



Machines of war

Diana

David Pearson Australian War Memorial

One of the more curious pieces of German equipment which Australians came across at Alamein was a hybrid vehicle combining a German semi-track with a Russian 76.2 mm gun. This vehicle, known as a “Diana”, was knocked out of action by Australian gunners of 11 Battery, 2/3rd Anti-Tank Regiment at Makh Khad Ridge on 19 July 1942, during the first battle of Alamein. Although these vehicles belonged to “tank-hunting” battalions, it is not known whether the nickname, “Diana”, refers to the Roman goddess of hunting.

During the invasion of Russia, Operation Barbarossa, German troops captured large quantities of Russian military equipment, including numerous 76.2 mm M1936 field guns. As they had done with French and Czech equipment captured earlier in the war, the Germans salvaged Russian material for their own forces. In this case the Russian gun, with its wheels and trail removed, was mounted slightly to the right of centre in an armoured box on the back of a five-ton semi-track. The rear half of the semi-track’s body was cut off behind the driver’s position and replaced with a high, slab-sided open fighting compartment. Access to the fighting compartment was via hinged steel doors on either side. The design was not particularly well suited to the war in the desert, suffering from both a high profile and inadequate armour.

These “Diana” vehicles were quite rare. Only nine were built, in late 1941, and all were shipped to North Africa, where they saw service with the 3rd self-propelled anti-tank company of the 605th Panzerjäger-Abteilung (605th S/P Anti-Tank Battalion). The vehicle knocked out by 11 Battery had been operating for six or seven months. A few days later, the Australians were able to recover it near Trig 22, and found it still in complete running order. It generated considerable interest throughout the Allied army, and was carefully studied by ordnance experts. It was then handed over to 3 Recovery Section, and what happened to it subsequently remains a mystery.

Above (inset): The “Diana” captured by Australian troops on 23 July 1942 (AWM 024683)

Left: Front view of the vehicle. Note the prominent hood band, probably necessary to ensure that such an unusual vehicle would be recognized as “friendly” by German aircraft. The elephant symbol on the right front mud guard is probably the unit tactical symbol. (David Pearson)

TECHNICAL SPECIFICATIONS

DESIGNATION	7.62cm FK36(r) auf Panzerjäger Selbstfahrlafette Zugkraftwagen 5t (SdKfz 6) (Anti-Tank Semi-Tracked Vehicle SdKfz 6)			
OTHER DESIGNATIONS	Diana, Büssing-NAG BN9			
CHASSIS NO.	between 3001-3617			
TOTAL BUILT	9 in late 1941			
CREW	5			
ENGINE	Maybach HL54TUKRM			
WEIGHT	10.5 tons			
GEARBOX	4 x 2 forward 1 x 2 reverse			
LENGTH	6.33 m			
WIDTH	2.26 m			
MAX. SPEED	50 km/hr			
HEIGHT	2.98 m			
VEHICLE RANGE	317 km			
ARMAMENT	1 x 7.62 cm FK36(r) L/51.5			
TRAVERSE	30° left and right			
AMMUNITION	7.62 cm Pzgr 39, Pzgr 40 and Spgr 39			
ARMOUR (MM/ANGLE)	FRONT	SIDE	REAR	TOP
SUPERSTRUCTURE	10/0°	10/0°	10/0°	Nil
GUN SHIELD	10/?			

After P. Chamberlain and H. Doyle, 1993, *Encyclopedia of German tanks of World War Two* (revised edition), (London: Arms and Armour Press), p. 183.

Below: A modified Russian 76.2 mm M1936, in use with the German army at Alamein in August 1942, of the type mounted on the Diana. The captured “Diana” vehicle appears in the background. (AWM 024685).

