

# TAC NEWS

May - June 1998

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## Singling Out Singling: Lorraine, December 1944

**A**utumn's fighting for the gateway to the *Reich*, up the Metz corridor, had brought the fighting 4th Armored Division to the point of exhaustion. The spearhead of Patton's Third Army, the 4th was in desperate need of R&R. The joint attacks on Singling and Bining were the division's last actions in Lorraine.

Throughout the Lorraine campaign the division operated in small, flexible task forces (generally two to a combat command) which themselves were constantly broken up into smaller forces of company strength tank or infantry commands. These smaller teams were ad hoc organizations, formed by order of the task force commander. In this sense, the attack on Singling was typical. In respect to weather, however, which all the tankers said was their toughest enemy during the campaign, Singling was not typical. The day of the battle was overcast, but there was no rain.

Singling was an agricultural village of some 50 squat stone houses, strung along the highway running from Saarbrücken east to Bitche. As in most Lorraine villages, Singling's buildings were of concrete construction, with 3-foot reinforced walls.

On December 5th 1944, the 37th Tank Battalion, with attachments, commanded by Lt. Col. Creighton W. Abrams, advanced to within 1,000 yards of Singling where difficult terrain and heavy artillery fire stopped it. Fourteen medium tanks were lost to mud and enemy guns. The battalion, reduced in effective strength to two medium companies was unable to advance further. That night, CCA HQs received from Division the next day's plan of attack. CCB was to advance from Schmittviller to take Singling and the high ground to the east. Abrams, whose

principal combat elements were the 37th Tank Battalion, 51st Armored Infantry Battalion, 94th Field Artillery Battalion (105mm howitzers), and Company B of the Tank Destroyer Battalion (less one platoon), was to attack Bining and Rohrbach. Abrams recommended he attack Singling first, because CCB was too far away to reach the assembly area in time. For the attack, he asked for at least six battalions of artillery. None of the division's artillery was in place to lend support, but Abrams heard nothing further from HQs and assumed he had the artillery as requested.

Abrams assault team consisted of the B Companies of the 37th Tank Battalion and of the 51st Armored Infantry Battalion. Capt. James Leach and 1st Lt. Daniel Belden, the respective company commanders, briefed their platoon leaders. The principal objective was Bining; no great attention was paid to Singling, which was thought to be undefended.

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 105mm assault gun.

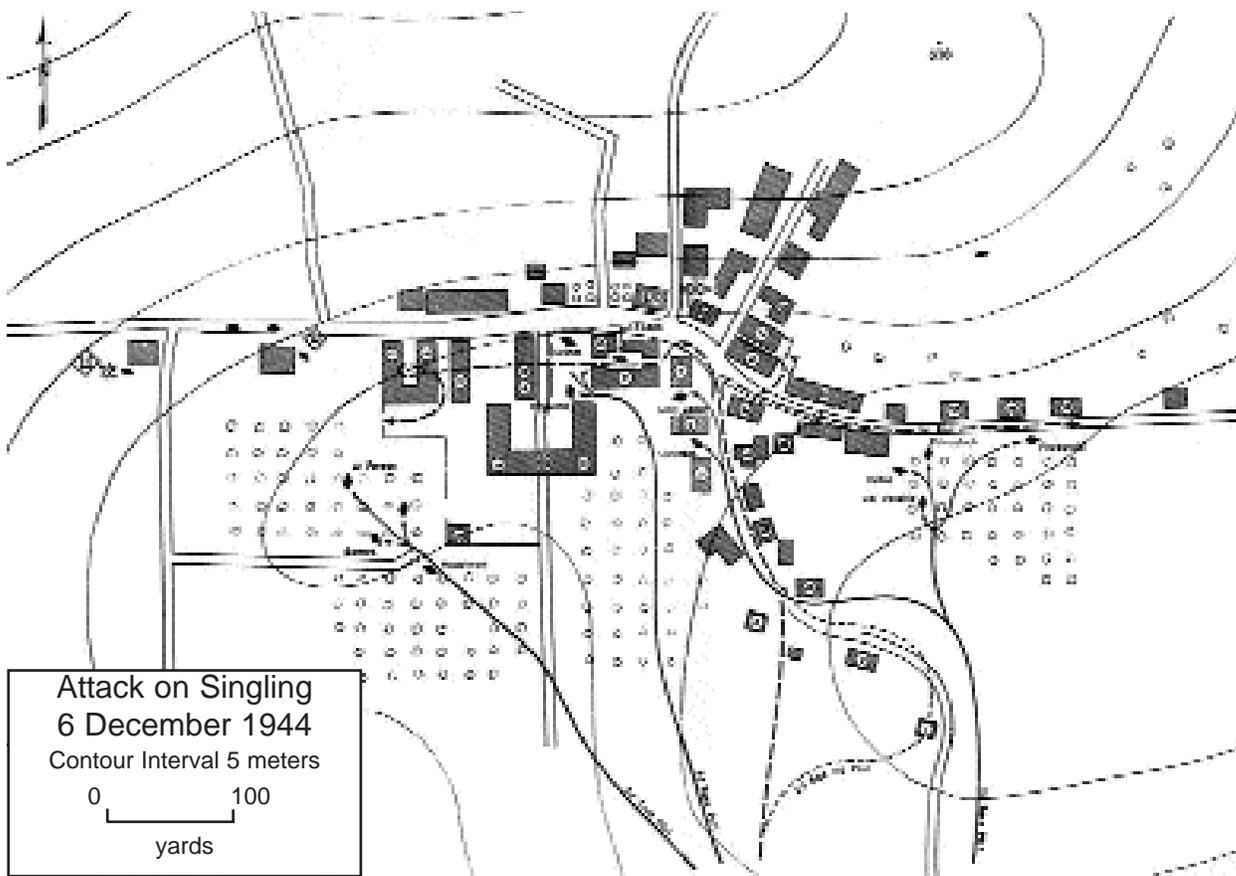
The attack commenced at 0800, December 6th. Team B's battleplan was to advance in a column of alternating tanks and infantry carriers up to the outskirts of Bining. The soaked ground proved too sticky for the halftracks, however, and they were left behind. The riflemen rode on tanks. When the column was 3,000 yards from Singling, Company A of the 37th Tank Battalion reported direct and indirect fire from Singling. At 0830, the 94th Armored Field Artillery Battalion began firing smoke concentrations. For the next hour, the Shermans

fired into the village, although only two German SP guns were actually spotted.

Colonel Abrams, on his own initiative, now decided to attack Singling directly, while the remainder of his force turned east into Bining. He assigned the mission of taking the town to Team B. Capt. Leach deployed his tanks, putting the 2nd Platoon under 2nd Lt. James Farese on the left; the 1st Platoon, commanded by 1st Lt. William Goble, on the right; and the 3d Platoon, under 1st Lt. Robert Cook, in support. The command tank moved between the 2nd and 1st Platoons in front of the 3rd. As the 2nd Platoon tanks carried no infantry, the three infantry platoons were mounted on the remaining eleven tanks. The infantry platoons were widely dispersed; the men of the 2nd 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.

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 them back. The other platoon remained in assembly area and was moved into Bining the next day. Company B tanks advanced rapidly toward Singling, immediately after the artillery preparation, firing as they moved.

The attack formation was soon broken. Sgt. Joe Hauptman's tank, running only in first gear, lagged behind. S/Sgt. Max Morphew's 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 fir-



ing endangered the lead tanks, and they were ordered to stop shooting. As far as the tankers noticed, there was no enemy return fire. As the company approached the town, the 1st and 2nd Platoons swung east and west respectively, and the 3d Platoon moved in through the gap. The effect then was of an advancing line of 13 tanks on a front of 700 yards. Only Lt. Farese's tank was notably in advance. Leading the tanks of S/Sgt. Bernard Sowers and Sgt. John Parks by about 50 yards. Lt. Farese moved up the hillside south of Singling and turned left into an orchard. As his tank topped the crest, it was hit three times by AP shells and immediately set on fire. Lt. Farese and his loader were killed. The rest of the crew bailed out. Sowers and Parks backed their tanks in defilade behind the rise and radioed Hauptman not to come up. The shells that hit Lt. Farese were from a Panther parked beside a stone barn or a towed 75mm ATG in the same general vicinity.

The area was heavily fortified. Some 75 yards from the center of town, stood a two-story stone house, a stone barn, and two Maginot pillboxes. One large-domed pillbox, with an ATG, stood just to the west of the barn. Two concrete buttresses fanned out to the northeast and southeast. Another pillbox housing a machine-gun covered the main road. The main street of town made a broad S-curve, which was covered by concealed guns. Maneuvering amongst this

cover, three Panther tanks, two SP guns, and one towed ATG successfully blocked every attempt at direct assault or envelopment.

The infantry dismounted at a hedge just south of Singling. Lt. Belden ordered 2nd Lt. Wm. Cowgill to take the left side of town, 2nd Lt. Theo Price was ordered to take the right side. 1st Lt. Norman Padgett was to support Cowgill. There was no prior reconnaissance. Although all the platoon leaders and most of the men were recent replacements, they all had combat experience and had fought in towns before. The enemy garrison consisted of the elements of 1st Battalion, 111th Panzer Grenadier Regiment, which mustered a total strength three or four times greater than that of the attacking American infantry. The Germans were also supported by two SP guns and the five batteries of the 119th Artillery Battalion (105mm howitzers).

Lt. Cowgill with his radio operator came into town ahead of his platoon. They made their way nearly up to the main square before spotting a parked SP gun. The square, surrounded by burning buildings, was clouded with thick smoke. Cowgill shouted back a warning to the tanks not to come up.

At Cowgill's shouted warning, Cpt. Leach dismounted and advanced along the street ahead of his tank. The SP up to this point was apparently unaware of the GIs,

although the commander's head was out of his hatch. Suddenly, the SP started to back across the street towards the church, spraying MG fire. Cowgill's 1st Squad, ducked into houses on the west side of the street. The 2nd Squad retreated hastily to the east.

Belden could not see the SP. He assumed the fire was coming from a MG nest and ordered up a tank. Sgt. Ken Sandrock of the 1st Tank Platoon moved forward, firing pot shots at the church steeple on the chance that it might hide a MG nest. Sandrock got lost in the maze of back alleys during this wild goose chase and didn't regain his platoon until after nightfall.

In the meantime the enemy SP at the square completed its turn and headed west along the main street. Leach did not follow. He received the report about a tank knocking out Lt. Farese, and decided that it would be wiser to flank the escaping SP by moving the 3rd Platoon tanks through the west end of the town. He therefore positioned his tank back between two buildings where he could command the square and called up Lt. Cook. Cook's three tanks and the 105mm assault gun advanced on the town from the south. In front of them a large farm building was on fire and the smoke reduced visibility to a few feet. Cook led his tanks to the right of the burning farm. Invisible in the smoke, was a low stone retaining wall and about a 2-foot drop into a walled garden. Hitting this unseen barrier at a 45° angle, Cook's tank teetered dangerously on its left tread. For a moment the Sherman threatened to overturn, then it righted itself.

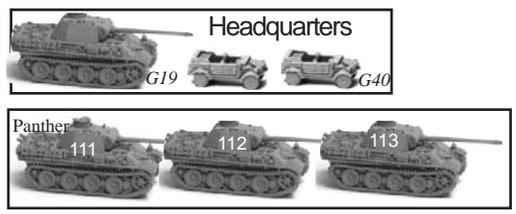
The garden in which Cook's tanks found themselves was enclosed on the north and west by a 4-foot concrete and stone wall, stepped up to 6 feet high around the northwest corner. Despite this enclosure the GI tankers felt hopelessly exposed, for the continuous slope of the ground northward for several 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.



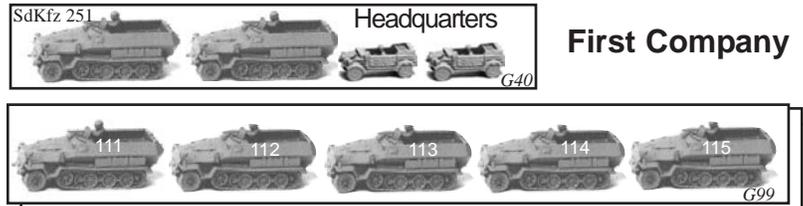
## Elements: German 25th Panzer Grenadier Division

### Defending Singling, France

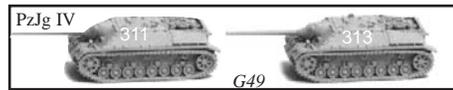
#### elements, 25th Panzer Regiment



#### 1st Battalion, 111th Panzergrenadier Regiment



#### 137th Panzerjager Battalion



elements,  
Third  
Company

*Balance scenario by modifying Panzer Grenadier strength (who played little part in the fighting historically), adding towed AT guns (PaK 40s), and with off-table artillery from the 5 batteries of the 119th Artillery Battalion. Don't forget the re-inforcements (panzers & nebelwerfer) on the ridge northeast of town.*

Originally, Cook 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 Lt. Cowgill had not appeared at that moment to warn him. Cowgill's platoon, moving into the west side of town, had spotted two German SP's parked on either side of the street 200 yards to the west.

In the meantime the 2nd Squad of Cowgill's platoon under Sgt. McPhail had crossed the square and entered a low-lying stone house set back from the street and surrounded by a 2-foot wall. The squad then set out to continue the sweep of the north side of the street. While McPhail made a dash to the schoolhouse he drew a machine gun burst, which cut him off from his squad. Lt. Cowgill, standing on the other side of the street, shouted across to McPhail if he could see the enemy SP's. He did and relayed the information to Lt. Cook who backed his tank into an alley. 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 Cpt. 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 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.

At the same time McPhail and Todd, who had fired a few rounds at the SP's, discovered what seemed to them more a more profitable target, a bunch of German infantry was coming up from the valley to the north. McPhail and Todd crossed the street and shot at the Germans, who promptly scattered. They continued to fire until an officer across the street shouted at them to stop. The officer was Lt. Price. The Germans were a group of prisoners who had surrendered to him earlier. After securing his prisoners, Price decided to alter his mission, which was to occupy the east end of town. He had already seen Lt. Padgett's men moving to the east. With Lt. Cowgill's men to the west, Price decided to move north. The going was difficult. A heavy wire fence blocked their access to the alleyway. It was at least six feet high and too exposed to be scaled. The fence had to be cut, but the platoon wire cutters were nowhere to be found.

At that moment, a volley of enemy mortar and artillery struck the square, wounding several of Price's men. Price ducked back from the alley, and began occupying houses on the square. Although Price believed that the 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.

From the east end of town, Lt. Padgett's platoon spotted a nebelwerfer and seven enemy tanks on a ridge to the northeast. Padgett occupied a farmhouse with walls of 3-foot concrete reinforced with steel girders. Despite the strength of his position, Padgett worried about the panzers until four tanks

of Lt. Goble's 1st Platoon pulled up in the orchard opposite the farmhouse.

Lt. Cowgill, meanwhile, was on the move towards the two German SP guns. Crawling through rubble buildings, Cowgill emerged into a garden and found himself within spitting distance of the two assault guns. Furthermore, not more than 200 yards distant, they saw the outlines of three more enemy tanks. Cowgill returned to his company HQs and relayed this intelligence personally to Cpt. Leach. Leach decided an infantry close-assault was the best way to tackle the SP's. He gave the job to Lt. Cowgill. Cowgill asked for a bazooka and riflemen to protect it. His plan was to shoot down at the Germans from an attic-level perch. A runner fetched the HQs bazooka, along with a dozen or so men from the weapons platoon for support.

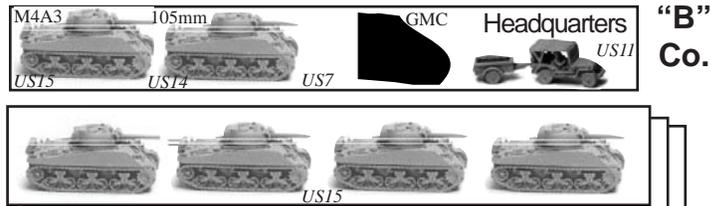
While Cowgill's men got ready to attack, Germans outside Singling appeared to be preparing a counterattack. Enemy tanks to the north were observed moving east. and five prepared artillery concentrations were laid on the town. The barrages were intense, with up to twenty rounds striking the ground simultaneously.

This shelling forced the tanks of 2nd Platoon back a few yards to a cabbage patch beside the orchard trail. There, by a curious freak happenstance, Sgt. Hauptman lost his tank to a German AP shell that had ricocheted off the ground, and plowed into the right side of his turret. When the loss was reported to HQs, the remaining 2nd Platoon tanks were ordered to get under shelter. As they were moving they were shot at from a



## Team B: CCB, US Fourth Armored Division Assaulting Singling, France

### 37th Tank Battalion



### 51st Armored Infantry Battalion



### 704th Tank Destroyer Battalion



Scenario variants might include: less mud, thus permitting use of the M3A1 half-tracks, off-table artillery from the 2 batteries of the 94th Field Artillery Battalion. You could also add the AT platoon of "B" Co., 51st Arm. Inf. Bttn. It would have had up to 3 halftracks pulling 57mm ATGs. Nice weather? call TAC Air!!

pillbox on the ridge 1,200 yards to the north. A 75mm AP round hit a Sherman on the drive sprocket and immobilized it. In the next few seconds the crippled Sherman was hit another four times and began to burn. The remaining Sherman bogged in the heavy mud and the crew bailed out.

Pressed on all sides, the American tanks now hedged into the area southwest of the square. It was becoming increasingly apparent to both the American infantry and armor that they were outnumbered and could not hope to secure Singling by attack. They could have retreated, but instead opted to hunker in and wait for relief.

Lt. Goble's 1st Platoon deployed to stop an attack coming over the ridgeline and down the road. All tubes were trained on the crest

a 1,000 yards distant. The first panzer to appear, however, drew up between two houses less than 150 yards away. Goble's powered-traverse turret quickly swung to bear and he got off the first shot at point-blank range. The round penetrated and the Panther began to burn. Another Panther popped its smoke candles and withdrew. A cat and mouse game then ensued among the walled gardens. Goble, stalking an SP gun, was hit by two AP rounds in quick succession. The first round set the Sherman on fire. The second round penetrated the turret and landed in the lap of the driver. The crew bailed-out and eventually found sanctuary in Sgt. Sower's tank.

On the other side of town Lt. Cowgill's bazooka was finally firing at the enemy SP gun. Five bazooka rockets were launched.

The last hit, causing the crew to bail out. Just then a Panther drew up alongside the damaged SP and sent a round crashing into the building housing the bazooka team. No one was hurt, but Cowgill opted to move his men to another building. Here the 3rd Platoon sat out the second of the enemy's short, sharp artillery concentrations, which scored three hits on the building but did little damage

It was now late in the afternoon and relief still had not arrived. Bad terrain and stiff German resistance had the relief column stymied. At the south edge of town the column turned northwest and passed Lt. Farese's knocked-out tank. Within seconds two AP rounds plowed into the lead tank and set it afire. The Americans then tried to move east and circle behind the enemy, but after a short while withdrew to the reverse slope of the ridge south of town. Colonel Abrams, wanting to pull his men out of Singling as soon as possible, called Captain Leach to find out how the relief was progressing. Leach 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. Colonel Abrams ordered Leach to have his tanks pick up the infantry and move out immediately. It took awhile to organize the withdrawal. It was already getting dark when the tanks moved out. Amidst heavy artillery fire, the evacuation was accomplished without a single casualty.

Within five minutes of the report that Singling was clear of friendly troops, corps artillery put a heavy artillery barrage on the town. Singling was finally taken on December 10th 1944.

by Edward Morris

### New German 8 rad Armoured Cars

G137	SdKfz 231	5 per pack
G138	SdKfz 233 & 263	3/2 per pack
G139	Brass etched aerials for SdKfz 232 & 263	

At right, SdKfz 263 detailed with brass aerial



At left, SdKfz 232 detailed with brass aerial