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TACTICS DEPARTMENT
THE ARMORED SCHOOL
Fort Knox, Kentucky

10 January, 1946

SUBJECT: Military Monograph

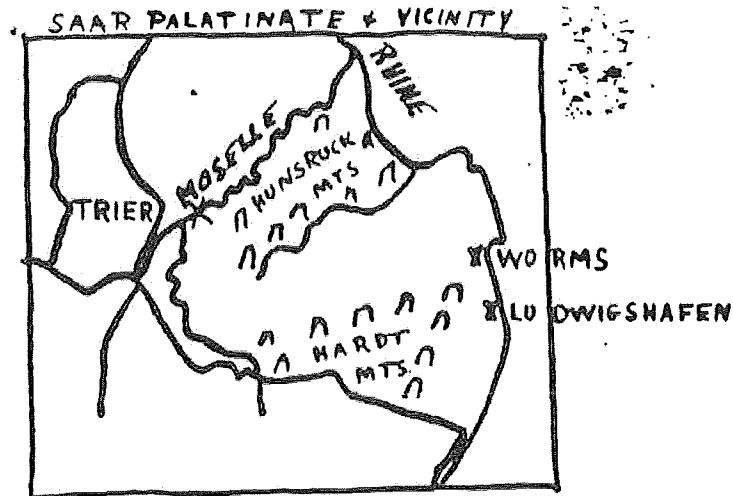
1. This monograph deals with a light tank platoon - the point for an armored reconnaissance spearhead - and its actions in exploiting the breakthru of the Siegfried Line at Trier, Germany. The tankers under consideration comprise the 3rd platoon of Company "F" of the 92 Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron (mecz.), 12th Armored Division. Manning M-5 A-1 models and attached to Dog Troop of the 92nd Cavalry, these soldiers in mid-March helped lead a brilliant drive for the 3rd Army's right flank corps and penetrate the enemy defenses in the Saar -- Palatinate between Trier and the Rhine.

2. General Situation.

a. Map references: Germany, 1/100,000, Sheets T-1 Trier, U-1 Neunkirchen, U-2 Kaiserslautern, U-3 Mannheim, V-1 Saarbrücken.

Dates: 18-20 March, 1945.

b. Terrain - From Trier on-the-Moselle to Worms and Ludwigshafen-on-the-Rhine - the route for our reconnaissance sprint - the land is generally open and rolling, with a sprinkling of woods here and there, with occasional steep hills and rugged slopes, but with excellent footing in most places for swift cross-country movements. The terrain is actually a corridor - a huge drainage saddle between the higher and more rugged barriers of the Hunsrück Mountains on the north and the Hardt Mountains on the south, a natural gateway from France and Luxembourg across the Saar-Palatinate to the Rhine.



Weather - Fair and warm - ideal early spring days, cheerful and dry and sunny, with cool clear nights, and a three-quarter moon which lasted from dusk 'til 02:30.

Season - Almost Spring, ie., 18-20 March, 1945.

Review of Friendly Situation on the West Front.

By 11 March, 1945, seven days before our action commences, Allied Armies controlled the west bank of the Rhine from Nijmegen, Holland, to Koblenz, Germany. The 9th Army had occupied Munchen-Gladbach and been in position opposite Dusseldorf since the 2nd of March. The 3rd Armored and 104th Infantry divisions had cleared charred Cologne by March 7th. Two days later the 9th Armored snatched the unblown Ludendorf bridge at Remagen. This same day of great good fortune the 4th Armored, a bolt of lightning, had zipped across the Eifel and into Koblenz. Thus the Saar-Palatinate, a triangle formed by the Rhine on the east, the Moselle on the northwest, and the Lorraine Plateau on the south - each leg about 80 miles long - remained the only Wehrmacht stronghold west of THE river.



c. Information of the Enemy.

(1) The German High Command entrusted the defense of the Saar-Palatinate to Army Group G, whose 1st and 7th Armies had 25 assorted infantry and mountain and volksgrenadier divisions occupying the Siegfried forts and the defenses along the Moselle River. We had no information on enemy armor in this triangle. These divisions were down to approximately 1/2 strength - many chewed to ribbons in the rout from the Eifel.

(2) The morale of these weary veterans, though studded with SS and bolstered with fortress battalions, was not very high. They had suffered serious reverses, and their communication and supply lines were taking a terrific daily pasting from our air force.

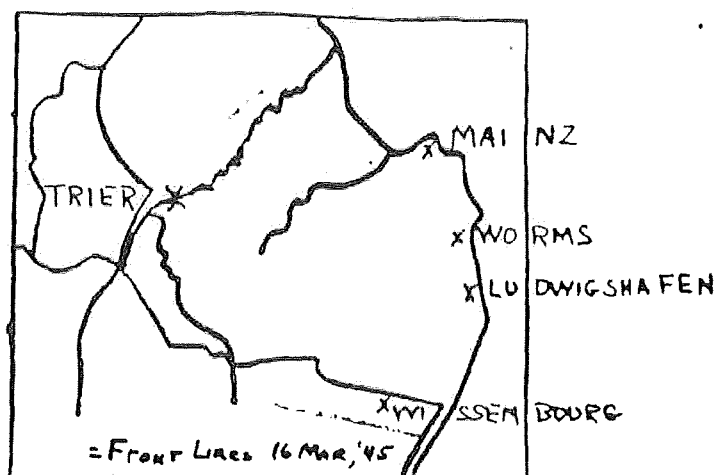
d. Information of Friendly and Supporting Troops.

(1) SHAEF related General Eisenhower's plan for the conquest of the Saar-Palatinate to Washington:

"Tomorrow morning (13 March) the XX Corps of Patton's Army begins a local attack in the Trier area as a preliminary to the general attack by 7th Army on the 15th. So far as we can determine there is not a single reserve (enemy) division in this whole area. If we can get a quick break-thru, the advance should go very rapidly and success in this region will multiply the advantage we have secured in the bridgehead at Remagen. It will probably be a nasty business breaking thru the fortified lines, but once this is accomplished losses should not be great and we should capture another big bag of prisoners. I have given Seventh Army 14 divisions for their part of the job (6 & 12th & 14th Armored, & 3rd & 36th & 42nd & 44th & 45th & 71st & 110th & 103rd Infantry, etc.) and XX Corps of Third Army jumps off with 5 (10th Armored & 26th & 65th & 80th & 94th Infantry). Patton will throw an additional subsidiary effort from north to south across the Moselle with about four or five divisions."

How did this plan work? Well, Trier had fallen to the 10th Armored Division on March 2nd, making a magnificent break in the Siegfried Line. To the immediate south coordinated attacks by three XX Corps infantry divisions (th 26th, 80th, & 94th) supported by 22 battalions of corps artillery brought in 5 days of uphill fighting (13-17 March) against fanatical resistance in extremely rugged pill-box studded country a 50 mile wide bridgehead over the Saar River and an equally broad 10 to 20 mile deep penetration of the once invincible Siegfried Line.

XII Corps forced a crossing of the Moselle southwest of Koblenz on the 14th of March and two days later the 4th Armored Division had slugged its way 32 miles south thru the Hunsruck Mountains and captured two bridges over the Nahe River - thus threatening Mainz!



Germany's hope of keeping American troops out of the Saar-Palatinate had failed miserably. Siegfried forts - the strongest defenses - had been smashed in the west. The U.S. Corps, the XXI and XVth, were making uncomfortable penetrations in the southwest. Mountains and the Moselle - and remnants of two German Armies - couldn't stem the XII Corps drive from the north. And VI Corps was about to uncork a haymaker from the southeast (the 14th Armored and 36th Infantry divisions via Wissembourg).

The enemy's decision to stand and fight for the Siegfried forts instead of dropping back to the Rhine was bringing him to the brink of disaster. He was being driven from positions once considered invulnerable, and forced into a retreat which was soon to become a rout. The entire defense system which had stalled the 7th Army since early winter was now being hopelessly outflanked. At the time, I must admit that we didn't think this picture was quite so rosy - particularly from the point of view of THE point of a small reconnaissance unit who would hunt 'em down.

General Walker - captor of Metz, liberator of Verdun, commander of troops that would later penetrate as deep as any other Americans (65th Inf. Div. at Linz, Austria on May 5th), pilot of a veritable juggernaut - was ready for his pursuit to the Rhine, - and he called for ARMOR. This is where we came in.

(2) Our morale was excellent, our training superb, and we'd been battling away at the Germans for several months - so I guess you'd say our battle experience was sufficient.

(3) Special Situation.

a. On 16th of March our division, the 12th Armored, was in XV Corps, 7th Army reserve. The cavalry squadron

was bivouacked in a woods north of Saarguemines in Germany directly behind the forward elements of the 63rd Infantry Division. (See Overlay #1). We had been reconnoitering routes for attack thru the Siegfried Line and, learning all about the use of "movement lights" to light the sky for night attacks. Our first assault mission with the 63rd had to be cancelled when at 0600 on 17th of March we were ordered to drop back into France and proceed as a division poste haste via Metz and Thionville to Trier and the Third Army. (See Overlay #1). We knew we were in for a long march, and that we must rush, and that we'd be with General Patton - but we had no idea of the thrills and excitement the next few days would offer.

We were to join this pursuit - and our little taskforce of one reconnaissance troop with two assault guns and five light tanks and a jeep with medics and a 2-1/2 ton fuel truck with trailer -- Battlegroup Bartholomew -- was to outdistance other friendly troops in a spirited drive packing a tremendous wallop (or at least buffaloing dazed Germans into thinking our 37s were being followed by telephone-pole prowlers), and reach our objective -- an airline 75 miles thru enemy lines in just that many hours. For this well-executed little mission we were to be signally honored with a Presidential Citation - the only one to come to elements of our Division.

My story is of particular interest because tanks are not normally employed as the point in reconnaissance outfits -- and yet we used them in this role to distinct advantage, and because we had a smooth-working seasoned reconnaissance troop to work for - one whose Capt. William B. Bartholomew was a real leader, loved and respected by all his men, and because the 15 ton light tank was well adapted to spearhead a uniquely successful breakthrough.

The enemy we knew to be disorganized. But, though the situation was fluid, we anticipated some sharp encounters, and had no illusions about the 88, the panzerfist, the mines, and the mobile tank, artillery and self-propelled reserves lurking over this ridge or in that town or down yonder defile.

We'd been fighting for almost 4 months. We knew what the score was. And our division had recently spent 4 weeks performing maintenance, drawing new equipment, and conducting realistic dry-run tank-infantry problems. We were set.

By 18:00 on 17th of March we'd climbed a high hill above the Moselle - at the junction of France, Germany, and the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg, and the 92nd Cavalry pulled to a halt in a quaint Luxembourg village. Standing up to stretch at the head of our section of the town, my tank crew was welcomed by a great peacock which rose to the height of his green and blue and yellow spread, glanced our way, and then sauntered off the road.

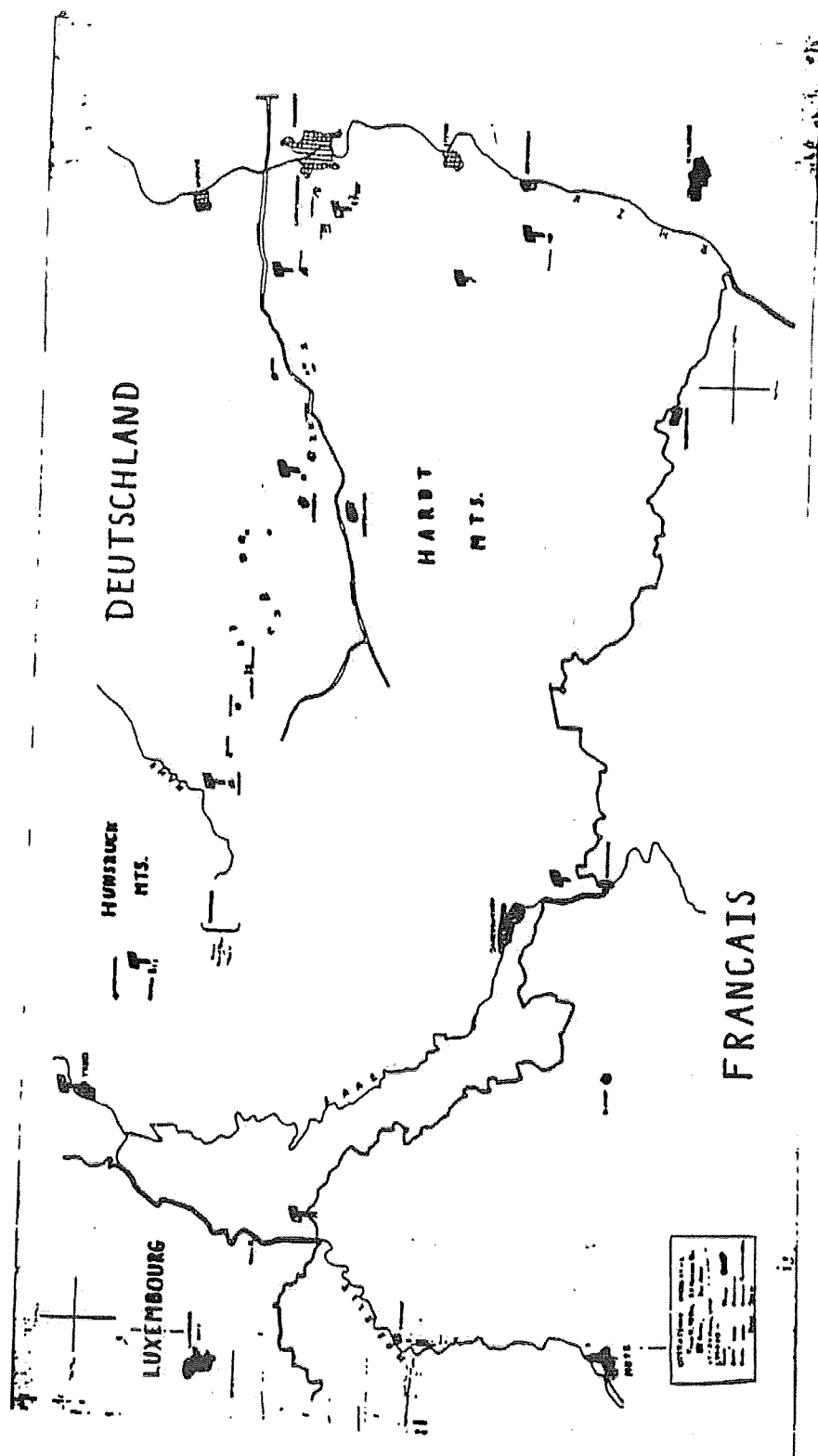
Tank commanders gathered around Hell's Back Door - that's my tank. Two pretty girls, leaning from a window, attracted more attention than a King Tiger. My crew chose their house for a bivouac. (Editor's note -Platoon Ldrs sleep at the Company C.P.) Everyone was tired - weary from the long march which had taken us since sunrise from inside Germany east of Saarbrücken back thru the Capital of Lorraine (Metz), and now up the Moselle to the German border again.

Yes, it had been a pretty long day. We hoped to hold up for the night. We'd completed our march - so we thought, and we knew little of the big picture. My German speaking soldiers, Oscar Bower and Pete Cheesman, went with sergeants to hunt billets in civilian homes. Twenty minutes later the streets were clear. Tanks and half-tracks nestled against yellow or green stucco houses. Joe Mansek, our radio electrician, had returned Sgt. Florida's radio, and Kenn Orr's crew had made a super-quick change of a busted track block. A huddle of five men here and three there brewing chow or shooting the breeze before hitting the sack. I relaxed on the cobble stone pavement, lay back with my head in my helmet.

b. "Be ready to move out pronto. Platoon leaders and sergeants report to the C.P. It's a long march tonight." The order quickly flashed. "Nuts", somebody cursed, "we'd almost forgotten we're with old Blood and Guts now".

The captain of my company, Robert Cobb, had maps for us, and said I was to report my platoon to Capt. Bart of Dog Troop. Five tanks and two assault guns were going each to Able, Charlie and Dog. Baker was to stay with Squadron Command. Our objective - the Rhine bridge at Worms. The 10th Armored would be on our right. The 11th on our left. A swift smashing drive hoping to outflank the deepest forts in the Siegfried Line. Our prize - upwards of 15 German divisions in these strongholds. Holy smokes. We shook hands, as our tanks were being scattered among the recon troops. Major Rideneur, our squadron exec., stopped by. "Bill", he said, "this should be a good day for you and John Sheehan (exec officer of the Dogs)". "By golly, it is St. Patrick's Day all right." We ate Spam sandwiches and drank coffee together. Then it was goodbye for awhile. This was it.

At 1845 hours we joined Dog Troop, checked our route which took us up the River to Trier, then southeast to an assembly area behind the foremost infantry - the 94th between Farschweiler and Nonnweiler (See Overlay #1), and we prepared for the jumpoff. The 12th Armored was to lead off in the pursuit across the Palatinate at 0630 on the 18th of March. Direction - due east. Two recon troops were to proceed abreast and in front of the armor, each troop covering 1/2 of the division's 5 mile front. Able Troop would take the northern half, and Dog the southern part. Enemy dispositions were unknown. We were to find



'em, bypass 'em, and get to Worms on-the-double, where the air reported a bridge over the Rhine was still very much intact.

The squadron would march in column to the assembly point. Within our troop the order of march was 2 tanks, 1 recon platoon, 3 tanks, a 2nd recon platoon, troop C.P. w/assault guns, and the 3rd recon platoon as rear guard. Lee Perry's jeep pulled to the head of our column to report Able Troop was all set behind us. Slowly the column worked its way out of the hills, funneled down into the inky blackness of a town in the valley. Thirty minutes later, we were roaring east up a fine riverside drive.

Our orders seemed clear and simple. Our route to the jumping off point was cut and dry. The zone of our little task force - we proudly christened Battlegroup Bartholomew - was definite. We knew that the 94th Division had broken thru the Siegfried Line. However, I hadn't learned that the 80th and 26th divisions had also crushed massive fortresses on a broad front. Our squadron was operating directly under division control; and, if a particular combat command had been designated to follow up each reconnaissance task force, we had not heard of it. We were to follow no particular route - just the line of least resistance within our zone. Conquest of each successive town was to be reported to Squadron immediately. Negative reports were due on the hour. It was a rush job, and we were anxious to be in on the kill.

For route to assembly area and zone of reconnaissance, see Overlay #1.

4. Towering hills tumbled into the Moselle from both sides. A beautiful parkway had been chiseled on the left bank of the river. The Flying Foxes (my light tanks) were point for the Daring Dogs (Troop "D") in a dash which, in less than 72 hours, was to bring us to Ludwigshafen-on-the-Rhine.

Night air was fresh and chilly. The sky sparkled with stars. Thru giant chalk-white dragons' teeth we bolted. Past abutments of once graceful suspension bridges - now twisted and torn. At Trier we left the river, crossing over an old Roman bridge marked by silent green and red sentinels, and swung due east. On and on into enemy territory.

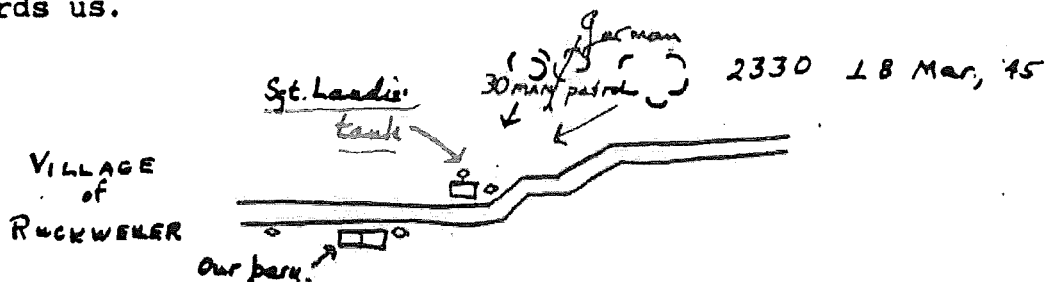
The road seemed slippery. Sgt. Landis, who in less than 24 hours was to distinguish himself, was uneasy. He'd just returned from the hospital, benched several weeks because his tank skidded off a bridge and crashed in a creek. That was on the Alsace plain north of Strasbourg. I kidded and encouraged him at the halts. You see our regular drivers were tucked into the bog hatches to sleep, resting for the big day ahead. And other men were at the controls.

Daybreak found us still on the move. Thru cool green forests of fine firs. Past formidable steel and concrete roadblocks. The sun was warm and bright when we pulled to a halt in a rich green meadow, close to Reinsfeld (See overlay #1). 2Gosh, what a day. What beautiful country.

Almost nine o'clock. A little late reaching the assembly area. The kitchen had coffee. Fuel trucks gave us plenty of gas. Twenty minutes to clean guns, get more routes on our maps, and get off again to seek out and bypass all enemy forces. Objective - still the not yet blown bridge at Worms. From the highway we waved so-long to our buddies in other troops. "Here come some stars, Lt.," Bob Jones, my gunner, alerted. A sharp salute from me was acknowledged by Major General Roderick Allen, our division commander, whose plexoglass enclosed peep coasted quietly by.

The day was bright and often dusty. It was over hills, thru woods, down side trails, back-tracking from blown bridges, thru deep-plowed furrows, sliding unexpectedly into valley villages. Anxious mothers peered from front room shadows. Children peeked thru barn loft cracks. Old men hid behind tall wood walls - expectantly. We didn't smile. No gestures of friendship. This was enemy country. We had just CONQUERED this town. Halted for 10 minutes, Locke [my driver, Sgt. Dee Locke] fell asleep in his driver's seat. Bob in the turret, and yours truly on the back deck. Everyone was tired. Faces were sore. Eyes burned from salt in the roadways. But, where is the enemy? We must make contact. "Let's get the show on the road," Captain Bart would call on the radio. "O.K. Let's be off. On the way -."

The day was uneventful. S/Sgt Lively threw a track on his tank, so we left him in a ditch awaiting our company maintenance which promised to arrive in less than 90 minutes. At 1530 we bumped into a Task Force from the 10th Armored Division at Ruckweiler. Our route coincided with their left flank here, and the 10th was held up by a self-propelled 88 in a village ahead. So.... they didn't need any help, and we were happy to let our men who weren't doing maintenance work (the steel tracks were a damn nuisance always losing parts of blocks 'cause the bolts holding 'em on would sheer off) go to sleep. The crack of friendly artillery was comforting. The mass of light tanks deployed on the ridge to our right was a welcome sight. And I smiled as a stream of super-P.W's. straggled down the road towards us.



Dusk found us heating C rations on the outskirts of this village. The guard set, we planned to sleep 'til the 10th pulled out and Captain Bart gave us the word. Our tanks were outposting the eastern exit of the town. My crew bedded down in the barn-half of the second last house in Ruckweiler. Chains rattled in the stable. Straw crunched under our blankets. Sleep was upon us.Someone jerked by shoulder. A sharp rip of a machine gun woke me the rest of the way. "Florida must be having trouble," Ken was saying. "Hey Bob - Dee - let's go." With helmet and gun, I stumbled clumsily thru the dark. There's the door. Quietly now.

Outside it was fairly bright. BANG - oh, oh, a 37 and two or three machine guns barked. No enemy reply, thank goodness. Not yet, anyhow. I tried to stay in the shadows, moving silently down toward the noise. Round the bend, dark shapes of a crowded group in the road and loud talking as German soldiers were searched. "Get these men back into town, Sergeant" I almost whispered, wanting more quiet. "Comon ze here wit hands haupt." Carl called from his tank during the lull in firing. Oscar repeated the order in better German. BANG Rat a tat tat. More encouragement. Silence. In came two more. After the confusion died down, Sgt Landis had 14 prisoners - one Tech Sgt and two buck Sgts to boot. He'd halted a patrol of about 30 coming right toward his tank. They'd scattered so he shot. Then called for them to surrender. One cried bitterly 'cause his buddy lay in the field. No one dared venture into that No Man's Land with its darkness and lurking death. I wouldn't have let anyone if he wanted to. Next morning S.Sgt Walker, our mess sergeant, found four "good Jerries" in that field. "Nice going, Carl."

Back in our barn, the Germans were parked on the warm straw under a glare of three flashlights. We separated the non-coms from the rest - or at least the two buck sergeants we saw. Not much dope from the prisoners. Their spokesman, a clear-headed blond, blue-eyed young fighter parked right in the center of the group, was a Tech Sgt. We hadn't noticed his rank. Bob and Hall helped march our loot to a P.W. cage in town. Guard O.K.? Everybody happy? O.K. Back to the straw for a few extra winks.

It was almost three. Four-thirty found our column lined up and ready to move. The 88 at the crossroad ahead had disappeared. Johnny Field, 1/Lt from the recon, took the lead with his armored car. My tank was right behind him. Then came a second tank. John's recon platoon, two more tanks, and the rest of the Task Force. Captain Bart wanted us to reach the third town ahead by five-thirty (Rohrbach, Fohren, and then Linden). So... we were off, slowly, as silently as possible, pressing thru the dark valley. Heavy black shadows lurked ominously. Wooded hillsides seemed poised. Empty towns too quiet. But ... the sky was brightening as we reached our third objective. It was palently chilly. To our surprise, there was an infantry platoon in

Linden, I guess from the 94th. Their C.P. was cozy and warm, and a lieutenant said he knew of no friendly troops to our east. It was 0525. Not bad. No more Jerries yet.

"You're in the saddle, Bill," Captain Bart called from under a blanket draped over his head and shoulders. "Take it easy and let's get as far as we can today." "O.K., Captain. We're off." And the Flying Foxes, spearheading the Daring Dogs, were off on a dash which marks March 19, 1945 as THE MOST UNFORGETTABLE DAY I'VE EVER SPENT.

Our charted route turned suddenly to a wagon trail that dropped sharply into a narrow canyon. Someone spotted dismounted Jerries on a ridge to our right. Our drivers stayed unbuttoned and all guns (except the 37s) were half loaded. The column halted. Men dismounted to check shattered German carts, shot up the previous day by our fighter support. Sgt. Orr and I went forward, our tanks moving by successive bounds - Orr covering my advance and remaining within visual contact - and we slipped into the valley. A mule team pulling the famous Jerry chow wagon had been abandoned right in our path - and there was no suitable bypass. Dick Ruble, my bow gunner, dismounted, tugged at the reins without success, and climbed onto the cart. Crack, snapped the whip. The wagon lurched. Dick went flying and the team would have run away except for a steep bank in front of it. We laughed. Ten minutes later - from the open country beyond our heavily wooded canyon - I called back that the defile was clear and passable. Racing across open places, we darted into empty towns. No battle scars. No signs of life. And except for the commanders we were now all buttoned up, all guns bristling for action. Here and there two or three Jerries would run out of the houses, toss their guns and pistol belts on the ground before them, and come forth hands up. After a quick frisk, we'd ask them where their comrades were. "To the east", was the only semblance of a reasonable answer we could get or understand. "O.K. you wait here for the Americans who will come later."

Each town, every woods and hill, held a certain mystery. We knew nothing of the enemy dispositions. And as the Point, we had to "sweat it out". Whatever there was to run into, we'd hit. Lt. Marian Reid's assault guns would move into direct support positions whenever we'd approach a rail junction, a river line, or other likely defense position. I jumped as my bow gunn unexpectedly barked at a bunch of logs by a roadblock in Patersbach. The Jerry behind them got away on a motorcycle. But we weren't going his way to the south, so we let him go. I smelled a rat, anyhow. I felt he was trying to coax us his way. No. No. We intended to shoot "Adolf Hitlerstrasse" off the village signpost. But we might hit a civilian. So...we did not shoot.

In some villages, the people rushed to meet us. Old men, in good English, said the Boche left yesterday. "Went that way. We

belong to an English Colony," one old bird said explaining he'd lived 17 years in the U.K. "Yes, and my home was Hoboken 'til 1934," another called. They were very surprised to see tanks. And volunteered that no tanks had been thru their berg. In fact, they'd never seen tanks before. Well, I suppose there are lots of little American villages that have never been visited by armored battlewagons, but we were happy to think that there were no tanks in this particular region, anyway. "Is the road between these wooded hills O.K.?", I asked. (Our 1/100,000 maps weren't too revealing.) "No, you'll have to go around to the right", they said, Sgt. Orr and I went forward to check; and sure enough, they were telling the truth.

It was 13:00 hours when we first met a real enemy column - coming out of a canyon on our left (See over #1). What a field day shooting up dozens of horses and wagons and German soldiers. A 37 H.E. can sure blow the hell out of a wagon. The next town we entered had 15 German Army wagons loaded and lined up. Ready to take off to the east. We got 50 prisoners here - out of the houses. Funny how the German women cried or rubbed their blood-shot eyes when we'd take their soldiers from them. We pushed on, always careful to reach each town from an unexpected direction - not via the most likely avenue of approach. In town after town, we'd rout out Jerries - doughfeet, artillerymen, cavalrymen, some motorcycles, a few trucks, mostly carts and horses.

Polish soldiers would run out and embrace us. Russians had been told we'd shoot them and had to be coaxed to come forth. But these Poles and Russians made good guards for our German catch. We soon quit searching each village. It took too long. It was obvious our enemy had poor morale and was dashing as fast as he could for that river -- the Rhine.

On we went. In one town German soldiers fled in all directions from our armored path. Bob and I, as our tank sped on, tracked one along a stucco wall with our Tommy guns - clipping the wall just behind him. Just as he reached an opening, half a dozen bullets hit the middle of his back. He fell forward, his face wrenched in pain.

Only three o'clock. Ahead on the crest was a German gas truck belching forth fire, three or four carts burning, a big bus in smoke, horses sprawled in the road, here and there a corpse. Over the ridge, and a great valley unfolded in front of us. Dotted with blazing vehicles, the air buzzed. Ah-ha. F-47s at work. We smiled. A couple hundred yards to our left, 20 soldiers hid behind a bank. My bow gunner spotted them. We hollered; they hesitated, they ran forward. Tanks crunched their rifles, thermite grenades ruined barrels on artillery pieces, pistols and bayonets were taken as souvenirs. We must hurry. Probably a big column ahead. Charging on, we spotted a slow moving, horse-drawn column. Faster, Hell's Back Door overtook and race past two, three, seven, eight wagons and a

German jeep in the lead. Whoaa. Our tracks gripped the gravel and we spun half around in the center of the road. They stopped all right, dismounted, hands up. "Clear the road." Quickly searched, curtly ordered to march to the rear, off they went. Whee - that was simple.

Half a mile ahead, at a little crossroad with three houses, we overtook a second group of seven wagons - only not so cooperative. I could only get past the first four. Most of the Germans surrendered though five or six scampered for cover in a house. We didn't shoot. I didn't want to broadcast our arrival. But two of our jeeps raced forward, so dismounted doughs could search the houses while we sped on.

"We'd better watch this next town, John," I warned. Lt. John Sheehan's jeep (Exec Off of the Dogs) was right behind my tank. We could see German vehicles disappear at the village entrance. "Hello all stations," I called "Don't shoot. these Heinies are scared. We don't want a fight. There are too many of them. Hold your fire. Be careful now. This town's loaded, and remember DON'T SHOOT." "O.K., Dee, move out." We were all eyes in this town. Germans scampering a dozen directions. We called for them to surrender. A couple did. Standing hips high out of my turret with hands overhead, I motioned them to go to our rear. Whee - thru that town O.K. - I guess.

Boy - more wagons ahead. Five, ten, fifteen, a great unending stream. Frightened horses bolted as my tank charged by frightened Jerries, hands in the air, afraid to grab the reins and check the stampede. Afraid of our armor. And not a shot was fired. Thru a big woods, soldiers deserted their volkswagens, ducked into brush, ran up hillsides, rifles in hand - dazed by the confusion. But they didn't shoot and we coaxed about half of them to surrender and join the evergrowing column of P.W.s marching to the west. The other half, "we sweated them out". Some sat on the sparsely wooded hillsides with rifles on their knees, waiting, watching, apparently indifferent.

Ahead, a clearing, more carts, and dragons' teeth. Thirty men scampered from the road to the pillbox 75 yards to the left in the midst of tank obstacles. Their captain, tall and Prussian, hurried from his fancy buggy. "Bob, we've got to get him." And we did, and his maps and pistol. "But my seat," he pleaded, distressed as his driverless buggy weaved down the road. "To the rear, officer." Off he and his crew - who looked a bit ridiculous ducking behind clean white teeth - went to the rear. "Nice going, Bob."

Everyone was collecting pistols, and more pistols and watches and bayonets and helmets from these enemy soldiers. We were happy and laughing. As we raced ahead to the next town, someone called to take it slow - so the column could catch up. Germans popped out of everywhere. Surprised that we didn't

shoot, impressed (I guess, I hope) by my hands-over-head stance in the turret of the lead tank, soldiers quickly and cheerfully drove trucks and pulled wagon teams from the roadway.

BANG - BANG - BANG Three sharp reports from a Tommy gun just behind us. Whipping around, I barely glimpsed Cheesman shove a man from his turret. Like a dummy he spattered, limp and lifeless in the street. Later, Ken Orr and Johnny Field told us the story. A German had hurdled from a high bank onto Sgt. Orr's back deck, with grenade in hand. Pete Cheesman, his gunner, saw him, firing three rounds into the on-charging German face. Ken whirled around, crashed Jerry on the head with his Tommy gun. Then Pete flipped the corpse from the tank. Just like that. And, thank God. If that Jerry'd accomplished his mission, not merely would one tank be hurting, but our column would have been temporarily halted and lots of armed, but frightened, Germans running thru the streets might have taken heart. We might have had a pitched battle on our hands. "On the ball, Ken. That was great."

Slicing thru the sunshine, our column moved from town to town, over hills, thru valleys, along a broad fine road, with lightening speed. The only time we stopped was to let the armored cars catch up with us. We were really out in front. We'd left S/Sgt (later Lt.) Wainwright with 9 men to guard 50 prisoners. He called to say he now had 500.

Directly ahead of us lay Otterburg, a town of I'd judge 12,000 people. Bigger, much bigger than most places we'd passed. On we bolted. The stacatto clatter of steel tank tracks against cobblestone echoed against brick buildings - bounced back in our faces. Rushing down a hill, Locke spun around a corner to the right. Hell's Back Door roared to an abrupt halt. The town square, smack in front of us, was crammed with vehicles - trucks, volkswagens, and half-tracks - a big German motorized column, all loaded and about to move out in our direction! Hundreds and hundreds of soldiers - a battalion, no - a motorized regiment. Were they surprised. Were WE surprised. Everyone tried to scatter. I visioned Jerry machine guns cutting loose at any moment and blowing our brains out. We didn't shoot. My gunner called, or fairly screamed, for them to surrender. Cautiously, a few approached. Then they came by the score down the center of the street with hands up, toward F-31. "Hey, John, let's get going. I want to find the head of this column." I called Captain Bart and gave him the big picture. Recon doughs came forward to search and gather up all these soldiers before they decided to be difficult. We backed our tank to the intersection and pulled away toward the east. Lt. Figg, one of the recon platoon leaders, routed Germans out of big beer joints and had a swell time collecting P.W's.

A great cheer arose as civilians, in a big crowd next to a cleared roadblock, waved and smiled our way. It was a roar we

hadn't heard since - since football season. That ringing cheer stayed in my ears for a long time. So loud, so spontaneous. What next.

German army trucks and wagons clogged the exist from Otterburg, beyond the bombed railroad yards. Blond Jerries, when they saw we didn't shoot, smilingly rushed to clear us a path. Off again.

Golden twilight was on our shoulders as we plunged eastward. The white-ribboned road before us was black. Not from wear, but from vehicles - trucks, wagons, peeps, armored half-tracks, prime movers pulling big guns, horse-drawn artillery. HOLY SMOKES. They were racing two abreast. Dozens and dozens of vehicles. A great enemy column in complete rout racing, too, madly for the Rhine - and capitalizing on the last hour of daylight as our P-47's headed for home. We took to the field and paralleled the road about 50 yards to the left. Waving for the enemy to halt and walk to the rear, we pushed on. I think about half of 'em though we too were Germans. Burning carts and trucks sprinkled along the route testified that the 9th Air Force hadn't been loafing. Now the Jerries were making their last 35 mile scramble for the river. My driver stopped parallel to an armored prime mover towing a 150mm gun. We must get that baby. Pointing my AA gun at the vehicle didn't phase 'em. It kept putting along, charcoal-powered. After coaxing for about 90 seconds, and moving closer and closer to this charcoal-chugger, we finally sold them the general idea. They halted. Steel doors swung open, half a dozen soldiers piled out. With hand overhead, they joined that line, now up to at least 1000 which we had sent trudging westward. "Go west, young men; go west - on foot and with your hands clasped behind your head," was our war cry. Lt. John Sheeha and Sgt Henry Florida dropped thermite grenades down the big barrel, and in the breech of the 150 mm gun.

It was funny to watch the column in front of this prime mover scatter and take cover in the woods and ravines off to both flanks. There were so, so many of 'em we couldn't afford to open up. Big lumbering covered wagons, swift purring peeps, streamlined half-tracks, etc.

Rolling ahead and into dense firs, I stopped next to a blazing gasoline truck. The flames, leaping yellow fingers, lit the forest. Yes, it was growing dark. We waited for our column to close up a bit. "John," I called down to the exec. officer of the bogs in a peep behind me, "we'd better grab the first town and take up a defense. Too damn many Jerries all over the place." And to my gunner, "Boy oh boy, Bob, if these guys decide to fight we'd make a swell ambush. They could shoot the daylights out of us. We must have passed 3,000 Jerries." Captain Bart later told our Colonel he could physically see 1,500 at one glance on this road. Maybe my total was conservative; but, more or less, there were plenty.

Moving slowly thru the dark, we came to a road jam. The next village, Baalborn, scarcely 200 yards in front of us and we couldn't get there. For the road shoulders dropped sharply 20 feet on both sides, and the road itself was packed solid with trucks and wagons, double-parked, all going east. Hmmm- we've got to act quickly, I thought. This may be a trap. There were just two tanks close, at the moment, "Come on, Ken" I called back to Sgt. Orr in the 2nd tank, "Let's clear this mess." Seven of us ran forward. Soon lost from each other, and among grumbling Germans sitting in wagons and hidden in half-tracks, we jerked horses off the road. Wagons rolled down the hill. Trucks coasted easily, tipped over and over. Horses whinnied. But, by golly, we got that road cleared. And it was getting dark.

"John, we'll secure this corner of town and hold up for a while. O.K.?" Lt. Sheehan agreed, We began directing tanks and peeps and armored cars into position. "Be CALM and ALERT." Within ten minutes our little square was crowded with prisoners. Holy Smokes. Ideas flashed quickly thru my mind. We haven't searched these houses. That hill up there may be held by Jerries, not so anxious to quit. Already today someone back in the column had captured a colonel. Nothing to keep some aggressive Nazi officer from becoming rambunctious. One bazooka into a tank - casualties, flames, explosions, too damn much confusion. We might be on the spot. I thought of Herrlisheim, an enemy filled town north of Strassbourg, where in early January 3 tank companies from the 43rd Tank Battalion had been ambushed and wiped out at nite. And of the cavalry captain from the 36th who had warned me against just such a spot as we were now in. "John, let's get out of here. Right away. We'll stop on the open road and see what Captain Bart wants. O.K.?" My tank commanders were close by. "Let's be off."

Cautiously we pushed thru dark streets, skirting ruins that littered the path. I was perched on the front slope plate of the first tank. Tommy gun on my knee. The village was quiet and empty. Which way at this fork,? The tank hesitated. I jumped down and ran over to the yellow and black road sign. Mud obliterated the names. But, a rolly-polly bald civilian with heavy shell-rimmed glasses assured us of the right way. Five minutes later I told Sgt. Locke to hold up and cut his motor. Moonlight made the road white, the fields white. Lt. Sheehan's peep closed in tight behind me. One, two, three more tanks snuggled up, shut their motors. Armored cars and peeps purred, closed in, went to sleep.

Armored vehicles appeared white in the moonlight. Each car threw a heavy black shadow. "Captain Bart should be here in a few minutes," John said. I breathed a sigh - but hardly of relief, for the night held forth all the suspense and anticipation of Jerry artillery crashing among us, of machine

guns raking our column, of tanks blowing our brains out. Boy oh boy. I dropped to the cool earth next to my tank - and prayed.

We were out in the country again. This, I thought, should be safer than in the shadows and basements of a hostile town. Here the fields were broad and open. Our highway rode over a low crest. With such a bright moon, we seemed uncomfortably conspicuous. To our front, about 1,000 yards, we could see the black eaves of three or four houses and a church steeple at the edge of the next town.

I walked slowly down the column, and as each vehicle closed in, signaled the driver to cut his engine, and whispered to the men to turn off their radio loud speakers and be very quiet. About half-way back, I asked a staff sergeant to pass these instructions on to the rest of the Battlegroup. I was tired, and anxious to talk with my sergeants. So I turned around.

Well, what's this in the center of the road? Up next to Hell's Back Door a big square-shaped vehicle. A white German ambulance, with large Red Crosses on it. Drove right down Bart Boulevard and into our arms. So.... more commotion. A dozen Jerries piled out. Lt. Sheehan set up a P.W. cage in the field to the left of the assault guns - about 200 yards back from my tanks. Our surprised first customers of the evening were hustled away, and Corporal Hall drove the ambulance off the road and to the rear.

Bzzzzz - putt - putt - bzzzzz - putt - putt. A Jerry motorcycle approached fast. Then two bicycles and a wagon. Well - from the looks of things, it'd keep 15 men busy all night just taking care of these uninvited guests.

We seemed to be taking all these soldiers, and a few civilians, by surprise. But it was plenty important not to let anyone make any noise or start any fireworks. They must be kept QUIET, too. We surely didn't want to attract attention from stray Panzers on the prowl. So.... make 'em dismount quickly, get their hands up, and whisk 'em down the road toward our P.W. cage where they'd be searched and questioned. Bikes and motorcycles were placed in the soft grass. Wagons pulled into the field. Horses unharnessed and left to graze. Trucks driven to the center of our column and parked in the field not too far from the P.Ws.

S/Sgt Costa sent four men from his recon platoon out as dismounted guards in front of our tanks. One pair laid in the grassy ditch on the right and a dozen paces in front of my tank, while the other two stopped in the shadow of the only tree in sight - a medium sized maple 25 yards to our left front.

Already our attention was focused on a little white light down the road, not much more than 100 yards in front of us. It

was blinking on and off. And from off in the distance to our left (north) we heard clup, clup, clup, clup, -- buzz - zzz - zzz - clank, clank, clank, clatter, clatter.... What in blazes. Why by golly, another Jerry convoy, coming down the road - closer and closer, louder and louder - until, right at the little white light the first Volkswagen stopped. Loud mutterings in guttural German. "Panzers" was all I could make out. An on the column went, right across our front and into that next village (Mehlinge).

Whee. Thank God they didn't turn our way. But, but what was that guy saying about "panzers"? Had he spotted our tanks? Why, how could he miss 'em. Or was he talking of German tanks perhaps being rallied to slaughter us? That fellow with the flashlight. He stops a vehicle every minute or so. And the column, what a whopper. It just kept coming and coming. Peeps, trucks, half-tracks, wagons and more wagons. Horses snort. Carts rattle, wheels squeak, tracks clank. Peeps buzz. And they kept going on and on, right passed our front, everyone not 100 yards from Hell's Back Door.

"Thank God, Dee, we stopped where we did, and didn't go on to the intersection. Why we couldn't begin to handle all those soldiers," I remarked to Sgt. Locke, my driver. "Or could We?" Captain Bart squelched the issue when he mumbled some interesting information. "We're out of all radio contact with squadron, Bill. Have been since 17:00. They don't know where we are or what's up."

Lt. Sheehan and I talked things over. "Should we bust in on that outfit and try to capture it?" "Hell no. Don't worry. They can't get far. The Rhine's still thirty miles away. We'll catch 'em in the morning. We've only got a handful of men. Look at all the wagons and trucks that've been piling up on us here. By golly we can hardly guard the P.Ws. we've got. And there've been darn near 100 vehicles pass out there already. No radio contact with friendly troops. Jerry artillery due soon. No medics, either. Davenport took a wounded man back at dusk. Thru that no man's land we'd just knifed across. With no escort - just the Red Cross flying from his peep." "Yea, we'd better sit tight. Okee-doakel."

Ninety minutes later, at 2215, we were slightly more relaxed. The wagons and trucks were still on the move. Only not so many. There were breaks in the column here and there for a minute or two. Our friend, the German M.P. on the corner with his flashlight, had become quite a familiar fixture. He seemed to be asking the password, or giving directions to everyone.

And our guards were kept very much on the go. One indigent civilian, alighting from his bike, showed me a pass signed by the Wehrkries Commandant. Certainly he mustn't be detained. I guess I should have told him his "enemy tank and uniform

identification" wasn't up to par - for the moon, though dropping in the southern day, was still bright. The prisoners, lying on the young wheat field, made an ever growing black patch in the light brown. More wagons and roaming horses indicated business hadn't slackened much. So far, we'd snagged four officers. They were kept apart, under a special guard. But, one plain Jerry soldier had SNEAKED AWAY, I was warned. "Oh, You mean he escaped?" "Yes. Across that field." "Oh, my busted back." Never a dull moment.

Business had been so brisk that the four guards placed in front of my tank had withdrawn to Hell's Back Door, and leaned against the track in the dark. Only, I reckon two of them returned to their peeps, 'cause there were but two left.

We'd had a little side show now for the last 40 minutes. 'Way off in the east terrific explosions rocked the earth, and the blazing inferno of ammo dumps turned large sections of the sky orange or blue or red or white. Every few minutes a new area would light up, and the thunder and crash of shells and TNT and black powder and whatever else was being destroyed seemed comforting and relaxing. It gave us something else to think about. I guess Jerry wouldn't leave us a second Remagen.

About eleven the traffic died down. Just an occasional peep, which would go BOTH ways, down the road and back. Wonder what the hell he's doing.

Off to the right, perhaps 600 yards, we spotted some pale green cat-eyes. And the bang and chug of a steam-driven bulldozer or something suddenly commenced. It would move back and forth, back and forth, and the lights with it. Then somebody'd swing a sledge against a heavy metal object. The ring of steel was sharp and clear. What in the blazes is that?

I walked back to talk to Captain Bart. Gee, it felt good to pass all our vehicles. Just to get away from the first tank, where you felt all alone and deserted. The terrible suspense and hollow feeling in a guy's stomach disappeared, and he was comforted by the sound of soft voices. Boy, these guys didn't know what an agonizing sensation it was to be first and alone and with nothing but darkness and danger and doubts in front of you. Hey, snap out of it. Quit feeling sorry for yourself. These peeps and armored cars and assault guns and half tracks looked good, and the batch of about 100 prisoners seemed satisfying.

There was a regular bull session by the command car. This seemed like rear echelon. I called the Captain aside, and we listened and watched the greenish lights chug back and forth. "Well, we'll just keep observing." "No luck on reaching squadron yet, Bill. Have each of your tanks take 15 gallons from the fuel truck. That's all we've got." "O.K. we'll do that now."

When Sgt. Locke and I got back from what seemed to me a hell of a long hike with 10 gallons of fuel each, from the tail to the head of the column, our little tractor friend was acting up. He started moving forward, and to his left, and slowly approached the Jerry M.P. Right at the corner he STOPPED, and backed around a bit. Then he cut his motor.

"Oh my God," I thought. "What if that's a prime mover towing an anti-tank gun into position at point blank range?" Sgt. Locke was sitting on the back deck of the tank, behind the turret, struggling quietly to open a gas can. It was a stubborn job, too, but he was quiet. I stood in the road in the shadows on the left side of my tank. Waiting, watching, trying to see without success, praying that this new maneuver was a false alarm. Things were too quiet. BAM - like an exploding boiler that's been generating too much steam, a bolt of man-made lightning burst in a great orange flash 15 yards to our left and a little short. I dropped to my knees. "Dear Jesus, please help us." I couldn't keep the words from my lips. "Now just traverse slowly to the left, a little more. There, that's it. Now let those American s.o.b.'s have it. Fire." Imaginary orders of the gun crew commander spun thru my brain. My heart beat so hard, I'm surprised it didn't wake the dead. Now I was flat on the road. Waiting ...Waiting.. Each second lingered like a leach. By God, if he lays on us in earnest, I'll knock his brains out with our AA gun if it's the last thing I do. Thank God none of our gunners have fired back - yet. We'll just sweat him out. Now- courage. Two hours, or rather two minutes later, I stood up, softly whispered to Sgt. Locke. By golly, he just wasn't firing anymore. Or was he? Walking around to the other side of the tank, so I could be by the AA gun while the moon slid down the sky, I dropped to the dirt - limp.

Sleep laid like lead on my brain. A sort of opium, it made a fellow's mind wander. For three days and nights we'd been going strong, and this night was a hard one. But, by golly we all wanted to get home. And we just absolutely had to stay awake. To get home. That's all anyone thought of, besides the enemy, and getting wine.

Getting home - yes, and the reason we hadn't fired on and killed hundreds of Jerries during the last 24 hours, like most everyone else would do if the situation presented itself, was 'cause this Lt., as point, asked for "No shooting". He figured that these Jerries want to get home just as much as we do. And not in a pine box either. And as long as they're toying with the idea of surrendering, well - don't shoot 'em and force 'em either to fight or die. This worked too. I felt very proud inside. The doctrine that I must hate my enemy has always gone against the grain - in this fellow. War has a certain chivalry and honor when a soldier is swift and skillful and merciful. And I think we were being gallant, and not motivated by hate and revenge.

That guy still didn't fire again. Why in the hell not? I walked to the other tanks, and whispered to the guards on duty - Ken Orr, and Duke, and Joe Murray, about that first round, about the bulldozer, about refueling, about S/Sgt. Robertson (Commo. Sgt. for Dog Troop) having made radio contact with squadron. "Yes, he reached them about 04:00. Able Troop is on their way to join us. I think we'll get thru the night O.K."

Minutes marched like milestones, It was almost torture trying to stay awake. Friendly artillery was landing way, way to our rear. It was fun to watch, though, and I never did quite understand why some shells shot up like Roman candles, showering blue and red and green and yellow flares.

About 01:00, from our rear we detected the distant rear of tanks or half-tracks on the move, but their engines didn't sound like ours. Lt. Sheehan was up asking me about our trouble. I couldn't explain the one round fired. Hob nail boots clicking the pavement hushed us. From our all-important little road-junction, toward us, two, no three pairs of boots. Well - oh, oh, they stopped, 30 yards from Hell's Back Door. The moon was slipping away. It was getting quite dark. Sgt. Landis, straining thru his binoculars, saw three men crouch in the ditch, then lay flat, then crawl into the grass to the left. Ho me, what next? Damn it anyway. Those armored vehicles coming toward us from the rear were growing louder and louder. John Sheehan rushed back, to check the bazooka and machine gun teams at the tail. By God, they weren't our vehicles, and they kept coming closer and closer. I was too whipped to even care. The rear of our small column seemed miles away. I was startled to hear this noise rushing so fast right toward our rear, though. Three or four loud crashes, no firing, assured me that things must be O.K. I guess. I hope. I don't quite care. Oh, yes I did and my bobbing head jerked up.

Sgt. Landis had lost our hob-nailed night-crawlers in the weeds. It was just too damn dark to see. John's loud and clanking callers turned out to be four Jerry 2½ ton trucks, with tracks on the rear in place of the customary eight wheels. They'd raced blindly down Bart Boulevard from the west, and bang - the first one crashed smack into the tail vehicle in our column, the trailer of the gas truck to be specific. Bang, bang, crash - the other three closed in. For a few minutes our P.W. chasers had a rush business - disarming, searching, and marching off this new batch of bewildered, beleaguered Heinies.

I crawled onto Hell's Back Door's rear deck, drew a blanket over me, and dozed on our steel sofa. It was 02:25. Every few minutes I'd awaken and listen to the strange sounds of the forbidden Fatherland. That damn Volkswagen driving down and back. A little after three there was a new noise though. A muffled roar, pretty low and far away in the west, but a roar we'd come to know so well in the California desert, in Tennessee,

in Texas. A roar that made our hearts leap with excitement and hope and belief. "Hey Bob, do you hear that? Boy oh boy, it must be C.C.B. [Combat Command B]" What a wonderful sound -- those whirring V-8 engines. Yes, it grew stronger and stronger. It was steady and sweet. Those 43 ton Shermans coming our way. Support at last. Oh, perhaps two hours away, but audibly, "On the way". Now I smiled to sleep.

Somebody tugged at my foot. Still plenty dark. Sorta cold. Brr, and five after four. Sitting up I stretched, and heard muffled voices in the road, next to my tank. I climbed down quietly. "Hello, Jack." (Lt. Jack Nuckolls, Ldr of the Dogs' 2nd Platoon.) "Morning Bill. Say, I hear you've been having trouble with a tractor down here and some shooting. I'm taking some men on patrol to check that corner." Holy smokes. Our minds really must be working in slow motion now. "Hell, that's been a couple of hours ago. But I'll sure appreciate it." An hour later a runner came back, reported the RJ secured and no enemy contacted.

Men couldn't welcome dawn any more than we did. When the clouds began to break up, I could have cheered. But a prayer sufficed, and was more "tactically sound." Skipping back down the road -- well, walking back with a light heart and a smile on my smudged face, I found ol' Bart. "Sir, what's on fire?" "Bill. I wish you'd send someone to the rear to pick up Able Troop and bring 'em up. We'll hold the column here." "O.K., Captain. Sgt. Orr and I will go and we'll take one armored car in case our communications gets snafued. We'll hurry."

I brushed my furry teeth. Gee, that feels great. And, with the armored car sandwiched between Fox 31 and Fox 35, we started back. The clean air smelled refreshing. In just a few minutes we bumped into a Task Force from C.C.B. They planned to swing south of our route, but were they welcome. Their point was in a hurry. I talked with Woody (Capt. Ivan B. Wook, C.O. Co. A, 43rd Tank Bn.), and told him where we were. Captain Bart, hearing that friendly armor was so close, elected to move out immediately.

Sgt. Florida and Sgt. Landis lead the Dogs' advance, and I was recalled. Let Able Troop catch up as best they can. We need you, Bill, and want to get moving."

Reversing our course, heading east again, Ken and I listened on the radio to Battlegroup Bartholomew's progress. Henry Florida reported Mehlinge and Neukirchen cleared. Enkenbach had snipers, but the cavalry raced thru without casualty. Alsenborn -- hmm -- that's the town we saw underlined in heavy black pencil on the German infantry captain's map Bob took by the pillbox and dragon teeth yesterday. Sgt. Florida hesitated -- studying the village from a distance of several hundred yards. "Say, off to the right of the road, just at the edge of town, a long yellow

pole pointing to the right and swinging around towards US. Step on it, Vince (Sgt. Florida's driver, Cpl. Vincent Konieczky)." And racing down the road at full speed, Sgt. Florida overran a big dual-purpose clip-fed 88 with two men sitting in the steel seats traversing it around as fast as they could. "Ho-ho, not quick enough you b..... Of the 12 men at the gun position, Florida got 4 prisoners. Skooting into Alsenborn (the recon would destroy the gun), Sgts. Florida and Landis ran into trouble. A German light machine gun hastily placed in the road was physically crushed. Snipers fired from windows. A bazooka lurched over the top of Henry's turret, pulverizing the spotlight and gouging hunks out of tank gunner Don Lukes and his grease gun. (You see, in villages except when we used marching fires, it was often best for the men in the turret to be up and handy with grenades and Tommy guns and the AA gun for close-in work.) Engaged in a fire fight at the main intersection of the town, with ol' Bart coming forward and emptying his Luger into four Heinies-in-a hurry, the forward momentum halted.

By now I caught the tail of the Dogs. Lt. John Sheehan had just rushed Don Lukes in a peep to the rear. Medics were giving him morphine and bandaging his arm and face. Good Don -- the youngest and one of the best men in the company. I jumped off my tank for a second to say hello. "Good luck, Don. Take it easy and hurry back. You've done a swell job." Pfc. Don Lukes, as pale as a ghost, smiled with his eyes.

Not really knowing what the hell was up, except that they needed us, we raced to the head of the column. No shooting now. We stopped by Landis' tank for a minute to get the big picture. "Hell, let's get thru this damn joint," I challenged. So...bingo -- firing machine guns, bow and coactual and ack-ack in my tank, Hell's back Door shot straight ahead and on out of town. Well, good. No, damn it, this is the wrong way. Turning around, Sgt. Orr's tank broke a track. Son of a gun I balked at leaving Orr, with Jerries running around in the town, and that hill and in the woods; but Captain Bart promised local security (4 riflemen) 'til maintenance arrived.

We had to retrace our steps to the center of Alsenborn, and take off in a different direction. Damn it. I'm sorry. I didn't even think which way we should be going -- except east. On down the road, charging under a bridge, another dual-purpose 88 and three towed clip-fed very long barreled 37s. Boy, I'm glad we've captured these.

My tank stopped at a Y-fork, behind the crest in the hill. Captain Bart asked me to hold up. Let's catch our breath. There was intermittent firing to our flanks and rear. The recon men were clearing the village, I guess. BAM -- a loud crack just a couple of hundred yards directly behind us. Don't know what's up for sure, but ----- We dismounted two men as lookouts on the ridge to our front. Our route followed the right fork which

immediately entered a woods over 6 kilometers deep. A dangerous place -- 'cause Jerries always took to the woods as hideouts from our bombings of towns and strafing of any vehicles on the roads or moving in the open. The left fork - well, it headed north towards another woods.

"Hello Dog One, this is Fox 30. There's a British armored car coming down the road from the north." There shouldn't be any British vehicles in this zone. Let's see. Four wheels. Dark blue. Maybe it's a German command car leading a couple of Panzers. Well, this is interesting. My tank, from defilade on the road, awaited my orders to move up and fire. The car stopped 300 yards away. Someone dismounted. With binoculars, I could very plainly recognize an officer in a most resplendent skyblue uniform -- with shiny black boots. The best looking uniform I'd ever seen. Really sharp, like something out of Esquire. My crew was briefed. "O.K. driver, move forward." When just in hull defilade, "Driver stop. Let him have it, Bob." Our first tracers were off to the left a bit. Three 37s tore right thru the radiator. And I tracked the Jerry into the woods with my AA gun. A dismounted party went forward, retrieved luggage including a handsome uniform of a Luftwaffe major, the same color and style of the one we'd just fired on. And it just fit Pvt. Dick Ruble, my bog. The staff car was not blue, but the yellow-brown-green camouflage paint so common in the German army. No panzers followed. No prisoners taken. Reflecting, I was sorry we didn't ambush and capture this early morning visitor.

John Sheehan came up to report that Lee Perry, C.O. of Able Troop, was shot thru the knee by a sniper in Alsenborn, that the column a couple of hundred yards back was receiving infrequent rifle fire, and that our colonel's armored car was K-Oed by an 88 several towns back. And he related a humorous incident. Remember the sharp explosion a few minutes ago near the underpass? Well, Captain Bart's armored car was parked there by the second dual-purpose 88. The gun is laid right across the road, aimed at the house on the opposite side. Cpl. _____, an eager beaver, jumped out of the Captain's car, grabbed an ax, and went to destroy the gun. Winding up, he swung right for the breech. BAM -- the gun barked. An AP shell sped right across the bow of the armored car, and made a hole in the side of the house big enough to fit a peep. The captain's car quivered, and the entire crew, including good Bart, are talking to themselves.

It will take too long to complete this story as a running narrative, but let me hit the highlights.

To move thru the big woods extending 6 kilometers to our east, tanks were again our point. We operated by bounds, successive bounds. But two tanks did the job normally given to one tank. So, Sgt. Orr (his track together) and I, operating roughly abreast and on opposite shoulders of the road, moved to the first curve. Then Sgt. Florida and Sgt. Landis closed up.

Again Ken and I moved out together, and so forth. Our turrets were turned to the right and left obliques. Everyone buttoned up except commanders who stayed on their AA guns. I kept a running account, a blow-by-blow description of what we were doing, flowing back to the Dogs on the radio. Why did we operate with two tanks making each move normally assigned to one? Well -- more fire power, more effective mutual support, and when we'd hit trouble if one tank would be slow getting off the first round, maybe the second wouldn't be. Of course -- twice the target; but we agreed to this plan, and that's the chance we took. It worked. One place my gunner and I fired on the crew of a Mark 1V S/P gun sitting by their tank cooking chow; and, though the gun wasn't 50 yards off to the right, the crew fled and from point blank range our 37mm SHOT pierced the armor of that long 75mm gun carriage. When we spotted a long column of wagons parked on a side trail, we opened up, using marching fires on both sides. Bang, bang, bang, bang....Bang, bang, bang, bang.... Pinning 'em down, starting some fires, stampeding some horses, and barnstorming thru.

West of Ramsen we entered a long, narrow valley at the far end of which my binoculars picked up what looked like 2 German H/Ts, a Jerry 2½ ton truck with its camouflaged canvas, and a dark green vehicle displaying a pink fluorescent panel. Well - friendly or enemy? I don't know. Slowly, quietly we sneaked along the left side of the valley 'til we were only 1,500 yards away. Lt. Reid brought his assault guns up into position directly behind the point two tanks. Our strategy - Hold our fire until we're sure it's the enemy. Rush the position with two tanks. The assault guns and other tanks in direct support. O.K. Sgt. Orr and I rushed. Are they or aren't they? Oh - oh, flying like the wind toward our target, we glimpsed a big herd of perhaps 80 Jerries out in the open. Hell, they must be prisoners. We breathed easier. And they were. I just don't remember if we knocked out any Jerry positions in the valley before we reached friendly troops, part of the 94th Infantry division with medium tanks. At any rate, we were happy not to have fired on friendly troops, concealed nearby the Jerry equipment drawn up in the field. These tankers and doughs were headed for Grunstadt.

We cut south to the Kaiserslautern - Mannheim Autobahn. Question - Should we travel east on the autobahn or follow woods and black top roads thru defiles off on a flank? Answer - The Jerries will defend their best roads for certain. "Avoid the most likely avenue of approach." Or "always cover the most likely avenues of enemy approach." Let's take to the country road. And we did. Not quite so direct, but one of the combat commands got in a hell of a battle on this autobahn at Neu Leiningen several hours later.

Clearing three more towns, Carlsberg, Hertlinghausen, and Alt Leiningen - clean, cheerful little villages - we entered a

valley, narrow and with treacherously steep towering walls and about 4 kilometers long. The perfect ambush. Our column was fired on intermittently by riflemen and machine gunners from obscure positions, but we made it to Kleinkerlbach at the mouth, and raced onto the open ridge.

"Hello Dog One. What a be-uu-tiful sight. Our objective sprawls right before me. Happy day." The rolling Rhine plain and the big cities of Mannheim and Ludwigshafen unfolded before us. What a sight. "O.K. Bill, hold it up. Fox 10 will take over." And another light tank platoon, which was attached to Able Troop, scooted ahead. (Our objective had been changed from Worms to Ludwigshafen, 15 kilometers south, 24 hours ago.)

The fighting wasn't over. Hardly begun. P-47s were playing hell with Jerry columns racing hither and yon. Freinsheim, a walled city on the plain, was defended by a roadblock, 2 bazookas, a 120mm mortar, and light machine guns. The lead tanks fortunately evaded casualties by taking cover when fired on. My platoon was about 500 yards back. We could make a quick, careful estimate of the situation. To the right side of the town there were houses built on high ground without a wall around them. Hell, let's outflank the roadblock and secure the top of the town. Without orders, while doughs from a recon platoon ran in the same direction, my tanks took off, loped across the land, dashed thru an orchard past deep deserted gun emplacements, and up to the first house. Well, good. I dismounted, ran across the street, and signalled the tanks into position along the sidewalks. In no time flat we were right behind the roadblock, capturing but one Jerry. And right over the obstacle climbs John Sheehan and carbine! "We'll secure the first three blocks." A Jerry darted into a doorway, with a W.P. rifle grenade hot on his heels. Our recon doughs swarmed thru backyards, over walls, thru gardens.

A truck hidden under a railroad trestle and loaded with ammunition sounded like the 4th of July for 15 minutes. Lots of big and little explosions. Only trouble, it took Gunner Darrell Hudson 3 rounds of 37 AP to hit his target, as Jerries scrambled from their storechest. A carbine bullet dropped one Heinie, but not 'til he lurched thru the air with arms outstretched and faltered like the villain in Dead Eye Dick. Securing our first 3 blocks, we liberated 75 PWs, some Poles and French and 3 American fliers. The impetus to open a larger stockade on the other side of town lead 3 recon troopers to take off thru the narrow cobblestone alleys against orders. Unfortunately, a bazooka discharged by a Jerry on motorcycle hit all three, and Scout Sgt. Tom Conry related his misfortune from the medical peep. Blood trickled down his cheek, one arm in a sling, and his 2 buddies on stretchers.

Captain Bartholomew decided to take up a defense for the night on a ridge 1,500 yards to our rear, the only high ground in

sight. It was dusk when my platoon, the rear guard, called Dog One and reported we were leaving Friensheim.

The troop established 360 degree security and prepared mine-chains for both ends of the main road which cut across our defense. Everyone dug in, expecting trouble. Sgt. Florida liberated a bottle of red wine from the lone house on the ridge. We met S/Sgt. Lively, just rejoining us from the place he broke a track 2 days before. Sitting in Sgt. Benton's fox hole, feeling dizzy from the wine and with Ernie Benton talking about his home in California, I fell asleep. A quiet and pleasant night.

Next morning, elements of the 10th Armored Division coming toward Kaiserslautern broke out of the Hardt Mountains and seized Maxdorf, but first losing 2 M-4s to AT guns on the approaches to this town in the Rhine valley (See Overlay #1). We relieved the 10th Armored here, and 1 armored car & two peeps & five light tanks forming a flying column raced toward Oggeraheim. Right down the main road, 5 kilometers across the billiard table, sailing like the wind, but feeling ridiculously exposed, we reached the first houses. A big broad street with 3 to 5 story buildings on each side, and a double street car track down the center, beckoned us. Tanks took the lead, but on the sidewalks. Two tanks moved abreast and a pair of dismounted men preceded each tank by 75 yards, hugging the walls and picking the new positions for the battle-buggies.

In the center of Oggersheim, we met a task force from the 43rd Tank Bn. These people had entered Oggersheim from the north and were swinging east, directly toward Ludwigshafen. Vehicles were bunched up and their column was halted. An AT gun had just hit their point tank.

We entered Oggersheim from the west and were to turn south and seize Futterstadt, another 5 kilometers away. Securing the southern exit, we held up, established OPs in a house at the commanding point, and called Dog Troop to join us. A tasty beer in a picturesque little courtyard, served thru a window by a comely fraulein and paid for in marks "borrowed" from a Jerry PW, was cut short. "Hey Lieut." Outside, in the center of the road, Major General Walton H. Walker, in a 4-ton followed by an armored car. The corps commander, "When's this attack to the south getting started?" "Sir, we are awaiting orders." And the general and his shadow sped off to headquarters of Col. Whipple (tanks & infantry) in Maxdorf.

Mutterstadt was well-defended by tanks and dug in doughboys. We seized several pillboxes along the road, secured a factory one-third of the way down, and two recon platoons proceeded on foot to "feel out" the Jerry positions with rifles and light machine guns. I helped operate Captain Bart's forward C.P. 2,000 yards from our objective. Our 2 assault guns played havoc with the Jerries running about, killing a score. Lieut. Sheehan's

accurate and miraculously quick adjustment on a S/P gun w/inf. atchd which was bearing down on the position of the dismounted recon saved the afternoon. Hitting the tank right on the button with 75mm HEAT jarred the monster sufficiently to make it withdraw.

After dark we were ordered to rush Mutterstadt with doughboys mounted on my 5 tanks. A quick dash to the edge of town, seize the first few houses, and start to work. For good reason, I initially warned my drivers to be very quiet and not race their motors. We moved slowly and quietly to the prearranged jumping-off point, and just as Captain Bart was about to mount his doughs on my tanks - pum, pum, pum, pum, chummm -- began a serenade to end all serenades. A 4 gun American battery laid in 200 rounds in no time flat - HE, air burst, the works. We displaced 600 yards, and received orders to follow TF Fields into our objective, using a route further west. The armored cars and peeps moved out. I held the tanks back for five minutes, expecting to draw artillery as soon as we'd begin to growl and roar. Once in Mutterstadt, we went into Sq. Reserve.

The 12th Armored Division was closing in on three Rhine cities - Ludwigshafen, Speyer, and Germersheim. Noon of the following day, the 22nd, Dog Troop was ordered to advance on Ludwigshafen from the southwest - mounted and moving 5 kilometers across the barren billiard table. My platoon was to lead. Estimate of the situation - It's very open country. A long distance. A dusty dirt road. Green fields. The enemy's surely going to fight, probably with AT guns and tanks. My plan - Move slowly, very slowly. Stay off the bumpy, dusty road. Don't kick up the dust. Drivers & bogs button up. Turrets unlocked. Point - 2 tanks, Sgt. Orr's and mine, leapfrogging each other. Execution - I failed to ask the Dogs to keep off the road. We progressed 4,500 yards without incident. CRACK. My turret unconsciously swung to the left. Two more CRACKS. Blossoms of dust on the outskirts of Ludwigshafen. Jones was laid right on the spot. "Hello, does anyone know who's shooting at who?" "Hell yes," came Lt. Sheehan's voice. "They're shooting at you - only a little over." We were halted. "Gunner, AT gun, range 2,700, HE, Fire." "Sir the sight doesn't go that high." "Wind it up a bit. O.K.? Let's go. __ Short. Up 800. Fire. Good." And we pumped 7 rounds of HE silencing our adversary - momentarily. Sgt. Orr was firing too. And another tank or two barked. The bog had more HE shells ready. CRACK. A burst of black 50 yards in front of us and directly on line with our AT friend. Two grenades, a WP and a Fragmafron latched to the periscope guard on the top outside of my hatch, were smoking. Hell. The tank lurched. "Swing the turret forward, Bob. Dismount." We raced for a bomb crater, the four of us, as the rest of the column executed "to the rear march" on the double and in route order. 88s blazed the way, skipping angrily across the plain. An 88AP had ripped thru our left sponsor, missing my

driver's seat by inches, and lodged in the right side of the tank.

The following morning, my crew in a replacement tank, we were ordered south on a mission to contact the 7th Army. The 71st Division, a new outfit made up of rear echelon commandos, was being initiated. The roads and fields looked more like Tennessee maneuvers at the end of a problem than anything else. Fortunately, we personally met little resistance. And at noon on March 24th, in the white flag-bedecked colorful village of Bellheim we met a Captain in a jeep from the 14th Armored, coming with the 36th Infantry Division from Wissembourg. The giant pincers movement in the Saar-Palatinate were closing. But we had a river to bridge. The pursuit across the Rhine had already been initiated by the 1st and 3rd Armies. We must hurry. We stayed in Bellheim long enough, however, to hear Mass on Palm Sunday, and thank God for His protection.

The Commanding General, 7th Army, awarded our little task force with the Presidential Unit Citation for this action. The occasion, a 12th Armored Division review on September 15, 1945, in Heidenheim, Germany - 22 miles north of Ulm-on-the-Danube. The citation recalled how we "spearheaded the 12th Armored Division's drive from the vicinity of Trier, Germany, to the Rhine. Covering a distance of 72 miles, the troop fought 4 separate engagements, overran 3 large columns of retreating enemy, and broke thru 2 well-organized defensive positions. Over 1,000 prisoners of war were captured and evacuated, and 100s more were disarmed and sent to the rear. Eighteen 75mm and 88mm anti-tank guns were captured, 10 of which were in position and overrun. Fourteen medium artillery pieces, 60 assorted motor vehicles, 7 ammunition trucks, and 300 horse-drawn vehicles were captured or destroyed. The success of this brilliant drive definitely demoralized the enemy defenses west of the Rhine and enabled the 12th Armored Division to reach its objective without serious interference."

5. Conclusion.

a. Bold aggressive action in a break-thru operation pays off.

b. M-5 A-1 light tanks are a good reconnaissance vehicle, fast and mobile and with splendid protection against small arms fire. The M-24, of course, would be even better.

c. Prior knowledge of enemy weapons, tanks, mines, organization, rank, etc., helps instill in your men a feeling of self-confidence. If we know our enemy's weapons and capabilities, we are better able to deal with him.

d. Not firing into disorganized fleeing columns, bypassing and disarming most of them proved less costly to us

than more blood-thirsty tactics in the number of men we had wounded by enemy snipers, and assisted in the accomplishment of our mission - to bypass all enemy and get to the Rhine.

e. Do not use the most likely avenue of approach, if other less traveled routes are accessible.

f. If we must move down the main street in an enemy town, have vehicles hug the buildings and let dismounted scouts precede your armor by 75 yards.

g. Work out your plans for the accomplishment of a mission in sufficient detail so that EACH soldier knows and appreciates HIS part in the big picture.

h. Always keep your non-coms abreast of the latest developments. Have them pass this information down thru the ranks.

i. At night, when selecting an assembly position for your troops, always choose an open area in the country in preference to the confining streets of an enemy town not yet cleared.

j. If you are a platoon leader, you needn't be foolhardy, but don't be afraid to get out in front and LEAD your men. This improves the morale and efficiency of your fighting team, if not carried to extremes.

6. Personal information of author.

a. William V. Finn, 1st Lieutenant, O-463268, Cav.

b. Tank Platoon Leader, 5th Armored Division, Desert Maneuvers, 1942. Tank Platoon Leader, Exec. Of., & Co. Commndr., Co. "F", 92nd Cav., 12th Armored Division, 2 Nov 42 - 16 Apr 45.

c. Officers' Orientation School, Fort Knox, Summer, 1942. Company Officers' School, Fort Knox, Summer, 1943. College Graduate, Georgetown University, B.S., 1942.

d. Rank and organization at the time of event.

1/Lt., Co. "F", 92nd Cav. Ren. Sq. (mecz.).
Position - Ldr., 3rd Platoon, Co. "F".

7 November, 1945

Para. 4. Troop "D", 92nd Cav. Recon. Sq. (mecz.), is cited for extraordinary heroism, gallantry, and esprit de corps from 18 to 20 March, 1945. During the three days of action, Troop "D", reinforced by the 4th platoon of Troop "E", the 3rd platoon of Troop "F", and a detachment of Hq. & Serv. Troop, 92nd Cav., spearheaded the 12th Armored Division's drive from the vicinity of Trier, Germany, to the Rhine. Covering a distance of 72 miles, the troop fought four separate engagements, overran 3 large columns of retreating enemy, and broke thru 2 well-organized defensive positions. Over 1000 prisoners of war were captured and evacuated and hundreds more were disarmed and started to the rear. Eighteen 75mm & 88mm anti-tank guns were captured, 10 of which were in position and overrun. Fourteen medium artillery pieces, 60 assorted motor vehicles, 7 ammunition trucks, and 300 horse-drawn vehicles were captured or destroyed. The success of this brilliant drive definitely demoralized the enemy defenses west of the Rhine and enabled the 12th Armored Division to reach its objective without serious interference. (G.O. #114, Hq. 12th Arm'd Div., 5 Sept., 1945, as approved by the Commdg. Gen., U.S. Army Forces E.T. (Main)."

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