"Typical Engagement"

Italy, June 22 1944 As the CCB of 1st Armored Division started up Highway 68 towards the Cecina River, it ran afoul of six Tigers supported by MkIV tanks and infantry. American losses were heavy and the advance ground to a halt. Immediately, Gen Harmon committed Task Force Howze, his divisional reserve commanded by Col. Hamilton Howze. Again the advance resumed, this time with Howze's armor in the lead. Shortly thereafter, the Task Force surprised a column of German infantry. The over-matched Germans attempted a fighting withdrawal, but appeared ignorant of the terrain at hand. They mistakenly retreated into a building cluster hemmed in a natural cul-desac. There they were pinned by a light tank company of the 1st Battalion, 13th Armored Regiment, and annihilated.

The rest of the Task Force continued in column along Highway 68 towards Montieri. Howze had no armored infantry, his close support came from the the green 361st regiment, a regular infantry unit temporary attached to 1st Armored for seasoning. Since the footsloggers lacked their own transport, they rode directly on the tanks. After a couple of miles, the road started a series of looping turns flanked by wooded hills. The column leader called a halt and pulled his armor into a deep ravine. He dispatched a foot patrol to reconnoiter the hidden ground behind the first bend. Col. Howze arrived at the column's head just as the patrol leader returned breathlessly reporting he'd seen a Tiger. The colonel was skeptical. The man was green and unfamiliar to him. To verify the report, Howze crawled up the wooded crest and focused his captured German binoculars on the road about 30 feet below and 200 yards distant. The view was startling. Not one, but two Tigers faced him. Each heavy was nestled hull-down in the loops of an "S" curve. The black-clad German tankers were clearly visible, standing exposed in their turrets scanning the horizon with binoculars.

Howze quickly formulated his battle plan. He deployed his infantry to the wooded high ground along side the road. When the GIs were in position, they would hit the Tigers' flanks with bazooka and rifle fire. The platoon leader of the attached tank destroyers was to verify the lead Tiger's position by personal reconnaissance and then return to his vehicle. Thirty seconds after the first rifle volley, his M10 was to emerge from the ravine and engage the Tiger. The command tank of the Sherman platoon was to escort him, spraying roadside ditches with cannon and machine gun fire keeping possible panzerfaust teams at bay.

After dispatching his forces, Col. Howze returned to his observation post. While waiting for his infantry to deploy, Howze whiled away the minutes studying his adversary through field glasses. The lead Tiger commander appeared agitated. The roadblock lacked sufficient infantry

support, and Howze suspected the tanker was counting on the now overdue infantry column Howze's light tanks destroyed earlier in the day. As the German nervously swept the surrounding terrain with his binoculars, his gaze fixed on Howze's position. Howze froze, and for a long half-minute it seemed the two men stared each other down through the field glasses. Whether the tank commander saw Howze or not, he

SET-UP AND SUGGESTED VICTORY CONDITIONS

The Germans set-up hull-down on any road hex at least three hexes north of the southern (bottom) map edge.

The Americans then enter the board along the southern edge.

To win the Americans must exit four AFVs off the north edge of the board.

The dark hexes are wooded level-one elevations, impassable to AFVs.

Battle runs from noon to 6:00pm Order of Battle: American Four Shermans, with 76.2 mm main gun

Four M10s; 90mm main gun Three infantry command stands Nine infantry squad stands Two .30 caliber machine gun stands Nine 2.36-inch bazooka stands Order of Battle: German Two Tiger Is One Infantry command stand Three Infantry squad stands Three light machine gun stands disappeared into his turret seconds before it was spattered with rifle fire.

Although the rifle fire missed him, the first bazooka rocket did not. Fired at the extreme range of 200 yards, it scored a direct hit on the lead Tiger's glacis. The round did not penetrate, but the impact may have caused a crew casualty or damage. This Tiger never fired its "88" and after a few awkward lurches foundered into the roadside ditch. Dust and smoke obscured its mate farther down the road.

The M10, no doubt mindful of its opponent, tarried long after the ordered thirty seconds. The Colonel ran to it and personally ordered the driver to put the TD on the road. The escorting Sherman, commanded by Lt. Carl Key, followed the M10's lead, branching off to the left as he came across a small bridge. From there Key swept the ditches with machine gun fire and engaged the bogged Tiger with his cannon. Although the behemoth was hit repeatedly, no rounds penetrated. However, the continued deluge of strikes eventually compelled the crew to bail-out. They should have stayed put; small arms fire chopped them down as they crossed the road.

With the first Tiger now out of action, Key stalked the second, using a group of commercial buildings as cover. The building cluster was dominated by a huge galvanized-iron warehouse with open doors at both ends. As Key maneuvered his Sherman towards the warehouse, he was able to sight down the road through the building's open doors. Although the second Tiger was not visible, Key elected to pop a few rounds through the hangar-sized structure. The vacuum created by each shell's passage sucked a huge dust cloud out of the building and buckled its corrugated sliding. The result was an astounding racket and a billowing dust screen that quickly blanketed the entire battlefield.

This was the battle's climax. Both sides now had difficulty breathing, let alone seeing. After a few blind shots all firing ceased, and the Americans retired back to the ravine. The next morning, after another fierce fight, Task Force Howze cleared the roadblock. Further down the highway the second Tiger was found abandoned. Its bogies, shattered by two 75mm hits, had slipped a tread. Perhaps, Key's blind shots through the warehouse had hit home.

Col. Howze described the action as a "typical engagement" in his after action report. The Colonel's tongue was firmly in cheek, taking two Tigers without loss wasn't typical. This battle opened the way to Montieri and the town fell on June 26. By June 30, TF Howze crossed the Cecina River near Volterra. Eventually relived by the 91st Infantry Division, the Task Force retired to the Bolgheri area with the rest of the 13th Armored Regiment. The 13th Armored had fought its last battle, it was disbanded during the division's reorganization on July 20.

