

# German Tactical Manual



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## INTRODUCTION

The aim of this manual is to introduce some of the fundamental tactical principles as drilled into German soldiers during the Second World War. This manual focuses mainly upon the individual infantryman and the infantry section (or "*Gruppe*") in combat. A brief description of the principles of attack, defence and reconnaissance is also included.

The source material consists of period manuals and guides. The manuals are from both official and unofficial sources.

There were a large number of privately available books in the 1930s and 1940s written by serving or former NCOs and officers as either preparatory reading for new recruits (the most popular of which was the *Reibert* series) or as guides for prospective section and platoon commanders.

The primary official manual used was the *Heeres-Dienstvorschrift 130/2a*, dated 1942. This manual served as a guide to the soldier in an infantry company and detailed everything from close order drill and weapons handling to the infantryman in combat and the operation of the infantry section.



An infantryman crosses a road in Poland, 1939

## **PART ONE**

### **KEY INFANTRY FORMATIONS**

#### **The Rifle Platoon (“Zug”)**

On paper, the rifle platoon (or *Zug*) was led by a *Leutnant* or *Feldwebel*.

The *Zug* went through a number of changes during the Second World War. However, a *Zug* basically consisted of a headquarters section, 3-4 rifle sections (or *Gruppen*) and, up until 1943-44, a 50mm mortar section.

At the outbreak of hostilities in September 1939, there were 3 *Gruppen* to a *Zug*. However, after the end of the Poland campaign, this number was increased to 4. In mid-1944, the number of *Gruppen* was again reduced to 3.

#### **The Rifle Section (“Gruppe”)**

The rifle section (or *Gruppe*) was led by an *Unteroffizier*, although in practice, it could be by the most senior member of the *Gruppe* in the absence of sufficient NCOs.

Up until mid-1944, a *Gruppe* consisted of a *Gruppenführer* (section commander), a *leichtes Maschinengewehr-Trupp* (IMG-*Trupp*) of 3 men and 6 *Gewehrschützen* (riflemen). However, in mid-1944, the strength of the *Gruppe* was reduced to 9 men due to manpower issues in accordance with a general reduction in the strength of an infantry division.

### **THE GRUPPE**

#### **Gruppenführer**

Nominally an *Unteroffizier*, the *Gruppenführer* was the section commander. He was both the ‘strong father’ and the ‘caring mother’ of the *Gruppe*. The personality of and personal example of the *Gruppenführer* was of the utmost importance, as the *Gruppe* is the largest grouping of soldiers, which can be lead effectively by a single individual. Accordingly, he must give an impression of confidence in the giving of orders and set an example to his *Gruppe* by remaining calm during the most difficult of circumstances, and must endure at least the same privations as his men.

The *Gruppenführer* was responsible for commanding the *Gruppe* in combat and for ensuring that its logistical requirements were satisfied.

The *Gruppenführer* was to be equipped with a *Maschinepistole* (such as an MP40 or later, an MP44) with six magazines; a magazine reloading tool; binoculars; wire cutters; and a signal whistle in addition to standard equipment.

On German diagrams, the *Gruppenführer* was denoted as follows:





A *Gruppenführer* and the *Schütze 1* and *2*.

### Leichtes Maschinengewehr-Trupp

The machinegun was fundamental to German infantry tactics and the entire *Gruppe* was centred on the IMG team. This is at odds with Allied tactics, whereby the riflemen were given more importance. The development of a mobile, light machinegun with a high rate of fire provided the German *Gruppe* with a highly effective offensive and defensive capability. Unlike the Allied equivalents (at the section level – the BAR or Bren Gun), the primary purpose of the German IMG team was to suppress the enemy in order to facilitate the advance of the riflemen, or to pour as much fire as possible upon an advancing enemy.

The Machinegun Team consisted of three *Schützen* – the machinegunner, his assistant and an ammunition carrier.

On German diagrams, the *Maschinengewehr-Trupp* was denoted as follows:



#### Schütze 1:

The *Schütze 1* was the machinegunner. His role was to handle the IMG in combat; to fire the IMG; and to care for the IMG.

The *Schütze 1* was to be equipped with the IMG (typically either an MG34 or MG42) with a magazine; a pistol; a gunner's tool pouch; and a signal lamp.

### Schütze 2:

The *Schütze 2* was the machinegunner's assistant. His role was to load the IMG; to reload empty belts and magazines; to assist in the positioning of the bipod legs, clearing of jams and barrel changes; and to fight in close combat when necessary.

The *Schütze 2* was to be equipped with a spare barrel and container; four magazines for the MG (of which one was to contain armour piercing ammunition); one ammunition box or alternatively, a carrying bag with four further magazines; a sling; a pistol; a short spade; and sunglasses.

### Schütze 3:

The *Schütze 3* was the ammunition carrier. His role was to be behind the MG, in cover where possible; to carry the IMG ammunition; to reload fired belts; to search for ammunition left behind during a position change; to check the ammunition; and to act as a rifleman when the situation requires.

The *Schütze 3* was to be equipped with a spare barrel and container; two ammunition boxes; a carrying strap; a rifle; and a short spade.

## **Gewehrschützen**

The *Gewehrschützen* were the assault element of the *Gruppe*. Under the covering fire of the IMG, they would advance towards the objective and under the cover of exploding grenades; the riflemen would carry out the final assault with fixed bayonets.

Additionally, the *Gewehrschützen* would serve as ammunition carriers (photographs of the period show all members of the *Gruppe* festooned with ammunition for the IMG) and some were designated as grenade throwers/carriers.

The *Gewehrschützen* were to be equipped with a rifle and two ammunition pouches; a short spade; hand grenades (for the nominated grenade throwers); as well as any additional equipment as per orders such as IMG ammunition – especially armour piercing; smoke grenades; *geballte Ladungen*; and the MG tripod. After 1943/44, the *Gewehrschützen* would also typically carry a number of *Panzerfäuste* to provide a hand-held anti-tank capability.

On German diagrams, a *Gewehrschütze* was denoted as follows:



## **Stellvertretende Gruppenführer<sup>1</sup>**

The *stellvertretende Gruppenführer* (often abbreviated to "*stellv. Gruppenführer*") was one of the *Gewehrschützen*. He was typically the most experienced rifleman and would serve as the second-in-command.

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<sup>1</sup> The *stellv. Gruppenführer* is often confused with the term "*Truppführer*". However, the term "*Truppführer*" is more generic in that it refers to a leader of a *Trupp* (or 'Troop'). Hence, the *Schütze 1* can be the *Truppführer* of the IMG-*Trupp*. Insofar as the author can tell, this confusion arises because in one of the most pre-eminent pre-War manuals by Kühlwein published in 1934, which later formed the basis for the US Army's Handbook on German Forces, the term *is* in fact used to refer to the deputy section leader position. However, by the latter half of the decade, the term is no longer used in this way, and has been replaced with *stellv. Gruppenführer*.

Unlike many other armies, the *stellvertretende Gruppenführer* was a position rather than a rank and was primarily concerned with ensuring integrity of the *Gruppe* and maintaining links with the rest of the *Zug* whilst the *Gruppenführer* concerned himself with tactics and logistics.

The equipment of the *stellvertretende Gruppenführer* was the same as that of the *Gewehrscützen*, except that he also carried an aerial recognition device.

On German diagrams, the *stellvertretende Gruppenführer* was denoted as follows:



A *Gruppenführer* directs his *Gruppe*, Russia, 1941

## **PART TWO** **INDIVIDUAL FIELDCRAFT**

This Part details the matters that an individual soldier was taught when operating in the field to reduce the likelihood that he and his *Gruppe* will sustain avoidable losses when engaging the enemy, and to ensure that each individual within the *Gruppe* is effective as a soldier.

### **Camouflage**

German soldiers were taught to make use of camouflage to break up their outline and reduce the likelihood of being spotted by enemy troops and aircraft.

German soldiers are often seen with rubber bands, chickenwire or breadbag straps on their helmets to enable them to attach foliage to their helmets. Soldiers would also attach foliage to the rest of their equipment, such as by stuffing grass under webbing straps.

Soldiers would use mud or cut up sacking/shelter quarters to reduce the shine of helmets and use mud or charcoal to darken faces and hands.

The only item of camouflage clothing generally issued to ordinary infantrymen was the *Zeltbahn* (shelter quarter), which was printed with a camouflage pattern and could be worn as a poncho. Some units (particularly motorised troops) were issued camouflage smocks and in the winter months troops began to be issued with reversible winter suits (white on one side, a camouflage pattern on the other) from 1942/3 onwards.

It is important to note that the camouflage used must be appropriate and should be changed with the terrain, i.e. woodland camouflage is not appropriate in an urban environment.

When camouflaging a position, German soldiers were taught to take foliage from a wide area to prevent an obviously missing large section of flora from giving away the position.

### **Use of Terrain**

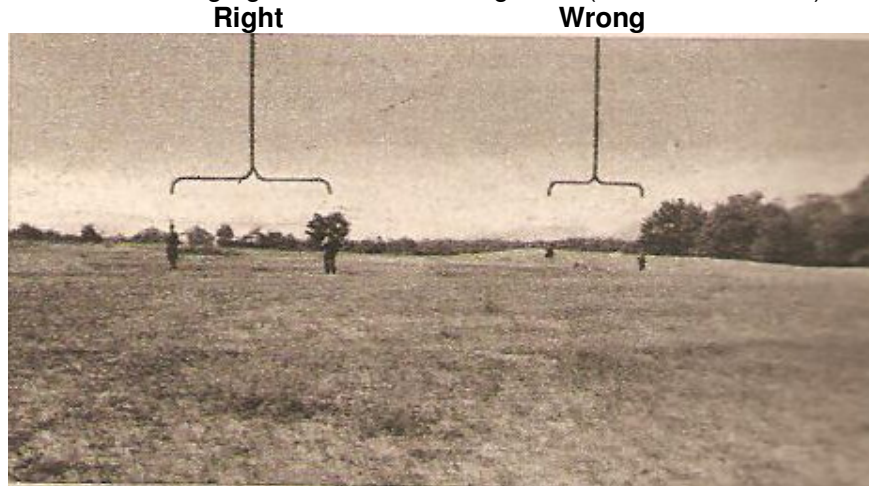
In order to reduce the impact of enemy fire and to reduce the availability of targets, soldiers should aim to make use of terrain features. This includes terrain and cover, which will serve to protect from aerial observation and/or attack.

A soldier should always be aware of the terrain:

- around him,
- under him,
- behind him and
- any illumination or shadows.



When moving across open areas against a light-coloured background, soldiers will be more visible than if moving against a darker background (see Picture below).



Likewise, soldiers should avoid the highest point of a ridge or hill, as they will be visible against the sky ('sky-lining') (see Picture below).



When moving along the edge of a wood, soldiers should walk slightly inside the wood, in order to take advantage of the protection provided by shadows (see Picture below).



Obvious terrain features, such as individual trees and bushes should be avoided, as they tend to draw enemy fire.

Additionally, soldiers should take note of future opportunities for cover and protection against enemy observation and/or fire.

Any opportunity for cover should be made full use of, no matter how small or insignificant. However, stones and boulders should be avoided due to the additional danger of splinters.

Although effective cover should be sought out, the German soldier was taught that: '**Effectiveness goes before cover**'. Meaning that if cover reduces the soldier's ability to observe and engage the enemy, an alternative, which will not impede the action of the soldier, should be sought out.

## **Weapons Handling**

When moving, it is necessary to carry weapons correctly. The methods of carrying weapons in Second World War era German manuals are less specific and rather different to how weapons are carried in modern armies.

Rifles should be carried howsoever is most manageable for the individual with the slings made loose. The most commonly seen method of carrying rifles was in one hand to the side of the body at the trail arms. The only proviso is that when the rifleman is close to the enemy, he will need to ensure that the rifle can be brought to bear more quickly.

When on the march and unobserved by the enemy, the IMG should be carried slung over either the right or left shoulder with the hand on either the butt or the sling, or over the shoulder with the butt forwards. In view of the enemy, the IMG should be slung over the shoulder so that the MG hangs *under* the arm with the barrel pointing forwards or should be carried by the sling in the right hand, so that it is not identified as an IMG by the enemy.

Neither the IMG nor the rifle should be carried on or slung from the shoulder in combat.

The MP should be carried slung from the shoulder with the muzzle pointing upwards, or under the shoulder with the muzzle pointing rearwards. The MP was also often seen slung around the neck with the weapon on the individual's chest, as this position facilitates the giving of hand signals by the *Gruppenführer*.

## **Positions**

When considering a choice of position, the German soldier was taught the following:

- The position must be entered and exited out of sight of the enemy;
- The position should provide both cover for the soldier and a clear field of fire;
- Notice must be taken of the principles regarding use of terrain outlined above;
- Stones or boulders should be avoided; and
- Where possible, the soldier should improve his position, including by digging in.

Moving into position (or *Instellunggehen*) out of sight of the enemy is necessary to catch the enemy by surprise when the *Gruppe* opens fire – where possible, a position should enable the IMG to fire into the enemy's flank

An ideal position will provide a clear field of fire as well as cover. It is important to remember that every opportunity to hide the position from enemy observation should be

made use of – notice should be taken of the subsoil and background, and ‘sky-lining’ avoided.

When firing from a position, the German soldier was taught to move position slightly in-between shots.

### Advancing under Fire

When under effective enemy fire, the infantrymen should advance in leaps (otherwise known as a *Sprung* and detailed below) or by crawling on hands and knees, whereby the rifle is hung from the neck. Alternatively, it may be necessary to crawl flat on the ground, whereby the rifle is held out in front of the body (see Picture below).



Advances from cover to cover should be striven for. Where cover is sparse, it becomes more vital to open fire quickly and, as soon as possible, move to a more suitable firing position.

### The Sprung

When advancing in combat, the German soldier was taught to advance using the *Sprung* (bound or leap). A *Sprung* can occur on an individual basis or as a whole *Gruppe*.

A *Sprung* is ordered with: ‘*Stellungswechsel!*’ (‘Position-change’) or ‘*Sprung – Auf! Marsch! Marsch!*’. It is also recommended that the objective to be reached by the position change should be given as part of the command.

Examples of commands:

- |   |   |  |
|---|---|--|
| 1 | ‘ <i>Stellungswechsel vorbereiten! Nächster Sprung Hohlweg!</i> ’                           | ‘Prepare to change position! Next bound to the defile!’  |
| 2 | ‘ <i>Fertigmachen zum Sprung bis an die Drachtsperre!</i> ’                                 | ‘Make ready to leap to the barbed wire!’   |
| 3 | ‘ <i>Stellungswechsel bis an das zerschossene Haus!</i> ’                                   | ‘Position change to the shot-up house!’  |
| 4 | ‘ <i>Durchrufen! Ganze Gruppe macht einen Sprung bis hinter den Bahndamm!</i> ’             | ‘Listen up! The entire <i>Gruppe</i> will make a leap to behind the railway embankment!’           |
| 5 | ‘ <i>Stellungswechsel vorbereiten! Nächste Feuerstellung Kiesgrube! Schütze 2 voraus!</i> ’ | ‘Prepare to change position! Next firing position the gravel pit! <i>Schütze 2</i> move forwards!’ |

The objective of the German soldier is to gain ground as rapidly as possible and to take the enemy’s position. Hence, a *Sprung* should be made without orders when:

- artillery fire, heavy weapons fire, or fire of neighbouring troops suppresses the enemy;
- the enemy ceases fire;
- tanks suppress the enemy;
- aircraft or artillery destroy the enemy's forward positions; or
- smoke blinds the enemy.

An advance from cover to cover should be striven for and preparations for the *Sprung* should be made in cover where possible.

Upon the command, '*Sprung!*', the soldier should prepare to move by ensuring that their ammunition pouches or boxes are secured and that weapons are made safe. The IMG should only be loaded during a *Sprung* if it is intended for the *Schütze 1* to fire it on the move, otherwise it should be unloaded as part of the preparations for the *Sprung*.

Then the prone soldiers take their rifle in their left hand, support themselves with their right hand and move their right knee as close as possible to their body without raising their upper body. The *Schütze 1* holds the IMG by the sling in his right hand and supports himself with his left. The right knee is moved inwards.

When the *Schütze 1* is ready to move, he shouts '*Fertig!*'. The *Schütze 2* and *3* place their ammunition boxes flat on the ground in front of them. (See Pictures below)



*Gewehr*schützen



*Schütze 1*



*Schütze 2 & 3*

On the command: *'Auf! Marsch! Marsch!'*, the soldiers rise up quickly and rush forwards. A *Sprung* can be halted on the command *'Hinlegen!'*, *'Stellung!'* or *'Volle Deckung!'*, but typically occurs without instruction – the soldiers instead following the example of their leader.



Practicing advancing under fire, early 1943

The length of the bound is dependent upon the situation (fire support; the effect of enemy fire; the nature and form of the terrain), but the further one can advance, the better. Short bounds – especially when near to the enemy – can prove necessary. A rapid and unified *Sprung* is important, as it hinders the enemy and makes seizing the objective easier.

### **Breaking Off the Advance**

Forward movements are broken off upon the following commands:

- *'H-a-l-t!'*
- *'Hinlegen!'*
- *'Stellung!'* or
- *'Volle Deckung!'*.

At the command, *'H-a-l-t!'*, the soldiers cease moving forwards and remain standing at order arms (the IMG is laid on the ground).

On the command, *'Hinlegen!'*, the soldiers lie down on the spot. Afterwards, every soldier improves his cover against observation (including by aircraft) and looks around for the *Gruppenführer*, the enemy, neighbours, heavy weapons, and possibilities for further forward movement.

After the commands, *'Stellung!'* or *'Volle Deckung!'*, every infantryman lays down immediately and attempts to seek out cover (which can also mean the construction of cover or digging in) against fire and observation.

However, it must be noted that the contact with the *Gruppenführer*; the integrity of the *Gruppe*; and observation of the battlefield (this is to be delegated to one or two riflemen) should not be lost.

## Night and Artificial Smoke

It was crucial that a soldier be able to fight and move noiselessly at night and is familiar with the particular quirks of the hours of darkness.

Some of the key things that soldiers should know about fighting at night are as follows:

- Equipment should be fastened so that it does not make any noise during night operations;
- Movement, including when off of trails should be conducted noiselessly;
- To immediately act as the man in front and to avoid use of verbal orders for all combat related actions such as lying down and fixing bayonets;
- Not to make any light without orders; and
- How to use a compass.

The primary difference with regards to movement in formation at night is that the spacing between the individual soldiers are reduced and *Schützenreihe* (or column) is the preferred formation due to it being easier to maintain the integrity of the *Gruppe*. It was also recommended that the soldier at the head of the column affix a white patch to his back.

Sound is audible from a great distance at night, so all unnecessary noise should be avoided. Use of the moon's shadows and a dark background are recommended to hide oneself.

Soldiers were taught to wrap their hobnailed boots in towels or rags to minimise noise when moving and to darken faces and hands as camouflage. On reconnaissance patrols in particular, equipment carried was minimal – just a weapon and ammunition in pockets and a cap instead of helmet.

If the moon is behind an observer, he will have an advantage. Likewise, an observer, who lies on the ground, has an advantage over one who is kneeling or standing. It is also possible to hear further by putting an ear to the ground.

However, the distances to sources of light are difficult to discern and the distances to sources of noise are often underestimated.

Soldiers should avoid betraying their position through careless use of signal lamps or lighting of cigarettes or cigars, as light is visible from a long way off. If a soldier must make use of a light, such as to look at a map, he was advised to use the light under the cover of a shelter quarter.

When flares are employed, the soldier should immediately throw himself flat upon the ground. Where a sudden light surprises a soldier, he should immediately freeze and remain motionless.

Behaviour in natural fog is the same as at night, but visibility in fog tends to be better at shorter distances and worse at longer distances. An added risk is that a sudden lifting of the fog should be expected at any time.

When in artificial smoke, bayonets should be fixed, as a sudden encounter with the enemy can be expected at any time. Firing into smoke must be specifically ordered and high shots should be avoided.

## Observation

Communication is key to success on the battlefield. Therefore it is necessary for a soldier to be able to communicate what he has seen and where to his *Gruppenführer* and vice versa.

Identification of the location of objects must be clear, concise and leave no doubt about its location.

When communicating an observation the following information needs to be included:

- The direction from your current position;
- How far the object is from your current position;
- Obvious features that the object is near to assist in location; and
- What you have seen.

Example:

“To the front, about 200m, right of the tree, enemy MG”

Where there are no objects that may assist in the identification of the location, a soldier was taught to use an extended thumb to assist in locating positions:

- Extend right arm and hold thumb up, line the thumb up on an object with left eye closed;
- Then switch eyes and the thumb will jump to the right.

At the *Zug* and *Kompanie* level, the *Spielmann* (“musician”) was specifically responsible for looking out for aircraft and enemy armoured vehicles.

## Fire Control Orders

The *Gruppenführer* should order the first opening of fire – except where the situation requires it.

To fire on a target, the following information needs to be communicated:

- Where the target is (see ‘Observation’ above);
- What the target is; and
- Type of firing and by whom.

Types of fire order:

- “Einzelschuss” – single shot, i.e. the individual(s) fire a single shot at the target.
- “Feuer frei” – fire at will, i.e. everyone engages the enemy with the maximum available firepower.

Example:

“Direction right, range 100m, enemy soldier, fire at will!”

“*Richtung rechts, Visier 100m, feindliches Soldat, feuer frei!*”

### **PART THREE** **OPEN-ORDER FORMATIONS**

The combat formations of the infantry are referred to as 'Open-Order' as opposed to the 'Close-Order' formations used for drill etc. Open-order formations are adopted when the situation or the terrain no longer makes a close-order formation appropriate and most importantly, open-order formations aim to reduce the effectiveness of enemy fire.

The two open-order formations used by the German army were the *Schützenreihe* and the *Schützenkette*. Although it was also possible to have the *Gewehr* and the *IMG Team* in separate formations (the distance from one another should not generally exceed 100m).

Open-order formations are adopted upon either hand signal or upon the command '*Stellung!*'.

The *Gruppenführer* and the *stellvertretende Gruppenführer* are bound to no specific place, although the *Gruppenführer* was usually to be found at the head of his men to improve observation and contact with neighbouring troops.

The role of the link-man, or *Anschlussmann* (usually the *Schütze 1*) was important when adopting open-order formations, as he serves as a point of reference for the other *Schützen*.

Unless specifically ordered or appropriate, open-order formations and changes to different formations should occur gradually (i.e. it is not necessary to immediately run into the formation) and before entering the terrain necessitating a particular formation (e.g. a *Gruppe* should adopt *Schützenkette* before entering an open field).

Two words are used to denote the spacing between soldiers:

- Abstand* – the vertical distance between two soldiers
- Zwischenraum* – the horizontal distance between two soldiers

#### **Schützenreihe**

The *Schützenreihe* is essentially a more spread out version of the close-order *Reihe* (or Column) formation.



The *Schützenreihe* forms itself behind the *Anschlussmann* (*Schütze 1* when the whole *Gruppe* adopts the formation; the lead rifleman when the rifle troop alone adopts the formation). At the rear is the *stellvertretende Gruppenführer*, who ensures that nobody is left behind and reports any events of note to the *Gruppenführer* at the head of the column.

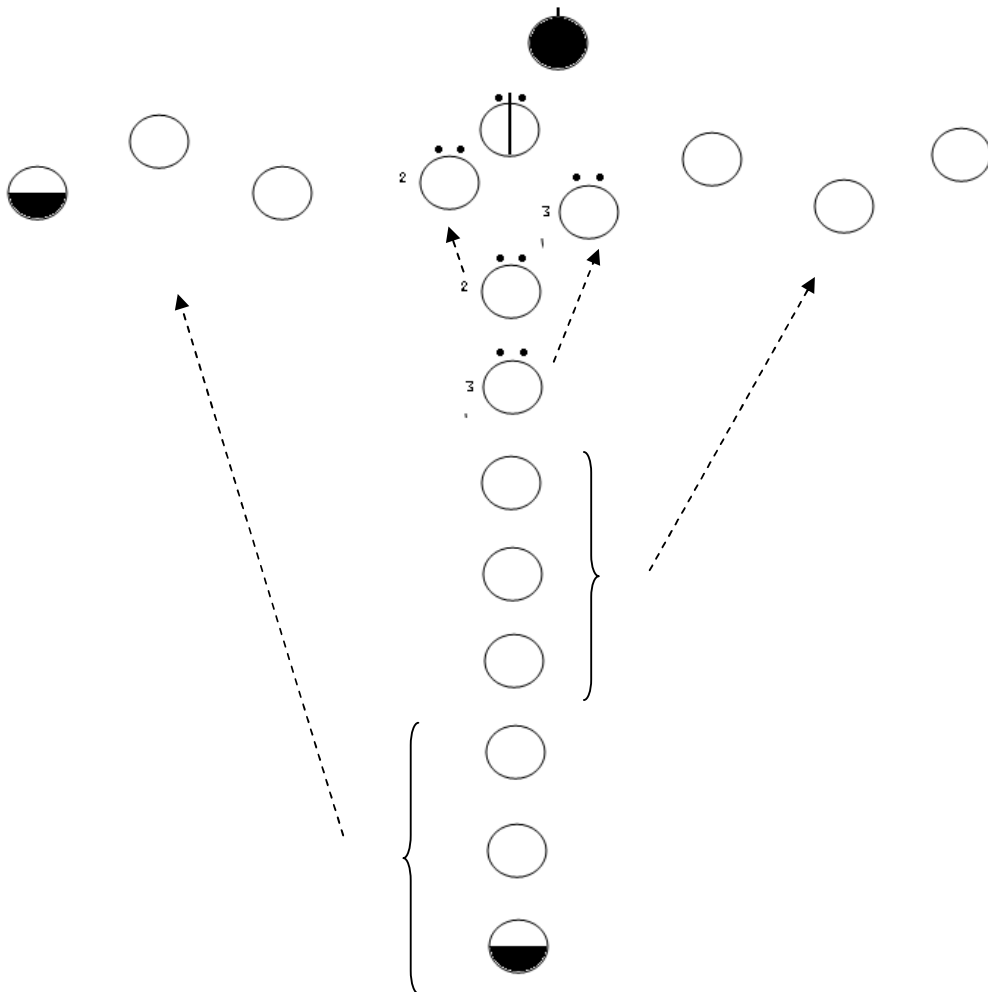
The spacing is typically 5 paces should nothing else be ordered by the *Gruppenführer*.

The *Schützenreihe* is the most appropriate formation for advancing when there is little likelihood of encountering effective enemy fire, as it is easy to maintain and control. In addition, it is useful for negotiating difficult terrain such as woods or when there is low visibility, such as at night.



## Schützenkette

The *Schützenkette* is essentially a more spread out version of the close-order *Linie* (or Line) formation.



The *Schütze 1* is the *Anschlussmann* with *Schütze 2* moving to his left and *Schütze 3* moving to his right (to facilitate the operation of the IMG). The forward half of the riflemen move to the right of the *Anschlussmann* and the rear half of the riflemen move to his left.

The riflemen may form to one side of the IMG Team only, but this must be specified by the *Gruppenführer*.

It is also possible to vary the depth of the formation, but rearward formed riflemen should not be so far behind that they are unable to safely fire past those in front.

Unless ordered otherwise, spacings should be 5 paces and the total facing and depth of the formation should not exceed 100m.

Typically, the command for *Schützenkette* is composed as follows:

'Gruppe X: Richtung [...] – [...] Schritt Zwischenraum – Schützenkette!'

'Gruppe X: Direction [...] – [...] Paces Spacing – Schützenkette!'

Or the formation can be ordered by the commands '*Stellung!*' or '*Feuerstellung!*'.

The *Schützenkette* is the most appropriate formation for engaging the enemy, as it provides a broad frontage and enables all of the troops to fire. In addition, the formation should be adopted for crossing open or exposed terrain (prior to entering it if possible) and when contact with the enemy is likely. Movements of a long duration should be avoided, as the cohesion of the *Gruppe* is difficult to maintain.



German infantry advance in Russia, 1942

## Others

It is also possible to order the MG Team to adopt one formation while the riflemen adopt another formation. For example, the *Gruppenführer* might order:

*'Gruppe A: I.M.G. Trupp – Richtung einzelne Kieser – 6 Schritt Zwischenraum – Schützenkette! Schützentrupp folgt mit 50 Schritt Abstand!*  
*'Gruppe A: MG Team – Direction single pine tree – 6 paces spacing – Schützenkette! Rifle troop follows at 50 paces distance!'*

Such a formation is useful when moving through broken terrain or forests, especially on reconnaissance missions, as the entire *Gruppe* will not fall victim to an ambush. Instead, the riflemen can cover the IMG Team or act as a reserve.

Alternatively, the *Gruppenführer* could order:

*'Gruppe A: Schützentrupp – Richtung Kugelbaum – 8 Schritt Zwischenraum – Anschlussmann Müller – Schützenkette! L..M.G. Trupp folgt unter Führung des I.M.G. Schützen 1 mit 50 Schritt Abstand!'*  
*'Gruppe A: Rifle troop – direction bullet tree – 8 paces spacing – link man Müller – Schützenkette! MG Team follows under command of the machinegunner at 50 paces distance!'*

Such a formation is useful when advancing through unclear terrain, as it serves to protect the MG Team from an ambush.

## **PART FOUR** **TACTICS**

This Part provides a summary of how the German *Gruppe* operated in the field, including in attack, defence and reconnaissance.

As a general point, the German armed forces made use of a mission-orientated doctrine (*Auftragstaktik*) whereby the subordinate commander would be given his objective, but the detail of how he achieves his mission is left up to him.

### **Mission Orders**

At the platoon and section level, German orders were much less regimented and in many respects less detailed than modern orders groups.

At the *Zug* level, the *Zugführer's* orders for an attack when on the move were to contain details of the following:

- Position of enemy and friendly forces and the general situation;
- Assignments or intentions of his unit;
- Formation of the *Zug*, including spacing between *Gruppen*;
- Path, direction or compass heading.

The orders may also include:

- Whether the spacing between troops should be especially close or far;
- Other details about formations;
- Locations of suspected enemy heavy weapons;
- Location of the *Zug's* supply cart;
- Location of the *Zugführer*.

The orders should then be repeated to the *Gruppenführers* and on the command "*Auseinander!*", the troops deploy.

The following is an example of a *Zugführer's* orders taken from a period manual:

"The enemy is on the yellow heights before those woods.

The Battalion is advancing on both sides of this road and aims to gain the dark ridge with the bushes.

On the right, 1. Company, our Company, is left of the road on a 400m front.

On the right, Hermel Platoon, left is Rofeck Platoon. Hermel Platoon is deploying itself to advance on the right corner of the high woods there.

Gefreiter Trops with two men from Gruppe A. move out as scouts!

In the first line Gruppe Gronau is the link, direction the indicated corner of the woods.

Gruppe Schreiber follows with 150 spaces distance, 80 paces echeloned right; echeloned about 120 paces to the left rearwards of Gruppe Gronau, Gruppe Labenstn.

I am behind Gruppe Gronau!"

## **Attack**

A typical attack consists of the following stages:

### *Entfaltung*

The deployment by the *Kompanie* from its marching formation into its ordered individual platoon formation and the platoons separate into their individual *Gruppen* in accordance with the *Zugführer's* orders. This typically occurs at least 800m from the enemy.



A *Zugführer* followed by his *Zug*, probably 1944 or 1945

### *Entwicklung*

This is a continuation of the previous stage and refers to the adoption of open-order formation formations by the *Gruppen* in accordance with the situation and terrain. This occurs when the *Gruppenführer* considers the situation requires it. The recommended formation is the *Schützenreihe*.

The enemy should not be engaged by the *Gruppe* when at distances in excess of 800m unless strictly necessary. Instead, the *Gruppe* should rely upon the *Kompanie's* supporting weapons to suppress the enemy

### *Angriff*

The *Gruppe* should advance for as long as possible using the cover of the terrain and/or support weapons. However, when it is no longer possible to advance unseen, the *Angriff* commences.

It is at this stage that the *Gruppe* begins to engage the enemy with its own weapons. However, the first opening of fire by the *Gruppe* should be ordered by the *Gruppenführer*, except where unavoidable.

Typically, the *Gruppenführer* positions the IMG and directs its fire against targets which will most impede the advance of the riflemen.

A *Gruppe* should employ fire and movement, whereby one part of the *Gruppe* fires at the enemy to cover the advance of the others, e.g. the IMG-*Trupp* covers the advance of the

*Gewehrschützen* and vice versa (this also applies in the larger framework of the *Zug* whereby one *Gruppe* covers another). It is important, however, to ensure that the integrity of the *Gruppe* is maintained.

The *Gruppe* should advance either under cover (using 'dead ground' for example) or in bounds (see 'Advancing under Fire' and 'The Sprung' on pages 11-13). The effectiveness of the enemy's fire will determine the length of the bounds.

Whenever the enemy's fire slackens, this should be used to move forward.

Wherever possible, a flanking attack against the enemy position should be employed.

### *Einbruch*

The *Einbruch* is the final stage of the attack, and typically occurs about 100m away from the enemy position.

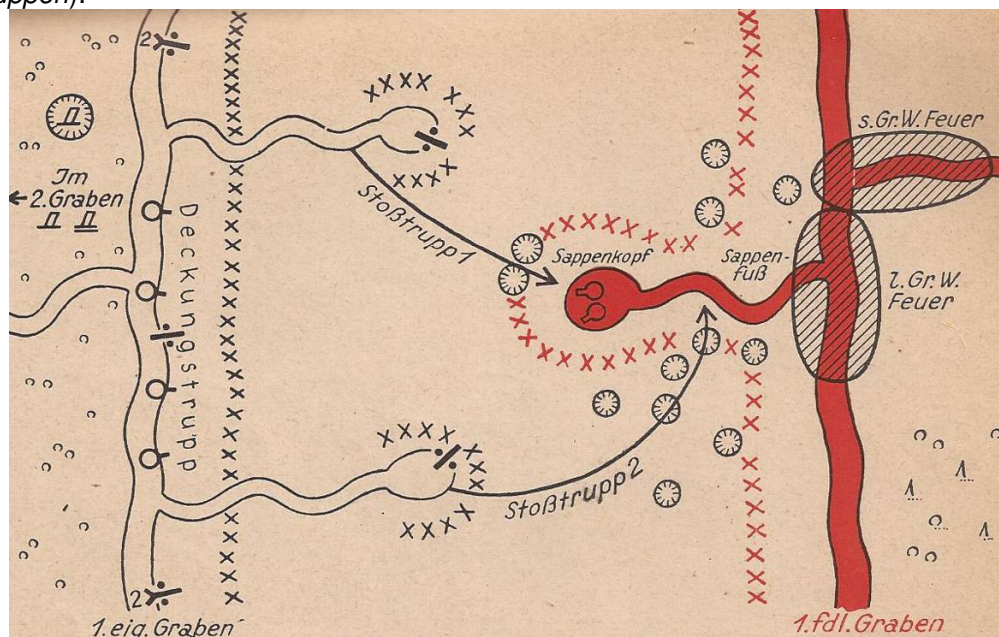
The riflemen should prepare, individually and at different times (to ensure that the *Gruppe* does not cease fire) for the assault by loading weapons, fixing bayonets and preparing grenades.

Where possible, the IMG should be positioned so that it is able to fire into the enemy position without risk of hitting the riflemen in order to ensure that the enemy position is suppressed for as long as possible. If this is not possible, the IMG should be prepared for 'firing from the hip' and will assault the position along with the riflemen.

Neighbouring troops should engage the enemy position with an increased weight of fire to enable the riflemen to move as close as possible to the position.

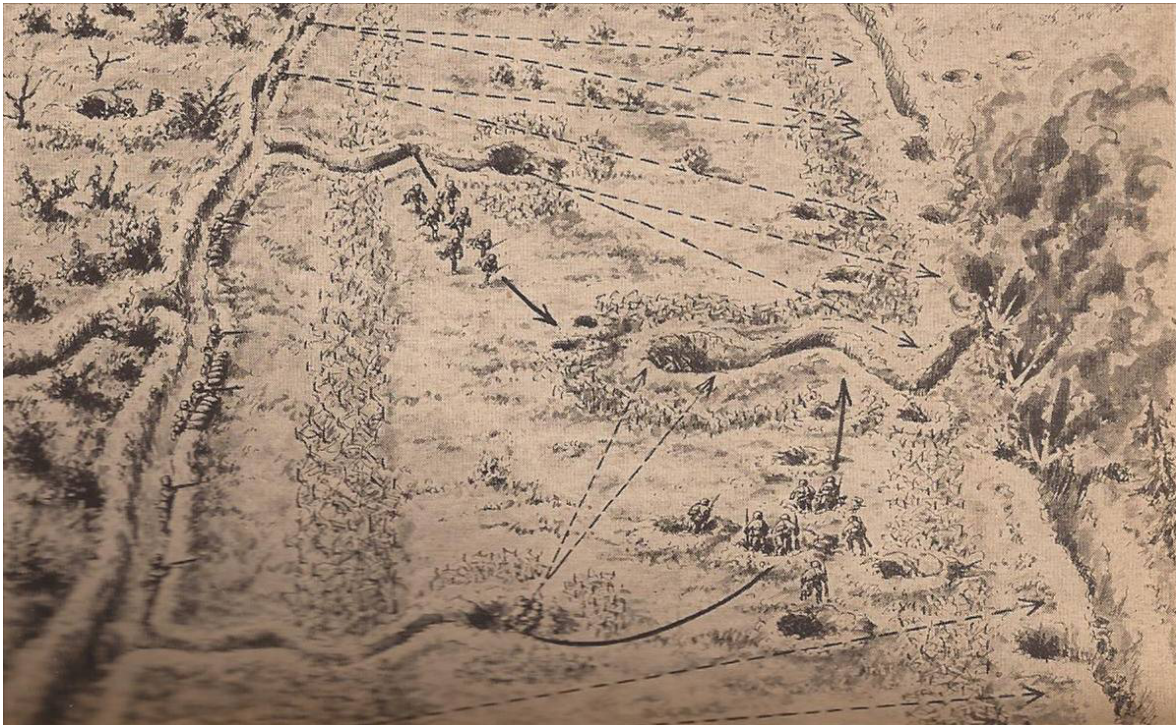
When the riflemen have approached as closely as they are able, the grenade throwers should, on the command of the *Gruppenführer* (typically, on a whistle), throw their grenades at the enemy. The riflemen should then storm the position under the cover of the detonating grenades. The *Gruppenführer* should lead the final assault by the riflemen.

The method of taking an enemy position is illustrated below (including support from other *Gruppen*):



In the example above, the *Zug* is attempting to take an enemy held sap (*Sappenkopf*).

- Friendly mortars bombard the trench immediately behind the enemy position.
- One *Gruppe* (the "*Deckungstrupp*") fires on the enemy position from the front and on the enemy trench ("*1.fdl.Graben*").
- Two assault *Gruppen* (*Stoßtrupps 1 & 2*) have positioned themselves in advanced positions to either side of the enemy position.
- The IMGs of the assault *Gruppen* have been positioned to fire on the enemy position.
- Under the cover provided by the *Deckungstrupp* and their own IMGs the assault *Gruppen* storm the enemy position.
- *Stoßtrupp 1* attacks the enemy position directly.
- *Stoßtrupp 2* moves to the rear of the enemy position to cut off reinforcements.



Once the enemy position has been taken, preparations should be made for an enemy counter-attack. The *Gruppe* should then prepare to either advance further or consolidate the position in accordance with the orders of the *Zugführer*.

## Defence

Defensive operations received much less coverage in period manuals, most probably as a result of the offensive-focused tactical doctrine followed by the German armed forces.

When defending, the defender aims to balance his weakness in numbers and/or equipment through his choice of a position and the coordination between his supporting arms. However, the position should be such that the enemy is forced to attack and cannot merely by-pass it and attack somewhere else weaker.

The terrain, defensive works, supporting units and observation should all be taken into consideration when selecting a position. Inter-locking and mutually supporting fire (especially from IMG's) of the *Gruppen* is of great importance at the platoon level.



IMG position, Russia 1942

The *Zugführer*, together with the *Gruppenführers* should, where possible, visit each *Gruppe* and give the following information in his battle orders:

- The route of the main battle line;
- The depth of friendly positions;
- Indicate overlapping fire sectors;
- The placement of the *Gruppe's* foxholes (*Schützenlöchern*) and their field of fire;
- Rules of engagement for opening fire on enemy troops and armoured vehicles.

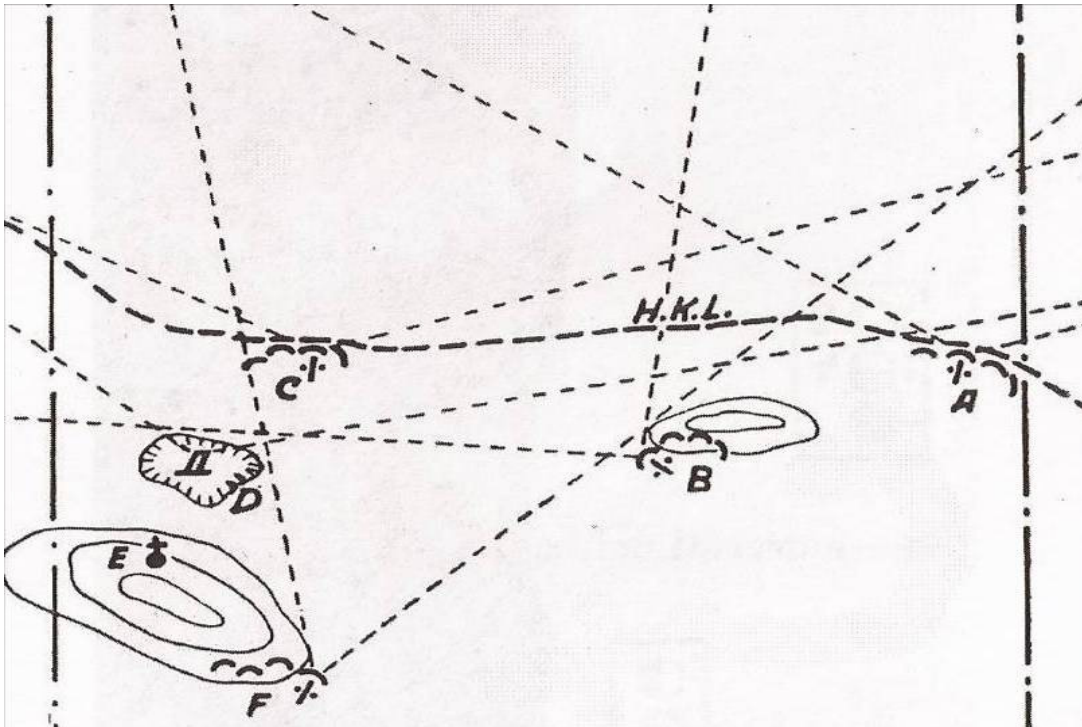
Defensive operations can be divided into either sustained or delaying actions.

#### *Sustained Defence*

In a sustained defence, the *Hauptkampflinie* (HKL) is established and represents the forward point of the advance. Should the position be lost, the defender must re-take it, in order to ensure the integrity of the frontline. Therefore, the position must be defended to the last man.

For a sustained defensive position, the defence is staggered and in-depth so that the effect of enemy fire is lessened. Also, should the forward positions be taken, the enemy is engaged by rearwards lying positions as well as by flanking positions. This serves to wear down an enemy assault and to minimise friendly losses.

An illustration of how a *Zug* should deploy defensively can be seen below:



In the example above:

- Two IMGs (A and C) are placed on the HKL with overlapping fields of fire.
- One IMG (B) is placed behind a hill covering C's position and overlapping C's field of fire.
- One IMG (F) is placed to the rear of the other three IMGs to cover C and B and overlap with their field of fire.
- The *Zug's* mortar (D) is positioned in a depression and can cover the HKL.
- The *Zugführer* (E) is positioned to the rear of the mortar on an elevation, so that he can observe the HKL.

The IMG should be placed first and be positioned so that it commands the best field of fire and can support neighbouring *Gruppen* through flanking fire. The *Gruppenführer* should then position the riflemen to either one or both sides of the IMG and oversee the camouflage and preparation of the position (otherwise known as a *Gruppenest*).

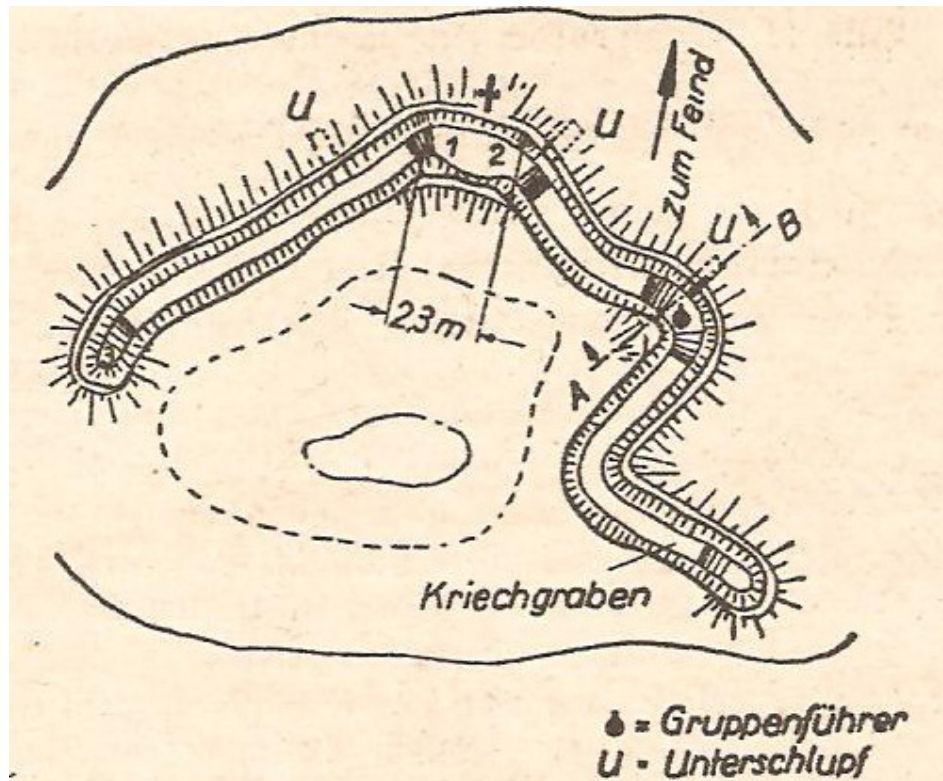
Each position should contain 2 or 3 riflemen and should be spaced at irregular intervals 4-8m apart staggered towards the rear. If time allows, the *Schützenlöchern* should be connected by a shallow trench (*Kriechgraben*). The *Gruppenest* should be no wider than 30m.

Alternative positions should also be selected and prepared. If time allows, a rear position should be prepared that will protect the *Gruppe* from observation and enemy artillery fire.

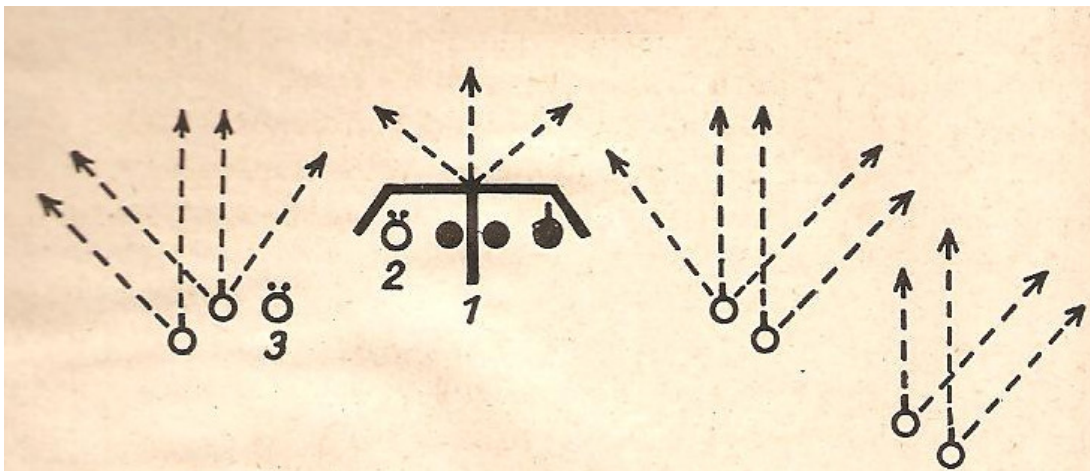
The *Gruppenführer* should position himself such that he is able to direct and control his *Gruppe*, especially the MG.



Examples of *Gruppeneste*:



Note: an *Unterschlupf* is a dug out to provide protection against artillery.



Once the position has been prepared, camouflage is of utmost importance and note should be taken of the earth from the digging activities. Unnecessary movement should be avoided.

Observation posts (or *Vorposten*) should be positioned ahead of the main position, in order to observe the enemy or to break up an enemy assault. Typically, *Vorposten* are composed of 1-2 men with a communication link to the main position. The position should be well camouflaged and offer good possibilities for observation. The occupants should be rotated at regular intervals and be aware of their task, especially whether to engage

the enemy or not. It is recommended that a sketch map be drawn and a *Meldung*, or log of enemy activity be kept and reported to the *Gruppenführer*.

When attacked, the enemy should be primarily engaged by support weapons and the IMG should hold its fire until the last moment, in order that it remains hidden. The *Gewehrschützen* should avoid firing and be held ready for counter-attacks.

Where the *Gruppe* is attacked by armour, the *Gruppe* should (if possible) allow the armour to pass by and engage the enemy infantry instead. The enemy armour should be engaged by friendly anti-tank units positioned to the rear. If directly assaulted by armour, some of the *Gruppe* should engage the armour at close range while the remainder of the *Gruppe* continues to engage the enemy infantry.

If a neighbouring position is taken, the *Gruppe* should continue the defence until the enemy has been thrown back by reserve troops.

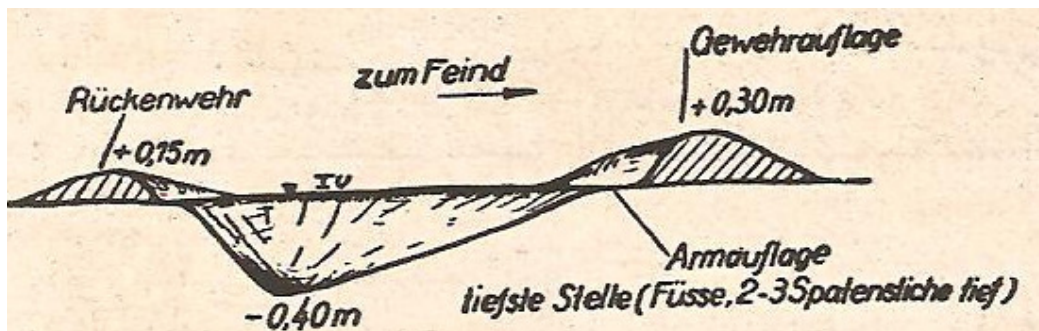
### *Delaying Actions*

In a delaying action there is no defined HKL. Instead the *Gruppenführer* should aim to force the enemy to commit as many resources as possible whilst maintaining the strength of his *Gruppe*. Unlike a sustained defence, the IMG should engage the enemy as soon as possible along with other supporting weapons.

The route(s) for a safe withdrawal should be reconnoitred beforehand, as it is intended that the defensive position is to be abandoned. During the withdrawal, the riflemen should withdraw under the cover of the IMG-*Trupp*. Once in the next position, the riflemen should cover the withdrawal of the IMG. The *Gruppenführer* should remain with the IMG.

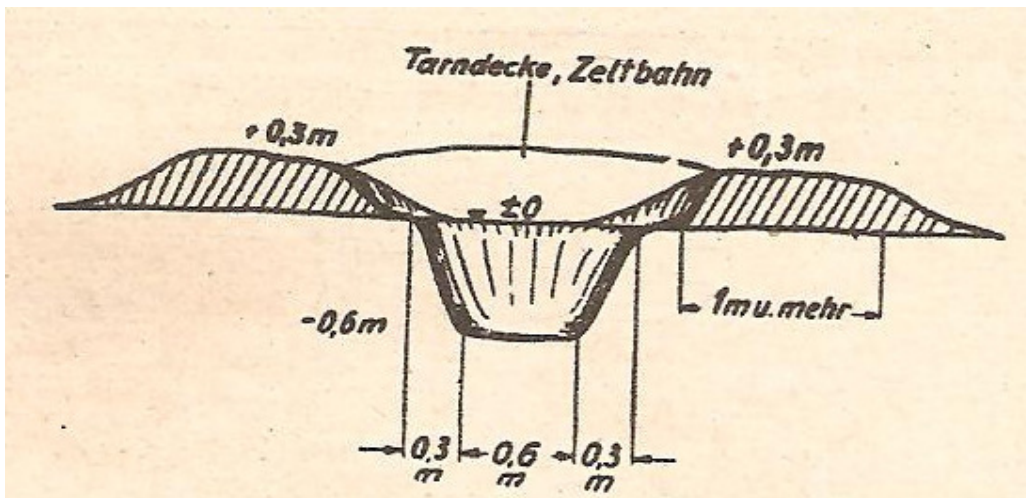
### *Defensive Positions*

Where there is little time for preparation of the position, the riflemen would dig a *Schützenmulde* (see below), which essentially consists of a hole about 0.4-0.5m deep for a rifleman to lie down in and offers additional protection for the prone soldier.

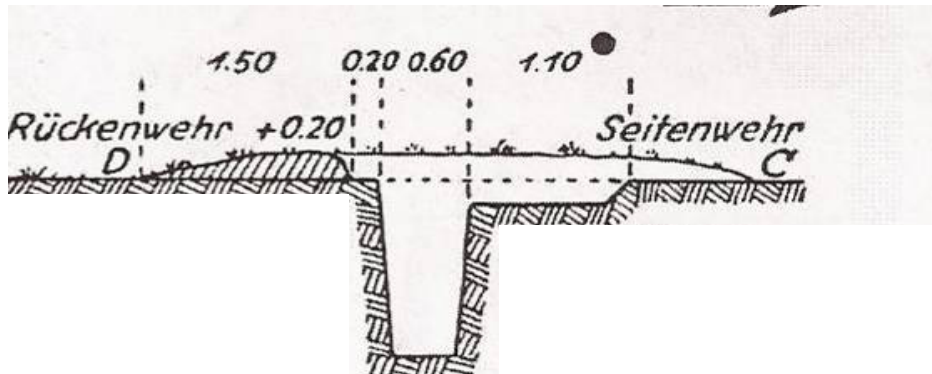


This would typically be dug where speed is of the essence or when under fire, as it is possible to dig it whilst lying down.

Where more time is available, a rifle-pit or *Schützenloch* (see below) would be dug. Typically, for 2-3 soldiers to either stand or kneel in dependent upon the depth, it offers more protection than the *Schützenmulde* against artillery and mortar fire. The *Schützenloch* can be covered by a shelter-quarter for camouflage.

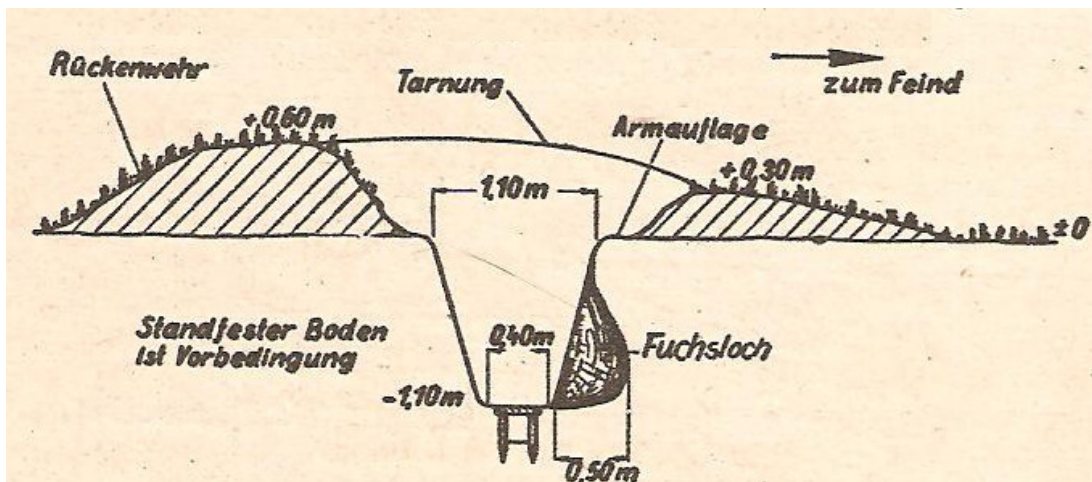


A Schützenloch for 2-3 riflemen.



An IMG position, note the rest for the IMG at the front of the position.

The *Gruppenest* should also contain *Unterschlupfen*, which serve to offer additional protection against enemy artillery. In essence, deeper *Schützenlöchern* with an overhang (known as a *Fuchsloch*) under which the riflemen can shelter.



## Reconnaissance

The aims of reconnaissance are:

- To discover the nature of the terrain;
- To warn against gas; and
- To determine the position of and warn against enemy forces, especially armour.

A *Spähtrupp* was a nominated unit with the task of conducting a reconnaissance mission to discover information and report back. A typical *Spähtrupp* should be no larger than a *Gruppe*, but may consist of only a few troops (where it is only expected to observe).

The equipment carried would depend largely upon the situation, but it was recommended that the IMG be left behind and instead a large number of automatic weapons and scoped rifles be carried. Additionally, the *Trupp* should carry a map, binoculars, compasses, report card and either a flare gun or a signal lamp. Apart from weapons, the equipment carried by individual soldiers should be minimal in order to reduce noise.

A password should be issued at night.

Every member of the *Spähtrupp* should be familiar with their mission and should be aware of the plan. This not only makes the *Spähtruppführer's* job easier, but also enables the mission to continue in case the leader is killed.

When advancing, the *Spähtrupp* should avoid trails and zig-zag when in woodland or broken terrain, so that no enemy positions are missed. The riflemen should be constantly on the look out for signs of the enemy and ensure that they know the route taken by the *Trupp*.

Two compasses should be used – one at the front, the other at the rear – in order to reduce the likelihood of a deviation from the ordered direction.

Orders and signals should be communicated as quietly as possible.

Cover should be made use of when moving and open areas should be avoided.

Contact with the enemy should be avoided where possible, as the role of the *Spähtrupp* is to gather information and report back, not to engage the enemy. If contact with the enemy can be expected, the *Gruppenführer* should move the *Spähtrupp* forward in small groups rather than as a whole.

When in a small *Trupp*, two riflemen should go forwards while the third protects the rear.











At night, the *Spähtrupp* should have frequent, short breaks in order to ensure that it remains together.












Once in a position to observe the enemy, it was recommended that an observer be placed up a tree in order to see further. It is important to secure the rear and flanks of the position.

It was emphasized, however, that a *Spähtrupp* must be able to report quickly and in time for the information it gathers to be of use.

**PART FIVE  
MISCELLANEOUS**

**Hand Signals**

	<b>Description</b>	<b>Meaning</b>
	Hold arm above head. (a) by leader (also with whistle) (b) by subordinate	(a) 'Attention' (prepare to receive order(s)) (b) 'Understood' or 'Ready'
	Pump arm up and down. (a) when halted (b) on the move	(a) Move out (b) Move faster
	Point arm left/right.	Move left/right
	Wave arm above head. (a) when assembled in <i>Marschordnung</i> (b) when at ease	(a) 'At ease' (b) Form <i>Marschordnung</i>
	Lower arm at the side slowly.	Move slower/reduce speed.
	Lower arm rapidly	Halt.
	Lower arm quickly to the front.	'Hinlegen!'
	Point with arm in a direction when on the move.	Move in the indicated direction.
	Extend fist from chest and then bring it back repeatedly.	Take cover from aircraft.
	Move arm in a circle above head.	Move to next state of combat readiness (such as from <i>Entfaltung</i> to <i>Entwicklung</i> ).

	Description	Meaning
	Extend both arms outwards.	Take positions. ( <i>Stellung!</i> )
	Hold out and circle arm when in open order.	Adopt close order again.
	Cross arms over chest.	Stack rifles.
	Wave hand above head.	Subordinate to the leader.
	Hold headgear above head.	'We have arrived!'
	Hold weapon vertically above head.	'Area free of enemies'
	Hold weapon horizontally above head.	'Enemy in the vicinity.'
	Hold spade above head. (a) from the front (b) from the rear	(a) we will dig in here (b) digging in
	Hold ammunition box above head.	Ammunition forwards.
	Hold gasmask tin above head. (a) from <i>Spähtruppen</i> (b) from leader	(a) gas warning (b) put on gasmasks
	Hold gasmask above head	Remove gasmasks

## Phonetic Alphabet

A a	Anton	N n	Nordpol
Ä ä	Ärger	O o	Otto
B b	Berta	Ö ö	Ödipus
C c	Cäsar	P p	Paula
Ch ch	Charlotte	Q q	Quelle
D d	Dora	R r	Richard
E e	Emil	S s	Siegfried
F f	Friedrich	T t	Theodor
G g	Gustav	U u	Ulrich
H h	Heinrich	Ü ü	Übel
I i	Ida	V v	Viktor
J j	Julius	W w	Wilhelm
K k	Konrad	X x	Xanthippe
L l	Ludwig	Y y	Ypsilon
M m	Martha	Z z	Zeppelin

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