



In Italy's Littoria area M10s served as reinforcing artillery. Their roadside positions (1) furnished a firm surface on which muzzle blast would not show and (2) automatically gave increased elevation, with the TDs tilted down in the ditch.

BRASSING OFF KRAUT

By Maj. Edward A. Raymond, FA

"A correct understanding of the capabilities and limitations of tank destroyers can only be given to artillery, infantry, and tank commanders by combined training with the TDs prior to combat. It is very necessary to develop teamwork between the tank destroyers and each of the three principal combat arms."—*Artillery Officer (U. S.) AFHQ.*

Far more German tanks have been knocked out during the North African and Italian Campaigns by one TD battalion than by any other. That battalion has had about the lowest losses in proportion to tanks KO'ed. Its men have fought for more days, have made more amphibious landings, and are more decorated, than any other Tigerheads extant. This is the story of their work at the Anzio Beachhead from D-day to the end of March.

The lessons the battalion learned in the battles of Sbeitla and El Guettar, during the Tunisian Campaign, were told in this JOURNAL for January, 1944*. Much water has run under the bridge since then. This battalion has turned in the old 75-mm guns on half-tracks with which it started fighting, and drawn 3" guns on a diesel-powered tank chassis, the M-10. Through constant, heavy fighting on the main Italian front the battalion learned the versatility of its equipment. In addition to doing its primary job, it learned to play on three teams—with infantry, with field artillery, and with tanks. It landed in the assault waves at Anzio.

OFFENSIVE PHASE

The battalion reached shore just after dawn on January 22nd. The first twenty-four hours were spent in unloading, moving to an assembly area, and de-waterproofing. Due to the marshy ground it took a lot of labor to reach the assembly area. Reconnaissance was initiated right away, and combat not long after. Next day B Co's 2nd Plat destroyed a Kraut tank with APC and knocked out an enemy strong point in a house with HE delay.

It took the Germans until the 2nd of February to gather their forces and to start their major attempts to crush the beachhead. Meanwhile the Allied forces struggled desperately to extend

their positions.

After several days the German plan of defense became evident. Their hastily-assembled units used as positions for strong points houses, ruins, and the natural cover provided by canals, stream beds, and draws. Strong points often consisted of 50-mm or 75-mm AT guns, with machine guns and rifles. Frequently the Boche would permit our forces to penetrate through this network, then fire upon them from the rear. Houses, and a tower and a steeple in Cisterna, were used as OPs. At night 88-mm and 170-mm guns were brought up close to our lines to harass installations in our rear areas, and on several occasions harassing fire fell in the vicinity of the TD trains. Jerry snipers were very aggressive, and on one occasion German riflemen penetrated two miles behind our lines at night, crossing the Mussolini Canal and firing at vehicles and houses; they withdrew before daylight. The armor used by the Germans on the beachhead ran from Ferdinand assault guns, with 200-mm of armor in front and 110-mm on top, through the PzKw VI, the PzKw IV Special, and the PzKw IV, to the PzKw III. In addition, a wide variety of self-propelled guns was encountered.

In the period discussed, armor was roadbound. The beachhead was on ground reclaimed by Mussolini from the Pontine Marshes. During the winter rains the watertable rises, and everything below a thin crust of soil is liquid mud. Being restricted to roads, the Germans used their tanks in small groups. Although there was relatively little defilade on much of the beachhead, farmhouses afforded the TDs some cover and concealment. They were Government-built, serial-numbered, regularly spaced, and made of cement and tile. Commonly they had patriotic slogans painted in large black letters on their walls. Behind these houses the TDs would lie in wait for their dangerous quarry. Destroyers were used in pairs at least, and covered one another's movements. Ordinarily they caught their adversaries in a cross-fire.

In the opening phases of the fight the TDs were used in an assault gun role in the infantry front lines. Their .50-cal. machine guns were constantly employed. Targets were personnel, houses, strong points, machine guns, vehicles, and towed

*P 14, *Slugging It Out*, by the present author.

guns, as well as tanks and SP guns. One house was fired upon at 300 yards. It had a German tank hidden behind it. An APC shell went into the house, on through, and out the other side, smashing the tank.

Lt. C. E. Bell was later in the same predicament as the German tank had been. His destroyer was sitting behind a house. An 88 started shooting at the house with direct fire. A round of AP came through the building about five feet above the destroyer. Lt. Bell backed away for a short distance. The fire ceased, and shortly afterward the 88 could be heard firing on another target. The TD ran out from behind the house and bagged the 88.

On another occasion Lt. Bell got within 200 yards of a haystack and saw that it had a door. He fired a round of HE and it bounced off. He fired with APCBC and flushed a dozen Krauts. In the "haystack" he found a 76.2-mm AT gun with a 75-mm round in the breech. Later in the day the Germans abandoned another loaded AT gun under similar circumstances. Lt. Bell plunked the sights down in front of his company commander when he made his report.

A tank platoon and a TD platoon were supporting an infantry assault company. The infantry had been brought to a halt on the night of January 24th. Enemy antitank, machine gun, and rifle fire had complete control of the route of attack, particularly the road which was our avenue of approach. The attack was to be renewed at dawn. The tank platoon commander said the fire was too heavy for a successful tank attack up the road, since antitank guns had already disabled one of his tanks.

When the attack started, S/Sgt. J. C. Ritso attacked up the road in his lone tank destroyer. He continued to advance about 100 yards forward of the advance infantry elements, partly exposing himself from time to time from the open turret of the M10, and directed fire on houses and machine gun nests at point-blank range. Machine pistol fire, enfilading cross-fire from machine guns, and sniper fire from right, left, and left rear were hitting the sides of the mount and flying within inches of him. He continued to fire for eight to ten minutes, covering a rush by our infantry, when two direct hits from a well-concealed AT gun knocked out his destroyer and set it afire. He received a compound fracture of the right leg.

The TD battalion executive and the commander of the reserve TD company were at the infantry company CP, following the progress of the attack. When they heard what had happened to Sgt. Ritso they left the comparative safety of the house, ran across 25-50 yards of open ground, across a driveway and then the road, and crawled along a ditch beside the road for 300 yards. It took them almost an hour to get to the destroyer. Every time they moved a bush they were fired on by enemy 50-200 yards distant. By the time they reached the destroyer the enemy had about a 100-yard skirmish line in a semi-circle around them and were sniping continuously. There was some mortar fire in the area, and a machine gun in a house 40 yards further on down the road had the destroyer covered and fired bursts at any observed movement. The major took Sgt. Ritso on his back, Lt. L. D. Matter took a man with a smashed foot on his, and they crawled for safety. The sergeant died from loss of blood, but this action unquestionably saved the life of one member of a distinguished tank destroyer crew.

On the previous day the same destroyer had greatly aided the engineers in blowing up a bridge in the face of an enemy counterattack. The destroyer had carried the engineers forward,

covered them for half an hour as they worked, and brought them back alive.

The division to which this TD battalion was attached began an attack on Cisterna on January 30th. The attack failed, but not because it lacked TD support.

The TDs destroyed German armor, won duels with AT guns at 500 yards, killed numbers of enemy infantry, wounded more, and took prisoners. One of these was a medical soldier with a Red Cross armband and a Parabellum .38 automatic pistol. The 3d Plat Recon Co fought off a fierce enemy counterattack. 37-mm HE was used, fired point-blank at 200 yards.

On Feb. 1st the destroyer of Sgt. W. B. Nesmith was the only one left in the 3d Plat of B Co. It did the work of all four, however, and stopped seven tanks attempting to break through our lines. One, a PzKw VI, was knocked out with three rounds of APC at 1,000 yards. On the 3d, Sgt. Nesmith was supporting an infantry attack in the vicinity of Cisterna. The other M10 with which he had been working had run over a mine that morning and was out of action for repairs. The enemy launched a counterattack of approximately a battalion of infantry with 20 or more tanks, threatening the flank of Sgt. Nesmith's position. He was behind a house, and as he started to run out to a firing position one of his motors went dead. Using the remaining motor he managed to get out beyond the corner of the house. The leading enemy tanks, now at a distance of about 900-1,000 yards, saw him and opened fire. A corner of the building fell down over the fighting compartment; a shell glanced off the front armor plate. Sgt. Nesmith opened fire and knocked out the first tank, a PzKw VI, with two rounds of AP. Then he fired at a second "VI" which was covering the first. He damaged it, but because of his dead engine could not maneuver to a position from which he could finish it off. The enemy tanks withdrew behind nearby houses, and retired about 45 minutes later when it grew dark.

DEFENSIVE PHASE

On 2 Feb the enemy took the initiative, and from then on until the 19th made a strong bid for the beachhead. He used elements of six divisions on a 3,000-yard front in the northern sector and gained five miles down the famous North Road to Anzio. An estimated 125-150 tanks, including PzKw Vis and Ferdinands, formed the spearhead of the offensive, which reached its height between the 16th and the 19th of February.

The battalion was on the eastern sector and so did not feel the impact of this fighting; nor was it involved in the American armored counterattack on February 19th, which was backed up successfully by a TD battalion in a direct support role. From the 19th to the 28th the enemy made only limited-objective thrusts and probing attacks.

By then the Kraut had reorganized. He shifted his attention from the northern to the eastern sector and struck along its entire front the division supported by our TD battalion. From 75-100 enemy tanks were employed in support of their infantry. The TD battalion committed all 36 guns over the division front of 25,000 yards in direct fire positions, and knocked out 25 German tanks with the loss of no M10s.

The development of the TDs in advance of action was dictated by a number of considerations. Being restricted to roads, the Germans used their tanks in small groups behind their infantry. Employment of tank destroyers in mass was dependent on the enemy using his armor in mass also, since

the 37-mm and other AT weapons with which the infantry was equipped were not counted on to stop the heaviest German machines, and the small amount of maneuvering space on the beachhead precluded a defense in depth. Linear defense tactics sound suicidal, particularly in country with little or no defilade, but again the Government houses provided a slender margin of surprise and protection that proved just sufficient.

In Fig. 1 the antitank warning net is shown. Upon the usual

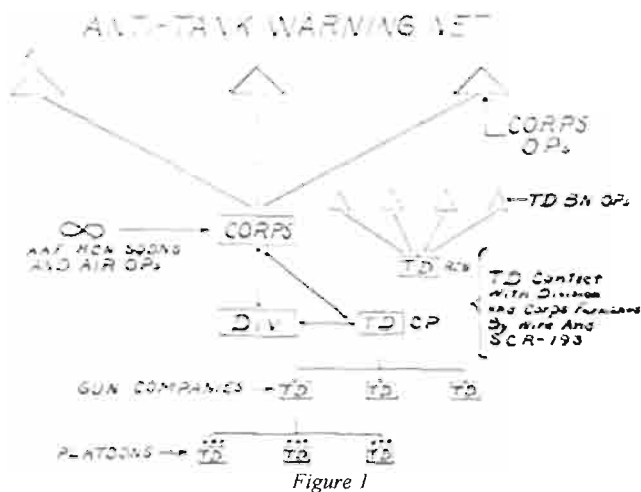


Figure 1

good warnings from Corps and Division G-2s, the TD crewmen had their lanyard arms limbered up on February 28th. The seriousness of the threat was not underestimated. Rear echelons had organized defensive positions against ground and air-borne attack.

The division gave way initially, counterattacked, regained most of the ground lost, lost it several times, and finally forced the Germans to drop the attempt after effecting small changes in the lines.

Selections are made from the Battalion Unit Journal for March 1st to indicate the nature of the TD action.

The TD liaison officer at division artillery Hq made the following reports by telephone:

0700—"30 enemy tanks at F-032298"

0702—"Alert 3d Plat 'A' Co, enemy counterattack in that vicinity. Enemy tank at F-975313"

0710—"10 enemy tanks at G-034284"

0715—"7 enemy tanks at F-980320"

Subsequent information from other sources showed 4 enemy tanks west of Ponte Rotto at F-993310 and an SP gun at F-926327, also enemy infantry moving south at G-010297.

At 1005 the following message was received from the division commander and relayed to 1st Plat B Co: "Enemy tanks moving south on Cisterna—Isola Bella Road. Stop them cold and leave them burning. We are pushing through with armor to regain ground lost."

At 1034 the battalion commander called Div CP to see if he could get word through to DivArty to fire on 7 tanks at A-980320, since they were out of TD range.

At 1040 a corps shoot was ordered; 5 rounds per gun at enemy infantry at G-012302.

At 1045, LO: "14-15 tanks at Isola Bella all dead (reported by Air OP planes). All road craters scheduled to be blown have been blown."

At 1105 a corps shoot was ordered, 5 rounds per gun at G-942322.

At 1132 BC to DivComdr: "All of those tanks at F-993310 are burning. 1st Plat B Co fired 40 rounds HE and APC at 4,000 yards (2 PzKw VIs and 2 PzKw IVs)."

At 1150, message received from 2nd Plat B Co that enemy artillery from G-048292 had pinned them down. BC arranged for artillery fire, and ordered (through B Co Exec) that 2nd Plat should pull out under cover of this barrage and take under fire the artillery that had fired on them.

At 1256 Recon Co OP reported a battalion of enemy infantry at F-957325, counterattacking. Message forwarded to Division.

At 1335 Recon Co reported that the infantry was at F-947336. "Our artillery is working on them. At a much greater range we can see the silhouettes of 5 tanks."

At 1400 Recon Co reported 2 batteries of nebelwerfers at F-956355, 1 battery at F-943362. Message forwarded to DivArty.

At 1410 Recon Co reported 2 batteries of enemy artillery at F-922364. Message forwarded to DivArty.

At 1425 DivArty asked if Recon Co could adjust artillery fire on targets. By time arrangements were completed haze had settled in and missions had to be postponed.

At 1540 2 live German tanks were reported to have sandwiched themselves in among the 4 knocked out at F-993310. 1st Plat B Co was given the mission. In anticipation of German thrusts during the night, indirect fire programs were drawn up on lines prescribed by the DivArty.

* * *

An individual destroyer action which took place on February 29th is worth recounting.

3d Plat Co B was interdicting the Cisterna Road. The destroyers of Sgts. H. J. Ritchie and J. C. Christian were behind buildings in Isola Bella. A Ferdinand (88-mm assault gun) and a PzKw VI tank attacked directly toward Sgt. Ritchie's building and reached a point on the road about 300 yards from him. They were being supported by the fire of three PzKw VI tanks 250 yards up the road behind them and another Ferdinand and a "VI" in a farmyard about 250 yards east of the position. As Cpl. J. P. Goldsmith, the gunner, tells the tale:

"Sgt. Ritchie ordered me to pull into open view around the corner of the building, and from this exposed position directed three hits onto the most exposed tank, it being about 550 yards up the road at that time, and knocked it out. We drew heavy AP and HE fire from the other tanks, shells barely missing our destroyer by a few feet and fragments hitting us. We were exposed for about five minutes. Then Sgt. Ritchie ducked his head and shoulders below the turret and pulled back behind the house. When enemy fire had ceased, Sgt. Ritchie had me pull out again, and from the same exposed position directed two rounds of AP shell that hit and bounced off the front armor of the Ferdinand 250 yards east of us. We again received intensive fire from the enemy tanks and shells were landing so close that fragments were coming through the open turret, one slightly wounding our gunner in the head when it hit our tank and damaging the counter-balance and .50-cal. machine gun mounted on the edge of the turret. We were again exposed to enemy fire for about five minutes. He ducked into the tank and we pulled behind the house again. We continued to fight throughout the day with our damaged gun."

Sgt. Ritchie continues the story: "The second time we fired, Sgt. Christian radioed me to cover him and pulled out behind

the house that he was using for defilade and directed the fire or five rounds, scoring two hits on the PzKw VI and two hits on the Ferdinand that were pinning us down. He definitely knocked them out: only two men got out of those two armored vehicles. Direct fire from the supporting enemy tanks was so intense that I saw two rounds hit the house around which he had moved to fire and another hit the corner of the building directly above his tank. If any of these shells had scored a hit, it would probably have put destroyer and crew out of action.

"A few minutes later Sgt. Christian again pulled out and fired on another supporting "VI" on the main road, scoring a direct hit and neutralizing that tank. He was exposed to intense enemy direct fire for about 15 minutes. By his coordinating the fire of our two weapons, diverting the attention of the enemy, that attack on our position was stopped. Prior to this action the sight extension bar on Sgt. Christian's gun had been bent, and the only means he had to adjust fire was to stand completely exposed above the turret with field glasses. Two teeth were broken off the turret worm gear, and throughout the engagement the gun was traversed by jolting against the gun housing and jerking the traverse handle until the gears would mesh."

LESSONS AND OPERATIONS

The German attack taught several lessons, among them that the enemy had carefully observed our movements and registered artillery on important points during periods of relative inactivity. Just before or during an attack, he will utilize this knowledge to neutralize these important points. Gun positions must be changed often to secure the element of surprise.

It was noted that the enemy would attempt any trickery which he thought might have even a remote possibility of bagging some of our guns. In several instances he would withdraw a knocked-out tank under cover of darkness and substitute a live tank in its place. Close observation on the part of the infantry and our gun crews exposed this trickery. It was found that the Kraut would re-man knocked-out tanks which had not burned and use them as pillboxes. It has become the policy of this TD unit to shell and set afire all enemy tanks knocked out.

March is said to come in like a lion and go out like a lamb. It never became very lamb-like on the Anzio Beachhead, but with the defeat of their second big offensive thrust the Germans evidently decided that they were not going to push the invaders into the sea at that point, and satisfied themselves with making the almost surrounded Allied forces as uncomfortable as they could. Our TD Battalion remained in the perimeter defense of the Beachhead, with always one full



A French crew from an Algerian division fires its M10 against Castleforte in May

company and often more in the infantry lines.

TDs on "pillbox" missions remained in position a week at a time, exposed to enemy mortar fire without overhead protection. Sometimes they were within 50 yards of the infantry outposts and ahead of our minefields. Companies were placed under infantry regiments and platoons under battalions.

Use of TDs to take advantage of their armor alone is unconventional, since the superstructure is open and is made of armor in places only 1½" thick. M10s have an equally obvious weakness in armament, when it comes to fighting against infantry infiltration. The M10 turret must be rotated to permit forward fire of the .50-cal. machine gun—and even then it can not be depressed enough to fire at infantry close-in. There is no flexible machine gun over the assistant driver's seat as in a tank, nor is there one coaxially mounted with the tube. There are not even fighting slits in the turret. Hand grenades are not carried by experienced units, as they may be set off by enemy shells striking the sides of the destroyer.

The men in some of the positions were under sniper fire and could not show themselves above the turret during daylight. Five could sleep in a destroyer by arranging themselves in a star inside the hull, their feet pointing toward the center. Most of the men were sleeping on two or three different levels at once, each with a sharp edge. It was often cold, and rarely quiet for more than a few minutes or so. For other living functions, a small dugout was scooped out beneath the M10.

The battalion feels that infantry commanders do not always put destroyers in positions with big enough fields of fire. Particularly after their attack from Cisterna, the Germans were wary of committing their tanks until their infantry had probed our defenses for antitank weapons, keeping the armor 3-5,000 yards out until they felt it safe to advance.

Guns should be mutually supporting. They should be in hull-defilade or, lacking this, under some sort of cover. They should not betray a fixed position by frequent firing on cannon company targets. According to established doctrine the infantry AT guns should normally be emplaced ahead of M10s, not behind them.

The TDs showed that they were capable of functioning in an assault gun role, if given a fairly free hand. TDs prefer to work up to a fixed objective deliberately, using indirect fire if possible; otherwise they launch a coordinated direct fire attack, using destroyers in pairs: one to fire, the other as a covering gun. Fire should be combined with movement. A successful commander of armor has said that in armor it is "Dig and Die." The battalion felt that infantry commanders could get much more from the TDs by assigning general missions, letting TD commanders make detailed tactical decisions.

This TD battalion—like others in Italy—thinks that it should tie right in as a battalion to the divisional artillery when acting in its secondary role as artillery. Its officers are mainly artillerymen, and after spending entire months on the main front in a secondary artillery role the rest of the officers became fully qualified. Tank Destroyer battalions in this theater like to run their own show, and feel that they do better work when they do their own forward observation, fire direction, and position area survey. The tie-in with the division artillery provides for long-range harassing missions beyond the capabilities of the 105-mm howitzer M2, and makes available TD observers, particularly in the reconnaissance

company, capable of adjusting the divisional artillery.

Particularly in the final phases of an enemy infantry attack, the ability of the TDs to adjust artillery fire has proved extremely valuable. When one or two members of every TD crew are qualified observers, as is the case in this battalion, every TD becomes an artillery OP. Each destroyer has its own radio and is in touch with any division artillery unit through the TD battalion's FDC.

Another artillery function of great importance to the division artillery has been the use of TDs as roving guns. This was tried on the main front with a variety of self-propelled weapons, but was carried further on the beachhead. It was done for two purposes. One was to answer the Kraut's "Flak-Wagon Serenade," a nightly harassing program to prevent our men from sleeping. The battalion has learned that the TDs are highly successful when they do the same thing. Our 3" shell arrives, like the German 88, before the sound of the projectile in flight; that is to say, it comes entirely without warning. The battalion sends out two or three destroyers to fire a few rounds from each of a number of positions up and down the line, firing at definitely located targets (such as houses, dugouts, trails, etc.), which are known to be in current use. Firing is never done at random.

The other purpose of hit-and-run play is for counterbattery missions. When employed, this was as effective as firing from regularly occupied positions, did not betray our field artillery emplacements, and confused the enemy as to the numbers, location, and type of our artillery. To minimize retaliatory fire, TD guns were fired singly or from well scattered locations.

A tie-in with the divisional artillery provided the TDs with air observation, which was especially valuable in registering the long-range and small-burst 3" gun.

It was reserved for a neighboring battalion to support a major American tank attack. The battalion feels that TDs suffer from the feeling of higher commanders that TDs are defensive weapons. They are defensive weapons, but their most neglected and perhaps their ideal role is to supply close-support fire for tanks while the tanks employ shock action. The Russians have long used this technique with self-propelled artillery and it is seen in the German employment of the Ferdinand with PzKw VI tanks. Teamwork is the secret of success here, and a TD battalion must work closely with its supported tank unit over a long period of time, so that each can learn the other's habits and know always what the other is able to do. In Italy the enemy has used large numbers of tanks, but due to terrain limitations has rarely used them in mass. It has been more normal to see groups of four to six. The TDs attempt to use cross fire from two or more guns on each successive target. Therefore a high ratio of TDs to friendly tanks appears to be desirable. Advance is made by leap-frogging from one set of mutually-supporting hull-defiladed positions to another set. It has been the experience of this battalion that high-speed armored engagements are a news-reel fiction, and that speed is not essential to keep up with a tank fight; 6 mph seemed to be plenty.

The battalion wants the biggest gun it can carry. It views the German Ferdinand with respect, but thinks that the German 128-mm Gun, SP, with less armor and more tube, will probably prove a more dangerous opponent.

MATERIEL NOTES

This section was provided by the battalion commander.

a. German tanks employ smoke generating apparatus to advantage for screening their movements or covering the evacuation of a crew when the tank can no longer move. TDs need them too.

b. When TDs were used as pillboxes in the front lines, a light armored hood that could be thrown off prior to antitank action was tried and found to be desirable.

c. Greater magnification is desired for the direct fire telescopic sights. The M12A4 panoramic sight should be retained, as it is more satisfactory than the azimuth indicator for artillery missions.

d. The 75-mm Howitzer Motor Carriage M8 would be preferred to the Armored Car M8 for TD reconnaissance companies. It has a superior flotation characteristics and is better protected underneath against mines.

e. The comparison of self-propelled TDs with the towed antitank guns of the British in the northern sector emphasized the superiority of the M10. Our TDs could follow the advance of our infantry much more closely, and when enemy infantry infiltrated into Allied positions could withdraw in daylight. The thin-skinned prime-movers for the towed guns could in general only approach the front at night. The limited traverse of towed guns also proved a serious handicap. The chevron type rubber track was called "the only logical type to be used in combat."

f. Illuminating shell was used under battle conditions by a neighboring TD battalion. Within the time of burning afforded, this ammunition worked very well and filled a long-felt need. An M10 used as a flare gun, one gun per platoon, lays back to obtain a higher trajectory. The battalion itself has had good success in getting the infantry to illuminate the target area with mortar flares on request.

CONCLUSION

Damage done to the enemy between January 22nd and March 31st is shown in Fig. 2. The outstanding conclusion to be drawn from the experiences of this TD battalion on the

STATISTICS				
22 January—31 March 1944				
GAINS	Jan.	Feb.	Mar.	Total
Tanks & SP	10	14	27	51
Probables		(3)	(3)	(6)
Armored Cars & HTs	4	1		5
Artillery & AT Guns	3	2	1	6
MGs	17	3		20
PWs	16	4		20
Misc.—				
Aircraft		1	1	2
Vehicle	1		1	2
LOSSES				
M10s (O/A more than 24 hrs)	2	1		3
Officers	1	2		3
E/M	6	34	29	69

Figure 2

Anzio Beachhead is that the M10 is one of the most versatile weapons on the battlefield. It is a quadruple threat, not only doing its defensive job in spectacular fashion but also acting offensively as an infantry assault gun, as a mobile artillery weapon, and as an invaluable adjunct in tank attacks.