

D757.55
U51

U.S. War Dept. General Staff, G-2.
Employment of German antitank regiment on
non-tank missions. December 26, 1941.

LIBRARY
ARMY WAR COLLEGE
CARLISLE BARRACKS, PA.

MILITARY INTELLIGENCE DIVISION
U.S. WAR DEPARTMENT, General Staff, G-2,
Washington, December 26, 1941

INFORMATION BULLETIN
No. 4
MID 461

NOTICE

The information contained in this series of bulletins will be restricted to items from official sources which are reasonably confirmed.

This document is being given an approved distribution, and no additional copies are available in the Military Intelligence Division. For provisions governing its reproduction, see Letter TAG 350.05 (9-19-40) M-B-M.

EMPLOYMENT OF GERMAN ANTITANK REGIMENT
ON NON-TANK MISSIONS

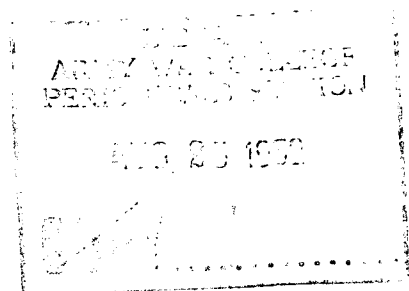
SOURCE

This bulletin is based on a report submitted by an American official observer in Berlin. The translated article originally appeared in the Militär Wochenblatt, a semi-official German military journal.

CONTENTS

1. INTRODUCTION
2. AN ANTITANK COMPANY IN ACTION
3. COMMENTS BY OFFICIAL OBSERVER

LIBRARY
ARMY WAR COLLEGE
CARLISLE BARRACKS, PA.



EMPLOYMENT OF GERMAN ANTITANK REGIMENT
ON NON-TANK MISSIONS

1. INTRODUCTION

The regimental antitank company, the 14th Company in the German infantry regiment, is composed of four platoons. Each platoon has three antitank-gun squads and a light machine-gun squad. During the Campaign in the West in 1940, antitank units were equipped with the familiar 37-mm. gun. It is believed that this weapon is being replaced by the 50-mm. antitank gun. Current newsreels and published photographs of the Russian Campaign show both the 37-mm. and the 50-mm. weapons in action.

All German antitank units are motorized, and the weapons are normally towed by motor vehicles. In combat, however, as the article translated below indicates, situations occasionally arise which necessitate the movement of regimental antitank guns by other means, such as man power or horse power.

When German assault infantry regiments are not threatened by hostile tanks, the weapons in the antitank companies of these regiments are frequently used to supplement the fire of infantry-accompanying guns. The action described in this article indicates how regimental antitank weapons have been used on non-tank missions.

2. AN ANTITANK COMPANY IN ACTION

"Prior maneuvers and combat firing exercises had given us confidence in our antitank guns, and our faith in these weapons increased after our first few days of actual combat experience.

"Early on June 20, 1940, we finally approached the enemy, who was methodically covering his retreat to the south with heavy and well-aimed artillery fire. The east bank of the Meurthe at Flin had been in our possession since early in the morning and our mission was to force a crossing over the Meurthe, and then to attack and pursue the defeated forces. In spite of the strong artillery fire, which was intended to prevent us from crossing the river, and the destroyed bridge, we reached the other side with our small arms, often wading through water up to our hips. The advanced elements of our regiment quickly occupied the outskirts and the exits of the village. Reconnaissance was immediately started by patrols from the bicycle company and the regiment and we were ordered to attack hostile units which had obtained a footing and were offering tenacious resistance at a point 2 miles south of Flin. As the regiment prepared to attack, we moved our antitank weapons to the crest of a ridge. At first, strong hostile machine-gun fire prevented us from crossing this ridge, and in spite of all our efforts it was impossible to discover the exact location of the enemy's resistance nests.

"There were apparently 2 heavy machine guns directly south

of us at a range of about 1500 yards, and some others had been brought into position at the edge of the woods to our right. Before we could safely carry out the attack, these weapons had to be put out of action. We fired about three rounds from each anti-tank gun into the suspected machine-gun positions, and the regimental infantry-accompanying guns also fired on these targets. Presently the fire coming from the south subsided, but it continued from the woods on our right and from the heights on our right front. As the attack progressed, our infantrymen on the left advanced at a good pace, and the word was passed around: 'Antitank guns, keep up close--continue advancing.'

"Our motor vehicles were not available because they were unable to cross the Meurthe until the pioneers had built a bridge. The terrain sloped slightly to the south, however; we advanced without difficulty, towing our guns by hand and carrying our ammunition the same way. The machine-gun and rifle fire on the right ceased after the infantry on our right flank penetrated the woods.

"The advance continued without complications in the direction of Domptail, and our assault elements were soon out of sight. With much exertion on the part of the gun crews we crossed the ridge quickly. After we had proceeded about 500 yards, the projectiles began whizzing over our heads and striking in the farmyard behind us. We had already learned that rapid, uninterrupted advance is the best protection against hostile artillery fire.

"We covered the 3 miles to Domptail without our motor vehicles. One crew, however, found a horse and used it to tow their gun. Other crews attached theirs to passing motorcycles, and one gun was towed by an abandoned French tank.

"When the assault elements entered Domptail, they were met with heavy fire. Consequently, we rushed forward with our guns to assist our endangered comrades. After passing the first few houses, we too were greeted with deadly fire. The men from the rifle companies were forced to go into shelter, while we sought protection behind the shields of our antitank guns. One house after the other was taken under fire by our guns, which always used an antitank projectile first* and followed with an H.E. shell. Gradually the hostile fire subsided.

"The infantrymen followed on either side of the street and cleared the houses systematically. At a turn in the street we began firing again, presuming that it was safe to advance. A hostile machine gun opened up, however, and wounded five men, one mortally. It was impossible to determine the exact location of the machine gun, but we suspected it to be in one of two houses down the street on our right. Consequently, we fired six H.E. shells into each of them. When one house began to burn, the

*Probably to determine accuracy by means of tracer. G-2.

machine gun ceased firing and we renewed the advance. In accordance with combat-proven procedure, the infantrymen, protected by the walls, advanced on both sides of the street and searched all the houses. The machine gun was discovered in a cellar entrance, camouflaged with branches to make it invisible from the street. A few hand grenades silenced the snipers firing from the roofs.

"After an hour and a half, the village was completely in our hands. Clouds of smoke rising into the sky and burning houses gave evidence of the bitter struggle. We antitank men were proud that we had been able to give such excellent assistance to our comrades in the rifle companies."

3. COMMENTS OF OFFICIAL OBSERVER

a. Although the German antitank gun is normally towed by a motor vehicle, gun crews are frequently required to move their weapons for considerable distance by hand. In the action described in the above article, guns were moved at least 5 miles without the assistance of their normal prime movers.

b. Although the primary mission of antitank weapons is to combat tanks, some current German training pamphlets (for example, Das Kommandobuch by Colonel Keygendorf, published in 1941) state that in special situations, such as combat in villages, antitank guns are especially effective in subduing hostile strong points. Naturally, such employment is recommended only in the absence of a hostile tank threat.

c. It is logical for the Germans to take advantage of the mobility, fire power, and the limited armor protection of their regimental antitank weapons to use them against ground targets checking the advance of assault units. They believe it is an inefficient use of available materiel to have such weapons and their crews remain idle during combat, if they can be used effectively against menacing hostile targets and if there is no threat from enemy tanks. The author's statement that his guns alternated antitank projectiles with H.E. shells when attempting to neutralize hostile fire coming from houses on a village street is noted with interest. Later, when the source of the hostile fire was localized to one of two buildings, he states that H.E. shells were used.