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SPECIAL EXPERIENCE GAINED IN MARCHES

OF MOTORIZED FORMATIONS

AND UNITS ON SICILY

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Special Experiences Gained in Marches of Motorized  
Formations and Units During Combat On Sicily.

(Units: Companies, Batteries, etc.)

I. The terrain on Sicily, in comparison with other theaters of operations, reveals the following characteristics:

High, and partly altogether impassable mountain ranges.

A few narrow improved or unimproved roads.

Steep grades on all improved and unimproved roads leading through the mountains.

Frequent sharp precipices along the roads.

A lack of shade trees along the roads.

Closely settled communities.

The climate from early summer until late fall was unusually hot. In July 1943, temperatures up to 47°C. in the shade were registered. The sky was almost never overcast; rain fell only at very rare intervals.

During marches and movements of motorized formations and units these factors resulted in the application of principles which differed from common practice and general regulations.



These principles equally applied to day and night marches, since the enormous superiority of the allied air forces made it almost immaterial whether troops marched by day or night. - In essence, these principles were applicable to retrograde movements as well.

It should not go unmentioned that also the state of motorization of the German formations constituted a severe handicap to the smooth conduct of marches. Thus, for example, almost four hundred different types of vehicles were represented in the motor pool of the 29th Panzer Grenadier Division.

II. A. Marches with no expected contact with enemy ground forces.

1. Enemy air attacks were to be expected at all times.

Leaving the roads was impossible almost everywhere, and passing other units or vehicles was likewise unfeasible in most instances. Movement through towns was a matter of great difficulty.

Experience substantiated the following tactical procedures:

a. Large intervals were to be maintained (approximately three minutes between units). In movements



of smaller groups, the individual vehicles occasionally had to advance in spurts from point to point.

b. Numerous air guards had to be employed (more than customary).

c. All available antiaircraft weapons had to be distributed throughout the entire convoy.

d. Engineers likewise had to be distributed throughout the entire convoy for the task of clearing roads and performing demolition work whenever necessary.

e. Fuel trucks, shop trucks, and ammunition carriers, as well as field kitchens had to proceed with the units.

f. Numerous traffic control personnel had to be on duty in the villages.

2. Terrain and climate subjected vehicles and drivers to considerably greater strain than was the case in flat country under normal climatic conditions.

Experience substantiated the following technical procedures:

a. Frequent halts had to be made for technical purposes (at least once every two hours). All vehicles had to be checked, particularly for fuel and oil consumption, which sharply increased (the increase amounted to approximately 35 percent).



b. Minor repairs were dealt with immediately during such halts, without being postponed until the next stop.

c. Halts for technical purposes were not made, and breaks not taken, on steep ascents or precipitous stretches of road.

d. No attempts were made at stripping totally disabled vehicles, since this procedure would have wasted time and caused delay. The disabled vehicle was simply pushed off the road, regardless of the material lost; nor was any hesitancy shown in the demolition of vehicles.

B. Marches expected to involve contact with enemy ground forces:

Reconnaissance by motorized forces was almost exclusively restricted to the few good roads.

In case of contact with the enemy action could be initiated only along the roads and highways; motorized deployment was impossible.

1. Experience substantiated the following tactical procedures:

a. Strong, motorized reconnaissance units had to be sent far ahead, and ordered to report frequently (see "Reconnaissance during operations on Sicily"\*)).

\* Ed: MS # D-089 "Aufklaerung waehrend der Kaempfe auf Sizilien."



b. The convoy had to be organized in such a manner that fully effective elements would engage the enemy. Infantry heavy weapons, tanks, or assault guns, and even individual artillery pieces had to be furnished to the units comprising the point.

c. Engineers had to constitute the third or fourth unit of the convoy.

d. Radio communications facilities had to be placed between the first and the following units.

2. Experience substantiated the following technical procedures:

a. The fuel trucks, shop trucks, and ammunition carriers, as well as the field kitchens belonging to the elements of the leading battalion had to trail the battalion. The composition of the other march groups remained as defined under BI a (5).

However, the combat vehicles of the leading battalion carried a reserve supply of fuel and ammunition.

b. During marches also in other theaters of operation, motorized formations and units gained specialized experiences with respect to geographic, geological, and climatic conditions. Reference is made, for example, to the muddy period in Russia, the impassable roads in certain parts of the Balkans, and the ice- and snow-covered regions of the Arctic.



It is not the aim of this brief study to compare these experiences in detail.

Colonel v. Schoen-Angerer in his study elaborates in detail on conditions and experiences in other theaters of operations.

signed: ULICH

signed: VON SCHOEN-ANGERER