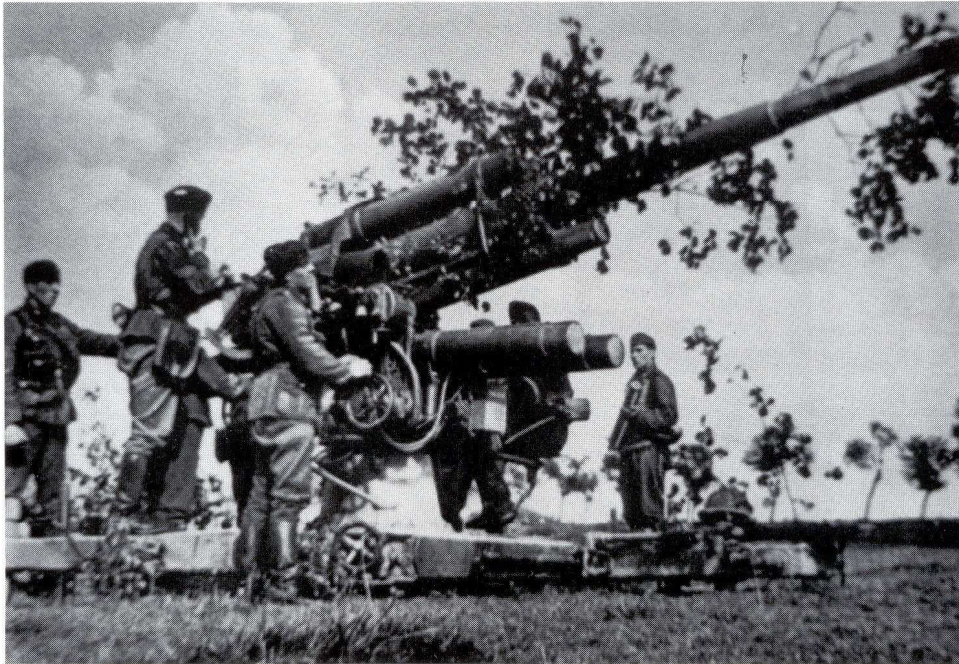


THE FLAK CANNON 88MM

By Bud Markel



An 88 mm flak cannon set up to fire at aircraft. The cruciform mount has been lowered to the ground and leveled. The wheel bogies have been removed. When used as an anti tank weapon the gunners were protected by forward facing armor plate.

The modern anti aircraft cannon came into being during World War I to knock down airships and aircraft. A gun was needed to have an effective range of 20,000 ft, or about twice the average height that WW I aircraft usually flew. This required a gun with a bore of about three and one half inches or 88 mm, thus a standard was set that was to continue well into World War II.

To fire a projectile into the air to an altitude of 20,000 feet, which a World War I aircraft was capable of reaching, required a gun with a bore of about three and one half inches or 88mm, thus a standard was set that was to continue into World War II.

This was the dreaded "88" the anti-aircraft gun used by the German Luftwaffe that was to play such havoc with the allied bomber formations especially the USAF because of their predominant daylight operations. During daylight operations predictors (sighting rangefinders) could be used to aim flak cannons fairly accurately. The preference, of course, was gun laying Radar. As a result, as any World War II bomber crewman of the United States Army Air Corps can testify, losses to flak cannon were severe.

It was not a new weapon, but was developed from a World War I design, entered into service in 1916. As a mobile weapon it was mounted on a four wheeled carriage and towed by specially built and equipped trucks. When in action, arms with self contained screw jacks could be swung out to form a secure firing platform. At that time, when aircraft were slow and flew at low altitudes, the design allowed for quick fire, but lacked refinements that were found necessary in modern warfare leading up to and including World War II. The standard 88 mm anti-aircraft cannon of World War I was the Geschutze 8.8 Kw manufactured by Krupps of Essen.

German anti-aircraft fire of the first World War was called "Archie." and was not very effective, as the various mechanical devices used to calculate precise aiming of guns were not very accurate. However, when attacks on enemy observation balloons were made, it was a different story. With the altitude of the balloon known, it was easier to make the calculations required to lay the guns properly.

Commanders of Archie batteries would resort to area defenses

According to The strict terms of the Versailles Treaty (that Hitler was to blame as the cause of World War II), Krupps was forbidden to manufacture the 8.8 in Germany after World War I.