WAR DEPARTMENT

The Adjutant General’s Office
Washington

April 6, 1938.

AG 537.3 (3-25-38) Misc. M-C.

Subject: Policies governing mechanization, and the tactical employment of mechanized units.

To: Commanding Generals of all Corns Areas and Departments, Commandants of all General and Special Service Schools, Superintendent, United States Military Academy, Chiefs of all Arms, Services and Bureaus, All General Staff Divisions, Commanding General, GHQ Air Force.

1. The program for mechanization in effect since 1931 has developed under the broad policy that "every part of the Army will adopt mechanization and motorization as far as practicable and desirable". The application of this policy has given considerable impetus to mechanization and has resulted in experience extremely valuable in its future development.
2. Mechanization is not a new arm of the service; rather it is a new weapon for assisting combatant arms in accomplishment of their mission. Recent operations abroad have shown that the combatant arms will fight in their traditional roles, and experience has shown that the combined employment of all arms is still essential to success. Domination of the battlefield by any one type of weapon or arm has not thus far materialized.
3. It is believed that the time has come to modify the policy governing further experimentation in extending mechanization through­out the Army. Hereafter, mechanization will be applied to certain cavalry and infantry units to the extent necessary to enable these arms better to carry out their prescribed tactical functions. This will not be construed as excluding further development of other mechanized materiel needed as an organic part of larger mechanized units.
4. The special value of cavalry lies in its mobility and its ability to displace its fire power quickly from one locality to another. It finds its most effective employment under conditions which permit fullest use of its mobility. Mechanization for cavalry has, therefore, developed along lines which increase its mobility, fighting power and radius of action, adding a strategic mobility far beyond that of horse cavalry alone.

For distant strategic employment in cavalry missions and for exploitation of a success, there will be required a self-contained mechanized force, capable of independent action, in which the scout car and the combat car constitute the principal mechanized elements. These elements are organized into reconnaissance, support and assault echelons. Any marked increase in the armor and armament of these vehicles will curtail their employment on cavalry missions.

1. The basic principles underlying the employment of mechanized cavalry are movement, surprise and the objective. If properly supported by aviation, artillery and antimechanized weapons, mechanized cavalry can gain an objective but it cannot hold such objective for a prolonged period without the support of infantry or horsed cavalry. The employment of mechanized cavalry on defensive missions should be limited to neces­sity and its relief from such defensive role should be effected at the earliest opportunity.

Mechanized cavalry finds its principal role in employment on strategic missions. The great value of mechanized cavalry lies in its ability, if properly employed, to conduct a distant reconnais­sance and to create an initial success in a critical zone of the theater of operations, which will form a basis for further action or exploitation by the higher commander. Mechanized cavalry is, however, very sensitive to obstacles and conditions of terrain, to hostile gun­fire and to attack by bombardment aviation. To have reasonable protec­tion against these interfering factors, mechanized cavalry requires a well-organized mobile reconnaissance, both air and ground, which will give it timely information of the enemy, as well as knowledge of the obstacles confronting it and of the most favorable terrain for develop­ment and attack.

Mechanized cavalry also finds special application in pursuit and delaying action. Due to its great mobility and automatic fire power, mechanized cavalry is able to operate on a broad front, to beat the enemy to defiles and other critical localities, to carry out destructions on the enemy's routes of advance or retreat, to strike the enemy in flank or rear, or to deliver repeated attacks against his flanks.

Mechanized cavalry is especially adapted to use in an envelopment or turning movement, and in the exploitation of a break­through. In such operations the most important factor to be considered is the terrain which must be favorable for mechanized vehicles. Such terrain may already be secured or it may first have to be reconnoitered and seized. This is the mission of the reconnaissance echelon, reinforced, if necessary, by part or all of the supporting echelon. Having secured favorable terrain for the development of the assault echelon of combat cars, the support echelon assists the attack of the assault echelon and advances to occupy the successive objectives captured by the latter. The support echelon thus becomes the spring-board from which the assault echelon makes its successive bounds to gain the ultimate objective.

1. The infantry is essentially the arm of close combat. This role rather than its armament distinguishes infantry as a combatant arm. Mechanization for infantry has developed, therefore, along lines which increase its power to engage in close combat and to overcome strongly organized resistance.

For the cooperative employment with infantry and artillery in the attack of a strong defensive position, tank units may be allotted to large units. The armor protection of these tanks must be sufficient (1" to 1.5”) to enable them to engage in the infantry zone of combat. However, the tactical mission rather than the armor protection will determine the types to be used. In general two types will be required: (1) a medium tank capable of dealing with hostile antitank weapons and of protecting itself against machine-gun fire in all directions; (2) a light tank capable of attacking hostile machine guns and of working in close contact with foot troops over varied terrain.

1. The following tactical doctrine will govern the employment of tank units:

Tanks are not committed to action until a well-defined objective has been located. Their piece-meal employment is without pur­pose. In principle, the mass of tanks is engaged on that part of the front where the decisive attack is to be made. The terrain is the governing factor. The tank objective coincides with that of the supported troops, with whose action their employment must be coordinated. The em­ployment of tanks in no way lessens the need for strong supporting fire of artillery and heavy infantry weapons.

Normally tanks do not operate beyond the effective fire support of the infantry and other supporting arms. Tanks are, therefore, given successive objectives which they attack. When the hostile re­sistance is subdued they reorganize and then they push on to the next objective or hold themselves in readiness as directed by the commander.

The conception of "leading tanks" in the sense of an inde­pendent combat group operating beyond the range of its infantry and supporting artillery is rejected. Tanks should not, however, be tied too closely to foot troops. If so they will sacrifice their mobility and become a vulnerable target for antitank weapons. Tanks therefore attack in several echelons disposed in depth and it is in the sense of the leading echelon that the role of leading tanks should be understood. This leading echelon will normally be composed of medium tanks.

In the attack, the leading echelon advances closely behind the supporting fire of the artillery and heavy infantry weapons. These tanks, with the support of the other weapons, have the mission of dominating the antitank guns. The second echelon, closely followed by the foot troops, advances with the mission of dominating the enemy's machine guns. These are the accompanying tanks that break into the hostile position with the infantry.

In certain situations it may be advisable to delay the entry into action of the tanks until a later phase of the attack. This may be advisable because of the character of the terrain, or to supple­ment the diminishing fire of the artillery during the assault, or to replace artillery support when batteries are displacing forward. Tanks are also very affective in counterattack.

The general distribution of tanks in combat and the general plan for their employment are determined by the higher commander. The subsequent action of the tanks is controlled by infantry regimental or battalion commanders to whom the tank units are attached. The higher commander is responsible for the proper coordination of the action of the supporting arms under his control.

The mission of the tanks is determined by their power to contribute to the execution of the infantry mission. The infantry takes advantage of the tank action to advance promptly and occupy each suc­cessive intermediate objective. The tanks are supported by the use of artillery, heavy infantry weapons, smoke, and combat aviation for neutralizing hostile antitank weapons and artillery which may threaten the tank advance. Observation aviation will cooperate in detection of tank obstacles. Whenever the necessity for their services can be fore­seen, engineer troops may be attached to tank units for assisting their advance.

By order of the Secretary of War:

Major General

The Adjutant General.