







G.I.'S IN THE BULGE

BY GREG MOORE REVISED MARCH, 2009

U.S. ARMORED DIVISIONS

In the '43 organization, each armored division contained three tank battalions, three armored infantry battalions, an armored engineer battalion, a armored cavalry squadron, and three armored artillery battalions. Though they were not part of the permanent organization, there would almost always be a tank destroyer battalion and an anti-aircraft battalion attached as well.

TANK BATTALION

5 A 5  5 M-5 11	11 A 8  9 M-4/75 8	14 A 10  10 M-4/76 9	14 H 10  9 M-4/105 8	3 M 12  3 M-21 10	2 C(I) 2*  1 M-8 Jeep 18
x 3	x 8	x 1	x 1	x 1	x 1

A tank battalion in the standard '43 organization contained one company of light tanks and three companies of medium tanks. The light tank was the M-5 Stuart (M-24 Chaffee was not available in the armored divisions yet). The medium tank was the M-4 Sherman. When the allies hit the beaches in Normandy, all regular Shermans mounted the 75mm gun. The 76mm gun version only began to arrive in France in July of 1944. As these upgunned tanks were shipped in, they were handed out to the armored divisions piecemeal and were mixed with the 75 gun tanks. By December, they represented about a third of medium tank strength on average in the armored divisions. A few of the newest divisions were fully equipped with 76mm gun tanks before they were sent to France although replacement tanks received for their losses from the depots would often be 75 gun tanks. Each battalion also included a platoon of 105 howitzer equipped Shermans for fire support along a platoon of halftrack mounted 81mm mortars. A small recon element consisted of jeeps, some with mounted machine guns.

ratio of 75 gun Shermans to 76 gun Shermans by division and month (1st of month figures)

[illegible]

THE HEAVIES



The allies had anticipated a need for a heavy assault tank for use against the West Wall defenses when they reached the borders of Germany. Since heavy tanks like the Pershing and other projects were still on the drawing board, the quick solution was to add extra armor to the Sherman. This resulted in the M4A3E2 variant. Only 324 were produced and, due to early demand for them, they were shipped to France starting in fall of '44. They were handed out to the armored divisions very sparingly and were spread out into the battalions. They were frequently used to lead a column or attack because they could usually take numerous hits without being knocked out. Due to their small numbers, however, there would rarely be more than one or two individual vehicles per battalion (of 51 medium tanks). Therefore players should resist using these in a scenario unless there are accounts of several of them in use. One has been included in a battalion of the 4th Armored because several of them led the task force which finally made contact with the defenders of Bastogne.

THE BLITZDOUGHS

4 1 2*	2 1 2*	9 A 5	3 M 12	5 H 8	2 C(I) 2*	2 C(I) 2
ARMORED	M-6	57mm	M-21	M-8 HMC	M-8 Jeep	M-3
10	1	2	3	5	1	3
x 9	x 3	x 3	x 1	x 1	x 1	x 15

The armored infantry battalions of the U.S. armored divisions achieved what the German Panzergrenadiers never could. The whole battalion was actually armored and rode in the reliable M-3 halftrack (the Germans never had enough halftracks to do this) and was amply supplied with extra machine guns and plenty of bazookas. They were liberally supplied with AT guns, although they were the marginally effective 57mm variety. They also had a platoon of M-8 HMC's for fire support and halftrack mounted mortars. The "blitzdoughs" took far more than their share of casualties in the ETO because they were used as assault troops so often.

ARMORED ENGINEERS

1 1	0 -	2 C(I)	0 C
6	Tank Bridge	M-3	Truck
1	0	3	1
x 9	x 1	x 3	x 8

The job of the armored engineers was to do whatever it took to keep the division rolling. They cleared mines and obstacles and built bridges. They also laid mines, built obstacles, and destroyed bridges. In combat, they could be parceled out to help the infantry in a tough assault. They were often used in the division as a reserve battalion to plug holes in an tight situation.

ARMORED ARTILLERY BATTALION

40 (H)	32
M-7 Priest	8
7	
x 3	

In an armored division, all of the artillery was mechanized. Each artillery battalion contained a total of 18 M-7's, armed with the 105mm howitzer. These three battalions were always ready to support an attack or defense with overwhelming firepower at short notice.

CAVALRY RECON SQUADRON

1 I 3 SCOUT	2	3 A 3 M-8	5 A 5 M-5	5 H 8 M-8 HMC	2 C(I) 2*
x 12		x 6	x 3	x 1	x 12

The cavalry recon squadron acted as the eyes and ears of the division. Their job was to find the enemy and learn about his dispositions. Though they were supposed to “sneak and peek” and avoid serious firefights, they did include a company of light tanks and an M8 HMC platoon for fire support. Most of their work was done by the recon platoons in their jeeps with the Greyhounds to back them up.

TANK DESTROYER BATTALION

14 A 4 M-18	10	2 C(I) 1 M-8 Jeep	2*	2 I 3 M-20	4	3 A 3 M-8	5
x 9		x 3		x 3		x 1	

There were 55 Tank Destroyer Battalions in the ETO. These battalions were independent of any larger organization and could be shifted around and attached to units as needed. Each division (armored and infantry) usually had at least one attached at all times. Some of these battalions were equipped with towed 76mm AT guns and some were equipped with self-propelled tank destroyers such as the M-10. The tank destroyer battalions attached to a armored division in the bulge would usually be equipped with the M-10 or the M-18 Hellcat with a few M-36's just being phased in. The primary job of the battalion was to destroy tanks but the lightly armored TD's were not capable of trading shots with the enemy very well. Instead they were used more as highly mobile anti-tank guns and they let the recon elements of the battalion seek the enemy tanks while the TD's sat back and killed them from protected positions. These battalions seemed to be at the critical point of any tank action in the Bulge and contributed greatly towards the allied victory.

MECHANIZED ANTI-AIRCRAFT BATTALION

6 H 3 M-15	12	8 I 3 M-16	4
x 4		x 4	

These also were not part of the permanent structure of the division but almost every division had at least one attached. Though they did not have many air targets to fire at in the battle, they occasionally contributed to the ground war by delivering devastating firepower on infantry targets. Some of these battalions were fully mechanized like the example above and some were towed. The ones attached to the armored divisions would almost always be mechanized.

COMBAT COMMANDS

A lesson learned from the Germans was the use of specialized task forces put together from the division to do a particular job. In order to facilitate this, the armored division organization had two extra command staffs built into its permanent organization, called Combat Command A (CCA) and Combat Command B (CCB). Though in theory these combat commands could be any mix of forces from the division, in practice they usually consisted of one tank battalion, one armored infantry battalion, one battalion of armored artillery, and a troop from the armored recon squadron. They would also frequently receive a company from the attached tank destroyer battalion and sometimes some engineers from the engineer battalion. There was also a small command staff for a third combat command called Combat Command Reserve (CCR). This third combat command was meant to be used as a reserve and troops would be rotated from it to CCA and CCB to keep them up to strength

and rested. Many armored divisions, however, borrowed officers from other commands to beef up this staff and used CCR as a full combat command equal to CCA and CCB. In the Battle of the Bulge, all armored divisions were organized into these combat commands. Also, if the combat commands of a division were operating close to each other, the artillery would remain attached to the division and placed in a central area where it could support any of the commands.

HEAVY TANK DIVISIONS

In 1943, tank divisions were organized under a new structure which reduced the number of tank battalions in the division. Two armored divisions, the 2nd and the 3rd, were heavily involved in action and time was never found to withdraw them and spend the necessary time to reorganize them. They remained under the old '42 organization and were referred to as "heavy" divisions, due to the extra tanks. Instead of three tank battalions, they had two tank regiments each with two medium tank battalions and one light tank battalion. Just before the start of the Normandy campaign, both these divisions swapped light and medium tank companies around in each regiment to form three equal mixed tank battalions consisting of two medium tank companies and one light tank company as follows:

5 A 5 5 M-5 11	11 A 8 9 M-4/75 8	14 A 10 10 M-4/76 9	14 H 10 9 M-4/105 8	3 M 12 3 M-21 10	2 C(I) 2* 1 M-8 Jeep 18
x 3	x 4	x 2	x 1	x 1	x 1

note: actual number of M4/76 tanks varies with division and date

Also, instead of a Cavalry Recon Squadron, they had an Armored Recon Battalion as follows:

1 I 2 3 SCOUT 1	3 A 5 3 M-8 15	5 A 5 5 M-5 11	5 H 8 5 M-8 HMC 11	2 C(I) 2* 1 M-8 Jeep 18
x 9	x 8	x 3	x 1	x 9

U.S. INFANTRY DIVISIONS




An infantry division consisted of three infantry regiments of three battalions each, plus one engineer battalion, four artillery battalions and one recon troop. Although not part of the permanent structure, there would nearly always be a tank battalion and a tank destroyer battalion attached. An anti-aircraft battalion would usually be attached as well. U.S. divisions had plenty of transport available and were highly mobile. The armored attachments made them more like a Panzergrenadier division than an infantry division.

INFANTRY REGIMENT

9 A 5 2 57mm 0	0 C 0 1 Truck 14	2 C(I) 2* 1 M-8 Jeep 18
x 3	x 3	x 1
28 (H) 30 2 105mm 0	0 C 0 1 Truck 14	Infantry Battalion x 3
x 1	x 1	
2 I 2* 6 RIFLE 1	2 I 2* 4 M-G 1	9 A 5 2 57mm 0
x 9	x 2	x 1
		3 M 12 3 81mm 1
		x 1
		0 C 0 1 Truck 14
		x 13



In addition to the three battalions, each regiment had a company of towed 57 AT guns, a cannon company, and a small recon element composed of jeeps. The cannon company consisted of six towed 105mm howitzers. They were intended to be used in the role of infantry guns for direct fire support, however they were often used by the G.I.'s as indirect fire support. The strength on the counter in the regiment is a compromise between a direct fire and indirect fire attack due to the due use nature of this piece.

ENGINEER BATTALION

1 6 1	1 1 1	0 23 0	0 1 14
			
x 9	x 1	x 10	




The Battle of the Bulge was an engineer's battle. These guys caused innumerable delays to the Germans by blowing bridges, felling trees across roads, building roadblocks and prepared positions, or just defending some little road intersection for a while. Wherever you looked in this battle, there seemed to be engineers at work.

ARTILLERY BATTALIONS

40 (H) 32 2 0	0 1 14	60 (H) 36 2 0	2 1 10
			
x 2	x 2	x 2	x 2







Each infantry division had three battalions of 105mm howitzers, pulled by trucks, and one battalion of 155mm howitzers, pulled by high-speed artillery tractors. Each battalion contained 12 guns. With an always ample supply of ammunition at hand, many German attacks were broken up by the fire support of these big guns.

RECON TROOP

1 3 1	2 1 18	3 3 15
		
x 3	x 3	x 2








The recon element of an infantry division was very small compared to that of an armored division and was not very effective when it had to fight to get information. In the American system, the armored cavalry group assigned to each corps was supposed to do the heavy scouting on an advance.

INDEPENDENT TANK BATTALION

5 5 11	11 9 8	14 10 9	14 9 8	3 3 10	2 1 18
					
x 3	x 8	x 1	x 1	x 1	x 1


There were about the same number of independent tank battalions in the ETO as there were infantry divisions. Although there was no tank battalion in the permanent structure of an infantry division, the standard practice was to attach one of these independent battalions to each division. Each infantry division, therefore, in almost every case had a battalion of tanks at their immediate disposal. These tanks were used to support the infantry when attacking but in this battle frequently gave the Germans spearheads a difficult time by backing up a defensive line or by providing a potent rearguard on the retreat.

TANK DESTROYER BATTALION

mechanized				towed			
14 A 10  6 M-10 9	2 C(l) 2*  1 M-8 Jeep 18	2 I 4  3 M-20 15	3 A 5  3 M-8 15	12 A 10 76 mm 2 0	2 C(l) 2  3 M-3 10	2 C(l) 2*  1 M-8 Jeep 18	2 I 4  3 M-20 15
x 9	x 3	x 3	x 1	x 9	x 9	x 2	x 1

Each infantry division could also expect to have at least one tank destroyer battalion attached at all times. In the infantry, these battalions might consist of self-propelled guns such as the M-10 or they might be the towed 76mm AT guns. They were more likely to be the mechanized variety but both types were used in the battle. The towed guns did not fare as well as the self-propelled variety and several towed battalions were upgraded to mechanized during or just after this battle. These battalions gave the infantry a nice defensive punch and allowed even the green troops to make a determined stand against the attacking German tanks.

ANTI-AIRCRAFT BATTALION

8 H 12 40 mm 2 0	8 I 4 .50 cal 2 0	0 C 0  1 Truck 14
x 4	x 4	x 8

Another type of battalion not part of the permanent structure of an infantry division but usually attached was the anti-aircraft battalion. This battalion could be mechanized or towed. In the infantry divisions, it was more likely to be the towed variety. It consisted of towed 40mm Bofers guns and quad .50 cal mountings fixed to a towed trailer. Although there were not many aircraft to shoot at in this battle due to the weather and the declining fortunes of the Luftwaffe, these weapons could be very useful to bolster a line against infantry attack.

FINAL COMMENTS

The U.S. armored division divided into three combat commands was an efficient organization. Though the Shermans did not always match up well against the German panzers, the Americans always seemed to be able to bring more tanks into the fight, due to the outstanding mechanical reliability of the Sherman, combined with the frequently demonstrated ability to replace tank losses very quickly, in many cases literally overnight. When the time came to counter-attack in this battle, the armored divisions usually spearheaded the way.

Even though many of the U.S. infantry division troops involved in this battle were inexperienced, they did not dissolve in the face of German attack. The many armored attachments and the ample artillery support they enjoyed gave them the backbone to stand up to armored assaults and gave the Germans a tough time of it wherever they went. American industrial production gave the Allies a edge over their opponents in mechanized warfare and the ability to rush divisions from other fronts into this battle proved decisive in the end.