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THE ALCHEMY
OF
WARFARE

Manoeuvre Warfare in Action?:

An Assessment of the Wehrmacht
Operational Warfighting Style.

Kristian J.A. Vette

2000

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A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the main offensive operations of the Wehrmacht forces during the Second World War from the perspective of modern manoeuvre warfare doctrine. It investigates the origins of both manoeuvre warfare and the Blitzkrieg style, questioning the extent to which pre-war German military doctrine advocated deep mobile strikes at enemy vulnerabilities. A model of manoeuvre warfare is developed which is then compared and contrasted with the Blitzkrieg methodologies.

It concludes that, while the Wehrmacht way of war had some similarities to modern manoeuvre theory, there is much mythology in existence today that has deified the German Forces of the Second World War as model manoeuvrists. It finds that, in fact, many of the Wehrmacht battles were fought on an attritional basis that targeted enemy strengths and not enemy vulnerabilities. The usual Wehrmacht pattern of warfighting was to attempt to encircle and annihilate the enemy fighting force. Many of its victories were dependent on a technological and firepower advantage.

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