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Subject: REPLY: Self-propelled artillery in the Philippines  
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From: "22Michael Alexander" Wildamike@Hotmail.Com  
Date: 11/15/06  
Subject: Self-propelled artillery in the Philippines

"> > [EDITOR'S QUERY: I am hungry for more information on the "modern self-propelled artillery available in the PI" to which Michael Mitchell refers. Marc James Small]

I have reread the US Official History on the fall of the Philippines and can find no reference to self->propelled artillery among the defense assets. They had mostly British surplus 75mm guns and >37mm anti-tank guns, but some 105mm towed guns were sent to the Philippines before the war began.

I think the only SPAs the US had early in the war were the 75mm guns mounted on halftracks, >used in Tunisia. Later they got the M7 "Priest" self-propelled 105mm, grafted onto a Lee/Grant >tank hull." In view of the confusion on this issue, I supply specific references below. In summary, the US had self-propelled artillery in the PI in 1941-42, specifically, fifty M3 75mm GMCs (usually described as "SPMs" by those US servicemen who saw service in PI). These consisted of a 75mm gun mounted on an M3 half-track .This weapon had entered service with the US Army in August 1941. It saw front-line service with US Army and Marines (e.g. on Tarawa). It was replaced for front-line tank destroyer service by the M10 from 1943 on, but still saw active use with US Army units until the end of the war, as an assault gun and as SP artillery.

The total US armoured force in the PI as at October 1941 (i.e. two months before invasion) was 108 Stuart tanks (organized into two 54 tank battalions) and 50 M3 75mm SPMs (organized into three provisional battalions of 16 gun vehicles each, plus two others, perhaps HQ vehicles).

The references that follow are not exhaustive, i.e. there are many more references to these weapons in both Morton and Weaver:

1. Morton refers to three provisional artillery battalions being formed, each with four batteries of four vehicles each (so a total of 48 vehicles - 50 are known to have arrived in PI in October, 20 were on the Pensecola convoy, Marshal told MacArthur that a total of 75 had been sent so I don't know what happened to the other five). Two of the battalions served with northern Luzon Force, and one with southern Luzon.
2. Two of the battalions made it to Bataan and fought throughout the siege. Along with the tanks, they were among the few remaining formed units at the surrender on Bataan in April 1942. They told the Japanese that they had destroyed all their vehicles just before the surrender, and I assume that was true, although they might have hidden them.
3. Morton does not give the battalions' designations, however they seem to have been referred to by the names of their COs. Two of the battalions were commanded by Major Ganahl and Major (later Lt-Col) David S. Babcock, respectively. I surmised that the latter might be related

to Brig-Gen Conrad Stanton Babcock who fought in the PI prior to WWI, however Marc Small has presented some pretty convincing evidence to me off list that this is not the case.

4. Quotes from BG Weaver's report: OPERATIONS OF THE PROVISIONAL TANK GROUP UNITED STATES ARMY FORCES IN THE FAR EAST 1941-1942. This can be found at <http://www.memorialmuseum.org/TankGrp.htm>><http://www.memorialmuseum.org/TankGrp.htm>  
BG Weaver commanded the US armoured group in the PI:

a. On night of 27 December 1941, 194th Tank Battalion reported several caches of 75mm ammunition on Route 3 which they could not move (i.e. during withdrawal):

"This had been spotted for the use of the 75mm SPM's supporting the tanks on Route 3. 5 SPM's under Captain Gordon Peck did notable work at the San Manuel roadblock. A 75mm SPM had been in a house at the road junction at Carmen when last seen on the 26th; it had previously pulled out, been intercepted twice, and sent back (Tank Group Commander personal action). It was not there unfortunately when the enemy came in and established his roadblock at Carmen about 2130, the 26th."

b. By 29 December 1941 there is a note that the Ordnance Coy (armoured) which the Tank Group had brought with it from the US was now responsible for maintenance of the SPMs. In practice the SPMs seem to have moved with the tanks and fought with them.

c. On 30 December 1941, 192nd Tank Battalion complained:

"At this juncture also, two batteries of SPM's from Major Babcock's battalion were attached to the tank task force; the order was transmitted, acknowledged, later reduced to one battery (USAFFE order). No evidence of their joining has come to light."

d. At paragraph 35:

"The 194th was under fire of various types all through the 4th and 5th January, on the southern outskirts of Guagua; its half-tracks operating at critical points in the town and on the road net surrounding. Guagua was burning fiercely on the night of the 4/5 January; but Captain Beck of Major Ganahl's battalion of SPM's supporting the tanks, was still directing fire from the church tower when last seen by the Group Commander. Š Four SPM's under Captain Gordon H. Peck supported the tanks in this fight with distinguished gallantry. This was the same battery which Captain Peck employed and withdrew successfully across country south of the Agno, 26/27 December, contributing notably to the defense of the road block established by the 194th commander, at San Manuel."

e. On 25 January 1942, "The tanks in the 194th sector were still in a covering position about a kilometer north of the Pilar-Bagac Road at about 0945 Š Major Ganahl's four SPM's were with the 194th, stationed on the flanks".

f. On 8 April 1942: "Š the 700 gallons of tank gas depended on for necessary refueling had been abandoned by the fuel dump people and had been utilized unwittingly by the SPM's".

g. On the same day: "57. Cabcaban line.--The remnants of A and D/194th, as darkness fell, joined the remnants of Colonel Ganahl's SPM's near Cabcaban and on the feeder roads into the South Coast Road, to prevent the enemy from cutting in from Trail 20."

h. An interesting note at the end of BG Weaver's report indicates that the tank force counted the SPMs as part of their own. It gives the total number of "tanks" as 158, i.e. 108 tanks and 50 SPMs. This indicates that the SPMs were counted as part of the tank force.

3. From Louis Morton "THE FALL OF THE PHILIPPINES":

a. Chapter 12: "For the defense of the Calumpit bridges MacArthur placed every unit that could be spared east of the Pampanga. From the South Luzon Force came the 51st Infantry (less 1st Battalion) and the 75-mm. guns of Colonel Babcock's SPM provisional battalion, both stationed at Plaridel."

b. At page 207: "Deeply concerned over the effect of an attack on the untried 51st Infantry, Jones ordered two platoons of Company C, 192d Tank Battalion, to cross the river and attack the enemy concentration at the east end of Baliuag. The tanks were to be supported by about a half dozen of Colonel Babcock's 75-mm. SPM's which were to fire on Baliuag and its northern approaches when the tanks broke off the attack. After a hasty reconnaissance, Babcock placed his guns on the dry, baked fields a few thousand yards west of Baliuag and sent a forward observer to a position 500 yards west of the town. For communications with the tanks Babcock had a radio-equipped scout car of Company C."

c. At pages 207-8 "At about 1700 the tanks of Company C, led by Lt. William Gentry, moved out to the attack. As the two platoons approached the enemy, the covering artillery fire, presumably supplied by the 71st Field Artillery, lifted. A bitter fight ensued. The American armor made a shambles of that part of Baliuag in Japanese hands. The tanks rolled through the streets, firing into bahays, smashing through the nipa huts as if they were so many toy houses, and scattering hostile infantry right and left. A brief but wild tank-versus-tank action followed. In the fading daylight American and Japanese tanks chased each other up and down the narrow streets, while enemy foot soldiers, in a futile gesture, fired small arms at the tankers. The SPM's and artillery remained idle, unable to fire for fear of hitting their own tanks. When Company C finally broke off the action, it had knocked out eight Japanese tanks with little loss to itself. As the tanks pulled back, the SPM's and artillery opened up on Baliuag and continued to fire until 2200 when Fowler and Babcock pulled their men back to Plaridel and then west across the Pampanga. The last of the tanks crossed the Calumpit bridge at about 0230 on 1 January"

d. At p 213 "While the 11th Infantry was preparing to move, an enemy force estimated as a reinforced battalion of infantry with artillery support was pushing south along the Magalang road from Concepcion. At 1630 this Japanese force attacked Townsend's line. Maj. Helmert J. Duisterhof's 2d Battalion, composed of Igorot troops, bore the brunt of the assault. Despite repeated attacks, the Igorots, supported by two 75-mm. SPM guns, held firm, inflicting heavy losses on the enemy."

e. At page 405 "With the exception of a few scattered detachments hiding out in the mountains of Luzon, all of the troops of General King's Luzon Force were crowded into the southern tip of Bataan. In this area, less than 200 square miles, were I and II Corps, force reserve, the Service Command, two coast artillery (antiaircraft) regiments, the Provisional Tank Group, two battalions of 75- mm. guns (SPM), plus engineer and signal troops."

f. At page 406 "Guarding the beaches from Limay southward to the corps boundary were the 2d Division (less the 1st and 2d Philippine Constabulary Regiments), a company of tanks, and a battery of SPM's."

g. At page 407 "Army artillery consisted of 27 75-mm. guns (SPM); two antiaircraft regiments, the 200th and 515th, in position to cover the airfields and rear installations, with one battery of 3-inch guns and two batteries of 37-mm. guns in support of the forward area; and one seacoast gun."

h. At page 411 "Fearful also of the "pitifully thin" beach defenses, Luzon Force organized a battery of 75-mm. guns (SPM) and a company of tanks into a mobile reserve and ordered them "to reconnoiter roads and avenues of approach."

4. THE HISTORICAL COMBAT EFFECTIVENESS OF LIGHTER-WEIGHT ARMORED FORCES Published by Dupuy institute on 6 August 2001 gives a good summary at page 60:

<<http://www.dupuyinstitute.org/pdf/mwa-2lightarmor.pdf>><http://www.dupuyinstitute.org/pdf/mwa-2lightarmor.pdf>:

"Another armored reinforcement for the USAFFE was created from 50 self-propelled 75mm guns that had been shipped to the Philippines in October. Three battalions of four 4-gun batteries were formed in the week following the initial Japanese attack. Personnel were drawn from the Philippine Scouts and Philippine Army reservists, with officers mostly drawn from the all-American 200th Coast Artillery Regiment.<sup>31</sup> The SPM (self-propelled mount) battalions were to prove to be a valuable, mobile supplement to the tank battalions. The mounts 75mm gun was especially valued for its range and high-explosive capability, both of which were lacking in the M3 tank. However, the guns were mounted on a vulnerable, lightly armored and open-topped half-track chassis, which sometimes limited their use."

All of the sources I have used are available on-line.

Regards Michael Mitchell

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