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Review

SECTION 7

THE ARMORED GOLIATH THAT FAILED

PANZER LEADER. By Gen. Heinz Guderian. Foreword by Capt. S. H. Liddell Hart. Translated from the German by Constantine Fitzgibbon. Illustrated, 528 pp. New York: E. P. Dutton & Co. \$7.50.

By DREW MIDDLETON

NOT long ago one of the suave young men around Chancellor Adenauer remarked that General Guderian, the author of "Panzer Leader," should be put in jail. He had not read the book. His remark reflected both the propensity of the Germans for putting people in jail without due process of law and the distaste felt for both Guderian and his book by the present regime in Germany.

There are two reasons for it. The first is that Guderian, the last Chief of the Army General Staff under Hitler, has offended the whole community of German interest whose center, almost its reason for being, is the plot, which failed, to assassinate Hitler. The second reason is that Guderian—who by any standards, was one of the leading German commanders of World War II and who, moreover, was a military innovator of the first rank in the field of armored warfare—is unsympathetic to the strategic and organizational concepts of the, to him, relatively junior generals who have been entrusted with the formation of the Army of the Fourth Reich.

"Panzer Leader" comprises a number of books. There is the story, well told, of Guderian's long struggle in the face of opposition by infantry and cavalry generals to build the panzer forces which swept east and west out of Germany from 1939 to 1942. There is a detailed account of the operations of those forces and indeed of the whole German Army in the great campaigns in Poland, France and the Low Countries and the Soviet Union. And there are Guderian's views on Hitler and his government, the plot and the leading personalities of the Third Reich.

SEPARATELY each section is of absorbing interest, though the reader may find it difficult to move from the details of battles to the feverish insanity of Hitler's court. And Guderian's views on Hitler and the other Nazi leaders seem to have been added as an after thought. Nevertheless, the book tells us a great deal. It is far better than anything yet written by a German general perhaps because Guderian was a high-ranking general, a man who knew what was going on at the battlefields of Europe—a man of limited political comprehension but deep tactical military insight. There is no soberer and better

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German story of how and why the Wehrmacht failed in Russia in 1941 than this.

Still, Guderian, like de Gaulle, another developer of the armored force, has a penchant for political pronouncements and it is these that have offended his countrymen. What he says about the plot is interesting, even refreshing, although undoubtedly offending to monarchists.

Noting that he refuses to "accept murder in any form," Guderian asserts "but he cannot approve of the assassi-

nation attempt. He then makes a number of biting criticisms of the plot: the conspirators were careless; once the bomb had exploded, Graf Stauffenberg, the would-be assassin, acted with "more than foolhardiness"; finally, the plot came too late.

The scorn in these sentences has offended many Germans: " * * * A very great deal has been spoken and written about resistance to the Hitler regime. But of those men who are still alive, the speakers and the writers, who had access to Hitler, which of them did, in

fact, even once, offer any resistance to his will?"

And later Guderian says: "Any man who was quite sure that Hitler's policy was bound to lead to war, that war must be prevented and that a war would inevitably bring our nation to disaster, such a man was duty bound to seek and find occasions, before the war had started, to say so without ambiguity both to Hitler and to the German people; if he could not do this from inside Germany then he should have done so from abroad. Did the responsible men at the time in fact do this?"

THESE questions underline another question that is sure to haunt the Germans for years. It is simply: If Hitler was so evil and so bad, why was there no outcry against him when Germany was winning? Germans invariably retort that this is an oversimplification. But great evil and great tyranny are simple.

"Panzer Leader" emphatically was not written to curry favor with the United States. Nor does Guderian attempt to place all the blame for defeat on Hitler. Keitel, Jodl and other generals contributed. And if there is little censure of his own operations—well, Guderian's campaigns have as good a chance of standing the test of time as those of any other German general.

Guderian, like many other German commanders at the top level, admired Rommel as a man and as a field commander, but evidently he does not consider the desert general as one of the great military commanders of history. Rommel was, Guderian writes, "an open, upright man and a brave soldier." He had "energy and subtlety of appreciation * * * great understanding of his men and, in fact, thoroughly deserved the reputation he had won for himself."

However, when Rommel and Guderian worked together preparing defenses and tactics against the landing of the Allied expeditionary force in France Guderian found the desert general "highly temperamental" and unable to understand the need for "mobile reserves."

GUDERIAN does not adopt the view that political considerations—such as the retention of west-front reserves for use in a national emergency in Germany in event of Hitler's assassination influenced Rommel's "overdue and piecemeal" commitment of reserves in Normandy. He says the question is an open one. Greater praise is accorded Field Marshal Manstein, at present a prisoner for war crimes in the British hands. Here, says Guderian, was a man of most distinguished military talents, "our finest operational brain."

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Armored Goliath

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Bonn Government, are mentioned only in passing by Guderian. And if he is critical of many generals his praise for battalion, regimental and company commanders who caught his eye is unstinted.

AMERICAN readers will be surprised at the emphasis which Guderian places on the war in the east. This is natural, because for the German soldier the war with Russia was the war. The Mediterranean, even to some extent the Normandy front until the Allied breakthrough, were sideshows. They knew they had to conquer Russia or fall.

Guderian's accounts of three great military operations, the break-through into France in 1940, the first assault on the Soviet Union in 1941 and the long retreat from Russia in 1943-45, are classics of their kind. No other memoirs give so complete an account of these operations, and the military detail is touched by sharp descriptions of the fighting and vivid glimpses of the vague distorted half-life of men at war.

Guderian's military masterpieces were the break-through at Sedan in May, 1940, and the subsequent drive to the Channel coast and the offensive on Moscow through Orel, which he led. Much has now been written about the drive through Sedan; French and British generals and historians have added their reflections, yet Guderian's luster is undimmed.

Pursuing his favorite tactic of "boot them, don't spatter them," Guderian took Sedan with the First and Tenth Panzer Divisions and then forced the crossing of the Meuse on May 13. Those who, with Tolstoy, hold that once a battle has begun generals surrender control may be confounded by Guderian's account. For this was personal leadership of a kind the West did not see again until Patton swept across France four years later. Guderian's record (and, it should be said, other records) shows a restless driving commander, confident that his theories of armored warfare would be borne out if only drive could be maintained.

THEN in command of the Nineteenth Corps under von Kleist, Guderian threw the French back across the river and then directed a series of smashing attacks which not only broke French resistance, with the help of the Luftwaffe, but made a complete breakthrough and opened the roads to the Channel.

The corps commander was furious with any general, no matter how superior, who asked for halt, and phrases like "Press forward with all possible speed" and "No time for hesitancy" run through his description of his battles.

Guderian, it seems, realized



Detail from an illustration for "Panzer Leader."

sooner than other generals the true weakness of the French Army and he was swifter to exploit it; greatly daring, he was greatly rewarded.

Guderian himself emerges from the book a little more than life size. That he was brave we know. That he was skillful as an organizer and a tactician is part of the military history of the last fifteen years. He obviously had a streak of deep combativeness which kept him planning and organizing after many others had lost heart.

HE reports his quarrels with Hitler over military matters. He won only minor victories in these battles. Like other men more astute politically, he was overcome by that demonic energy and spate of words. Hitler, he remarks, could not understand Germany's limitations and once the armies had been checked outside Moscow "plunged into the unlimited" instead of choosing more modest objectives or breaking off the battle.

The writing is crisp, at times very personal, and has a curiously old-fashioned quality. Some of the details of how the German armored force was organized may bore the average reader, and Guderian perhaps labors Hitler's military ineffectiveness in his last years. But throughout the battle scenes there is an authentic touch. The description of the fighting in Russia as winter came in 1941 is told in brief, sharp sentences which give a strong picture of a great military machine slowly running down in the face of bitter resistance and bitter cold.

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