

Events down the street cause the crew of this Hellcat to man their guns. The ration boxes and .50 caliber machine gun dismounted from its turret ring-mount indicate that they plan to stay awhile. Although the censor has obliterated the unit markings, details of the siren, headlights and panel allowing access to the transmission are readily visible. US Army Photo SC 194638



moving on the left, along secondary roads. Entrenched German paratroopers of the 5. *Fallschirmjaeger-Division*, which the 4th Armored Division had met previously in Brittany, checked CCA's advance at Martelange for the rest of the day. In Bastogne, General McAuliffe, commander of the surrounded American troops, rejected a German surrender demand with the famous comment, "Nuts!" The CCA columns spent most of the day waiting at Marlenge while engineers spanned the wide chasm of the Sure River with a ninety-foot Bailey bridge. To the west, CCB reached Burnon, only seven miles from Bastogne the first day, but the head of the column was stopped by anti-tank fire in nearby Chaumont after midnight. CCB decided to take no chances and waited for daylight.

Saturday dawned clear and bright, enabling Allied aircraft to intervene in the fighting for the first time. Tankers and crewmen of the 704th watched hundreds of C47 transports rumble overhead, bound for Bastogne to paratroop supplies. Soon afterwards, P38s now relieved of their escort duties, swooped down to bomb and strafe. After softening Chaumont with an artillery barrage and airstrikes, CCB launched an attack at 1330 hours. At first everything seemed to go fine as the armored infantry and the twenty-two remaining Shermans of the 8th Tank Battalion swept into the village while M18 Hellcats of the 704th laid down a base of fire. But, the clear weather had thawed the fields, and the soft ground bogged down the American tanks. Then, a counterattack from the high ground beyond, led by the 26. *Volks-Grenadier-Division's* 11. *Sturmgeschuetz-Brigade*, blasted eleven of the Shermans and the enemy reentered the village. The Americans fell back with heavy losses.

On the main road, Task Force Oden took the lead once the bridge at Martelange was completed, and CCA got rolling again at 1500 hours. The vehicles climbed the twisting road that led out of the Sure Valley to the plain beyond where the column was stopped at Warnach. The night was lit by the flames of a "Harpoon" M18, victim of a direct hit on the engine compartment during an artillery barrage. Further east, CCR headed for Bigonville to protect the division's right flank, but it was halted by fire from German paratroopers in the woods a mile short of the village. By night fall, General Patton was growing impatient. All three combat commands were facing heavy resistance and much of the 4th's strength was spent screening between the widely separated columns. Bastogne radioed a reminder that there was only one more shopping day til Christmas.

Heavy fighting followed on Christmas Eve, as CCA finally cleared Warnach after a bitter, expensive fight with *Fallschirmjaeger-Regiment* 15. CCR methodically cleared the German paratroopers out of Bigonville while CCB, on the other flank, spent the day waiting for replacements and the remainder of the division to draw abreast. The 101st Airborne Division in Bastogne reported that they were still holding

firm, but the supply situation was now critical.

CCR was relieved at Bigonville by the 26th Infantry Division, and was switched from CCA's right to the 4th Armored Division's left flank in an attempt to break the impasse and move around the tough defenses in front of the other two combat commands. The CCR drive from Bercheux started on a freezing Christmas morning with light tanks and a platoon of the speedy 704th M18 Hellcats in the lead. The column scattered the enemy outposts, took Vaux-lez-Routeres and then headed northeast on a secondary road. Above them, ungainly C47s flew towards Bastogne again with more supplies. Some of the aircraft didn't make it, blasted by the wicked German anti-aircraft fire. But, the rest never faltered. By dusk, CCR had captured Remonville and drawn abreast of CCB who finally took Chaumont with the help of an infantry battalion. In Bastogne, the beleaguered American defenders fought off another major assault. The situation was growing desperate in spite of the air drops of supplies.

Boxing Day dawned clear enough for P47s to support the 4th Armored Division and the ground was frozen again, allowing cross-country movement. All three combat commands resumed their advances, and finally success came in the CCR zone. A sudden afternoon thrust through Assenois by a column of tanks and infantry riding in halftracks caught the Germans by surprise after the town had been blasted by thirteen artillery batteries. The lead tank, an M4 "Jumbo," reached the 101st Airborne Division's perimeter at 1650 hours, and shortly after midnight, the first relief convoy of trucks and ambulances made the journey to Bastogne. After daylight, Sergeant Orleno's crew, manning a 704th tank destroyer to the south, made some history of its own when Corporal Michael Bodinsky blasted a *Panther* at 1,600 yards for "C" Company's 25th confirmed kill.

The siege was broken, but the Germans remained determined to take Bastogne once and for all. General Patton added more divisions to expand the III. Corps attack and to protect the narrow corridor from the desperate German attacks. The result was a classic meeting engagement. In the 4th Armored Division zone, CCA and CCB finally battered their way through the stubborn Axis defenders who had held them up, and now took part in stopping the German attacks. Six Shermans of CCA's "B" Company, 35th Tank Battalion, halted one of the largest attacks on December 30th by ambushing twelve enemy tanks, while an attached platoon from the 704th destroyed three enemy assault guns and dispersed the accompanying enemy infantry. New Year's Eve was celebrated in typical Third Army fashion with a midnight artillery barrage that thundered for twenty minutes.

The new year found Harpoon's "A" Company at Hompre with CCA, "B" Company at Brunon with CCB, one Platoon of "C" Company with the 25th Cavalry Squadron, and the rest of "C" Company at Remon-

ville. Reconnaissance Company (—) screened the division's right flank at Warnach. The men of the 704th spent most of their time huddled in outposts, trying to cope with the bone-chilling cold and survive the frequent, crashing artillery barrages. A new slogan made the rounds, replacing last year's "win the war in '44." "Stay alive in '45" aptly reflected the current mood. On January 3rd, two platoons of "C" Company moved to Bastogne to support local attacks by the 101st Airborne Division's paratroopers. Nearby, Patton's attack collided with the 5. *Panzer-Armee's* attempt to crush the Allied salient. Bitter meeting engagements on both sides of Bastogne led Patton to note in his diary, "We can still lose this war." However, the *Wehrmacht* efforts proved hopeless in the face of the American strength and two days later, the Germans started a grudging, skillfully conducted withdrawal. The great gamble had failed. The American divisions gained ground slowly as they drove north to meet the divisions of the First Army and erase the German penetration. Most of the 704th's "B" Company was sent to provide additional aid for the 101st on January 9th.

Then, two days later, Patton was directed to pull an armored division out of the Bulge and send it south to Luxembourg as a reserve in case the Germans staged an attack in the thinly held XX Corps area. He picked the 4th Armored which badly needed a chance to finish its refit which had been interrupted in December and replace the many casualties suffered in the relief of Bastogne. So, the cold, tired men of the 704th gladly pulled out of the line and headed south with their 4th Armored buddies, leaving the white hell of the Ardennes behind. The anticipated German attack never came and the next week proved a happy interlude, providing a chance to train, get warm and sleep. The lull was also used to camouflage the Battalion's vehicles with whitewash.

SAAR-MOSELLE TRIANGLE

The 704th Tank Destroyer Battalion returned to combat on January 19th, 1945, when it was assigned to the XX. Corp's 4th Tank Destroyer Group. "B" Company was sent to St. Avold to aid the 5th Ranger Battalion and one day later, "A" Company moved to Halstroff to support the 94th Infantry Division. The inexperienced soldiers of the 94th held a thirteen mile stretch along the Orscholz Switch of the Reich's "West Wall" defenses. Called the "Siegfried Switch" by the Allies, these fortifications consisted of a band of concrete pillboxes, bunkers and "dragon's teeth" tank obstacles built before the war to protect Germany from an invasion through the "Saar-Moselle Triangle," formed by the confluence of the Moselle and Saar Rivers in Trier to the north. (The "Sarre" River becomes the "Saar" when it crosses the Franco-German border.) XX. Corps okay'ed a series of probing attacks by the 94th Infantry Division to try and break through

the Switch's two-mile deep system of concrete fortifications.

An attack launched by the 1st Battalion, 301st Infantry Regiment, on January 20th, was quickly blasted by mortars, mines and machine guns in the pillboxes. Marshy ground prevented a platoon from "Harpoon's" "A" Company Hellcats from getting forward to provide effective support. Four days later, the rest of the veteran 704th was attached to the 94th Infantry Division by Colonel S. R. Browning of the 4th Tank Destroyer Group. "B" and "C" Companies moved through a partial breach in the West Wall defenses made before the Battle of the Bulge, and took up positions in the villages of Nenning, Weiss, Besch, Tettingen and Wochern. Only the day before, a counterattack by the 4th Armored Division's old opponent, the *11. Panzer-Division*, had driven a second 94th Division advance back to the villages. These positions were maintained for the rest of the month while further north, the Allies finished the job of eliminating the "Bulge."

It rained during the first eight days of February while the 94th's 302nd Infantry Regiment took the Kampholz Woods after a prolonged fight among the mines and bunkers. Part II provides a graphic description of the terrible conditions encountered during the drive. Platoons of the 704th worked hand in hand with the infantry. One TD section would suppress the enemy emplacements while the platoon's other section worked its way into position and blasted a selected pillbox, enabling the infantry assault parties to advance. Although the concrete of the pillboxes was usually too thick to be penetrated by the 76mm guns of the M18s, it was possible to hit the embrasures and jam the armored shutters, stunning or wounding the defenders inside. Then, the TDs ceased fire on signal as the infantry made the final assault.

Meanwhile, the 301st Infantry Regiment tried to clear nearby Sinz. The regiment's 2nd Battalion ran into elements of the *11. Panzer-Division* in the Banholtz Woods, north of the village. "B" Company of the 704th lost five M18s and had five men captured on February 9th, when German infantry counterattacked and cut off two of the tank destroyers. In exchange, "B" Company destroyed two of the *Panzers*. The next day, "B" Company's 2nd Platoon and a section of the 3rd Platoon helped even the score when they destroyed four more *Panthers* as German counterattacks continued.

A few days later, a full-scale attack launched by the 94th Infantry Division (supported by "Harpoon's" "A" and "B" Companies) proved successful; the tough *11. Panzer-Division* had withdrawn and had been replaced by *Volksgrrenadiers*. As the 94th completed the breach in the Orscholz Switch, General Patton released the 10th Armored Division to exploit the breach and to clear the Saar-Moselle Triangle. The 704th's "A" and "B" Companies crossed the Saar River with the 94th Division's G.I.s on the 23rd of February at Taben, taking up positions around

Serrig. The 94th's infantry continued the American drive north along the banks of the river, clearing Saarburg. Lieutenant Mankin's platoon of tank destroyers from "A" Company helped destroy a number of pillboxes in this advance.

Further north, "C" Company — which had been detached to rejoin the 4th Armored Division on February 7th — was in action in the XII. Corps area. After helping to erase the Bulge, Patton's VIII. and XII. Corps continued east in the Twelfth Army Group's "Operation Lumberjack;" breaching the West Wall defenses in the Eifel Mountains east of the Ardennes. CCB of the 4th Armored Division, supported by "C" Company of the 704th, returned to combat on February 23rd when it was attached to the 80th Infantry Division to take Sinspelt as the Americans advanced further into the Eifel. Despite heavy fighting with remnants of the *2. Panzer-Division*, trying to prevent a breakout, Sinspelt was soon taken. The rest of the 4th Armored Division joined CCB the next day and drive across the Pruem and Nims Rivers. "C" Company TDs kept pace with the advance and Corporal Dominick Sorrentino, gunner for Sergeant Stasi's M18, knocked-out a self-propelled gun that tried to resist. The armored columns made their way through the little village of Rittersdorf, reaching the high ground along the west bank of the Kyll River, two miles northeast of the important road junction at Bitburg, late on the 26th. The 5th Infantry Division proceeded to clear the town and soon established a bridgehead across the Kyll River.

During February, administrative changes occurred as well. Captain Crosby P. Miller was promoted to Major and became the new Executive Officer of the 704th, replacing Major Charles L. Kimsey, who was transferred to the 4th Armored Division. Former "C" Company commander, Captain Thomas Evans relinquished command of Headquarters Company to become the Battalion S-2, and "C" Company's Executive Officer, Lieutenant Edwin Leiper, became the Battalion Motor Officer. In a special awards ceremony on February 13th, the commanding general of the 94th Infantry Division, Major General Maloney, visited the 704th's Command Post and presented the Silver Star medal to Lieutenant Colonel James W. Bidwell for his actions with the 9th Tank Destroyer Group at Luneville the preceding September. Technician 5th Grade Richard W. Bowman of the 704th's Medical Detachment was also awarded a Silver Star. Sixteen other men of the Battalion were awarded Bronze Star medals during the month as well.

TO THE RHINE

The 704th Tank Destroyer Battalion (less "C" Company) was released from the 94th Infantry Division and marched north to the XII. Corps zone where it rejoined "C" Company and the 4th Armored Division on March 4th, near Bitburg in the Eifel. "B" Company was

assigned to the division's CCA, "C" Company stayed with CCB, and the rest of the Battalion was attached to CCR, except for "A" Company's 3rd Platoon which joined the 25th Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron. In the next phase of "Operation Lumberjack," General Bradley directed General Patton to strike for the Rhine River, only forty-four miles as the crow flies from Bitburg. A couple of narrow, muddy roads which wound their way along the constricted valleys of the Hohe Eifel — terrain even more rugged and heavily forested than the Ardennes — provided the only axis for the advance. The 4th Armored Division was directed to assemble in the 5th Infantry Division's bridgehead across the Kyll River, strike northeast for eight miles, and then turn east and head for the Rhine near Andernach.

The attack started on Monday, March 5th, with CCB in the lead. Rain and snow flurries prevented air support, but the Germans had little hope of stopping the 4th Armored Division's spearheads. *Wehrmacht* troops were reduced to draining gas from their trucks and command cars to keep a few remaining *Tiger* tanks in action. CCA moved through Oberkail and then fell into line behind CCB, using the only good road. "B" Company's 1st Platoon, working with the 25th Cavalry, destroyed two tanks and a halftrack, while Reconnaissance Company acted as flank guard and maintained contact between CCA and CCB. 4th Armored Division officers were tense and concerned that the mist-shrouded, thickly wooded slopes on both sides of the road were still held by the Germans. But, they soon found that the "master race" was more concerned with getting to the Rhine ahead of "Roosevelt's Butchers" than in trying to cut off one of the American columns.* More than a thousand Germans were taken prisoner the first day.

The attack continued without let up the next day in more rain and fog. "C" Company's 3rd Platoon destroyed two *Panthers* and an SP gun at Daun. It was the beginning of the end. Germans started streaming into the villages from the hills and forests to surrender. In the distance, thick columns of smoke from *Wehrmacht* vehicles, being destroyed by their dejected owners to prevent capture, marked the totality of the defeat. Wednesday, March 7th, brought success as 4th Armored Division columns reached the Rhine. In just two and a half days, they had smashed the German defenders west of the Rhine in a classic armored operation in spite of the rugged, easily defended terrain. The division had taken more than 5,000 prisoners in the operation. Further north, in the Ninth Army zone, another, even greater calamity befell the Germans when G.I.s of the 9th Armored Division stormed the Ludendorff railroad bridge at Remagen before it could be blown up. The Nazi's last major defensive barrier, the Rhine, was compromised. Unknown to the men of the 4th Armored Division, another railroad bridge was still standing at Urmitz, only a few miles

* "Roosevelt's Butchers" was the German nickname for the 4th Armored Division.

downstream from their own positions. It would not be blown until Friday. However, the 4th had already been directed to turn south and prepare to cross the Moselle yet again.

General Patton's advance to the Rhine had placed the German High Command in a terrible dilemma. Would Patton turn the XII. Corps north to reinforce the Remagen bridgehead, or south to outflank the vital Saar Palatinate? Formed by the Moselle meandering northeast to join the Rhine, the Palatinate was bordered on the north by the Moselle (where XII. Corps waited), the west by the Saar (and XX. Corps), the east by the Rhine and in the south by the strongest West Wall defenses of all along the Franco-German border. In front of these defenses waited the Seventh Army which had maintained defensive positions during the Battle of the Bulge and the winter operations. Although attacks by XX. Corps and XII. Corps could easily outflank and destroy the defenders in the West Wall positions, the Germans couldn't afford to abandon the Palatinate until the last possible minute as it contained the Saar, second most important industrial area in the *Reich*. Trains carrying steel, coal and vital synthetic oil still rumbled daily across the Rhine in spite of the Allied bombers. As things turned out, the Germans had little time to ponder their dilemma before the Allies struck again.

THE PALATINATE

The 4th Armored Division and the 704th Tank Destroyer Battalion assembled in positions near the Moselle River on March 9th, while in the south, General Patch's Seventh Army prepared a massive set-piece attack through the West Wall fortifications, to start March 15th. Counting on the defender's confusion, Patton ordered XX. Corps to attack east from its bridgeheads on the Saar (which the 704th had helped establish with the 94th Infantry Division in February) on the 12th. After this attack had attracted the slender remaining German reserves, the 5th and 90th Infantry Divisions crossed the Moselle River in the XII. Corps zone at 0200 hours on the 14th. The 4th Armored Division was committed on the Ides of March with the 704th's "B" Company assigned to CCA, "C" Company supporting CCB, and "A" Company's 2nd Platoon attached to the 25th Cavalry Squadron. The rest of the Battalion and the M5 light tanks of "D" Company, 35th Tank Battalion, had the task of keeping the supply lines open during the drive while "A" Company's 3rd Platoon guarded the 4th's Forward Command Post.

A number of the crews started the new drive in brand-new Hellcats which had finally arrived to replace the travel-worn M18s which had seen so much action since landing in France the preceding year. The 76mm guns on the new destroyers were equipped with double-baffle muzzle brakes. These proved to be a mixed blessing. From a distance, the M18's low slung silhouette and large road wheels, along with the

muzzle brake, made it easy to mistake them for German tanks. This led to some anxious moments, and resulted in at least one tragic incident in which "friendly" fire destroyed a nearby M8 of the 25th Cavalry.

CCA attacked through the 90th Infantry Division's bridgehead in the rugged Hunsrueck Mountains, encountering heavy resistance as they approached the open terrain beyond. Germans fought desperately, trying to maintain an escape route open to the Rhine. CCB, starting from the 5th Infantry Division bridgehead, soon brushed aside the small roadblocks the defenders had hastily assembled and advanced sixteen miles to Simmern. Above the rapidly moving columns, the "jabos" of the XIX. Tactical Air Command circled ceaselessly in the sunny spring weather, ready to swoop down the minute resistance stiffened. White flags and sheets appeared at the windows of most of the German villages along the way. As they roared through the prostrate towns, crewmen of the 704th could dimly read the defender's threatening slogans crudely painted on walls and building sides. The Seventh Army's assault against the West Wall also started that day, straining the defenders meager resources even further. The next day, CCB slashed through the Soonwald, the last major terrain obstacle in front of the Nahe River, and drove fourteen miles to Bad Muenster where the 4th Armored Division's tankers seized a railroad bridge across the river. The XII. Corps objective, Bad Kreuznach, was only two miles downstream. By dark, CCA had also made its way to the Nahe. General Eisenhower sagely noted in a discussion with General Patton that the weak resistance in front of the 4th Armored Division was often a result of its moving too fast for the Germans to establish a defense.

The 17th found the 4th Armored Division holding in place, resting and refitting, while Patton negotiated a new objective — the city of Worms on the Rhine — with General Patch of the Seventh Army. When he returned and found out that the 4th Armored Division was not advancing, Patton was not happy. XII Corps' General Eddy was soon in touch with the 4th Armored with orders to get moving again, telling them, "...the heat's on." During the next two days, the 4th Armored Division cleared Bad Kreuznach and renewed the advance. Progress was slower as the defenders, aided by grenadiers of the 2. *Panzer-Division*, had their backs against the Rhine, trying to hold open an escape route for the German units fighting against the Seventh Army. The roads leading to the Rhine were clogged with wrecked and burning vehicles. Desperate men struggled to escape the swiftly closing trap while American fighter bombers — the dreaded "jabos" — roared overhead, strafing and bombing incessantly. Germans could be seen trying to get across the Rhine on boats, rafts, anything that would float amidst the terrible carnage.

On March 20th, the 4th Armored Division finally fought its way



Winter in the Bulge. A snow covered M18 negotiates a narrow hairpin turn in the bitter cold of the Ardennes. Sandbags cover the thin glacis for added protection and a white sheet has been wrapped around the long gun tube to help blend with the snow when the TD reaches a firing position. US Army Photo SC 199435



A Third Army Hellcat waits near a burning German village while a GI cautiously checks for mines. Note the usual cluttered stowage, stripped aiming stakes and battered condition of the flimsy front fenders. The detachable co-drivers' windshield has been discarded, and its square rack on the front side of the turret now holds a jerry can and a canteen cup. The USA number is 401453589. US Army Photo SC 201509

through the last rag-tag defenders to Worms and the Rhine while spearheads of the 10th, 11th and 12th Armored Divisions also thrust towards the river. "C" Company crews, headed by Sergeants Jesky and Zamora, added to the carnage by destroying a self-propelled gun and a light tank. The desperate German command used almost 300 planes, including jet-propelled *Me-262s*, to try and slow the American columns to no avail. Although the jets were too fast to track, the American anti-aircraft artillery units had a field day against the other aircraft. The 704th also engaged the low-flying *Luftwaffe* and the next day, Sergeant Stephan Krewsky downed a *Me-109* with the ring-mounted .50 caliber machinegun on his M18. Over 11,000 prisoners were taken on the 22nd, a new Third Army record. By the 24th, all resistance west of the Rhine had ended. It was a classic operation, one of the Army's finest achievements in mechanized warfare. The twelve divisions of the Third Army had destroyed two German armies with the help of General Patch's Seventh Army, capturing over 68,000 prisoners of war with only light losses. The operation cost the Germans seventy-five to eighty percent of their infantry in the area and left little to defend the east bank of the Rhine.

Germany's last remaining hopes were pinned on buying time with the formidable defense barrier formed by the Rhine River and blunting the American bridgehead at Remagen. In the north, General Montgomery was busy amassing supplies for a massive Rhine crossing involving thousands of troops and an airborne assault under a pulverizing artillery barrage. General Patton, in the south, was determined to beat Monty across the Rhine, and prevent the Germans who had escaped the Palatinate from catching their breath and regrouping. The 5th Infantry Division was directed to "take the Rhine on the run" and sneak across at Oppenheim during the night of March 22nd, while the 90th Infantry Division made a feint at the more logical crossing site at Mainz. By daylight on the 23rd, the 5th Infantry Division had six battalions across — thirty-six hours before Montgomery's well publicized extravaganza. The 4th Armored Division regrouped without pausing and moved from Worms to the crossing site, ready to exploit the German confusion on the east bank.

BLITZKRIEG

The division and attached 704th Tank Destroyer Battalion crossed the Rhine River on a pontoon bridge during the afternoon and evening of March 24th. For most of the Battalion, the Rhine was a disappointment. The reality was smaller and less impressive than they had come to expect after all the talk of the past months. Soon it was far behind them. CCA drove past Darmstadt before turning northeast towards the Main River. It was *Blitzkrieg* with a vengeance! Now the civilians of the *Reich* found out what their counterparts in Poland, Belgium, Greece, France and Russia had endured. The relentless armored columns swept forward, overwhelming the hodgepodge of small detachments, cadres

and training units manning roadblocks. The long American columns snaked through village after village watched by gaunt, tight-lipped women and tired old men. Bitter. Defeated. The next day, CCA headed for Hanau on the Main River, while CCB went for Aschaffenburg, also on the Main. By nightfall, both combat commands had seized railroad bridges over the river. Illfated Task Force Baum was detached from CCB to liberate the Allied Prisoner of War camp at Hammelburg, thirty-five miles northeast of Aschaffenburg, that midnight. Only fifteen of the 307 men would escape after the task force was surrounded and destroyed a few days later. Controversy still rages because Patton's son-in-law, Colonel Waters, was being held at the camp. Was Patton trying to rescue him or did his staff simply underestimate the German strength in the area?*

An hour and a half after Task Force Baum left, "C" Company's 1st Platoon outpost in the vicinity of Grossotheim was hit from behind. An estimated thirteen enemy tanks and SP guns followed a convoy of friendly armor up the road from Aschaffenburg to the south. Just as the lead SP gun came abreast of the "C" Company position, it fired, setting aflame the Sherman tank it had been following until then. Partial crews on duty in the outpost's M18s desperately traversed their turrets to the rear while the rest of the men, wakened by the gunfire, stumbled into their places, half asleep. There was a brief, short ranged engagement in the eerie light provided by the blazing Sherman tank. When it was over, three enemy SP guns had been destroyed, in exchange for two "C" Company M18s, a jeep, and two 1½-ton trucks.

Dawn found the tired crews of the 4th Armored Division and 704th TD Battalion's vehicles advancing again, using the *autobahns* to reach Giessen on the 28th and Hersfeld on the 29th. There, the 4th Armored Division caught the forty tanks of *Panzer-Brigade Thuringen* deploying. Less than half of the enemy tanks escaped. The 704th's Corporal John Eidenschink accounted for three of the *Panzer IVs* and a towed gun. Back in Aschaffenburg, the 45th Infantry Division and the 645th Tank Destroyer Battalion, which had drawn the task of clearing the city, were engaged in a bitter, week-long struggle. Diehard Nazis carried out Hitler's instructions to the letter, converting the red-roofed hilltown into "Fortress Aschaffenburg." G.I.s of the Thunderbird Division inched their way from house to house. Even the civilians were armed and young girls threw grenades from the rooftops. Each city block had to be methodically blasted and reduced to rubble as the fanatic citizens converted the town into a symbol of German determination. Aschaffenburg was leveled.

The end of March found the 4th Armored Division at Eisenach. CCA and the 704th's "B" Company were directed to drive through Gotha to Ohrdruf and seize a German headquarters reported to be there. When they got to Ohrdruf, the headquarters proved to be an extensive

complex built for the OKW (the *Wehrmacht* High Command) during the 1938 Czech crisis, but never used. A more grisly discovery soon followed when the nearby concentration camp was uncovered. It was the first camp the Allied armies had come across. Generals Patton, Bradley and Eisenhower all later toured this disgusting hallmark of Nazi culture and man's inhumanity to man. The men of the 4th Armored Division and the 704th Tank Destroyer Battalion left Ohrdruf with a better understanding of what they were fighting for, and a determination to finish the job of defeating Nazi Germany. Quickly!

All across southern Germany, the tired G.I.s drove their spearheads at an unprecedented rate until General Patton was ordered on April 4th, 1945 not to advance more than a few miles a day until the First and Ninth Armies closed up. This would take a while as they were still clearing out the Ruhr pocket further north. So, the front continued to move forward slowly in what had become almost a comic opera war atmosphere. The ill-dressed *Volksturm* defending the roadblocks would fire a few rounds for honor and then surrender to "Roosevelt's Butchers," their sullen towns already decked out with white sheets in the windows. More dangerous opposition was provided by a few scattered groups of fanatic Nazis, determined to create new Aschaffenburgs. These groups resisted with a savage ferocity until overwhelmed. As the 4th Armored Division advanced diagonally northeast across the Third Army front, it was transferred from XII. Corps to VIII. Corps and finally to XX. Corps on April 7th. The 704th's TDs participated in what Patton later called the "Third Army War Memorial Project" by firing a few rounds of ammunition into each town before giving it a chance to surrender, leaving the inhabitants something with which to remember the passage of the Third Army.

Erfurt was reached on the 11th, and Buchenwald was cleared the next day, where an even larger concentration camp was found. Buchenwald graphically defined the sordid depths of depravity; not even Ohrdruf had prepared the GIs for this. "Harpoon" vehicles continued on with the 4th Armored Division columns to Weimar and Jena, site of Napoleon's classic victory, finally stopping in the outskirts of Chemnitz along the Mulde River on the 13th to wait for the Russians. A few days later, Patton's divisions turned southeast to clear the mythical Nazi "Redoubt." Persistent rumors maintained that the remaining Nazi officials planned to retire to the hills of southern Germany where they had prepared for a final stand. Fortunately these rumors proved to be false. By May 1st, Headquarters & Headquarters Company of the 704th was at Bayreuth, providing security for the 4th Armored Division's Headquarters, while "A" and Reconnaissance Companies were with CCR. "B" Company was with CCA, and "C" Company supported CCB. The next day, they moved to Deggendorf, Bruek, Grottersdorf and Hengersberg respectively where the units remained until May 5th, refitting. Along the way, one column of the 704th ran into a convoy of White Russian gypsy waggons filled with

* The story of Task Force Baum and the controversy surrounding it are discussed in detail in "48 Hours to Hammelburg" by Charles Whiting, Ballentine Books, 1970.

antiques. The “antiques” turned out to be jewelry, chalices, gold and silver plates, and icons valued at ten million dollars. Some of the pieces dated back to the reign of Czar Alexander. The White Russians, fleeing both the Soviets and the SS, turned over custody to the startled “Harpoon” G.I.’s. It was the culmination of an odyssey that began during the Russian Revolution when White Russian patriots fled their homeland to prevent their historic treasures from falling into the hands of the communists.

On May 6th, the battalion advanced with the 4th Armored Division into Czechoslovakia to a joyful reception by the Czech people. “No fraternization” orders had no validity here! They were ordered to stop, however, along the Pisk River, four miles west of Prague while the Soviet Army “liberated” the city. During the next three days, crewmen of the 704th at Volonay watched as eighty thousand German soldiers raced across a nearby bridge to surrender to the Americans. Soviet troops, meanwhile, blasted away at the fleeing Germans with heavy machine gun fire. Lieutenant Hughes drove over to the Russian position to get them to cease fire in the interest of humanity, but this resulted in only a temporary respite. Finally, the lieutenant lined up a few M18s and fired several air bursts over the Soviet positions. He then returned to the Russian position and added that a barrage would follow if they didn’t cease fire. The communists took the hint, ending one of the first Cold War confrontations. Unfortunately, several weeks later, the disarmed *Wehrmacht* soldiers were marched back across the river and turned over to the Soviets.

Finally, on May 9th, D + 337, it was officially over; the last remnants of Nazi Germany surrendered unconditionally. The 704th’s job was done and the members of the Battalion could look back on their achievements with pride. Fighting alongside the men of the 4th Armored Division, they had played a prominent part in the destruction of the German Army and ran up the highest score of any tank destroyer battalion equipped with the M18. A few months of occupation duty followed. Then having played its part on history’s stage, the Battalion — like the old soldier in the song — faded away... into history.



DISTINCTIVE INSIGNIA 704th Tank Destroyer Battalion

On a shield barry gold and green, a black raguly pile charged with an oak twig, gold leaves and acorn. The motto “Victory not Glory” is gold on a pierced black scroll.

THE
HISTORY
OF THE
704th TANK DESTROYER BATTALION

from
D PLUS 36
to
V-E DAY

Dedicated to the Memory of A Fine Commander
Lt-Colonel Bill A. Bailey

PROLOGUE

The 704th Tank Destroyer Battalion is probably better known to the Germans than to the people back home. Yet to us as members of the Battalion the numbers 704 have a significance which reaches into the depths of Man's virtues and draws forth courage and determination. The 704th has achieved a name in the memoirs of outstanding units, and the men who made the name can be more than justly proud of the fine record and outstanding service rendered to their country during World War 2.

Let us go back to the time the Battalion was first activated on December 15, 1941 at Pine Camp, New York and trace its excellent record to Landshut, Germany; the last stop in the ETO. The nucleus was formed from "D" Battery, 22nd Field Artillery Battalion of the Fourth Armored Division and was attached to that famous division for training. The first commander was Lt. Colonel Cameron who relinquished his command to Lt. Colonel Sears. While still at Pine Camp the 704th had two more commanders, Lt. Colonel Stork (Black Lou), a fine officer, and Major Oden, who soon received his promotion and commanded the Battalion until Orleans, France. After receiving basic training, the Battalion packed their equipment in September of '42 and proceeded to Table Rock, Camp Hood, Texas to expand chests and harden biceps in a rigid physical training schedule which lasted three months. At the Camp Hood Unit Training Center the Battalion gained a fuller knowledge of Tank Destroyer tactics. It was here that apprentices developed into specialists. The men were now ready to test their skill and abilities under simulated battle conditions. This was done in the California Desert in maneuvers with the 4th Armored Division from January to August of 1943.

The next stop was Camp Maxey, Texas, an Army Ground Force conditioning camp where hikes predominated, and where, after various tests, the Battalion was declared fit for the supreme test - Combat. On February 18, 1944 the outfit left for Camp Miles Standish, Mass., the springboard to England. Boarding the British ship, Britannic, on February 27, 1944, the battalion sailed for the United Kingdom and arrived fifteen days later at Liverpool. From there it entrained for Tilshead and then to Trowbridge where, for four months, last-minute training was carried out on the Downs of England in final preparation for the job ahead. For over three years this battalion had been shaped and moulded and tempered and emerged with men of steel, tough and confident, an unbeatable team for an unbeatable army.



Roadblock! A Third Army Hellcat guards a liberated intersection in a German town while a second tank destroyer, seen in the distance, covers another avenue of approach. Note the spring-equipped tie down for the radio aerial, the gun cleaning rods on the left side of the hull, and the air identification panel covering the top of the box strapped to the back of the turret bustle. An empty carbine rack can be seen above the dashboard of the Peep in the foreground. U.S. Army Photo SC 392730



Blitzkrieg American Style! Infantrymen crowd a Hellcat of the 822nd Tank Destroyer Battalion as it speeds along one of Germany's famed autobahns. Such scenes were common place during the rapid advances in the waning weeks of the war. Note the double-barreled muzzle brake in this late model M18 Gun Motor Carriage. US Army Photo SC 206022

COMBAT HISTORY

On July 11, 1944 the 704th left the marshalling area and boarded LCT's at Southhampton. The following day the first contingents of the battalion landed on Utah Beach on the Normandy coast of France at 0930 hours. On the morning of July 17th, 704th tank destroyers, along with the mighty power of the Fourth Armored Division, left St. Mesnil Martin, France to speed inland and take up their first combat positions - indirect fire on the enemy in the vicinity of Raids. The next day they got their first taste of counterbattery fire from the highly publicised "88" - an undesirable introduction to an acquaintance which was to molest them for many months to come. It was here that the first man in the Battalion paid the supreme price. Pfc Robert A. Nicholas of Company "B" was killed by shellfire on the 23rd of July, 1944. They were shelled intermittently during their stay here, but their "76's" coughed "outgoing mail" constantly, giving little rest to the enemy. Jerry was busy with his aircraft. ME 109's, scouring low from out of the sun, strafed and bombed the gun positions, but 50 calibers spoke harsh and defiant answers. It was during the stay here that the Battalion learned what war really was. It learned the things that are not mentioned in field manuals - that there is much more to war than just shooting guns and receiving medals, that there is tragedy and humor in every day. It was in the Hedgerows of Normandy that the men became familiar with such things as "incoming mail", "burp" guns, and the advantage of a deep, convenient foxhole.

July 25th, 1944 was an unforgettable day to the men of the 704th - the start of the Normandy breakthrough. Forts, Liberators, Marauders, Mustangs, and Thunderbolts filled the sky - a sky filled with the black balls of bursting "ack-ack". But they flew steadily on and spilled tons of bombs that shook the ground on which we stood three miles away from the target area. Three thousand planes were involved, and when the last one had finished its work, the 4th Armored Division with the 704th attached plunged out through the dazed enemy, cutting down, and overrunning anything that presented oppo

sition - the situation was no longer a static one. "B" Company under Captain Falloon was attached to CCB, "C" Company under Captain Evans to CCA, and "A" Company under Captain Ryan, with Headquarters Company under Captain Tanner went to CCR. Rcn. Company under Captain Horn had platoons out with each line company. They rolled to Coutances and assembled to refuel. Snipers and small isolated groups of Germans caused minor delays, but they were wiped out in short order. Moving on to Avranches, "A" Company had its first opportunity to carry out its primary mission. Several well - camouflaged German tanks opened fire and knocked out five halftracks. Lt. Addison of the 2nd platoon of "A" Company roared past the column with two guns to flush the Jerries out. Sgt Joe Shedevy, tank commander spotted the enemy tanks first, T/5 Bleemel Beck, driver, whipped the tank around into firing position, Pfc Manuel Alviso shoved home a 76 mm APC, the breechblock snapped shut, Cpl Clinton Threet laid the crosshairs on the center of the swastika, and the first round fired at an enemy tank by an M18 of the Battalion tore through its mark. Before the Hell Cat had stopped rocking, another round was in the chamber and Threet was traversing the tube with swift coolness to another tank partly hidden behind a hedgerow. The Jerry, already laid, fired and missed which cost him his life for the second round from Shedevy's gun left the Kraut tank burning. Two other tanks in the vicinity saw the action and, panicstricken, tried to escape and exposed their positions. Four more rounds were expended, and two more enemy tanks were stopped in their tracks, a holocaust of flame. The battle was won and confidence in men and machines was secure. Lt. Addison, instantly killed in this battle, was the first officer of the battalion killed in action.

The Tank Destroyers moved on to Rennes on August 3rd where SS troops were defending the city, determined and arrogant men who fought with zeal and cunning. The Battalion was ordered to feint an attack on the city to distract attention from a task force which was to race around and attack the city from the South. Here the Battalion lost its first tank

destroyed by enemy action. Although the tank was hit repeatedly, with one man killed, two missing, and one evacuated, Sgt Roger Turcan continued to load and fire the gun until he had exhausted his ammunition. The city fell the following day.

On August 7th, "B" Company, while enroute to Lorient, was pounded by a heavy artillery barrage. Without warning shells rained in on the column, getting several direct hits, and instantly killing the Company Commander, Captain Falloon and his Liaison Officer, Lt. Kelly. The company showed superb coolness, immediately deployed and took action to settle the score. The first platoon by evening had destroyed two anti-tank guns, one lorry, one O.P. and two heavy machine gun emplacements.

There were many towns and little villages liberated by the Battalion, some by exploding shells and some by wine bottles. The town of Vannes was a typical wine bottle affair - the Krauts had pulled out, and our column, which had been racing down the road since 0200 hours in the last phase of snapping shut the pincers on the Brest Peninsula, entered the town without a shot being fired. As the tanks rolled in early in the morning, windows flew up and doors flew open and the people flocked into the streets, laughing and crying, cheering and yelling. Flowers, eggs, wine, cognac and apples poured into the dust-begrimed hands of the men. It was a welcome that will never be forgotten, a compensation for blood and sweat. "Le Bodie caput"!

The Battalion was moving fast now, miles of liberated France fell behind the clattering tracks, imprinting an undisputable claim to victory. In the mad dash across France, generally through Orleans, Sens, Troyes, Chalon sur Marnes, Commercy, the men exerted themselves to the maximum, fighting briefly and savagely, overrunning the enemy, sleeping and eating at odd moments, but always pressing relentlessly on into the rear of a dazed, staggering enemy. At Orleans, France Lt. Col. Bailey assumed command of the Battalion. The companies, spread throughout the Division, had their individual engagements day after day, shooting up towns and villages,

knocking out gun emplacements, destroying fleeing vehicles, supporting dismounted infantry attacks, outpostting towns, crossroads, and bridges, cleaning out small pockets of resistance, protecting flanks and securing main supply routes. Each platoon had its experiences which in the big picture were relatively small and unimportant, but which were to each individual the most important thing in the world, involving life or death. Minor operations go unheard of and many heroes go unacclaimed. Many have gone, wounded and killed, with their praises unsung in a fierce battle or because of a stray shell, or an undiscovered mine, or a lone sniper behind the lines. These men play an unheralded role in the final reckoning.

Through September our tanks beat a steady tattoo on pavements and gravel roads. Haroué, Luneville, Arracourt are never to be forgotten places that soaked up the blood and sweat of fighting men.



The city of Luneville is an undesirable memory to many men of the outfit. It was here that Col. Bailey, Battalion CO, fell in action, and it was here that "B" Company chalked up a record to make him proud of them. Eight German Mark V tanks, supported by infantry, made a counterattack to regain a foothold in the city. The third platoon fought it out at close quarters. A bridge across the railroad tracks just south of town proved to be the bottleneck for the Kraut attack. Sgt Mankin maneuvered his tank into position, fired pointblank and destroyed an enemy tank, traversed rapidly, fired again, and reduced another tracklaying pillbox to a lifeless hulk. Sgt Monaco and Czytajlo accounted for three more tanks, the latter getting two in fast, furious action. The counterattack was beaten off without the loss of a tank and with only five shellfire casualties. The next day dawned cold and wet and with it came a concentrated, continuous pounding by guns and mortars that caused fourteen

casualties. Enemy infantry and tanks got into the town from the East, and street fighting raged throughout the night. "B" Company knocked out a Ferdinand (SP) and a heavy machine gun. "C" Company sent in a platoon to help and promptly KO'd a Mark V tank. Relief by the 6th Armored Division was welcome. But the relief was out of one hot spot into another - the Arracourt area. Lt. Col. Hyde took the Battalion for a short period, received orders for home, and relinquished command to Lt. Col. Alanis.

The period of 20 September to 7 October, 1944 marked a tank battle that again knocked the German 11th Panzer Division back on its heels. The Battalion had contacted the 11th Panzer earlier in Normandy, but never had it shown itself in full mass strength as it did around Arracourt. The German High Command threw the 11th Panzer into battle in a desperate attempt to stop the Famed Fourth, "Patton's Butchers". The Fourth sustained losses, but when the 11th Panzer put its tail between its legs and ran, it left three-fourths of its strength battered, useless, steel-walled coffins on the battlefield. Tank battles raged in the dead of the night and in the thick, blinding fog of early dawn. The green-white tracers of German AP crossed in the night sky the fiery trails of the American shot. There would be a sudden spatter of sparks, a blinding flash, and a pillar of flame would mark the pyre of another enemy tank. "C" Company in moving down into the Arracourt area with CCA ran into trouble around St. Genevive and in the vicinity of Chateau Salins. The 3rd Platoon of Ren. Company lost Lt. Barfus and Pfc. Solomos through bazooka fire in some Jerry held woods near St. Genevive. S/Sgt Proto, Pfc Brower, and Pfc Destfano held off the Krauts until "C" Company brought up their tanks. They knocked out an AT gun, killed nineteen Jerrys and captured twenty-six. "C" Company moved into Arracourt thinking of a rest, but was sent out on a routine mission near Reichcourt. The 3rd platoon under command of Lt. Leiper came face to face with what seemed to be all the armor of the German army. Guns instantly flamed into action and Cpl Stewart, gunner for Sgt Stasis, knocked out two Kraut tanks before his tank was hit

and put out of action. Cpl Eidenschink of Sgt Ferraro's crew accounted for three more before his tank was hit. Cpl Eaton of Sgt Krewsky's section destroyed four more German tanks in fast, furious firing before he too was knocked out of action. Sgt McGurk, with Cpl Sorrentino firing, liberated the crews of two other enemy tanks with neat AP hits. At the same time more enemy tanks moving to assist their apparently "outnumbered" cohorts lumbered across the front of the gun positions of the 1st Platoon. That was their last mistake for Pfc Amodio, gunner for Sgt Hartman, nailed five of them before they could even swing their turrets to bear on him. Cpl Ewamtako of Sgt Donovan's crew clouted three into oblivion. When the smoke cleared the count showed that eight gun crews had knocked out nineteen German tanks with the loss of three destroyers, only one man killed and five wounded. Truly a record to be proud of. "B" Company had accounted for six, while the second Platoon of "B" Company working with the 25th Cavalry destroyed five more near Marsal.



"A" Company was also involved in the dismemberment of the 11th Panzer for four enemy tanks came out through a drizzling rain looking for trouble and found it waiting for them near Arracourt. Sgt Hicklin's gunner, Cpl Hosey, through a dank fog, calmly laid his sights and "squeezed" off his shots. And called them too in spite of return fire, for the four tanks were "finis".

The 11th Panzer had thrown its best against us and been hurled back, beaten and chopped to shreds. Its best men and its best equipment, the famed "Panther" with all its armor, had proved vulnerable to fast-moving "Hellcats" manned by men with the guts and the determination to overcome apparently insurmountable obstacles.

The Fourth Armored was relieved in the line by the 26th Infantry Division, but the 704th stayed in with the 26th in close support. Finally, on 27 October, the Battalion moved back into a rest area near Lenoncourt and was attached to

CCR of the 4th Armored. Here a tally was made, and the count of enemy tanks destroyed was twenty-nine Mark V, four Mark VI tanks and two S.P.'s against a loss of five M18's. The C.O. of CCA of the 4th made the statement that except for C/704 the 11th Panzer could have wiped out his command.

After a welcome rest - in spite of rain and mud - the outfit again moved out with the 4th on 7 November. With "A" Company attached to CCB, "C" Company to CCA, and "B" Company working with CCR, and with a platoon of Rcn. Company attached to each line company, the Battalion again started to roll. The weather had become terrible, cold rain and flurries of snow making the already nasty business of fighting even more dreary. Mud became as formidable an enemy as the German Army. Moving up through Chateau Salins, Hampont, Obreck, Conthil, and Rodalbe the outfit fought the Jerry and the weather. Wheeled vehicles and even tanks became hopelessly bogged down whenever they left the road. Intense artillery concentrations hit the companies all along the route, but heavy casualties were inflicted on the enemy infantry. On 17 November, "C" Company left for Nancy attached to the 6th Cav. Gp. (Mecz) and was billeted in buildings - a good break. Captain Evans came to Battalion Headquarters as S/2 and Lt. Winkhaus took command of "C" Company. "A" Company had troubles in getting into Morlange, losing a Tank Destroyer and several men, including a platoon leader, Lt. Pfaelzer, but in turn destroyed four enemy tanks, one S.P., two pill boxes, and "liberated" many Krauts. The Company made a rugged night march south to Corbesseaux, moved out after two days and drove into Fenetrance through Mittersheim.

Crossing the Saar at Fenetrance, the outfit drove north east through many little towns such as Drulingen, Gungwiller, Mackwiller, Schmittville and Bining. In this area "B" Company was temporarily attached to CCA of the 12th Armored Division, came back to the 4th on 8 December, 1944 and in this period destroyed seven pillboxes and knocked out a Mark V tank. This action took place on the Maginot Line. The Battalion moved back into a rest area, and once again the

outfit was together even though scattered throughout several small towns. "C" Company which had left Nancy on 28 November and rejoined CCB, had its troubles with places like Berg, Rimsdorf and Vollerdingen. The 3rd Platoon was practically isolated in this area - the only contact was by radio or a tank of the 8th Tank Battalion. Mud was so deep that any other vehicle would bog in trying to move cross-country to their position. The Platoon was subjected to intense artillery concentrations night and day for nine days. They were a grimy tired bunch when they finally rejoined the Battalion in Guermange.

On the 14th of December, "B" Company went back to war with the 25th Cavalry of the Fourth Armored and went into position near Rimling and Hoelling. The 3rd Platoon fired the first round of the Battalion into Germany. Lt. Col. Bidwell assumed command of the Battalion. On the 18th of December, the rest of the 704th rolled out to assist the 87th Infantry Division north of Gros Rederding where the occupation of positions was nearly completed when a hurry call came in to rejoin the Fourth Armored. The companies were pulled out and the outfit moved back into an assembly area in Cutting and Lostroff. No words can describe the orderly confusion and tenseness brought on by these rapid-fire orders and the long moves back and forth through rough terrain in an uncertain situation. Yet the companies clicked as a team and again the battalion was together - but not for long as a call came from the 4th Armored to join it on the way to Bastogne and to help punch a hole into Von Runstedt's south flank.

The Ardennes Bulge and Bastogne bring memories of biting, numbing cold and of white snow sometimes dyed red, podmarked with powder-blackened craters, churned and muddy by slipping tank tracks. It brings memories of channelized approaches, incoming mail, trench foot, frostbite, and death that froze too quickly to bleed. It meant stopping and driving back an enemy that was confident and fanatical, an enemy that resorted to every trick of the trade, including the use of American clothing, wheeled vehicles and even tanks. The road