

# Towed Tank Destroyers

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*This article is largely based on recent reports concerning the use of tank destroyers in the field, and the principles it presents are those now being taught at the Command and General Staff School. However, the reader is reminded that the methods of employing tank destroyers may be changed in the future to conform to any changes in tactics and employment of armor in the various theaters of war.—THE AUTHOR.*

THE INFANTRY division commander has had no primary antitank gun means available to him for divisional use since the field artillery antitank batteries and platoons were eliminated from the division. Although antitank platoons and companies are organically contained within the infantry battalions and regiments, their primary mission is antimechanized protection of the subordinate organizations of which they are a part.

It is planned, as deemed necessary by the situation, to make available to the division commander for divisional use additional antitank means by attaching a tank destroyer battalion.

Security against mechanized attack must be considered from two viewpoints:

- a. The protection of the troops and their installations.
- b. The protection of the command or area as a whole.

Local antimechanized security for troops is provided through means organically contained in lower units, such as the regiment and battalion:

Some of the more important means contained in regiments and lower units at present are 57-mm antitank guns, rocket launchers, and antitank rifle grenades.

The protection of the command as a whole must be accomplished through the employment of organic or acquired antitank units at the disposal of the higher commander; for instance, the division commander.

The result of the lack of organic antitank gun means available to the division commander has forced the emergency use of at least a portion of the organic field artillery for the additional antitank security of the division, when mechanized attack threatened.

This practice of diverting field artillery from its normal mission of rendering close fire support to the infantry was particularly undesirable. It seriously endangered the successful accomplishment of the divisional mission.

The need of additional and heavier antitank gun means within the infantry division has been felt for

some time. This need apparently has been for an antitank gun unit, of sufficient size, immediately available to the division commander for antimechanized security of the division flanks and rear—and with which to reinforce or extend subordinate means as found necessary.

## MISSION

The primary mission of all tank destroyer units is the destruction of hostile tanks. They have been especially designed for offensive fire action against hostile armored forces.

It is believed that a TD battalion, when attached to an infantry division, should have the specific mission of protecting the division flanks and rear against hostile armored attack; of reinforcing or extending the organic regimental and battalion antitank gun defense; and, if and when attacked by hostile armor, of repelling it or delaying it for the necessary time to permit the employment of massed tank destroyer units under control of corps or army.

Since we now have the towed tank destroyer battalions, it is believed they are better suited for attachment to an infantry division because they present a smaller target and are easier to conceal in advanced positions.

## CHARACTERISTICS

The principal characteristics of tank destroyers are their mobility and armor-piercing firepower.

Although self-propelled tank destroyers are endowed with strong defensive capacity against small-arms fire and bomb and shell fragmentation, our towed units, having little or no armor protection, are quite vulnerable but are more easily concealed.

The towed TD units are amply equipped with communication means, principally radio, giving them the capability of considerable flexibility of action and control.

They are not equipped or organized to combat ground forces other than armor. They are particularly vulnerable to close hostile infantry action in any force, artillery fire, and especially combined infantry-artillery action. They must be supported by one or more of the other arms, particularly infantry and engineers, during the execution of any mission against hostile elements involving ground troops—other than tanks.

## ORGANIZATION

The battalion is the basic tank destroyer tactical organization.

The towed battalion is organized as shown in Figure 1. It is organized similarly to the self-propelled battalion in that it has a headquarters and headquar-

ters company, three TD companies, and a medical section. However, it does not contain a reconnais-

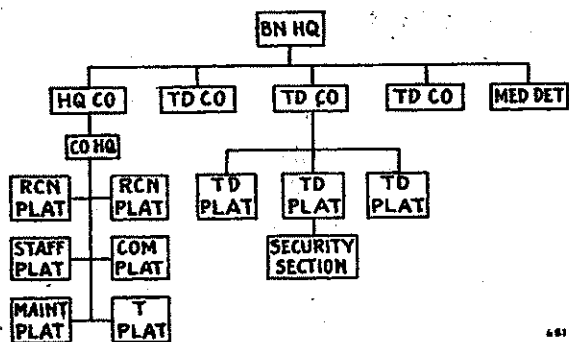


FIGURE 1.

sance company—having, instead, two reconnaissance platoons contained in the Hq Company.

The 3-inch gun M-5, mounted on the 3-inch gun carriage M-6, is the tank destroyer or principal weapon with which the towed battalion is equipped. This gun is essentially a field artillery piece having the mechanical characteristics, and permitting the ballistic features, desired in a weapon for use against tanks. It is a flat trajectory gun firing an armorpiercing projectile which weighs from 14.91 to 26.56 pounds. High explosive projectiles may also be fired from this gun. Although its prolonged rate of fire is five rounds per minute, short bursts of from fifteen to twenty rounds per minute may be fired from it.

The M-6 gun carriage is of the split trail type. Its traversing mechanism is of the pintle type, permitting a traverse of forty-five degrees.

The gun has a maximum elevation of thirty-one degrees and depression of five degrees. At its maximum elevation, using high explosive shells—M42—a range of 14,800 yards may be attained.

The prime mover, that is, the motor vehicle which tows the gun, is the Half-Track Personnel Carrier M-3. This vehicle fully loaded weighs about eight and a half tons.

The towed tank destroyer company contains, in addition to a company headquarters, three gun platoons. Each platoon, commanded by a lieutenant, contains four guns—each manned by ten men, and a security section of ten men. With a platoon sergeant, this makes a total of one officer and fifty-one enlisted men to each gun platoon. Each gun company having three platoons, has twelve guns, making a total of thirty-six for the battalion.

This organization compares favorably with the self-propelled battalion which has thirty-six self-propelled 3-inch guns.

#### EMPLOYMENT

*General.*—It is the plan that tank destroyers, generally, be employed in mass and in superior number, so as promptly and quickly to present to any hostile tank force attacked an overwhelming mass of highly

mobile destructive fire power which has, and is capable of retaining, the initiative.

Normally, tank destroyers, as such, should not be employed in less strength than the battalion. Experience has taught that employment in less strength than the battalion seldom produces the desired results and frequently fails.

When operating under the control of a higher echelon of command, as corps or army, the tank destroyers should be held concentrated in mobile reserve well to the rear prepared to move and strike in any direction. In planning for mass employment, consideration should be given to the use of a pivot of maneuver or holding force of sufficient minimum strength, while utilizing the bulk of the TD's for the main attack by fire from initial positions on a flank. That is, by use of the holding attack and envelopment, or double envelopment, and amply supported by other combat elements, seek to isolate and destroy the hostile tanks.

It is believed that towed tank destroyers have a definite place in the employment en masse. Probably the most desirable proportion of towed destroyers to self-propelled, in planning for mass emplacement, would be from one-third to one-half.

This proportion would permit the use of towed units for any delay planned, that is, amply supported by infantry and engineers, as the holding force of any TD mass counteraction. The towed destroyers are believed to be better suited for this purpose of blocking the head of a hostile tank attack than the self-propelled destroyers—being easier to conceal and better adapted to holding to and executing anti-tank fire from initial positions.

It is fundamental that tank destroyers occupy ground of their own choice if at all practicable. This should be done in advance of the arrival of hostile tanks, so as to permit the establishment of positions in ambush—in order to effect the maximum in surprise, security, and prompt fire superiority. It is most essential that towed units operate in this manner when possible, as they do not have the tactical mobility inherent in the self-propelled destroyers.

Consideration should be given to the following when planning for the employment of a towed tank destroyer unit which has been attached to a division:

- a. Disposition of the organic antitank guns and their probable need of immediate reinforcement.
- b. The presence, location, and attitude of hostile armor and the imminence of its employment.
- c. The routes and areas favorable for tank approach, with particular regard to the flanks and rear.
- d. The tank destroyer assistance available in the higher echelon, in the event of a serious hostile tank attack.

Regarding the first of the above considerations, it must be kept in mind that the mission of the organic

## TOWED TANK DESTROYERS

guns is the local or immediate antimechanized protection of the various subordinate units of which they are a part. Where necessary these dispositions should be coordinated by division.

In the infantry division, when properly coordinated, the organic 57-mm antitank guns will be the minimum sufficient to provide the necessary delay to permit the commitment of attached tank destroyers in mass, in most situations. However, when the seriousness of the situation dictates and the terrain permits, a portion of the attached towed tank destroyers—usually not to exceed one company—may be assigned by platoon or section (two guns) to the control of subordinate regimental commanders with which to reinforce their organic guns.

Concerning the second item, it must be remembered that protection of the division as a whole is the general mission of an attached tank destroyer battalion. In the majority of instances, the situation initially will undoubtedly be vague. Under such conditions, the principle of employment should be observed, when practicable, where only a minimum of destroyers—usually not in excess of one company—are committed to position initially to cover the most likely avenues of approach. The bulk of the destroyers are held in mobile reserve prepared to meet and repel hostile tank approach from any direction. We cannot be strong everywhere; and in attacking us, the enemy's armor holds the initiative until such time as he manifests his intentions.

On the other hand, should the threat of a tank attack be imminent and its probable direction reasonably well estimated, a majority or all of the attached tank destroyers may be committed initially in the likely direction. All elements, however, should be prepared for prompt and rapid displacement to other positions or localities.

Information concerning favorable routes and areas for tank approach must be promptly acquired from available maps and by actual ground reconnaissance, as well as from any other available sources. Such information will facilitate the early preparation of routes and positions for movement and occupancy of the destroyers.

### RECONNAISSANCE

Prior to any mass employment, time permitting, a thorough organized reconnaissance by organic tank destroyer reconnaissance elements should be made covering routes, position areas, likely avenues of hostile tank approach, obstacle sites, friendly dispositions, and information of hostile elements.

At the same time, command reconnaissance must be executed. Particularly in the defensive situation, it should result in either the prompt occupation of selected positions or positions in readiness, or the preparation and organization of firing positions—including routes of approach and egress—for prompt occupation in the event of a tank attack.

It is important that the division and tank destroyer commander be informed as to the strength and the plans for employment of tank destroyers available with the higher echelon. Should the higher echelon be without additional tank destroyer means, or should the destroyer units be at such a distance as to preclude their timely assistance and employment in the event of a serious tank attack, the maximum reserve must be held available for mass use.

### TOWED TANK DESTROYER BATTALION WITH AN INFANTRY DIVISION MARCHING

The infantry division, during a march prior to contact or when contact is imminent, is quite vulnerable to the action of hostile tanks. It will usually move in either two or three columns with regimental combat team organization.

Security elements are strongly reinforced with organic antitank-gun means.

An attached towed TD battalion normally should be marched in a central location, under division control, prepared to meet and repel hostile tank approach from any direction—particularly from the flanks. When the division is marching on three routes, it might well be located on the central route.

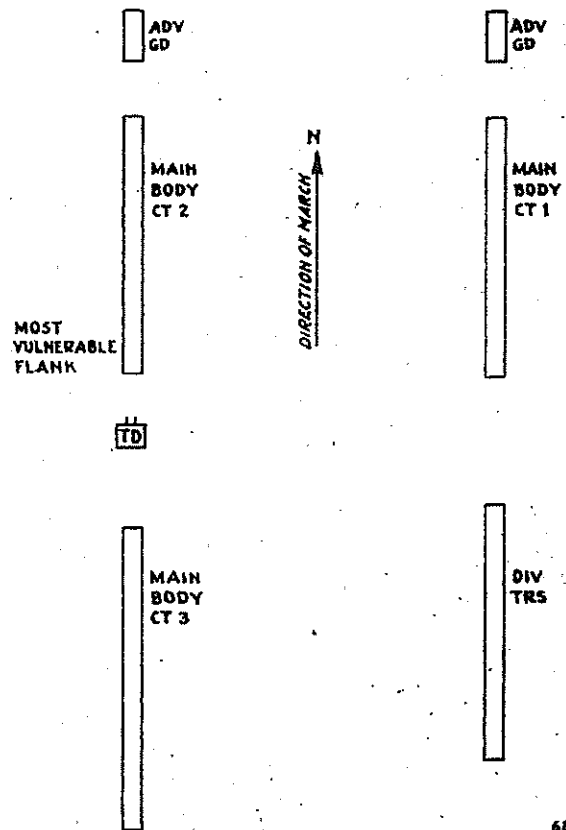


FIGURE 2.

When movement is made over only two routes, it may march between the two combat teams, and on the route nearest to the more vulnerable flank (Figure 2). However, when the terrain prevents lateral move-

ment between elements of the division, consideration must be given to attaching a portion of the TD battalion to each column.

When the division is moving as an interior one of a larger force, the TD battalion may be marched between the advance guard and main body. In such a situation, depending on the capability of the various columns to render mutual support, the battalion may be moved on one route or distributed by companies—at least one company to each column.

When the division is operating independently, a portion of the TD battalion may be assigned to security elements, usually a flank guard. Should the situation dictate, the battalion—with infantry and engineer support—may be moved ahead of the division or well off to a flank in order to intercept hostile tanks—permitting the division to continue with its mission.

**INFANTRY DIVISION IN THE OFFENSIVE**

During the offensive the towed TD battalion should be located initially far enough forward to be able quickly to meet and repel any hostile mechanized counterattack. It must not only be ready to employ its guns in mass to repel a mechanized counterattack against our forward elements, but must be prepared to repel one on either flank—with particular attention to an exposed flank and the flanks of the main effort.

The battalion should be so located in mobile reserve as to facilitate its use of the available road net, or routes of approach, and communication fa-

as to be in a position to render prompt assistance to the main effort.

A minimum portion of the TD's, probably not in excess of one company, may be employed in positions, or positions in readiness, covering the most likely avenues of approach for hostile tanks should they be used to counterattack. TD's so used would move forward by bounds following the progress of attacking elements.

The functioning of TD reconnaissance must be aggressively sustained. Command reconnaissance must be aggressively, thoroughly, and promptly executed—particularly with regard to newly uncovered terrain.

The organic artillery situation should be followed closely and plans coordinated for the prompt employment of TD platoons and companies as additional artillery should the situation permit.

In order to facilitate the prompt and efficient employment of elements of the TD battalion as reinforcing artillery, early liaison contact with the division artillery is desirable. This would not only permit current knowledge of the artillery situation; but should result in the timely availability of survey data as accumulated within the artillery, and prior consideration of the matter of additional ammunition supply for the TD's. In the event of their use as artillery, the additional ammunition necessary must be made available to them, as organic TD ammunition loads should be left intact for use on their primary mission of destroying enemy tanks.

The use of tank destroyer elements for artillery missions presupposes that they are prepared so to function as a result of previous training. Provision for such training is covered in AGF Letter 353/2233 (6 Nov 43) GNGCT, subject: "Employment of Tanks and Tank Destroyers as Artillery."

**INFANTRY DIVISION IN THE DEFENSIVE**

A towed tank destroyer battalion with an infantry division in the defensive situation should initially be held in mobile reserve centrally located in concealment, if practicable, out of effective range of hostile light artillery. It should be so located as to be prepared to make full use of the existing road net and within minimum distance to the command post of the unit to which attached.

A minimum of the TD's, usually not in excess of one company, should be committed promptly to cover the most likely avenues of approach for hostile tanks with particular attention to flanks and rear. The bulk of the TD's in mobile reserve must be prepared promptly to move to intercept and repel mechanized approach from any direction (Figure 4).

A portion of the TD's, should the situation make it desirable, may be attached by platoon or section (two guns) to subordinate infantry regiments to reinforce the organic antitank guns. In such an event, the attached TD platoons or sections should be lo-

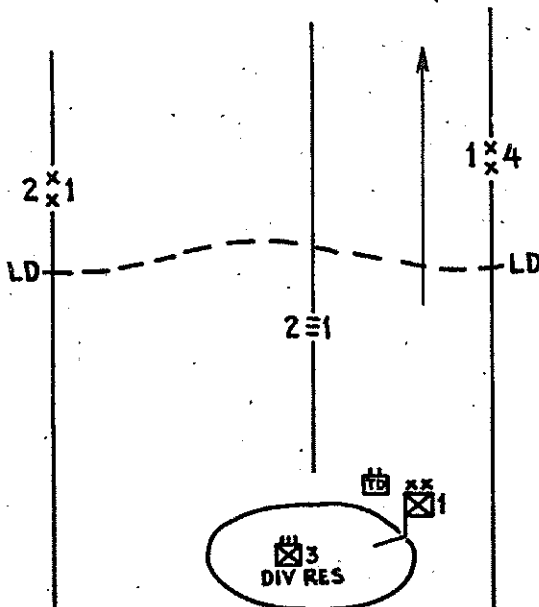


FIGURE 3.

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ILITIES to the division command post (Figure 3). When practicable, the battalion should be so located

cated within infantry battalion defense areas as shown in Figure 4.

When sufficient information concerning the enemy's armor is available and it can be reasonably determined where his tanks will probably strike, all

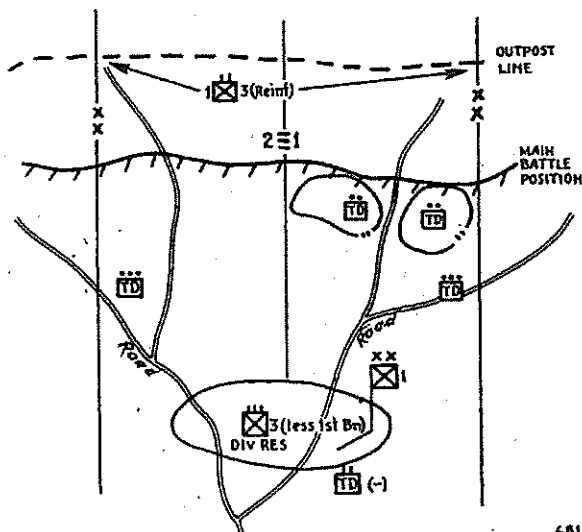


FIGURE 4.

or the bulk of the TD's may be committed initially but must be prepared for prompt displacement to other positions or areas.

Employment of organic reconnaissance must be continuous. Command reconnaissance should be executed promptly and thoroughly, so as to permit early selection and preparation of positions.

Plans should be promptly prepared for use of the TD's. There should be a plan for each estimated capability on the part of hostile armor.

**TOWED TD BATTALION WITH AN ARMORED DIVISION**

When the threat of hostile armor is present, it is desirable that the armored division have two TD battalions attached to it—one of which may be a towed battalion.

For purposes of secrecy, the armored division will often move under cover of darkness from its location in the rear to a forward assembly area—to be followed by its offensive employment. The anti-mechanized security for such an assembly area might well be provided for by movement of the towed battalion with infantry and engineer support in advance of the division, so as to permit the towed TD's to occupy positions beyond the assembly area (Figure 5).

Although positions may be selected and occupied as the result of a map study, the movement and deployment of the TD's and their attached armored infantry and engineer support should be preceded—if practicable—by a daylight reconnaissance for routes and positions. It should be planned to block quickly the most suitable avenues of approach for enemy armor, using a portion of the TD's to be supported by elements from the attached infantry and engineers; the remainder of the battalion to be held centrally located under cover, prepared for mass use in the event of hostile mechanized approach prior to or after daylight. Such a plan would provide for covering the assembly area and preparation of the division for further movement or offensive action against premature attack or harassment by hostile armor.

During offensive action, the towed battalion may be used to cover a vulnerable flank against hostile armored interruption. Its companies must be quickly available to reinforce and extend the organic anti-tank-gun defense of the armored infantry. This AT-gun defense must be promptly established as each objective is taken, in order to secure the uninterrupted rally and reorganization of friendly tanks in preparation for the continuance of the attack.

Where Combat Commands are employed at some considerable distance from each other, either on a march or in an attack, a towed TD company might well be attached to one or both CC's.

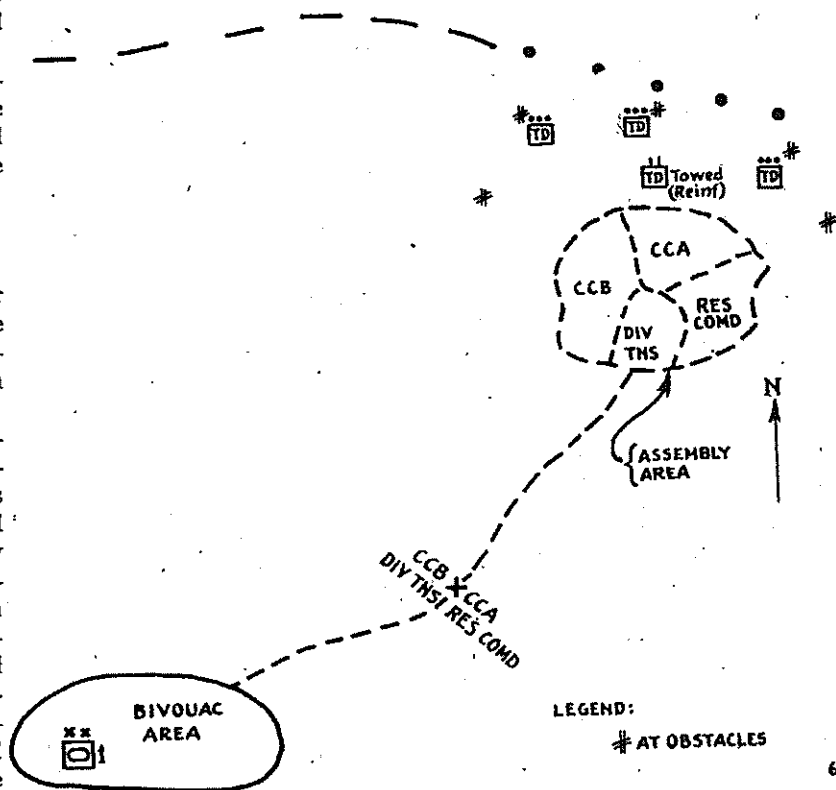


FIGURE 5.

## MILITARY REVIEW

When one Combat Command is sent on a fairly wide envelopment, at least one company of either towed or self-propelled TD's should be attached. It may well be employed as part of the base of fire to assist and cover the movement or maneuver of the tanks or to assist in covering by fire action the safe withdrawal of our tanks in the event of a reverse.

In all of the above instances, the self-propelled TD battalion would be available as a mobile reserve to be employed in mass against a serious hostile counterattack involving armor.

### SUMMARY

1. The towed tank destroyer battalion is well suited for attachment to divisions as additional anti-tank-gun means.

2. Attached to an infantry division, it has the mission of protecting the division flanks and rear, reinforcing or extending organic regimental and battalion antitank gun defense, and repelling or delaying attacking hostile armor for the time necessary to permit employment of massed TD's under control of corps or army.

3. Towed tank destroyers are particularly vulnerable to hostile infantry and artillery action. They must therefore be supported in turn by ample friendly infantry and engineers.

4. It is fundamental that all TD's occupy ground of their own choice.

5. When practicable, positions should be occupied

in advance of the arrival of hostile tanks, so as to effect the maximum in surprise, security, and prompt fire superiority.

6. TD reconnaissance must be continuous, covering routes, position areas, avenues of approach, obstacle sites, friendly dispositions, and information concerning hostile elements.

7. When employed with a division, unless most definite information concerning hostile armor is available, the principle of employment should be observed where only a minimum of TD elements are committed to positions initially while the bulk are held in mobile reserve prepared to meet and repel hostile mechanized approach from any direction.

8. It is desirable that an armored division have two TD battalions attached to it, one of which may be towed.

9. During offensive armored action, towed TD elements must be available to reinforce promptly organic antitank gun means of the armored infantry, while any additional self-propelled battalion is generally held available for maneuver against an actual mechanized counterattack.

10. Prior training for execution of artillery missions must be accomplished, if TD's are to be employed as reinforcing artillery. As previously stated, provision for such training is covered in AGF Letter 353/2233 (6 Nov 43) GNGCT, subject: "Employment of Tanks and Tank Destroyers as Artillery."