

## GENERAL DE GAULLE

### Vers l'Armée de Métier

(Toward a Professional Army)

#### **V**ers l'Armée de Métier

was a little book by a French officer. The French army chose to ignore it. The German army, on the other hand, did not! It was published for the first time in 1934. Hitler was only just consolidating his hold on Germany at this time. The Nazi onslaught that was to pour across Europe was still half a decade in the future. Italy had yet to invade Ethiopia. The League of Nations continued to give the illusion of viability. France was still the world's greatest military power. Most countries actually believed that another World War was simply not going to happen.

The author of this book was a comparatively obscure army captain, teaching at the prestigious military college of St. Cyr. The army described in Captain de Gaulle's book would be a reality in a little more than five years -- but a German reality, not a French one. It swept like a firestorm through Luxembourg and the Ardennes, precisely as De Gaulle had foreseen. The most important of its objectives was to be the sources of the River Oise, "the worst flaw", in De Gaulle's own words, "in our frail defenses".

In this little book, only a bit more than forty-five thousand words, De Gaulle describes his imaginary mechanized force in detail. He speaks of it always maneuvering to attack the enemy flank or rear, its leading units employed "to break through and push on" toward the final objective with "lightning speed". He describes aircraft "not only as auxiliaries but indispensable comrades in arms". He predicts armored columns work-

ing hand-in-hand with flights of dive-bombers acting as "flying artillery". Again, the French did not read it, but the Germans did, the Americans did, and the Soviets did. Afterward they organized fighting machines that pushed De Gaulle's theories to their logical limits and changed the face of war for the rest of the century.

#### The "New Model" Division

In Vers l'Armée de Métier and in an earlier work, Le Fil de l'Épée (The Cutting Edge), De Gaulle explained how his armored divisions would be organized. They were enormous. More "Corps" than "Divisions", they contained the following:

One Heavy Armored Brigade of one Heavy Tank Battalion, three Medium Tank Battalions, and one Light Tank Battalion

One Motorized Brigade of six Motorized Infantry Battalions and one Mechanized Infantry Battalion

and One Artillery Brigade of two Heavy (155mm) Artillery Battalions and three Light (75mm) Artillery Battalions

It would also include a Reconnaissance Battalion, an Engineer Battalion, a Signals Battalion, a Logistical Support Battalion, and whatever Anti-Tank, Anti-Aircraft, Staff, or Support elements necessary to make for an efficient "all arms" combat formation capable of operating with complete independence.

De Gaulle's elite "Army of Maneuver" would consist of one "Light" and six "Line" divisions, with a total of approximately 100,000 personnel serving

six-year enlistments. If we compare this to PanzerGruppe Kleist in 1940, the parallels are striking. Kleist commanded a total of five Panzer Divisions and three Motorized Divisions numbering 100,000 men in all! Numbers of tanks and motorized infantry would have been remarkably comparable.

#### The Real Thing

The armored division France finally decided to build in 1938, consisted of two mixed "demi-brigades", each of two tank battalions and one infantry battalion. General Héring suggested the division be divided into two "combat groups", each with two tank battalions, one infantry battalion, a recon company, an engineer company, a signals company, an Anti-Tank battery, and an AA battery. It would also have an artillery regiment of thirty-six guns (nine batteries), but this was to remain together, not divided between the "groups". In December General Billotte agreed to create two such divisions. General Colson warned they would not be ready until 1941, however. They would be called "Division Cuirassée de Réserve" (Armored Divisions of the Reserve or DCRs). The first of the new French armored brigades was created on 2 September 1939, the day before France declared war!

On 11 September 1939 Colonel De Gaulle sent a letter to Army High Command requesting to be posted to a DCR, citing his combat experience in the Russo-Polish War. He had commanded a mixed tank-and-infantry force at the Battle of Warsaw with such brilliance that he earned the Cross of

St. Wencelas from a grateful Poland and a citation from his commanding officer, General Weygand. He also recommended that some of the army's independent tank battalions be formed into brigades to improve their effectiveness. The reply was not recorded...On 17 December there were further dilutions. There would now be three DCRs consisting of the following:

- One Heavy Tank Demi-Brigade of two Heavy Tank Battalions
- One Light Tank Demi-Brigade of two Light Tank Battalions
- One Battalion of Mechanized Chasseurs
- One Artillery Regiment
- One Engineer Company, one Signals Company, and one AA Group

## War and Vindication

On 10 May 1940 the Wermacht crashed across the frontier and France was at war. On 11 May, Colonel de Gaulle received command of the 4th DCR, which didn't exist yet! On 15 May, he went to get his instructions from General Georges at GHQ. These instructions were pitifully simple. The High Command was trying to form a new front on the River Aisne. De Gaulle with his one understrength division, operating out of Laon, was to delay them in any way he could.

"Why not, even now, mass all our armor in one strike force and smash the Nazis to pieces?" De Gaulle asked.

General George replied shaking his head, "1st DCR was annihilated in Belgium. 2nd was destroyed in transport on the Oise. 3rd fought gloriously in bits and pieces and was overwhelmed. Yours is all that is left. Voilà, de Gaulle! You have long held the ideas the enemy is putting into practice. Now is your chance to act!"

Just beyond the Serre, masses of German troops and armor were marching westward toward St. Quentin. The roads were choked with refugees intermixed with bands of demoralized French soldiers without weapons or organization. When he saw

this, De Gaulle was appalled. After a quick reconnaissance, he decided to attack on the morning of the 17th with whatever he had. During the night three battalions of tanks arrived by train. One consisted of heavy Char-B1s, the other two of light R-35s. They were unloaded in the dark. Many of the men had never driven in a tank before! There were also a number of artillery batteries and a single battalion of infantry in ordinary buses!

At first light they moved out. Colonel de Gaulle, the most junior officer in the history of the modern French army to command a division, was in the lead. His long body stuck out of the turret of the lead tank next to his personal standard, a simple flag bearing the Cross-of Lorraine. They killed hundreds of Germans that day and took one hundred thirty prisoners. These and the others 4th DCR took over the next few days around Montcornet, Crécy-sur-Serre, and Abbeville were very nearly the only German prisoners taken in the entire Battle of France.

It is true that de Gaulle's attack at Montcornet, in the final analysis, had little effect on the Battle for France. The German advance was delayed by a day, but the Germans decision to halt their westward drive was reached before the action at Montcornet and had no connection with de Gaulle's attack. Its importance, therefore, must be measured in might-have-beens rather than tangibles. De Gaulle had shown what could be accomplished with a scratch force commanded with courage and vigor. In the North a few days earlier at Hannut, between the Dyle and the Albert Canal, two French mechanized divisions (the 2nd and 3rd) had met two panzer divisions (the 3rd and 4th), punishing them severely. The French lost 105 tanks and the Germans 160, in spite of muddled French leadership. French tanks were often superior to their German counterparts and the average French soldier was the equal of his German adversary if well led and properly trained. However, French tactics were ill conceived and their doctrine fatally flawed. What an aggressive and clear-minded French armored doctrine might have achieved, had De Gaulle been taken seriously and the French leadership willing to make the sacri-

fices necessary to build and maintain effective military institutions can only be imagined.

## POSTSCRIPT An Evening in Berlin

One night in what I believe was 1938, Bill Shirer, the New York Times correspondent now famous for such books as *Rise and Fall of the Third Reich*, *The Collapse of the Third Republic*, and *Mid-Century Journey*, was having a drink with several army officers at the American Embassy in Berlin. A young French officer was telling Heinz Guderian how impressed he was with the German's work on the development of mechanized warfare in the new Wermacht.

Guderian smiled modestly and replied, "But after all, captain, I did not work entirely in a vacuum. J.F.C. Fuller and Liddel Hart in England, the Soviet Marshal Tuchashevsky, and many others have contributed much to the debate." He turned to Shirer, "There is, of course, your General McNair in America". Then he turned to the Frenchman, "Of course, how could we forget your brilliant Colonel de Gaulle". The French officer stared at the German general for a moment before speaking, "I beg the general's pardon. Of whom were you speaking?"

Vers l'Armée de Métier had been printed in German and distributed to all Panzer Corps officers as required reading. In France, the book sold only a few thousand copies. The French nation stood on the brink of war and her most brilliant military theoretician was almost totally ignored. In fact, his theories were virtually unknown and his work unread in his own country.

### NEW RELEASES THIS MONTH

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# 4th Division Cuirassée de Réserve: 1940

Portee Infantry Company:	3xInfantry/Bus, 1xInfantry Support/Bus
Portee Support Company:	2x25mm ATG/Truck, 1x81mm Mortar (2)/Truck
Rifle Squadron:	3xInfantry/Truck, 1xInfantry Support/Truck
Support Squadron:	2xInfantry Support/1xTruck, 1x25mm ATG/Truck, and 1x81mmMortar(2)/Truck
Tank Company (A):	4xChar-D2 or R-35
Tank Company (B):	3xR-40
Tank Company (C):	4xR-35
Cavalry Tank Company (A):	4xS-35
Cavalry Tank Company (B):	4xH-39
Armored Car Squadron:	4xAMD-178
Motorcycle Company/Squadron:	4xMotorcycle Infantry
Heavy Tank Company:	3xChar-B1bis

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Heavy Tank Battalion:	3xHeavy Tank Company
Tank Battalion (A):	1xChar-D2 or R-35 (HQ), 3xTank Company (A)
Tank Battalion (B):	1xR-35 (HQ), 1xTank Company (B), 2xTank Company (C)
Tank Battalion (C):	1xR-35 (HQ), 3xTank Company (C)
Cavalry Tank Battalion (A):	1xS-35 (HQ), 2xCavalry Tank Company (A)
Cavalry Tank Battalion (B):	1xH-39 (HQ), 2xCavalry Tank Company (B)
Portee Infantry Battalion (4th Chasseurs):	1xInfantry (HQ)/Truck, 3xPortee Infantry Company, and 1xPorteeSupport Company
Dragon Portee Battalion:	1xInfantry (HQ)/Truck, 1xMotorcycle Company, 2xRifle Squadron, and 1xSupport Squadron
Recon Group:	1xInfantry (HQ)/Truck, 1xArmored Car Squadron, and 1xMotorcycle Company

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6th Tank Brigade:	1xInfantry (GHQ)/APC, 1xHeavy Tank Battalion, and 1xTank Battalion (A)
8th Tank Brigade:	1xInfantry (GHQ)/APC, 1xHeavy Tank Battalion, and 1xTank Battalion (A)
3rd Cuirassier Regiment:	1xInfantry (GHQ)/APC, 1xCavalry Tank Battalion (A)
7th Dragon Portee Regiment:	1xInfantry (GHQ)/Truck, 3xDragon Portee Battalion
10th Reconnaissance Regiment:	2xRecon Group

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Division Assets:	6th Tank Brigade, 8th Tank Brigade, 3rd Cuirassier Regiment, 4th Chasseur Battalion, and 7th Dragon Portee Regiment
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Division Support:	1xAnti-Tank Battery:	1x Laffly W-15, 1x 25mm AA/Renault UE
	2xArtillery Battalion:	@ 3x105mm M3(2)/P-107 Halftrack
	1xEngineer Group:	2xEngineer/Truck

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- Notes:
- 1) 1xTank Battalion (B) was divided between the two Tank Brigades.
  - 2) On 25 May, 4th DCR received 1xHeavy Tank Battalion and 1xTank Battalion (C) to replace operational losses.
  - 3) On 25 May, 1xCavalry Tank Battalion (B) was added 3rd Cuirassier Regiment, to fill out its authorized strength.
  - 4) French APCs included Renault Tracteur Blindé L37s and MCG-5 Halftracks.
  - 5) The Laffly W-15 was a 47mm Anti-Tank gun in a "portee" mount on the back of a Laffly truck, firing rearward.

### The Battle for the Serre Bridgeheads

17 May 1940



**French**

**4th DCR**

Cohesion

**14**

Brigade Headquarters: 1x Infantry (GHQ+1)/MCG-5 Halftrack

Colonel De Gaulle), 3x AMD-178(R)

Heavy Tank Battalion: 1x Heavy Tank Company: 3x Char-B1  
1x Heavy Tank Company: 3x Char-B1  
1x Heavy Tank Company: 2x Char-B1

Tank Battalion(-): 1x R-35 (HQ)  
1x Tank Company: 2x R-35  
1x Tank Company: 3x R-35  
1x Tank Company: 4x R-35

Tank Battalion(-): 1x R-35 (HQ)  
1x Tank Company: 3x R-35  
1x Tank Company: 3x R-35  
1x Tank Company: 2x R-35

4th Chasseurs(-): 1x Infantry (HQ)/Medium Truck  
1x Portee Infantry Company:  
3x Infantry/Medium Truck, 1x Infantry Support/Light Truck  
1x Portee Infantry Company:  
2x Infantry/Medium Truck, 2x Infantry Support/Light Truck  
1x Portee Infantry Company:  
3x Infantry/Medium Truck, 1x Infantry Support/Light Truck  
1x Portee Infantry Company:  
2x 25mm ATG/Light Truck, 1x 81mm Mortar(2)/Medium Truck  
1x Light Artillery Battalion(-): 2x 75mm Mle36(2)/P-107 Halftrack  
1x Light Artillery Battalion: 3x 75mm Mle(2) (OFF MAP)

**Germans**

**1st**

**Panzer  
Division**

Cohesion

**13**

Vervins Bridgehead: *Deploy within 6" of "Area-1"*  
1x Infantry(GHQ)/Light Truck, 3x Infantry'39/Light Truck,  
1x Infantry Support/Light Truck, 2x Pz-1, 3x Pz-IVE

Montcornet Bridgehead: *Deploy within 6" of "Area-2"*  
6x Infantry'39/Light Truck, 2x Infantry Support/1x Light  
Truck, 1x 8cm Mortar(3)/Light Truck

Boi-de-Montcourvier Bridgehead: *Deploy within 6" of "Area-3"*  
1x Infantry(HQ)/Light Truck, 5x Infantry'39/Light Truck,  
2x Infantry Support/1x Light Truck,  
3x 37mm ATG/Kubelwagen, 6x Pz-IIIF, 4x Pz-IIID

### INITIAL DEPLOYMENT:

**Germans** - (set up first) Deploy at bridgeheads as indicated above. German troops are inexperienced and suffer from "Tank Terror". Add 2 to their Cohesion die-rolls when overrun by tanks.

**French** - Enter the *Southern* and/or *Eastern* edge of the map within the designated "French Entry Areas" on turn one. French "off map" artillery must plot 3 fire missions before the Germans deploy. These missions take place *before* turn 1. French troops are inexperienced and suffer from "Panzer Terror". Add 2 to their Cohesion die-rolls when overrun by tanks. The 4th Chasseurs were actually carried in *buses*. Reduce the Movement Value of all troop-carrying trucks by 6 points.

### SCENARIO LENGTH: 15 TURNS

### VICTORY CONDITIONS:

**French Marginal:** Destroy or disorganize all German troops on the French side of the Serre River by the end of turn 15.

**French Tactical:** Accomplish the above and occupy the town of Marie.

**French Decisive:** No "decisive" French victory is possible in 1940. The French leadership believed the nation doomed from the outset!

**German Marginal:** Prevent any French units from crossing the Serre before the end of turn 15.

**German Tactical:** Maintain at least 3 friendly units on the French bank of the Serre, within 4" of any initial German deployment area (Bridgehead) by the end of turn 15.

**German Decisive:** Maintain 2 bridgeheads as above.

### TERRAIN SUGGESTIONS:

The Serre is not fordable at any point.  
The Serre battlefield measures 3 feet by 6 feet.  
Each hexagon on the map is 4" across.

