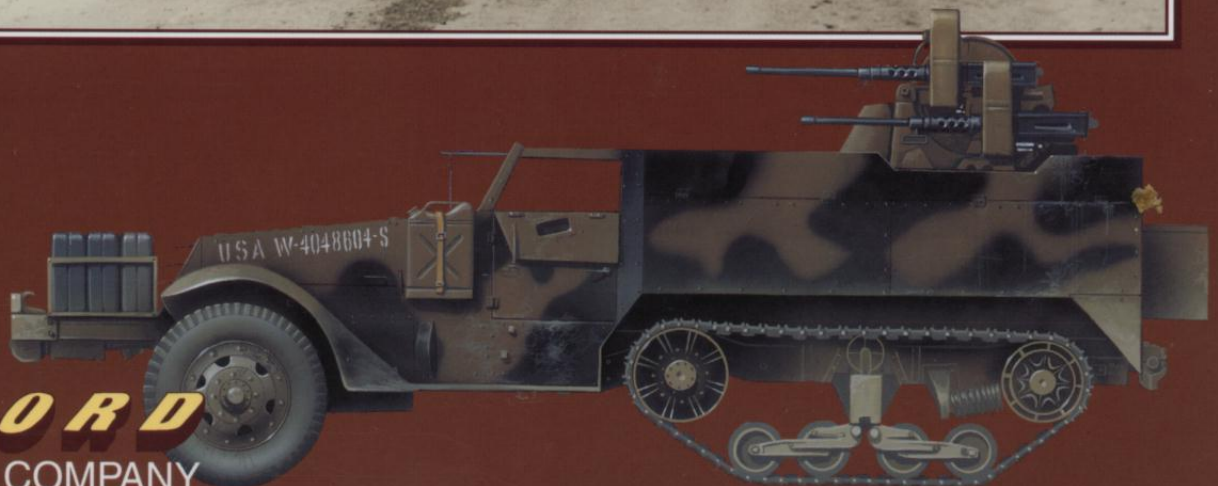


U.S. Half-Tracks in Combat 1941-1945

Steven J. Zaloga



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INTRODUCTION

Infantry Mechanization

Most studies of mechanized warfare in World War II focus on tank tactics and doctrine. But the dilemma of tank and infantry cooperation on the battlefield has long been one of the most controversial and intractable problems faced by armored forces. The United States Army confronted this issue in 1940 after the formation of its Armored Force. The US Army was well on its way to infantry motorization, that is, the use of trucks to transport infantry to the battlefield. But US Army leaders realized that trucks were inadequate for infantry units operating with tanks. The trucks were not mobile enough in poor weather conditions and had little cross-country capability. Lacking armor, they could not close on enemy positions. The US Army studied the conduct of German operations in France in 1940 and noted the use of armored half-tracks such as the Sd.Kfz. 251. The other alternative was the British approach, with a small, fully tracked infantry vehicle like the Universal Carrier. The US Army favored the German approach. Such a vehicle was large enough to fit a full infantry squad, the stowage and armor protection was better, and the mobility was comparable.

The US Army was already well on its way to the production of an armored half-track by 1940. The Cavalry had been working on a half-track version of its M3A1 scout car. In December 1939, the artillery began development of a similar vehicle as a prime mover for artillery. This was accepted for service as Half-track Car M2 and its main role was to serve as prime mover and ammunition carrier for the 105mm howitzer. Infantry officers examined the new vehicle and concluded that with modest changes, it would be suitable as an armored infantry vehicle. The body was lengthened and the center-mounted stowage bins deleted. This was standardized as the M3 half-track personnel carrier. Ultimately, both types of half-tracks were manufactured for the new armored divisions. The M3 half-track was used primarily for carrying infantry, but it also was deployed for many support roles where its larger capacity hull was needed. The M2 half-track car was used in armored infantry regiments to carry machine gun squads, and in armored reconnaissance units until specialized vehicles such as the M8 armored car, became available. It was also used by other types of units needing

storage capacity, for example in anti-tank gun companies. The seating capacity was ten in the M2 half-track car and thirteen in the M3 half-track.

In September 1940, the US Army Ordnance laid out plans to ensure that both vehicles use interchangeable parts and the M2 half-track car and the M3 half-track personnel carrier were approved for production on 17 October 1940. The first M2 half-track cars were accepted by the Army in May 1941, and the first M3 half-tracks in June 1941. Of the 53,813 half-tracks built, 73 percent (39,436) were half-track cars or carriers. The first armored infantry regiments were formed in July 1940, even though there were still few tanks or other armored vehicles available. A total of fourteen armored infantry regiments were raised by 1941, and half-tracks were gradually provided to units as they became available.

As the half-track became available, it was soon evident that it was an effective chassis for many other applications. One of the main shortages facing the new armored divisions was in the area of self-propelled artillery. Programs were underway to develop fully-track self-propelled artillery, most of it on the new M4 medium tank chassis. But in the interim, the armored division lacked mobile guns. As an expedient, the US Army decided to mount artillery on half-tracks. These were regarded as stop-gaps, and these vehicles were produced in relatively small numbers. The first of these was the T12 75mm gun motor carriage (GMC), later standardized as the M3 75mm GMC. This combined the M3 half-track with the World War I vintage 75mm gun M1897. This vehicle was intended as a tank destroyer until the M10 3-inch gun motor carriage became available. The T19 105mm howitzer motor carriage (HMC) consisted of the standard 105mm howitzer on an M3 half-track chassis. This was an expedient until the M7 105mm HMC became available. The T19 was mainly used in cannon companies of US Army infantry divisions, and in artillery battalions of armored divisions. It was used in the 1942-43 North Africa campaign, but was replaced by M7 105mm HMC in most armored units by the time of the Sicily invasion in 1943. A very similar vehicle was the T30 75mm howitzer motor carriage. This placed the small 75mm pack-howitzer on a M3 half-track chassis. It was

intended for direct fire support in the assault gun role, and was eventually replaced by the M8 howitzer motor carriage on the M5 light tank chassis. Armored infantry regiments received 9 T30 HMCs each: three in each battalion's headquarters. Infantry divisions in North Africa deployed a cannon company with six T30 75mm HMC and two T19 105mm HMC. Air defense was provided by the T28E1 combination gun motor carriage (CGMC), which put the 37mm combination gun mount on a M3 half-track.

Into Combat

The M3 half-track was first deployed in combat in December 1941 in the Philippines. As there were no armored infantry units in the Philippines, the half-tracks were used in other roles. The most extensive use was with the Provisional Field Artillery Brigade of the Provisional Tank Group. This self-propelled artillery unit received 50 of the 86 pilot production T12 75mm GMCs. They were called SPMs (self-propelled mounts), a name which stuck with the Marine Corps as well. They were not often used in their intended role as tank destroyers as Japanese tanks were seldom encountered in the fighting. More often, they were used to provide direct artillery fire support for infantry units. Besides the T12 GMCs, the Provisional Tank Group had 46 M2 and M3 half-tracks in headquarters and reconnaissance companies. The early half-tracks had early teething problems including a weak front suspension, track-throwing problems, and power-train problems. Curiously enough, this was the only US tank unit in World War II equipped with both half-tracks and their British equivalent, the Bren Carrier. The Bren Carriers had been diverted to Manila from their intended destination of Malaya after the outbreak of the Pacific War on 7 December 1941. In spite of problems with the new M2 and M3 half-tracks, these were preferred to the Bren Carriers which were regarded as too small, too fragile and too weakly protected.

The Provisional Tank Group was very critical of the thin armor and the lack of overhead armor protection in the half-track, a feature which would continue to be the source of complaint throughout the entire war. Radio reports from the Philippines helped the Ordnance Dept. to prepare improvements on new half-tracks,

but overhead armor and thicker armor were never provided. After trials, Ordnance found that the extra armor was much too heavy for the existing chassis. Short of a complete re-design, additional protection was impossible. The US Army wanted large quantities of inexpensive infantry vehicles, not small quantities of expensive vehicles, so the half-track design remained essentially the same throughout the war except for very modest improvements.

The first use of the M3 half-tracks in their intended role as infantry vehicles came during Operation Torch in November 1942 - the invasion of French North Africa. At the time, a US Army armored division had two armored regiments, each with 100 half-tracks, and an armored infantry regiment with 230 half-tracks. Including half-tracks in artillery and reconnaissance units, there were 733 half-tracks in each armored division. The 6th Armored Infantry Regiment of the 1st Armored Division was the first such unit raised, and the first unit to see extensive infantry combat in half-tracks. This unit suffered heavy losses during the battles near Sidi-bou-Zid and Kasserine Pass in January-February 1943. The half-tracks were extremely unpopular and were called "Purple Heart Boxes", a reference to the US Army's decoration for combat wounds. The infantry squad was vulnerable to overhead artillery air-bursts, overhead small arms fire, and heavy machine gun fire. When II Corps commander, Gen. Omar Bradley questioned a young rifleman on whether the half-track armor offered enough protection, he said "No sir, it does not. As a matter of fact, bullets generally only come in one side and rattle around a bit." Many infantry officers, uncomfortable with the heavy maintenance demands of tracked vehicles, were unhappy about the amount of support the half-tracks required on a daily basis. Some felt that they were wasteful as they carried fewer troops than a normal 2 1/2 ton truck.

This viewpoint was not shared by the senior leadership such as the II Corps commander, Gen. Omar Bradley, or the I Armored Corps commander, Gen. George S. Patton. They felt that the resistance to the half-tracks came mainly from peacetime infantry officers not familiar with the potential of half-tracks in mechanized combat, and not comfortable with the growing mechanization of the army. Furthermore, many of the troops

used the half-track as though they were as well armored as a tank which they most certainly were not. The senior army commanders insisted that the half-track be retained and that the infantrymen get used to using it properly. The North African campaign saw the first widespread use of specialized half-tracks, including the M3 75mm GMC and the T28E1 combination gun motor carriage.

Half-tracks were again used in 1943 during Operation Husky, the invasion of Sicily. On this occasion, they were employed most extensively by the 41st Armored Infantry of the 2nd Armored Division. The half-tracks provided the regiment with considerable mobility. This unit found that the half-tracks gave the armored infantry the capability to follow tanks across terrain that would have been impossible for trucks. The armor protection, even if not perfect, permitted the infantry to dismount much closer to their objectives than if they were using trucks. The armored infantrymen could also attack, unencumbered with packs, since these could be left in the half-track. Officers found that the armored infantry was often more effective in combat since they didn't exhaust themselves as quickly as "straight-leg" infantry. The feelings about the half-tracks was not unanimous, especially among older, more senior officers. The 2nd Armored Division commander was annoyed by the rag-tag appearance of "gypsy caravan" of the 41st Armored Infantry half-tracks and thought they should be replaced by a more tidy convoy of 2 1/2 ton trucks. Unlike trucks which provided only temporary transport for the regular infantry, the half-tracks became a moving home for the armored infantry and so became cluttered with personal gear, bedding, supplies and other paraphernalia. This bothered many officers, but most soon accepted the new vehicles in light of the advantages that the half-tracks conferred. By this stage of the war, the Army was fully committed to half-tracks, and there was never any serious thought given to abandoning them.

The North African fighting in 1943 prompted the US Army to reorganize its armored divisions. However, this did not come into effect until after the Sicily operation. The aim was to create a better balanced force with more infantry and artillery. The regimental organization was abandoned (except in the first three

armored divisions which retained the "heavy" configuration). In their place, the Army adopted a more flexible organization called "Combat Commands". These resembled German battle groups and were a combined arms force of tank, armored infantry, field artillery and other types of battalions tailored to particular missions. Each division was built around two such commands (Combat Command A and B) with a third (Combat Command R) as the reserve. Instead of its previous organization of two armored regiments and one armored infantry regiment, the new armored division's configuration switched to three tank battalions and three armored infantry battalions. This recognized the importance of the infantry in modern mechanized combat.

The new 1943 armored infantry battalions were reinforced. The 1942 armored infantry company had a towed 37mm anti-tank gun in each rifle platoon but the new companies added an anti-tank platoon with towed 57mm anti-tank guns. The infantry platoons were strengthened by raising the squad size from 11 to 12 men and a M1 2.35 inch rocket launcher (bazooka) was added to each infantry squad. So a 1943 company had 251 troops and 20 half-tracks while the 1941-42 company had 178 men and 17 half-tracks. A 1943-pattern armored infantry battalion consisted of five companies: a HQ company, three rifle companies and a service company. Each rifle platoon had five half-tracks, each half-track carrying a squad. There were three rifle squads in M3 half-tracks, a light machine gun squad in a M2 half-track car and a mortar squad with two 60mm mortars.

In the M3 half-track, the vehicle's machine gun armament was fitted to a pintle mount behind the driver's compartment, while on the M2 half-track car, it was on a skate rail. Neither approach was particularly effective, and in 1943, Ordnance modified the M32 truck ring-mount to fit over the right side seat in the driving compartment. Combined with an armored collar, the new M49 mounting was authorized in May 1943. Half-tracks with this feature were redesignated as M2A1 and M3A1 half-tracks. Production of new M2A1 and M3A1 half-tracks began in October 1943 and 5,065 M2 half-tracks were rebuilt as M2A1 half-tracks. This mount was usually fitted with a .30 cal machine gun except for platoon leaders'

vehicle which were authorized a .50 cal heavy machine gun. Once in combat, squads usually augmented this armament and many squads ended up with .50 cal heavy machine guns whether authorized or not.

By 1943, it was becoming evident that the M3 was the more effective of the two half-track designs and that there was no need for two separate types. A universal type, the M3A2 half-track was standardized in October 1943, but so many half-tracks had already been manufactured that no series production of the M3A2 was approved. There was a program of steady improvements in the M2 and M3 half-track design. In May 1942 after reports from the Philippines, heavier bogie springs were authorized for the suspension. In August 1942, normal automotive style track chains were authorized instead of grouzers for improved traction in mud and snow, and side mine racks were approved for new production vehicles. In September 1942, a spring loaded idler was added to the suspension to prevent track throwing. In November 1942, the use of dismountable headlamps was approved, although this feature had already entered production as a means to avoid damage to the headlights on gun motor carriages. In January 1943, a tire plate was authorized to prevent tire scuffing. In February 1943, the Ordnance Committee approved the retrofit of side mine racks on fielded vehicles. In September 1943, added luggage racks and winterization equipment were approved.

New Half-track Variants

One of the most successful half-track variants in the North African campaign had been the T28E1 combination gun motor carriage. It was one of the few effective Army anti-aircraft weapons, and was credited with 78 kills in a three-month period, and 39 German aircraft during the Kasserine fighting alone. The T28E1 had been considered an expedient with only 80 manufactured. But their success led the Army to revive production in February 1943, with the vehicle being reclassified as the M15 MGMC. A simple shield was mounted around the gun, and 680 M15 CGMCs were built in February-April 1943. They were followed by the improved M15A1 Combination Gun Motor Carriage from October 1943 to February 1944 and this became the most common version of the family. Only 100 M15s were exported via Lend-Lease, all going to the USSR.

Besides the gun-armed M15 family, the Army worked on machine-gun air defense vehicles on the half-track chassis almost from the outset of half-track development. After many false starts, the M3 half-track was modified with a Maxson M33 turret armed with two .50 cal. heavy machine guns. This type was accepted for production on 27 July 1942 as the M13 MGMC (on the M3 chassis) and M14 MGMC (on the M5 chassis). All of the M14 MGMC were provided to Britain, but they did not fit into British Army air defense doctrine and so most were rebuilt as half-track carriers. A small number of M13 MGMCs were deployed with US Army units during the Italian campaign. The main drawback to the M13 was its paltry armament of only two .50 cal machine guns when the M15 CGMC had not only two .50 cal machine guns but a 37mm automatic cannon as well. As a result, the M33 mount was improved as the M45 mount which had four .50 cal machine guns. The M3 half-track with the M45 mount entered production in May 1943 as the M16 MGMC and the M5 with M45 mount entered production in December 1943 as the M17 MGMC. All 1,000 M17 MGMCs were supplied to the USSR. A total of 568 of the older M13 MGMCs were remanufactured as M16s even before being issued to the troops. Besides factory built M16s, a number of Army units created improvised M16s by mounting Maxson turrets from towed M45 trailer mounts onto normal M2 and M3 half-tracks.

The M15 and M16 were deployed in an anti-aircraft artillery (AAA) weapons company of armored divisions with eight M16 MGMCs and eight M15 MGMCs each. There were also separate AAA weapons battalions at corps and army-level by which had 32 M16 MGMCs and 32 M15 MGMCs for the defense of high-value installations such as bridges, headquarters and rail junctions. Due to the weakness of the Luftwaffe in 1944-45, the M16s were frequently used for ground fire support where they were called "meat-choppers" due to their bloody effectiveness. Air defense half-tracks were the most significant of the gun motor carriage half-tracks, totaling 9,107 or 17 percent of total half-track production.

Lend-Lease Half-tracks

By early 1942, the three plants manufacturing the M2 and M3 half-tracks

were running near capacity. But more half-tracks were needed to meet US Lend-Lease commitments to other armies, especially to Britain. Plans were laid to extend production to the International Harvester Company (IHC). The use of this plant necessitated many small changes to the design, including the substitution of 5/16 inch homogenous plate armor instead of face-hardened 1/4 inch armor plate, the use of welded rather than riveted construction and the use of the IHC RED-450-B engine. The International Harvester vehicles were designated M5 half-track personnel carrier for the M3 equivalent, and M9 half-track car for the M2 equivalent. The new IHC half-tracks could be externally distinguished by two main detail changes. The front fenders were simple flat stampings instead of the automotive style on the M2/M3 and the rear corners of the hull were round instead of being butt-jointed. The M9 did not use the shorter body of the M2, nor was it fitted with external doors for access to the forward stowage bins due to the decision to move to a more "universal configuration". The only main difference between the M5 and M9 half-tracks was the internal configuration; externally, they were very similar. The first production M5 half-track was completed in December 1942. The M5 and M9 underwent almost the same modification and upgrade program as the M2/M3 half-tracks. In May 1943, production began to shift to the M5A1 and M9A1 half-tracks, which were fitted with a M49 pulpit machine gun mounting.

The M5 and M9 half-tracks were officially earmarked for Lend-Lease after October 1943. Some IHC half-tracks were used in the United States for training, but so far as known, none were shipped overseas for combat use by US troops. Britain was the main recipient of the M5 and M9, receiving 5,238 of the 11,017 manufactured. The only other major recipients of these vehicles were the Soviet Union (420) and Canada (20). Britain did not employ the half-tracks extensively in the mechanized infantry role since by this time, the British Army had already standardized on the Universal Carrier for this role. Instead, it was used in the motor battalions of some infantry regiments in place of 15 cwt lorries. The nominal organization of a motor battalion was three companies each with 2 platoons on 15 cwt lorries and a platoon on Universal Carriers, but half-tracks were sometimes substituted

for lorries. The British and other Commonwealth formations also used the IHC half-tracks as a prime mover for 17 pdr. and 6 pdr anti-tank guns, as an armored utility vehicle with Royal Engineer units, and as a command vehicle.

Only one version of the half-track series was built specifically for export, the T48 57mm gun motor carriage. This was based on an urgent British Army requirement for a tank destroyer armed with the 6 pdr. anti-tank gun. This consisted of the US-manufactured 6 pdr., designated the M1 57mm anti-tank gun, mounted on an M3 half-track chassis. By the time production took place, Britain no longer felt they were necessary and only 30 were provided to the British Army. A total of 650 vehicles were supplied to the Soviet Union under Lend-Lease and the remaining 281 were converted back to M3A1 half-track carriers for US Army use. The Red Army designated them as SU-57 and formed them into special independent tank destroyer brigades with three battalions and 60 SU-57s each. The 16th Separate Tank Destroyer Brigade was the first to see combat during the Dnepr river offensive in Ukraine in August 1943.

Britain provided half-tracks to the Commonwealth armies as well as armies under British direction such as the Free Polish and Free Czechoslovak armies from their Lend-Lease allotments. Some other armies such as the Free French forces were organized and equipped from US sources. The US Army provided 1,431 half-tracks to the Free French forces including 176 M2/M2A1, 245 M3/M3A1, 1,196 M5/M5A1 and 603 M9/M9A1 half-tracks as well as their variants. The Soviet Union received 1,158 half-tracks consisting of 342 M2s, 2 M3s, 401 M5s and 413 M9s. The Soviets used the half-tracks primarily as headquarters vehicles in tank units. Small numbers of half-tracks were provided to the 1st Brazilian Infantry Division of the Brazilian Expeditionary Force that fought in Italy during the war including 8 M2/M2A1, 3 M3/M3A1, and 20 M5/M5A1 half-tracks. China also received a small number of half-tracks which served with their Tank Group in Burma.

Half-tracks in North-west Europe 1944-45

The US Army half-track is most closely associated with the fighting in

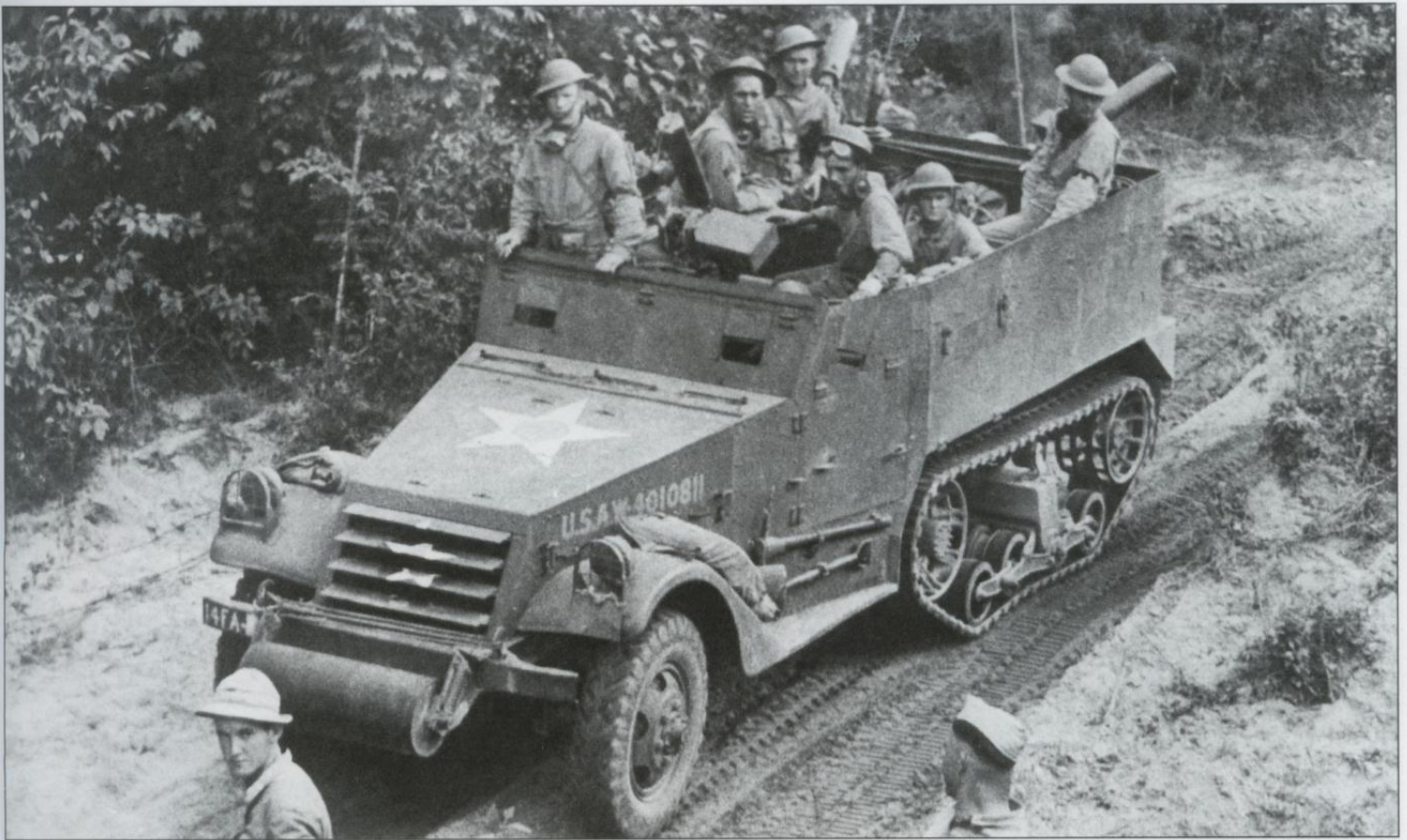
Europe in 1944-45. Since they were used primarily with the armored divisions, they saw extensive use in all the offensive operations of the North-west Europe campaign. At the time, armored infantry soldiers were nicknamed "armored doughs", or "blitz doughs" based on the nickname "doughboys" for US infantry in World War I. Life in the armored infantry battalions was different than in "straight-leg" infantry units. Due to their half-tracks, armored infantry could carry far more equipment with them into combat and this tended to include a heavier assortment of weapons than was the case for regular infantry. Armored infantry were notorious for pilfering gear, since they could carry it with them in the half-tracks. Half-tracks often became covered with additional tarps, bags, stoves, brooms, wash basins, pails and other amenities. A common, though officially discouraged practice, was to line the floor with sand-bags in hopes of minimizing casualties to mines. Even though the half-track gave the armored infantry relief from the foot-slogging misery of the normal infantry, it was not an easy life. Armored infantry suffered some of the highest casualties of any single combat arm during the war in Europe. They suffered high casualty and exhaustion rates like normal infantry. But these were exacerbated since the mobility of armored infantry battalions led commanders to use them in attacks more often than the average foot infantry battalion. A secret report by the Army medical report concluded that "In armored divisions, with too few armored infantry, the infantry contributes from 80 to 90% of the combat exhaustion casualties, rates becoming extremely high after the third to fifth days of action. In hard, continued action, armored infantry companies may be down to 40-50 men (out of a strength of 245), with three company commanders casualties in the process. One unit had 150-180% replacements in 200 days; another had 100% turnover in 60-70 days."

Infantry tactics varied depending on terrain and the opposition. Against a defended position, armored infantry companies attacked with two rifle platoons forward, the anti-tank platoon providing long range cover, and the third rifle platoon would be kept in reserve. In an attack against weak enemy positions such as in the final weeks of the war, all three rifle platoons would deploy forward. Against determined opposition, half-tracks carried

the infantry squads as far forward as possible until enemy fire or terrain forced them to dismount. Mounted attacks of enemy positions were discouraged since a single grenade or *panzerfaust* into the rear compartment could kill the entire squad. Mounted attacks regularly occurred, especially against lightly defended objectives in the final months of the war as German resistance began to collapse. Armored infantry battalions usually fought as a whole, with an armored infantry battalion supporting a tank battalion. Sometimes, individual rifle companies would be cross-attached to tank battalions. For example, an armored infantry company might be attached to a tank battalion during an attack on a small village, with the tanks providing the initial shock and firepower and the infantry responsible for clearing out the houses.

Although far from perfect, the US Army concluded that its half-tracks were superior to comparable vehicles of the period including the German Sd.Kfz. 251 half-track and the British Universal Carrier. The Sd.Kfz. 251 had marginally better armor protection due to its use of sloped sides, but this reduced its internal carrying capacity by 20 percent. The US units captured many Sd.Kfz. 251 half-tracks during the war, but found them to be inferior to the M3 half-track due to their poorer mobility. The Sd.Kfz. 251 was not fitted with a powered front axle, had about 25% less horsepower, required a higher level of maintenance, and had problems with its interleaved wheels becoming impacted with mud which could lead to shedding tracks. However, most armored infantry commanders wanted a fully tracked vehicle capable of traversing the same terrain as tanks, and with full armor protection. As a result, half-tracks were replaced after the war with fully tracked armored personnel carriers such as the M59 and the later M113. Some specialized half-tracks, such as the M15A1 CGMC and M16 MGMC continued in US Army service into the 1950s, and saw combat in Korea. But the troop carriers were retired after the war, or provided to NATO allies under the Military Assistance Program. Probably the best known post-war user of half-tracks was the Israeli Defense Force which used them in combat through the 1982 Lebanon war. These are outside the scope of this book, but coverage will be found in the two-volume Concord books on armor of the Mid East wars.

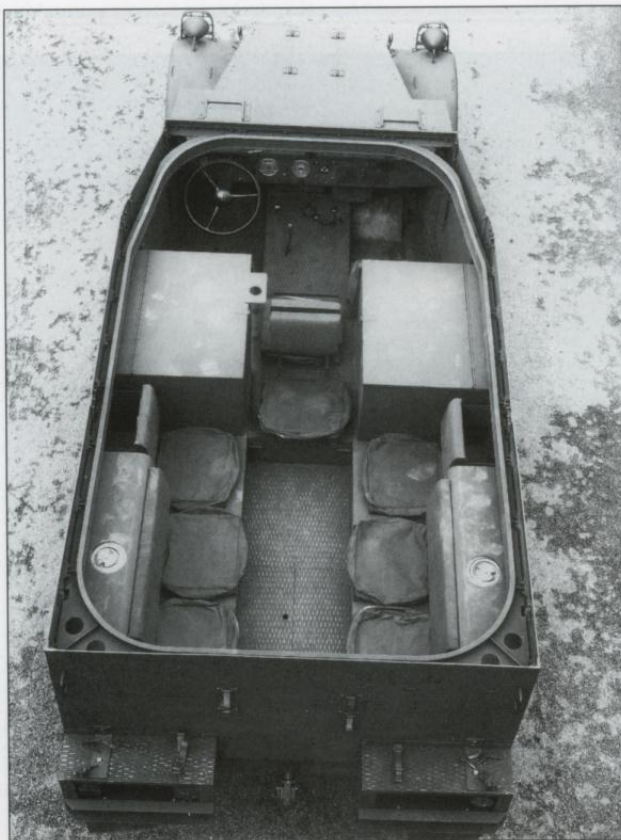
Preparing for War 1941-42



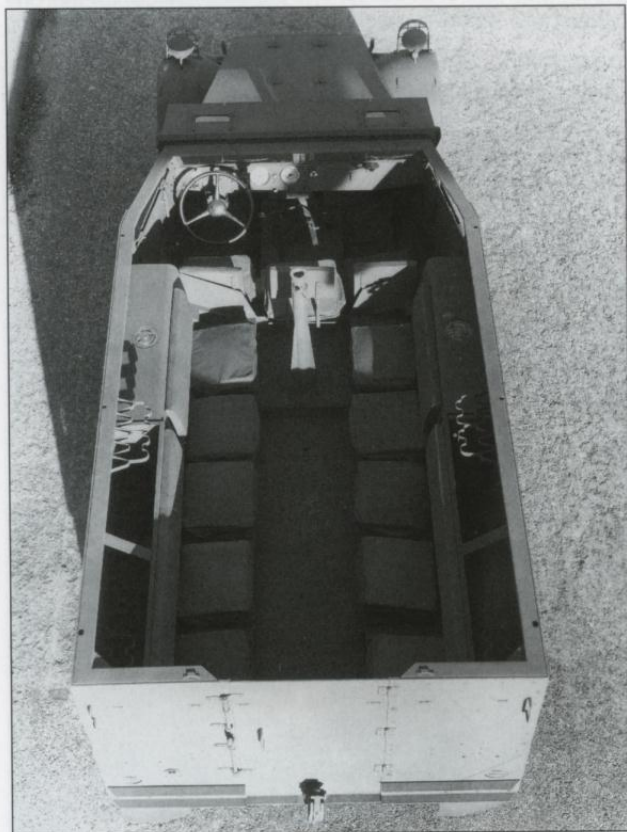
The M2 half-track car entered US Army service in May 1941. Although originally developed as a cavalry scout vehicle, by the time it entered production the cavalry's armored units had been absorbed into the new Armored Force. Instead it was used as a jack-of-all trades. This particular example is from the 14th Field Artillery during war-games near Leesville, Louisiana in September 1941. It is armed with no fewer than three water-cooled .30 cal Browning machine guns.



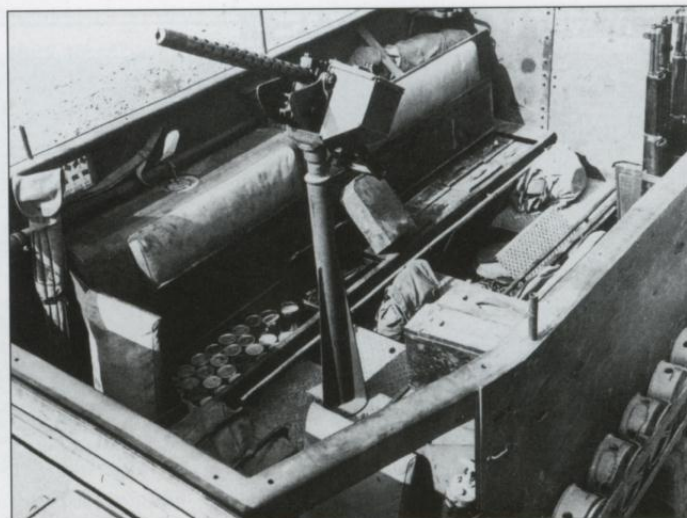
The M2 half-track car was commonly used for towing infantry support weapons such as this M3 37mm anti-tank gun with the 6th Infantry Anti-Tank Company, in Jefferson, North Carolina, in November 1941. The cloth band on the hull side is a colored marker used to distinguish opposing forces during war-games.



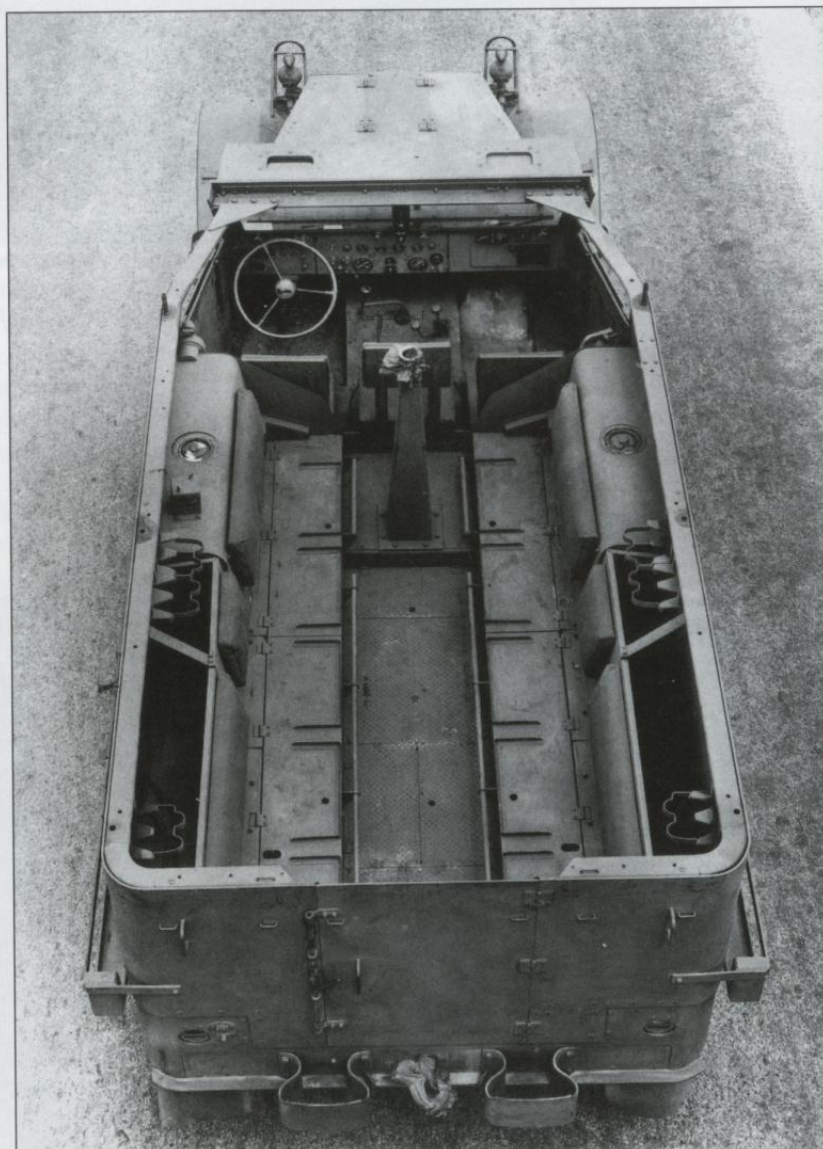
The M2 half-track car was configured to support towed weapons and for other specialized applications. It was fitted with two large stowage bins behind the driver's compartment which had exterior doors for easy access. The fuel tanks were located in the rear corners of the hull behind the troop seats.



The M3 half-track was designed primarily as a troop transport. It had a longer body than the M2 half-track car for additional seating, and lacked the large stowage bins. The fuel tanks were further forward, behind the driver. The cavity behind the seats included clips for the infantry squad's rifles, and space for other stowage.



This view of an M3 half-track in use gives some idea of the stowage in combat. In the center is a pintle mounted .30 cal Browning machine gun. The seats on the right side have been folded up, showing the stowage tray below for canned rations, tools and .30 cal ammunition boxes. To the extreme right outside of the hull can be seen the mine rack for carrying anti-personnel mines.

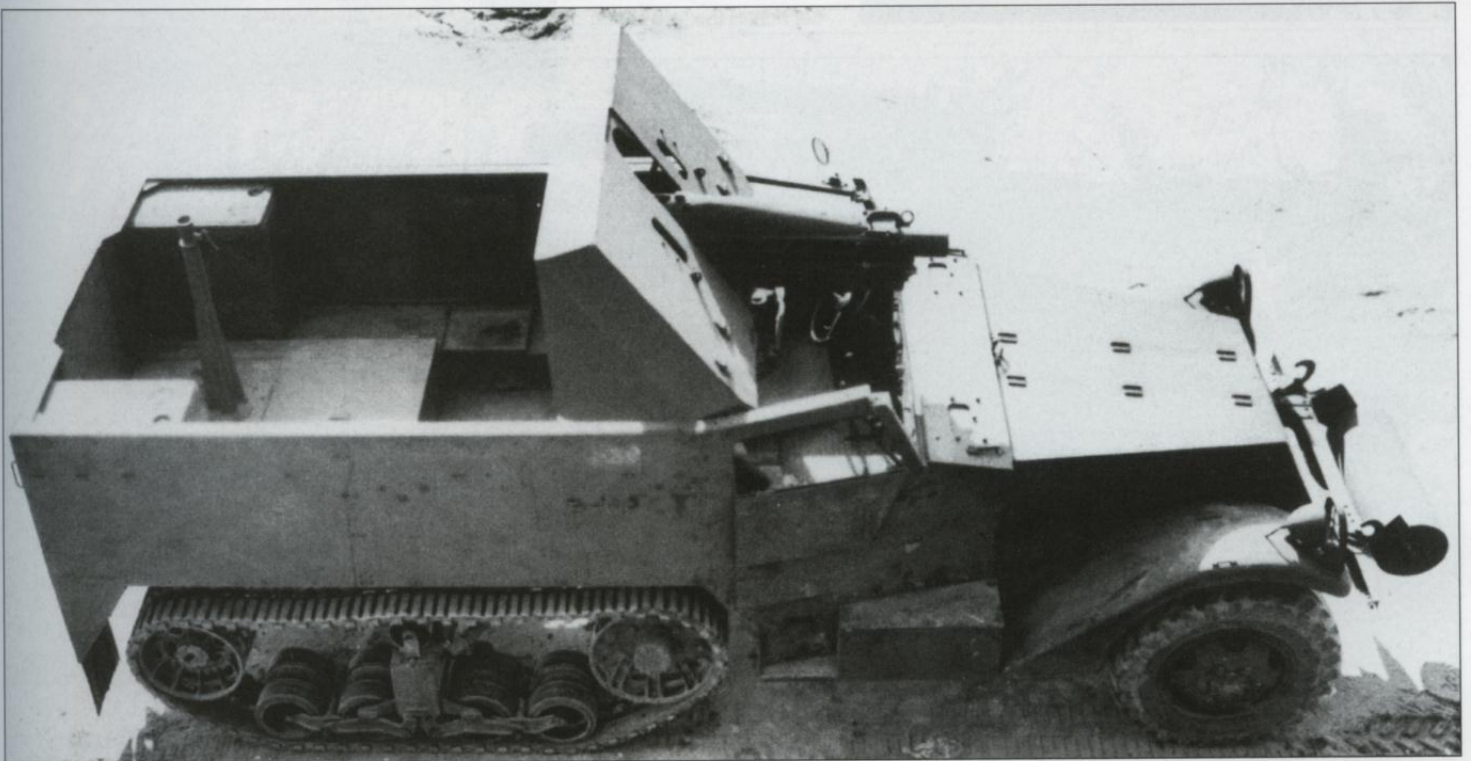
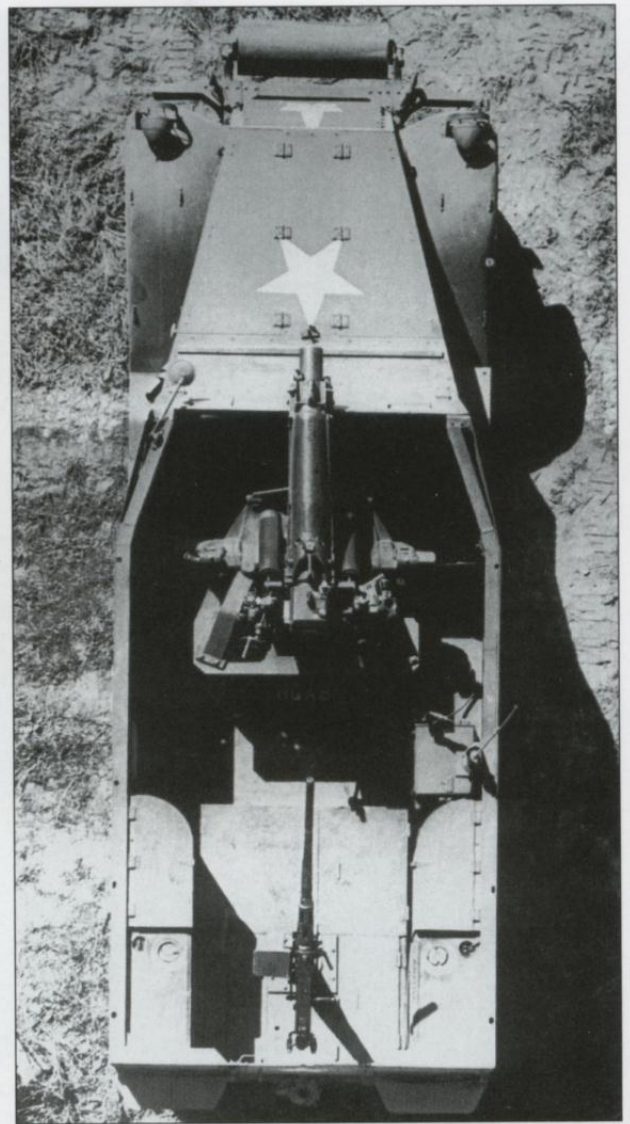


In December 1942, the International Harvester Company (IHC) began producing half-tracks. To speed up production, changes were made in the design to make it easier for IHC to manufacture. This included simpler flat front fenders, a rounded rear hull and an IHC engine. The IHC counterpart of the M3 half-track personnel carrier was the M5 seen here. The IHC counterpart of the M2 half-track car was the M9. (IHC)

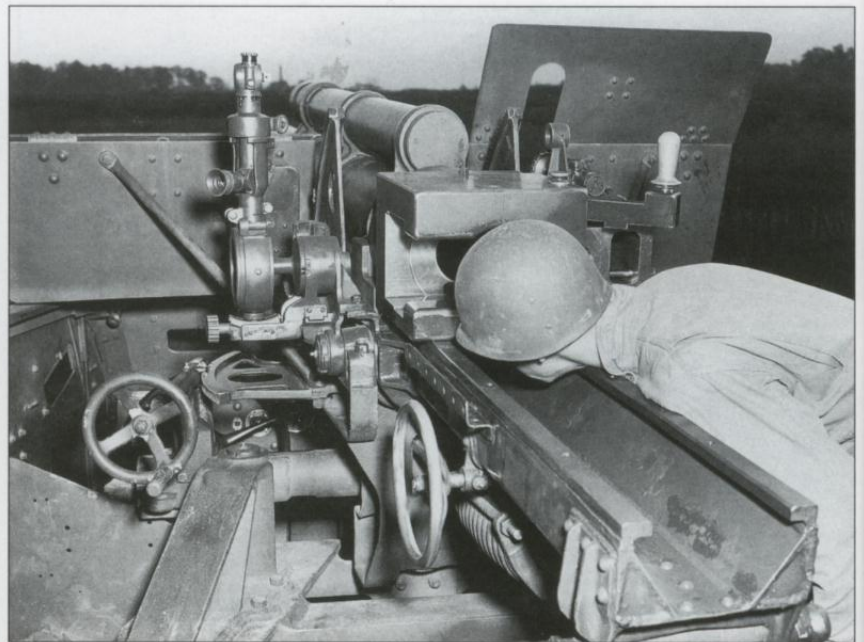
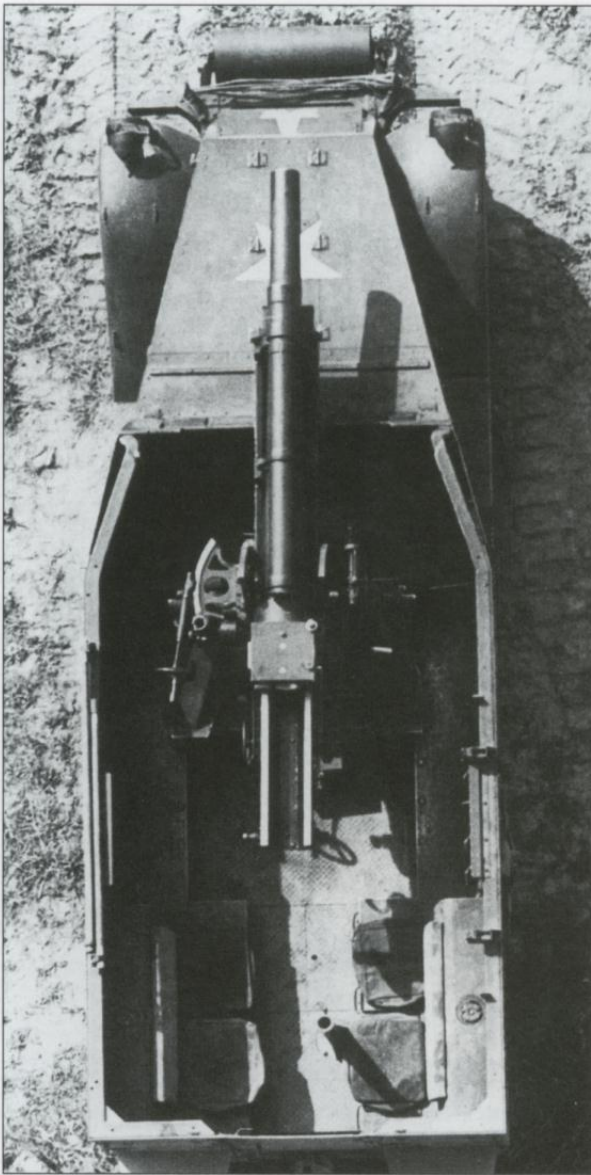


The M3 half-track proved to be a dependable and an inexpensive method to mechanize artillery weapons. The 75mm T30 howitzer motor carriage (HMC) entered Army service in February 1941 as an expedient assault gun until the definitive M8 75mm HMC became available. This is one of the early production vehicles on display at an open house at Ft. McPherson, Georgia on 9 April 1942. The early production vehicles lacked an armored shield for the gun crew.

This overhead view of the 75mm T30 HMC shows the layout compared to the standard M3 half-track. The fuel tanks have been shifted into the rear corners, a pair of stowage bins have been added in front, and ammunition bins have been added on the rear floor. The 75mm pack howitzer was mounted on a low elevated table sufficient to permit the gun to clear the driver's armored plate.



This is the pilot for an improved version of the 75mm T30 HMC with an armored shield added for the gun crew. By the time that the T30 entered combat with US troops in North Africa in November 1942, all of the deployed vehicles were fitted with the shield. (Patton Museum)

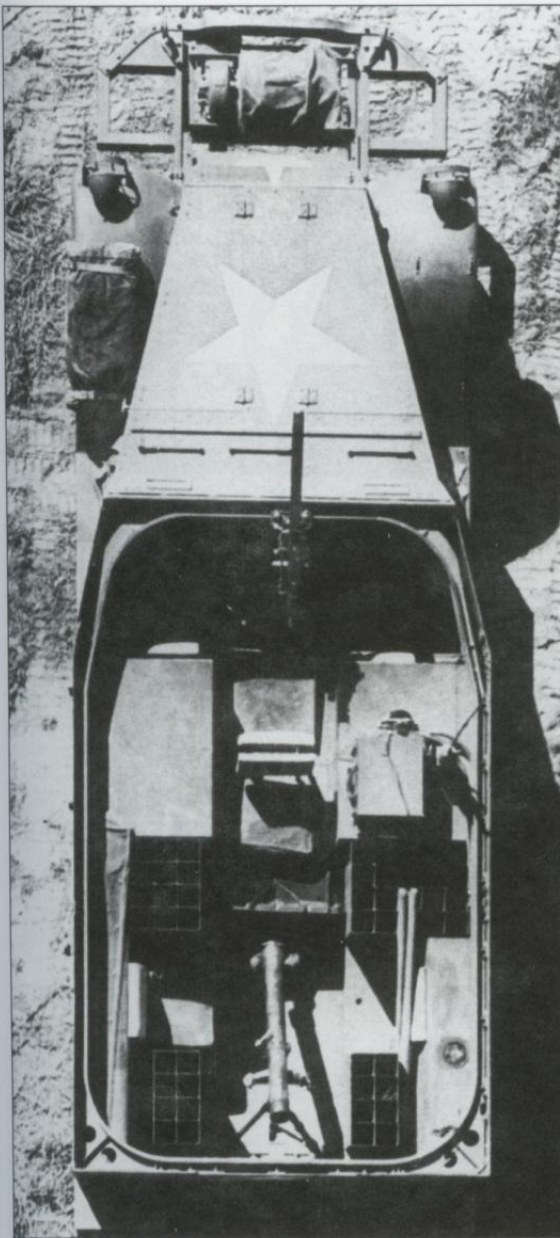


A detail close-up of the howitzer mounting on the 105mm T19 HMC. This vehicle was named "Average" and was from Battery A, 93rd Armored Field Artillery Battalion, 6th Armored Division during its training at Camp Chaffee, Arkansas on 2 November 1942. The only armored division to take the T19 HMC into combat was the 1st Armored Division. All other armored divisions had them replaced with the M7 HMC before entering combat.

The 105mm T19 howitzer motor carriage was an expedient design until the definitive 105mm M7 HMC on the M4 medium tank chassis became available. The configuration of this vehicle was similar to the T30 HMC, with the howitzer mounted on a small table and the rear compartment reconfigured to allow access to the cannon. This vehicle entered service in the late spring of 1942.



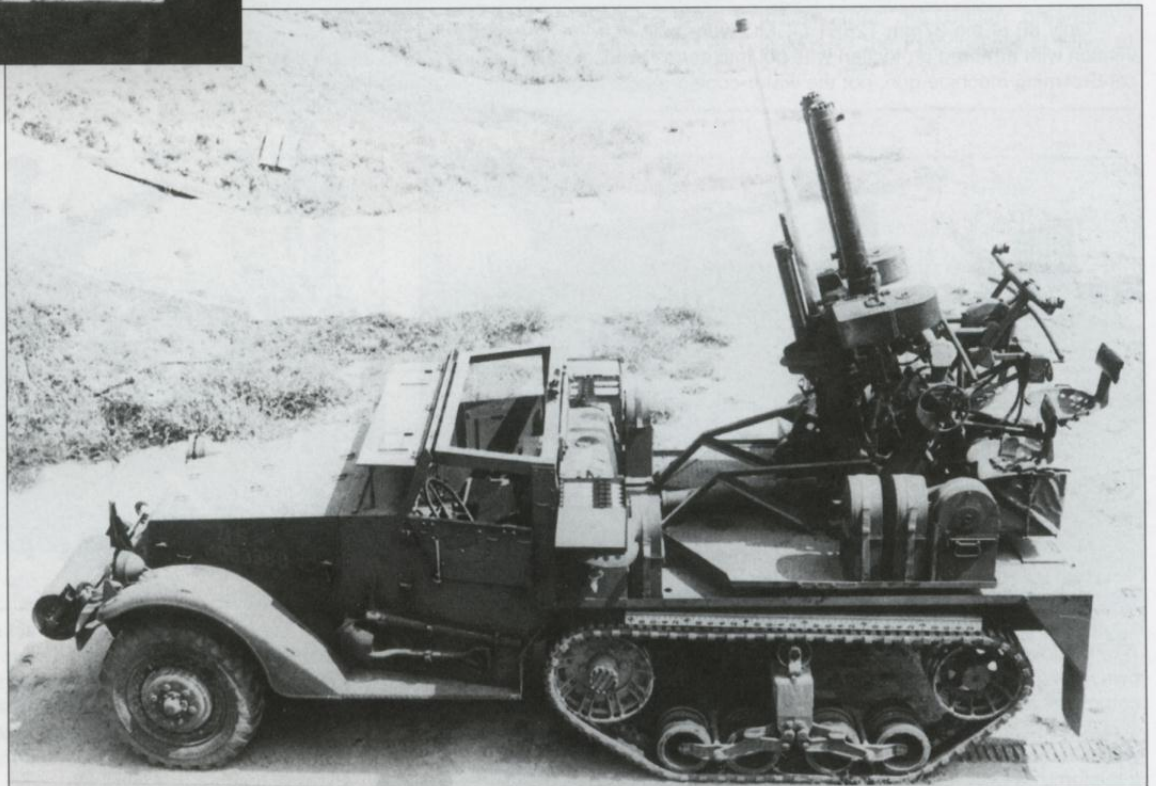
"Battering Ram", a 105mm T19 HMC during training at the Desert Training Center in the Mojave desert in southern California on 26 January 1943. The initial production batches of the T19 HMC lacked a gun shield for the crew.

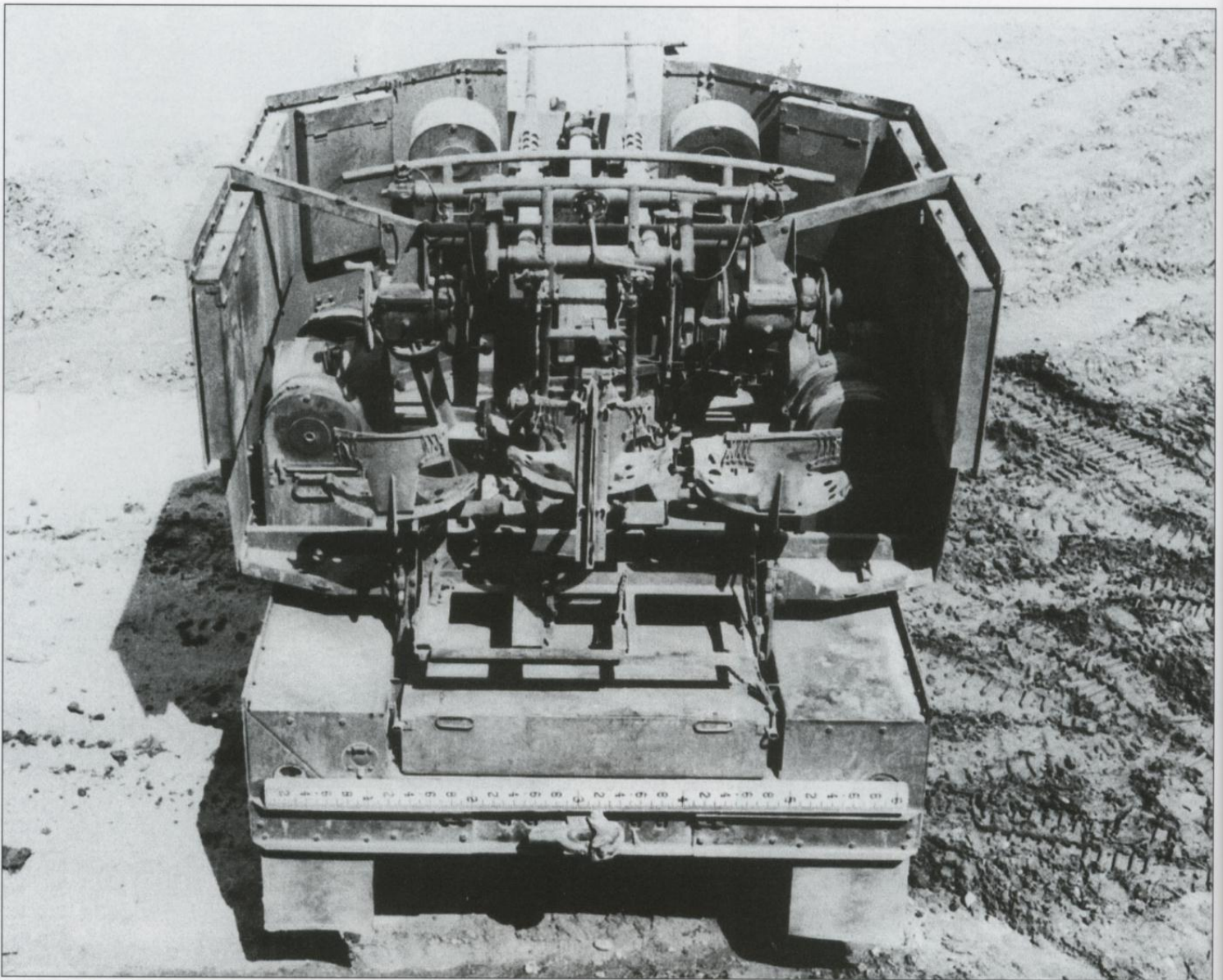


A M4 mortar motor carriage during stateside training. As is evident in this view, the mortar bombs came packed in fiber-board tubes. The mortar loader stood on the left of the mortar, the gunner to the right and the commander behind.

One of the earliest intended support roles for the half-track was to carry the mortars of armored infantry companies. The M4 81mm mortar motor carriage (MMC) was based on the standard M2 half-track car, but had a mounting plate for the mortar at the rear of the chassis along with suitable ammunition stowage racks.

The half-track chassis was soon adapted to air defense roles. The first of these was an attempt to mechanize the 37mm combination mount as the 37mm T28 combination gun motor carriage (CGMC) as seen here with a pilot vehicle. This was reconfigured prior to series production as the T28E1 CGMC.





Only 80 of the 37mm T28E1 CGMC were built as a hasty expedient, but they proved very successful in combat in Tunisia. As a result, an improved version with armored protection was put into series production in February 1943 as the M15 combination gun motor carriage. These used the air-cooled .50 cal Browning machine gun, not the water-cooled machine guns found on the earlier type.



Besides authorized variants, US troops were prone to develop their own derivatives of the half-tracks. This is a M3 half-track rebuilt as a command vehicle on the instructions of Lt. Gen. George S. Patton during his stint at the Desert Training Center. Patton loved to tinker with customized vehicles, and while in command of the 1st Armored Corps in Tunisia, used a customized M3A1 Scout Car.



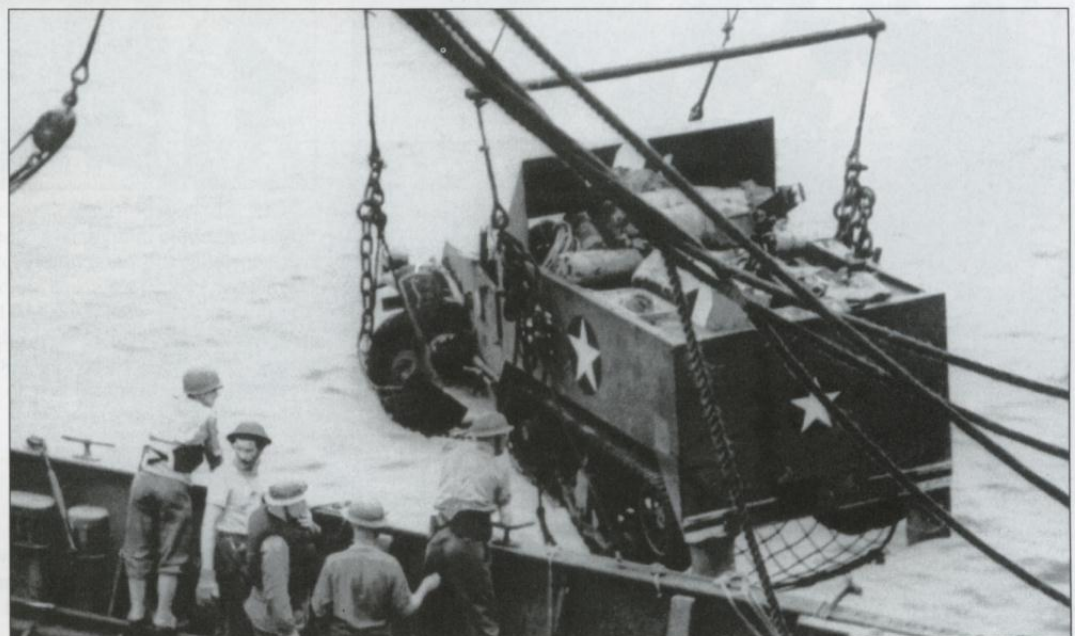
The first combat use of half-tracks came in December 1941 in the Philippines. The Provisional Tank Group was equipped with 46 M2 and M3 half-tracks, as well as 50 T12 75mm gun motor carriages. The T12 was intended as a tank destroyer and mounted the American version of the legendary French "soixante-quinze" canon of World War I fame. When standardized, it was designated as the 75mm M3 gun motor carriage (GMC). (Michael Green)

Combat in North Africa 1942-43

Half-tracks were among the first US Army vehicles into combat in North Africa since they were easier to transport from ship to shore than the heavier tanks. This M2 half-track car nicknamed "One Dozen Roses" has landed at Y Beach, Les Andalouses, Algeria on 9 November 1942. It is fitted with a deep wading kit to allow the vehicle to be driven through the surf, evident from the exhaust extension on the hull side. It belongs to an anti-tank platoon supporting Brig. Gen. Theodore Roosevelt's 26th Combat Team of "Big Red One", the 1st Infantry Division. Shortly after the landings, a patrol of three French armored cars were ambushed and destroyed by 37mm anti-tank guns of Company G near Bou Tlelis.



A M3 half-track of Combat Command B, 2nd Armored Division named "Ababa" moves inland towards Mazagan, Morocco on 10 November 1942. This vehicle is a new production vehicle with the side mine racks, a feature only authorized in August 1942. By this stage, many of the French units were switching sides without a fight, and French colonial troops can be seen in the background. The widespread use of the US flag on armored vehicles during Operation Torch was done deliberately in hopes of discouraging the French from fighting. It was presumed that they would be less willing to fight US forces than British forces after the British preemptive sinking of the French fleet at Mers el Kebir a year before.



A T30 75mm HMC is hoisted overboard in anticipation of the Task Force Green amphibious landings at Oran on 8 November 1942. This vehicle carries the official air recognition markings for Operation Torch, a white star on a blue circle. Normally this was carried only on upper surfaces, but here it is carried on the sides as well.



A T30 75mm HMC shortly after having landed near Algiers on 8 November 1942. These landings were conducted mainly by infantry units, but a small number of T30 75mm HMC and T19 105mm HMC were landed to provide fire support.



Lt. Col. Edson "Little Caesar" Raff, the impetuous commander of the 509th Parachute Infantry Regiment monitors the progress of operations from his jeep. After the parachute drop on the airfield at Youks les Bains on 15 November 1942, Raff's unit, reinforced with half-tracks, a company of M3 75mm gun motor carriages, and French troops of the 3rd Zouaves, began a "reconnaissance in force" towards German positions near Gafsa in Tunisia. Shortly after this photo was taken, several of the officers were killed or wounded when this position was strafed by a German aircraft.

The T30 has been placed within the LCVP, and a 37mm M3 anti-tank gun follows. This equipment belongs to an armored task force from the 13th Armored Regiment, 1st Armored Division, which spearheaded the landings near Oran.

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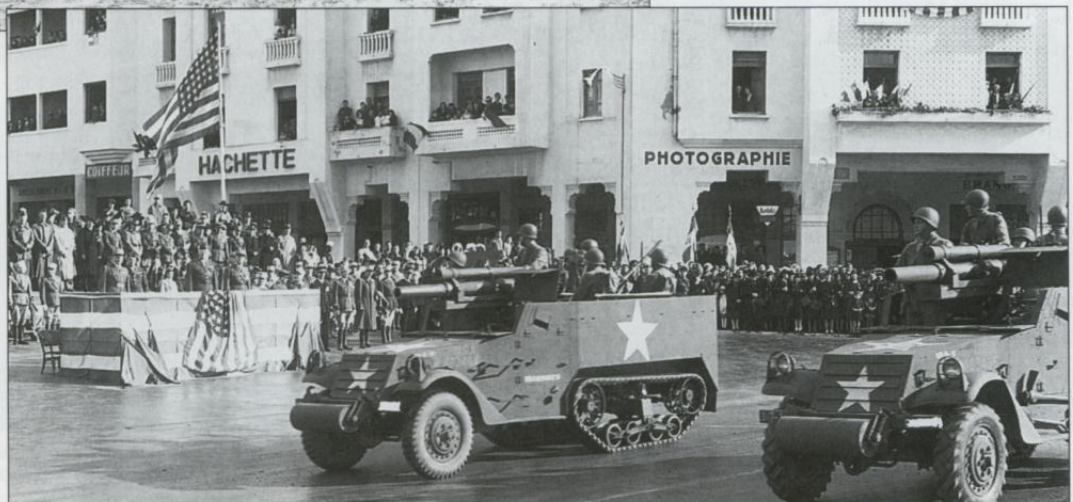
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Troops of the Company D, 2/13th Armored Regiment, 1st Armored Division pose for a photo in front of their M2 half-track car near Souk el Khemis, Tunisia on 26 November 1943. At this stage, the American Eastern Task Force was moving eastward from landing areas in French North Africa to make contact with German and Italian units in Tunisia.



Another view of a M2 half-track car of the 2/13th Armored Regiment, 1st Armored Division near Souk el Khemis, Tunisia on 26 November 1942. The tactical markings on the box lashed to the back of the vehicle include the insignia for Co. D, 2nd Armored Battalion, 13th Armored Regiment in the upper right corner, and the three bar unit identification marking consisting of two dark brown bars (outlined in white) and a center bar in red.

A T19 105mm howitzer motor carriage named "Ironsides" of a cannon company of the 7th Regimental Combat Team, 3rd Infantry Division, passes in review before Maj. Gen. George S. Patton, commander of the US Army's Western Task Force, and Gen. Nogues of the French Army in Rabat, Morocco on 19 December 1942. The vehicles have been cleaned up for the parade and wear white stars. The previous policy of yellow stars for reduced visibility was amended in December 1942 when it was found that they tended to lose their identification value when covered by desert sand.





An overhead view of T19 105mm HMCs of the 7th Regimental Combat Team in Rabat during the parade for Allied commanders. These vehicles retain the prominent US flag markings on the hull side adopted for Operation Torch a month earlier.

During February 1943, the US Army's 1st Armored Division endured a series of sharp encounters with German forces in Tunisia. This is a T19 105mm HMC that was destroyed by a direct hit from a bomb from a Ju-87 Stuka dive-bomber on 2 February 1943 during an attack towards Maknassy by the 81st Reconnaissance Battalion. The North African campaign was one of the few during the Second World War where the US Army Air Force did not enjoy air superiority, and air attacks on army columns were frequent.



A M4A1 medium tank of Co. G, 1st Armored Regt., 1st Armored Div. recovers a M3 half-track during the fighting with the 21. Panzer-Division of the Afrika Korps on 14 February 1943 near Sidi-bou-Zid, Tunisia. The US units took heavy losses during the fighting, which was one of their first encounters with the German Tiger I heavy tank.



A M3 half-track of the 1st Armored Regt., 1st Armored Div. near Sidi-bou-Zid on 14 February 1943, towing a M3 37mm anti-tank gun. By this stage of the fighting, US forces had begun to use an improvised mud camouflage on their olive drab vehicles to help them better blend in to the desert background.

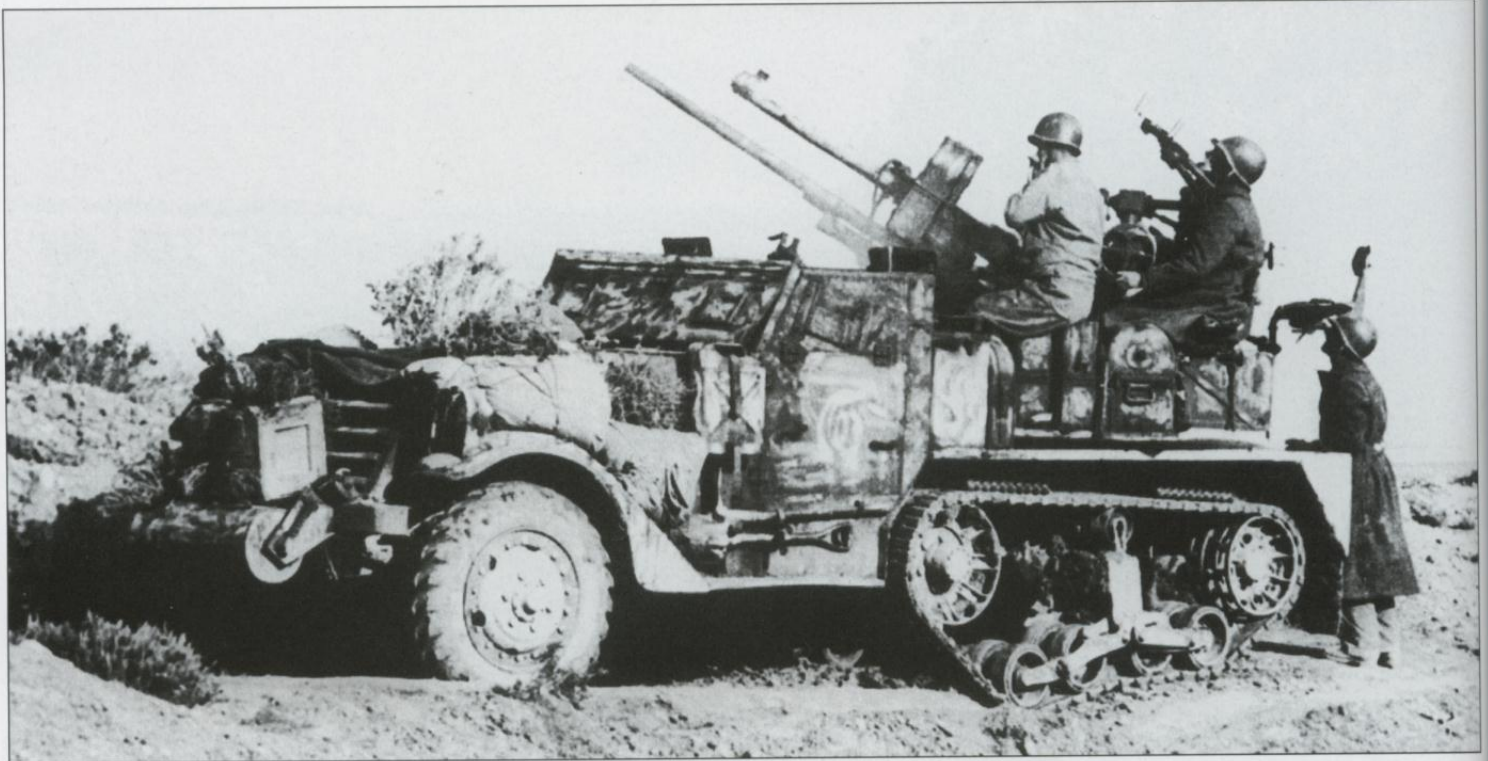
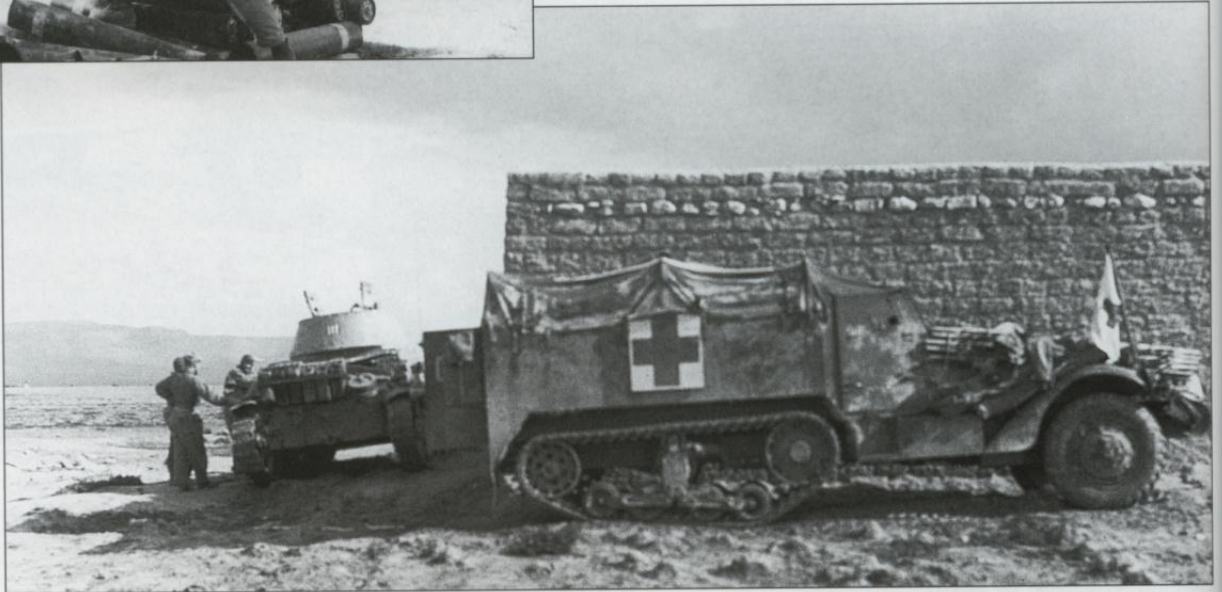


A camouflaged M3 half-track is used to move ammunition forward to 1st Armored Division forces near Sbeitla on 17 February 1943 during the 5. Panzer Armee' Operation Fruhlingswind counter-offensive against the 1st Armored Division near Kasserine Pass. They are probably supplying the 27th Armored Field Artillery Battalion's T19 105mm HMCs which at the time was supporting 2/13th Armored Regt. against a tank attack by Gruppe Stenkhoff.

A close-up of a M3 half-track used as an ammunition carrier during fighting near Sbeitla on 17 February 1943. The devices on the hull side are hoops for a canvas cover that could be placed over the open troop compartment.



Medics from a M3 half-track of the 1st Armored Division look over an abandoned Italian M-13/40 tank, probably from the Cernauro Division, in the Kasserine Pass area on 24 February 1943. By this time, Rommel had shifted his attention back towards the advancing British Eighth Army, after having given the US Army a stinging defeat in its first major battle of the European war.



A T28E1 combination gun motor carriage takes up defensive positions on 24 February 1943. Although the German offensive had halted for the time being, Axis air attacks remained a constant threat. The system proved to be one of the few effective army anti-aircraft weapons, and during the Kasserine Pass battle, they were credited with 39 German aircraft, mostly Ju-87 Stuka dive-bombers. The T28E1 CGMCs were credited with downing 78 Axis aircraft in the three months of fighting in 1943.

A T28E1 combination gun motor carriage is dug in beside a fortress in Tunisia in February 1943. This weapon consisted of a 37mm automatic cannon with a pair of water-cooled .50 cal heavy machine guns above it. The machine guns were used to target the aircraft with tracer fire, and then it would be engaged by the heavier 37mm gun. The initial tracer fire sometimes misled German pilots into thinking that they were being engaged only by short-range machine guns, only to be hit moments later by the longer-ranged 37mm cannon.



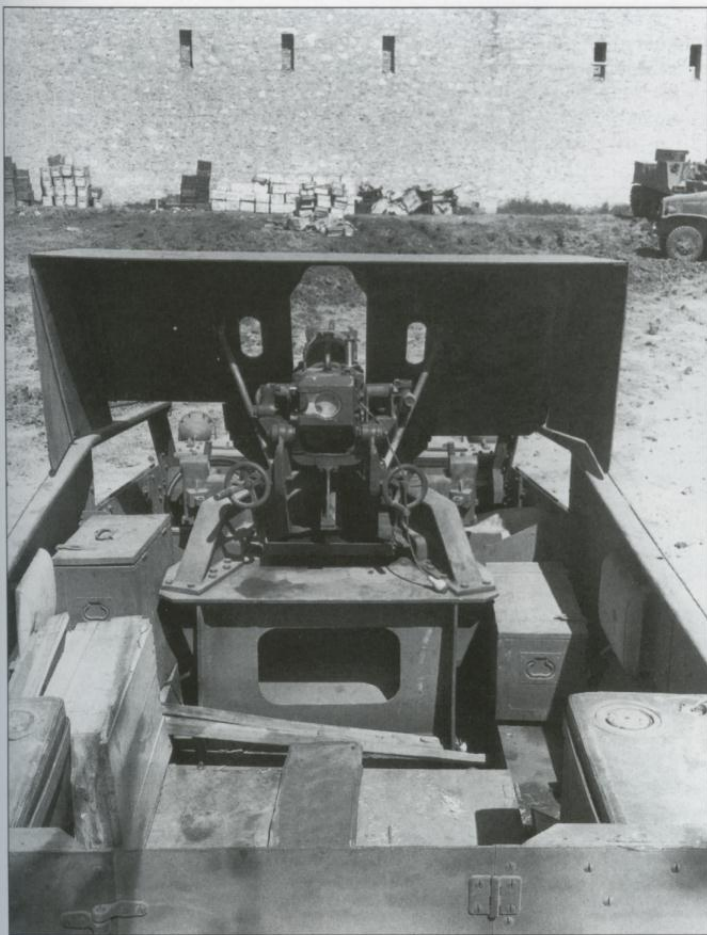
Capt. Paulick and 1Lt. Gioia of the 601st Tank Destroyer Battalion examine a map in front of their M2 half-track car during the battle for El Guettar on 23 March 1943. During the fighting, this battalion lost 21 of its 36 M3 75mm Gun Motor Carriages, like the one seen in the background, but inflicted severe losses on German tanks assaulting the 1st Infantry Division.



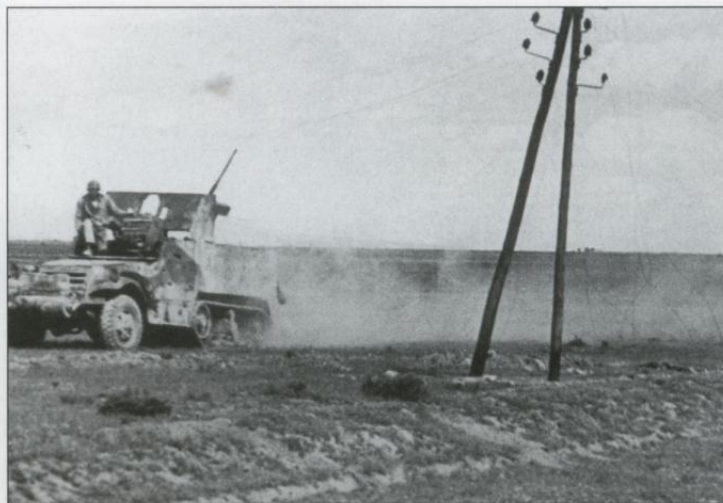
A M3 75mm gun motor carriage uses the camouflage provided by a tree during fighting in Tunisia in the spring of 1943. The improvised mud camouflage used in Tunisia is very evident in this view. The threat of air attack was constant in Tunisia, and pintle mounted heavy machine guns were a common feature.



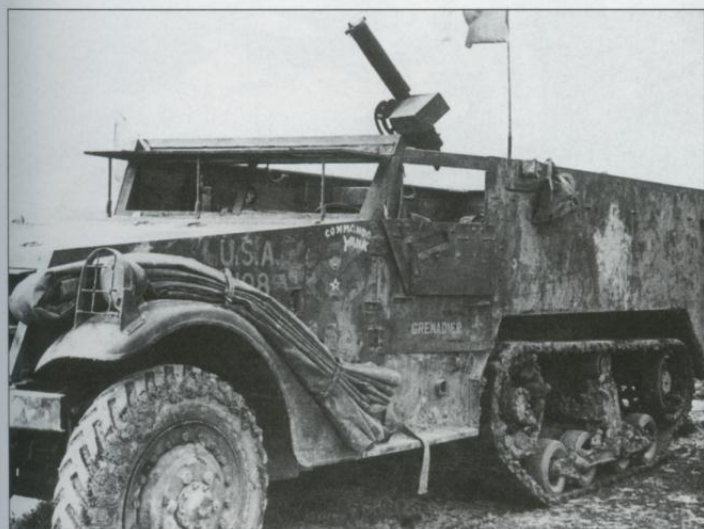
A view of the front of the same tank destroyer. This vehicle is fitted with the initial pattern headlights. These were replaced with a type of detachable headlight, since the fixed headlights were often destroyed or damaged from the muzzle blast of the gun firing.



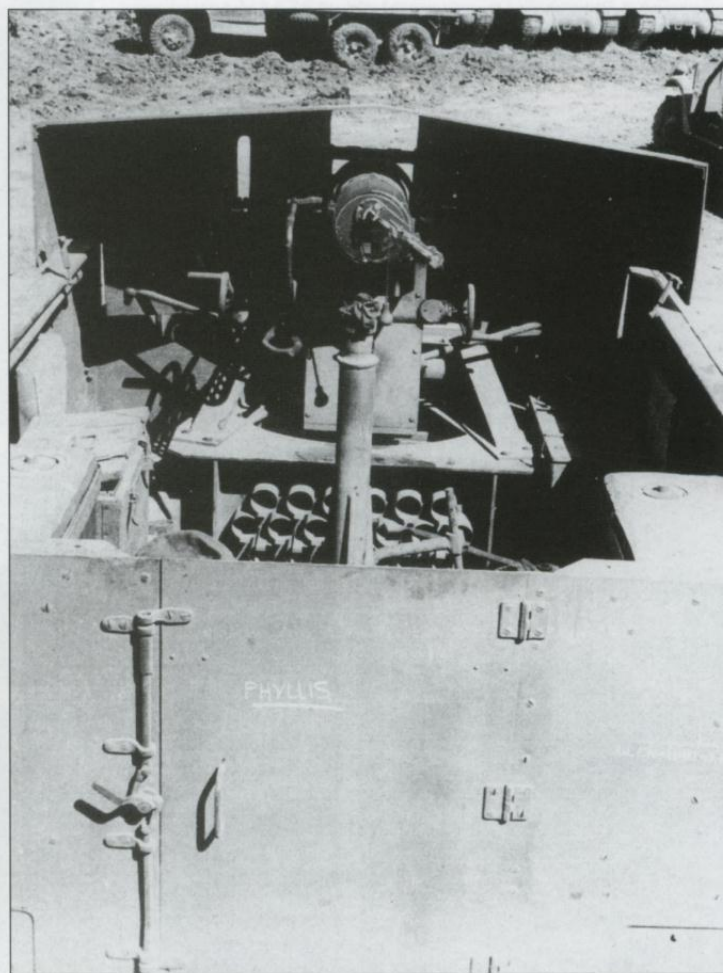
A close-up view of the interior of the T30 75mm HMC taken in Oran in April 1943. As is evident in this view, the M1A1 75mm howitzer was mounted on a simple box attachment in the M3 half-track fighting compartment. This vehicle proved to be poorly armored and too vulnerable to enemy fire, but was used with considerable success in spite of its drawbacks.



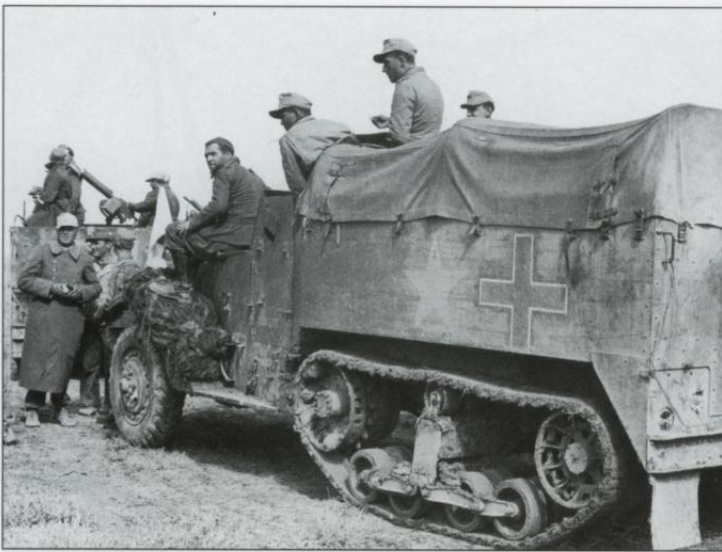
A T30 75mm HMC races forward during the fighting near El Guettar on 23 March 1943. This was one of the first major US Army successes after the disastrous Kasserine-Faid Pass fighting in February.



The Germans captured a significant amount of American equipment during the Kasserine-Faid Pass fighting in February 1943, including 95 half-tracks of various types. This is a M3 half-track of Co. G, 6th Armored Infantry, 1st Armored Division. It carried the official name "Grenadier" while on the side is a cartoon with the name "Commando Yank" This is an early production M3 with the early headlights, and lacks the spare gasoline rack and mine rack. (National Archives)



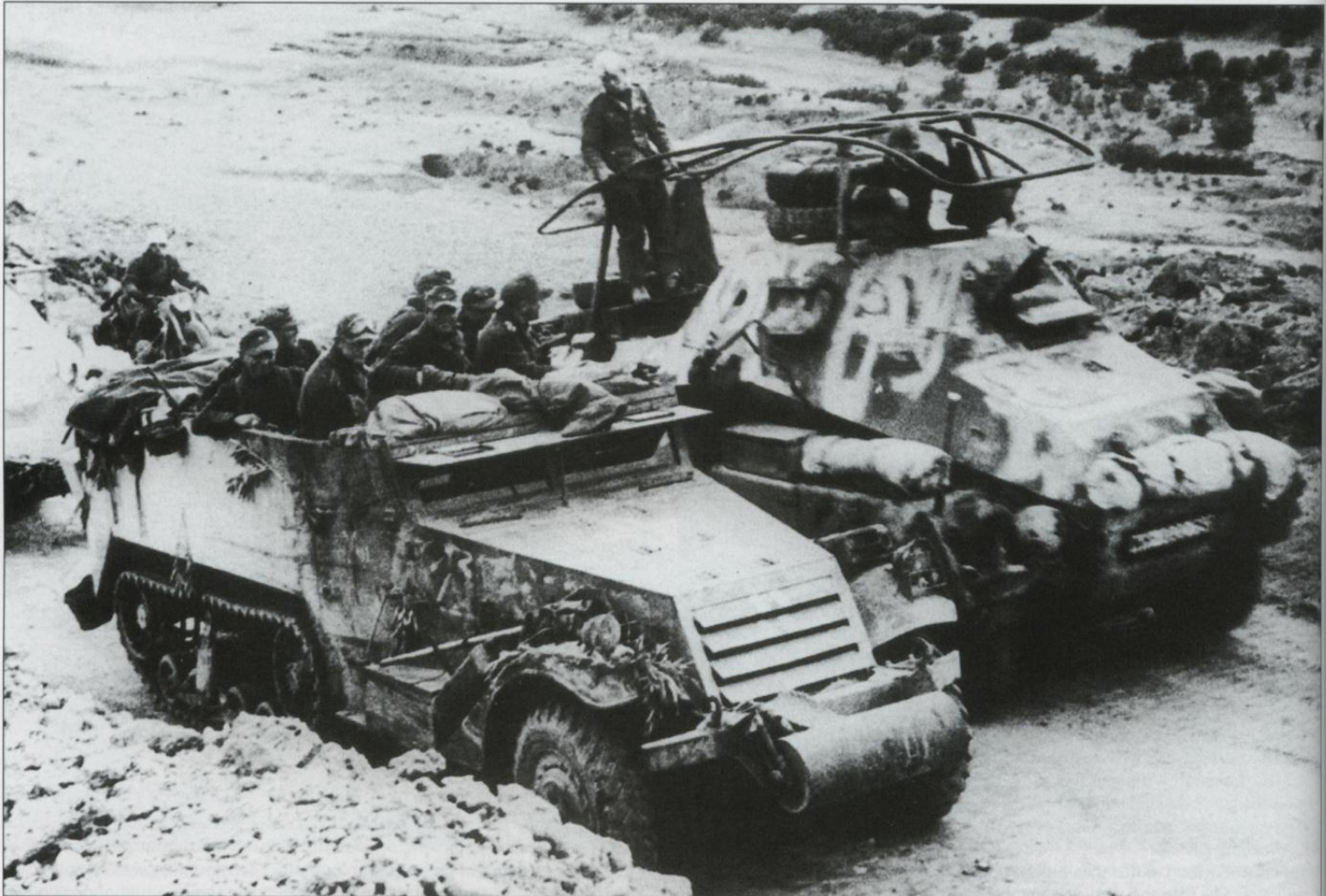
A detailed view looking into the fighting compartment of a M3 75mm gun motor carriage in North Africa in 1943. The mounting was fairly similar between many of the gun and howitzer motor carriages, although the M3 75mm GMC used the space below the gun for ammunition stowage.



A M3 half-track in German service. While Rommel's forces showed little interest in American tanks or other weapons, motor transport was always in short supply and captured equipment was always welcomed. The faded yellow American star can be seen on the hull side, along with an improvised German cross. (National Archives)

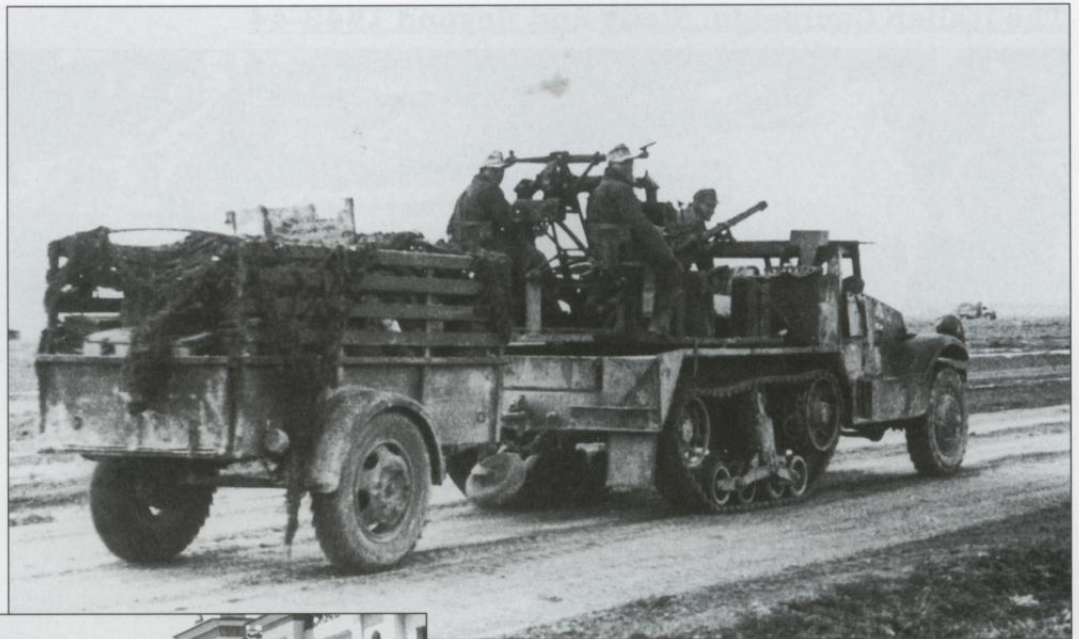


A German motorized column in Tunisia in 1943 based around captured US Army equipment including a pair of M3 half-tracks, a tow M3 37mm gun, a jeep and other motor transport. (National Archives)



A German mechanized column moves forward with a captured M3 half-track in the lead. Behind it is a Sd.Kfz. 263 radio vehicle. (National Archives)

Amongst the booty from the Kasserine Pass fighting was at least one T28E1 combination gun motor carriage seen here towing a one ton cargo trailer. (National Archives)



Following the Allied victory in Tunisia, the US Army held a Fourth of July celebration in Rabat, Morocco with the usual parade. These M3 half-tracks have been painted in anticipation of the forthcoming invasion of Sicily, and are finished with a pattern of earth yellow over the usual olive drab. The half-tracks are towing M1 57mm anti-tank guns, a US copy of the British 6 pdr., and not used in combat in North Africa by the US Army.

After bitter fighting through the late spring of 1943, the German defense of Tunisia was finally overwhelmed by the combined onslaught of British and American forces. Here, a M2 half-track car of the 9th Infantry Division's 15th Engineers rest in a square in Bizerte on 9 May 1943, two days after the city was captured. The regiment was assigned the task of clearing German mines and booby traps during the operation. This particular vehicle has a front winch fitted, a standard option on both the M2 and M3 half-tracks.



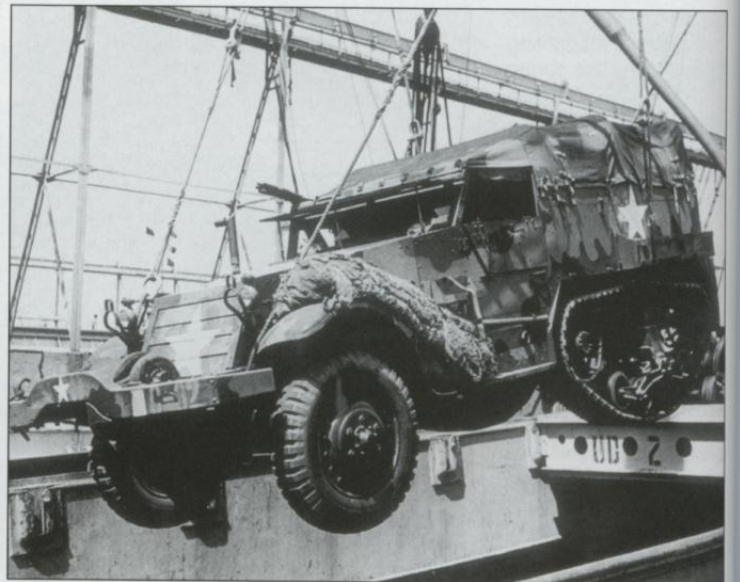
The Italian Campaign: Sicily and Beyond 1943-44



A T28E1 combination gun motor carriage of the 3rd Infantry Division is loaded into an LCI alongside some DUKWs in preparation for Operation Husky: the invasion of Sicily. The vehicle carries the unit bar codes of 5214, and so the three colored bars evident below the headlight are blue/yellow/blue.



An M15 combination gun motor carriage is prepared for shipment to the Mediterranean theater in 1943 at an Atlantic coast port. The M15 was an upgrade of the T28E1, most easily distinguished by the use of an armored basket around the gun mount. This vehicle is painted in a disruptive scheme of black over olive drab.



A M2 half-track car is loaded into the hold of a ship prior to transfer to the Mediterranean theater. This vehicle has the new mine stowage racks on the rear hull side along with the new pattern quick disconnect headlights.



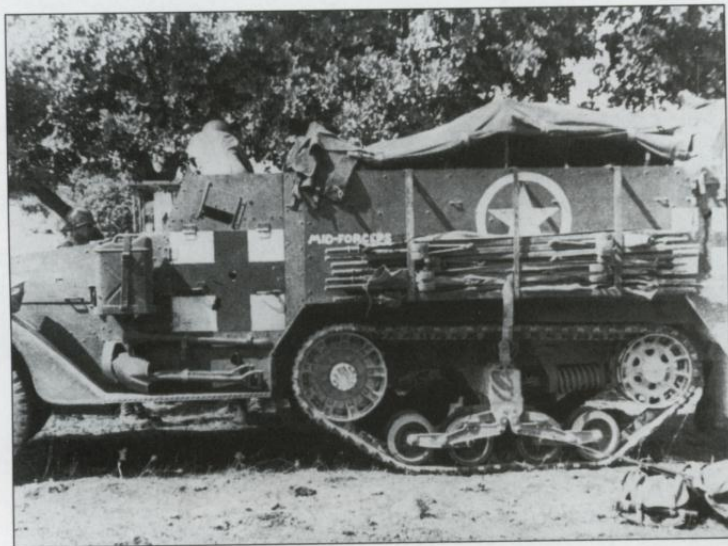
A T19 105mm howitzer motor carriage comes ashore from a LCT at Licata, Sicily on 10 July 1943 during Operation Husky. The large white circle around the star insignia was added at this time to minimize the risk that the star would be mistaken for a German cross at long ranges.



A platoon of T30 75mm howitzer motor carriages provides fire support for the infantry during the landings at Licata, Sicily on 10 July 1943. There was very little armor landed in the initial waves of the invasion, and self-propelled artillery on half-tracks was one of the main sources of fire support.



A close-up of the T30 howitzer motor carriages at Licata. The three color bars on the vehicle side are unit identification markings. The unit ID code, 2651-R can be seen below the bars. From the last two digits of the unit code, the bars colors were light gray top and bottom and blue in the center. The vehicle is finished in the usual ANA 305 earth yellow over olive drab, the official pattern ordered for Husky.



An M3 half-track on Sicily on 11 July 1943 is being used in the ambulance role. Half-tracks were widely used for specialized support roles by units other than the armored infantry, including medical and engineer units.



A mechanized column in M3 half-tracks passes through Palma di Montechiaro on 14 July 1943. This was the first major town to the east of the Licata beachhead, and the center of operations for the US Army breakout along the coast to the west of Licata on 13-14 July 1943.

On 19 July 1943, the US 7th Army began operations to clear western Sicily and seize Palermo. This is a M3 half-track named "Billy Brown" of 41st Armored Infantry Regiment, 2nd Armored Division during movement through the village of Santa Stefano. It has the original pattern headlights but has been fitted with the side mine racks.



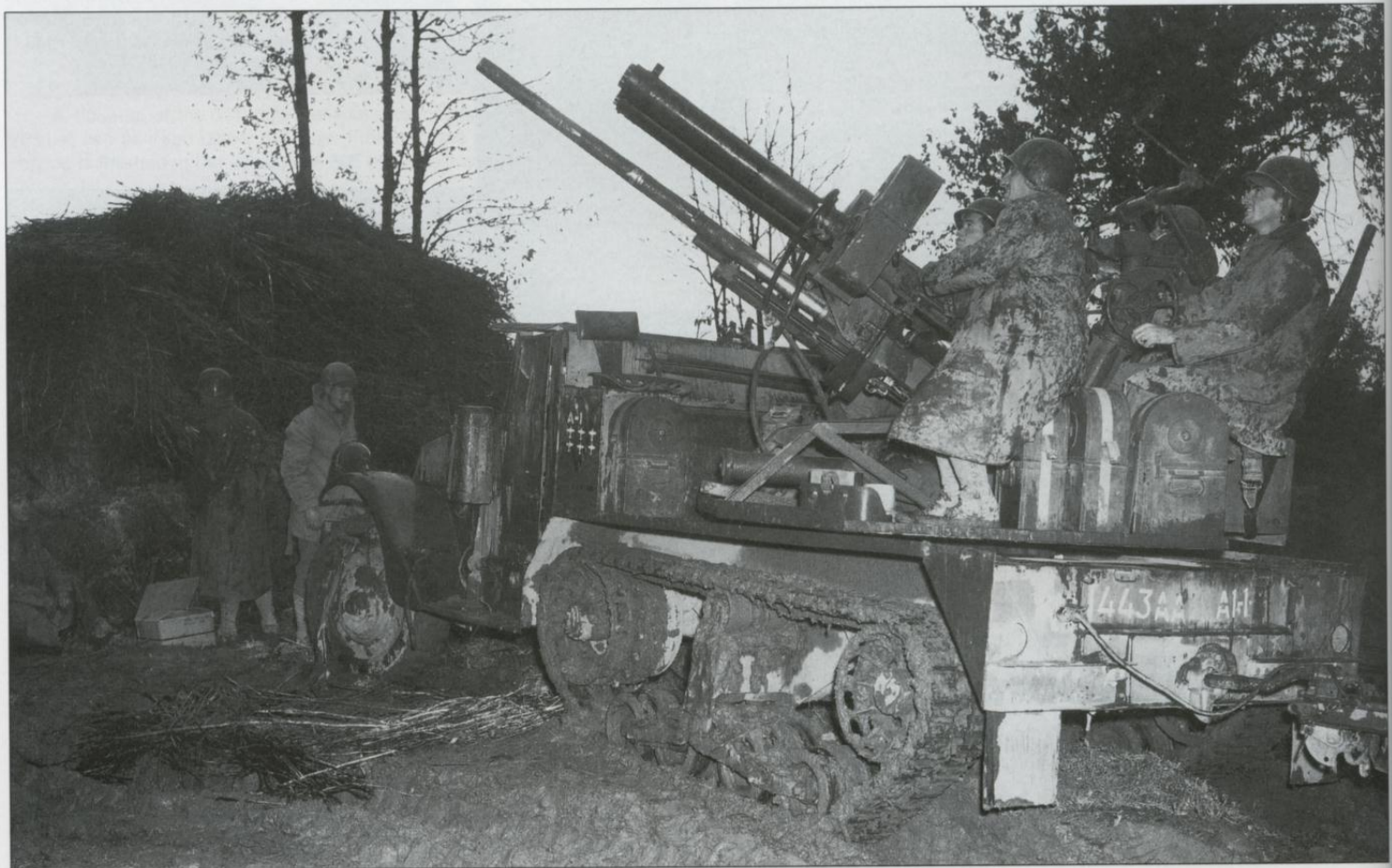
A T30 75mm howitzer motor carriage named "Cunningham" of Company C, 82nd Reconnaissance Battalion, 2nd Armored Division moves through Rebera, Sicily on 25 July 1943. This unit had spearheaded the division's drive on Palermo, and entered the city on 23 July 1943.



A M3 half-track named "Cochran" of Company C, 82nd Reconnaissance Battalion, 2nd Armored Division moves through Rebera, Sicily on 25 July 1943. The unit was used as a security patrol around Palermo securing the city in the days following its capture.



A M3 half-track towing an M3 37mm anti-tank gun passes through the ruins of a Sicilian village. This particular vehicle was attached to a headquarters unit of Bradley's 2nd Corps, and the troops in the vehicle are wearing the 2nd Corps patch.



The T-28E1 combination gun motor carriage remained in combat through much of the early Italian campaign with anti-aircraft units of the 5th Army. This is a vehicle of Battery A, 443rd Anti-Aircraft Battalion in the Venafro sector, 19 November 1943. This particular vehicle has been credited with shooting down six German aircraft as can be seen from the kill markings on the side.



A M15 combination gun motor carriage of the 434th Coast Artillery (Armored Anti-aircraft) provides air defense coverage at the Volturno river crossings near Capua on 20 November 1943. In late October 1943, the US Army VI Corps advanced over the Volturno, and units like this one protected the river crossing areas from German air attack. This campaign saw the first extensive combat use of the M15 CGMC.



An M2 half-track car on patrol for snipers in the Venafrò sector during the winter fighting in December 1943. The crew has added a large stowage bin on the rear of the vehicle for personal gear.



Italy was an infantryman's war, and the mountainous terrain before Rome did not make it suitable for large mechanized formations. Only one armored division, the 1st, was used in this theater in 1943-45. As a result, most of the half-tracks which saw action in Italy were in other types of units, notably anti-aircraft battalions like this M15 CGMC of the 105th AAA Battalion near San Pietro on 3 January 1944. The town had been the scene of vicious fighting the previous month as the Fifth Army battled its way towards Cassino.

Another M15 CGMC of Battery D, 105th AAA Battalion in the San Pietro area on 8 January 1944. This vehicle is towing a one-ton trailer which was usually used for crew equipment and additional ammunition.



A M15 of Battery D, 105th AAA battalion near San Pietro on 8 January 1944. A camouflage net is fitted to the rear turret, and the vehicle also has pattern painted camouflage, probably black over olive drab.

The US Army anti-aircraft battalions were composite formations, being equipped with 32 M13 MGMCs and 32 M15 MGMCs. This is an M13 multiple gun motor carriage of Battery D, 105th AAA Battalion near San Pietro on 8 January 1944. The M13, armed with two .50 cal heavy machine guns, was only used in combat by the US Army in Italy. By the time of the fighting in France later in 1944, the improved M16 MGMC with four .50 cal machine guns was available for use.





On 22 January 1944, the Fifth Army attempted to avoid the bloody slog along the Italian mountains by staging an amphibious assault closer to Rome at Anzio. The beachhead area came under continual air attack and mobile anti-aircraft units like this one, a M13 multiple gun motor carriage of Battery C, 441st AAA Battalion, were widely used.



Already by 10 April 1944 when this photo was taken, the newer M16 multiple gun motor carriage was available and was first deployed in combat in the Anzio beachhead. This vehicle had four .50 cal heavy machine guns instead of two, but was otherwise similar to the M13 MGMC.



The British Army received the M3 75mm gun motor carriage, but never used it in its intended role as a tank destroyer. Instead, it was used as a fire support vehicle in reconnaissance units. British armored car units in Italy used them in the heavy sections of troops to provide added firepower, like these vehicles of the King's Dragoon Guards, 23rd Armoured Brigade, near Mt. Cairo in the Cassino area of Italy on 20 February 1944.

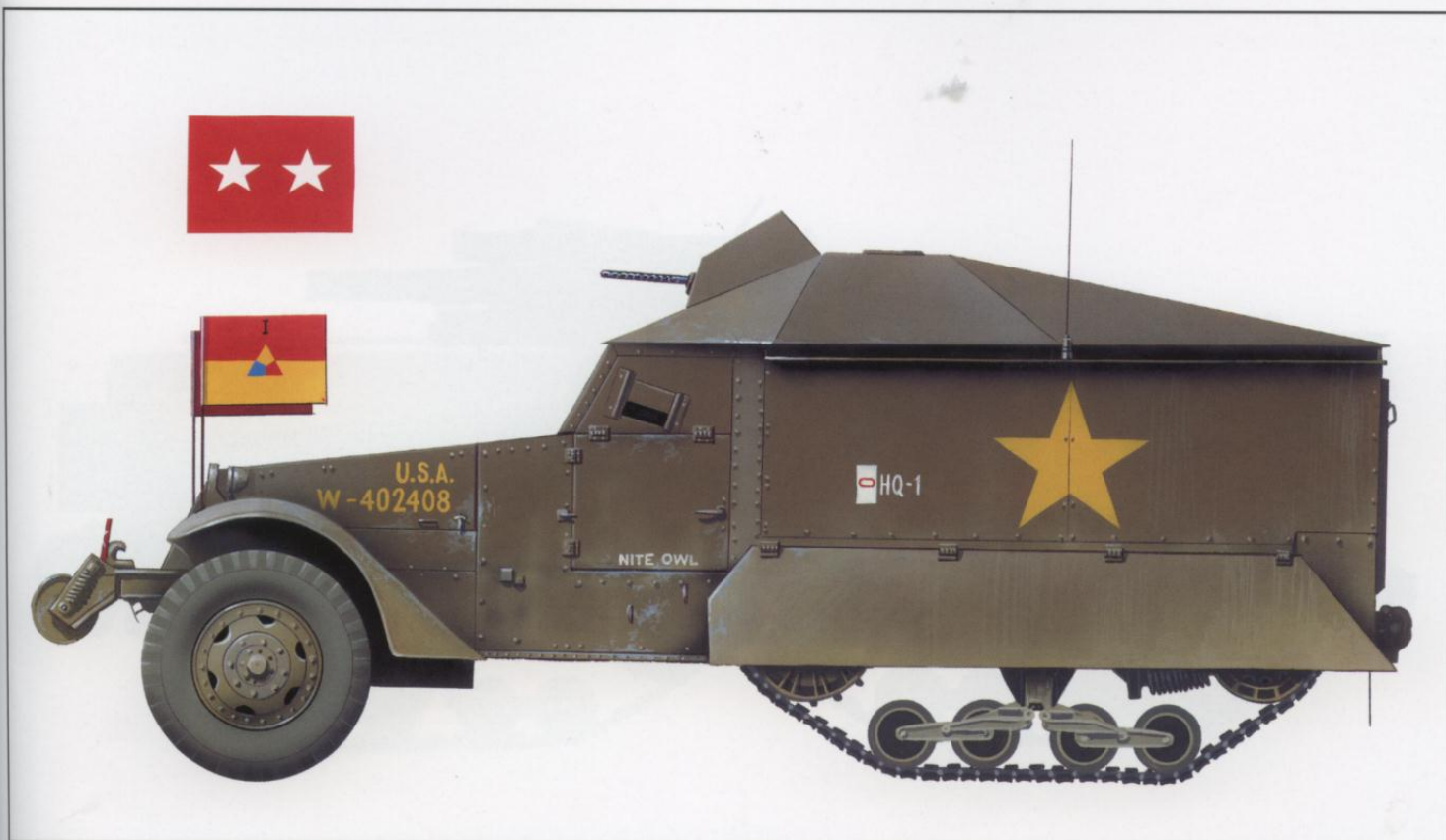
Although the British Army received significant numbers of half-tracks, they tended to employ them in support roles rather than for mechanized infantry. This is a M5 or M9 half-track of the 56th London Division towing a 6 pdr. anti-tank gun during the Po Valley campaign in 1944. The division's characteristic cat insignia is evident on the left rear side. The number 46 on a red/blue square is the tactical marking of the division's anti-tank regiment. To the right is an Allied Italian soldier escorting a group of pack mules.



On 15 August 1944, The US Army landed troops along the French Mediterranean coast as part of Operation Anvil. This is a M2 half-track car supporting the 141st Infantry, 36th Infantry Division on Camel Green beach near San Raphael on the right flank of the landings in the Frejus Gulf. It is fitted with an improvised mine rack to carry additional mines, and is towing a 57mm anti-tank gun. Many of these units used in Anvil were drawn out of the Italian theater, and so tended to carry Italian theater style markings and camouflage.

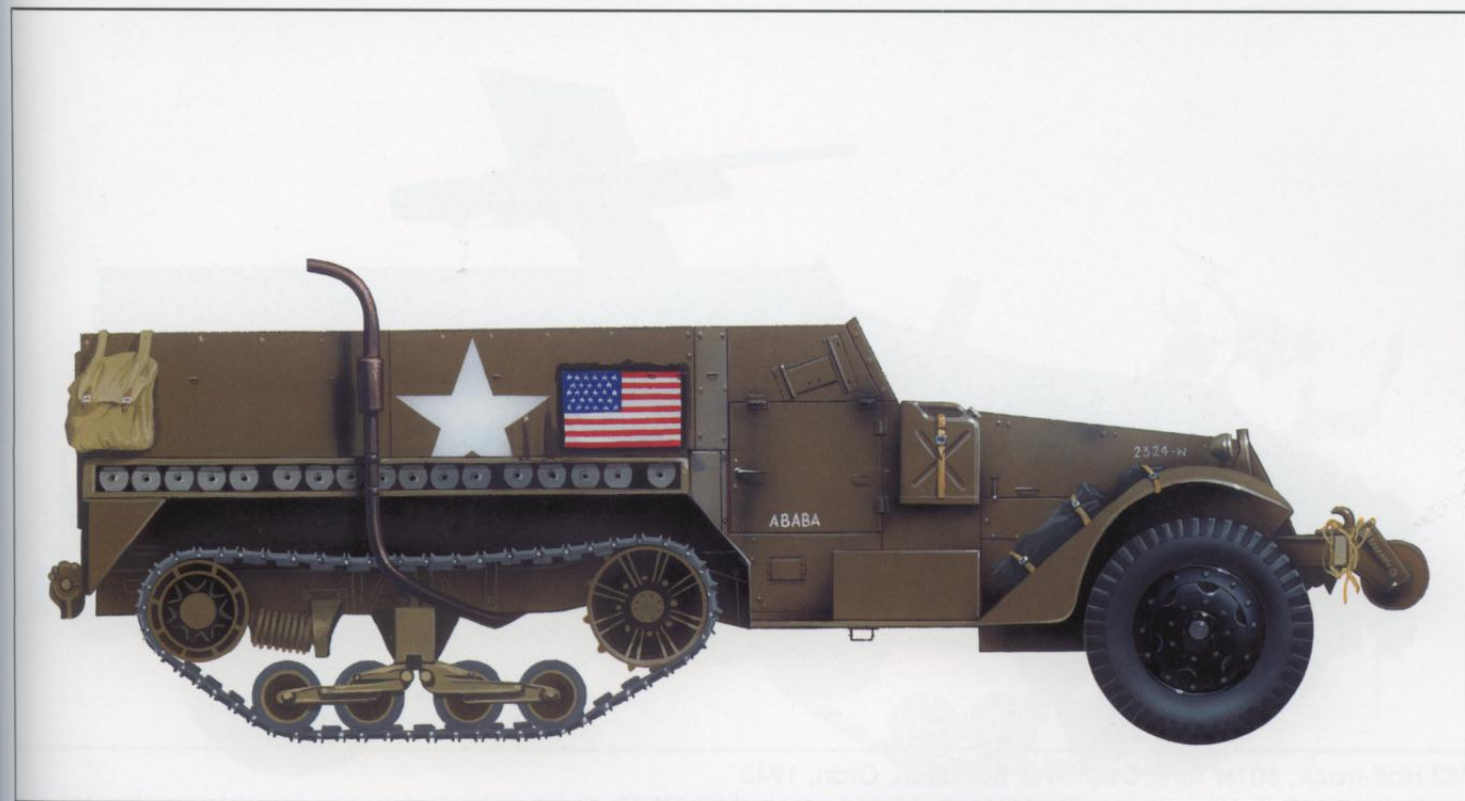


An AM15 CGMC is landed from an LCT at Alpha Red beach along Cavalaire Bay on 15 August 1944 in support of the 3rd Infantry Division during Operation Anvil. In front of it is an M8 armored car. The anti-aircraft vehicles were put to immediate use, as the beach was later attacked by German Ju-88 bombers.



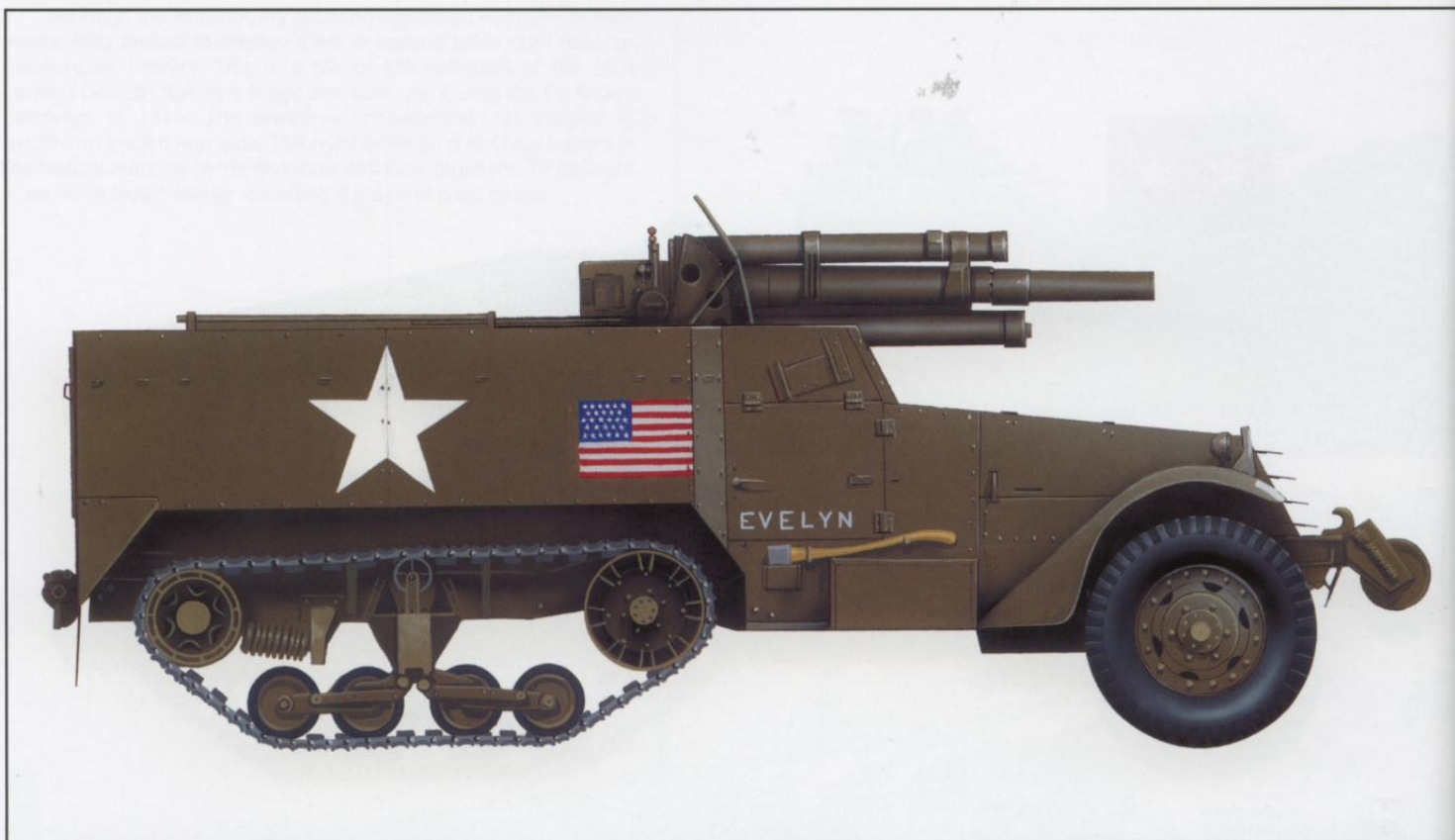
M3 Command Half-track, I Armored Corps, Desert Training Center, 1942

Lt. Gen. George S. Patton had a customized half-track while at the Desert Training Center. The markings consisted of the yellow star, common on Armored Forces vehicles at this time. The serial number also appears to be in yellow rather than in the official blue drab. This command vehicle was called "Nite Owl", painted in white on the door. There is a tactical insignia on the side, a red oval on a white rectangle followed by HQ-1. The command pennants are carried on metal flags on the fenders. On the left is a red/yellow I Armored Corps flag with the usual armored force red/yellow/blue triangle, while on the right fender is a lieutenant general's flag, two white stars on a red rectangle.



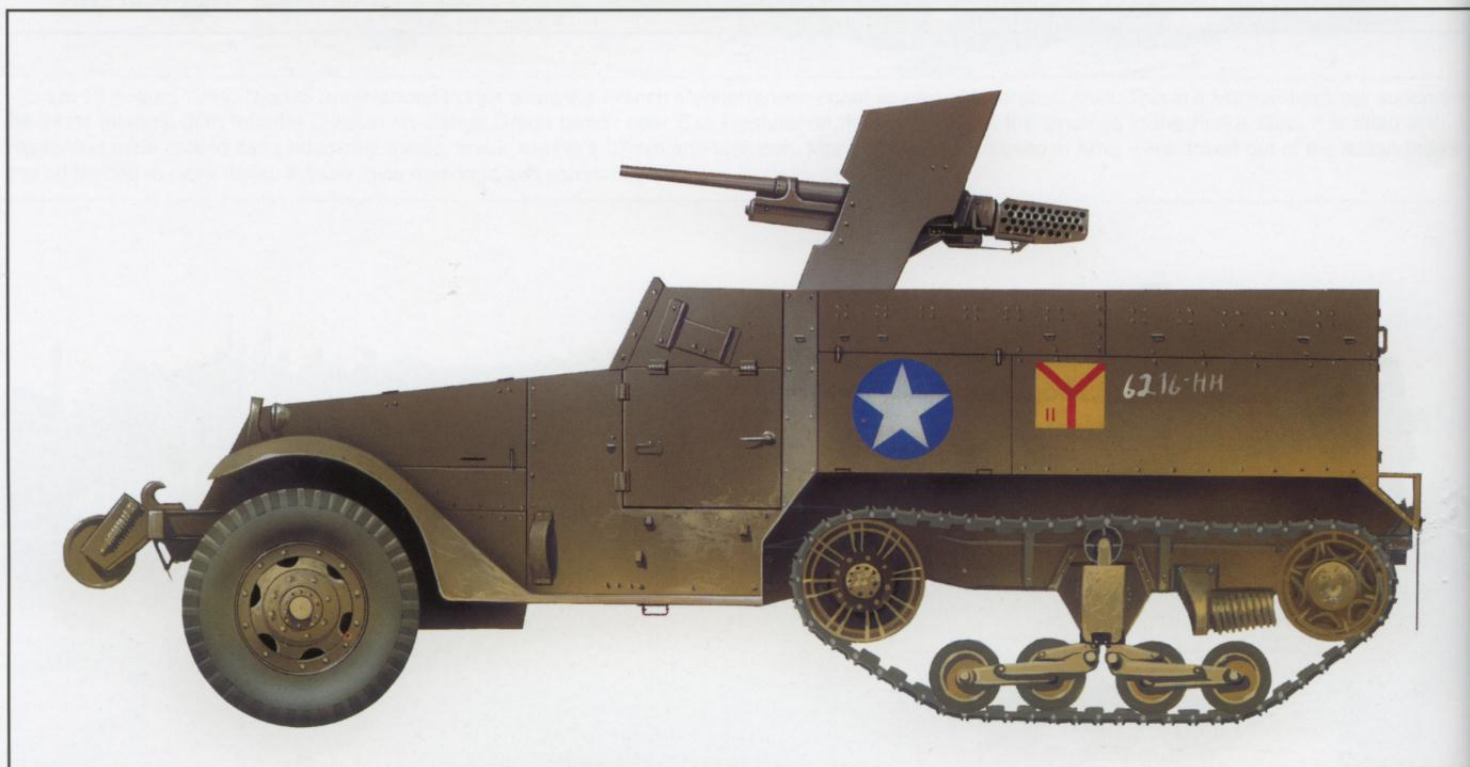
M3 half-track, Combat Command B, 2nd Armored Division, Mazagan, Morocco, 10 November 1942

This M3 half-track named "Ababa" is a new production vehicle with the side mine racks. It uses the US flag insignia common during this operation in hopes of discouraging the French from fighting. The US star is the later pattern white star, not the yellow star that was common on 1st Armored Division vehicles during this operation. On the side of the engine compartment is the unit shipping code, 2324-W in white and the blue drab serial.



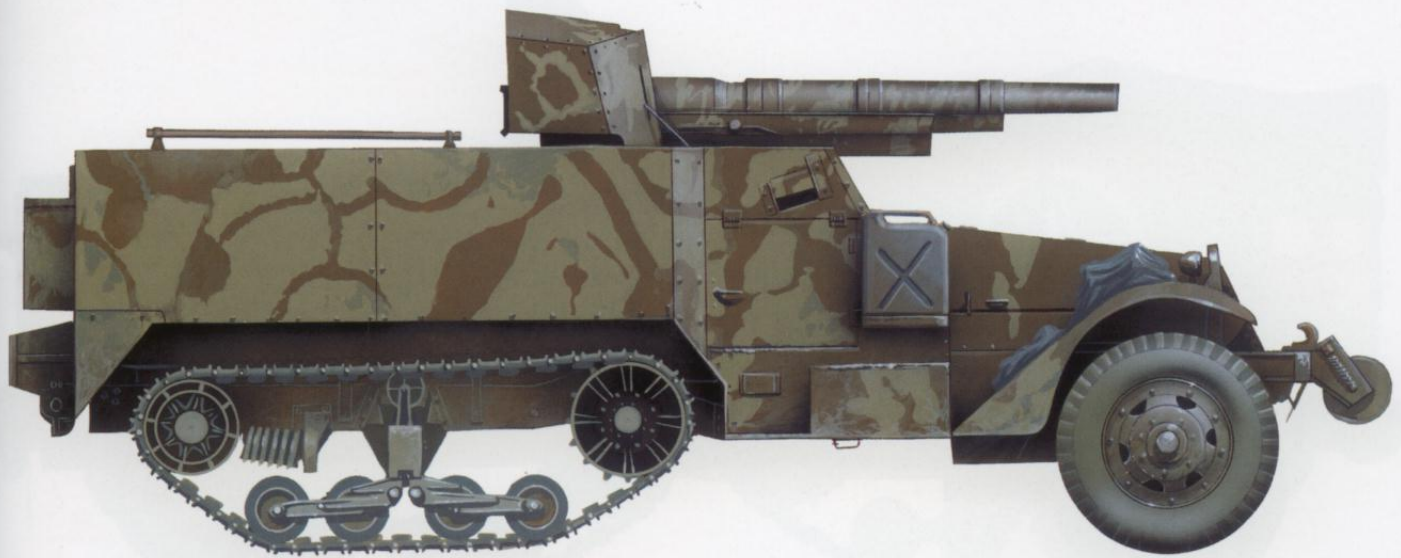
T19 105mm Howitzer Motor Carriage, Cannon Company, 7th Regimental Combat Team, 3rd Infantry Division, Rabat, Morocco, December 1942

The vehicles have been cleaned up for the parade and wear white stars. The previous policy of yellow stars for reduced visibility was amended in December 1942 when it was found that they tended to lose their identification value when covered by desert sand. The vehicle name "Evelyn" is painted in white under the door, the standard location for half-tracks.



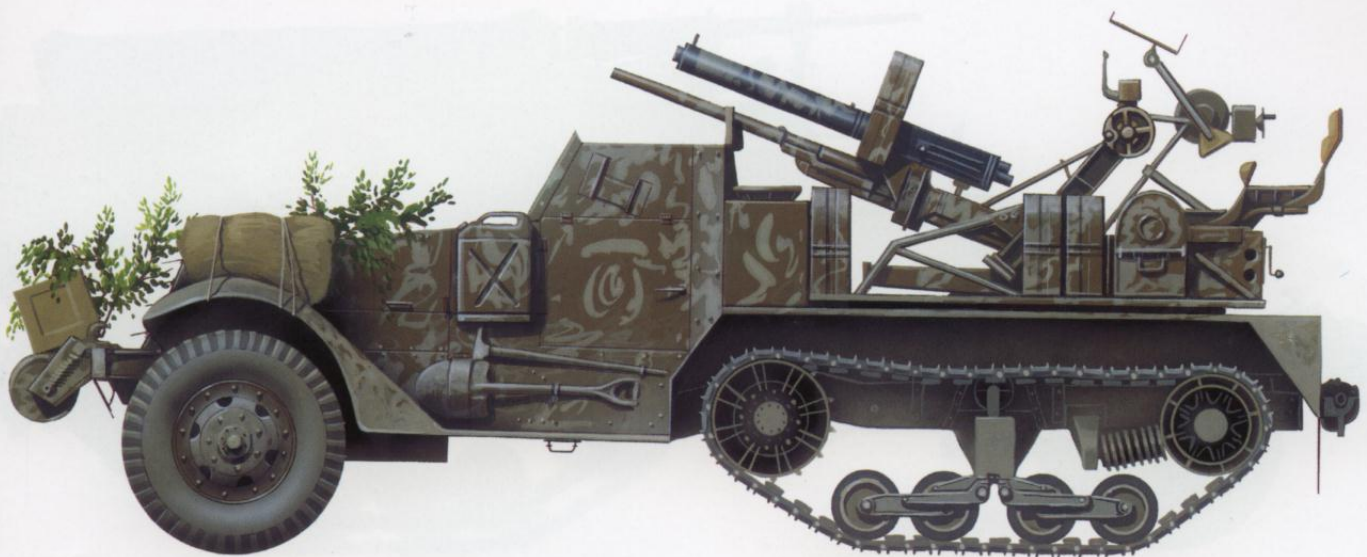
M2 Half-track, 601st Tank Destroyer Battalion, Oran, 1943

During the North Africa fighting, it quickly became apparent that the M6 37mm gun motor carriage was completely inadequate. As a result, they were pulled out of service. Some units made use of the 37mm gun mount and shield by mounting them on half-tracks as seen here. The markings consist of the blue circle and white star that were the official air identification markings prescribed by a GHQ Mediterranean Expeditionary Force order of 31 August 1942. This order was widely ignored, and most units used the white or yellow star. The red Y on a yellow square was the tactical marking of this battalion, with the company number in roman numerals in the lower corner. The chalked 6216-HH is the standard unit shipping code which was normally stenciled on.



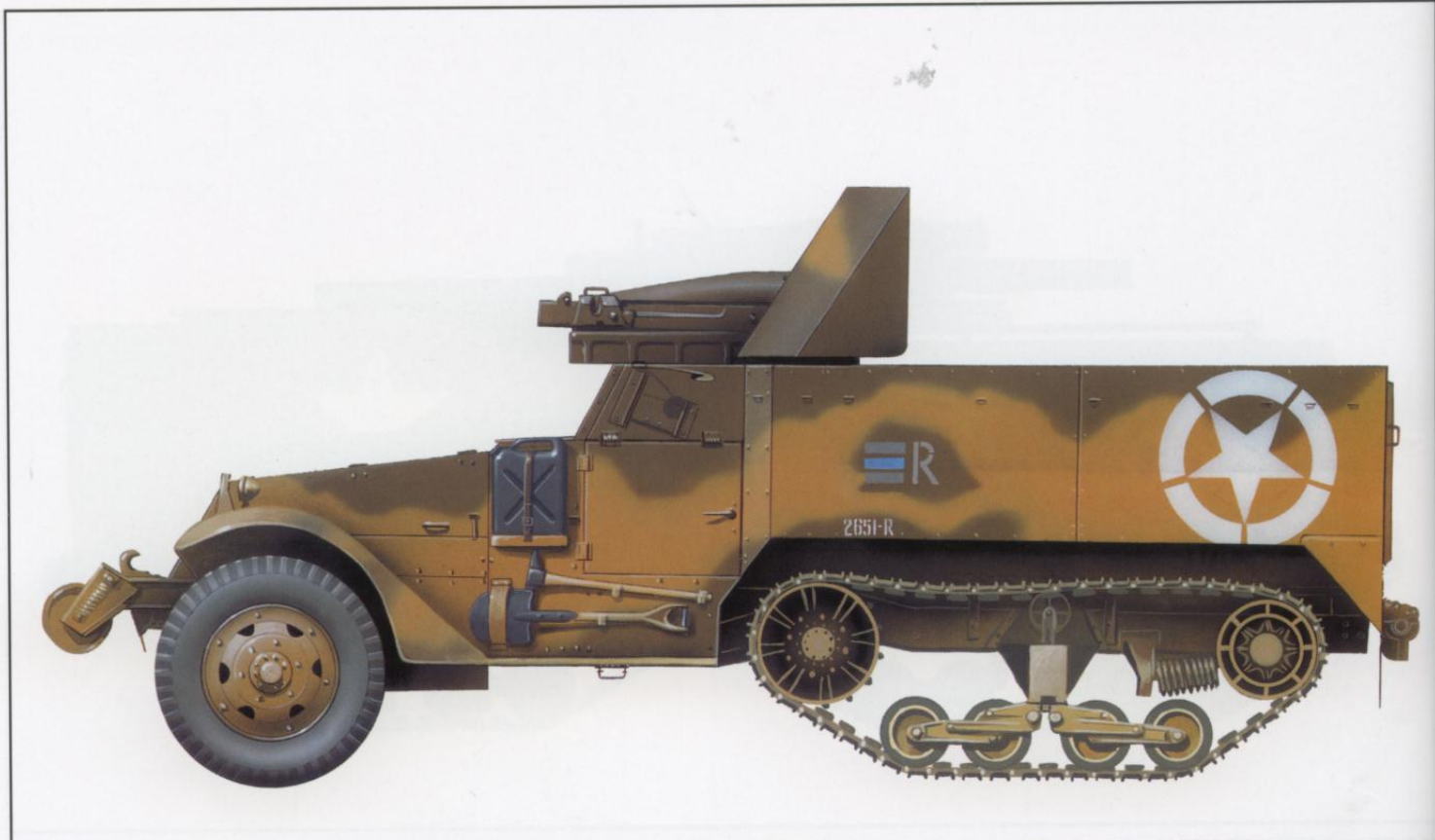
M3 75mm Gun Motor Carriage, 601st Tank Destroyer Battalion, Tunisia, February 1943

During the fighting in Tunisia, the dark olive drab finish of the half-track proved to be poor camouflage. So many units adopted improvised camouflage. This was created by mixing the local sand with water to create an improvised camouflage paint. This tank destroyer has a more elaborate scheme than most.



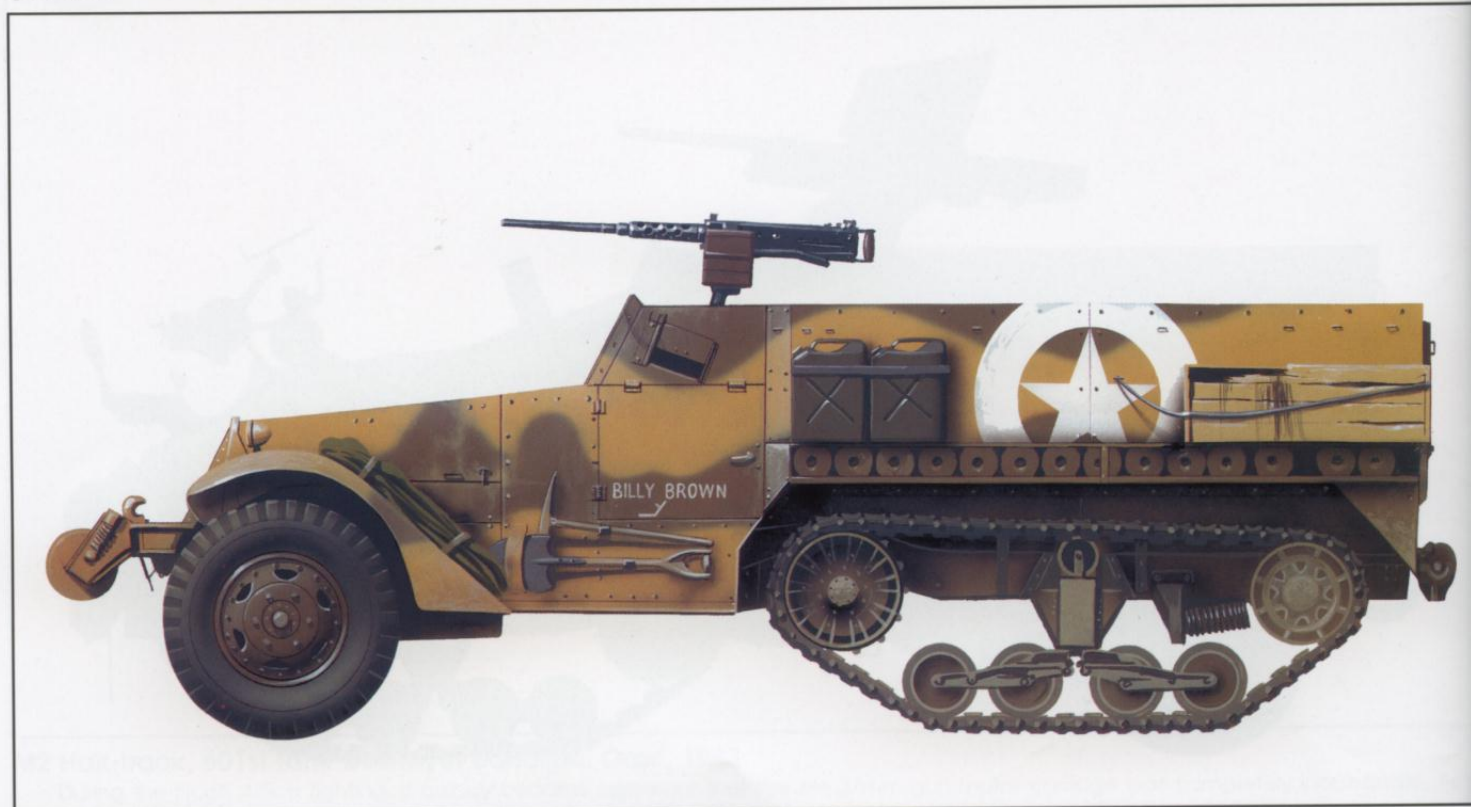
T28E1 CGMC, Anti-Aircraft Artillery Battalion, Tunisia, February 1943

This provides another example of the style of improvised camouflage common during the Tunisian fighting in February 1943. In contrast to the tank destroyer, the pattern here is smaller patches of camouflage.



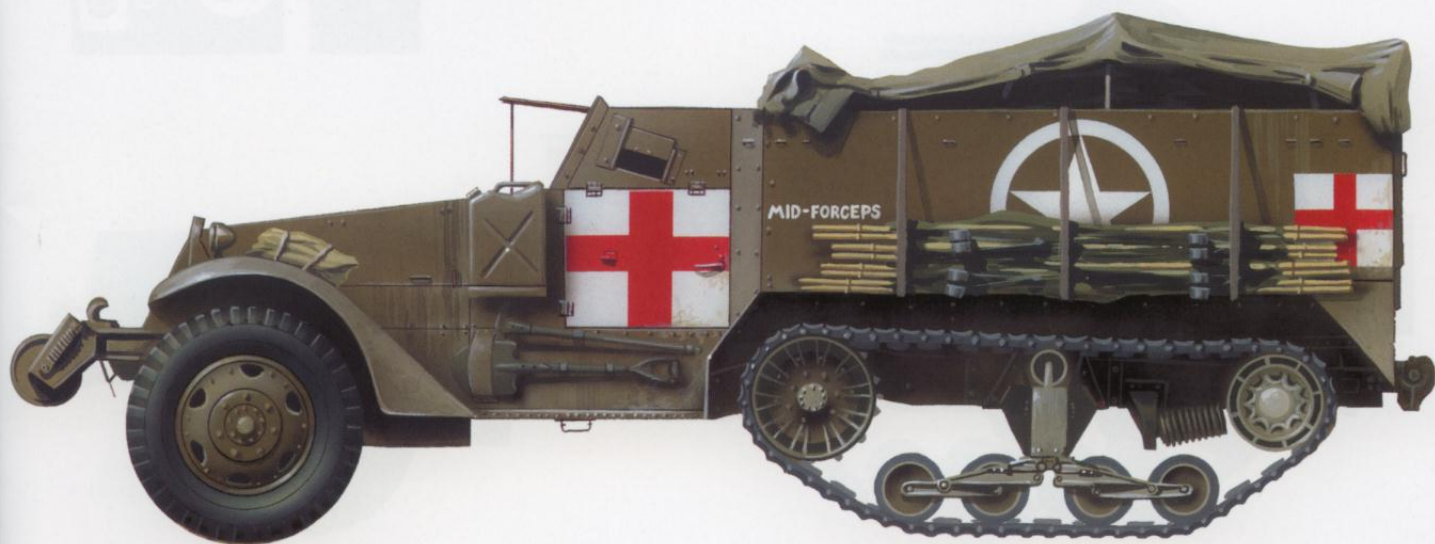
T30 75mm Howitzer Motor Carriage, 7th Army, Licata, Sicily, July 1943

The vehicle is finished in ANA 305 earth yellow over olive drab, the official camouflage pattern ordered for Operation Husky. The large white circles around the stars had also been ordered for the Sicily operation after it was found that the white star alone could be mistaken for a German cross at long ranges. The three color bars on the vehicle side are unit identification markings. The unit ID code, 2651-R can be seen below the bars. From the last two digits of the unit code, the bars colors were light grey top and bottom and blue in the center, with the "R" in grey also.



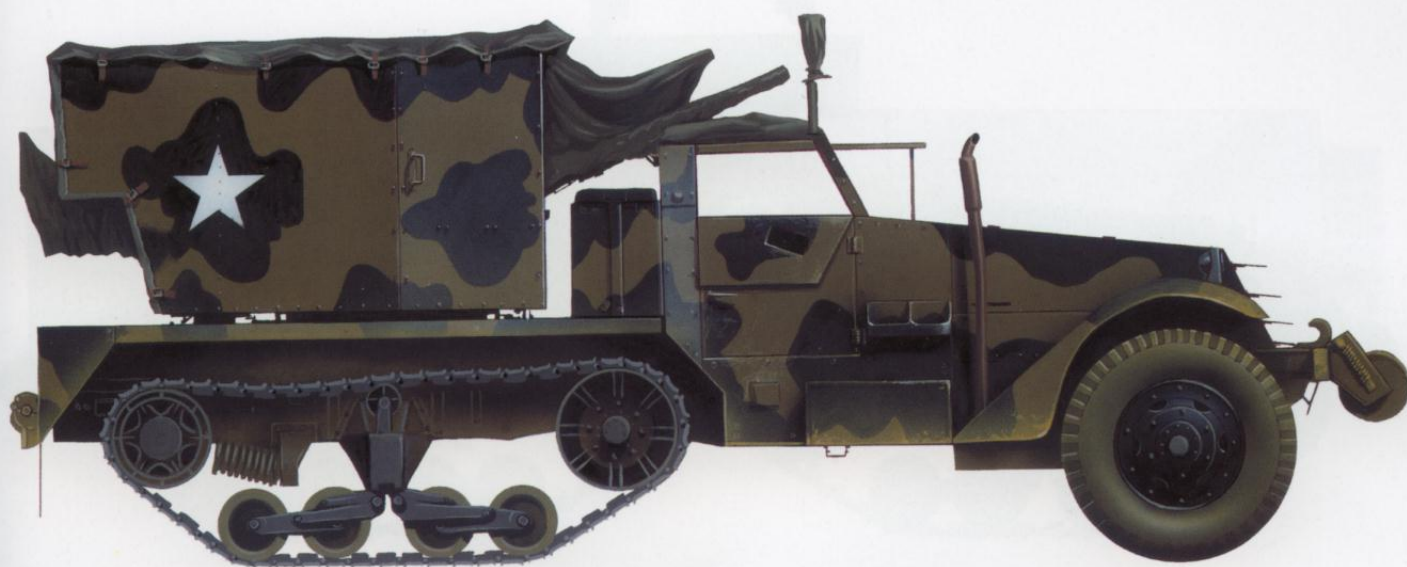
M3 Half-track, 41st Armored Infantry Regiment, 2nd Armored Division, Santa Stefano, Sicily, July 1943

This half-track named "Billy Brown" shows the typical markings of the US 7th Army in Sicily. It has the official camouflage pattern of earth yellow over olive drab, and the large circled white star. The 2nd Armored Division used a set of geometric symbols as tactical markings. This particular one identifies B Company, 41st Armored Infantry Regiment.



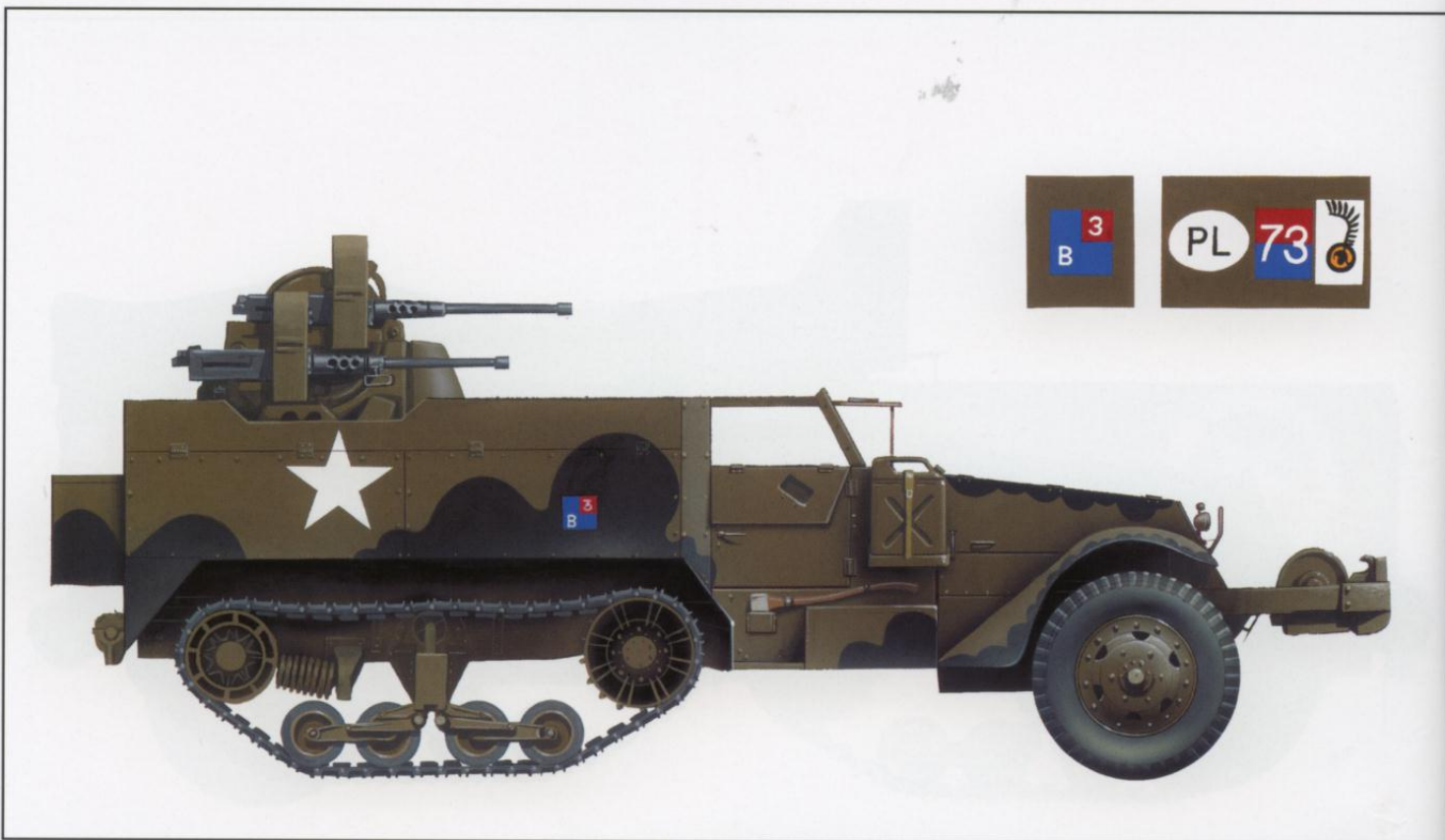
M3 Half-track Ambulance, US 7th Army, Sicily, July 1943

In contrast to the other Operation Husky half-tracks shown here, this ambulance is very simply marked with no camouflage pattern. It does carry the circled star, but the circle is quite small. It is prominently marked with two Red Cross insignia on the door and on the rear. The vehicle name is "Mid-Forceps".



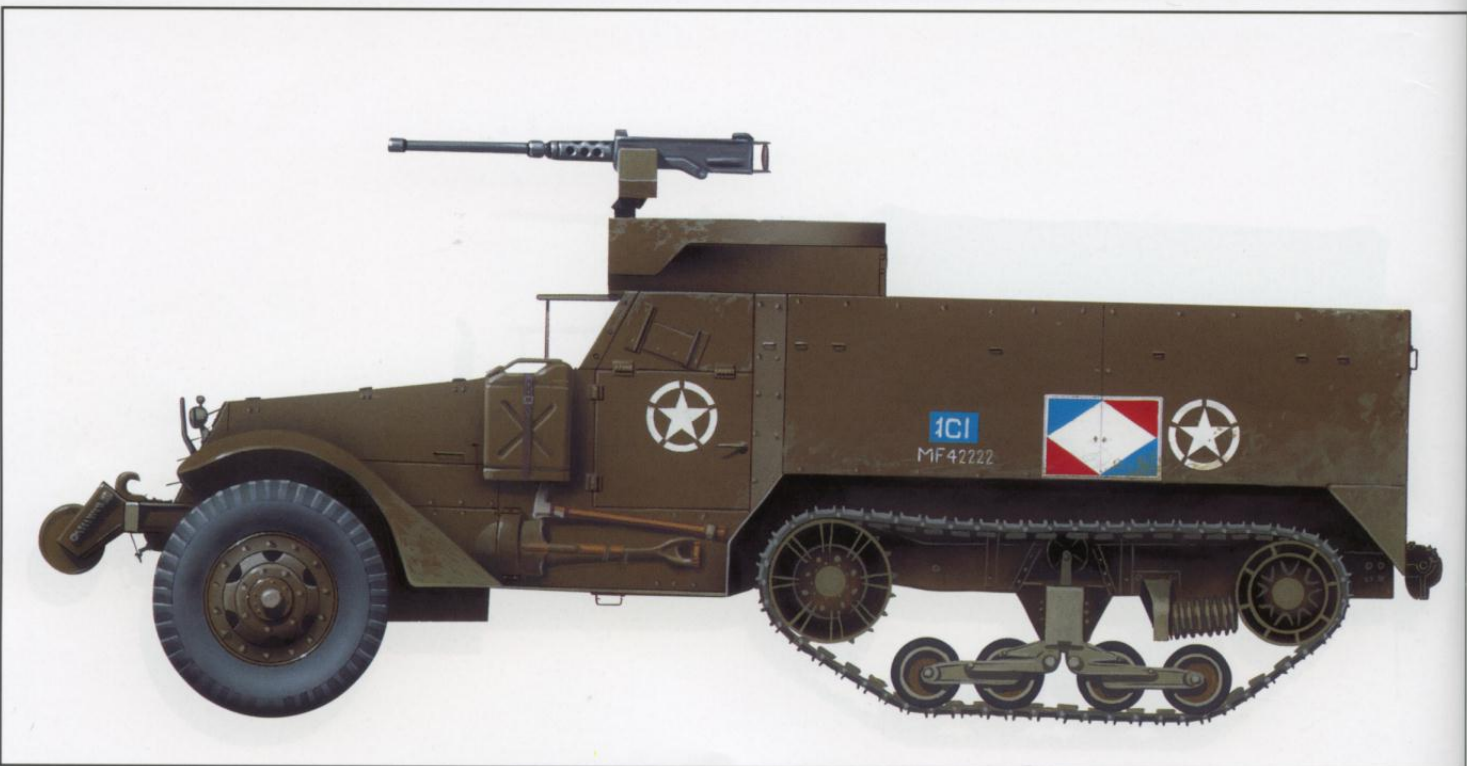
M15 Combination Gun Motor Carriage, US 7th Army, Mediterranean Theater, 1943

This is a M15 CGMC being prepared for shipment to the MTO in 1943. It is finished in a pattern of black over olive drab, reminiscent of the British Mickey Mouse style. Black over olive drab was by far the most common camouflage pattern on US Army vehicles in 1944-45.



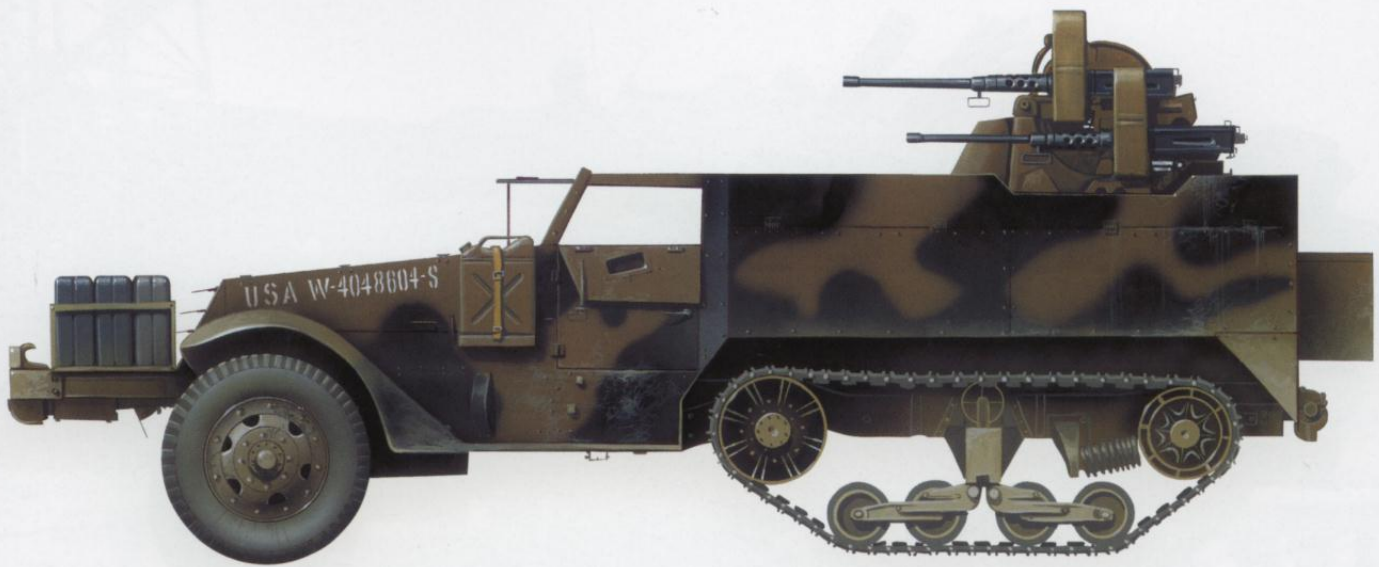
M16 Multiple Gun Motor Carriage, 1st Light AA Regiment, Polish 1st Armoured Division, France, August 1944

The Polish 1st Armoured Division followed British markings and camouflage practices. This M16 MGMC is finished in standard British practice. The basic color is Shade No. 15 olive drab, which replaced Standard Camouflage Colour No. 2 khaki brown in 1944. It carries the standard Allied white star insignia, and on the side is the regimental tactical insignia, a divided blue and red square. The location of the red square indicates this is a vehicle of 1st Battery. The unit arm-of-service square is a red-over-blue square with the number 73 in white. Polish vehicles usually carried the European road national emblem, a black PL on a white oval. Vehicles of this unit carried a divisional insignia, a stylized winged hussar in the traditional Polish armor colors of black and orange.



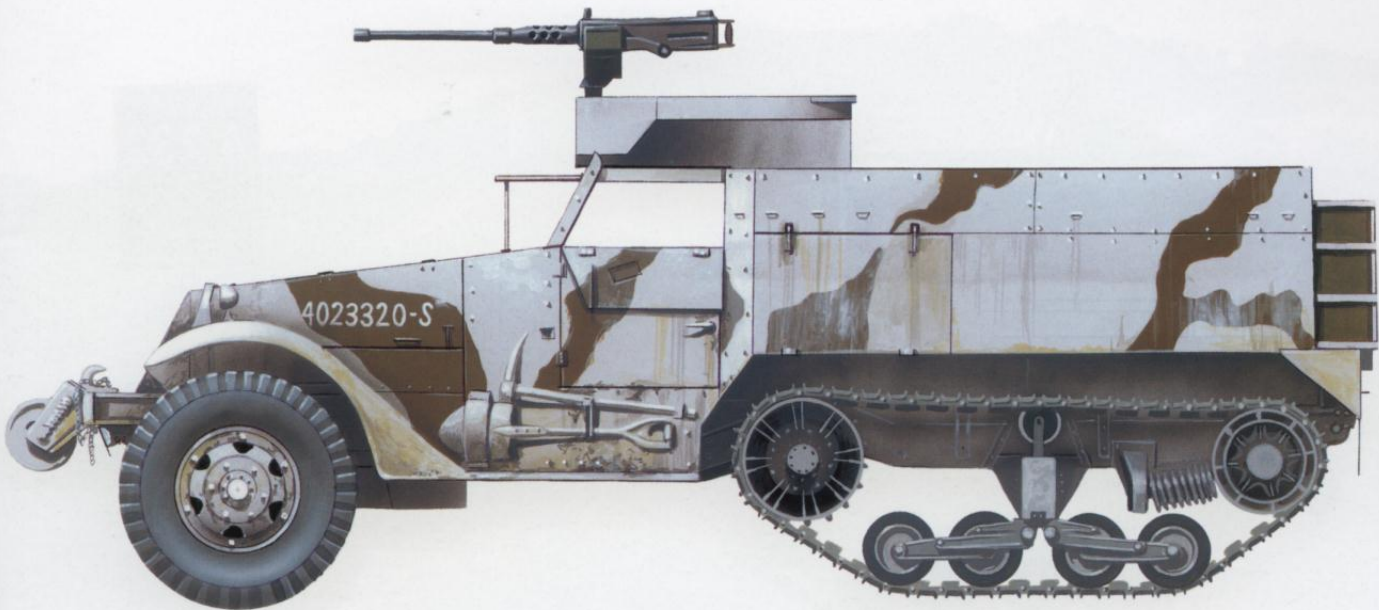
M3A1 Half-track, 2nd Squadron, 2nd Cuirassiers, French 1st Armored Division, France, 1944

This is a half-track from the recovery group of the 2nd Cuirassiers. The division used the Napoleonic regimental standard in national colors painted horizontally. The unit tactical insignia followed a pattern used by other French armored units consisting of a letter on a colored rectangle with two vertical bars on either side. The blue background identifies the division, the letter "C" identifies the regiment. The two small squares on the left vertical bar indicate the 2nd Squadron.



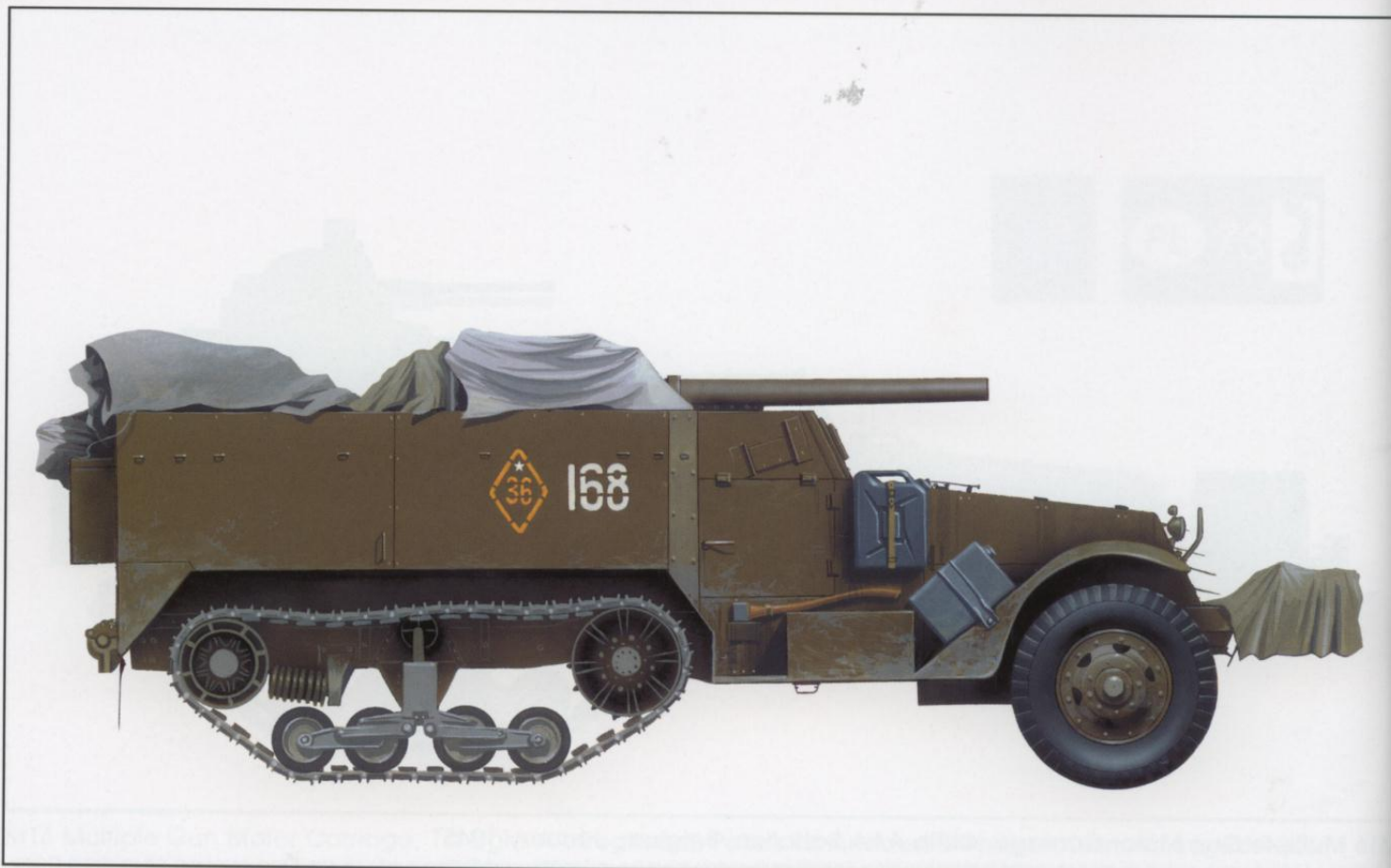
M16 Multiple Gun Motor Carriage, 447th AAA Battalion, Belgium, January 1945

This M16 is in the most common camouflage colors for US armored vehicles in North-west Europe, black sprayed over an olive drab base. This particular vehicle had a large circled Allied star on the hood, but most US Army tactical vehicles began painting over stars on the front and sides as they were conspicuous targets.



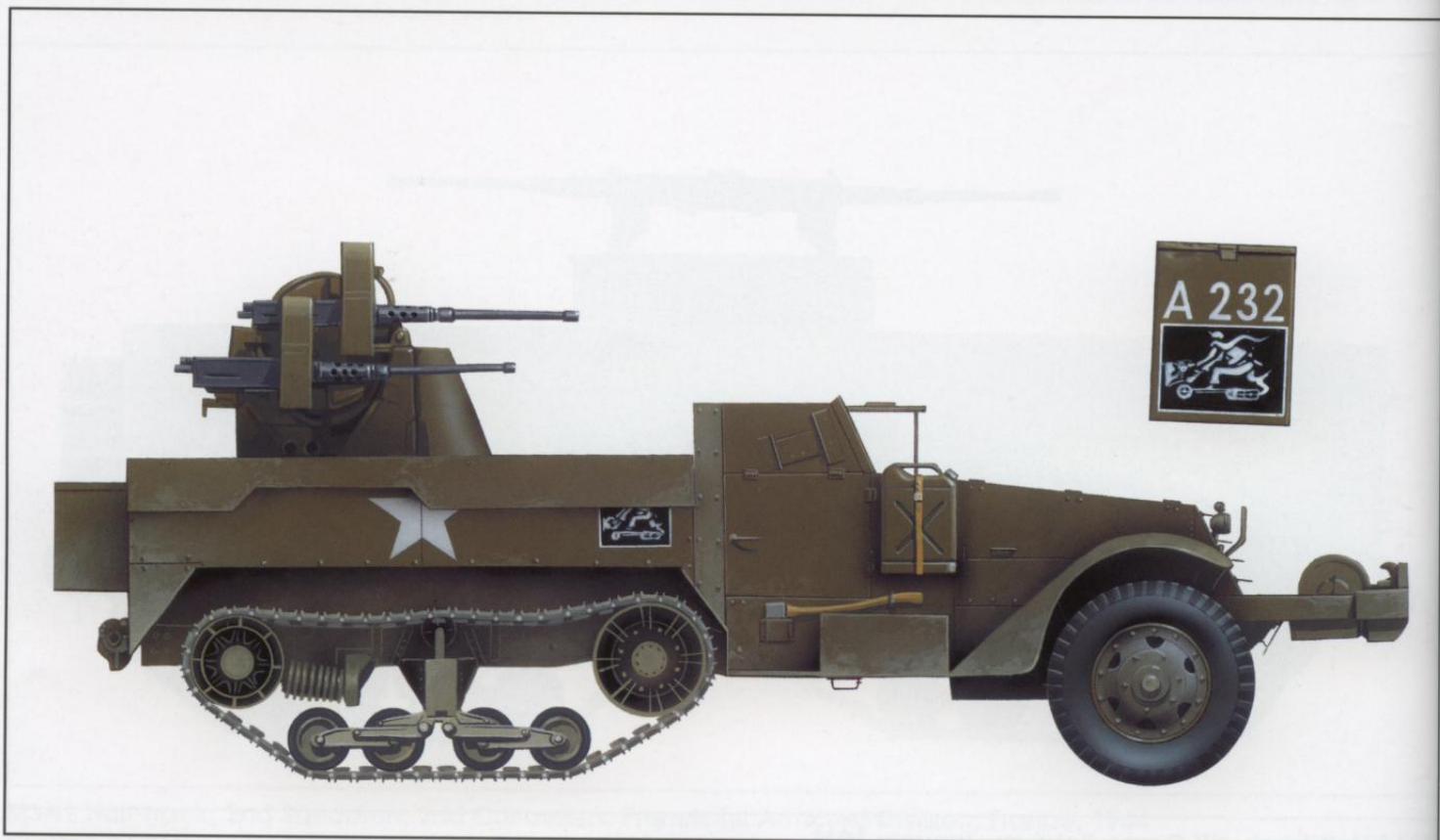
M2A1 Half-track, XX Corps, Belgium, January 1945

The XX Corps encouraged the pattern painting of armored equipment during the Battle of the Bulge using whitewash, and this particular M2A1 half-track car was displayed as an example. The dark bands are left from the original olive drab finish while the rest of the vehicle has a rough coat of whitewash.



SU-57, Soviet Independent Tank Destroyer Brigade, Prague, May 1945

Soviet vehicles received via Lend-Lease remained in their original olive drab finish. This particular brigade used a yellow tactical insignia consisting of the number 36 with a star above it in the normal armored force diamond. The vehicle tactical number is 168 in white.

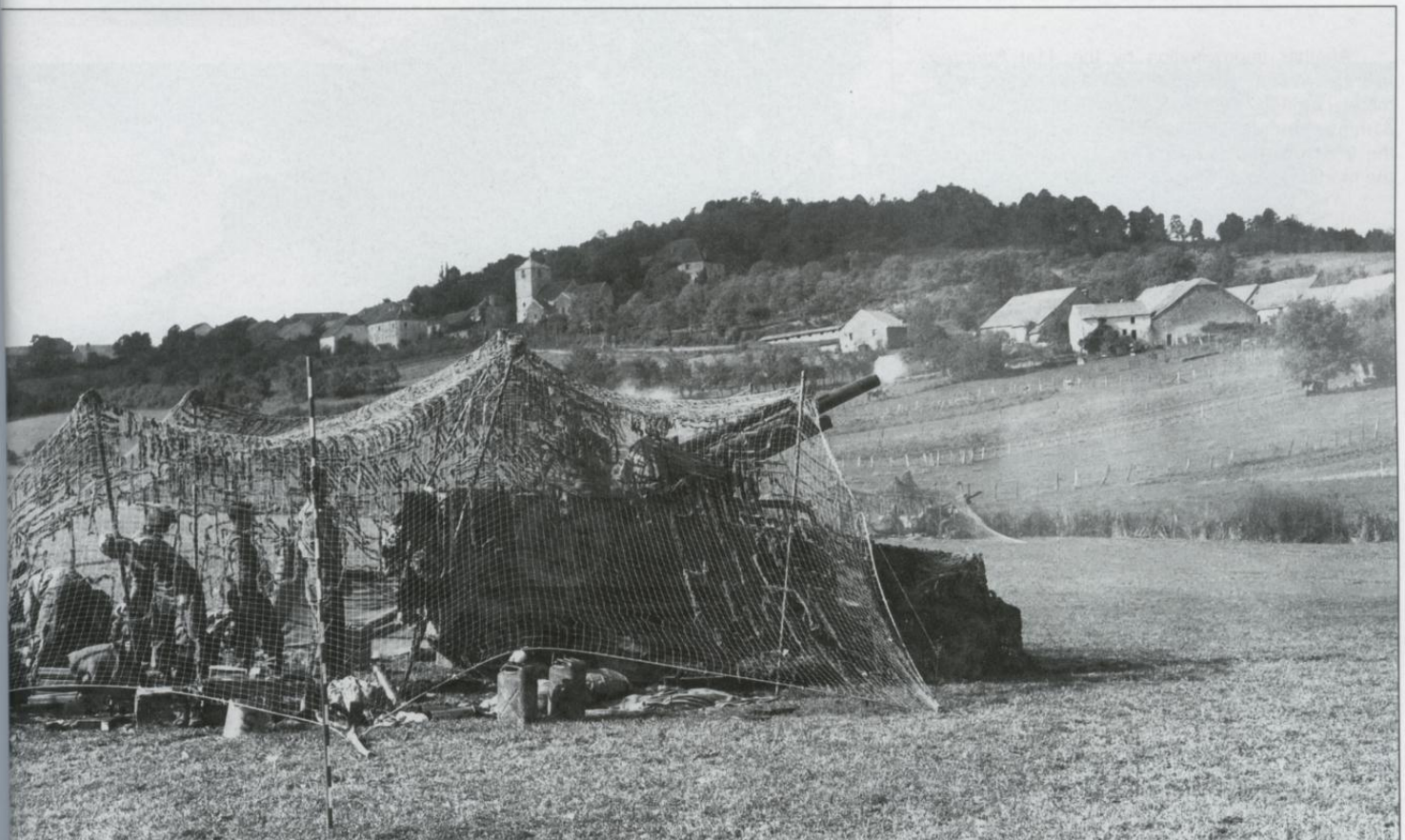


M16 Multiple Gun Motor Carriage, 209th AAA Battalion, Luzon, Philippines, 1945

This unit used cartoon insignia on the sides of some of their vehicles. This is a stylized cartoon of a soldier riding a half-track like a children's scooter. This insignia was carried on the hull side in black and white and on the rear as well. The vehicle is finished in the usual olive drab.



A T28E1 combination gun motor carriage of the 443rd AAA Bn. guards St. Raphael air base in southern France on 17 August after the landings in the 36th Infantry Division sector. This old vehicle had been in combat use in Italy the previous years as will be noted from earlier photos in this book, and had also served in North Africa and on Sicily.



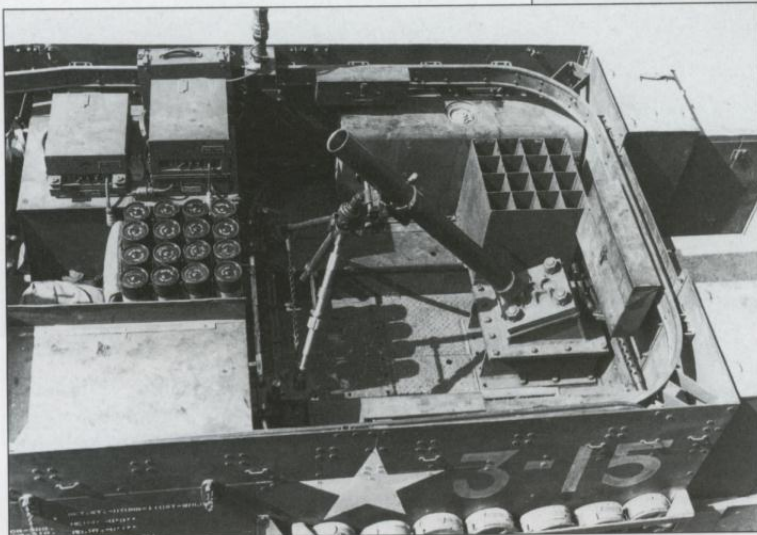
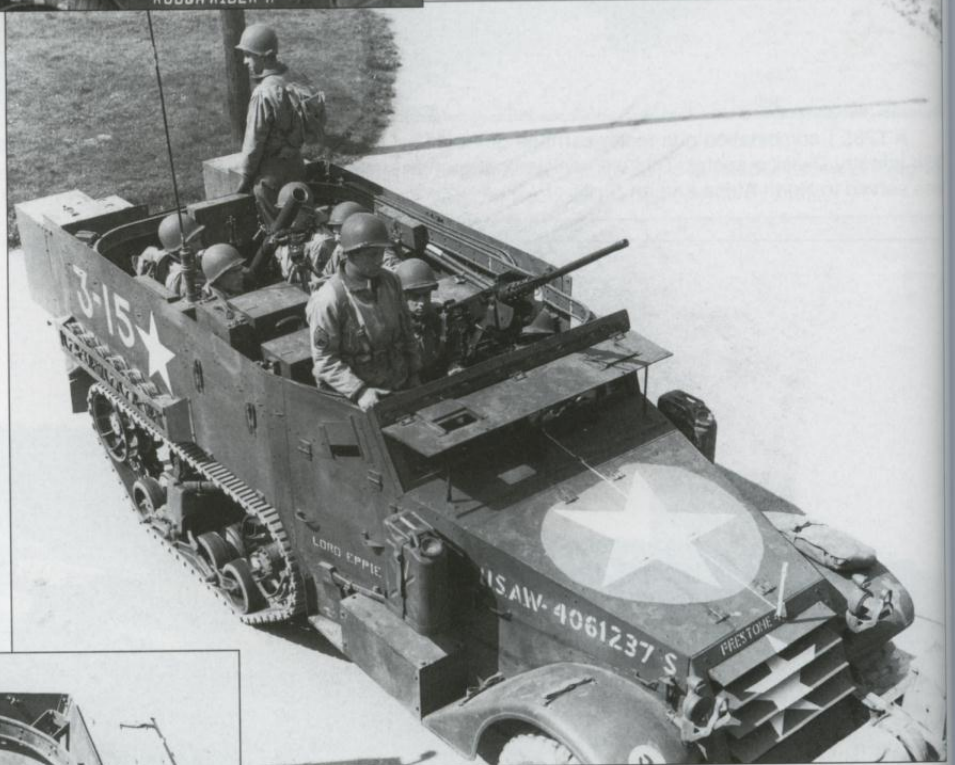
Another case of an outdated piece of equipment still in service can be seen from this T19 105mm howitzer motor carriage provided fire support of the Seventh Army landings during Operation Anvil in southern France in August 1944. By this stage, units in Normandy had completely re-equipped with the M7 105mm HMC, and the old T19 was only in service in the Italian theater in dwindling numbers.

Normandy and the Campaign for France 1944



The 2nd Armored Division during its training operations in England made some changes to their half-tracks. The 41st Armored Infantry took the 37mm gun mounting off the retired M6 gun motor carriages and mounted them into a M2 half-track car. Note also the added stowage bin on the back which the division had first used during Operation Husky in Sicily. This photo was taken in England in April 1944 before the Normandy landings.

Another improvisation by the 41st Armored Infantry was a rearrangement of the M4 mortar motor carriage. These vehicles normally had the 81mm mortar pointed over the rear of the vehicle. In the 2nd Armored Division, this was reversed and the mortar pointed forward.



A close-up view of the interior of the M4 mortar motor carriage of 41st Armored Infantry showing the revised interior layout.

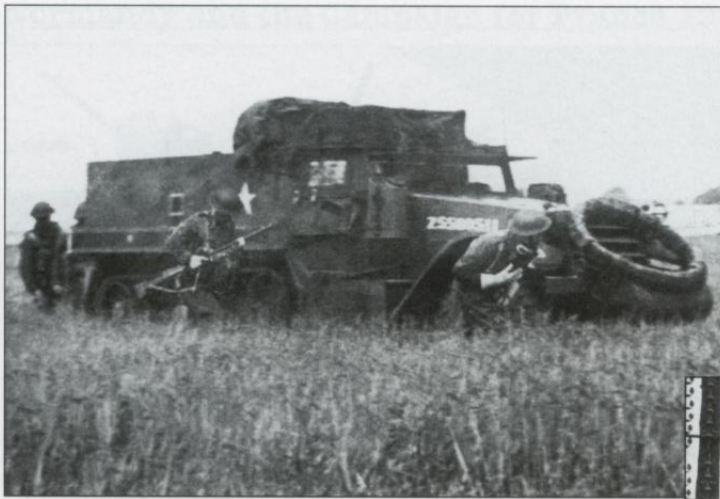
A M15A1 CGMC of the 474th AAA Battalion takes part in a practice landing at Slapton Sands in England on 27 April 1944 during the D-Day preparations. Slapton Sands was the scene of a major disaster during the preparations for the Normandy landing when some German torpedo boats torpedoed a troop ship taking part in landing exercises. The 474th AAA Battalion was landed at Normandy on D-Day.



A M3A1 half-track moves through a French village in Normandy on 13 June 1944. The Army censor has painted out the unit codes on the winch bumper. This vehicle is towing one of the new M6 76mm anti-tank guns, and so is presumably from an anti-tank company of an armored division.



A multiple gun motor carriage of the 377th AAA Battalion is being used to provide fire support for an infantry unit in Normandy on 12 July 1944. There was so little German air activity over the beachhead that many anti-aircraft units were sent forward to provide fire support. This is some sort of expedient M16 as careful inspection reveals it is mounted on a M2 half-track chassis, not the normal M3, and does not have the characteristic folding sides.



Infantry from a M5A1 or M9A1 of the Polish 1st Armoured Division move forward during the fighting around Falaise in August 1944. The Poles were supplied equipment via British Lend-Lease stocks, and so mainly used the M5 and M9 half-tracks. It is nearly impossible to distinguish these two types unless the interior can be seen. (Sikorski Institute)

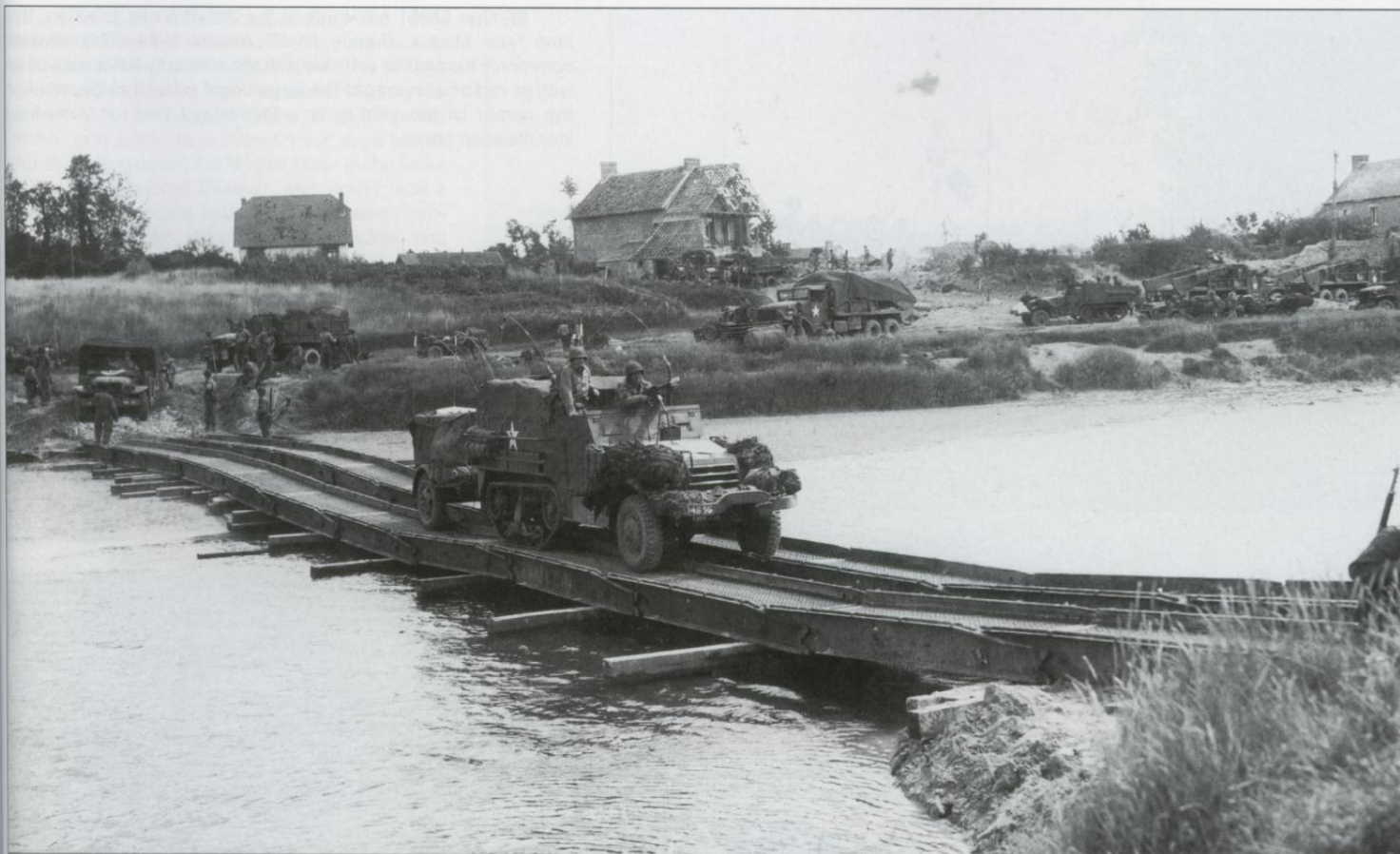
Although the M3 75mm gun motor carriage was not used by the US Army after 1943, some still remained in service in British armoured car units for fire support as can be seen from this vehicle near Ande, on the Seine river in August 1944.



A Polish M5A1 or M9A1 of the 11th Sapper Company, 1st Armoured Division moves through a French village passed a wrecked Sherman Firefly. The barrel of the Firefly has been completely split open. (Sikorski Institute)

Another view of an M5A1 or M9A1 of the 11th Sapper Company, 1st Polish Armoured Division in France in August 1944 during the assault towards Falaise. This vehicle has rolls of white tape that were used to mark cleared lanes through minefields. (Sikorski Institute)





A M3 half-track of the 146th Armored Signal Company moves across a new bridge laid by divisional engineers of the 6th Armored Division during operations near La Rogue, France on 31 July 1944. This half-track has been modified with additional radio equipment as can be seen from the many whip antennas. The vehicles in the background are from the division's 25th Armored Engineer Battalion and form the divisional headquarters.



A M3A1 half-track of the 3rd Armored Division passes through the ruins of Roncey on 1 August 1944. In the wreckage is a destroyed Sd.Kfz. 7 fitted with a quadruple 20mm anti-aircraft gun and a 7.5cm Pz.Jäger 38(t) Ausf. M (Sd.Kfz. 138) tank destroyer of the SS-Pz.Jg.Abt.2 of the 2.SS-Panzer-Division. The M3A1 half-track is towing a 37mm anti-tank gun, a weapon inadequate for anti-tank defense in 1944.



Another M3A1 half-track of the 3rd Armored Division, this time near Meaux, France on 28 August 1944. This division commonly marked its vehicles with the company letter as well as with its radio call number. The large bright colored cloth panel on the corner of the vehicle is a fluorescent pink or yellow air identification panel.

M3A1 half-tracks of Company D, 41st Armored Infantry, 2nd Armored Division pass through the town of Catigny on 31 August 1944. The lead vehicle, numbered D-9, has the name "Daring" on the side door. The 2nd Armored Division also had the practice of marking company numbers on its vehicles, much like the 3rd Armored.



A column of M5 or M9 half-tracks of the British 11th Armoured Division moving forward. These carry the markings of its lorried infantry, the 8th Battalion Rifle Brigade, a white 54 on a red square. This marking is obscured on the nearer vehicle by stowage. The nominal organization of a motor battalion was three companies each with platoons on 15 cwt lorries and a platoon on Universal Carriers, but half-tracks were sometimes substituted for lorries.

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A M15A1 CGMC supporting the 90th Infantry Division in Chateau Thierry, overlooking the Marne river on 31 August 1944. The M15A1 can be distinguished from the earlier M15 by the placement of its .50 cal machine guns, below the 37mm gun rather than above. Four days before the division crossed the Meuse River in the wake of the 7th Armored Division, and would face a major German tank counterattack a week later on 6 September 1944 between Landres and Mairy.



A group of half-tracks from the 3rd Armored Division pass through Theux, Belgium on 10 September 1944. The lead vehicle is a M4 81mm mortar motor carriage, but it is unusual in that the crew has reversed the side armor panels and now the access door is on the rear. Note also the bazooka lashed on over the driver's armor plate.

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A British anti-tank regiment moves forward, with its heavily camouflaged 17 pdr. anti-tank guns being towed by a M5 or M9 half-track. The 17 pdr. was undoubtedly the most effective towed Allied anti-tank gun of the war.





US troops inspect a knocked out column of armor outside Nancy, France on 10 September 1944 during the initial stages of the fighting for Lorraine. These are probably from the 4th Armored Division. The M3A1 half-track has been hit by a high explosive round which has caved in the side armor and set the vehicle on fire.

THE M3A1 HALF-TRACK WAS A COMMONLY USED VEHICLE IN THE EUROPEAN THEATRE OF WAR. IT WAS DESIGNED AS A LIGHTLY ARMORED, HIGHLY MANEUVRABLE VEHICLE CAPABLE OF CARRYING A COMPANY OF INFANTRY OR A BATTERY OF ARTILLERY. THE M3A1 WAS A DEVELOPMENT OF THE M3 HALF-TRACK, WHICH WAS FIRST INTRODUCED IN 1942. THE M3A1 WAS IMPROVED WITH A HEAVIER TURRET AND A MACHINE GUN PULPIT. IT WAS USED IN A WIDE VARIETY OF ROLES, INCLUDING AS A HEADQUARTERS VEHICLE, A TRANSPORT VEHICLE, AND A LIGHT TANK.

A M3A1 half-track of the Combat Command B headquarters from 7th Armored Division, named "Lucille-B". The extra radio antennas typical of a headquarters vehicle are evident here. There is an air identification panel adjacent to the machine gun pulpit. (Withers collection, Patton Museum)



A M3A1 half-track of the Combat Command B headquarters of 7th Armored Division with a pair of German prisoners riding on the fenders. US armored divisions divided their combat forces between two combat commands (CCA, CCB) which served as combined arms task forces, while a third (CCR) was kept as a reserve. (Withers collection, Patton Museum)



A detailed view of the gun tub of a M15A1 combination gun motor carriage. The twin .50 cal machine guns were usually used to bring the target under fire and range it, after which the more powerful 37mm automatic cannon was engaged.



An M2A1 half-track car attached to an anti-tank company brings a 57mm anti-tank gun forward during the bitter street fighting in Aachen, Germany on 15 October 1944. As the first German city to come under Allied attack in the west, the defense of Aachen was particularly determined. The 57mm gun was an American copy of the British 6 pdr., and its auxiliary shield can be seen stowed on the side of the half-track.



A M15A1 combination gun motor carriage of the 390th AAA Battalion in operation near Hoeville, France on 3 November 1944. Although the Luftwaffe was very weak on the western front, raids became more frequent in the autumn of 1944 as Allied forces pressed towards Germany.



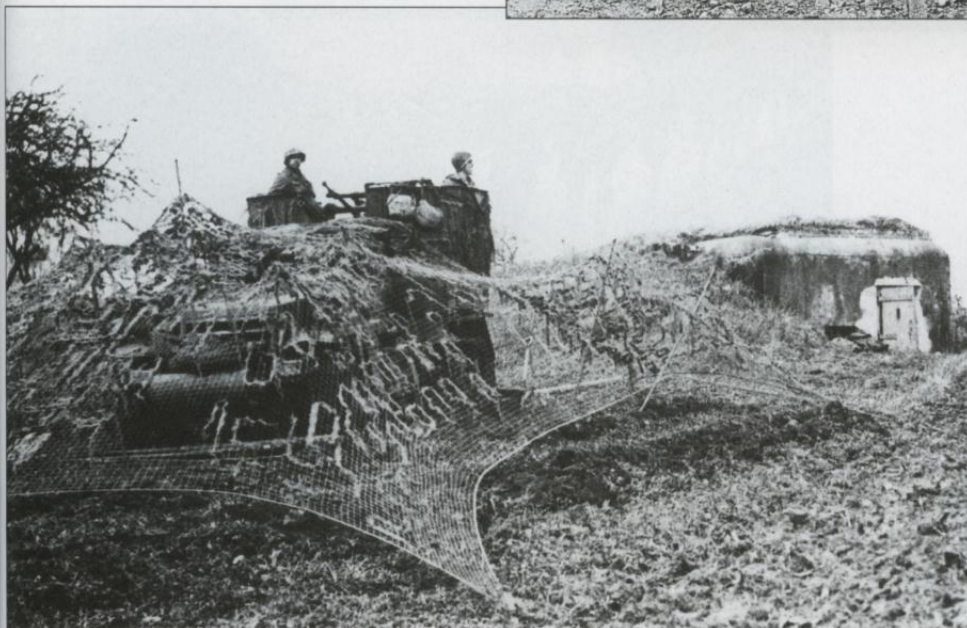
A M2A1 half-track car passes through the ruins of Xosse, France on 18 November 1944. The side mine rack has been converted to carry jerry cans of fuel or water.

On 19 November 1944, a M3A1 half-track passes through a gap of metal anti-tank "dragon's teeth" that had been laid near the French-German border.

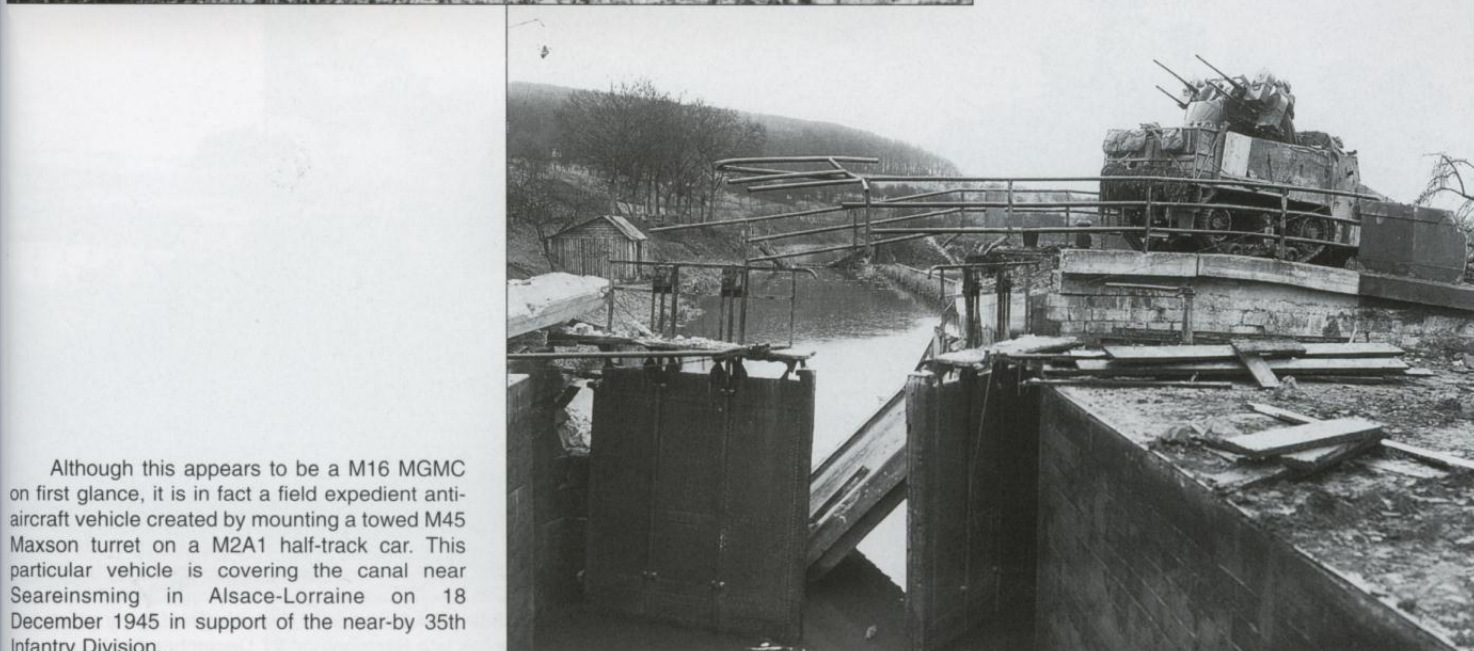


A M3A1 half-track named "Baby Bastard No. 1" passes the burning wreck of a M4A3 (76) medium tank of the 48th Tank Battalion, 14th Armored Division, knocked out during the fighting in Barre, France on 29 November 1944.

An engineer checks around a M2A1 half-track car of the 495th Field Artillery, 12th Armored Division that was disabled by a mine in Bining, France on 10 December 1944. A common field modification was to add a storage rack on the rear of the M2A1 as internal stowage was never adequate.



A M15A1 multiple gun motor carriage is parked under a camouflage net next to a Maginot fortification along the French-German frontier on 13 December 1944.



Although this appears to be a M16 MGMC on first glance, it is in fact a field expedient anti-aircraft vehicle created by mounting a towed M45 Maxson turret on a M2A1 half-track car. This particular vehicle is covering the canal near Seareinsming in Alsace-Lorraine on 18 December 1945 in support of the near-by 35th Infantry Division.

The Battle of the Bulge, December 1944-January 1945



While it's often thought that the Battle of the Bulge was fought in a snow-covered landscape, much of the early fighting took place in cold, rainy weather. Here, paratroopers of the 506th Parachute Infantry Regiment of the 101st Airborne Division march along the Bastogne-Hauflige road on 19 December 1944 to reinforce Team Desobry north of the encircled city. In the background are an assortment of armored vehicles including a M3A1 half-track and a M7 105mm howitzer motor carriage.

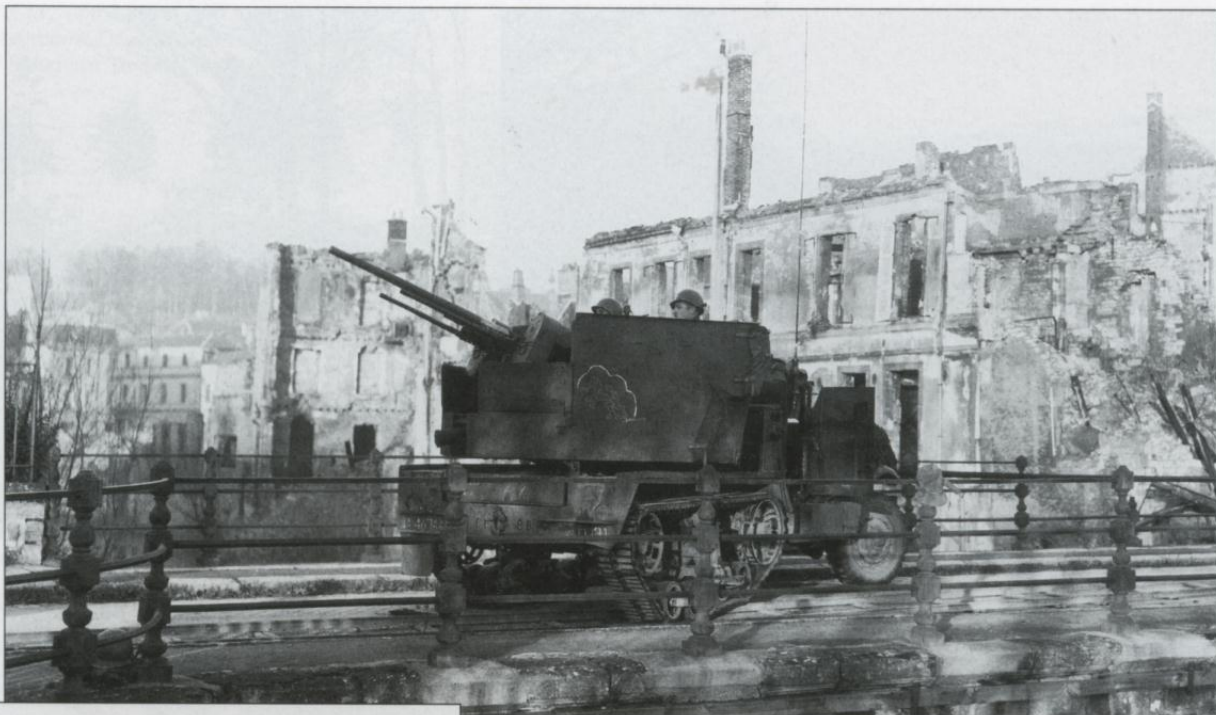


Another view of the paratroopers of the 506th PIR of the 101st Airborne Division along the Bastogne-Hauflige road on 19 December 1944. In the lead here are bazooka teams and in the background is a M3A1 half-track.



Snow fell around Bastogne later in the month as seen here in a view of a M16 MGMC from the 488th AAA Battalion of Patton's Third Army which had already broken through to the encircled city. Here, the half-track crew watch as C-47 transports fly supplies into Bastogne on 27 December 1944.

During the Ardennes fighting, the Luftwaffe made one last major attempt to attack Allied forces, and anti-aircraft units were put on heightened alert. This is a M15A1 of Battery D, 467th AAA Battalion guarding one of the Meuse river bridges in Sedan, France on 27 December 1944.



Lacking paint, some units trapped in Bastogne tried other methods of snow camouflage. This is a M3A1 half-track of the 10th Armored Division in Bastogne on 27 December 1944 using white sheets.

The 4th Armored Division from Patton's Third Army led the counter-attack to relieve Bastogne. Here, a M3A1 half-track from the division moves past a column of German prisoners on the way to Bastogne on 27 December 1944.





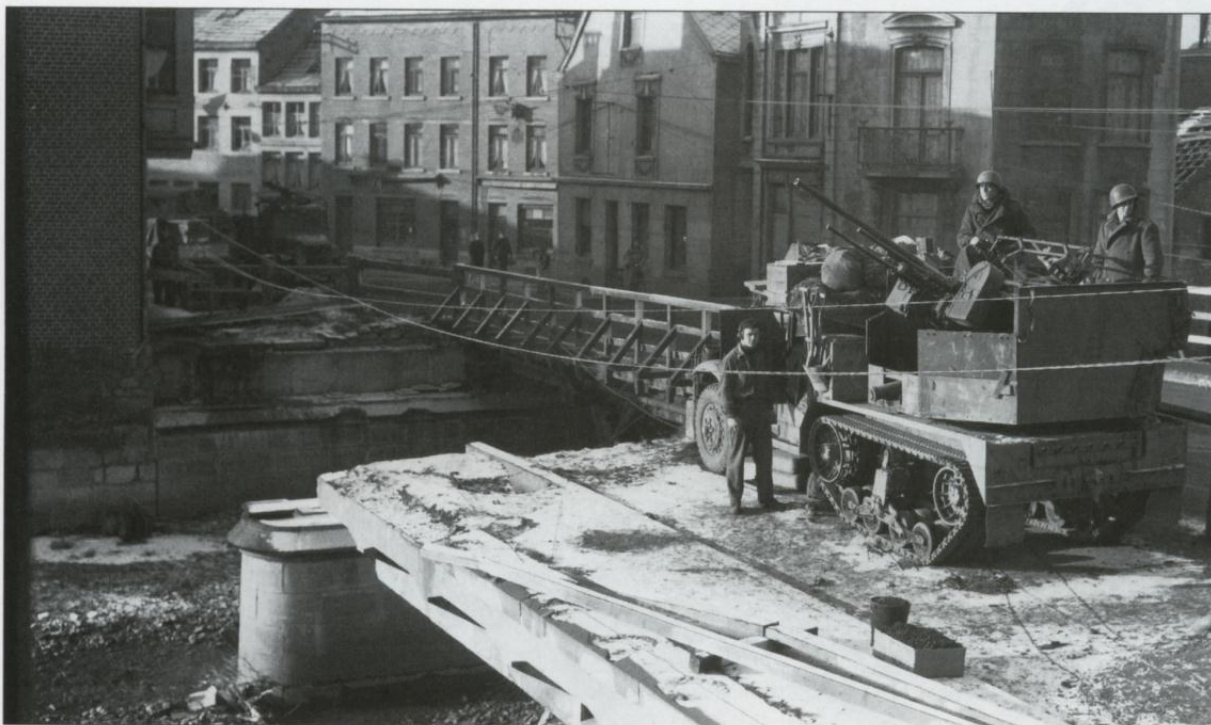
A M3A1 half-track from the 4th Armored Division moves forward through Chaumont in Luxembourg during the attacks to relieve Bastogne on 27 December 1944. The new folding rear stowage racks have been modified to permit stowage across the whole rear of the vehicle.



A M3A1 half-track from the 4th Armored Division passes by a mined jeep from the 25th Cavalry Squadron on the road through Chaumont, Luxembourg during the fighting for Bastogne on 27 December 1944.



An older M3 half-track named "Helen" of a headquarters unit from the 6th Armored Division moves through Habay-la-Neuve, Belgium during the Ardennes fighting on 29 December 1944. The chain of logs lashed to the side were used to help unditch the vehicle's forward wheels if soft mud was encountered.



A M15A1 CGMC of Battery D, 197th AAA Battalion guards a bridge through the town of Limbourg in Belgium. The bridge is a temporary engineer span after the original bridge had been destroyed during earlier fighting.

The crew of a M15A1 CGMC of the 777th AAA battalion and some paratroopers from the 101st Airborne Division warm their hands over a small fire on the outskirts of Bastogne, Belgium on 31 December 1944.



A M16 MGMC of the 447th AAA Battalion is dug in near Neufchateau, Belgium on New Year's Day, 1945. The vehicle has jerry can racks added on the winch bumper and is pattern painted with black camouflage paint over the usual olive drab.



A white-washed M3A1 half-track of the 21st Armored Infantry Battalion, 11th Armored Division passes by a destroyed German Pz.Kpfw. IV tank in the village of Foy, Belgium in early January 1945.



Earlier photos in this book showed how the 2nd Armored Division modified their M4 81mm mortar motor carriages by redirecting the mortar tube forward. This photo shows one of those vehicles in action on the outskirts of Amonines, Belgium during the fighting on 4 January 1945.

The XX Corps encouraged the pattern painting of armored equipment using whitewash, and this particular M2A1 half-track car was displayed as an example. The dark bands are from the original olive drab finish.



Another view of the pattern-painted winter camouflage on a XX Corps M2A1 half-track, this time showing the left side.



A M2A1 half-track car towing a M3 37mm anti-tank gun crosses a bridge recently erected by troops of the 49th Combat Engineer Battalion seen in the foreground on 15 January 1945 near the town of Houfallize.



Wind-driven snow completely covers the side of a M15A1 CGMC of the 778th AAA Battalion attached to the 3rd Armored Division near Bastogne on 19 January 1945.



M3A1 half-tracks of the 44th Armored Infantry, 6th Armored Division rendezvous in a field outside Mageret, Belgium on 20 January 1945. All the vehicles have whitewash camouflage, and most have their canvas tarps over the troop compartment to better protect the infantry squads inside from the cold weather.



A M15A1 CGMC and a M16 MGMC of an AAA battalion supporting the 14th Armored Division move through Mertzwiller, France on 20 January 1945. These air defense vehicles usually towed trailers with additional ammunition and supplies as seen here.

An armored infantry battalion in M3A1 half-tracks moves up through snow covered pine woods near Born, Belgium on 21 January 1944.





With the Ardennes bulge eliminated, the Allied armies began pressing ahead towards Germany. Here a M3 half-track of the French 2nd Armored Division passes through a tank barrier in the outskirts of Colmar on 2 February 1945. The rear tracks have a set of chains added for better traction in the snow.



As weather improved, the winter whitewash was gradually removed from vehicles, in this case from a M2A1 half-track car of the 489th AAA Battalion, attached to the 4th Armored Division on 8 February 1945. This shows the battalion's cartoon unit insignia.

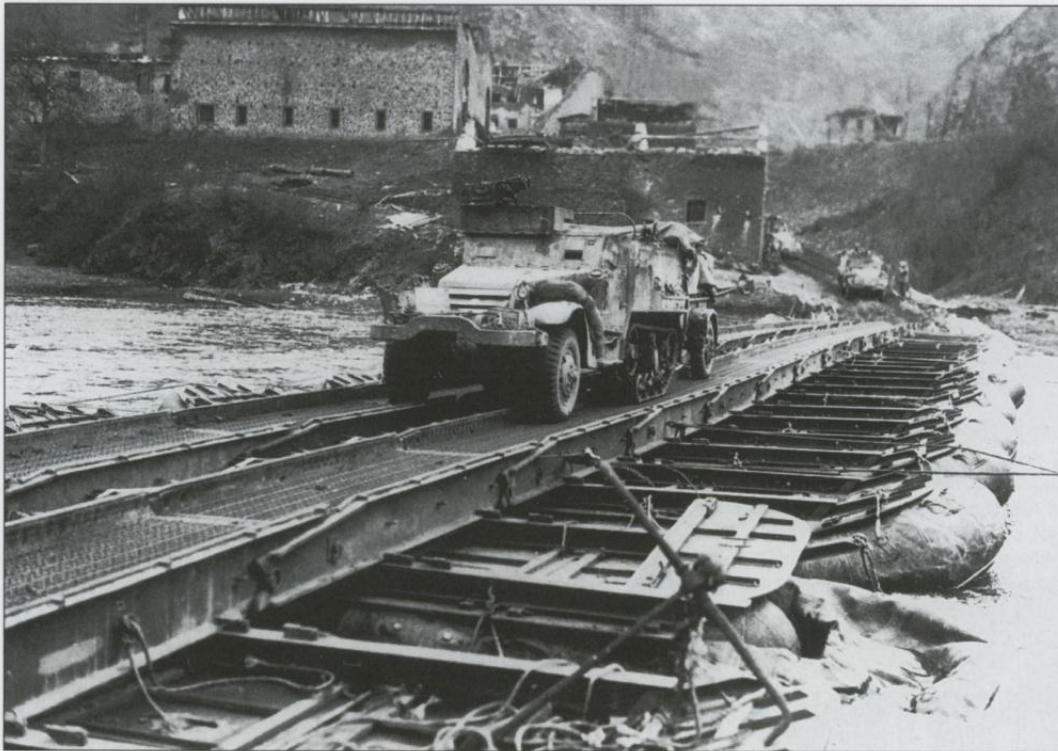


A M3A1 half-track of the 119th Engineers, 12th Armored Division rest in the town of Rouffech, France on 5 February after the Colmar pocket had been sealed. The vehicle is fitted with a locally built stowage rack on the rear. This half-track is marked with the "bar and ball" geometric tactical insignia peculiar to the 12th Armored Division.

Some units customized their half-tracks for special roles such as this command post vehicle of the 85th Reconnaissance Squadron, 5th Armored Division at Hoensbroek, Holland on 19 February 1945. The basic M3 half-track has had an extended section added to the rear to permit the officers to stand while viewing maps.



The Campaign in Germany, 1945



With the German offensive in Belgium crushed after two months of intense fighting, the road into Germany was wide open. Here a M2A1 half-track of the 10th Armored Division crosses a pontoon bridge over the Saar river near Taben during the advance by Patton's Third Army.



In the foreground is a M3A1 half-track named "Achtung!" of the 23rd Engineers, 3rd Armored Division while in the background are other vehicles from the unit including a M36 90mm tank destroyer. The unit is passing through the ruins of Dueren, Germany on 26 February 1945. Dueren had been hotly contested due to its strategic position on the Roer river, and it was a staging area for the VII Corps' Roer river crossing during Operation Grenade in late February 1945.



Support units of the 10th Armored Division including elements of a field artillery and AAA battalion prepare slit trenches for a night-time bivouac near Trier, Germany on 27 February 1945. In the background are a M15A1 CGMC, a M16 MGMC, a M3A1 half-track, and several M7 105mm howitzer motor carriages.

On 7 March 1945, Task Force Engeman from 9th Armored Division was able to seize a railroad bridge at Remagen over the Rhine river before the Germans could destroy it. The bridge seizure was a major coup and undermined German plans to use the Rhine river for the last ditch defense of the Ruhr valley. Over the next several days, the Luftwaffe staged repeated air raids against the bridge hoping to knock it down. This is a view down a side street in the town overlooking the bridge with a M3A1 half-track wedged in, and one of the squad using the vehicle's .50 cal machine gun to fire on German aircraft during a 9 March 1945 raid.





Engineers of the 125th Engineer Battalion, 14th Armored Division complete work on the pilings for a bridge over the Seltzbach river near Niederroedern on 18 March 1945, with a M3A1 half-track from the unit in the foreground.

M3A1 half-tracks of the 6th Armored Division move across a field during a successful attempt by Patton's Third Army to drive a wedge between the German 7th and 11th Armies near Lobitz on 12 April 1945.



The town crier of Anrochte is driven through the streets reading the terms of martial law from the back of a M3A1 half-track of the 8th Armored Division on 5 April 1945. Little boys seem more curious about the affair than the adults.



A fine study of armored infantry in action in the final month of the war. This is an older M3 half-track of the 46th Armored Infantry of 5th Armored Division named "Copenhagen", heavily encumbered with equipment, K-rations and supplies, moving past a burning barn near Wittenmoor on 12 April 1945.



Resistance was not over even in the final weeks of the war. Here, a squad from the 61st Armored Infantry, 10th Armored Division dismount from their M2A1 half-track car to carry on the attack on foot near Bubenorbis, Germany on 17 April 1945.



A M3A1 half-track of the 61st Armored Infantry, 10th Armored Division moves forward on 17 April 1945. The farmhouses in the foreground were set ablaze by accompanying tanks of the 21st Tank Battalion to suppress sniper fire.



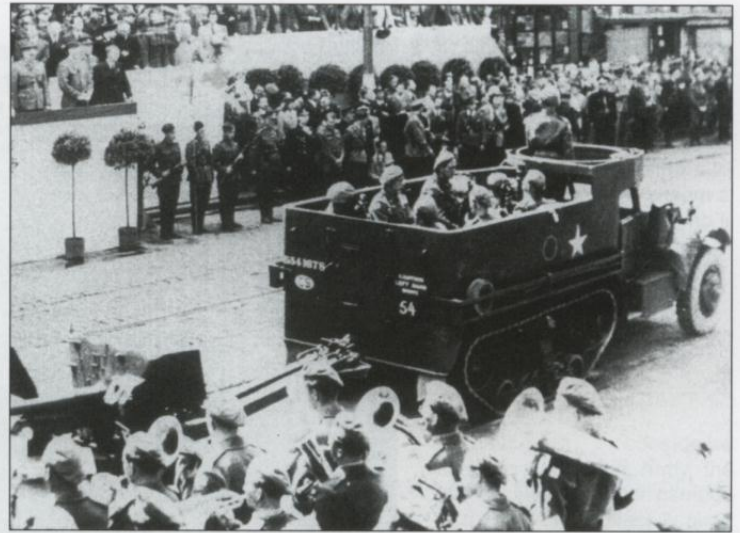
Infantry from the 14th Armored Division of Patton's Third Army move through Gungolding, Germany after having crossed the Altmuhl river on 26 April 1945. The M2A1 half-track car is from the 807th Tank Destroyer Battalion, and is being followed by an M20 armored utility car and a M8 armored car.



An increasingly common sight in the final weeks of fighting was the decision by German townspeople to declare their town "open" and put out white flags. This late in the war, US armored infantry was in no mood to engage in street fighting, and if resistance was encountered, the town was liable to be pummeled by artillery. Here, an armored infantry battalion from the 20th Armored Division move through Aichach, Germany on the outskirts of Munich on 29 April 1945.

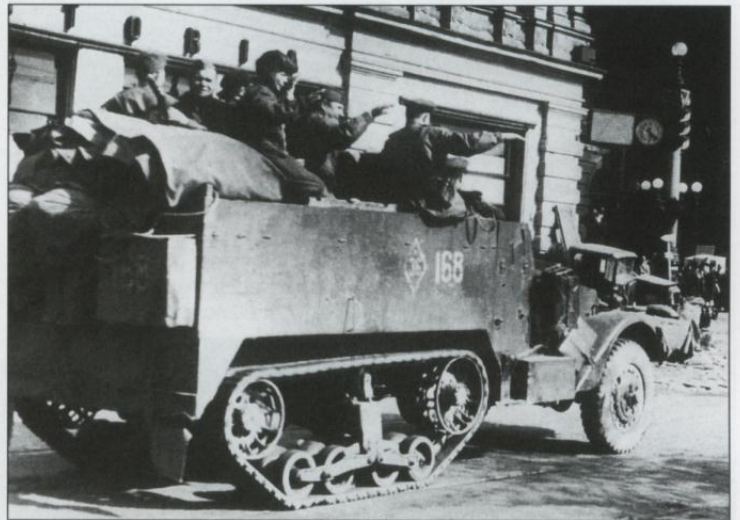
Half-tracks on the Eastern Front

The Czechoslovak 1st Independent Armoured Brigade was raised in Britain and fought in northwest Europe. However, in April 1945, it was shifted eastward to take part in the liberation of Czechoslovakia. Here, a M9A1 half-track of its anti-tank battalion is seen on parade in Prague towing a 6 pdr. anti-tank gun after the fighting. It carries British style markings and insignia, having been raised with British assistance. (Ivan Bajtos)



The T48 57mm gun motor carriage was originally built for a British requirement but by the time they became available, they were considered obsolete. As a result, most of the production run, 650 vehicles, was shipped as lend-lease to the Soviet Union. They were designated SU-57 and were used in special independent tank destroyer brigades. This is a view of a SU-57 in Prague in May 1945.

Another view of one of the Prague SU-57 tank destroyers, this time from the rear to better see its tactical markings. The unit marking is a 36 in a diamond.

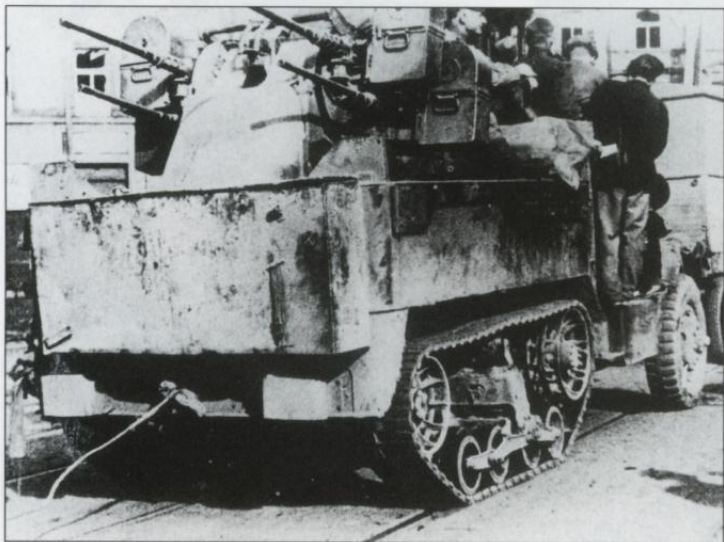


Yet another SU-57 in Prague in May 1945. This vehicle, with the tactical number 21 on the side, also reveals the new pattern air identification marking for May 1945, a large white triangle on the hood that was supposed to replace the white cross so commonly seen on Soviet vehicles in Berlin.

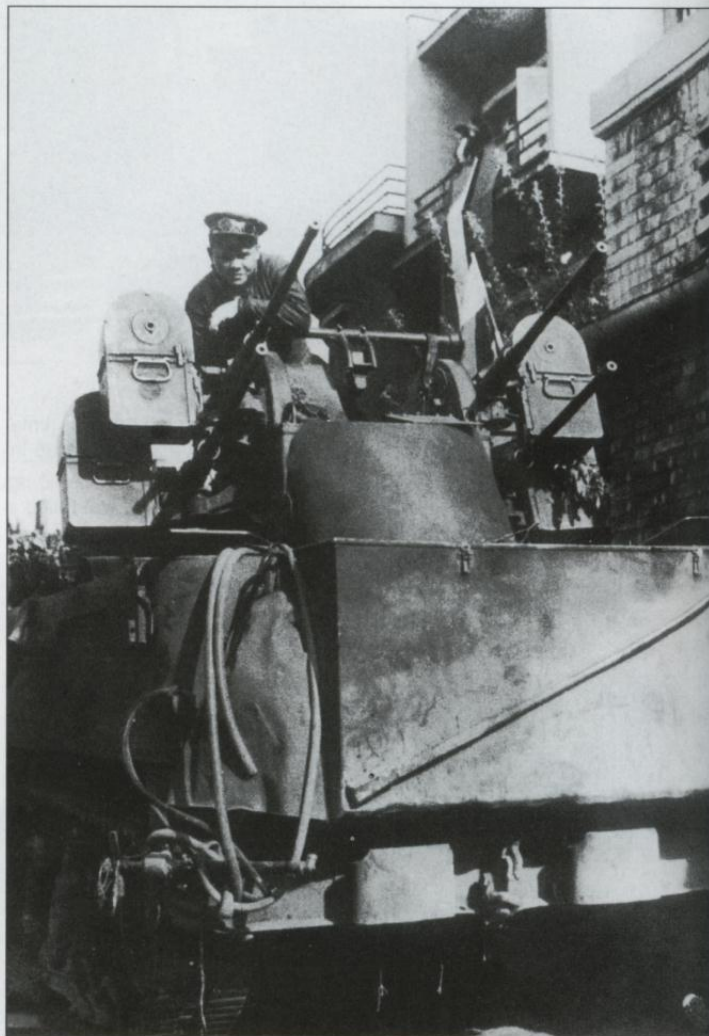
Another view of one of the SU-57 tank destroyers in Prague in May 1945, probably from the same brigade as number 21. These vehicles also are carrying the white triangle air identity marking. This marking was adopted in the spring of 1945 after the Germans caught on to the use of a white cross on the roof of Soviet vehicles as a means of air identification, and began painting it on their own vehicles. (Ivan Bajtos)



The only other army to use the SU-57 in combat was the Polish Peoples Army (LWP) which was raised by the Soviet Union to fight on the Eastern Front. A total of 15 of these were supplied and they were employed by the 7th Separate SP Artillery Battery starting in the summer of 1944. Here one is seen in the background during a consultation in Germany in March 1945 with troops from the 1st Polish Armored Brigade. (Janusz Magnuski)

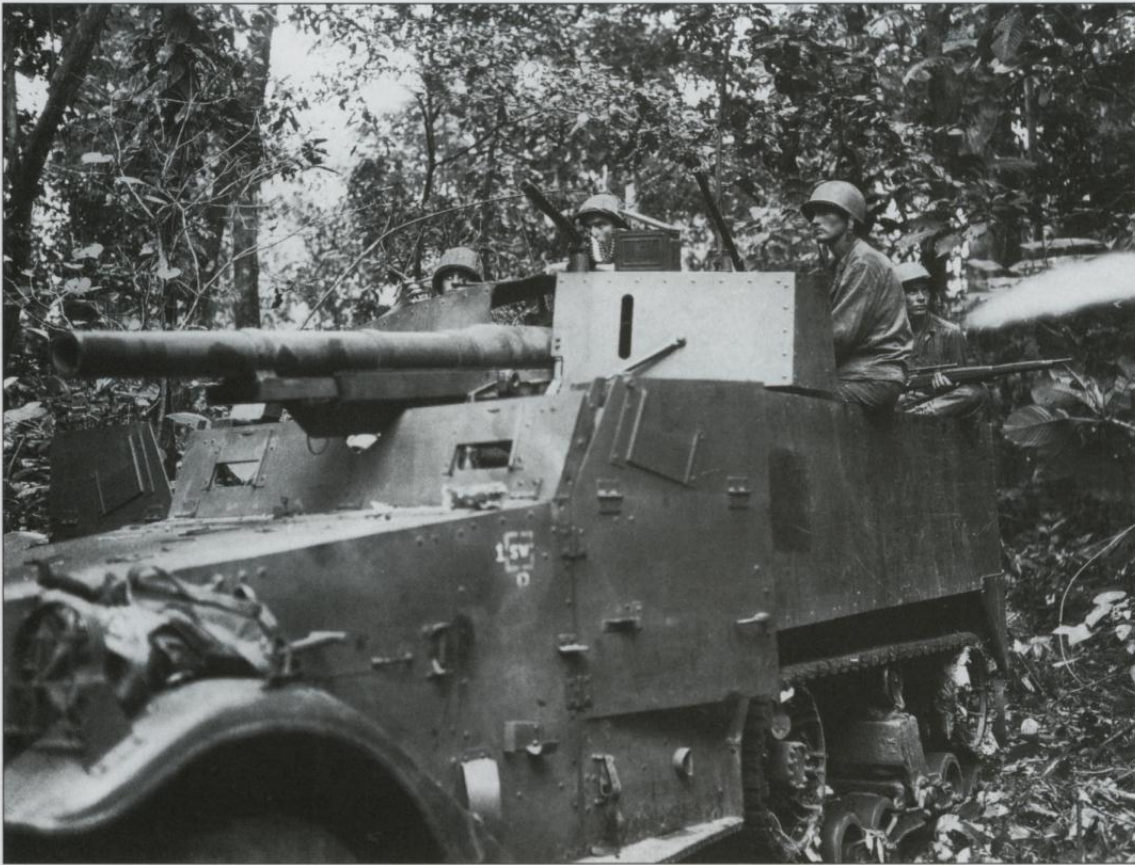


The Red Army was supplied with the M17 MGMC, equivalent to the US Army M16, but based on the M5 half-track rather than the M3. This vehicle was photographed in Prague in May 1945. (Ivan Bajtos)



The Red Army was poorly equipped with mobile air defense weapons, and the M17 MGMC proved popular. This is a rear view of a Soviet M17 in Prague in 1945, and the characteristic rounded rear hull of the M5 half-track chassis is evident in this view. (Ivan Bajtos)

Half-tracks in the Pacific



Although considered obsolete by the US Army, the M3 75mm gun motor carriage was a valuable direct support weapon for US Marine Units in the Pacific. They were officially designated as SPM by the Marines (Self-Propelled Mount) and were attached to the Special Weapons Company in each Marine division. This SPM, probably of the 5th Special Weapons Company, is on Cape Gloucester in early 1944. A simple pintle mount for a .30 cal machine gun has been added to the top of the gun shield of the vehicle. (USMC)



Since the Marine Corps did not have mechanized infantry units, most half-tracks in Marine Corps service were in specialized roles. This is a Marine M3 half-track in a communications unit during operations on the Marshall Islands on 1 February 1944. (USMC)



The US Army did not use armored infantry battalions in the Pacific but did use half-tracks in reconnaissance, headquarters and communications units. This is a M3 half-track of the 37th Recon Troop used during the fighting on Bougainville on 10 March 1944.



These M3 half-tracks were attached to the 640th Tank Destroyer Battalion, supporting the 40th Infantry Division at Gloucester, New Britain on 24 May 1944.



A well armed Marine SPM of the 4th Special Weapons Company on Saipan in June 1944 with two heavy pintle mounted .50 cal heavy machine guns on either side, two smaller pintles for .30 cal machine guns forward of these, and a third .30 cal pintle over the gun shield. The profusion of machine guns was due to the fact that these vehicles were often called upon to engage Japanese infantry where automatic weapons fire was more effective than the gun. (USMC)



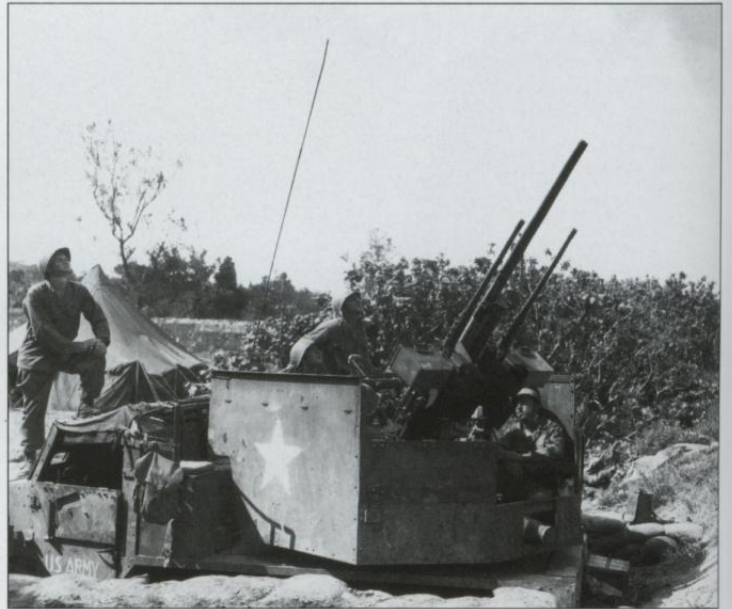
A M3 half-track in action near a wrecked plant on Peleliu island, Palau in the Caroline Islands in 1944. Curiously enough, the exhaust extension is vented up through the cab rather than outside the cab as on most deep wading kits.



A SPM of the 2nd Special Weapons Company providing fire support for Marine units on Tinian on 30 July 1944. The ground near the vehicle is littered with packing tubes and expended brass shell casings. These vehicles were used on occasion in their intended role as tank destroyers, including engagements on Peleliu and Saipan.



Chinese forces were amongst the units using half-tracks in the Pacific theater. This is a M3 half-track of the 1st Regt., 5332nd Brigade which was mechanized to provide infantry support to the First Tank Group during operations in Burma. This is a training exercise near Kabani on 25 January 1945.

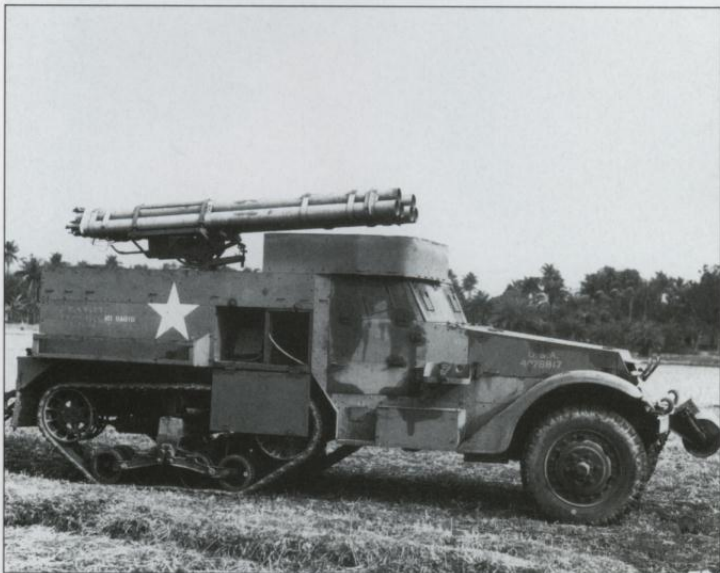


A M15A1 CGMC of Battery D, 834th AAA Battalion at Machinato, Okinawa on 12 June 1945.



A M15A1 CGMC of the US Army's 834th AAA Battalion, stationed at Yontan air field in Okinawa on 7 June 1945.

A M2A1 half-track car passes by a number of disabled Japanese Nell bombers at an air base on Okinawa on 13 June 1945. This vehicle has the later fittings such as the mine racks and rear folding stowage racks.



Some US Army units experimented with additional armament for the half-track. This is an Army M2A1 half-track car that mounts an improvised pair of three tube rocket launchers taken from US Army Air Corps aircraft at the Bengal Air Depot in India.



Another improvisation in the Pacific was this vehicle, sometimes called a M15 Special, fitted with the 40mm Bofors gun instead of the usual 37mm gun. The Coopers Plains 99th Ordnance Depot near Brisbane, Australia built several of these, some on the basis of an M15 CGMC, and others on normal half-tracks. These were issued to the 209th AAA Battalion which used them in combat on Luzon in the Philippines as seen here on 8 May 1945.



A M16 MGMC of the 209th AAA Battalion provides supporting fire for the 63rd Infantry Regiment during fighting near Kiangang, northern Luzon on 31 July 1945. In the background are a pair of M4A1 medium tanks from the 754th Tank Battalion.



An interesting shot showing both a M15 Special and a M16 MGMC of the 209th AAA Battalion providing fire support for the 32nd Infantry Division near Yamashita Ridge on the Villa Verde Trail in the Philippines on 17 August 1945. The elaborate cartoon insignia is repeated on the side of the M16 as well.

