

(THE
TANK
HUNTERS)

FOR F & M ARTICLE
NEEDS INTRODUCTION - 1/2 PAGE
EPILOG - 1/2 PAGE

Into the Breach... Filling the Gap at Falaise

On the morning of August 13, 1944, the battalions' direction of advance was shifted northwards. When the German reserves were shifted west to isolate Patton by a counterthrust through Mortain, Field Marshall Montgomery's British and Canadian 21st Army Group launched their own drive south from Caen. Two German armies now found themselves in a dwindling corridor between Patton and Montgomery - a most unhealthy position. Presented with a golden opportunity to encircle and destroy both ^{THE} 7th Armee and Panzer Gruppe Eberbach, On August 8th Patton ^{HAD} ordered XV Corps to drive to Argentan. By the 12th, the 5th Armored Division had reached the southern outskirts of Argentan and the following day elements entered Le-Bourg-Saint-Leonard. Here they halted to wait for the British, now some 18 miles north.

At 1030 on the 13th the 773rd left Le Mans and, after a pause at Courgain, arrived at Marche Maisons that evening. The previous tenants of the Bivouac ~~area~~ ^{area} had left rather hurriedly and C Company's armored cars gathered in eight abandoned trucks from a German ammunition convoy. The original owners were nowhere to be found so the battalion settled in for the night. Meanwhile, elements of the 116th Panzer Division heading back from Mortain were ordered to take up positions in Argentan and the neighboring Gouffen forest.

This new German armored presence soon made itself felt. At 1000 hours on the 14th "A" and "C" Companies were alerted to the approach of a column of German tanks. Captains Richard and Kelly were making ready for their first action by checking vehicles and equipment, when overhead a flight of P-47 "Thunderbolts" roared in to launch their rockets at targets beyond view. The air strike, together with a shoot by the 813th Tank Destroyers, turned back the Nazi thrust and the two 773rd companies were able to stand down. Their advance to Argentan continued until 1810 hours when the battalion took up position about three miles southeast of that city, relieving the 628th Tank Destroyer Bn. Firing positions covering the southern exits of the town were taken up by the M-10's of "A" and "B" Companies, while the Reconnaissance Company Personnel provided a security screen. "C" Company was in

reserve and ready to move to the support of the other two. Later that night the 2nd Free French Armored Division moved up on the battalion's left behind "A" Company's position.

Back at XV Corps Headquarters, General George S. Patton was perturbed. Four of his divisions (5th Armored, 79th Infantry, 90th Infantry and 2nd French Armored) were halted, not by enemy action, but by orders from SHAEF. Allied plans, decided on at a conference on August 8th, had set a boundry between the British and American ⁱⁿ ~~armies~~ just south of Argentan. Now Patton had reached his side of the line, but Monggomery was still 18 miles away; and if there was one thing "old blood and guts" could not abide it was sitting still waiting for Monty. Patton, therefore, detached two of his divisions (5th Armored and 79th Infantry) to press on to the Seine River ~~crossing~~ ^{crossing} sites, while the remaining units extended their lines to hold the southern Pincer. To facilitate this reorganization, Patton created a "provisional Corps" under Major-General Hugh J. Gaffey. This would include the 2nd French Armored Division, 80th Infantry Division and the 90th Infantry as well as such auxillary units as the 5th Tank Destroyer Group and the 773rd.

These changes in command had little effect on the tank destroyers outside Argentan. Through the next day the 773rd held their positions under sporadic artillery fire. The German gunners merely wasted their ammunition, while the battalion gathered in Nazi stragglers and began a program of aggressive patrols. In all, 89 Germans were captured by various elements of the 773rd on August 15, but the best news arrived shortly before midnight - the first infantry company from ~~Major~~ Major General MacLain's 90th Infantry Division marched ~~in from~~ from Alencon. This was to mark the beginning of a long association between the "BlackPanthers" and the "Tough Ombres" of the 90th.

But a single company could not replace the entire 5th Armored Division, now on its way to the Seine; and the canoneers of the 773rd were still required to fill in as honorary foot sloggers protecting their gun positions. They remained in position here during the day of August 16th, with their principal activity being an excursion

through enemy territory by Captain Emhardt's Reconnaissance Company.

Early that morning a French woman had stumbled into the battalion's headquarters and assembly area. She claimed to be the wife of the village doctor in nearby Sai, and that a group of Germans were holding her husband and the other townspeople hostage. In response to her appeal, Lt. Col. Spiess ordered the Recon Company to investigate. Emhardt's armored cars made two passes through the town the last instance just as dusk was falling. There was a brief fire-fight among the buildings, and Emhardt returned with the doctor, the villagers and 13 German prisoners. But there was to be no rest for Recon platoon - by 1900 they were back in the front line covering "B" Company's fire positions.

During the day General Gaffey had laid plans for a new attack further to the east. The gap would now be closed along the line of the river Dives. Montgomery's divisions would strike through Trun while the U.S. 90th Infantry drove on Chambois. As a result the 773rd (less "B" and Reconnaissance Companies, who were still holding a sector of the Argentan front) was moved east to Almeneches at about midnight in preparation for an attack on Le-Bourg-St-Leonard on the morning of the 17th.

However, the planned assault was delayed by another change in command. General Leonard Gerow with his V Corps Headquarters had been appointed by Commander 12th Army group to take charge of the Provisional Corps. This would put the troops in the Argentan area under command of the U.S. 1st Army, and thereby free Patton to concentrate on his dash to the Seine. But the reshuffling cost time, and thus it was not until 1400 hours on August 17 that the battalion launched its first attack.

The town of Le-Bourg-St. Leonard is located on a ridge line overlooking the Dives River valley. West of the town the Foret-De-Gouffen covers the crest of the ridge towards Argentan and Falaise with dense woods. The main highway, N 24 Bis, runs south of this wooded area to Le-Bourg where it joins a secondary road leading north down into the valley to Chambois. From vantage points in and around the

village, the gently rolling terrain of the valley is clearly visible as it stretches to the high ground on the opposite side of the Dives. This is farmland with few patches of woods and numerous small villages scattered over the landscape.

Between August 13th and 17th LeBourg had changed hands several times, as patrols from both sides passed through. The last exchange had occurred just the day before when Col. Bacon's 359th U.S. Infantry had been driven out by a determined attack by elements of both the 2nd SS and 116th Panzer Divisions. The Germans, however, ~~intended~~^{tended} to stay. Minefields were laid, machine guns were set up and the clatter of German tanks was heard in the narrow streets and surrounding fields and woods.

Before the counterattack, at about 1400 hours, the Reconnaissance Company rejoined the rest of battalion at Almeneches, having been relieved by infantry of the 80th Division. Emhardt reported that he and Capt. Patterson's "B" Company had been under German artillery fire during the morning but no casualties had been suffered. However, "B" Company would not be able to return to the battalion before the scheduled assault. Nevertheless Lt. Col. Spiess deployed his two remaining TD companies to supporting positions.

Capt. Richard's "A" Company lead the way north along the Almeneches-LeBourg road. The I Battalion, 359th Infantry was in position on the southern outskirts of Le Bourg and the M-10's of "A" Company were to support their attack. Lieut. John Snider, commanding the 2nd platoon, was riding in a jeep ahead of the main body of the company, when he passed over a culvert through which ran a shallow creek. A bit beyond this point, Snider turned off to the right, where he reconnoitered possible positions for his 4 tank destroyers.

Sergeant Henry Mutt's M-10 was leading the 2nd platoon, and A Company, as they approached the creek crossing. No one is quite sure what happened then. Perhaps a lurking German pioneer saw his chance and closed an electrical circuit; or perhaps it was just an anti-tank mine. Nevertheless, as the tank destroyer rolled onto the culvert, the roadway exploded under it. The M-10 lurched to a halt where

it and the crafer from the explosion blocked the road.

Scouts were sent out and reported that there was a passable trail east of the highway and soon "A" Company was rolling forward again. Capt. Richard deployed his three platoons across the southern edge of town. Here two roads entered the built up area, and on the right Lt. Snider's 3 remaining guns covered one route. On the opposite flank Lt. Glen Reck's 1st platoon was in firing position; while, between the tow, Lt. Bill Maus' 3rd platoon made ready to provide close support for the infantry assault.

"C" Company had also been ordered forward with the mission of covering the western approaches to the town and woods north of the Argentan-Le Bourg highway. Captain Kelly followed the same route as "A" Company as far as the destroyed bridge, but when he attempted to by pass it, he ran into a minefield which blocked further progress. With no way to clear a way through the mines, Kelly radioed battalion H.Q. for further orders.

They were soon forthcoming. Blocked to the west, C Company was sent east. Back down the road to Almeneches, then across to LE Heres Du Pin and up the Argentan-Le Bourg-Paris Highway to a rendezvous with II Battalion of the 359th east of Le Bourg. Kelly set up his command post here and then dispatched two of his platoons in an immediate drive toward the eastern side of the town.

It was now about 1600 hours and past time for the planned attack.

It was now 1600 hours and, south of Le Bourg, the 1st and 3rd platoons of "A" Company opened a short but concentrated barrage. For about 5 minutes high explosive crashed into the German occupied buildings.

The Germans were not caught napping, however. Heavy guns from the Panzer Divisions' artillery laid their own concentrations on the attacking formations forcing the Americans to inch their way forward among a forest of shell bursts. But the American assault was irresistable. Supported by the Shermans of the 712th Tank Battalion, Maus' platoon of TD's entered the built up area; and in the failing light M-10's and German Mark IV's stalked each other in the alleys of Le Bourg.

Sergeants Nolan Mintz and Herman Werner followed Maus into the town. Among the close spaced houses their T.D.'s encountered three Mk IV's; but the gunners, Corporals H.C. Carleton and Jim Holmes, were ready, and all three Nazi tanks were disposed of. However, in the narrow streets German snipers were able to look right down into the open topped M-10's. A Company's casualties began to mount.

The American attack brought a quick German reaction. As the 3rd platoon fought its way into Le Bourg, two Panzers were maneuvering to take them in the flank. Lt. John Snider was perched on the rear deck of one his M-10's covering the southeast road when the sinister shape of a German Mark IV emerged. Both crews saw each other at the same time and both turrets began to traverse. By good luck and quick reflexes the American got off the first shot. There was no need for a second round. A short time later Snider's attention was attracted by a G.I. from the 359th. The soldier was pointing into the brush and saying that another German tank was lurking in the woods. Snider ordered the gun commander to train on the suspected area, then scanned the foliage for a sign of the target. But the German's camouflage was too effective. Frustrated the infantryman came up with an idea

"Aim directly over my helmet" he said. Then turned and walked toward the enemy tank. Some distance from the M-10 he turned and signaled to Snider. In the turret the gunner found his human aiming post, set his sights and sent a round of A.P. into the bushes beyond him. Scratch one flanking force.

On the east side of town the original attack had been stalled under the heavy German artillery fire. To regain momentum the reserve company of I Battalion, 359th Infantry was committed, just north of the Paris highway. Supporting them was Lt. Nick Allender's platoon from "C" Company accompanied by the armored cars of the 3rd Recon platoon. Renewed pressure from both south and east forced the Nazis slowly back.

At 1930 hours, the time of the renewed attack on the eastern approach, Captain Kelly was finally able to complete his original assignment. The 2nd Platoon from "C" Company was ordered to skirt the southern edge of town through

"A" Company's area and take up covering position on the Argentan road. The defenders were now boxed in on three sides.

By 2000, the town was secured and consolidation began. Allender's platoon rallied back at the "C" Company command post east of the town, less one M-10. It had been knocked out with two crewmen wounded in the close fighting. Lieut. Joe Michaels' 1st platoon remained in the town holding positions with the infantry. "A" Company also held their ground both in the town itself (3rd platoon) and on its southern perimeter. Within the American lines six smouldering Panzer Mark IV hulks marked the 773rd's first victims. They would not be the last.

Meanwhile, battalion headquarters was keeping busy as well. When the report came in from "A" Company about the T.D. damaged by mines, Col. Speiss sent Lt. John Sharp and his pioneer platoon down the Almenèches-Le Bourg road to clear it. In the process the damaged M-10 was recovered. At the same time Tech/5 H. Riviere along with Pfc. Ray Dehon set out by truck to evacuate the battalion's casualties from Le Bourg. This they did, bringing back the 14 wounded men from A and C Companies, as well as casualties from the 359th and the 712th Tank Battalion, to the battalion aid station set up by Capt. Singer's medical detachment.

In what was rapidly becoming the Falaise Pocket, the German command was desperate. An orderly withdrawal was fast turning into a rout as Canadian and Polish armor drove towards the Dives crossings from the north. On the evening of August 17, the pressure on the northern flank forced the Field Marshall von Kluge to withdraw 2nd SS Panzer Division units from Le-Bourge St. Leonard to Vimoutiers where II SS Panzer Korps was reforming. The withdrawal plan was for Panzer Gruppe Eberbach to hold the corridor open for 7th Armee. Thus the German armor was deployed for the final breakout as follows:

Panzer Gruppe Eberbach - holding the shoulders of the pocket

II SS Panzer Korps - northern flank

2nd SS Panzer Division

9th SS Panzer Division

12th SS Panzer Division

21st Panzer Division

XLVII Panzer Korps - southern flank
 2nd Panzer Division
 116th Panzer Division

7th Armee - withdrawing from pocket

1st SS Panzer Division

10th SS Panzer Division

The result of this reshuffling was the loss of any chance to retake Le-Bourg-St. Leonard. The last reserve of 116th Panzer Division - the ~~the~~ eighty odd survivors of Division Reconnaissance Battalion - was thrown in to replace the storm troopers; but their weakened counterattack on the town made at 2300, was repulsed and by midnight - Le Bourg was firmly in American hands.

The Nazis had not yet shot their bolt, however. The pre-dawn darkness was ripped apart by the shriek of hundreds of rockets. The German Nebelwerfers, alias "Screamin Mimis", smashed into Le-Bourg and the American positions surrounding it.

One 150mm projectile landed directly on Sgt. Charles Brough's M-10's. The vehicle was blown apart; and Brough, Private R.L. Simpson and Private G.L. Sorret were killed instantly. Miraculously, however, the other two crewmen, though badly wounded survived. Three other men from the battalion were wounded; but the Germans failed to follow up their bombardment with a ground assault, and at 0400 hours on the 18th, Michaels platoon was withdrawn from its position in the town to the C Company command post in preparation for the next days operation.

➤ Dawn. From patches of damp ground and woods white masts rose to mingle with the smoke from the burning forest. Soon the fighter-bombers would be circuling above the valley. Along the Le-Bourg - Chambois road the Germans dug in with grim determination to hold the retreat route open.

But it was not Gen. MacLain's intention to attack the enemy's strongest point. At 0700 III Battalion, 359th Infantry renewed the attack, supported by Lieut. Allenders platoon from "C" Company. This force side stepped past the main Nazi position along the road; and, moving along the edge of the forest, dug themselves in on the high ground northwest of the village of Fougy. This was a headland

at the northeast corner of the Foret-De-Gouffern with a commanding view of the western approaches to Chambois. From the crest of the rise known as hill 129 a vast panorama of panic spread before the astonished G.I.'s. The east-west roads in the valley below were choked with enemy transport. It was an artilleryman's dream and at 0900 hours the guns - 15 batteries of division and corps artillery - opened fire. Allender's T.D.'s, waited for the inevitable German counterattack.

Lieut. Charles von Behren's 2nd platoon, "C" Company had spent the night in position west of the town. Now they were shifted to the northern approach, along the Chambois road. The four T.D.'s took up positions on the outskirts of the town near the church ~~with~~ two M-10's on each side of the roadway. Beyond the church the highway entered a broad "S" curve and at the opposite end a German Panzer IV covered the road in much the same way as von Behrens own vehicles. The two T.D.'s on the left side of the road were under occasional sniper fire from the Germans around the church during much of the morning. At about 1100 hours a jeep with an officer from the 359th drove up to the platoon's position. He was warned of the presence of the German tank, but disregarded the advice. The jeep sped on around the bend and a moment later there was a sharp crack of a high velocity gun followed by a cloud of smoke rising over the tree line. A patrol with a bazooka team had been sent out earlier to deal with the troublesome tank but ~~they had not been sent out earlier to deal with the troublesome tank but~~ they had not been able to get in a good shot. Now von Behren took matters into his own hands. He knew approximately where the Panzer was lurking and so ordered the M-10 to advance. Corporal Leon Martin, the driver, edged onto the road and headed for the bend, While above the turret traversed to the left and an AP round was rammed up the snout. It was like the classic western "shoot-out". Both antagonists knew what was coming and he who got off the first shot would survive.

"Fire".

The 3 inch ~~crashed~~ and slammed back against ~~its recoil~~ ^{its recoil} mechanism. The loader flung another shell into the open breech, But it wasn't necessary. The first round had blasted the Mark IV to scrap iron.

During the ~~rest of~~ ^{rest of} the afternoon the 2nd platoon held their post. Early in ^{the} evening another German tank was reported nearby and the platoon opened fire on its suspected position, but without noticeable result. Then at 1930 hours the T.D.'s were ordered to move forward with the II Battalion 359th, advancing about a mile to the crossroads leading to Fougy. Here they took defensive positions and within half an hour the Germans launched their own counterattack. The T.D.'s were well sited, and in the fading twilight well aimed fired and accounted for three more Mark IV's (one of these was recovered by the enemy however and was only claimed as a probable.)

While "C" Company bore the brunt of fighting on the 18th, A and B companies remained in their positions. Late that night relief finally arrived for "B" Company still holding the line south of Argentan. Captain William B. "Pat" Patterson left the area at 2100 hours and moved to the command post. In the morning the battalion would finally be able to operate as a complete unit. Meanwhile Lieutenants, Walt Schewe and Charles Thompson took their recon platoons towards Fels and Chambois in a search for possible firing positions and routes of advance. At 2300 hours they reported back at the CP then turned in for a few hours rest. Tomorrow would be a busy day.

In the enemy camp, August the 18th had been a disastrous day. In the north, the Canadians had captured Trun, and deployed along the east bank of the Dives. A small allied force was threatening the two stone bridges at S. Lambert. In the west the British 2nd Army was exerting pressure on the front of the pocket, while in the south the Americans were closing in on Chambois, while on three sides the massed artillery of three field armies pounded every inch of the pocket.

General Hausser, commanding 7th Armee, knew his time was running out. Now, if any of his troops were to escape they might fight their way out. The attack eastwards was set for the next day, the 19th, and all 5 Panzer Divisions were to be directed against Chambois.

0630 hours on the 19th and "B" Company was already on the move. Joined by the two reconnaissance platoons that had scouted the last night, Captain Paterson lead

his company in support of III Battalion, ~~358th~~ ^{358th} Infantry. Their objective was the high ground northeast of Chambois and to reach it the TD's had to cross the Dives. Lieut. Ben Phillips' 1st platoon was in the lead when they reached river; but here the stream proved only a minor obstacle - 12 feet in width - and caused only a brief delay. In a few minutes, Phillips and his platoon were headed northward again. They were badly needed.

About half a mile northeast of Chambois the 358th had run into a hornet's nest. A large contingent of Germans with armored support had stopped the battalion cold and was forcing the G.I's back when Paterson arrived with the 1st platoon. The TD's roared into action and in a furious fire-fight they broke the back of the Nazi battle-group. Two German tanks erupted under fire from the M-10's. Ammunition trucks, a staff car, and groups of infantry were all blasted by high explosive from the 3 inchers of the 1st platoon. Encouraged the G.I's swept forward again and gathered in some 400 dazed and exhausted prisoners.

The 2nd and 3rd ~~platoons~~

~~On Hill 129, Lieut. Allender's~~ platoons of "B" Company were some distance behind Paterson and Phillips, and only reached Fels by nightfall. One Mark IV Panzer had been dispatched by the 2nd Platoon on the way, however, there was relatively little other resistance.

On Hill 129 Lieut. Allender's platoon from "C" Company was running short of ammunition, and Capt. Kelly decided to relieve it in order to resupply the M-10's. The 1st platoon had spent the previous day in reserve; now Lt. Michels lead their 3 remaining TD up the hill. As afternoon turned into evening a long column from the 1st SS Panzer Division passed under Hill 129 heading east towards the crossings at Chambois and St. Lambert. The TD's opened fire speeding the Germans on their way and littering the roadway with an undetermined number of burning vehicles.

Relieved from their position on hill 129, Allender's 3rd platoon returned to the C Company command post at the crossroads east of Fougy. Here the M-10's were refueled and their ammunition racks refilled. Then they set out once more to join

I Battalion of the 359th at Fougy. Allender remained in the relatively quiet sector the rest of the day and night.

The main blow on August 19th, however, was to come from II Battalion of the 359th supported by von Behren's 2nd platoon, "C" Company. Their mission was to capture Chambois. During the afternoon they advanced down the Chambois-Le-Bourg highway to the Fel crossroads where they crossed the dikes. At about 1600 the battalion reached the outskirts of their objective. The tank destroyers were called up and von Behren's guns softened up a row of fortified houses. "E" Company of the 359th entered the town and soon had joined men from the 1st Polish armored Division. By 1930 hours the Germans had been cleared from the town, and the American and Polish commanders had organized its defense. An integral part of that defense would be 2nd platoon C Company, 773rd Tank Destroyers.

Deployed along the western and northern approaches to the town, von Behren's platoon was engaged by large enemy force at about 1800. (This probably included survivors of the column engaged by the 1st platoon from hill 129). The series of fierce fire-fights lasted until 2230 hours (10:30pm) and between them the two C Company platoons (Michael's 1st and Hill 129 and von Behren's 2nd in Chambois) accounted for 2 ~~panzer~~ ^{panther} tank, 8 panzer Mark IV's, 2 panzer III's (Command tanks), a self-propelled gun and some 20 other vehicles.

— von Behren's platoon had also suffered some losses, however.

Two of his M-10's were mechanical casualties and a third had ^Wdamaged turret which could not be traversed. Sgt. Louis Schimpf's TD was the only fully operational M-10 in the platoon and early in the evening it took up a firing position on the north edge of Chambois. Hull down behind the angle of a stone wall at the junction of a farm track and the main road, the ^{vehicle's} 3-inch had a commanding field of fire. To their right an isolated farm house was burning providing a limited amount of illumination while in the intersection directly in front of the TD was the wreckage of a German motorcycle combination. A few yards north along

the main road a Nazi ^{gun} machine team had settled for the night.

August 20, 1944, found the 773rd deployed in a wire acre across the German retreat routes through Chambois. On the extreme left 1st platoon, C Company held the crest of hill 129. To their right 3rd platoon C Company, was in position near Fougy. On the western and northern outskirts of Chambois the depleted 2nd platoon still held their position and on the high ground east of the town 1st platoon, B Company, covered the eastern exits. Southeast of Chambois the 2nd and 3rd platoon held the right flank. A Company was in battalion reserve at Le Bourg St. Leonard, ready to support any of the other units as needed.

Dawn on hill 129. Lieut. Michaels, on the crest with his M-10's, looked down a chilling sight. On both sides of the hill long columns of German armor were deployed. Immediately the TD's opened fire, sending an avalanche of armor piercing and high explosive shells down the slope and the mass of Nazi vehicles. The Germans were quick to reply with artillery, mortars and shell arms - as well as direct fire from half a dozen tanks and assault guns. For two hours the exchange continued, but the M-10's were fast running out of ammunition. A large portion of their shells had been expended the night before and no resupply had reached them. At 0800 hours Michaels sent out a call for help to battalion H.Q.

"We're hit"

Sergeant Ernie Rabe ordered his crew to bale out and take cover. Clear of the damaged M-10, Rabe organized the evacuation of his three wounded crewmen, while Private Ira Conklin went back to make sure that the tank destroyer would be of no use to the enemy. German infantry were closing in on the gun position, as Conklin scrambled into the turret. He noted that there were still four rounds of high explosive left in the racks; and, rather than waste them, Conklin singlehandedly loaded and fired each at the advancing German infantry, dropping some 40 of the attackers. With the closest German a scant 100 yards away Conklin set the demolition charges and scampered to safety.

A short distance away Sergeant Aubrey Rayburn was engaged in a duel with two

panthers, and 3 Mark IV's. Rayburn stood in his turret and carefully chose his shots. Below him Private Levander Morris kept a steady stream of shells flowing into the hungry breach of the 3 inchers while Corporal Ralph Walls, laid his piece with precision. Before they ran out of ammunition all 5 Nazi tanks had been reduced to burning wreckage.

Michaels' platoon was now down to two TD's-both with empty shell racks. The battalion ammunition sergeant, Sergeant M.C. Ely, had tried to get a load of ammo up to hill 129 but due to enemy activity he was unable to proceed beyond the "C" Company command post. The relief platoon had not yet arrived, but Michaels had no option but to withdraw to the C.P. to reload and refuel.

Meanwhile, the German column north of the hill passed in front of the 3rd Platoon's position outside Fougy. It was about 0800 hours and the Germans were between 1000 and 1500 yards away when Lieut. Allender gave the order to open fire. It was like a shooting gallery. Across the front of the platoon moved a solid line of tank trucks, guns and wagons heading east. The Germans even failed to shoot back and only a few scattered artillery shells fell near the M-10's. For three and a half hours the one sided battle continued until 1130 hours when the battalion commander of the 359th ordered a halt to the barrage. Along the roadway were found the hulks of 1 panther, 12 panzer IV's, 2 self-propelled guns and 27 other vehicles.

Nearby Lieut. Delbert Reck's 1st platoon, A Company, was moving up to relieve the platoon on Hill 129. About 1000 yards southeast of the hill, Reck observed a large group of enemy vehicles crossing the southern shoulder of the rise. This was the same force that had forced Michaels platoon to withdraw from the hill a short time before. Reck with his four M-10's quickly took positions along a thick hedgerow and managed to get off the first shot. This commenced a wild melee with the Americans, firing at a tremendous rate from shifting positions, tired to convince their opponents that they were stronger than they were. The Germans on the other hand were caught by surprise and threw everything they had at the hedgerow but with

out noticeable result. One German vehicle after another burst into flames. After an hour the fire slackened and the G.I.'s advanced into the fields and began rounding up German stragglers from among the haystacks and hedges. For three hours this continued as the M-10's also stalked the few remaining Nazi tanks. In all some 900 Germans were captured and a detail from battalion headquarters under Lt. McMahon was sent out to gather them in. Left on the field were 1 panther, 7 panzer IV's, 16 armored cars, 19 half-tracks, 10 field guns, 2 AA guns, and 68 other vehicles.

When Reck's platoon engaged the German column, Lieut. John Snider's 2nd platoon, A Company was ordered forward to the C Company command post at the crossroads east of Fougy. This was to block any possible breakthrough and an hour later the 3rd Platoon was also called forward. At about 1400 hours Lt. Naus' 3rd Platoon moved up to assist Reck in mopping up the German column and covering his advance onto hill 129. The two units then leap-frogged onto the high ground, knocking out 4 more panzer IV's during the late afternoon.

In Chambois, Sergeant Schimpf's M-10 was still in position behind the stone wall on the road to St. Lambert. During the night they had taken some sniper fire from the houses behind them. Schimpf's driver, T/5 Bill Grant, and his assistant, Private Burke, tried to scout the field north of the track; but as Grant raised his head above the protection of the wall, the staccato burst of a German machine gun cut the air. Grant opened his mouth to yell and felt the hot passage of bullets in front of his face and under his chin. Miraculously, he was unscathed, but beside him Burke was hit and fell back behind the stone barrier. That ended the scouting expedition and also left Schimpf short a crewman.

Meanwhile, a few miles to the west General Lieutenant Freiherr von Luetwitz's 2nd Panzer Division (the "Vienna Division") was assembling for their breakout attempt. Von Luetwitz had about 15 tanks, a Panzer Grenadier Regiment, and assorted tank destroyers (Panzerjaeger) and self-propelled guns; and, at 0400 hours on the 20th the division started its run through the Allied gauntlet.

The morning of August 20th brought a thick layer of fog to the valley of the

Dives, and the Germans were able to get a good start, before the sunburned through the overcast and brought down upon them the concentrated fire of the massed Allied artillery and fighter-bombers. By 1000 hours, 2nd Panzer had reached the bridge outside St. Lambert. Here they were met by scattered opposition from Canadian and Poles. Von Muettwitz set about securing the crossing point while sending his armored elements on south along the east bank to Chambois, where the single M-10 blocked their escape.

Through the morning Schimpf's crew had been engaged in sporadic fighting as groups of German stagglers tried to force their way past. It was early in the afternoon when 2nd Panzer arrived. A large column of transport, lead by some 25 armored vehicles, were observed moving along a secondary route then turning south on the main trunk - Chambois road. The German tanks - including 3 panthers - were in the lead, and rapidly closed on Schimpf's position.

In the ~~Manning~~ ^{M-10's} turret Corporal Ed Bundle tracked the leading Panzer until he was sure he couldn't miss, then squeezed the trigger....

The 3-incher barked sharply. The breech slammed back with the recoil and Nelson rammed another round home. Another crash. Dodging hot brass shell casings bouncing on the turret floor, Nelson grabbed another 27pounder shell from the ready rack, pushed it into the gaping breech, and returned to the rack. 162 times Nelson repeated this exercise that afternoon using not only the full stock of ammunition in his own vehicle but those of the two damaged T.D.'s as well. Beside Nelson in the narrow confines of the turret, Bundle coolly chose his targets - aiming for those few vulnerable chinks in the Panthers' armor.

The Germans had been caught flat-footed by the ambush. Concealed behind its wall the American Tank Destroyer had remained undetected until its first shot brought the leading Nazi tank to a halt. Now they were hemmed in on the right by a patch of woods between the road and river, and on the left by a stone wall surrounding a plowed field. The wreck in the roadway blocked progress to the front and every 3 second came another blast from the hidden American gun. Desparately the survivors backed and turned in an effort to escape or fight back.

One, two, three Panthers clanked to a halt or erupted in flames. Seven Panther * Mark IV's and 2 Mark III command vehicles also littered the road and fields, as well as 30 other vehicles including 3 self-propelled guns. Small arms still crackled, ^{but} by 1700 the battle here was over.

Nearby, the 2nd Platoon's remaining M-10 the one with the jammed turret was brought into action as well. On the western bank of the Dives Capt. Lienhart's "E" Company of the 359th faced continuous piecemeal attacks from 1000 hours. At one point 3 Panthers lead some 500 troops in a dash for the American lines. The G.I's replied with everything they had. A lucky hit by one of the 81mm mortars brought one of the tanks to a stop, and bazooka teams disabled another. However, the third took shelter in a large barn a few yards from where "E" Company sheltered in the river bed.

It was a standoff, then Sgt. John Hawk put in the call for TD support. Von Behren's crippled M-10 was on the opposite bank near Schimpf's position when Hawk reached him. Although his turret could not reverse, the gun itself was operational and von Behren decided to engage. It didn't matter that he would be up against a superior machine with his own vehicle badly damaged. After all, they were paid to hunt tanks. Slowly the invalid machine clanked off behind the infantry man. Once within view of the barn, von Behren jockeyed his vehicle into position, aiming the gun with the steering levers. On target! The first round crashed out...and erupted near the structure. A minor adjustment and the second shot seeks its mark. Still off a bit. A third try came closer and a fourth closer still. But before a fifth shell could be loaded and sent on its way, a large white cloth appeared on the bar. After some negotiations 6 German officers, 500 men and the Panther surrendered to "E" Company.

During the engagement, Lt. John Snider's platoon, "A Company", arrived at Chambois. Having spent the morning at the "C" Company Command Post near Fougy, holding a back-up position on the western approaches to the town. Action here was light and only a relatively few survivors on the battles further west managed to

come within range. Nevertheless, the platoon accounted for two Panzer IV's that afternoon.

Withdrawing from Hill 129 that morning, Michaels 1st platoon had returned to the company command post where his two remaining M-10's drew a full load of shells and topped off their fuel tanks. He was also able to pick up a replacement tank destroyer; and, with 3 guns again, he set off for Chambois, arriving there at about 1900.

On the east side of the town "B" Company Hill held supporting positions with the III Battalion 358th Infantry. The company headquarters and Lt. Phillips 1st platoon remained all day on the high ground a half mile northeast of the town. Few German armored vehicles made it this far, but there was heavy infantry fighting and over 1200 German P.O.W.'s were taken in the area (23 by B Company personnel themselves).

The 2nd and 3rd platoons, B Company, along with 2nd Recon. platoon, held Fel on the road leading due east from Chambois. However, with the capture of Chambois itself their position became that of a backstop and remained relatively quiet.

As August 20th passed into history the 773rd's role in the battle came to an end. To the northeast the Poles^{and} Canadians were still fighting, but in and around Chambois only a few German stragglers remained. In the past four days the battalion had destroyed 41 German tanks (including 3 Mark V Panthers) and 32 other vehicles, had captured seven thousand Germans, and slammed the door on the main route of withdrawal of the German 7th Army. The cost had been 3 M-10's destroyed, 1 M-10 damaged by mines but recovered and 3 others lightly damaged. Six men from the battalion had been killed and 25 wounded.