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Dennis Showalter, *Hitler's Panzers: The Lightning Attacks That Revolutionized Warfare*. New York: Berkley Caliber, 2009. Pp. 390. ISBN 978-0-425-23004-6.

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Few subjects attract the attention of general readers, historians, and publishers alike more than armored warfare as practiced by the German Army and the Waffen SS during World War II. A cursory look at relevant titles available from an internet bookseller reveals well over 4,000 books of various types and assorted scholarly value for an apparently insatiable audience. *Hitler's Panzers*, Professor Dennis Showalter's masterful synthesis, is a welcome addition to this crowded field of historical research. It puts the panzers at the center of three interfacing narratives: their "contributions to the development of mechanized war and armor technology, their influence on the role of the army in German culture and society, and their role in the Third Reich's conduct of World War II—militarily and morally" (1). The approach here is broadly narrative rather than particularist, providing a story as much as a history, but without sacrificing depth, breadth, or context. The book will appeal to a very wide readership in modern military history.

Showalter is eminently qualified to write this book. For more than forty years, he has taught military history at Colorado College (and on five occasions as a distinguished visiting professor at U.S. military academies). He has published more than a dozen books and well over a hundred scholarly articles on German military history from Frederick the Great to World War II. *Hitler's Panzers* is the well-honed product of this lifetime of teaching, research, and writing on the theory, strategy, tactics, myths, and realities of Germany's approach to warfare. The book also deals candidly and critically with the darker aspects of the partnership of German military leaders and armed forces with National Socialism.

The first two chapters of the book provide an erudite introduction to the history of armored and mechanized warfare in World War I and its further development in the 1920s and 30s. Showalter tells us the British introduced the tank to the modern battlefield in 1916, during the Battle of the Somme, achieving spectacular but ultimately limited tactical success. The Germans quickly developed effective antitank measures, which in part explains their tardy appreciation of the operational benefits of armored warfare. Weakness in Germany's war industries and growing shortages in raw materials in 1917 and 1918 further reduced the General Staff's interest in developing this new form of warfare. The combination of the unsolved tactical and operational problems (combining fire and movement) and military restrictions imposed by the Versailles Treaty led General Hans von Seeckt and the Reichswehr in the 1920s to search for a new way to defeat an enemy's superior numbers. This did not mean either instant or widespread German enthusiasm for tanks and mechanized warfare, but with von Seeckt's steady encouragement and a number of military and political incentives, a cadre of talented young officers in various branches of the army persisted with their investigations and trials. These efforts, combined with the rise of Hitler and the National Socialist government beginning in 1933, in due course produced the panzer forces that spearheaded victories in Poland and France in 1939 and 1940.

Showalter is at his best explaining the basis of the panzers' success: "The guiding tactical principle was attack by fire and movement: platoons and individual tanks supporting each other, and in turn supported by motorized infantry, artillery, and engineers—an integrated combat team. Tank-against-tank combat was not considered something to be sought, merely an aspect of the overall mission. Its success depended on hitting first with superior firepower, and, like every other aspect of armored warfare, that situation was best created by seizing the initiative through maneuver" (69-70).

The Spanish Civil War provided the practical experience the German army needed to refine its armored doctrine and battle tactics, and to broaden its concept of all-arms (including ground-air) cooperation. Hit-

ler and the Nazis added both essential political support and a *furor teutonicus* to the new, high-tempo offensive warfare.

Chapter three covers the Wehrmacht's three triumphant campaigns against Poland, Denmark and Norway, and the Low Countries and France. "Blitzkrieg" or "lightning war," with the panzers in the lead, shattered Germany's numerically superior and, at least on paper, more formidable enemies in a matter of weeks. These were extraordinary triumphs compared with the protracted and demoralizing stalemates of the Great War only twenty years earlier. "Blitzkrieg" was not, however, a German word, but a sensationalized label coined by a British journalist writing for the *Daily Mail*, a popular London tabloid newspaper, not *Time* magazine (85). In any case, the word was adopted to describe the unprecedented success of German arms in the summer of 1940. The men and machines of Hitler's panzer and panzer grenadier divisions acquired a mythic stature that neither defeats in Russia, Normandy, and during the Battle of the Bulge, nor the passage of time has diminished.

In chapter four, Showalter examines the consequences of the fall of France for both the western allies and the German army in terms of the new challenges of modern war: "blitzkrieg's real victor in 1940 was National Socialism" (132). The panzers enabled the Nazis to transform their apocalyptic ideology into genocidal reality. Rather than establishing a new paradigm of war, "the success of 1940 arguably led Germany down a dead-end road of operative hubris, emphasizing combat at the expense of strategy" (131). The victories did not suddenly come to an end: campaigns in the Balkans, North Africa, and Operation Barbarossa, against the Soviet Union, all demonstrated the extraordinary fighting prowess of the panzers and the Wehrmacht. But the seeds of decline were also planted during these campaigns as deficiencies in its war-time industries, fuel shortages, and logistical oversights started to erode Germany's military effectiveness. The book's last three chapters discuss the decline, defeat, and destruction of the panzers and the Third Reich.

A short epilogue summarizes the end of the panzer divisions and the differing fates of their army and Waffen SS commanders at the hands of the Allies. It also discusses the effect of the war's lessons on the Bundeswehr, the British Army, the U.S. Army, and NATO during the Cold War.

Dennis Showalter skillfully tells a complex and at times controversial story with a tone and degree of detail suited to both experts and new readers in World War II studies. In addition, he unobtrusively weaves into his narrative the main historiographical debates concerning the development of operational art in the two world wars (and the key contributors to these debates). Not all readers, however, will be happy with the absence of footnotes and bibliography. And, too, the volume's five maps, while illustrating the main strategic course of the war, do not provide any specific information on the war fought and experienced by the panzers and panzer grenadiers. These shortcomings are mitigated by the reasonable price of the book. Most scholarly monographs with detailed notes and extensive bibliographies, prized by graduate students and serious scholars, are priced around \$125 and marketed mainly to libraries.

Readers seeking an informed, intelligently argued, and engaging account of German armored warfare in the first half of the twentieth century will find this book well worth their investment of time and money.