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Comments on “Cavalry Tanks”

BY

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(These comments are made at the request of the writer of the preceding article)

IN RESPONSE to a request for remarks on the foregoing article, I must begin by a most vigorous dissent from the writer's picture of a senile and impotent cavalry, futilely butting it's head against impregnable strong points. I can agree only to the extent of admitting that a cavalry which so deported itself would certainly have no future; nor has it, when well led, had any such past in history.

Cavalry, now as always, must advance by enveloping. When the ground, as in France, was so limited as to prevent this, cavalry must await the breakthrough made by the tanks. However, western Europe is the only country small enough and with sufficient population and roads to render such a state of things possible. In other theaters of war, the constant power of envelopment which the mobility of cavalry makes possible will render strong points nothing but asylums for the safe-keeping of the hostile idiots who infest them.

There are many cases, such as in raids, long turning movements, screening, etc., where cavalry is and ever will be wholly self-sufficient and where the addition of mechanical devices will be more of a hindrance than otherwise. Cavalry has lived off the country and can yet do so. To it, lines of supply are unnecessary. Tanks, on the other hand, depend wholly on lines of supply for the vast tonnage of gas, oil, and spares. Without these they become merely inferior pill-boxes. Hence, to attach them to cavalry on lengthy operations is to seriously demobilize the latter.

In other cases, however, such as in short turning movements, advance and rear guard work of mixed commands, counter-attacks, etc., where lines of supply are not needed or already exist, tanks will be of

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great assistance to cavalry, combining, as they do, great mobility with concentrated firepower.

The point as to the economic impossibility of building enough tanks to constitute a mechanical army is well taken. In addition, however, to this vital objection to the ubiquitous use of tanks should be mentioned the restrictions due to unsuitable terrain and the difficulty of oversea transport. I was, and believe that I still am, as enthusiastic a tanker as ever caterpillared, yet I cannot bring myself to the point of picturing tanks, present or future, real or imaginary, as ever operating in the mountains of Mexico, the rice paddies of the Philippines, the forests of Canada, or, in face of competent artillery, on the sandy and gully-infested plains of Texas. I cannot picture a large oversea force giving up that priceless commodity, deck space, to large shipments of tanks; nor can I imagine a sea-borne invasion so transporting them to our shores.

Tanks are a new and special weapon – newer than, as special, and certainly as valuable as the airplane. Can one imagine infantry airplanes manned by detailed doughboys; or artillery airplanes manned by wagon soldiers or cosmoline kids; or yet cavalry airplanes ridden by sturdy troopers with the use of “lateral aids”? Hardly!

The tank is a special, technical, and vastly powerful weapon. It certainly is neither a cavalryman nor an infantryman. Yet, give it half a chance, over suitable terrain and on proper missions, and it will mean the difference between defeat and victory to the infantry or cavalry with which it is cooperating.

What is wanted, then, is neither infantry tanks nor cavalry tanks, but a **TANK CORPS**, a special mobile general headquarters reserve, to be detailed, as circumstances demand, with whichever arm it can best cooperate.

Editor's note: The U.S. Army has a long history of internal discussion and debate among junior and field grade officers on issues of contemporary military concern. Many important ideas surfaced in such discussions that incubated overtime and were later brought to fruition as those officers ascended to higher rank and influence. Among the many venues in which such important discussions took place was the *The Cavalry Journal*, which was published from 1888 to 1946, after which it was superseded by *The Armored Cavalry Journal*. As a prelude to a continuation of this heritage of internal Army debate over proposed innovations that appear in this issue of *Military Review*, an article written by then Maj. George S. Patton Jr. has been republished here for reader interest with permission of the U.S. Cavalry & Armor Association.