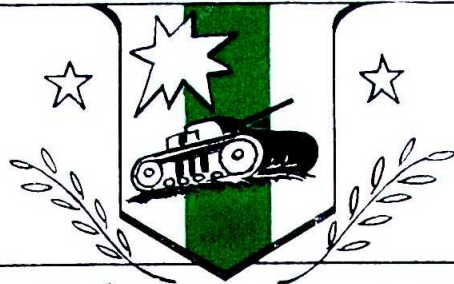




History
OF
THE 712th TANK BATTALION

HISTORY

OF THE 712TH TANK BATTALION



"The men have grown to feel that you are a part of this regiment. We regret that our partnership has ended . . ."

COLONEL JOHN H. MASON
CO 357TH INF. REGT.

"Administration for tank companies often many miles away was handled without a flaw . . ."

MERITORIOUS SERVICE UNIT
PLAQUE, HEADQUARTERS CO.

"The more I hear of the 712th, the prouder I am of it. You're a grand outfit . . ."

COLONEL GLEN C. McBRIDE
CO CCA 6TH ARMD. DIV.

"Despite its proximity to the enemy and constant exposure to hostile artillery fire, this organization kept the entire battalion supplied at all times."

MERITORIOUS SERVICE UNIT
PLAQUE, SERVICE CO.

"Your continued aggressiveness . . . Your willingness to push on despite lack of sleep and food . . . made it a privilege for me to command you."

LT. COL. FRANK G. SPIESS
CO 773RD TANK DESTROYER BN.

"Congratulations to your whole unit on a job well done. The fine support you gave reflects . . ."

COLONEL RAYMOND O. BELL
CO 359TH INF. REGT.

"No fighting division ever had better armor support than did the 90th Division 'Tough 'Ombres'; in fact in many engagements the tankers were attacking and the other arms were in support."

MAJ. GEN'L. J. A. VAN FLEET
COMMANDING GEN'L. III CORPS

"You are fortunate in having so competent a medical detachment . . ."

LT. COL. JOHN M. THOMPSON
CO 8TH MEDICAL BN.

"The company performed its duties in a superior manner . . . Its aggressive action and bold attack saved the lives of our splendid infantry."

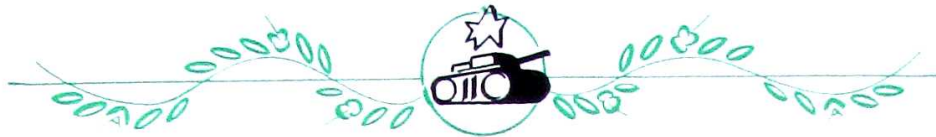
LIEUT. GEN'L. M. B. RIDGWAY
COMMANDING GEN'L.
82ND AIRBORNE INF.

"Need I do more than point to the trust and love the 90th Div. doughs had for the 712th Tankers . . ."

COLONEL JACOB W. BEALKE
CO 358TH INF. REGT.

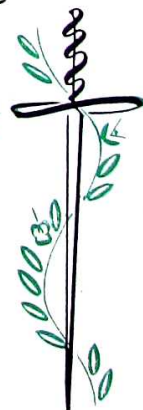


DEDICATION



To those men of this Battalion who without hesitation laid down their lives on the field of combat, this book is dedicated xx
May their sacrifice serve constantly to remind those who still live that the task of creating a more decent world must be as nobly assumed & as courageously accomplished.

WORLD WAR II - 712 TANK BATTALION



82nd Airborne Div.



Normandy

3rd Corps



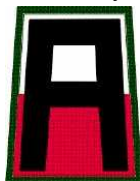
The Bulge

12th Corps



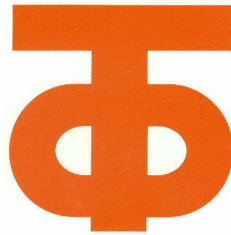
Mainz, Central Germany
Czechoslovakia

1st Army



Nomandy
Falaise Gap

90th Infantry Div.



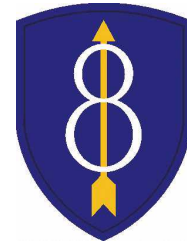
Throughout Combat

5th Corps



Le Mans
Falaise Gap

8th Infantry Div.



Normandy

8th Corps



Normandy
Siegfried Line

20th Corps



Rheims, Mazieres
Metz, Dillingen

3rd Army



France, Luxembourg,
Belgium, Germany
Czechoslovakia

**Insignias of the Divisions,
Armies
And Corps to which the
712th was assigned during
combat**

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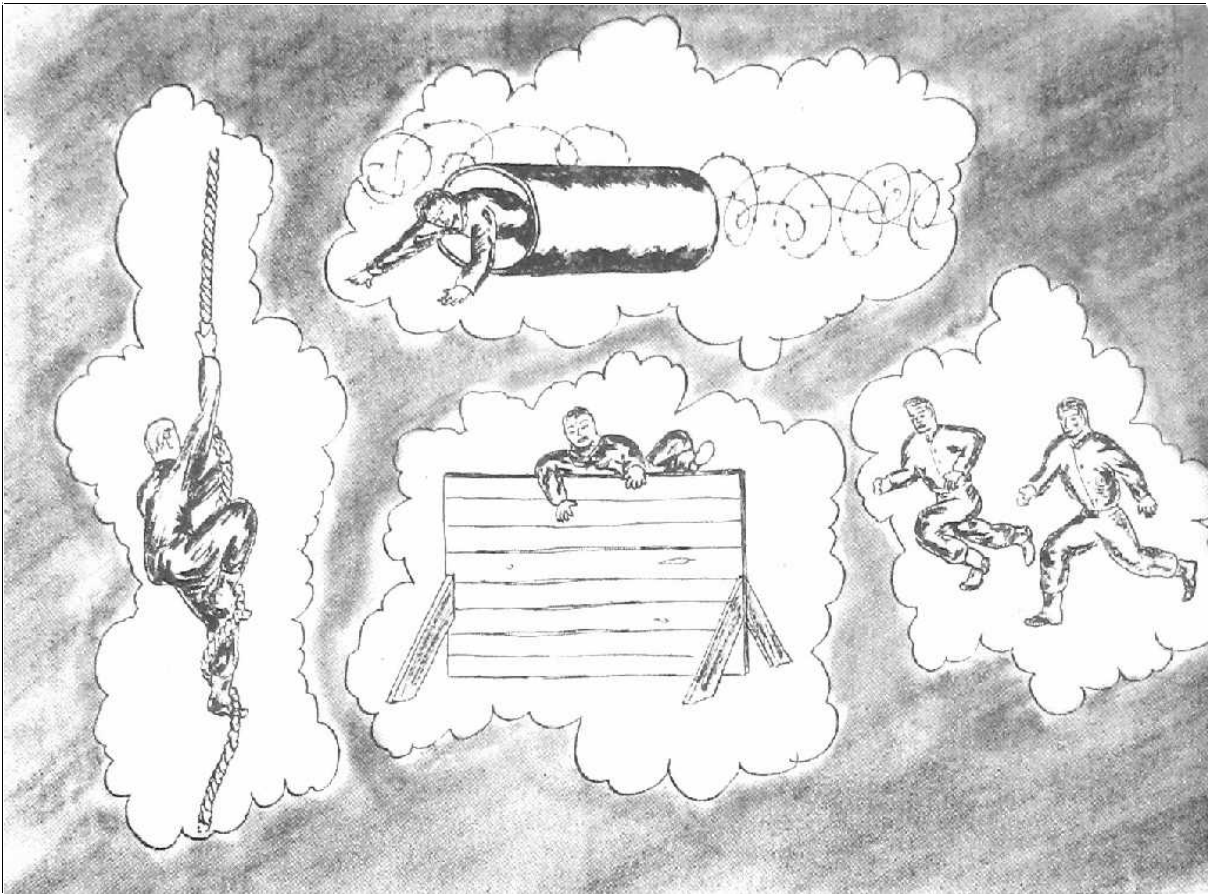


Lt. Col. Vladimir B. Kedrovsky
Battalion Commander

You have marched to a glorious victory in World War II. Your battle scarred armor has been dressed for the last time, and as all warriors before you your thoughts are of home and the land of liberty and happiness. You have been a great fighting team; your valor and courage on the battlefield have been exemplary, your esteem among fighting men of the highest. General Patton said the 90th was his best infantry division – you supported Patton’s best, and, as I have said in the states, in combat, and after combat, “The 712th Tank Battalion is the best tank battalion in the U. S. Army.”

I cannot put into words the admiration and praise each of you earned and deserved, but to those who love you and to me each one of you is a hero, and I say to you – WELL DONE!

ACTIVATION



Building the body beautiful

On 20 Sept, 1943 the 712th Tank Battalion was activated. This date is in a sense deceptive for although the 712th came into being then it had existed as part of the 10th Armd. Division from the latter's activation in July 1942, and many members could trace their Army careers back to early 1941 and the 11th Cavalry. It was this same 11th Cav. Regt., made tough and experienced in the rugged hills near SAN DIEGO, that formed with the 3rd Cav. Regt. the cadre for the 10th Armd. "Tigers". What was later to be the 712th was at the time the 3rd Bn. of the 11th Armd. Regt., with D Co. being born as C Co. of the 1st Bn. of that Regt.

Though members of the 3rd and 11th Cav. Regts. were good soldiers basically – and even better cavalymen – they were ill equipped for Fort Benning and tanks. Fortunately the cadre had four months to gain a head start on their yet-to-be drafted pupils. The rigorous and comprehensive training schedule allowed little leisure but the application to duty paid dividends as recruits began to pour in early in November. They were quickly introduced to Army routine and rapidly started the transformation to "Tiger" status. The crowded hours saw the old hell-for-leather men patiently applying the lessons that had given them such a foundation. In addition to the usual garrison routine of spit and polish, parades, etc., there were long hours spent at the motor park exhausting the mysteries of the tank and its allied vehicles. Many weapons were mastered and proficiency tested by many hours on the ranges. A great

number of men were sent to the Armored Force Schools at Ft. Knox – maintenance, gunnery, radio – and soon returned as qualified instructors, which lightened the task considerably. In no time at all civilians once removed were ready to attempt application of the lessons so diligently studied.

Prior to maneuvers each battalion of the two Armored Regts. moved into the field in the spring of 1943 for two weeks of “roughing it”. One week was spent at tactical camp where all that the name implies, and much that it does not, was practiced. Following that the men, minus their vehicles, trekked to an adjoining camp devoted solely to toughening the body beautiful, and where the men were separated from the boys. If it did nothing else “Tiger Camp” did prove to the men that their endurance had reached unexpected limits. Field exercises over furloughs followed and then the men were engaged in preparing the tanks for rail shipment to Tennessee and maneuvers. At the end of June the division closed out at Ft. Benning.

If the success of Tennessee Maneuvers as a command exercise was doubtful, the same cannot be said of their effect on the individual soldiers. Much that never could be learned in garrison came to light here. In addition the men soon found themselves able to sustain life, and almost enjoy it, while separated days on end from the comforts of civilization. It was a tired yet a confident group of soldiers that dismounted from the train which had carried them to Camp Gordon, Georgia early in September. Upon arrival here the battalion found the Camp rife with rumors of an imminent reorganization which involved the creation of two separate tank battalions. It is a wonder now what seemed so desirable about such a status but when on 20 Sept. the battalion stood free and independent the men were proud as hell of their new name – 712th Tank Battalion.

Very soon after the re-designation the Battalion moved from Camp Gordon to Ft. Jackson, S. C. Though living facilities were not as fine, everyone was now able to knuckle down to a much greater extent than would have been possible had Division SOP encumbered every move. November and December saw intensive efforts to master every feature of tank fighting. Long days were spent on the range with everyone firing every type of weapon. Christmas came and went and shortly after New Year's the long awaited news came – the Battalion was alerted for overseas shipment. Now there were a 1000 and 1 things to do, and in between times each tank crew had to complete all the Armored Force tests. There were day and night problems, command exercises and the inevitable mountain of paper work. It was a terrific month and there were few regrets when the tanks were turned in and the Battalion mounted the train for the POE.

It turned out to be BOSTON and after a short stay at the staging area – Camp Myles Standish – the Battalion boarded the SS Exchequer on 27 Feb. and by dawn the next morning that noble vessel was off toward a convoy rendezvous and the open sea. A few days out found a good many unreconstructed landlubbers. Aside from the well worn path beaten by these unfortunates the trip passed with a minimum of activity, and although long hours in the never-ending chow line for two meals per day helped to pass the time, the inevitable Pocketbook Mysteries and card games used up the rest. The strict blackout made nights long and in the crowded quarters none too comfortable. It was therefore a happy bunch that welcomed land on 8 March as the Battalion debarked at GOUROCH, Scotland to the skirl of bagpipes and the cheery welcome of the Scottish Red Cross.

A train carried the tankers through the beautiful hills of Scotland into England, with the main part of the Battalion pulling in at CHISELDON near SWINDON while A Co. located temporarily at a small camp in STOW-ON-THE-WOLD, later joining the Battalion. Here training was resumed but not on such an intensive scale. A liberal pass policy permitted many tankers to visit nearby points of interest, particularly LONDON. But here the refined intricacies of the aiming circle and indirect firing

were introduced and many classes were held in mines and booby traps, aircraft recognition and identification of enemy clothing and equipment. There were weekly night problems and early in May the entire Battalion moved down near AMESBURY for target firing. Later a large group went to WALES for anti-aircraft firing. All of this didn't leave too much time for fish and chips, ATS Girls, pub crawling and the like.

Late in May, speculation about D-Day was current everywhere, and the numerous flights of towed gliders over the area gave strong indication that such a day was not far away. These same days saw the tank park a scene of feverish activity as the "Battle of Bostik" was fought with every minute of the daylight hours being utilized for waterproofing. And on 6 June 1944 the world awoke to D-Day and the 712th awoke to

find a new Battalion Commander and that it had received alert orders looking toward debarkation for France on 28 June. A lot still had to be accomplished and the tankers set to work with increased resolution. With approximately another week still left for preparation the tankers hit the sack on the night of 16 June, confident that the present unreadiness of their tanks and equipment would be eliminated when the time came. Six hours later – at 0430 17 June – they found themselves racing down the roads toward the POE as a premature movement order had reached the Battalion an hour before midnight. It was a long, fast march and the day was blistering hot. Tanks burned and fell Out as bogie wheels and tracks deteriorated. The column thinned out and stretched way back, but eventually all tanks pulled into DORCHESTER and all tankers were filled with uneasiness. Work to complete waterproofing was recommended on arrival but soon word came down to stop and take a good night's sleep, if possible, since almost every man's eyes were inflamed and irritated. By the next day it was discovered that the movement orders had been a mistake and the Battalion, assembled in a large field near YEOVIL to await actual commitment.

The next week was spent in waterproofing, de-waterproofing, re-waterproofing and in doing the many last minute things needed to prepare the vehicles for the real thing. Then on the morning of 28 June, and this time everyone was ready and confident, the tanks moved down to the POE and boarded the LSTs and LCT at WEYMOUTH. The tides and natural confusion incident to this mighty effort made the Channel trip a 2 day instead of 8 hour affair. But it seemed no time at all before the tanks were threading their way past the wreckage on OMAHA BEACH, under cover of the ever-present P-47s and the odd, huge barrage balloons.

After de-waterproofing the tanks moved to an assembly area near PICAUVILLE. The first night in France was definitely an experience. Maneuvers and training had never involved the sound of enemy artillery and the explosion of an incoming shell. The devastation that had been wrought by American planes and arms was complete and warned the tankers that like it or not they were now in the war for keeps. Soon the Battalion learned that it had been assigned to the 90th Infantry Division whose personnel wore TOs on their sleeve, standing for Tough 'Ombres, (Originally this stood for Texas-Oklahoma). A Co. was temporarily assigned to the 82nd Airborne Infantry Division. And on the evening of 2 July the platoon leaders returned with the plans for action the following day. July 3rd then, the day before Independence Day, would become the red letter day in the Battalion's history. Hitler, Rommel and Co. were now faced by the "Best Tank Battalion in the U. S. Army".



"I saw you first!"



"Gunner-Anti-tank-HE-One Two Hundred-Traverse
Right-Steady On - FIRE!"



The First Lap



"How Long Till the Next Break?"

BATTLE OF NORMANDY

At 0530, 3 July the 712th Tankers stood ready to attack on the heels of a mammoth artillery barrage which had lasted 15 minutes. Untested tankers were teamed with veteran infantrymen to engage an enemy which had revived and reoriented after the initial shock of D-Day and in terrain which required the utmost in tank-infantry cooperation. The CHERBOURG campaign was nearly at an end, the port itself having fallen to VII Corps which was regrouping for an assault south out of the peninsula in conjunction with VIII Corps, which had now been assigned the task of pushing the Boche south and cracking his defenses so that American arms could break into Central France. The 79th Inf., 90th Inf., and 82nd Airborne were "divisions abreast" with the main effort on the left – the 90th's zone. B Co. and Hq. assault Guns moved out with the 90th's 359th Regt. toward ST. JORES on the Division's right. Co C. later joined by a platoon from D Co., worked with the 358th Regt. at STE. SUZANNE and toward the FORET DE MONT CASTRE on the Division's left. A Co., assigned to the 82nd Airborne on the right of the 90th, had two platoons in line supporting the 507th and 325th (Glider) Regts.

This was it. By the end of the day every component of the 712th had been called upon to perform and had responded. Maintenance men had retrieved and repaired crippled tanks; radio men had eliminated bugs; supply men had rushed forward with needed ammo, gas and oil; medics had tended the wounded. And at the end of the day the fighting men – already minus some who had paid the supreme sacrifice – knew that they had been tested and proved able. Ideas of tactics were radically altered in the face of hedgerows. The basic scheme of maneuvers and test problems – 1st section lay down a base of fire, 2nd section hook right – had been quickly discarded. What roads there were in agricultural Normandy were heavily mined and under cover of well entrenched and concealed artillery pieces – particularly the 88. And although tanks were at times forced to blast bravely forward on these roads, a great share of the fighting was done from field to field, each separated by ancient hedgerows in which strong and supple roots gave firm foundation to the 3 to 4 feet walls of earth. Time and again the tanks would smash into these walls, teeter, and be forced to back up and charge again, all the while perhaps in the very next field crouched the Boche, well dug in. The average range for the 75 mm and 37 mm cannons was 30 to 40 yards; belts of .30 cal. were fired by the co-ax and bog almost in complete strings. And the doughboys on the ground had to work in clock like harmony with the tanks. If either element forged too far ahead, the Boche could wipe it out.

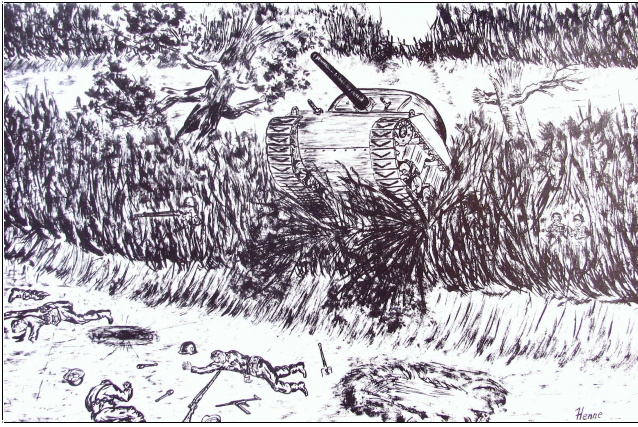
But proficiency, teamwork and guts had paid off. The Boche had been driven back some 1200 yards despite his evident and determined plan to contain the American forces in the small piece of the peninsula they had conquered. Captured enemy documents revealed that he intended to hold at any price the newly formed MAHLMAN LINE, which extended from BEAU COUDRAY on the east through the FORET to the west coast and was named for the Commander of the 353rd Inf. Div. which was in immediate opposition. From 4 July to 8 July this same intensive, bloody and unorthodox fighting waged day and night. A Co. with the 82nd was fighting savage resistance on the right flank, northeast of LA HAYE DE PUIITS. The 79th Inf. could make little headway. The 83rd Inf., operating with VII Corps, could count as gains only a few hedgerows. And B, C and D Cos. were assaulting the fanatically defended FORET, with 8 of the 9 infantry battalions of the 90th completely committed. The German defense had been well planned and was superbly executed. Capture of the FORET became essential – without it we had no observation; with it the Boche had too much. B Co. and Hq. 105s poured fire into its vital spots. C Co., besides offering the infantry close support, used its tanks in perilous efforts to take supplies to isolated units. D Co. fired approximately 750 rounds of 37 mm and 30,000 rounds of .30 cal. on one day – 7 July.

The Boche not only fought defensively; strengthened by the addition of various paratrooper units he made frequent and ferocious counterattacks. The 712th did not withdraw her tanks at night but held them out on the perimeters with the doughs, guards kept their bolts back and their safetys off. Foxholes were being subjected to both friendly and hostile shelling and frequently engaging in hand to hand fighting. On this same day B Co. drove to the SEVES RIVER. And on 13 and 14 July A Co. working with the 8th's 13th Regt. struck rapidly forward. Resistance was beginning to crumble although it had not yet been shattered as one platoon discovered when encouraged – by success – it pushed well out in front of the infantry and avoided encirclement only by speedy and skillful maneuvering.

The MAHLMAN LINE was broken. For 9 continuous days and nights the 712th had fought without respite against a determined and entrenched enemy and its wounds notwithstanding had emerged victorious, seasoned and high-spirited. The Americans were pouring men and equipment onto the peninsula, building up the momentum and power for Operation “Cobra” – the break-through. Already the 712th had made great contributions to the preliminaries. But the big picture meant little or nothing to the tanker. To him each field mirrored the entire battle area; each hedgerow gained had been a campaign in itself. He had learned to sleep in the tank half on the alert; to sleep when the chatter of a burp gun seemed only several hundred yards away. He had developed almost a 7th sense in detecting the approaching accuracy of Heine artillery. He had become familiar with death and mutilation. And slowly he was grasping a tank-infantry technique which in time functioned with a precision unparalleled in the ETO.

On 14 July the Battalion was reassigned to the 90th and spent the next seven days in maintenance, reorganization and briefing for the next onslaught. Despite enemy shells which continued to harass the area, for the first time the tankers had a real rest-time to read and write letters, take showers, change clothes, rehash experiences with members of other platoons. The dead horses and cows which littered the entire combat area were swept away and buried. The telephone lineman could finally rest assured that for several days their wires would not be clawed up by tank tracks. The few hardy Normans who had managed to survive the struggle emerged from their cellars to gaze aghast at the ruins which once formed a cozy home and to offer the various drinks they had distilled from the apples which grew in abundance everywhere in this area.

Early in the morning of 22 July the 90th launched its attack on the SEVES ISLAND, with A Co. supporting the assault troops of the 358th and B Co. and Hq. 105s firing indirect. The approaches to the ISLAND were barren and much depended on a rapid overrunning of this area. The Boche was well set for this move and blocked the advance of our troops with accurate and heavy fire of all types. For 5 days and nights the battle raged. At times footholds would be gained on the ISLAND, only to be lost again. A Co. attempted to cross the swamp and stream but was forced to withdraw. B Co., performing its own surveying and operating its own fire direction center, fired 5560 rounds of HE into vital spots. Every energy was directed toward reducing the unexpectedly strong position so that “Cobra” could be initiated. And finally the tankers and doughs slogged forward, immeasurably assisted by the more-than-welcome dive bombing P-47s. The pressure they exerted could not be withstood and the ISLAND was stormed and taken on 27 July. On that same day D Co., supporting 359, exploited the victory and overran the key town of PERIERS bumping into several Heine tanks which were quickly dispatched with the help of one platoon from B Co.



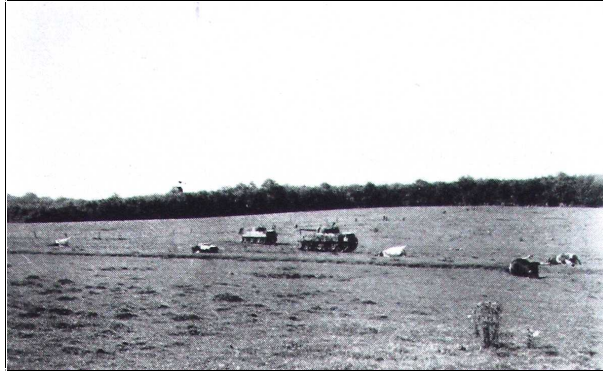
The 712th would eventually destroy over 100 Heinie tanks



The Team of Steel and Muscle at Work



Home, Sweet Home?



Bring up the Bull Dozers

BATTLE OF NORTHERN FRANCE

A great share of the peninsula had been taken over by American arms, and advance elements were stabbing toward the neck of NORMANDY. Field Marshall Montgomery further north was forcing the Boche to divert troops to contain the constant pressure he was exerting on positions around CAEN. The American zone was seething and boiling with troops and material ready to spring out in a mad rush across France. But the groundwork for this great operation had been a painful and bloody affair and the 712th Tankers, as they prepared their tanks and awaited the signal, could look back on 4 weeks of magnificent accomplishment. Sitting on their tanks they witnessed the tremendous aerial bombardment which preceded the ST. LO breakthrough. Thousands of bombers and escorting fighters blackened the sky, dropping their destructive cargoes not too far in front. The Luftwaffe did not even make an appearance but Heine ack-ack occasionally found its mark and the flaming fortress blossomed out with parachutes.

By 1 August a major breakthrough had developed and the Battalion was put under the aegis of Gen'l. Patton's 3rd Army, made operational that day. Three divisions were assigned to the XVth Corps with the 5th Armd. on the southern or right flank, the 79th Inf. in Corps center with LAVAL as the objective, and the 90th on the north headed towards MAYENNE, on the flanks of the 1st Army.

On 2 August the Division rolled, spearheaded by Task Force Randolph which consisted of D Co., Recon. Plat., Hq. 105s and 90th Recon. This highly mobile force moved forward quickly and after brushing aside light and disorganized resistance reached ST. HILAIRE DU HARCOUËT to find the main bridge still intact but well covered by high velocity weapons. The light tanks, in a daring and aggressive move, stormed the bridge, swept into the town and eliminated all nearby opposition. After reassembling, the Task Force pushed south and seized LOUVIGNE DU DESERT, thereby consolidating the advance of the 1st Inf., whose position until then was none too secure. On 2 August this Task Force took LANDIVY.

Meanwhile the rest of the Battalion, moving with the main body, finally obtained clearance on the overburdened roads which were choked to capacity by all the vehicles of the American Armies which were commencing one of the most brilliant enveloping movements in the history of warfare. The column rolled steadily ahead, reaching AVRANCHES around midnight. Suddenly the black night was pierced by flares dropped by an attacking squadron of Luftwaffe bombers. The tankers crouched in their

tanks and experienced all the fearful perils of a bombing as the Boche dumped his load. Personnel riding trucks, peeps and half-tracks rushed for the tanks and either ducked into one of the hatches or slid underneath. The Heine's accuracy was fortunately poor and he made a final effort by strafing the road. An ammo truck was hit and blazed mightily but the column was efficiently detoured around it and continued to progress forward.

On 5 August Task Force Weaver was organized to spearhead the Division. It consisted of Sub-Task Force Randolph as the point and the 712th, 357th (motorized) and a limited amount of artillery and communication as the main body. Sweeping forward toward the MAYENNE RIVER this force received information that the 1st Inf. had been held up at MORTAIN and was unable to reach the highly important town of MAYENNE. Task Force Weaver undertook to complete this mission and cutting through ERNEE reached the outskirts of MAYENNE early in the evening. There the light tanks engaged and reduced the surprised Kraut outposts and a platoon of B Co. forged into the town into the mouth of several 88s, crossed the bridge and seized important ground on the south side of the river. An enemy force had just reached the approaches to this bridge but B Co. forced them to retire. Later that night the rest of the Battalion moved across and was at once aware of concentrated Heine activity several miles south. A strong security was set up and the next morning found the Battalion faced by a determined counterattack to regain the MAYENNE bridge. After the bivouac area had been heavily shelled, A Co. tanks pressed forward and blunted the German effort in a bitter hedgerow struggle which lasted well into the night. Assembled in a huge field with the angry Boche only several hundred yards in front, the Battalion heard for the first time the awesome shrieks of the "screaming Mimi". Late that night and early the next morning the 1st Inf. effected a relief and Task Force Weaver was ordered to seize LE MANS by the most expeditious route.

The force split in two with two C Co. platoons and one from A Co. joining the flank column called Task Force Barth. The rest of the Battalion remained with the main body and pushing north slammed into a strong-point at STE. SUZANNE. Tanks from B and D Cos. made a forceful effort to crash through but discovered that an attack in strength would be necessary to dislodge the Boche. The decision was quickly made to reverse direction and take an alternative route – this was the war of movement with the objective being encirclement and then massive destruction. Striding rapidly forward both Task Forces – their progress accelerated, and eased by the accurate and damaging bombing of P-47s – reached LE MANS on 8 August several hours ahead of schedule. Here they ran into a cluster of Heine armor and artillery which began to deploy in an effort to prevent entrance into the town. D Co. tanks thrust forward quickly and catching the Panzers before they had time to take good positions forced them to flee. Co. C tanks, with Task Force Barth, meanwhile had moved up to take commanding positions overlooking the very road down which the Panzers fled and in an incredibly short time inflicted havoc and death. The A Co. platoon with the same force meanwhile struggled with and overcame other elements of this doomed band of Nazis.

The entire Battalion reassembled near LE MANS and bivouacked down for the night. They awoke the next morning to find that 12 Boche soldiers had shared the same hedgerows. They awoke also to find that the day could be spent on much needed maintenance and rest and an attempt to grasp what had been accomplished by American arms in the last 8 days – a task which probably overtaxed SHAEF, so fast and multi-pronged were the advances. In this phase in one day the tanks had moved many more miles than they had during the entire Normandy operation. Instead of an entrenched enemy defending each inch they now had a disorganized enemy attempting to group forces and dam the tide. The Boche still had power and fighting strength as testified by the charred American vehicles at the outskirts of every town and in front of every strong-point. And the lightning advance of the 712th – as part, of what General Patton subsequently lauded as "the outstanding pursuit of World War II" – was

made possible and effective only by other units whose mission was to hold the by-passed and half-encircled Heines who were pressing at all points to cut off the forward elements. The success of this racing drive was still uncertain and danger was present in the rear as much as in the front as evidenced by the march of the 712th Trains on the road from MAYENNE to LE MANS where they unwittingly passed some 1500 yards in front of the huge German force which several hours later cut the road and made the furious assault at MORTAIN in an effort to sever the American forces. The tankers had also shared in the joy of the celebrating and liberated French people who lined every road, bedecking the vehicles with flowers, heaving apples and tomatoes, offering champagne and wine, cheering and waving their gratefulness, and writing with chalk on the sides of the tanks: "Vive Les Americains!"; "Merci Beaucoup!". Bivouac areas were no longer small fields laboriously gained and immediately burrowed into; they became mere resting places in which the tankers hurriedly assembled, gassed up, and while catching a few winks, listened to old "Bedcheck Charlie" as he droned overhead sounding more like a washing machine than a member of the once invincible Luftwaffe.

The 3rd Army's VIIth Corps had cut the Brittany peninsula and was moving on BREST. The rest of the 3rd Army was racing east toward CHARTRES. The 712th was part of the extreme left flank of the 3rd Army, closely linked with the 1st Army which was now driving toward the British, Canadians and Poles who were pounding south with juncture as the objective. And the German 7th Army was desperately trying to avoid this trap, sounding out all thinly held Allied positions. It was in the process of being crushed in the FALAISE-ARGENTAN Gap and was now directing all energies toward running its units through the last escape route: the two highways extending northeast from ARGENTAN. One went to TRUN and one to LE BOURG ST. LEONARD, both angling off to join at CHAMBOIS from which two other main highways opened up to the north and east.

The campaign which began on 11 August with the advance north from LE MANS and culminated with the juncture of American and British forces north of CHAMBOIS will forever be regarded as one of the most brilliant episodes in the Battle of France. The 90th Div. with its attached 712th commenced the action in a support role but later became a prime factor in its success. For 3 days they closely followed the 2nd French Armd., consolidating the French gains and sealing off all possible escape routes through ALENCON and SEES. After relieving the 5th Armd. northeast of the latter town, they took the initiative and pushed forward aggressively. Seizing LE BOURG they stood firm against repeated attempts by the Deutschland Regt. to break through and they beat that unit to its knees. Using LE BOURG as a pivot they swung quickly to the northwest, outflanking resistance on the LE BOURG-CHAMBOIS Road, captured CHAMBOIS and its surrounding high ground. From there they set the greatest ambush of the war and maintained that ambush against all counterattacks.

The 712th was in this decisive and climactic battle from start to finish, frequently playing a key, if not the main, role. 90th Div. Operational Reports understandably concerned with the exploits of its own glorious doughs pay unusual and generous tribute to the tankers. They may be quoted at random : – At LE BOURG: "A ... German attack threatened to envelop (our forces). Prompt and aggressive action, however, on the part of the supporting tanks ... neutralized the ... enveloping force."; "At one time an attempted German envelopment temporarily cut off elements (of our forces) ... But effective work by the attached tanks ... eliminated this threat." At CHAMBOIS: "Recognizing this serious threat to their line of retreat the Boche attacked ... from both flanks and forced the right ... backward ... Tanks were sent to assist this unit ... and the situation was restored."; "(Our forces were) struck ... by a column of tanks and infantry in half-tracks. It was ... a last desperate attempt to break Out ... A portion of this column did break through the murderous hail of fire leveled on it by tanks.

And each line Co. had materially assisted. D Co. did great work in mopping up the flanks as the column moved on LE BOURG, particularly in the FORET DE COUVES. A Co. was in the thick of things at LE BOURG, jockeying and feinting with Panzers around the corners of buildings and pouring 30 cal. into the Boche infantrymen at close ranges. At 0400 one morning a desperate stab by some Mark V's was whipped when an A Co. tank, waiting until the last minute, blocked the road by knocking out the lead tank some 15 yards away. B Co., in on the initial assault at LE BOURG, later moved up to CHAMBOIS and fought the infuriated Boche to a standstill. Later they, with C Co., which had blasted its way up on the left, found large forces in the valley and plastered them with an avalanche of 75 mm. and 30 cal. The Co. Comdr. of B Co. personally accepted the surrender of 1100 troops and one platoon of A Co. joined with advance elements of the Polish forces to round up many thousands more. The Gap was firmly shut and the German 7th Army beaten and pulverized. The destruction wrought by American arms had been staggering. The 712th and 90th alone accounted for some 8200 Boche vehicles and artillery pieces, 8000 German dead and 13000 prisoners.

The Battalion bivouacked near NONANT-LE-PIN for a brief respite. The tankers assembled on sloping ground in an orchard and heard their beloved Battalion Comdr. speak in measured tones:

“The War has not yet been won. We've got the Nazis on the run but the time has not yet come when we can settle back and relax. We will still suffer. But we will still fight as nobly and as splendidly as we have to date. The tank-infantry team is beginning to function with real efficiency. We must make it better.” And he closed with deeply impressive and proud words: “There is no one I admire more than a man with courage. And that is why I so highly admire each one of you men.”

The Battalion at this time received its first big group of replacements and after reorganization of platoons and crews was once again at full operating strength. The 3rd Army was racing across France, reaching points east of PARIS, while the 1st Army, on the northern flank, was making a similar drive, ending in the liberation of that great city. The 712th tanks, loaded down with doughs, moved up to mop up in the wake of the 7th Armd. Now the pace was even faster as they sped across the broad flatlands of north Central France. The brief after action reports tell the story: 26 Aug. :, “Battalion moved to ... MONT MIRAIL. Distance 63.1 miles.”; 27 Aug.: “Battalion moved to ... MAISON ROUGE. Distance 127.1 miles.”; 28 Aug.: “Battalion moved to ... LA CHAPELL. Distance 36.1 miles.”; 29 Aug.: “Battalion moved to ... HERMONVILLE. Distance 46 miles.” The prime concern now was maintenance and supply. All crew members were ever-alert to find and mend any mechanical deficiency; to watch the bogie wheels, track blocks and connectors. The Serv. Co. truck drivers were taxed to the limits of their endurance hauling gas and oil. The hot sun and the tar on the road combined to plague eyes and make sleep, whenever available, almost an impossibility; They crossed the SEINE near FONTAINBLEAU and by 1 Sept. reached a bivouac just outside REIMS, relieving the 5th Inf., which in turn relieved the 7th Armd., at historic VERDUN, allowing the latter unit to utilize its entire strength in an effort to expand its bridge heads across the MEUSE.

The RHEIMS bivouac area was the most pleasant and restful the Battalion had during its entire combat life. Warm, unhurried days with perhaps a little too much rain but with nights made, comfortable by the soft pine needles. Good movies – “Two Girls And A Sailor”. Good food – cooked at last by the Co. mess staffs. Good champagne – even without the long stemmed glasses. And everyone, was optimistic. The 1st Army and the British were surging through the Lowlands and all resistance seemed to have cracked, particularly since the 7th Army had stormed in at MARSEILLES. Home by Christmas 1944 seemed a real possibility. It seems foolish now in retrospect but then it was a very comforting and happy thought. And the stay here was prolonged as the 3rd Army became immobilized when the increasing gas shortage assumed critical proportions. Air supply alleviated the

situation to some extent and by 6 Sept. full scale operations were resumed. The 3rd Army, with orders to secure crossings of the RHINE from MAINZ to KAHLSHUHE, advanced “Corps abreast”. XII Corps on the right or southern flank had NANCY as its immediate objective. XX Corps on the left drove for METZ. The 712th and 90th, as part of the XXth, were to advance northeast of VERDUN and cross the MOSELLE at THIONVILLE, while the 5th Inf. Div. and the 7th Armd., further right, were to make straight for METZ. The Battalion rolled 95 miles through World War I sites – VERDUN and ARGONNE FOREST – and on 7 Sept. reached a bivouac area near MAIRY just as an ME 109 swooped in at tree-top level. All Cos. were within 1000 yards of each other and, still somewhat complacent, set up only light security outposts. At 0300 the Boche struck, hitting the 90th Div. Arty. CP which was outposted by a section of A Co. tanks. He struck with a full column and the A Co. tanks accepted the challenge. The resulting explosions and tracers alerted the whole area and no sooner had all men in the area jumped to readiness than 5 Mark V tanks, 1 half-track and a reconnaissance car broke through and came down the road between A and B Cos., neither being able to fire for fear of damaging the other. C Co. tanks were quickly dispatched to guard the 90th Div. CP, just adjacent to the Arty. CP. By daybreak all units in the area were ready to smash this Heine effort and, through the coordinated activities of tanks, doughs, artillery and TDs, did. C Co. and Hq. 105s inflicted particularly devastating blows, while A and B Cos. did their share of damage. Even an engineless Serv. Co. tank was manned and fired. (See Chart p. 27 for details of the engagement.) By the day's end the newly formed and equipped 106th Panzer Brigade was completely destroyed. Captured documents later revealed that its mission had been: “Annihilate armored spearhead of 90th Inf. Div.” But the tables had been turned and the score showed: 30 tanks, 60 half-tracks, and over 100 miscellaneous vehicles captured or knocked out, and 764 prisoners taken. From this date on the 712th was known as the “Armored Fist of the 90th” and Lt. Gen'l. McLain had not overestimated the strength of his attached tanks when, in rejecting an offer to use a Combat Command of one of the Armd. Divisions, he had with conscious humor replied: “No, thank you. I have the 712th Armd. Division.”

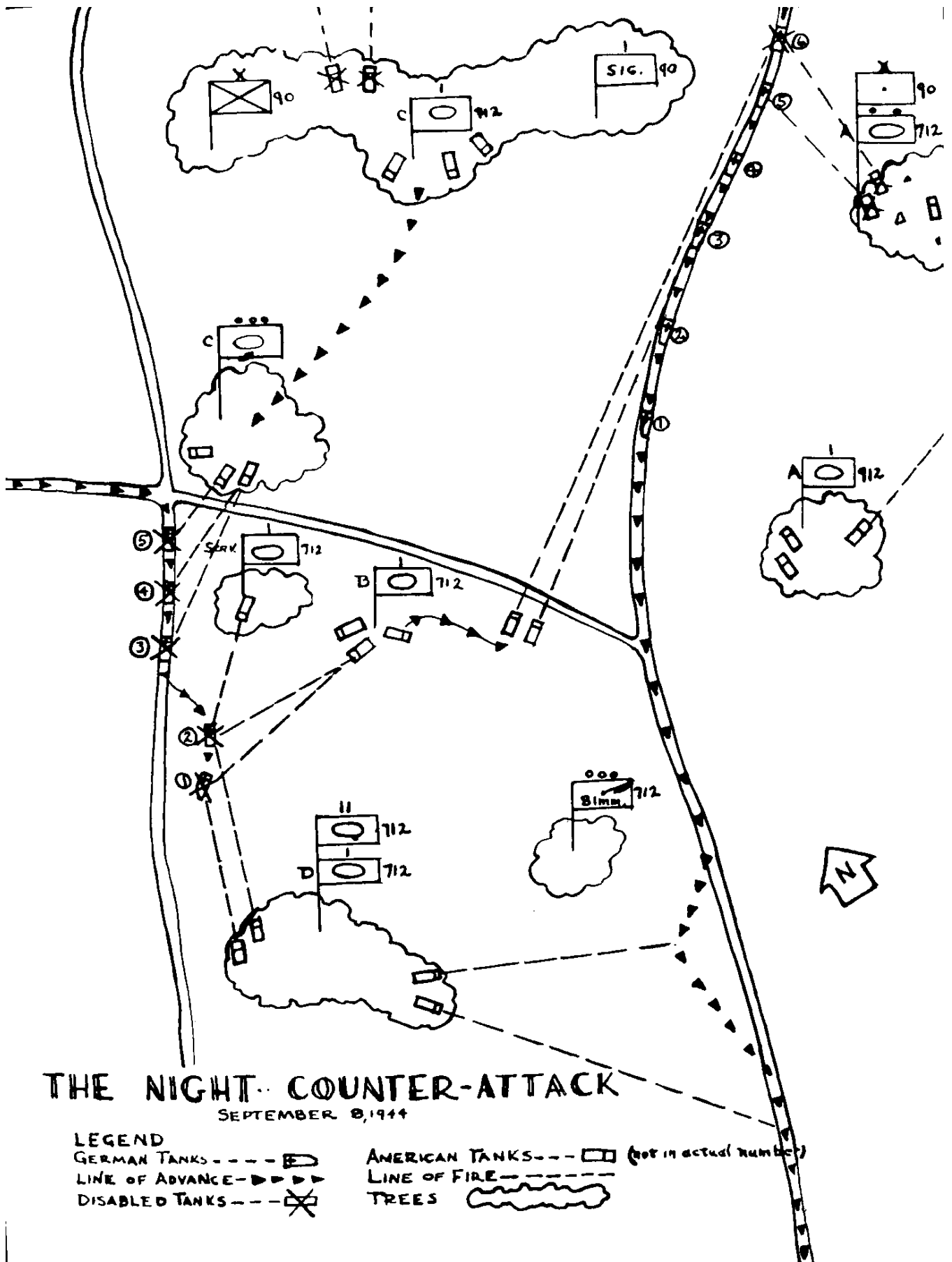


“They Parteed Beaucoup Quick”









The 712th Would Finally Travel 3,750 Miles in Combat





THE NIGHT COUNTER-ATTACK

SEPTEMBER 8, 1944

- LEGEND**
- GERMAN TANKS ---  ---
 - LINE OF ADVANCE ---  ---
 - DISABLED TANKS ---  ---
 - AMERICAN TANKS ---  --- (not in actual number)
 - LINE OF FIRE ---  ---
 - TREES 

BATTLE OF THE RHINELAND

The 7th Armd. on the right was held up west of METZ and further south the 5th Inf. was laboring mightily to maintain a precarious bridgehead across the MOSELLE. What was originally assumed to be a stout rearguard action soon disclosed itself as an organized defense. XXth Corps in fact was hammering on the outer fringes of FORTRESS METZ, which the enemy had decided to hold. Between the 712th and the MOSELLE however stood only the outposts of this mighty bastion. Wiping these aside and only infrequently meeting any sizeable attempt to stop their progress, the tankers and doughs drove forward. On the northern flank B Co. with 359 reduced ANGEVILLERS and HETTANGE GRANDE. On the south C Co. with 357 passed through BRIEY and after taking HAYENGE reached the MOSELLE south of THIONVILLE. In the center A Co. with 358 pressed forward past FONTOY and on 12 Sept. assaulted the key town of THIONVILLE from two sides, while the attached Hq. 105s harassed enemy vehicles on the other side of the river. The tanks had to fight from corner to corner as roadblocks, bazookas and snipers prevented any rapid movement. They reached the vicinity of the bridge after nightfall just as it was blown by the Boche. Knowing that strong forces were well emplaced on the other side, the Division Comdr. abandoned the idea of crossing in the middle of the night.

Operation "Thunderbolt" as originally conceived contemplated a frontal assault on METZ, with the 90th making the main effort after forcing a crossing at THIONVILLE. Preparations were made to put this plan into operation on 13 Sept. but when the V Corps' 5th Armd. moved up abreast on the left flank and relieved pressure there, the 90th received orders to slide right and relieve the 7th Armd. and 5th Inf. of their positions across from METZ. This involved a considerable thinning of the lines and made an attack in strength for the time being impossible. The relief was effected on 14 and 15 Sept. C Co. and 357 covered the left flank, with B Co. and 359 on the right. Task Force Randolph, consisting of A, D and Hq. Cos. with TD and Engineer attachments, filled in the gap between B and C Cos. and held the open ground northwest of AMANVILLERS. This force centered in STE. MARIE AUX CHENES, minus one A Co. platoon which remained at THIONVILLE for 10 days as part of a diversionary force. During the period 16 Sept. to 31 Oct. Task Force Randolph – renamed Task Force Sundt by 1 Oct. – remained stationary with A Co. rotating platoons from the "Mine" to the open ground near AMANVILLERS, at which place the tanks did indirect firing, occasionally pulling up to fire straight into the villages to the immediate front, assisted at times by Hq. 105s. On 15 Oct. A Co. traded places with B Co., while D Co. remained in the same position the entire time with several platoons outposting the left flank near ST. PRIVAT.

With Operation "Thunderbolt" not yet discarded B Co. with 359 made a major thrust into GRAVELOTTE and into the teeth of mighty FT. DRIANT. This action lasted from 15 Sept. to 30 Sept. and was fiercely resisted by the Boche. The tankers found that direct and close range firing into the forts caused little damage; even a test blasting by P-47s met with little or no success. But this team would not be denied its assignment and pounding forward from gravel pit to gravel pit, all the while subjected to devastating shelling, it took over complete control of GRAVELOTTE by 1 Oct. Even then however strong patrols from both sides were constantly active. Ordered to remain on the aggressive defensive B Co. set up indirect firing positions near VERNEVILLE and operated there until 15 Oct., at which time it swapped places with A Co., moving over to the "Mine" and STE. MARIE. Experience had shown that a frontal assault on the METZ bastion would, even if eventually successful, be much too costly. Further an ammo shortage made any large scale offensive impractical. It was therefore decided to nibble at the forts and keep the Heine alert and guessing. But for any future enveloping movement to be rewarding it was essential to batter down FT. DRIANT and to seize MAIZIERES LES METZ so that huge FT.

JEANNE D'ARC could be flanked. The 5th Inf.'s 11th Regt. drew the DRIANT mission while C Co. with 357 were allotted MAIZIERES.

This latter operation commenced early in October and lasted the entire month. It was one of the most, if not the most, bitterly waged contests in the entire 3rd Army zone during the period. The Boche was determined, strong and brilliantly led and since the Division was so greatly extended it was impossible to assign more than 1 Tank Co. and 1 Inf. Battalion to the struggle. For 25 days and nights the C Co. tankers and 357 doughs held one-half of the town, the fanatical Boche the other half. And while huge slag piles and a school house offered some protection the big guns of the defending ring of forts were constantly launching their deadly peril. The reserve C Co. platoon worked feverishly to answer and still this blasting and the men in the town made use of every opportunity to occupy the next house, the next block. Finally on 28 Oct. the original heroic forces were reenforced and after a large scale effort the whole town was occupied. MAIZIERES: a small town but the site of great gallantry and skill and perhaps the key to the huge operation which so closely followed its capture.

October was a month of nibbling – at the METZ bastion – and waiting – for more gas, for more ammo, for warmer clothing. Fall weather had set in and with it incessant rain. The roads became mucky; the fields in which the tankers did their indirect firing became big seas of mud. Firing used up 24 hours a day and all crew members became experts with the Azimuth Indicators and Gunner's Quadrants which though inexact did not prevent one gunner from putting a shell through a window when the forward observer called for it. Ingenuity was at a premium as the tankers dug caves in the mud and built elaborate houses – even mess-halls – with the crating slats and cardboard shell cases. In the north the 1st Army fought and won the battle for AACHEN and Germany proper was at last penetrated. In the relatively quiet 3rd Army sector METZ still stood, taunting and fearsome. And as the month closed the 712th knew that it was destined to be once again involved in one of the vital campaigns of the whole war.

On 1 and 2 Nov. the 95th Inf. Div. relieved the 90th, and the 712th moved back to JOUDREVILLE. This area had previously been used by other reserve divisions for rest and training and ostensibly the 90th was to have a similar break. In fact a training schedule was framed, complete with such garrison favorites as reveille and retreat. Vehicles were restored and new issues of clothing made in anticipation of the fast approaching winter. There was even a café in which reunions were held with old friends from the newly committed 10th Armd. Many crews billeted in houses with hospitable civilians whose radios were always available and with whom, in most stumbling French, the night counterattack of 8 Sept. was rehashed, as advance elements of the Nazis had reached the outskirts of JOUDREVILLE. But this move, while it did result in some rest and relaxation, was in the main only a feint. By limited objective attacks and continued patrolling during October the contours of the METZ defensive area were fixed and plotted. Supplies had been accumulated in vast quantities and the plan to encircle the most formidable Heine stronghold in France had been devised: The 5th Inf. on Corps right was to thrust northeast from its bridgehead and form the southern arm of the pincers. The 95th Inf, was to contain the enemy salient west of the MOSELLE and when the pincers began to close to reduce the salient and capture the city. The 90th and 712th, making the main effort, were to cross northeast of THIONVILLE, roll up the Maginot Line and, teaming with the 10th Armd., close the pincers east of METZ.

The Battalion rolled on election day – 7 Nov. – to be in a position to cross as soon as a bridge was constructed and by 8 Nov. all preparations were made, with B Co. at EVANGE and C Co. at BOREST assisting in the preparatory artillery barrage. Early in the morning of 9 Nov. the doughs mounted assault boats and shoved off. Soon they were across in considerable numbers and were

infiltrating around huge FT. KOENIGSMACHER. The tanks waited on a minute's alert, ready to cross when the signal came. Rumors floated back from across the swollen waters, all later proving to be facts. The doughs were battering gallantly and successfully at the FORT but were being constantly and savagely assaulted by strong Boche armored columns – this action was dramatized by Pierre Huss in the Cosmopolitan Magazine: “The Fort Is Ours !”. The subsequent 5 days were anxious and frustrating ones for the tankers. Already the 712th – 90th team had become “blood-brothers” and yet one half of that team was fighting to the very utmost, while the other half – the tanks – was unable to assist. The MOSELLE was on a rampage and the engineers were unable to construct a bridge on its overrun banks. Kraut artillery was finding the bridge sites with deadly and punishing accuracy. But the work continued and frequently word would be received to “prepare to cross”. The tanks, sporting their newly attached floaters which had been put on in record time after Gen'l. Patton had indicated his wishes to Battalion Hq., would crawl down the murky, muddy roads in the black of night, only to be informed that the swift waters had smashed the bridge, or mines had blown it, or direct shell hits had ruined it. A new bridge site would be chosen and the tanks would waddle through the mud to be near it, only to find that the previous one had been chosen again. The tankers spent wakeful nights in hay lofts in and near FINEM and listened to the nearby Long Toms throw the book at the Boche.

The situation on the other side finally reached such a critical stage that supporting armor became essential if it were to be retained and exploited. So on 13 Nov. at 1400 a B Co. platoon pulled down to the river bank and under an elaborate smoke screen ferried across on rafts, with shells plopping in the waters all around them. The fire power of these 5 Shermans could not begin to compete in value with the morale boost they gave to the exhausted doughs. Both this platoon and the C Co. tanks which came over shortly afterwards were greeted with cheers and tears. All armor fanned out to support all forward troops and in a short time the atmosphere was changed from an overall feeling of last ditch retention of position to aggressive offense. Meanwhile work on the bridge continued despite adversities and success at last came to the dogged engineers. By the evening of 14 Nov. the entire Battalion was across the pontoon bridge, along with great quantities of supplies. Now the team of steel and muscle was reunited and ready to complete the assigned task – juncture with the 5th Inf. Once again the tankers saw the ruins and wreckage of houses. And for the first time they saw pillboxes in great numbers. Mines, always a peril, were laid in abundance with 12000 found in one field 1 km. wide and 15 kms. long.

B Co. working with 359 on the left began a drive onto the REITHOLTZ WOODS to close a gap that had been created between 359 and 357 in the vicinity of OUDRENNES. While pushing forward one platoon hit a dense mine field and in a very short time three tanks were disabled. The area was under accurate Kraut fire and anti-personnel mines were everywhere so the tankers were forced to remain in their tanks throughout the night while the wounded doughs lay on the ground nearby. Eventually B Co. was completely covered by the advance of the 10th Armd. and reverted to Division reserve. C Co. with 357 in Division center was subjected to a terrific artillery barrage from the big guns of FORT HACKENBURG. All American guns, including the tankers 75 mm. were brought to bear on this FORT and it was smashed. Later a skillfully conducted thrust secured BUDING, BUDLING and HELLING. On 17 Nov. a strong-point having been uncovered at KLANG, C Co. tanks, with the town of KEDANGE just added to their belts, were called in. As the Shermans approached the enemy bolted and fled right past some 357 doughs who massacred them. At dawn on 15 Nov. the most violent counter-blow of the entire campaign struck in and around DISTROFF where A Co. with 358 was located on Division right. Two battalions of the 25th Panzer Div. drove abreast into the town, while a third enveloped from the left flank. After recoiling from the initial blow, tankers, TDs and doughs stood their ground and lashed at the Heine armor and doughs. One platoon made a masterly flanking movement across the summit of a barren hilltop to join the fray. After 4 hours of savage fighting the attackers accepted failure and withdrew. On the following day A Co. supported the doughs in seizing

INGLANGE by flanking through a dense, mucky woods – a previous effort down the main road had been stopped by the counterattacking Boche. D Co. attached to 90th Recon, had the mission of screening the right flank and contacting elements of the 95th making a brilliant sweep on KUNEZIC they were badly hampered by large minefields. But they continued their mission and soon had a route cleared for the 10th Armd. as well as keeping the flanks of the 90th and 95th linked.

At this point the 90th Operational Reports read : “Teamwork among the several components of the Division developed in 5 months of hard combat was paying off ... Tanks and TDs rendered close and effective support at all times ... The north pincers of the Corps was advancing on schedule.” The Kraut was beginning to falter. Many Heines were using the Safe Conduct Passes dropped to them from the air. On the night of 16 Nov. A Co. tanks, working without infantry, broke into METZERVISSE and eliminated the German garrison there. The next day the tanks spearheaded the attack on METZERESCHE, with one platoon flanking to the left and covering the enemy escape route from woods on a high hill. Later they seized LUTTANGE and with 358 went into Division reserve. The noose was beginning to tighten and everything indicated that the Boche was attempting to escape from METZ. 18 Nov. was a day of pursuit; the once proud defenders of the bastion had been outwitted and outfought. All previously assigned objectives were scrapped and all units ordered to extend themselves to the utmost. B Co. rolled forward so quickly and with such effectiveness that the Boche had no time to blow prepared demolition charges on bridges and overpasses. Brushing aside resistance at CHARLEVILLE-SUR-BOIS, they crossed the NIED RIVER and took a position at CONDE-NORTHEN squarely athwart the major escape route. Here they intercepted a fleeing column and annihilated it. C Co. advanced boldly across fields into EBERSUITTER and, forced to switch routes due to anti-tank ditches, drove into BOCKANGE where they caught a supply column and pounded it unmercifully. D Co. continued its brilliant work clearing VIGY and VRY and establishing a forward position at AVANCY. The move was so rapidly and adroitly executed that several retreating columns were trapped and the 37 mms. rained death and destruction.

On 19 Nov. D Co. made contact with elements of the 735th Tank Bn., supporting the 5th Div., and the great operation was at an end. Mighty METZ was encircled and itself fell on the following day to the 5th and 95th. This stupendous achievement had been accomplished against a fanatical and unusually strong enemy, across rugged and adverse terrain, and under the most miserable weather conditions. As the tankers and doughs turned toward the SAAR and their next engagement the acclaim resounded in their ears:

“The capture and development of your bridgehead over the Moselle river in the vicinity of Koenigsmacher will forever rank as one of the epic river crossings of history.” Gen'l. George S. Patton in a Letter of Commendation.

“All units shared the dangers, all units met their responsibilities with resolution and an overpowering will to win. It was perfectly coordinated team-play among the several components which insured ultimate victory.” Maj. Gen'l. Walton H. Walker, Commanding Gen'l. XXth Corps, in a recommendation for a Presidential Citation for the action.

Leaving the forts around METZ to be mopped up by the 5th Inf. (not until 13 Dec. did FT. JEANNE D'ARC finally capitulate to the 87th Inf. Div. which had relieved the 5th) XX Corps headed toward Germany proper, with only the SAAR RIVER lying between it and the SIEGFRIED LINE. The 712th pulled in around DALSTEIN and took advantage of a short break to do justice to a Thanksgiving Dinner served up in grand style by the mess crews. But as they gorged on the turkey, stuffing and cranberry sauce, the dank cold and driving rain reminded them of others who were not so fortunate. The

7th Army on the right was painfully carving out the COLMAR POCKET. Further north the 1st and 9th Armies were fighting inside Germany, feeling out the West Wall. Even in Corps sector the 10th Armd., with 358 attached, was striking east against German emplacements and having a rugged go of it.

On 25 Nov. a powerful series of attacks were launched in the final drive to clean out the area west of the SAAR. B and C Cos. were committed, while the Battalion with A and D Cos. followed in their wake, bunking down in NEUNKIRCHEN for several days. The attacking forces found only rearguard action but it was skillfully devised and materially assisted by tremendous concentrations of artillery from the other side of the river; the Boche meant to tramp on any river crossing and blanketed the approaches with well directed fire. C Co. was instrumental in cleaning out FURWEILER and OTZWEILER. B Co. aggressively supported the drive of 359. Bulldozers were in constant use, filling in anti-tank ditches and scooping holes for the Long Toms. Their work was made doubly difficult by the sluggish mud and constant shelling but they performed ably and without a hitch. By 1 Dec. these troops had cleaned out all but one small spot west of the river and as the tanks pulled up in the woods covering the high hills which commanded the short flat banks of the river the tankers could look across through the rain and see the towns of PACHTEN and DILLINGEN, and they could take partial stock of what was in store for them.

The east bank bristled with pillboxes, the outer fringe of the heaviest belt of the entire SIEGFRIED LINE. The hills behind were high and made ideal spots for heavy Kraut guns. The river, while normally small, was overflowing its banks and everywhere, even on the main roads, there was mud. One tank in a period of 8 hours rescued 9 peeps which had been hopelessly bogged. Not only did they have the desperate Boche, now fighting on his own soil, to fight, they also had the swollen, changeable river, the terrain and the weather. While the 10th Armd. on the left charged for MERZIC, the 95th – at SAARLAUTERN on the right – and the 90th – at DILLINGEN in the center were to force crossings and make juncture on the other side. Early in the morning of 6 Dec. the 90th doughs slogged down the hills, mounted the assault boats and went across. By dawn they had infiltrated past some of the strong points and had obtained fairly strong positions, with 357 in the woods to the north and 358 in the town itself. Now the job was to keep them supplied and get the armor over so that the bridgehead could be exploited. Every component cooperated to this end, while the doughs stubbornly maintained their positions on the other side, constantly set upon by Kraut tanks and frequently encircled by infiltrating Kraut doughs. Huge artillery duels waged as the Boche brought up his best and his biggest. One dud which thudded through a half-track was measured at 10 inches. American 105s and 155s were pulled forward to fire point blank into the pillboxes. Men from D Co. manned .50 calibers and, lying in water filled slit trenches under constant shelling, poured lead across the swollen stream. The Mortar Platoon set up positions equally exposed to the Boche concentrations and kept their guns firing night and day. The tankers from A, B and C Cos. lived in their tanks on the wooded hills and frequently pulled up to destroy designated targets. A change of socks every day helped to reduce the fast growing rate of trench foot.

And again the gallant engineers were momentarily whipped in their efforts to construct a bridge. The Boche kept all chosen bridge sites covered with HE and the river itself frequently smashed the first attempts. A footbridge was finally completed and reinforcements filtered across it with supplies. Many tankers from D and Hq. Cos. were pressed into this service and made perilous and heroic trips across with food and ammo, returning with the wounded on litters. Without supporting armor the decimated ranks of 357 and 358 doughs were hard put to maintain their positions, much less expand them. And finally 359 was committed and went over to take positions in the center, between the woods and the town. And on 9 Dec. one A Co. platoon crossed by ferry near WALLERFANGEN under a heavy smoke screen into the flames and explosions that enveloped PACHTEN and DILLINGEN. Again the

tankers were greeted with cheers and they immediately deployed forward to support all three regiments. A sudden fall of the river, perhaps controlled in part by the canny Heine, grounded the ferry and effectively stopped its operations. On this same day the smoke screen dissipated for a short time, giving the Boche visual observation of which he took full advantage and most floats were destroyed. For three days and nights the engineers worked feverishly to repair the damage while the 5 Shermans on the other side were constantly engaged, rushing through the rubble in forward areas to frustrate Heine blows which were hitting from all sides. Finally after an elaborate system of smoke screening had been established the ferry began operation again, and on 12 Dec. one platoon of C Co. and the rest of A Co. tanks were borne across. The first tanks managed to slither their way up the slushy, muddy banks to the main road but soon the path, supported in part by landing mats, became impassable and one tank bellied down some 20 yards from the ferry landing, thus blocking the crossing of all others. At once men on the other side began cutting logs which were soon delivered across the river and everyone assisted in building a corduroy road, which despite the continued shelling was completed by midnight. It was just wide enough to hold the tracks and the tank drivers were called upon to use all their skills in using it. Early the next morning the remaining tanks crossed and the situation, while still tense, eased somewhat.

Up until now a juncture between the 95th and 90th was considered impossible but this mission, now that the armor was across, was again the objective. To complete it the PRIMS RIVER BRIDGE on the DILLINGEN-SAARLAUTERN road had to be taken. Plans were laid whereby 358 and 359 would attack southeast across the railroad tracks and clean out the business and factory section of the town there. This would permit both 357 and 359, to slide right, and closer, stronger cooperation between the three regiments could thereby be effected. This was to be done against an enemy still marshaling strong forces in the many pillboxes and an enemy which, while not acting in concert, was excellent individually and skillfully led. On 14 Dec. A and B Cos. and Hq. 105s supported the attack – at times leading the forces – across the tracks. For the first time they faced strong, interlocking pillboxes, but they quickly learned how to deal with them. The tanks poured lead at the concrete forts, buttoning up all apertures and at times stunning the occupants into insensibility, and the doughs rushed forward to plant the explosives. The advance was slow but inexorable. Speaking of this action the 90th Operational Reports state: “Only through the perfect cooperation between armor, TDs and infantry did it become possible to capture the ... objective some 300 meters east of the tracks.” Casualties were slight as the tanks saw to it that the machine guns in the pillboxes were silent and the tankers had learned how to blast away the lurking bazooka man, but several tracks were blown by the ever-present mines.

For the next five days the team, working with assurance and reciprocal confidence, inched forward from pillbox to pillbox, house to house, in “the hottest spot on the Saar.” There was little left of DILLINGEN and all the civilians, save a few hardy souls, had fled. Cellars, caves and in one instance a rifle range pit served as shelters. And while a captured slaughter house provided fresh meat, other supplies and facilities were scarce. Generally it was necessary to dispatch a tank back to the ferry landing for the supplies, although occasionally a peep ventured up to the front despite the continued and accurate shelling. And occasionally the tankers took advantage of a lull to explore the vacated and ruined buildings and enjoy the best “looting” area there ever was. On 18 Dec. all personnel were alerted to be on guard against possible paratroop attacks as indications pointed toward the Boche employing such tactics. A PW reported that a Battalion of picked men was poised, ready to strike on the exposed left flank. And then quite unexpectedly the Division was ordered to withdraw all elements back across the SAAR; Von Rundstedt had attacked in the ARDENNES and the 90th was to be denied its fiercely fought for prize of DILLINGEN so that the American lines could be ready for any further attack. The withdrawal operation was conducted with consummate skill and under trying conditions. No bridge had yet been constructed and the armor had to be taken back by ferry – tank by tank. Mud still was a formidable and exasperating obstacle preventing any rapid movement. The chance had to be taken that

the Boche would detect the tactics and wait until half the units had cleared, striking in strength against those remaining. Operations continued 24 hours a day from 19 Dec. until early 23 Dec. The whole area was heavily blanketed with a smoke screen from the time the ferry chugged the first A Co. tank back on 20 Dec. until 02:30, 23 Dec. when the last B Co. tank returned. All that was left were two tanks which had become mired and were self-destroyed. What few structures there were in battle ravaged DILLINGEN were blown by a demolition squad. It was not easy to abandon this hard won gain but once the orders were received every effort was bent on executing them with dispatch and efficiency. So once the operation was over and successful all concerned could take a few easy breaths and then turn to plan for the next job.

During the period 23 Dec. to 6 Jan. the Alsatian towns of KIRSCHNAUMEN, REMELING, SCHEVERWALD, FLATTEN, OBERESCH, SILWINGEN, GUARLFANGEN, BERINGEN and FREMERSDORF became familiar places to the various units of the 712th as the Battalion, spread thinly along an extended line, assumed a position of aggressive defense, interlocking with TDs, mine fields, roadblocks, prepared demolitions and doughs. The MAGINOT LINE just behind was extensively reconnoitered so that all units could speedily move to it in event of a major thrust by the Heine from either the SAAR-MOSELLE TRIANGLE or MERZIG, to tie in with Von Rundstedt's offensive in the north. Frequent sorties and screening movements were made by the armor to feel out enemy positions and compel him to retain forces in that area. The Recon. Platoon was very active these days, maintaining constant liaison with troops on the southern flanks where occasional reconnaissance in force by the Boche gave promises of developing into a major assault. And again the tankers had a break for they ate their Christmas feast in style and relative quiet, with their ears peeled to the radio listening to the tense situation in the ARDENNES. Winter had arrived and with it cold, clear days and sharp, bright nights. The weather was ideal for air operations and the tankers had frequent opportunities to watch ME 109s and P-38s and P-47s chase each other, punctuating their dives with the chatter of machine guns, and to watch the huge American armadas, leaving their fantastic vapor trails, drone northward to offer welcome and immense assistance to the unflagging efforts of the ground troops in the BULGE. With winter the mud soon hardened and froze, and all tanks had to be warmed up daily and their lubricating systems refueled with winter oil. With winter also came snow and ice, elements that were to torment the tankers for the next two months.

At the beginning of the New Year plans were initiated to drive on the SAAR-MOSELLE TRIANGLE; all unit commanders were oriented and final preparations laid. Then on 5 Jan. a message from XX Corps read: "Be prepared for movement." Nothing more, but all plans were immediately scrapped. And by 6 Jan. the 712th and 90th were making their unsung and unheralded drive north to enter the BULGE and prove a decisive factor in its eventual reduction. Once again the team was rolling but this time under cover of darkness and on roads which defied the most skillful and strenuous efforts of all drivers. Sheets of ice made traction difficult and at times impossible; huge snowbanks concealed treacherous ditches. Often the levers would fail to control the tracks and the tank would scud and spin. The column began to thin out as tanks barged off into ditches or slid into positions crosswise to the road, thus preventing any forward movement of the vehicles in the rear. But the tankers surmounted and conquered these obstacles and the column continued to roll through THIONVILLE and LUXEMBOURG, past scenic beauty, enhanced by the heavy snow, which would have enthralled the peaceful tourist. Singly and in pairs the tanks began to arrive in the rear assembly areas near RIPPWEILER and BOULAIDE and by dawn 7 Jan. all units had completed the better than 60 mile march.

Here they were apprised of their mission. A large enemy salient still stood southeast of BASTOGNE. It was being contained but not penetrated by American forces in that area – thinly spread

and badly exhausted after days of bitter fighting. The 712th and 90th, joining III Corps, were to add fresh impetus to this sector and make the main effort in reducing the salient and entrapping the Boche. They were to attack through the 26th Inf. positions, while the 35th Inf., 6th Armd. and 101st Airborne on the left or north and the 80th Inf. on the right were to make simultaneous thrusts. The greatest precautions were taken to insure surprise. Armor had moved up under cover of darkness and every unit took up positions in concealed assembly areas. Artillery emplaced battery by battery, and in registering prior to attack a 26th Div. gun ceased firing as each gun of the 90th opened up, so as not to increase density of fire. All unit and personnel markings were removed, a stratagem which paid dividends as a document captured later from the German 13th Paratroop Regt. revealed: "It is imperative that steps be taken to ascertain whether or not the American 90th Inf. Div. has been committed. Special attention must be given to the numbers 357, 358, 359, 343, 344, 345, 915, and 315. Prisoners identified with these numbers will immediately be taken to the Regt. Section."



Whoever Thought That These Ship Quarters Would Seem Comfortable Later On



General Patton requested that Floaters be Put On



"Pull Hard on the left Lever"



Score One for the Engineers



A Welcome Change from Cold C Rations
and Liberated Chickens



On the Way! – “Into Dillingen”



“Target!” – Dillingen



Sweating It Out



All the comforts of Home



GI Santa Claus



No Red Points



5th Gear



“Where does a Fellow Sleep Around here?”

BATTLE OF THE ARDENNES



Born in Detroit; Buried in the Bulge

On 9 Jan. the attack was launched. Ahead lay steep, unrelated and snow covered hill masses, rising in instances to 2000 feet and manned by a well equipped enemy with better than average training and a fairly high state of morale. Successive defense lines were dug-in foxholes along the high ground and in the dense forests. Most Heines were armed with automatic weapons and SS Panzer units formed a mobile reserve. The cold was numbing and pierced to the very marrow of the bones. Snow was everywhere, its whiteness setting off the large, green silhouettes of the Shermans (a whitewash preparation was not used until the middle of the month), and stilling the tread of the ever present Nazi patrol. This was the fourth time this hilly, thinly populated section of Luxembourg had been ravaged by the shells and bombs of men locked in fierce struggle. There was never a pause, never a time to relax. If the tankers managed to find some sort of shelter, no sooner would they have shaken the ice and snow

off the bedroll and lain down than the guard would be at them, whispering in hurried, anxious tones: "Heine tanks coming in on the left !" Back they would have to mount into the cold, slippery and cramping tanks. Then the period of waiting and listening, their eyes straining to pierce the black night and spot the movement. Frequently the Heine would be no more than 100 yards away on the other side of the hill and his guttural accents would fall on tense ears. Often some miserable, wounded Boche would scream his pleas "Kamerad!" from his slushy foxhole. The driving snow grounded the fighter planes and Piper Cubs, so that many times attacks were launched without the usual preliminary bombing, strafing and reconnaissance. Day battles were titanic clashes with the tankers and doughs resolved to prevail and the Boche striking with savage desperation.

B and C Cos. were committed on the first day, joining in making flanking squeeze on BERLE. B, on the right or east flank, jumped off from NOTHUM just as tragedy struck when Lt. Col. George B. Randolph, up front as usual with his men, was felled by shrapnel never to rise again but his inspiration lifted his men of the 712th time and again in the succeeding days and months. C pushed off from BAVIGNE on the left flank. All units gained initial surprise but soon the Boche had rallied and stubbornly tried to block the advance. High velocity shells rained through the air as the tanks slugged forward through the snow to eventually seize BERLE and take positions on the hill just north of the town. The infuriated Boche sent a strong Panzer force to regain this hill in the middle of the night only to have a short fused flare expose his lead tank. Quick and daring advantage was taken of this by a B Co. tank at a 20 yard range and the Mark V was soon aflame, its brothers scared into retreat. The flanks had not kept pace with the BERLE thrust and the Boche tried to capitalize. Smashing at the left he was beaten to a pulp by 2 C Co. tanks which rushed west from BASTOGNE. Attempting to leap on NOTHUM, he ran into D Co. tanks, serving as flank guards, and was decimated. B Co., having suffered high losses, was now fighting mad and with reckless courage lunged forward in the middle of the night to seize an important cross roads east of BAHOEY. Taking positions here, they were hit by the ferocious Boche. Refusing to budge, they tore the guts out of the attackers, expending 100s of rounds of ammo. D Co., still patrolling the precarious right, was pressed into service and attempted to rush ammo and supplies up to the hard pressed B Co. tanks. A hail of artillery from the dominating high ground lashed at them and the deep snows caused them to flounder. Seeking cover in a woods they found that a combination of snow, ice and roots played havoc with their suspension system and soon 4 tanks had thrown their tracks. Working without cessation under these conditions they managed to extricate enough tanks to get the supplies to B Co. C Co. still on the left thrust forward in a brilliant maneuver, harassed by AP fire from both flanks, and surged on DONCOLS with such speed that an entire Regimental CP was captured. They then took up defensive positions on the main highway in this area and in BENONCHAMPS. For 5 days they held here – living in their tanks in the biting, raw weather and frustrating every counterblow by the Heine.

The 26th Inf. began to pinch off the battered B Co. tankers, and on 12 Jan., after outposting at BOULAIDE and HARLANGE, A Co., with 358, moved up through C Co. The 6th Armd., striking east with exposed flanks, was pointing toward BRAS. If juncture could be effected there, a large enemy force would be entrapped. A Co., moving through SONLEZ, was chosen to effect this mission and soon was locked with the strongly resisting Heine in a two day slugfest. Finally two tanks, braving devastating anti-tank fire, grasped the other side of the important railroad tracks and joined with the 6th Armd. in BRAS, thus sealing off large Heine forces. From BRAS A Co. battered forward, plowing across open fields to take NEIDERWAMPACH and, after skirting thick mine fields, reached OBERWAMPACH which they set about to do with desperate resolution and a never-mind-the-cost recklessness. For 3 days and nights the 712th, 773rd TDs and 90th doughs stood firm against 9 major counterattacks, inflicting huge casualties in men and equipment. Fighting became so intense that 1 tank, dealing with the Boche on its right, had just enough time to traverse left and knock out at a 15 yard

range the lead half-track of another armored column. Massive artillery barrages assisted each side – the Heine threw 1500 rounds in a 24 hour period; the 344th FA Bn. unleashed 6000 rounds in 36 hours. Speaking of this action 90th Operational Reports state: “German losses were enormous and mounted as heavy snow storms blanketed enemy dead and wounded alike. No exact count was possible but an estimated several hundred Germans were buried from sight for long after the Division had left the area.”

B and C Cos. meanwhile had moved up on the left flank and by 17 Jan. B Co. had seized the key town of LONGVILLY, sending tanks out to take up defensive positions on the high ground. By 20 Jan. it had beat down the Boche rear-guard in HAMMIVILLE and for 3 days threw shells across the LORRAINE RIVER into the retreating confused and beaten Boche. With the tanks serving as brass knuckles, the 90th Div. first had smashed the salient and with it Von Rundstedt's ambitions. The team had never before worked with such effectiveness. German documents time and again referred to the devastation wrought by the tanks; never had they suffered so many casualties by the machine gun fire of tanks. Even though never officially confirmed, the story that Gen'l. Patton had rejected XX Corps' offer of other Divisions and insisted in his characteristic words that the 90th be sent north, was borne out by the results achieved. 3rd Army Reports state: “All through the Campaign III, XII and VIII Corps faced determined and heavy resistance. It was largely due to the extreme power exerted on the enemy salient from the south that the enemy operation ended in failure. Although contact was established with surrounded forces in BASTOGNE early in the operation the issue remained in doubt till the middle of January. From that point on there was steady gains, and the enemy, his penetrating power gone, was forced to give ground and to retreat to his Siegfried Line emplacements.”

With its northern flank secured the Division pivoted right and swung east. C Co. supporting 357 moved through ASSELBORN and BOXHORN on 22 Jan. but in trying to ford a creek north of SASSEL 4 tanks bogged down. Their infantry probed forward while the tankers labored in deep snow and icy water retrieving their Shermans. Just as night fell word reached them that the Heine was hitting at BINSFIELD and that the doughs were hard pressed without supporting armor. Without wasting a moment the tankers took the main highway to TROISVERGES and, turning right or east, headed down an ice covered, strange and unconquered road in the black of night. The Boche attempted to halt this movement by raining AP shells down on the column but the C Co. tankers drove on. The noise of their approach enheartened the embattled doughs and soon the “blood brothers” were reunited and the attackers were sent reeling backwards. Slogging their way forward this team battered through HUPPERDANGE and cut the SKY LINE DRIVE – the main LUXEMBOURG-ST. VITH highway. Reaching WEISWAMPACH on 27 Jan. they were again hit by the Boche in his final lunge but they sent him spinning.

On 26 Jan. the 712th and 90th passed from III Corps to VIII Corps control and were assigned the mission of spearheading the Corps drive across the OUR RIVER. The precipitous cliffs on the east side of this river gave the Boche a natural defensive position and he made the most of it. And once more the doughs had to cross waters while their tanks awaited the bridge. A and C Cos. stood ready to spring from their positions around BEILER, LEITHUM and OBERHAUSEN, occasionally pulling out onto exposed high ground to fire into enemy strong points on the other side. On 30 Jan. a fording place was located and three C Co. tanks slogged across but tore up the bottom and made further vehicular progress there impossible. Further south 358 erected a bridge and A Co. tanks moved across into STUPBACH, pushing out later in the day to secure STEINKOPF. Here they found the outer fringes of the SIEGFIED LINE, with well emplaced pillboxes scattered in the high and steep hills. What few roads there were became more and more impassable as huge chunks of earth loosened by the tank tread or an explosive slipped down to block the road, the bed of which itself was crumbling. All the terrain bore the scars of three periods of intense fighting and the villages were nothing but rubble and walls. Despite these

adversities the town of HECKLANFIELD finally fell to the resolute team and the bridgehead was firmly established. For 25 days the fighting had been constant and intense and at last, while new plans were being plotted and new missions assigned, it was possible to relax for a bit. Summarizing this last period 90th Operational Reports state: "Supply – always a problem – was made more difficult by the constant snow storms and the limited road net of the narrow Division sector. Engineers labored unceasingly to keep roads open Litters were attached to skis to expedite evacuation Tanks were whitewashed for camouflage and it worked well but near-zero temperature and drifting snow caused much mechanical trouble Withal armor support as well as accurate artillery fire were again invaluable in crushing the enemy defense."

By the end of January all territory which had been seized by the Boche in his December breakthrough had been regained and now, badly disorganized, he was attempting to regroup himself in the SIEGFRIED LINE in front of the 3rd Army which continued its remorseless march to the east. As the West Wall campaign commenced VIII Corps was on Army left or north, with the 87th, 4th and 90th Infs. on line from north to south and the 95th Inf. and 11th Armd. in reserve. Further south the III Corps was poised with the 5th, 76th and 80th Infs. and 4th Armd. on line, and linking with the 7th Army was XXth Corps with the 26th and 94th Infs.

During the first few days in February the 712th and 90th remained on the aggressive defense across the OUR but soon found themselves shifting north to assist in the main effort at PRUM, their positions being taken over by the 11th Armd. A major thaw had set in and the snow had turned to slush, the rock-like mud to mire, and the ice-covered streams were overburdened with water and debris. The tanks passed through ST. VITH – easily the most devastated town seen in the entire war – and traveled over roads many of which had become almost impassable. The main road was canalized into a narrow, muddy bottleneck that taxed engineers and MPs alike to keep open – an entire column of the 11th Armd. bogged down and the armor stretched bumper to bumper for many miles. The Recon. Plat. worked incessantly, looking for alternate routes and guiding the line platoons to their respective assembly areas. Jump-off positions were reached on 4 Feb. and the task ahead at first seemed insurmountable. It was found that pillboxes were far more numerous than shown on defense overlays, and many were adeptly camouflaged. The enemy usually fought stubbornly until completely surrounded, and he supported his positions with artillery, considerable deadly nebelwerfer and mortar fire, high velocity fire from dug-in gas-less tanks, as well as roving tanks and SP guns. The ground was hub-deep with mud, streams were flooded, and the constant rains made air cover something to wish for. The wet, and at night freezing, cold, coupled with the heavy expenditure of ammo in this type of fighting placed heavy demands on the supply sections, already laboring under tremendous obstacles due to the conditions and qualities of the road net.

But the 712th-90th team rammed through the two heavy belts of the LINE in 15 days – 5 Feb. to 20 Feb.; a tribute to the might and skill of this team, tempered and forged for such deeds in the fires of DILLINGEN. Even the 3rd Army Reports, with rare precision, single them out to state : "As an example of the bitterly contested drive toward Prum, the 90th Inf. Div. reduced 153 enemy pillboxes in one day, 8 February." This could well be called the "SCHEID" area for most of the fighting centered around the towns of HABSCHIED, BRANSCHIED, BINSCHIED, EIGELSCHEID, WINTERSCHIED, HERSCHIED, BNOBLANCHEID, HECKUSCHIED, and HALSCHIED. Once these were little towns, their inhabitants concerned only with peaceful agricultural pursuits. But they happened to be located right where the Nazis chose to build the LINE. And so the barns became intermingled with many concrete boxes. Now as the tankers remember them there is nothing left but a few walls and concrete rubble with the steel structural supports asunder and clawing the air. Huge pools of thickly muddied waters in which floated the dead and the destroyed spotted the mucky streets and yards. And

other places like WINTERSPELT, KELFELD, HOLL NICH, GROSSLANGENFELD, NDR, UTTFELD, OBR, UTTFELD, and MASTHORN recall the freezing cold nights during which the enemy was often caught napping and considerable progress made, and the murky, rainy days during which the tanks were continually spitting out lead at the next pillbox – the next pillbox, hoping that perhaps one would be sufficiently unharmed to provide some shelter in its dank, dark chambers for a night of rest. If not, the cramped floor and seats of the tank itself would have to serve. It sounds easy: “Button up the apertures and let the doughs rush forward.” But AT guns, mines and bazookas rang up a heavy toll. The tank platoons were soon well under strength often operating with two instead of five tanks. But the tankers sought no relief and continued to form a strong link in the team chain. Individual exploits and extraordinary incidents were frequent. One tank platoon leader, having been misguided, walked into an un-captured pillbox just as the Heines in it were walking out. He beat them to the draw and took the next pillbox as well. One platoon seized a box to find it manned by members of the 4th Inf., stranded and isolated there for 5 days. One platoon cast caution aside and drove right through a huge minefield and, although badly mauled, accomplished its mission. And even when a Company was put in reserve it immediately reverted to the secondary role for tanks and fired indirect. In actual fact the SIEGFRIED LINE was not impregnable. It was breached by a team – armor, infantry, engineer, and artillery. Constant plugging by the tankers and doughs and engineers created the original chinks and then, as the Boche fell back, artillery smashed at his communications, P-47s bombed and strafed his rear areas, and then deep-driving infantry mounted on tanks and fast moving Task Force Speiss exploited the gains and generated the rout. This much touted barrier was crumpled and ground to bits by the inexorable and matchless onslaught of the 712th-90th team. The score showed: 500 pillboxes reduced, 3195 PWs, 25 tanks, and a cornucopia of captured enemy material.

Deprived of his LINE the Boche now began a headlong retreat which did not end until V-E Day. The 712th and 90th drive began to gain momentum and speed, spearheaded by Task Force Speiss. This force, having D Co. as its basic unit and with small TD, Engineer, Recon., and Inf. attachments, was attached to 358 and worked mainly on Division right, riding roughshod over the piecemeal resistance. Other units swept forward, finding only isolated Panzer units as their main opposition. C Co. ran into 5 Tiger Royals at LICHTENBORN but managed to score only once and was forced to chase them to KOPSCHEID. Here again the Panzers showed their heels and on 23 Feb. retreated back across the PRUM at WAXWEILER. C Co. closed in fast but, finding the bridge at WAXWEILER blown, had to wait a day before taking that town, by which time the tanks had gotten away again. Task Force Speiss meanwhile made rapid thrusts, clearing HALENBACH and WINDHAUSEN, where a large group of PWs reported that all Heine positions had been overrun. A Co. likewise bumping into Panzer opposition, seized LAUPERATH and KRAUTSCHIED and on 24 Feb. made the Division's final spurt in this area, capturing many PWs at BELLSCHIED. Since about the 3rd week in Normandy rumors had been current almost every day that at last the tankers were going to go into reserve and have a real rest. Suddenly the rumors became fact and, their positions taken over by the 6th Armd. and 6th Cav. Grp., the doughs and tankers moved into SHAEF reserve on 25 Feb., with the 712th settling down in HACKHALENFELD.

SHAEF Reserve was a luxury even though HACKHALENFELD was no paradise. The rest achieved and the maintenance performed – although not for B Co. which was attached to the 6th Cav. Grp. to assist in the holding positions – made the next two months less arduous. The 3rd Army had been put on the aggressive defense in the middle of February but March brought marching orders and soon all units were in high gear, eventually to thrust clear across Germany with dazzling, history-making speed. The 712th and 90th reverted to VIII Corps control on 2 March and were ordered to make a bridgehead across the KYLL RIVER. They moved through the 6th Armd. on Corps left and at once were pacing the Corps drive, with the 4th and 87th Infs. on their right and the 11th Armd. initially on the left. The

Boche, pressured all along the front, was bending all his efforts to get east of the KYLL, but the speed and adroitness of the tank-riding doughs frustrated this tactic, despite the hilly, densely-wooded terrain and the never-ending rainfall.

Newly-formed Task Force Kedrovsky – D Co., with Recon. elements from the 773rd TD and 90th, and later augmented by Hq. 105s, minesweeping teams and several rifle platoons – was attached to 359 on Division left and spearheaded the drive. Brushing aside roadblocks, catching Panzer crews unawares, bludgeoning AT guns, skirting mine fields (in which the new plastic devices were found), this force swept forward seizing NEUSTRASSBURG and many prisoners, all the time keeping liaison with 6th Cav. Grp. on the right. B Co., handicapped at first by roadblocks, kept pace, cleaning out SEIWERATH, while C Co. on the left took OBERHERSDORF after many small fire fights with enemy forced into the sector by the advancing 11th Armd. By nightfall 5 Mar. all units had reached the river only to find all bridges blown. C Co. had charged through BIRRESBORN, taken MINERALBRUNNER, and then surged into LISSINGEN, where it was relieved by Task Force Kedrovsky. B Co., in a brilliant stroke, had captured MURLENBACH, while A Co. moved up prepared to strike across and seize GEROLSTEIN, a huge marshaling area. The river itself was not wide but reconnaissance indicated, as did fairly heavy Heine small arms, mortar and AP fire, that the east bank could be turned into a strong-point. The ground rose sharply there and many cunningly concealed and carefully placed entrenchments had been dug. On the whole it was similar to Normandy and the Boche could have charged a bloody price for it, had he been able to regain his balance. It was still cold, rain seemed endless, and living facilities were few, so the tanks again served as homes.

On 6 Mar. C Co. forded across after the 357 doughs and made excellent progress initially but left exposed flanks. The Boche, revealing unexpected power, hit these flanks and soon had many American doughs surrounded. A quick revision of tactics was undertaken to meet this threat and in several hours the doughs were liberated, the situation restored and NEIDEREICH seized. Here B Co. passed through and went on, engaging in frequent fire fights, to take DENSBORN and GEES. Task Force Kedrovsky and A Co., fording across at WALLERSHEIM and hampered only by AT ditches and road craters, soon had the situation in GEROLSTEIN well under control, chasing 5 Heine tanks into PELM. A Co., after making contact with B Co. at GEES, followed the Panzers and seized PELM. Later in the afternoon the bridgehead was expanded, with A Co. taking ESSINGEN and BERLINGEN without much trouble, while B Co. had to make a real fight for WABKONIGEN. The 712th-90th team had made an 8 km. bridgehead across the KYLL and while originally only CCA of the 11th Armd. was to pass through it, both CCB and CCR used it, as the 4th Inf.'s, as well as the 11th's own, were not wide enough. This was the beginning of the great and widely heralded "Armored Division Days". But just as the unsung linemen on the gridiron make it possible for the all-American backs to flare across the headlines, so did the 712th-90th team frequently have to punch out the holes for the organically faster moving Armored Divisions. For the moment the tankers were content to watch the 11th Armd. vehicles go through as many a cellar in the vicinity revealed "beaucoup" Moselle and Rhine wine. But by 8 March, with the 11th really rolling, they were once again in the thick of things. Summarizing the next four days, 3rd Army Reports state: "Closely following armored spearheads of the 11th Armored Division, the 90th Infantry Division made rapid progress while other units made good progress." Jumping off early each morning the tankers, their tanks covered with doughs, thrust with lightning-like rapidity into the small towns by-passed by the 11th. Here they would help make the house-to-house cleanup and set up roadblocks. Pausing just long enough to consolidate and coordinate, so complete was the rout that frequently two American units would be off again. Battalion and regimental zones soon overlapped and moved in on the same town from different sides. This section had never been a Nazi hotbed and more often than not the streets would be lined with cheering civilians, waving flags in much the same way as the Frenchmen had. But most gratifying was the unmitigated and overflowing joy of the liberated slave

laborers as they burst from their miserable hovels and camps to cheer the tanks. A polyglot of all nationalities was found in every town, and the roads soon became jammed with these people as they wasted no time in starting the trek to their homeland. And the roads were always lined with prisoners, frequently traveling unescorted. With the 4th Inf. and 87th Inf. containing the EIFEL POCKET created by these thrusts, it appeared that the 712th-90th team was destined to don the garb of an Armored Division as it kept pace with the history making advances of the 4th and 11th Armd. Divisions. But on 12 Mar. a stop-order was received and the 90th was transferred to XII Corps, assigned to the 4th Armd. zone to protect Corps' north flank and to cross the MOSELLE in conjunction with the 5th Inf.



The Noblest profession – 712th, 90th Team had third highest casualty list in the ETO



“Prepare to move Out”



A Light Tank puts on Camouflage





Setting Up Home in a Pillbox



Alles Kaput



Hurray Up and wait

BATTLE OF CENTRAL EUROPE

Cleaning out the west bank of the MOSELLE was an easy task, although C Co. ran into a hot spot at LOF. For one month the Boche had been unable to use defensive terrain positions and had only resisted locally – from town to town. Reaching the broad MOSELLE at HATZENPORT and MOSELKERN, where contact was made with the 5th Inf., the tankers speculated on whether the Boche had the power and the will to use this natural barrier effectively. The orders were to cross, advance southeast and seize a bridgehead across the NAHE RIVER between BAD KREUZNACH and BINGEN. If the past three weeks were any indication, then all that would be met would be snipers, roadblocks and occasionally a nest of fanatics. On 14 March the doughs went across, meeting at the outset very little opposition. But there were still Heines with some will to win and the 1211th Regt. of the 159th VG Div. struck the 359th at MORSHAUSEN. The situation became tense, but B Co. tanks, crossing by ferry, rushed up and quickly routed the attackers. The engineers, working this time in comparative ease, soon had a pontoon bridge up and the rest of the tanks, under cover of darkness but assisted by the newly developed artificial moonlight, debouched across to join their respective regiments. What little enemy forces there were facing A and B Cos. on the Division's right flank quickly collapsed and again the tanks, loaded with doughs, were dashing from town to town. But on the left, where C Co. and 357 were, it was another story. The 6th SS Mountain Division had decided to hold PFAFFENHECK and were making the tankers and doughs pay a heavy price. PFAFFENHECK and the neighboring BUCHOLZ were not cleared until 16 March, at which time C Co. tanks, taking the initiative and working with masterly skill, stormed the positions and seized as booty forty-eight 20 mm., four 40 mm. and eight 88 mm. guns.

Meanwhile on 15 March “Patton's Famous Fourth Armored” passed through the Division's bridgehead and, with B Co. and 359 attached, began to cut swathes in the German ranks, assisted by XIX Tactical Air Command which took advantage of the first rainless days in March. The Boche was scurrying east to the RHINE and all American units were extending themselves to prevent any wholesale escape across that mighty river. The 87th Inf. had crossed the MOSELLE in the north and turned northeast toward COBLENZ. The 4th Armd. had encircled BAD KREUZNACH, which B Co. and 359 mopped up. On 17 March Task Force Speiss went on a rampage, accepted the surrender of ST. GOAR, reached the RHINE and fired across it into retreating columns. And on the next day with A Co. and 358 it cleaned out all territory east of the NAHE and south of BINGEN. 19 March found A Co. with 358 and B Co. with 359 – now back under Division control – fording across the NAHE. They carved a bridgehead 6 miles deep, only mildly hampered by scattered flurries of the limping Luftwaffe. Then Task Force Speiss, broken down into three components – Task Forces Wagnon, Dye and Kelly – broke loose again, making a 10 mile plunge in 6 hours and meeting only spotty resistance, with Task Force Wagnon hauling in 500 prisoners in one day. On 20 March this Task Force was sent to block and protect the southeastern flank which had become exposed by a widening gap as the 4th Armd. moved southeast toward WORMS and the 90th northeast toward MAINZ. On this same day A and B Cos. ran into snags, the danger of which was always present. While the perils of fighting were greatly reduced from what they had been in previous campaigns, death still lurked at every roadblock and every once in a while a savage clash would flare up. A Co. hit one of these at OBER INGELHEIM, while B Co. had to hit with both fists at EBERSHEIM; in both instances, however, the 712th-90th team was much too proficient and daring for the cluster of fanatics. The Luftwaffe made an appearance this day, flying 44 seemingly aimless sorties with jet propelled, FW 190 and ME 109 planes. And that night some audacious prowling Nazis hit an A Co. platoon bivouac area and were thrown back only after a fierce fight during which one Boche managed to heave a hand grenade down the barrel of a Sherman, inflicting painful injuries on the occupant.

On 21 March the tankers and doughs began converging on MAINZ. A Co. with 358 struck from the north, B Co. with 359 hit in the center, and Task Force Speiss blocked on the right flank. The Boche evidently planned to make a real stand as all units bumped into particularly stout resistance in the suburbs and were once again embroiled in savage conflict. Big Kraut guns from the other side of the RHINE threw heavy barrages at the advancing American columns. But persistence and resolution told and by nightfall the team was ready to move in on the city the following morning. The attack began as scheduled in a perfectly coordinated assault. For the Germans it was a sorry day. Proud MAINZ was falling and falling fast in spite of repeated assertions that the city would be defended to the last man and to the last round of ammunition. For the Americans, after the all-out house-to-house defense of the suburbs, the ease with which the city itself was taken was an anti-climax. Neither threats nor pleadings could evoke the will to resist in more than a handful of the miscellany who were the city's defenders. A feeling of hopelessness pervaded this one time capital city. Its heart was gone with its buildings for Allied bombers had done their work well. Now the civilians huddled for the last time in their underground shelters. Braver ones on the streets watched apathetically as their soldiers surrendered by the hundreds. There was fighting – on the outer edges and in the green parks. But the Citadel, moss-covered underground fortress defiantly barring the south entrance, was taken without fanfare, and when the railroad tracks which bound the city's girth were crossed, resistance became sporadic, confined to small groups of die-hards. Finally it stopped altogether. The City's radio station was taken intact and Col. Weiss, the Commandant, surrendered. By nightfall the city of MAINZ was added to the already impressive group of scalps taken by the 712th-90th team. Meanwhile C Co. with 357, assigned the job of cleaning out the west bank of the RHINE, ran into a hornet's nest at WEISAU which they overcame only after a furious assault.

Further north American Arms were pouring across the RHINE on the REMANGEN BRIDGE but in the 3rd Army sector no bridge had been captured and an assault crossing was necessary. The 90th was originally ordered to create a diversionary feint around MAINZ, while the real crossing would be effected by the 5th Inf., further south. All proposed plans indicated that for the next several days the tankers would only be required to roll their tanks around and perhaps fire across the river. But at 0925 23 March Division received the following order: "Assemble 2 Regts. in reserve at once prepared to cross RHINE tonight." The 5th Inf. had crossed with ease and no time was wasted in exploiting the situation. As the tanks rushed down to DEXHEIM, where the crossing was made, changes in orders flooded in. The 80th Inf, was to relieve the 90th and now it would not arrive and the 26th Inf., itself not even relieved in the south, would take the 90th's positions. The high command was hard put to adjust itself to the ease with which the once mighty barrier had been surmounted.

C Co., with 357, was attached to the 5th Inf. and as soon as they crossed were embroiled with the 112th Regt. of the 553rd Div. at ERFELDEN and with 120 FRANKFURT policemen near LEITHUM. Fighting became so intense and the lines so confused that two C Co. tankers were just about to leave one building after a conference when they discovered a Heine guard posted outside the building. But soon the situation was under control. Meanwhile B Co., and then A Co., had crossed and were making steady, slashing gains, despite an occasional JU 88 and ME 109. Sufficient ground was quickly cleared – the hole had been opened – to permit the 4th Armd. to uncoil and again that outfit moved through to commence its dash to the MAIN RIVER. The 90th was off in its wake and 25 March was a day of rapid overrunning of much ground. All three medium Cos. sliced across a major autobahn and reached out way past their initial objectives, while the light tanks, with Task Force Speiss, had the honor of seizing industrially important DARMSTADT, moving in from the west as the 4th Armd. surged by on the east. With the 6th Armd. on the left or west, the 90th in the center, and the 4th Armd. on the right the area between the RHINE and the MAIN was quickly contained and only minor resistance met – A Co. at

DIETZENBACH, B Co. at SPRENDLINGEN and D Co. at OFFENTHAL. By 27 March all the south side of the MAIN had been cleared and the tankers watched the Heines attempting to construct entrenchments on the north side while the Long Toms blasted at them. 6 or 7 less fanatical Hitlerites climbed into a rowboat and rowed across to surrender.

The MAIN crossing, spearheaded by the 90th in the vicinity of DOERNIGHEIM west of HANAU and east of FRANKFORT, was contested by the Boche much more bitterly than he had the RHINE. A Battalion of Hitler youth, led by veteran NCO instructors from an OCS in the neighborhood, were not dismayed by the overwhelming advance of Allied Armies on all fronts, and they made a stand for it. But their lines were spread too thinly and they were no match for the best functioning, most experienced tank-infantry team in the ETO. The doughs crossed at 0300 28 March and soon were joined by the Shermans. By the day's end a 400 yard water barrier lay behind, with a firm 5 to 6 mile bridgehead established to cover the debouchments of the 4th and 6th Armds., and the OCS Battalion had been badly bloodied. The remaining days of March were marked by rapid progress in all sectors, as the 712th and 90th sped through the white flagged towns of the Hills of Hessen, with B Co., again attached to the 4th Armd., running into the only thing that amounted to major resistance at SELTERS, where a section of tanks were surprised by several Panzerfaustmen. And by the end of March the units were 250 miles inside Germany. They had swept past incalculable enemy material, rounded up many more thousands of prisoners, and were ready to strike clear across the "Fatherland" into Czechoslovakia.

When April commenced the 712th and 90th were driving lancets through the HESSE CORRIDOR, mopping up behind the 4th Armd., as well as conquering ground on their own. On the right in XII Corps sector the 11th Armd. and 26th Inf. were making similar gains. Lines were stretched to the utmost and on 1 April the disquieting information came that sizeable enemy forces had cut across the axis of communication to the rear, blocked the Main Supply Route north of HOCHSTADT, and were harassing and ambushing supply vehicles. Seven Serv. Co. trucks left NIEDERAULA for gas and were set upon near WALLERNHAUSEN. A stiff fight ensued with the Serv. Co. boys, ill-equipped to combat such tactics but resolute in their desires to keep the tanks supplied – a job they performed throughout combat with great energy and skill – finally forced to capitulate, although one truck managed to wheel about and escape. This confusion and danger in the rear, a natural incident to long stride advances with extended lines, was shortly corrected when light tanks were attached to all supply columns, but only after the 712th Personnel Section, along with the other units in 90th Rear at OFFENBACH, readied themselves for the attack only to find that a burning carload of ammo had been the cause of the alarm. And in several days all personnel who had been captured in these ambushes were once again back at their parent units.

When the 4th Armd. shifted out of XII Corps the 90th was once again on its own, fronting the left flank of the Corps drive, with the 11th Armd. on the right and the 26th and 71st Infs. in the rear. B Co. and 359, again doing superb work with the 4th Armd remained with that spectacular Division until 4 April. They showed their mettle at MADELUNGEN where a band of SS Troops evidently thought that they could stop this experienced team and were soon outwitted, outfought and whipped. The crooked, narrow WERRA RIVER now stood in the way of the 90th's advance and proved to be a much greater obstacle than had the once feared, mighty RHINE, as the Boche charged with defending its banks displayed unusual tenacity and power. C Co. probed a weak spot and forded across with 357 on 2 Apr. Striking straight out and with a classic display of marching fire and teamwork – highlighted by a dough who served ably as an assistant tank gunner – stormed into DIPPACH. On 3 April they found a bald ridge near VITZERODA stoutly defended by 100 SS Troops backed by mortars. The fighting continued from 0930 until dark, when an adroit flanking movement by the tanks completely upset the Boche and routed him. A Co., with 358, had reached the WERRA on 2 April but found that the railroad bridge they

had seized could only be used for foot-troops. So on 3 April part of this team forded across behind C Co. and headed down the far banks of the river, cleaning out many towns. The other part of the team paralleled this drive on the near banks and all defending forces were quickly dispatched. What was left – some 500 troops armed mainly with Panzerfausts – holed up in VACHA but were soon hit and whipped by the onrushing tanks and doughs. This action by A and C Cos. had effectively ruptured the Boche's attempt to form a Main Line of Resistance, and the 712th-90th team had now straddled the WERRA, over which no American soldier was to have passed. But that evening the Boche unwittingly dealt a devastating blow. At 1830 one of his planes roared in and was immediately hit by AA. Limping, it began a crash dive and apparently jettisoned its bomb load right over A Co. and 358 CPs at HEIMBOLDHAUSEN. One bomb hit a boxcar of black powder and the resulting terrific explosion left a 50 foot crater, leveled 5 houses, blew the roofs off 30 others, and broke all windows in the vicinity. It also left men pinned under the debris, men with burst eardrums, and in several instances men who had thus paid the supreme sacrifice. Out of a total of over 40 men the A Co. Hq. platoon could not muster even 10 to carry on the next day, and of these two-thirds sported purple hearts.

All units moved rapidly forward against dissolving opposition, although C Co. was compelled to blast a determined SS aggregation out of MARKSUHL. On 4 April A Co., with 358, noticed nothing unusual as they moved into MERKERS – a salt mine and the usual run of houses. But some chance remarks by civilians put intelligence on the scent and in no time at all evidence revealed that the subterranean chambers of the salt mine contained a gigantic haul of wealth. Complete unearthing produced 100 tons of gold bullion, 5 billion German Marks, 2 million American Dollars, 4 million Norwegian Pounds, 100 million French Francs, 110,000 English Pounds, 200 painting masterpieces including Raphaels, Rembrandts and Van Dycks, 1500 priceless tapestries, and many other highly valuable works of art. This cache was considered so important that 2 platoons of C Co., 2 Bns. of 357, and 2 platoons of D Co. were used to guard it for the next 10 days, and those men lucky enough to draw this assignment watched as such dignitaries as Gen'l. Eisenhower, Gen'l. Bradley and Gen'l. Patton made inspections.

For the next 10 days the doughs rode on the tanks seeking the vanishing enemy as all Allied armies began to carve Germany up into little bits. The end was not far away and tactics were reduced almost to a formula. Swooping into the vicinity of a town, the tankers would scout out to see whether the white flags were flying. If so, the doughs stayed on as the tanks laid their tracks down the main street. Soon squads of infantry were searching the houses and the Burgomeister would be announcing at every street corner the regulations concerning weapons, travel and curfew. Frequently even before this was under way the fast riding team would be headed toward the next objective. If however no white flags were flying, then the tank guns would feel out the enemy by firing 3 or 4 rounds and usually the white flags came up. But sometimes there were SS men, or Hitler Youth, or even some fanatical Volkstrum, who would resist until overpowered, more often than not inflicting several casualties with the result that their town would feel the wrath of the tank guns and small arms. If the town was the day's objective, the tankers soon knew how to pick out the best appearing house in the sector they were to outpost, and in a mixture of English and German issue the following orders: "Funf soldaten schlafen hier. Yo nix bleiben hier. Yo bleiben keller. Rouse und Vech in zwanzlg minuten." The house would be taken over, guard set up, and soon the tankers would be sitting down to a hearty meal in the Heine kitchen.

But all was not a bed of flowers. Road blocks were often strongly manned and only eliminated after an assault. The 712th and 90th had the mountainous and heavily wooded THURINGER WALD, one of the first areas fully dominated by the Nazi Party. But the team drove along the roads which had been carved on the mountain sides and chopped through the thick trees with such skill and power that

they soon earned the reputation and accolade among the Nazis as being “The Forest and Mountain Division.” And more than ever the tankers became convinced of the justness of their cause and the depravity of the Nazis, as Allied prisoners were liberated and concentration camps freed. The feeling of joy inspired by these emancipations was quickly replaced by anger at the sight of emaciated bodies and the stories of suffering and cruelty.

By 14 April B Co. with 359, on the left and echeloned back to keep contact with the slower moving Division in that sector, had swept through GEHREN, LANGE-WIESEN and KONIGSEE, and had reached the SAALE RIVER. A Co. with 358 had ridden roughshod through GROS BREITENBACH, GRAFENTHAL and LOBENSTEIN to the SELBITZ RIVER, and now stood ready to jump on the key town of HOF in conjunction with D Co. now working with 90th Recon. The offensive of HOF was perfectly executed and the town fell in a short time and with it 1192 prisoners. The 712th-90th team was now spearheading the 3rd Army drive and stood poised near the CZECHOSLOVAKIAN BORDER waiting for orders to move across and cut Germany in two. For several days they merely consolidated positions and shoved strong reconnaissance patrols forward. These latter elements found that the BORDER reacted very sensitively, but on 18 April A Co. with 358 went across and thus became the first American unit to sever Germany across her waist.

The Division now pivoted right and headed south and southeast along the BORDER, with the mission of preventing any Heine troops from massing in the REDOUBT AREA – the mountainous region surrounding BERCHESGADEN. A Co. with 358 on the sensitive left flank pounded southward seizing SELB, SCHONWALD and ROTHENBACH on 20 April, and on 23 April pounced on the huge death factory at FLOSSENBERG, finding some 1160 of the original 16,000 inmates. C Co. with 357 maintained the same lightning pace, running into some resistance from Heine half-tracks at HEBANZ on 19 April and being delayed for a short while at POPPENREUTH on 20 April. On 24 April C Co. tanks led the doughs and TDs in a brilliant stab to seize the bridge at BURGTRESWITZ before the enemy could blow it. Surging around a corner the tanks were suddenly faced by 5 Panzerfaustmen and a sharp, bloody engagement resulted, with the tanks taking the honors. Still intent on their mission the C Co. tankers rushed on and seized the bridge. D Co. still working with 90th Recon. swept into FUCHSMUL on 20 April to rescue some badly starved and brutalized GIs, and on 21 April took TISCHENREUTH and with it 1000 Hungarians.

Although intelligence reported that there was an increasing amount of Heine armor in the Division sector, nothing that even resembled organized resistance was evident as day after day the tankers and doughs repeated the same tactics. The roads were now clogged with unescorted Heine soldiers – mostly deserters, walking hospital cases, rear echelon and service troops. Occasionally they formed Kampfgruppen to stem the tide, but these dissolved on contact. Mostly they were fleeing from the onrushing Russians and found themselves sandwiched in between the two Allied Armies. At times a fearless group would cause trouble as D Co. discovered at SCHAFFERIE on 26 April when a patrolling band of Hitler Youth bloodied their noses. And on this same day B Co. had to really exert itself to take WALDMUNCHEN, while on 30 April A Co. ran into several well-manned SP guns near CAPARTICE.

But at the end of April the tankers knew that the end was not far away and that their 300 mile sweep during that month had materially accelerated it. Eventually the intelligence reports added up to show that the entire 11th Panzer Division was in this zone, and as May opened up B Co. jockeyed with Mark Vs from this unit in and around VSERUBY. And then just as the Division prepared to go into reserve on Corps order General Von Weitersheim of the 11th Panzer refused to surrender to any other unit but insisted on having “the honor” of surrendering to the “elite 90th Div.” On 3 May he met Maj. Gen'l. Earnest and unconditionally surrendered his entire outfit which consisted of close to 10,000 men

and over 2000 vehicles. B Co. and 359 were hard put marshaling these troops as they poured into the American sector. This surrender, a great tribute to the 712th and 90th, was blanketed by the news of mass surrenders taking place on all fronts. Any minute would bring the final word and perhaps the last encounter of any intensity took place at ZHURI when C Co. with 359 routed some bitter OCS Troops who had caused the 2nd Cav. Group on the left so much trouble. Perhaps, also, the last major accomplishment of this great team was to create a hole through which the 4th Armd. plunged in its final drive toward PRAGUE.

The end surprised no one. Czechoslovakia was a great country and its people were generous and friendly. The tankers and doughs, living in the Czech cottages, merely looked up with not much more than a smile when the official word came that the entire German military machine had unconditionally surrendered to the Americans, Russians and British jointly. And then they turned to their newly made Czech friends and drank to victory in wine and beer.

The long awaited day had finally arrived. V-E Day found the tankers scattered over a wide area of Czechoslovakia. Now began the difficult task of reconversion to peacetime status when again it was "Verboten" to kill ; when dwellings were searched for contraband only by a delegated few. Search for eggs and potatoes became looting and conquering a fraulein became fraternizing instead of the spoils of war. A Co. assembled briefly at STACHY but soon the line platoons went back on outpost "just in case". B Co. billeted in a castle at TYNEC and C Co. centered in a schoolhouse at MALY BOR. D Co. gathered at BESINY while Serv. Co. set up shop at MESTYS ZELEZNA RUDA – better known by the German name of MARKT ETSENSTEIN. Hq. Co. had the most luxurious quarters at SUSICE. This was like a vacation after the rough stuff of the war but first echelon maintenance, of necessity neglected for some time, again was on the schedule. The weather was perfect and the tankers on their free time made the most of it, swimming, fishing, sightseeing and just loafing. Nights were made lively with music and dancing around the village maypoles, movies under the trees, and quiet walks in the moonlight in an atmosphere heavy with lilac. It was spring in the Balkans and the war seemed unreal, even though not so far away there was a large Heine force working back to the American lines to keep from surrendering to the Russians.

By 15 May temporary zones of occupation had been selected and the 712th made a 118 mile road march back through much of the country it had recently conquered. Hot, dry weather is hard on tanks and bogie wheels and tracks caused much trouble but the maintenance men were up to the task and practically all tanks reached AMBERG before midnight. The Battalion had been assigned to barracks here which formerly housed a German Artillery unit and was known as Metzer Kaserne. The name was more appropriate than the original occupants knew for the whole place was a mess. The air corps boys who had taken care of the nearby glass factory had graciously spared most of the camp buildings, but shrapnel and concussion had worked havoc with the roofs and windows. The Germans in their haste to depart had left things in a turmoil and the first wave of infantry which took and looted the place had not improved matters. But the advance party had worked a small miracle and accommodations were already far better than they had been throughout most of the war.

The tankers at once set about making the place livable. Civilian labor was secured for fixing the windows, shingling the roofs, carting away the rubble and trash, scrubbing the floors, and denazifying the walls of the more radical decorations. Among the jumbled mass of junk in the surrounding warehouses sufficient chinaware and silver was found and soon a full blown Battalion Mess was in operation, with cooks from all companies and Kraut KPs. An elaborate system of underground wiring connecting all nearby camps was discovered and repaired and eventually a switchboard was put in operation, thereby eliminating all the unsightly wires which had been strung tree to tree in combat

fashion when the place was first occupied. Mudholes were filled and graveled over – the fag hungry civilians took care of policing up so that the men of “Old Blood and Guts” were thus relieved of mud and butts and could turn their attention to more interesting pursuits. Volleyball courts and horseshoe pits sprang into being all over the place. Softball teams were organized in each Company and round robin games were a constant and popular attraction. A swimming meet was scheduled for “Sunday” but was postponed from “Sunday” to “Sunday” and never held. A track meet finally was run off.

Other improvements came in rapid order. A sand floored training barn was cleaned and converted into a movie theater. Soon a stage was added and served for the production of the elaborate “Anything Goes” USO Show. By the time the excellent “Hubba Hubba” show came the floor had been cemented. In no time at all the old cavalymen had acquired a few horses and the sport became so popular that the stable soon housed some 40 nags and riding became one of the main sources of entertainment. Part of the motor park was fenced off for a training ground and a horse show was held with jumps and stunts, more to the enjoyment of the spectators than to the participants who spilled their dignity freely. After an evening of riding the men would frequently go up to the “Beer Tank” for a friendly beer or coke. This was strictly a 712th affair, built from scratch in an empty warehouse room and decorated with drawings and photographs made by members of the Battalion. Here the Companies held parties with music by the 712th Downbeats. The latter outfit was constantly in demand playing dinner music in the Mess Hall and Officers Mess, accompanying many of the entertainers at the Opera House, and giving out with jive for dances and impromptu get-togethers.

A Tailor Shop was established with three pressing machines and civilian seamstresses who did pressing and alterations first for a fee and then for free, to keep the tankers looking sharp for guard and fraternizing. That old Army institution the PX got off to a slow start because of the delay in the shipment of supplies but it gradually got in gear and toward the end was getting a few such luxuries as wrist watches and kodak films. A Battalion Dark Room was set up and furnished with excellent equipment. It was forced to curtail activities sharply on account of the shortage of film so that much of the developing work was done in town, although instruction classes in such were held frequently. Other classes soon commenced. The Opportunity Course was carried through for those who had not had much civilian education. German Language Classes were held three days a week to supplement the work of “Private tutors” in AMBERG. And several of the more fortunate were sent to various schools in France and England.

Most popular of all the I & E projects were the sightseeing tours. The Italy trip, including AUGSBURG, OBERAMMERGAU, GARMISCH-PARTENKIRCHEN, INNSBRUCK, BRENNER PASS, BODENSEE, ULM and NUREMBURG, was the most interesting until it had to be curtailed due to difficulties in crossing the French zone of occupation. The BERCHTESGADEN trip included visits to such famous places as MUNICH, FREISING, CHIEMSEE, where Mad Ludwig had his fantastic castle, BAD REICHENHALL, KONIGSSEE, the Eagle’s Nest, SALZBURG, LINZ, PASSEAU and REGENSBURG. That trip, with slight variations, was operated every week during the latter part of the stay. Two other trips, one to PILSEN and one into Switzerland, were inaugurated near the last. Besides the conducted tours there were individual furloughs to PARIS, LONDON and the RIVI ERA. For those not lucky enough to draw one of the fancy furloughs and not interested in the conducted tours there was still opportunity for fun and relaxation in the hunting and fishing trips to the nearby lodge.

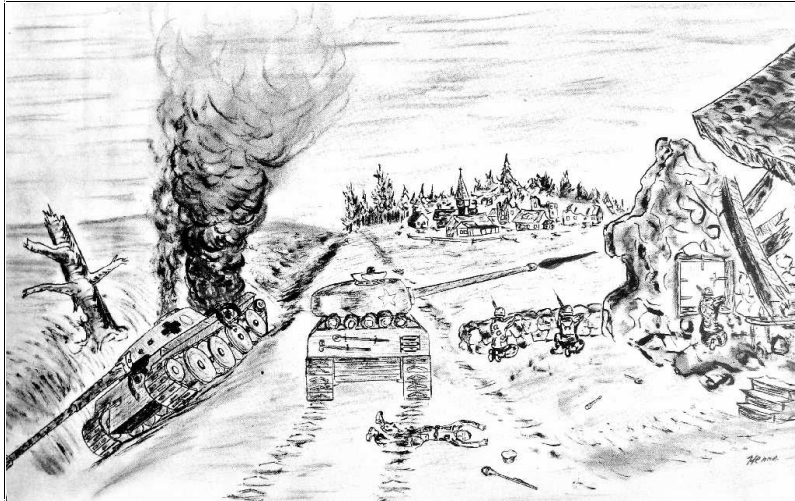
Life wasn’t all play. The Camp was primarily a military establishment. Tanks require a lot of work, even when they are not running regularly and there were persistent rumors that they would be turned into Ordnance at any time, so they had to be kept in tip-top shape. Morning on a typical day would find the motor pool and maintenance shops a beehive of activity; a roar and a blue cloud of

smoke from an engine tuning up, three men on a rammer staff swabbing a gun tube, a crewman using a grease gun on the suspension system, and a goldbrick asleep in the Bog seat. Over at the gas dump a truck would be gassing up while the dispatcher checked the trip ticket. At the stables several attendants would be grooming the horses while some supermen employees “policed up” behind them. Back at the barracks a gang lines up for early chow preparatory to going on AMBERG Guard. Chow over the relief loads up while the truck driver impatiently toots for some last minute Joe. Afternoons meant organized athletics, swimming trips and bunk fatigue. Swimming at first could be enjoyed in the Lake about 3 Km. east of the Camp, or in the pool in Amberg. But toward the last the water became rather bad in both places and the boys came up with another answer. Back of the Mess Hall there was a large concrete water reservoir which through the efforts of the Fire House Crew was converted into a respectable pool. The Fire House boys also put the big tower clock back into operation, besides keeping their fire equipment in inspection order.

The last scheduled formation for the day was Retreat which single Companies stood in rotation with a weekly Battalion Retreat Parade at which awards were presented. It was at one of the first of these formations that Brig. Gen'l. Joseph M. Tully presented the standard to the Battalion and shortly thereafter the camp was named “Camp George B. Randolph” in honor of the late Battalion Commander who had given his life in action on 9 January 1945. In honor of these occasions the Battalion newspaper “Tank-Tracks” was born and it continued to make its appearance for 12 successive weeks.

A history of the 712th would be incomplete without a page on AMBERG. This little Bavarian town had not been hard hit by the war and retains much of its old world charm, With narrow, crooked streets, tiny dark alleys, an ancient moat and wall, battlements and arched gates at every entrance. As the personnel of the AMBERG GUARD the tankers saw the town from the Duty side as conquerors and governors; directing traffic, halting and questioning suspicious persons, listening to the varied complaints of civilians and DPs, and shivering through the long, gray hours on the first shift from 0100 to 0500. As soldiers with considerable free time they saw the town from the pleasure side. The long, shady promenade around the Stadtmauer or City Wall, the quiet parks with convenient benches, the friendly frauleins everywhere, and the beaucoup kinder who can smell gum or candy a mile away. A completely modern Movie Theater had everything but a place for your best girl. Beer was plentiful but none too good. And toward the end the Red Cross took over the EM Club with their menu of mud and sinkers.

It is difficult to tell just when the breakup began. All during the later part of combat men had gone home on rotation furloughs. Then after the point system was instituted they began to go in small bunches, and when the transportation system got into high gear several large groups took leave. But the Battalion was still essentially the 712th when on the memorable Sunday noon Col. Kedrovsky broke the news in the Mess Hall. It appeared as though the men who had worked and fought together would go back home together. But the highly impersonal point system stepped in and separated friend from friend. Low pointers went to the 2nd Cav., middle pointers to 90th Recon. and 315th Eng., while the high pointers – above 65 – stayed. The redeployment took place on 11 Sept. 1945. The 712th was still a Tank Battalion on paper, but the 712th of FORET DE MONT CASTRE, FALAISE GAP, MAISIERES, METZ, DILLINGEN, OBERWAMPACH, THE SIEGFRIED LINE, and CZECHOSLOVAKIA was a thing of the past. The “best tank battalion in the U. S. Army” that the Boche could hurt but never whip, an outfit that never retreated in the face of the enemy – broken up by the point system.



“Hande Hoch!”

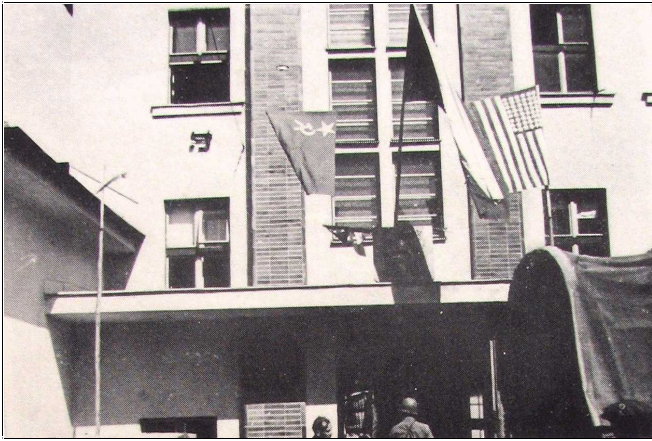


A 712th-90th Prize – The Merkers Salt Mine

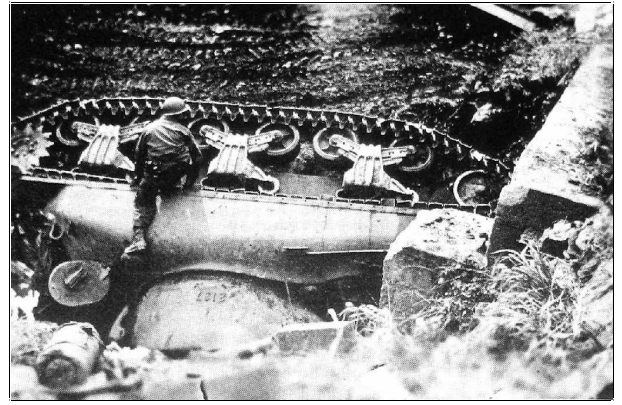


“Give him another WP”

A moment's rest for mail. 712th spent 310 days in combat, 298 of which were in active contact with the enemy.



Ivan meets GI Joe in Czechoslovakia



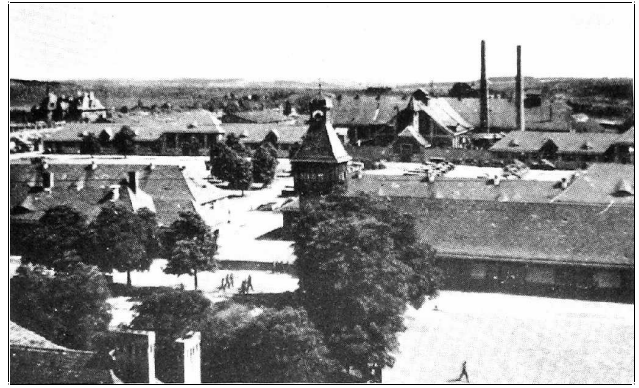
Non-battle Casualty



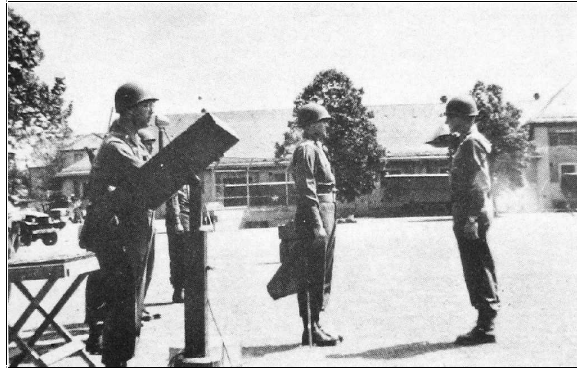
Taking Them the Easy Way



Part of the 83,000 PWs taken by the 712th-90th Team



Camp George B. Randolph, Amberg, Germany



Men of the 712th Received

1 Legion of Merit	56 Silver Star
2 D. S. C.	362 Bronze Star
8 Croix de Guerre	498 Purple Heart

SERVICE UNITS



“Good Old Maintenance”

Books and poems will never be written about the transportation crews which tirelessly supplied the iron horses with vital fuel and ammo, the long hours of reparations performed by highly skilled maintenance crews, the ingenious ministrations of the first aid men to the wounded, sick and weary, the undramatic labors of the S-2, S-3, and S-4 Sections, and the processing of essential administrative details in the face of great discomfort and privations. But the truth is that without the service elements the most fearless and aggressive army is helpless.

The tank-infantry team cooperated as effectively in tackling problems on paper as it did in tactical operations against the enemy. During the Battalion's initial commitment in Normandy, typewriter keys played a shrill obbligato to the thunderous booming of heavy artillery nearby as the first casualty reports filtered in from the front. Speed and accuracy were essentials in the preparation of statistical reports, and one could not be sacrificed for the other. Every name, number, figure, and letter must be checked and double-checked to obviate the erroneous reporting of a casualty. Message Centers “burned the midnight oil” feverishly receiving, receipting, registering, and dispatching important documents and messages. When the Normandy breakthrough came, the Personnel Section joined the 90th Division Rear Echelon for obvious reasons. Cooperation with the Division and higher headquarters was simplified by this action, but the distance between Battalion Headquarters and the Rear Echelon was often extended to a point where communication was rendered extremely difficult. Frequent transfers from one corps to another complicated but did not impede the continuous flow of administrative detail, for in this respect as in any other, the 712th quickly adapted itself to the situation.

During the entire combat period the 712th drew all supplies, with the exception of rations, from Army Depots. Rations were procured through 90th Division Quartermaster. Although supply lines in Normandy were relatively short, difficulty was encountered in securing numerous items due to existing shortages. Gasoline and ammunition were in constant demand – vital necessities for moving the tanks and blasting the enemy from his entrenched positions. Transportation crews worked relentlessly under hostile observation to fuel and refuel the tanks. Tirelessly they labored to keep the guns belching a continuous hail of fire. As the supply lines stretched across France and Germany, drivers pitted their courage and initiative against comparatively uncharted routes in locating supply dumps. Weather

conditions were no barrier to these men; the word “impossible” had been discarded from their vocabulary when they hit the beaches. Procurement of combat vehicles was handled through Corps and Army where allocations had to be made and frequently a considerable difficulty was encountered in obtaining enough tanks to keep rolling. When the race across France was at its peak, the supply situation became increasingly critical. A gasoline shortage threatened the advance of the 712th and the tanks stopped in their tracks near RHEIMS while the vital fluid was flown in by air. Curtailment of ammunition was first felt before METZ when artillery rounds were rationed. At this time the battalion was firing indirectly and special allocations had to be procured to fulfill missions. All maintenance parts were secured by the battalion maintenance who kept the tanks rolling most efficiently. Possibly the most difficult operation for supply was near WINTERSPELT, Germany, where roads had to be completely rebuilt throughout the entire sector; and in spite of the fact that the battalion operated at one time with a shortage of fifteen trucks, business as usual was the rule. Often it was necessary for the battalion to be re-supplied with all classes of equipment when tanks were lost with all equipment inside. Although radio parts were often difficult to procure, all radios were constantly maintained to a high degree of working order by the Battalion Maintenance Signal Section. In the final phase of the war a convoy of seven trucks enroute to a gas dump was ambushed by the enemy, resulting in one driver's death and the capture of several others. Eventual annihilation of the enemy forces ensued shortly, and the captives were behind the wheel when V-E Day was proclaimed.

The Medical Detachment of the 712th Tank Battalion worked with the collecting companies of the 315th Medical Battalion and the 8th Medical Battalion during the bitter hedgerow fighting in Normandy, often within range of small arms fire. Here, medical personnel worked sedulously, with the recognized red cross as their only weapon. A vehicle and three enlisted men were always attached to a Task Force and not infrequently reconnaissance troops intercepted ambulances or litter “peeps” coming from enemy held territory to obtain information. On the march to Le Mans, the Detachment acted as a mobile aid station for the infantry as well as the tankers. Medical treatment and evacuation of casualties on the move presented great difficulties, requiring personnel to work for more than thirty-six hours without rest. Evacuation meant “bucking” columns of vehicles in extreme blackout conditions through enemy held territory, sometimes as much as twenty miles back from the scene of action. Nor was the administering of aid to casualties confined to military personnel; numerous civilians were treated as well. The Detachment always carried enough medical supplies for a five-day period at least. Replenishments were secured from collecting companies along with the blanket and litter exchange. At the Falaise Gap the greater part of the medical personnel worked with the collecting companies of the 315th Medical Battalion, which handled over 300 patients per company in a 24-hour period; however, practically all of these casualties were enemy troops. At St. Marie-aux-Chenes and Kirschnaumen, France, the importance of immunizations necessitated the giving of serum to the men on the front lines where the procedure was periodically interrupted by enemy fire. The health of the battalion attests to the importance of the serum. The detachment received the well-deserved combat medical badge for superior work.

The responsibility of maintaining all vehicles in a working condition rested upon the maintenance crews who applied their skills daily in keeping the tanks and other vehicles operating with maximum efficiency. Alert minds and nimble fingers worked in coordination to minimize the number of “deadlined” vehicles. Disabled tanks were retrieved by crews of intrepid recovery personnel, in the face of withering enemy fire. Long, arduous hours of repair work inconvenienced by extreme blackout conditions were performed irrespective of the weather, however inclement. Never was there time-out for the maintenance crews, as poor roads and rough terrain took their toll of vehicles even as enemy fire.

And what Headquarters and Service Companies accomplished on a large scale was duplicated at Company level for each of the line Companies. Here, too, the administrative, supply, maintenance and radio sections, the mess staffs and the peep drivers were frequently called upon to perform under the most adverse conditions – always ready, willing and most exceptionally able to lend their particular skills to the problems and the needs of the boys on the line.

THE LAST LAP

The rest can be told briefly. In the middle of September the 712th moved by motor convoy and train to Camp Detroit. After initial processing it was moved by train to the Calas Staging Area near MARSEILLES, where on 15 October all personnel loaded aboard the USAT George Washington. A calm, pleasant voyage ended in NEW YORK on 25 Oct. from which place by ferry and train the 712th was taken to Camp Joyce Kilmer. Here the Battalion finally passed out of existence and in no time at all trains, busses, planes and autos were carrying the ex-tankers toward home and civilian life.

MINIMUM ESTIMATES OF ENEMY EQUIPMENT

DESTROYED

426	Trucks	26	AA Guns
253	Horsedrawn Vehicles	20	Armored Cars
136	Half Tracks	11	Peeps
126	Artillery Pieces	7	Airplanes
116	AT Guns	6	Nebelwerfers
112	Command Cars	4	120 mm Mortars
103	Tanks	2	Locomotives
57	SP Guns	2	Ammo Dumps
54	Motorcycles	1	Motor Boat

AMMUNITION EXPENDED

3,000,000	rounds	.30 cal.	40,000 rounds 76 mm
100,000	rounds	75 mm	25,000 rounds 37 mm
100,000	rounds	.50 cal.	100 Hand Grenades

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712th OPERATIONAL REPORTS
90th DIV. OPERATIONAL REPORTS
3rd ARMY OPERATIONAL REPORTS
NUMEROUS CAPTURED ENEMY DOCUMENTS
REPORT OF THE ARMY SERVICE FORCES IN THE ETO

Photography:

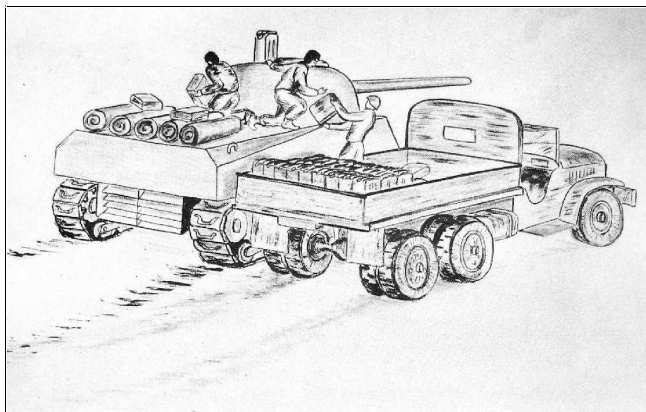
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U. S. ARMY SIGNAL CORPS



“We can use about 3 more”



Part of the Haul

