

**the**  
**GERMAN**  
**ARMORED**  
**COMBAT**  
**TROOPS**



*EDITOR'S NOTE: This report is a translation of a briefing given by the German Army Armor School; it was sent to us by LTC Peter F. Dauber, TRADOC Liaison Officer to the German Army Armor School/Mechanized Infantry School. The purpose of the briefing is to describe the concept and operational principles of the German Army's armored combat troops. It is hoped that this article may make a small contribution to the further strengthening of relations between the U.S. Army and the*

*German Army.*

*The information contained in this report does not necessarily represent the official view or position of the German General Army Office or subordinate schools. Questions, comments, or requests for additional information should be addressed to: LTC Peter F. Dauber, TRADOC Liaison Office KTS-2, c/o 25th Artillery Detachment, APO New York 09069.*

At the beginning of a conflict between NATO and Warsaw Pact forces, the initiative in terms of space, time, and force employment lies with the enemy. During the crucial early phase, decision-makers at all levels must react quickly. Units must take the initiative using their high agility and firepower to move out of their defensive positions to regain the freedom of operational-tactical action.

The superior strength of the enemy will require a rapid shifting of forces to create and change points of main effort with the help of fire and units. At the same time, a high degree of agility ensures that friendly forces avoid enemy artillery and air superiority.

One distinct advantage for NATO forces is that the enemy, despite his technical superiority and his efforts to achieve mobile combined arms operations, will, as a result of his ideological system, conduct highly planned and centralized actions, the essential characteristic of which is to plan in such detail that disruptions of any kind lead to time-consuming delays. Allied operating principles, technical equipment, agility of operations, and high state of troop readiness must be used to upset these plans through tactically offensive counteractions. This demands from commanders a high degree of mental flexibility and the ability to conduct operations rapidly in conjunction with different weapon systems.

## **TERRAIN AND TROOPS AVAILABLE**

The terrain is an important factor in determining the appropriate mix of armored combat troops. Therefore, it is imperative in built-up areas to provide for a component capable of conducting typical infantry missions while ensuring a mix of direct fire weapons and missiles.

Armored combat troops must be mutually supporting and organized in such a manner that different components complement each other during ever-changing combat situations. However, all components should have one thing in common: the ability to independently fight enemy tanks.

Armored combat troops provide the bulk of the combat troops of the German Field Army. Within the 17 armored and 15 mechanized infantry brigades, they influence considerably the brigades' command and control capability. This also applies to the newly reorganized and strengthened German Territorial Army.

Each branch of the armored combat troops has its own characteristics. The tank is the central weapon system, around which the major effort at every level of command is built. Tanks are employed primarily against enemy tanks.

Tank units fight in all types of combat. In the attack, they form the nucleus of offensive combat. Tanks develop the momentum necessary to penetrate enemy defenses through their firepower and agility. In the defense and during delaying operations, tank units can concentrate firepower very quickly, halt the enemy by sudden fire, or hit him with quick counter-strokes. In this manner, even superior enemy forces can be defeated or at least worn down.

Mechanized infantry is usually employed in broken or covered terrain. During offensive and delaying operations, mechanized infantry usually fights mounted in their IFVs. In defense, the Panzergrenadiers invariably fight dismounted from fortified positions. Whenever possible, all dismounted infantry in a company should be consolidated into one position, with a width of 500 meters. The MARDERS, using their mobility, fight initially in front of and later on the flanks of the fortified positions. The dismounted Panzergrenadiers and the MARDERS do not conduct separate operations; they operate as an entity.

Tank destroyer vehicles of the antitank units are equipped with antitank guided missile systems. With these long-range weapons, the JAGUAR (an antitank tracked vehicle armed with two HOT missiles) will be able to defeat enemy tanks at ranges up to 4,000 meters. Tank destroyers are normally employed in close coordination with tanks in all types of combat operations. This cooperation is characterized by a clear "division of responsibilities," i.e., missile-equipped tank destroyers engage enemy tanks in depth, while friendly tanks engage the leading tanks. Depending upon the terrain, missile-equipped tank destroyers are usually employed as platoon entities, each platoon having three missile-equipped tank destroyers.

The armored reconnaissance forces can conduct deep reconnaissance using light recon/recce elements — two LUCHS (a six-wheeled scout vehicle). Heavy reconnaissance patrols are formed by three LEOPARD tanks; patrols may be mixed. The German Army under its wartime organization has the following equipment available in the Divisional Recon/Recce Battalion:

Five light recon/recece patrols or 10 LUCHS; 10 heavy recon/recece patrols or 30 LEOPARD tanks; one recon/recece company or 9 TPz (transport panzer) FUCHS (an eight-wheeled armored vehicle for transporting personnel); one radar platoon or nine FUCHS-mounted radars.

The divisional recon/recece battalion can be tasked to perform the usual spectrum of recon/recece operations and, in exceptional cases, can be employed in defensive and offensive operations. Therefore, the recon/recece battalion is a unit that can be employed in most phases of war and even as an emergency divisional reserve.

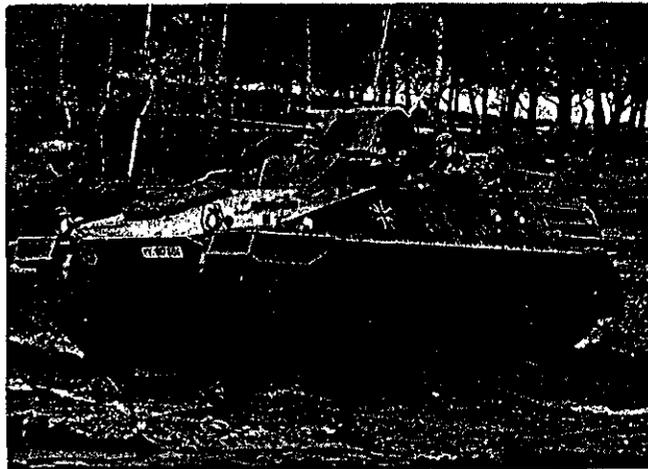
## CONCEPT OF OPERATIONS

The individual characteristics of armor, antitank, mechanized infantry, and armored reconnaissance elements do not result in independent employment on the battlefield; rather, the branch elements fight together in close coordination as a team. They are one system.

To ensure this close coordination, German brigades are organized to include all the branches of the armored combat troops. In addition, the combat support elements of artillery and engineers, together with the usual logistics units, are integral to each brigade. To ensure close coordination, the brigade often "task organizes" battalions. In this manner, mixed armored forces are formed, which are tailored according to mission and terrain. This ensures a high combat effectiveness of all units. Even though the basic rule is to retain the companies unchanged under their parent unit commanders, the principle remains to mix or reinforce at the lowest level if the mission demands it (as in reconnaissance and security operations, which demand cross-attachment or reinforcement down to and including individual combat vehicles).

From this it can be concluded that officers and NCOs should be able to lead units and platoons of other branches. They must master the principles of employment and know the weapons and equipment characteristics of the other armored combat troops. That is why in Munster the German Army has one school and one doctrine for the leaders of their four armored combat troop branches.

Although task forces are flexible and suited for employment in all types of combat, they do require additional support by combat support troops on the battlefield. This encompasses artillery — to include the multiple launch rocket system (MLRS), which can rapidly emplace mine barriers against enemy tanks — engineer, air defense, and antitank helicopters. Thus, these elements of armored combat troops and combat support troops are combined into what is called a combined arms operation. It is the brigade commander's task to conduct these combined arms operations. However, because of the multitude of weapon systems and their availability on the battlefield, battalion commanders, and often company and platoon leaders, are forced to master this task.



The Marder is an infantry combat vehicle.

## "BEWEGLICHKEIT"

Successful employment of armored combat troops is characterized by what is called *Beweglichkeit*, which means mobility of armored troops on the battlefield and flexibility of the leaders at all levels in command and control.

The achievement of *Beweglichkeit* depends on various factors. It is essential that all combat vehicles of the armored combat troops have an equal degree of agility and cross-country mobility. This requirement for agility places great demands on logistic support in terms of rapid resupply of bulk material, continuous maintenance, and medical services. *Beweglichkeit* is equally valid for all types of combat: defense, delay, and offensive operations. It does not mean just speed, or the technical ability to move quickly on the battlefield; speed is only one of the prerequisites for agility.

*Beweglichkeit* above all means flexible command and control. In terms of command and control within a brigade, it can be said that a combat operation is only an operational goal, for example, to gain time — operational delay or to hold an area; operational defense or to defeat the enemy and seize key terrain — operational attack. The conduct of battle below brigade level is also marked with a high degree of *Beweglichkeit*. This means that the employment of subordinate units under the operational goal of the brigade is characterized by continuous rapid changes between the different types of combat — from delay to defense or attack, and vice versa.

The flexibility of a command and control system is best exemplified by delay operations against a superior enemy. It is characterized by sudden fire from unexpected directions as well as by quick counterattacks. Delay operations are conducted in a similar way to the parry and thrust in fencing, where the fencer rapidly changes from giving up ground to attacking. Original ideas, cunning, deception, and above all, activity in spite of numerical inferiority are demanded from all leaders.

The enemy is weakened at every opportunity. To gain time, the operational goal is not the concern of platoon and company commanders; rather, this is the responsibility of the brigade commander. As a result of constant attrition of his leading elements across the whole front, the enemy will be forced to alter his plans, to reorganize his forces, to expose his main thrust lines, and to commit his reserves earlier.

In the defense, the armored combat troops of the brigades and battalions must be controlled by using the depth of their positions in such a way that the enemy is constantly confronted with locally superior firepower. This idea becomes the keyword of a successful defense. The defender cannot be equally strong in all places. The courage to form main points of effort in order to be strong at the decisive point at the right moment forces one to accept weak areas. Only flexible command and control makes it possible to accomplish local and timely limited superiority. This does not mean that fighting from prepared positions is not done. It would be wrong, however, to rely solely on such positions. It is the mark of flexible command and control to disengage forces that are not fully committed and to concentrate them rapidly at the decisive point. Therefore, flexible command and control in defense consists of the rapid change between fire and movement as opposed to rigid positional defense. This demands leaders who are capable of thinking ahead. It is also essential that the combat support troops fully complement the effectiveness of the armored combat troops.

The attack requires the destruction of the enemy and the seizure of objectives. Only armored combat troops are able to develop the necessary shock effect to penetrate and exploit success. Here the hallmarks are rapid action and rigorously pushing forward toward the objective. This does not mean that the shortest, most direct route to the objective guarantees success. The will to bring superior firepower to bear on the enemy from unexpected places and from varying directions forces the enemy to diversify his fire. The speed of action and the frequency of quick and independent decisions made by thinking leaders make the attack the best example for the principle of command and control by mission-type tactics.

*Beweglichkeit* in command and control at brigade level means quick changes of missions for the battalion, rapidly shifting the main effort by concentrating forces and fire, employing reserves and disengaged troops when the situation is favorable, and re-establishing reserves as soon as possible. It also means quick changes of the type of combat and task organization. The key to the command and control tasks of battalion and company commanders is to follow the command and control measures of the brigade during combat. Company commanders

and platoon leaders must transform *Beweglichkeit* in command and control into rapid and effective action. This requires the will for independent action, the courage to take risks, the ability to commit disengaged forces, to withdraw unengaged forces, and to concentrate at the main point of effort to defeat the enemy.

The application of all this requires a particular style of leadership. It can only be practiced by subordinate leaders if they are granted freedom of action. In that regard, education is required for those who issue orders and also for those who execute them. *Beweglichkeit* only requires the setting of operational objectives, formulation of the mission, and making available the means necessary to accomplish the mission. The execution of the mission, the choice of the route to the objective, and in general, "how to do it" is left to the next lower level of command. Subordinate leaders must be allowed freedom of action. This style of command and control is called *Auftragstaktik*, or "mission type tactics." It is vital in leading armored combat troops, and it is an indispensable element of German tradition.

## SUMMARY

Units of the armored combat troops form the nucleus of the German field army. Armor, panzergrenadiers, antitank, and armored reconnaissance elements employed in close coordination with combat support elements provide the brigades with a high degree of firepower and mobility, hence, great combat effectiveness.

With the introduction of such newly developed weapon systems as antitank guided missiles and new main battle tanks, the capability of armored combat troops to defeat enemy tanks is continuously improved.

The German Army attempts to compensate for the quantitative superiority of the enemy by investing in the development of technically superior equipment. This approach, however, cannot be overestimated, since budget limitations often force a compromise with only intermediate solutions. Hence, in another effort to balance the enemy's quantitative superiority, the weapon of *Beweglichkeit* is employed, which requires highly skilled leaders.

*Beweglichkeit*, the ability to quickly switch from one type of combat to another, is the outstanding characteristic of armored combat troops. But it can only fully develop in concert with other weapons, including close cooperation with the Air Force. That means armored combat troops and combat support troops are totally interdependent.

It is in this spirit that the units of the armored combat troops must be trained and led. They must conduct operations based on the operational goals of the brigade.

