

HISTORY OF THE 714TH TANK BATTALION (through March 1952)

November 11, 1951 marks the 8th anniversary of the activation of the 714th Tank Battalion.

Looking at the history of the 714th Tank Battalion, we find two periods of active service, the first period from November 1943 to December 1945, and the second period from July 1950 to (March 1952).

In the first week of November 1943, after the 12th Armored Division moved from the Tennessee Maneuvers to Camp Barkley, Texas, its new home, its principle tank forces, the 43rd and 44th Armored Regiments, were deactivated and the personnel from those regiments were utilized to form five tank battalions, two of which were the 714th and 44th Tank Battalions. The 44th remained with the 12th Armored Division, and the 714th left Camp Barkley as a separate tank battalion to go to Fort Jackson, South Carolina, in December 1943.

At Fort Jackson, the 714th conducted basic and advanced unit training as a separate tank battalion until March 1944. At this time, the 44th Tank Battalion was ordered to a port of embarkation for overseas assignment as a separate tank battalion. The vacancy left in the 12th Armored Division by the departure of the 44th Tank Battalion was capably filled by the 714th Tank Battalion, recalled from Fort Jackson, South Carolina.

The return of the 714th Tank Battalion to the 12th Armored Division at Camp Barkley, Texas was considered a homecoming for the battalion since most of its personnel had been originally from the 3rd Battalion of the 44th Armored Regiment, 12th Armored Division.

From March 1944 until July 1944 the 7th continued its vigorous training in preparation for eventual combat as an element of the 12th Armored Division. In July 1944, the Division was alerted for shipment overseas, and from the period 15 July 1944 until 13 September 1944, the 714th was heavily engaged in preparation and movement to the Division staging area at Camp Shanks, New York.

September 20, 1944 was sailing day for the 12th Armored Division. For the next eleven days, the tankers of the 714th watched with mixed interest and emotion the Atlantic Ocean pass swiftly by, and the ultimate purpose of their long hard training draw nearer.

On October 2, 1944, the Division debarked at Liverpool, England, and proceeded to Tidworth Barracks in southeastern England.

Five weeks later, the 714th Tank Battalion crossed the English Channel with the rest of the 12th Armored Division, landed at LeHavre, and went into an assembly area near Auffay, France.

On December 5, 1944, the 12th Armored Division was assigned to the XV Corps of the U.S. Seventh Army and was ordered to relieve the 4th Armored Division on the front.

The actions of the Division during December are divided into two phases, the first for December 1 – 15, and the second for December 19 – 25.

During the Division's first action, the 714th Tank Battalion was committed with C Company, 56th Armored Infantry Battalion as a task force. This task force moved swiftly across country toward the division objective, a town named Bettviller, and aided in the final attack and occupation after seizure. In the Division's second action, the 714th supported the 56th Armored Infantry Battalion in the seizure of the division's first German town, Uttweiler. The support given by the tankers of the 714th during this action was outstanding.

The turn of the new year, 1945, produced the bloodiest chapter in the history of the 714th Tank Battalion. The scene was Herrlisheim, from January 8 – 11.

Two factors weighed heavily against the lead elements of the 12th Armored Division as it rolled toward the riverhead at Herrlisheim. The country was definitely not tank country, and most important, the enemy's strength was underrated. What was thought to be a small inferior force of 500 enemy actually consisted of two divisions, the 10th SS Panzer and the 553rd Volksgrenadier, skillfully organized for defense.

Combat Command B, composed basically of two task forces, Task Force Rammer, the 56th Armored Infantry Battalion, and Task Force Power, the 714th Tank Battalion was the first to test the enemy's strength. From the morning of January 8 to the night of January 10, the tankers of the 714th supported the infantry of the 56th AIB fighting their way into Herrlisheim against very heavy resistance. The town was reached and January 9th and one third of it was captured.

Throughout this action, the tankers of the 714th demonstrated outstanding courage and ability. Company D of the 714th with its light tanks was given the task of evacuating wounded and bringing up supplies. The action of D Company alone saved the lives of more than 75 men and kept the rest of the tankers and infantry supplied when they sorely needed it. More than 200 German prisoners were taken during this engagement and a large number of the enemy were killed and wounded. The 714th suffered 30 tank casualties and the loss of their Battalion Commander, Lt Col Phelan who had commanded them since March 1944. The infantry company attached to the 714th was reduced to 36 men, but the enemy paid a price four times as great during their engagement against the tankers of the 714th.

Herrlisheim was not taken until sometime later, but the 12th Armored Division and in particular the 714th and the 56th AIB had hold against a tremendous pincher movement by some of the best troops in the German Army.

From January 20 until early in February 1945, the tankers got a well deserved rest. New men, vehicles and supplies were received during this period as a result of the losses at Herrlisheim, and Lt Col Field was assigned as new commander of the battalion.

Early in February the 12th Armored Division played a major role in routing the Germans from their last major stronghold in French territory – the Colmar Pocket. In a lightning three-day drive which

found the tankers of the 714th as one of the lead elements of the 12th Armored, contact with French forces was made and a band of steel was snapped around the Colmar Pocket, thus sealing off the German forces in this area.

March 1945 saw the 12th Armored lead General Patton's Third Army drive to the Rhine River. From 18-24 March, the tankers of the 714th found themselves in the middle of an Armored Field Day that rivaled any mission in the ETO for speed and accomplishment. Germans threw everything they had into battle in an effort to save their precious Rhineland, but the spearheading 12th Armored could not be stopped. In less than three days, the Rhine was reached and in three more, the important Rhine River cities of Ludwigshafen, Speyer, and Gemersheim were occupied. Efforts to secure a bridge over the Rhine were unsuccessful, but all other phases of this operation were outstanding achievements. More than 7,000 PWs and a great quantity of equipment were taken during this period.

On March 24 the 12th Armored Division reverted to control of the 7th Army, and the tankers of the 714th found themselves again a part of the spearhead division for an Army. All elements of the 12th crossed the Rhine River at Worms on the morning of March 28 and headed across southern Germany into the heart of the Nazi's vaunted National Redoubt.

The 12th pointed its guns towards Wurzburg and began another swift drive that swept aside all resistance. Upon reaching Wurzburg, CC-B with the 714th Tank Battalion as a principal Task Force moved south and east of Wurzburg taking a bridge and airport at Kitzingen. Large enemy areas were surrounded and cleared by the fast-moving task forces.

The 12th Armored Division's advance turned southeast towards historic Nuremberg, gateway to Bavaria, on April 13, 1945. Enemy resistance stiffened as the division elements approached the Redoubt although many towns surrendered without a fight.

Because of a shift in Army boundaries, the Division mission was changed again on April 17 and the tankers of the 714th found themselves turning south toward Munich.

The 714th as part of Company B entered Ansbach against moderate resistance and continued to Feuchtwangen. At this point Company A passed through Company B and continued the drive to Dillingen and seized a bridge crossing the Danube before it could be blown by retreating Germans. Company B immediately crossed over the bridge and Task Force Field, composed of the 714th Tank Battalion, was responsible for establishing a bridgehead and driving the enemy beyond artillery range of the prized bridge.

The division was relieved of the bridgehead and once more spearheaded the advance of the 7th Army; slashing south and east the division headed for Landsberg and the Lech River. After crossing the river the 714th as part of Company B attacked Diessen with the mission of assisting Company A.

On the official VE Day, May 8, 1945, the 714th Tank Battalion was in its assigned area carrying out its mission as part of the security command of the 12th Armored Division.

With the war over, the days of passes, garrison life, PX rations, athletics, movies, leaves to Paris, London, the Riviera and the like were once more a reality for the batter-seasoned men of the 714th.

Looking back over the short space of five months they had been in combat, the tankers of the 714th saw their unit transformed from a green, untested outfit into as well functioning combat unit and a member of one of the most feared outfits on the Western Front.

Three campaigns, Rhineland, Central Europe and the Ardennes, traced a trail of victory for the tankers of the 714th against a mixture of weary German soldiers and Right-to-the Death SS Troopers.

November 1945 saw the 714th sailing home. Upon arriving in the States in December 1945, the 714th was deactivated like many other units no longer needed, since peace had once more been established throughout the world. Thus at this time the first chapter in the history of the 714th Tank Battalion was brought to a close.

As a result of the outbreak of the Korea War, 25 June 1950, and the increased tempo of the Cold War between Communist forces and the non-Communist peoples of the world, our country had to expand its Armed Forces. Many of the units which were deactivated after the close of World War II were reactivated to serve again for their country. Among these units was the 714th Tank Battalion.

On July 15, 1950, at Fort Bragg, North Carolina, the 714th Tank Battalion was reactivated and assigned for duty with the 82nd Airborne Division as a separate tank battalion. At the time of its reactivation, the assigned strength of the battalion was 10 officers and 10 enlisted men. Work was immediately begun and the time from 15 July 1950 to September 1950 was spent in internal organization.

During September 1950, the 714th received 474 Basic Trainees. Training in armor had to be given to these personnel, so in conjunction with the 44th Tank Battalion, also of the 82nd Airborne Division, an "Armored Unit Filler Training Program" was initiated for the purpose of training these personnel in the branch of armor. The school was operated under the supervision of the battalion commanders of the 714th and 44th Tank Battalions and was conducted from 25 September to 4 December 1950.

Upon completion of the school, an Interim Training Program was conducted to prepare the personnel for Basic Unit Training which was to commence early in 1951.

From January 1951 to March 1951 Basic Unit Training was conducted for all personnel in conjunction with the 44th Tank Battalion.

In March 1951, the men of the 714th participated in their first combined arms exercise, Operation Bridgehead, at Camp Mackall, North Carolina, since the Battalion had been reactivated. The battalion during this operation was supported by the 1st Battalion, 504th Airborne Infantry Regiment.

Further combined arms and advanced unit training was conducted from April to July 1951 with various elements of the division.

During the first three weeks of July 1951 the tankers of the 714th engaged in the "Air Support Weapons Effectiveness Test, ASWET" conducted by the Army, Navy, Air Force and Marine Corps for the Department of the Army Research Board.

Upon return to garrison from Operation ASWET, on July 21, 1951, the 714th began plans and preparations for participation in "Exercise Southern Pines," a joint exercise.

On the afternoon of August 10, 1951 the tankers moved to the field for participation in "Exercise Southern Pines." During this exercise, the 714th worked both with its parent unit, the 82nd Airborne Division, and with the 43rd Infantry Division. The actions of the 714th during this exercise were outstanding in every phase in which it participated. Personal praise by Major General Hickey, Commanding General, 82nd Airborne Division and Major General Cramer, Commanding General, 43rd Infantry Division was received by the tankers of the 714th for their actions. The excellent results of the performance of the 714th Tank Battalion in Exercise Southern Pines brought the tankers one step closer to their ultimate goal: combat readiness.

On January 20, 1952, the battalion entrained for movement to Camp Irwin, California and arrived there January 24. The period January 24 to March 6 was spent training at the Armored Combat Training Area. This training consisted of: 1) All tank crew members firing a Gunnery Qualification Course with the major tank weapon, with all overhead personnel and supporting infantry firing a Gunnery Familiarization Course. 2) Small unit tactics under simulated combat conditions stressing a combination of tactics and gunnery. This consisted of a tank-infantry platoon in daylight attack of a terrain feature, a tank-infantry platoon night attack on a limited objective, offensive tank platoon against a defensive tank section using live sub-caliber ammunition, a single tank combat reaction course, a tank-infantry platoon in delaying action, infantry-tank platoon in daylight attack, comprehensive training by the battalion reconnaissance platoon, with concurrent training on such subjects as communications, driving, maintenance, and flame throwers given throughout this cycle. 3) "Company problems" putting earlier tactical training to the test. 4) A two-day battalion problem (final exam) including combined arms of armor, infantry and Air Force.

On March 6, 1952, the battalion entrained for movement back to Fort Bragg, North Carolina arriving March 10, 1952.

Today, after 21 months of intensive training since the battalion's reactivation in July 1950, the tankers of the 714th stand ready again to fight if necessary for the rights and freedoms of this country with the same courage, fortitude and ability as did their fellow tankers of World War II.