

SMALL UNIT ACTIONS



SINGLING

4th ARMORED DIVISION 6 December 1944

CHURCH AT SINGLING, *looking east up the main street which was in ankle-deep mud when picture was taken. (All photos for this action, unless otherwise stated, were taken 12 December 1944.) Figure in center is the combat historian who studied this action.*



176

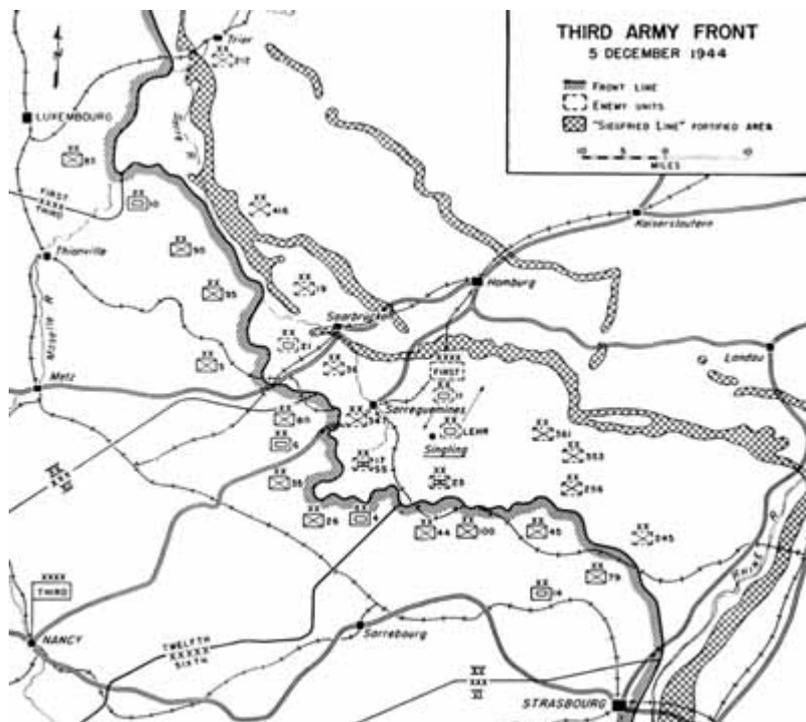
Lt. Gen. Fritz Bayerlein, Commanding General of the crack *Panzer Lehr Division*, was on a hill north of Singling on 6 December 1944, when tanks of the 4th Armored Division broke across the open hills to the south in a frontal attack on the town. After the war ended he remembered that sight and spoke of it with professional enthusiasm as "an outstanding tank attack, such as I have rarely seen, over ideal tank terrain."

General Bayerlein could afford a detached appreciation. At the moment when he saw the American tanks in motion, the attack was not his problem. His division, after ten costly days of trying to drive south to cut off the rear of advancing American forces, had just been withdrawn, relieved by the *11th Panzer Division*. Bayerlein himself had remained behind only because some of his tank destroyer units had been attached temporarily to the relieving forces.

The attacks on Singling and Bining which General Bayerlein so admired were the last actions in Lorraine

of the 4th Armored Division commanded (after 3 December) by Maj. Gen. Hugh J. Gaffey. For nearly a month the division had been fighting in the most difficult terrain and under the most trying weather conditions of its entire campaign in France. Casualties in men and materiel had been very heavy, largely because constant rains prevented air cover and because swampy ground either confined the tanks to the roads or so reduced

177



MAP NO. 1

their maneuverability in cross-country attack that they fell an easy prey to the enemy's prepared defenses.

Throughout the Lorraine campaign the division practice was to operate in small, flexible task forces (generally two to a combat command) which themselves were constantly broken up into smaller forces of company strength of tanks or infantry or both. These smaller "teams" were generally formed at need by the task force commander to deal with a strongpoint of enemy resistance which was holding up the advance of the main body, or to clean out a village or hold high ground to safeguard such advance. In this sense, the attack on Singling, though inconclusive, was typical of the campaign tactics. It shows some of the difficulties of the use of armor in terrain which naturally favored the defense, and which the Germans

178

knew thoroughly and had ample time to fortify. In respect to weather, however, which all the tankers said was their toughest and most memorable enemy during the campaign, Singling was not typical. The day of the battle was overcast, but there was no rain. Mud, except during the assembling stage, had no influence on the course of the action.

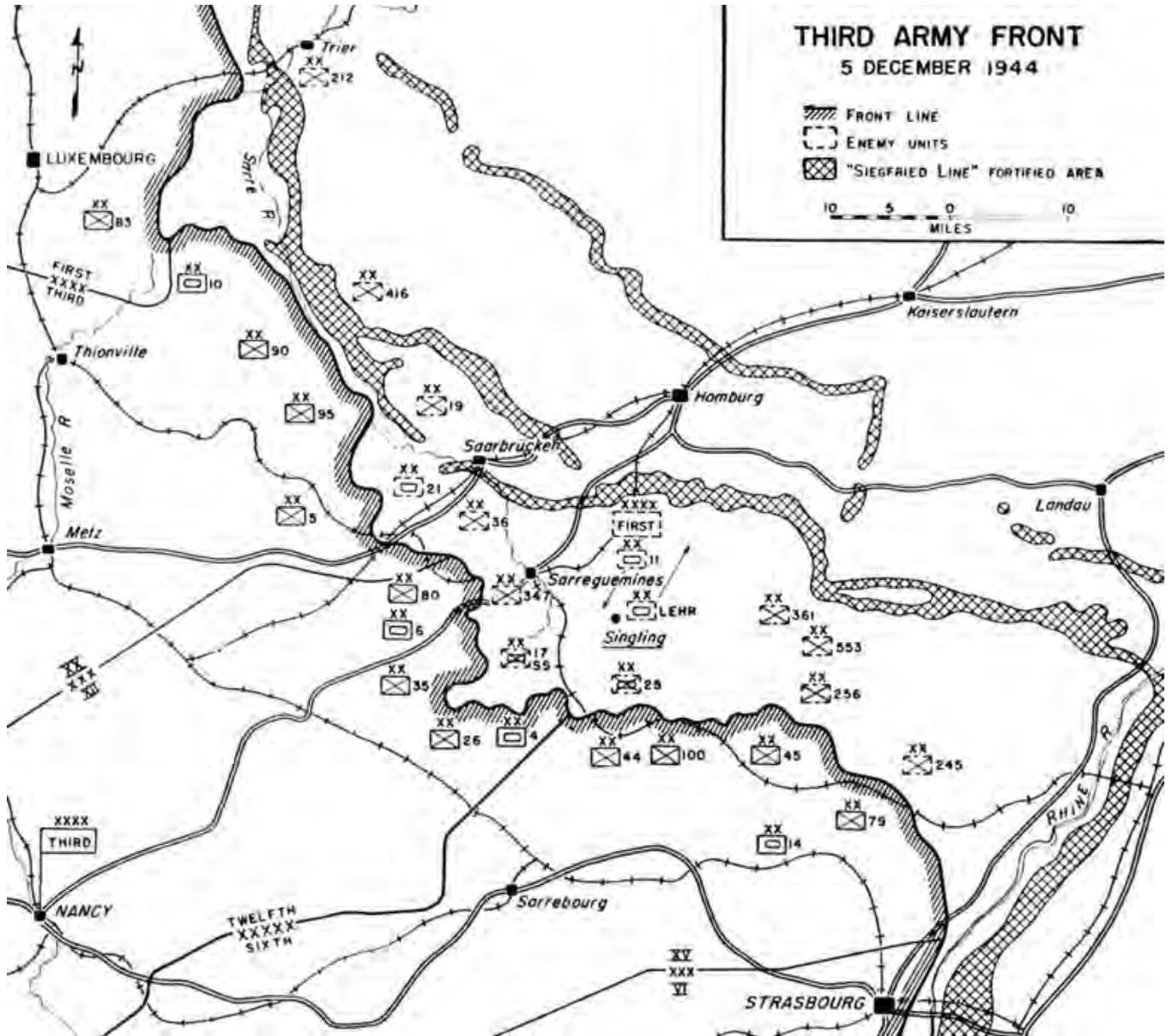
One feature of interest in the detailed narrative of the action lies in the picture of battle confusion, which extends to higher headquarters. At Corps nothing at all was known of the engagement described in the following pages, and the day's events were represented to the higher command substantially as the realization of the original plan. The G-3 Periodic Report (XII Corps) Number 115, 071200 December 1944, reads:

4th Armored Division Combat Command A began their attack on Bining around noon. The 38th (sic) Tank Battalion and 53d Infantry formed a base of fire to the south of town and the 37th Tank Battalion hit Bining from the west. As the attack on Bining (Q6549) progressed, Combat Command B passed Combat Command A and attacked Singling (Q6249). The opposition here consisted of infantry, tanks, and antitank fire from numerous

THIRD ARMY FRONT 5 DECEMBER 1944

- FRONT LINE
- ENEMY UNITS
- "SIEGFRIED LINE" FORTIFIED AREA

10 5 0 10
MILES

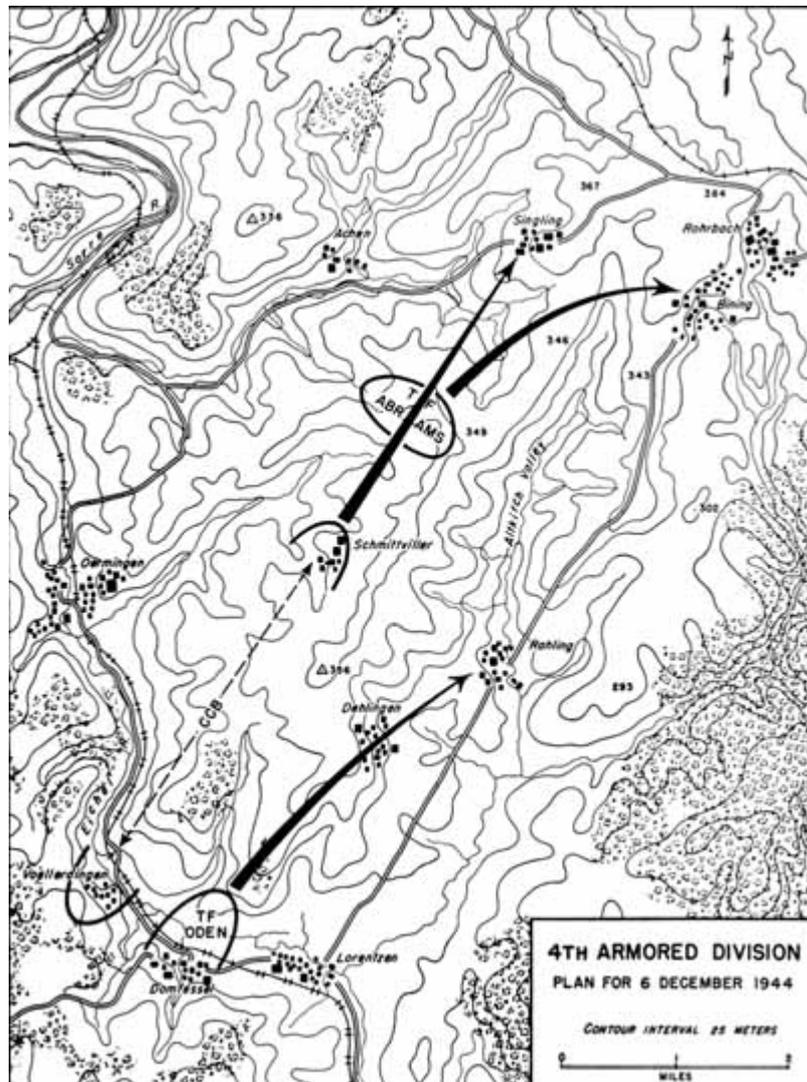


pillboxes, and artillery fire which came in 30- to 40-round concentrations. The fighting at Singling and Bining was very difficult, but by night fall Combat Command A was in Bining and Rohrbach (Q6549). Singling was not clear as of 1730....

In actual fact, as the narrative will show, Combat Command A attacked Singling and secured the southern and eastern portion of the town before Combat Command B came up; the attack on Bining did not begin until late in the afternoon and was made by only the light tanks of the 37th Tank Battalion supporting a battalion of the 328th Infantry; and, finally, no elements of Combat Command A ever reached Rohrbach.

Background of the Attack

The impromptu attack on Singling, 6 December 1944, by Company B of the 37th Tank Battalion and Company B of the 51st Armored Infantry Battalion represented the farthest advance northeast of the 4th Armored Division in its slow, difficult drive toward the German border which began 10 November from assembly areas just east of Nancy. From the military standpoint, Singling is important not as a town but as a terrain feature. An agricultural village of some 50 squat stone houses, it is strung along about half a mile of the highway from Achen (near the Sarre River) east to Bitche and the German border. Around the simple square church, the brown stone schoolhouse, the market square, cluster the houses whose concreted walls are painted white, red, yellow, blue, pink, and roofed with red tile. As in most Lorraine villages, the stables are on the main street and the manure piled in the front yards. But the picturesque insignificance of Singling conceals a military reality. Some of these farm houses have 3-foot reinforced concrete walls; the garden walls are high and thick; concrete pillboxes stand guard at the entrances to town east and west, on the hills and in the valley north, and on the ridge south. For Singling is in the Maginot Line, and its position along a southwest-northeast ridge is tactically important. In the Maginot fortification scheme, oriented north and east, Singling was a focal point in the secondary system of forts. For the Germans defending



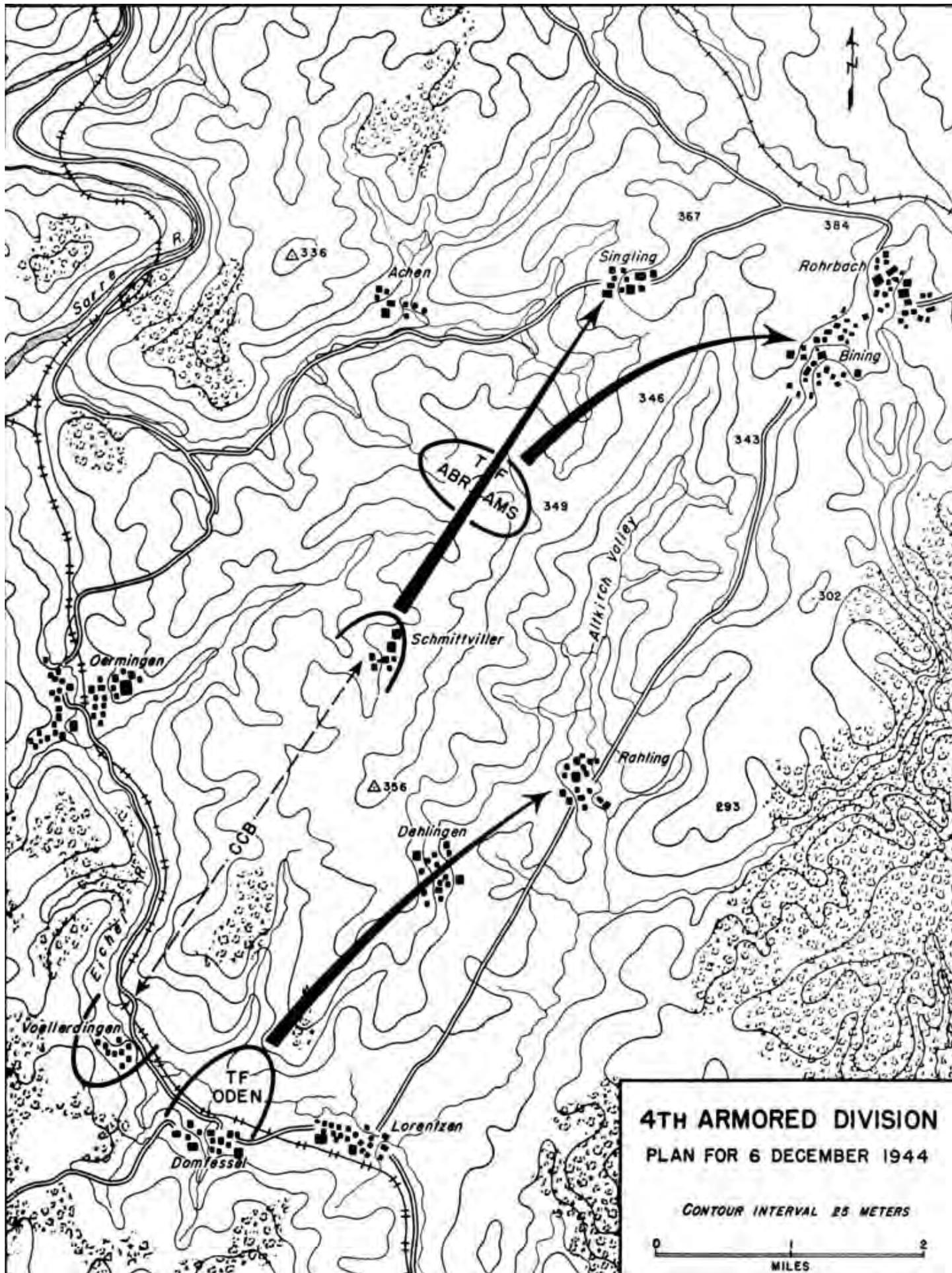
MAP NO. 2

180

south and west, it was admirably placed as a fortified outpost for the defense against attack from the southwest toward the cities of Rohrbach, an important rail and road center and military barracks area, and Bining, which controls the approaches to Rohrbach from the south.

Rohrbach and Bining, both located in the valleys dominated on three sides by high ground, are themselves tactical liabilities. But control of the cities through occupation of the ridge to the north was especially important at this time both to XII Corps, which ordered the attack, and to Seventh Army (XV Corps), which was on the 4th Armored Division's right flank (Map No. 1, page 178). The principal objective of the XII Corps was Sarreguemines, an important city on the Sarre River and the German border. Through Rohrbach pass a railroad and one of the main highways east out of Sarreguemines to Germany, The 4th Armored Division was to seize this escape route while the 35th Infantry Division attacked Sarreguemines. Rohrbach had an additional importance as an objective at the time, because it was a focus for roads north out of the large forest area (including the Forêt-de-Lemberg and Forêt-de-Montbronn) then under attack by XV Corps units.

But Rohrbach as an objective could not be separated from Singling (Map No. 2, opposite, and Map No. 3, 184). The main road into Rohrbach from the south follows high ground, but passes by a series of small knobs which makes it unusable for attack. The alternative is the ridge west of the Vallée d'Altkirch. The east slopes of this ridge are, of course, enfiladed by the same hills that control the Rohrbach road. The west side, on the other hand, comes under direct frontal fire from Singling, which, by reason of a few feet additional elevation, and its position on the curving nose of the ridge, commands this approach route for three or four kilometers to the south. Neither route, therefore, was satisfactory, since tanks on both would



**4TH ARMORED DIVISION
PLAN FOR 6 DECEMBER 1944**

CONTOUR INTERVAL 25 METERS



MILES

come under enemy observation before they were within range to attack, but the west side of the ridge with comparative freedom from flanking fire seemed to offer the best hope for success. To use it for attacking Bining, however, it was first necessary either to take or to neutralize Singling. The ridge configuration and the impassability of flooded terrain in the Vallée d'Altkirch compelled the attacking force to come up east of Singling and then make a ninety-degree turn southeast on the high ground into Bining. Assault of Singling was rendered difficult not only by the canalized approach but also by the fact that the heights it occupies are themselves dominated by a ridge 1,200 yards to the north which is in the main defenses of the Maginot Line.

Just how difficult the task was had been discovered on 5 December by the 37th Tank Battalion, commanded by Lt. Col. Creighton W. Abrams, when it attacked from Schmittviller under orders to advance as far as possible, with Rimling as a limiting objective. In fact, the attack carried only to within 1,000 yards of Singling and was there stopped by difficult terrain and by heavy artillery and direct fire from Singling and beyond. Fourteen medium tanks were lost to mud and enemy guns. Five were hit almost simultaneously on topping a ridge south of

181

town; others bogged in the sticky ground and were destroyed by artillery or temporarily disabled. The battalion, reduced in effective strength to two medium companies and unable to advance, reassembled northwest of Hill 349. That night (5/6 December), Combat Command A Headquarters received from Division the plan of attack for the next day. Combat Command B was to advance from Schmittviller to take Singling and the high ground to the east. Task Force Abrams (of Combat Command A), whose principal combat elements were the 37th Tank Battalion, 51st Armored Infantry Battalion, 94th Field Artillery Battalion (105mm howitzers), and Company B of the 704th Tank Destroyer Battalion (less one platoon), was to attack Bining and Rohrbach and reconnoiter the high ground to the north. Task Force Oden (of Combat Command A) meanwhile would push on from the Eichel River bridgehead at Domfessel to take Dehlingen and Rahling, and be in a position to support Abrams (**Map No. 2**, page 180).

AERIAL VIEW OF SINGLING; *photo taken 10 September 1944*



182

Colonel Abrams recommended to Combat Command A that he be allowed to attack Singling first. Combat Command B was still in the vicinity of Voellerdingen and Schmittviller, and, though they could march as far as Abrams' assembly area without opposition, he knew that they would be unable to come up in time to jump off abreast with Combat Command A in the attack. This would mean that Abrams would have to turn his flank to Singling in attacking east. If that turning had to be made, he asked Combat Command A for the

support of at least six battalions of artillery. (In fact, when he attacked the next morning, all artillery battalions except the 94th were, unknown to him, on the road.) Abrams sent his recommendations as to objectives and artillery support to Combat Command A by liaison officer, along with a plan for attack on Bining if his preferred plan was not accepted.

But Colonel Abrams heard nothing further from Combat Command A, and assumed that they desired the original scheme of attack carried out, as ordered.

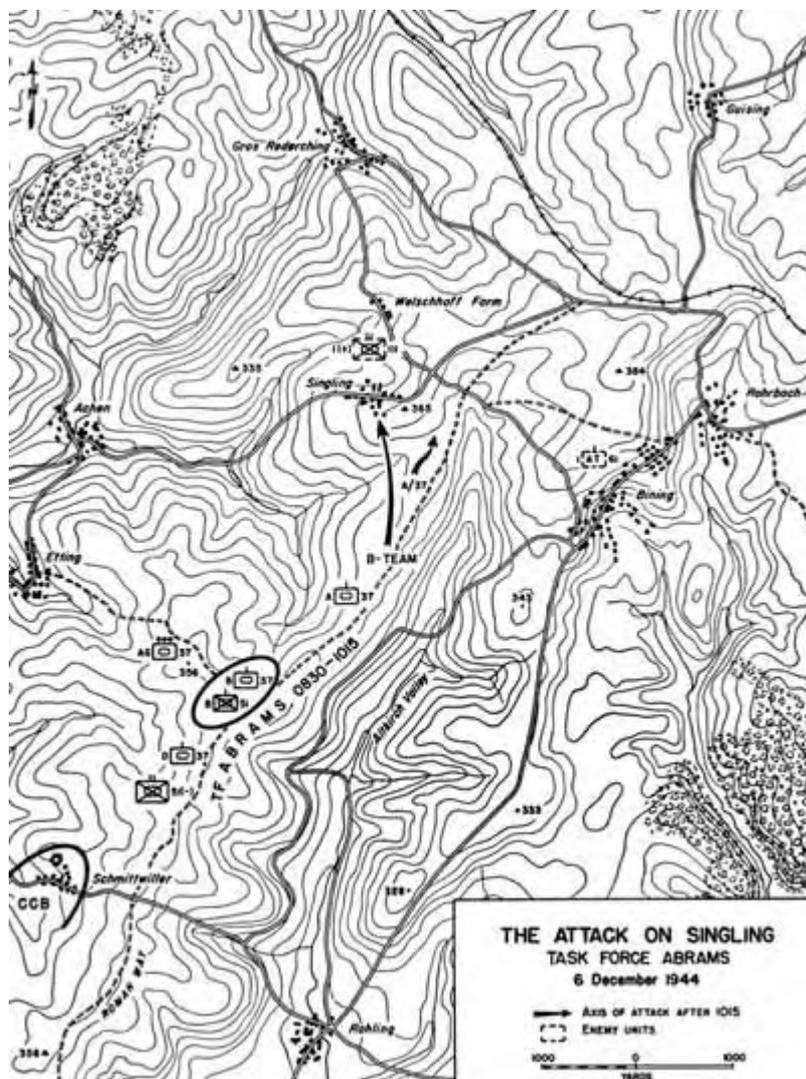
This called for advance north to the high ground south of Singling, then east to the trail fork and along the axis of the main road into Bining (shown on **Map No. 3**, page 184). Like-lettered infantry and tank companies were to be paired off, the two platoons of tank destroyers to be used for direct fire support. The turning movement south of Singling, compelled by the terrain, was to be covered not only by the artillery fire but by the assault guns and mortars of the 37th Tank Battalion, firing smoke and HE into the town and adjacent high ground from positions near Hill 356 (southwest of Singling). In the detailed plan, the assault team composed of the B Companies of the 37th Tank Battalion and of the 51st Armored Infantry Battalion was selected to make the sweep into the town of Bining. Capt. James H. Leach and 1st Lt. Daniel M. Belden, the respective company commanders, therefore met with their platoon leaders to study a town plan of Bining and map out detailed routes and dispositions for their troops. No one paid any attention to Singling, which they were to bypass under cover of the supporting fires.

Both tank and infantry battalions were far below strength; the 37th had only the equivalent of two medium tank companies; the 51st had about 180 combat effectives. Team B had 14 tanks, of which one was a Headquarters 105 assault gun attached,¹ and 57 infantrymen.

A Change in Plan

The 51st Armored Infantry Battalion commanded by Maj. Dan C. Alanis, at 0700, 6 December, left bivouac areas in the vicinity of Schmittviller to meet the tanks for the jump-off at 0800. The plan, as far as it concerned Team B, was to advance in column of alternating tanks and infantry carriers up to the outskirts of Bining. But the soaked ground even on the hills proved too sticky for the half-tracks, and they were left in the bivouac area with their drivers while the riflemen rode the rear decks of the tanks. When they mounted at 0835 (Lieutenant Belden looked at his watch and was worried because

1. An M-4 tank mounting a 105-mm howitzer instead of a 75- or 76.2-mm gun.



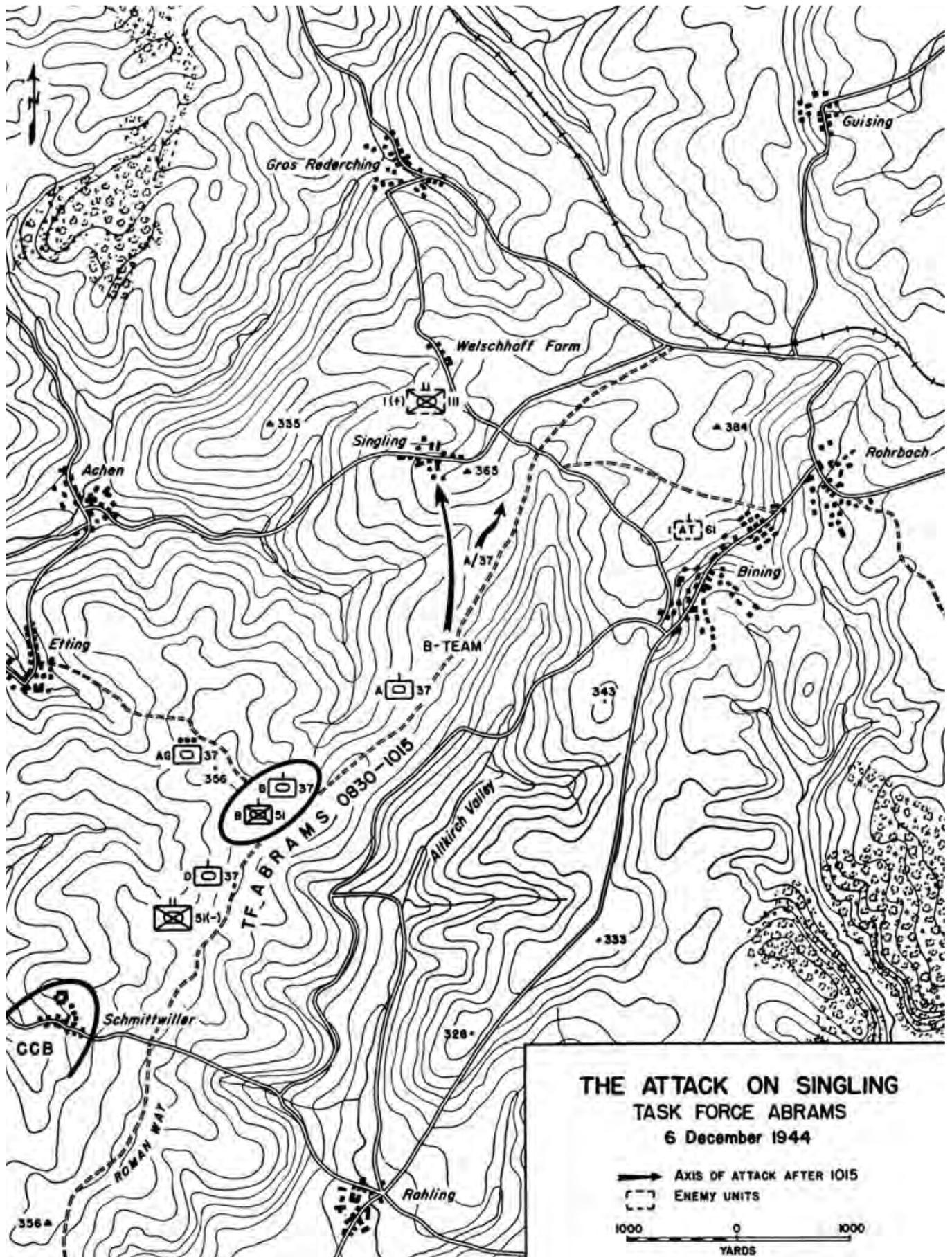
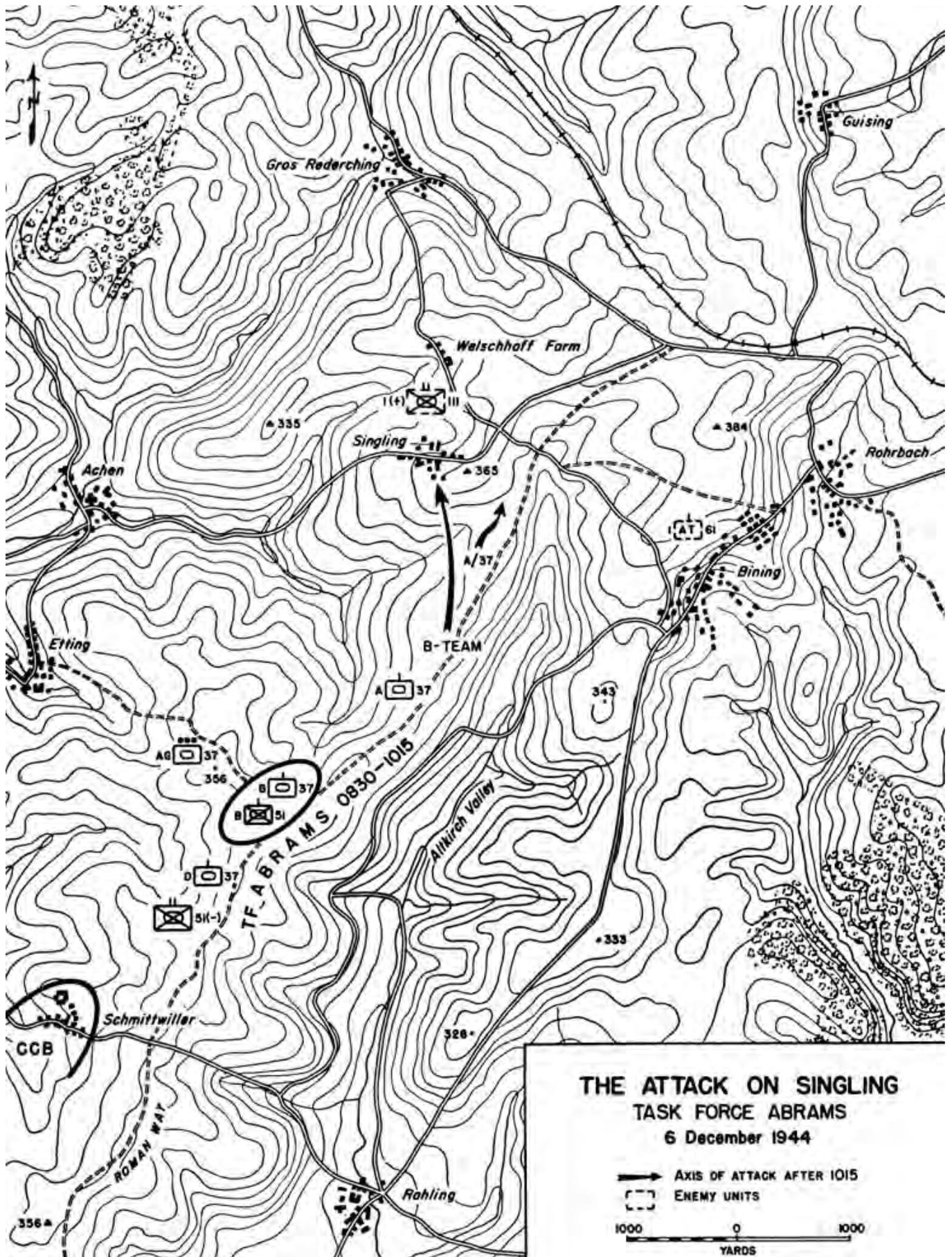
MAP NO. 3

184

they were late in starting), the plan still called for Team B to attack Bining. They were then just west of the Roman Way, still in the immediate vicinity of the battalion assembly area, 3,000 yards from Singling. Company A of the 37th Tank Battalion at the head of the column was a mile to the north, and had been stopped by direct and indirect fire from Singling as heavy as that of the day before. At 0830, Batteries B and C of the 94th Armored Field Artillery Battalion began firing smoke concentrations north and east of Singling. On 6 contiguous target areas they fired 13 1 rounds, but, although a gentle southwesterly breeze drifted the smoke perfectly across Singling, enemy fire continued heavy, and for the next hour or so the column made no attempt to advance. Company A, 37th Tank Battalion fired into the town, although targets were seldom visible. Company B of the same battalion shot occasionally at targets of opportunity at extreme range and without observed effect. Of the enemy ahead in Singling, Company B observed two tanks in the orchards west and east and a gun firing from the center of town. This turned out to be a self-propelled gun which later engaged the attention of the assaulting companies most of the day.

Convinced that enemy guns in Singling could not be neutralized by a fire fight, Colonel Abrams decided on his own initiative to attack the town and attempt to hold it with one tank company and infantry, while the remainder of his force turned east into Bining. He assigned the mission of taking the town to Team B (Map No. 3, opposite), which had no time to make detailed plans.

Captain Leach was given the order to attack; he informed Lieutenant Belden but, as the infantry was already mounted, Lieutenant Belden could not pass the word on even to his platoon leaders. (One of them thought until that night that he had been in Bining. The tank commanders were so sure of it that they mistook Welschoff Farm north of Singling for the barracks they had expected to find at Bining.) Captain



Leach deployed his tanks, putting the 2d Platoon under 2d Lt. James N. Farese on the left; the 1st Platoon, commanded by 1st Lt. William F. Goble, on the right; and the 3d Platoon, under 1st Lt. Robert M. Cook, in support. The command tank moved between the 2d and 1st Platoons in front of the 3d. As the 2d Platoon tanks carried no infantry, the three infantry platoons were mounted on the remaining 11 tanks (5 in the 1st Platoon, 4 in the 3d, the commanding officer's tank, and the artillery observer's). The infantry platoons were widely dispersed; the 11 men of the 2d rode on four tanks. Before the attack at 1015, Batteries A and B of the 94th Field Artillery Battalion put 107 rounds of HE on Singling, of which 3 rounds were time-fuzed, the rest impact. The assault guns of the 37th Tank Battalion took up the smoke mission and continued to fire north of the town until the tanks got on their objective. Company A of the battalion turned east and throughout the day fired on the Singling-Bining road and to the north. One platoon of tank destroyers, in position to support the attack, actually did little effective firing during the day because heavy enemy artillery forced the guns back. The other platoon remained in assembly area and was moved into Bining the next day.

185



ENEMY SELF-PROPELLED GUNS were located at the far end of the main street (this view looks northwest) so that they could command the whole length of the street. Third Platoon tanks were in position in the walled garden just behind first house on the left.

Company B tanks advanced rapidly toward Singling, immediately after the artillery preparation, and fired as they moved. But the planned formation was soon broken. Sgt. Joseph Hauptman's tank (2d Platoon) developed engine trouble, ran only in first gear, and so lagged behind; S/Sgt. Max V. Morphew's (3d Platoon) radio failed and he did not bring his tank up at all. The other three tanks of the 3d Platoon crowded the first two until their firing endangered the lead tanks, and they were ordered to stop shooting. As far as the tankers noticed, there was no appreciable return fire from the enemy. As the company approached the town, the 1st and 2d Platoons swung east and west respectively, and the 3d Platoon moved in through the gap to come up substantially on a line. The effect then was of an advancing line of 13 tanks on a front a little less than the length of Singling, or about 600 to 700 yards. Only Lieutenant Farese's tank was

186

notably in advance. Leading the tanks of S/Sgt. Bernard K. Sowers and Sgt. John H. Parks by about 50 yards, Lieutenant Farese moved up the hillside south of Singling and turned left into an orchard (**Map No. 4**, in side back cover). As his tank topped the crest of a slight rise just south of a stone farm yard wall, it was hit three times by armor piercing shells and immediately was set on fire. Lieutenant Farese and his loader, Pfc. William J. Bradley, were killed. The gunner, Cpl. Hulmer C. Miller, was slightly wounded. The rest of the crew got out. Sowers and Parks backed their tanks in defilade behind the rise and radioed Hauptman not to come up.

The shells that hit Lieutenant Farese were probably from a Mark V tank which was parked beside a stone

barn, though they may have come from a towed 75-mm antitank gun in the same general vicinity. In any case, what Lieutenant Farese had run into was a nest of enemy armor and defensive emplacements a perfect defensive position which the enemy used to the fullest and against which Team B fought and plotted all day without even minor success.

Here, just south of the main road and 75 yards from the thickly settled part of town, are a substantial two-story stone house and stone barn and two Maginot pillboxes. One large-domed pillbox, constructed to house an antitank gun defending to the north, is just to the west of the barn. Two concrete buttresses fanned out to the northeast and southeast to form a good field emplacement for an antitank gun defending southeast. The towed antitank gun may have been emplaced there. The orchard southeast is thin, the slope of the hill gentle, so that the turrets of tanks attacking from that direction are enfiladed from the pillbox position at 150 yards. The other pillbox is much smaller, designed probably as a machine-gun outpost to cover the main road. It juts out into the road and, together with the high walls of the farm buildings to the east, provides cover from the town square for a tank parked behind it on the south side of the road. The main street of town makes a broad S-curve which serves to conceal guns on the south side from observation of an attacking force entering the center of town from the south, yet still permits those guns to command the full length of the street to the main square.

In this area at least three Mark V tanks, two SP guns, one towed antitank, and one machine gun (German .42- or possibly an American. 50-cal.) successfully blocked every attempt at direct assault or envelopment, and during the day fired at will at all movements across or along the main street and to the south and southeast. Sergeant Sowers and Sergeant Parks found that if they moved their tanks only so far up the slope as to bare their antennae masts they drew armor-piercing fire.

For some time, however, Parks and Sowers were the only ones who suspected the strength of this thicket of enemy defensive armor. They knew that they could not advance, but they had seen only one tank and one gun. The destruction of Lieutenant Farese's tank was, of course, reported to Captain Leach, but Captain Leach at the moment was preoccupied by another more immediately pressing problem, an enemy SP 50 feet in front of him.

187

The Infantry Attack

When two tank platoons carrying the infantry reached a hedge just south of Singling, they slowed up to let the infantry dismount. Lieutenant Belden got off ahead of his platoon leaders. First to reach him was 2d Lt. William P. Cowgill, whose platoon assembled most rapidly because the men happened to be riding on tanks relatively close together. Lieutenant Belden told Cowgill to take the left side of town, disregard the first three houses on the south, and move in; 2d Lt. Theodore R. Price was ordered to take the right side. Belden said to 1st Lt. Norman C. Padgett, "Follow up after Cowgill." Padgett commented drily afterwards, "I was in support." That was the plan. Neither leaders nor men had any knowledge of the town or of the enemy. They were to clean out the houses, splitting the work as circumstances dictated. Though all the platoon leaders and a good percentage of the men were recent replacements,¹ they had all had combat experience and had fought in towns before.

The enemy they now attacked included as the principal combat element all four companies of its *1st Battalion* of the *111th Panzer Grenadier Regiment* (armored infantry of the *11th Panzer Division*), with a total strength three or four times as great as that of the attacking American infantry. They were supported by two "tanks" (probably SP's) of an unknown unit, by the five batteries of the *119th Artillery Battalion* (three or four 105-mm howitzers), organic battalion of the *11th Panzer Division*, and by elements at least of the five battalions of the *208th Volks Artillery Corps* with guns of miscellaneous caliber from 75- to 210-mm. Three days before, headquarters of the *1st Battalion, 111th Panzer Grenadier Regiment* had been in Singling, while the companies were committed near Hisingen. On about 4 December the companies moved via Sarralbe to Voellerdingen, where they fought against elements of Combat Command B, 4th Armored Division, and apparently retreated that day or night to the vicinity of Singling. The original mission after the withdrawal was to attack Oermingen, but this mission was changed to the defense of

Singling.

Considering its depleted strength (150-200 men), the enemy battalion was well armed. The three companies actually in contact at Singling had one towed 75-mm antitank gun, at least five 81-mm mortars, eight to ten light machine guns, one heavy machine gun, three 20-mm antiaircraft guns, and a *wurfgeraet*, an improvised rocket launcher of steel-supported wooden frames, capable of firing two 200-pound, 36-inch projectiles at a time.

An indication of the relative importance of Singling and Bining in the enemy's defensive plan is the fact that while a battalion with tank and artillery support held Singling, the defense of Bining was entrusted to a single company (the *1st*) of the *61st Antitank Battalion (11th Panzer Division)*. This company had about 50 men and 8 old-type 75-mm antitank guns mounted on Mark IV chassis, which a prisoner of war testified could not penetrate a Sherman tank from the

1. From 9 November to 6 December, the company had received 128 replacements and had suffered 100 percent officer casualties. Lieutenant Belden took command 25 November but had been in the company before; Padgett, Price, and Cowgill were all replacements who had joined the company 13, 16, and 21 November respectively.

188

front at more than 600 yards. Near Bining, exact location undetermined, were one or possibly two companies of the *2d Battalion, 111th Panzer Grenadier Regiment*, whose presence was apparently unknown to the men of the *1st Battalion* of that regiment. Probably at least a company of tanks was in the area, though no identifications were made. Finally, the enemy was employing *Marsch Battalion B* a collection of some 250 overaged, crippled, or otherwise unfit personnel as labor troops to dig defenses.

The enemy facing Team B was thus stronger and better armed (particularly in respect to heavy weapons) than the attackers. Nevertheless, before the battle was joined some of the enemy troops had been warned by their own officers that they were facing the 4th Armored Division, "one of the best divisions in the American Army." This they had a chance to discover for themselves in both Singling and Bining as the day wore on.

Lieutenant Cowgill (3d Infantry Platoon) with Pfc. John T. Stanton, his radio operator acting this day as runner, came into town ahead of his platoon. They made their way nearly up to the main square before spotting an enemy SP parked beside No. 44. The building, burning from shell fire, clouded the square with thick smoke. Cowgill turned and shouted back a warning to the tanks not to come up. Padgett with two men of his 1st Squad was nearby. He had not waited to assemble his platoon as they were trained to watch him, when they dismounted, and to follow. This they did, though the 2d Squad was actually held up most of the morning by some house-cleaning (see below). At Cowgill's shouted warning, Captain Leach dismounted and advanced along the street ahead of his tank. The SP up to this point was apparently unaware of them, though the commander's head was out of the turret. Padgett, Leach, Cowgill, and the two men started firing to make him button up. Then the SP moved. It backed across the street to the church preparatory to heading west. In the meantime more infantry had come up from the south. When Lieutenant Belden approached, the street was crowded. Annoyed, he shouted at the men to clear off and fan out into the houses on either side. His shout was less effective than a burst of machine-gun fire from the SP which followed the shout by a matter of seconds. The 1st Squad of the 3d Platoon (Lieutenant Cowgill), which, for the first half hour or so that it remained together, was under command of Cpl. Ralph R. Harrington, ducked into houses on the west side of the street. The 2d Squad, under Sgt. John McPhail, retreated hastily into No. 45 on the east, and the street was nearly clear.

Belden could not see the SP. He stopped a soldier to ask what they were getting ahead. The answer was: "Machine gun." "If it is a machine-gun nest," said Belden, "we'll bring up a tank." In the mysterious pathways of rumor, this remark traveled rearward, lost its "if," and resulted in the ordering of the last tank under Sgt. Kenneth L. Sandrock of the 1st Tank Platoon to clean out an enemy machine-gun nest. Sandrock moved west from his platoon which had driven into the orchard east of town, fired pot shots at the church steeple on the chance that it might be an enemy OP, went on up the south street, and found no machine-gun nest. Then, meeting Captain Leach, Sand-



SINGLING MAIN SQUARE looking south at House No. 6. Vehicles belong to 12th Armored Division, which relieved 4th Armored. Leach's tank was sited during the day in the opening between houses.

rock drove his tank in behind No. 6, where he remained separated from his platoon the rest of the day.

In the meantime the enemy SP at the square had completed its turning and headed west along the main street. Leach continued to fire his tommy gun at it. But in so doing he blocked the line of fire of his own tank behind him, and the SP escaped. Leach did not attempt to follow. He had received the report about a tank that had knocked out Lieutenant Farese, and decided that it would be wiser to attempt to get the escaping SP from the flank by moving the 3d Platoon tanks through the west end of the town. He therefore had his own tank back between buildings No. 6 and No. 7, where he was covered from the west and could command the square, and called Lieutenant Cook. Cook's three tanks, his own, the one commanded by Sgt. Giles W. Hayward, and the 105-mm assault gun, commanded by Sgt. Robert G. Grimm, were advancing on the town between the two southern trails. In

front of them the large farm building (No. 11 was on fire and clouds of smoke reduced visibility to the north to a few feet. Cook led his tanks to the right of the burning farm with the idea of cutting across the main street in pursuit of the enemy SP. As they approached, Pvt. Charles R. McCreer, Cook's loader, saw Farese get hit in the orchard to his left. He may have informed Cook, or may have assumed that Cook had seen it too. In any case, Cook did not absorb the information and made his next moves in ignorance of the existence of enemy tanks on his left flank. He drove his tank between the corner of the burning barn and the house north of it, No. 9. Between these buildings, invisible in the smoke, was a low stone retaining wall and about a 2-foot drop into the walled garden in front of No. 11. Hitting this unseen barrier at a 45-degree angle, Cook's tank teetered dangerously on its left tread. For a moment it threatened to overturn, then lumbered on, righting itself. Grimm and Hayward, following, had little trouble as the first tank had broken down the bank.

The garden in which the three tanks found themselves was inclosed on the north and west by a 4-foot concreted stone wall, stepped up to 6 feet high around the northwest corner. Despite this inclosure, they felt, on emerging from the smoke pall, as naked as if they had suddenly come up on a skyline. In fact, their position was seriously exposed from the north, for the continuous slope of the ground northward for several hundred yards canceled out the wall as a screen. Immediately across the street were two smaller gardens with low stone walls, and a dirt trail leading down into the valley. Originally, Cook had no intention of staying there. He planned to cross the road, then work around to the west still intent on trapping the SP which he knew was somewhere on his left. He did not know that its gun now commanded the street, and he would have found out too late if Lieutenant Cowgill had not appeared at that moment to

warn him.

Cowgill's platoon had set out immediately after the escape of the SP from the square to move into the west side of town. Cowgill, himself, with two men of his 1st Squad (Harrington and Pvt. Grover C. Alexander), moved along the south side of the street. (The other four men of the squad stayed behind near No. 7 from which later on they undertook an independent mission to the north.) Cowgill, Harrington, and Alexander made their way to No. 10 and from there could see two German SP's parked on either side of the street 200 yards to the west. It was then that Cowgill, coming around No. 10 into the garden into which Cook's tanks had just driven, found Cook and warned him of the enemy. Cowgill said, "There is a Kraut tank behind the third building down to the west." Cook got the impression that the "tank" was located behind a house which he could see on the north side of the street. He therefore had his tank and Grimm's 105 chop down the corner of the wall in front of them. This fire probably nettled the enemy into replying, and a round of 75-mm struck the northwest corner of No. 10 not far from where Cowgill was standing. Cook dismounted and with Cowgill walked around to the east side of the building which had been hit.

191

In the meantime the 2d Squad of Cowgill's platoon under Sergeant McPhail had moved on from No. 45 into which the SP's machine gun at the square had driven them. Satisfied that there were no enemy in No. 45, the seven men crossed the square and entered No. 28, a handsome low-lying stone house set back from the street and surrounded by a 2-foot wall, surmounted by an iron railing. In this house McPhail and his men discovered twelve civilians sheltering in the cellar. A few minutes were consumed in searching them, then the squad set out to continue the sweep of the north side of the street. McPhail and Tech. 4 Ben A. Todd emerged through the front door of No. 28 and made a dash to the schoolhouse. A third man tried to follow but ducked back when machine-gun bullets spattered in the front yard. Then and for the rest of the day, No. 28 was under direct fire from the enemy tanks on the west. McPhail and Todd reached the school; the rest of the squad stayed in No. 28. Lieutenant Cowgill, standing on the other side of the street, shouted across to ask McPhail whether he could see the enemy SP's. He could. Cowgill ordered him to fire. Lieutenant Cook, having seen the true location of the SP's, returned to his tank and backed it into an alley between No. 9 and No. 10, just wide

GARDEN in which Third Platoon tanks took up firing positions. The destroyed portion of the wall (center) was chopped down by Sgt. Grimm's 105-howitzer. Lt. Cowgill's men fired bazookas from the attic of the house on the left through the gaps in the roof tiles.



192



MAIN STREET IN SINGLING, showing the schoolhouse (opposite House No. 8) and looking northwest, where the road curves.

enough to let him through. He told Grimm and Hayward about the enemy SP's, asked Grimm whether he thought he could get out of the garden if necessary, and Grimm thought he could. Cook then called Captain Leach and asked whether tanks could be sent around to hit the enemy guns from the southwest. Leach radioed orders to Sowers (2d Tank Platoon) to try to go through the burning barn (No. 11) and find a way to attack the SP's. Sowers tried, but got only a few yards. Just beyond the wall, the nose of his tank, exposed through the gate to the west, was shot at. Convinced that advance was impossible, Sowers returned to the orchard.

Every attempt to deal with the enemy so far had been made in ignorance both of the layout of the town and of the enemy position. This Lieutenant Cowgill set out to remedy and, while Cook maneuvered his tanks, Cowgill and his two men started on a devious exploratory journey through the houses to the west.

At the same time McPhail and Todd, who had fired a few rounds at the SP's, discovered what seemed to them more profitable targets in enemy infantry in the valley to the north. This enemy was also occupying the attention of two other groups of men in town. The four men of Cowgill's 1st Squad (Pvt. Joseph C. Bridges, Pvt. William M. Convery, Pfc. Frank M. O. Asplund, and Pfc. L. W. Battles) who had stayed at the square when the squad leader, Harrington, had accompanied Lieutenant Cowgill,

193

spotted 15-18 Germans near a pillbox in the valley. They crossed the street, took up firing positions in the yard of No. 28, and shot into the Germans. They thought two were hit before the group dispersed. They continued to fire until an officer across the street by the church shouted at them to stop.

The officer was Lieutenant Price (1st Platoon), whose men had come last into town because they had stopped at two small pillboxes south of Singling to take and disarm 11 unresisting Germans. Although Price's mission had been to occupy the east end of town, when he arrived at the square he could see Lieutenant Padgett's (2d Platoon) men already moving along the houses to the east. Lieutenant Cowgill's men were on the west. Price decided to go north. Tech/Sgt. Lovell P. Mitchell with four men cleaned out the houses on the southeast corner of the square while S/Sgt. John Sayers and six men took over No. 35. Price with the rest of his platoon crossed the street to the back of the church, moved along the hard-surfaced alleyway between the church and No. 35. Posting Pvts. Rudolph Aguilar and Randall S. Brownrigg at the northeast corner to watch in that direction, Price and four men followed the alley around the north side of the church. At the corner they could see the Germans at the pillbox who had already been spotted by the four 3d Platoon men. A burp gun was firing from somewhere to the northwest. The steep drop of the Singling ridge to the north made it possible for Price's men to return fire over the roofs of the houses back of No. 28.

Under cover of this Lieutenant Price and Sgt. Elmer White planned to work their way into the valley behind the northeast row of houses. But they were checked at the outset by a heavy wire fence which,

hooked to the

194



VIEW NORTHEAST FROM SINGLING toward ridge where Maginot Line defenses were. German tanks were seen on ridge during the battle. An artillery observer had OP on roof of this house (No. 33).

corners of No. 34 and No. 35, inclosed the alleyway. It was at least six feet high and too exposed to enemy observation to be scaled. It would have to be cut. The platoon wirecutters, however, had been entrusted to a man who two days before had been evacuated, taking the cutters with him. White went into No. 34 to look for tools. While he was in there, the Germans in the valley were getting ready to give up. They were encouraged in this not only by the continuing small-arms fire of Price's men and the four men of the 3d Platoon, but also by machine-gun and HE fire from Lieutenant Cook's tanks. Sergeant Grimm started it by dispatching a lone German a few hundred yards away with 100 rounds of .30-cal. Minutes later, Grimm saw six Germans jump up and run into the valley pillbox. In his own words, he "closed the door for them with HE." All three tanks also periodically fired HE at the ridge 1,200 yards to the north, more to register the range of the skyline on which German tanks were likely to appear than to engage specific targets. The total effect, however, was to throw a large volume of fire in the direction of a handful of enemy, and shortly Lieutenant Price saw white cloths wave from the pillbox. It was then that he ordered the men across the street to cease fire. Twelve Germans walked up the hill and surrendered to Price. One who spoke some English reported that there were five more in the valley who were anxious to surrender but were afraid to come out. After all the Germans had been disarmed, Price sent one back down the hill to corral his comrades.

At that moment, however, a volley of enemy mortar and artillery struck the square. One shell hit No. 34 and Sergeant White inside was wounded in the head by fragments and wood splinters. Sayers and Pvt. Randall S. Brownrigg outside and Cpl. Frank B. McElwee in No. 43 were slightly wounded. Price and his men ducked back from the alley, and began occupying houses on the square where they were to remain all day. Although Price believed that enemy held the houses to the north, he decided not to attack them, because by advancing north he would move out of contact with the platoons on his flanks. No more was seen of the German emissary or the five volunteers for capture. The 11 still in the possession of the 1st Platoon were sent down the road south. Just

195

as these started off, two more walked up the hill to the schoolhouse and surrendered to McPhail and Todd. McPhail escorted these two across the square to the street south. There, seeing Price's 11 walking down the street, he motioned to his 2 to fall in with them, and, himself, returned to the school. He and Todd then climbed to the second story, and resumed the business of shooting enemy in the valley. The four men of the 1st Squad decided then to go down to the pillbox to get whatever Germans might still be in it. They found none, but did draw machinegun fire from the direction of Welschoff Farm. Battles was wounded in the leg and the squad was pinned in place for several hours.

From the east end of town, Lieutenant Padgett (2d Infantry Platoon) had also seen the enemy infantry in the valley, but he had seen two other things which worried him far more—a rocket launcher (*wurfgeraet*)

firing from about 800 yards west of Welschoff Farm, and seven enemy tanks on a ridge northeast. Padgett was in No. 39, which he had reached with his 1st Squad without difficulty after going through the three small houses to the west. These houses were occupied only by a few scared civilians who were rounded up and sheltered in No. 39. House No. 39 was a fine place to be. Outwardly just another farm house, it was actually a fortress, with walls of 3-foot concrete reinforced with steel girders. Nevertheless, Padgett was still worried. Protection enough from artillery and the *wurfgeraet* (which Padgett decided was shooting short anyway), the house would not be of much avail against the enemy tanks. More reassuring were the four tanks of the 1st Platoon (Lieutenant Goble) which pulled into position in the orchard opposite No. 39 about the same time that Padgett arrived there. The enemy armor, though threatening, was still too far away for direct action. Padgett sent his runner to report the situation to Lieutenant Belden and also to find the 2d Squad of his own platoon and bring them up. When the runner failed to return in what seemed to Padgett a reasonable time, he sent out another man, Pvt. Lonnie G. Blevins, on the same mission.

Blevins left on his run under the impression that the infantry company CP was at No. 3 where it had first been set up by Belden on entering the town. Actually Belden had stayed in that house less than half an hour, only long enough to set up the radio and notify the 51st Infantry Battalion that he was in town. He then moved to No. 28. Blevins reached No. 44, where he met a man of Price's platoon and was warned not to cross the square which enemy guns to the west covered. Blevins went around No. 44 and on up the road south to No. 3. Finding no one, he returned along the west side of the street and got as far as No. 5. A tanker, one of Sandrock's or the forward observer's crew, waylaid Blevins and told him to take charge of a prisoner who had just walked up to the tank and surrendered. At No. 7 Blevins with his prisoner met Battles who had not yet started for the valley pillbox. Battles took temporary charge of the prisoner while Blevins dashed through a burst of machine-gun fire across to No. 28. In a few minutes he reappeared in the door and motioned to Battles to send the prisoner over. Half his mission accomplished, Blevins still had to find the 2d

196

Squad. By luck he met them near No. 44 and delivered his message to Pfc. Phillip E. Scharz in charge.

Scharz's squad had already with little effort accomplished one of the most notable successes of the day. Investigating the southernmost house of town, which the rest of the infantry, entering between No. 2 and No. 3, had bypassed, they found a Frenchman and asked whether there were any Germans inside. He shook his head, but Scharz's men, noticing a radio antenna thrusting out of a cellar window, were suspicious. Four of them surrounded the house, and Scharz and Pfc. Lewis R. Dennis went in. In the cellar they found 28 German enlisted men and 2 officers. None offered any resistance. They were frisked and evacuated. A search of the house then revealed large stores of small arms and ammunition. When the squad emerged, they met on the road the 13 prisoners sent back by Lieutenant Price and McPhail. Having discovered enemy in one house, they searched with slow caution the others along the street, and so arrived late at the square where Blevins found them.

When Blevins had completed his mission of telling Scharz to take his squad east, the enemy artillery and mortar which had wounded four of Price's men was falling around the church. Blevins crossed the street to No. 7 to "see Battles." With Battles now was 1st Sgt. Dellas B. Cannon who was on his way to the CP. Cannon sprinted across to No. 28; Blevins followed, and then worked east back to No. 39.

Cannon had not been in the CP long before a round of 75-mm hit the building. Pfc. John E. Tsinetakes was scratched by dislodged plaster but there were no other casualties. The fire had quite possibly been drawn from one of the enemy SP's by the recent activity in the street. In any case the shot decided Cannon to go west to where the SP's were and "get a closer look." He invited McPhail who had just come over from the school to go along. The two set out, taking almost exactly the route that Lieutenant Cowgill, unknown to them, had already followed twice.

Sergeant Grimm had started Cowgill on his first journey from the garden, which the 3d Platoon tanks occupied, by blasting open the door of No. 12 with a burst of .50-cal. Cowgill and his two men entered and climbed to the attic. They found that, although they could see the two enemy SP's through the damaged tiling on the roof, they could not see beyond. They continued exploration westward. For one reason or

another they were unable to reach the roofs of the next three buildings. In the last (No. 17) they found their progress blocked by the lack of openings of any kind in the west wall. They backtracked through the courtyard between No. 16 and No. 15 and then walked through an opening in the south wall out into a garden-orchard walled with concreted stone like all the Singling gardens. They crawled to a gap in the wall and found themselves within spitting distance of the two SP's. Beyond, in an arc or line not more than 200 yards distant, they saw the outlines of three enemy tanks. They returned at once to Lieutenant Cook's position to report. Cowgill sent word to Lieutenant Belden that there were "five enemy tanks on the west" and then he took Lieutenant Cook back to the OP at the

197



COURTYARD and manure pile for Houses 8, 9, and 10, where Lt. Cook parked his tank. View north.
Note heavy stone construction.

wall. Harrington and Alexander were left at No. 12, which Cowgill decided was the most suitable spot he had seen for his platoon headquarters.

When Cook returned from his reconnaissance, he was impressed with both the strength of the German position and the difficulty of dislodging them. Their command of the main street and of the nose of the ridge west of town made it impossible for tanks to attack them. Artillery seemed, despite the proximity of our own troops, the most logical answer, and Cook therefore went to look for the observer, 1st Lt. Donald E. Guild. Guild was at the infantry company CP with Lieutenant Belden and Captain Leach. When Cook joined them, the four officers discussed the problem. Lieutenant Guild felt that artillery could not be brought down without unduly endangering friendly troops. Mortar fire would be fine, but the infantry had brought no mortars because they had too few men to man them and carry ammunition. The mortar squad, down to three men, were armed with a bazooka. Lieutenant Cook suggested that the street might be smoked

198



OPEN YARD in foreground is where Hayward and Grimm were parked. Lt. Cook backed his tank into alley shown blocked by truck.

with grenades and the tank mortars. Behind that screen the tanks might cross the street and attack the enemy from the northeast. Actually he felt that the smoke alone would be enough to force the SP's to withdraw. The proposal was not seriously considered because Captain Leach preferred to try the infantry bazookas. This was the decision, and the job was given to Lieutenant Cowgill.

He sent back to ask Belden for a bazooka, and riflemen to protect it. His plan was to shoot at the Germans from the attic of his CP. Lieutenant Guild advised that it would take the SP about two minutes to elevate its gun to fire, and that was considered ample time to launch the rockets and move out. Belden sent Pfc. Kenneth L. Bangert and Pvt. Frank LeDuc down to Cowgill with the headquarters bazooka. Headquarters runner, Pfc. Melvin P. Flynn, went over to No. 7 occupied by seven men of the machinegun and mortar squads. His message apparently was, "Lieutenant Cowgill wants some riflemen to protect his bazookamen." What happened was that S/Sgt. John W. Herring, the two men of his mortar squad

199

who carried the second bazooka of the company, and S/Sgt. Patrick H. Dennis, leader of the machine-gun squad, went down to No. 12; the other three men of the machine-gun squad remained all the rest of the day at No. 7 where, having no field of fire, they were unable to set up their gun.

Stalemate in Singling

While Cowgill's men got ready to attack the German tanks on the west, a series of incidents occurred to suggest that enemy armor might be forming on the north for a counterattack on Singling. Tanks to the north were observed moving east; prepared artillery concentrations were laid on the town; the enemy on the west renewed his interest in our tanks in that sector (2d Platoon); and finally tanks came into the east side of town.

The enemy tanks (three to five) moving on the north apparently along a road were spotted and reported by Sergeant Grimm, but as the range was extreme he did not fire. Furthermore, Grimm's gun was trained through the gap in the wall to the northwest against the SP threat. Sergeant Hayward had adjusted on the north ridge and Grimm left that zone of fire to him.

HAUPTMAN'S DESTROYED TANK in orchard south of Houses 11 and 13. Most of damage was done by Germans who set fire to the tank before our forces retired from Singling during evening of 6 December.



200

Lieutenant Cook moved his tank into the courtyard of the cluster of buildings (No. 8-No. 10) where he could observe north. Suddenly just west of town a white signal flare shot upward. Almost immediately a short, intense artillery concentration rocked the town. Mixed with shells of light or medium caliber were some rockets and some mortar. The tankers' later estimate was that the fire was about equivalent to a battalion concentration of five-minute duration, that at times as many as 20 shells hit in the same instant.

In the 2d Tank Platoon sector the shelling followed by only a few minutes an incident to which the tankers paid little attention at the time. A dismounted German suddenly appeared on the rise in front of them and walked across the orchard less than 50 yards away. Before the tanks could adjust fire on him, he had gone. The intense shelling, which started almost immediately, forced the tanks to back a few yards to a cabbage patch beside the orchard trail. When the artillery fire broke off, they stayed where they were, and there by a curious freak Sergeant Hauptman a few minutes later lost his tank. A German A-P shell hit the crest of the rise 100 yards in front of him, ricocheted off the ground, and plowed into the right side of Hauptman's turret. His loader, Pfc. William J. McVicker, was killed. If the German tanks west of town aimed that shell to carom into the tanks parked where they had been observed by the lone infantryman, the accuracy of this shot was most remarkable. The reaction of the tankers at the time, however, was that they were still not defiladed from the enemy northwest. Lieutenant Cook, to whom Hauptman reported his loss in the temporary absence of Captain Leach, ordered Sowers and Parks (the remaining tanks of the 2d Platoon) to get their tanks into shelter. Both drove up behind the 3d Platoon in the lee of No. 11.

They were moving when Grimm casually turned his field glasses to a pillbox on the ridge 1,200 yards north where he had seen a few enemy infantry minutes previously. He got his glasses on the spot just in time to see the long gun tube of the German tank's 75 flame and fire directly at him. The round hit nearby, and Grimm had a split second to decide whether to shoot back or run for it. He figured that his 105 without power traverse could not be laid in less than 20 seconds. That was too long. He threw his tank in gear and backed out of the garden. He had just started when a second round hit Hayward's tank on the sprocket, crippling it. In the next few seconds Hayward was hit four times and the tank began to burn. Gunner, Cpl. Angelo Ginoli and the bowgunner Pvt. John H. Furlow were killed; Hayward and his loader, Pfc. Vern L. Thomas, were wounded. Grimm made good his escape through the opening between No. 9 and No. 11. Outside, the tank bogged down in the heavy mud, and the crew evacuated while Grimm got Sowers to pull him out.

The 2d and 3d Platoons, Sergeant Sandrock of the 1st Platoon, the command and the artillery observer's tanks were now all bunched and immobilized in the area southwest of the square which, covered on three sides by buildings, was the only relatively safe place in town for tanks. It was becoming

201

FITZGERALD'S FIRING POSITION, looking north from road between Houses 37 and 38. The Mark V tank destroyed by Fitzgerald is in almost the exact center of the fields beyond the road.



increasingly apparent to both infantry and tanks that, with the small forces at their disposal and against an enemy who had at least equal strength and every terrain advantage, they could not hope to secure their position in town by attack. They had, instead, to make such dispositions as would complement the enemy's stalemate and wait it out. They were expecting momentarily relief by units of Combat Command B. Colonel Abrams had already called Captain Leach to tell him the relieving companies were on their way. In the meantime there was no point in incurring needless casualties. Lieutenant Price, after having four men lightly wounded by artillery, gave strict orders to his platoon to stay inside unless the Germans counterattacked. Lieutenant Padgett's men holed up in the cellar of their fortress house and the lieutenant himself found a bed which, as long as there was no place to go, he made his personal headquarters.

While the enemy tanks, however, on the north still threatened to attack, Padgett was very busy trying to find ways to deal with them. He sent his runner, Blevins, across

202

the street to warn the 1st Platoon tanks (Lieutenant Goble) in the orchard. (Goble's vision to the northeast was obstructed by a 6-7 foot bush and apple-tree hedge, and by houses and brush on the north side of the road.) Lieutenant Padgett himself then set out to find the artillery observer to see whether a concentration could not be put on the enemy to discourage if not destroy him. He tried four times to walk down the street to the company CP; three times he was turned back by spurts of machine-gun bullets on the west side of No. 37. The fourth time he got through to report to Lieutenant Belden, but he could not find Lieutenant Guild. It was late in the afternoon when Padgett returned to his own CP.

While Padgett had been trying to get to Belden, Lieutenant Guild, the observer, had already spotted the enemy tanks himself from the roof of his OP, No. 33, and had informed Captain Leach. Leach took the warning personally to Lieutenant Goble. Goble, figuring that if the Germans attacked they would come either down the road or in back of the houses opposite, had Sgt. Robert G. Fitzgerald on the right move his tank down the hill to within 15 yards of the edge of the road, where he could observe better to the northeast. Fitzgerald kept his gun sights at 1,400 yards, the range to the northerly ridge where the enemy was reported. The first tank to appear, however, drew up between No. 37 and No. 38 less than 150 yards away, heading toward the church. The enemy Mark V and Fitzgerald saw each other at about the same time, but neither could immediately fire. While the enemy

MARK V TANK destroyed by fire from Fitzgerald's tank. Enemy tank is headed southwest, and the gun has not started to swivel southward to engage Fitzgerald. Note broken track, front bogie.



203



LT. GOBLE'S TANK, *showing the holes made by enemy shells.*

started to traverse his turret, Fitzgerald brought his gun down. He shot first and, at point-blank range, put the first round into the Mark V, setting it on fire. One man jumped out and ran behind one of the houses. Fitzgerald fired two more rounds into the burning tank.

Later, on warning by Lieutenant Padgett's infantry that more enemy tanks were approaching from the northeast, he drove his tank through the hedge and east along the road almost to the bend where observation north and east was clear. He saw an enemy tank, but before he could adjust his sights the German fired smoke and in a few seconds disappeared as effectively as an octopus behind its self-made cloud and escaped. Rockets then began to fall close to Fitzgerald's tank. Whether this was aimed fire from the battery near Welschoff Farm or simply a part of the miscellaneous area concentration on the town, Fitzgerald did not stay to find out. He retired westward to the concealment of the hedge, and there, leaving his tank, crossed with Lieutenant Goble to Padgett's CP. From the house they could see a Mark V in the valley

204

northeast, apparently parked with its gun covering the road east, facing, that is, at right angles to the tankers' observation. Fitzgerald went back to try a shot at it. Again he moved his tank east, getting a sight on the enemy between two trees. The second round was a hit; one more fired the tank. He then shot a round or two at another Mark V facing him about 800 yards away, at which Sgt. Emil Del Vecchio on the hill behind him was also firing. Both 75-mm and 76.2-mm shells, however, bounced off the front armor plate of the enemy. Fitzgerald decided to move back to his hedge. Back in No. 39 again he saw an enemy

SP moving east in the vicinity of Welschoff Farm.

Rather than risk exposing his tank again by moving it out to the east, Fitzgerald decided to wait until the SP came around behind the farm and emerged into his field of fire. But the SP did not emerge. Whether, concealed among the farm buildings, it fired into the 1st Platoon tanks cannot certainly be determined. But in any case, a short while after it had disappeared, two rounds of AP hit Lieutenant Goble's tank in quick succession. The first round set it on fire and wounded Goble and his gunner, Cpl. Therman E. Hale. The second round penetrated the turret, then apparently ricocheted inside until its momentum was spent, and finally landed in the lap of the driver, Tech. 5 John J. Nelsen. Nelsen dropped the hot shell, scrambled out, and with the loader, Pvt. Joseph P. Cocchiara, ran from the burning tank. In the excitement they headed the wrong way and high-tailed up the main street into the center of town. There they paused long enough to ask some infantrymen where the tanks were. Directed southward, they eventually came on Sergeant Sowers' tank and got inside.

As soon as Lieutenant Goble was hit, S/Sgt. John J. Fitzpatrick took command of the platoon and ordered them to back over the ridge behind them into defilade from the enemy north. As they backed, a round of HE exploded in front of Del Vecchio's tank, splattering it with fragments. The enemy continued to fire at Goble's tank, but the others reached the cover of the hill without loss.

On the other side of town Lieutenant Cowgill's bazookas in the attic of No. 12 were getting ready to fire at one enemy SP. (One of the two guns in the street had withdrawn by this time.) In the garden east of No. 12 Sergeant Hayward's tank was burning. McPhail, leader of the 2d Squad, and Company 1st Sergeant Cannon were on their way westward to have a look at the SP's, unaware that the reconnaissance had already been made and action taken as a result of it. They sprinted past the burning tank, picked up Harrington at the chapel, and followed Lieutenant Cowgill's previous route to the wall beside No. 17. Through the same gap Cowgill had used to observe, the three men fired at Germans standing near the tanks and pillboxes. They hit one who rolled down the slope. After half a dozen rounds, they moved back. Cannon and Harrington went to the basement of No. 12, where they found S/Sgt. Patrick H. Dennis and S/Sgt. Harold A. Hollands, both with rifles, preparing to cover from the basement windows the bazookamen, then getting set to fire through the roof. One of the two bazookas with old-type firing

205

mechanism failed to go off. From the other, the three men in the attic launched five rounds in turn at the SP. Only the last hit, and it did no more than knock a fragment off the right side of the turret. It did, however, cause the crew to jump out, and two were shot by the four men in the basement. Hardly had this happened when a Mark V drew up alongside the damaged SP and sent a round crashing into the side of No. 12. At about the same time another shell from the north struck the building at its foundations, showering the men in the cellar with plaster. It was a narrow escape on both scores, but no one was hurt. Cowgill moved his men to No. 13, which turned out to be another of Singling's thick-walled fortress-farms. Here the 3d Platoon sat out the second of the enemy's short, sharp artillery concentrations, which scored three hits on the building but did little damage.

Relief of Team B

It was now getting late in the afternoon, and still the relief scheduled to take place an hour or more earlier had not been accomplished. It was shortly past noon that Colonel Abrams had been ordered by Brig. Gen. Herbert L. Earnest, Combat Command A, to turn over Singling to Combat Command B and get ready to move on his own objective, Bining and Rohrbach. On information that his tanks and infantry were in town, Colonel Abrams told Mal. Albin F. Irzyk, commanding officer, 8th Tank Battalion, in the presence of Major Alanis, commanding officer, 51st Armored Infantry Battalion, that he was "ready to turn over to them their objective and without a fight." Despite constant fire from the direction of Singling, the relieving units henceforth acted on the assumption that the town was clear.

Major Irzyk decided to send Company C of his battalion in with Company B of the 10th Armored Infantry Battalion. The infantry had been in assembly area 3,000 yards south of Singling for more than an hour; the

tanks were moving up when orders reached the commander of Company C, 1st Lt. William J. Marshall. The orders were to pick up the infantry, go into Singling, contact the commanding officer of the tank company in town, and take over the outposting with infantry and tanks. In addition to the outposts, patrols were to be sent out north. Marshall was instructed to enter town "as the other unit had done." With some of the 35-40 men of Company B of the 10th mounted on all his tanks, Marshall set off to carry out these instructions exactly, as his tanks moved in at about 1400 following the tracks of Company B, 37th Tank Battalion.

At the south edge of town the 1st Tank Platoon (2d Lt. George Gray), in the lead, turned northwest following the approach route of Lieutenant Farese. Farese's two knocked-out tanks were, of course, still where they had been hit. Although Lieutenant Gray remarked that the tank hatches were open and there was no sign of the crew, he did not suspect that the tanks were out of action. Approaching the corner of the wall at No. 14, he saw ahead of him near the road a tank which he assumed to be American since he believed no enemy were in town. When, therefore, Lieutenant Marshall called to ask how he was making out, he replied, "OK, as soon as

206

I get around this corner." Then he was hit by two rounds of AP. The gunner, Cpl. Tauno H. Aro, was killed. Gray, seriously wounded, was evacuated to Lieutenant Cowgill's CP at No. 13, arriving there just as McPhail, Cannon, and Harrington returned from their reconnaissance trip to the west wall.

As soon as Gray was hit, Lieutenant Marshall ordered the 2d Platoon (S/Sgt. Edwin J. De Rosia) to move east and try to circle behind the enemy tank that had knocked out Gray. De Rosia, however, had not moved far when he reported enemy direct fire from north and east which he could not exactly locate. Marshall then ordered all tanks to withdraw to the reverse slope of the ridge south of town. Except the men who had been riding Gray's tank and who dismounted when the tank was hit to assemble near No. 49, the infantry remained on the decks of the tanks when they withdrew. 1st Lt. Robert F. Lange, commanding officer of Company B, 10th Armored Infantry Battalion, went into town to make contact with Lieutenant Belden. At the same time Lieutenant Marshall returned with his tank to the 8th Tank Battalion to consult with Major Irzyk.

Lange found Captain Leach in a tank outside of town and together they went to No. 28 to talk with Lieutenant Belden. The decision agreed on by the three commanders was to relieve Lieutenant Cowgill and Lieutenant Padgett in place; Lieutenant Price was to be withdrawn first from the center of town without relief. Company B of the 10th Armored Infantry Battalion had organized its handful of men into 2 platoons; about 15 men in one, 18 in the other. While Lieutenant Lange sent a noncommissioned officer to meet his platoon leaders, inform them of the decision, and guide them into town, Captain Leach went to look for Lieutenant Marshall and arrange for the relief of his tanks.

The afternoon was wearing on and Colonel Abrams began to worry; he wanted to pull his tanks out of Singling as soon as possible. He called Captain Leach to find out how the relief was progressing. In Captain Leach's absence Lieutenant Cook took the call and made a report which could not have been very reassuring. He said that there were five enemy tanks west of the town and that from three to five more had been observed moving down the ridge to their front. He said that one enemy tank had been knocked out by the 1st Platoon on the right. He detailed the disposition of his platoons and reported that they were receiving heavy enemy artillery fire and that the enemy was laying a smoke screen on the north. (Lieutenant Cook did not know at the time that this was put down by the Mark V to cover its escape from Fitzgerald's fire; he believed that it might herald a German counterattack.) He told Colonel Abrams that the 51st Infantry was still outposting the town and that the 10th Infantry was in process of relieving them. He added that he was not in contact with the infantry's commanding officer; that he had not yet heard from Captain Leach who was conferring with Lieutenant Marshall.

Colonel Abrams called back a little later and told Cook to organize the company tanks, pick up the 51st Infantry, and move out immediately whether he found Captain Leach or not. Cook notified all tanks to

207

prepare for immediate withdrawal. In fact, however, the withdrawal was delayed about half an hour to allow the relieving infantry to consolidate their positions.

Lieutenant Lange made few changes in Lieutenant Belden's dispositions, except to post most of his men outside the buildings to guard against enemy infiltration during the night. He established his CP at No. 45 to get away from the direct fire that had been harassing No. 28 all day.

Captain Leach, in the meantime, had arrived at the Company C, 8th Tank Battalion position in the absence of Lieutenant Marshall, but was able to talk to Marshall over Sergeant De Rosia's radio. Leach reported the situation in Singling as follows: he said there were four enemy SP's in town, but he thought one had been knocked out by a bazooka; some enemy infantry occupied the northern part of the town (Lieutenant Lange, who put outposts to the north later, reported no enemy there); a Panther tank to the northeast of town had fired on our tanks when they exposed themselves in that direction. Leach then asked Marshall how long it would be before the latter relieved him. Marshall, who had just been ordered by Major Irzyk to stay put, replied that he would not come into town "until my orders are changed."

This change in plan was not known to the infantry in town, who were completing the relief as scheduled. Most of the wounded had already been evacuated earlier on Sergeant Morphey's tank, which due to radio failure had not been in action but was brought up expressly to take the wounded back. No regular evacuation vehicles were available at battalion, as Lieutenant Cook ascertained early in the afternoon when he called just after Sergeant Hayward was hit. Some wounded nevertheless remained to be evacuated by the withdrawing infantry. Cowgill and Padgett led their men to the street south to a rendezvous with the tanks in the vicinity of No. 3. Price, who did not have to wait for relief, moved his men out first and met the tanks outside town beside the two pillboxes that had been cleaned out by Padgett's 2d Squad that morning. Here they picked up the last prisoner of the day, a sleepy German who had to be prodded into surrender. He was lying on the ground swathed in a belt of .50-cal. Ammunition and evinced no interest in his capture.

It was already getting dark when Cook moved his tanks out. They collected the infantry as arranged, and found Captain Leach with Lieutenant Marshall about 400 yards south of town. As the 2d and 3d Platoon tanks moved out together and the 1st Platoon on the right headed back to join them further south, another heavy enemy artillery concentration fell among them, but by a miracle caused only one light casualty, Pvt. Genar W. Ferguson, 2d Infantry Platoon, who was hit in the leg. To cover the withdrawal, all tanks swiveled their guns north and fired back into Singling. The enemy tanks replied and the AP tracers streaked through the gathering darkness. Two rounds landed within a few feet of Sergeant Del Vecchio's tank before the fire fight was taken up by Lieutenant Marshall's tanks and the enemy shifted his attention to them.

After Captain Leach's tanks had pulled out, the relief infantry company in Singling

208

remained more than three hours without direct tank support. During this time the enemy on the west crept up to the two destroyed tanks of Farese's platoon and started the battery chargers. It may be that they were going to attempt to drive the tanks away. When the infantry outposts at No. 14 heard the engines, they believed them to be relieving tanks which they were expecting. 2d Lt. Robert J. Victor, commanding the platoon which took over Lieutenant Cowgill's sector, went out with one of his squad leaders to investigate. He approached one of the tanks to within 25 feet, then stopped. The silhouette of the three figures on top of the tank made him suspicious; their overcoats were too long, their helmets too sharply beaked. As Victor and his sergeant had only one carbine, they returned to the CP to pick up weapons and another man. Approaching the tank the second time, they were fired on by a burp gun, which they answered with rifle fire and grenades. The enemy retreated but later in the night, returned to set fire to the tanks.

Lieutenant Lange, in the meantime, worried about his thinly outposted positions in town, had gone out to see Lieutenant Marshall and, as he said, "try to move the tanks in personally." As Lieutenant Marshall had been called back shortly after dark to battalion by Major Irzyk, commanding the 8th Tank Battalion, Lieutenant Lange found Sergeant De Rosia temporarily in command. Major Irzyk and Capt. Abraham J.

Baum, S-3 of the 10th Armored Infantry Battalion, were also in the company area at the time.

The question of whether to attempt to hold in the town for the night or withdraw was discussed. Although Major Irzyk's first plan was to send one platoon of tanks in to support the infantry, he reversed his decision after talking to Lange. He was already doubtful, because he could see no very good reason for holding the town when the enemy occupied all the high ground north and east. Lange reported that with less than 50 men at his disposal he had had to outpost very thinly and that it would be easy for the enemy to probe out these outposts during the night and infiltrate through his whole position. Major Irzyk was also impressed by an incident which Lange related. An hour or so earlier (it was now about 2000) the east platoon under 2d Lt. James W. Leach, had shot up and captured a German kitchen truck which they waylaid at the town square. The truck was carrying hot soup, estimated to be enough to feed at least a company. Major Irzyk, taking this to indicate that the enemy in at least that strength still held the outskirts of town, west and north, figured that the presence of our own troops in the center of town would only obstruct the use of artillery against the Germans.

Major Irzyk therefore gave the order to withdraw from Singling. To cover the withdrawal, Sergeant De Rosia jockeyed his tanks back and forth on the reverse slope of the hill to make the enemy believe that they were entering town. The infantry assembled in about an hour near No. 47 and moved back to the tank positions 400 yards to the south. They dug in and outposted the tanks for the night. During the few hours they had been in Singling they had suffered five light casualties from enemy mortar fire.

Within five minutes of the infantry report that Singling was clear of friendly

209

troops, corps artillery put a heavy TOT¹ on the town. The next day (7 December) tanks and infantry moved back up to just short of the crest of the Singling ridge, but they were ordered not to advance as they would be relieved momentarily. Relief by units of the 12th Armored Division actually took place that night. Singling was finally taken on 10 December.

The final reckoning of the battle at Singling reveals neither a big action nor a startlingly successful one. All 4th Armored Division units directly involved suffered a total of 22 casualties, of which 6 were killed; they lost 5 medium tanks. Known enemy losses were 2 Mark V tanks and 56 prisoners.

1. A type of artillery concentration in which the shells from a number of batteries are timed to burst simultaneously on the target. Such a concentration was used for its demoralizing effect on the enemy and also to prevent enemy observation outfits from picking up the location of individual batteries.

210



SCENE NEAR BINING, where the Germans blew out a section of road in their retreat. (Photo taken 11 December 1944.)

The attack on Singling was made against heavy odds, and attended with all the confusion of a hastily improvised maneuver. In itself, the action was a stalemate; nevertheless, it achieved immediate tactical

success for Combat Command A. With the main German forces heavily engaged at Singling during the afternoon of 6 December, other elements of Combat Command A were given the opportunity to pass Singling and reach the primary objective, Bining. This was accomplished by the 1st Battalion, 328th Infantry, and Company D (light tanks) of the 37th Tank Battalion. Rohrbach, the further objective, was not entered by Combat Command A.

By probing one of the areas in which the Germans had strongest prepared defenses, the action at Singling opened the way for later advances by the 12th Armored Division.

211

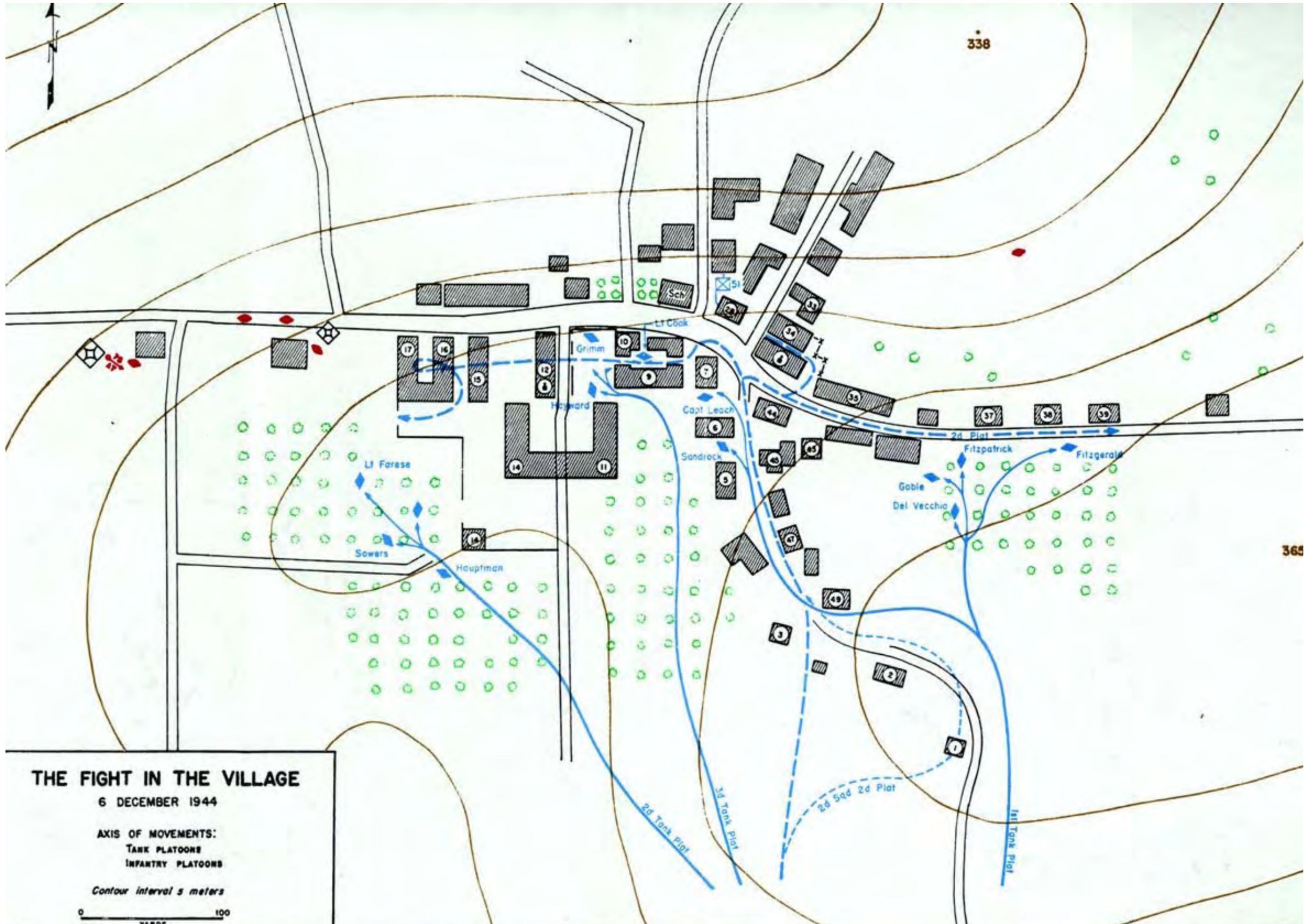


MAP NO. 4

page created 16 November 2001

[Return to the Table of Contents](#)

[Return to CMH Online](#)



THE FIGHT IN THE VILLAGE

6 DECEMBER 1944

AXIS OF MOVEMENTS:
TANK PLATOONS
INFANTRY PLATOONS

Contour interval 5 meters

