

SCHÜTZENPANZERWAGEN

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**War Horse
of the
Panzer
Grenadiers**

Horst Scheibert



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Left: Gathering after the battle and forming for a further advance — Russia 1941. In the foreground is a light (le) armored observation car of the artillery (Sd.Kfz.250/4). Unlike the Sd.Kfz.250/1, it has an antenna at the left front. The very heavy corduroy carpet over the bow is of particular interest.

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RETREAT FOR ROMILLY

On a hot, foggy August morning, a Panzer-grenadier scout team in their tri-color "ambush" camouflaged Sd.Kfz.251/1d halftrack have found an open escape route, just as enemy shells begin to fall on their garrison back in the village of Nogent. The *Unteroffizier* has radioed to his company commander that the road is open momentarily, but the halftrack crew will have to press on alone to the greater garrison in the town of Romilly, twenty kilometers to the east. Their chances of survival are abysmal.

Unknown to the thousands of such stranded grenadier units in the battle of Northern France in 1944, the audacious American General George S. Patton and his 3rd Army had swept across Orleansais province south of Paris and wheeled north into Champagne province to cut off their retreat. With the liberation of Paris and the villages of Champagne in late August, hundreds of abandoned *Schützenpanzerwagen*s dotted the French countryside as thousands of hapless panzer-grenadiers failed to regroup. Only the lucky ones found relative safety on the east bank of the Rhine River in Germany proper.

Translated from the German by Edward Force.

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SCHUTZENPANZERWAGEN (SPW)

As a result of Guderian's concept of placing tanks at the center of the battle and arranging all types of weapons related to them accordingly, there originated the motorization and later armoring of the infantry accompanying them. The infantrymen were called riflemen (Schützen) and, in 1942, armored grenadiers (Panzergrenadiere).

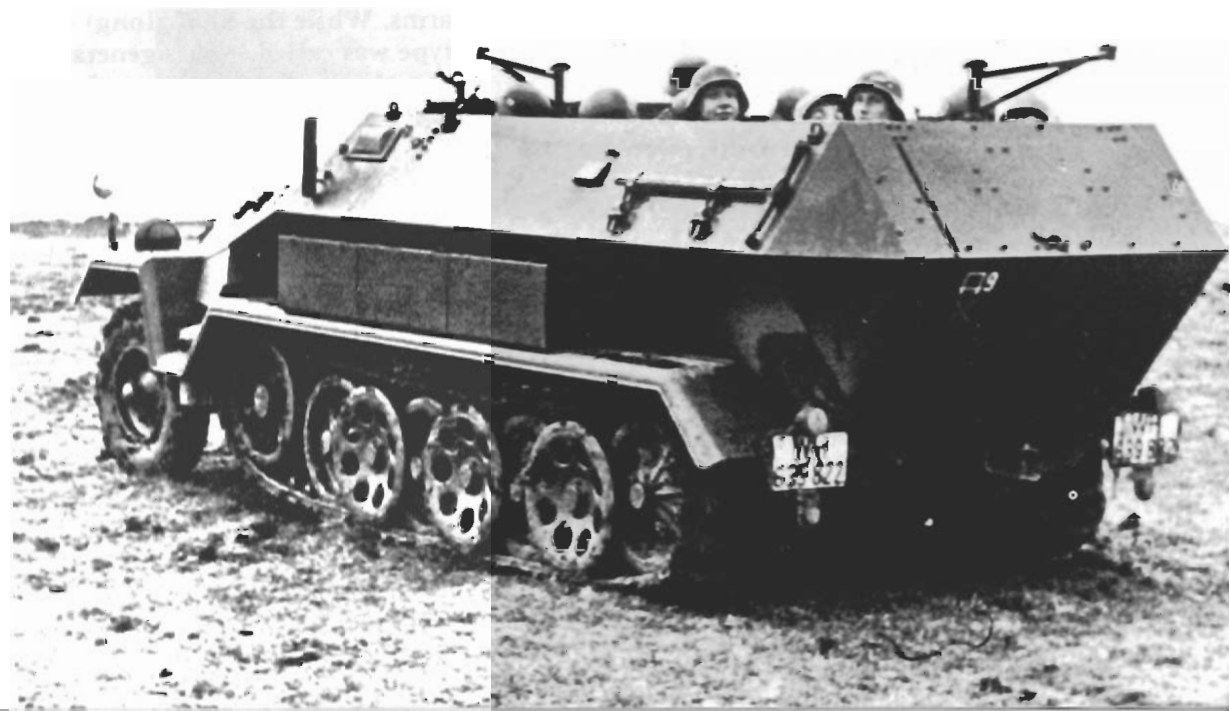
Originally, though, the vehicles were just supposed to transport them onto the battlefield so they could be dropped there and carry on the battle along with the tanks. Thus the pictures originated that we know from the campaigns in Poland and France. Their vehicles were trucks of various types, especially the Protzkraftwagen made by Krupp (Kfz.69). But even in peacetime, test were made with an armored vehicle, and in 1939 and 1940 some of them were tested by, and saw action with, the 1st Panzer Division. General der Panzertruppe Guderian was also using them already as command cars in the Polish campaign.

When it was found that in Blitzkrieg action, with its quick battles, too much time was lost in dropping and picking up troops who fought battles on foot — and that time was used by the enemy — the production of armored vehicles was hastened.

For this purpose, the relatively well-developed 1- and 3-ton towing tractors had been armored and turned into light and medium armored personnel transport vehicles (Sd.Kfz.260 and 251). They were abbreviated as le. or m. gep. MTW. The larger one was capable of carrying a group of



Above: A light Schützenpanzerwagen (Sd.Kfz.250/1), below a medium type (Sd.Kfz.251/1). The upper one could transport six men, the lower one twelve — counting the driver and commander. (2 x BA)



Light Schützenpanzerwagen (le. SPW)

Right: Unlike the somewhat ponderous medium type, the light SPW was a powerful and very mobile combat vehicle.



ten soldiers. Later these vehicles were more correctly called riflemen's armored trucks (Schützenpanzerwagen, SPW for short), since they were used — as it soon turned out — not only for transport, but also for shooting from the vehicle, and the grenadiers were unloaded only in country with a poor view, such as in forest, town and night battle.

By the time the Russian campaign began (1941), almost all of the twenty Panzer divisions were able to equip at least one battalion with them. For reasons of production, though, it was never possible during the war to equip all armored grenadier units with them — aside from special units like "Grossdeutschland" and the Waffen-SS. One reason was the large number (36!) of variations of these two types of vehicles,

which also had to be built for other service arms. While the SPW (long) — as the larger type was called — was generally supplied to the armored grenadiers, the SPW (short) usually went to the motorcycle rifle battalions and armored reconnaissance units.

The first SPW (long) had a smaller bow armor plate than later models, with a bumper. In the last years of the war, there was another version of it with a smooth, inclined and no longer angled rear end. The SPW (short) also gained smooth side panels toward the end of the war.

Both Schützenpanzerwagen were also armed with captured weapons by the troops, or used as towing tractors. This resulted in a great number of combinations, some of them quite unusual.

Unlike the tanks, though, they were protected only from hand weapons and shrapnel. Their use along with tanks came to an end when more and stronger enemy tanks and antitank weapons appeared. Toward the end of the war, this led to their use in the second battle line. But for them there was no alternative — they were still better than anything else.

On the right page, the light SPW (Sd.Kfz.250/1) can be seen with and without a machine-gun shield. They belonged to different Panzer divisions (10th upper left, 23rd lower left, 16th lower right). Note the later-type bow protection extended downward — easily seen on the vehicle at upper left. (2 x BA)

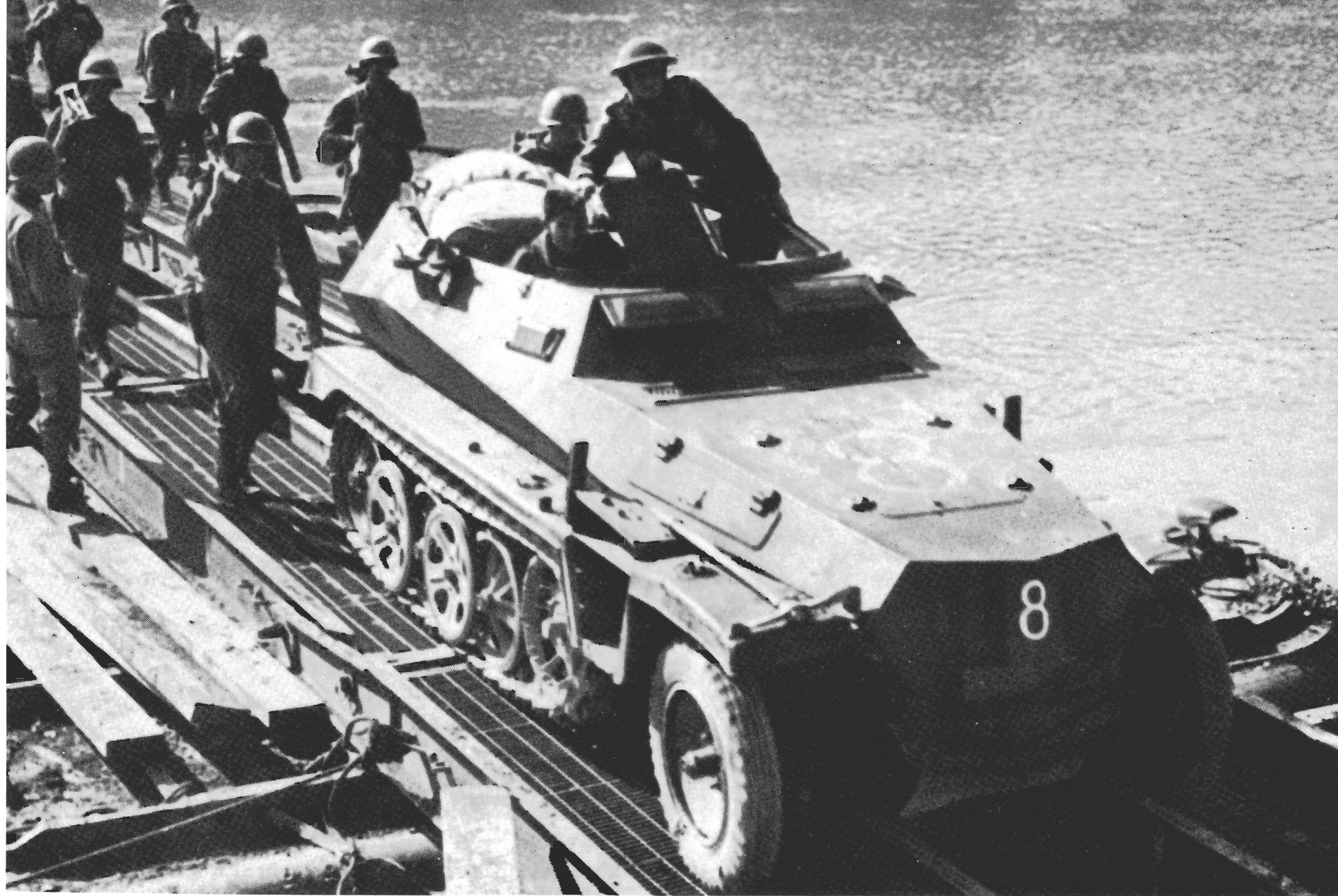




Upper left: Russia — mid-1941.

Above: Here the rear entrance can be seen — around Maikop, 1942.

Left: This photo shows the later version of Sd.Kfz.250/1 with lengthened sidewalls. The third SPW in this column is a Sd.Kfz.250/9 with turret and 20mm KwK 38. (2 x BA)



A light SPW captured by American soldiers. A British soldier can also be seen on the vehicle. The photo was probably taken on a military bridge over the Rhine, March-April 1945.



By the second antenna of the vehicle in front, it could be a Sd.Kfz.250/3, but these vehicles also exist with other antenna configurations.



As can be seen in this picture; this is a light SPW (250/3) of the "Grossdeutschland" Panzer-Grenadier Division. This one is a command car (note the emblem at left front) of the "GD" Motorcycle Rifle Battalion (as shown by the divisional and tactical emblems on the bow of the vehicle).



According to the umbrella antenna (above), this could be a Sd.Kfz.250/3 or /4, probably the former. In the vehicle are four Knight's Cross holders of Panzer Reconnaissance Unit 6 of the 6th Panzer Division.



Upper right: A somewhat high-riding but rain-shielded SPW. (BA)

Right: A Special Vehicle 250/3 with frame antenna, fresh from the factory and still lacking a machine gun. (BA)





Upper left: At left is a medium SPW gun car (251/10), at right a light SPW 250/3 with a particularly interesting antenna arrangement. Besides the frame antenna, it also has two staff antennas, both on the right side!

Above: A variation of the 250 was the light armored ammunition vehicle (Sd.Kfz.252) with special trailer 3 1/1. They were used by Sturmgeschütz units. (BA)



Left: The famous "Greif" (Griffin), Rommel's command car in North Africa — a 250/3 — here with an additional staff antenna on the left.

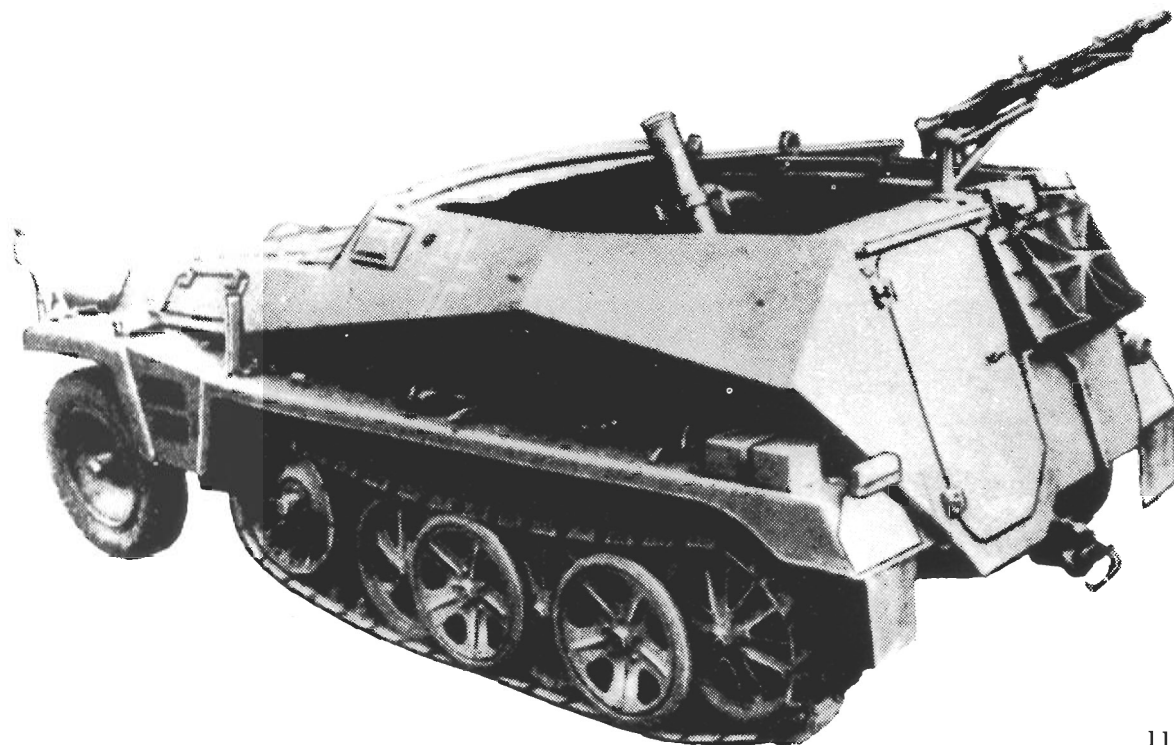


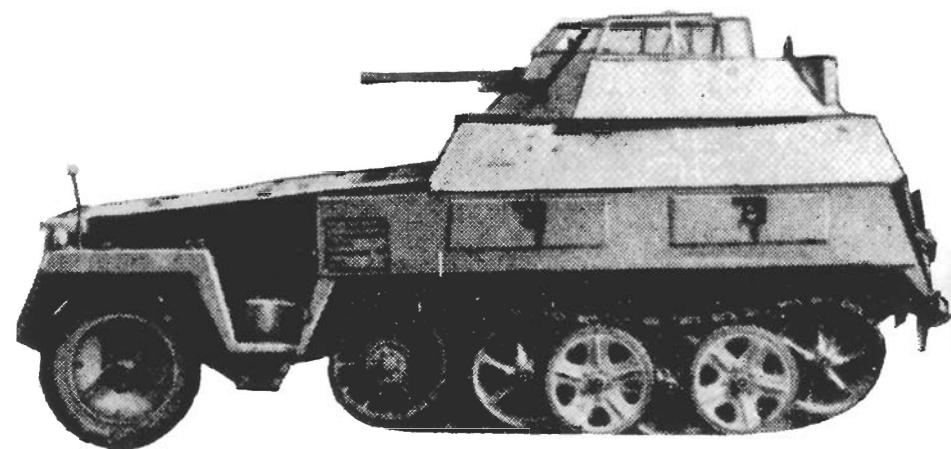
A light armored observation car (Sd.Kfz.253), also based on the 250 type. They were to be found in the artillery units within the Panzer divisions.



Upper right: The same type of vehicle with a rear box body. (BA)

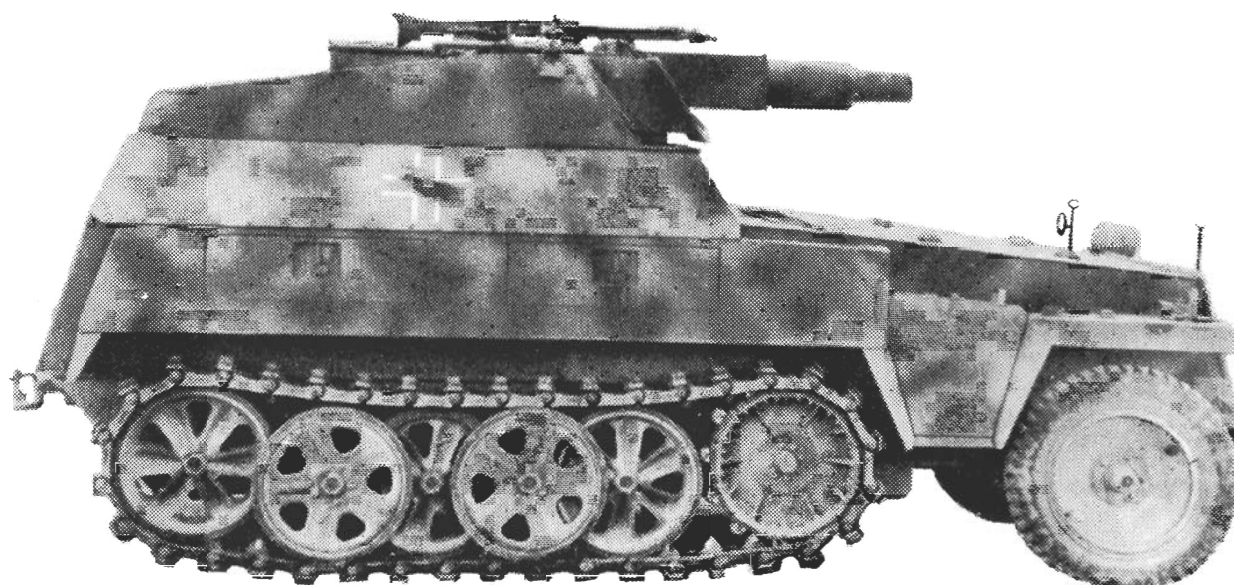
Right: A light 80mm grenade-launcher Schützenpanzerwagen (Sd.Kfz.250/7).



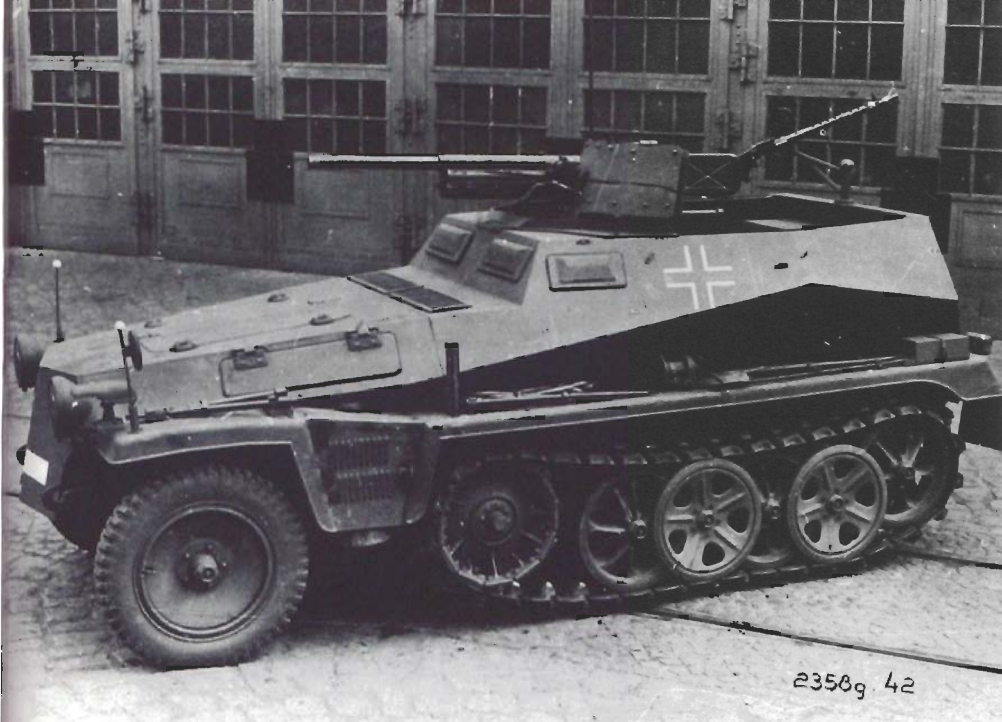


Upper left: A light Schützenpanzerwagen with turret, armed with a 20mm KwK 38 L/55 and a machine gun. It was also used as a light armored scout car — but made a lot more noise than those that ran on wheels.

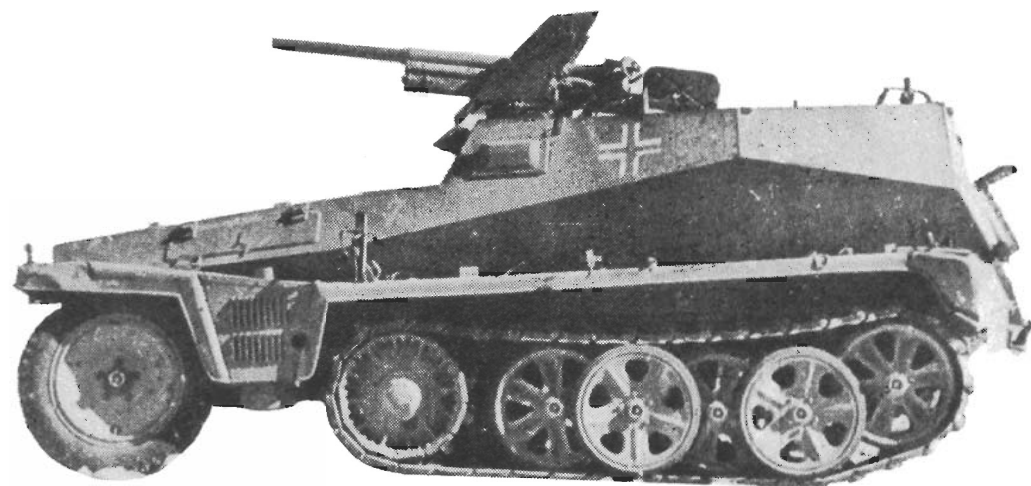
Above: There was also a version based on the later model of the light SPW.



Left: The light Kanonen-Schützenpanzerwagen with a 75mm L/24 (Sd.Kfz.250/8) — this time based on the later version of the light SPW. The gun caliber and vehicle size did not exactly match.

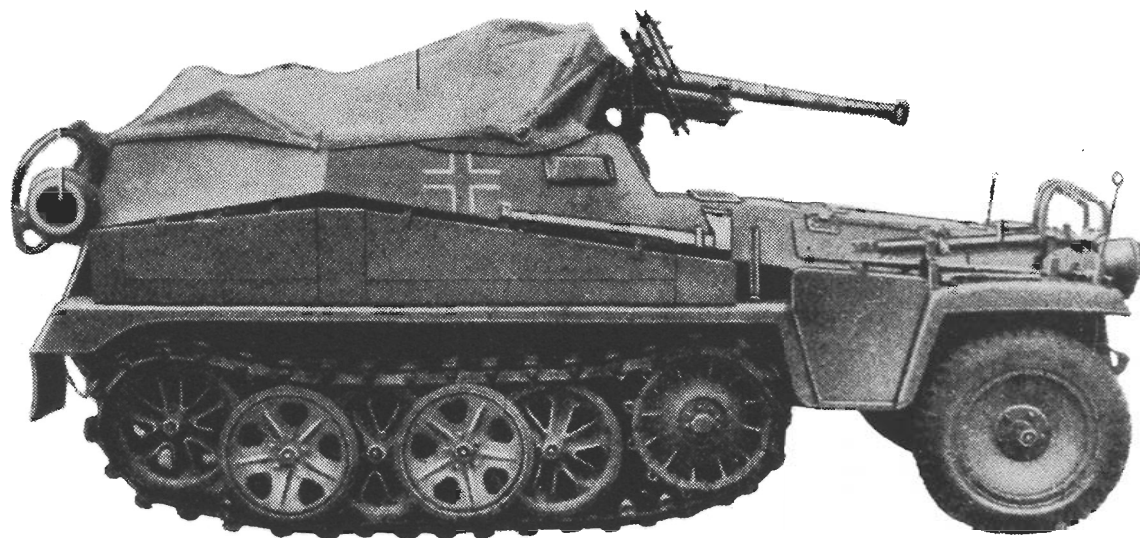


The two upper pictures show the light Kanonen-Schützenpanzerwagen, Sd.Kfz.250/10, with the 37mm Pak 36, at left with the later small shield only on the left side to provide a better view of the battlefield.



Right: The light Schützenpanzerwagen, Sd.Kfz.250/11, with Panzerbüchse 41 (caliber 28mm).

Both versions — especially the 37mm type — were usually used as platoon leaders' vehicles. Along with these factory-made combinations, there were a great many improvisations made by the troops — sometimes with captured weapons.





Above: Two photos of the light armored ammunition transporter, Sd.Kfz.252. It too was based on the Sd.Kfz.250. As shown by the tactical symbol on the bow and the tank column (Tunis), the one in the left photo belonged to a Panzer regiment. The one in the right photo is loading a Sturmgeschütz.

The Sd.Kfz.252 differed from the Munitions-Schützenpanzerwagen Sd.Kfz.250/6 by its closed roof, in which — as seen in both photos — there were two hatches. (1 x BA)

Left: A light SPW U 304 (f), 1944. This is a French armored halftrack, Unic Kegresse P 107, that was used by the security forces of the German Army in France as an auxiliary SPW. (BA)

Medium Schützenpanzerwagen





The previous page and these two show the medium Schützenpanzerwagen, Sd.Kfz.251/1, Types A and B (scarcely distinguishable externally). The letter "G" on the vehicle on page 15 shows that it belongs to Panzer Group 2, which was commanded by General Guderian in 1941.



This page: Upper left: A medium SPW with a machine gun behind the shield and an aircraft machine-gun mount — here without the gun, in France in 1942. The left photo shows a medium SPW with two mounts for aircraft machine guns. Types A and B are best distinguished by their two-piece bow with a heavy rounded bumper.

Right page: The SPW at the upper left was photographed during the Balkan campaign; beside it are Yugoslavian prisoners. Next is an SPW with winter camouflage; its two-piece bow and bumper are especially easy to see. At lower left is a photo from the first days of the French campaign. This SPW lacks its lower bow armor plate. They were often lost in off-road terrain or were removed for better cooling. The photo at lower right also comes from the French campaign. The side flaps of the motor hood are opened for better cooling.







Note the German cross on the cab front of the SPW on the left page; this was not usual.

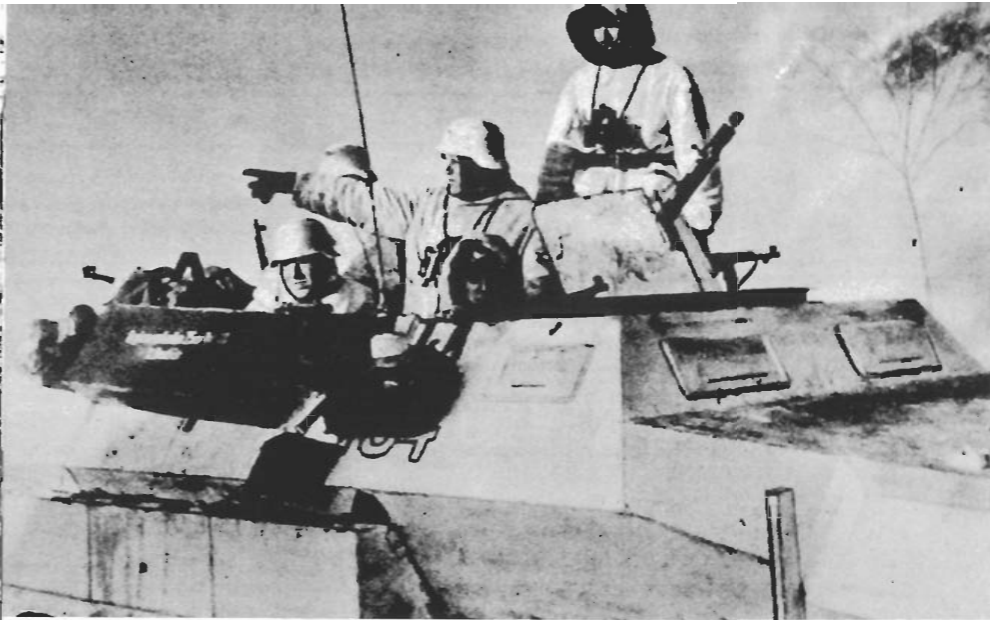
Above: A photo taken in Greece in 1941. (BA)

Upper right: The one-piece bow armor of this SPW seen in North Africa in 1941 is of particular interest. It shows that it is a Type C. The extended armor around the ventilator openings can also be seen. (BA)

Right: Another photo from North Africa.

All SPW on these pages show that there were rain- and dust-covers that could be mounted on flat bows over the fighting compartment.





The photos on this page show winter action. At the upper left, a particularly good camouflage paint scheme can be seen; above, on the other hand, is an old-type SPW without winter camouflage; at left are soldiers, and their vehicle, covered by white sheets from a textile mill — an improvisation by troops in Klin, which they have just occupied. (BA)

The right page shows photos from Russia and Italy (upper right). An interesting feature is a Knüppelteppich ("log carpet") for driving through muddy areas on the medium vehicle at lower right, and the easily recognizable side bulges of the engine armor at the upper right. (3 x BA)





Left: In the flat terrain of the south Russian steppes and in North Africa, these vehicles often served as raised vantage points. This one of the "Grossdeutschland" Panzer-Grenadier Regiment is seen in the Ukraine.

Above: A Type C in Tunis. (BA)

Right page: The Schützenpanzerwagen was very cramped with ten or twelve soldiers, and was no pleasure in rainy weather — especially if it continued for days. In the picture at far right, the flat bows for the canvas cover can be seen. (2 x BA)







These two pages also show the medium SPW (group vehicle) Sd.Kfz.251/1. Note the two contrasting upper photos on the left page. Here the different types of bow armor can be clearly seen. The two lower photos show the different rear ends. The right photo shows the rear of the Type D, introduced as of 1943. The driver's compartment is shown at the right on this page.

All versions, A through D, were still being used in 1945. Most of the D types though, reached only the "Grossdeutschland" Division and those of the Waffen SS.

The photos were taken in:

Left page — Upper left: Russia, mid-1941, Panzer Group 2; upper right: Northern Russia, 1941 (BA); lower left: Northern Russia, 1941 (BA); lower right: Lithuania, 1944, 2nd SS Panzer Division "Das Reich." This page — Above: France, 1944 (BA); upper right: Russia, 1943.

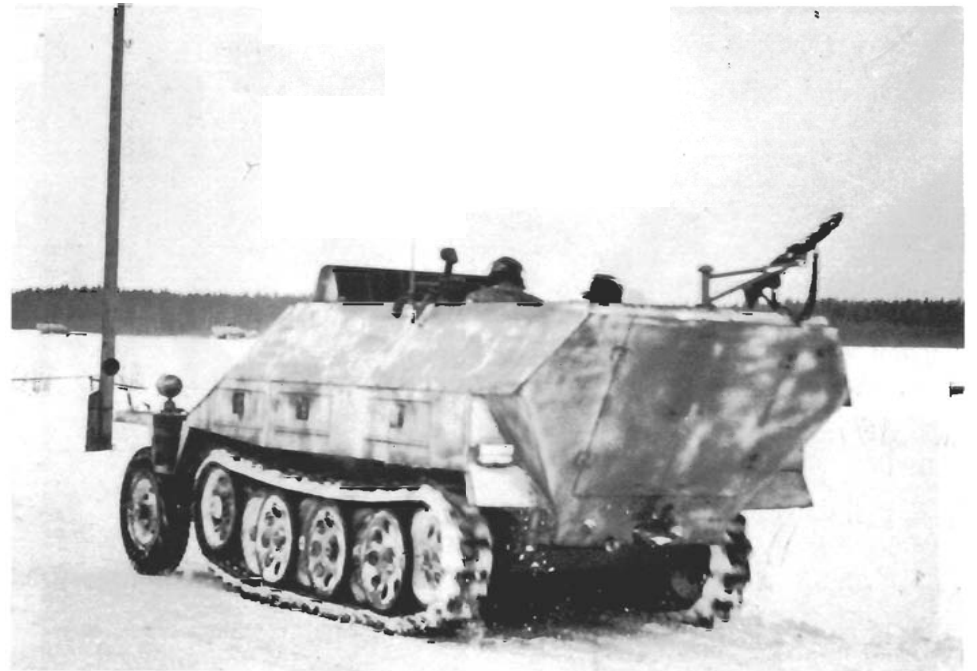




A battle group with tanks (Kampfpanzer II at upper left, Panther at left as well as the lower left picture on the next page, along with Kampfpanzer III) was the norm in combat. Unloading troops — if necessary, over the side walls (right page, upper right) — or more usually via the rear entrance, had to be practiced.

In the lower right picture on the right side two SPW that hit mines are shown. They belonged to the 6th Panzer Division during the advance toward Leningrad in 1941. (5 x BA)







All photos except the two top, left page show type D with the angled rear. The combat photo at the upper left (opposite) shows a medium armored ambulance, Sd.Kfz.251/8, recognizable by the red cross on a white background.

Note that these photos, like those before, sometimes show very different forms and positions of the German cross. There seems to have been no clear regulation as to placement. Numbers such as those on the upper photo appeared on the SPW only toward the end of the war. They showed the position of the vehicle within the unit. (6 x BA)





Variations

Sd.Kfz.251/1 with launcher frames

Attaching launcher frames to normal medium Schützenpanzerwagen — almost always to Type C — was officially only auxiliary armament for Sd.Kfz.251/1, but it is a genuine variation, for the interior was changed too. These SPW were nicknamed “Walking Stuka” or “Bellowing Cow”, because of both their powerful 28- or 32-cm mortar shells, which had an effect much like bombs, and the howling noise of launching them. (2 x BA)







There were several versions of the medium radio SPW Sd.Kfz.251/3. At the left on this page is one with an umbrella antenna; above is one with a staff antenna on the left, and special bodywork in the regimental staff of a Panzer-grenadier regiment (note the "R" next to the tactical emblem on the fender), and on the right page are frame antennas of different types (see also the following page) on Types B through D.

All were used as armored and mobile command posts within armored units and larger groups from battalion or company size to Panzer army groups.

At the far right, *General der Panzertruppe* Guderian, as the commander of Panzer Group guderian stands in his command vehicle during the French campaign. At the front is the Enigma code machine.

There were few identical SPW command vehicles, as many commanders had their own individual setups. (4 x BA)





Above: Beside a Command Panzer III (two antennas) stands a SPW, Sd.Kfz.251/3 or /6, of a rifle battalion of the 9th Panzer Division (note tactical and division emblems on the nose of the SPW). Here a Panzer unit commander is talking with the commander of a rifle battalion.

At left is a frame antenna of a type known only from the North African campaign. The motorcycle messenger is holding a message in his teeth.



Right page (3 x BA): At upper left is a platoon leader's Sd.Kfz.251/10 with a 37mm Pak. Next to it is a 20mm Flak wagon of the Army Flak (here Panzer Grenadier Division "Grossdeutschland"), in 1944.

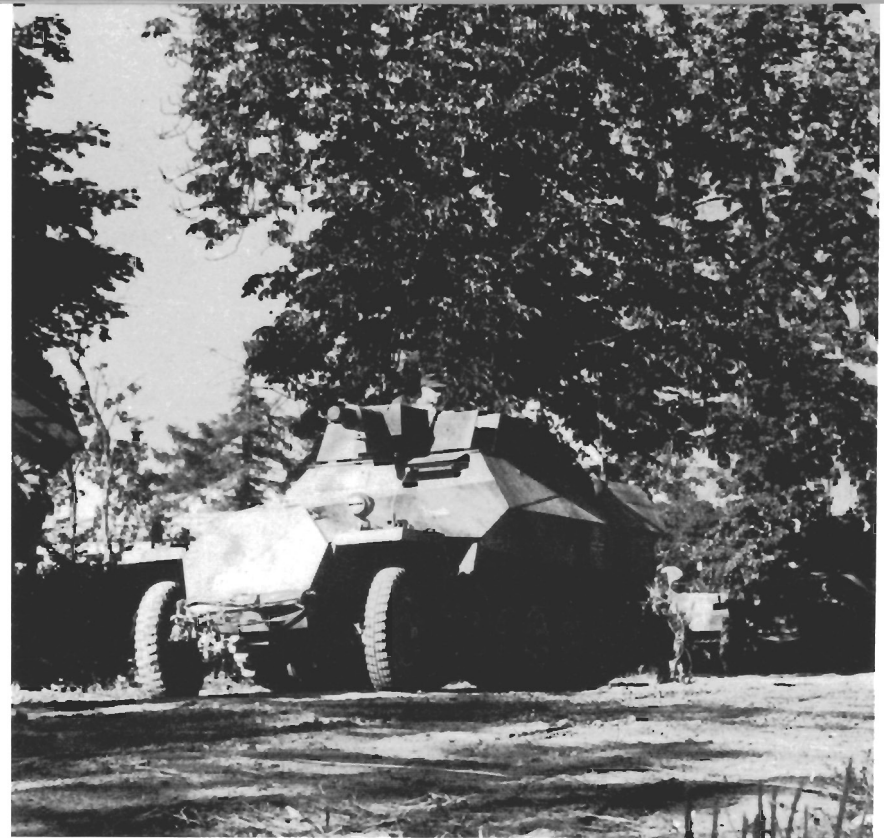
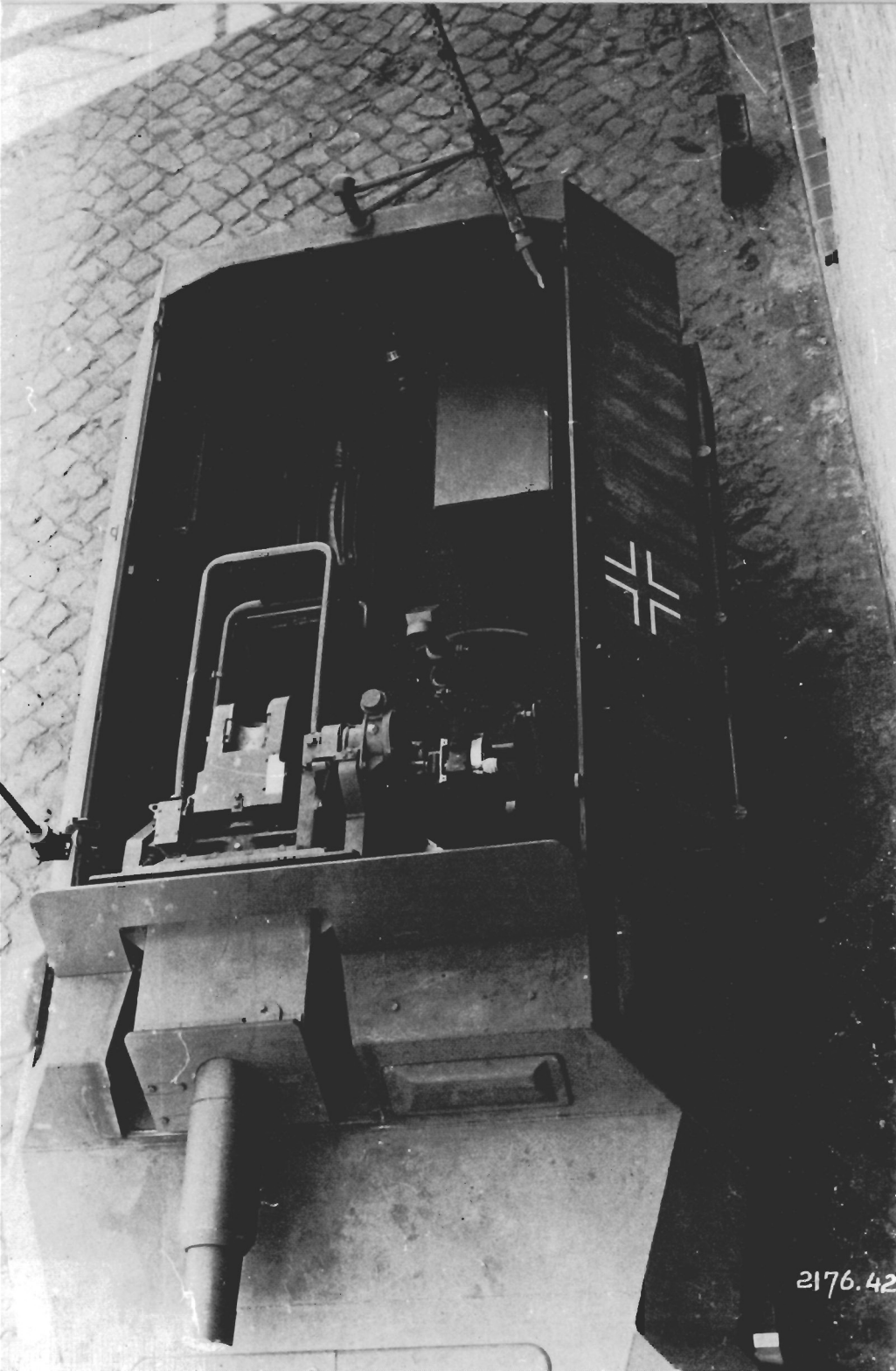
The two lower photos show the Sd.Kfz.251/9 (medium cannon SPW). It carried the 75mm Stuk 37 L/24.







After Kampfpanzer IV and Sturmgeschütz III were fitted with longer guns, the remaining KwK and Stuk guns were installed in Schützenpanzerwagen. (2 x BA)



2176.42



The left page shows three more photos of the Sd.Kfz.251/9. Of special note are higher side panels for crew protection. They were installed only late in production — some older vehicles were also equipped. (2 x BA)

On this page, Luftwaffe Sd.Kfz.251/17's with folded-down side walls can be seen.

The armoring of the ventilators, added during production of Type C, can be seen especially clear on the vehicle above. They were omitted from the Type D (3 x BA).





The medium Pionier-Geräte-Schützenpanzerwagen, Sd.Kfz.251/7, seen on this page as Type C and on the right page as Type D. Both photos show them with assault bridges; they also existed without them. (1 x BA)





On this page are three more photos of the Sd.Kfz.251/9.

In the photo at upper left, it is seen towing a 28mm heavy Antitank Gun 41, or "Panzerbuchse." This was not part of its usual equipment, and was probably either "found" or "borrowed."

The Schützenpanzerwagen on the photo at left is lacking its portable assault bridges (Sturmbrücken). The attachments for them, visible here, and the tactical emblem show that it is a vehicle of the Pioniertruppen (Combat Engineers).

The medium Pionier-Schützenpanzerwagen, Sd.Kfz.251/5, differs in not having attachments for assault bridges. Externally it is difficult to distinguish from the 251/1. Only the tactical emblems offer any distinguishing difference.



The medium Schützenpanzerwagen was often used as a towing tractor, as was foreseen in the war strength instructions, but it was also the result of troop improvisations. Three “foreseen” uses are shown on this page.

Above: Towing a 150mm heavy gun.

Upper right and right: Towing a 75mm antitank gun. (1 x BA)

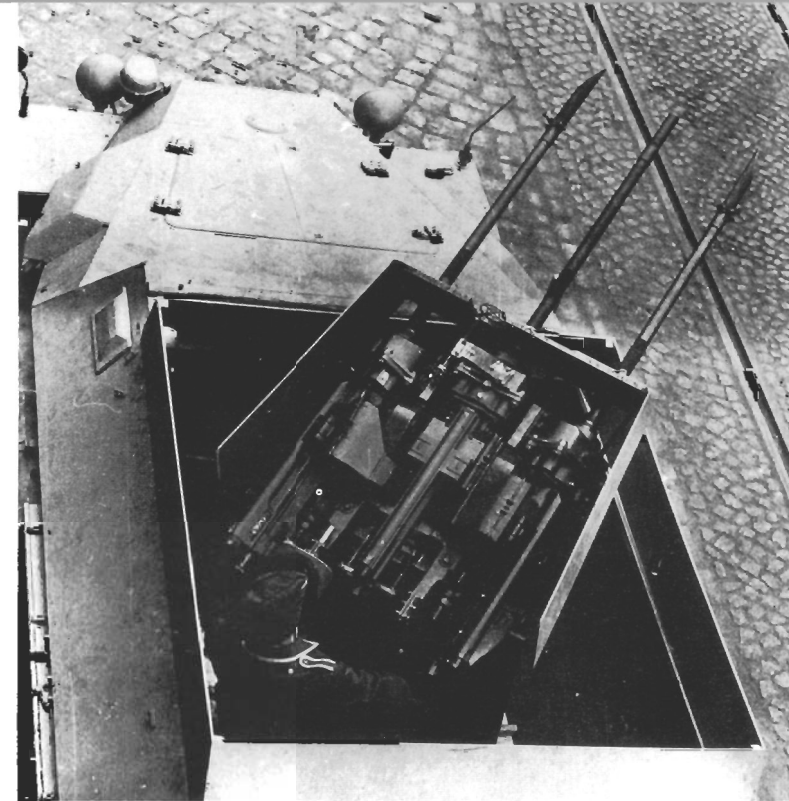




Above and on the right page, the medium Flammpanzerwagen (flamethrowing) is seen in action. The plume of flame extended up to 60 meters. Note the protective clothing in the lower left photo on the right page; it was not always worn, though (see lower right photo). (2 x BA)

The artillery (left) also used the Schützenpanzerwagen. In addition to being used as a towing tractor, as shown here, it was also used as an observation vehicle for VB, a survey, listening, sound- or light-measuring vehicle. The last four types — Sd.Kfz.251/12 to 15 — were found only in the armored observation artillery.





This page:

There were only a few of the medium Schützenpanzerwagen with 15 or 20mm triple anti-aircraft guns, and even fewer of them saw action. Here are several views of the vehicle with triple 15mm AA guns. (2 x BA)

At the top and right of the opposite pictures, the Sd.Kfz.251/20 with the UHU infra-red spotlight. With it, the battlefield could be kept under surveillance even at night. It first saw service in 1944. At lower left is Sd.Kfz.251/22, consisting of the medium SPW with a mounted 75mm antitank gun. This vehicle existed both with (as here) and without sidewalls.

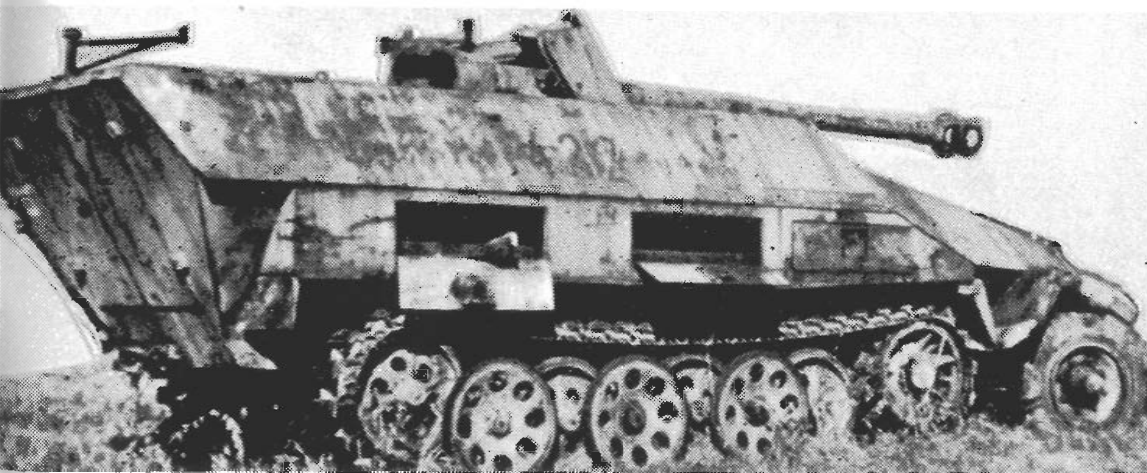
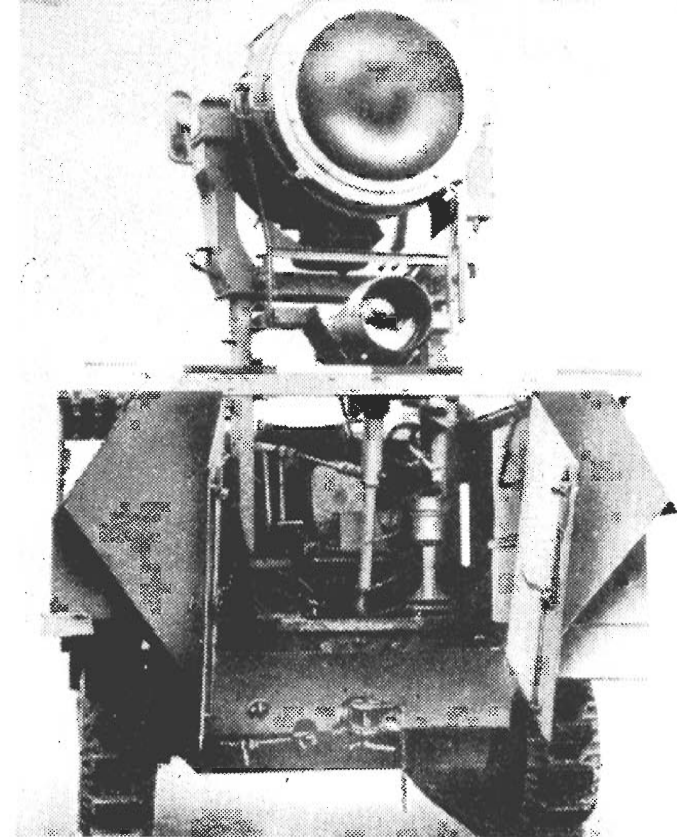
Afterword

One cannot help but wonder whether the construction of two different SPW versions was really necessary. Both the light and medium types, including some of their special versions, had essentially the same tasks.

By the end of the war, this vehicle family's disadvantages had begun to show up. Their crews dismounted more and more rarely, so as not to lose the protection of the armor plate. Thus the enemy was able to stay in country with poor visibility or make its way past them. Then too, the numerous enemy tanks and antitank weapons made life more and more unpleasant for the SPW. The demand for heavier armor and better armament could not be ignored. Thus it was soon armed with 37- and 75mm guns. But that meant that it grew more similar to a battle tank, a tendency that still continues today, as

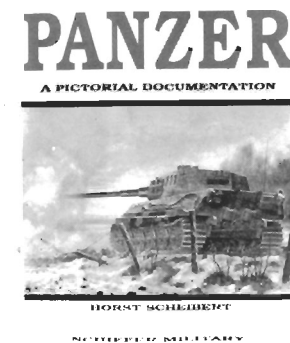
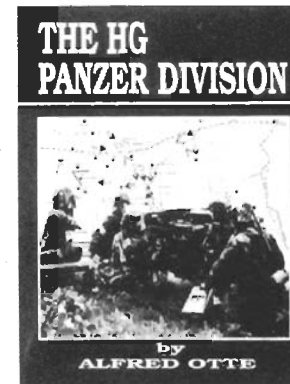
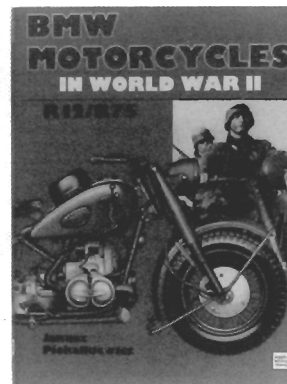
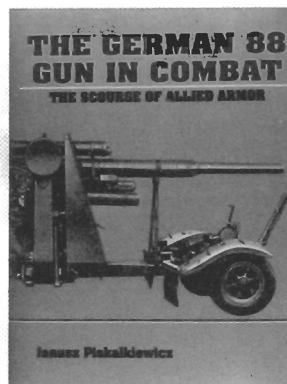
the Bundeswehr's "Marder", heavily armored and armed with rockets, has gone a step further in this direction. Fighting from the vehicle — still customary today only in the German army — becomes even more inviting, what with the Marder's side portholes and closed roof armor. Thus it has much in common with the tanks of World War I with its many machine guns and large crew.

Today, though, in guerilla warfare, or more accurately combat trained individual fighters, it is effective close-combat weapons and accurate, easily operated rockets that have become more and more powerful and are on the way to becoming the king of the future battlefield. Somehow, some time, a new concept for the battlefield must be developed.



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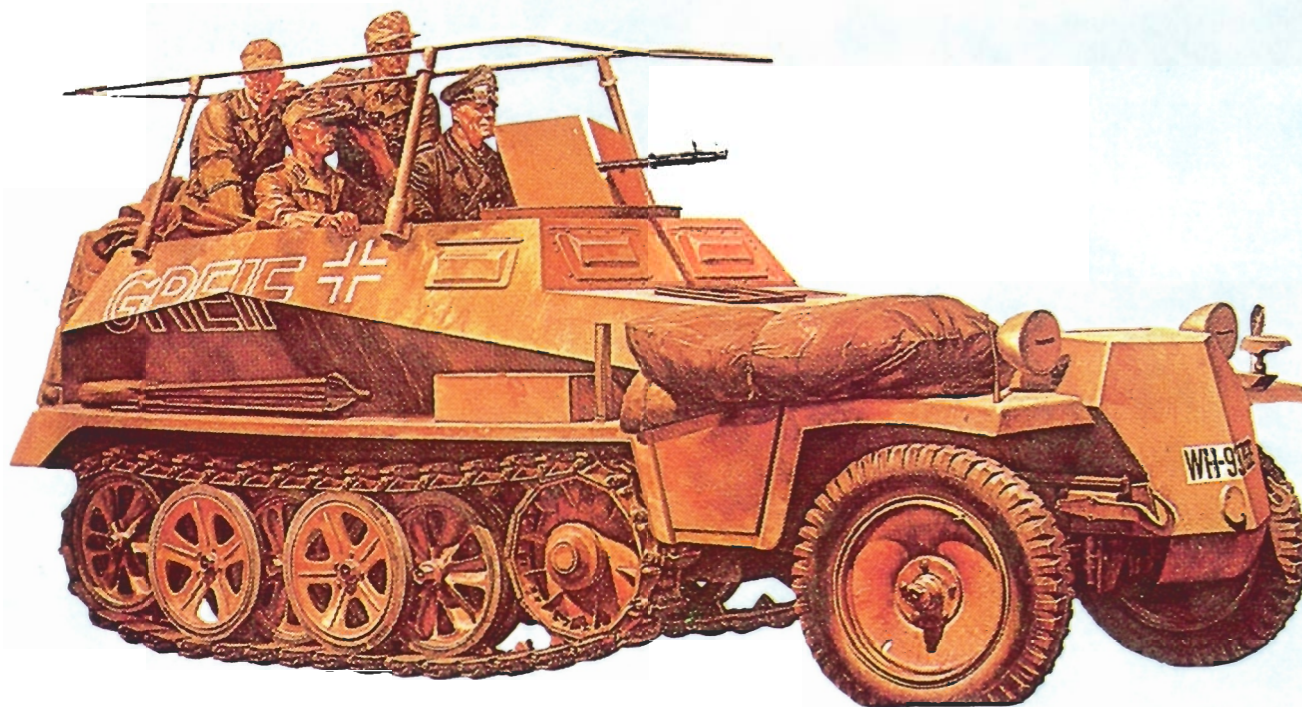
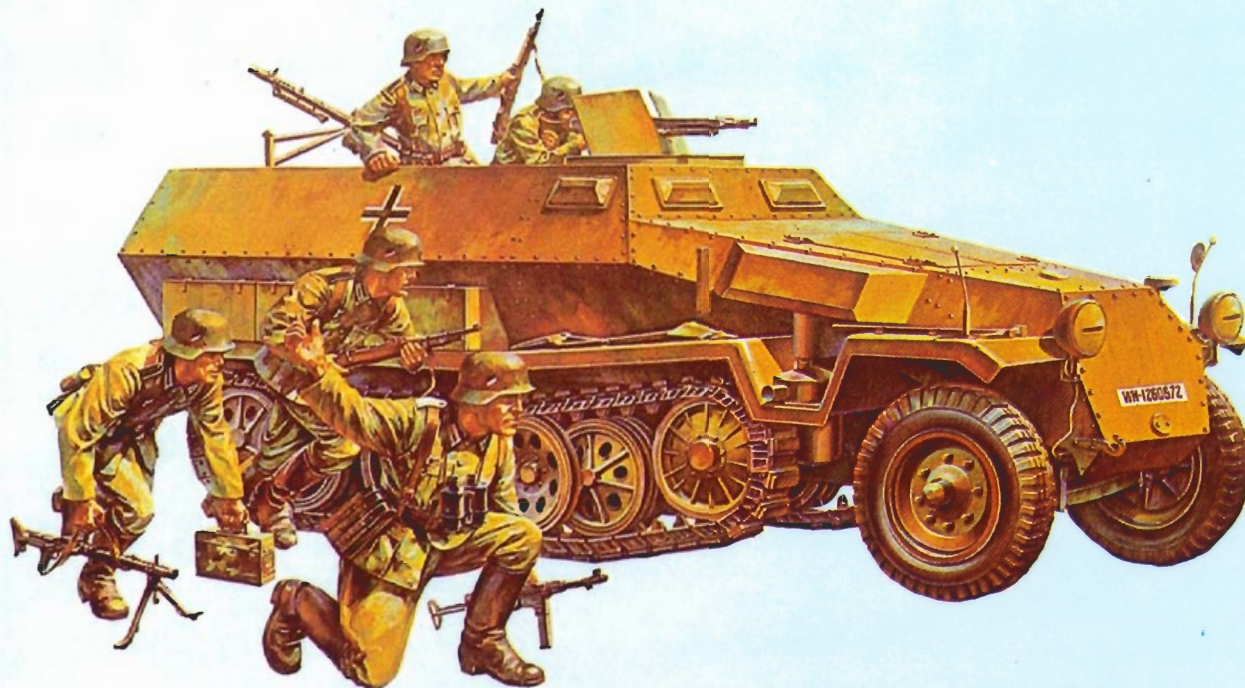
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