

The following comments by Lt. Col. Van W. Pyland, Commanding, 636 TD Battalion, relative to the Dual Mission of Tank Destroyer organizations are forwarded as being of interest.

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The Dual Mission of the Tank Destroyer

The primary mission of the tank destroyer is apparent by its name, that is defense against enemy armor. In carrying out this primary mission even in an offensive situation, the tank destroyer seeks by the exploitation of terrain and cover to maintain an advantage over its heavier armored enemy, the tank. Speed in the occupation of positions, fields of fire covering probable avenues of approach, concealed and dug in positions have become a tried and accepted tactics of successful "tank killers".

Now an entirely new field for the tank destroyer has been tried and proven in the campaign in Italy. That is its secondary role as artillery. In that this role is played by the tank destroyer a much greater percentage of its time in this theater, it is well to consider the characteristics of the weapon and how it can be made to fit both its primary and secondary missions.

The greatest danger of the tank destroyers employment as artillery is that it will not be positioned and ready in the path of the enemy armored attack. This is absolutely essential and rightly recognized as tank destroyer tactics. Yet to place the tank destroyer in this direct fire position prematurely is to expose it to unnecessary casualties from enemy fire and to sacrifice its tremendous fire power in its secondary role as artillery.

Here is how the dual mission can be accomplished successfully. The flat trajectory, high velocity 3" gun on

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the M-10 mount must be positioned behind very little mask so that the minimum elevation will enable it to fire at close-in targets. The usual artillery piece will occupy a position behind a mask from which a destroyer can only be fired at its maximum ranges. This means that positions suitable for artillery are not usually suitable for the tank destroyer.

On the other hand the destroyer's primary mission demands that it be further forward near good routes and close to its previously selected direct fire anti-tank positions. So it is believed that if careful consideration is given the tank destroyer in the selection of its indirect firing position, that it can perform its secondary role without danger to the successful accomplishment of its primary one. These are the fundamental rules:

(1) That the indirect position be well forward and as near the probable avenue of approach of enemy armor as the terrain permits.

(2) That this position afford at least flash defilade or concealment, but a very low mask in order to exploit the close as well as maximum ranges of the gun.

(3) That good routes lead from the indirect position to the direct position.

(4) That the ammunition requirements of the direct and primary mission be constantly in mind.

(5) That the capabilities of the 3 inch gun fired indirectly by forward observer methods, at fairly close ranges, using delayed fuse, at enemy pill boxes, bunkers, and stone houses be thoroughly understood.

If these rules are known and practiced the tank destroyer can accomplish its dual mission and completely justify its existence and its extremely high cost to our government.

In rule five (5) above the registering of one gun of each platoon of the battalion on a common base point and closing the sheafs, enables the battalion commander to fire one gun or mass the fires of thirty-six in a very small area with terrific effect.

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