

STURMGESCHÜTZ III AUSF.G IN FINNISH SERVICE

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The Sturmgeschütz III fuer 7.5 cm Sturmkanone 40 (L/48) Ausf.G was in Finnish Army service during the Continuation and Lapland War

80MM FRONT ARMOUR

Some Finnish Sturmgeschütz III Ausf.G assault guns had a single piece of 80mm frontal armour while others had a 30mm armour plate bolted on top of the original 50mm armoured glacis plate.

STURMGESCHÜTZ III AUSF.G

COMMISSIONED:	DECEMBER 1942
ORIGIN:	GERMANY
LENGTH:	6.77M (22FT 5IN)
RANGE:	140KM (86 MILES)
ENGINE:	MAYBACH HL 120 TRM 265 HP PETROL
CREW:	4
ARMOUR:	15MM-80MM
PRIMARY WEAPON:	7.5CM STUK 40 L/48
SECONDARY WEAPON:	SOVIET 7.62MM DT MACHINE-GUN

75MM GUN

The long-barrelled high velocity 75mm StuK 40 L/48 anti-tank gun was introduced to enable the Sturmgeschütz to knock out heavily armoured Soviet T-34 and KV tanks at long ranges. It could fire high explosive and armour-piercing shells.

THE COMMANDER'S CUPOLA

A commander's cupola was first introduced in the Ausf.G version. Before that, the officer had to stick his head out of a hatch or look through a periscope. This vehicle was called the Sturmgeschütz III (StuG III) and Sturmgeschütz 40.

THE FINNISH SWASTIKA

The Finnish Army first used a 'good luck' swastika symbol in 1918, before the German Nazi party existed. The swastika was usually painted on the front, rear and sides of the Sturmgeschütz as well as on top of the gun-mantlet.



Illustration: Alex Pang

Between 1939 and 1945, Finland actually fought three separate wars. On 30 November 1939, the Soviet Union invaded the country, beginning what was called the Winter War. After fierce resistance by the Finnish Army, a peace treaty was signed on 13 May 1940. The Continuation War started on 25 June 1941 when Finland attacked Soviet occupying forces in an attempt to recapture lands taken from them during the Winter War. It lasted for three years, two months, three weeks and four days. When the Finns needed help to fight the Soviets, Germany supplied them with aircraft, weapons

and logistical support. This included Sturmgeschütz 40 Ausf.G assault guns. On 5 September 1944, there was a ceasefire. The Armistice was signed on 19 September 1944.

One of the conditions of this Armistice was the expulsion, or disarming, of German troops in Finnish territory. The Finnish Army complied with these terms and the Lapland War started on 15 September 1944, lasting for over seven months. The Germans had anticipated what would happen and had started an orderly retreat to German-held Norway by crossing the border in the north. The Lapland war ended when the last German soldiers left Finland on 27 April 1945.



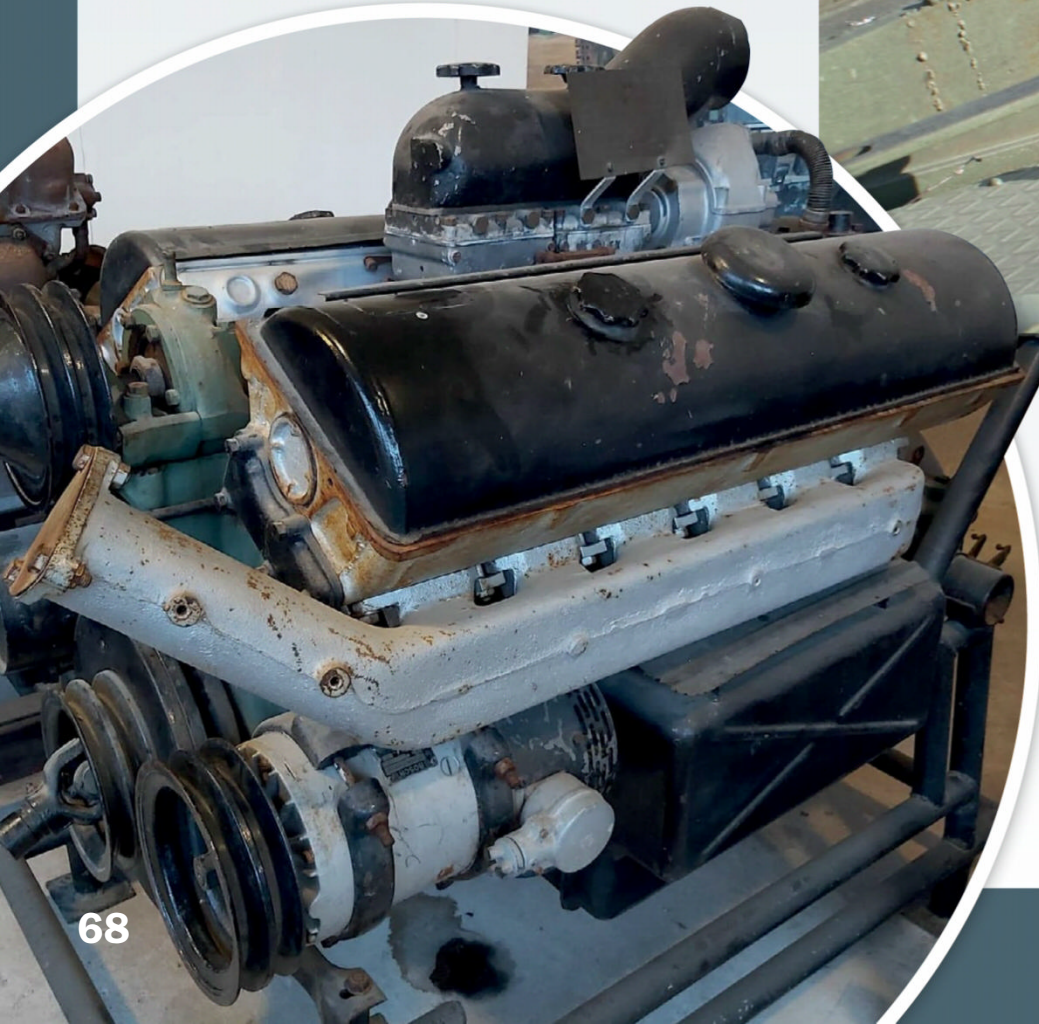
Both these vehicles are Ausf.G versions. Changes were made during production. On the right can be seen a Topfblende ('Saukopf' pig's snout) gun mantlet

ARMAMENT

The primary weapon was a high-velocity 7.5cm Sturmkanone 40 (L/48) anti-tank gun. Captured Soviet 7.62mm DT machine-guns were fitted instead of German 7.92mm MG 34 machine-guns on the roof gun mount. The modified version used in tanks and the StuG III was called the Degtjarev tankovy which was abbreviated to 'DT'. A new mount had to be fitted and a larger hole made into the loader's protective gun shield. The crew also had access to handheld Suomi sub-machine guns.



The engine compartment at the rear of the Sturmgeschütz was protected by 16mm armoured hatches and ventilation covers



ENGINE

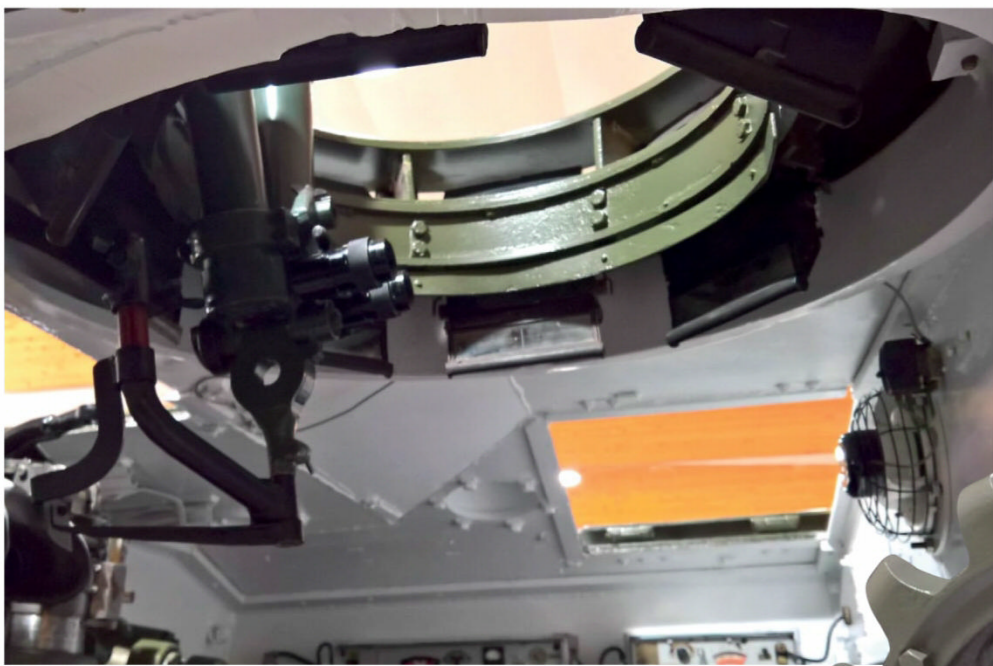
The Sturmgeschütz III Ausf.G was powered by a Maybach HL 120 TRM V-12 petrol 296hp engine. That power was transferred to a large-diameter sprocket wheel at the front of the vehicle, via the six forward speed and one reverse gear transmission and final drive. Its top road speed was 40km/h (25mph), and it had a range of 140km (86 miles).

It had six paired rubberised road wheels on a torsion bar suspension system and three track return rollers. The idler wheel was at the rear.

The Sturmgeschütz was powered by a Maybach HL 120 TRM petrol 296hp engine and had a top speed of 40km/h (25mph)



This StuG III Ausf.G has 30mm face-hardened armour plate bolted on top of the 50mm glacis plate armour



“THE FINNISH ARMY AUSE.G VERSION WAS FITTED WITH A LONG-RANGE, TANK-KILLING, HIGH-VELOCITY 7.5CM STUK40 ANTI-TANK GUN”

Left: The commander's cupola had seven periscopes and a long-range Scherenfernrohr scissor periscope that could protrude out of the hatch


DESIGN

Initially, the German-designed Sturmgeschütz III assault gun was fitted with a short barrel, low-velocity 7.5cm Sturmkanone 40 (L/24) gun that was intended to be used to support infantry units and fire high-explosive shells at enemy fortifications and soft-skinned targets. The Finnish Army Ausf.G version was fitted with a long-range, tank-killing, high-velocity 7.5cm Stuk40 anti-tank gun. Its low profile made it an ideal defensive weapon. The StuG III was continually upgraded, and the 59 Finnish StuG IIIs did not have the same specifications.



The large sprocket track drive wheel was at the front of the Sturmgeschütz. Later versions had all-metal return rollers

Images: Finnish Tank Museum Parola



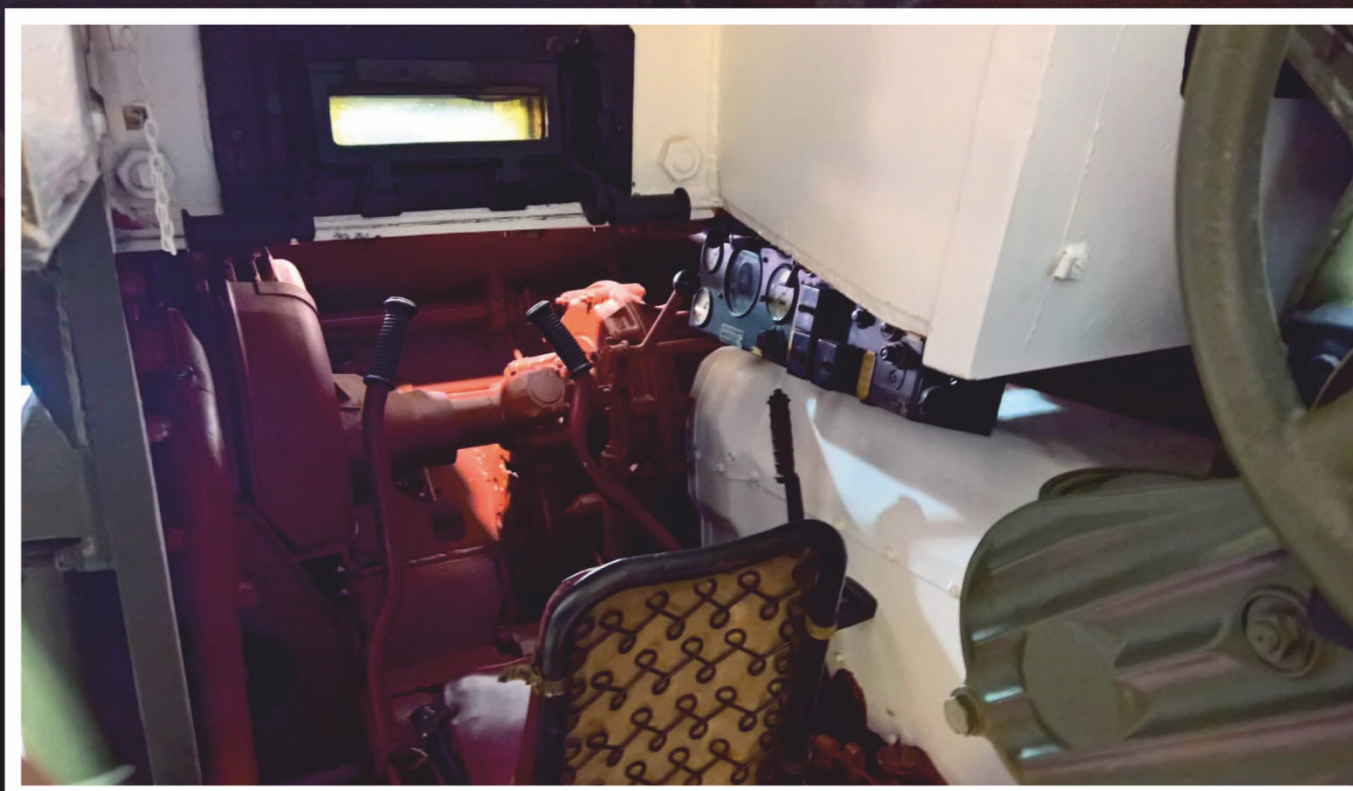
The gunner sat on a seat behind the driver. The loader was on his right and operated the radios

“ON 15 JUNE 1944, THE STURMGESCHÜTZ FIRST SAW COMBAT DURING THE KARELIAN ISTHMUS SOVIET MASS-OFFENSIVE AT KUUTERSELKÄ”

Below: The driver's instrument panel was on his right. He drove the Sturmgeschütz by pulling on the left or right tiller

CREW COMPARTMENT

The driver sat on the left of the Sturmgeschütz at the front. He had an armoured visor in front of him and a periscope above his head. The gunner's seat was behind him, fixed to the gun mount. The loader was on the right of the gun, while the commander was behind the gunner and had a cupola with seven periscopes for all-round vision. His seat was spring loaded and could be raised or lowered. A Scherenfernrohr scissor periscope could be slotted out of the hatch lid when it was closed.



Images: Finnish Tank Museum Perola

SERVICE HISTORY

Between July and September 1943, 30 German Sturmgeschütz 40 Ausf. Gs arrived in Finland. These were early production vehicles with the square gun mantlet and rubber-rimmed return rollers. Some had additional bolted-on armour at the front while others had a single 80mm-thick armour plate. Finland purchased a further 29 Sturmgeschütz III Ausf. G that were delivered between June and August 1944. They were a variety of late-middle and early-late production models, with differing specifications. These had the Topfblende gun mantlet and all-steel return rollers. They were known as 'Sturmi'.

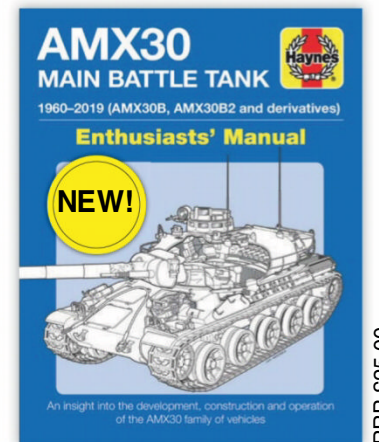
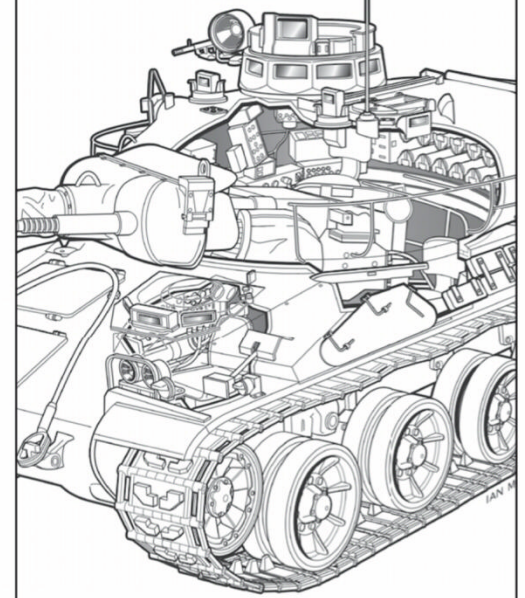
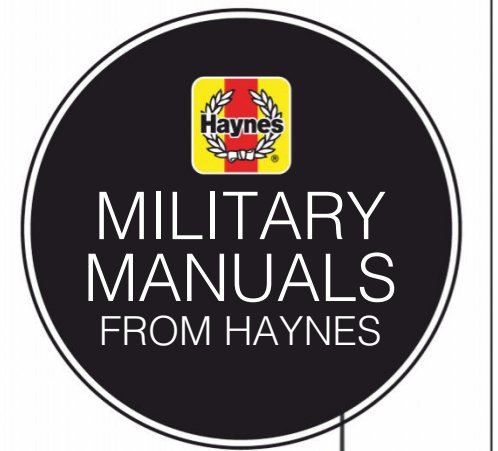
On 15 June 1944, the StuG first saw combat during the Karelian Isthmus Soviet mass-offensive at Kuuterselkä. Finland lost eight of the 1943 batch, while the 1944 batch arrived too late to help in the battles before the Armistice was signed.

They did not see action during the Lapland War and survivors were painted green after the war.



Above: StuG III Ausf. G assault gun at the junction of Rybaki and Zakatna Street in Warsaw Old Town, during a German attack

Finnish Army Sturmgeschütz 40 Ausf. G self-propelled assault gun PS.531-5 in Tienhaara, Hanhijoki, Finland, 23 June 1944



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