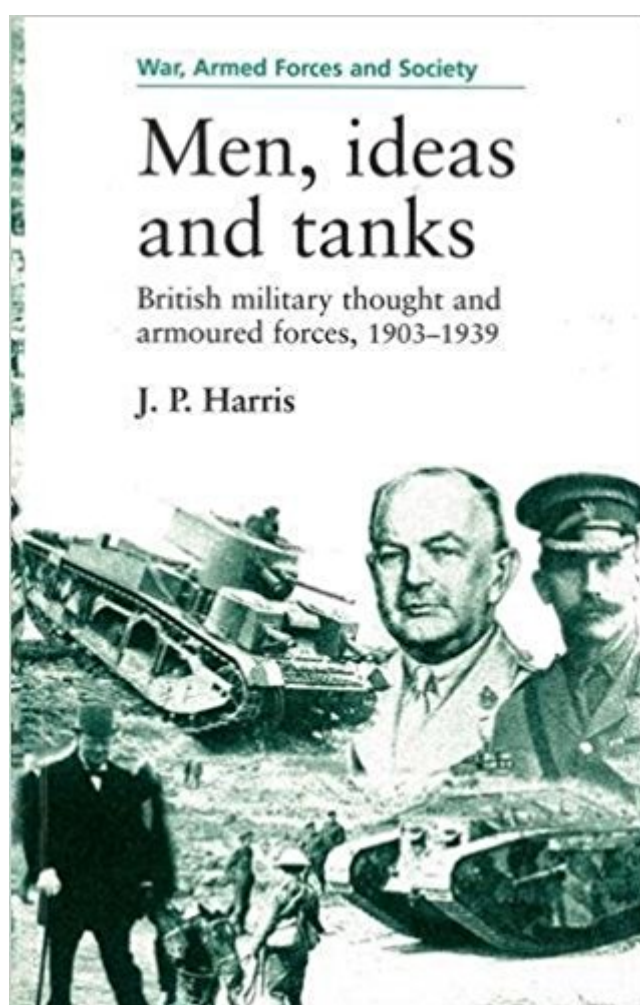


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# Men, Ideas, And Tanks: British Military Thought And Armoured Forces, 1903-1939 (War, Armed Forces, And Society)



## Synopsis

*Men, ideas and tanks* reviews the development of British military ideas on armoured forces from 1903 to 1939. Great Britain was the nation which first developed the tank, first used it in action and first gained dramatic results by employment. The British continued to be world leaders in the field of mechanised warfare until the early 1930s. Now available in paperback for the first time, J. P. Harris original work offers new interpretations of the early history of British armoured forces and explains why Great Britain had lost the lead by the outbreak of the Second World War. This work will be of interest to all those concerned with British military history in the first half of the twentieth century, with the history of mechanised warfare and with the history of military thought.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"...a constantly interesting book." --The Journal of Strategic Studies  
"Men, Ideas and Tanks is a gripping and wholesome review of the stages of the development of the early combat tank ... The book is an interesting and thought-provoking review of why and how Britain gained and lost initiative in armoured warfare before the Second World War." --The Journal of the United Service Institute of India

J. P. Harris is a Senior Lecturer in War Studies at the Royal Academy, Sandhurst and a Senior Research Fellow in the Institute for the Study of War and Society at De Montfort University.

If, as the author indicated in his introduction he is seeking to open a debate; well, I, as an ex-tankee, am game! The best and largest part of this book is the beginning covering the evolution of the Tank as a battlefield weapon and its deployment as such by the British in the Great War. What becomes clear is that many influences brought the Tank into being; not least of which being a certain Winston S. Churchill! The second is that contrary to the writings of those involved, the effect of the tank upon the outcome of the conflict was by no means as decisive as the post-WW1 armour proponents would have it. Rather it becomes obvious that one, it was the Germans with their spring 1918 offensive employing infiltration tactics that opened up the battlefield at long last; two, the use of innovative artillery tactics by the British and three, Air Power employed by all combatants. Further, the original tank designs were extremely stressful and physically taxing in every respect in which to fight while being painfully slow and short-ranged to boot, thereby limiting the breakthrough effect of the Tank in most if not all engagements it took part in. Also, at that stage the Tanks' primary function was support of infantry attacks with a view to merely achieving a breakthrough with limited follow-on capability. So far so good, except that the criticisms aimed at Field Marshall Haig by the Royal Tank Corps(RTC) alumni post-war are largely brushed aside with considerable excuses being offered as to Haig's attitude in particular, making it appear that far from being a negative influence, Haig provided as much support as could reasonably be expected. He also suggests that that the original debut of the Tank could not have been improved upon due to manufacturing restraints. I frankly, felt this to be a moot point at best. But it does set the scene for the second part of the book, covering the inter-war years and delineates its central theme: the loss of leadership by Great Britain of Armoured Warfare Theory and Practice coupled to its usurpation by Germany and, as a secondary one, the de-bunking of both J.F.C Fuller and Sir Basil Liddell-Hart as the generally acknowledged originators of modern armoured warfare. The author is particularly scathing towards each, in different ways. Towards Fuller, that General's penchant for first, religious mysticism, then witchcraft, followed by a descent into fascism is used as a springboard to indicate Fuller had no really good ideas at all: the celebrated Plan 1919 notwithstanding. What was missing from all this was the fact that the man - to quote Major Kenneth Macksey - who Got It Right, Heinz Guderian, was an enthusiastic student of Fuller and his ideas, despite the twaddle in Panzer Leader about Liddell-Hart. On the other hand, Harris illustrates clearly how a mere Hanger-on (Liddell-Hart) succeeded in inveigling himself into an unjustified position of considerable influence. A view I subscribe to myself! The weak part of the book is the post-war development of the RTC, vehicle development and evolution of tactical doctrine for general use by the British Army. Again, plenty of excuses can be found for the senior men while the middle-echelon officers, with one exception -

Lindsay- are heaped with criticism centering upon the obsession with the All-Tank Idea so vociferously pushed by Maj. Gen PCS Hobart, in particular. In effect the generally mediocre performance of British Armoured forces in WW2 is laid at the feet of the the Original RTC and it's successor, the Royal Tank Regiment while the Cavalry element of the Royal Armoured Corps is excused. UNFAIR say !! Very Good book though, I must emphasis. If this aspect of military affairs interest you, you MUST have this book. Certainly an excellent candidate for devil's advocate in what one would hope is an on-going debate! One thing this book has in spades is it's sources & references: some might find this irritating but it gives a clear picture the author has indeed done his homework!

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