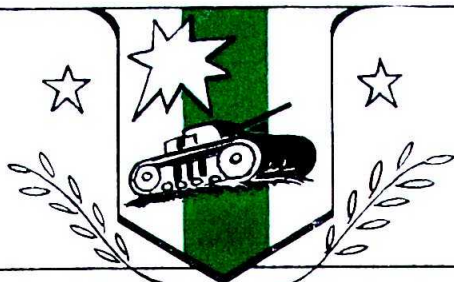




History
OF
THE 712th TANK BATTALION

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 . . ."

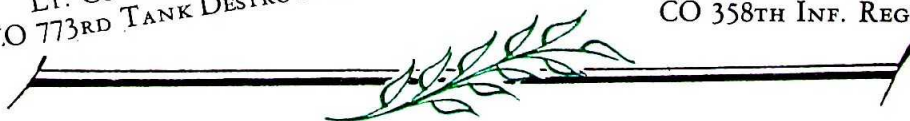
LT. COL. JOHN M. THOMPSON
CO 8TH MEDICAL BN.

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

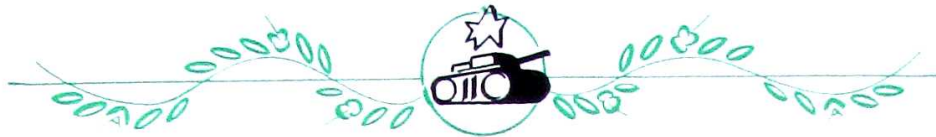
LIEUT. GEN'L. M. B. RIDGWAY
COMMANDING GEN'L.
82ND AIRBORNE INF.

"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.

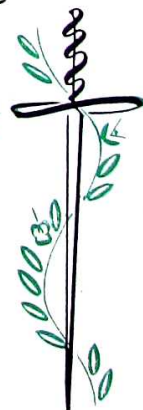


DEDICATION



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



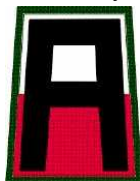
The Bulge

12th Corps



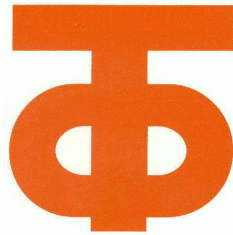
Mainz, Central Germany
Czechoslovakia

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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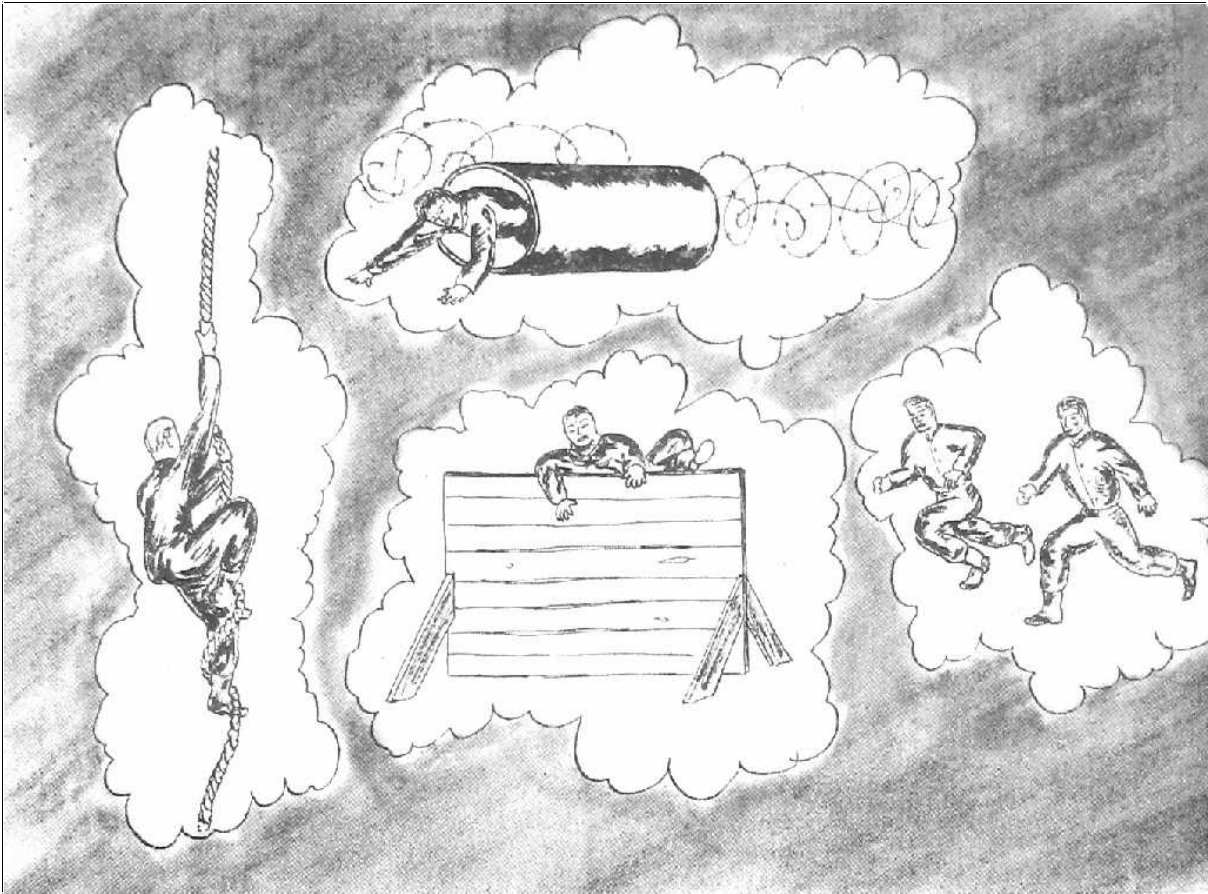


Lt. Col. Vladimir B. Kedrovsky
Battalion Commander

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

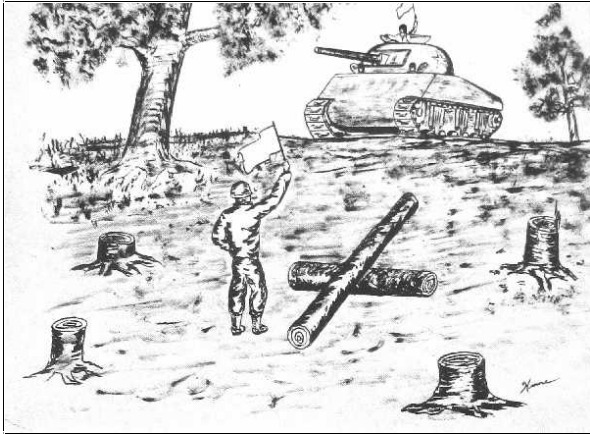
identification of enemy clothing and equipment. There were weekly night problems and early in May the entire Battalion moved down near AMESBURY for target firing. Later a large group went to WALES for anti-aircraft firing. All of this didn't leave too much time for fish and chips, ATS Girls, pub crawling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



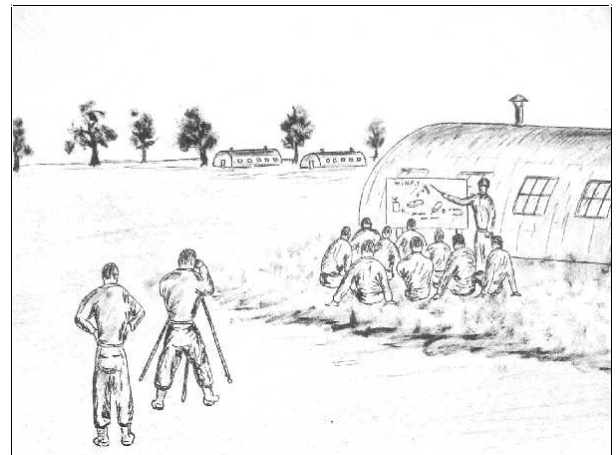
"I saw you first!"



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



The First Lap



"How Long Till the Next Break?"