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"What Jerry Thinks of Us... and Himself" from *Intelligence Bulletin*, Dec. 1944



A U.S. report on German comments on Allied and German tactics in Italy, from the [*Intelligence Bulletin*](#), December 1944.

[Editor's Note: The following article is wartime information on enemy weapons and tactics published for Allied soldiers. More accurate data on German weapons and tactics is available in postwar publications.]



A German prisoner, a Panzer Grenadier who had spent 16 weeks at Cassino, told his British interrogators that, in his opinion, Allied soldiers had made a number of outstanding mistakes in combat. He discussed these in some detail, and, while his views are not necessarily endorsed, they are worth examining as an indication of how some enemy troops may expect us to fight in the future. On the other hand, this same prisoner's battalion commander, addressing his company officers on the subject of the battalion's performance in battle, analyzed the unit's shortcomings in forthright language. The comments of these two men are specially interesting when read in sequence.

COMMENTS ON ALLIED METHODS

"Allied infantry attack very cautiously and bunch up too much when they move against their objectives," the Panzer Grenadier said. "They are very negligent about seeking concealment, and therefore can be seen most of the time. When they move against their objectives, their lines are not staggered enough and are deep instead of wide.

"Allied soldiers on the double, upon coming to a sudden halt frequently remain in a kneeling position, simply waiting to be shot at, instead of throwing themselves to the ground. Then, if nothing happens, they get up on the same spot where they were kneeling before, and continue their advance. I think this is extremely dangerous, especially when the terrain is dotted with snipers, as it is in Italy. I myself have seen at least a dozen Allied soldiers die because of this stupidity.



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"In the German Army we think it is only common sense for an attacking soldier to select an objective for each phase of his advance. Upon reaching an objective, he immediately throws himself to the ground and crawls 10 to 15 yards to the left or right, carefully avoiding observation. He waits there a few seconds before continuing his advance.

"Sometimes, however, the Allied infantryman will drop after a shot has been fired and will roll to the right. We Germans know this. We have also noticed that Allied infantry run toward their objectives in a straight line, forgetting to zigzag and thus making an excellent target.

"In Italy, especially, attacking forces can use rocks to better advantage than they do. While I was at Cori, there was a large space between two rock formations, which afforded a clear field of fire. We covered it with a light machine gun. The first Allied troops who tried to pass between the rocks moved very slowly and in line, and some of them were hit. Not until then did the others dash through the open space.

"Many Allied commanders lack aggressiveness. They do not realize when an objective can be taken; consequently, attacking troops often turn back just before they reach their objective.

"At Cassino I was in a valley with 97 other German soldiers in foxholes and slit trenches. First, a group of Sherman tanks attacked within range of our *Faustpatronen*. Three of the tanks were knocked out. The infantry, who should have followed right behind the tanks, were about 500 yards behind, and therefore were too far away to seek the cover of the armored vehicles. The tanks immediately retreated. When the infantrymen saw that the tanks had turned around, they, too, turned around and retreated. The whole valley should have been cleaned up in a matter of minutes.

"This great distance between Allied armored units and infantry was apparent almost every time. There was one instance when Allied tanks smashed across our foxholes, to be

followed an hour later by infantrymen, who were driven back by hail of machine-gun fire. *We Germans rely on you to make these mistakes.*

"The net cover on the helmets of Allied soldiers permits us to see the outline of the helmet distinctly, and at a considerable distance, in the daytime," the German soldier concluded. "On the other hand, the camouflage that we [Germans] use on our helmets disrupts the outline of the helmet, and the canvas cover can be painted to suit the terrain."

COMMENTS ON GERMAN METHODS

"Defense, with its digging-in and long hours of lying in wait, is contrary to the nature of the German soldier," the German battalion commander told his officers. "Every company commander must emphasize to his men repeatedly that the life of a whole company depends on the alertness of a single soldier. We must be prepared for new dirty tricks on the Allies' part every day.

"I do not want to hear soldiers complain that they have not eaten or slept for two days and that the situation is impossible. The word 'impossible' must not exist in our vocabulary.

"Principally because of its monotony, observation has become very poor. The slightest movement of bushes must be reported. Remember that trifles may be pieced together at higher headquarters to form a significant picture. Even negative reports may be of the utmost importance. I have been noticing that our observers do not use camouflage, and that, when they do, it usually does not match the terrain. As a result, the observer stands out like a flag. The companies seem to do their utmost to tell all their actions to the enemy. In short, camouflage discipline is poor.

"Again and again, it has been evident that our soldiers consider the night their enemy. Most of our men are completely helpless at night.

"The Allies are using the night for much of their activity, and have achieved a great deal of success. I have noticed that they use their machine-gun fire very effectively at night. They can place their machine-gun fire 10 to 20 centimeters above the top of our foxholes, so that even at night our men don't dare to stick their heads up.

"Our soldiers have learned the same tactics, but are too lazy to prepare their weapons for night firing. Many of our soldiers have even adopted the idea that they mustn't fire at all. This can be traced back to the fact that the enemy, with his superiority in materiel, often has placed an artillery barrage on individual soldiers. If we want to bring the old spirit back, the soldiers must learn that their most important weapon is their shovel.

"Soldiers must prepare alternate positions. We must never fire from our main positions during daylight. It must not happen again that our men refrain from firing on Allied troops, giving as their excuse, 'We would only hit the sand.' It is the responsibility of the company commander to see that his company can be ready for action at an instant's

notice. In the instance I have in mind, I don't believe that everybody was asleep, but, rather, that the proper system was not being followed.

"Our men are not well trained in patrolling. They always want to attack after a heavy artillery preparation. This is wrong. Creep up, Indian fashion, and arrive in the enemy's midst suddenly. It is now self-evident that machine-gun belts must be wrapped around the stomach, and that pay books and all papers must be left behind.



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"Men must be trained to understand brief military orders. Our organization is poor. It is changed only after the enemy has taught us a lesson. The other day we lost a deserter. That this man is going to talk is obvious. He will at least have told the enemy the time and route our food carriers change. That the enemy has acted on such information is proved by our losses. Why aren't the schedules changed from day to day? Ambulances do not arrive at the front fast enough. The other day they took three-quarters of an hour, and I understand that some of the wounded bled to death.

"Enemy penetration of our lines has occurred mainly because the gaps between companies have been too large. If the company on your left fails to maintain contact, you must in your own interest maintain contact to the left.

"Communications have been very poor. During a barrage, never send just *one* messenger. Because of Allied artillery fire, our line communications have been cut most of the time. Use of radio, instead, has been impossible because of the lack of radios. There are far too few messages. The junior officers never put themselves mentally in the position of the higher echelons. These echelons are mostly so far to the rear that they cannot be contacted. Every man, from privates up, must make it a habit to report as often as possible.

"The distribution of ammunition has been satisfactory, and our system of ammunition dumps has proved its worth."