Notes on:

Closing with the Enemy: How GIs Fought the War in Europe, 1944-1945

by **Michael D. Doubler**
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Chapter Two: Busting the Bocage

In some divisions at Normandy, each Sherman tank was accompanied by an engineer squad and an infantry squad. Pages 52 –53 describe the bocage drill, originally recounted in Doubler's *Busting the Bocage*. The 741st Tank Battalion lost six unprotected tanks in one company to German anti-tank rockets. Proper tank-infantry-engineer teams, enabled by good communications and preparatory training, both protected the tanks as well as penetrated the hedgerow defenses.

Chapter Four: Battles of Buildings and Cobblestones

1. The 1941 edition of FM 100-5 suggested that mechanized forces were of little value in urban operations.

2. The Germans had learned extensive lessons in defending urban areas. They staged reserves of ammunition, water, rations, and medical supplies in protected caches. They established fortified strongholds in large stone buildings, located on the outer edge of city blocks, that were not easily surrounded or bypassed. Heavy machineguns dominated avenues of approach and large open areas.

3. In the fight for the city of Brest in 1944, the U.S. Army quickly learned the urban combined-arms lesson that infantry needed vital assistance from other combat arms: engineers, demolitions, mortars, aircraft, and especially tanks. Commanders used tanks and tank destroyers as heavy supporting firepower, firing high explosives point blank into enemy strongholds. Infantry platoons developed assault element and support element tactics to seize buildings and clear city blocks. The decentralized battlefield meant that tanks often supported isolated infantry squads and platoons.

4. In the city of Aachen, 2nd Battalion, 26th Infantry conducted one of the classic combined-arms actions of WWII, fighting as company-level combined-arms teams that included tanks, anti-tank guns, engineers, and infantry heavy weapons attachments. The battalion commander prepared extensively, developed a number of new tactics and techniques for urban fighting, and maintained tactical patience while systematically clearing the city. His close integration of infantry, armor, artillery, and engineers also contributed to his very low casualty rate.

5. Despite these battlefield experiences, updated manuals, sometimes suffering from branch myopia, did not reflect the truth on the ground in Europe. In 1943, FM 17-36 *Employment of Tanks with Infantry* was published by the War Department, but the Armor School at Fort

Know published a separate supplement to FM 17-36. Unfortunately, neither manual went far enough in capturing the lessons and advocating combined arms action. Doctrine still called for separate infantry and tank units to maneuver and support, and failed to describe fire and maneuver by tank-infantry teams.

6. The 2nd Armored Division's operations during November 1944, were a model of the combined-arms approach. The division commander, MajGen Ernest N. Harmon emphasized that the secret to a successful attack was the "close coordination of all means at the right time and place." Working communications were essential. Infantry commanders rode in command tanks to control tank-infantry teams, FOs and FACs rode in vehicles from which they could both observe the battlefield as well as maintain radio contact with artillery and fighter-bombers.

7. Doubler recounts on pages 103-104 how a typical 2nd Armored Division combined-arms attack was conducted. General Harmon's focus on integrated support between units as they fired and moved led to a new tactical term, coined by the 2nd Armored Division: *overwatch*.

8. The 30th Infantry Division learned that hours of extensive prior coordination between arms was needed to execute a combined-arms attack on a village that may only last sixty minutes.

9. In Europe, the U.S. Army learned that infantry could not bear the entire cost of city fighting. Combined arms doctrine, organizations, and tactics were required. The use of tanks in cities as direct fire support weapons, and the organizational and tactical adjustments required to fight as combined-arms teams, were significant innovations.

Chapter Five: Struggles against Steel and Concrete

The 30th Division created a combined-arms pillbox reduction technique. Pages 121-123 describe how infantry assault units and engineers, supported by indirect fire and the suppressive direct fire of tanks, closed on enemy strongholds to place demolitions or fire bazookas. Team leaders used colored smoke to shift tank fire. Pre-battle training insured that the combined arms team acted in concert.

Chapter Seven: Confusion and Slaughter among the Firs

1. 4th Division published "Notes on Woods Fighting" on 28 October 1944. This recommended close tank-infantry coordination for fighting in forests. Each tank platoon should receive one infantry squad, an engineer mine removal squad, and a bazooka team for continuous security. Soldiers should affix a field phone onto the tank and develop hand, pyro, and smoke signals to control movement and direct fire.

2. Experience in the Huertgen Forest suggested that instead of the two doctrinal armor missions of sweeping around a forest or staying in reserve until the forest was cleared, tanks should disperse into small teams to support the infantry while clearing the woods. Cooperation between infantry and armor was in direct proportion to the length of time they had worked together. The best tank-infantry coordination was between units that had been together since the Normandy landings. Infantry commanders with little armor experience typically misused their supporting tanks.

3. The 746th Tank Battalion joined the 9th Division at Normandy, so by the time of the Huertgen battles, it was a cohesive team. One tank company was attached to each regiment, single tank platoons supported each battalion. Infantry commanders rode on command tanks, field phone were strapped to tank decks, infantry squads provided security to tanks, and standard drills were developed to respond to common combat actions.

A Note on Sources

The Armor School at Fort Knox produced a series of reports on performance of American tankers during WWII. “The Battle of St. Vith, Belgium, 17-23 December 1944” and “The Remagen Bridgehead.” are the best of this series.

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