

THE INITIAL STAGE OF THE SECOND WORLD WAR: GERMANY'S BLITZKRIEG STRATEGY

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Abstract

This article analyzes the formation, principles, and practical implementation of the Blitzkrieg strategy used by Germany during the early stage of the Second World War. It examines the role of armored forces, air power, communication systems, and psychological warfare in Germany's initial victories. The study focuses on the Polish campaign of 1939, Western European operations, and the beginning of the invasion of the Soviet Union. It also discusses the limitations of Blitzkrieg in prolonged warfare.

Keywords: World War II, Germany, Blitzkrieg, Wehrmacht, Luftwaffe, military strategy, armored forces, Operation Barbarossa.

Introduction

Аннотация

В статье рассматриваются формирование, основные принципы и практическое применение стратегии «блицкрига», использованной Германией на начальном этапе Второй мировой войны. Анализируется роль танковых войск, авиации Люфтваффе, системы связи и психологического воздействия в достижении первых военных успехов Германии. Особое внимание уделяется польской кампании 1939 года, операциям в Западной Европе и началу войны против Советского Союза. Также исследуются причины ограничения данной стратегии в условиях затяжной войны.

Ключевые слова: Вторая мировая война, Германия, блицкриг, Вермахт, Люфтваффе, военная стратегия, танковые войска, операция «Барбаросса».

Introduction

One of the greatest military-political tragedies experienced by humanity in the history of the 20th century, the Second World War, began on September 1, 1939, with Germany's invasion of Poland. The initial period of this war is particularly distinguished in military history by Germany's "Blitzkrieg" strategy. This strategy was aimed at disrupting the enemy's military and political capabilities within a short period of time, gaining strategic initiative through rapid attacks, and preventing the opponent from preparing for a prolonged war. The term "Blitzkrieg" is derived from the German words "Blitz" — lightning and "Krieg" — war, and it began to be used in 20th-century military thought to describe a method of rapid and highly coordinated attacks. However, as historians emphasize, Blitzkrieg was not an officially written doctrine of the German army, but rather a practical strategic approach based on the effective use of tanks, aviation, and motorized troops. The experience of trench warfare during the First World War encouraged German military specialists to search for new methods of warfare. The stagnation of fronts and the enormous human losses during the 1914–1918 war demonstrated that rapid movement and technological superiority would play an important role in future conflicts. Therefore, the German military leadership sought to develop a concept of mobile warfare adapted to new conditions. The main objective of Germany's Blitzkrieg strategy was to identify weak points in the enemy's defense, break through them with the help of tank units, destroy communication and command centers through aviation, and encircle enemy forces. In this method, speed was not considered merely a means of movement but was regarded as the primary strategic weapon.

Main Part Germany's Blitzkrieg strategy was one of the most significant changes in 20th-century military thought. Unlike traditional front warfare, it was based on rapid maneuver, high mobility, and the coordinated actions of different types of troops under a unified command. The formation of this strategy was greatly influenced by Germany's military experience after the First World War. Although the Treaty of Versailles officially prohibited Germany from developing tank forces and military aviation, German military specialists continued to study new methods of warfare theoretically. In the late 1920s and early 1930s, Germany conducted secret military training exercises on Soviet territory, increasing its experience in the use of armored vehicles and aviation.[1]General Heinz Guderian played an important role in the development of the Blitzkrieg strategy. He was one of the military theorists who

viewed tank forces not merely as supporting units for infantry but as an independent strategic instrument. In his work “Achtung-Panzer!”, Guderian emphasized that the combination of armored forces, aviation, and radio communication would become the key factor in achieving victory in future wars. According to him, a rapid strike against the enemy without giving them time to react and the disruption of their command system could provide a significant military advantage.[2] After Adolf Hitler came to power in the 1930s, Germany began eliminating the restrictions imposed by the Treaty of Versailles and carried out a large-scale rearmament policy. In 1935, compulsory military service was restored, and new tank and motorized units were created within the Wehrmacht. During this period, the German military leadership understood that in modern warfare, not only the number of soldiers but also the speed, technical equipment, and quality of command of military forces played a decisive role.[3] The main strength of Blitzkrieg was demonstrated through the cooperation between tank forces and Luftwaffe aviation. German aircraft attacked enemy communication centers, railway junctions, command posts, and military facilities, weakening their ability to control operations. After that, tank divisions rapidly broke through enemy defenses and advanced into their rear areas. Infantry forces then carried out the task of securing the captured territories. In this way, the three main forces — aviation, tanks, and infantry — became an integrated system in which each component complemented the others.[4] Germany’s invasion of Poland on September 1, 1939, became the first major test of the Blitzkrieg strategy. German forces managed to disrupt Polish defenses within a short period of time. During the operation, Wehrmacht forces used rapid attacks, air strikes, and encirclement tactics. Although the Polish army offered courageous resistance, it was unable to effectively respond to Germany’s new style of warfare due to its reliance on outdated military doctrines.[5] One of the interesting aspects of the Polish campaign was that the German army did not have an absolute numerical superiority. Many tanks in the German forces were lightly armored and had limited technical capabilities. However, Germany’s main advantage lay in the excellent organization of its troops, an effective communication system, and centralized command. This demonstrated that Blitzkrieg was based not only on technological superiority but also on the combination of military organization and tactics.[6] In 1940, Germany applied the Blitzkrieg strategy even more successfully in Western Europe. After Denmark and Norway were captured within a short period, Germany launched an offensive against France. The military leadership

of France and Great Britain expected the German attack to follow the main front route used during the First World War. However, German forces launched an unexpected offensive through the Ardennes Forest, breaking through the Allied defenses. This became one of the most famous strategic maneuvers in military history.[7] The rapid defeat of France was caused not only by the superiority of German tactics but also by mistakes in the military planning of the Allied states. Although the French army possessed strong defensive structures, the Maginot Line did not fully cover the direction of Germany's new offensive. The rapid movement of German forces placed the Allied armies in a strategically difficult situation.[8] After the 1940 French campaign, Blitzkrieg turned Germany into one of the most powerful military states in Europe. However, the success of this strategy was limited. Although Blitzkrieg was highly effective for short-term operations, a prolonged total war required enormous economic resources, industrial capacity, and human reserves. This factor later caused serious difficulties for Germany during its war against the Soviet Union.[9] The "Barbarossa" Operation, launched on June 22, 1941, became the largest application of the Blitzkrieg strategy. At first, German forces captured vast territories and inflicted heavy losses on the Soviet army. However, the vast territory of the Soviet Union, its large human and industrial resources, strong resistance, and harsh winter conditions disrupted Germany's plan for a quick victory. As a result, the Blitzkrieg strategy revealed its weaknesses in the conditions of a long-term war.[10]

Conclusion

The initial stage of the Second World War holds a special place in military history due to Germany's Blitzkrieg strategy. Unlike the traditional methods of warfare at the beginning of the 20th century, this strategy was based on rapid movement, a high level of cooperation between different branches of the military, and the effective use of technological capabilities. By utilizing tank divisions, military aviation, motorized infantry units, and modern communication systems, the German army achieved major military successes against Poland, the countries of Western Europe, and France within a short period of time. The initial successes of Blitzkrieg can be explained by several factors. Firstly, the German military leadership drew proper conclusions from the experience of the First World War and focused on the principles of mobile warfare. Secondly, the high level of training of Wehrmacht forces, the rapid command system, and coordinated actions between military units played an important role. Thirdly, the

reliance of opposing states on outdated military concepts facilitated Germany's early victories. At the same time, the Blitzkrieg strategy was not an absolute method that could be effective under all conditions. Its main weakness became apparent during prolonged warfare. The occupation of vast territories, supply problems, limited economic resources, and confrontation with a strongly resisting enemy reduced the effectiveness of Germany's strategy. Particularly in the war against the Soviet Union, the plan for a rapid victory failed, and Germany faced a long and resource-intensive conflict. Overall, although the Blitzkrieg strategy provided Germany with significant advantages during the early years of the Second World War, it was a strategically limited concept. This experience remains an important example in military history, demonstrating the significance of speed, technology, and cooperation between different branches of the armed forces.

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