

THE INFANTRY SCHOOL
GENERAL SECTION
MILITARY HISTORY COMMITTEE
FORT BENNING, GEORGIA

ADVANCED OFFICERS COURSE
1946-1947

THE OPERATIONS OF COMPANY B (755th TANK BATTALION)
(ATTACHED TO THE BRITISH 8th ARMY) IN
AMPHIBIOUS OPERATIONS, LAKE COMACCHIO,
ITALY, 11-13 APRIL 1945
(PO VALLEY CAMPAIGN)
(Personal experience of a Company Commander)

Type of operation described: TANK COMPANY ON SPECIAL MISSION

Captain Milton A. Pullman, Infantry

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<u>PAGE</u>
Index	1
Bibliography	2
Introduction	3
Geographical Features	4
Phase 1, Preliminary Training	5
Phase 2, Advanced Training	9
Phase 3, Actual Operations	12
Analysis and Criticism	21
Lessons	23
Map A - General Map, Showing Training Areas and Order of Battle, Italian Front, April 1945	
Map B - Area of First Landings - Longastrino - Menate	
Map C - Area of Second Landing, 13 April 1945	

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- A-1 Finito - The Po Valley Campaign 1945 Headquarters, 15th Army Group - Italy
- A-2 19 Days, From the Apennines to the Alps, The Story of the Po Valley Campaign, 5th Army
- A-3 Army Ground Forces Board, MTOUSA Report #612, 3 August 1945 - Historical Narrative, April 1945, 350th Infantry (Reported by Colonel A. R. G. Sanders, Inf.)

The above references are all the sources which could be found to contain any material relating to this operation. Therefore, rather than footnote each paragraph (as personal experience) this note is entered in the bibliography. All information, other than that obtained from the above listed references is personal experience.

THE OPERATIONS OF COMPANY B (755th TANK BATTALION)
(ATTACHED TO THE BRITISH 8th ARMY) IN AMPHIBIOUS
OPERATIONS, LAKE COMACCHIO, ITALY, 11-13 APRIL 1945
(PO VALLEY CAMPAIGN)
(Personal experience of a Company Commander)

INTRODUCTION

This monograph covers the operations of Company B, 755th Tank Battalion, in amphibious operations on Lake Comacchio, Italy, 11-13 April 1945, at the beginning of the Po Valley Campaign.

In addition to the actual operation, it covers the preliminary and advanced phases of training, which the Battalion went through prior to the operation itself.

GEOGRAPHICAL FEATURES

The terrain over which this operation took place, was to say the least, very difficult. Lake Comacchio itself is about twenty miles long from Northwest to Southeast. It is about ten miles wide. It is separated from the Adriatic Sea by a narrow spit of land. It is very shallow, averaging about six or seven feet of water. However, the mud, under the water, seems bottomless. This is to have a great effect on the amphibious operation itself.

The south shore of the lake is separated from the adjoining flat lands by earth dikes, built to keep the lowlands from being flooded. These flat lands are used for agricultural purposes, and small farms are to be found scattered throughout the area.

The land is extremely flat for a distance of six or seven miles from the lake shore south to the Reno River, and it is crisscrossed by canals. The few roads are raised several feet above the level of the surrounding ground in order to permit their use during the rainy season.

The enemy had blown the dikes and flooded this entire area some time before our operation. This covered all the usual vehicular roads mentioned before, and constituted a very effective barrier to normal ground attack. There were no terrain features anywhere in the area which provided observation.

PHASE 1
PRELIMINARY TRAINING

Through the dismal winter of 1944-45, Allied and German troops watched each other vigilantly across the lines of the forgotten front - Italy. Neither side had been doing anything other than patrolling, and artillery exchanges for several months. The Allied Forces were holding a line extending across the entire width of the Italian peninsula south of the Po River Valley. (1) (See Map A)

The Allied Forces had fought a long, hard war up the entire length of Italy, and in the early Winter of 1944 the long march and pursuit of the retreating Germans had bogged down just short of the Po River Valley. This was due to several causes. Some of these were: The rich, industrial and agricultural Po Valley was very important to the desperate Germans; They had excellent terrain in which to set up ideal defensive positions; And they had been reinforcing these ever since the invasion of Italy. Then too, the fast, relentless chase up the peninsula by the Allied Armies had taken its toll. This, with the diversion of the majority of the supplies and equipment to France, was another contributing cause of the Allies not reaching the Po Valley in the Fall of 1944. (2)

Our Tank Battalion, the 755th, was attached to the 91st Infantry Division. This division was assigned a sector about fifteen to twenty miles southeast of Bologna, and east of the life line of the Allied troops in northern Italy, the famous Highway 65. This was in the Mount Grande section.

Company "B", of which I was Company Commander, had its Command Post located with the Battalion on Highway 65 just south of Radicosa Pass, near Pietramala. Our tanks and crews were in indirect firing positions throughout the division sector. We fired harassing and interdiction missions on order of the division Field Artillery.

(1) A-1, P. 5; (2) A-1, P. 6

On 12 February 1945 our Battalion was relieved of this assignment. We were told that we were going to turn our tanks over to Ordnance, and get ready for a move to the west coast of Italy, near Leghorn. We were unaware of what we were going to do. However, all sorts of rumors were prevalent, as usual in such instances. We were told that our destination was to be kept secret, and none of us was to mention our move to any other troops, and especially not to civilians.

On 15 February 1945, the entire Battalion started the move south down Highway 65. We went back to Florence and then moved west toward the Ligurian coast. After passing through Pisa, we entered an area about five miles west of the city on the north shore of the Arno River. The area was well guarded, and as far as we were concerned was a very welcome change from our previous assignment. Here we had pyramidal tents and even Nissen hut mess halls. The camp area was very sandy, and it was laid out very similar to camp areas in the states. The move was completed on the afternoon of the 15th of February.

The next morning there was a meeting of all the officers in the Battalion, at which we were given the nature of our task. Before the meeting began I noticed there were several British officers present. Very shortly, we found their connection with our Battalion.

We were told that our Tank Battalion had been selected to participate in an amphibious operation at the eastern end of the Po Valley; we were to transport British Infantry troops in LVT's in an assault landing. This was in the British Eighth Army zone and we would be working with the Eighth Army in these operations. We would use LVT's (Landing Vehicle Tracked). These vehicles were also called "Buffaloes", and the British called them "Fantails", which name came from the manner in which the tracks threw water from the rear of the vehicle.

Our Battalion of three medium tank companies, and one light tank company was formed into three amphibious squadrons of thirty-five vehicles each.

Tankmen had been selected for this job inasmuch as the LVT's were quite similar in operation to tanks. Therefore, it would not require extensive training on our part. This operation was classified Top Secret, and we were told this was the first time these vehicles had been used in the European Theater of Operations. Our vehicles were due to arrive in Leghorn within a few days and would be moved to our tank park, near the Arno River. An Army Ordnance expert, from the factory which made the vehicles, was to be with us until after the operation. His job was to acquaint us with technical details and operations of the vehicles. Pending the arrival of the craft, we were told to get our personal equipment in shape, carry on athletics, and prepare for some thorough, fast training with LVT's. This was very welcome since we had not been able to participate in athletics in the deep snow of the Appenines along Highway 65.

This area had been the scene of heavy fighting a short time before, and German mines were still in evidence, and an Engineer detachment was busily engaged in their removal and disposal.

On 20 February, the LVT's started arriving. They were brought into the harbor at Leghorn and unloaded as secretly as possible. They were covered with tarpaulins to conceal them as much as possible, and moved to our tank park on tank transports. This was to prohibit, as much as possible, any unauthorized persons knowing what they were. They were slow in being delivered, and it was about three weeks before our squadron was full strength.

As soon as our first vehicles arrived our companies (squadrons) began training with them. Before any actual operation was undertaken, we had a few days in which the Ordnance expert gave us all the information and details concerning the vehicles. In addition, all weapons and tools had to be cleaned and stowed properly.

During this time it was also necessary to make the crew assignments. The regular tank had a five man crew and the LVT a three man crew. This crew consisted of vehicle commander, driver and assistant driver. This

necessitated rearranging crews and selecting the best man for each job. We were no longer a company, but a squadron. Instead of having platoons, the squadron was made up of five troops. Three of seven LVT's each, and two of five LVT's each. In addition each squadron had one LVT equipped with a British Naval type compass, and navigating equipment. This LVT was operated by our men; however, there was a British Naval Officer who was our squadron navigator. There was one LVT used as squadron command vehicle, used by myself. Finally, there were two maintenance LVT's. This gave a total of thirty-five LVT's in a squadron.

The light tank company of our battalion was divided into three groups and one group assigned to each of the three squadrons. There were also several additional LVT's for Battalion Command purposes and medical LVT's.

All LVT's were numbered in front, rear, and on both starboard and port sides. The numbering system was as follows: "B" squadron, about which this monograph is written had five Troops. The troops were numbered from one through five. Each LVT in a troop had a letter assigned also. For example, in a seven vehicle troop the letters ran from A through G. The markings consisted to two letters and a number. The first letter designated the squadron, the second, a number, showed the troop, and the third, a letter, showed what LVT in a particular troop. This was necessary to simplify control. For example, B1A was the first vehicle of the first troop of "B" squadron.

After about a week of preliminary instruction and "dry running", we began operating the LVT's on the Arno River. There was quite a varied assortment of river bank conditions in the stretch of river where we trained, and this gave us an idea of what the vehicles would and would not do. We did everything possible to them, except sink them. We learned what kind of mud and water they would operate in, how steep a bank they would climb and descend, and how they functioned in the water.

Maintenance was a big problem on the vehicles. They had to be completely greased after each days work in the water, and with hand tools took a great deal of time and hard work, because there were a great number of grease fittings on these vehicles. As far as operating them on dry ground was concerned, this was kept to a minimum, because the tracks were fairly light and the deep cleats or grousers (for propulsion in the water) would very easily break off in any rough hard terrain, other than sand or soft soil.

Our tank park was completely enclosed by wire and patrolled constantly by guards. This guard was made up of an Infantry company detailed especially for the purpose. All civilians had been moved from the entire surrounding area. The tank park itself was a huge pine grove which furnished excellent concealment from air observation.

During this period of about four weeks our men became thoroughly proficient in the operation and maintenance of the LVT's. We were ready to move into the next phase of our training.

PHASE 2 ADVANCED TRAINING

Since the area along the Arno River did not furnish enough water area for formation training, it was necessary to move to an area that would. On 15 March 1945 our battalion was moved to a suitable training area for this type training. The area selected was Lake Trassimeno, southeast of Florence. This lake is fairly large, being about twenty miles in length and twelve miles wide. It was very well suited for the purpose, being large enough to allow our entire battalion of three squadrons to be afloat at one time.

The move from the Arno River training area to the Lake Trassimeno area was made at night. The LVT's were moved on British operated tank transports, and again the LVT's were securely covered by tarpaulins. This was to further preserve the Top Secrecy of the operation.

The British too, were to operate LVT's in the Comacchio landings, and they were in training areas around Lake Trassimeno at this time. They were to furnish us direct artillery support from LVT's, on which they had mounted British 17 Pounders. They also had amphibious engineers using LVT's. The training on Lake Trassimeno was to consist of combined operations with all units participating, and we all went through practice landings as nearly the same as the actual landings would be.

My Command LVT was dispatched across the lake to the British area for the purpose of having several British radio sets installed. My LVT was to be the Command Post of the infantry battalion transported in my squadron. Hence, the necessity for the installation of the British radio sets. During this training all personnel had to learn various arm and flag signals which were used by the British, and various naval terms also had to be studied and used by all troops.

We started out by having the various troops practice formation driving and maneuvers. It seems that it would be fairly simple to maintain formation in the water. However, this was found to be a fairly difficult task, due to waves, wind and various LVT's performing slightly different in the water.

After the Troops became proficient in maneuver and formation driving, the squadron performed the same training. This training was carried on in all sorts of weather and in all possible water conditions.

During our training here, two LVT's in each troop had stretcher racks installed in them for the purpose of transporting casualties back from the beaches. Each squadron command LVT was equipped with a light proof canvas cover. This was necessary because while enroute to the landing areas in the operation, the infantry battalion staffs were using maps and holding last minute conferences which necessitated using special small lights. These canvas covers were very excellent for this purpose, and were used to good advantage.

During our stay at Lake Trassimeno we trained with the same British troops which we were to later carry in the actual landings. In addition, the British operated LVT's, carrying artillery and engineers, which took part in all our practice landings.

Everyone worked very hard during this phase of our training, since we did not know exactly when the operation was to take place. We wanted to get all the training we could, knowing it would stand us in good stead later on.

In conjunction with all the British troops we would work with, we made several full scale daylight practice landings on various shores of the lake. Then we moved into night training and practiced night moves and landings of all types. Small colored lights were placed on the stern of each LVT to enable the LVT's to follow in formation in darkness.

In our training, we practiced entire operations without the use of radio, relying entirely on flag and visual signals. Also some landings were made using radio communication. For the most part, radio communication was excellent in all phases of our training. The sets used were the same sets used in our medium tanks; therefore, we had no trouble at all in operating the radio equipment.

This training area, the same as the Phase 1 training area was heavily guarded and patrolled. During our entire training we had a number of DUKWs working with us. These were primarily for the purpose of giving any unauthorized persons, especially civilians, the idea that all our vehicles were DUKWs. These had been in use for some time and were not secret. They would move around in the open and could be seen by anyone who might get close enough to identify them. They did a lot of good too, since it was evident later on that the enemy was definitely surprised by the LVT's operations.

During our training period in this area all the officers of our battalion

were invited by the British officers Mess to visit their area one evening. This was for the purpose of becoming better acquainted and to promote better understanding and cooperation during the coming operations. The British were drawing an excellent Scotch ration at this time, and it was no trouble at all to cement friendly relations.

Our battalion also invited the British Officers to visit our area for dinner to further promote a harmonious relationship. This worked out very well inasmuch as we were drawing some fairly good food rations at this time and the British seemed to enjoy this as much as we had enjoyed their fine Scotch.

I have not mentioned the armament on the LVT's thus far. The usual weapons carried are four machine guns, either caliber .30 or caliber .50. However, on our vehicles we had only two machine guns, 1 caliber .30 and 1 caliber .50, both mounted forward. In addition, on each Troop Leader's vehicle there was a 20mm antiaircraft gun of British design and operated by a British soldier. The British gunners lived in our bivouac area and trained as part of the crew.

While the LVTs would navigate in almost any kind of footing, there were some types of bottom in which they would bog down. To solve this problem, the Engineer LVTs were equipped with some special matting, which would be unrolled from the LVT's special racks. This was laid down as a roadway for the following vehicles and worked very well.

PHASE 3 ACTUAL OPERATION

On 5 April 1945, orders were issued to move to an assembly area north of Ravenna. "A" and "B" Squadrons were to move first. "C" Squadron was held back for another mission, which was to ferry troops across the Po River. Again the LVT's were loaded in transports, securely covered and moved at night. The route direct from Lake Trassimeno to Ravenna is very mountainous

and hazardous for the heavy tank transports. The LVT's were taken by a much longer route to the east and up along the Adriatic coast, however; some personnel went along with each of the LVT's. The rest of "A" and "B" Squadrons left 6 April and took the direct route to our assembly area north of Ravenna, arriving there 6 April 1945. It was a heavily wooded area about two or three miles in from the Adriatic coast. It afforded excellent cover and concealment. However, the surrounding area was very low, swampy and crisscrossed by canals. For this reason, mosquitoes were present in hordes, and it made life very unpleasant, even in the daytime. It was fortunate that the mosquitoes were not the malaria type, because if they had been, our entire battalion would have become infected.

Our vehicles arrived in the assembly area on the evening of 6 April.

At 0300 hours, 2 April, the first blow had been struck to eliminate enemy observation of the Eighth Army's right flank from the spit that divides Lake Comacchio and the Adriatic. Commandos of the 2nd Commando Brigade, 20 men to each 20-foot, powered, plywood storm boat, headed from Lake Comacchio's southeast end for the spit's western shore. At the same time, other Commandos attacked across the River Reno, to clear the spit's east side. After two days, despite heavy rifle, machine gun, mortar, artillery fire, and many mines, the whole spit was in our hands, along with nearly 1000 prisoners. Small enemy outposts on the lake were also wiped out. (3)

On the night of the 6th, the 167 Brigade of the 56th (British) Division attacked to win a bridgehead across the Reno on the lake's south shore. Opposition was moderate and by the 8th the line stood on the Navigazione Canal. (4)

On 9 April, at 1350 hours, a terrific bombardment was begun by Allied Air forces on the Eighth Army front. (5)

(3, 4, 5) A-1, p. 12

With the enemy busy along the rivers and canals, the British 56th Division, using amphibious vehicles along the west and south shores of Lake Comacchio, struck for Bastia, gate to the Argenta Gap. (6)

As soon as the British had secured the south shore of the lake, we undertook extensive reconnaissance. Several LVT's were moved up to the lake shore, for the purpose of trying them out in the lake, since the operation had been planned across the southwestern end of it. (See Map B) As soon as we moved into the lake, we were in for some bad news. The LVT's would not operate due to the peculiar mud and water consistency, mentioned before.

It was necessary to make some quick changes, and after a discussion, the LVT's were tried on the flooded land south of the lake shore. Here, it was found they worked very well, so it was decided to make the attack along the south shore, travelling over the flooded low ground.

At 1300, 10 April, the officers of our battalion were told to report to the Command Post of the British 56th Division to receive attack orders. The orders were issued and we proceeded to carry them out.

The General Plan called for two landings to be made, Squadron "B" at Longastrino, and Squadron "A" at Menate. Each Squadron would carry one Battalion of British Infantry.

Starting at 1500, 10 April, we moved out of our assembly area north of Ravenna. We moved forward to an intermediate area near S. Alberto, on the south bank of the River Reno, where we remained until after dark. As soon as darkness had fallen, we left this area, moved through S. Alberto and across a Bailey bridge at S. Alberto, because the banks of the river in this area prohibited moving the LVT's across in the water. It was decided to make this part of the move at night, since there would be a good deal of congestion at the bridge. In daylight, there was the possibility of the enemy either bombing the area or shelling it with long range artillery. However, German air

(6) A-1, p. 14.

activity at this time was at a minimum. This was probably due to lack of fuel and also lack of planes. Crossing the bridge, especially at night, was a slow process, because the LVT's were nearly as wide as the bridge itself. This necessitated very careful and slow movement. After crossing the bridge the LVT's moved out in column along the Strada della Rotta. We were all across the bridge and in position along the road by 0100, 11 April. (See Map B). At 0230 the British Infantry we were to transport moved along the road and loading commenced. Loading operations proceeded smoothly, and by 0400 the LVT's were ready to go. Each LVT would carry thirty fully equipped infantry men and my squadron carried 1 Battalion. Loading operations proceeded smoothly and were complete by 0400. During this time intense artillery fire was being placed on the enemy front lines all along the Eight Army front.

The front lines at this time were along the Navigazione Canal, about three thousand yards in front of our launching area along Canaletta Umana. At 0400, just as we were starting to move forward toward the launching area, several British lorries drove up, loaded with collapsible canvas boats. One of these was quickly loaded on each LVT. They were very light and could be easily handled. They were for the use of the infantry after they left the LVT.

At 0430, the navigator's LVT entered the water and the entire Squadron quickly followed. We at once took up a column formation. The navigator LVT led, followed by the 1st Troop, Squadron Command LVT, then the other Troops in order. This was actually a double column, having two LVT's abreast. There were also several British Engineer LVT's scattered throughout the column, and our two maintenance LVT's brought up the rear of the column. Interval was determined by visibility and the ability of the LVT drivers to follow the stern lights of the vehicle ahead.

Three phase lines had previously been established and a radio report was made to the Force Commander each time a Phase line was reached. These phase lines were readily recognizable, being objects such as bridges over canals,

or roads which were only slightly covered with water. They were given code names.

Our objective on this first landing was the village of Longastrino, eight thousand yards west of our launching area. "A" Squadron moved on our right, with Menate as their objective. (See Map B).

The British No. 40 Commandos waded and walked to Menate along the bank separating the Lake from the floods. (7)

At H-20, British artillery in support of the landings, placed preparation fires on both Longastrino and Menate. Rocket firing planes thoroughly covered the landing area just prior to our landing.

About halfway to the objective, it became light enough to begin to see fairly well. We expected to receive enemy fire, but fortunately, aside from some mortar and light artillery fire none was forthcoming. Smoke, which was laid down by supporting artillery, can be credited. About 0600 our line of deployment was reached and the navigator's LVT pulled aside and allowed the 1st Troop to take up a line formation, (the usual landing formation) and move into the beach. This they did, and as fast as one Troop had completely unloaded, it at once moved off the beach, to allow the next Troop to come in and unload. No two Troops were on shore at the same time. This was necessary, as it would have resulted in a congested landing area and a good possibility of mortar and artillery registering hits on us. Enemy mortar fire began increasing in intensity during the unloading. However, only a few casualties among the infantry resulted, and no LVT's were hit on the beach.

During the unloading, Lt. Kelly, Troop Leader of Troop 1 moved his LVT forward and into a deep canal. He was unable to get out, and I called one of our maintenance LVT's forward and by using their winch we succeeded in getting him out.

This completed the unloading and the maintenance LVT, Lt. Kelly and my

(7) A-1, p. 24.

LVT moved off, headed back to our launching area. About four hundred yards off the beach, an enemy mortar crew did some fine shooting on Lt. Kelly's LVT. One round was placed on either side of his moving LVT and the third scored a direct hit, just over the engine compartment. The LVT started burning, and the entire crew, although all were wounded managed to tumble off and into the water. The maintenance LVT and my LVT moved up to the burning LVT and quickly picked up the wounded crew from the water. For some unknown reason the mortar crew failed to get either the maintenance LVT or mine, and we moved on back toward the launching area out of range. Farther back we found one more knocked out vehicle, one of our maintenance LVT's. It had been hit by a small artillery shell, without wounding any of the crew. We moved on back to the launching area, where the casualties were transferred to an ambulance and taken to the rear.

We were to make another trip as soon as possible, carrying ammo, supplies and other necessary equipment. This was done, and the second trip was completed without mishap about 1400.

Our vehicle park was south of Strada della Rotta. The battalion Command Post was in a group of large stone buildings just north of Strada della Rotta. There was no cover or concealment of any kind for the LVT's in this area, so they were merely widely dispersed. Maintenance and refueling was carried out at once, and after the vehicles had been serviced the men were fed a hot meal and told to get some rest. (See Map B).

Results of this first landing was the moving of our front lines about four miles forward and the taking of 150 prisoners. It is not know how many of the enemy were killed during this landing. Our Squadron losses consisted of two LVT's and four wounded men. (8)

During the night of 11-12 April, enemy planes came over and dropped a few bombs. However, they were not even close to our area and didn't interfere too

(8) A-1, p. 24.

much with our sleep.

At 0900, 12 April, we were told to report to the battalion Command Post for orders. This we did and learned that due to our success, we would make another landing, deeper in the enemy rear. This landing would be made along the Canaletta di Bando, eight thousand yards northwest of Menate. We were told also, that Parachute Troops were to be used this time, dropping in the area in rear of our landing beaches. This was good news, but shortly before our departure, we were informed that we would do it alone, because the parachute drop had been cancelled. (See Map C).

This time our Squadron would carry the 1st Battalion Buffs of the 24th Guards Brigade. At 2400, 12 April, our squadron was again lined up along the Strada della Rotta, and the British infantry moved up and loaded. At 0130, 13 April, our squadron moved out from the launching area. We were supposed to hit our beaches just after daylight. Our artillery support and air strikes were to be placed just before our landing.

The canal running from Menate to Lake Comacchio had only a few crossing spots where the LVT's could cross easily, and this held the column up for a while. There were two squadrons, "A" and "B", which had to move through this narrow area. Again Squadron "A" was on the right and "B" Squadron on the left astride the Scola Gramigne. (See Map B).

We used the same phase lines as our first landing. In addition there were three more phase lines established between Menate and our new objective. This move was very similar to our first one, but we did not make as good progress and daylight found us only about midway between Menate and our landing beaches. The beaches were now being heavily shelled and smoked to screen our approach.

Our squadron was to land at Yellow Beach, and "A" squadron was to attempt to land at Red Beach. However, there were alternate plans for both squadrons; particularly for "A" Squadron, because map reconnaissance had shown that it might be impossible for them to get far enough in at Red Beach. Green Beach

was designated as the alternate landing area for both squadrons. (See Map C).

Upon approaching the beaches, everything was quiet, that is, insofar as enemy fire was concerned. Our rocket firing planes were giving the beaches a terrific pounding. Near Red Beach there was a large stone farm house, from which a white flag was being frantically waved, which we assumed to be civilians.

"A" Squadron moved into Red Beach first and as expected were unable to land, so they immediately swung around and proceeded back to Green Beach. There was still no enemy fire being delivered.

This lulled us into a false sense of security; but not for long. About five hundred yards off Yellow Beach, Troop 2 which was leading, moved into a line formation and headed for the beach. Still no enemy activity. My LVT was following along about three hundred yards in rear of the 2nd Troop. Troop 2 was leading, followed by three, four and five, and finally Troop 1, which was commanded by Staff Sgt. James May, who did a very commendable job.

Just as the 2nd Troop had reached ground suitable for unloading the infantry and were swinging around, preparatory to lowering the ramps to allow the infantry to move off, the enemy made his play. From a group of buildings about two hundred yards to the front, two German S.P. guns moved out. In the space of about five minutes, every LVT in the 2nd Troop had been hit and was burning. In addition, the navigator's LVT and two British Engineer LVT's were hit and burning. Then German machine guns and rifles commenced firing at the surviving British infantry and LVT crew members who had been lucky enough to escape from the LVT's. (9)

The S.P. guns then directed their fire at the Command LVT and the 3rd Troop moving in toward the beach. I ordered my driver to try and turn around and move to the shelter of a large straw stack in our immediate rear. I called the rest of the squadron and ordered them to move back. I then called our Battalion Command LVT and urgently requested artillery fire to be placed on

(9) A-1, p. 30.

the shore, in the vicinity of the SP guns. For some unknown reason the SP guns failed to hit our Command LVT and we reached the doubtful cover of the straw pile. The German SP guns indeed had a field day. There were no weapons on the LVT's which could harm the armor protected SP guns.

Shortly our artillery began coming down and also some rocket firing planes made a run over the beach. This drove the SP guns to cover. Our Medical Administrative Officer, using an LVT, displaying the Red Cross did some excellent work at this time, moving in and picking up wounded and also some men who had managed to swim out from their burning LVT's.

After a consultation with the Infantry Commanders aboard my LVT, it was decided to have our squadron land at Green Beach. I got on the radio and assembled the squadron and we moved out and made an easy landing on Green Beach, on which "A" Squadron had already landed and cleared. While leaving this beach another of our LVT's was hit by artillery and destroyed. However, none of the crew was hit. Just after we cleared the beach the enemy placed a terrific artillery concentration all over the area of Green Beach, which resulted in some casualties to the British infantry on shore there.

The troops of the 1st Battalion Buffs, and the surviving LVT crew members of the 2nd Troop made their way forward as soon as the SP guns were driven to cover. These men took up positions along one of the raised roads and dug in, and German infantry dug in on the opposite side. These positions were maintained during the night, with hand grenade exchanges taking place during the night. Also both sides took an occasional prisoner. Early the next morning the enemy withdrew to the west toward Argenta. The troops which landed at Green Beach moved down along the Strada della Proppa and joined up with the dug-in troops. The chase was then taken up by the British troops, who moved on towards Argenta.

The results of this landing was not as good as our previous landing because we lost seven of our LVT's in addition to the three lost by the British. Our 2nd Troop was decimated, and the 1st Battalion Buffs had sustained heavy

casualties. However, our landing at the alternate position moved our front lines well forward, even though it had been costly.

We then returned all our remaining LVT's to our vehicle park. Here they were serviced and made ready for possibly another landing; however, we were then told that we would not have any more missions in this particular area.

On 15 April, our LVT's were left in charge of our S-4 who turned them in and our Battalion then moved back to Florence, where we drew regular tanks again, moved north, and took an active part in the final Po Valley victory.

ANALYSIS AND CRITICISM

In making a study of this operation, it will be seen that the 755th Tank Battalion was assigned a very important mission. The operation was intended to surprise the enemy and force him to draw reserves from the zone of the Allies main effort. (In the Bologna sector) (10)

This mission was to move deep into the enemy rear, by making a surprise attack on his flank. A flank, which he thought relatively secure, due to very difficult terrain over which an attack would have to come.

1st: More thorough and earlier reconnaissance in connection with the operating effectiveness of the LVT's on the Lake itself would have been desirable. As it worked out, an alternate route was used. However, had the use of the LVT's across the flooded lowlands not been possible, the LVT's could not have been used. This could have resulted in much more costly and lengthy efforts to pierce the strong enemy positions.

2nd: Since trained personnel were not available to operate the LVT's, it was a wise decision to use individuals with experience in operating similar equipment, namely, trained tankmen. This required a minimum of training time and time is always very valuable, even more so during combat.

3rd: The extreme secrecy measures taken during all phases of training proved to be essential and valuable. This is evidenced by the almost complete surprise attained on our first landing.

(10) A-1, p. 9.

4th: This operation, as stated before, was intended to force the enemy to bolster this front with reserves, drawn from the sector of the Allies main effort. This, I believe was accomplished, since our second landing and also subsequent forward movement by the British was contested savagely and strongly. Also our attack, in all probability drew some enemy from positions on our left flank, thereby aiding the movement of the friendly forces on our left.

5th: I believe that some credit to the enemy should also be given here. Undoubtedly we attained almost complete surprise in our first landing. However, it did not take the enemy very long to realize the probability of another landing still deeper in his rear area. This he made quick preparations against and made our second landing very costly, both in men and equipment.

To sum up the results of these landings: The enemy was forced to withdraw hurriedly before being encircled and also was made to draw on his reserves, which were badly needed in other vital areas within a short time.

Finally, the following was taken from one of my references: "Reports received 14 April 1945, point to sensational successes of the 8th Army on our right. Opposition is described as exceedingly heavy in the 8th Army sector, although extensive preparations and shelling preceded the attack. (11)

(11) A-3, p. 4.

LESSONS

Some of the lessons to be learned from this operation are:

1. Secrecy measures cannot be too strongly emphasized.
2. Thorough and early reconnaissance is very desirable and necessary.
3. Alternate plans are a must in all attacks.
4. Close support by rocket firing fighter bombers is extremely helpful and has a definite effect on enemy morale.
5. Good communications are necessary and desirable in all operations, but are even more important in an operation of this type.
6. Never under estimate the enemy.
7. Thorough training always pays off.
8. Smoke, laid down by artillery can very effectively cover an approach march and assist in achieving surprise.
9. Surprise is an essential element of a successful attack.