

## A TANK PROBE OF THE RAPIDO

On 3 February I received a surprise call by telephone from the II Corps Commander, Major General Geoffrey Keyes. The General started by acknowledging the fact that he had given me the Silver Star for Gallantry in action on the previous day and he said he wanted to take every effort to congratulate me for exemplary services. The General then stated he had just talked to Major McCarthy (acting commander of the 48th) regards the demolition of the banks of the Rapido. He told me his concern was to make sure the banks had been sufficiently blown to allow tanks to pass through the gap. I believe he called it breach.

I told the General it was my opinion that tanks once could have crossed, but since the river belongs more to the Germans than the Allies it was hard for me to believe this was still true. I told him I would be concerned about mines, or explosives that would be planted in the river bed itself. The General congratulated me again and hung up.

At 2100 hours I received another call and this time it was Major McCarthy and he told me to report to Company "C" of the 753rd Tank Bn. He said for me to give them whatever assistance possible.

The Company Commander told me he was required to make an attempt to cross the Rapido. His plan called for the use of two tanks with the second tank giving cover fire for the first tank in case the crew had to leave their vehicle. The second tank was expected to continue the mission if the first tank was disabled. I told the commander the one thing I insisted on was that I not be required to ride inside of the tank. I told him I did not think there was any problem on finding the breach and by telephone or radio I could help the tank commander from outside of the tank as much or more than if I was inside. It made sense if the tank got into the river they had no further need for me so why should I be subjected to such a likelihood. The possibility for mines was more prevalent leaving the river than entering it, and they didn't need me on the other side. It was decided I would communicate with the commander by telephone since same was attached to the backside of the tank.

It was a very dark evening when we rounded the corner of Mt. Trochio (Italian--Trocchio) and headed directly to the Rapido. The tanks made a

terrible lot of noise and even I was convinced there had to be more than two. I found hanging on to the back side of a tank was much harder than it might appear, especially since I had to have a telephone in one hand. It was approximately one mile from Mt. Trochio to the Rapido but it seemed much longer. We had travelled about half way when German fire started coming in from several locations in Cassino. It was small caliber with tracers and it appeared the tracers were trying to pick up the target for possibly some type larger direct fire weapon. Most of the initial firing appeared to go over us because I could actually see the tracers pass over. The closer we got to the river the more accurate the firing became and it wasn't too long before some were bouncing off the tank. I expected something horrible to happen but never once was I sorry about not being inside of the tank. I honestly felt more safe on the back side with the tank giving me lots of armor protection. Do not get the idea I wasn't afraid because on more than one occasion I closed my eyes knowing this had to be it. I fell off of the tank before it got to the breach and followed as closely as possible for a short distance. When I saw the tank was about to enter the breach I dropped the phone and hit the ditch crawling as fast as I could to get out of the proximity of the Rapido. Finally I lay there motionless waiting for the tank to explode. I was hugging the ground as close as I could because mortar fire as well as antitank fire was hitting all around between me and the river. The next thing I knew the tank backed out of the river and made a sharp turn and headed back toward Mt. Trochio. I learned later the Tank Commander hit a solid wall on the far side and after hitting it three or four times he knew he could not make it up the far side. It was apparent the Germans had anticipated such a venture and by hand labor had cut the bank so no tank could traverse. If they had placed mines or explosives the tank somehow escaped. I was wrong about the placement of mines and when the tank passed me heading for the protection of Mt. Trochio I was wrong for the second time because I sure was wishing I was inside that tank.

I learned on the 4th of February that a frontal attack on Cassino by tanks was off indefinitely.

15 March 1944

### COMPANY "A" BRIDGES THE RAPIDO

#### "Send Sammys Boys When The Light Is Right"

For two weeks we tuned our radios at 1700 hours waiting for this message to come in. This message is like the word Cassino, and it will not be forgotten easily. It meant something different for everyone in the 48th, but for Company "A" it meant a bridge had to be built across the Rapido. But, it was not as simple as that, because if the Germans had wanted one there they would not have destroyed the one that was there when they arrived. It was the fact that they did not want one there that bothered me. They had the advantages in that the site was very exposed to their excellent observation and the close proximity to their mortars and small arms fire.



The bridge across the Rapido in the same area where Company "A" built their first bailey.