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SPECIAL SERIES, NO. 9

JANUARY 25, 1943

THE GERMAN SQUAD IN COMBAT.

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THE GERMAN SQUAD IN COMBAT . . .



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FOREWORD

THIS TEXT is the translation of the greater part of a German handbook designed to aid in squad training. The material illustrates, with a wealth of concrete examples, the basic tactics of the German rifle squad. These tactics differ somewhat from those of the U. S. squad, mainly in that the enemy unit is built for tactical purposes around the employment of the squad's light machine gun. It is believed that U. S. company officers and noncommissioned officers will profit by this opportunity to study the combat methods of the basic German infantry unit.

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Section I. ORGANIZATION AND FORMATIONS OF THE SQUAD

1. ORGANIZATION AND EQUIPMENT

The rifle platoon consists of the platoon leader, platoon headquarters (one leader and three men), four squads, and the light-mortar squad (one leader and two men).

The squad is the smallest combat unit. It consists of the squad leader and nine men, one of whom is the second-in-command. The second-in-command is the assistant of the squad leader and represents him in case of necessity. He is responsible for liaison with the platoon leader and adjacent squads.

Members	Equipment	Duties
Squad leader	Machine pistol with 6 magazines (each with 32 rounds) in magazine pouches, Magazine loader, Field glasses, Wire cutters, Pocket compass, Signal whistle, Sun glasses, Searchlight.	The squad leader commands his squad. He directs the fire of the light machine gun and, in so far as the combat permits, that of the riflemen also. He is responsible for the mechanical condition of the weapons and equipment, and for the availability of ammunition within his squad.

Members	Equipment	Duties
Machine-gunner (No. 1).	Machine gun 34 with belt, Magazine 34 (50 rounds), Tool pouch, Pistol, Short spade, Sun glasses, Searchlight.	The machine-gunner op- erates the machine gun in battle. He is responsible for the care of the weapon.
Assistant (No.2)	Barrel - protector with a spare bar- rel, 4 belt drums (each with 50 rounds), Ammunition belt 34, Pistol, Ammunition box (300 rounds) Short spade, Sun glasses.	This member of the squad is the assistant to the machine-gunner in com- bat. He insures the sup- ply of ammunition. He assists the machine-gun- ner in the preparation for firing and in going into position. Then he usu- ally takes position under cover, several paces to the left flank or rear of the machine-gunner. He is always ready to aid the machine-gunner (for ex- ample, by correcting jams, changing barrels, righting the gun on bipod) or to replace him.

Members	Equipment	Duties
Assistant (No.2) —Continued.		After the gun has gone into position, if there is suitable cover present he lies down near the machine-gunner and aids him in serving the machine gun. He also aids the machine-gunner in the care of the weapon.
Ammunition-carrier (No. 3)	Barrel - protector with a spare barrel, 2 ammunition boxes (each with 300 rounds), Ammunition belt 34, Pistol, Short spade.	If possible, the ammunition-carrier takes a position to the rear, under cover. He inspects the ammunition belts and ammunition. He also operates as a close or hand-to-hand fighter.
Riflemen (Nos. 4-9)	Rifle (each) 2 ammunition pouches, Short spade. <i>And when ordered:</i> Hand grenades, Smoke grenades, Explosive charges, Ammunition, Machine-gun tripod.	The riflemen execute the close-combat fighting with rifle fire and bayonet. One rifleman is the second-in-command. He is the assistant of the squad leader and commands the squad in the absence of the leader. He is responsible for liaison with the platoon commander and with adjacent squads.

2. SQUAD FORMATIONS, CLOSE ORDER ¹

Figure 1.—Squad symbols

The formations in figures 2, 3, and 4 are taken at once upon the following orders, respectively:

1. SQUAD LINE, ONE DEEP, 2. FALL IN.

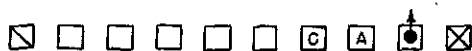


Figure 2.—Squad in line

1. SQUAD COLUMN, 2. FALL IN.

1. IN MARCH ORDER, 2. FALL IN.



Figure 3.—Squad column

Figure 4.—Squad in march order

¹ See FM 22-5, "Infantry Drill Regulations," August 4, 1941, paragraphs 114-130, for comparison with U. S. Army squad formations. Figure 1 gives the U. S. symbols used to represent the members of the squad.

3. SQUAD FORMATIONS, EXTENDED ORDER

When the situation, terrain, and hostile activity no longer permit close-order formation, the squad adopts open formation—that is, deployment. The deployment of the squad usually follows immediately after the platoon develops. It is executed upon signal, order, or command.

The principal deployed formations are the squad column (fig. 5) and the skirmish line (fig. 6). The squad is always deployed as a unit, with the machine-gunner (No. 1) as the base man.

a. Squad Column

The squad column formation is used for approaching the enemy during the fire fight when only the light ma-

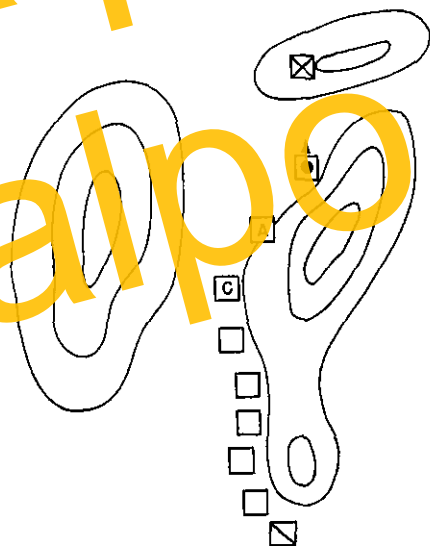


Figure 5.—Squad column moving forward

chine gun is firing and the riflemen are held back. The second-in-command is at the tail of the column to insure that the members of the squad keep closed up (see fig. 5).

b. Squad Skirmish Line

If the immediate, combined fire action of both the light machine gun and the riflemen is required by the situation, the skirmish-line formation should be adopted.

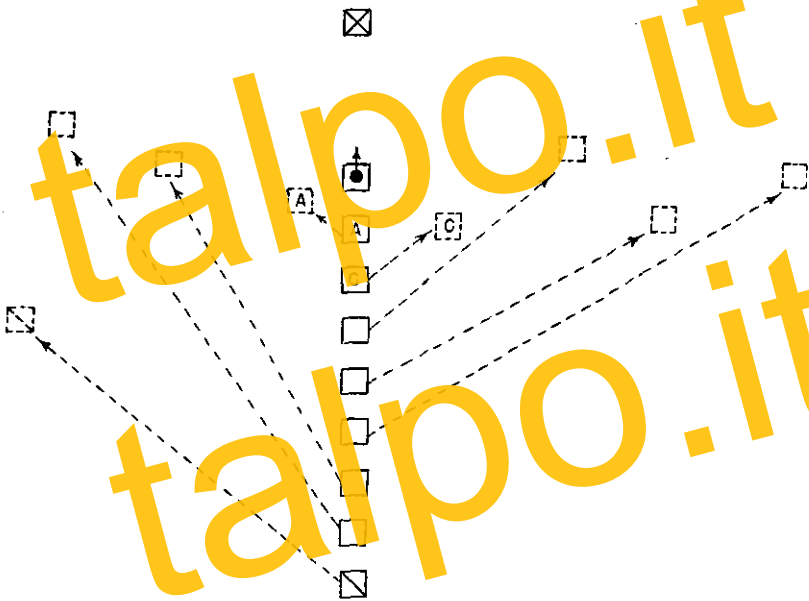


Figure 6.—Squad in skirmish line

If the whole squad is to engage simultaneously in fire fight, the riflemen take positions according to the terrain, usually building up a skirmish line on both sides of the light machine gun (see fig. 6). The light machine gun remains centrally located in the squad skirmish line, ex-

cept where the terrain or situation suggests the deployment of all the riflemen to the right (or to the left) (see fig. 7).

If it is desired to change the formation from squad column to skirmish line in order to take up the fire fight immediately, the leader gives the signal or command to deploy. Bunching around the machine gun must be avoided under all circumstances.



Figure 7.—Skirmish line echelonned to the right

In order to form the skirmish line from the squad column, the forward half of the riflemen deploys to the right of the machine-gunner, and the rear half to his left. The interval between men is approximately 5 paces, unless a different interval is expressly ordered. If it is

desired that the riflemen deploy all on one side, it must be so ordered. If the deployment is executed from the march order (fig. 4), the riflemen take the same positions as indicated in figures 6 and 7.

c. General

The use of other formations, or the omission of parts of the squad, is permissible only when the situation makes it necessary. In this case special orders should be given. Cohesion within the squad must be maintained at all costs.

The formation of the squad may be changed from column to skirmish line (or vice versa) to reduce casualties from hostile fire or to negotiate difficult terrain. Formation changes in rough terrain are often necessary in surmounting or avoiding obstacles of all kinds, or in closing up on rear squads.

It is less important that the distances and intervals be maintained exactly than it is that the squad avoid losses—in other words, that it reach the enemy position in full strength. The attention of the riflemen should be directed more in the direction of the enemy and less on the formation.

The squad leader is not restricted to any given position or place. *As a rule, he moves before his squad.* On occasion it may be necessary for him to leave his squad temporarily in order to observe the enemy, reconnoiter the terrain, and maintain connection with adjacent units. His place is then taken by the second-in-command.

Section II. COMBAT METHODS OF THE SQUAD

4. SQUAD LEADERSHIP

a. General

In modern combat the squad is usually the largest unit which can be controlled by an individual leader on the battlefield.

The efficiency of a squad depends essentially on the personality of its leader, his conduct in emergencies and in danger, his example, his power to make decisions, and his coolness. A good leader, one with a good personality, means a good unit, and a poor leader means a poor unit.

The development of the personality of the squad leader is one of the most important training objectives during peacetime. He must learn the way to the hearts of his subordinates and win their confidence by understanding their feelings and their way of thinking, and by justice and solicitude for their welfare. The subordinate wants to feel that his superior has a heart for him, looks after him, and intercedes in his behalf. It is only in this way that in the field the squad leader can be at the same time a stern father and a kind mother.

In the first few battles, where the inexperienced soldier may be influenced and frightened, the strong will and strict discipline of the leader will assist the soldier in overcoming his fear and in carrying out his mission coolly.

b. The Squad Leader

The squad leader must be an example—and a combat example—for his men. The most effective means for gaining the respect and confidence of subordinates, and for getting the most out of them, is to set an example. But in order to set an example, the squad leader must have a stronger will than his men, must do more than they do, and must himself always faithfully discharge his duties and obey orders cheerfully. A superior can make his subordinates reliable and conscientious in the carrying out of orders only by setting them a good example in this respect, even in the smallest things. In order to be a leader in the field, a superior must display an exemplary bearing before his men in the moment of danger and be willing, if necessary, to die for them. The weak and vacillating are then guided by his example and by his disregard of self in accepting privations and dangers.

The way in which the squad leader gives his orders exercises a great influence upon subordinates. Calmness and certainty, as well as clearness in the dispositions and the orders; immediately create in subordinates the feeling that the leader is competent and make them confident of success. They want to see and feel that their leader is superior to them in knowledge, ability, calmness, behavior, and experience.

In offensive action, the squad leader comes after the platoon leader in driving power. He must continually keep alive the will to conquer the enemy.

Under heavy fire, only a real man maintains the composure necessary for calm judgment, so essential to proper decisions. Only the man who does not fear dan-

ger, or who can control his fear, can lead his men against the enemy, and such a man, in spite of discouraging progress during the course of the battle, will lead his men on.

In defense also, the squad leader, by his personal fearlessness and coolness under heavy fire, retains the unswerving loyalty of his men. The troops in the front-line units look to their squad and platoon leaders for strong leadership when attacked by a numerically superior enemy. Lastly, it is the squad leader who incites his men to engage in vigorous hand-to-hand fighting or to launch swift counterblows when the enemy closes in the final assault upon them.

If the squad leader conducts himself in the presence of his unit in an exemplary and calm manner—in other words, acts like a real man—his men will also do their duty and carry out his orders conscientiously. The squad leader will then be able to depend upon them in every situation.

5. THE SQUAD IN THE FIRE FIGHT

a. General Principles

The squad is usually employed in combat as a unit. The division into two groups—a light machine-gun group and a rifle group, with different combat missions—no longer applies. The fire fight is now conducted through the concerted effort of the entire squad.

If the situation requires the opening of fire—in the attack usually at the shorter ranges—the squad leader, as a rule, employs initially only the machine gun, the fire of which he personally directs. In many cases (for example,

if the target is small and the range short) it is preferable to employ a good rifle marksman.

In order to obtain the most effective results, the riflemen will be employed early. This employment should be effected at short ranges and when the riflemen have sufficient cover so that they will not lie on the field of battle merely as targets. When the squad is organized for penetration, the riflemen are deployed in the front line in preparation for the final assault upon the defender. Those parts of the squad which are not actually engaged in the fire fight are held under cover. However, the tactical integrity of the squad must be retained. The opening of fire is normally ordered by the squad leader.

The employment of the light machine gun in the fire fight emphasizes the heaviest concentration of fire against the more threatening and most dangerous targets. Selection of the target is determined by the combat mission of the unit. It is most important that the unit defeat that portion of the enemy, or take under fire those targets, which may prevent the accomplishment of the combat mission. For effective distribution of fire, careful coordination with adjacent units and with the heavy infantry-supporting weapons is essential.

When a squad is operating under hostile fire, the breadth and depth of its deployed formation often render control of the entire squad by one person very difficult. Therefore, the riflemen assist in the fire fight of the squad by conducting their fire independently, unless the squad leader concentrates the fire of his riflemen upon one target.

b. Fire Discipline

(1) *Targets.*—The rifleman fires upon that portion of the target designated to him, and in the case of very broad targets he directs his fire at that position directly opposite him. If the selection is left to the rifleman, he himself fires upon the target which interferes most with the accomplishment of the squad's mission. All the riflemen must therefore know the combat mission and must understand the squad leader's plan for its accomplishment.

The selection of the aiming point is usually left to the rifleman. In the case of small targets, the aim should be at the bottom; in the case of large ones, at the middle. If a target is moving to one side, the rifleman must aim ahead of, or move his sights with, the target, taking into account the speed of movement and the velocity of the bullet.

Unless the command FIRE AT WILL has been given, the rifleman will not fire except at targets that suddenly appear at close range. Even this is not permissible if the squad leader has ordered the withholding of fire.

(2) *Ammunition.*—Ammunition supply plays an important role. Hence, every leader must supervise its expenditure carefully and provide for its replenishment. All leaders must know how much ammunition they have at their disposal, and when and how they can supplement it. Each light machine gun must hold back as long as possible 200 to 250 rounds as a reserve.

(3) *Range estimation.*—Usually the estimate made by the leader provides the basis for the initial sight-setting. By the action of the enemy and by the impacts of the

bullets, the leader and the men should try to determine whether or not the range has been correctly estimated. The fire is being aimed well when a part of the bullets are observed in front of the target, and the majority fall behind the target. If poor observation in the vicinity of the target renders it difficult to determine the correctness of the range, then a point in the vicinity of the target which may be more clearly observed should be fired upon, and the correct range determined.

c. Employment of the Squad in Surprise Fire

(1) *General.*—Light machine-gunners and riflemen cannot conduct a fire fight over a long period of time. An effort should always be made, therefore, so that they may go into position and fire without being discovered. Victory comes to the one who fires the largest number of well-aimed shots against his opponent in the shortest time.

After a fire action of brief duration, or as soon as the purpose of the fire is attained, the light machine-gunners and the riflemen take cover. If necessary, they move to another position. These changes in position must be made under cover; otherwise, they will be worthless. Fire pauses should be utilized for improving the position.

If the terrain permits or the riflemen have dug in, the opening of fire is always prepared under cover. Not until then do the riflemen and light machine-gunners go into position for fire by surprise. Every moment which is not used to good advantage weakens the fighting power of the unit.

The conduct of a surprise fire attack is divided into

preparation and execution. The initial preparation includes all activities which may be conducted under cover (for example, designation of targets, sight-setting, distribution of extra ammunition, fire distribution in so far as necessary, etc.). The execution includes the occupation of positions and actual firing.

The amount of ammunition to be used in rapid fire may be ordered if it can be foreseen that the amount prescribed is adequate to attain fire superiority or to accomplish the object of the firing.

When a light machine gun fires through a gap in the line, it should be located behind the center of the gap, and the distance from the gun to the gap should be less than the width of the gap (fig. 8). Overhead fire with the rifle and light machine gun is undertaken only when the weapons are located on high ground immediately above the troops over which the firing is directed.

The employment of rifle fire must always be determined by the terrain and the situation. Using riflemen in surprise fire, the squad leader from a covered position points out the target to the riflemen before the beginning of fire, and indicates the range and the target. At the commands POSTS, FIRE AT WILL the riflemen rush to the firing positions (approximately even with the leaders), thrust rifles forward, push the safety to the "off" position, and open fire immediately.

Easily recognizable targets may be pointed out under cover. If it is not possible to designate the target while the men are under cover, the leader first lets them occupy their firing positions and then designates the target. Fire may be opened by an arm signal, a command, or a whistle.

During pauses in the firing, every rifleman and machine-gunner must inspect independently his weapon and ammunition. By questioning the men, the squad leader finds out the amount of ammunition on hand. The

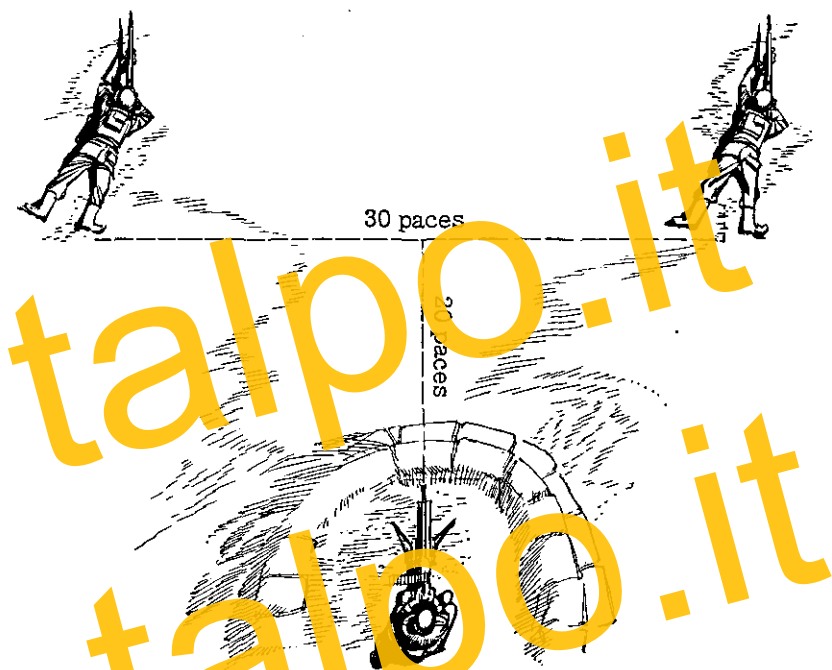


Figure 8.—Relative positions of machine-gunner and a line of riflemen
 dual-purpose machine gun (MG 34)² is always prepared to fire by having the bolt in the forward position and the ammunition belt or magazine in the firing position.

² This is the standard German machine gun. It is used both as a light and as a heavy machine gun, depending on whether it is mounted on a bipod or a tripod. For details, see TM 30-450, "Handbook on German Military Forces," paragraph 77.

(2) *Examples.*—(a) To accomplish surprise fire, the light machine gun is brought into position as follows:

Taking advantage of cover and concealment, the squad leader points out the target to the machine-gunner (the field glasses may be used), for example:

Direction: farm houses, pile of bright stones. One finger to the right, an enemy machine gun.

The gunner shows that he understands, for example:

There appears to be smoke from the machine gun's fire; (*or*) The machine gun appears to be about 100 yards behind a bright green bush.

The squad leader gives the range (for example, RANGE 700), and indicates the location of the gun position. He may prescribe the number of rounds to be fired (for example; 50 rounds).

While these orders are being given, the assistant (No. 1) often aided by the ammunition-carrier (No. 2), makes the light machine gun ready under cover as close behind the firing position as possible, sets the range, and loads the light machine gun.

At the command POSTS, FIRE AT WILL the gunner brings the machine gun forward to the firing position, unlocks the piece, and opens fire.

The assistant helps in putting the gun into position; then he lies down, usually a few paces to the left or to the left rear and under as good cover as possible, always ready to assist the machine-gunner: for example, in removing stoppages or in replacing him. Only when there is ample cover available will he remain beside the machine-gunner to assist him. The ammunition-carrier lies to the rear under cover.

If haste is ordered, or if it is necessary to open fire in uncovered terrain in the face of enemy fire, then target and range are ordered briefly and quickly: for example, 1. SQUAD, 2. POSTS, 3. MACHINE GUN IN BUSHES, LEFT OBLIQUE, RANGE 450, 4. FIRE AT WILL.

If fire is to be discontinued, CEASE FIRING and immediately thereafter, as a rule, TAKE COVER are ordered. Before the gunner leaves the position, he locks the gun. If the gunner has fired the prescribed amount of ammunition, he independently discontinues fire, locks the gun, takes cover, and awaits further orders.

(b) Opening of fire with light machine gun and rifles successively begins with the following command:

1. LIGHT MACHINE GUN, 2. POSTS, 3. 400 YARDS TO OUR FRONT A ROAD FORK, TWO FINGERS RIGHT, A MACHINE GUN, RANGE 400, 4. FIRE AT WILL.

If during the fire light it becomes necessary to use riflemen—for example, if to the right of the enemy machine gun riflemen also appear—then the further command is given:

1. RIFLEMEN, 2. POSTS, 3. HOSTILE RIFLEMEN TO THE RIGHT OF THE MACHINE GUN, RANGE 400, 4. FIRE AT WILL.

The following are examples of the opening of fire by the entire squad:

1. RIGHT OBLIQUE, AT THE WOOD, RIFLEMEN, 2. POSTS, 3. ENTIRE SQUAD, RANGE 350, MACHINE GUN, 100 ROUNDS, 4. FIRE AT WILL; (or) 1. ENTIRE SQUAD, 2. POSTS, 3. RANGE 400, ATTACKING ENEMY TO FRONT, 4. FIRE AT WILL.

If haste is ordered, or if fire must be opened from positions offering no cover in the face of enemy fire, then

target and range are usually left to the riflemen, and the order becomes 1. POSTS, 2. FIRE AT WILL.

Fire is discontinued at the command 1. SQUAD A, 2. CEASE FIRING, and usually this is followed by the command FULL COVER. Before the rifleman leaves the position for full cover, he must lock his rifle. If the ammunition ordered for the surprise attack has been fired, the riflemen stop fire of their own accord, lock their rifles, and take cover.

The commands SQUAD A, CEASE FIRING and FULL COVER are to be passed along by all the riflemen. All the other commands and orders are to be passed along when the situation requires.

Definition for Training in the Fire Fight.

(1) *General*.—For the mechanical drill of the squad, a situation that conforms to reality in every particular is not required. It is sufficient, for example, to assume that the squad is in a defensive position and arranged as a combat group.

Upon a prearranged flag signal several targets in succession and at various ranges may appear. If there is a shortage of personnel or means by which an enemy may be represented, any target may be designated for the purpose of training. The essential thing is that the squad leader be trained to recognize the target quickly and correctly, point it out distinctly and briefly, and give the correct fire order. If he is given several targets simultaneously, he should learn to recognize and combat the one that is the most dangerous and most important for the time being.