CHAPTER 11

THE ARRIVAL OF THE CAVALRY GROUPS, D-DAY TO THE WEST WALL

During the war in Europe, the 4th Cavalry [Reconnaissance Squadron] was repeatedly committed in every type of role except one—we were not dropped by parachute or glider.

—Lieutenant Colonel John R. Rhoades,
Commander 4th Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron

"But we halted at the frontier for a reason unforeseen,
Not because of hostile action but for lack of gasoline."[1]

In the inky darkness of the morning of 6 June 1944 a group of four men slipped over the side of a boat armed only with knives. Against the black backdrop periodically punctuated with flashes and claps of artillery, they made their way to the small islands of *Iles St. Marcouf,* some six thousand yards off the coast of Normandy near what the world would come to know as Utah Beach. In their wake followed a small task force composed of men from Troops A of the 4th and 24th Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadrons. Under the command of Lieutenant Colonel Edward C. Dunn, the cavalry troopers seized the small mine-infested islands at 06 0430 June 1944, two hours in advance of the assaulting divisions at Omaha and Utah beaches. In doing so, the cavalrymen joined the paratroopers in leading the way for the ground forces bent on invading France and conquering Hitler's Third Reich.[2]

[1] "Old Nicomus in Western Europe," box 5, Dickson Papers, USMA.

[2] Ernest E. Epps, *Fourth Cavalry, The History of the Fourth Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron, European Theatre of Operations* (Frankfurt: Gerhard Blümlein, 1945), p. 1.

After years of development, the United States finally committed mechanized reconnaissance units intended to serve units corps sized and larger to the fighting in Europe, albeit in a role no one would have predicted during the interwar years. Like so much of what was to take place during the six ensuing months, the elements of the 4th Cavalry Group, like the other cavalry groups soon to join them in Europe, made important contributions to the success of D-Day, but not in the manner long envisioned for them. Like the cavalry reconnaissance troops and squadrons assigned to infantry and armored divisions, the cavalry groups were organized, equipped, and doctrinally expected to perform reconnaissance. Like the smaller mechanized reconnaissance units that had proceeded them, the cavalry groups soon confronted the realities of war that did not always square with the expectations of the interwar years. In this environment, in the service of generals with barely enough soldiers to accomplish the mission, the cavalry groups began to reclaim the combat functions long ascribed to their branch that were largely usurped by the Armored Force in 1940. It was in Europe, with changes that had already occurred to what remained of Cavalry Branch's most dominant organization, the cavalry group, and the manner in which commanders employed them that the reconciliation between Cavalry Branch and the Armored Force made its most credible headway. By the time the European crusade was complete, the men who wore crossed sabers, the symbol of Cavalry Branch, no longer accepted a subordinate role to horse cavalry, still doctrinally recognized and celebrated on the cover of the May-June 1944 edition of *The Cavalry Journal* with a picture of a cavalry trooper assigned to the 3d Provisional Cavalry Troop saddling a horse. Whether riding on rubber rafts, horses, jeeps, armored cars or tanks, cavalry was cavalry. Mechanized cavalry, by campaign's end, no longer meant just reconnaissance; it often meant fighting. The first six months of campaigning in Europe presented the cavalry groups with a host experiences. They were confronted with the stalemate of the *bocage*, the thrill of breakout and pursuit, and again challenged with the inability to maneuver as the Allies crashed into Hitler's *Siegfried Line*, the vaunted West Wall. All of the action of the first six months on the Continent continued to provide grist for the unending debate on the continued role of the horse. Information and lessons learned from combat contributed to finding ways to improve the future performance of all mechanized ground reconnaissance units.

Part I

Just as the invasion of North Africa featured mechanized reconnaissance men blazing the way to the landing sites near Safi, modern cavalrymen again rode in from the sea to accomplish the important mission of securing the islands off the coast of France. The 4th Reconnaissance Troop arrived on the Continent at 0930 on D-Day, but with only two operational vehicles failed to accomplish its first mission of linking up with the paratroopers at St. Mere Eglise. The entire troop assembled by 9 June and throughout the remainder of the next two months supported the 4th Infantry Division's fight in the *bocage* with security patrols and reconnaissance. The troop also experienced frequent attachment to the 24th Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron.[3] The 1st Cavalry Troop, which had already seen action in North Africa and Sicily with the 1st Infantry Division, crossed the beaches of Normandy without their equipment one day after their parent division stormed ashore.[4] The same was true of the 82d Armored Reconnaissance Battalion that followed immediately in the wake of the 2d Armored Division. A permanent fixture in every division and well established by 1944, these units ultimately received less attention in the final analysis of what had been good and bad about ground reconnaissance when World War II ended. Far more numerous than the cavalry groups, their contributions to the first six months in Europe were considerable, but not the primary focus of this or the next chapter.

Like previous missions in which commanders committed mechanized reconnaissance units in piecemeal fashion, the same disastrous results awaited the untested cavalrymen. Captain William Larned's Troop B, 4th Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron found itself attached to the 82d Airborne Division from 6 June-3 July 1944. As if taken from the script of a Hollywood Western, Larned's mission was to link-up with the lightly armed and supplied paratroopers and in doing

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[3] "Troop History of the 4th Reconnaissance Troop, 1 June 1944 to 30 June 1944" and "Troop History of the 4th Reconnaissance Troop 1 July 1944 to 31 July 1944," Historical Documents, World War II, box 150, 4th Infantry Division (CAV) 4th Recon Troop (Mecz) Combat History, 4 August 1940-30 August 1945, USMA microfilm collection.

[4] Votaw interview, p. 34. Similar to early experience in Sicily where they had had a hard time identifying American paratroopers in uniforms they had never seen, the troops soon encountered and fired upon and advancing tank. Now armed with bazookas, which were capable of stopping German tanks at close range, the troopers disabled the tank, which had been moving down the road they were watching. Under most circumstances, stopping the tank would have been a good thing, but in this case the tank was British.

so, provide them the additional firepower required to repulse the expected hostile onslaught, in this case Nazis, not native Americans. Second Lieutenant Gerald H. Penley led his platoon across Utah beach at 0930 on D-Day and proceeded to fight his way through to elements of the 82d[d] Airborne Division at Ste Mere Eglise. Joined a few days later by the remainder of Troop B, the 82[d] Airborne Division assigned the cavalry troop combat patrols in the hedgerow country and enjoyed the additional firepower the troop brought with it in the form of 37 mm cannons and machine guns. It was on one of these platoon-sized patrols that the troop lost an entire platoon of men and vehicles, less one jeep and two scouts who managed to escape.[5] Lacking the support of the troop's other platoons, and beyond the support of the other assets found in every mechanized reconnaissance squadron, the lightly armed platoon faired poorly.

Early fighting in Normandy provided one fascinating example of the value of stealth, one of the salient features of the interwar debate on the desired characteristics of a mechanized reconnaissance unit. In helping to take Auderville, in support of the 9th Infantry Division, Troop B, 4th Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron, proved under combat conditions the value of wheeled vehicles for mechanized reconnaissance. Confronted with a continuous line of German defenders, the cavalrymen found a hill behind friendly lines that allowed them to gain enough speed on the descent into enemy lines to gain the speed and momentum to coast undetected into and beyond the German positions. Completely surprised, the Germans retreated under pressure from attacking American infantrymen as the cavalrymen dashed on to Auderville where they surprised the garrison and took control of the village by daylight.[6] This was not characteristic of most of the fighting in Normandy.

The 4th Cavalry Squadron participated in the drive to secure the Cherbourg Peninsula. During the advance up the peninsula, the 4th Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron helped maintain contact between the 9th and 79th Infantry Divisions. During the fighting there a very different pattern of employment emerged at the squadron level in contrast to the stealthy exploits of Troop B's advance on Auderville. The squadron quickly learned at Rocheville and Les Flagues that

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[5] Epps, *Fourth Cavalry*, p. 1. During the same period, Troop C supported the 101st Airborne Division in a similar fashion.

[6] Ibid., p. 2.

only the concentrated fire of Troop E's assault guns, combined with Troop F's light tanks and the support of dismounted attacks generated from the reconnaissance troops enabled them to overcome prepared enemy positions. Reflecting on the squadron's first thirty-nine days in combat, it was not lost in the unit's official history that although they had been trained and equipped for mounted service, their "missions had been almost consistently dismounted." The fighting resulted in 138 casualties of which 24 enlisted men and officers were killed in action.[7] Not fighting was not an option.

While VII Corps drove north to capture Cherbourg and clear the Cotentin Peninsula and the British Second Army found itself fighting toward Caen where they were opposed by heavy concentrations of German armor, seven divisions by the end of June, the rest of the Allied effort endeavored to move inland and expand the beachhead. The *bocage* country with its associated hedgerows limited mobility and observation slowed the American efforts to move off the beaches. The same was true of the sluggish streams found around Carentan that created marshes devoid of cover and concealment leaving the few roads as the only avenues for mounted advance. Although the action ultimately embraced four American corps of General Bradley's First Army as they fought their way free of the constricting terrain, the XIX Corps carried the action oriented on the vital road junction at St-Lô. The drive on St-Lô presented the opportunity for the wholesale commitment of an intact cavalry group, the 113th.

St-Lô, a small town in one of the loops of the Vire River, controlled all the roads in the immediate area, but especially the lateral routes that allowed the Germans to shuttle forces along their front depending on where the Americans attacked. The XIX Corps zone of attack straddled the Vire River and was fifteen miles wide at the line of departure.[8] First Army assigned the 113th Cavalry Group to the XIX Corps for their drive on St-Lô. XIX Corps ordered the cavalrymen to support the 30th Infantry Division during the opening phase of the offensive.[9] The 113th was to

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[7] Ibid., p. 3.

[8] U. S. War Department General Staff, *ST-LO, (7 July-19 July 1944), American Forces in Action Series* (Washington: War Department, 1947), pp. 1-6.

[9] Ibid., p. 7.

maintain contact between the 30th Infantry Division and the 83d Infantry Division of the adjacent VII Corps.[10]

When the offensive began on 7 July 1944, the 30th Infantry Division led the attack with its first objective of gaining a crossing of the Vire-Taute Canal.[11] While the infantrymen advanced and gained the far shore, the cavalrymen in the 113th Cavalry Group, under the command of Colonel William S. Biddle, awaited their turn to cross into the ever-expanding bridgehead created by the infantrymen and combat engineers. It took the cavalry group six hours to cross on the single-lane bridge and once across they immediately encountered mud as deep as four feet along the trail that was to lead them to their sector near the village of Goucherie. The 113th Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron led its advance with a light tank, an assault gun, followed by another light tank and then a reconnaissance platoon. The squadron commander interspersed light tanks and assault guns throughout his column. [12] When the squadron finally reached its objective in the early morning hours of 8 July 1944, it was able to overcome the initial resistance at Goucherie, but it took the concerted effort of two troops to dislodge a single platoon. Only demolition charges set in the hedgerows allowed the light tanks and assault guns to maneuver into positions to support the dismounted attacks of the reconnaissance troopers.[13]

As morning arrived so did the other squadron of the 113th Cavalry Group, the 125th Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron. It moved to the left of the 113th Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron, which had a established a generally north/south line. In doing so the 125th linked the 113th with the rightmost element of the advancing 30th Infantry Division. The XIX Corps' flank was secured, but the terrain and stiff enemy resistance nullified any hope of the cavalry

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[10] Operations Order, 113th Cavalry Group, 4 July 1944, France, unmarked folder, box 5, William S. Biddle Papers, MHI.

[11] War Department, *ST-LO,* p. 9.

[12] Ibid., pp. 19 and Observer Report C-156, "Story of the Operations of the 113th Squadron Cavalry Mechanized in Normandy for the Period 7 July-10 July," 7 August 1944, France, U.S. Army Ground Forces Observer Board, European Theater, vol. II, MHI.

[13] Observer Report C-156, "Story of the Operations of the 113th Squadron Cavalry Mechanized in Normandy for the Period 7 July-10 July," 7 August 1944, France, U.S. Army Ground Forces Observer Board, European Theater, vol. II, MHI.

advancing mounted to the west. The cavalry had already begun to advance dismounted without the benefit of their light armored protection and vehicular mounted weapons. Others braved "the gauntlet of heavy flanking fire from the hedgerows." Colonel Biddle decided at 8 1600 July 1944 that his cavalry group would take up defensive positions, placing a higher premium on maintaining contact with the advancing 30th Infantry Division. By doing so, Biddle made sure the Germans could not counter attack into the flank and rear of the division he had been assigned to assist.[14] Although the cavalry group maintained contact between two separate corps, a traditional mission in many respects, terrain and enemy opposition prevented the group from advancing in the manner envisioned during the interwar years. In the most traditional sense of American cavalry, the specialized mechanized reconnaissance men found themselves fighting on foot. The next day, 9 July 1944, the XIX Corps commander, attached the 113th Cavalry Group to Combat Command B, 3d Armored Division.[15] Rather than reinforcing success, the situation forced General Charles H. "Cowboy Pete" Corlett to divert armor assets to hold open the shoulder of a penetration because the cavalry group lacked the strength to do so.

The 9th Infantry Division attacked through the 113th Cavalry Group on 10 July 1944, but they too met stiff resistance and made little headway which allowed a gap to develop between them and the continued advance of the 30th Infantry Division. Even so, the XIX Corp had been fortunate thus far that the Germans had been unable to mount anything more than localized counter attacks. The 113th Cavalry Group had avoided any serious test, but it had not been without a cost. In four days of action the cavalry group suffered fifty-three casualties, lost three jeeps, three light tanks and one armored car for the gain of a few thousand meters.[16] Unable to achieve any depth between the enemy and the corps it served, the 113th Cavalry Group was unable to provide any early warning when the German *Panzer Lehr Division* attacked the 9th

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[14] War Department, *ST-LO*, pp. 19-22.

[15] War Department, *ST-LO*, p. 23 and Observer Report C-156, "Story of the Operations of the 113th Squadron Cavalry Mechanized in Normandy for the Period 7 July-10 July," 7 August 1944, France, U.S. Army Ground Forces Observer Board, European Theater, vol. II, MHI.

[16] War Department, *ST-LO*, pp. 36-37 and Observer Report C-156, "Story of the Operations of the 113th Squadron Cavalry Mechanized in Normandy for the Period 7 July-10 July," 7 August 1944, France, U.S. Army Ground Forces Observer Board, European Theater, vol. II, MHI.

Infantry Division in the early morning hours of 11 July 1944. The attack along the boundary between the 9th and 30th divisions disrupted communications, but the 9th Cavalry Reconnaissance Troop helped restore the division's situational awareness. This allowed the 9th Infantry Division to seal the penetration by committing ground and air forces, but did cost them a day of planned advance.[17] XIX Corps placed the 113th Cavalry Group in reserve beginning on 11 July 1944.

The 113th Cavalry Group continued to support the drive on St-Lô when the XIX Corps attached the group directly to the 29th Infantry Division on 18 July 1944. While the cavalry group stood by waiting to be used, infantry divisions fought slowly forward to St-Lô. The 29th Cavalry Reconnaissance Troop as part of Task Force C, led the advance into St-Lô on 19 July 1944. Used extensively to cover gaps between the division's regiments, the cavalry troop now led a combined arms task force, organized for speed, under the leadership of General Norman D. Cota. Cota's contingent was composed of tanks, tank destroyers, engineers and the 115th Infantry Regiment. Of note, a 37mm gun in the reconnaissance troop, which led the advance, silenced an antitank gun outside of St-Lô. The cavalry troop then pushed as far into the rubbled town as they could before dismounting to secure three critical road junctions. Their gains were quickly reinforced with tanks and tank destroyers to stop any potential German counter attack. After forty-three days of continuous fighting, the 29th Infantry Division delivered St-Lô.[18] True, the Germans were in retreat, but General Charles Gerhardt, the former cavalryman, built a task force for swift advance to take advantage should the opportunity present itself.

With the enemy expelled from the key road juncture, XIX Corps hoped that the 29th Infantry Division could maintain enough pressure on the retreating Germans to force them as far south as Torigni-sur-Vire before they could establish an effective line of resistance. The cavalry, with its superior mobility, was expected to maintain contact with the enemy and report what was hoped to be his steady withdrawal. Troop C, 113th Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron passed through the 29th Infantry Division and St-Lô at 0200 hours, 19 July 1944 and started its mission of reconnoitering the three roads leading to the south out of St-Lô. The troop advanced 500 yards when at 0415 German forces defending only 1,000 yards south of St-Lô inflicted heavy

[17] War Department, *ST-LO,* pp. 37-38.

[18] War Department, *ST-LO,* pp. 116-119.

losses. The same was true for Troop A, which was also attempting to advance from St-Lô in an effort to maintain pressure on the enemy before he could consolidate and form a new defensive line. Within hours the cavalrymen were again relegated to dismounted patrolling to maintain contact with the enemy. They also reconnoitered to the eastern corps boundary and in the process eliminate remaining pockets of enemy resistance.[19]

The *bocage* of Normandy stymied the efforts of all mechanized ground reconnaissance units operating in Europe in June and July 1944. Troops assigned to divisions continued to contribute to their divisions' success within the limits of their capabilities. In the case of the 4th Cavalry Group, squadrons continued to see their troops employed on independent missions. The 113th Cavalry Group, with an early opportunity to demonstrate the full might of an intact unit could not overcome the Germans or the terrain that lent the defenders such an advantage. With their host of supporting weapons from mortars at the platoon level to the assault guns and light tanks found in each squadron, the mechanized reconnaissance troopers quickly adapted to the dismounted techniques required of them. Even if the mechanized cavalrymen were largely unable to carry out their primary doctrinal mission of distant mounted reconnaissance, they were making some contribution to the campaign. During this stage of the fighting there was no call for the reintroduction of horses as the solution for the static nature of the fighting. For all the frustration presented by the Norman hedgerows, the opportunity to perform a "real cavalry mission" was about to take place. This would be the opportunity for the interwar faith in the mobility of the future battlefield to come to the fore.

With a well established beachhead and with the preponderance of German armored forces confronting Field Marshal Bernard L. Montgomery at Caen, it was time to get on with liberating France. The Twelfth Army Group commander, General Omar N. Bradley believed that "only a *breakout* would enable us to crash into the enemy's rear where we could fight a war of movement on our own best terms."[20] The interwar faith in the "war of movement" was about to be proven, if for ever so brief a time. Upon the stage of movement the offspring of the Cavalry

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[19] War Department, *ST-LO*, pp. 120-121 and unlabeled account of the 113th Cavalry Group during World War II, unmarked folder, box 5, William S. Biddle Papers, MHI.

[20] Omar N. Bradley, *A Soldier's Story* (New York: Rand McNally and Company, 1951), p. 318.

and Infantry Branch, the Armored Force and its armored divisions dazzled the world as they raced across France and ultimately Belgium under the air-cover of Major General Elwood A. "Pete" Quesada's XIX Tactical Air Command.[21] While units like the 4th Armored Division captured the headlines, the cavalry groups finally came into their own and made important contributions.

All that remained to get on with the war of movement was the creation of a penetration. Operation COBRA, with its carpet of bombs created the hole to send the mobile units through and into the rear of the German army. Lieutenant General Leslie McNair died in the carpet bombing that preceded the breakout. Just as in North Africa when he had moved close to the front to observe the Army he built, he died with a forward battalion in a common soldier's foxhole when a short bomb found him and hundreds of other American soldiers.[22] McNair did not live to realize the full capabilities of the fully mechanized corps cavalry regiments, now groups, as they burst forth from the rupture created by COBRA and performed in the manner long anticipated during the interwar years. The loss of General McNair was not lost on the pro-mechanization faction of the cavalry community. Major General Charles L. Scott, one of the pioneers of mechanized ground reconnaissance at Fort Knox during the interwar years wrote, "Our armored units have lost a great mentor, director and leader who had the forsight [sic] and judgement [sic] to make provisions in our army for a greater proportion of armor to other arms than that of any other army in the world, including Germany."[23] With the way cleared, what ensued was a period characterized by little time for maintenance, maximum use of extended daylight during August, driving off the maps and using tourist maps to find the way across France and Belgium, and sharp encounters with the wounded but undefeated foe. Fuel shortages

[21] Ibid., p. 337.

[22] Ibid., pp. 348-349.

[23] Statement prepared by General Charles L. Scott, 27 July 1944, [Fort Knox], folder July 1944-September 1944, box 3, Charles L. Scott Papers, Library of Congress. Scott and McNair had been cadets in the same company at West Point.

at the beginning of September 1944 and the respite they brought to the retreating Germans marked the end of the brief period of war of movement.[24]

Waiting for the opportunity to redeem himself, Lieutenant General George S. Patton, Jr., stood ready with his Third Army. The Allies had long planned to liberate the Brittany Peninsula's ports, St. Malo, Brest, Lorient and St. Nazaire. This task fell to General Troy Middleton and his VIII Corps. In addition to clearing Brittany and reducing the hold-out German garrisons, Middleton was also responsible for securing Third Army's ever expanding southern flank. Middleton used the 2d Cavalry Group to cover the area between Angers and Nantes along the Loire River. This was particularly important since VIII Corps was becoming overextended after the loss of the 4th Armored Division as the pursuit continued east and north of the Seine.[25] Throughout early August the 2d Cavalry Group worked with or was attached to the 4th Armored Division as it raced south and east. As the VIII Corps settled down to reduce the channel ports, Third Army reassigned the 2d Cavalry Group to Major General Manton Eddy's XII Corps on 22 August 1944.[26] Although they had not fought in the manner experienced by the other cavalry groups in Normandy, the 2d Cavalry Group experienced regular contact on the Third Army flank. Marching more than three hundred miles during the first weeks of August, although not moving forward of a corps or division in a reconnaissance role, the 2d Cavalry Group lent security to the breakout by screening the exposed southern flank of Third Army.

The 2d Cavalry Group was not alone in the Brittany Peninsula during the early days of August 1944. The 15th Cavalry Group provided the principal maneuver units of Task Force A, which joined the 4th and 6th Armored Divisions in their initial thrust south from Avranches into the Brittany Peninsula.[27] Brigadier General Herbert L. Earnest commanded the collection of cavalry reconnaissance squadrons, a tank destroyer battalion, and combat engineers assembled at

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[24] White interview, pp. 245-246.

[25] Martin Blumenson, *Breakout and Pursuit, The United States Army in World War II, The European Theater of Operations* (Washington: Center of Military History, 1989), p. 634.

[26] "Report of Combat Operations, 1 August-5 November, 2d Cavalry Group (Mecz)," file CAVG-2-0.3, box 17942, RG 407, NA II.

[27] Blumenson, *Breakout and Pursuit*, p. 349.

La Repas, twenty kilometers north of Avranches, on 1 August 1944. In this instance, Task Force A followed the 6th Armored Division. Believing the route clear, the mechanized cavalrymen moved at speeds as high as forty miles per hour as they slashed west from Avranches as if on mounts "with stripped saddles."[28] The race ended abruptly when the lead platoon drove into an ambush at Baguer-Pican in the early morning hours of 3 August 1944. Out in front, as if leading a horse cavalry charge at one the 1st Cavalry Division's interwar maneuvers, rode the cavalry group commander at forty miles per hour with the lead reconnaissance platoon in tow. Rounding a bend, which concealed a well constructed road block, the commander's car burst into flames with the first report of a German anti-tank gun. Surrounded on both sides of the road by ditches and hedgerows, it was impossible for the fast moving column to avoid becoming easy targets. After the exertions of the remainder of the 15th Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron, three survivors of the lead platoon escaped. Those not killed spent the remainder of the war in a German Prisoner of War Camp on the Island of Jersey until it was liberated in May 1945. Among the internes was the over-zealous group commander.[29]

Although their initial action was reminiscent of the mad dashes of the Louisiana Maneuvers, the 15th Cavalry Group soon found itself conducting the same kind of operations that were carried out by the other cavalry groups. With the support of the assault guns and light tanks, they too performed extensive dismounted operations to clear pockets of German resistance.[30] The group participated in the reduction of Brest and remained stationed in the Brittany Peninsula until February 1945.[31]

As Third Army poured through the breach at Avranches and Patton's VIII Corps drove south into Brittany, his XV Corps drove southeast keeping pace with the First Army, which was

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[28] "15th Cavalry Group, An Ambush in Brittany, Part I," *The Cavalry Journal* (September-October 1945), p. 3.

[29] Ibid., p. 4 and Interview with Lieutenant General Adrian St. John.

[30] G. J. Dobbins and Thomas Fiori, "Cavalry and Infantry at St. Malo," *The Cavalry Journal* (November-December 1945), pp. 15-16.

[31] Blumenson, *Breakout and Pursuit*, p. 641 and "15th Cavalry Group, An Ambush in Brittany, Part I," *The Cavalry Journal* (September-October 1945), p. 2.

also exploiting the breakout. Early in the breakout a thirty-five mile gap developed between VIII and XV Corps. Patton used the 106th Cavalry Group to cover the growing gap and the terrain between Louvigne and Rennes.[32] As VIII Corps' advance pushed further into Brittany the 106th continued to support XV Corps' exploitation by conducting reconnaissance toward the east from Fourgeres to Mayenne and Laval, and on to Le Mans. Against light enemy resistance, the 106th participated in the XV Corps' single-week eighty-five mile dash, often leading or protecting the open flanks.[33] As XV Corps started north toward Alençon after it captured Le Mans on 8 August the 106th Cavalry Group continued to range to the corps' right where it continued to meet minimal resistance.[34] As the noose tightened around the German *Seventh Army* in the Falaise pocket, the XV Corps turned north and headed for the Seine. The 106th led this advance, covering in excess of fifty miles on 15 August arriving at Dreux west of Paris by nightfall. The group remained west of Paris protecting XV Corps' flank until 27 August when they were briefly attached to XII Corps for twelve days carrying out reconnaissance as that corps advanced east. They concluded their two-month and 400 mile journey across France by returning to the XV Corps as it moved to take up position on the Third Army's southern flank.[35]

The 106th, because of its location near Paris, missed the opportunity to shine during the fuel crisis that plagued American forces for the first five days of September 1944.[36] With the Germans reeling backwards toward their borders it looked as if all pressure would be removed from their retreat. Into this crisis stepped the cavalry groups.

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[32] Blumenson, *Breakout and Pursuit*, pp. 428-429.

[33] Ibid., pp. 436-439.

[34] Ibid., p. 497.

[35] *The 106th Cavalry Group in Europe, 1944-1945* Thomas J. Howard et al eds.(Augsburg, Germany: J. P. Himmer, 1945), p. 42, 49, 51, 59 and James W. Cocke, "Battle Reconnaissance," *The Cavalry Journal* (May –June 1945), pp. 18-23.

[36] Hugh M. Cole, *The Lorraine Campaign*, U. S. Army in World War II, ETO (Washington: Center of Military History, 1984), pp. 22-23. Cole describes the pause that occurred in early September as the "iron rules of logistics."

The 3d Cavalry Group burst forth from the Norman hedgerows in August as it accompanied Major General Walton H. Walker's XX Corps' drive to the east. Like the 2d Cavalry Group, it too had seen extensive service initially along the Loire River screening the advance of Patton's Third Army. At times they had moved in advance of XX Corps in a sector as wide as seventy miles and by 20 August reached the Seine and crossed it at Tilly on 25 August. With a squadron following the 7th Armored Division and the other screening the corps' right flank, the group moved through the World War I battlefield at Chateau Thiery and crossed the Marne on bridges captured by the 7th Armored Division. When the XX Corps reached Reims it changed its axis to a due east heading with its new objective being a bridge over the Meuse at Verdun where their 400-mile foray culminated.[37] Third Army was out gas.

For the next five days, patrols from the 3d Cavalry Group ranged between the Meuse and Moselle Rivers. Operating to a large extent on captured fuel, platoon size patrols pushed east to the limit of their capability. One platoon made it as far as Thionville, near the Luxembourg border, where for a few hours they managed to defuse an intact bridge over the Moselle that the Germans had rigged for demolition. Increasing German opposition forced the small cavalry force, equipped with only six jeeps and three armored cars, to give up the bridge. The same former French marine who had joined and guided them to the bridge was equally helpful in leading the platoon to safety.[38]

Other patrols had similar experiences, but by 3 September even the 3d Cavalry was beginning to suffer under the constraints of limited gasoline. The mechanized scouts made it to the river's edge and in many places reported no German resistance on the opposite bank. They obtained this information by fighting, not by "sneaking and peeking," but lacked the power to seize and hold critical crossings, a mission long envisioned in the early development of mechanized reconnaissance doctrine. By the time the flow of fuel resumed, the Germans had

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[37] "3d Cavalry Group, Metz Operations, 10 August-1 November 1944," pp. 1-44, Combat interviews folder 321, box 17953, entry 427, RG 407, NAII. The 3d Cavalry Group only arrived in France on 9 August and was committed to combat on 10 August. Cole, *The Lorraine Campaign*, pp. 117-118.

[38] Joseph Bleich, "Thirty Men at Thionville," Combat interviews folder 321, box 17953, entry 427, RG 407, NAII.

consolidated their defenses and forced a long campaign to reduce the fortress of Metz on the Moselle.[39]

Farther south, in the XII sector, "Tiger Jack" led the 4th Armored Division over the Meuse River on 31 August. On 1 September, 4th Armored Division was equally immobilized by fuel shortages plaguing the entire Third Army. Major General Wood siphoned fuel from the vehicles in his division so that his 25th Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron might continue its advance and at the same time maintain some pressure on the retreating Germans. Like the 3d and 43d Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadrons to the north, the 25th Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron moved against limited resistance to report that there was little to bar the advance of the division into Lorraine.[40] With enough gasoline to resume the offensive, the 25th Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron again saw its assets allotted to the combat commands where they served with distinction during the subsequent crossing of the Moselle on 11 and 12 September and the subsequent encirclement of Nancy. Scouts accompanied the penetration reaching as far as Arracourt by 14 September 1944.[41] Here, Brigadier General Bruce Clark pushed Troop D of the 25th Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron, which was attached to his combat command, even further to the east. Prepared to continue moving east before the Germans could reform, the XII Corps commander, Major General Manton Eddy decided to use the division to help the infantry divisions consolidating the corps' gains on the east bank of the Moselle. The Germans used the reprieve to organize their reeling forces for a counter attack intended to envelop the exposed Third Army penetration.[42] The first wave of General Hasso von Manteuffel's *Fifth Panzer Army* counter attack fell on the 2d Cavalry Group.

The 2d Cavalry Group, having been attached to the XII Corps since 20 August moved more than 300 miles to resume its role of protecting the Third Army's exposed southern flank which now belonged to General Eddy Manton's corps. By 29 August the group had shifted from

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[39] Cole, *The Lorraine Campaign*, pp. 119-124.

[40] Christopher R. Gabel, *The 4th Armored Division in the Encirclement of Nancy* (Fort Leavenworth, Kansas: Combat Studies Institute, 1986), p. 10.

[41] Ibid., p. 16.

[42] Ibid., pp. 18-19.

the corps' flank to its front, conducting reconnaissance as XII Corps advanced first on the Meuse and then on the Moselle Rivers. Like the 3d Cavalry Group in their sister corps to the north, the 2d Cavalry Group continued to push toward the Moselle when the rest of the corps' units ground to a halt on 1 September. Using captured German fuel in their jeeps, the mechanized cavalrymen reached the Moselle on 2 September where they continued to patrol in the vicinity where the Madon River joined the Moselle until the corps could resume offensive operations.[43]

The 2d Cavalry Group's position on the XII flank was particularly important. Since the Allies had landed on the south coast of France on 15 August, Lieutenant General Alexander Patch's Seventh Army had been making steady progress north. The 2d Cavalry Group now sat along the German route of escape. On 6 September, the 43d Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron, in conjunction with the 696th Field Artillery Battalion blocked an escaping German column, killing 151, destroying 30 vehicles, and capturing an additional 178 enemy soldiers.[44] The group was only days away from fighting off its first concerted attack.

As the XII Corps resumed the offensive, the 2d Cavalry Group moved forward with the 42d Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron. The 2d Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron had been detached to secure the corps headquarters and the field artillery battalion and tank destroyer battalion that had been attached to the group were detached as the group advanced. The 2d Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron, back with the group, reached Luneville on 15 September and with the assistance of Combat Command B of the 4th Armored Division, the group gained control of the town on the morning of 18 September. Based on the reports of prisoners captured on 17 September, 2d Cavalry Group commander, Colonel Charles Reed, became convinced that the Germans were preparing to launch a major counter attack and requested tank destroyer assets from the XII Corps headquarters. His request was denied.[45]

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[43] "2d Cavalry Group Report of Combat Operations, 1 August-5 November 1944," 5 November 1945, APO 403, box 17942, entry 427, RG 407, NA II, pp. 5-9 and Combat Interviews, p. 2.

[44] Ibid.

[45] Report of Operations, pp. 9-11 and Combat Interviews, pp. 5-7.

The next morning, the advanced guard of the *111th Panzer Brigade* struck the screen line established by the 42d Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron. This was part of the general counter offensive being conducted by Field Marshal Hasso von Manteuffel's *Fifth Panzer Army* across the salient created by the 4th Armored Division's penetration. Lacking the tank destroyers he had requested, Colonel Reed was wounded that day as the rounds fired from assault guns bounced off the armor of the advancing German tanks. The 42d Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron fought a spirited delay that allowed the remainder of the 2d Cavalry Group to retreat to Luneville. By 1200 that day, elements of the 4th Armored Division were able to advance with added support of tank destroyers to maintain the defense of Luneville. The preserving XII Corps' flank had been costly. The 42d Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron's commander died in the heavy artillery fire that characterized the fighting that day. The squadron also lost twenty-seven of its vehicles.[46] One journalist following the rapid advance of Patton's Third Army observed that the "2d Cavalry Group, the unit which made a story-book dash across France and always moved so fast it never had to dig foxholes" finally had to slow its pace when confronted with an onslaught of German tanks at Luneville on 18 September 1944.[47] The results of the attack at Luneville should have served as a warning that might have prevented a future disaster for a less fortunate cavalry group.

To a large degree Patton was able to command and control, at one point, four corps during the breakout through use of an organization of his own creation, the Army Information Service. Also known as Patton's "Household Cavalry" the 6th Cavalry Group fulfilled the Third Army commander's anticipated need to be capable of commanding and controlling rapidly moving forces on his dispersed front. His "Household Cavalry" may have mirrored Field Marshal Montgomery's "Phantom" network of reporting as suggested by historian Martin Blumenson, but equally reflected the interwar use of early mechanized reconnaissance units serving traditional horse cavalry units.[48] More in line with the argument that the Army

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[46] Report of Operations, p. 11 and Combat Interviews, p. 8 and Cole, *The Lorraine Campaign*, p. 221.

[47] Lewis Hawkins, Associated Press War Correspondent, "Mechanized Cavalry Retains Tradition of Slashing Advance," cited in *The Cavalry Journal* (November-December 1944), p. 11.

[48] Blumenson, *Breakout and Pursuit*, pp. 349-350.

Information Service was not necessarily an idea borrowed from the British, at least in terms of word choice, Hasso von Manteuffel cited Patton's use of "cowboy-aides" and"saddle-orders" something he was familiar with as a cavalryman himself.[49]

Formation of the Army information service required the 6th Cavalry Group to acquire additional radios and vehicles while they were still stationed in England. To accomplish their special mission, the group underwent intensive training as it prepared to become the eyes and ears of an entire army that ultimately operated from Brest, on the Atlantic coast, all the way to the Moselle River, on the doorstep of Germany.[50] Patton activated his "Household Cavalry" when his Third Army arrived on the continent. As the detachments arrived at their units, roughly a reconnaissance platoon per division, they carried with them a letter from Patton explaining they were not there to comment unfavorably on the unit's performance, rather to ensure a secure line of communication between the supported unit and the Army headquarters.[51]

By 15 August, Patton committed fifteen detachments, which consumed an entire cavalry squadron, leaving him one squadron from the 6th Cavalry Group to perform missions for the Third Army. Army Information Service planners had also not anticipated the need for a higher headquarters, the cavalry group, to provide centralized command and control for the many detachments. There were also initial problems with the radios, many of which had been installed while the units were operating under a veil of radio silence. Motorcycle scouts and jeep couriers

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[49] Hasso von Manteuffel to I. D. White, 25 March 1967, Diessen am Ammersee, Germany, Correspondence between I. D. White and General Hasso von Manteuffel, 1967-1976 folder, box unassigned, White Papers. Manteuffel went on to write about Patton that, "His preparations and transmissions respectively of orders—we say his technics in issue of orders—is of the same kind we cavalrymen used!" Manteuffel arrived at his use of "cowboy" on his own according to I. D. White. White, having talked with Mantuefel, found he did the same thing, "he called them his cowboys with subordinate units." White interview, p. 254.

[50] Lyman C. Anderson, "Third Army Reconnaissance," *The Cavalry Journal* (January-February 1945), pp. 20-23.

[51] Ibid., and War Department. *After Action Report, Third U. S. Army, 1 August 1944-9 May 1945, vol. II Staff Section Reports*. [1945] Department of History Library, United States Military Academy, August, Army Information Service, G3, p. 12.

proved the most reliable means of communication until wire could be strung.[52] The sheer volume of radio traffic forced the detachments to shift their efforts from monitoring radio nets to having scout platoons obtain the latest information directly from the senior commanders or from the front. The cavalry group headquarters took these reports directly from the field to conduct extensive battle tracking with situation maps and copies of orders to better direct their reconnaissance detachments to the action in order to gather the most up-to-date information.[53] All told this allowed Patton to have a very complete picture of an exceptionally fluid situation. Moreover, Patton was able to get a very timely picture because the Army Information Service eliminated the time lag required for a message to travel from a division operating at the front through the corps headquarters and on to army headquarters. With the Third Army headquarters never remaining at any single location for more than five days during the open field running days that characterized August 1944, the Army Information Service played a vital role in maintaining contact between senior and subordinate units.[54]

As the front stabilized on 15 September as Third Army conducted the important link-up with Seventh Army closing in from the south, units were able to string adequate wire, the importance of the work that had been carried out by the scouts in August diminished. Rather than gathering information from the front for Patton, they now often passed information to the subordinate unit commanders about the "broad picture" and how their corps or division supported the overall mission. The 6th Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron rotated with the 28th Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron on 21 September. The new squadron operated thirteen detachments in support of ten divisions and three corps. This allowed Third Army to maintain contact with VIII Corps operating on the Brittany Peninsula, 400 air miles from the Third Army HQ at Chalons-Sur-Marne. Stability also led to a deluge of minor spot reports that the Army Information Service staff was not equipped to analyze. Since the spot reports often contradicted

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[52] War Department. *After Action Report, Third U. S. Army, 1 August 1944-9 May 1945, vol. II Staff Section Reports*. [1945] Department of History Library, United States Military Academy, August, Army Information Service, G3, p. 12.

[53] Ibid., p. 12.

[54] Robert D. Sweeney, "How Patton Kept Tabs on His Third Army," *Armored Cavalry Journal* (March-April 1949), p. 53.

other spot reports, the Army Information Service suspended passing intelligence data to the army headquarters until it had been approved for release by the corps G2.[55]

Operations in October were much like those of September. The 6th Cavalry Groups again rotated the mission on 21 October. Weather limited the ability of the solo motorcycle couriers. The static nature of the front allowed the cavalrymen to establish a pigeon communications network. Not surprisingly they concluded that "pigeon communication proved to be not as rapid as radio communication." The pigeon network was also unable to keep pace with fast moving operations. What it did do well was allow Third Army to operate under the conditions of total radio silence.[56]

With Third Army preparing to breakout again in November, General Patton directed the 6th Cavalry Group commander to reorganize the "Household Cavalry" so that it could be run by a single cavalry reconnaissance squadron. This allowed him to build a task force around the 6th Cavalry Group headquarters. The 28th Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron inherited the information mission and drew members of the F Troop, the light tank company, to augment its squadron headquarters that now took over the functions carried out by the group headquarters. The 28th Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron also detached its Troop E of assault guns to the forming cavalry task force.[57] The 6th Cavalry Group with an attached battalion of Army Rangers and a company of tank destroyers and engineers joined XX Corps and attacked dismounted toward L'Hopital and the forest of Karlsbrunn on 2 December 1944.[58] Even Patton, strapped for

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[55] War Department. *After Action Report, Third U. S. Army, 1 August 1944-9 May 1945, vol. II Staff Section Reports*. [1945] Department of History Library, United States Military Academy, September, G3 p. 17.

[56] Ibid., p. 20 and Sweeney, "How Patton Kept Tabs on His Third Army," *Armored Cavalry Journal* (March-April 1949), p. 53. The Army Information Service used on average 40 birds per day during this phase.

[57] War Department. *After Action Report, Third U. S. Army, 1 August 1944-9 May 1945, vol. II Staff Section Reports*. [1945] Department of History Library, United States Military Academy, November, G3, p. 21.

[58] "The 6th Cavalry Group, Attack to Seize L'Hopital and Clear Karlsbrunn Forest, December 2-5, 1944," *The Cavalry Journal* (May-June 1945), pp. 12-13.

manpower, could no longer avoid committing his last reserve of highly mobile troops to the infantry fight and the entire Army Information Service discontinued its service to Third Army in December 1944.[59] Between August and October the 6th Cavalry Group suffered 58 casualties roughly split between combat and vehicular accidents.[60]

Patton's Third Army fulfilled the interwar expectation of mechanized ground reconnaissance units in a variety of ways. While they had been used on exposed flanks extensively, they had also led the rapid advance at times. Even Patton's use of the 6th Cavalry Group was unorthodox and reflected the worst interwar abuses of the mechanized reconnaissance units in horse cavalry units, it did substantially contribute to his ability to command and control his forces, especially during the dynamic months of August and September. Although Lieutenant General Courtney Hodges did not use an entire cavalry group to assist him in commanding and controlling his First Army, his corps commanders all made use of their respective cavalry groups.

While Third Army raced off in every direction after Operation COBRA, First Army was left the task of repelling the German counter attack at Mortain on 7 August, encircling the German *Seventh Army* in the Falaise pocket, liberating Paris and then racing for the German border themselves. The 4th, 102d and 113th Cavalry Groups continued to support the VII, V and XIX Corps respectively. During the fighting in early August the cavalry groups' service was little different than the operations they conducted prior to the breakout. Like the cavalry groups in Third Army, the First Army cavalry groups came into their own once the Falaise pocket closed on 21 August.

The Twelfth Army Group Commander, General Omar N. Bradley may have believed that "for all its past glories, Paris represented nothing more than an inkspot on our maps to be by-passed as we headed toward the Rhine," but he could not avoid the "city of light" even if it represented a major logistics burden with 4 million inhabitants.[61] General Philipe Leclerc had

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[59] War Department. *After Action Report, Third U. S. Army, 1 August 1944-9 May 1945, vol. II Staff Section Reports*. [1945] Department of History Library, United States Military Academy, December, G3, p. 25.

[60] Blumenson, *Breakout and Pursuit*, p. 350. 28 battle casualties, 30 traffic accident casualties.

[61] Bradley, *A Soldier's Story*, p. 384.

begun petitioning General Patton, on 15 August 1944, only fifteen days after being committed to combat on the continent, to allow his French 2d Armored Division to have the honor of entering Paris first.[62] Having "liberated and celebrated" across France since he arrived on 1 August 1944, Leclerc was determined not to miss the biggest party of all.[63] Taking matters into his own hands and without orders, General Leclerc dispatched an advanced party of seventeen tanks, ten armored cars, and two platoons of infantry on trucks toward Paris on 21 August, but the French were about to cross paths with and share the glory of reaching Paris with an American cavalry group.[64]

The 102d Cavalry Group arrived on the Continent late in June 1944. Like the other cavalry groups, it had seen its share of hedgerow fighting, rather than mounted reconnaissance, while it supported V Corps. With the Falaise pocket closed, the 102d Cavalry Group abandoned its previous role during the breakout of maintaining contact with adjacent units on the corps' flanks and assumed the mission of leading the 4th Infantry Division into Paris. Troop B of the 102d Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron joined General Lecclerc's French 2d Armored Division,

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[62] Leclerc to Third Army HQ, 15 August 1944, [France], folder La-Lec, box 34, Patton Papers, Library of Congress. General Leclerc's real name was Philipe de Hautecloque. He fought under a *nomme de gurre* after escaping from Vichy France and continuing the fight for French Freedom first in Africa and then in Europe. Leclerc was particularly disappointed on 15 August as he saw the remainder of the corps he had originally been assigned to, the XV Corps, move on to the Seine while his French 2d Armored Division was attached to the First Army's V Corps. Not only did he ask Patton's HQ to give him the honor of entering Paris first, he initially requested to only remain for twenty-four hours so that he might quickly rejoin the Third Army and continue to fight with them for the remainder of the war. He also asked to be relieved of command if the French 2d Armored Division was denied the honor of entering Paris first. Because they had drawn U. S. equipment, the French 2d Armored Division served with the American forces for logistics reasons. Leclerc thought little of the United States' martial talents based on American performance in North Africa, but he was pleased to know he would be assigned to Patton's Third Army. Within Patton's Third Army, Lelerc initially served in Wade. H. Haislip's XV Corps. Haislip was fluent in French and had attended the Ecole de Guerre. Leclerc wrote to Patton around the same time he was detached from Haislip and assigned to General Gerow's V Corps. Henry Maule, *Out of the Sand, The Epic Story of General Leclerc* (London: Odhams Books, Limited, 1966), p. 173, 183.

[63] Maule, *Out of the Sand*, p. 185.

[64] Ibid., pp. 205-206.

perhaps as the corps commander's way of keeping track of the French. The 38th Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron, encountering limited resistance, secured all the bridges on the Seine and reached Notre Dame cathedral on the morning of 25 August.[65] Troop B, 102d Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron raced to Paris with the French 2d Armored Division "at 50 miles an hour" with "[French] soldiers and ladies drinking in the vehicles."[66] Leclerc ordered the 1st Syrian Spahis to the lead the way. With roots reaching back to horses and camels in Syria when World War II began, the 1st Spahis served the same function as a cavalry reconnaissance squadron and used much of the same equipment.[67] Only days after the liberation of Paris, the Spahis escorted Charles DeGaulle's triumphant return.[68] The lightning dash to Paris, led by the mechanized ground reconnaissance units drawn from two nations, but organized along lines of American design, was instrumental in retaking the city.

For the men of the 102d Cavalry Group the stay in Paris was relatively short. As the drive beyond the Seine began, they drew the task of moving forward to gain control of the bridges over the Meuse River.[69] After V Corps was forced to pause as VII Corps changed its axis of advance, the 102d Cavalry Group reconnoitered the advance of the 4th Infantry Division until they ran up against the *Siegfried Line* near the Belgian villages of Manderfled, Holzeim,

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[65] Harold J. Samsel, "Operational History of the 102d Cavalry Regiment (Group) "ESSEX TROOP" 38th Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron, 102d Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron, World War II,"Harold J. Samsel folder, box 3 102d Cavalry Regiment, MHI, WWII veterans surveys.

[66] "The Liberation of Paris," statement prepared by Sergeant Robert Schreil, B Troop, [102d CRS] 102d Cavalry Group, cited in Samsel, "Operational History of the 102d Cavalry Regiment (Group).

[67] Colonel Paul Willing to Major Matthew Morton, 6 October 2003, Paris, France, possession of author.

[68] Ibid.

[69] Harold J. Samsel, "Operational History of the 102d Cavalry Regiment (Group) "ESSEX TROOP" 38th Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron, 102d Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron, World War II,"Harold J. Samsel folder, box 3 102d Cavalry Regiment, MHI, WWII veterans surveys.

and Krewinkle on 14 September, just south of where the 4th Cavalry Group stopped as they too hit the West Wall. All along the way there had been sharp fights with withdrawing German forces, but the group had managed to travel from Paris to the German border in roughly two weeks.[70]

The first cavalry group to see combat, the 4th continued to fight beyond the hedgerows. They continued to secure the flanks of VII Corps and during the German thrust at Mortain, the 4th Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron's light tanks even led the relief force to members of the "lost battalion" on Hill 317.[71] It was beyond the Seine that they made one of their greatest contributions and exhibited the best characteristics of the fully mechanized corps cavalry concept.

As the exploitation continued on 31 August, the 4th Cavalry Group played a vital role in maintaining contact between First Army's VII Corps and Patton's Third Army. Rather than leaving behind a division to fill the growing gap after First Army changed the VII Corps' axis of advance toward Mons, Belgium, General "Lightning Joe" Collins used his 4th Cavalry Group reinforced with a battalion of light tanks, motorized artillery, tank destroyers, infantry, and three companies of engineers, to fill the growing void. Reaching the Meuse on 3 September, the 4th Cavalry Group used it as a natural obstacle and screened the right flank of VII Corps from Mézières to Rocroi.[72] The 4th Cavalry Group filled this crucial gap until V Corps, which had been cut-off when VII Corps reoriented on Mons, could be brought back into the line south of VII Corps and become the connection between the advancing First and Third Armies.

As V Corps took up position between VII Corps and Third Army, the lack of German defensive measures allowed the cavalrymen to cover great distances until after crossing the Meuse between Dinant and Givet. Once in Belgium, they began to encounter stiffer resistance. As the resistance increased, the cavalry group found itself assigned to the corps' flanks. The 4th Cavalry Group forged ahead clearing the Belgian towns of Celles, Rochefort, Hotton, Marche,

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[70] Ibid.

[71] Epps, *Fourth Cavalry*, p. 11.

[72] Blumenson, *Breakout and Pursuit*, pp. 682, 693-694.

and Malmedy, towns unknown to the world in September, but soon to be famous in December. The group's advance finally culminated in the shadow of the *Siegfried Line* on 14 September 1944. There they tested the disposition of the Germans and determined the contours of the defense in the vicinity of the Elsenborn Ridge and the small villages of Rocherath, Krinkelt and Bullingen.[73] Maintaining contact with V Corps to the south, the 4th Cavalry Group secured the southern flank of VII Corps as it battled its way into Aachen from 16 September until 2 October. This allowed General Collins to concentrate his combat power. The V Corps ultimately took over the extensive sector held by the 4th Cavalry Group as it shifted north.[74]

While the 4th Cavalry Group filled the gap between VII Corps and Patton's Third Army, enabling VII Corps to turn north toward Mons, the 113th Cavalry Group operated forward of XIX Corps. After briefly working directly for the 2d Armored Division after the capture of St-Lô, the 113th began its northward dash across Europe on 13 August 1944 near Mortain. Ordering the group to "fan out ahead of the advance in a fast bold run, keeping well ahead of the skirmish line" General Charles H. Corlett had the 113th precede the advance of the 30th Infantry Division while the 82d Armored reconnaissance moved forward of the 2d Armored Division. Starting on 19 August, the 113th covered 106 miles as XIX Corps attempted to cut-off the German forces escaping from the Falaise pocket. Aside from reconnoitering the advance of the 30th Infantry Division, the group captured a number of small objectives with dismounted attacks supported by the light tanks and assault guns in each of the squadrons.[75] Colonel William S. Biddle's cavalrymen continued to pursue the Germans, crossing the Seine at St. Germain on 29 August and from 1-2 September led the advance of the 30th and 79th Infantry Divisions as the 2d Armored Division moved on slightly in advance of the group on their left flank. During the first two days of September, the group gobbled up 150 miles and crossed the German border on the

[73] Epps, *Fourth Cavalry*, pp. 13-20.

[74] General Board Report, 49, Appendix 6, p. 8.

[75] William Eagen, *The Man on the Red Horse* (Portland, Oregon: Metropolitan Printing, 1975), pp. 93-95.

afternoon of 2 September.[76] Then like all other American forces operating in Twelfth Army Group, the gas ran out.

General Corlett's XIX Corps was down to two divisions, the 30th Infantry Division and the 2d Armored Division, when it became immobilized for lack of fuel on 3 September. On 4 September, General Corlett visited Colonel Biddle's headquarters and ordered him to prepare to turn his cavalry group due east and clear a twenty-five mile wide swath of Belgium all the way to the Prince Albert Canal, approximately 125 miles.[77] The 113th Cavalry Group departed on 5 September on what was later described as a "perfect cavalry mission" that saw the mechanized reconnaissance men moving days in advance of the corps they supported. The only reason the group was finally able to achieve the operational depth envisioned by interwar mechanized reconnaissance doctrine writers was because the remainder of the corps lacked to fuel to move along the five routes the cavalrymen were clearing. Fuel was not the only problem. The rapid advance across Europe had worn the tracks off of Biddle's light tanks, so he advanced the on 5 September with nothing more than wheeled vehicles. [78]

Fortunately, the cavalry group experienced little resistance as it liberated Belgium ending its first day practically on the Waterloo battlefield. Belgian "Forces of the Interior" dealt with German prisoners and the cavalry group bypassed pockets of resistance as it plunged farther east toward the German border. All General Corlett could do as his cavalry group liberated Belgium was listen to the reports coming over the SCR 399, long-range radio.[79] By the evening of 7

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[76] [Summary of Operations, 113th Cavalry Group, July 1944-May 1945], unmarked folder, box 5, Biddle Papers, MHI and Blumenson, *Breakout and Pursuit*, pp. 679-680. The rapid advance to Tournai, Belguim, which was actually in the British sector, was in part a desire on Bradley's part to get to Tournai before a scheduled airborne operation that was scheduled to take the same objective. Bradley was further convinced that his Twelfth Army Group would advance faster than the British to his left/west flank. Securing Tournai offered some protection as he attempted to cut-off the German line of retreat at Mons. Stripping trucks from many of his artillery units and air defense units, Corlett motorized the 79th and 30th Divisions for the rapid advance north.

[77] "113th Cavalry Group in Mission of Reconnaissance," p. 1, box 5, Biddle Papers, MHI and Eagen, *Red Horse*, p. 108.

[78] "113th Cavalry Group in Mission of Reconnaissance," p. 3, box 5, Biddle Papers, MHI.

[79] Ibid., pp. 4-5.

September the group reached Hasselt in the north and St. Trond in the south of its assigned zone and was only a few miles short of the Prince Albert Canal. With enough fuel to resume movement, General Corlett ordered the group to move its northern squadron, the 125th Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron, south as the 82d Armored Reconnaissance Battalion, with full fuel tanks, raced ahead of the rapidly closing 2d Armored Division moving up on the cavalry group's left flank. By the end of the day, the entire corps drew up to the Prince Albert Canal.[80] Albeit against crumbling German resistance, the 113th Cavalry Group with its wheeled vehicles raced ahead of the heavier forces immobilized for lack of fuel as if on a maneuver. Days later, General Corlett drew on the same mobility to find a way across the water barrier to his front.

To the south of XIX Corps, VII Corps was able to secure an intact bridge over the Meuse at Liege. With two companies of attached infantry riding on trucks, a tank destroyer battalion and two companies of engineers, Colonel Biddle took his cavalry group across the corps boundary, drove thirty-five miles to Liege where he crossed the Meuse River and then preceded north with squadrons abreast. With infantry platoons riding assault guns and assault guns attached to the leading reconnaissance squadrons, the cavalry group turned the Germans out of their positions. This allowed the 30th Infantry Division to construct a bridge at Vise. With a bridgehead over the Meuse in the XIX Corps sector, the 113th Cavalry Group advanced on the left flank of the 30th Infantry Division as it advanced into Holland.[81] As the British pulled out of the line to the left of XIX Corps as they prepared to make their ill-fated drive on Arnheim, leaving a fifty mile gap between General Corlett's corps and the British. The British supplied a Belgian Brigade which Corlett agumented with the 113th Cavalry Group and an infantry battalion, thus beginning the type of defensive operations that characterized the remainder of the 113th Cavalry Group's stay in Holland.[82] Augmented as they were, the 113th Cavalry Group was able to turn the German forces opposite XIX Corps out of their positions with bold movement

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[80] Charles H. Corlett, *Cowboy Pete; The Autobiography of Major General Charles H. Corlett.* William Farrington, ed. (Santa Fe, New Mexico: Sleeping Fox, 1974), p. 101.

[81] [Summary of Operations, 113th Cavalry Group, July 1944-May 1945], unmarked folder, box 5, Biddle Papers, MHI and Eagen, *Red Horse*, pp. 116-117.

[82] [Summary of Operations, 113th Cavalry Group, July 1944-May 1945], unmarked folder, box 5, Biddle Papers, MHI and Corlett, *Cowboy Pete*, pp. 101-102.

more so than fighting prowess. At the opposite end of the Allied line, in the south of France, a similarly augmented cavalry reconnaissance squadron had carried out an even more extensive and bolder maneuver.

The controversial decision to invade southern France went forward against Prime Minister Winston Churchill's wishes on 15 August 1944. Operation ANVIL, or DRAGOON as Churchill preferred, featured Lieutenant General Lucian K. Truscott as the commander of the VI Corps, a veteran cavalryman, improvisor, and amphibious landing expert. Unlike Anzio, what ensued was a "wild cat" and not a beached whale. Within days of landing, Trucott unleashed a reinforced mechanized cavalry squadron on a plunge into the German rear. Not focused on reconnaissance, Task Force Butler sought to close the route of escape for German *Army Group G.*[83]

From west to east, Truscott's assault on 15 August put ashore the 3^{d}, 45th and 36th Infantry Divisions east of Toulon. In keeping with the 3^{d} Infantry Division's spirit of improvisation in regard to ground reconnaissance, the invasion of southern France witnessed the employment of the 3^{d} Provisional Reconnaissance Squadron. Built around the divisional cavalry troop, it included a company of tank destroyers and light tanks. With mobility and firepower, the provisional squadron led the advance of the 15th Infantry Regiment's rapid advance inland that carried it to La Roquebrussanne, ten miles south of Brignoles, by 18 August. The 36th Cavalry Troop made forays to the north and northeast as deep as the Route Napoleon, in excess of thirty miles against minimal German resistance.[84] Arriving on D-Day, all three of the 117th Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron's line troops, with attached assault guns and light tanks from Troops E

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[83] Jeffrey J. Clark and Robert Ross Smith, *Riviera to the Rhine, United States Army in World War II, The European Theater of Operations* (Washington: Center of Military History, 1993). See Chapter 1 for the details of the debate of going to southern France rather than an attempt through the Lubjana Gap.

[84] Clarke, *Riviera to the Rhine*, Map 6 on p. 109, and p. 129. There were also a French Special forces involved in the landing operations and an inland airborne assault.

and F, supported all three American divisions by 16 August. This broad support to the landing was short-lived ending on 17 August.[85]

General Truscott could not plan on the use of his floating armored reserve for a deep thrust inland. The reserve, a combat command from a French armored division, waited off shore and General Alexander Patch, Seventh Army commander, insisted upon its return to French control by 19 August for their drive on Toulon. Therefore Truscott was on his own to build a fast moving, hard hitting unit for his planned envelopment of the Germans.[86] Truscott built Task Force Butler, named for his assistant corps commander, around the 117th Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron, a corps asset. The 117th immediately contributed not only its mobility and combat power, but also the staff and command and control apparatus upon which to attach the other assets destined for service with Task Force Butler without cutting into VI Corps staff and command and control assets (radios).[87] When it was activated on 17 August, the remainder of the task force included: and armored field artillery battalion, independent tank battalion less two companies, and infantry battalion, tank destroyer company, engineer company, medical company, and quartermaster truck company to move the infantrymen.[88]

Task Force Butler advanced north on 18 August toward its first intermediate objective, Sisteron. With very limited combat experience in Italy, the 117th moved tentatively, but picked up speed with General Butler's encouragement. By the end of the their first day, the cavalrymen had captured a German *LXII Corps* commander Lieutenant General Ferdinand Neuling and his staff and advanced as far as Digne. Light aircraft had assisted the rapid advance by finding bypasses for destroyed bridges and maintaining contact with VI Corps headquarters, now well beyond radio contact until one of the same light airplanes flew in a long-range radio for Task Force Butler's use. The *maquis*, local resistance fighters, established a number of roadblocks

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[85] "History of the 117th Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron (Mecz), From 1 August 1944 to 31 August 1944," p. 5, Unit History Summary folder, Charles J. Hodge Papers, MHI.

[86] Clarke, *Riviera to the Rhine*, p. 132 and Frederic B. Butler, "Southern Exploits of Task Force Butler, Part I," *The Armored Cavalry Journal* (January-February 1948), p. 13.

[87] Butler, "Task Force Butler, Part I," p. 13.

[88] Ibid.

oriented on avenues of advance from the Route Napoleon to prevent any penetrations of Task Force Butler's line of communication. Trucks carrying nothing but gasoline insured the advance deep into the German rear could continue on 19 August.[89]

For the next two days, Task Force Butler with the 117th Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron leading, pushed farther north, capturing Gap on 20 August and having progressed more than half way to Grenoble. The 36th Infantry Division followed in the wake of Task Force Butler, orienting on Sisteron. On 21 August, General Truscott ordered Butler to change directions, "go west, young man, go west," toward the heights that dominated the German escape through Montelimar.[90] The main body of Task Force Butler was nearly 100 miles from its new objective, but Troop B arrived at a position that gave a full view of the escaping German forces by the afternoon of 21 August.[91] The rest of the 117th Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron and other elements of Task Force Butler closed rapidly on Montelimar where during the next two days the task force fought alongside the *maquis* while they awaited the arrival of the 36th Infantry Divison. When the division arrived and disbanded Task Force Butler, the 117th took up a position along the Roubion River, the scene of heavy fighting as the Germans attempted to turn the American flank.[92]

Worried about his exposed eastern flank as the battle continued to develop around Montelimar, General Truscott formed yet another specialized unit, Task Force Bibo on 25 August. Built around Troop A of the 117th with the added firepower of two mortar companies and two batteries of artillery, Task Force Bibo, with the assistance of the local *maquis*, watched the passes at Briancon, nearly a hundred miles east of the Rhône Valley near the Italian border.

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[89] Ibid., pp. 15-18.

[90] Butler, "Task Force Butler, Part II," *The Armored Cavalry Journal* (March-April 1948), p. 33 and Clarke, *Riviera to the Rhine*, pp. 146-147.

[91] Butler, "Task Force Butler, Part II," p. 34

[92] "History of the 117th Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron (Mecz), From 1 August 1944 to 31 August 1944," pp. 8-9, Unit History Summary folder, Charles J. Hodge Papers, MHI.

Troop A remained there until they rejoined the rest of the squadron on 2 September after being relieved by French forces.[93]

Task Force Butler, even with the support of the 36th Infantry Division, lacked the power to close the German route of retreat. Inspired by the fighting in Italy, Truscott did manage to inflict serious damage and maintain pressure on retreating German forces which enabled the Seventh Army to rapidly move up the Rhône Valley and tie in with Patton's Third Army on 11 September 1944.[94] Men from Troop B would join hands with troopers from the 1st Syrian Spahis, the same unit that led the French 2d Armored Division into Paris, on 18 September as the 117th Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron continued to assist the advance of VI Corps.[95] As part of Task Force Butler, the corps reconnaissance squadron had moved 235 miles in four days and fought heroically against superior German forces. Although it had received a number of attachments and did not focus on reconnaissance, the 117th Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron's participation in Task Force Butler offered one of the most exciting examples of what interwar mechanization advocates had hoped to realize. The 117th Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron, like the other squadrons operating to the north, was doing far more than just reconnaissance.

As the front stabilized in Lorainne and along the *Siegfried Line* a general pattern began to emerge in regard to how corps and division commanders used their mechanized ground reconnaissance assets. Cavalry squadrons became interchangeable with infantry regiments and groups at time with divisions. Screening had long been a cavalry function, but it presumed the closeness of larger forces being supported who might respond just as the 2d Cavalry Group depended on the 4th Armored Division to come to its assistance at Luneville. Now mechanized cavalry units took up their own defensive sectors and in some cases were committed to offensive operations in the capacity of dismounted infantry.

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[93] "Briancon, France Operation During World War II," prepared by Thomas C. Piddington, Troop A Commander, 117th Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron, Lanser folder, Non-Divisional Cavalry Units box, MHI.

[94] Clarke, *Riviera to the Rhine*, p. 170, 223.

[95] "History of the 117th Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron (Mecz), Federal Service During World War II, January 6, 1941-November 25, 1945," p. 22, Robert C. Lutz folder, Non-Divisional Cavalry Units box, MHI.

Colonel Biddle's 113th Cavalry Group remained on the extreme northern end of General Bradley's Twelfth Army Group. After its exciting dash across Belgium in September it remained in the area of Sittard where it occupied large portions of the Ninth Army front while American forces attempted to penetrate the *Siegfried Line*. The group took part in limited offensive operations while attached to the 29th Infantry Division in late September. The 17th Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron, normally assigned to the 15th Cavalry Group joined the113th Cavalry Group in early November, which allowed them to begin rotating their squadrons out of the line for rest and maintenance. At times, the cavalry group, with attachments, held a division-size front for weeks on end.[96]

The 11th Cavalry Group arrived on the Continent in December 1944. Hoping "for a true cavalry mission" after training for a "war of movement" the "troopers disliked being separated from their vehicles" as they replaced an infantry regiment of the 102d Infantry Division. Their assault gun troops joined the 102d Division Artillery while the men assigned to the light tank troops joined the scouts in the line as infantrymen.[97] Having missed the dash across France and Belgium, the soldiers of the 11th Cavalry Group quickly became acquainted with the reality that other mechanized reconnaissance men had been living with for months.

Just as the augmentation of cavalry groups, sometimes called task forces, was not uncommon during the offensive phase of Allied operations during the first six months in Europe, the corps commanders were applying the same concept to defensive operations. As VII Corps front grew to thirty-five miles, Lieutenant General J. Lawton Collins assigned the 4th Cavalry Group twenty miles of his corps' responsibility. Collins provided Colonel Joseph Tully, "a great cavalryman and fine fighter," additional artillery, tanks, and a battalion of infantry to round out what had grown into a "small corps."[98] This use of the cavalry group in an economy of force

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[96] "the 113th Cavalry Group, Defense of the north flank of the 12th Army Group, Sittard Area, September 19-November 12, 1944," *The Cavalry Journal* (July-August 1946), pp. 2-3.

[97] George L. Haynea and James C. Williams, *The Eleventh Cavalry From the Roer to the Elbe, 1944-1945* (Nurnberg: Entwurf, Druck Union-Werk, 1945), p. 33. Each infantry division included its own artillery units, also called DIVARTY.

[98] Combat Studies Institute, "Report No. 5, Conversations with General J. Lawton Collins," transcribed by Major Gary Wade (Fort Leavenworth, Kansas: Combat Studies Institute, [1983]), p. 9.

role allowed Collins to narrow his active front to fifteen miles. Relief of responsibility for portions of the 4th Cavalry Group's sector in September did provide some relief from being overstretched in static positions, but in many respects, the worst was yet to come.[99]

From 23 November through 21 December the 4th Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron participated in the fighting in the Hurtgen Forest, attacking for fifteen days on a 2,000 yard front, to gain 5,000 yards of densely forested hillsides. Sandwiched between the 1st and 4th Infantry Divisions, the troopers stayed in the line despite its eighty-four casualties even as the 1st Infantry Division was pulled out of the line. These casualties resulted from days of fighting like 19 December when the squadron attacked toward the village of Bogheim. Early morning fog covered the dismounted advance of the line troops into the village where they gained contact with a stalwart German defense. Troop F's light tanks drove into a wall of steel as they tried to move forward to support the beleaguered dismounted troopers. Before the day was over, every troop commander was dead or seriously wounded. The squadron fought on, and on the following day gained the ridge that dominated the first day's fighting.[100] Dismounted combined arms offensives, even for limited objectives, were a long way from mounted reconnaissance with an emphasis on stealth.

The 102d Cavalry Group, first to Paris in the halcyon days of August when the gains came quickly, remained pinned against the *Siegfried Line* from the middle of September onward. In that time they occupied five different portions of the V Corps front, the last one extending 14,000 yards, which afforded the group no depth to what might be generally characterized as static defensive position. Tasked with preventing infiltration, the group received a number of attachments at different times to augment their capabilities. These included infantry battalions, tank destroyer units, field artillery battalions, medical detachments, and wire teams. Even the crews from the groups tanks took their turns in the line dismounted. The group patrolled

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[99] Epps, *Fourth Cavalry*, p. 22.

[100] Ibid., pp. 22-23.

constantly with small four to five man teams to maintain contact between distant outposts.[101] They would go largely untested until December.

The 3d Cavalry Group also saw offensive action. Formed on 3 November 1944, General Walker grouped a battalion of heavy field artillery, a battalion of regular field artillery, two tank destroyer battalions and an engineer battalion with the 3d Cavalry Group to create Task Force Polk, a robust organization.[102] Task Force Polk's first mission was to secure the town of Berg and the commanding hills around it that threatened XX Corps' planned crossing of the Moselle in its efforts to reduce the defensive complex of Metz. Lightly held, Colonel Polk elected to use a single platoon of dismounted cavalrymen to seize the hill. Major George D. Swanson, executive officer of the 43d Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron, led the dismounted attack that briefly gained control of the hill. A German counter attack swept the small American contingent off the hill the next day. A combined arms attack drawing on many of the attachments now found in Task Force Polk retook Berg on 5 November. Task Force Polk then patrolled a twenty mile sector along the Moselle while the remainder of the corps prepared to cross the river.[103]

On 13 November, XX Corps ordered Task Force Polk to follow the advance of the 10th Armored Division which had crossed the Moselle. Now with only a tank destroyer battalion, an

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[101] Lyman C. Anderson, "Patrolling the Siegfried," *The Cavalry Journal* (May-June 1945), pp. 12-14 and Observer Report C-479, "Interview with Colonel S. N. Dolph, Commanding Officer, 102nd Cavalry Group," 31 December 1944, [Belgium], U.S. Army Ground Forces Observer Board, European Theater, vol. III, MHI.

[102] Role of Task Force Polk, (3d Cavalry Group Reinforced) in the Metz Operation," 3-4 January 1945, revised copy, box 17953, entry 427, RG 407, NAII. Task Force Polk was named after its commander, Colonel James Polk. "Jimmy" as he was known within the old cavalry community, had been a spirited lieutenant. While assigned to the 8th Cavalry Regiment under the command of Colonel "Jingles" Wilson, himself a Medal of Honor winner Philippine Insurrection, Polk and other single officers of the command had gone to Mexico. Upon their return they raised enough hell that the 2d Squadron commander wanted to prefer court martial charges. With Earnest N. Harmon's, another horse cavalryman who went on during World War II to gain more experience in the command of armored divisions than any other commander, recommendation, nothing came of the incident. *Personal Memoirs of Major General E. N. Harmon, U. S. A Retired*, pp. 39-40. Special Collections Norwich University, Northfield, Vermont.

[103] "Role of Task Force Polk, (3d Cavalry Group Reinforced) in the Metz Operation," 3-4 January 1945, revised copy, pp. 1-5, box 17953, entry 427, RG 407, NAII.

engineer battalion and a single battalion of field artillery, Task Force Polk moved across the Moselle and took up a position on the left flank of the 10th Armored Division. Starting on 16 November, the cavalry task force attacked to the north, protecting the flank of XX Corps as it began to ascend the Sarre-Moselle triangle. Shifting its additional assets between squadrons, the group advanced by bounds. Once a cavalry squadron using all its assets plus the task force assets seized an objective they halted as the group's other squadron employed all of the additional support to seize its objective. The leap-frog advance ended on 19 November when Task Force Polk ran into the *Siegfried Line*.[104] Like the 4th and 102d Cavalry Groups which first encountered the West Wall in mid-September, the lightly equipped cavalry group was incapable of further forward progress. Their sister group in Third Army, the 2d Cavalry Group was fairing no better.

After the sharp German counter attack at Luneville that exacted such a heavy price on 2d Cavalry Group, the front stabilized. From 20 September through 5 November the group maintained a static position along XII Corps' right flank and used the time to rotate its squadrons in and out of the line. There, they maintained contact between the 26th Infantry Division and the 106th Cavalry Group operating on the flank of the XV Corps that had taken up position on the right of XII Corps.[105] The group remained attached to the 26th Infantry Division as it advanced in early November, screening the gap between the Marne-Rhin Canal and the division's right flank.[106] The group supported the division's advance with active patrolling and limited attacks until 27 November, when the group moved to the corps' northern flank. There, they resumed the pattern of rotating squadrons in and out of the screen line until they were able to pull the entire group out of the line for maintenance and training the 400 new personnel that had joined since

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[104] "Role of Task Force Polk, (3d Cavalry Group Reinforced) in the Metz Operation," 3-4 January 1945, revised copy, pp. 8-15, box 17953, entry 427, RG 407, NAII and Cole, *The Lorraine Campaign*, p. 485.

[105] "Report of Combat Operations, 1 August-5 November 1944," 5 November 1944, HQ 2d Cavalry Group, [France], pp. 12-17, file CAVG-2-0.3, box 17942, entry 427, RG 407, NAII and "Combat Interviews, 2d Cavalry Group, Lorraine, 1September-22 December 1944," p. 9, folder 320, box 17942, entry 427, RG 407 NAII.

[106] Cole, *The Lorraine Campaign*, p. 320 and "Report of Combat Operations, 6 November-23 December 1944," 5 December 1945, HQ 2d Cavalry Group, APO 403, pp. 3-4, file CAVG-2-0.3, box 17943, entry 427, RG 407, NAII.

active campaigning began in August.[107] Like the 3d Cavalry Group's participation in the Lorraine Campaign, the 2d Cavalry Group in an economy of force role allowed XII Corps to focus its combat power with the confidence that its flank was secure.

On 29 September 1944, Major General Wade H. Hailsip's XV Corps left Patton's Third Army and joined Lieutenant General Alexander Patch's Seventh Army. The 106th Cavalry Group accompanied the transfer.[108] The 106th Cavalry Group carried out extensive dismounted operations in the *Foret de Parroy* throughout late September and early October. Major General Wade H. Haislip, characterized the terrain there as being "in reality a jungle."[109] The 106th also maintained contact with Major General Manton Eddy's XII Corps to the north. This allowed the group the opportunity to rotate its two squadrons in and out of the line as trench foot began to take its toll on the troopers.[110] They moved forward into the Vosges Mountains maintaining their position on the northern flank of XV Corps where they remained until December. Dismounted operations characterized their actions throughout the fall and early winter of 1944.

From north to south along the extended American front, cavalry groups served every American corps then operating in Europe. A handful had experienced the struggles in the Norman hedgerows, all had experienced the exhilaration of the breakout and race across Europe, and now all experienced, to some degree, the frustration of being limited to what was primarily an infantry role on the periphery. All these experiences generated a number of observations about the techniques, doctrine and equipment used to move across Europe during the first six months.

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[107] "Report of Combat Operations, 6 November-23 December 1944," 5 December 1945, HQ 2d Cavalry Group, APO 403, pp. 6-10, file CAVG-2-0.3, box 17943, entry 427, RG 407, NAII and "Combat Interviews, 2d Cavalry Group, Lorraine, 1September-22 December 1944," pp. 15-16, folder 320, box 17942, entry 427, RG 407 NAII.

[108] Keith E. Bonn, *When the Odds Were Even* (Novato, California: Presidio, 1994), p. 69.

[109] Wade H. Haislip to George S. Patton, Jr., 12 October 1944, HQ XVth Corps [France], folder Haislip, box 33, Patton Papers, Library of Congress.

[110] *The 106th Cavalry Group in Europe, 1944-1945*, pp. 60- 68.

PART II

From afar, the former Chief of Cavalry, John K. Herr, was keeping abreast of the situation in Europe through his son-in-law, Brigadier General Willard "Hunk" Holbrook, serving with the 11th Armored Division, but still waiting to be committed to the action. Having visited with other former cavalrymen now serving as armored division commanders, Holbrook expressed enthusiasm that these men were using their divisions "much like our old cavalry" with the principal exception being their "tremendous firepower" advantage. Probably much to Herr's liking, Holbrook spoke of the "present 'cavalry'" completely dedicated to reconnaissance as being "not very satisfactory."[111]

General Holbrook, yet to see combat, was not the only man dissatisfied. Two young mechanized cavalry officers, who had seen combat, took exception to an observation expressed by Brigadier General (Retired) Hamilton S. Hawkins, in the July-August edition of *The Cavalry Journal*. Hawkins suggested that the operations in Europe lacked the participation of "cavalry." In the September-October edition, Hawkins freely admitted that these men had been fighting in Europe and then proceeded to list a number of other actions in the history of the branch where troopers fought without their horses. He went as far as to blame the prolongation of the American campaign in the Philippines as a result of horse cavalry fighting without their mounts. In 1944, Hawkins was equally "convinced that large forces of cavalry, using horses, could, in combination with mechanized forces, shorten the war there and save thousands of lives."[112] He remained convinced that the units that had just raced across France now confronting the German West Wall would be better served with the support of "strong horse cavalry units." After all, the Russians were still using horses.[113]

From their conceptualization, mechanized reconnaissance units were intended to fill the gap between the leading edge of ground forces and the planes that had ranged ahead of the action

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[111] Willard A. Holbrook to Helen Herr Holbrook, November-December 1944, France, folder World War II letters, box 41, Holbrook Papers, USMA.

[112] Hamilton S. Hawkins, "Cavalrymen—Mounted, Dismounted and Mechanized," *The Cavalry Journal* (September-October 1944), pp. 29-30.

[113] Ibid.

since World War I. Combat forced improvements in the realm of air-ground coordination in contrast to earlier outings. Early July brought the IX Tactical Air Command to the direct support of the troops on the ground. Operations Order No. 90, Advance Headquarters, IX TAC, 20 July 1944, directed that three different groups of the command carry out "Armored Column Cover." This consisted of a "four ship flight" flying in support of the moving columns on the ground. Not only were they to pass vital reconnaissance information, they were also to attack "any target which [was] identified as enemy" and focus their efforts on "the terrain immediately in front of the advancing columns."[114] This set the stage for the rapid advance across France and Belgium that had long been envisioned and that had demanded the creation of the mechanized reconnaissance forces on the ground that filled the space between the leading edge of the main force columns and the enemy. Commenting on the rapid advance of Major General John "Tiger Jack" Wood, an observer noted that "the cub planes [were] worth their weight in gold" moving at the front of the armored spearheads streaking across France.[115] "P. Wood's" only complaint was that as the division commander he needed a faster plane.[116] Planes had also played a vital role in the rapid advance of Task Force Butler in the south of France.

Cavalry group scouts learned to tune the radios in their M8 armored cars to the frequency of the artillery observers flying above. These same planes, at times, directed the advance of the mechanized reconnaissance men operating below. Divisional reconnaissance troops could now expect almost immediate close air support if it was available by directly contacting the air liaison party at the division headquarters. The process was somewhat more complicated for the cavalry groups who might have to relay their request through the divisional cavalry troop or squadron of

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[114] *12th Army Group, Report of Operations, (Final After Action Report), vol. XI, Antiaircraft Artillery, Armored, Artillery, Chemical Warfare and Signal*, p. 41

[115] Joe Holly to Charles L. Scott, 5 September, HQ Communications Zone (FWD), folder General Holly, box 12, Charles L. Scott Papers, Library of Congress.

[116] Ibid., and Hanson W. Baldwin, *Tiger Jack* (Fort Collins, Colorado: Old Army Press, 1979). "P." Wood was another name for Major General John Wood earned at West Point. Before attending West Point, Wood earned a degree in chemistry at the University of Arkansas where he also served as the starting quarterback. "P." was, and still is, the term used by cadets for "professor." The Germans used the term "Tiger Jack" to describe him.

the closest division to which they were assigned.[117] In the opinion of an armored division combat commander, the best support resulted when the Army Air Force attached pilots to marching columns since "they were able to talk the language of the pilots in the air and talk them onto the targets."[118]

Despite the general improvement, sharp contacts with retreating German forces beyond Paris continued to result in losses. Lead vehicle rounded corners and were "nailed by an 88." General I. D. White later remarked,

> I believe now with our scout helicopters that we probably could have avoided direct meeting engagements with those elements and shelled them with artillery fire and eliminated them without loosing our lead personnel and vehicles. We did not use our light artillery observation planes as much as I think we should have for scouting. One reason was because the Germans had pretty effective low level antiaircraft defense and it wasn't particularly healthy to fly low enough where you would have to fly to observe and locate these weapons.[119]

While there were marked gains in air-ground cooperation, these gains were accomplished by commanders and staffs, not because of changes to the organization and equipment found in the mechanized ground reconnaissance agencies. From the perspective of Army Ground Forces all the way down to the common trooper, there were calls for action, and in many cases, actions taken to improve or modify existing equipment in the field to improve the performance and survivability of the men in combat.

Arriving at the front in December 1944, Vernon Brown, a scout with the 94th Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron organic to the 14th Armored Division, noticed the stark contrast between his unit and the unit it was replacing in the line, the 117th Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron. Brown whose experience was limited to having fired five training rounds of .50 calibre before entering combat, quickly picked up on the different appearance of the veteran 117th. Their vehicles lacked windshields and had additional weapons mounts welded on in a variety of locations. The veteran troopers carried an assortment of pistols taken from their

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[117] Observer Report 169, "Extracts from Various Observers, 18 November 1944, box 56, entry 15a, RG 337, NA II.

[118] White interview, p. 245.

[119] Ibid., pp. 240-251.

German foes.[120] In addition to these noticeable modifications as well as the ubiquitous, life-shortening for the jeep, but life-lengthening for the occupants, sandbags and wire cutters affixed to the front bumpers to prevent decapitation, both common in previous campaigns, mechanized cavalrymen tinkered with their organization and equipment with the same spirit that propelled them forward during the austere interwar years.[121]

The limitations of the M8 Armored Car identified in Italy were recognized during the first six months of fighting in France and Belgium. It still could not absorb the blow of a Teller mine, but with some modifications like additional steel plate welded to the floor, the crew did have a better chance of survival.[122] Like jeeps, armored cars not only received armor modifications, they also received modified weapons mounts and additional storage racks for ammunition and personal items. Still armed with only a 37 mm cannon, the M8 was of little use against tanks and the more common heavy pill boxes being encountered at the end of the September sprint across Europe. [123] For all its shortcomings, it still provided a relatively safe platform for the radios essential for requesting support and passing information. The armored car's road speed and greater fuel economy allowed the cavalry groups to move rapidly and farther as the heavier armored divisions ground to a halt in early September for lack of gasoline. That which the scout platoons encountered with their armored cars and jeeps that exceeded the capabilities of a .50 calibre machine gun or a 37 mm cannon could often be dealt with by one of the other two pieces of equipment in the squadron. This was especially true as the men who

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[120] Vernon H. Brown, *Mount Up! We're Moving Out! A World War II Memoir of D Troop, 94th Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron [Mechanized] of the 14th Armored Division* (Bennington, Vermont: Merriam Press, 2002), p. 19.

[121] Kenneth T. Barnaby, "Face-Lifting a Cavalry Squadron," *The Cavalry Journal* (July-August 1946), p. 10.

[122] Observer Report 157, "Armored Reconnaissance in the European Theater of Operations, [23 August 1944], box 56, entry 15a, RG 337, NA II and Barnaby, "Face-Lifting a Cavalry Squadron," p. 8 and *The Cavalry Journal* (November-December 1944), p. 17.

[123] Barnaby, "Face-Lifting a Cavalry Squadron," pp. 8-9.

were supposed to be riding in the jeeps and armored cars often found themselves attacking on foot like their brothers in the infantry.

The assault guns found in Troop E of each cavalry reconnaissance squadron remained very popular with commanders because of their ability to shoot indirect fire from defiladed positions. Their continued presence in the organization guaranteed cavalry commanders a limited indirect fire capability when field artillery was not attached to their groups by the division or corps they were supporting. The 117th Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron used the larger 105 mm M7 Assault Gun rather than the smaller 75 mm M8 Assault Gun found in the other mechanized cavalry units and thought the advantage obvious. Having worked with attached field artillery battalions, it was becoming obvious to other commanders as well. Not only did commanders begin to express a desire for a larger caliber assault gun they expressed concern that they might lose their assault guns once they fielded light tanks with comparable cannons. For this reason, they emphasized the important indirect fire capability the assault guns lent their units.[124] Given the large amount of dismounted action they had performed during the first six months of war in the European theater, both offensively and now in static defensive positions, the indirect fire capability afforded by the assault guns was critical to the cavalry reconnaissance squadrons.

Light tanks continued to gain a lot of attention also. During the Normandy phase of the campaign, the commander of the 121st Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron commented on the survivability of the light tank, remarking, "Mines are plain hell and don't let anyone tell you a light tank can take a Teller mine. They cannot." Just as units had in North Africa and Sicily, the units now in Europe tried to modify their light tanks and other vehicles with additional armor.[125]

Mines were not the only factor limiting the mobility of Allied forces in June and July 1944, the greatest inhibitor was the *bocage.* Sergeant Curtis G. Culin, 102d Cavalry

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[124] Observer Report 385, "Cavalry and Armored Report," 27 November 1944, *Report of Observers*, vol. 3, MHI, p. 9 and Observer Report C-479, "Interview with Colonel S. N. Dolph, Commanding Officer, 102nd Cavalry Group," 31 December 1944, [Belgium], U.S. Army Ground Forces Observer Board, European Theater, vol. III, MHI and Barnaby, "Face-Lifting a Cavalry Squadron," p. 10.

[125] Observer Report 157, "Armored Reconnaissance in the European Theater of Operations, [23 August 1944], box 56, entry 15a, RG 337, NA II.

Reconnaissance Squadron, developed the first device to be affixed to the front of a tank that allowed some mobility through the hedgerows that made up the *bocage* country. Although the device was developed in the early part of July, it was kept a secret until 500 additional "Rhinoceros" tanks could be created for the First Army's intended breakout, Operation Cobra. It was Sergeant Culin's "American ingenuity" that allowed all armored forces operating in Normandy to "surmount a difficulty"which planners had not anticipated.[126] This was also in keeping with traditions of the men who had filled mechanized reconnaissance units from the very beginning right down to building their first vehicles up from the chassis in the late 1920s.

The French had little use for the light tanks the United States issued them for use by the 1st Spahis. Aside from being "very noisy, lightly armed and armored," the M5s were notorious for catching fire "at the least impact." The son of a commander of one of the combat commands in the French 2d Armored Division burned alive in his light tank while fighting in the *Foret d' Ecoures* in mid-August before the liberation of Paris. The 1st Spahis lost the majority of their light tanks in combat during August and elected to replace them with medium tanks.[127] At the same time the 1st Spahis were losing their light tanks the 4th and 6th Armored Division had adopted the practice of placing their own medium tanks on point. One observer noted that this had "paid them dividends."[128]

American reconnaissance units did not field medium tanks but started replacing their M5A1 light tanks with the M24 light tanks during the fall of 1944. As far as the 12th Army Group's Armor section was concerned, the M24 light tank with its larger 75mm cannon could not be substituted fast enough for the under-gunned M5A1 light tank. War Department officials promised to replace losses with the newer tank because the priority was first to equip those units

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[126] *12th Army Group, Report of Operations, (Final After Action Report), vol. XI, Antiaircraft Artillery, Armored, Artillery, Chemical Warfare and Signal*, p. 38, 58.

[127] Colonel Paul Willing to Major Matthew Morton, 6 October 2003, Paris, France, letter in possession of author.

[128] Joe Holly to Charles L. Scott, 5 September, HQ Communications Zone (FWD), folder General Holly, box 12, Charles L. Scott Papers, Library of Congress.

still in the process of getting from the United States to the European theater.[129] The M24 proved the "premier reconnaissance tank in all armies" according to those who had probably spent more time than anyone else putting together the empirical data for the United States Army's effort in Europe, the Armored Section of the 12th Army Group Staff. The M24's mechanical reliability even offered hope that it's chassis might serve as the starting point for a new generation of armored infantry carriers.[130]

For all the shortcomings of the light tanks and the inability to field improved light tanks fast enough, there was a call from the field for light tanks to perform another important role, command and control. Only weeks into combat, Colonel Charles H. Reed, commander of the 2d Cavalry Group requested a change to the table of organization and equipment for his group headquarters. Specifically, he wanted light tanks included in the headquarters so that he might be able to accompany "his assault guns and tanks into enemy lines." He believed the "presence of these tanks would greatly increase the speed and efficiency of operation of the group commander and his staff."[131] Much had changed in the cavalry since the interwar years when commanders willingly abandoned their vehicles for horses. Now not only did the commanders fully appreciate the command and control capabilities afforded them by radio carrying vehicular platforms, they also sought the maximum protection as they led their groups near the front.

In the realm of command and control there had been a number of modifications and improvisations less dramatic than Patton's "Household Cavalry." Many of the maps that had facilitated the race across Europe were common road maps purchased in England before the invasion. As the advance continued, Americans raided gas stations along the route of

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[129] *12th Army Group, Report of Operations, (Final After Action Report), vol. XI, Antiaircraft Artillery, Armored, Artillery, Chemical Warfare and Signal*, p. 43. James P. Hart to Charles L. Scott, 30 September 1944, HQ Ninth U.S. Army [France], folder LTC J. P. Hart, box 12, Charles L. Scott Papers, Library of Congress.

[130] Ibid., p. 58.

[131] Memorandum prepared by Charles H. Reed for Commanding General Third U. S. Army, Subject: Authority For Assignment of Two (2) M5 or M5A1 Light Tanks to HQ, 2d Cav Gp (Mecz), 12 August 1944, [France], file CAVG-2-0.1, box 17942, entry 427, RG 407, NAII.

advance.[132] The motorcycle continued to enjoy some utility for aiding in the command and control of mechanized columns and far flung corps and cavalry groups during the breakout. One of the pioneers in the field of mechanized ground reconnaissance, Brigadier General I. D. White, in command of a combat command in the 2d Armored Division, often operated from the buddy seat of a motorcycle. This allowed him to get around columns on the narrow Norman roads. He also believed, mistakenly, that he could avoid setting off land mines by riding on the motorcycle rather than a jeep; plus, it was easier to dismount and get into ditch when rounds started to fall.[133] The 6th Cavalry Group, operating Patton's "Household Cavalry," also made extensive use of motorcycles until cold weather set in and they transitioned to jeeps.[134] Perhaps their decision to use jeeps rather than motorcycles was also influenced by the number of non-combat casualties suffered by the 6th Cavalry Group in vehicular accidents while carrying out their duties.

Most reports from the field expressed satisfaction with the radios then in use. Rainy weather in France had limited the range at time and there remained the reminder that the radio operators themselves should know more about their equipment so that they might effect minor repairs.[135] Members of the 1st Spahis, the mechanized reconnaissance agency of the French 2d Armored Division were thrilled with the inclusion of radios at every echelon in the reconnaissance organization. Radios represented "an important change from the desert days" where the 1st Spahis depended on "different color pennants for signaling!"[136] What had become the static nature of the cavalry groups' missions along the *Siegfried Line* did force them to call for the inclusion of switchboards and additional communications wire. The requirement for an

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[132] Harold J. Samsel, "Operational History of the 102nd Cavalry Regiment (Group) "Essex Troop," 38th Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron, 102nd Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron, World War II," typed manuscript, Harold J. Samsel folder, box 3 102d Cavalry Regiment, MHI WWII Veterans' Surveys, MHI, p. 17.

[133] White interview, pp. 96-97.

[134] Robert D. Sweeney, "How Patton Kept Tabs on His Third Army," *Armored Cavalry Journal* (March-April 1949), p. 53.

[135] "Notes From Combat," *The Cavalry Journal* (November-December 1944), p. 17.

[136] Colonel Paul Willing to Major Matthew Morton, 6 October 2003, Paris, France, letter in possession of author.

organization designed for mobility to maintain wire communications to higher headquarters, subordinates and adjacent units was more than the cavalry group headquarters organization could handle.[137] The importance of radios to mechanized reconnaissance, long recognized in the United States, was one area in which mechanized ground reconnaissance units continued to do well, even in combat.

All the dismounted fighting even called for the addition of weapons systems not associated with the interwar cavalry in any respect. One group commander, like many others holding large sectors of the *Siegfried Line*, saw his unit committed to constant dismounted patrolling. He proposed the addition of sniper rifles as a means to "keep the Jerrys in their holes during the day time."[138] Having already acquired a number of Browning Automatic Rifles (BAR), the same group commander suggested this infantry weapon was also needed in the mechanized cavalry.[139] Not only was there beginning to be a call for infantry weapons, there was also a call for the addition of entire rifle troops and platoons to the existing organization.[140] Some units had gotten extremely creative in their search for additional personnel.

When they crossed the beaches at Normandy to begin their drive on Berlin, the 1st Reconnaissance Troop brought along an extra rifle squad above their authorized strength. They used even more creative means to maintain the strength of their organization as they advanced across Europe by adding Dutch, French, and Belgian men to their troop. These men were mostly used to man the machine guns and occasionally drive, leaving the radio operation and gunning

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[137] Observer Report C-479, "Interview with Colonel S. N. Dolph, Commanding Officer, 102nd Cavalry Group," 31 December 1944, [Belgium], U.S. Army Ground Forces Observer Board, European Theater, vol. III, MHI.

[138] Observer Report C-479, "Interview with Colonel S. N. Dolph, Commanding Officer, 102nd Cavalry Group," 31 December 1944, [Belgium], U.S. Army Ground Forces Observer Board, European Theater, vol. III, MHI.

[139] Ibid.

[140] Ibid.

and vehicle commanding to the Americans.[141] The additional rifle strength, both the unauthorized Americans and the foreign tag-alongs, was probably very useful to the troop throughout the remainder of the European campaign. The local nationals certainly helped by manning the vehicles and providing an increased ability to converse with the locals and hence gather more information, the primary purpose of reconnaissance. When the troop was not conducting reconnaissance or providing security to the division's flank it often itself employed as an infantry unit.[142] On these occasions the additional rifle strength would have been particularly important to make-up for the mounted unit's limited dismounted capability. The experience of the 1st Cavalry Troop was not unique. Many other mechanized cavalry units avoid contact under unfavorable circumstances, especially during the fast moving days in August and early September, by heeding the warnings of people who relished being liberated from Nazi oppression. In the realm of reconnaissance, cooperative citizens were an incredible force multiplier, but not one that could be counted on once in Germany.

The commander of the 121st Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron sounded like a rifle battalion commander when he informed an Army Ground Forces observer in August 1944 that: there needed to be more emphasis place on the use of mortars, training on infantry tactics, fighting in cities, reconnaissance by fire, use of white phosphorus for clearing houses and buildings, and Standard Operating Procedures for immediate action on contact.[143] Another report filed in December also spoke too much of the static as opposed to mounted performance of cavalry missions in Europe when it reminded those back in the states to "learn early to dig foxholes and dig them deep as it is too late after the artillery begins to fall." Perhaps a jibe at the infantrymen the troopers now found themselves serving along side in the foxholes, the report offered that it was "not necessary to eat out of tomato cans, wear muddy clothes and fail to shave

[141] Votaw interview, pp. 30, 37-38. Hazard and Skogsberg do not believe the foreign nationals serving with them would have been reflected in the official morning reports rendered by the First Sergeant each day. Even so, there was always enough food to feed all the men in the troop.

[142] Votaw interview, p. 36.

[143] Observer Report 157, "Cavalry Notes, 23 December 1944, box 56, entry 15a, RG 337, NAII.

to be a good fighter…cavalry tactics are sound."[144] Mechanized cavalrymen had reclaimed their full-fledged combat identity, but seemed to want to make sure they were accomplishing the missions thrust on them with the same style that had distinguished them in the past. Horse or no horses, they were still warriors with more class than those eating out of tomato cans.

It was not uncommon for divisional cavalry troops assigned to infantry divisions to work directly for or adjacent to cavalry reconnaissance squadrons. This had been the case often with the 4th Cavalry Troop and the 4th Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron, for example. In some cases groups and squadrons did so at the behest of the supported division.[145] Divisional cavalry troops continued to serve infantry divisions in their intended capacity with little controversy. They received no attention from the combat observers dispatched to Europe by the Army Ground Forces and received little attention in the pages of the *Cavalry Journal*. As in the case of the 1st Reconnaissance Troop, they too served much of their time in the line dismounted.

Combat Command commanders in the armored divisions had very mixed feelings about the utility of the cavalry reconnaissance squadrons assigned to their divisions. Since the cavalry reconnaissance squadrons assigned to the armored divisions rarely operated as an entire unit, its not surprising that the combat commanders were so critical in regard to the combat characteristics of the reconnaissance troops they received. Brigadier General Truman E. Boudinot, Combat Command B, 3d Armored Division remarked that the current mechanized cavalry reconnaissance squadrons had "no combat power," and since one had to "attack to get information" leading the attack with light vehicles was "suicide."[146] A combat commander with

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[144] Observer Report 186, "Armored Reconnaissance in the European Theater of Operations, [23 August 1944], box 56, entry 15a, RG 337, NAII.

[145] Epps, *Fourth Cavalry*, p. 7, 11. During the breakout operations, 4th Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron served a number of divisions including the 4th Infantry. The 4th Cavalry Troop worked with the squadron during its mission to Hambye on 29 July 1944. During the fighting around Mortain, the 4th Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron worked directly with the 90th Reconnaissance Troop and attached the 4th Cavalry Troop again when the squadron was attached to the division.

[146] "Notes observed on active front by an armored division and sent to Armored Center for its information," enclosure to memorandum prepared by Charles L. Scott, 23 November 1944, Fort Knox, Kentucky, folder Charles L. Scott, classified, box 11, Charles L. Scott Papers, Library of Congress. While awaiting combat, Major General Kilburn, commanding officer of the 11th

the 6th Armored Division saw their only utility in finding alternate routes since to place the division's cavalry reconnaissance squadron on the main axis of advance was sure to cause a delay for the advancing friendly force.[147] These views were echoed in the 5th Armored Division where commanders saw some utility in having the squadron for the race across France against light resistance, but concluded that the "present reconnaissance squadron is not a combat unit."[148] With a full complement of mechanized infantrymen, light and medium tanks, and the full weight of the division's artillery assets to back them, it was easy for the commanders in the combat divisions to discount the capabilities of the relatively lightly equipped cavalry squadrons.

The low esteem held of the divisional reconnaissance squadrons in the armored divisions may have reflected another problem, poor training. As late as August 1944, the commanding general of the Armored Center at Fort Knox, Kentucky, concluded that "almost without exception, inspections by this office reveal that the training of the Reconnaissance Squadrons of Armored Divisions is not up to the standard of the other units of the division."[149] In essence, the Armored Center concluded the reconnaissance squadrons were poorly trained because they were not getting enough of the attention of the division commander and his staff, nor were they under the constant supervision of the combat command commanders they could expect to work for in combat.[150] Another factor for consideration, not covered in the Armored Center report, was the impact of the rapid expansion that had taken place in the Army. In the case of the 41st Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron, organic to the 11th Armored Division, the squadron executive officer who oversaw much of the unit's training before being shipped to Europe, had only graduated

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Armored Division dispatched his officers to the active front to gather information. Among the observers was Colonel Wesley W. Yale.

[147] Ibid.

[148] Ibid.

[149] Memorandum prepared by Charles L. Scott for Commanding General, Army Ground Forces, Subject: Reconnaissance Training in Armored Divisions," 21 August 1944, Fort Knox, Kentucky, folder July 1944-September 1944, box 3, Charles L. Scott Papers, Library of Congress.

[150] Ibid.

from West Point eighteen months prior to pinning on major's oak leaves.[151] Though the rapid rise in rank and the commensurate authority and responsibility that came with it were exceptional in this case, they nonetheless placed an individual with extremely limited experience in a critical position as a unit trainer.

The "cavalry group" organization in contrast to the regimental organization started to come under fire during the first six months of combat. Often General McNair's pooling concept had been applied to the cavalry groups favorably when they received attachments that allowed them to better accomplish their missions, and negatively when groups were stripped of their squadrons which were dispatched on independent missions. Colonel S. N. Dolph, serving with the 102^{d} Cavalry Group, saw the return to a regimental headquarters as the most appropriate solution. The regimental headquarters could manage organic tank destroyers, engineers, and liaison planes. There were all assets the groups had come to depend on but were not guaranteed under the pooling concept. Dolph also called for the return of the logistics and support resources then found in each squadron to regimental control.[152] This would force corps commanders to employ the regiment as a unit, not as independent squadrons.

During the first six months in Europe, every type of mechanized ground reconnaissance unit finally saw wartime service in almost every capacity imaginable. Cavalry group commanders were already recognizing the ability of their units to do far more than just reconnaissance and that the reconnaissance they had performed more often than not required fighting. To this end, the old cavalrymen who commanded the groups began to reclaim the branch identity they were familiar with even if doctrine, prepared by their own branch, suggested their inability to carry out fighting missions. Colonel S. N. Dolph, 102^{d} Cavalry Group commander observed,

> We have performed all the cavalry mission listed in the field service regulations except withdrawals and delaying action. I believe mechanized cavalry is perfectly

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[151] Bill Yenne, "*Black '41," The West Point Class of 1941 and the American Triumph in World War II* (New York: John Wiley and Sons, Inc., 1991), p. 166 and Interview with Brigadier General (Retired) Michael J. L. Greene, Reichelt Oral History Program, Florida State University.

[152] Observer Report C-479, "Interview with Colonel S. N. Dolph, Commanding Officer, 102nd Cavalry Group," 31 December 1944, [Belgium], U.S. Army Ground Forces Observer Board, European Theater, vol. III, MHI.

> capable of performing these missions; we should not limit ourselves to reconnaissance.[153]

Colonel Joseph Tully, 4th Cavalry Group commander echoed these sentiments.

> Experience in the campaigns of Western Europe has proven the doctrine of "sneaking and peeking" by reconnaissance units to be unsound, as we have had to fight to obtain information in practically every case. Our training back in the states and in England was guided by the belief that we would have to fight for information. Extensive training in "combat" reconnaissance exercises has paid dividends.[154]

Even if Colonel Tully anticipated the need to "fight for information" the doctrine the Army went to war with did not.

The first six months of war on the European continent was laden with more success than disappointment and plenty of irony in regard to the employment of mechanized ground reconnaissance units so long in development. The corps cavalry regiment concept worked well, and in this even John K. Herr could take pride even if the cavalry groups lacked real regimental identities and more importantly horses. For the first time during the war, even if only for a few days in September, the corps cavalry groups gained the operational depth long envisioned during the interwar years. True, it was a lack of gasoline that allowed them to fill the gap between air reconnaissance and the stalled main body, but they had finally met this challenge. Though not fully codified and largely worked out on a unit-by-unit basis, cooperation between ground reconnaissance units and eyes in the sky was improving. Recognized equipment shortcomings were really not new, and in the case of fielding an improved light tank, were being addressed formally while modifications in the field took a more informal approach. The organization of the cavalry groups with all arms worked well even if there were not enough riflemen and no regiment with which to identify. Patton had in the spirit of the worst interwar abuses of mechanized ground reconnaissance units, used an entire cavalry group for little more than their radios. Patton's malice of forethought was justified when one considers the contribution the

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[153] Observer Report C-479, "Interview with Colonel S. N. Dolph, Commanding Officer, 102nd Cavalry Group," 31 December 1944, [Belgium], U.S. Army Ground Forces Observer Board, European Theater, vol. III, MHI.

[154] Observer Report C-483, "Notes on the 4th Cavalry Group," 29 December 1944, [Belgium], U.S. Army Ground Forces Observer Board, European Theater, vol. III, MHI.

"Household Cavalry" made to commanding and controlling four different corps moving in four different directions, but all into the rear of the enemy.

Without a doubt, the greatest irony of all was the ease with which the cavalry groups took to combat. With the pioneers of mechanized ground reconnaissance for the most part now leading the Mechanized Force, those that led the Cavalry Branch rump represented those who had not jumped ship and remained loyal to their branch. When their horses were taken from them in 1942, they were left no alternative but to learn to deal with all mechanized regiments that gave way to groups. The horses may have been gone, but the prejudices held by doctrine persisted, continuing to identify horse cavalry as the fighting arm whereas mechanized cavalry was almost solely limited to reconnaissance. Steeped as they were in the traditional sense of cavalry, the mechanized commanders had no reservations about dismounting to fight and abandoning their specialized role. They were eager to carry on all the cavalry missions and were unwilling to abide by the doctrinal constraints their own beloved horse cavalry instincts had placed on the men who road iron ponies between the wars. Although the cavalry groups could not fully take back the missions now performed by the armored divisions of the Armored Force, they could easily claim the ability to do far more than passive reconnaissance.

Fighting was not always by virtue of willingness. It also reflected the hard realities of the "90 Division Gamble." Infantry divisions launched December attacks at 75% strength for lack of replacements. This was because of the upsurge in casualties, largely a function of the bloody fighting in the Hürtegen Forest and the some 12,000 non-battle casualties as a result of trenchfoot.[155] What had initially begun as the wise economy of force measures during September that allowed corps commanders to maintain pressure on withdrawing and wounded German with their infantry and armor divisions gave way to the dangerous habit of filling extended gaps with lightly armed cavalry groups and squadrons. Safe behind the West Wall and closer to his logistics, German forces were far from beaten. There really had been "shades of Jeb

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[155] Bradley, *A Soldier's Story*, p. 444.

Stuart," in August and September, but the stagnant front of October, November and December allowed disaster to lurk just around the corner.[156]

[156] "History of the 117th Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron (Mecz), From 1 August 1944 to 31 August 1944," Unit History Summary folder, Charles J. Hodge Papers, MHI.