main battle” concept is out-of-date. We want to develop a new principle of offensive fluidity of force — to operate like a swarm of bees, not a battering ram.



NEW WARFARE- NEW TACTICS

By Capt B. H. Liddell Hart

☛ WHEN THE NORTH ATLANTIC Treaty Organization and the Supreme Headquarters, Allied Powers Europe were originally established in 1950-51, the prevailing idea was that the planned buildup of the Western land forces and their tactical air forces would provide an adequate defense against a Russian invasion without recourse to nuclear weapons. But that idea has gradually faded, and it is now commonly assumed that no effective defense can be possible without using such weapons. The heads of SHAPE declared last year that “we have reached the point of no return as regards the use of atomic and thermonuclear weapons in a hot war” — and explained this conclusion by saying: “We cannot match the strength that could be brought against us unless we use nuclear weapons.”

This conclusion, and consequent action, entail a greatly increased risk that civilization would be de-

stroyed in the effort to defend it. It is, therefore, worth going deeper into the question of the possibilities of effective defense without using such suicidal weapons.

Examination of German experience in 1944-45 is far more encouraging for the members of NATO than is apparent from the surface of events—and all the more so because the ground and air odds against the Germans at that time were much worse than the NATO forces now face. These have a better chance of successful resistance than is recognized—if the tactics of mobile defense, by delaying action combined with riposte, are properly understood and applied.

In analyzing the Normandy operations of 1944, and the forces on either side, one finds that Allied attacks rarely succeeded unless the attacking troops had a superiority in strength of *more than 5 to 1*, accompanied by domination of the air —

which at least doubles the value of attacking ground forces and, in some staff calculations, has been reckoned as trebling it.

On the British front the most striking case of all was “Operation Bluecoat” — the attempted break-out southward from Caumont on 30 July. Here the stroke was so well conceived, and the westward switch from the Caen sector so well organized, that it succeeded in concentrating and launching two specially strong army corps against a 10-mile sector held by only two weak German infantry regiments. The attackers’ superiority in fighting units was nearly *10 to 1*, and in number of troops was more than that. Being backed by air supremacy, the real measure of our advantage must be reckoned as at least 20 to 1, and may well be reckoned as 30 to 1. Moreover, a total of well over 1,000 tanks were concentrated, in this case, on a sector where there were no German

tanks in the earlier phase of the battle. Yet the massive blow failed to overcome the thin defense except on the western part of the sector, and even there it was checked on the third day when meager tank reinforcements began to arrive on the German side. And it suffered continuous checks during the days that followed.

What is the meaning of such a sequel to a very ably planned attack? There are only 2 apparent explanations: (1) that defense in itself had a much greater superiority over attack than was ever realized; or (2) that the attacking troops' combat performance was inferior to that of the defenders. The alternative explanations need to be examined, and the operations investigated more deeply than has yet been done.

The course of the Allied campaigns from Alamein onwards has had a misleading influence on the common run of thought by being an unbroken "advance to victory," punctuated only by halts and checks (except for the temporary reverse in the Ardennes, December 1944). It has fostered a double illusion in superficial minds: that attack proved superior to defense in World War II; and that the Allied troops were superior to the German.

The Ratio of Forces

If the attacking side requires even a shade of superior strength to overcome the defender — a mere 11 to 10 — such a requirement really shows that, materially, defense is superior to attack.

This simple issue, and test, has been confused by cases where an attacker inferior in strength has (a) met a defender much weaker in morale; or (b) had space for maneuver, and the skill to exploit it. Military thought, in treating the question of attack and defense, has not yet learned to discriminate clearly between offensive maneuver and direct attack.

The Imperial General Staff, however, showed a notable growth of realism when, after 4 years' war experience, they issued a new "Umpiring" manual for use in training which laid down that, to succeed in an attack, a 3 to 1 superiority of strength was normally required. This calculation corresponded to the ratio deduced from the experience of

World War I and set forth in the British Official History, and also that which the German General Staff had taken as a working guide between the wars. The question remains whether a 3 to 1 ratio fully represents the basic superiority of defense over attack in the light of World War II experience.

The Normandy operations have all the more lesson-value because, here, the front allowed little room for maneuver until after the breakthrough. They were, thus, an unusually clear test of the relative strength of attack and defense. Their results show the attack's need for a superiority much higher than 3 to 1. But *how much* higher is a more difficult matter to determine. For here the attacking capacity of the attacking troops is brought into question, and we have to examine the alternative explanation of our repeated inability in Normandy to overthrow the enemy decisively even when we had a ground-and-air superiority of 10 to 1 and upwards.

Combat Performance

In deepening study of the operations it is disturbing to find how poor was the performance of the attacking forces in many cases. Time after time they were checked or even induced to withdraw by boldly handled packets of Germans of greatly inferior strength. But for our air superiority, which hampered the Germans at every turn, the results would have been worse. The attacking forces seem to have had too little initiative in infiltration, and also too little determination — with certain exceptions. Repeatedly, big opportunities were forfeited because crucial attacks were stopped after suffering trifling casualties. That was particularly marked with the armored formations. Moreover, it is all too often evident that a "divisional" attack was in fact merely carried out by a tiny fraction of the available strength, and that the real burden was borne by a few squadrons or battalions. Backing up was poor and slow.

Contrary to the experience of past wars, the deficiency seems to have been more on the lower levels of command than on the higher. Montgomery and Dempsey came out of such an examination remarkably well. The corps and divisional

commanders do not come out of it badly on the whole, with certain exceptions, although it is evident that they were slow in their reactions as compared with their opponents. The main weakness seems to have been on the brigade and regimental levels.

What were the causes? Among those suggested in discussion on the subject, are:

(a) General war-weariness.

(b) The prevalent feeling that the end of the war was near, and thus a naturally increased reluctance to getting killed needlessly. (The Germans had more reason to fight desperately.)

(c) The immense Allied resources in mechanical weapon-power, inducing a tendency to "let the machine win the battle" as it was sure to do in the end — rather than take risks. (The Germans being short of such resources, had to depend far more on their own efforts.)

(d) The fact that a large proportion of the most vigorous commanding officers, and potential ones, had become casualties earlier. (But in this respect the Germans had suffered a still heavier drain.)

(e) A decline in the quality of NCOs, through the wholesale promotion to officers of those who showed power of leadership. (The German Army was more careful to maintain NCO quality.)

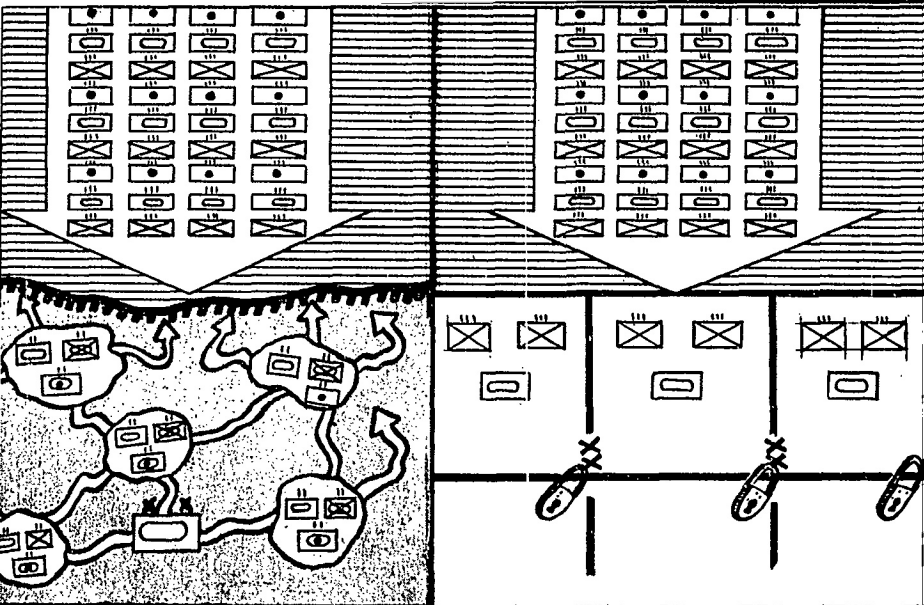
(f) A failure of the training system to develop bold and resourceful leadership.

(g) The ill effects of side-tracking, before or early in the war, of the ardent and experienced tank leaders who had shown most grasp of armored mobility — and who were best qualified to bring up a new generation in the faster operational tempo required.

(h) A national decline in boldness and initiative — from decreasing vitality or increasing domestication.

(i) A growing reluctance to make sacrifices in attack as compared with defense — this is a general tendency in people as they become more civilized. (German reports, while often remarking the failure of the British troops to exploit gaps, emphasize their continued stubbornness in defense and the difficulty of shifting them once they had dug in.)

It is vitally important for future



Eastern Front 1944-45: examples of the employment of a flexible chain of small groups compared to direct support of delimited infantry formations

guidance to establish the causes, and gauge their relative importance. That will not be easy. But the essential first step towards their investigation is to get out of the rut of complacency produced by the finally victorious course of the war. Armies have always suffered worse in the long run from victory than from defeat—for victory lulls them to sleep, instead of spurring them to pursue new ways of progress.

Ten years have passed since the war ended, yet the significance of the comparative odds in Normandy, in relation to the results, has never been adequately brought out in any official report, history, or training manual. There has been too much glorification of the campaign and too little objective investigation. The detailed accounts of the campaign hitherto produced have been "missing the wood for the trees."

In the light of the basic data already brought out, it is evident that the resistance capacity of an efficient and determined defense has been underestimated, and is potentially greater than has yet been recognized in staff studies or military doctrine. So there is much value to be gained from a closer study of the defense mechanism in the 1944-45 battles, and of the technique which the Germans applied.

Defense Technique

The German defensive tactics in Normandy, and later, were a blend of static defense with dynamic defense by dispersed battle-groups—making sharp "finger-thrusts." These repeatedly checked the Allied col-

umns and brought them gradually to a halt, not usually on any pre-chosen line. (We still talk about fighting the "main battle" on some river line. The "main battle," it seems to me, is an out-of-date concept.) By contrast with the effect of the multiple finger-thrusts, the German attempts at concentrated counterattack failed repeatedly, and almost invariably, under Allied air and artillery action.

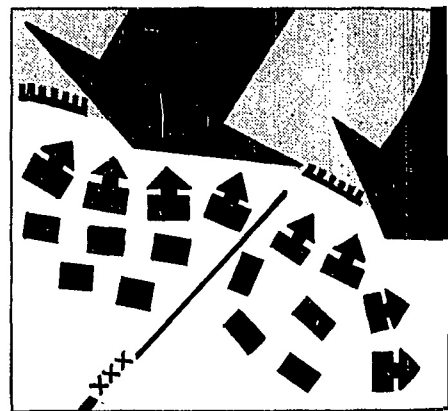
On the Eastern Front, the Russian attacks had still higher ground odds, though less air strength. There, again, the attacks were repeatedly held up unless they had ample space for outflanking the defense. Another point which emerges is that the German defense was most effective whenever it could throw the Russians out of their stride—and least effective whenever the Russians were able to mount a *deliberate* attack, particularly an attack on a river line. One finds, too, that a Panzer division, even a weak Panzer division, often successfully covered a 20-mile front against heavy odds for weeks on end, giving remarkably little ground.

Such analysis suggests that prolonged resistance can be produced, even with the present numbers in the North Atlantic Forces, provided new tactics and tactical organization are developed. What should be the pattern?

In 1940 the West was overrun, and the course of history changed by the German armored forces applying a new blitzkrieg technique of swiftly maneuvering concentration, exploit-

ed by deep strategic penetration. Guderian, the creator and leader of these "Panzer troops," has generously stated in his memoirs that their organization and technique were inspired by my theories and writings of the 1920s. But in the 1930s I came to see how this revolutionary technique could be countered by a new defensive one. Unfortunately, it proved difficult to induce the French and British General Staffs, either to recognize the power of the new offensive technique or, to develop the countertechnique.

Brilliant as was the performance of the German Panzer forces in 1940, and tremendous as were its results, they were only made possible by the Allies' incompetence and their weakness in the air. In particular, the *concentrated* action of armored divisions was *potentially* out of date by



Piecemeal distribution is different from.

the time it was so successfully put into practice. It is now definitely out-of-date. There is fatal folly in dreaming that armored divisions can operate in mass and deliver concentrated punches under an enemy-dominated sky or in face of atomic weapons.

Fluidity of Force

We need to grasp the principle of "fluidity of force" in contrast to the old and obvious interpretation of "concentration"—and to develop a new technique of *controlled dispersion*. The embryo was contained in German practice during the later years of the war. Indeed, it had been conceived in Britain before the war and practiced by the pioneer tank brigade under Hobart in the trial exercises of 1934.

On the Russian front in 1944-45

the Germans often achieved an amazingly prolonged resistance, against much superior numbers, with armored divisions that were flexibly spread in small combat groups on a wide frontage—20 miles or more per division. The composition of such groups was usually a battalion of tanks, a battalion of mechanized infantry and an equivalent artillery unit of self-propelled guns. The units were nearly always below strength.

On the Western Front, too, remarkable delaying and defensive power was produced by similar groups, which in many cases, were even smaller. Often they were composed of a tank company, a mechanized infantry company and a battery or two. The tiny scale of such groups was dictated not only by the scanty strength available to cover

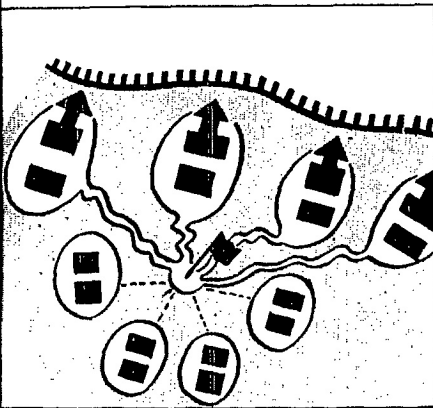
be brought together, to make a concentrated punch, if opportunity arises and conditions in the air permit.

Controlled dispersion is basically different from distribution piecemeal. Little groups thus directed can have multiple effect while not offering concentrated targets to the air. A swarm of bees do not concentrate—they attack you from all directions simultaneously. That is “multiple effect”—and should be our guiding idea in applying tactics of controlled dispersion. That kind of multiple envelopment was seen even in Napoleon’s campaigns. It was only in his later years that he concentrated before a battle. Earlier he used to keep his numerous small columns coming in from all directions, and they hit the enemy from all directions, each reacting on the other.

The aim of the new tactics must be to *paralyze* the enemy’s action. The slogan of “destroying him” in battle leads to self-exposure, self-pinning and the risk of being smashed. Dominating areas is going to count more than capturing or maintaining positions. We want a new principle of “offensive fluidity of force”—to operate like the sea or a swarm of bees, not like a battering ram. Even in 1940 the decisiveness of the Panzer thrusts of Guderian lay in producing paralysis after

penetration, not in producing destruction of the enemy’s forces in battle. It really eliminated battle. In Africa, Rommel applied such new methods offensively and defensively.

More consideration, too, should be given to what I would call “preparatory tactics and strategy.” One lesson of the war that emerges clearly is the Russians’ susceptibility to the unexpected and to penetrating ripostes. In developing this potential advantage, we have a basic advantage in the fact of being on the spot before any invasion comes, and occupying the ground over which it would advance. That enables us to reconnoiter routes beforehand for counterthrusts so that they can be made almost entirely across country. We can also go farther than reconnoiter routes. We can prepare those routes, having thought out our moves. We can clear gaps in obstacles so as to make cross-country movement more possible. We can place supplies beforehand in concealed dumps so that the counter-attack forces can move with a minimum of transport. The defender, too, has a potential advantage over the attacker in way of preparation for moving across rivers without being “canalized” by the usual bridge limitations. Counter-maneuver, properly thought out, has numerous advantages over an invader. USMC

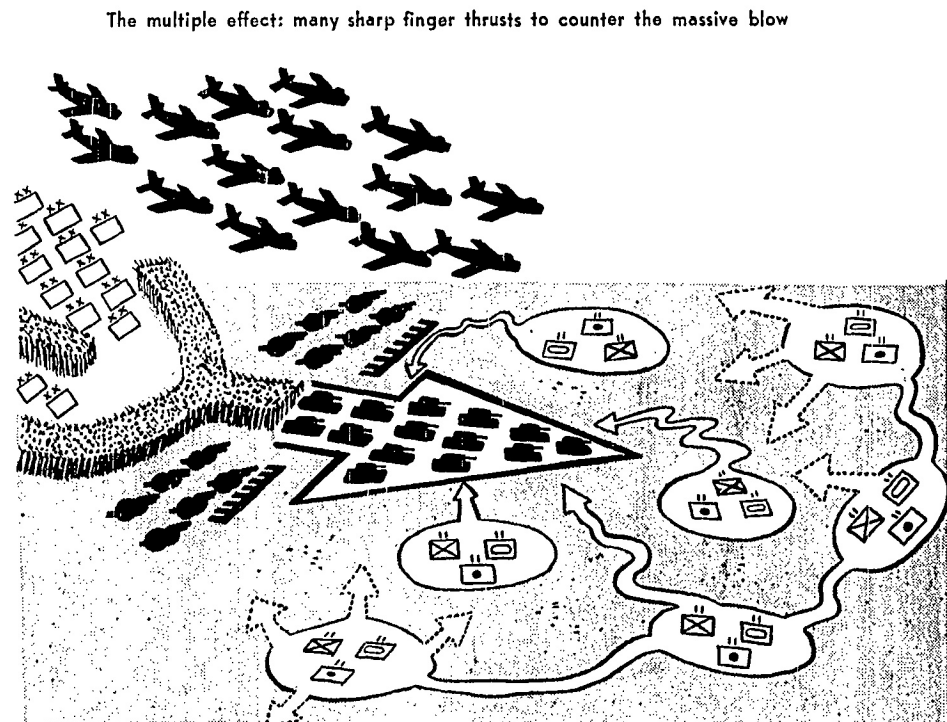


Controlled dispersion, or fluidity of force

the large front but by the better chance they had of evading the ubiquitous and overwhelmingly strong Allied air forces—and by their greater ability to penetrate between the Allied columns and deliver a quick counterthrust at the most effective moment.

To distribute an armored division in such a flexible chain of small groups, each of them completely mobile, is essentially different from distributing armor piecemeal to support ordinary infantry—and free from the drawbacks of that practice.

The present overlarge division would become a more “operable” hand if divided into 4 or 5 major combat groups subdivided into a similar number of “fingers,” or minor combat groups, capable of operating separately and practiced in doing so. They could at any moment



The multiple effect: many sharp finger thrusts to counter the massive blow