

Press Association

GROUND FORCE MOBILITY

by BRIGADIER GENERAL PAUL M. ROBINETT

Modern warfare is mobile warfare. The nation that acts on the lessons of history will field forces predestined for victory

IN a military sense mobility implies more than just mobility in equipment and in organization. It is also a state of mind. If it does not exist in the minds of responsible high level civilian and military leaders, mobility is impossible on the battlefield even though equipment and the organization of forces make it possible. The lack of mobility in mind will result in rigid, shortsighted plans and in sloth-like operations which will tend to degenerate into static situations. On the

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other hand, mobile-minded leadership, lacking mobile weapons and organization and adequate logistical preparation for the execution of operations, can only develop unsound projects which will ultimately lead to disaster. So it is that static or defensive warfare is the refuge of mediocre civilian and military leaders and mobile warfare the pitfall of the incautious. These two possibilities are the scarlet threads that run through all of recorded military history.

The story of war is the record of an unending contest between the proponents of static and mobile concepts. Napoleon, for example, came upon the scene at a time when the armies of Europe had fallen into a fixed pattern and military operations were conducted in a sluggish, geomet-

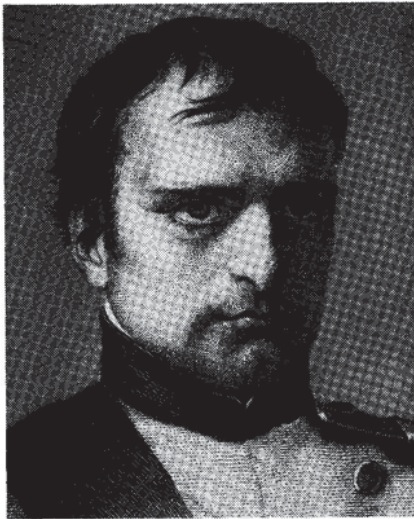
ric manner. It was the end of the period of mercenaries. He adopted a revolutionary practice by developing military organization in an army of the masses which was capable of moving with great rapidity, of living off the country, and of striking with great violence at a decisive place and time. Napoleon was a genius of maneuver and, for a time, of logistics. In the end, however, he brought about his own ruin in pursuit of the elusive Russian Army beyond the limits of his mobility and in disregard of logistical considerations.

Another great disciple of mobility was Hitler. Taking advantage of the industrial potential of his country, of the military decadence of his neighbors, and of the disarmed status of Germany, he developed military or-

ganization and equipment of great mobility and offensive striking power. Consequently, by 1939 all opposing ground forces were obsolete and ripe for destruction. But the Fuehrer was an impatient man and launched a series of lightning wars before his machine was fully built. He won some of the greatest victories of all time but to no avail. His obsession for mobility and his lack of comprehension of logistical considerations led him into the limitless depths of the Soviet Union without having taken the precaution of preparing for a winter campaign; led him beyond the capabilities of his mobile forces, and ultimately to his doom. Hitler entered upon this venture with less than 3,500 Mark II, III, and IV tanks while, Guderian estimates, the Soviets had 17,000 tanks in 1937 and had increased the number by the time the campaign opened on 22 June 1941. But the great surprise to the Germans was the appearance of the superior Soviet T-34 tank near the limit of their penetration.

Interesting examples of offensive mobile-minded high commands, lacking the means for mobile operations or the ability to concentrate those available, were those of France and of Germany at the beginning of World War I. The high commands of both nations had decided upon the offensive and each of them attempted to launch a great attack at the outbreak of hostilities. The French forces were quickly thrown back and were fighting for existence in a series of retrograde actions. On the other hand, the German high command, although tactically successful, lacked energy and weakened the enveloping forces by detaching elements to the east and by failing to mass the cavalry on the exposed right flank. It soon lost the ability to continue the offensive and was forced back upon the defensive. It had hoped that by repeated limited objective attacks it could hold the initiative and eventually wear down and destroy the Allies in the west. But it failed completely when the weight of the United States Army tipped the scales against Germany. Genius was lacking on both sides during the prewar planning and organization of forces and in the actual employment of existing mobile forces in the conduct of operations.

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Napoleon

The possibilities of mobile warfare were not fully tested in World War II because of a lack of imagination in the preparation of plans and in the organization of forces. The chiefs of the various military establishments and their principal staff subordinates were of traditionally conservative mold—some more than others. In Great Britain, France, and the United States the idea of mobile warfare was not welcome. There were some advances in mobility but its advocates, particularly in Great Britain and France, had no official part in the preparation of either plans or forces. Many advocates of mobility, notably Fuller, Liddell Hart, and De Gaulle, were to have more influence in the enemy camp than in their own lands. In Germany, Guderian's ideas of mobility were no better received in the General Staff. On gaining control in 1933, Hitler quickly adopted



Captured German Photo
Hitler

the idea of mechanized warfare, but his administrative organization was inefficient. Finally, he was lured into precipitate action by the prospects of quick and sure tactical successes but with the Panzer command still in an incomplete state and its destructive operational possibilities imperfectly understood. Although improvements were made and Panzer corps and armies were created, the German armored force was never as fully developed as mobile-minded commanders, such as Guderian, planned, but remained a makeshift substitute to the end. It was so because Hitler made twenty-five Panzer divisions out of ten without increasing his tank strength proportionately. Neither did German invention and production ever match Hitler's requirements, which were far greater than he envisaged. Thus he won only tactical successes and eventually suffered an annihilating defeat. The mobile-minded Fuehrer came to his tragic end still commanding imaginary mobile forces, which in reality existed only on paper.

In the United States mobile-minded men were denied responsible posts in the War Department. They had no part whatsoever in planning the World War II Army or in formulating strategic plans for the employment of the Army. German blitz successes in Poland were rather lightly regarded, but the fall of France, under the crushing blows of Kleist's and Guderian's Panzer forces, made a profound impression. However, the basic reasons for the German victory in the west were not well understood. It resulted from a strategical surprise, from the speed and violence of the attack by massed and coordinated Luftwaffe and Panzer forces on a narrow front at the point of main effort, from the speedy exploitation of the breakthrough, and from the relentless pursuit of the broken Anglo-French armies.

Following the German successes in Western Europe, the Armored Force, with almost autonomous authority, was quickly created by the War Department on 10 July 1940 and General Chaffee, a long-time advocate of mobile warfare, placed at the head. He had the vision so lacking in the War Department, but death intervened and his grand idea was soon blighted by less imaginative minds. The crisis in Europe having amelio-



Martel

British Official

rated, the traditionalists in the War Department reverted to form. Effort and means that should have gone into the creation of an offensive mobile force of armored corps and armies were squandered in developing inefficient antitank organizations and equipment. Some of the latter, as for example a 37mm gun mounted in the tail end of a light truck and a 75mm gun mounted in the front end of a halftrack, although probably adopted only as stopgap equipment, were retained too long and proved useless and sometimes even tragic to the little band which fought the meeting engagement with German troops in Africa. Yet it cost many millions of dollars and, most unfortunately, represented the squandering of military personnel, of strategic materials, and of labor on defensive organizations. This violation of the principle of economy of force and of means, together with others, could have been responsible for our defeat had the balance been more closely drawn than it was.

Finally, when Germany culminated a blitz through the Balkans by seizing Crete with airborne troops, the War Department, not knowing the exorbitant cost of the apparent victory in blood and matériel, created an excessively large airborne force—the most costly and the least mobile form of ground troops. But worse still, these units were allowed to recruit the adventurous, dynamic, mobile-minded personnel from the Army. This tended to reduce the quality of the infantry, armor, and artillery personnel because the Air Forces got first choice.

In the European Theater the lack of mobile mindedness in the War Department was equally apparent in Allied Force Headquarters and in 12th Army Group Headquarters. All of the principal commanders and staff officers assigned to these two important headquarters were soundly based in traditional broad front operations by infantry. The concepts of battle and of logistical support originating in these headquarters displayed a uniform lack of imagination in concepts of mobility. A mobile-minded subordinate, General Patton, frequently achieved limited successes by circumventing his superiors, but he was not even able to destroy the German Fifteenth Army which extricated itself from France, established a defensive position, and inflicted very



De Gaulle

heavy casualties before being driven out.

General Chaffee had envisaged a mobile force including armored corps and armored armies. But before the battle was joined the armored corps was abandoned and all ideas of armored armies discarded in favor of a more even distribution of mobile troops throughout the field forces. For example, during operations in Europe a typical American corps included one armored and two infantry divisions and, in time, each infantry division included one or more separate tank battalions. Such an allotment of armored elements did not materially increase the mobility of infantry divisions or corps. But, on the contrary, it precluded the creation of efficient armored corps and armies

capable of cross-country mobility in all their parts. This inevitably led to operations on a broad front with lack of armor concentration at points of main effort. Consequently, the Anglo-American campaign in the West was a conventional operation in which superior numbers of men and equipment overcame a failing enemy, hopelessly thrown back everywhere upon the defensive. The possibility existed for a classical and speedy victory of enormous proportions. But this would have required the concentration of a highly mobile armored army on the right flank, backed with adequate logistical support both on the ground and from the air. The actual performance of General Patton's Third Army on the right flank during its drive across France furnished only a hint of what might have been accomplished by an adequately supported armored army on that flank. General Patton was mobile-minded but his army was only a typical American army, not an armored army, and lacked the necessary logistical support from the air and on the ground. This support could have been furnished had higher staffs been mobile-minded in sufficient time to prepare the means. Little could be done by improvisation.

A contributing factor to the mediocrity of the Anglo-American victory in Western Europe during World War II, one which clearly indicated the lack of mobile mindedness, was the multiplicity of overstuffed headquarters in the chain of command and the excessive control exercised by these headquarters. From the divi-



Liddell Hart

U.S. Army



Fuller

British Official

sions and corps, the chain extended back through army, army group, and Allied Force to the Combined Chiefs of Staff and the Chiefs of State—Churchill and Roosevelt. This, however, does not reveal the real situation: because various headquarters had deputy commanders the practical effect was to still further lengthen the chain of command. Oversuffed staffs tended to slow down decisions, to retard the flow of information, and to delay the transmission of orders. Illustrative of overstaffing was General Eisenhower's headquarters which included more than 16,000 officers and enlisted men during operations and more than 30,000 by the time the occupation of Germany was under way. The troops serving under such command arrangements were not even capable of the mobility inherent in their equipment and organization. Sloth-like operations and a tendency to fall back upon the defensive inevitably resulted and were generally overcome by the initiative and resolution of troop leaders near the front.

American planners would do well to turn to history for a few basic principles concerning staffs rather than blindly accept the World War II pattern. Von Steuben was a capable general staff officer. He sums up his experience as follows: "My observation is where one person is found adequate to the discharge of a duty by close application, it is worse executed by two and scarcely done at all by three." Still later, General William T. Sherman, the outstanding Army commander of the Civil War, severely criticised large staffs in these

words: "A bulky staff implies a division of responsibility, slowness of action, and indecision, whereas a small staff implies activity and concentration of purpose." The severest criticism of an overlengthened chain of command has been made by the profound student of war, Clausewitz, who has said: ". . . an order loses in rapidity, force, and exactness if the graduation ladder down which it has to descend is long. . . ." Even if allowance was made for the simplicity of warfare during the days of Von Steuben and Sherman, little justification can be found for the excessively large staffs during World War II. Their conclusions still apply. Something must be done to prevent the staffs from degenerating into intellectual boondoggling. There are de-



Chaffee

U.S. Army

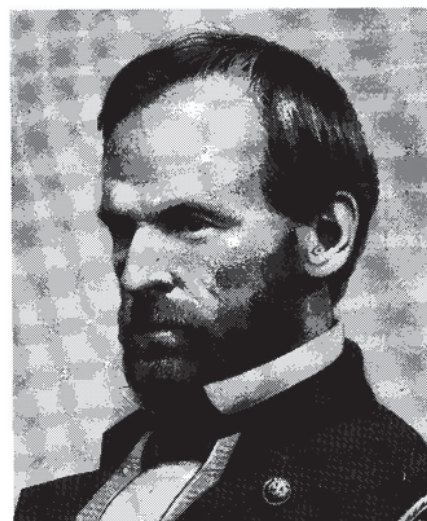
grees of refinement in staff work which go far beyond the practical requirements of the armed forces and a marked tendency for intellectuals to worm their way into such work. This tendency should be resisted in order that the intellectuals may shoulder their full responsibilities as fighting men and leaders.

Sufficient information is not yet at hand to fully analyze the Soviet performance in Eastern Europe but enough information is available to indicate that the Communists' performance on that front was rather mediocre considering the means at their disposal, the nature of the terrain over which the fighting took place, the determination of Hitler to hold ground, and the weight of the ground and air effort of the Allies

from the West. With a few exceptions, notably the Russian breakthrough and advance to Warsaw in the summer of 1944, the Soviet effort was little more than a methodical advance on a broad front during which German resistance was simply ground underfoot.

The American situation following World War II was that of a victor with all the advantages and disadvantages that usually accrue to a nation under such circumstances. Having destroyed the menace posed by the German and Japanese war machines, with the help of allies, it found itself one of the two remaining great powers. Unlike the other, however, the United States, while retaining the atom bomb, abandoned its armed forces and lost, through improper storage, or scrapped its military equipment. On the other hand, the Soviet Union retained its armed forces and equipment and adopted a line of action diametrically opposed to that of its former associate. As a result of these opposite decisions, preponderance of force almost immediately passed to the Soviet Union and led it to become increasingly belligerent in all its actions. To rectify the imbalance it had itself created, the United States was forced to expand its armed forces and to initiate an enormous re-armament program. Herein is found the opportunity of all nations which build their military organization and armament last.

Following World War I, Germany was stripped of armament and denied the right to build certain types such as tanks and airplanes. On the other



Sherman

Library of Congress

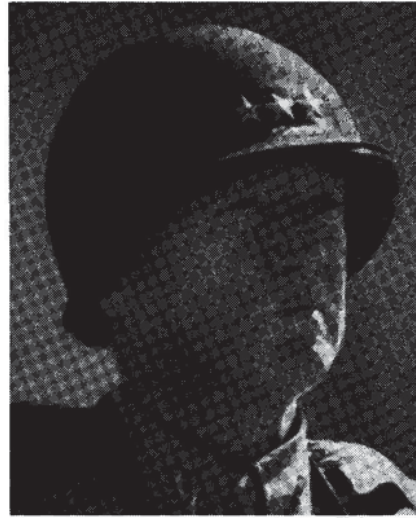
hand the Allied nations retained old armament and expended little upon new developments. When Germany rearmed, it took advantage of considerable research into the weapons of other armies but neither copied the old ones they had been compelled to abandon nor the new ones of other nations. It developed weapons and organization with which to destroy the armed forces of its prospective enemies. Following World War II the United States demobilized its armed forces and scrapped about 80 per cent of its equipment while the Soviet Union retained the mass of its equipment. Consequently, it created for the United States the same advantage that Germany had following World War I. Taking a lesson from German experience, military forces and equipment retained by the Soviet Union could have been rendered utterly obsolete by developing a more flexible and mobile organization with superior weapons. When caught in a predicament such as that of the United States, however, the natural tendency is to develop quickly the military organization and equipment necessary to counter the enemy rather than those intended to defeat and destroy him. This natural tendency is, therefore, defensive and static and not offensive and mobile and should be avoided.

There is already certain evidence to show that American civilian and military leadership has followed the natural tendency and has lost faith in the most mobile ground weapon—the tank. In this connection we need only recall the statement of Secretary of the Army Pace to the West Point cadets on 6 June 1950:

The principles of the recoilless weapon, the bazooka, and the shaped charge are being developed to a point where the mechanized panzer blitzkrieg will play a much less decisive role than it did in the last war.

Adding to those the more recent developments with regard to guided missiles and rockets, target seeking equipment, and the possibilities of tactical use of atomic weapons, it may well be that tank warfare as we have known it will soon be obsolete.

In addition to official pronounce-



Patton

U.S. Army

ments indicating a loss of faith in mobility and the mobile arm, the post-war field exercises have written out this lack of faith on the ground. There is, however, evidence to show that our leaders have put their faith in airborne troops which some of them consider to have the highest order of mobility. General Bolte has said that our objective is airborne armies. But an analysis of the facts will show conclusively that airborne troops are the least mobile of all ground fighters, although primarily for offensive warfare and tied to other ground elements. For example, on several occasions in World War II, it was planned to use airborne troops but ground elements had already seized the objective before they could be launched. Unless carefully coordinated with armored elements, airborne troops are inevitably drawn into piecemeal action at a time when they are bruised,



Guderian

Wide World

battered, and confused by the landing. At the very best they are but light troops incapable of sustained action or of standing against heavily equipped, mobile ground troops. There is a role for airborne troops, but it is not to win wars by themselves. Such troops are of highest importance to armored corps and armies in seizing defiles and airfields essential for rapid sustained operations and in partisan activities behind the enemy's front. Airborne and armored elements and air forces must be trained together continuously if they are to function efficiently as a team.

The defensive mindedness of our current leadership has led to the parceling out of mobile armored troops and of permanently tying them to the capabilities of foot soldiers having only a nylon suit and a steel helmet to protect them from enemy fire. This dispersal of the mobile elements of the Army will lead to static actions on a broad front and, even if successful, will result in position warfare based upon mobile equipment, fire power, and manpower. This is just as fallacious as the passive defense based on field fortifications, obstacles, mines, and fire power such as the Maginot Line. Decisive results can never be achieved by such immobile measures.

If the United States abandons the dominant principle of mobility in favor of the static concept, it will forfeit its best chance of winning the next great war. It lacks the necessary manpower for such a concept. Besides, such a concept would be faulty even if the manpower were available. If the genius of the American people is fully employed in developing the forces required to win the next war, advantage would be taken of their mechanical ability and productive capacity. This would lead to the organization of armored, full-tracked corps and perhaps armies capable of being operationally and logistically supported from the air and of operating in the great plains areas of the world towards decisive geographical, political, and production centers without regard to frontiers or linear defenses established by the enemy and would lead also to the organization of light troops capable of effecting the final subjugation, occupation, and administration of territories overrun by the

mobile army.

The modern mobile army should be capable of operating logistically from landing areas in much the same way that fleets operate from naval bases. Advance into hostile territory should be from landing areas to landing areas and operations should be extended from such areas as bases. Such an organization, coordinated with a dominant and properly constituted air force capable of all support missions including the delivering of essential airborne troops and the atomic bomb, could overwhelm any armed force that exists in the world today. With it the true genius of our native military leadership would rise again to the level set by General Grant and his mighty team of Meade and Sheridan in the east and Sherman in the west and south. In cooperation with the blockading fleets at sea this combination brought the Civil War to an end. A proper mobile force, with up-to-date support in the air and on the sea and with the guidance of gifted leaders, might again take the risk, incident to a deep penetration into the enemy's heartland, that Sherman took, and would reap an even greater harvest. The logistical plan for Sherman's operation contemplated living off the country, but his wagon train carried the minimum requirements necessary to reach a base at Savannah, Ga. That was the reserve that reduced considerably the risk he took.

It is the historical example that needs careful study by those who would fully exploit the possibilities of mobile warfare in this era of cross-country tracked vehicles, airplanes, guided missiles, and atomic bombs. Air power has made it possible for an armored force, completely mounted in cross-country fighting vehicles, to operate on land in much the same fashion as an air-supported fleet operates on sea. This modifies the orthodox concepts of linear or broad front tactics and of secure lines of ground communications in war.

The problem of combining air power and mobile ground forces into an offensive team is the challenge that confronts American military leadership in the dangerous days that lie ahead. This is the combination that can relieve the infantry of the bloody battles of broad front operations.

THE NEW EIGHTH ARMY COMMANDER



U.S. Army

Lieutenant
General
Maxwell D.
Taylor

Maxwell Davenport Taylor . . . born in Keytesville, Missouri in 1901 . . . Attended Kansas City Junior College . . . graduated from USMA, June 12, 1922 and commissioned a second lieutenant in the Corps of Engineers . . . assigned to the Engineer School, Fort Humphreys, Virginia . . . upon completion of course transferred to the 17th Engineers, Camp Meade, Maryland . . . assigned to Schofield Barracks, Hawaii with the 3rd Engineers and became aide to the Commanding General of the Hawaiian Department . . . assigned to the 6th Engineers at Camp Lewis, Washington . . . transferred to the Field Artillery in July, 1926 and assigned to the 10th Field Artillery . . . assigned to Paris, France to study French in preparation for service at West Point . . . in September, 1927 assigned to the Academy as instructor of French and assistant professor of Spanish . . . he entered The Artillery School at Fort Sill, Oklahoma in 1932 and upon completion was immediately ordered to the Command and General Staff School, at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas . . . stationed with the American Embassy at Tokyo as a student of the Japanese language . . . in September, 1937 detached for duty at Peking, China as assistant military attache . . . returned two months later to his post in Tokyo . . . enrolled in the Army War College, Washington in 1939 . . . upon completion he was detailed to the Latin American countries on a special mission concerning hemisphere defense . . . assumed command of 12th Field Artillery Battalion at Fort Sam Houston, Texas . . . assigned to the Office of the Secretary of the General Staff . . . in July, 1942, transferred to Camp Claiborne, Louisiana as Chief of Staff of the 82d Infantry Division . . . instrumental in organizing the first Airborne Divisions of the Army, becoming artillery commander of the 82d Airborne Division . . . went overseas with 82d in March, 1943 and took part in Sicilian and Italian campaigns . . . during Italian campaign he was senior U. S. member of Allied Control Commission in contact with Italian Government . . . appointed Commanding General, 101st Airborne Division in March, 1944, which he led in the airborne invasions of Normandy and Holland and campaigns of the Ardennes and Central Europe . . . appointed Superintendent of USMA in September, 1945 . . . assigned as Chief of Staff, EUCOM in January, 1949 . . . became U. S. Commander of Berlin the following September . . . appointed assistant Chief of Staff for Operations at Army Department Headquarters in February, 1951 . . . became Deputy Chief of Staff for Operations and Administration of the Army . . . appointed Commanding General of Eighth Army in Korea in February, 1953.