

## 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 Wagon, Dye and Kelly – broke loose again, making a 10 mile plunge in 6 hours and meeting only spotty resistance, with Task Force Wagon 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 Weisersheim 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 Metzger 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 cavalrymen 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.

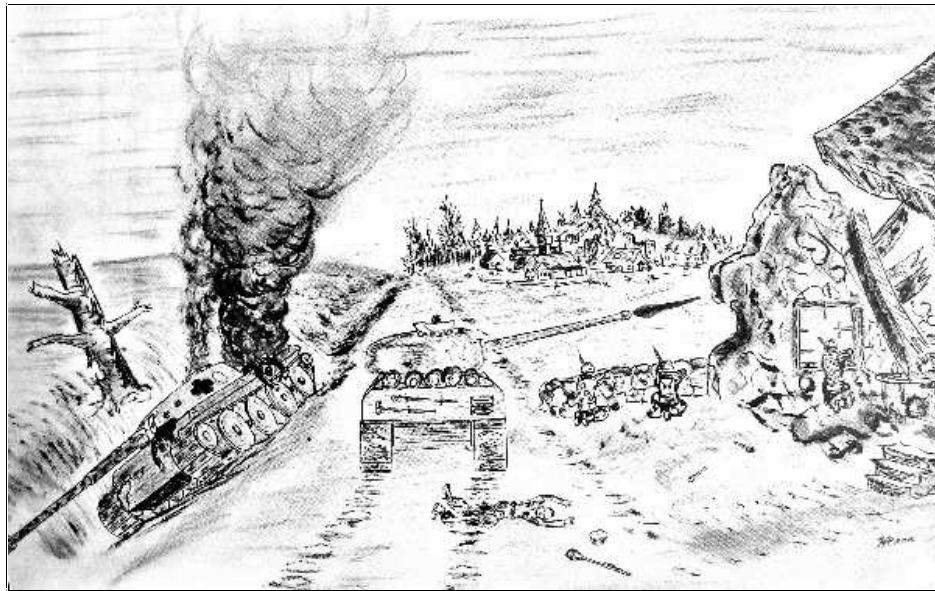
Life wasn’t all play. The Camp was primarily a military establishment. Tanks require a lot of work, even when they are not running regularly and there were persistent rumors that they would be turned into Ordnance at any time, so they had to be kept in tip-top shape. Morning on a typical day would find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

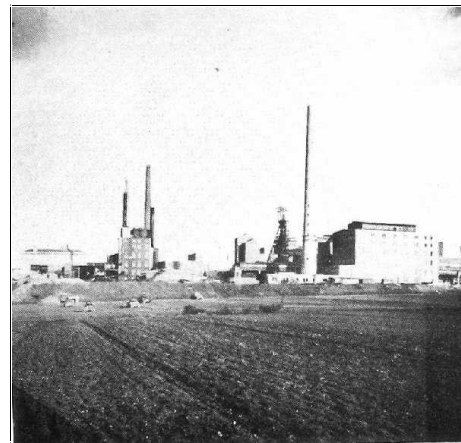
The last scheduled formation for the day was Retreat which single Companies stood in rotation with a weekly Battalion Retreat Parade at which awards were presented. It was at one of the first of these formations that Brig. Gen'l. Joseph M. Tully presented the standard to the Battalion and shortly thereafter 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.

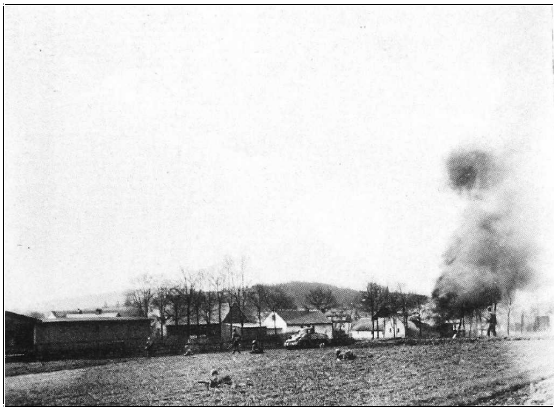
It is difficult to tell just when the breakup began. All during the later part of combat men had gone home on rotation furloughs. Then after the point system was instituted they began to go in small bunches, and when the transportation system got into high gear several large groups took leave. But the 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!”



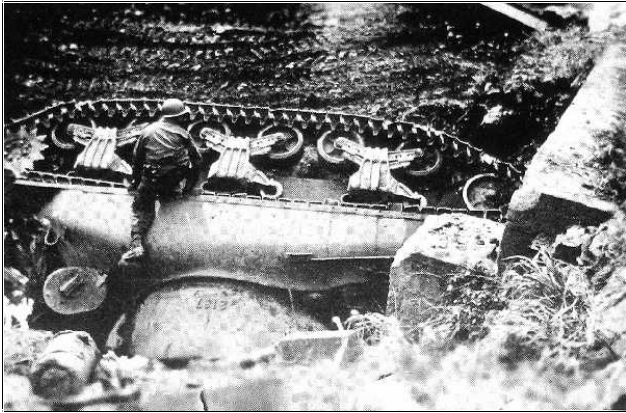
A 712<sup>th</sup>-90<sup>th</sup> Prize – The Merkers Salt Mine



“Give him another WP”



Ivan meets GI Joe in Czechoslovakia



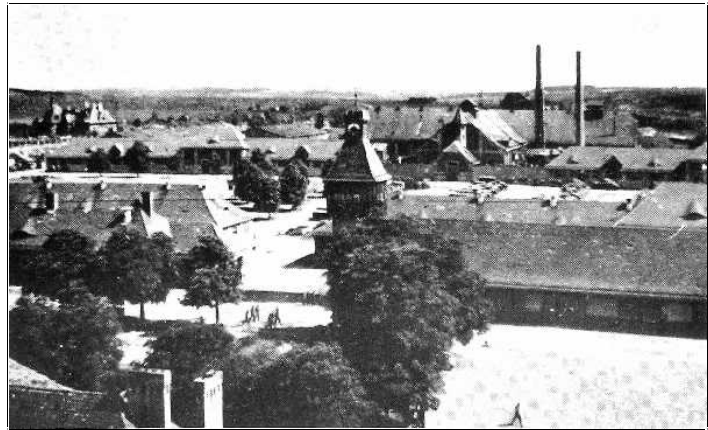
Non-battle Casualty



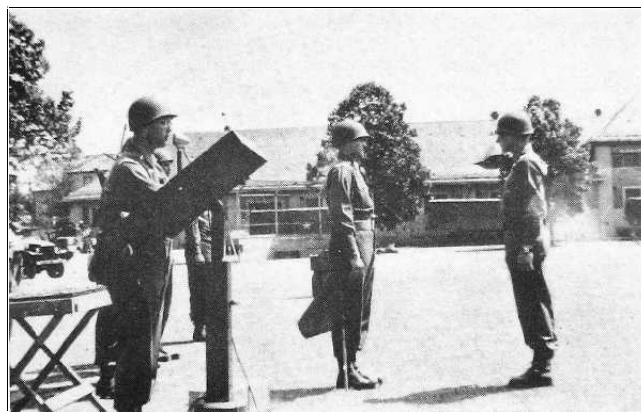
Taking Them the Easy Way



Part of the 83,000 PWs taken by the 712th-90<sup>th</sup> Team



Camp George B. Randolph, Amberg, Germany



Men of the 712<sup>th</sup> 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 USAAT 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:

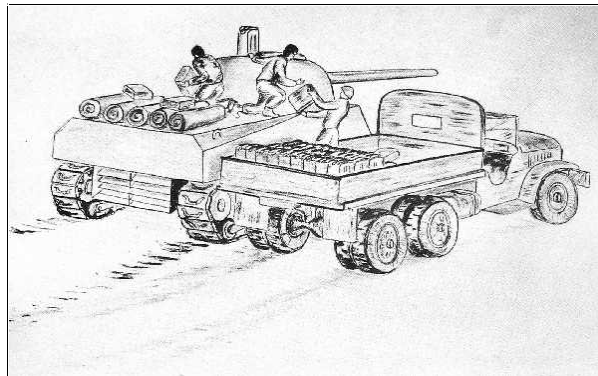
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U. S. ARMY SIGNAL CORPS



“We can use about 3 more”



Part of the Haul

