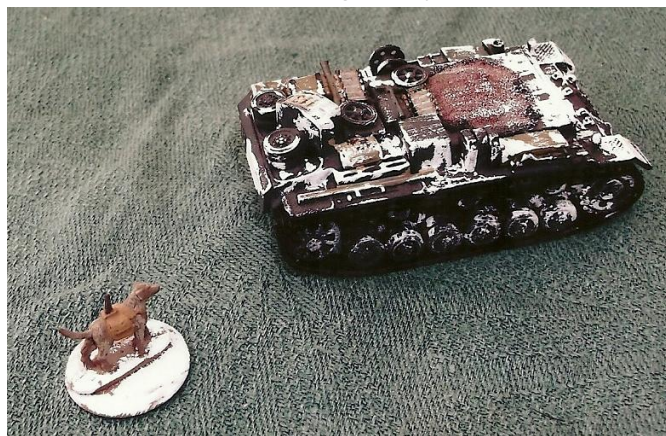


# Mine Dogs on the table-top

## Review by Rob Morgan

Back in the early '90s, I wrote up a note on the use by the Red Army of dogs with explosives as an anti-tank weapon. That was for *Practical Wargamer* (a journal still sorely missed by wargamers!) and reviewed the only wargame scale ready-made mine dogs around. They were from Dixon Miniatures and Platoon 20. The latter, shown in the photos, is a bit static, sad to say, but the range of these killer canines has now been greatly extended. Mick Yarrow Miniatures has just



produced a pack of 15mm mine dogs at the standard pack price and in a much more active, i.e. running, pose. They do actually fit in together, all three makes.

The dogs are bulky, hairy animals with small explosive packs on their flanks and a fuze antenna standing up from the back. They are 15mm, but since the Soviets used all sorts of

canines for this suicidal form of attack, they will look smaller but just as effective in 20 or 25mm and, at a pinch, 28mm. In smaller scales, there are plenty of railway modelling type dog models about and converting with slivers of plastic and a short pin head is straightforward. Handlers from any suitable Red Army figure.

Excellent little models from Mick, and of course the colour schemes are fairly straightforward (purists will probably, looking at the photos, recognise my own dog painting limitations). After all, what colour are dogs? The satchels should be khaki brown-green, the fuze black. Simple!

For those with little knowledge of this astonishing weapon, read on:  
In the autumn campaigns following Barbarossa, tank crews of XXIV Panzer Corps reported small packs of dogs on the battlefield, but the connection between the dogs and the destruction of numbers of their tanks was not



immediately apparent. Fairly quickly, the corpses of numerous dogs killed before they reached the AFVs and the interrogation of prisoners taken around the same time, revealed that large numbers of trained dogs were being used as lethal anti-tank mines by specialised NKVD and infantry units.

The dogs were taught to crawl under the body of a tank to find food, and dogs linked the presence of the tank with food. If kept hungry, the animals would, on being unleashed, head straight for the nearest AFV and a meal. Of course training needed to be a little more sophisticated than that, to deal with moving tanks, to accustom the dogs to wearing harness and to the effects of fire. The kit and weight of charge carried by the dogs might vary slightly, but dogs are very strong and fast for their body weight. So, a simple fabric harness, with pouches each side containing high explosive (one account I found suggested phosphorous charges were an option), and triggered by the fuze, which stood eight or so inches above the dog's back.

During the autumn and winter of 1941/2 these dogs scored many successes against German machines, particularly in built-up or wooded areas where their presence was hard to detect at ranges where they could be shot or driven off. In fact, these dogs were so successful racing around the panzers in small packs that Army Gruppe issued an order calling for the slaughter of all dogs found in Soviet territory, and for a time the use of the Wehrmacht's own dogs was severely restricted. There are differing opinions as to when these dogs ceased to be encountered, some German sources say by early 1942, but it seems likely that they were encountered as late as the time of Kursk, and were used in the battle for the Dniepr bulwark, but not during the westward surge of the Red Armies in 1944-5.

There were claims that the dogs were ineffective because they were trained under Soviet vehicles, and so destroyed as many Soviet as German AFVs! Or that they were rapidly neutralised by effective counter-fire procedures. In all probability, they were an urgent stopgap measure, brought in when all available methods of stopping Axis armour was needed, and there were not enough anti-tank guns of any type. They stopped being used later in the war, except in very specific circumstances, because of the overwhelming numbers of Soviet armoured vehicles and with German AFVs of any kind becoming rare beasts indeed.

There was a substantial report in *The European* newspaper back in late 1994, with detailed photographs. They were taken at a Russian army training school and surprised many writers. The article illustrated the continued use of dogs as tank destroyers in the modern Russian army and in the Soviet past. My colleague Dr.

Serhiy Muzychuk of the Slavic Military History Group, assured me that this is not a fiction.

Food for thought for any NATO wargamer of the '70s or '80s. To the RPGs and "Snaggers" add a couple of hundred mine dogs and handlers, probably 3:1 or 4:1 ratio. Dropped far behind Blue lines by Mil-24, to cause havoc among the M113's and Chieftains en route for the front. After all, how many US, British or Dutch troops were taught to respond to dogs as running bombs? How many squadrons would become history before the survivors were believed? Explosives in the later Cold war era were a bit more effective too.

If nothing else, the mine dog is one of 20<sup>th</sup> century warfare's most unusual combat weapons, and its place on the battlefield is assured.

Excellent models, well worth the price. Take a look. The dogs can be used in the 15mm, 20/25mm as supply or support dogs for virtually any modern army, simply by removing the upright fuze, of course.

See: [www.spanglefish.com/mickyarrowminiatures](http://www.spanglefish.com/mickyarrowminiatures)