

C-O-N-F-I-D-E-N-T-I-A-L

APPENDIX

NARRATIVE OF TASK FORCE SPIESS
16 March to 31 March 1945

PHASE 1. BOPPARD

On the 14th of March 1945, the 90th Infantry Division made an assault crossing of the Moselle River near HATZENPORT. On the 15th the 4th Armored Division passed through the 90th bridgehead and drove South towards WORMS. On the night of the 15th TF Spiess was formed. TF Spiess consisted of 773rd TD Bn Hqs, Recon Co, 773rd TD Bn, Company C, 773rd TD Bn, Company D, 712th Tk Bn, and 90th Recon Troop. Task Force Spiess crossed the HATZENPORT bridge the next morning between 0730 and 0800 and pushed to its zone of action through the 4th Armored Division, which had road priority.

The task force had the mission of blocking to the South of the 90th Division flank and cleaning the area of enemy to the Rhine River from ST GOAR to BOPPARD, exclusively. Divided into three separate groups, the task force fanned out from EHR and drove rapidly to complete this job. The units pushed off at 1230 and by 1430, Colonel Spiess had "washed his hands" in the Rhine River, complying with orders from Colonel Tully, Assistant Division Commander. By nightfall the mission was nearly completed.

In the Northern part of the sector, South of BOPPARD, the task force had very heavy fighting with elements of the Sixth SS Mountain Division. A strong enemy force was dug in around the main roads leading North to BOPPARD. Heroic work by Major Robert L. Moore, Bn Executive Officer, and 1st Lt. Walter E. Schewe, leader of the 3rd pltn, Company C, 773rd TD Bn, aided materially in breaking this road-block. Our losses were high, two enlisted men were killed, six enlisted men were wounded, one officer (Major Moore) was wounded, and two MIOs were lost to mines and enemy AT fire.

By 0900 the morning of the 17th, the mission was completed. The task force did some excellent shooting across the Rhine River while waiting to be relieved by the Second Cavalry Group. This relief was completed by 2000 hours. Over a hundred prisoners were taken. A number of general purpose vehicles and a multiple AA gun were destroyed. The task force moved South to LIEBSHAUSEN preparing for another mission.

PHASE II - BACHARRACK

The second mission was given to clean out the area along the Rhine between OBERWESEL on the North and NIEDER HEIMBACH on the South. Starting from RHEINBOLLEN at 0630, 13 March 1945, the task force again fanned out in three directions and by 0845 the first elements reached the river at BACHARRACK and by 1145 all units had closed up to the river having encountered no opposition. 20 prisoners were evacuated who had been picked up hiding in the towns and woods. Artillery fire was directed on troops and anti-aircraft positions on the East bank of the river.

The plan had been to relieve the task force on completion of its' mission, but this was changed at 1800 hours when the Division Commander and his G-2 and G-3 stopped in the TF CP. It was decided that the task force would assist the 358th Infantry Regiment in holding the present area along the river front.

The task force held this ground until 1630 the following day when it was relieved by the 2nd Cavalry Group to move on again. That night the task force made a long march through BAD KREUZNACH to vicinity of WOLFSHEIM, some units having to move as far as 30-miles.

PHASE III - MAINZ

On the 20th of March at 0600 the task force moved out on its' new mission which was to reconnoiter in front and protect the right flank of the division as it raced towards MAINZ. It was known that the bridges at MAINZ were blown and that there were large numbers of enemy troops in the city and in the numerous towns in the bend of the river. Company C, 773rd TD Bn was re-attached to the 359th Infantry Regiment and Company A was brought in to replace Company C.

Although the troops of the task force were quite tired due to fast movement and lack of sleep, they pushed ahead with lightning-like speed. By 1200 they had cleared 16 towns, three minefields and two roadblocks, and had reached a point only three miles from the city proper. There they were blocked by enemy dug in along the railroad tracks, supported by heavy mortar fire, AT guns and a large number of flak guns.

The force under Captain Wagner, CO, Co. D, 712 Tk Bn, covered a central route through the zone. Colonel Spiess, the task force commander, accompanied this group. The column was moving from NIEDER SAULHEIM to NIEDER OLM in the latter part of the morning. It was about to close in on the town after white flags had been displayed when they were met by a withering blast of 20mm and 40mm AA fire. Two M10s were blasted before the little group could recover. Colonel Spiess personally flushed a German soldier crouched in a trench with a bazooka ready in hand. A TOT was immediately called down on the town. The infantry then attempted to take the town but were forced back. Later on in the afternoon another TOT was placed on the town and the infantry finally moved in from the southern flank.

TF Spiess was ordered then to protect the right flank of the Division while the infantry cleaned up resistance. Three regiments were used, taking until late the next day as over 4000 PSW were captured.

While blocking to the south and southeast during the night, the 90th Rcn Troop had its CP in SELZE. It was attacked during the night by a strong combat patrol. Most of the enemy were killed or captured without casualties to our troops.

During the next day, 21 March 1945, the task force moved up along the right flank of the Division, taking the towns of NACKENHEIM on the Rhine River.

Again, for the third time that the task force had fought its way to the Rhine River in six days, it found opportune targets on the far shore.

The task force was relieved of its responsibility at 2026 on the night of 22 March 1945, but due to the small force making the relief, units of the task force were left in position during the night.

PHASE IV - DARMSTADT

The units that normally form the task force having crossed the Rhine River with their respective units, TF Spiess was reformed on 24 March, with the mission of capturing DARMSTADT, a city normally of about 100,000 population. The reason such a small force was used was that the woods west of DARMSTADT and the city itself were reported clear of enemy troops. Before the task force went into action on the morning of the 25th, the 90th Rcn Troop was detached from it and one platoon of light tanks was ordered away. Luckily, the order removing the light tanks was not received until after the attack had started, and it could not be complied with.

The small force assembled in GRIESHEIM at 1130 AM, having been delayed while waiting on orders from higher headquarters. The task force moved into town from the west and southwest. Very little opposition was met. There was a short firefight over a roadblock as the task force entered the city from the west. On the northeast side of town, the second platoon of 773rd TD Rcn Co. was patrolling a wooded area when enemy bazooka and machine gun fire KO'd one jeep. The three occupants were injured, one of them being taken prisoner. A few days later he was retaken by friendly troops.

In scouring out the city, 130 PSW were taken, and a number of prisoners were freed. A liberated French Colonel estimated that there were 1000 French refugees released.

The problem then was control of the civilian population. At 2000 hours, Colonel Spiess was relieved of his position as mayor of the town since it fell at 1600, by the 26th Infantry Division.

On the following morning, 26 March 1945, Colonel Spiess had

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Captains Kelly and Dye into the CP at 0600 hours to explain the new task force mission which had been received during the night. The mission was to reconnoiter in front of the Division as it advanced northeast towards the Main River with special emphasis on the right flank.

The task force moved out at 0700 hours, blocking the right flank as it cleared five towns on the right flank.

Elements of the 4th Armored Division were met at the crossroads north of WEISKIRCHEN at 1600 hours and then blocked to the right, thereby accomplishing the mission. Only small elements of disorganized enemy were met during the day.

PHASE V - HANAU

Company D, 712th Tk Bn crossed the Main River on the 90th Division bridge at MULHEIM on the night of the 28th of March with Bn Hqs and Ren Co., 773rd TD Bn, even though TF Spiess was not operational at the time. 712th Tk Bn assault guns were not available for this operation. During the night, the task force was given the mission of reconnoitering and blocking the Division right flank as the Division zone fanned out into a pie shape. 328th Regiment of the 26th Infantry Division on the 90th Division left, was contacted during the night of the 28th and the plans of the task force were coordinated with that unit.

At 0600 on the 29th of March, the task force moved out on its mission and by 0830 hours had advanced 10-kilometers to the northeast to the town of LANGENSBERGHEIM. Colonel Spiess halted the task force there, since its leading elements were quite exposed. On the right, the 11th Armored Division and the 26th Infantry Div. were meeting stiff resistance. At 0850 word was received from Division that its sector had shifted to the East. The task force then changed its direction of advance to the northwest in order to comb the area in the new zone. The general area HEIDENBERGE - ALTENSTADT - NDR FLARSTADT was cleared and occupied. During the day, 119 PSW were taken and some valuable information about enemy positions that the 11th Armored Division was to meet the next day in the BUDDINGEN area was passed on to higher headquarters.

PHASE VI - HERSFELD

At 0600 hours, on the 30th of March 1945, the task force moved out on its new mission, clearing roads and towns in front of the 90th Division as it mopped up to the northeast behind the 4th Armored Division. Many pockets of enemy had been bypassed by the armor as it moved down the main roads.

The task force was instrumental in the Division's 25-mile advance during the day. All but two towns, USENBORN and GELNHU, in the Division zone were cleared by the task force.

Firefights were engaged in at BOBENHAUSEN, BERGHEIM, HIRZENHEIM, and USENBORN. At the latter, our forces KO'd one AT gun and one M8 (2nd pltn, 773rd Rcn Co.) was KO'd by another AT gun. Three men were injured when the vehicle burned. Colonel Spiess was present at this action. Since it was an Infantry job to clean out the town, he turned USENBORN and GELNHAAR over to the 2nd Bn, 358th Inf. while he sent his force around to the rear where they took the town of WENINGS. During the day 96 PSW were taken and a number of enemy were killed and wounded.

The task force was complimented on its good work during the day. On 31 March, the task force continued its mission of reconnoitering to the Division's front. Due to the large number of friendly troops in the area (elements of three armored division's trains were contacted) it was almost impossible to accomplish anything worthwhile, however, a number of back roads and out of the way towns were cleared. At 1800 hours that night the task force was dissolved.

During the period the task force captured a total of 783 PSW, and KO'd the following enemy equipment: 1 steamboat, 2 trucks, 16 GP vehicles, 1 other vehicle, 2 MGS and 2 AA guns.