

# TAC NEWS

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## ABRAM'S FOLLY

### Singling - Lorraine - 6 December 1944

**T**he last months of 1944 found the US 4th Armored Division slugging eastward in the Lorraine toward the German border. Since jumping off from the division rally point near Nancy in early November, the division had encountered difficult terrain, frustrating weather and near constant rain. The rain and heavy cloud cover denied needed air cover to the division and turned the ground into a sea of mud.

The 4th Armored Division was part of Patton's Third Army. The division's drive was spearheaded by the Shermans of the 37th Tank Battalion under the command of Lt. Col. Creighton Abrams (namesake of the modern US battle tank). Unofficially and irreverently known as Roosevelt's Butchers, they had well earned the moniker since landing at Normandy six months earlier.

The 37th was a hard charging unit led by an officer developing a reputation as one of the army's best armor officers. Three months earlier the 37th had tangled with the 113th Panzer Brigade at Arracourt. Roosevelt's Butchers earned their nickname that day. By the end of the battle the 113th Panzer Brigade had ceased to exist, losing 43 brand new Panther tanks. The 37th suffered repairable battle damage to 8 vehicles.

Throughout the Lorraine campaign the 4th AD operated in small, flexible task forces (two to a combat command). These task forces were used to deal

with pockets of enemy resistance, take a village or to safeguard the flanks of the division as it moved toward Germany. The task forces were often broken up into combat teams, smaller forces pairing a company of tanks and a company of armored infantry.

Task Force Abrams of Combat Command A (CCA), 4th AD, included the 37th along with the 51st Armored Infantry Battalion, the 94th Armored Field Artillery Battalion and Company B (minus one platoon) of the 704th Tank Destroyer Battalion. The 37th and 51st were both significantly under strength. The 37th was effectively short a company of tanks and the 51st had less than 190 combat troops. Casualties the previous

month had been heavy as a result of no air cover and limited mobility in the mud against prepared German positions.

The 4th AD was directed to take Rohrbach, an important railroad town located at the crossroads of the German route of retreat. CCA was ordered to take the town of Bining along the way. The road to Rohrbach and Bining ran along the west side of the Altkirch River Valley. The valley was sprinkled with several hills that offered the Germans interlocking fields of fire on any unit moving eastward. There was an alternative: An old Roman highway ran along the reverse slope of the ridge that formed the northwest side of the valley.



But that road could be brought under direct fire from the town of Singling.

Singling was a small agricultural town of some 50 buildings two miles northeast of Aachen. Singling was located along a ridge that provided a commanding view over several miles of the old Roman road. Just 1200 yards northeast of Singling was located another ridge that was part of the old Maginot Line. German Lt. General Fritz Bayerlein, commander of the Panzer Lehr Division, noted in his memoirs that the area was "ideal tank terrain."

On December 5th Task Force Abrams advanced toward Bining. They were stopped 1,000 yards southwest of Singling by direct fire from the town and by German artillery on the ridge to the northeast. Fourteen Shermans bogged down in the mud and were knocked out. The 37th Battalion, now reduced to less than two companies, backed off to reassemble further south of Singling. That night division ordered Task Force Abrams again to attack Bining. Another unit from CCB was ordered to attack Singling. Lt Col Abrams was concerned that CCB units wouldn't attack and neutralize Singling in time to remove the threat from his left flank. He sent an officer to CCA headquarters to ask for either 1) six batteries of artillery to neutralize Singling or, 2) for a change of plans to allow him to neutralize Singling before turning on to Bining. Unbeknownst to Abrams, all of the supporting batteries he requested were in trail on the road.

Abrams heard no response to his request to change plans so Task Force Abrams prepared to drive towards Bining. Unit commanders studied maps and made plans. On the morning of December 6th the advance began.

In a rare change of events the weather was overcast the day of the battle, but there was no rain. Mud in the assembly area limited the mobility of the halftracks and the men of the 51st AIB were ordered up on the rear decks of the tanks. Mud had no other influence on the course of the action that day.

About a mile south of Singling, the advance stalled under fire as heavy as the day before. The task force responded with screening smoke from batteries B and C of the 94th but a stiff breeze from the southwest blew the smoke away. Abrams realized that his artillery alone wasn't going to neutralize Singling. He took the initiative and ordered an assault team comprised of Company B/37th and Company B/51st to attack the town. He believed he could take Singling with a single tank company and an under strength infantry company.

Captain Leach, B/37th commanding officer, turned his company north towards Singling. The decision to attack was so hastily made that the change of plans was not passed on to the infantry commander riding on the back of the tanks. B/51st entered the town thinking they were in Bining. The divisional headquarters knew nothing of the change in plans until the next day.

Under the cover of smoke and HE rounds the assault team crested the ridge south of town and found that Singling was near perfect as a defensive position. The houses were typical of the area, with basements and thick reinforced concrete walls surrounded by high and well constructed garden walls. Concrete pillboxes guarded the east and west end of the town. German artillery on the ridge northeast of town could hit anything in sight.

The American assault team entered the engagement with 15 M4 Shermans, 57 infantry, and two platoons of tank destroyers. Two batteries of the 94th FA supported the team. Five of the Shermans were an upgraded model with a 76.2 mm gun firing the recently available HVAP round.

The 150 to 200 Germans in and around Singling were from the 1st battalion, 11th Panzergrenadiers, 11th Panzer Division. They had a 75mm antitank gun and several 81mm mortars and machine guns. Three self propelled howitzers and at least a company (8 to 10) of MkV Panthers from unknown units were in and north of town. Indirect fire support was sometimes available from several batteries of different caliber guns. This artillery was possibly from the 208th Volks Grenadier Division.

At 1030, just south of town, the infantry dismounted from the Shermans and the fight was on. The German infantry took positions in the basements of the buildings and the fight soon progressed into two separate battles, infantry versus infantry house-to-house and tank versus tank. The tank battle quickly became a battle of hide and seek as units maneuvered to advantage using the buildings as cover. The American units had to consider the artillery spotters northeast of town that brought the German artillery to bear every time they moved out from behind a building.

The fight soon turned into a stalemate. Abrams, in contact with Leach, promised relief but none materialized. In the late afternoon units of CCB (the unit originally scheduled to take Singling that morning) arrived to relieve the units of Task Force Abrams. However, poor communications between the relief units, Company C, 81st Tank Battalion and Company B, 10th

Armored Infantry Battalion, and the units in town delayed the relief. Finally, around 8 p.m., under the cover of darkness, the last American units withdrew from Singling. The Germans landed one more artillery barrage for good effect as the units withdrew south of town.

Task Force Abrams lost five tanks and 22 casualties. The Germans losses included at least two Panthers and 56 prisoners. The attack at Singling highlighted the American weaknesses during the fall of 1944, mainly poor communications between units and lackluster intelligence. A shortage of troops and a lack of mortars compounded the situation.

The assault team was sent in hastily and without a plan, also no reconnaissance had been conducted of the German positions or units. The situation was nearly a disaster for Task Force Abrams. Singling was finally secured on the 10th of December by units from the 12th Armored Division.

The action at Singling is unique in that an intensive after action study of the engagement was made within a week while detailed memories were fresh. Captain Delo Dayton and M/Sgt Gordon Harrison from 3rd Army HQ prepared an analysis titled "*Special Study Number 8*," now maintained as part of the US National Archive.

by Ed McGinley

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## Abram's Folly

Singling, Lorraine - 6 December 1944

Abrams' Folly is a simulation of the battle between units of Task Force Abrams (37th Tank Battalion and 51st Armored Infantry battalion, 4th Armored Division) and German units in and around the town of Singling on December 6, 1944. Lt. Col. Creighton Abrams directed a battered tank company and an under strength infantry company against superior German forces in the small farming community of Singling. The attack was hasty and unplanned. Intended to remove flanking fire from Task Force Abrams' drive towards the German border, the attack was nearly a disaster for the Americans. The battle is an example of the weaknesses of the American Army in the European theater.



Germans

Elements

Cohesion

11th Panzer Division

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## INITIAL FORCES

Within 2 Inches of point "B"

- 1 x 75mm ATG - towed
- 1 x Infantry Support Unit in heavy improved position
- 1 x Heavy Improved Position

Within 4 inches of point "C" and on ridge

- 1 x Wespe (1)
- 2 x JagPz4 L48
- 1 x 8 cm mortar (2)

In town

1st Battalion, 111th Panzergrenadiers 11th Panzer Division

- 1 x HQ (+0 GHQ) (FO)
- 4 x '44 Infantry
- 1 x Infantry Support

(any unit in buildings is considered in light improved positions if designated in the basement level)

In Church steeple

- 1 x FO

North of East-West Highway

- 2 x Mk V Panthers



Americans

Elements, Cohesion

4th Armored Division

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## INITIAL FORCES: (see sketch map)

The following American Forces enter the game map within four (4) inches of Point "A" The Infantry enters riding on the rear deck of the tanks. The historical record documents that in the assembly/staging area of the 37th Tank Battalion on the morning of December 6th the ground was muddy from all of the recent rain. The halftracks were having difficulty in maneuvering and the infantry were ordered to ride the rear deck of the tanks for the attack on Bining. When Co. B/37th was ordered to divert to Singling the infantry went with them, unaware of the change of plans.

Company B / 37th Tank Battalion

- 2 x M4 Sherman
- 2 x M4A1C Sherman, 76 mm gun, HVAP round
- 1 x M7 Priest (1)
- one tank stand designated +1 GHQ

Company B / 704th Tank Destroyer Battalion (-)

- 2 x M18 Hellcat Tank Destroyers

Company B / 51st Armored Infantry Battalion (-)

- 3 x '44 Infantry
- 3 x M3 Halftrack
- one stand designated FO

94th Armored Field Artillery

- 2 x 105 mm Howitzer (2) off board SW corner

## SPECIAL RULES

## Optional rules to be used:

- 12.1 The Hot Shot!

**Ridge Sighting:** Units located behind the crest of elevated terrain cannot sight units that are located against the slope. The blind area is as wide as ½ the distance the sighting unit is behind the crest. This applies to all lower elevation slopes.

**Stone Walls:** The thick stone walls south of town provided cover for the attacking American forces during the battle for Singling. During this scenario attacking units add +2 to cohesion to fire through the walls and any unit behind the walls is considered to be in a medium improved position.

**Forward Observer in the Church:** The German player has a forward observer in the church tower. This FO is not attached to any stand and may not be moved. If attacked the FO has a D[6] rating. The American forces are not aware of this FO unless they occupy the church or attack a stand in the church. The FO in the church must plot artillery fire one turn ahead. For sighting distance the FO is considered to be at terrain level 4.

## TERRAIN SUGGESTIONS:

- The scenario area should be approximately 36" (East to West) x 24" (North to South)
- The road running East to West is a Good road, all other roads are Poor on the Terrain Effects Chart.
- There are four orchard areas south of town, treat as Groves on the Terrain Effects Chart.
- The buildings in town are described as having heavy walls made of reinforced concrete up to 3 feet thick. Treat the buildings as Heavy Buildings on the Terrain Effects Chart.

## VICTORY CONDITIONS:

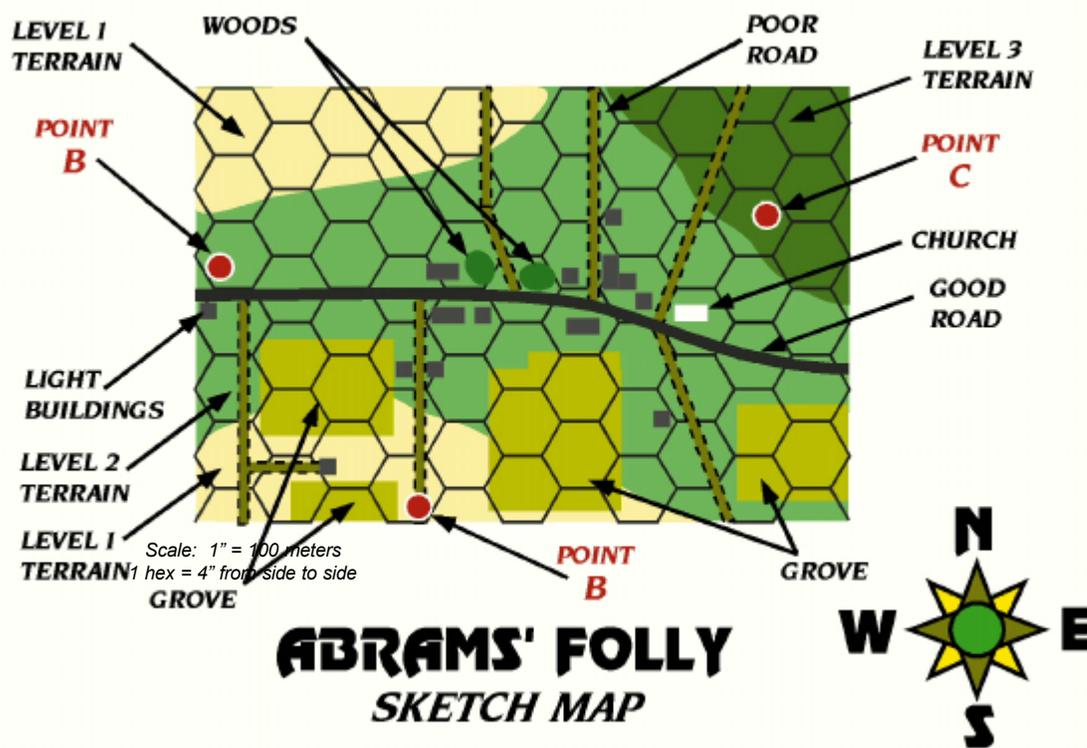
### German Victory:

Eliminate 1/3 of the American stands, not counting the halftracks, before the German player achieves his victory conditions.

### American Victory:

Eliminate at least 3 of the 5 German armored vehicle stands (one of the three must be the Wespe) before the German player achieves his victory conditions.

**SCENARIO LENGTH: 12 TURNS**



## SPECIAL UNITS

M4A1C Sherman, 76 mm with HVAP rounds

AP [10] zero to 10 inches range, AP [8] greater than 10 inches

By the November of 1944 some Shermans had been equipped with a 76 mm 40 caliber gun and muzzle brake. The tank had a larger turret from the T20 development program. The T20 was the tank slated to be the successor to the Sherman but the program was cancelled. These tanks could fire a new armor piercing round designated M93 HVAP (Hyper Velocity Armor Piercing). About 1/3 of the 37th Tank Battalion's Shermans were the M4A1C.

The round was rushed into production after reports of up armored German vehicles encountered on the battlefield. The M93 was a lightweight round with an aluminum body and a tungsten carbide core similar to the German APCR (Armor Piercing Composite Rigid) in performance. These rounds along with the British APDS (Armor Piercing Discarding Sabot) were attempts by the military technologists to achieve greater armor penetration by raising the muzzle velocities of the rounds. Without modification to the gun, using a smaller denser projectile in a standard barrel increased the velocity of the round. The standard APC round, the M62, had a muzzle velocity of 2,600 ft/sec. The M93 HVAP round, with a muzzle velocity of 3,400 ft/sec, was capable of penetrating 103 mm of armor, but only to about 1,000 yards. After 1,000 yards the velocity dropped off dramatically. The round was developed for the 76 mm and 3-inch guns. Initial production was limited to about 10,000 rounds per month. As a result the round was initially issued to only a few units. The production eventually increased and the M93 round proved very effective at the end of the war.