

1st Lt. William N. Fudge, His Introduction to Combat

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My uncle, 1st Lt. William N. Fudge (Uncle Bill) joined the 609th Tank Destroyer Battalion on Feb. 27-28, 1945 as a replacement platoon commander for 2nd Platoon, Company B. Uncle Bill was part of Team Haskell, Combat Command B, 10th Armored Division, US Army XX Corps, under overall command of Gen. Patton's Third Army for operations in the Saar-Moselle Triangle. The structure and organization of military operations can change consistently. Such as the case with Task Force (TF) Haskell, which was called Task Force O'Hara prior to Feb 27th when Lt. Col. O'Hara was wounded and replaced by Maj. Haskell. To further confuse the organization, the command of Task Force Haskell went from Combat Command A (CCA) to Combat Command B (CCB) of the 10th Armored Division at 1730 hours (5:30PM) on March 1, 1945.

Units of the 10th Armored Division crossed the Saar River at either Serrig or Taben south of Saarburg on Feb. 27th. The Saar River towns of Serrig and Beurig were captured by the 94th Infantry Division days before. Once across the Saar River, the towns of Irsch, Oberzerf and Zerf fell to TF Haskell. They continued their attack towards Trier moving in a northwest direction along the high ridge east of the city. This armored column did what an armored division spearhead was meant to do, breakthrough the enemy hit its rear and flanks, paving the way for the hard fighting infantry to clear areas that armored units broke through.

The three Infantry Regiments; 301st, 302nd and 376th of the 94th Infantry Division along with the 5th Ranger Battalion cleared this area of the Saar-Moselle Triangle earning their places in history. The infantry had to capture and destroy hundreds of concrete pillboxes of Hitler's defensive line, the West Wall or known to the allies as the Siegfried Line. TF Haskell met and engaged a few German tanks, infantry, road blocks, minefields and numerous attacks by artillery and mortar fire that destroyed American armor and inflicted many casualties. In the morning of Feb. 27 around 2200 (10:00pm) TF Haskell started its 40 kilometer/25 mile march to Trier. Today this is a 45 minute car ride but during the 1945 fighting march it took two days.

On the night of Feb. 28 the task force stopped to rest at 2200 (10:00pm) four miles southeast of Trier. Unknown to the G.I.'s they were just on the other side of a hill occupied by a German Luftwaffe flak battery sited to provide anti-aircraft protection to Trier. Research has tentatively identified this battery as Flak-Regiment 27 of the 9. Flak-Division under the IV-Flakkorps, consisting of five 88mm dual purpose guns and up to a dozen 20mm anti-aircraft guns of various mounts. At 0030 (12:30 am) the resting Americans started to receive heavy artillery fire in the form of airbursts. Under cover of this barrage a limited German infantry attack of two machine guns, panzerfausts and small arms fire came from the east. This attack was quickly pushed back by Haskell's armored infantry and 50 cal. machine gun fire from two half tracks.

A recon jeep was sent out in the darkness to determine the location of the German guns. In the jeep were Sgt. Robert "Vern" Brookshire and Sgt. Nelson "Pop" Wilson from Second Platoon, Company B of the 609th Tank Destroyer Battalion. The two scouts drove the jeep close to the hilltop to their north, stopped and went by foot to look over the summit only to be spotted by the Germans and had an 88mm airburst fired on them. Thinking that they were all right both men returned to report that they found a flak battery on the opposite side of the hill they were on. Just as they were about to give the details to their commanding officer, "Pop" Wilson fell over dead as a result from the airburst they received. Sgt. Wilson was reported to be the oldest man in the 609th Battalion. The officer that Sgt. Brookshire reported to was Lt. Bill Fudge from Harrisburg Pennsylvania.

It was a costly attack against this task force, which lost two half tracks a jeep and an ammo trailer. Three tanks were hit with no damage to them. However the artillery fire caused approximately fifteen casualties. At 0200 (2:00am) Company B of the 54th Armored Infantry Battalion and 2nd Platoon, Co. B of the 609th Tank Destroyer Battalion launched a counter attack against the enemy position. The 54th Infantry circled to the east to get behind the hill/flak site while two to four M18 Hellcat Tank Destroyers from Uncle Bill's 2nd Platoon maneuvered to take the battery from its south flank. The American attack was completed by 0330 (3:30am) now March first. As a result of this previously "un-know battle" during the night of Feb.28-March 1 uncle Bill's platoon and Co. B of the 54th captured and destroyed five 88mm guns, up to a dozen 20mm guns, a half-track and a complete fire direction control center. Over 30 Germans were captured. No details on the number of German casualties could be found nor is it known how many Germans from this flak site evaded capture.

For his March 1, 1945 heroic actions of repeatedly exposing himself to intense hostile fire to direct his tank destroyer platoon in the destruction of enemy positions, 1st Lt. William Newman Fudge was posthumously awarded the Bronze Star Medal for Valor. General Order #89 from HQ 10th Armored Division dated May 28, 1945 gave the location of this action as the villages of Tarforst and Filsch which are the closest identifiable towns along TF Haskell's route of march. Uncle Bill's Bronze Star was in my mothers possession until she gave it to me at around age eight. During my wife's and mine 2009 memorial tour of Germany to retrace Bill's route of march his Bronze Star and a replacement burial flag were with me at all times. We raised his flag over Bill's grave in the Lorraine American Cemetery in St. Avoird, France. I have a great uncle, Pvt. Walter T. Newman who died in the First World War on Oct. 24,1918 he is buried at the Meuse-Argonne American Cemetery in Romagne, France this flag we had also raised there to honor an earlier generation American soldier.

At 2300 (11:00pm) TF Haskell was on the outskirts of Trier. Its hard to say if they made it into Trier before March 1st ended but by 0230 (2:30am) March 2nd they were in Tier. Other 10th Armored Task Forces had Trier under American control on March 1st& 2nd, 1945. -These were Uncle Bill's first four days in combat.