



The Roots of Blitzkrieg: Hans von Seeckt and German Military Reform

By James S. Corum

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Following Germany's defeat in World War I, the Germans signed the Versailles Treaty, superficially agreeing to limit their war powers. The Allies envisioned the future German army as a lightly armed border guard and international security force. The Germans had other plans.

As early as 1919, James Corum contends, the tactical foundations were being laid for the Nazi Blitzkrieg. Between 1919 and 1933, German military leaders created and nurtured the Reichswehr, a new military organization built on the wreckage of the old Imperial Army. It was not being groomed for policing purposes.

Focusing on Hans von Seeckt, General Staff Chief and Army Commander, Corum traces the crucial transformations in German military tactical doctrine, organization, and training that laid the foundations for fighting Germany's future wars. In doing so, he restores balance to prior assessment of von Seeckt's influence and demonstrates how the general, along with a few other "visionary" officers—including armor tactician Ernst Volckheim and air tactician Helmut Wilberg—collaborated to develop the core doctrine for what became the Blitzkrieg.

The concepts of mobile war so essential to Germany's strength in World War II, Corum shows, were in place well before the tools became available. As an unforeseen consequence of the Versailles Treaty, the Germans were not saddled with a stockpile of outdated equipment as the Allies were. This, ironically, resulted in an advantage for the Germans, who were able to create doctrine first and design equipment to match it.

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- Sales Rank: #177794 in Books
- Published on: 1992-10-30
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 9.06" h x .68" w x 6.00" l, .88 pounds
- Binding: Paperback
- 294 pages

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Editorial Review

From Library Journal

This well-written, thoroughly researched book makes a powerful case that the tactical concepts used so effectively by the German army in World War II originated with Hans von Seeckt in the 1920s. Corum (military studies, Air Univ., United States Air Force) deserves particular credit for demonstrating that the German army's tactical orientation reflected not indifference to strategic questions but recognition that Germany's national interests were best served by short wars ending in decisive victories. In a state disarmed by the Versailles Treaty, Seeckt established a body of doctrine independent of armies and weapons. He broke with many aspects of the Prussian-German military tradition to develop concepts of offensive mobile war by elite combined-arms forces, closely supported from the air. He also emphasized high standards of leadership and training at all levels--standards that persisted in the Wehrmacht and contributed greatly to its wartime efficiency. Recommended for military history collections.

-D.E. Showalter, *U.S. Air Force Acad., Colorado Springs*

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Review

"This well-written, well-organized, and comprehensively researched work fills a significant gap in the literature on Germany's way of war in the 20th century. Corum integrates principles and hardware in a way inspiring emulation."—**Dennis E. Showalter**, author of *Tannenberg: Clash of Empires and Railroads and Rifles: Soldiers, Technology and the Unification of Germany* "A splendid work. Corum moves away from the conventional political concentration on military-state relations. He looks below the level of the high command to discuss the intellectual and technical debates by the largely unknown colonels, majors, and even captains. This well-written and exhaustively documented work not only provides a clearer understanding of military thinking, reform, and reorganization in post-World War I Germany but raises valuable questions regarding fundamental processes in the study and development of military doctrine, issues that remain pertinent."—**Gunther E. Rothenberg**, author of *The Art of Warfare in the Age of Napoleon* "Corum's extremely thorough labor in the German sources of the period gives English-speaking readers their first look at the internal studies and analyses that emerged from the Reichswehr's systematic examination of that experience. This very important work provides an interesting case study for comparative historical analysis of the way various national armies attempted to assess their World War I experiences."—**Harold R. Winton**, author of *To Change an Army: General John Burnett Stuart and British Armored Doctrine, 1927-1938*

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