



The M-18 "Hellcat" Tank Destroyer.

Kentucky Windage

Dear Sirs:

Reading in the May-June issue about the increased "lethality and fightability" of the enhanced M1A2, with its extensive use of digital electronics for target acquisition and target tracking, made me wonder if any younger readers knew how target acquisition and target tracking was done fifty-odd years ago. I would like to quote a paragraph from the combat history of the 704th Tank Destroyer Battalion, Fourth Armored Division, of General Patton's Third Army.

The time was September, 1944, the weapon was the 76mm, high-velocity antitank rifle that armed the M-18 "Hellcat." The gunner was SSG Phillip Hosey. I quote from Phil Hosey.

"Near Nancy, France, between Luneville and Arracourt, we faced a group of German tanks that had taken a position one mile away, across a shallow open valley. Our M-18s were in defilade, facing out over a small hill. Infantry led the way across the valley with three M-4s intermingled. The Krauts let them get halfway across, then opened up with anti-tank fire from woods on the right. They immediately KO'd two M-4s and drove the infantry to the ground. Two Panthers, a Mark IV, and an assault gun came out of the woods and moved across our line of fire at the distance of about a mile. In his position in our open turret, the tank commander, SSG Hicklin, watched their progression through his glasses and called out the range: "Two thousand yards, moving at about ten mph." Our rifle, with AP, had a muzzle velocity of 2,700 fps, so it would take two seconds to arrive on target. The Krauts were moving at fifteen feet per second, which let them travel thirty feet in two seconds. Their lead tank was twenty feet long (from the book), so we led him a good length for a center shot. We laid on and fired. Voila, a hit! It struck two feet in front of his rear drive idler. We then picked the last tank and scored — he began to burn. The two intervening tanks were destroyed by two fast AP shots. So we got two Panthers, a Mark 4, and an assault gun. Our 76mm rifle packed a good punch, even at two thousand yards. We felt that we had the best self-propelled antitank gun in the ETO."

In spite of his Purple Hearts and continued combat-related disabilities, Phil Hosey has provided many important first-hand accounts of his experiences for our combat history of the 704th Tank Destroyer Battalion.

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