

BATTLEFIELD CENTRAL EUROPE

DANGER OF OVERRELIANCE ON TECHNOLOGY  
BY THE ARMED FORCES

by

BG FRANZ UHLE-WETTLER

TRANSLATION APPROVED BY

FRANZ UHLE-WETTLER

NOTE FOR AMERICAN READERS

In 1950, the author had the privilege to be granted a Fulbright Scholarship. He spent one year studying at a liberal art college in Ohio (Denison University, Granville) and has ever since been a sincere friend of the United States. This booklet has been written with true admiration for the US Army. This includes those paragraphs in which the author tries to draw attention to lessons possibly to be learned from the failure of American forces in certain battles of the Korean War.

In fairness, it should be mentioned that MOD Bonn disagreed with most of what is said in this booklet. Various official publications issued both to the press and, within the armed forces, down to company/battery/air force squadron and ship level, made this disagreement known. These statements, inter alia, showed that the author failed to make it clear beyond doubt and misinterpretation, that he does not advocate a move away from the strategy of Forward Defense. In his personal view, Forward Defense should be a condition for the membership of his nation in NATO. This however still allows us to ask whether we do right in earmarking fully mechanized forces for the defense of those large areas in Germany which due to forests, towns and villages are ill-suited for mechanized warfare. On the other hand, as regards open terrain the author firmly believes that in our time complete mechanization of manoeuvre battalions is a pre-requisite for successful operations. Among others, this means re-equipping mechanized infantry with MICV instead of APC.

For a quick and introductory reading, the author recommends; pages 6 thru 9 (an American division on the defense and an American division on the attack), page 40 (Scylla or Charybdis as the future of the Army), the summary on page 42, and the final remarks on page 111.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

PAGE

Note for the American readers

A

FORWARD

1

CHAPTER I. THE COST OF TECHNOLOGY

TWO EXAMPLES

First Example: An American Division on the Defense

Second Example: An American Division on the Attack

THE FIRST PART OF THE COST: FIGHTERS BECOME RARE

THE SECOND PART OF THE COST: FIGHTERS BECOME POORER IN QUALITY

THE THIRD PART OF THE COST: INCREASED DEPENDENCY ON RESUPPLY

THE FOURTH PART OF THE COST: SPECIALIZED MOBILITY

THE FIFTH PART OF THE COST: SPECIALIZED FIREPOWER

THE SIXTH PART OF THE COST: DIFFICULTY WITH MAINTENANCE AND  
REPLACEMENT OF MAJOR ITEMS OF  
EQUIPMENT

THE SEVENTH PART OF THE COST: ARMIES BECOMING EVER SMALLER

THE EIGHTH PART OF THE COST: SCYLLA OR CHARYBDIS AS THE FUTURE  
OF THE ARMY

SUMMARY

CHAPTER II. THE GERMAN ARMY TODAY

SOME CHARACTERISTICS OF OUR ARMY

TACTICAL CONSEQUENCES OF ANTITANK GUIDED MISSILES

MOTORIZED (JAEGER) INFANTRY FORCE AND NEW ARMY STRUCTURE

A SONG OF PRAISE FOR OUR ARMORED FORCES

A SONG OF PRAISE FOR THE INFANTRY

(TABLE OF CONTENTS Cont.)

CHAPTER III. CONCLUSIONS

FIRST BASIS FOR A SOLUTION: ADAPTATION TO THE TERRAIN

SECOND BASIS FOR A SOLUTION: ADAPTATION TO EMPLOYMENT

THIRD BASIS FOR A SOLUTION: REDUCTION OF SUPPLY REQUIREMENT

FOURTH BASIS FOR A SOLUTION: ADAPTATION TO THE TERRAIN:  
MECHANIZATION OR PARTISAN TACTICS

CHAPTER IV. THE LIGHT INFANTRY

COMBAT DOCTRINE: DEFENSE

COMBAT DOCTRINE: ATTACK

COMBAT DOCTRINE: DELAYING ACTION

COMBAT DOCTRINE: SPECIAL APPLICATIONS

ARMAMENT

EQUIPMENT

ORGANIZATION

The Squad

The Platoon

The Company

The Battalion

The Brigade

The Division

FORMATION

EXCURSION: MBFR

POLITICAL AND MILITARY-STRATEGIC CONSEQUENCES

FINAL REMARKS

FOOTNOTES "

## FORWARD

Until modern times, technical bases for warfare have undergone changes very slowly. Sword and shield, bow and arrow dominated the battlefield for thousands of years. Even firearms needed centuries to force cut-and-thrust weapons off the field and finally prevail. The reasons for this slow progress are plain. The technical capacity of antiquity, the Middle Ages and the very beginnings of modern times were slight. For this reason, it took a long time to evaluate inventions and to develop weapons ready for the front. Thus, long periods of time passed before new weapons forced basic changes in the tactics and organization of armies.

In our times, however, warfare underwent change ever more quickly; e.g., the cavalry regiments which attacked saber-in-hand at Vionville and Mars-la-Tour in 1870 still bore a great resemblance to the cavalry units of Hannibal and Alexander the Great. However, they had little in common with their successors, the tank and tank reconnaissance units of the Second World War. Thus, it was only in the Twentieth Century that technology succeeded completely in transforming all armies. The advantages of this development, i.e., the advantages of technology, are clear and well known. Automatic weapons, engines, armor and radios provide armies with an earlier undreamed-of firepower, bestow their movements with ever more flexibility and speed as well as an ever greater striking power for attack.

~~Conversely, the disadvantages of total reliance on technology originally showed up indirectly and only in remote theaters of operations, first of all perhaps in the Finnish Winter War of 1939-40. For this reason, little attention was paid to them. Technology dominates our age and hence the thinking and codes of values of soldiers. The subject matter of "Soldier and Technology" has become a catchword of the armies. It has indeed been the subject of a great many investigations whose outcome, however, was certain from the start: The soldier needs to learn to apply technology and to become its master and not however, to become its servant. In this way, its clear advantages have established a dominating environment for reliance on technology. Progressive, modern and trail-blazing are adjectives denoting all those who require future and advanced technologies for the solution of as many problems as possible and can only imagine further development as a further improvement of technology. Those who venture doubt are classified as behind the times.~~

It is, however, precisely in this not at all false but biased view that it can be seen how completely technology dominates the minds of soldiers through and through. The questions as to what price we pay for reliance on technology and what disadvantages are incurred by its advantages are raised rarely. The consideration whether an excessive reliance on technology in subareas is leading to the redevelopment of more simple forms appears to be outmoded. In addition, the soldiers also are subordinated to the intellectual dominance of technology and are fascinated by the successes achieved by the mechanized divisions of the Second World War as well as later on in completely different terrain. Reference to the cost as well as to possible dangers and limits of reliance on technology is usually considered as an anachronism and dismissed unchecked.

There is still one more reason which should lead to frequent questioning of traditional concepts. Each weapon, hence each form of military technology, constrains to a tactic appropriate to its special features. Owing to head-long technical developments, it is, however, evermore difficult to determine validly the tactical consequences of a weapon. Cut-and-thrust weapons did last for millennia. Thus it was possible to evaluate the tactical requirements which these weapons posed by examining the battles of many past wars. Modern weapons, however, have dominated the battlefield for only a short time and must then make room for ever newer weapons. The rapid-firing breechloaders determined the outcome of the German Wars of Unification, machineguns the First World War, the tanks as well as anti-tank guided missiles, area fire weapons, new forms of armor and new types of minefields -- will affect a future conflict without our being able to safely say which one of these new weapons is in the forefront and how it will affect tactics. At an earlier time, a commander could be certain that a future war would resemble past and present ones. This enabled him to analyze appropriate tactics from past and present. The troop commander of today no longer has this possibility. He knows only that whoever fails to adapt the experiences of the last war will surely lose the next one.

Accordingly, one of the most important tasks of the peacetime soldier is to draw appropriate tactical conclusions from technical development. Only in this way is he able to suitably arm, organize, equip and train the armed forces. This task was performed only incompletely before the First World War. Few officers foresaw that the firepower of the modern weapons of that time, above all automatic weapons and artillery, would neutralize the movement of infantry on the battlefield. Almost no one had drawn the conclusion that movement on the battlefield would require armored combat vehicles. The lessons of prior wars, especially the Boer War and the Russo-Japanese War were neither acknowledged nor exploited.

In like manner, soldiers of almost all countries missed the mark before the Second World War. Only a few recognized the capabilities and outstanding significance of major armored formations. Only in Germany these officers succeeded against the embittered opposition of their superiors and brothers in arms (1). Most armies failed to recognize the future significance of armored units. They interpreted wrongly the lessons of the First World War as well as subsequent technical developments.

The question, therefore, arises whether we are evaluating the future today any more validly than most armies did before the First and Second World Wars. The statistical probability argues against it. This is all the more reason to calmly look into prevailing valid doctrine - both critically as well as self-critically.

Prediction of tactical principles of the future was made all the more difficult because the smaller conflicts carried out between the big wars provided scant information. These were mostly wars between militarily second-rate states and often carried out in restricted confines and with antiquated equipment. However, three of the conflicts which took place since 1945 form a clear exception: The Korean War 1950-1953, the Vietnam War, and the wars in the Near East. The question is justified as to why the argumentation of this book, insofar as recent

wars are discussed at all, is oriented to one of these wars only and indeed, of these, to the Korean War which lies farthest back and made the least impression on the German public. One reason results from the situation with regard to sources. Indeed, a great many publications are available for all Near East wars. The degree of detail and reliability of statements are, however, quite varied and not in the least because only one of the two warring sides understood how to carry out a comprehensive and frank, granted perhaps also a very clever, information policy. In addition, the question is justified whether a nation fighting for its life can always be interested in the uncompromising truth. For this reason, there is no source work available for the Near East wars and, for other reasons, for the Vietnam War whose reliability and degree of detail can even remotely compete with the outstanding and uncompromisingly frank American official work on the Korean War. Reliable basic data represent the indispensable prerequisite for reliable conclusions (2).

The second reason for occasionally supporting the arguments by reference to the Korean War instead of the Near East wars lies in the terrain. This book will attempt to demonstrate that the armament and organization of our army are not suited to the Central European terrain, the battlefield Central Europe. We have an army set up for long-range operations in open terrain without cover. If we were to have the terrain of the Sinai Peninsula or the Golan Heights, without forests, swamps, industrial zones and populated areas of Central European frequency, density and construction type, this book would not need to be written. Doctrines for warfare in our terrain with its many populated areas and forests can only with difficulty be derived from the Near East wars which were carried out predominately in desert areas.

The Korean War is, however, also interesting for further reasons. In the beginning, an unprepared but highly industrialized major power fought with the support of 21 million South Koreans against a pygmy. North Korea had only nine million inhabitants and no armament industry at all. After the intervention of China, two great powers confronted one another. One of these powers was highly industrialized, and its armed forces were armed and equipped accordingly. The other major power had just begun to industrialize. In addition, civil wars, revolutions, complete governmental breakdowns as well as the war against Japan had devastated China for almost 40 years. The industry of Manchuria had been dismantled by the Russians down to the last light switch before they returned the country to China.

Countless differences can be found without difficulty between the Korean War and a possible conflict in Central Europe. Still, it remains certain that the armies of almost all countries entered many past wars, especially the First and Second World Wars, using obsolete army organizations and tactics. This is true even though more appropriate principles could have been derived from previous wars. The question is suggested whether despite many differences in external circumstances, wars waged since 1945 provide lessons which we should learn.

Consequently, the present work has the goal, also on the basis of examples from previous wars, of demonstrating the dangers which could arise from a reliance on technology carried too far by an army. It seeks in addition to demonstrate that the high technology level of our army requires field forces for

combat in those wide-ranging areas which exclude the reasonable employment of technical resources. These field forces would certainly be exceedingly inexpensive since they would largely do without the costly military resources which would only be incompletely used in the above mentioned areas. This could enable corresponding savings in favor of mechanized formations. The last chapter outlines the combat doctrine, equipment, armament and organization of such a field force.

Severe consequences are unavoidable if tactical doctrine is wrongly pre-specified. This requires keeping an aloof distance from all new theories and their careful skeptical examination. The significance of the task, however, also requires open-mindedness with respect to all new ideas. This open-mindedness must be based on the consideration that a future war will probably appear completely otherwise and will use tactics, techniques and organizations quite different from past ones. The outbreak of such a war would be a catastrophe for the nations affected and especially for the German people then located in the center of the action. The main task of our armed forces is and remains the preservation of peace by deterrence. This could involve the containment of a conflict which had broken out and re-establishment of peace. These tasks cannot be performed without the highest effectiveness of armed forces.

The author does not believe that he is hostile to armor or that he is unable to understand the meaning of mechanized operations. He spent his entire service time in the field in armored brigades, first as company commander in the Lehrbrigade and then as its General Staff Officer (G3). This was followed by service as Deputy Commander of an armored brigade and finally as Commander of the Lehrbrigade, the by-far largest brigade of our army which is organized in peacetime as an extensively reinforced armored brigade. Our mechanized major formations are outstandingly equipped and appropriately organized. No change is required for them, only an augmentation. There is a need in wide areas of the Federal Republic for augmentation by a completely different field force. Otherwise our mechanized units will be excessively overburdened in the battlefield of Europe, will waste extensive resources and will be quickly exhausted.

The fundamental concepts and conclusions of this book have already been set forth as early as 1966 under the title, "Leichte Infanterie im Atomzeitalter" (Light Infantry in the Nuclear Age). The view that our army is too weak in infantry has gained the upper hand in the meantime. Since 1966, however, a great many conditions have changed -- from the organization and armament of our army to nuclear strategy. While still maintaining the fundamental concept, argumentation, presentation of proof and inference must for this reason be adapted to circumstances present today. This has required such an extensive revision that it appeared justified to republish this work under a new title.