

CHAPTER 16

GHQ TANK UNITS

■ 1145. Tank units of GHQ reserve consist of separate tank battalions and tank groups. A group is composed of a group headquarters and several tank battalions.

GHQ tank units are usually allotted to infantry, cavalry, and armored divisions for specific operations. One or more groups or several separate tank battalions may form the nucleus of a composite force, including the necessary supporting arms and services, for employment on tasks similar to those of the armored division. (See ch. 15.)

■ 1146. Properly employed, *tank units* constitute a powerful maneuvering force in the hands of a higher commander with which to influence the course of combat. In the defense they constitute an effective means of counterattack.

For the effective employment of tanks adequate air or map reconnaissance of the terrain and knowledge of the general hostile dispositions are essential.

Tanks are essentially offensive weapons; they are employed in mass on ground favorable to their characteristics, they are assigned missions, the accomplishment of which will assist the supported troops to reach their objectives, and, if practicable, to assist the main attack. When widely distributed or engaged piecemeal, tanks suffer rapid destruction from the concentrated fire of artillery and antitank weapons.

■ 1147. Tanks in the attack are given successive objectives. When hostile resistance at each objective is subdued, they reorganize and prepare for further employment. Tanks should not be tied too closely to foot troops. If so restricted, their mobility is sacrificed and they become a vulnerable target for antitank weapons.

In the attack, tanks are disposed in depth. The first echelon, supported by artillery and combat aviation, has the mission of destroying the hostile antitank guns.

The next echelon is composed of the tanks which accompany or immediately *precede* the other attacking units. The mission of this echelon is to overrun the hostile position just prior to the arrival of the assaulting troops and destroy the hostile automatic weapons which have survived the preparatory fires. Attacking troops promptly take advantage of the tank action, advance to and occupy each successive objective.

■ 1148. Occasionally, it is advisable to delay the entry into action of tanks until a late phase of the attack to replace the fire of artillery as it lifts for the assault, to supplement the diminished artillery fire when batteries are displacing, or because of the character of the terrain or the hostile anti-mechanized defenses.

■ 1149. The employment of tanks in no way lessens the need for strong fire support. Combat aviation and the supporting fires of artillery, chemical weapons, and other supporting weapons, are carefully coordinated with the advance of the leading echelon. The mission of fires supporting the tank action is to neutralize hostile antitank guns and hostile observation posts, to place protective fires on dangerous localities which tanks must pass, to destroy mine fields and obstacles, and to block the movement of hostile reserves, particularly antitank and mechanized units.

Observation aviation cooperates in the detection of obstacles, hostile artillery, and hostile forces assembling for counter-attack, and provides liaison between the tanks and supporting fires.

Efficient signal communication between tanks and the supporting artillery and combat aviation is indispensable.

■ 1150. The employment of tanks in attack must surprise the enemy. When there is a possibility that the enemy has discovered the presence of tanks, their mobility must be exploited to keep the enemy in doubt and to deceive him regarding the front selected for their employment.

■ 1151. The strength of the antimechanized defense which will be encountered by a tank attack will depend largely upon the length of time the enemy has had to organize his position and the effectiveness of our measures for secrecy and deception.

When tanks are employed in an attack, intensive reconnaissance to discover antimechanized defenses must be initiated promptly and must be continued throughout the tank action.

When necessary, engineer troops with suitable equipment are attached to tank units to assist their advance. Mine fields and serious obstacles must be destroyed before the tank attack is launched. Their destruction must be accomplished at the last possible moment in order not to warn the enemy of the impending attack.