

HEADQUARTERS
899TH TANK DESTROYER BATTALION
APO 250 U.S. ARMY

29 June 44. 179

SUBJECT : Lessons from the present campaign.

TO : A.T. Officer VII Corps.

1. Following are comments on pars. c. and d., letter, subject Lessons from the present campaign, HQ VII Corps, 26 June 44.

a. Tank destroyer as assault guns:

(1) Against automatic weapons.

(a) The prime consideration when using TD's as assault guns is the probable threat of enemy armor. Once TD's are committed in the role of assault weapons, breaking contact to accomplish their primary role becomes increasingly difficult. However when no enemy armored threat is imminent it is felt that utilizing the fire power of a TD Bn. in a support role to the infantry is justified rather than 36 guns remaining idle.

(b) Destroyers can effectively operate against enemy automatic weapons if close support is afforded by our own infantry. In one instance destroyers were used ahead of the infantry and an enemy grenade was thrown into the open turret of the destroyer thus stopping it and causing casualties to the crew.

(c) It is felt however that our medium tanks could accomplish the task with use of the MG's in the tank more economically than the destroyer that is not designed for this type of fighting. Unless the enemy automatic weapons are heavily fortified or emplaced the Infantry Mortar or Tank can easily handle the task.

(d) In this type of firing HE ammunition with direct hits or ricochet, will accomplish the mission. If in the event of emplacements APC followed by HE is quite effective.

(e) In this role close liaison with the infantry for the purpose of target description and location is necessary. The infantry elements when stopped can identify targets to TD's that are holding up the advance. For example; "Around that bend is a 20MM gun firing down the road". With the information the TD can proceed and accomplish the task.

(2) Against fortified positions. —

(a) The 3" AT gun had difficulty in piercing 4" of concrete. In one instance 56 rds were used (all hits) and only chips were knocked out. In tests in Africa and England up to 7" of concrete was pierced but the German emplacements are reinforced by steel plates up to 2". The 56 rds were fired at short ranges (200 to 400 yds.).

(b) The apertures in these fortified positions are the targets which can be fired upon by use of a forward observer tied in with combat wire and remote control devices. At Grisbecq this method was employed by TD's and the results were excellent. It amounts to direct indirect firing.

b. New developments in the attack of fortified positions:

(1) See par. a (2) (a) & (b).

(2) Recommend that a higher velocity gun be used.

HOYT K. LORANCE
HOYT K. LORANCE,
Major, 899th T.D. Bn.,
Commanding.

Hdqs., 899th T.D. Bn.,
In the Field,
15 July 1944

LESSONS LEARNED ON MK V TANKS

The lessons learned on Mk V Tanks by this Battalion have been confined to one or two day's activity against them. They are few and simple.

I. Camouflage:-

a. The German has outdone himself here. The tanks observed were covered with a linoleum-like surface glued to the hull and turret. This had a rippled surface to reduce glare and is painted in shades of green much as an American parachute. Over this was chicken wire in which he put fresh branches in a very natural manner. The result is as perfect a camouflage in this green hedgerow country as could be obtained. When halted against one of the hedgerows the tank is practically invisible, as proven by the destroyer crew who knocked out the three (3) rear tanks in a column of four (4) enemy tanks without seeing the lead tank which was under 150 yards from them.

II. Tactics:-

a. Mk V's have been used in our particular sector in groups of 4 or 5 together in at least two cases without accompanying infantry.

b. He moves very slowly, stopping frequently for observation and to make use of natural cover. In this manner he also utilizes to its best advantage the excellent camouflage mentioned above.

c. When his thrust is stopped it seems to be every tank for himself and get out the best way possible. The remaining tanks proceed by other routes and seek other avenues of advance or withdrawal. Gunners continue to fire even after tank has been stopped by our H.E. and set afire.

d. These tanks will at times show themselves in order to draw movement from Tank Destroyers or by any armored vehicles and will not fire on small vehicles or personnel while doing this. This was observed in the edge of a heavy wooded area. The Mk V's would pull out slowly, withdraw then reappear in another spot.

III. Vulnerability:

a. Contrary to popular belief, the Mk V is vulnerable to 3 inch fire. The tank has several weak spots, namely:

- (1) Sides and back of turret - approx. 3" plate.
- (2) Top of tank in front of turret. This takes a luck hit or very good gunner at close range. A hit must be obtained on the lower half of the gun shield thus deflecting the shot down into the ammunition compartment behind the driver. - About 1" to 1-1/2" plate here.
- (3) Sides just above track or just under track easily penetrated.

III. a. (1) From the appearance the rear of the tank would also be easily penetrated. It appears to have from 2" to 2 1/2" plate in rear.

(5) The frontal slope is far too heavy for the 3" to penetrate even at close range. Hits at 135 to 200 yards merely gouge out chunks of metal and deflect upwards doing no damage. One hit on the 30 Cal. ball mount drove it completely back thru the tank and fired the vehicle.

However, one penetration was obtained on the reverse or "belly slope" in front of the Mk V at a range of approximately 150 yards. This may have been a chance penetration and should not be relied on as an aiming point.

IV. General:

a. The Panther Mk V tank is a formidable enemy and one deserving of caution when engaging. To stand toe to toe and slug it out means disaster for the T.D. His High Velocity 75 mm is a good gun. He knows how to use his tank and weapon to the utmost efficiency and does so at all times. He continues to fight even when his position is hopeless. His tank is slow and hard to maneuver on the present narrow roads. His visibility is poor when buttoned up.

b. To sum up the facts so far learned we might say we are fighting a tough competitor but one that has been thoroughly beaten by the M-10 Tank Destroyer. We must not meet him face to face and slug it out, depending on luck, but must be accomplished by our maneuverability coupled with very good and thorough reconnaissance on foot when necessary, by air when possible. If we use the inherent mobility of our weapon and out-manuever the Mk V, he can be stopped by the 3 inch gun.

Following are comments of the gun company commanders of the Battalion who have been concerned with the Mk V "Panther" Tank:

Company "A", 899th T.D. Bn. - 1st Lt. ROBERT W. YOUNG - Commanding Co "A":

In view of the fact that it is impossible to penetrate the frontal armor of the Mk V "Panther" Tank with 3" APORDF ammunition unless it is ricocheted down into top of the tank by hitting the lower half of the gun shield or by hitting the ball mounted machine gun, the following recommendations for the employment of the M-10 Tank Destroyer are made:

a. In stabilized Anti-tank defensive positions M-10's should be placed to deliver fire on approaching Mk V Tanks from the side or rear as they by-pass our A.T. positions. The employment of 90 mm AT Guns covering avenues of approach is recommended for frontal fire on Mk V Tanks. However, it must be borne in mind that enemy columns cannot be expected to approach our positions down main routes of travel.

b. During an attack with M-10's it is highly desired that Mk V tanks be previously located so that flanking movements can be initiated in order that fire can be delivered from the flanks or rear of Mk V "Panther" Tanks.

Company "C", 899th T.D. Bn. - Captain CLARENCE A. HOOKERHORN - Commanding Co "C"

As a result of action of "C" Co on the day of July 11th, 1944 against Mk V "Panther" Tanks the following comments are made:

a. Whenever possible M-10's should try to ambush tanks and to wait until the M-10 can fire into the sides or rear of the tank. 3" A PORDF shell shot into lower portion of the gun shield or a shot into the under-plate of the frontal armor will destroy a Panther tank. It is almost impossible to knock it out by hitting it in the front at any other place.

b. The Panther is vulnerable to 3" H.E. ammunition at close ranges, as one round of H.E. fired at a range of 300 yards shattered the turret of a Mk V Panther Tank.

c. In a Tank Destroyer battle the one who gets the 1st hit usually wins out, for that reason, marksmanship and alertness are two of the important factors. German tanks are always well camouflaged.

HOTT K. LORANCE,

The 1st Lt. learned on Mk V Tanks by Major, 899th T. D. Bn.,
on the day's activity against them. They are few and far between.

Camouflage

a. The German has camouflaged himself here. The tanks observed were covered with a lime-green-like substance glued to the hull and turret. This had a stippled surface to reduce glare and is painted in shades of green much as an American naturalist would. The result is a perfect camouflage in this green hedgerow country as could be observed. When halted against one of the hedgerows the tank is practically invisible, as proven by the Destroyer crew who knocked out the first (1) about 100 yards in a column of four (4) enemy tanks without seeing the lead tank which was under 150 yards from them.

Actions

a. Mk V's have been used in our particular sector in groups of 4 or 5 together in at least two cases without accompanying infantry.

b. He moves very slowly, stopping frequently for observation and to make use of natural cover. In this respect he also utilizes to his best advantage the excellent camouflage mentioned above.

c. When his thrust is stopped it seems to be every tank for himself and against the Destroyer possibilities the remaining tanks proceed by other routes and back out whenever at advance or withdrawal. German's continue to fire over other tanks that are stopped by our D.D. and not return.

d. These tanks will at times show themselves in order to draw our armor from Tank Destroyers or by any exposed vehicles and will not fire on small vehicles or personnel while doing this. This was observed in the edge of a heavy wooded area. The Mk V's would pull out slowly, withdraw then reappear in another spot.

Vulnerability

a. Contrary to popular belief, the Mk V is vulnerable to 3 inch shells. The tank was observed with armor, mainly:

(1) Hull and back of turret - approx. 1 1/2 plates.

(2) Top of tank in front of turret. This takes a luck hit or very good gunner at close range. A hit must be directed on the lower half of the gun shield thus deflecting the shot down into the ammunition compartment behind the turret. About 1 1/2 to 2 plates here.

(3) Side just above track or just under track easily penetrated.

HEADQUARTERS
899TH TANK DESTROYER BATTALION
APO 230 U.S. ARMY

17 October 1944.

SUBJECT: Lessons Learned and Battle Experiences.

TO : Commanding General, 1st U.S. Army, APO 230, U.S. Army,
(Thru Channels)
Attn: Anti-Tank Officer.

1. In compliance with request for information on "Lessons Learned and Battle Experiences", the following summary of ideas by units of this organization is submitted:

RATIONS AND SUPPLY

C.O., Company "A", 899th T.D. Bn.

"This company has found the most desirable type of ration to be two days B ration and one day C or 10-1. The C ration or 10-1 is distributed to the T.D. platoons attached to the Infantry Battalions. The B ration is sufficient to feed the CP and Security personnel hot meals, and to provide one hot meal per day for the destroyer platoons which are normally taken to the destroyer platoons at times when they supply some with ammunition, water, diesel, etc. This provides the destroyer platoon with one hot meal per day, remaining meals are provided by the platoon from their C or 10-1 rations."

SECURITY SET-UP

C.O., Company "A", 899th T.D. Bn.

"This company for the past year and 3 months has employed the security sections of the three destroyer platoons as a supply and security platoon under the leadership of the senior security Sgt. It has been found impractical for the security section to remain with the T.D. platoon in combat and to the difficulty involved when one section attempts to supply their platoon alone. This platoon under one head supplies all three platoons with the minimum use of vehicles, personnel and confusion.

If security is required by a destroyer platoon during the night a section of this platoon is sent out to perform that mission and returns the next morning. Replacements for the destroyer platoons come from this security platoon.

(Cont'd.)

Ans (2) - Security Set-up (Cont'd.)

"Under this set-up the Company CP is the supply point for all platoons. Supplies for the entire company are brought to the company supply point from the rear by the least amount of transportation necessary. Supplies going from the Company CP to the Platoons are concentrated into the smallest load possible. Often it has been found that one vehicle can supply all three platoons in rotation. Not show when available is sent out with the regular supplies. The platoons call in their requirements at noon each day to the Co. CP. The necessary supplies are immediately picked up and on the way to the platoon by 1700. Therefore all supplies are taken care of before dark.

To appreciate this set-up one must see it in actual operation."

COMBATTING PILL BOXES

C.O., Company "A", 899th T.D. Bn.

"In combatting enemy infantry troops within the Hurtgen Forest, entrenched in concrete dug-out pill boxes, which are several feet in thickness, the 1st Platoon Co. A. in support of the 3rd Bn. 60th Inf. Regt., first sprayed the area adjacent to the pill box with H.E. to root out the rocket launchers. It has been found that rocket launchers are habitually employed alongside concrete emplacements which have been found to contain only small arms, therefore these rocket launchers are employed to stand off tank attack. Second the destroyers fired at the apertures of the pill box, attempting to grind thru by repeating their fire until they got the desired effect. APC used in penetrating the concrete in all cases. Old type AP would be more desirable for this type work when followed by H.E. upon breaking thru the wall."

For the Battalion Commander:

Daniel M. Carter
DANIEL M. CARTER,
Major, 899th T.D. Bn.,
B-3.