

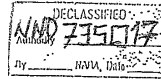
REPORT OF ATTACK ON FORT SIMSERHOF

Fort Simserhof is located generally at 711518, on commanding ground. The construction is such that its guns are easily capable for firing well to each of its flanks as well as giving perfect coverage of the ground to its front. Its excellent observation posts in the concrete cupolas on the top of the Fort give the enemy a decided advantage over any direct fire weapon, which makes it almost impossible to secure a position to fire on the Fort that cannot be observed.

Company "A", 776th Tank Destroyer Battalion, in support of the 71st Infantry Regiment, 44th Infantry Division, whose sector is completely dominated by this Fort, was given the mission of firing on the apertures and neutralizing the guns. A reconnaissance was made of the Infantry front lines. These positions were on a steep slope in a forest, which was, in itself, an obstacle for a Tank Destroyer.

The next position reconnoitered was on a slight ridge about 1000 yards from the Fort at 722517. Directly in front of the Fort the ground rises slightly and the barb wire, steel posts and underbrush cut out a good view of the apertures. Since this area was under direct fire from the Fort, it was necessary to dig the Destroyer in, which placed the gun below the apertures. The brush and small trees in the front of the Fort were in the path of fire and could not be cleared by the projectile. This tentative position could not be used.

A thorough reconnaissance was then made to the left in the 324th Infantry sector and positions were located in the vicinity of 718518. This position was, however, under direct observation by the enemy and was heavily shelled from the North, Northwest, and East by enemy artillery and self-propelled guns. This area had many pillboxes and it was decided to go into position by two pillboxes close to the Koanerhl farm. The Fort could be plainly seen from this position at a range of 2100 yards. One gun would be dug in in the earth works on the North side of the pill box. A bull-dozer dug a gun position at night, and the gun position was further built up with logs and sand bags until nothing but the tube of the gun could be seen. While the bull-dozer was working, artillery was placed on the Fort to cover the noise of the bull-dozer. This was necessary since the gun was within self-propelled range from the left, rear, and front. The next position was selected at another pill box 100 yards to the front and slightly to the right of the first gun. This gun had protection of the pill box from the North, but was vulnerable to fire from the front and rear from direct fire, and was within easy range of enemy artillery on its right. The front and rear were built up with logs and sand bags for protection against direct fire weapons, and the side against artillery. The construction of these two positions involved the work of 100 men for approximately twelve hours and a bull-dozer for approximately four hours. When the positions were completed, the gun tubes were the only target for the enemy, and it was felt the crew would be able to shoot it out with the Fort without having the M-36's knocked out and preventing them from neutralizing the guns in the Fort. The minute the guns would open up they would be seen, as the flashes were under observation from three sides. To distract the enemy's attention, a fire plan was worked out. "B" Company in position in the vicinity of 706525 and 703529 was to fire on the high ground in the vicinity of 726547 or any other enemy activity to the North to prevent firing on the two dug-in guns. Fire was to be laid down intermittently to discourage enemy tanks or self-propelled guns from occupying this ground with armor, as they had previously run tanks into these general locations. One platoon of "A" Company in position in the vicinity 706514 was to furnish a base of fire on the cupolas of the Fort, and was to attract attention of the Fort. These guns had a hall down position and no effect was to be made by this platoon to conceal their flashes from enemy observation. Artillery concentrations were also planned on the cupolas. A tank was put into position at 721-515 and every part of the tank was sandbagged but the tube. The tank could not fire high explosive since his trajectory would not clear the brush in front of the Fort. The tanks phone was tied into the Tank Destroyer telephone line. While the two Tank Destroyers were firing, no friendly artillery would be fired at the front of the Fort. It was decided to open fire with one gun and bring the other gun in after the first gun had been located by the enemy. An observation post was secured about 800 yards from the front of the Fort to sense the rounds for the gunners. Two telephone lines were laid from the observation post to the guns with a battery pack radio at the observation post so an alternative means of communication if the wire was shot out. This was a party line consisting of the battalion commanding officer, the observation post, tank and the two tank destroyers. All parties listened in and could easily communicate with any party without being involved in the mechanism of a switch board.



Report of attack on Fort Simserhof (cont'd)

The reconnaissance for an observation post was made during daylight and selected in the vicinity of 727521. During the night the observation post was dug in, sand-bagged, camouflaged and wire laid to the observation post. It was occupied at 0600 hours. About 0830 hours the sun came out, the sky was clear, and it was evident that it would be an excellent day for observation. The shadows were bad about mid-morning so the firing was withheld. At 1100 hours three large apertures were very evident and a large port hole was on the left, which indicated a smaller artillery gun or large caliber machine gun. At 1145 hours one tank destroyer opened fire on the center aperture with high explosive super-quick fuze with the tank observing the rounds to locate the target. Three rounds of high explosive super-quick fuze were fired and lost. The fourth round was observed on the fort and the adjustment of the aperture was made. The ammunition was changed to high explosive delay and about 20 rounds were laid into the aperture with about ten rounds going directly into the aperture and the rest hitting the slope and sides of the aperture. Four rounds of high explosive with T105 fuze were fired. These hit in and around the aperture and seemed to make a great blast and flame in the aperture and smoke began to come out of the aperture. The observation post then brought the tank in with armor piercing cap on this aperture and about 40 rounds were fired, of which approximately ten went into the aperture, the balance hit the sides of the aperture and the face of the fort. The dispersion on this gun was large and it was quite impossible to get accurate shots from the gun.

The tank destroyer was then registered on the right aperture and about 20 rounds were fired, half of these going into the aperture. Five rounds of the T105 were fired at the aperture with two rounds going into the aperture and the same blast effect was observed, but smoke did not come out of this aperture.

The second tank destroyer took the left aperture under fire and about 25 rounds were fired into this one. Hits were again made in and around the aperture. Three rounds of T105 were fired at this aperture and part of the upper part of the aperture crumpled from the effects of one of the rounds. The port hole on the left was taken under fire. This was difficult to hit, as it was much smaller, and about thirty rounds of high explosive were fired with about six direct hits in the hole. Two T105s were fired, but neither hit the hole. The right aperture was again fired at with eleven rounds of high explosive with hits made in the aperture.

The Tank Destroyer was then brought in on the right aperture with armor piercing. Twenty rounds were fired at the aperture and about half of these appeared to go right in, while the other hit the sides. Smoke started to come out of the aperture. Twenty rounds were fired at the other two apertures with the same results. Fourteen rounds were fired at the small port hole on the left an again it was difficult to hit the hole. About three rounds were considered as direct hits.

A total of 122 rounds of high explosive, 14 T105 and 74 armor piercing cap were fired at the three apertures and port hole. Once a round of high explosive delay went into the aperture an exact estimation could not be made of the results or the exact part of the aperture hit. It generally produced a flame that covered the entire aperture and a great deal of smoke and debris could be seen. The T105 fuze seemed to produce a greater blast and flame and its effects were even more difficult to assess than the high explosive delay. The armor piercing cap could be observed easier and rounds were seen from the observation post that appeared as hits right in the center of the aperture. It is estimated that about 30 percent of all rounds fired were direct hits within the apertures with the balance being in the close vicinity of the apertures. Quite frequently near hits on the sides of the apertures would cause debris to fall into and on the base of the aperture. Both tank destroyers were used since there was such a small difference in their gun-target line that both guns were equally effective. A great amount of physical work, thorough reconnaissance, and careful planning made it possible to successfully execute this mission, and it is believed that a great deal of damage was done to the apertures of Fort Simserhof and the firing was successful.