

Blitzkrieg

(lit., "lightning war"), theory of the conduct of war, developed by the German armed forces in World War II, aimed at winning complete victory in as short a time as possible, measured in days and weeks rather than months and years. The term was first used in connection with the German attack on Poland in 1939. In the blitzkrieg, tanks and armored and other motorized vehicles for transporting troops were concentrated, and massive attacks by dive-bombers and self-propelled artillery were directed at selected enemy front-line positions. Dive-bombers also attacked vital enemy localities in the rear. These actions were calculated to create psychological shock and resultant disorganization in the enemy forces and to prevent any concerted reaction by the enemy high command.

The tactics of blitzkrieg were evolved by the German general Heinz Guderian (who drew most of his ideas from the writings of the British military theorists Basil Henry Liddell Hart and John Frederick Charles Fuller), and consisted of a splitting thrust by armored columns on a narrow front and complete disruption of the main enemy position at the point of attack, followed by wide-sweeping encirclement movements of fast-moving armored spearheads, thus creating large caldrons of entrapped and immobilized enemy forces.

The Blitzkrieg method was successfully applied by the German Wehrmacht in the campaigns against Poland, France, Denmark, Norway, Yugoslavia, and Greece. However, after initial successes in the attack on the Soviet Union (Operation "Barbarossa"), its failure there in late 1941 was the turning point of World War II and heralded the doom of the Third Reich. The British also used the term "Blitz" for the German terror air attacks on British cities from September 1940 to May 1941