



Heeresdienstvorschrift 299/11 of 1944 for the armored reconnaissance battalion. MICHAEL H. PRUETT

58. Collocated with the battalion commander are generally the signals officers, the leader of the reconnaissance reserve and the commander of the heavy troop.

The reconnaissance platoon generally moves with enough of its elements in the advance guard (1st section), so that necessary contact can be maintained with the reconnaissance patrols employed, with superior headquarters, with neighboring reconnaissance formations and within the march column proper. The remainder of the signals platoon remains with the main body.

As with all reconnaissance activities, timely reporting is critical and the radio was often considered by commanders in the field to be the most powerful weapon in the battalion's arsenal. This is stressed in the following two paragraphs:

68. Information concerning the enemy is only of value if it reaches the commander in a timely manner. If information concerning the enemy is lacking, the reporting of the location of the reconnaissance patrol or the motorized reconnaissance battalion can be of importance to the superior headquarters.

69. Initial contact with the enemy is always to be reported, unless other orders have been issued. If possible, the strength and combat arm is to be indicated. It is especially important to report enemy movement and the direction of movement early to the superior commander.

Reconnaissance was an ongoing requirement, since the terrain and the enemy situation could change rapidly, especially in fluid situations, such as movements to contact. To that end, single patrols might not always capture the information needed by the higher commander:

Frequently, the first employment of reconnaissance patrols will not suffice in sufficiently clarifying the enemy situation in the reconnaissance area or satisfying the missions assigned by superior headquarters. Intensifying reconnaissance efforts in the direction the enemy has been determined will often be necessary based on the initial reports. By means of increasingly focused individual missions that are given to subsequent reconnaissance patrols, which increasingly concentrate on details, the effort must be made to complete the picture of the enemy. When the enemy situation changes, it may be necessary to send out additional reconnaissance efforts.

The commander of the reconnaissance battalion must be prepared at all times for enemy countermeasures in the reconnaissance area of operations. If reports from individual reconnaissance patrols are not received and it is believed that they may have been lost after contact with the enemy, then the dispatching of new reconnaissance patrols will be necessary.

While the above manual seems to be relatively detailed and comprehensive, one only need to review

its 1944 counterpart, *HdV 299-11c*, dated 15 August 1944, to see how five years of war had both finely tuned the practical aspects of the manual as well as expanded the scope of the missions and capabilities of an armored reconnaissance battalion. The “Guidelines for Command and Control and Combat Employment of the Armored Reconnaissance Battalion (Armored)” wastes no time in diving directly into the subject matter (emphasis in the original):

I. Nature and Missions

1. The **Armored Reconnaissance Battalion (Armored)** is the eyes of an armored division. Its **particular nature** lies in the ability to switch between **reconnaissance** and **fighting**. It is **fast, maneuverable** and **capable of crossing all types of terrain**.

Based on its being equipped with numerous armored vehicles and automatic weapons and possessing a wide operating radius, the battalion is also capable of conducting reconnaissance through force.

2. The **main mission** of the battalion is the **conduct of tactical reconnaissance** for the division, so that, in supplementing aerial reconnaissance, the prerequisites for its employment can be created. In addition, the battalion is suitable for the execution of **combat missions**.

Those are:

- (1.) Employment as an advance guard.
- (2.) Advances into the rear and flanks of the enemy.
- (3.) Pursuit.
- (4.) Screening of gaps along the flanks, in the rear and to the front.
- (5.) Screening of withdrawal movements.
- (6.) Advancing into enemy air-landed and parachute formations; destroying, sealing off or monitoring them.
- (7.) Masking of friendly movements.

3. Those responsible for reconnaissance are the armored **reconnaissance** sections. Combat power and support are provided by the armored reconnaissance companies and the heavy company.

4. Reconnaissance is only successful when the battalion is **employed in a timely manner**,

in order to get the necessary head start (time—3–4 hours; space—up to 100 kilometers).

5. To conduct its reconnaissance, the battalion is assigned a movement zone (reconnaissance zone). Unless there are special reasons (advance guard), it is not to be limited to a **single** route. The width of the reconnaissance sector can be up to 60 kilometers; in the case of open flanks, even more.

6. When given separate **combat missions**, the battalion is to be reinforced with **mobile antitank elements** (self-propelled antitank guns, tank destroyers, assault guns), **engineers**, and **artillery**.

7. Combat with tanks or strong enemy defensive forces is to be avoided, so as to be able to advance at another location. The **weak armor** of the armored cars and the *SPW*'s **prohibits their use as tanks**.

8. **The battalion fights mounted**. That is the only way that that armor, maneuverability, and strong firepower can be fully exploited.

9. Every type of reconnaissance is to also be simultaneously used to scout roads and terrain and report to the division in a timely manner.

10. Advancing and fighting across the breadth of the sector is a hallmark of its organization. Pressed together in a small area, it cannot be completely effective.

11. **Every splitting up of the force** by assignment of dual missions calls the success of the operation into question.

12. **Short-term** missions, which can be performed through movement, correspond to the organization and equipment of the battalion. Any combat operations lasting a longer time bring about increased attrition and, as a result, reduced capabilities.

What stands out when comparing the two texts is the addition of fighting as part of its capabilities, inasmuch as its “particular nature lies in the ability to switch between reconnaissance and fighting.” While pre-war theory acknowledged that the reconnaissance battalion might have to fight on occasion, the thinking had evolved in the course of battlefield experience into giving the battalion a combat mission as