

RETROKIT

Schwerer Reihenwerfer auf Somua MCL S303 (f)

The fall of France in June 1940 offers the victors a very rich booty in terms of road vehicles. All of those vehicles are immediately either re-used or stocked for future use as Hitler is already planning the attack of the Soviet Union and a great part of the German army remains to be motorised. But if a large part of those vehicles will find their way to, and eventually be lost on the Russian steppes, a fair amount has been kept by the occupying forces in France. In 1943, with the growing menace of a possible allied landing in France, it is decided to re-equip the units stationed in the West. However, the German industry is not able to cope with this extra work and it is therefore decided to re-use captured material to refurbish those units.

The French half-tracks Somua MCG and MCL are amongst the various types of vehicle re-used by the German forces. The MCG and MCL are very similar vehicles, but the MCL features a more powerful engine and a slightly different set of wheels. In the German nomenclature, the MCG becomes S307(f) and the MCL S303(f). Both will at first serve without major changes as artillery or heavy PaK tractors. Eventually, 5 specialised vehicles will be built upon the MCG and MCL chassis.

The most dramatic conversion is without any doubt the Reihenwerfer (with either 16 or 20 French 81mm mortars); 36 MCG and 16 MCL will be modified into this type of vehicle, officially called Leichter Reihenwerfer mit 16 Rohren, and Schwere Reihenwerfer mit 20 Rohren.

One of the most prolific variant is the one carrying the PaK 40; 72 Panzerjäger mit 7,5cm PaK 40 (or Selbstfahrlafette für 7,5cm PaK 40) will be built on MCG chassis.

The same MCG chassis is also used to develop an ammunition-carrying vehicle, the Munitions-Zugkraftwagen Gepanzert, of which about 100 will eventually be built, and yet more (?) MCG are used to build an engineer's vehicle, the Pioneer Panzerwagen, as a substitute for the 'real thing', the SdKfz 251/7.

The MCL chassis is used as mentioned above for the 20-tube Reihenwerfer, but also for 6 (or 12?) Raketenwerfer mit 48 Schluss (8cm) carrying a German copy of the Soviet rocket launcher Katiouchka (with 24 ramps firing 48 rockets). Unfortunately, some confusion with the Reihenwerfer exists in books because those rockets are also of a 81mm caliber...

Anyway, if there are some question marks on the actual number of vehicles built, it is much more difficult to say where and when they were used... The 21st Panzer Division may well have used most variants because this unit was not 'flavour of the month' for a very long time and would not, after its return, or rather re-birth, from Africa, be re-equipped with modern AFVs until may 1944... With the help of Panzer Voran we can *propose* the following affectation: Panzergrenadier Regiment 192 and 125 each received 7 Panzerjäger and 4 Reihenwerfer (with 20 tubes?); StuG Albeitung 200 uses 50 Munition Zugkraftwagen. Panzer Artillerie Regiment 155 has 2 (or 4?) Raketenwerfer in its 10-Batterie. Pioneer Regiment 220 has 7 Pioneer Panzerwagen.

The remainder is given to unknown units, on the Eastern front from 1943 then in France from 1944. The other Panzer Divisions stationed on the Western front do not seem to have received any of those vehicles, so can we imagine that some ended up in infantry divisions? This may be the case for the 709th and 716th infantry divisions, as we still do not know what type of PaK 40 SP equipped their Panzerjäger Bataillons.

We do know who produced those vehicles, though: Alkett, who specialised in re-furbishing French AFVs, and the Alfred Becker workshops in Maison-Laffitte and Satory. Using the Somua half-tracks, Becker may have built 16 Panzerjäger, 16 Reihenwerfer (with 20 tubes?), 12 Raketenwerfer and about a hundred Munition Zugkraftwagen, out of a total of 447 vehicles converted from French material (Renault, Hotchkiss, FCM,...). Alkett would have built the 36 Reihenwerfer with 16 tubes, the only Somua variant not used by the 21st Panzer Division.

Few, if any of those Somuas would have survived the French campaign of 1944; we know that the 21st Panzer Division only has two left (a Panzerjäger and a Raketenwerfer) in September and none left in October.

In terms of markings and colours, Panzergrau would have been used up until 1943, then Panzergelb after February 1943, often with green and red/brown applied over. Markings if there are any, follow the normal German practice.