DE GAULLE'S CONCEPT OF A MOBILE, PROFESSIONAL ARMY: GENESIS OF FRENCH DEFEAT?

by

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(Editor's Note: *In the 1930's, the military and political leaders of France rejected De Gaulle's plan for the creation of a professional army with a separate armored corps. As a result of her failure to accept the potential of a strong armored force manned by professional soldiers, France entered World War II with a non-professional, citizen-soldier army trained primarily as a defensive force. French reliance on the nation in arms concept, the citizen-soldier, and the strategy of defense–the "Maginot Line complex"–contributed significantly to quick defeat of the French army in 1940. The French experience, related here, may have particular relevance for US defense planners who are now coping with the military, political, and social problems of today's professional army.)*

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The fall of France to the German blitzkrieg in June 1940 has generated a great deal of literature that attempts to pinpoint the causes of France's rapid collapse. Among the important immediate causes identified is the French failure to mass armored forces for use against the attacking German thrusts. It is clear that the French error ensued from an inability to recognize the potential of mechanized warfare, not from a shortage of armored vehicles. By May 1940, France and Germany were approximately equal in the number of tanks available for combat on the western front, France having 2,431[1] and Germany 2,439 (not counting command vehicles).[2] The Germans massed their ten armored divisions into an armored group, two separate corps, and one separate division, while France haphazardly scattered her three armored divisions, three mechanized divisions, and her remaining twenty-seven non-divisional tank battalions among the eight French armies.[3] While the Germans recognized the potential of massed armored forces in conducting rapid, mobile operations, French armored units were committed to battle in a piecemeal fashion, resulting in their "melting away one after the other like snow flakes in the sun, without having any appreciable effect on the course of the battle."[4]

One might validly conclude that the Germans had learned more than the French from the First World War, and that the German commanders were more innovative than the French. There are numerous statements by prominent French military leaders supporting these views. For example, Marshal Pétain admitted in 1947 his early lack of familiarity with combat involving tanks: "I had never worked with them. In the course of

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the War of 1914, I did not have armored divisions. This caused me to be somewhat disinterested in them."[5] But the problem of French employment of armor is more complex than this, since their consideration of armor was greatly influenced by the traditional French approach to national defense, which called for the entire nation to spring to arms during times of national emergency. This defense concept has been called "the nation in arms."[6] Many military and political leaders believed that an Armor Corps (i.e. a separate armor command having large homogeneous tank units)—because of its inherent offensive capabilities, its needs for a better-trained and longer-serving soldier, and its frequent association with elitism and professionalism—was not consistent with the basic tenets of the nation in arms. This negative view of armor became even more prevalent when General Charles De Gaulle offered his famous plan for the formation of a highly mobile army, insisting that it be formed with professional rather than citizen-soldiers. The question of armored units subsequently became subsumed by the controversy over professionalism, leading France to reject the creation of a highly professional mechanized force without adequately considering the potential of armored units. This crucial decision was brought about more by a belief that the Armored Corps violated the "republican" approach to national defense than by a consideration of the capability of a spearhead of tank forces.

THE NATION IN ARMS VERSUS THE PROFESSIONAL ARMY

The concept of the nation in arms had originated in the French Revolution with the "cannonade of Valmy" in 1792 and the *levée en masse* in 1793. Its true spirit was reflected in the decree establishing the *levée en masse:*

> Henceforth, until the enemies have been driven from the territory of the Republic, the French people are in permanent requisition for army service.... The young men shall go to battle; the married men shall forge arms and transport provisions; the women shall make tents and clothes, and shall serve in the hospitals; the children shall turn old linen into lint; the old men shall repair to the public places, to stimulate the courage of the warriors and preach the unity of the Republic and the hatred of kings.[7]

This reliance on the military potential of the citizenry became an important part of French republican tradition. Many Frenchmen came to believe that when the country was in danger, a mass of patriotic volunteers would rise and destroy the invading armies. The concentration of all national energies against an enemy would be morally and militarily sufficient to defend France. Even though she moved away from the armed nation to a professional army for a time after the Napoleonic Wars, the total commitment of the entire nation remained the theoretical basis of the French nation in arms.

The nation in arms was not reinstituted by the French until after the War of 1870-71, during which Germany dramatically reminded them that wars were no longer simply quarrels between governments of ruling families, fought by relatively small armies of professional soldiers.[8] Wars were now conducted between entire peoples, fought by armies of completely mobilized nations. From the time of that defeat, the foundation of the French national defenses rested on an unswerving faith in the massive mobilization of the citizenry in times of national peril. The resulting symbiotic bond between army and nation was well characterized in a 1904 report by a Chamber of Deputies Commission: "The modern concept of the army is that . . . it is identical with the nation, draws from it all its resources, and has no separate and distinct existence outside the nation."[9] After the First World War, the principle of the citizenry in arms was expanded to include the notion of complete mobilization of every possible materiel resource. The concept came to be one of total war. France was convinced that her best defense lay in committing *all* her resources, both men and materiel, against an attacking enemy. The completely committed

"WITHOUT A PROFESSIONAL ARMY, THERE CAN BE NO FRENCH DEFENSE."

Lieutenant Colonel
Charles De Gaulle, 1934

and mobilized nation, since it was peace-loving, came to emphasize as well the defense as opposed to the offense, and the citizen-soldier as opposed to professional. For many Frenchmen the three—nation in arms, defense, and citizen-soldier—became synonymous.

There was little doubt that the nation in arms was based essentially on a defensive principle. An army composed of citizens performing their patriotic duty would be very reluctant to aggressively attack another state; however, they would willingly defend to the death their sacred French soil. The example of World War I also contributed to a continued belief in this defensive principle. French commanders—almost to a man—accepted the popular perception of the Great War as a heroic defensive effort by an armed nation. An aroused France had succeeded in 1914 in turning back the invading German forces; why shouldn't she again succeed in the future? They had learned too well the lessons of the First World War and could visualize only a war similar to the previous. Their vision rarely ranged above the trenches of that war, which had validated the principle of the armed nation. As a result of such outmoded thought, the offensive was de-emphasized, and France's strategy between wars became one of the armed nation gloriously defending its borders. France would wait for Germany to strike the first blow; then, after the initial attack had been repelled, she would undertake limited, methodical attacks of massed infantry, armor, and artillery. Armor would be used in these attacks, but its purpose would be to support the infantry, not to conduct rapid, independent maneuvers. The ultimate result of this thinking was the "Maginot Line Complex": the delusory belief that the fortifications on the northeast frontier would protect France or at least give her time to mobilize and commit the nation in arms. As Marshal Pétain envisioned, "The active metropolitan army will act as the covering force; under its protection, the principal mass of our forces will be mobilized."[10]

And with regard to the citizen-soldier, France had learned yet another important lesson from the First World War; in it the reservist demonstrated that he could perform admirably in battle. Since republican France traditionally feared the conservatism of the professional soldier, she possessed a natural bias in behalf of reliance upon citizen soldiers. Accordingly, France maintained short-term service for the conscript and held the size of the professional component to a comparatively low figure. The term of service for the conscript was reduced from three to two years in 1921, to 18 months in 1923, and to one year in 1928 (though later increased to two years in 1935). During the same period the permanent component was gradually reduced to the point where it could be spared only for a few priority roles, e.g. in the frontier fortifications, the conscript training centers, and the planning staffs. The professional army thus became the cadre for training the citizen-soldier before returning him to civilian life; it also provided the umbrella of protection under which the armed nation would be mobilized. "France had no army in peacetime in the old sense of the word," according to Irving M. Gibson. "She had only a permanent frontier guard and 240,000 recruits under training."[11] The active army was described even in French law as a training rather than fighting force.[12] This system was to last through 1939 and the beginning of World War II.

In addition to the firm belief in the potential of a completely armed French nation, this predominant emphasis on the citizen-soldier was based on the beliefs that such an army would be totally loyal to the republican regime, that it could not be used in initiating an aggressive war. According to the republican view, there was little likelihood that the army could be persuaded to act against the republican regime if it consisted

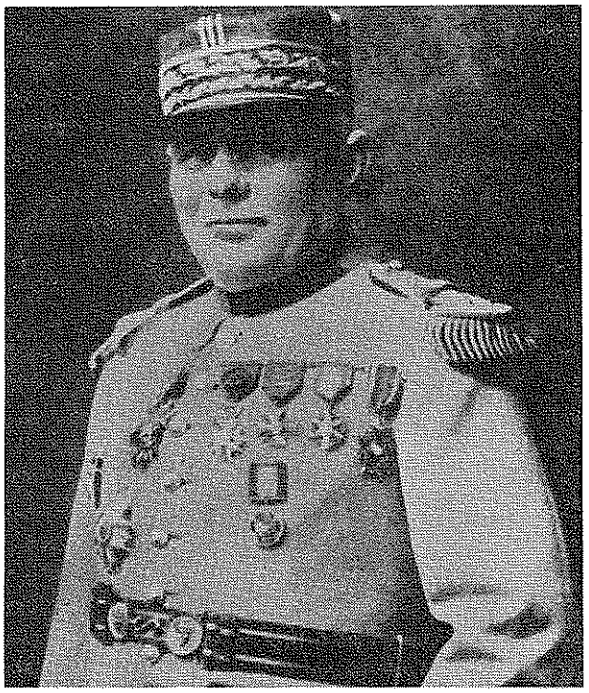
mostly of conscripts. Those who supported this view had only to look back to the professional army of Napoleon III to see the menace of such a military force. As for a professional army's being more prone to undertake international ventures, many Frenchmen agreed with their countrymen who asserted, "When one has such fine arms, there are always fools who are burning to try them out, [for] . . . soldiers, like iron, rust in times of peace."[13] In contrast, an armed nation would fight only in defense of its own territory or for essential national needs. Since the nation in arms was composed of citizen-soldiers, it would be impossible for France to fight an aggressive war undesired by the citizenry. Furthermore, the political left believed that a professional army was not necessarily a more effective fighting force. One leftist observer opined that "a professional army increases, in time of peace, the chances of war, and in times of war, . . . diminishes the chances of victory."[14] After all, a professional French army had lost the Franco-Prussian War of 1870-71, but a nation in arms had won the First World War.

The French, then, firmly believed in the principle of an aroused nation valiantly defending itself, this belief reaching its zenith during the 1930's when the political left acquired its greatest power. The principle accorded with their republican sentiments, furnished a means of controlling the potentially reactionary military, and provided what they considered to be the most effective national defense strategy. The army thus became a deterrent or defensive force, rather than an aggressive war-making institution. The close relationship between the nation in arms and the army, and its consequences, were noted in an army manual, *Provisional Instructions for the Tactical Employment of Large Units,* published by the French General Staff from 1921 to 1936 and often referred to as the "Gospel of the Army": "The very life of the citizenry is associated in an intimate fashion with that of the army, and thus the formula for the nation in arms is realized in every aspect. . . . [This] greatly influences the eventualities of war and consequently the formation of strategy."[15]

This common French perception of national defense strategy had a decisive influence upon the manner in which the French army organized its armor forces. Since armored units were more capable than foot soldiers of offensive action, many thought that lack of emphasis on large armored formations would reduce the possibility of France's starting a war. As one military observer noted, "The Germans, who are naturally aggressive and who prepare their army for the attack, must naturally have armored divisions. But France, being pacific and defensive, is bound to be anti-motorization."[16] Important political leaders also adopted this attitude toward large armored formations. For example, Léon Blum, leader of the Socialist Party and Prime Minister from 1936-37, was convinced that De Gaulle and the High Command were conspiring to create an aggressive army of "shock and speed." He felt that such a conception was a "menace to peace."[17] To meet the threat of German invasion, even by armored divisions, France would rely on a full-scale mobilization of French infantrymen to defend the northeast frontier, thereby avoiding the possibility of French armor-led aggression. The anti-tank gun, rather than the tank, was most accordant with France's approach to national defense, since it was less expensive, was primarily a defensive weapon, and could easily be handled by the citizen-soldier.

DE GAULLE'S PROFESSIONAL ARMY

There were some early attempts in France to create a modern armored corps. The most influential individual during the initial period was Colonel (later General) J. E. Estienne, now known as the "father of French armor."[18] An artillery officer, he conceived the idea of an armored fighting vehicle during the First World War and dubbed the French tank units as the *Artillerie d'Assaut,* or assault artillery. Yet, he clearly recognized the wider possibility of tanks and in 1922 called for a primitive type of armored division. His ideas fell on the deaf ears of the French High Command, and the separate headquarters of the armor command established during the



US ARMY

General J.E. Estienne

war was soon abolished. In a decision that reflected France's future approach to the employment of tanks, questions regarding armor were placed under the purview of the infantry command. There were others who recognized the potential of mechanized warfare. In July 1927, General André Doumenc, who had served as General Estienne's chief of staff in the Great War and who was to serve in World War II as the chief of staff of the Armies of the Field under General Alphonse Georges, called for the formation of large armored units. Also, a continual trickle of articles and books emphasizing the need for French mechanization appeared in the interim between the wars.

One of the best known of these was *Vers l'armée de métier* by Lieutenant Colonel (later General) Charles De Gaulle. This work, calling for the creation of a separate armored corps, first appeared in 1934. The thrust of the author's argument is suggested by his title. While the English translation of 1941 is entitled *The Army of the Future,* a better translation would be *Toward the Professional Army.* In this work, De Gaulle asserted essentially that quality is better than quantity. A professional army is superior to the nation in arms, and France should construct a strongly armored, professional army. The fundamental assumption of the French national defense, that is, the superiority of the nation in arms over other modes of defense, is fallacious.

De Gaulle observed several weaknesses in the theory of the nation in arms. First, he recognized that the geographical nature of France made it particularly vulnerable to attack. If converging attacks were made from Flanders, the Ardennes, Alsace, or Lorraine, and one attack broke through the defenses, it could "strike straight at the heart of France"—Paris. The armed nation was particularly vulnerable in this situation, since its slowness to mobilize made it more likely that a break could swiftly be made in the defenses along France's frontiers. De Gaulle also believed that the nation in arms could be mobilized only during periods of the greatest danger. Because commitment of the nation in arms to battle would necessarily entail heavy losses, he recognized that national security would have to be gravely imperiled before France would go to war. Yet, De Gaulle could envision instances when France would want to "seize the coveted prize as swiftly as possible, thus offering the adversary the alternative either of resigning himself to the *fait accompli,* or of assuming the risk and

"THE LAST WAR SAW THE POWER OF MACHINERY REACH AN UNHEARD-OF DEGREE, BUT IT WAS BRUTAL AND UNSTABLE. BY ADDING TO IT SPEED, IN THE HANDS OF A SELECT BODY OF MEN, THE FUTURE WILL RESTORE TO IT SOME OF ITS FORMER CHARACTER."

Lieutenant Colonel Charles DeGaulle, 1934

odium of a war of extermination."[19] He firmly believed there were instances when France would want to attack outside her own borders. Therefore, he rejected the defensive nature of the nation in arms and, in effect, called for the creation of an army that could launch a "preventive strike" or initiate an immediate offensive upon the declaration of hostilities.

De Gaulle also attacked the fighting capability of the citizen-soldier, and asserted that too much stress was being placed on numbers of personnel. With the increasing complexity of war machines, there existed a "latent opposition between mechanization and the exclusive system of numerical strength." Since war was becoming more and more technical, he could not believe a massively armed populace would have great military power simply because it was armed. He was particularly disturbed by the inadequate training the conscript received: "Soon, someone will set up as a principle that the less military training a nation has had, the better it fights, as Émile acquired learning through not having studied."[20] The increase in the technical level of warfare, in his view, demanded more highly trained troops, not simply more troops.

Thus, De Gaulle attacked the efficacy of the entire concept of the nation in arms. He asserted that "No form of battle is more bloody than that of nations in arms." The solution was to establish a professional army. "Without a professional army, there can be no French defense."[21] A professional army would have both an offensive and a defensive capability, could be used immediately without wasting precious time mobilizing, would compel economy in both personnel and in materiel, and could be highly trained in the use of modern weapons of war. France would still require a system of reserves, since this elite force could not possibly destroy all the forces of the enemy in an all-out war. But the "picked troops" of a professional army would be the foundation of France's defenses and would be the "vanguard of the mobilized nation."[22]

As for mechanized forces, De Gaulle's professional army would consist primarily of armored units. It would be composed of 100,000 volunteers, composing six divisions. Each division would have three brigades (one each of armor, infantry and artillery) with supporting engineer, signal, reconnaissance, and aerial units. The army would also have a light armored division for scouting purposes, a brigade of heavy tanks for attacking permanent fortifications, and assorted other support units. This professional army, then, would be a powerfully armed, swiftly moving body employing all the potential of armored forces. To use De Gaulle's descriptive terminology, "the aristocrats of war" would become "the chief element of maneuver."[23]

US ARMY

French B-1 Tank.

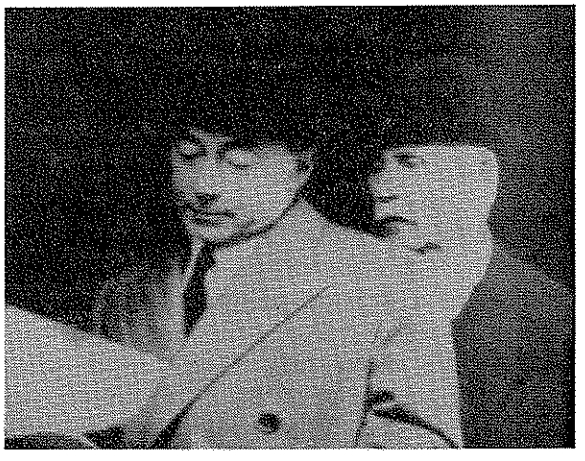
But De Gaulle had unfortunately linked the growth of French armored forces to the appearance of a professional army. This linkage required a rejection of the tradition of the nation in arms and was a direct affront to much French republican sentiment. Additionally, he had committed heresy by suggesting that France itself could initiate a war, and by intimating that expansion of her frontiers could be in her general interests. Thus, De Gaulle, by suggesting the possible use of armored forces in an aggressive role, corroborated many of the fears of those who opposed armored forces for France. In the debate over mechanization, his proposal shifted attention to the demand for a professional army, rather than to the merits of large armored formations.

THE POLITICAL REACTION

There is little doubt that De Gaulle's argument aroused the suspicion and opposition of important political leaders. Léon Blum expressed the complaint that De Gaulle had "combined two ideas, which in my opinion should not be associated in any degree: one was the strategic employment of large armored units and the other was the return of the professional army. I was tempted by the first idea; I was a resolute adversary of the other."[24] Such sentiments on the part of the political left became increasingly apparent, for it considered itself the true heir and defender of French revolutionary and republican ideals. To the leftists, the shibboleth of the nation in arms was sacred. Many members of the political left would have preferred a militia rather than an active army, and nothing was more contradictory to their beliefs than a professional army. De Gaulle's book could not have been published at a more inopportune moment, for when it appeared France was attempting to amend the law of 1928 and convert from one-year to two-year service in the army. On March 15, 1935 (the eve of Hitler's denunciation of the clauses of the Versailles treaty providing for German disarmament), Blum cited the book as evidence in the Chamber of Deputies that while the High Command was apparently seeking two-year service it ultimately wanted to create a professional army.[25] Nothing could have been further from the military hierarchy's intentions.

Because of their controversial nature, De Gaulle's theories received little support from the War Ministers. Edouard Daladier, War Minister from December 1932 through January 1934 and from June 1936 through May 1940, asserted: "General De Gaulle systematized the [armored] doctrine with an incomparable brilliance, but, in my opinion, was mistaken to tie his concept to a professional army. For as much . . . as I understand the need for armored divisions, I say that I am hostile to the creation of a professional corps of 100,000 men that risks being engaged in an offensive adventure. . . .[26] Jean Fabry, War Minister in three different cabinets between 1934 and 1936, felt that it was unnecessary to create a special mechanized corps that could not by itself protect the national territory. Such an elite unit would detract from overall defense needs; besides, such an organization had precisely the same objective as France's existent covering forces.[27] General Joseph-Léon-Marie Maurin, also War Minister in three different cabinets during the period 1934-36, also perceived as inappropriate De Gaulle's ideas: "How could anyone believe that we can still contemplate an offensive, when we have spent billions to establish a fortified barrier? Would we be foolish enough to go beyond this barrier, to I do not know what kind of adventure?"[28] With the addition of Marshal Pétain, War Minister from February through November 1934, to the opposition, every individual who had occupied or was to occupy the War Office from 1932 through May 1940 attacked De Gaulle's scheme, with their public objections concentrated on the professional and aggressive nature of his mechanized force.

Nonetheless, certain political leaders supported De Gaulle's ideas, chief among them being Paul Reynaud, who became the parliamentary champion of the armored corps. Reynaud was convinced France was again preparing for the war that had just been fought, while the Germans were preparing for the war of the future. He earnestly believed



Reynaud and Pétain

the key to a successful defense for France lay in mechanization, and he asserted that armored units "should be the gauntlet of steel with which you strike the adversary the decisive blow."[29] Reynaud saw a need for the French armored force to be an elite unit that would spearhead the national army, and described it as "the steel head of the lance while the national army would be the wood." He also accepted the idea that soldiers serving with armored units required additional training and expertise, and thus lengthier service in the army. As he described it, putting the complex, fragile, and expensive tank in the hands of short-term conscripts would be the same as "putting torpedo boats in the hands of neophytes."[30] Reynaud eventually offered legislation for the formation of an "elite corps" barely distinguishable from De Gaulle's professional army, but it proved impossible to disassociate armored units from the politically explosive issue of professionalism. De Gaulle's armored model could not be reshaped to fit the mold of the French nation in arms; it had been too closely linked to the bête noire of French politics, the professional army.

DE GAULLE AND THE MILITARY HIERARCHY

All of the foregoing is in no way to claim civilian responsibility for French failure to recognize the potential of large armored units. Four generals—Henri-Philippe Pétain, Marie-Eugène Debeney, Maxime Weygand, and Maurice-Gamelin—held the positions of Vice President of the Superior War Council and Chief of the General Staff of the French army from the early 1920's through 1940. Each of them openly opposed the ideas of De Gaulle. Though apparently recognizing that the political climate was not propitious for the formation of a professional armored force, they chose to reject that force on its own merits. Not surprisingly, their objections also revolved around the questions of professional army and the nation in arms instead of the value of mechanization.[31] In each case, they emphasized the special link between army and nation, frequently more vigorously than their civilian counterparts. They felt a national army was the most effective mode of defense, and that a professional army would actually detract from France's ability to defend herself. Marshal Pétain asserted, "Since modern struggles naturally involve putting to work the totality of the people's resources, our national defense should be established on the principle of the armed nation. This conception corresponds exactly to the political and social state of a nation lacking all territorial ambition and having no objection other than the safeguarding of its soil."[32] The national defense system existent in France in 1935 had been established by the organization law of 1927 and the recruitment law of 1928; these had firmly institutionalized—more than in any other period—France's tradition of the nation in arms. As General Debeney stated in 1930, "The metropolitan army, the army of the French territory, organized by the laws of 1927-1928 is entirely oriented toward a realization as complete as possible of the nation in arms."[33] In the period after 1930, there was little or no questioning of this situation by the military.

If there were any questions regarding France's approach to national defense, they revolved around whether Germany's army would remain small and whether a sufficient number of conscripts would be available to maintain the French army's strength at an appropriate level. With the rearming of Germany in March 1935 and the appearance of a number of lean recruiting years from 1935 to 1939 because of the low birth rate in World War I, these questions became critical. The predicament brought on a bitter period in French civil-military relations,[34] but there was still no concerted attack on the principle of the nation in arms. What the military sought was an increase in the term of service from one year to two years, not a change in the basic principle of the national defense. As Marshal Pétain asserted, "It is not necessary to change the principles upon which our military system rests."[35] When the term of service was increased in 1935, the mobilization system established in 1927-28 was retained. The armed nation remained the firm basis of the French military philosophy.

Once the military leaders had accepted this reality, their other decisions and views on national defense followed from that acceptance. First, there was no doubt that the national army would have to be defensive. The active army was too small for initiating an offensive; further, it had been designed as a covering force for the mobilization of the entire nation. There was also some questioning of the ability of any national army to launch an offensive immediately upon mobilization, since in comparison to the defense the offensive required a greater degree of training and discipline on the part of the individual, as well as greater unit cohesiveness, training, and efficiency. In sum, the military hierarchy doubted that short-term conscripts could acquire sufficient skills in their brief period of service to be prepared for the offensive. For example, General Narcisse-Alfred-Gabriel-Louis Chauvineau, known as the "high priest of the defense," saw the nation in arms as eminently appropriate for the national defense. But when he entertained the possibility of an offensive immediately upon the beginning of hostilities, he suggested the creation of a "small, special army," specifically trained for the offensive. This "special army" would rely on servicemen with an obligation of no less than four years, rather than on conscripts of short-term service.[36] In the absence of the stiffening afforded by long-term service, French military leaders were reluctant to commit their army to an early offensive.

This is not to say that emphasis on the defensive was due solely to the armed nation principle, for the military view of the citizen-soldier and the defensive was obviously reinforced by other factors such as the great lethality of modern weapons, which enabled the defender to inflict heavy casualties on an attacker. It was normally assumed that the attacker required a massive superiority of "three times as much infantry, six times the artillery, and fifteen times the ammunition."[37] In view then of the prevailing army predilection for the defense, De Gaulle's attack on the nation in arms gained him little support among the military community, which firmly believed "The professional army is above all an offensive instrument."[38]

Military leaders also attacked De Gaulle's concept of a professional army for tending to split the national army into two armies, thereby causing the second-line army to suffer. This was not a theory solely constructed to counter De Gaulle. General Debeney had offered the objection as early as 1930, when he described the problems and limitations of a professional army for France. After De Gaulle offered his theory, Debeney's argument resurfaced[39] and was a continual theme in the works of the military hierarchy attacking De Gaulle. Essentially, these soldiers viewed the professional army as a siphon that would progressively act to drain resources from the legitimate needs of national defense. Even though the division into a professional and non-professional component might work initially, the second force would eventually suffer in peacetime when the question of finances became difficult. The needs of the professional force would probably be met at the expense of the remainder of the army, and the best personnel would also tend to gravitate toward the professional army. The defense of France would thus rest on an insufficiently prepared second-line force if the professional component did not prove equal to the task. General Debeney graphically predicted the armored corps' fate against a mass German army: "We will have a brilliant communique at the beginning, then silence, and after a few days, a useless S.O.S."[40]

With respect to the question of quality versus quantity, which De Gaulle had broached, General Weygand commented: "The question is not of opposing quality to quantity, this is a simple play on words, but of disposing at all times of quality in sufficient quantity, and very rapidly afterwards, of quantity provided with quality." France most of all had to "fear an abrupt attack, unleashed without a declaration of war." She had to have an army with enough strength in manpower and materiel to stop the initial attack, and enough potential to expand its size for the long war. A professional army, it was argued, detracted from both these capabilities. It could possibly

be checked and shattered in its initial aggressive assault, leaving France ill-defended during national mobilization; furthermore, resources allocated to it would seriously detract from the potential for molding an effective national army. As General Weygand asserted, the second-line army would quickly "fall to the state of a resigned militia, without pride, without life."[41] Only a national army, supported by all the resources of the nation, could meet French defense requirements. Modern warfare was simply too vast an enterprise for an elite force alone to fight a nation's battles. As Marshal Pétain noted, "War . . . today is no longer only that of professional armies, but that of entire peoples, abundant with all their resources and with all their faith."[42]

General Émile Alléhaut, one of the most perceptive French officers of his day and one who labelled the argument for a purely defensive army as "abominable sophism," also opposed De Gaulle's conclusions. Alléhaut was a strong advocate of mechanization and recognized that there was some agreement between his ideas and those of De Gaulle, for example, recognition of the need for a strong covering force based on maneuver and armor. But he could not accept De Gaulle's insistence upon a professional army. The republicans, according to Alléhaut, "are distrustful, rightly or wrongly, a professional army will be considered a praetorian army, an army for a *coup d'état*. . . . Hence, of what use is a system based on an institution that domestic politics will not allow?" Alléhaut expressed his confidence in a national army as the "generator of the spirit of sacrifice and of abnegation which has permitted the writing of never-to-be-forgotten pages [of history]: the Marne, Verdun, the Somme, Champagne, and many others. . . ."[43] Thus, in the views of many soldiers, a professional army was a threat to a triumphant national martial spirit, for it would create an elite force apart from the populace. Only a national army responded to the French national spirit and to the egalitarian principle giving rise to this spirit.

THE ECLIPSE OF THE ARMORED CORPS

The French military hierarchy thus rejected De Gaulle's highly mobile, professional army without adequately studying the merits of large armored formations. At the same time they opted for the continued application of the methods learned from World War I. The introduction to the 1937 edition of *Instructions for the Tactical Employment of Large Units* stated: "The mass of doctrine that was objectively fixed, on the morrow of victory, by eminent leaders who had but recently exercised high command . . . remain[s] the authorized guide for the tactical employment of large units."[44] Implicit in the retention of the old precepts was the rejection of the newly proposed large armored units, even though the approach to armor was more realistic in the 1937 than in the 1921 manual. The French High Command still seriously questioned the potential of the tank, observing, "At the present time, the anti-tank weapon confronts the tank as, during the last war, the machine gun confronted the infantry."[45] Many officers considered the terrain on the Franco-German frontier to be unsuitable for armored formations, and the example of the Spanish Civil War was often cited to refute those praising the potential of mechanized warfare. Until the beginning of World War II, the High Command's answer to armor proponents was that armor "needed further study," and the operations bureau concluded that no change in French tactics was necessary despite Poland's frightening experience with the German armored blitzkrieg. The first French armored division was not created until October 1939, and when Germany attacked in May 1940 France had only three armored divisions in being with a fourth (commanded by De Gaulle) being formed.

France's consideration of armor had been far from zealous because of its perceived threat to the basic republican tenets of the nation in arms. De Gaulle's equation of a professional army with an armored corps, and his attack upon nation in arms, served only to solidify opposition to separate armored forces. While he may have been the French prophet of armor, his linking of a mobile army to professionalism was a major reason for the French failure to recognize the value of large armored forces. Others such as Blum,

US ARMY

Armored Commander De Gaulle, 1940

Daladier, Pétain and Gamelin failed to understand the true potential of armor, but De Gaulle committed an equally grave error by associating armored units with professionalism and thus making it politically untenable for France to acquire large armored forces until the beginning of the war, when it was too late to gain sufficient experience in their use. Had he been more politic, seeking instead the creation of an armored force in a manner not directly challenging widely held French views on national defense, or more in agreement with the tradition of the nation in arms, the chances for the earlier creation of large armored units would have been materially enhanced. Political considerations and military traditions, not advances in military doctrine, had determined the shape of France's defenses, and ultimately her future.

NOTES

1. The number of French tanks is calculated by adding the 2,285 battle tanks given by Lieutenant Colonel Charles de Cossé-Brissac in "Combien de chars Francais contre combien de chars Allemands le 10 Mai 1940?" *Revue de Défénse Nationale* (July 1947), 81, to the 146 *automitrailleuses de combat* mentioned by General Maurice Gamelin in Servir (Paris, 1946), I, 157.

2. Heinz Guderian, *Erinnerungen eines Soldaten* (Heidelberg, 1951), p. 429.

3. *Commission d'enquête parlementaire: Les événements survenus en France de 1933 à 1945; Rapport,* (Paris, 1952), II, 306. (Hereafter abbreviated as *Commission d'enquête: Rapport.*); and Gamelin, pp. 157-9.

4. A Goutard, *1940: La guerre des occasions perdues* (Paris, 1956), p. 84.

5. France, Assemblée Nationale (1947), *Commission d'enquête parlementaire: Les événements survenus en France de 1933 à 1945: Témoignages* (Paris, 1951), I, 169-70. (Hereafter abbreviated as *Commission d'enquête: Témoignages.*)

6. On the entire question of the nation in arms, see Richard D. Challener, *The French Theory of the Nation in Arms, 1866-1939* (New York: Russell & Russell, 1965). His work is fundamental for an understanding of French military institutions.

7. David B. Ralston, ed., *Soldiers and States: Civil-Military Relations in Modern Europe* (Boston: Heath, 1966), p. 66.

8. See J. Monteilhet, *Les Institutions Militaires de la France, 1814-1932* (Paris, 1932), pp. 110-53.

9. *Journal Officiel de la République Francaise: Documents Parlementaires* (1904), p. 148.

10. Maréchal Philippe Pétain, "La securité de la France aux cours des années creuses," *Revue des Deux Mondes,* 26 (1935), i.

11. Irving M. Gibson, "Maginot and Liddell Hart: The Doctrine of Defense," *Makers of Modern Strategy,* ed. Edward Mead Earle (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1941), pp. 369-70.

12. Philip C. F. Bankwitz, *Maxime Weygand and Civil-Military Relations in Modern France* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1967), p. 41.

13. Jules Simon, *La politique radicale* (Paris, 1868), p. 181.

14. Monteilhet, p. xvi.

15. France, Ministere de la Guerre, *Instructions provisoire sur l'emploi tactique des grandes unités* (Paris, 1922), p. 11.

16. Général X (anonymous), "L'armée de métier," *Mercure de France,* 267 (1936), 14-15.

17. Léon Blum, "A bas l'armée de métier!" *Le Populaire,* December 1, 1934, p. 1.

18. See Général P. A. Bourget, *Le général Estienne, penseur, ingénieur et soldat* (Paris, 1956); and Colonel Georges Ferré, *Le défaut de l'armure; Nos chars pouvaient-ils vaincre en 1940?–Enseignements et perspectives nouvelles* (Paris, 1948).

19. Charles De Gaulle, *The Army of the Future,* trans. Walter Millis (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1941), p. 77.

20. *Ibid.*, pp. 58, 60.

21. *Ibid.*, pp. 43, 89.

22. Charles De Gaulle, "Comment faire une armée de métier," in *Trois Études,* ed. L. Nachin (Paris, 1945), p. 122.

23. De Gaulle, *Army of the Future,* p. 69.

24. *Commission d'enquête: Témoignages,* I, 223.

25. *Journal Officiel de la République Francaise: Chambre Débats* (1935), p. 1025. (Hereafter abbreviated as *J. O. Ch. Déb.*)

26. *Commission d'enquête: Témoignages,* I, 22.

27. *J. O. Ch. Déb.* (1935), p. 2776.

28. *Ibid.*, p. 1045.

29. *Commission d'enquête: Témoignages,* I, 97.

30. *J. O. Ch. Déb.* (1937), p. 297; (1935), p. 1041. See also *Commission d'enquête: Témoignages,* I, 103.

31. The High Command demonstrated its intolerance of any more "new" ideas in 1935, stating that only the High Command was qualified to define military doctrine. Thenceforth, military writings did little more than mirror official doctrine. See Général André Beaufre, "Liddell Hart and the French Army, 1919-1939," in *The Theory and Practice of War,* ed. Michael Howard (New York: Praeger, 1966), p. 140.

32. Pétain, "*La securité de la France,*" p. VII.

33. Général Debeney, *Sur la securité militaire de la France* (Paris, 1930), p. 28.

34. Some of the resistance of the military leaders to De Gaulle was undoubtedly due to their awareness of the reaction his ideas were producing in the political community. See Bankwitz, pp. 83-115, 151-67.

35. Pétain, "*La securité de la France,*" p. VII.

36. Général Chauvineau, *Une invasion: Est-elle encore possible?* (Paris, 1939), pp. 149-50.

37. *Ibid.*, p. 122.

38. Pétain, "Preface" to Chauvineau, p. XIII.

39. Debeney, *Sur la securité militarie de la France;* "Encore l'armée de métier," *Revue des Deux Mondes,* 28 (1935), 279-95.

40. Debeney, "Encore," p. 283.

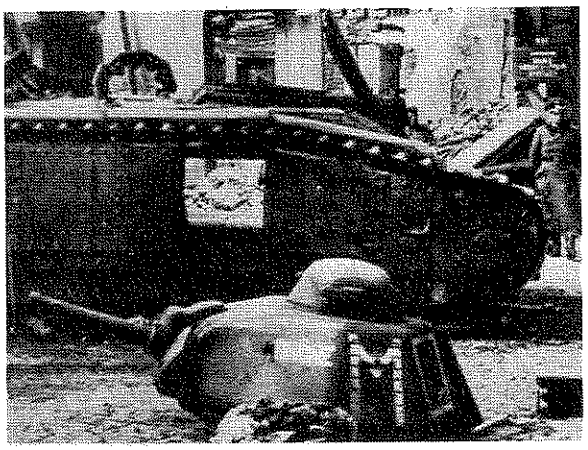
41. Général Weygand, "L'état militaire de la France," *Revue des Deux Mondes,* 35 (1936), 724; and "L'unité de l'armée," *Revue Militaire Général,* 1 (1937), 16, 18-19. Interestingly enough, Weygand opposed De Gaulle's ideas even though he had provided for the motorization of five infantry divisions and for the transformation of a cavalry division into a light mechanized division.

42. Maréchal Pétain, "Preface" to Colonel P. Vauthier, *La doctrine de guerre de Général Douhet* (Paris, 1935), p. XI.

43. Général Émile Allehaut, *Être Prêts* (Paris, 1935), pp. 145, 179.

44. France, Ministry of War, *Instructions for the Tactical Employment of Large Units,* trans. Lieutenant Colonel Richard U. Nicholas (1937 ed.; Fort Leavenworth, 1938), p. 1.

45. *Ibid.*, p. 4.



French tank destroyed by the Wehrmacht, 1940.