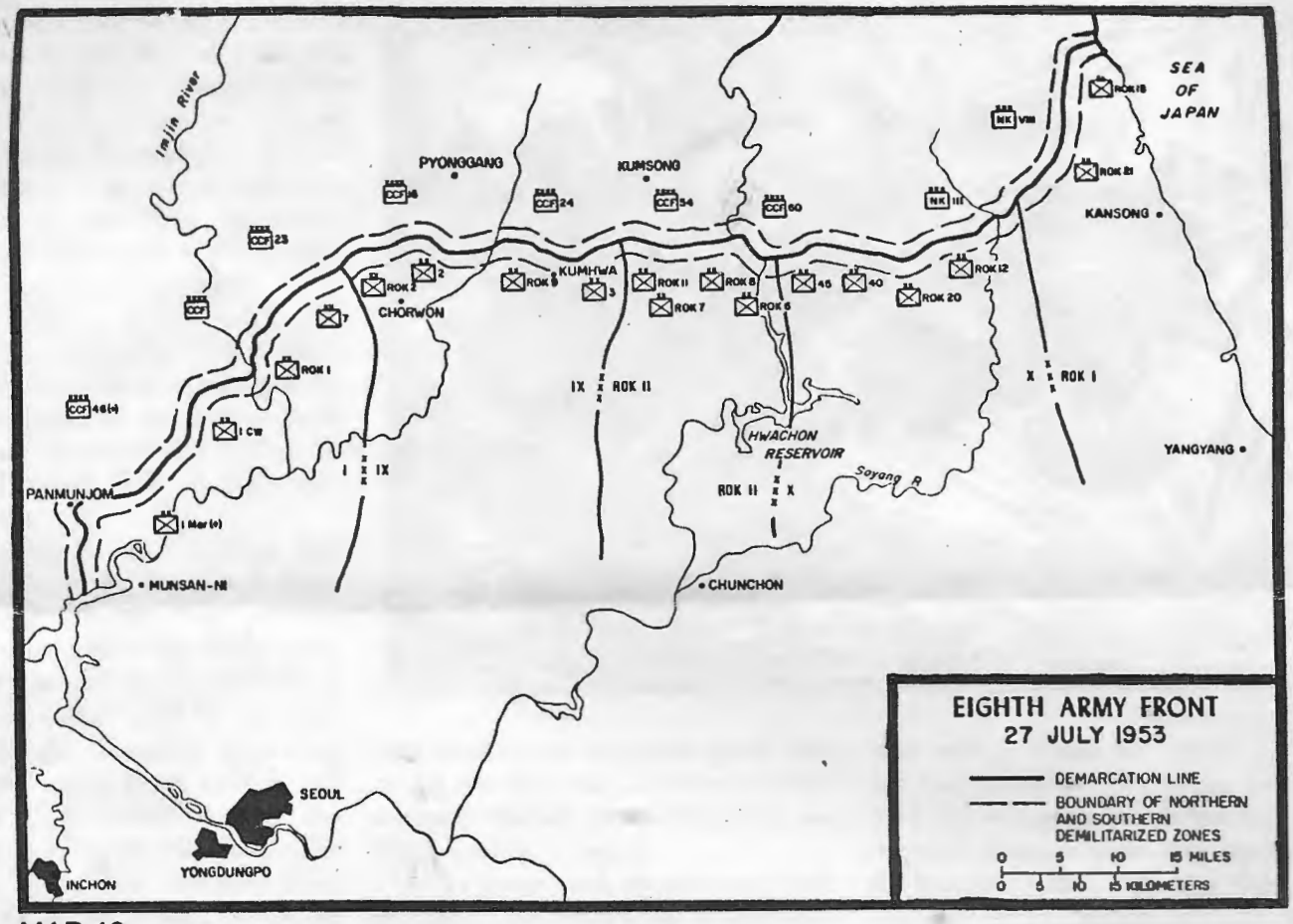
140th AAA AW Battalion

By LTC K. R. Schweidel

This article was scanned 25 March 2018. It originally appeared in the May-June 1952 issue of *Antiaircraft Journal.*



MAP 46

140th AAA AW Battalion

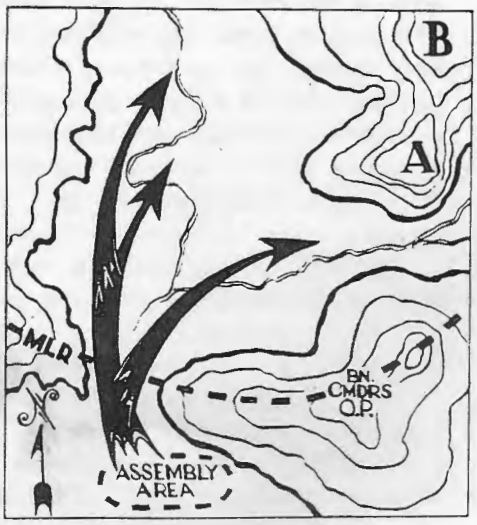
By LT. COL. K. R. SCHWEIDEL

"AND one platoon of quads will support the Tank Company." This was it, the first actual mission into enemy territory for the 140th AAA AW Bn.

There was a planned lull in the operation of the 40th Infantry Division. During this quiet period, the enemy didn't play fair. They moved into no man's land, occupied two hills, dug like gophers and scattered mines like a sowing Kansas wheat farmer.

Four platoons of tanks supported by one platoon of our M16's from C Battery under the command of Lt. "Nellie" Nelson were to debouch from a narrow valley entrance, proceed north up the valley. If possible, two platoons would move into the east-west valley. Each tank platoon was to be accompanied by two M16's.

My S3, Capt. "Wild" Bill Klafehn, accompanied Nelson in the M3 as an observer, to gain firsthand combat experience.



The tank and infantry briefing gave our platoon no planned fire missions, no prior target designations. It could only expect to take on targets of opportunity.

At 0630, on this particularly cold, black morning, the platoon of M16's were to assemble in the valley, defiladed by hills from enemy observation. These guns were pulled out of emplacements in front line positions, many of them very difficult to get in or out of, particularly so in darkness. This assembly plan made it almost impossible for Lt. Nelson to make a complete personal inspection and check of the equipment. He had to rely strictly on what he could accomplish during the night.

The SCR 528's were tuned to the M16 platoon channel, while the command track's SCR 508 was tuned to both the

tank and M16 platoon channel. Something must have gone wrong at Nelson's briefing because we learned later that some of our tracks were actually on the tank channel instead of our own platoon network. We also learned that the tank channel slopped over rather badly into our platoon channel. This undesirable condition obviously had its advantages and disadvantages since many tracks could hear both.

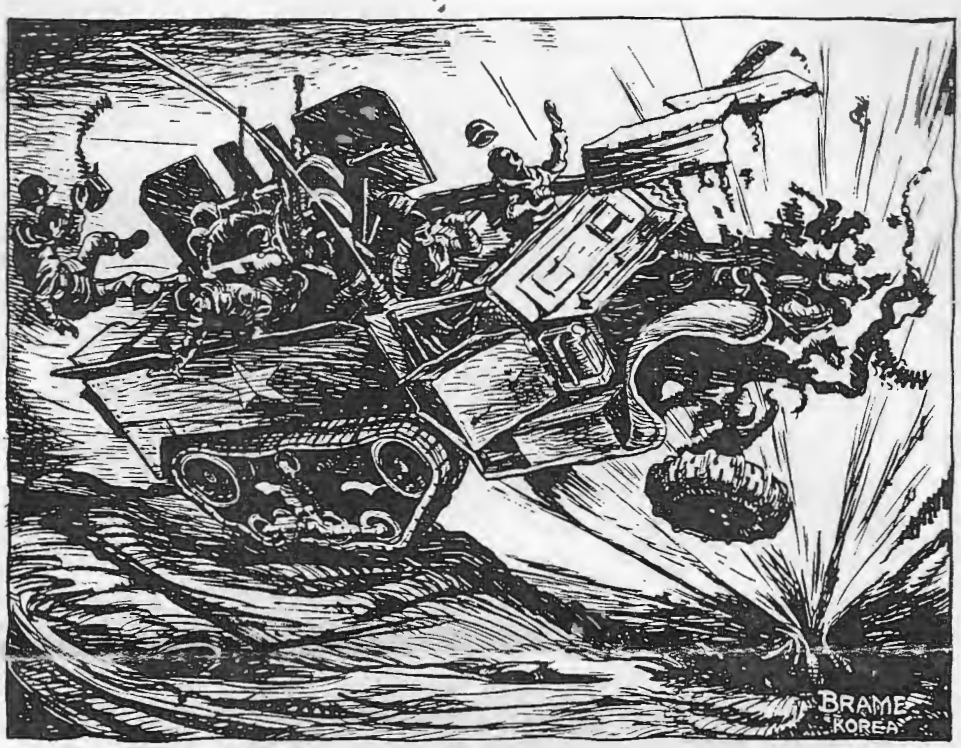
Each half track carried 10,000 rounds of ammunition for the fifties and piled as much ammunition as the tankers would stand for on accompanying tanks. All M16's had shields and all men wore armored vests.

Accompanied by my S2, Capt. Bob MacDonald, and S1, Lt. Chuck Beckwith, I occupied a high ridge point on the MLR from which the entire north-south valley as well as the entrance to the east-west valley could be observed. Incidentally, the Comrades spotted us and we came under heavy artillery and mortar fire. Our binoculars were evidently giving off some reflections. The doughboys said, "The commies don't seem to mind people walking around the MLR, but they deeply resent snooping."

At H-hour minus 10 (0650) the 40th Division Artillery, some corps artillery plus heavy weapons of infantry clobbered the objective. After H-hour the artillery shifted to other areas from which suspected or expected enemy artillery or mortar fire might come.

The 1st tank platoon lumbered out at 0700 with two of our M16's in this order: Two tanks, an M16, two tanks, an M16 and a tank. They moved out in file fifty yards apart preceded by some combat engineers clearing a path for them through the mine field. About 700 yards out, the leading M16 hit a water hole. We just have to learn that an M16 just can't go everywhere a tank can go! However, with speed and skill, the tank ahead of the M16 backed up, hooked on and hauled the half track clear. The tanks, of course, had their own problems getting around, too. There was good bit of backing and filling and it was fortunate that enemy artillery hadn't opened up yet. A hundred yards apart might be better in open country.

About one mile down the valley enemy artillery and mortars opened up. The tanks had no visible target and had to fire somewhat by guess. They ordered the M16's to rake the ridge lines. It was soon noted that as long as the quads were raking the ridge lines, no enemy artillery or mortar fire fell, but as soon as fire was lifted, it really poured in.



As the quads fired, the men got a little hot and the cannoneers had to shed their parkas. The mount was loaded to the hilt with ammunition and there was no space in the cab where they wouldn't be in the way. If we had to do this job again, I think we'd shed the unnecessary clothes at the assembly area, even though it were cold as they set out.

Let's see what's going on in the second tank platoon. One of our M16's just won't run. The sergeant thinks it's a fuel line so they are checking all fuel lines. Meanwhile the battery commander, Lt. Whitney, had a reserve M16 ready to go forward when the second tank platoon moved out. Incidentally it was a gas line, one between the fuel filter and gas tank, evidently dirty gas. Dirty gas is an ever-present problem in any combat zone. We've tried to lick it by daily emptying of fuel filter cups and additional draining of about a cup of gas from the tank every morning. The latter, aimed at getting rid of condensation which freezes. This procedure is helpful and recommended. It took three hours to remedy this fuel line difficulty with the mechanics working in the assembly area, in a temperature of minus ten degrees out in the open.

The second platoon moved out with a column of four tanks, two M16's and a fifth tank. They proceeded up the north-south valley and headed into the east-west valley. About 600 yards up the east-west valley and despite the fact the M16 was following dead in the tracks of the tank ahead, a mine blew up under the left front wheel. We had taken the precaution of sandbagging the cab. This quite evidently saved the lives of the driver and the section leader or at least prevented serious injury. The driver suffered a bruised ankle. The section leader and remainder of the crew were merely shaken up. The dazed crew climbed out of their half track to clear the fuzz from their eyes and a crew from another disabled M16 came over and manned the turret. In about three minutes the original crew was able to count all its fingers and get back into its own turret and operate, expending about 8,000 rounds of ammunition in the ensuing hour. The platoon leader via radio directed another reserve track to replace the damaged one.

Heavy mortar fire was falling quite regularly now. In this valley the M16's spotted an OP dugout which had apparently been by-passed by the infantry. This was quickly taken under fire and neutralized. Here again, because of the terrain, no other fire mission could be layed directly on the enemy because they were dug into hill "B" which was defiladed by hill "A." This mount only fired 3,000 rounds as it was having wiring circuit troubles. It was decided to replace this unit.

The infantry had six badly wounded men needing immediate evacuation. This M16 was selected for this job. The crew

jumped out of their vehicle, helped the wounded aboard, who were quickly evacuated to medical vehicles in the assembly area. A reserve quad less crew was sent out as a replacement, picked up the waiting men and resumed firing on ridge lines and suspected bunkers. One gun of this quad broke a portion of the barrel extension which put one barrel out of action.

Let's pick up the 3rd platoon debouching from the valley in a little different order: Three tanks, an M16, a tank, an M16 and a tank, with an interval of about fifty yards. They moved out into the north-south valley and settled in an area in the flat somewhat south and west of the 1st platoon. Their firing mission followed the pattern of the 1st platoon.

The guns, which had a bare minimum of oil due to the freezing weather, began to malfunction after they became slightly heated. With the lavish hand of a cook in a training camp preparing a fresh salad, oil was poured over the machine guns. This solved the problem very nicely and since all the other quads suffered the same experience it is a good trick to remember. That is, in cold weather operations, routinely plan to use lots of oil as soon as the guns warm up, to insure smooth functioning.

Artillery and mortar fire were now beginning to fall heavily in the areas of both platoons. It should be noted here that the two hills which were the infantry's objective were of such configuration that neither the tanks nor half tracks in the north-south valley could observe or fire visually on any enemy in the area.

The fourth tank platoon, which was in reserve, was directed to enter the east-west valley. Entering the valley, the M16's were ordered to neutralize by fire the crest of a hill. As soon as their firing ceased, mortar fire poured down. Our luck was still holding and no damage occurred. After the first 45 minutes, firing two guns in short bursts, 7,000 rounds were expended. Despite this staggering of fire, barrels overheated and tracers were observed tumbling. The spare barrels located in their normal positions were buried under the expended brass and linkage and were very awkward to get at. We are considering bracketing these spare barrels on the side armor plating. The men put on their asbestos mittens to change barrels, but even with mittens on, their hands became overly hot.

Continuing up the valley the engine on a quad conked out. A quick survey revealed that the coil wire on the engine was bare. It was remedied in five minutes and forward progress continued. The lead M16 backed into a turn to position itself when the track started to come off. Before any action could be taken the entire track fell off. The crew dismounted and attempted to force the track back on the rollers. However, it was discovered that several guides were broken. An attempt was made to move into position by using front wheel drive. This could not be done. The left drive sprocket was inactivated by tying a restraining chain to it.

By 1230 we were all safely out of the hell zone. Immediately after lunch and hot coffee, we critiqued the operation carefully with the battery, platoon, and section commanders.

In talking to Captain Krieger, the CO of the tank company, he had this to say, "The M16's did a wonderful job. I don't see how I could have gotten along without them. As you know my radio conked out on my tank and I had to depend almost entirely on your M3 command track for my control. Incidentally, your radio operators are the best I've ever worked with. The M16's saved us a lot of casualties, because whenever they were firing on those ridge lines we never got any artillery or mortar fire. I was sure happy to have them with us."

Summing up the engagement, the men performed in a superior manner for their first combat. While we learned that the M16 is vulnerable to mines, the personnel casualties were light. Ammunition expended, 89.000 rounds, over an actual firing period of about three and a half hours. Our accompanying pachyderms did well too, suffering no casualties or serious tank damage.

Based on this operation I would stress the following points:

- Brief more carefully, then check and re-check to be sure every man understands his job thoroughly.
- Radios should be checked for channel carefully.
- Don't follow the tanks too closely so they can back and fill if necessary.
- Have plenty of oil on hand and prepare to use it as the guns warm up.
- Plan for reserve half-tracks in the assembly area.
- Train gunners to conserve fire so as not to burn out barrels unnecessarily.