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## **COVER**

Preparing to carry out its mission in any climate, the Army trains as it will fight. On page 25, Robert E. Rogge describes an unusual 130-mile road march in 100-degree temperatures...unusual because it was a National Guard unit on its way to the NTC. On page 28, two participants in the 1984-85 Reforger exercise discuss the lessons of last winter's record cold snap in Europe.

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## Return to Singling

by A. Harding Ganz, PhD.

In April 1978 two American tankers, retired Colonels James Leach and Robert Cook, returned to the WW II battlefield of Singling in Lorraine, France. In December 1944, First Lieutenant Bob Cook had been a tank platoon leader, and Captain Jimmie Leach the tank company commander, of Team B, mounting a tank-infantry attack as the spearhead of the veteran 4th Armored Division, as Patton's Third Army drove to the German border. At the village of Singling they encountered elements of the German *11th Panzer Division*, and at day's end the Americans abandoned the village as not worth the cost, even as the 4th Armored's Combat Command A secured its primary objective of Bining.

The fight at Singling was the subject of a detailed study by Second Lieutenant Gordon Harrison of the War Department's Historical Department, and published in its "Small Unit Actions" series in 1946. When Leach and Cook returned to Singling some thirty years later, they were guests of Major General Paul Gorman, CG (Commanding General) of the 8th Mechanized Infantry Division stationed at Bad Kreuznach. Two *Bundeswehr* officers accompanied them. They toured the battle area, by helicopter and on the ground, to clarify details of a typical armored battle, as a division terrain walk exercise. The tankers could critically review and analyze the tactics of that fight, even as in their minds' eyes they vividly envisioned the

four destroyed and blackened tanks and the ten casualties, that included the other two tank platoon leaders, on that grim December day.

### Tactics and Weapons

In the breakout and pursuit campaign in the summer of 1944, the 4th Armored Division had performed brilliantly, receiving the accolade from General George Patton: "There has never been such a superb fighting organization as the Fourth Armored Division." But the situation was changed for armor in the offensive that had jumped off on 8 November. The Germans had been able to create an elastic defense-in-depth, skillfully using minefields and the muddy terrain to canalize an armored attack and block it with demolitions and anti-tank gun ambushes. The few *panzer* units available conducted a mobile defense, but with the threat of American air superiority, mounted only sharp, local platoon- and company-level counterattacks. There would be no large-scale tank battles as there had been in September.

The German main battle tank *Panther*, with its 25 3/4-inch wide track, giving it a ground pressure of 12.52 pounds per square inch, had a flotation and cross-country terrain capability greater than the American *M4A3 Sherman* tank, with a 16 9/16-inch wide tread and a ground pressure of 13.7 lbs psi. Duckbill track extensions helped only somewhat. The power traverse and gun stabilization of the *M4*

gave it some advantage over the *Panther's* slower manual-hydraulic system of gun-laying, but the high velocity 75-mm KwK 42 L/70 German gun could easily penetrate the *M4's* 2 1/2-inch frontal armor at 2,000 yards. The *M4's* low velocity 75-mm could not penetrate the *Panther's* 3 1/2-inch frontal armor, angled 55° from the vertical. Up-gunned 76.2-mm HV *M4s* began to replace the older tanks during the autumn of 1944, but even these, with HVAP (Hypervelocity Armor-Piercing shot) ammunition, were really only effective under 300 yards. Thus German tactics were to seek positions with extended fields of fire and engage at long range. American tactics were to close the range, under cover of defile or obscurity (smoke and artillery fire), and engage at close range or from the flank.

American tanks were further encumbered by the armored infantry, who were carried on the tanks. The *M3* halftrack with its thin 1/4-inch armor and open top, was not a battle vehicle, nor could its tires and narrow treads negotiate the muddy terrain. The practice was for the armored infantry to ride their personnel carriers from the assembly area to the attack position just short of the LD (line of departure), and there "marry up" with the tanks, a rifle squad of armored doughs clambering onto each tank to maintain unit integrity, the platoon leader mounting his counterpart's tank to facilitate communication using the tank com-

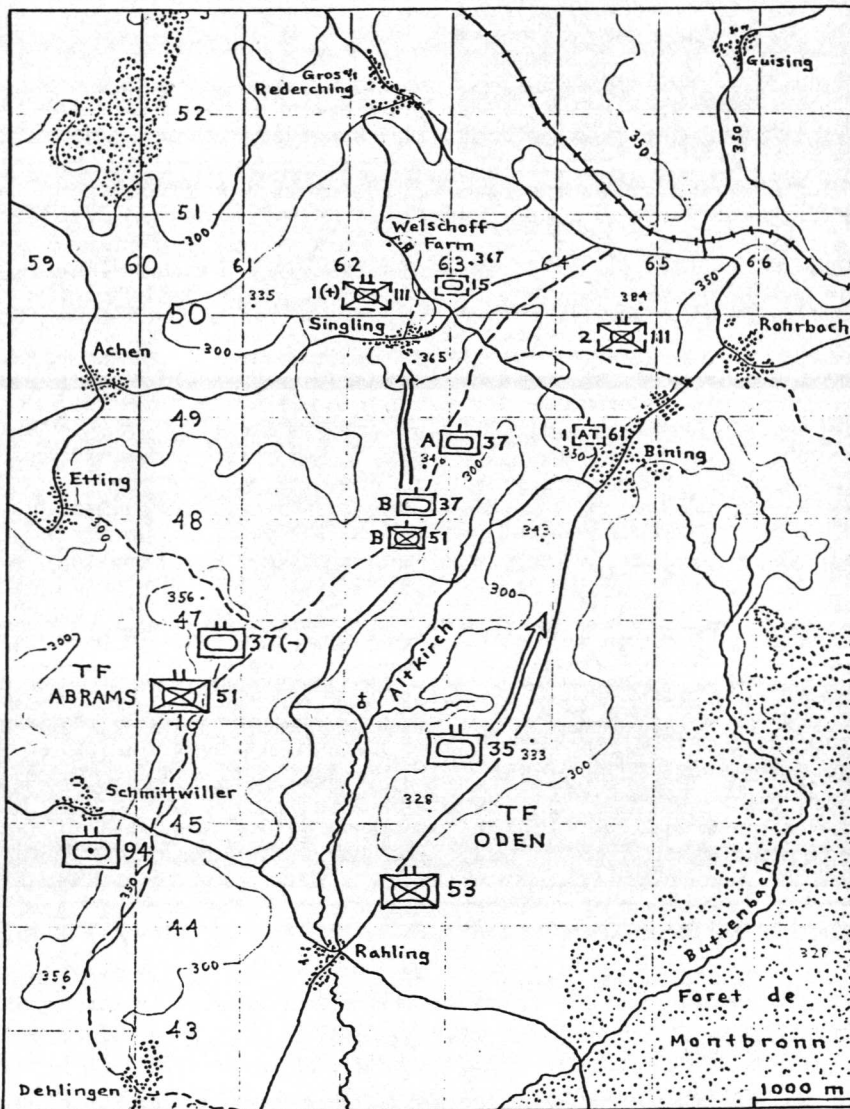
pany radio frequency. The infantry dropped off in the assault or if the tanks came under fire. An artillery FO (forward observer) in his own tank was attached to a tank company, to call fire missions of WP (white phosphorous) for smoke screening, or HE (high explosive) to weaken defenses and cause casualties. The limited range of the M7's 105-mm howitzer, 12,000 yards, under seven miles, meant frequent displacement to cover an advance.

American tactics were improvised of necessity. American armored forces had been organized and equipped to implement the doctrine of Lieutenant General Lesley McNair's AGF (Army Ground Forces), whose concept was that the armored division was *not* to spearhead the advance — as was the mission of the *panzer* division in the German *blitzkrieg* concept — but was to exploit a breakthrough made by the infantry divisions. Hence, American tanks were not designed or gunned to fight German tanks, nor were the infantry trained to fight from their vehicles.

The American doctrine had been dramatically successful in the breakout and pursuit during the summer of 1944, but literally bogged down in the mud and German defenses of November. Patton had not achieved the decisive breakthrough for which he had hoped, and the armored divisions had had to be committed to slug the advance forward.

### First Advance on Singling

By early December 1944 Patton's Third Army was driving to the German border and the *Westwall* Siegfried Line defenses of the Saar industrial area. On 5 December, the 4th Armored Division advanced from its Eichel River bridgeheads with its two combat commands abreast. Combat Command B's 8th Tank Battalion had captured Voelldingen, crossed the Eichel, and now drove almost to Schmittwiller; but then was ordered to hold up until CCA cleared Domfessel. The new CG, Major General Hugh Gaffey, Patton's former Chief of Staff, committed the relatively fresh 37th



Map illustrates the routes taken by U.S. units enroute to Singling.

Tank Battalion from Reserve Command through CCA, to drive to Bining, toward Rohrbach les-Bitche.

As the main highway was exposed to flank fire from the Forêt de Montbronn, the 37th Tank's commander, Lieutenant Colonel Creighton Abrams, swung to the next ridge line farther to the west. It was late afternoon as the tanks advanced. The 94th Armored Field Artillery (AFA) Battalion had barely gone into firing position to support the attack, though its CO, Lieutenant Colonel Robert Parker, had

planned numbered concentrations with Abrams to be fired on call. About 800 yards south of the small village of Singling, Captain Charlie Trover's C Company tanks churned over a slight rise in the line formation and five mediums were simultaneously knocked out by high velocity gun fire. Nine others were disabled by accurate artillery fire while they were mired in the mud on the naked high ground. Fourteen tanks were lost, including two FO tanks. Charlie Company was wiped out; and under the covering fire of Captain Jimmie Leach's



Sergeant inspects welded-on "duck-bills", used to widen narrow Sherman track for operation in soft terrain.

B Company tanks and the 94th AFA, Abrams withdrew his battalion for the miserably cold, wet night.

There had been no infantry to secure the village, there had not been enough artillery to effectively screen the advance over the open ground, and Lieutenant John Whitehill's A Company tanks, deployed to the left, had not been able to provide the long-range tank fire necessary to suppress the high velocity tanks or guns apparently in and around Singling. In addition, the loss of the FOs, and the dreary rain which grounded even the *L4* spotter planes, kept the ubiquitous American artillery from pin-pointing specific targets.

### Second Advance on Singling

On 6 December, CCA advanced again, on two axes. Task Force Oden drove along the highway through Rahling toward Bining, while TF Abrams would come in on Bining from the West. Abrams had his own 37th Tank Battalion and Lieutenant Colonel Dan Alanis' 51st Armored Infantry Battalion (AIB), cross-reinforced. But Abrams determined to neutralize Singling, so as not to expose his flank as he swung on Bining, and so recommended to CCA.

Whitehill's Able Company tanks moved out to neutralize Singling by fire. They were supported by Batteries B and C of the 94th AFA which fired smoke concentrations of 131 rounds. But heavy direct and indirect German fire stopped A Company. Since this fire could not be suppressed, Colonel Abrams decided on his own initiative to take the town of Singling. By radio he passed the order to Captain Jimmie Leach, commanding Team B, which was moving up for the attack on Bining.

Like-lettered infantry and tank companies were often paired as teams, the tank company CO usually commanding the whole team un-

til the infantry went into action. Familiarity and cooperation between the company commanders was essential. Captain Jimmie Leach's B Company/37 Tk was at strength, moving out with fourteen of its seventeen T/O&E tanks, five of them having the new 76-mm gun, plus First Lieutenant Don Guild's FO tank of the 94th AFA. Leach was an aggressive company commander, and his tankers were veterans of the campaigning since Normandy. But First Lieutenant Dan Belden's Baker Company of the 51st AIB was far below strength, reflecting the proportionately heavier casualties the infantry incurred, and the scarcity and inadequacy of replacements. The three rifle platoons numbered 19, 14, and 15 respectively, instead of the authorized 56 men each, there were only 6 in the company headquarters section and 7 from all the weapons squads. In addition, there had been a 100% turnover in officers during the November fighting, though Belden himself was experienced, having returned after recovering from wounds. Further, morale was not helped any by the fact that three days earlier, the division's beloved commander, Major General John "P" Wood, had clashed with the corps commander and been relieved by General Patton.

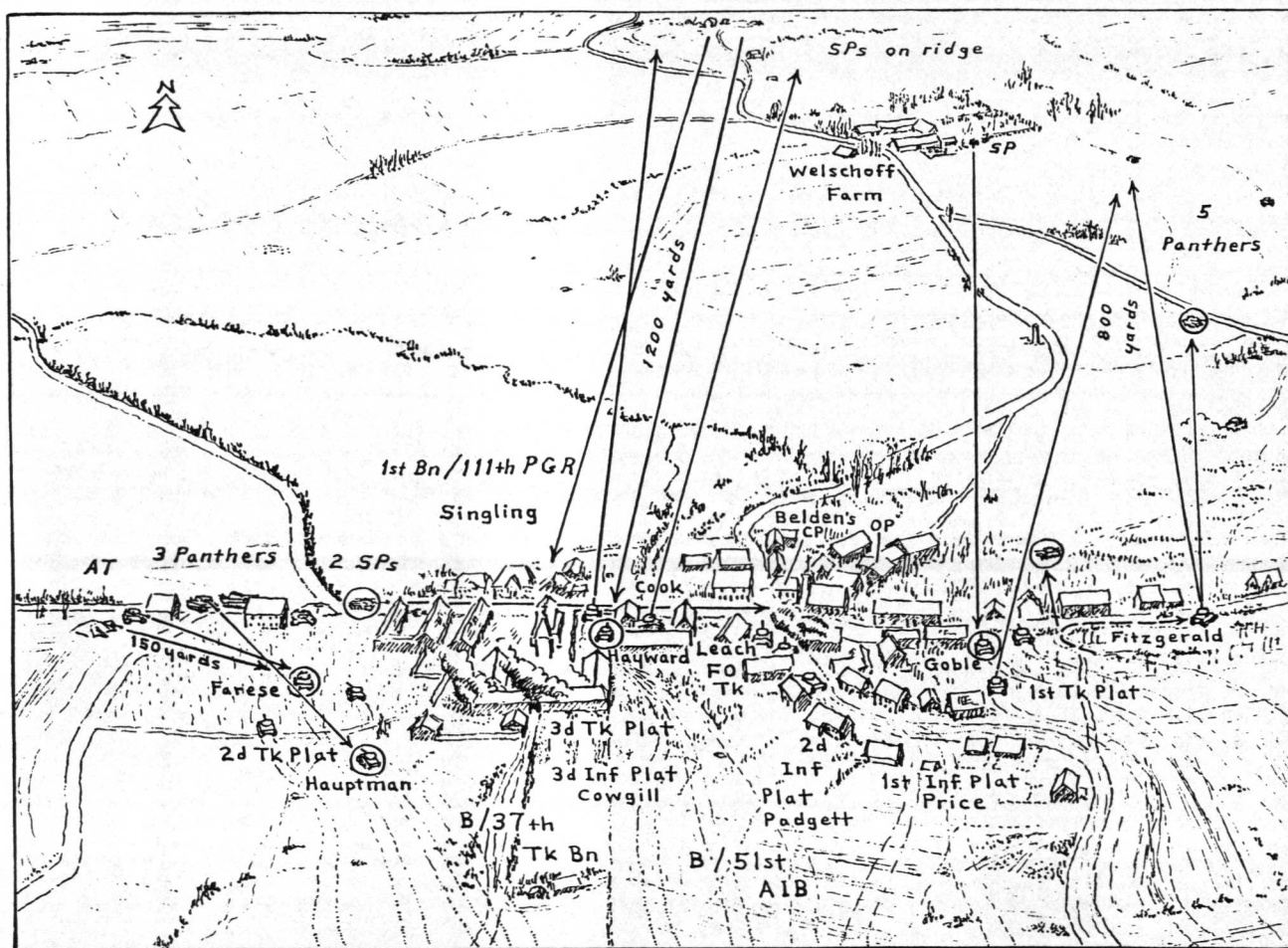
The two companies had moved out of their bivouac areas at 0700, but the halftracks soon bogged down. "The mud was so bad," related the battalion After-Action Report, "that only full-tracked vehicles could maneuver, even on trails." The armored doughs mounted the tanks in the tankers' assembly area, 3,000 yards from Singling. When Leach received Abrams' order changing his objective from Bining to Singling, he could pass it on to Belden, but with radio listening silence he was unable to inform the other platoon leaders or to make detailed plans. The commanders

had to rely on their combat-wise men to adjust to the change of objective, though even that night some believed they had been fighting in Bining, not Singling.

At 1015, Team B jumped off in the attack. There was a heavy overcast, and no air support could be anticipated. A and B batteries of the 94th put 107 rounds of HE on Singling, and the 37th's assault gun and mortar platoons took up the smoke mission from 3,000 yards distance. Whitehill's A Company tanks put down covering fire on the road to Bining, and a platoon of *M18 Hellcat* tank destroyers from B/704th TD Bn, put direct fire on Singling with their high velocity 76-mm guns, though their open turrets were soon exposed to German artillery fire. A WP smoke screen, stabbed occasionally by HE explosives, drifted across the village, partially obscuring it. There were some fifty buildings strung half a mile along the road to Bining, a typical Lorraine farm village, stone stuccoed houses fronted by manure piles. But the Singling ridge was in the old Maginot Line, and the stone buildings and scattered pillboxes provided good defensive positions.

### Tank Attack

Leach's tankers opened up with their cannon and machineguns, shells and tracers streaking across that sodden ground as the tanks churned forward, an impressive volume of fire to overawe the defenders. Indeed there was no return fire as the tanks advanced on the smoke-shrouded village. Sergeant Joe Hauptman's tank of the 2d Platoon developed transmission trouble and dropped behind, and Staff Sergeant Max Morpew's radio conked out, and his tank dropped out of 3d Platoon to help evacuate wounded later. In the sudden violence of tank action, radio commo was essential. In a five-tank platoon, only three or four tanks were generally available for



combat. But the other thirteen tanks deployed and attacked in line formation, spitting fire, on a front of 600 yards. Watching from a distance was Lieutenant General Fritz Bayerlein, whose *Panzer Lehr Division* had just been relieved by *11th Panzer*. He later recalled that it was "an outstanding tank attack, such as I have rarely seen, over ideal tank terrain." It was the compliment of the true professional.

On the left, Second Lieutenant Farese's 2d Platoon, carrying no infantry, moved up through a sparse orchard toward the west end of the village. Jim Farese's tank had just topped a slight rise — when suddenly three armor-piercing shells slammed into it. The platoon leader and his loader, PFC Bill Bradley, were killed by the steel shards that flew around the turret compartment. The gunner was wounded but managed to get out. The driver and BOG (bow gunner) scrambled out, and dodged back down the slope. The other two tanks backed into defilade, finding that even exposing their radio antennas drew instant AP fire. Farese had been knocked out, it was later

determined, by a *Panther* or by a towed 75-mm AT gun emplaced by the buttress of an old French pillbox, scarcely 150 yards away.

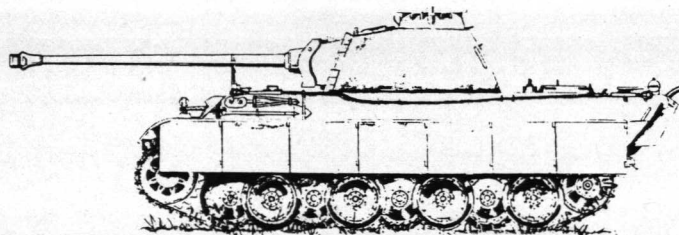
Meanwhile, the other two tank platoons reached a hedge just south of Singling, and slowed up to let the armored infantry jump off. Lieutenant Belden met his platoon leaders as they came up, telling Second Lieutenant Bill Cowgill to take his 3d Platoon to the left side of the town, followed by First Lieutenant Norm Padgett's 2d Platoon. Second Lieutenant Ted Price's 1st Platoon was to take the right side.

Cowgill had almost reached the town square when he spotted a German SP (self-propelled) gun in the smoke of a burning building, and shouted for the tanks to hold up. Captain Leach dismounted his command tank, "Blockbuster 3d," and advanced ahead of it, to see the situation for himself. He joined Cowgill's men in spraying the SP with tommy-gun fire. The assault gun backed up, opening up with its own machinegun. Bullets ricocheted off the stone walls, and the armored doughs ducked into the buildings. The SP then drove off west down

the main street, with Leach firing his grease gun at it and gesturing wildly for his gunner in "Blockbuster 3d," Corporal John Yaremchuk, to fire with the 76-mm. When he accosted Yaremchuk later he demanded, "Why didn't you open fire?" His faithful gunner replied calmly, "You were in the way, Cap'n" — for which Leach has been forever grateful.

Leach then radioed his 3d Platoon leader, First Lieutenant Bob Cook, to "get that SP." Cook's 3d Tank Platoon had come up in the center, and he now led his other three tanks past a large burning farm building. Suddenly his tank lurched at a dangerous angle upon hitting a low retaining wall invisible in the smoke, and then lumbered over a two-foot drop into a walled garden. Two other tanks followed, but then found themselves exposed to the Welschoff Farm ridge 1,200 yards to the north. They were about to cross the street, when Cowgill came up and warned Cook, "There's a Kraut tank behind the third building down to the west." That meant the street was enfiladed, and Cook ra-

U.S. armor at Singling encountered the formidable German Panther, known as much for its frontal armor as its powerful, long 75-mm high-velocity gun.



died Captain Leach to see if 2d Platoon tanks couldn't maneuver around to the southwest. His own tanks registered on the ridge to the north should more *panzers* appear, but he was beginning to feel a little boxed in and vulnerable. By now Farese's death had also been reported over the company frequency, and Leach realized that he had a real fight on his hands.

The American tank and infantry company team was, in fact, engaged with an entire *Panzer Grenadier* battalion, reinforced — the three rifle companies and the heavy weapons company of the 1st Battalion/111th *Panzer Grenadier Regiment* of the 11th *Panzer Division*. Though itself understrength, the battalion still counted 150-200 troops in Singling, supported by an AT gun and three 20-mm flak guns, and a two-barrelled rocket launcher and five 81-mm mortars, to the north. Division and corps artillery were on call. Armor in the village included two SPs (probably mounting the 75-mm L/48 on a *Panzer IV* chassis) from the heavy weapons company, and three *Panther* tanks from the 15th *Panzer Regiment*.

The American fire during the assault had suppressed defensive fires, however, and enabled Team B to close on their objective. When Cook's tanks fired across the valley to register on the Welschoff Farm ridge, the concussion from the screaming shells demoralized some Germans who had crowded into a small pillbox, and who now waved white rags to surrender. Lieutenant Ted Price had them come out and sent the eleven to the rear as PWs. His own 1st Platoon was to have gone to the right, but they had stopped to round up eleven other Germans in two small pillboxes. Thus Norm Padgett's 2d Platoon ended up deploying to the right, and began clearing the houses to the east.

Padgett's 2d Squad had already rounded up 28 German soldiers and two officers, hiding in a cellar. The GIs had asked a French villager if there were Germans inside, and he had shaken his head; but a radio antenna sticking out of a cellar window had given the Germans away. The incident did typify two things: that the eastern Lorrainers, many of whom stayed in their villages and sought shelter from the shelling, were pro-German; and that the *panzer grenadiers* at Singling, as battle-weary as their American foes were cowed by the violence of the American fire and tank attack. The growling tanks clanking and churning around the village, and armored doughs coming in with them, were enough to break the defenders' will to resist.

The *panzers* in the west end of the village were another matter, however, and Bob Cook went to find First Lieutenant Don Guild, the Arty FO, to put fire on them. Guild was with Leach and Belden at a house north of the square, where the infantry CO had set up his CP (command post). The consensus was that the *panzers* were too close to the American GIs to bring in artillery fire, so Leach sent word to have Cowgill go after them with the two bazookas in the infantry company. One was a headquarters bazooka, the other was carried by three mortarmen attached to 3d Platoon. (The company was down to one mortar squad, and they had left the 60-mm mortar behind when they mounted the tanks, taking a bazooka instead.)

### Counterattack

Suddenly a white signal flare shot up just west of town, the signal for a German counterattack. Artillery shells came crashing in as the GIs ducked for cover, and some were wounded. Sergeant Joe Hauptman's tank in the orchard had re-

joined 2d Platoon, but an AP shell ricocheted off the ground and into the turret, killing his loader, PFC Bill McVicker, though the rest were able to bail out. In the garden with 3d Tank Platoon was Sergeant Bob "Pappy" Grimm (at 42, the oldest man in Baker Company). Grimm looked through his field glasses toward the distant ridge just in time to see a long-barrelled *Panther* fire directly at his tank. He shouted at his driver, Tech 4 Chuck Bienick, to reverse "Backbreaker" out of the garden. But five more AP rounds streaked in and hit Sergeant Giles Hayward's tank, and Gunner Ginoli and BOG Furrow died as it flamed up. Grimm's tank successfully backed out between the buildings, only to bog down in the mud; and Cook's tank was left trapped in an adjacent courtyard.

Cowgill's 3d Platoon doughs had meanwhile taken the two bazookas up to the attic of a house to fire down at the German assault gun on the road. One bazooka misfired, and the other only hit after four tries, though the SP was scarcely 100 yards away. The SP was hardly damaged, but the crew bailed out and two were gunned down by GIs in the basement. Then a *Panther* came up, elevated its gun, and sent a round crashing through the house, just as another round from the north smashed into the foundation, showering the men inside with plaster. Cowgill and his men scrambled back to a different building, as another artillery concentration pounded the village.

Unable to raise Lieutenant Bill Goble by radio, his 1st Tank Platoon on the east end of town, Leach ran over personally to warn him about the approaching German tanks. Goble in turn had Sergeant Bob Fitzgerald on the right move his tank to better cover the primary armor approach, down the Bining road. Fitzgerald had his gun sights

The improved Sherman, with wider tracks and a longer, more powerful cannon, helped somewhat to neutralize the Germans' armor advantage, but was still vulnerable to the panzers firing from standoff ranges.

set at 1,400 yards, the range to the northern ridge, when suddenly he saw a *Panther* coming down the slope only 150 yards away. "Gunner! Kraut tank! Shot! Traverse Left!" Simultaneously the *Panther* halted and also began to traverse, but Gunner Private Chuck Fibranz was faster, "Steady...On! One-fifty! Fire!" Fibranz tromped his foot on the firing pedal and the 76-mm bucked and flamed. That fired the *Panther*, but Fibranz slammed two more rounds into it anyway.

"More Kraut tanks!" yelled the doughs. Fitzgerald crunched though the hedge and along the road to get a clear view to the northeast. There he saw another *Panther*, but it fired its turret-mounted smoke mortars and reversed behind its self-made smoke screen. Fitzgerald also reversed, back behind the hedge for concealment, then dismounted to join Goble in Padgett's CP. From the house they saw a third *Panther* in the valley, and both raced back to their tanks. Fibranz fired at the *Panther* — short! Adjusted to Burst On Target, and got two hits that fired it up. Fitzgerald and Sergeant Emil Del Vecchio then engaged a fourth *Panther*, but it was 800 yards away, and even 76-mm shells bounced off the angled frontal armor.

The 1st Platoon was engaging some five *Panthers*, and there were also a couple of *Panzerjager IV* SPs with 75-mm L/48 high velocity guns among the buildings of Welschoff Farm. Lieutenant Goble had scarcely regained his tank when "Bottle Baby" was hit by an AP round that wounded the platoon leader and his gunner and fired the tank. "I had the motor off so we could hear the Kraut shells come in," said driver Tech 5 John "Swede" Nelsen. "I had just finished cleaning my periscope and had stuck it back in place when — wham! It sounded and felt like our own gun firing, but it wasn't. A shell had hit our turret. I looked back and saw smoke behind me. I was thinking of getting out when — blam — again. And I'll be damned if I didn't have a German armor-



piercing shell in my lap." The hot slug scorched his olive drab gloves, but Nelsen and the rest of the crew scrambled out to safety.

Platoon Sergeant John Fitzpatrick then assumed command and ordered the platoon to back over the hill into hull defilade, keeping the frontal armor toward the enemy. The German counter-attack had failed and B Team still held most of the village, but the enemy dominated the position by fire.

### Relief in Place

It was shortly past noon when Colonel Abrams was ordered to turn over Singling to Combat Command B, and move on to his own objective, Bining. Major Albin Irzyk, CO of the 8th Tank Battalion, drove up in his tank to meet with Major Alanis of the 51st AIB. He was new to the command, but a veteran tanker. Irzyk clambered atop Colonel Abrams' tank "Thunderbolt VI". Abe was impatient to move on, and said he was "ready to turn over to them their objective — and without a fight." A misconception had arisen that would lead

to casualties and acrimony, and exemplifies the confusion of battle command, for the relieving units assumed the town was clear. Leach recalls relaying to Abrams that the center and right of Singling was clear, but not the left, "which is still under hostile antitank fire." The import of this radioed message was unfortunately lost.

Major Irzyk ordered First Lieutenant Bill Marshall's C Company/8th Tank, carrying First Lieutenant Bob Lange's B/10th armored doughs, to enter the town "as the other unit had done." But as Second Lieutenant George Gray's 1st Tank Platoon followed Farese's tracks left into the orchard, his tank was struck by two AP rounds, ripping off his hand, and killing Gunner Aro. Marshall then radioed Staff Sergeant Ed De Rosia to circle around east with his 2d Platoon tanks, but German fire discouraged that move. A shaken Marshall then ordered all tanks, still carrying the infantry, to back to the reverse slope south of town. He then drove back in his tank to find out from Major Irzyk what the hell the story was.

Lieutenant Lange went on into town and met with Leach and Belden, and arranged for his company (down to about 40 men total), to relieve B/51 in Singling. Colonel Abrams meanwhile wanted to pull out of Singling and get on with the attack on Bining. He radioed Captain Leach, but Leach had gone to find Lieutenant Marshall of the 8th. As acting CO, Lieutenant Cook reported on the situation, and Abe told him to pick up the infantry and move out immediately.

Captain Leach had gone on foot to the C/8 tanks. Finding Lieutenant Marshall gone, he called Marshall on Sergeant De Rosia's tank radio, outlining the situation, and insisting on knowing when his tanks would be relieved. Marshall, who had just been ordered by Major Irzyk to stay put, responded that he would not come into town "until my orders are changed" — and he never did.

It was dusk as Cook, rejoined by Captain Leach, pulled his tanks and infantry back about 400 yards south, to where Marshall's tanks were in defilade. The badly wounded Lieutenant Gray came out on the turret floor of Leach's tank. AP tracers streaked through Singling and across the valley, and German mortar and artillery concentrations periodically crumped into the village, where Lieutenant Lange's B/10 infantry were hunkered down, alone and with no tank support. When tank engines were heard in the orchard, Second Lieutenant Bob Victor went to investigate — but it was Germans who had crept down, trying to start the engines of the two knocked-out tanks from Farese's platoon. They were chased off, but returned during the night and set them on fire.

Task Force Abrams had now been reoriented, and converged on Bining with TF Oden, to take the primary CCA objective. Major Irzyk could see no point in holding Singling, zeroed in as it was from the high ground. When Lange reported that a German mess truck, with hot soup for at least a company, had been shot up and captured when it drove into the town square, Irzyk ordered B/10 AIB to pull out. They made it back with five casualties, to Marshall's C/8 tanks, and outposted them for the night. They did not



In 1978, Colonel Jimmie Leach returned to the spot where his Sherman, "Blockbuster 3", was sited in Singling action.

attack again the next day, as elements of the new 12th Armored Division were to relieve the 4th Armored units during the night. Singling had cost the 4th Armored 23 men. All six killed, and six of the wounded, were tankers, for Singling had been a tanker's battle. Five medium tanks had also been lost, and could not be recovered. Known enemy losses were two *Panthers* and 56 prisoners.

### Critique of Operations

The village of Singling was of little tactical value in its own right. It was captured by the 12th Armored a few days later, as the Germans fell back to defend Rohrbach. Nonetheless, because of the extensive combat interviews and the detailed study made of the fight at the time, and its subsequent analysis by two of the participants, it is instructive as a 1944 small unit armored battle.

### Could the German armored forces to the north have been suppressed?

The Welschoff Farm ridge dominated the village area tactically. It was 1,200 yards distant, beyond the effective range of American tank gunnery, but ideal for the high velocity German guns. Nor could the ridge have been effectively screened, for artillery would have had to fire continuously all day. The ridge might have been attacked and captured, but there was a similar ridge farther north, and the axis of advance was not in that direction.

### Could the Germans in the village have been defeated?

The German *panzer grenadiers* were demoralized by the violent armored assault and offered little resistance. The *panzers*, however, were manned by determined crews. They were well-sited to fight the American tankers, who in any case soon had to contend with a counter-attack. But tanks alone in built-up areas are vulnerable, and if the American armored infantry had had more antitank weapons than two bazookas, they might have been destroyed.

### Were American supporting fires effective?

American direct-fire tank guns were limited in range, and the tank destroyers, while mounting an excellent 76-mm gun, were exposed and vulnerable to enemy artillery fire. Indirect fire weapons — mortars and artillery — effectively put down smoke and HE that screened the attack, and demoralized the defending infantry. Had adequate artillery fire also been called down on the German counterattack, the *Panthers* would have been forced to button up, with loss of visibility, and churning around in the open, would have been sitting ducks for the American tanks. (Colonel Abrams had, in fact, wanted more artillery support.)

### Was communication adequate?

The tank radios were effective, and used as the team's primary

**"...The Germans finally prevailed because they had the advantage of terrain..."**

method of communication. The infantry radios (walkie-talkies) were less effective, because of building obstruction. Runners were sent, but the enlisted men seldom had an overview of the unit situation; they had difficulty locating the indicated command post, and their information was quickly overtaken by events. In any case, it is better for commanders to confer personally and make decisions in coordination.

#### **Were command and control adequate?**

The CP and the Arty FO were sometimes only located with difficulty. In town — fighting this was not unusual. While small unit communication was provided by word-of-mouth of necessity, some symbol or object to mark the CP would have been advantageous. Unit commanders were not always at their posts. But usually it is better for company-grade officers to see for themselves what a situation is, rather than rely on impressions from other sources. In such cases it is important that unit elements know the chain of command, and are able to refer others to acting commanders. Again, one is struck, that in crack units like the 4th Armored, leadership was up front.

#### **Could the German battalion have better defended Singling?**

That the German soldier could continue to fight effectively at this stage of the war was credit to his will and determination. Yet the *panzer grenadiers* at Singling crowded into cellars and old French

pillboxes, and were taken prisoner without resistance. Even though they were exposed to the whirlwind of fire of the American armored assault, they could have better used the stone buildings for defensive protection. The German *panzers* were also not well positioned to capitalize on their long-range fire advantage. Yet the battalion had been in the town since the night of 4 December. But even in the constricted village the *panzers*, at least, held their own.

#### **Might the German counterattack have succeeded?**

The German counterattack was well coordinated. Yet the advantages of German *panzers* were their armor and long-range gunnery from over-watching defensive positions. Advancing across the open closed the range and negated these advantages, especially with their lack of gun-stabilization and slower traverse. The Germans might have done better to isolate the American force by long-range fire and counterattack at night, with *panzer grenadiers* using *Panzerfausts* (AT rockets).

#### **Was the American mission accomplished?**

"Yes," concludes Colonel Leach. "We were to neutralize Singling and take fire off the main attack — we did this quickly and easily." The village itself was of little intrinsic military value, nor was it worth additional casualties.

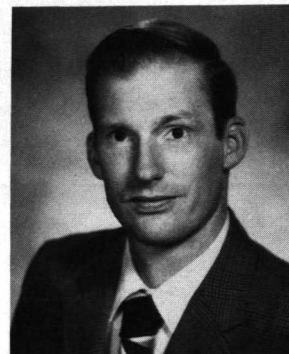
#### **Conclusion**

Fighting forces manifest characteristics of weaponry and capability that the astute commander uses to advantage. To this extent, the American forces were probably better handled. The Germans finally prevailed because they had the tactical advantage of terrain, and in dominating a specific area by long-range antitank fire. Team B was not itself strong enough to affect the larger battle area. Yet armored warfare demands flexibility in attitude, even to accepting losses and abandoning an untenable position, to achieve the larger objective.

#### **Source Materials**

This account of the Singling fight depends heavily on the study by Second Lieutenant Gordon Har-

rison in the War Department's Historical Department "Small Unit Actions" series published in 1946, though checked against the original combat interviews, and unit diaries, journals, and After Action Reports, and using Kenneth Koyen's *Beach to Bavaria* (1946). Essential, of course, was collaboration with Colonels (ret.) James H. Leach and Robert M. Cook, through correspondence, and discussions at the annual 4th Armored Division Association convention, in Columbus in 1984. In addition, Brigadier General (ret.) Albin F. Irzyk related the circumstances of the relief by the 8th Tank Battalion. German sources, including the *15th Panzer Regiment* history by G. W. Schrodek (1976), and the *11th Panzer Division* history by Oberstleutnant Donnhauser and Generalmajor Drews (1982), are unfortunately limited in detail. Research assistance was provided, in part, by a Special Research Assignment from the Ohio State University, Newark Campus.



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