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INFANTRY TRAINING

PART VI

THE ANTI-TANK PLATOON

1943

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THE ANTI-TANK PLATOON

Object.—This part of infantry training deals with the handling of the anti-tank platoon and should be read in conjunction with Small Arms Training, Vol. I, Pamphlet (Anti-tank gun) and M.T.P. No. 59A (Anti-tank tactics). The object is to deal with the tactical employment of the anti-tank platoon from the point of view of the battalion and company commander.

SECTION 1.—CHARACTERISTICS

1. **The 6-pr. anti-tank gun.**—This gun is of the Q.F. loading type. It has a calibre of 2·244 ins. and fires a shell weighing 6 lb. 4 oz. The total weight of the equipment is 22½ cwt. The gun is fired off wheels only and has a speed of traverse which allows a limited traverse of 90 degrees. It has a limited traverse and is fired by hand.

2. The gun has an effective range up to 800 yds. Although it can fire at longer ranges, targets will not be engaged at ranges exceeding 800 yds. unless the gun is being attacked by a tank when fire will be returned up to a range of 1,200 yds.

3. The equipment can be towed by most types of vehicle. It is usually towed by a carrier. It can be manhandled, and ropes and towing bars are provided for the purpose.

4. The gun detachment consists of five men, although four are directly concerned in firing the gun.

5. The five are:—

The detachment commander.

No. 1 (Layer).

No. 2 (Loader).

No. 3 (Second-in-command of detachment and responsible for the numbers).

No. 4 (Ammunition number—manning the L.M. gun when required).

6. The 2-pr. gun is not mentioned elsewhere in this part. There is no difference between the tactical handling of the 2-pr. and the 6-pr. gun. When local anti-tank resources include both types of equipment, the 2-pr. guns will be allotted sites for the shorter fields of fire and from which they are more likely to engage directly from a flank.

In the future, 2-pr. guns are not likely to be employed in theatres of war where the nature of the country prohibits the use of heavily armed troops.

SECTION 2.—ORGANIZATION OF THE ANTI-TANK PLATOON

7. The organization of the anti-tank platoon is as follows:—

ANTI-TANK PLATOON

Headquarters

Carrier, universal		Pl. comd. (Captain)	Pistol
		Dvr./mech.	Rifle
Motor cycle	1	2.I.C. (Subaltern)	Pistol
Motor cycle	2	Orderly	Sten
Truck, 15-cwt.		Pl. sgt.	Rifle
4 × 2 G.S.	(1)	Storeman	Rifle
6-pr. amn.		Dvr./batman	Sten
Truck, 15-cwt.		Fitter, R.E.M.E.	Rifle
4 × 2 G.S.	(2)	Fitter general, R.E.M.E.	Rifle
		Dvr./batman	Sten
6-pr. amn. fitter's stores.			

Three Sections (each)

Motor cycle		Orderly	Sten
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No. 1 Detachment

Loyd carrier	(1)	Sgt. (Sec. comd.)	Rifle
		3 gun numbers	3 Rifles
		Dvr./mech.	Rifle

6-pr. gun : 6-pr. amn.

2-inch mortar

Loyd carrier	(2)	1 Cpl.	Rifle
		Dvr./mech.	Rifle

6-pr. amn.

L.M.G. side shields

No. 2 Cooker

No. 2 Detachment

Loyd carrier	(3)	L./sgt.	Rifle
		3 gun numbers	3 Rifles
		Dvr./mech.	Rifle

6-pr. gun : 6-pr. amn.

2-inch mortar

Loyd carrier	(4)	1 gun number	Rifle
		Dvr./mech.	Rifle

6-pr. amn.

L.M.G. side shields

No. 2 Cooker

SECTION 3.—ENEMY TANK TACTICS

8. Tanks are likely to attack in large numbers with the object of breaking through and overrunning our defended localities. Extensive bombardment and dive-bombing will normally precede the launching of the attack. The attack is usually led by a mass of tanks, whose object is the destruction of our anti-tank guns; the tanks will be followed by infantry, who destroy any centres of resistance left by the tanks and exploit success. Reserve infantry and anti-tank guns may be brought up to carry out encircling attacks from a flank.

9. On meeting an anti-tank gun, one tank will seek cover and pin the gun by fire, so that other tanks can encircle the gun and attack it from the flanks and rear. Tanks normally attack by fire, seldom by charging. They make full use both of their machine guns and anti-tank weapons, ranging from 50-mm. upwards, for this purpose. At close quarters they also make use of grenades.

10. During the extensive reconnaissance preceding the attack, the enemy makes full use of "spotters" and sends out fighting tank reconnaissance to discover the whereabouts of anti-tank guns. This fighting reconnaissance will both bait anti-tank guns at long ranges and penetrate into localities in an attempt to make anti-tank guns disclose themselves.

11. Tanks do not like shooting when on the move; consequently when called upon to engage targets they will normally get into hull-down positions behind some feature or cover.

SECTION 4.—TACTICAL HANDLING

12. The platoon commander is responsible for the tactical siting of the infantry anti-tank guns. Normally, the detailed siting of the guns must be left to the section commanders, when the platoon commander has previously allotted to them approximate gun areas and tasks. The platoon commander must always co-ordinate the siting of the platoon guns at the earliest possible opportunity.

13. The considerations governing the handling of anti-tank guns are:—

(a) Since the gun fires "direct" with a flat trajectory, the layers should have an uninterrupted field of view over the arcs of fire allotted. Care must be taken that dead ground in the arc of fire of one gun is covered by another, and if possible by a third.

- (b) Since guns are vulnerable to infantry action, they must be sited within localities.
- (c) Effective fire depends on concealment and surprise. Guns should be carefully camouflaged, occupy positions defiladed from the enemy's observation area, and be "dug in" wherever possible. Although good siting of anti-tank guns is of primary importance, great attention must be given to concealment from ground and air observation.

For quick occupation and when on the move, full use should be made of natural vegetation to break the outline of the gun and to harmonize it with the background. Natural garnish can be bound to the barrel, and attached to the front and side shields by means of string nets or wire kept permanently in place for the purpose. Full use should also be made of garnish net, steel wool, and hessian provided, but care should be taken to see that they do not interfere with the traverse of the gun. It may sometimes be more beneficial to remove (or partially remove) the net when the gun is being fired.

Shadows thrown by the shields should be broken or extended, and care taken that the gun position is not given away by ammunition boxes in the open, soil left uncovered from digging emplacements and weapon slits, by the parking of vehicles near the gun site, or by bad track discipline.

The personal concealment of the detachment is equally important, and strict camouflage discipline should be enforced. Use should be made of veils, and faces should be darkened with some suitable substance. Personal kit and any materials that shine must be kept under cover.

(See also Infantry Training, Part VIII.)*

The fact that anti-tank guns are the primary concern of enemy air and tank reconnaissance cannot be over-emphasized. Concealment must at all times be good.

- (d) Guns must be so sited that they are mutually supporting. Such siting will enable them to fire towards each other across the likely tank run for which they are sited. Thus, should one gun be attacked by tanks, the other gun will be in a position to retaliate. When guns are thus sited, there can be no safety limit, because the danger to our

own troops from the attacking enemy tanks outweighs the danger to them from our anti-tank guns.

- (e) The guns form a part only of the defence. Their "layout" must be co-ordinated with that of the other arms.
- (f) The allotment of guns is governed by the suitability of the ground for enemy tank action and by the existence of any natural or artificial obstacles.
- (g) Penetration by enemy armoured fighting vehicles into a locality cannot be accepted. The guns of the defence must, therefore, be sited in depth.
- (h) Whilst "all-round defence" is essential, guns will be primarily sited to cover the most likely avenues of tank approach.
- (i) Second positions will always be prepared, and, if the line of enemy tank attack can be detected, the fire of the guns will be concentrated to meet it.
- (j) Alternative positions must be selected both for initial gun positions and for second positions.
The same arcs of fire should be covered from the alternative positions. Gun positions, or second positions, and their alternatives should be connected by a covered line of approach and should not be nearer than 100 yds. from each other. It must be possible to manhandle the gun quickly from one position to the other. The digging of weapon slits for the detachment and ammunition must be carried out, and an emplacement must be dug for the gun, "Alternative" positions should not be confused with "second" positions under M.T.P. 59a, 1943, para. 46.
- (k) In fluid operations, when the threat of an enemy tank attack exists, guns will never remain undeployed.
- (l) To achieve the maximum effect, fire should be withheld until there is a certainty of hitting with the opening round.
- (m) Effective control and distribution of fire of all guns for the defence is essential to defeat an enemy tank attack.
- (n) No matter how good the initial siting may be, gaps in the anti-tank defence are bound to occur. A reserve should therefore always be kept in the hands of the com-

* In preparation.

mander to fill in these gaps. Holding a reserve is far simpler than moving guns which are already deployed.

14. The following additional considerations should be observed whenever circumstances permit:—

(a) *Dangerous space*

Anti-tank guns should be so sited as to ensure the maximum "dangerous space." This will be achieved by siting guns to cover flat or slightly sloping ground. "Plunging fire" should be avoided whenever possible.

(b) *Field of fire*

The areas of fire of anti-tank guns should contain no ground which affords hull-down positions to enemy tanks. It is also important to avoid distant horizons from which enemy tanks can observe guns and fire at them from ranges beyond the effective range of anti-tank guns. The horizon from an anti-tank gun position should not therefore be farther away than 800 yds.

(c) *Obstacles*

Whenever obstacles or broken ground which will slow down the speed of enemy tanks can be included within the arcs of fire of anti-tank guns, more effective shooting will result.

SECTION 5.—OBSTACLES

15. The skilful use of obstacles will enable a commander to economize in the allotment of anti-tank guns and also impose delay on the enemy's attack. Obstacles remain effective only when covered by the fire of infantry small arms and anti-tank guns.

16. **Natural obstacles** consist of:—

- (a) Rivers, canals, lakes, and marshes, provided they are at least 4 ft. deep.
- (b) Slopes with a gradient of over 1 in 1, *e.g.*, railway embankments or cuttings.
- (c) Woods thick enough to prevent the passage of tanks between the trees. Each tree must have a diameter of not less than 18 ins.
- (d) Built-up areas which can be turned quickly into anti-tank localities.

17. **Artificial obstacles** can be divided into:—

- (a) Those which take a considerable time to prepare, *e.g.*,

Concrete blocks.	Steel wire cables.
Pimples.	Anti-tank ditches.
Steel rails.	Demolitions.
- (b) Those which can be prepared quickly, *e.g.*,

Anti-tank mines.
No. 75 grenades.
Barbed wire concertinas.

18. Details of anti-tank mines are clearly set out in M.T.P. 40. Minefields will be sited in conjunction with existing obstacles, either natural or artificial, and with fire and counter-attack plans. They are subdivided as under:—

- (a) *Protective minefields*, laid to prevent penetration by the enemy of a defended locality, post, or roadblock.
- (b) *Defensive minefields*, laid with the object of preventing penetration between forward defended localities or into an outpost position.
- (c) *Tactical minefields*, laid with the object of canalizing penetration within a defended area or enemy movement round the flank of such an area.

SECTION 6.—TACTICAL EMPLOYMENT OF THE INFANTRY ANTI-TANK PLATOON

19. The principal role of the infantry anti-tank gun is the destruction of tanks. The tactical handling of the anti-tank platoon will therefore be directed towards this purpose within the framework of the Bn. Comd.'s intention. The principal tasks of the infantry anti-tank platoon may be enumerated as follows:—

20. **General.**—The task of the anti-tank platoon during any platoon will therefore be directed towards this purpose within the length, sharing the task with any R.A. anti-tank guns which may have been allotted to the battalion. The platoon guns will either be distributed throughout the column by sections so that any part of the column that may be attacked will have some anti-tank defence, or concentrated together so that stronger resistance to enemy tanks can be offered from one particular area.

21. In the particular role of covering unarmoured troops on the move, anti-tank guns may break the standard rule and fire at

ranges exceeding 800 yds., their task being to keep the enemy tanks away from the column and not necessarily to kill them.

22. Approach to contact.—When an infantry battalion is acting as advanced guard, the protection of marching troops during the advance to contact is best achieved by allotting one section to the vanguard company and two to move with the main guard. The sections with the main guard may *either*:—

- (a) Move at the head of the column (probably near battalion "O" group) under control of the platoon commander, so that they may be quickly deployed to engage enemy tanks as they appear.

This method will be used when tank runs on to the axis of advance are not clearly defined and cannot be anticipated; should enemy tanks attack, a concentration of guns can be quickly sited against them wherever they threaten. The ground along the axis of advance must be sufficiently open to allow emergency formations to be used.

Or

- (b) Picquet the route by bounds, each section in turn taking up position along the axis of advance, to cover likely tank runs along each flank. Marching troops should be allowed to pass them before they in turn pull out of position and move on to the next bound.

This method will only be used when the tank runs on to the battalion axis of advance are limited, the country is close and the ground along the axis of advance does not allow rapid deployment into emergency formations. The axis of advance must also be sufficiently wide to permit the guns the necessary movement past the marching troops.

23. If during the advance to contact the battalion is embussed, sections will be distributed throughout the column, one probably being allotted to the leading company. If during an approach march the battalion is deployed, sections should be allotted to companies to provide anti-tank protection, and the guns linked in with any R.A. anti-tank guns which may be in support.

24. An anti-tank troop R.A. will normally be allotted to the advanced guard and will move concentrated with the main guard.

The anti-tank troop commander will move with the advanced guard commander.

25. In the *main body*, security can best be obtained by moving both infantry and R.A. anti-tank guns in one or more group within the battalion group. In an emergency, such groups can quickly take up a position with all-round defence.

The attack.

26. The role of the anti-tank guns in the attack is to provide continuous defence to the attacking troops whilst they are moving forward, and to form a "secure base" on any ground won by the rapid establishment of a co-ordinated anti-tank defence on the objective. Whenever the ground is suitable for tank action, the attacking troops are liable to counter-attack by enemy tanks, particularly when they themselves are not supported by tanks. The task of the anti-tank platoon and of any R.A. anti-tank guns, which may be in support, is to protect the infantry against such counter-attacks.

27. This main role may be subdivided into the following tasks:—

- (a) Protection of the concentration area.
- (b) Protection of assembly areas and forming up places.
- (c) Protection during the assault.
- (d) Consolidation.

28. Protection of the concentration area, or area in which the battalion debusses or harbours before continuing its advance to contact. The co-ordinated layout must here be the best that the platoon commander can achieve in the time available.

29. Protection of assembly areas and forming up places.—These must be secure both whilst the attacking troops are assembling and after they have moved forward, in order that they may be used as a base until consolidation has started on the objective. Security is achieved during the first phase by the early deployment on the forming up place of a proportion of the anti-tank guns accompanying the assault.

30. Protection during the assault.—If the attacking troops are to be protected against counter-attack at their most vulnerable moment, anti-tank guns must be got on to the objective and into positions from which they can fire as soon as possible

after the infantry have arrived there. Guns may have to be manhandled and infantry may have to be allotted to assist.

The battalion commander must make quite clear in his orders with which assaulting companies the anti-tank sections are to move, and will detail in general their consolidation tasks. Guns will move with "F" echelon of the company to which they are allotted. On these occasions, sections of the anti-tank platoon should be placed under the command of company commanders for the purpose of immediate consolidation only. This is to ensure that sections are deployed immediately to cover the main direction of tank threat from ground which the infantry is in fact holding on the objective. Unless there is good reason to the contrary, they will be sited to conform to the fire plan which will have been detailed in the orders for the attack. Section commanders normally report to the commanders of the companies to which they have been allotted at the forming up place. They will be accompanied by a guide, and should move close to the company commander during the assault so as to be able to make an early reconnaissance of the area allotted to them.

The battalion commander should also indicate the area from which he wants any R.A. anti-tank guns that may be under his command to operate, together with the tasks he wants them to carry out. R.A. anti-tank guns under command should be regarded as a reserve of guns which can give depth and solidity to the anti-tank layout. The plans of the platoon commander and any R.A. commander must be carefully detailed and discussed in advance.

Sections should move under the command of the "F" echelon of the company to which they have been allotted. The commander of "F" echelon should not necessarily wait for the success signal before moving his group forward. On occasions, "F" echelon may arrive almost at the same time as the company commander and the assaulting troops. There will be times when all "F" echelon transport is under battalion control, particularly at night.

31. Consolidation.—Sections will be deployed by the detachment commander immediately on arrival on the objective, to cover the main direction of tank threat. The company commander allots gun areas and tasks to the section commander; he will be influenced by the ground, by likely approaches for enemy tanks, by the final positions of platoon posts, and by the existence of obstacles. But unless there is good reason to the

contrary, these orders must conform with those originally given by the battalion commander.

The section commander will move guns from their immediate positions to these reconnoitred positions as quickly as possible.

It is very important that this immediate consolidation layout is co-ordinated by the platoon commander as soon as possible and linked in with the R.A. anti-tank troops.

The defence

32. The role of the infantry anti-tank guns in the defence is to destroy tanks that attempt to enter the battalion locality by engaging them on the approaches the guns have been sited to cover. This will primarily be done between the perimeter of the battalion locality and out to a range of 800 yds. Depth, however, is essential to anti-tank guns in the defence and must be built up by the co-ordinated layout of the infantry and R.A. anti-tank guns inside the battalion locality. But depth in the main is achieved by the co-ordination of all anti-tank weapons in the brigade locality.

33. It is essential that the platoon commander and the commander of any supporting R.A. anti-tank guns are present at the battalion commander's orders. The plans of both platoon commander and any such R.A. anti-tank gun commander must be co-ordinated, and sections allotted tasks and sited in company areas which enable the majority of the tank runs into the battalion locality to be covered. Gun positions will be selected from which the initial tasks can be carried out. Subsequently, further tasks may be allotted and second positions selected and prepared, to which some guns may have to move to meet a threatened attack. The general principles of siting anti-tank guns are given in Sec. 4.

Withdrawal

34. In the withdrawal, the main role of infantry anti-tank guns is the defence of the battalion in successive rearguard positions. The battalion anti-tank layout must be co-ordinated by the platoon commander, and linked in with any R.A. anti-tank guns that may be in support.

35. For purposes of the withdrawal, sections will operate under command of companies in whose areas they are sited, and will

withdraw them. Close co-operation is necessary between rifle company commanders and anti-tank platoon, section and detachment commanders, who must know the general plan for the withdrawal, including timings and routes. Company commanders will be responsible for giving the final order to withdraw to detachment commanders under their command.

36. The defence of the next position must be organized before any rearguard position is vacated, and a reconnaissance party must be sent back early for this purpose.