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Division and the 745th Tank Battalion, in tank-infantry team work.

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TANKS WITH INFANTRY

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In November of 1943 the 1st U.S. Infantry Division returned

England feeling as any other outfit would after completing three campaigns that only the infantry fought and won wars.

AP But on April 24 1944, the 745th Tank Battalion was attached to the 1st

Infantry Division. This was a very short time before the invasion of Europe but a great deal could have been done with the limited time available if attachments had been made to the regiments.

Upon landing in France, one company of medium tanks was attached to each infantry regiment. Company A was attached to the 16th U.S. Infantry Regiment; a Company B was attached to the 18th U.S. Infantry Regiment, and Company C was attached to the 26th U.S. Infantry Regiment. Each regimental commander attached a platoon of five tanks to each of his rifle battalions. These attachments continued throughout the entire Continental War with the same tank platoons and infantry battalions being paired up except for temporary interruptions when it was thought advisable to assign two platoons to one rifle battalion for a special operation. For the greater part of the war the light tank company was attached to the 16th Infantry Regiment which attached a platoon to each infantry battalion. The mortar platoon of headquarters company consisting of three 81mm mortars was attached to the 16th Infantry along with the three assault guns of the same company. This attachment continued to V-E Day. The 105mm assault gun of each medium tank company was attached to the assault gun platoon making it a six gun firing battery. The three tanks were taken from headquarters company,

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and attached, one to each medium company as replacements for the 105mm assault guns.

Tank platoons attached to infantry battalions were ^{in turn} attached to infantry companies for specific operations. Each tank platoon leader received his orders from the infantry company commander of the rifle company to which the platoon was attached; he in turn advised the company commander upon the use of the tank platoon. Company commanders of tank companies located their command posts in the vicinity of the respective regimental command posts of the regiments to which they were attached. This facilitated close liaison with the tank company commander advising the regimental commander on the status of supply and maintenance and making recommendations upon the employment of the tank platoons.

The permanent attachment of tank platoons to the battalion made the tanks immediately available for any action and the tanks and infantry formed a strong team, each with the greatest respect for the capabilities of the other. On some occasions three tank platoons were attached to one infantry battalion for a particular operation, but the greatest care was taken to give the platoons time for maintenance and for their return to their own infantry battalions.

Generally the employment of a tank platoon by each battalion commander was the same except for small personal opinions, and it was not long before a standard procedure for the employment of tanks with slight operational variances went into effect.

In the landing on Omaha Beach in Normandy, France, the 745th Tank Battalion did not furnish close-in fire support for the 1st Infantry

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Division, but one medium company landed shortly after noon on D-day and the other two companies landed on ^{D plus One} ~~D plus~~. They moved forward with the leading elements of the 1st Division, clearing out the hedge-rows as they advanced. Saumont, Normandy was taken by 12 June 1944. In this operation both flanks were threatened by the enemy since he was able to hold up the advance of friendly units adjacent to the division. The tanks had aided greatly in the rapid advance of the infantry, and they had been immediately available for the ever present enemy armored ~~threat~~ which could be ruinous to any beachhead if it was not quickly repulsed.

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All tank units that gave close fire support from landing craft, mechanized, to the leading waves of infantry were either destroyed before they reached the shore or in their attempts to cross the beach. The tanks, when coming ashore in the L.C.M.'s _{5 5 5} were helpless, all maneuverability had been lost, their fire was inaccurate and they were at the mercy of the high velocity anti-tank guns on the shore. The beach was well mined, the anti-tank guns were accurate, and obstacles and deep anti-tank ditches canalized the battlefield.

In my opinion tanks should be loaded on L.C.M.'s _{5 5 5} and held off shore until infantry has cleared the mines and destroyed the anti-tank gun fire. The tanks are lost if employed before these things have been accomplished. Tank dozers should be gotten ashore early to fill tank traps and clear roads for other mobile equipment.

In the attack it was the mission of the tanks to get the infantry forward by placing point fire on targets that were holding up the advance

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of the foot troops. ^{extremely} the tanks were ~~very~~ vulnerable to the panzerfaust and enemy rocket launchers, so they had to be protected by the infantry on all sides. The tank commander usually operated from the ground and controlled his platoon with a prearranged arm and hand signal system, tracer bullets and the S.C.R. 300 radio, but since there were only two of these radios in a platoon it made control by the latter method impractical. The telephone was used ~~very little~~ ^{seldom} since it was usually damaged and in many cases it would have been poor judgement on the part of the foot troops to expose themselves. Each tank working with infantry should have an S.C.R. 300 radio. A telephone with a long heavy duty trailing wire would provide a greater latitude, insure a positive contact, and I think it should be tested to determine its practicability with tank-infantry teams.

The tanks were normally employed as a platoon, and it was only when tanks could not support and cover each other ~~that they were~~ employed in fewer numbers than five. A tank employed alone needed more infantry protection and created a separate maintenance and supply problem. It was found to be most important to have a platoon leader's recommendation prior to an attack since he was much better qualified to determine routes of approach and terrain that might limit his tanks' mobility. The platoon leader must always be given time for a personal reconnaissance before an attack, and each tank commander should accompany the platoon leader if possible.

In the hedge-row country the immediate objective was the next hedge-row. Hedge-row country would be almost fatal to infantry alone, but with tanks supporting and used properly, fair advances could be made with few casualties. The center tanks placed machine gun fire in the

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next hedge-row and moved forward with flanking infantry while the flanking tanks sprayed the hedge-rows running parallel to the axis of advance. A few rounds of white phosphorous would always dislodge a well dug-in machine gun crew. The infantry was alert to deal with any enemy who escaped the tankers, in their rapid advance.

When attacking a wooded area it was found best to have the infantry advance to within ~~400~~ ⁴⁰⁰ or ~~500~~ ⁵⁰⁰ yards of the wood's edge. The tanks moved up to the infantry and placed direct fire into the woods. When the infantry entered the woods the tanks fired over-head machine gun fire and moved with the forward infantry elements through the woods with all around protection. This operation, as all others, was influenced by the terrain, enemy weapons and the situation. For example, in taking a wooded area with open, level country to our front and well dug-in enemy anti-tank guns, it was found better to have the infantry cross the open country at night without the tanks and with no artillery preparation. The infantry was in the woods at dawn; they destroyed the anti-tank gun fire; the artillery was adjusted on the enemy's rear and the tanks joined the infantry for the push through the woods.

In the approach to the Siegfried Line most of the movement had been made along roads, but after the first defenses of the line had been contacted, the tanks moved off the roads and cross-country through the woods. Although the woods were dense for tanks, the defenses of the line were weaker in the wooded areas and the fields of fire were shorter and greatly to our advantage.

The tanks moved up as close as ~~50~~ ⁵⁰ yards in some cases, to pill

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boxes and fired 75mm $\overline{A.P.C.}$ at the embrasures.

After an opening had been made 75mm $\overline{H.E.}$ and $\overline{W.P.}$ was fired into the pill box. This usually brought the occupants out of the box, and enabled the infantry to close in and throw hand grenades and prepared demolition charges into the pillbox, destroying the enemy who remained inside. The engineers blew openings through the dragon's teeth in some places and covered them with dirt in others. Tank dozers filled ditches and covered openings of pillboxes in many cases.

Tank-infantry teams worked very well in the taking of Aachen. A large city such as Aachen channelized the fighting by streets and the standing stone buildings. It was found that the best combination was two tanks on a street with a platoon of infantry providing all around security: this was necessary since the houses offered the defender great opportunity to fire panzerfaust from the windows at tanks. He could also fire his small arms at the infantry. The infantry preceded the tanks by at least ¹⁰⁰~~one hundred~~ yards thoroughly searching the houses on both sides of the street for the enemy. The tanks provided machine gun and tank cannon fire as requested by the infantry. Before moving ahead the tanks placed $\overline{H.E.}$ and machine gun fire on all positions known to be occupied by the enemy and on all positions thought to be occupied by the enemy. The tanks placed fire on all corners of a street intersection before the infantry moved in and also placed fire down the streets at likely occupied positions, before the infantry entered those streets. This caused the enemy to surrender or to take cover in the cellars, making the infantry advance much more rapidly and easily. The tanks gave the Infantryman a feeling of security as

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he advanced down the street, since he had the knowledge that either cannon fire, machine gun fire, or both, would be placed on any enemy who attempted to impede his advance. The Infantrymen had to protect their protectors by constant reconnaissance. Infantrymen observed intersections and described targets, gave range, direction, and location to the tankers in order that they could move rapidly into an intersection and quickly bring fire on an anti-tank gun. Four riflemen were assigned to each tank to be directly under the command of the tank commander. It was the duty of these four men to provide close-in security, act as runners and keep the tankers informed of the exact location of the infantry groups working through back yards and from house to house through openings not visible to the tanker. This type of fighting was slow and consumed a great deal of ammunition. This necessitated the maintaining of a battalion dump close enough to enable the tanks to go back to replenish their supply. Each battalion commander had to coordinate the progress of the teams on parallel streets, to keep them abreast.

In attacking small towns, tanks were normally not sent into the town with the leading elements, but remained in a covered position and delivered direct fire into the town prior to the infantry going in and seizing some houses and the town's anti-tank defenses. The tanks then moved up and supported the infantry in clearing the town.

In a river crossing tanks covered the crossing infantry by firing across the river at possible enemy positions. After the infantry had secured the opposite bank, bridges were built and tanks crossed on them.

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Tanks were used successfully in night attacks, moving with the leading elements of the infantry. The tank fire was not too accurate and all adjustment was made with tracer. It was found that it was best to fire only when necessary at night as the fire was inaccurate and disclosed the tanks' positions. The tanks gave the attacking infantry a defense against machine guns, built up his moral^g and unnerved the defender. The enemy or anybody, hearing tanks at night becomes very much alarmed and especially so if he cannot locate them or determine their number. It was found that better results were obtained when a detailed daylight reconnaissance was made prior to the attack and when plans further provided that the forces arrived on the objective while there was sufficient light to reorganize the ground in preparation for possible counterattacks. This denied the enemy the opportunity for launching a night counterattack against an unprepared position.

In a defense position some rifle battalions kept the tanks with the most forward infantry elements while other battalions assembled the tanks in the vicinity of a forward company or battalion command post. In other cases the entire company was assembled in the vicinity of the regimental command post.

The tanks should always remain on a newly taken objective until it is fully organized and ground mount anti-tank guns have been brought forward to cover the possible tank routes of approach. Tanks should always be allowed to assemble as a company, if the infantry remains on the defense for more than a day. This permits the tankers to take care of maintenance, familiarize their replacements, reorganize the

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platoons and allow the men to clean and rest themselves.

The tanks moved in the tank-infantry team set-up on road marches when there was any possibility of encountering the enemy. This was rough but it was the accepted way of moving infantry when the truck attachments were limited. It was found to be better to move the tank company as a unit for marches in excess of ~~twenty~~²⁵ five miles. This allowed the tanks to move more slowly, thus reducing wear and maintenance troubles.

The light tank company of the 745th Tank Battalion was attached to the 16th Infantry Regiment for the greater part of the European War. It is my opinion that the light company should be attached to a regiment and employed as a company whenever possible, attaching a platoon to each battalion only when absolutely necessary. This company can only be used in the absence of enemy anti-tank guns and enemy tanks, but it is highly maneuverable and can be used to advantage when a fast, light striking force is needed. I remember one night when an infantry battalion failed in two attacks, to take a hill objective and suffered heavy casualties. This battalion had a company of ~~5~~^{M-5} light tanks but failed to use them because they did not know the value of such an attachment. The light tanks were finally ordered to take the hill with infantry following in close support. This could have been done at first with practically no casualties, but in this case the value of the company was learned by experience.

The tankers were furnished with post exchange supplies and rations along with the infantry, since it was impossible for the tank company

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to feed its separated platoons B rations, and it was another binding feature to have the tankers fed hot meals by the ration details of the infantry.

Tankers and infantry both saw the value of teamwork developed through close cooperation under combat conditions. The attachment of the 745th marked the first time that the 1st Division had really worked with a close support tank unit. At first the ~~troops~~^{infantrymen} were not sure what they could expect from the tankers but early in the hedge-row country there developed mutual respect which furthered the spirit of cooperation. The 745th was a hard hitting unit that could be counted on to supply the big punch. The infantry showed the tanks that they did not expect them to fight alone and gave them the protection that they needed.

It is felt that in future wars the tank-infantry team will be the great striking force. Such a team should not be made up on the battlefield but must be trained long before battle. Its men must know each other well, must work together, and must learn each others capabilities and limitations. Its officers must have the spirit of cooperation and teamwork. This is the lesson that can be learned through the experiences of the 745th Tank Battalion and the 1st Infantry Division; that a strong team can be built by the attachment of tanks to infantry; that the team can be adopted to almost any job and that friendly cooperation is the secret of teamwork.

