

ROCKETS in ITALY



This multiple-rocket launcher for 4.5-inch rockets uses as its mount the chassis of an American M4 tank.

The Buck Rogers Platoon handles a 4.5 rocket launcher that looks like something out of 2045 A.D.

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WITH THE FIFTH ARMY, ITALY—The MP steps from his sandbagged dugout and points to the shell-marked road that curves along the crest under Jerry's eyes. A jeep with the top down and windshield covered jerks sharply to avoid the holes. As you ride along you hear the muffled whoomph of our 105s echoing across the heights.

Jerry is quiet today. It is warm and the sun is bright. Parts of the road are sprinkled with water to keep the dust down, but along most stretches the dust fans thickly from your tires.

Suddenly, behind a rise, you see the rocket gun. Its great mass of launching tubes, like a huge honeycomb, rests on a medium tank mount. You find yourself believing that time has been stepped up somehow to bring a 21st Century weapon to Italy. You say this aloud to a private who is pulling himself out of the tank hatch and he replies with a grin: "That's right. That's why we're called the Buck Rogers Platoon."

Lt. Edward C. Fraedrich of Tucson, Ariz., the rocket platoon's leader, comes out of a battered stable and explains that rocket fire is scheduled for 1400 hours and that the gun crew—it is only noon now—is already loading the tubes because it takes two hours to complete the job.

Although planes have long been using rockets in Italy, the ground rocket gun is new to the Italian front. In many respects the Buck Rogers Platoon is experimental.

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The rockets are 4.5s, and when they are slipped out of their cases you see that they come in sections. As Pvt. Richard Burns of Scranton, Pa. and Pvt. Frank Randazzo of New York City remove the cases, they put boosters into each rocket nose and then screw the nose fuse on. Each missile weighs almost 50 pounds and looks like any big shell except that it has six thin metal fins on the tail. These stabilizers fold back when in the tube but open out at right angles to the rocket when it flies through the air.

Burns and Randazzo fit 54 rockets together, placing them in a pile beside the tank. The honeycomb of tubes is constructed in groups of three—six groups wide and three groups high—and firing is synchronized so that all 54 rockets on a single gun can be released within 30 seconds. You get a rough idea of what this means when you learn that *each* rocket is equal to a 105 shell.

THE rockets are all out of their cases now. The gun crew forms a chain to pass them to T-5 Donald Pascuzzo of Santa Cruz, Calif., the gunner and the man responsible for the loading. Pvt. Jesse C. Clements of Rochelle, Ga., sitting on the tank, passes each rocket to Pascuzzo after pulling the safety pin from the nose fuse. Since the rockets are fired by electric contact points, which detonate the propelling force, Pascuzzo presses the two contact points firmly against each rocket to make sure the circuit will be completed when he turns the switch on.

It is 1345. Lt. Fraedrich and Sgt. Angelo Romeo