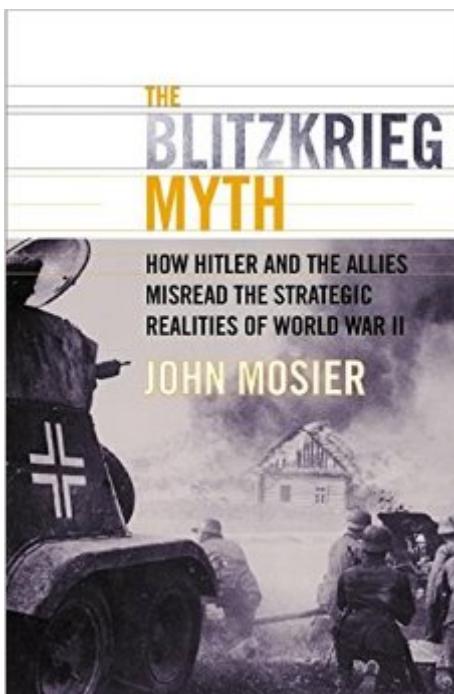


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The Blitzkrieg Myth: How Hitler And The Allies Misread The Strategic Realities Of World War II



Synopsis

A challenging reassessment of the military history of World War IIThe great myth of the First World War was that defense was all-powerful. In the inter war years, a new myth appeared -- that the new technology of the airplane and the tank would result in rapid and massive breakthroughs on the battlefield, with the enemy being destroyed in weeks.John Mosier shows how Hitler, Rommel, von Manstein, Montgomery, and Patton were all equally seduced by the breakthrough myth, or blitzkrieg, as the decisive way to victory. He shows how the Polish campaign in the autumn of 1939 and the fall of France in the spring of 1940 were not blitzkrieg victories. He also reinterprets Rommel's North African campaigns, D day, the Normandy campaign, and Hitler's last desperate breakthrough effort to Antwerp in the Battle of the Bulge in December 1944, among others. All these actions saw the clash of breakthrough theories with the realities of conventional military tactics. The Blitzkrieg Myth is a compelling and original rethinking of the strategy and tactics of World War II by the author of the highly praised The Myth of the Great War.

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Customer Reviews

When I saw John Mosier's The Blitzkrieg Myth on the shelf, I couldn't help but start reading it. As the title suggests the book is revisionist history, and I am always interested in finding out what recent research and ideas have uncovered, and what traditional beliefs consequently have been brought into doubt. I expected something fresh and thought provoking, but I was sorely disappointed. Mosier's book told me only one thing I didn't already know when I was twelve years old- the extent of German air transport losses in Holland. Needless to say, that has nothing to do with proving his

thesis. The same could be said for most of the book. The main point of The Blitzkrieg Myth is to discredit Fuller's ideas on armored attacks, and Douhet's on strategic bombing. Since virtually no one believes in the efficacy of strategic bombing as conducted in WWII, the latter assertion is largely superfluous. The majority of the book is devoted to advancing the idea that armored breakthroughs were a myth created by propaganda and reinforced by the blind beliefs of military leaders. Naturally, one would expect that Mosier would address the battles which are considered to be classic examples of armored breakthroughs and explain how and why they have been misunderstood. But he doesn't. The most troubling feature of the book is Mosier's ignorance or willful exclusion of contradictory or problematic evidence. As I read The Blitzkrieg Myth, I kept leafing backwards and rereading, wondering if I had missed something. But I hadn't. Mosier simply does not deal with events that don't fit neatly into his prescriptive theory. A good example of his biased selectivity is the chapter in which he deals with the German invasion of France in 1940.

In 1979 Len Deighton wrote a book called Blitzkrieg: From the rise of Hitler to the Fall of Denmark. It was quite a readable and well written book which showed that the allies greatly outnumbered the Germans during the battle for France in 1940. Not only did the allies outnumber the Germans their tanks were superior and their units were mechanised. Deighton went on to say that there was only really one Blitzkrieg campaign and that was the battle of France. It consisted of the rapid movement of German armed units after the initial breakthrough. The French and British flummoxed around and because of their lack of response lost. Deighton suggested that all other conflicts in the war, specifically Poland and Russia were of a different character. In 2001 Ernest May wrote a well researched book called Strange Victory: Hitler's conquest of France. This book showed that the allies outnumbered the Germans, that their tanks were better and they had greater numbers of aircraft. May's book argues that a failure to understand the nature of the German attack lead to their demise. However the allies learnt from their experience whilst Hitler did not. Hitler's confidence about tactical victory led him to close his eyes to other considerations. We now have Mr Mosier's book that contains the alarming revelation that the Germans were outnumbered by the allies in France. Further that the allies had far better tanks and more aircraft. The reason the allies lost was that the British irrationally withdrew from Dunkirk. Sound familiar, you bet. It is what has been for some time the general view. That is that the German attack caused a command paralysis that led to an allied defeat. Later in the war such attacks would be dealt with by counter attacks or more spirited defences.

Searching for the genuine thesis of John Mosier's mess of a book is something of a challenge. Mosier is critical about the "conventional wisdom" of WW2 interpretation - but he is hard pressed to actually explain what it is. There is, he argues, something wrong in the concept he calls "breakthrough" - that fast moving tanks will cut through the enemy defenses and attack the rear of the population. He also argues against the concept of strategic air power - destroying nation's ability and will to fight by bombing its industry and civilian population. At times, he attacks a host of other - dare we call them mini myths? - For instance, the abilities of General Patton ("the great dash across France that had established him as a tanker par excellence has been accomplished without any real opposition" p. 259). The central myth of Mosier's, though, carefully concealed until the end of the book, is that technology matters at all. "The only real lesson to be derived by the Second World War" Mosier writes "is that advances in technology do not really change the basic principles of warfare". I find this claim quite astounding. I'm far from an expert on the second world war, but it seems clear that the central novelty was the new technology of tanks, properly engaged (that is, combined with infantry and anti-antitank weapons) supported by aerial superiority - tactics that might have been available in the Spanish Civil War, but hardly before that (indeed, the Spanish Civil War is conspicuously absent from Mosier's narrative of Military technology, tactics and thought in the 1930s). Weren't these the causes of Germany's brilliant triumph over Poland?

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