

The Untold Story of How the Luftwaffe Developed Blitzkrieg Tactics in the Spanish Civil War Air Campaign



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LEGION CONDOR 1936–39

The Luftwaffe develops *Blitzkrieg*
in the Spanish Civil War

JAMES S. CORUM

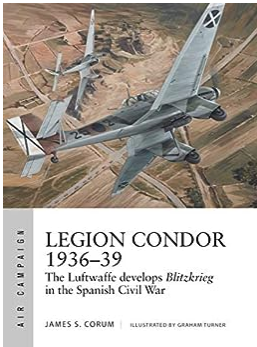
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The Luftwaffe, the German Air Force, played a significant role in shaping the outcome of World War II through their innovative tactics and advanced

technology. One lesser-known chapter in the Luftwaffe's history is their development of Blitzkrieg tactics during the Spanish Civil War Air Campaign. This article reveals the untold story of how the Luftwaffe utilized this conflict to refine a military doctrine that would later have a profound impact on the outcome of World War II.

Background: The Spanish Civil War

The Spanish Civil War, fought between 1936 and 1939, served as a testing ground for military powers to experiment with new strategies and weapons. It offered an opportunity for Germany's Air Force, the Luftwaffe, to showcase its air power in support of General Francisco Franco's Nationalist forces.



Legion Condor 1936–39: The Luftwaffe develops Blitzkrieg in the Spanish Civil War (Air Campaign)

by James S. Corum (Kindle Edition)

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The Luftwaffe's involvement in the conflict began in earnest in 1936 when Germany established the Condor Legion. Led by talented and ambitious officers, this unit was tasked with providing air support to the Nationalist forces. However,

it was also an opportunity for the Luftwaffe to test their emerging ideas around Blitzkrieg.

Blitzkrieg Defined

Blitzkrieg, meaning "lightning war," was a military strategy based on speed, surprise, and overwhelming force. It aimed to achieve rapid and decisive victories by using combined arms, including armor, infantry, and air power, to strike deep into enemy territory. Blitzkrieg relied on superior technology, coordination, and flexibility.

The Luftwaffe's Role in Developing Blitzkrieg Tactics

The Spanish Civil War provided the Luftwaffe the perfect opportunity to experiment and refine their Blitzkrieg tactics. They demonstrated the effectiveness of their air power in achieving quick victories and overwhelming their enemies.

The Luftwaffe focused on several key aspects of Blitzkrieg during the Spanish Civil War:

1. **Target Prioritization:** The Luftwaffe emphasized targeting enemy infrastructure such as bridges, railways, and communication lines. This disrupted the enemy's ability to mobilize and coordinate their forces.
2. **Close Air Support:** The Condor Legion provided extensive close air support to the Nationalist ground forces. This collaboration between air and ground units increased their overall efficiency and combat effectiveness.
3. **Horizontal Coordination:** The Luftwaffe pioneered the idea of horizontal coordination, where different elements of air power worked together, such as dive bombers attacking ground targets while fighters provided close protection.

4. Vertical Coordination: Another key development was vertical coordination, where bombers flew at different altitudes to maximize their effectiveness. This allowed for improved target coverage and reduced the risk of collisions.

5. Flexibility and Speed: The Luftwaffe showcased the importance of quickly adapting to changing circumstances on the battlefield. Their ability to rapidly redeploy and strike where and when needed became a hallmark of Blitzkrieg.

Impact and Legacy

The lessons learned during the Spanish Civil War Air Campaign had a lasting impact on the Luftwaffe's operational doctrine and shaped their approach in World War II.

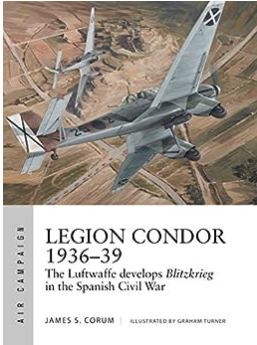
In Poland, during the initial stages of World War II, the Luftwaffe demonstrated the full potential of Blitzkrieg. Rapid and coordinated air strikes combined with ground offensives led to the swift defeat of the Polish forces.

Blitzkrieg tactics played a crucial role in the early German victories in France, the Balkans, and even the invasion of the Soviet Union. The Luftwaffe's ability to dominate the skies and provide close air support to ground forces was a key factor in these achievements.

However, the Luftwaffe also faced challenges and shortcomings in their implementation of Blitzkrieg. The Battle of Britain revealed weaknesses in their strategy and showcased the importance of air superiority in successful Blitzkrieg operations.

The Spanish Civil War Air Campaign served as a crucial testing ground for the Luftwaffe to refine and perfect the innovative Blitzkrieg tactics that would later shape the outcome of World War II. From target prioritization to vertical

coordination, the lessons learned during this conflict allowed the Luftwaffe to demonstrate the full potential of air power in achieving quick and decisive victories. The legacy of their achievements during the Spanish Civil War can still be seen in modern military doctrines and tactics.



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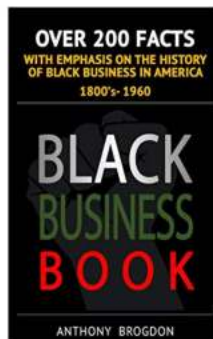
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The bombing of Guernica has become a symbol of Nazi involvement in the Spanish Civil War, but the extent of the German commitment is often underestimated. The Luftwaffe sent 20,000 officers and men to Spain from 1936 to 1939, and the Condor Legion carried out many missions in support of the Spanish Nationalist forces and played a lead role in many key campaigns of the war. Aircraft that would play a significant role in the combat operations of World War II (the Heinkel 11 bomber, the Me 109 fighter, and others) saw their first action in Spain, fighting against the modern Soviet fighters and bombers that equipped the Republican Air Force. Condor Legion bombers attacked Republican logistics and transport behind the lines as well as bombing strategic targets, German bombers and fighters provided highly effective close air support for the

front-line troops, and German fighters and anti-aircraft units ensured Nationalist control of the air.

The experience garnered in Spain was very important to the development of the Luftwaffe. The war allowed them to hone and develop their tactics, train their officers, and to become the most practised air force in the world at conducting close support of ground troops. In effect, the Spanish Civil War proved to be the training ground for the Blitzkrieg which would be unleashed across Europe in the years that followed. In this rigorous new analysis, Legion Condor expert James Corum explores both the history and impact of the Luftwaffe's engagement during the Spanish Civil War and the role that engagement played in the development of the Luftwaffe strategy which would be used to such devastating effect in the years that followed.



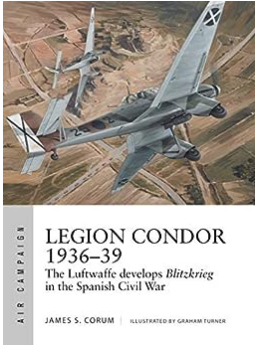
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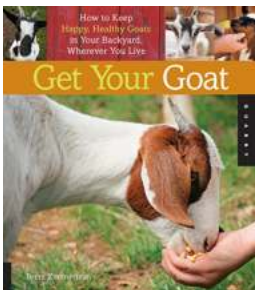
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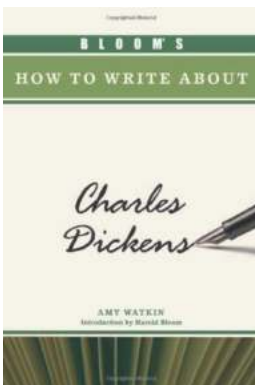
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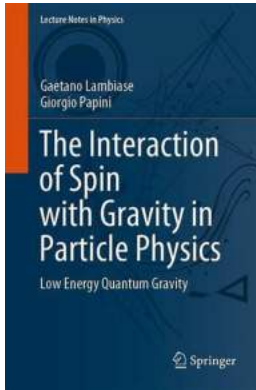
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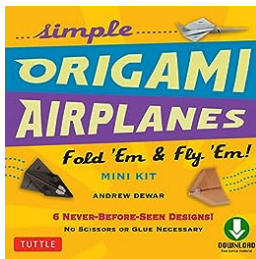
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