



Combat in the raw. Slugging it out toe-to-toe in the confines of a town is the dread of the crews of lighter, faster American tanks. Blown out of his burning tank (beneath clock), this crewman lived, but lost a leg.

INTERNATIONAL

Rat Chase to the Rhine

By COLLIE SMALL

"There has never been anything like it," reports a Post war correspondent, and that about labels the story of the immortal 4th Armored Division's stampede to glory.

GERMANY, BY WIRELESS.

IT had been a fitful night filled with the thunder of big guns and the rumble of German traffic moving along the river road, but now the noise had died away. The tankers sat waiting for the fog to lift, so they could move across the last 1000 yards to where the Rhine swept around the big bend from Coblenz.

Then the explosions came—dull, muffled booms that rolled up from the river and shouldered their way through the filmy mists hanging over the orchards and gently rolling fields. Hidden in the fog, the slender Crown Prince Wilhelm Bridge disintegrated with a roar as the center span collapsed into the river. German soldiers and vehicles catapulted from the bridge in a tangled shower of horses, carts and men. A machine pistol spoke sharply in short sentences, then stopped. The tanks moved.

At the river road, they swung right and crunched over the broken bodies and smashed vehicles strewn along the tree-lined highway. They lumbered into Urmitz, moved through streets still heavy with the pungent smell of battle smoke, then followed the road out to where the ragged stump of the bridge stood in a maze of twisted railroad tracks and girders hanging down into the river. There the column halted and the fabulous colonel who commanded the tanks turned to the equally fabulous major who commanded the armored infantry, and said, "Hell, this is the Rhine,

and we're just sitting here looking at it. Let's go spit in it."

They had come a long way. July, 1944, was hot and the dust swirled across the beach in stifling clouds when the fledgling 4th Armored Division's shiny new white-starred tanks rolled up through the surf and started down the road to Ste. Mère Église on the shattered Normandy coast.

That was the first mile. The first prisoner was a gangling, bedraggled SS deserter who shuffled across a marsh to give himself up to the curious tankers. At Coutances, burly Maj. Gen. John S. Wood, who then commanded the division, strode into the town during a heavy artillery barrage and personally captured a German soldier.

Avranches was next. Pvt. "Red" Whitston, of Indianapolis, sat at a curve in the road, playing his machine gun like a garden hose until two dozen vehicles were burning fiercely and four dozen German bodies sprawled in the road where a plunging mass of maddened horses tried to wrench free from their traces. They left Whitston in Avranches, slumped over his smoking gun.

Then the division broke through the German defenses with a tremendous rush and sealed off the Brittany Peninsula. The mass of armor wheeled east on the right flank of Patton's 3rd Army and started a sweeping right hook that carried clear across the face of France. In five days, three German infantry divi-



Living legend. Lt. Col. Creighton Abrams sets his tanks rolling with: "It's 'Katy, bar the door.'" ACME



Typical scene of the chase from Normandy to the Moselle River. A tank of the Fourth Armored Division rumbles past an enemy panzer that has been knocked out of the war on a winding German road. SIGNAL CORPS PHOTO

sions and four regiments from other divisions were swept under the avalanche of clattering tanks. The swift spearheads smashed fifty-four miles to Rennes, Breton capital, hacking away at vital enemy communication lines. They sped seventy miles to Vannes. One combat command struck toward Lorient on the Brittany coast. Another drove eighty miles to the cathedral city of Nantes. There has never been anything like it.

The 4th Armored Division became a shifting island of armor in a sea of milling German troops. The tanks moved so fast that fuel and ammunition had to be flown to them from England. They ran off their maps and had to have new ones rushed from England by plane and dropped to the columns on the road. On August fourteenth, they raced 153 miles to St. Calais, refueled and within six hours were rolling again, toward the city of Orléans on the Loire. Combat Command A attacked Orléans early the next morning, took it by two-fifteen in the afternoon and turned it over to the 35th Infantry Division. On the same day, Combat Command B left the Lorient sector and sprinted eastward 264 miles in thirty-four hours, finally halting at Prunay.

In a little more than seven weeks, the 4th Armored spearhead hurtled from Normandy to the Moselle River, rolling up some 1500 speedometer miles. They threw a pincers around beautiful Nancy and in a roaring fifteen-day battle knocked out 281 German tanks. It was on the Moselle that Sgt. Constant Klinga, of Brooklyn, made his classic observation, "They got us surrounded again, the poor devils."

It was near Nancy that Capt. James H. Fields, of Fort Worth, Texas, an armored-infantry platoon leader, took fifty-five men up the bloodiest hill in Lorraine. Enemy tanks crawled up the other side of the hill and rolled down at the doughboys in their foxholes. The German tanks loomed over the desperate infantrymen and fired point-blank into the foxholes with their big 88's. The doughboys fought wildly, but, one by one, the foxholes went silent. Shrapnel ripped into Fields' face and filled his mouth with jagged steel splinters and bone fragments from his shattered jaw. The young captain jammed a compress into his mouth, held another over his gaping cheek, and continued to fire with his left hand. He directed the shrinking platoon with hand signals and penciled notes passed from one foxhole to another. When he staggered down the hill twenty-four hours later with thirteen dazed survivors, they carried him away to a field hospital and awarded him the Congressional Medal of Honor.

Then the division plunged into the Saar. A cavalry troop stormed Gosselming and captured, intact, the bridge across the Saar River, after which they mopped up the village and took, among other prisoners, the German demolition crew charged with blowing up the bridge. They were sitting quietly in the local beer parlor when the cavalry jeeps burst into the town.

At Domfessel, the enemy road blocks were strong and well defended. So the leading Sherman charged out of an orchard and bulled its way between two houses, tearing down the walls on both sides of the narrow opening. The other tanks churned over the

rubble in single file and then fanned out into the town to complete the capture.

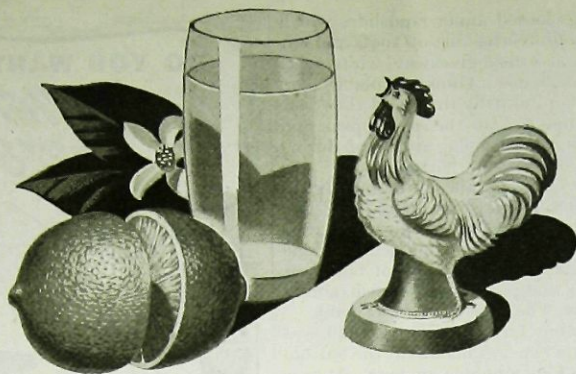
They were still slugging away in the Saar against bitter German resistance when Patton called for Gaffey. The 4th Armored swung away from the enemy and raced north over the black-topped roads on the famous "Fire-Call Run" to besieged Bastogne under stern, aloof Maj. Gen. Hugh J. Gaffey, of Austin, Texas, successor in December to General Wood, and since promoted to corps commander. The tanks rammed their way into Bastogne and left the battered 5th German Paratroop Division reeling helplessly in its wake, 65 per cent of its strength smashed. The siege was lifted.

The tanks drove on through Bastogne. Lt. Robert Pearson, of Highland Park, Michigan, peered down from the cockpit of his tiny Cub artillery-observation plane and spotted tank movements on the edge of a woods. Pearson and his flimsy puddle jumper came down through a storm of small-arms fire to seventy-five feet to make sure the tanks were German. Then he swept away, marked the spot on a map and dropped it to the American tankers on the ground.

Under Lt. John Kingsley, of Dunkirk, New York, six Shermans slipped into ambush, only the tops of their round turrets showing above the thick foliage. The Panthers poked their long-nosed 88's into the open and started moving across an open field. The big guns on the Shermans roared. The first German tanks burst into flames, but the rest kept coming until eleven had strayed out to their (Continued on Page 90)



"... a shifting island of armor in a sea of milling German troops." The Fourth frequently ran off its maps and took to the open fields during its spectacular cross-country dash. ACME



JUICE OF
1 LEMON

IN A GLASS
OF WATER

FIRST THING
ON ARISING

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...first thing on arising

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soldier in the open, while doing little or no damage to their own men under the protection of concrete and stone. They used counterbattery fire against the American guns; they used harassing fire against landing parties and even some important command posts. They did not move around.

But no contrast to the usual Japanese custom was more striking than the evidence of the end of this artillery battery. Each foxhole in that semicircle below the cliffs contained the bodies of some three or four Japs. These weren't suicides by their own grenades, nor had they died in wild *banzai* charges. They'd simply stayed in foxholes and had fought until every one of them was dead. Most had died from small-arms fire. Many were shot through the head as they craned out to fire on advancing invaders. One man lay across his rifle with his hands still gripping the stock. Another had his outstretched hand curled down—and in his hand was a grenade ready for throwing.

American marines are among the world's most avaricious souvenir hunters and are disinclined to make heroes out of any enemy, dead or alive. They have long been accustomed to Japanese suicides in the Pacific and most of them recognized some time ago that both suicide and *banzai* charges, rather than forms of bravery, were actually signs of cowardice, like the mass surrenders of German platoons or battalions. But these men in the Iwo battery weren't suicides. They died fighting. The marines looked at them, noted the manner of their dying, and went on past. Possibly there was no real feeling for a courageous enemy, but there was no souvenir hunting either.

Over by the airfield at which the Japanese gunner at North Motoyama fired occasionally, three transport planes circled. They flew over low with their side doors opened, and on the second circle each dropped a number of small parachutes with whole blood and other badly needed supplies ordered up from Saipan or Guam. The field still was not ready for such large planes to land, but the aerial supply line was open for land planes as well as big seaplanes, which made hazardous landings and take-offs on the rough water off Suribachi—take-offs with the aid of awe-inspiring jet-propulsion chambers.

Below the guns was the command post of the 9th Marines, which had advanced to the cliffs and on up over them that same morning. The advance had been rapid and there was still some mortar fire and an occasional sniper's bullet from some cave where a Japanese huddled, firing his last rounds.

The Japanese cave theory is fine when the principal attack is by air or bombardment, but it has one great weakness. It is unquestionably a difficult business to get the enemy out of a cave into which he has scurried, but in the cave he himself can do nothing offensively. And, if getting in is difficult, getting out is impossible. So American advances now normally go right around caves, merely leaving guards at the entrances. Thus snipers at the cave entrances need only to be found to be eliminated. Once driven underground, a Japanese ceases to be a real factor in battle unless or until he is able to force his way into the open again. The cave is a protection, but it is also a trap. Why the Japs trap themselves, only Japs know.

At the 9th regiment command post, few people paid attention to snipers. They were the responsibility of weary patrols, already throwing sticks of dynamite into caves, blocking entrances or driving out the occupants with smoke grenades. The command-post personnel was busy laying telephone lines, eating and preparing for more advances. The battle for Iwo was definitely breaking.

The advance had been so rapid, however, that not all the wounded were yet evacuated to the rear. The dead men—shrunk by the suddenness of death—lay along the road which had been the taxiway for Japanese aircraft, and several were laid in groups near 9th headquarters. Some Japanese dead also lay among hummocks which make the top of Iwo look like nothing so much as a roadside gravel pit turned inside out.

From the ravine, the radio jeep and marine truck emerged. The two prisoners still faced each other in the rear of the truck and had been joined by the cadaverous Japanese in the faded green uniform. He looked even more emaciated than before, and shook his head sadly when the truck stopped long enough to disgorge the interpreter and several other marines. All looked desperately weary, as did most of the men in the command post, and all were caked with dust and soot until their faces had a pallor almost like that of the men who lay dead beside the road.

A marine shuffling in weariness walked around the end of the cliff from the mouth of the ravine. He was asked whether the Japanese had succeeded in getting any more of his fellows to surrender. "Naw," he said, "the damn fools wouldn't come out. We had to burn them, after all."

A sharp, violently unpleasant odor, faint but unmistakable, came over the edge of the cliff from the direction of the ravine.

RAT CHASE TO THE RHINE

(Continued from Page 19)

death. Kingsley leaned on his turret and gazed wonderingly across the field at the eleven smoking tanks. "If the German who commands that tank company isn't dead," he said, "I hope they promote him to battalion commander. We could use more like him."

The tanks were still attacking when orders came to disengage. In one of its most ticklish operations, the entire division eased away from the enemy at night, blacked out all its markings and quietly moved southward into position east of Luxemburg, where German armor was massing for an expected counterattack. The 4th Armored waited patiently, but in vain. The counterattack never came.

Patton, ringmaster for this most potent collection of armor, long had dreamed of fighting on the Rhine. At a press conference when the 3rd Army was still grinding slowly ahead against stubborn opposition in Eastern France, the "Old Man" suddenly rose from his chair,

strode stiff-leggedly across the room and drew the curtain back from his map while newspapermen crowded around. He waited until the room was quiet. Then he pointed to the thin blue line that marked the storied river and nodded his head slowly, as if in anticipation of some great and deep satisfaction yet to come. "That will be the day, gentlemen," he said. "That will be the day."

A wet snow was falling at seven-thirty in the morning when the first light tank of Combat Command B clattered across the bridge over the Kyll River near Metterich, under diminutive, bespectacled Brig. Gen. Holmes E. Dager, of Union, New Jersey. The objective was the Rhine, sixty-six miles away through the rugged Schnee Eifel and across the undulating middle-Rhine plain. The night before, Lt. Col. Creighton Abrams, of Agawan, Massachusetts, deceptively pink-cheeked commander of the 37th Tank Battalion and a living legend among tankers, told his men, "The board of directors has met. We jump off at seven-thirty, and it's 'Katy, bar the door.'"

Fortified with a week's rations, in case they outran their food-supply trains, Combat Command B moved up through the bridgehead which was established on the east bank of the Kyll by the veteran 5th Infantry Division. Combat Command A was to parallel Combat Command B to the north. The orders were simple: "Get to the Rhine." Abrams didn't even bother to ask what lay between his tanks and the objective. "If I plotted German divisions on my map," he said, "I'd be too frightened to move."

Five hundred yards out of its bridgehead, Combat Command A bogged down hopelessly in the mud. Its route was hastily altered and Combat Command A was ordered to fall in behind Combat Command B. They tried to break Combat Command A away again, but the mud was too heavy on the alternate roads available. So the 4th Armored Division, Combat Command B leading, rolled along one narrow road, strung out along a sector sixty-six miles long and twenty-five feet wide.

The spearhead slashed into the surprised Germans from the south instead of from the west, the direction from which the enemy expected the attack. For the first nine miles the tanks moved parallel to the German lines, drawing fire from both the west and the east, but rolling up the enemy flank as they went. Then they turned east and the rat chase was on.

Nimble light tanks and heavy assault guns led the way over the narrow, twisting roads through the pine-clad hills of the Schnee Eifel. Half-tracks and other vehicles became mired and the tanks had to tow them a part of the way. The snow turned to rain at Badem and the enemy attacked with tanks. Four of them were knocked out in a brisk duel on the road and Combat Command B pushed on past the burning hulks.

Abrams raced up and down the column in his jeep or jumped into the turret of his Sherman, pleading with his men, swearing at them, encouraging them. It was he who kept them going when it looked as though they might bog down. Once the irrepressible young colonel knocked General Dager's helmet off with a blast from his big gun when the general got too close to the muzzle. The cherub-faced demon was never still. He ran the gamut of vocal expression from stevedore to senator and back. He often used an obscene battle cry that crackled out of radios the length of the column like the snap of a whip. At other times he just said quietly, when things were sticky, "All right, boys. Let's get a helpin'."

When the tanks couldn't do it, the armored infantrymen climbed down off

the tanks and did it. Maj. Harold Cohen, a hearty shirt maker from Spartanburg, South Carolina—whose postwar plans are whimsical enough to include shirts with pockets in their tails—commanded the 10th Armored Infantry Battalion attached to Combat Command B. With complete faith that the particular tank crew with whom they rode was the greatest tank crew in the world, the doughboys rode outside the same tanks every day, clinging to the slippery Shermans by means of special handles the tankers had welded on for them. Nothing short of death could make a doughboy change tanks. When Cohen told Abrams how proud his men were of the tankers, Abrams said, "Cohen, my boys are fine. But they never forget they're fighting with a nice thick wall of armor plate wrapped around them. The OD shirts on your boys don't quite match it."

It was like that all the way. Even the light tanks did more than they were supposed to do. Once they knocked out two massive German Tigers by slipping around to the rear of the enemy tanks while assault guns laid down a thick white phosphorous smoke screen. The little tanks darted in through the smoke and, like blow darts, shot 37-mm. shells into the unprotected engine boxes in the Tigers' sterns.

Casualties were astonishingly light, but some never saw the river. A youthful jeep driver died in Abrams' arms at a crossroad after driving his jeep, at sixty miles an hour, back from an enemy village two miles away. His jeep rolled to a stop and Abrams gently lifted him out, his throat streaming blood from a half-dozen machine-gun bullet holes. A young platoon leader in a light-tank company had his hand torn off by a bazooka shell that went through the turret in which he was standing. He looked incredulously at his hand lying on the floor of the turret. Then he leaped from the tank and with his one remaining hand he killed the German kneeling by the side of the road. The tankers said, "He didn't have to do that, you know."

The long armored snake wound through the steep-sided canyons, through the neat German villages where bed sheets and pillowcases fluttered from the upper stories in token of surrender, while poker-faced men and women watched the procession from behind lace curtains. The white flags drooped from slender white spear-tipped rods. Those were the rods the Nazis had distributed for the party flags that flapped in the streets in better days.

The tanks stopped that night. They counted 1200 prisoners streaming back toward the rear in ragged gray columns.



YOUR MUFFLER'S A MENACE

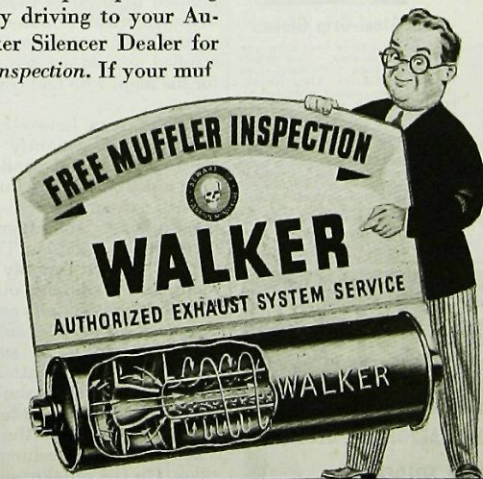
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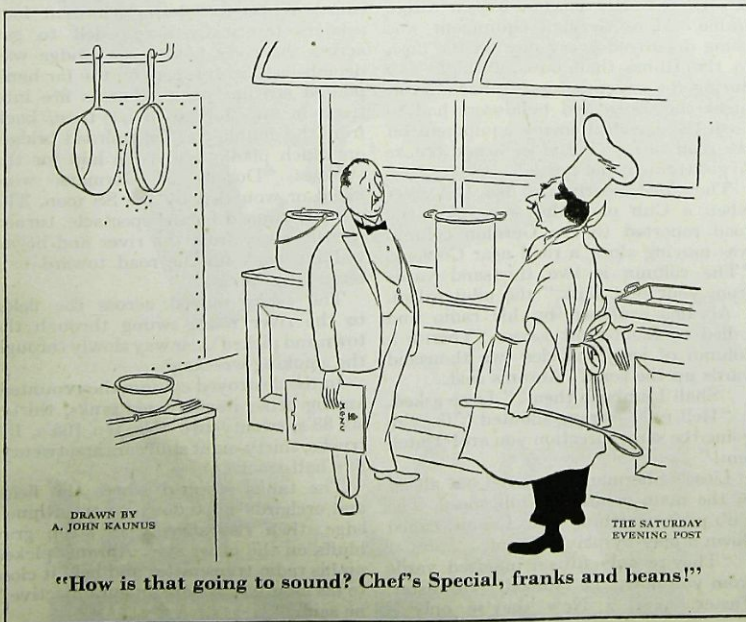
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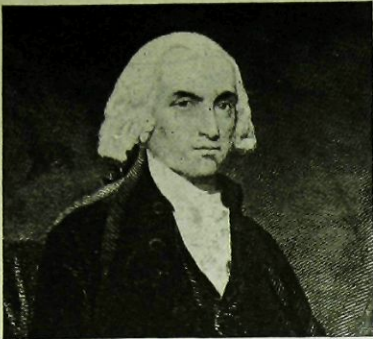
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DRAWN BY A. JOHN KAUNUS

THE SATURDAY EVENING POST

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While they waited for the supply trains to come up, the tankers brewed coffee on little stoves inside the tanks and passed hot cups out to the doughboys on the wet ground. It was snowing again in the morning when the tanks moved out. They gathered speed and raced through Daun, Darscheid and Ulmen, faster than the Germans could warn the towns. In Ulmen, a tank rolled up to the railroad station to cut the telegraph wires. A fat *Fraulein* was waiting on the platform for her train, and almost fainted with fright when she saw the Americans. Inside the station, the telegraph key chattered: "Such and such train has just left Coblenz." A tanker listened amusedly, then smashed the key with a rifle butt and cut the wires.

Near Pützborn, the tanks had already gone through when a supply train was ambushed. The column halted and engaged in a brisk skirmish with the Germans in the hills. After the battle, while the tanks were still parked on the road, a German staff car suddenly appeared, speeding straight toward the column. The driver had told the German general that the tanks were American, but the general, out inspecting his "forward positions," had said, "They can't be. They must be ours." He was fifteen yards away when he discovered his mistake and the car ground to a stop.

Hawk-faced Lt. Gen. Ernst George Edwin Graf von Rothkirch und Trach, Prussian commander of the 53rd German Corps, looked around dazedly at the Americans and the muzzles of their guns pointed at his stomach. Lt. Bernard Liese, tank-company commander from Pittsburgh, nonchalantly leaned up against his Sherman and waited while the general walked over to him.

"Where do you think you are going?" Liese asked.

The Teuton looked around again. Then, with a rueful smile, he said, "It looks like I'm going to the American rear."

"That's a good guess," Liese said. They took the general away in a jeep. Near Weidenbach, a tire went flat. While the driver and escorting Lt. Alfred Maul, of Milwaukee, worked over the tire, artillery fire began falling near by.

Maul and the driver moved into a ditch for protection, and Maul said to Von Rothkirch, "That's yours, isn't it?"

The German smiled sadly. "Don't worry, son," he said. "There isn't much left."

The column thrust deeper. Startled enemy artillery units, accustomed to being far behind the lines, were overrun before their brand-new guns had time to fire their first shot in combat. Bewildered prisoners came walking in from every conceivable type of unit, including the 226th Snow-shovel Company and the 40th Woodchopping Command. Two sailors from the merchant marine were amazed to discover themselves prisoners of an American armored division. A German officer was taken as he leisurely strolled around a town arranging billets for his men, who had come to defend the place.

At Mülheim, however, the aged *Burgemeister* stood defiantly on the steps of the town hall and challenged the tanks with a pistol. He fired until the gun was empty, then turned and ran into the building. Infantrymen chased him through the building. The spry old gentleman dodged nimbly from room to room, finally skipping out the back door. The doughboys finally caught the winded *Burgemeister* two back yards away. Puffing mightily, he surrendered.

At Kehrig, an anti-aircraft regiment opened fire on the column with 20-mm. flak guns. Abrams ordered the hatches buttoned up, and the armored mass rolled forward, crushing men and guns alike. On the outskirts of the town, one tank was hit by an antitank gun and another by a bazooka as they nosed over

the brow of a hill. Abrams sent out a distress call for "The Mad Russian," a division character.

Alexis Sommaripa rolled up to the head of the column in his light tank with a special loud-speaker. For weeks, the Millwood, Virginia, evangelist had practiced a speech designed to induce Germans to surrender peacefully. He also had spent considerable time practicing in a tank, driving it through people's back yards and testing the various guns on assorted haystacks and manure piles.

Abrams had asked him, "Why all the practice with a tank? I thought you used psychology."

Sommaripa looked a little guilty. "Well, to tell you the truth, colonel, sometimes this baloney doesn't work."

Actually, Sommaripa's spiel had proved highly successful. At Kehrig, however, he didn't quite make it. Sommaripa cleared his throat and edged his little tank up to the outskirts of the town, where a fanatical German lieutenant and fifty infantrymen were making a determined effort to block the tanks. "Come on out!" Sommaripa boomed out of the loudspeaker. "Citizens, stay in your houses! The Fourth Armored Division is prepared to destroy your town if you do not surrender! Do not expect to fire your last shell and then surrender! Surrender now—or else!"

The tanks waited for five minutes. Then, when there was no answer, they

★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

Young Tears

By WILLIAM W. PRATT

Is there any word that grips
Like a tremulous one spoken
When emotion rules the lips
Of a child whose heart is broken?

★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ★

backed off and division artillery moved into position. They drenched the town with incendiaries and high-explosive shells until it was blazing. Then the tanks swept over the hill in a wave of armor and plunged into the burning town. The German lieutenant, who had fired his last shell in defiance of the warning, stepped out to surrender. Unfortunately, he met with a serious accident.

The tanks moved on. Now the traffic on the narrow road was slowing their progress. Once division headquarters told the tankers either to get everything except combat vehicles off the roads or else to get staff officers out to direct traffic. More German equipment was being destroyed every day on the dash to the Rhine than on any single day during the sweep across France, and at night the tanks and bulldozers had to push the smashed enemy equipment off the road to permit the jeeps and trucks to get through the tangle.

They had nearly reached the river when a Cub plane hovering over the road reported that a German column was moving along a road near Coblenz. "The column is two thousand yards from your rear tank," the pilot called.

Abrams switched on his radio and called to Lieutenant Liese. "There's a column of jerry vehicles two thousand yards up the road," Abrams said.

"Shall I ambush them?" Liese asked. "Hell, no!" Abrams shouted. "They're going the same direction you are! Catch 'em!"

Liese's Shermans lumbered out ahead of the main column at full speed. The Cub pilot, watching from the air, called down a play-by-play account.

"They're only fifteen hundred yards from you now," he radioed. "Go faster. Faster. . . . Now they're only a

thousand yards from you." He was silent for a moment while the tanks raced ahead after their quarry. Then he called again, "They're around the next curve. Go get 'em."

There was another moment of silence while the straining Shermans hammered down the road. Then Liese broke in excitedly, "I see 'em! I see 'em! What'll I do?"

Abrams jumped up and down in his turret. He screamed into his transmitter, "Slaughter 'em! Slaughter the so-and-so's!"

Liese's tanks ran right up the back of the surprised enemy column, big guns and machine guns spraying the road. Startled German soldiers toppled from their vehicles into the road. Trucks exploded into flame. Writhing horses thrashed about on the pavement. The rampaging Shermans reached the head of the column and turned around. Then they raced back the length of the column a second time, destroying all that was left or living. Then it was all over and the tankers slowed down and stopped.

Young Liese, as famed for his inability to read a map as for his ability to fight, looked out of his turret at the countryside and scratched his head. He called Abrams on his radio, "Where am I, colonel?"

"How do I know where you are?" Abrams snapped. "All I know is that you're at least five miles past the place you were supposed to turn, and you better get back here before you get more lost than you are already."

They first saw the Rhine at 3:45 in the afternoon when Combat Command B moved into Kettig, overlooking the wide river. Abrams had spread his tanks out in a skirmish line between the town and the river. The 8th Tank Battalion, under Lt. Col. Albin Irzyk, of Salem, Massachusetts, attached to Combat Command A, fanned out in front of Malheim and Karlich.

All that night fleeing German columns streamed toward the Crown Prince Wilhelm Bridge at Urmitz, last link with the east bank. The Shermans unlimbered their big guns. A steady procession of high explosive and incendiary shells hurtled across the 1000 yards to the river road, raking the German columns. Wreckage jammed the road, and flames silhouetted the carnage. At 1:30 in the morning, the tanks stopped firing and called for the divisional artillery. Every fifteen minutes until 6:30, a salvo of artillery shells whistled over the tankers' heads and dropped along the road where the Germans were still struggling to move through the debris.

An eerie silence settled over the fog-shrouded fields. Then the explosions came. While the fleeing German foot soldiers frantically stampeded to get across the river before the bridge was demolished, SS troopers on the far bank poured streams of small-arms fire into them in an effort to drive them back from the double-tracked railroad bridge, on which planks had been laid for the vehicles. Dozens of Germans were killed or wounded by the SS men. The others, stunned by the spectacle, turned wearily away from the river and began walking back up the road toward battered Urmitz.

The tanks moved across the fields to the river road, swung through the town and picked their way slowly through the smoking wreckage.

In the destroyed column they counted, among other items, three tanks, thirty-six 88's, twenty-two 75's, ten 105's, 137 trucks, thirty-eight staff cars and twenty-five half-tracks.

The tanks stopped where the fields and orchards slope down to the Rhine's edge, then rise sharply in steep gray bluffs on the other side. Abrams picked up his radio transmitter and held it close to his mouth. "We are on our objective," he said.

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