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ARMORED INFANTRY VERSUS INFANTRY ON TANKS

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PREFACE

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The point of view expressed in this paper is that of the author- not necessarily that of The Infantry School or the Department of the Army.

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INTRODUCTION

"Four infantrymen rode each tank, they proceeded and the rest of the infantry company followed. This time the attacking battalion took the town with very little trouble." (7:1)

These are the words of a combat observer in the European Theater Of Operations in November of 1944, describing how an infantry commander organized his troops and supporting armor into an infantry-tank team. Using the tanks as a means of transport, in the attack he placed his troops on the objective which was in open terrain with the approach area under complete enemy observation and direct fire.

Of the three basic methods for employing the infantry-tank teams in the attack, the one of infantry and tanks moving on the same axis will be the doctrinal aspect upon which we will build this study.

During World War II and until as recently as September of 1953, Department of the Army Doctrine stated that when infantry and tanks were attacking on the same axis, the method might be varied to allow infantry to ride on the tanks until enemy fire forced them to dismount and fight on foot. This variation was especially recommended for use during the exploitation phase of an attack. Field Manual 7-35 (1949), in paragraph 61 b, stated that, "on-tank transportation may be the most desirable method since it reduces road space, decreases supply problems, and preserves the team unity". (3:79)

Current doctrine is different. It states in effect that when infantry

ride on tanks it is for transportation only, and is not considered a method of attack, but qualifies this by stating infantry may ride in advance to contact, and when it is desired to speed the attack to the final assault. (3:11) This change in doctrine seemed not to recognize the tactical conditions which caused infantry commanders to place their troops on tanks for an attack, exploitation, or rescue operation.

Tactical situations frequently develop in which the need for a vehicle to move infantrymen to their objective becomes apparent. This vehicle should afford protection from small arms fire, shell fragments, and should be capable of at least the same cross-country mobility as a tank. While infantry riding tanks has been a successful method of employment, it has left much to be desired. The mobility, maneuverability, and firepower of the tank is greatly reduced, plus the infantrymen becomes vulnerable to all types of fire. (3:11)

This paper will show infantry commanders the value of, and need for a limited number of personnel carriers in an infantry division to provide a battalion commander with transportation for his foot troops in operations best conducted by employment of an infantry-tank team. Can infantry riding on tanks properly perform an armored infantry role?

DISCUSSION

The third attack on Warden, Germany on 18 November 1944 is an excellent example of using infantry mounted on tanks with the tanks advancing at full speed to an objective, covered by the direct fire of supporting units and by friendly artillery. Companies A, C and F of the 117th Infantry Regiment, 30th Infantry Division and Company A, 743rd Tank Battalion were the participating units. (6:61) The town was well defended by the Germans who made good use of concrete emplacements and houses as strong points supplemented by at least four direct fire assault guns. (9:2)

The fight for WARDEN (LB 045382) can best be told in three parts. (See Annex A)

PART I, ATTACK 0730 (FAILURE)

The 117th Infantry Regiment was engaged in securing the left flank of the 30th Division on 18 November 1944, north and east of Aachen, Germany. (5:150) The First Battalion was given the mission of attacking to the southeast to seize the town of WARDEN (LB 045382). (1:5) The Second Battalion occupied the town of HONGEN (LB 038396) and was to support the First Battalion by fire. (1:5) The Third Battalion was to occupy defensive positions at MARIADORF (LB 025387) and protect the right flank and rear of the regiment. (1:5) The attack started at 0730 with Company B jumping off from the vicinity of the highway on the southwest edge of MARIADORF. (6:60) Company C attacking from the village at (LB 035375), nicknamed "Paper Village". (6:60) The tanks from Company A, 743rd Tank Battalion were to attack with the infantry, but when the time came to move out, the tank company commander refused to move his tanks because of enemy AT guns. He wanted them destroyed by artillery

or dive bombers. (5:150) The leading platoon of Company B, got to the edge of WARDEN but was stopped by intense fire from self-propelled guns and machine guns. (6:60) The leading men were killed and the rest of the men pulled back. (6:60) Company C fared no better. They got as far as the railroad embankment between "Paper Village" and WARDEN and were also halted. (6:60) The attack was stopped by the powerful screen of German artillery, small arms fire, and direct fire from dug-in tanks. (9:2)

PART II, ATTACK 1115 (FAILURE)

The Battalion Commander ordered all troops back to the original LD to regroup for a renewed assault. (6:60) There appears to be some conflict as to what the mission of the tanks was to be in this second attack. The Tank Battalion Commander states it was to support by fire. (2:47) The infantry unit history states it was to follow closely the leading riflemen. (6:60) Whatever it was, virtually the same thing happened as in the first attack, with Company B, taking seventy casualties, and Company C being again stopped at the railroad embankment. (6:60)

PART III, ATTACK 1515 (SUCCESS)

Prior to the third attack, Lieutenant Colonel Duncan, Commanding Officer of the 743rd Tank Battalion, and Colonel Johnson, CO of the 117th Infantry Regiment acted to replace the Tank Company Commander. (5:150) The new attack plan called for the Air Corps to bomb WARDEN from fighter aircraft, to be followed by intense artillery and mortar fire. The depleted Company B was replaced by Company A. Company A was to place men on three tanks and move into the attack from the edge of MARIADORF, with the remainder of the company following closely behind the tanks on foot. Company C with all its automatic weapons on four tanks, was to rush the town from the "Paper Village". (6:61) Company F, with part of its infantry

mounted on four tanks was to advance from HONGEN on the left of Company A. (2:48) At 1515 the third attack started. (5:150) The heavy artillery and mortar fire lifted as the tanks neared WARDEN. (5:150) This time everything went according to plan, and at 1600, eight and one half hours after the original attack the town was secured. (2:48) By 1620 consolidation was completed. (2:48) After bitter house-to-house fighting, 209 prisoners, tons of ammunition, and two self-propelled assault guns were taken. (9:2) In addition, two anti-tank guns and seven machine guns were overrun as the tanks, carrying infantrymen, advanced in this three directional attack into WARDEN. (2:48) The most salient feature of this attack was that there were no casualties among either the American tanks or infantrymen. The First Battalion of the 117th Infantry Regiment used the infantry on tanks assault tactics for the first time at WARDEN. They found it worked so well that they used this method frequently during the rest of the war. (6:62)

Past authors have taken great "arm-chair" liberties in talking about the mistakes or shortcomings of leaders or plans. But, it is not the purpose of this paper to discuss or criticize leadership technique, the purpose is to show that it is often desirable to move infantry troops quickly across open, observed terrain by a motorized means. Let us re-evaluate each of the three above attacks in the light of the use of an armored personnel carrier for the infantry.

The first attack may be said to have failed because of enemy artillery, small arms fire and direct fire from dug-in tanks. Armored personnel carriers would have provided protection against the enemy artillery fragments and small arms fire. Against the German Tanks, the best weapon would have been American Tanks. Keeping in mind the somewhat non-aggressive tank company commander, the personnel carriers would probably have had a bad

time. At this point, I would like to point out that in my opinion the personnel carrier is not a complete means of warfare in itself, but is a companion vehicle to the organic tanks of the infantry regiment and infantry division.

Now let us examine the second attack. It appears that the second attack was merely a repetition of the first attack. The costly loss of seventy men indicated it was far from a successful attack. It is debatable that the attack would have succeeded with armored personnel carriers, since it took place over the identical route of the first attack. The German Commander had located the American Forces, and knew the logical direction from which they would come. One can easily imagine the re-positioning of weapons within the city of WARDEN the morning of 18 November 1944, after the first unsuccessful American attack.

When we analyze success it presents us with many "whys". Why did the third attack on WARDEN succeed? A new tank leader was designated who either by force or belief applied the shock action of tanks. The proper "leaning into" of available fires, air power plus shock action of tanks, are all good answers to the "why" of success in the third attack. Imagine yourself in the place of the German Commander at WARDEN. The US Forces tried twice to take your position then late in the afternoon your garrison was bombed, then shelled, and suddenly from three different directions armor arrived on the scene, carrying the "cincher" of battle, the infantrymen. Let us not under-estimate speed to the objective, which was an important factor in this and any attack. Armored personnel carriers would give this speed with less personal danger to the individual infantrymen. Instead of four men to a vehicle that figure would have been doubled,

and the troops that walked on foot behind the tanks, would have arrived in WARDEN in a better physical state to engage in the intense house-to-house fighting. There is no mention in any historical reference of the tanks having to fire the main armament in this attack on WARDEN. This caused a terrific loss of firepower.

At this time let us turn the pages of American Military History. It is 15 February 1951, Korea, we find the 5th Cavalry Regiment on the move with the mission of driving through enemy lines to the encircled 23rd Regimental Combat Team. (4:134) By accomplishing this mission it was thought that the road north to the encircled garrison at CHIPYONG-NI (CS 799478) would be opened for supply vehicles and ambulances. (4:134) (See Annex B) The 5th Cavalry Regiment had started a motorized movement in the direction of CHIPYONG-NI on the 14th of February from YOJU (not shown on Annex B) on the west bank of the HAN River, but were forced to stop during the night because of a damaged bridge in the vicinity of HOP-O-RI (GS 768347), which is about halfway to CHIPYONG-NI. (8:35) On the morning of the 15th they resumed the attack to the north this time on foot, with the First Battalion attacking the high ground on the right (east), and the second Battalion the high ground on the left (west). (4:136) The morning of the 15th was spent by the 5th Cavalry Regiment in a full scale regimental attack. It became apparent to the Regimental Commander Colonel Marcel G. Crombez, that his regiment would not cover the required distance by evening. Consequently, he decided to make up an armored task force. (4:136) This task force called TASK FORCE CROMBEZ was made up of Company L, 5th Cavalry Regiment, plus a total of twenty-three tanks from Company D, 6th Tank Battalion, and Company A, 70th Tank Battalion, plus engineers from Company A, 8th Engineer (Combat) Battalion. (4:136) It was decided that the infantry would ride on the decks of the tanks, so as to protect the tanks from fanatical enemy tank hunter teams. (8:36) The

engineers were to ride well forward in the column to clear any minefields the column might encounter. The rifle company commander and the tank company commander agreed that when the tanks stopped, the infantry would dismount and deploy on both sides of the road, to protect the tanks. (4:137) At 1545, TASK FORCE CROMBEZ began the advance from five hundred yards northeast of the road junction in the vicinity of SANGCHOH-OHYON-NI (CS 765379), with the Regimental Commander, Colonel Crombez, in command — riding in the fifth tank. (8:36) This task force proceeded north with fifty yard intervals between tanks. Liaison planes overhead provided observation well to the front, and two infantry battalions maintained pressure on the flanks. (4:137) Friendly aircraft strafed and bombed enemy positions along the route prior to the departure of the task force. (4:137) The column had moved less than two miles when it was fired on at long range by small arms and automatic weapons from both sides of the road and the right rear. (8:36) This fire came from PYONGCHON (GS 776397) and a small village beside it to the north. Several of the exposed infantrymen were wounded by the first bursts of enemy fire and fell from the tanks. (4:138) Others were knocked off by the rotating turrets operated by the tankers attempting to observe and engage targets. (4:138) Approximately thirty men from Company L were forced off the tanks and took cover in the ditches. (8:36) The tankers were quick to engage the enemy; but they received orders from Colonel Crombez, the task force commander, to continue forward. (4:138) One account of this operation states, "Without warning, the tanks moved forward. The troopers raced after the moving tanks but, in the scramble, thirty or more men, including two officers of Company L, were left behind." (4:138) When the tanks turned the sharp bend at (CS 778408), south of KOKSU-RI (CS 775413), intense fire was received from the high ground west of the town and from the ridges to the east. (8:36) Again when the column passed through KOKSU-RI (CS 775413) it again came under intense enemy fire, forcing about one hundred riflemen

from the tanks. (8:36) The tanks were again ordered to move out but now there were less than seventy men with the column out of the original one hundred and sixty. (4:138) Among those left behind by the tanks was the Third Battalion Commander. (4:138) As the column continued north over the next three and one-half miles there were several more halts, with continuous fire received by the column, halted or moving. (4:138) North of KOKSU-RI the road passes through a valley, following the hillside on the left closely, with open ground on the right. As the valley becomes narrow it angles over toward the east, until it moves into the jaws of the high ground in the vicinity of Benchmark 129. (See Annex B) It was in these jaws that the "all out" Chinese effort was made to stop TASK FORCE CROMBEZ. At this point there are steep embankments on each side of the road, with dominating ground on both flanks. On the right flank is Hill 397, and an unnumbered hill on the left side of the road. Crossing through this gantlet the tanks did a fine job of supporting one another, but after this last ordeal few infantrymen remained on the tanks and the improvised two and one-half ton truck ambulance carrying the wounded was put out of action. (4:139) The Chinese located on the high ground overlooking this cut, threw satchel charges and fired American rockets down onto the tanks. (4:140) This ingenious action of the enemy cost the task force one tank and damaged two others. (4:140) At 1700, TASK FORCE CROMBEZ entered the CHIPYONG-NI perimeter of the 23rd Infantry Regiment, it had covered six and two-tenths miles of enemy territory in one hour and fifteen minutes. (8:36) Of the one hundred and sixty Company L infantrymen, plus four engineers who had started the ride to the north, only twenty-three remained, and of these--thirteen were wounded. (4:141) The column reached the encircled perimeter with no supply vehicles, limited ammunition and a large number of wounded infantrymen. The following day when the task force was scheduled to go back, the infantrymen on the decks of the tanks

were conspicuous by their absence. The Regimental Commander stated that only volunteers would ride the decks--- no one volunteered. (1:141) Prior to its return TASK FORCE CROMBEZ made arrangements for Heavy Mortar Company of the 23rd Infantry Regiment, to fire concentrations on the jaws of the pass, as the task force approached Benchmark 129. (8:37) An artillery liaison plane was covering the column with the mission of adjusting proximity-fuzed shells directly on the column if the enemy attempted to destroy it. (1:142) Ironically, not an enemy was seen or a shot fired at the column on the return trip. (1:142)

"This fact, that no enemy forces opposed the Task Force on its return indicated that the GCF had been crushed and decisively beaten, they suffered and estimated five-hundred killed. " These are the words of Lieutenant Colonel George B. Pickett, Jr, who is probably one of the most prolific writers in the United States Army, on the use of Tanks. (8:37)

Success came to the commander who loaded infantry on the decks of tanks in the battle of WARDEN, but I have dejected feelings about the outcome of TASK FORCE CROMBEZ. Military Historians feel that this unit accomplished its mission, but paid a rather high and unnecessary price for it. It appears that many things were out of balance in this particular operation: the mission from higher headquarters of attacking fifteen miles in one day; the loading on and off tanks; the lack of artillery fire; the task force commander riding inside of a tank giving orders for the moving out, but keep in mind it is not the purpose of this paper to evaluate plans, leadership or subsequent orders and actions. This situation was recounted to illustrate the need for some type of armored personnel carrier to be made available to standard infantry.

Let us evaluate this operation with the thought of using armored

personnel carriers. The reason the infantry were carried on the decks of the tanks was to provide close-in protection for the tanks. This protection could have been provided by artillery fire and the bow machine guns of the tanks. The armored personnel carrier is ideal for carrying of troops to perform minefield clearing operations. The arrival of the tanks with few infantrymen, a depleted ammunition supply caused a favorable psychological effect on the troops of the 23rd Infantry, but it would have been far better if the vehicles would have arrived with ammunition and one hundred and sixty fresh fighting men of Company L, compared to the twenty-three of whom thirteen were wounded, that did arrive. Armored personnel carriers could have been used to carry the wounded out of the perimeter which was a problem at this time, for when the siege of the 23rd Regimental Combat Team ended, nineteen ambulances and seven two and one-half ton trucks of wounded were taken out of the CHIPYONG-RI perimeter. (1:142) Upon seeing the results of infantry riding on the decks of tanks, it immediately comes to mind why not place the infantrymen inside. This is not feasible because of the size of the fighting compartment of the tank. Vehicles which carry troops are not only needed but are essential to give proper mobility to tank-infantry teams. A survey of the geographical make-up of the world shows that it would be hard to envision complete use of armored personnel carriers by a standard combat division. There are often times when the situation will permit and demand a protective, speedy approach to the objective. A limited number of armored personnel carriers should be available at division level. These vehicles could be carried by a unit much the same as the bridging materials are now carried by the bridge platoon of engineer combat battalion. Each regiment would have one battalion that would have special training in the use of the armored personnel carrier.

CONCLUSION

The commander at WARDEN and the commander of TASK FORCE CROMBEZ were faced with a problem that has been common in every battle, that is how to limit the time of exposure to fire of attacking troops. This is normally accomplished by speed or a covered route to the objective area. Both commanders in the above examples though in different parts of the World, with entirely different terrain were faced with the task of moving infantry into an objective area under close enemy observation and fire. Both elected to use a method which they felt would provide them with rapidity of action, a minimum of loss and the least fatigue, by using the only available transportation which was the combat tank. It can be seen that the loading of troops on the decks of the tanks and entering areas covered by enemy small arms fire and observed indirect fire, will seldom pay a commander dividends. At WARDEN the tanks stopped being tanks and became mere carriers, losing the heavy fire of the tanks main weapon. At CHIPYONG-NI the tank attempted to transport infantry and at the same time employ their firepower with reduced speed and limited maneuverability— result and infantry company was lost. The current doctrine that states: infantry riding on tanks is not a method of attack, is sound, but military planners must go further and provide standard infantry with armored personnel carriers, for the proper composition of tank-infantry attack teams when the tank and infantry must attack over the same axis. Success will come to the commander who can move quickly in battle, but infantry cannot be expected to perform an armored infantry role, by riding on the decks of tanks.

It may be concluded that:

- (1) To employ the tank-infantry team in the manner that provides the greatest speed, flexibility and shock action, it is necessary to

have the infantry mobile, and capable of moving with the shock action of the tanks.

- (2) Infantry riding on tanks cannot perform the role of armored infantry troops in a mounted attack.
- (3) Even standard infantry at times need a method of transportation that will permit them to move on the same route, at the same speed as a tank. This method must provide protection from shell fragments, and small arms fire.
- (4) That the current infantry division needs a limited number of armored personnel carriers.

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