

The U.S. Cavalry: Still Relevant in Full Spectrum Operations?

**A Monograph
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Abstract

THE U.S. CAVALRY: STILL RELEVANT IN FULL SPECTRUM OPERATIONS? by Major Andrew J. Watson, United States Army, 67 pages.

The demands of 21st century military operations require an organization that is trained and equipped for independent offensive, defensive, and stability operations. This type of organization, the armored cavalry regiment, is fading from the U.S. Army. However, the demand for the types of operational capabilities inherent in such an organization is not disappearing. Does the United States Army need to retain an independent, combined arms formation, similar to the current armored cavalry regiment that gives higher echelon commanders the option of fighting for information and conducting economy of force operations? The Army has struggled with this question before and numerous examples from the Second World War to the Persian Gulf provide a historical foundation for the continued existence of these formations in this era of persistent conflict.

Despite the need to stretch existing forces over tens of thousands of square kilometers of operating environment when tasked with conducting overseas contingency operations, however, the United States Army will soon lack the specially trained and equipped organizations necessary to most effectively accomplish these missions. In fact, the only remaining armored cavalry regiment will begin transitioning into a Stryker fighting vehicle equipped brigade combat team in 2012. Once this conversion to a Stryker based infantry brigade is affected, the last of these uniquely organized units, born of the lessons of the Second World War, refined throughout the Cold War, and proven on the battlefields of Operations DESERT STORM and IRAQI FREEDOM, will cease to exist. When that happens, the United States Army will have eliminated the last of a group of versatile and proven specialized formations capable of conducting the full spectrum of traditional cavalry operations.

These scheduled changes highlight the importance of examining the question of whether or not a requirement remains for specialized cavalry units in the United States Army. American cavalry units have long played a prominent role on the battlefield and over time, these units have steadily evolved to meet the challenges of their era, yet they have continued to execute traditional cavalry missions regardless of the unique nature of the current conflict. In addition to reconnaissance and security missions, these organizations have traditionally conducted offensive, defensive and stability operations, as an economy of force element, freeing up other units or reacting faster than their training and equipment allowed.

The U.S. Army mechanized cavalry groups that served in the European Theater of Operations during the Second World War serve as relevant historical examples in determining the importance of separate cavalry organizations on current and future battlefields. These examples illustrate how U.S. cavalry organizations were employed in offensive, defensive and stability operations between 1944 and 1946. Moreover, examination of the various roles they played on the battlefields of Europe compared against the demands of the current operating environment demonstrates the continued importance of cavalry units in the current and future force.

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Introduction: The Cavalry in Perspective

The demands of 21st century military operations require an organization that is trained and equipped for independent offensive, defensive, and stability operations. This type of organization, the armored cavalry regiment, is fading from the U.S. Army. However, the demand for the types of operational capabilities inherent in such an organization is not disappearing. This monograph will present historical examples of the use of cavalry in the modern era and review the conditions of 21st century combat and stability operations that demand independent combined arms formations. It addresses the fundamental question: Does the United States Army need to retain an independent, combined arms formation, similar to the current armored cavalry regiment that gives higher echelon commanders the option of fighting for information and conducting economy of force operations? The Army has struggled with this question before and numerous examples from the Second World War to the Persian Gulf provide a historical foundation for the continued existence of these formations in this era of “persistent” conflict.

On June 6, 1944, the first elements of the 4th Cavalry Group (Mechanized) landed at Utah beach as part of the initial forces to land in Normandy as part of Operation OVERLORD.¹ During the first hectic days of the attack on Hitler’s Fortress Europe, elements of the 4th Cavalry Group’s, 4th Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron would conduct offensive, defensive, reconnaissance and security operations in support of the lightly armed Parachute Infantry Regiments of the 82nd Airborne and 101st Airborne Divisions.² Little more than a week after the initial landings in France, the 4th Cavalry Group’s 24th Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron landed at Utah Beach. Within twenty-four hours of arriving in France, on June 16, 1944, while attached

¹ John P. Tully, *Doctrine, Organization, and Employment of the 4th Cavalry Group During World War II*. (Masters of Military Art and Science Theses Collection. Fort Leavenworth: Command & General Staff College, 1994), 41-44.

² Robert R. Tincher, “Reconnaissance in Normandy: In Support of Airborne Troops.” *Cavalry Journal*, January-February, 1945, 12-14.

to the 4th Infantry Division, the Squadron, augmented by the 4th Division Reconnaissance Troop, was ordered to relieve the 22nd Infantry Regiment along the Quineville-Montebourg ridgeline. Under cover of darkness, the troopers of the 24th Squadron moved into the 22nd Infantry's defensive positions and prepared for future operations.³

On June 18, C Troop, 24th Squadron received orders to conduct a reconnaissance of a key intersection to the northwest of Bourg de Lestre. During the mission, the Troop engaged and killed three Germans at the crossroads. The Germans then counterattacked, forcing C Troop to withdraw with heavy casualties. Later that same afternoon, Lieutenant Colonel F.H. Gaston, the 24th Squadron Commander, ordered the tanks of F Troop to attack the crossroads. Supported by the squadron's organic artillery in the form of the E Troop assault guns, the light tanks attacked and soon seized the enemy positions, killing approximately seventy-five enemy soldiers and destroying two antitank guns and a large cache of ammunition.⁴ This engagement marked the start of eleven days of continuous combat action during which the 24th Squadron, as an independent organization and in an economy of force role, would participate in numerous reconnaissance and security operations. The squadron also played a key role in the attacks to seize the towns of Pinabel and Gonneville. As a result of these primarily offensive and defensive operations, the 4th Cavalry Group killed 205 and captured 342 enemy soldiers at a cost of eleven troopers killed, forty-five wounded and three missing in action.⁵

Nearly fifty years later, a modern descendant of the mechanized cavalry groups of the Second World War, the 2nd Armored Cavalry Regiment, crossed the defensive berms into Iraq on the night of February 23-24, 1991. This movement, again under the cover of darkness, was

³ Tully, *Doctrine, Organization, and Employment of the 4th Cavalry Group During World War II*, 45.

⁴ Harry A. Clark Jr., *Operations of the 24th Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron (Mechanized), 4th Cavalry Group (VII Corps) in the Normandy Campaign, France, 6-27 June 1944.* (Student Monograph, Fort Benning: Infantry School Library, 1949), 9-11.

⁵ Tully, *Doctrine, Organization, and Employment of the 4th Cavalry Group During World War II*, 47-49.

another D-Day and marked the start of the ground campaign of Operation DESERT STORM to liberate Kuwait from occupying Iraqi forces.⁶ Two days later, on the morning of February 26 as the regiment continued to lead the U.S. Army's VII Corps' attack into Iraq, the lead elements of the 2 Armored Cavalry Regiment's 2nd Squadron encountered and destroyed forward elements of the Iraqi Republican Guard's *Tawakalna Division*.⁷ By late that afternoon as the movement to contact continued, the 2nd Squadron's E Troop commanded by Captain H.R. McMaster encountered another, larger Iraqi force. This force, comprised of tanks and infantry fighting vehicles, was in a defensive position near a nameless village in the vicinity of the 70 Easting.⁸

Soon after opening the engagement against the larger enemy force, it became apparent to McMaster that although the Republican Guard forces he had encountered were numerically superior, he had the advantage of surprise and vastly superior firepower. Without hesitation, the Troop Commander elected not to conduct a hasty defense and wait for the arrival of additional forces. Instead, McMaster seized the initiative and ordered his Abrams tanks and Bradley cavalry fighting vehicles to continue the attack against the enemy.⁹ Approximately twenty-three minutes later what would soon become widely known in the U.S. Army as the Battle of 73 Easting was over. The outcome of the battle resulted in the destruction of approximately thirty Republican Guard tanks, sixteen armored personnel carriers and thirty-nine trucks of the *Tawakalna Division* without a single American casualty. Although not a particularly large or long fight, the attack at

⁶ Robert H. Scales, Jr., *Certain Victory: The U.S. Army in the Gulf War*. (London: Brassey's, 1994), 223-224.

⁷ Stephen A. Bourque, *Jayhawk! The VII Corps in the Persian Gulf War*. (Washington D.C., Center For Military History, 2002), 227-228.

⁸ Tom Clancy, *Armored Cav: A Guided Tour of an Armored Cavalry Regiment*. (New York: Berkley Books, 1994), 256-257.

⁹ Rick Atkinson, *Crusade: The Untold Story of the Gulf War*. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1993), 443-444.

73 Easting was a pivotal engagement in the larger battle to destroy the Republican Guard and was indicative of the manner in which mechanized cavalry had fought since the Second World War.¹⁰

In each of these examples, separated by nearly fifty years and thousands of miles, cavalry units performed vital independent operations to provide a higher echelon commander with the ability to mass the majority of his forces elsewhere. Despite the need to stretch existing forces over tens of thousands of square kilometers of operating environment when tasked with conducting overseas contingency operations, however, the United States Army will soon lack the specially trained and equipped organizations necessary to most effectively accomplish these missions. In fact, the only remaining armored cavalry regiment will begin transitioning into a Stryker Fighting Vehicle equipped brigade combat team in 2012.¹¹ Once this conversion to a Stryker based infantry brigade is affected, the last of these uniquely organized units, born of the lessons of the Second World War, refined throughout the Cold War, and proven on the battlefields of Operations DESERT STORM and IRAQI FREEDOM, will cease to exist.¹² When that happens, the United States Army will have eliminated the last of a group of versatile and proven specialized formations capable of conducting the full spectrum of traditional cavalry operations.

These scheduled changes highlight the importance of examining the question of whether or not a requirement remains for specialized cavalry units in the United States Army. American cavalry units have long played a prominent role on the battlefield and over time, these units have steadily evolved to meet the challenges of their era, yet they have continued to execute traditional

¹⁰ Bourque, *Jayhawk! The VII Corps in the Persian Gulf War*, 228-229.

¹¹ Gina Cavallaro and Kris Osborn, "Army to Switch two heavy brigades to Strykers," *Army Times*, October 3, 2009.

¹² U.S. Department of the Army, Stryker Brigade Combat Team Project Management Office. <http://www.sbct.army.mil> [accessed April 6, 2010]. The Stryker family of vehicles are eight-wheeled, armored vehicles that come in a variety of configurations and are produced by General Dynamics Land Systems. These include a infantry carrier, and mobile gun system, a medical evacuation vehicle and a reconnaissance variant.

cavalry missions regardless of the unique nature of the current conflict. In addition to reconnaissance and security missions, these organizations have traditionally conducted offensive, defensive and stability operations, as an economy of force element, freeing up other units or reacting faster than their training and equipment allowed. Due to the move towards a modular force and the incorporation of both division and corps functions in the modular division, it was determined that a force capability to conduct traditional cavalry missions such as the guard, cover and screen was no longer required.¹³ The inclusion of additional reconnaissance assets in each brigade combat team could be indicative of a belief that there is no longer a need for specially trained and equipped regimental cavalry units possessing a unique institutional culture to provide commanders above the brigade level with an economy of force capability in support of Full Spectrum Operations.¹⁴

In order to discuss the role of cavalry it is important to first touch upon what the Army means when it uses the term doctrine. Army doctrine has historically provided a foundation for military operations and helped to increase efficiency. Army doctrine manifests itself through published field manuals that provide ways to think rather than telling proponents what to think as it applies to training and operations. Army doctrine, for example, explains how Army forces operate independently and as a member of the joint force with the current force structure and available resources and equipment as well as provides common definitions for terms and operations.¹⁵ Accordingly, Army doctrine defines cavalry and its role in the force. The 1941

¹³ United States Army Armor Center, “White Paper for Full Spectrum Cavalry Regiment” (Fort Knox: U.S. Army Armor Center, 19 June 2009), 1. According to Appendix C of FM 3-0 *Operations*, the modular force refers to the “capability to rapidly tailor and task-organize expeditionary force packages. A force package may consist of light, heavy and medium forces; it can blend Regular Army, Army National Guard, and the U.S. Army Reserve units and Soldiers.” (C-1).

¹⁴ John J. McGrath, *Scouts Out! The Development of Reconnaissance Units in Modern Armies*. (Fort Leavenworth, KS: Combat Studies Institute Press, 2008), 180-181.

¹⁵ U.S. Department of Defense, Joint Publication 1-02: *Department of Defense Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms*. (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 2008), 178. Doctrine is

Edition of the U.S. Army's *Field Manual 100-5 Field Service Regulations: Operations* defines cavalry as "highly mobile ground units, horse, motor, and mechanized...characterized by a high degree of battlefield mobility"¹⁶

The definition of what a cavalry organization is has changed little since the Second World War and Army doctrine builds upon that of World War Two by stating that "Cavalry serves as a catalyst that transforms the concepts of maneuver warfare into a battlefield capability."¹⁷ There is still a need for the mobility and versatility provided by cavalry units in the current and future force. Closely tied to the historical use of regimental cavalry organizations in the army is the term economy of force and discussion of the role of cavalry organizations must include their role in independent operations and as a provider of economy of force.

Today, economy of force is a term heard repeatedly in discussions relating to ongoing operations in Iraq and Afghanistan and is frequently used as a catch all term to describe any manner of operations being conducted in support of the main effort. According to the current U.S. Field Manual 3-0 *Operations*, however, economy of force is only briefly defined within the "principles of war and operations." Moreover, economy of force is not actually a mission according to the 2008 edition of FM 3-0 *Operations*. FM 3-0 states "Economy of force is the reciprocal of mass. Commanders skilled in the operational art appreciate the importance of combat power ratios and therefore allocate the minimum combat power necessary to shaping and sustaining operations so they can mass combat power for decisive operations. This requires accepting prudent risk."¹⁸ Hence, the summary of the doctrinal view of economy of force is to

"fundamental principles by which the military forces or elements thereof guide their actions in support of national objectives. It is authoritative but requires judgment in application."

¹⁶ U.S. War Department, *Field Manual 100-5: Field Service Regulation, Operations*. (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1944), 6.

¹⁷ U.S. Department of the Army, *Field Manual 17-95: Cavalry Operations*. (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, December 1996), 1-2.

¹⁸ U.S. Department of the Army, *Field Manual 3-0: Operations*. (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, February 2008), A-2.

“allocate minimum essential combat power to secondary efforts.”¹⁹ With the broad scope of military operations in which the U.S. Army is currently engaged, the importance of the principle of economy of force has become more important than ever before.

Looking beyond the boundaries of current operations, the analysis of past combat operations indicates that the requirement remains for mobile and flexible units to independently conduct offensive, defensive and other economy of force operations. The decision to transition to a force without regimental sized cavalry units is not the first time the U.S. Army has struggled to define the roles and responsibilities of cavalry in the force. In the wake of the First World War, many senior leaders sought to limit the role of mechanized cavalry organizations solely to reconnaissance and due to the lethality of modern weapons, were skeptical of the value of horse mounted cavalry. During the years leading up to the Second World War this debate over the role of cavalry units on the battlefields of the future continued.²⁰ As a result of interwar transformation efforts, the U.S. Cavalry branch was in a state of flux on the eve of the Second World War and questions similar to those raised today regarding the importance of cavalry would soon be answered on the bloody battlefields of Western Europe.

The role played by mechanized cavalry groups in the European Theater of Operations during the Second World War provide historical examples that assist in determining the importance of separate cavalry organizations on current and future battlefields. These examples show how U.S. cavalry organizations were employed in offensive, defensive and stability operations between 1944 and 1946. Moreover, they demonstrate the continued importance of cavalry units in the current and future force.

¹⁹ U.S. Department of the Army, Field Manual 3-0: *Operations*, A-2.

²⁰ Robert S. Cameron, *Mobility, Shock and Firepower: The Emergence of the U.S. Army's Armor Branch, 1917-1945*. (Washington, D.C.: Center for Military History, 2008), 97-105.

Background: The Cavalry from the First World War to Normandy

The twenty years between the First and Second World Wars was a pivotal time for the United States Cavalry. Brutal warfare on the European Continent, dominated by trench warfare during the so called “war to end all wars”, had signaled the beginning of the end for horse cavalry and ushered in the dawn of mechanization in military operations. Both the victors and the defeated struggled to adapt their formations to take advantage of the myriad of technological advances that resulted from the war. The American Army, constrained by a tight budget, moved slowly and deliberately as senior leaders sought to determine the structure of the future force. Throughout this process, conservative members of the Cavalry branch supported the modernizing horse cavalry in an attempt to make it relevant on the modern battlefield but worked diligently to block efforts to transition horse cavalry units to a predominately mechanized configuration.²¹

The efforts of men dedicated to the preservation of the horse cavalry regiments at the expense of mechanization, such as Major General John K. Herr, who served as the last Chief of Cavalry and retired Brigadier General Hamilton S. Hawkins, had a detrimental effect on the modernization of the U.S. cavalry.²² As a result, on the eve of its entrance into the Second World War, the United States Army possessed a limited number of modern mechanized cavalry formations and still relied upon a essentially hybrid cavalry regiment built around two squadrons of mechanized cavalry equipped with a variety of lightly armored motorized and tracked vehicles.²³ What is more, the doctrinal roles of these squadrons differed greatly. The mechanized squadron was limited to the performance of reconnaissance missions and prevented from undertaking other traditional cavalry missions in support of general combat operations, while

²¹ Cameron, *Mobility, Shock and Firepower*, 105-107.

²² Dean A. Nowowiejski, *Adaption to Change: U.S. Army Cavalry Doctrine and Mechanization, 1938-1945*. (School of Advanced Military Studies, United States Army Command & General Staff College, Fort Leavenworth, KS, 1994), 7-10.

²³ McGrath, *Scouts Out!*, 98-100.

traditionally minded doctrine writers fought to ensure that these mission sets were reserved for the horse equipped squadrons.²⁴

Due to continued resistance against mechanization, the Cavalry branch eventually lost its influence as a guiding organization for mechanization in the Army. As a result, with the establishment of the Armored Force in 1940, cavalry leaders effectively surrendered their vote in nearly all matters related to traditional cavalry operations.²⁵ Consequently, the new armored and mechanized infantry formations took over many cavalry missions, including elements of reconnaissance and counter-reconnaissance, pursuit, exploitation and liaison. Based on this paradigm shift, the role of cavalry was reduced to the narrowly defined set of tasks with emphasis placed on reconnaissance “out of contact.”²⁶ The conditions were set for the establishment of what would become the mechanized cavalry groups that despite obvious limitations in equipment and a shortfall of authorized personnel would play a pivotal role in U.S. ground combat operations in Central Europe.

The doctrine utilized as the foundation for the employment of mechanized cavalry groups throughout the war focused primarily on the role of mechanized cavalry organizations in reconnaissance operations. The basis of the doctrine was developed for the Corps Reconnaissance Regiment in the 1930s.²⁷ The War Department initially created this hybrid organization in an attempt to synchronize the efforts of both traditional horse cavalry organizations and the evolving mechanized cavalry formations then gaining prominence in the debate regarding the structure of the force.²⁸ A compromise, this organization had originally contained one mechanized cavalry squadron tasked with reconnaissance in depth and one squadron of horse cavalry that retained all

²⁴ Nowowiejski, *Adaption to Change*, 16-18.

²⁵ Christopher R. Gabel, *The U.S. Army GHQ Maneuvers of 1941*. (Washington, D.C.: Center for Military History, 1991), 23-24.

²⁶ Nowowiejski, *Adaption to Change*, 11-12.

²⁷ Nowowiejski, *Adaption to Change*, 21-22.

²⁸ McGrath, *Scouts Out!*, 53-55.

other cavalry missions including that of fighting for information when reconnaissance out of contact proved ineffective.²⁹

The doctrine developed throughout the 1930's failed to anticipate the possible removal of horse mounted squadrons and did not expand the role of the mechanized squadron. Accordingly, as the United States moved closer to war, the organization of existing cavalry units was never modified to provide the right ratio of men and equipment required to accomplish the entire range of cavalry missions.³⁰ As a result, the cavalry doctrine applied during the fighting in Europe limited the ability of the mechanized cavalry to adequately conduct aggressive reconnaissance operations without significant support. Despite the shortfalls in doctrine and equipment, however, thirteen mechanized cavalry groups formed between 1942 and 1944 at camps and posts across the country and a small, but skilled cadre of professional soldiers with decades of prewar service molded thousands of new recruits into cavalrymen.

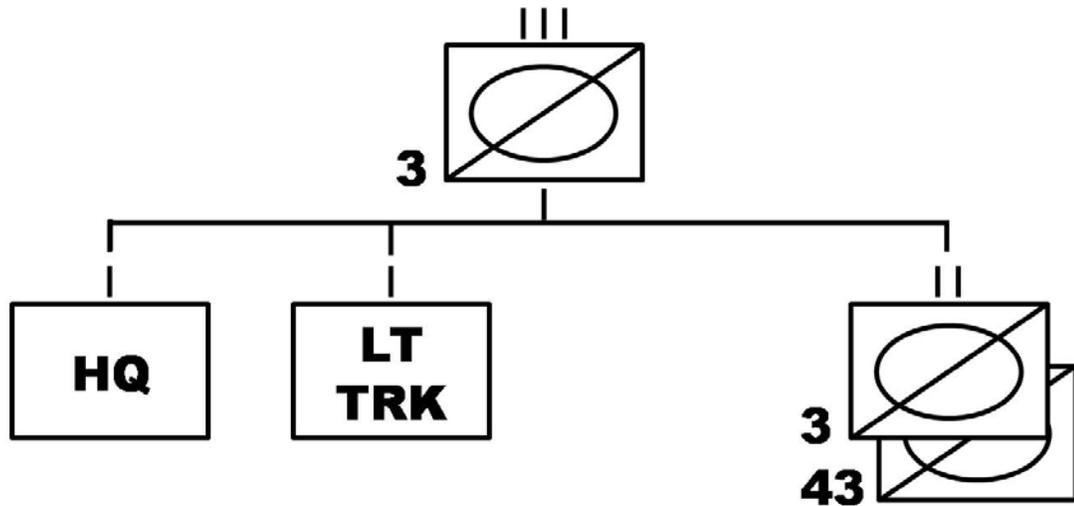
Just as the doctrine employed by mechanized cavalry groups during the Second War was based upon concepts dating back to the 1930s, so was the basic structure of the organization. Although the modernized cavalry regiments contained one horse and one mechanized squadron when the United States entered the war, the decision by General George Marshall, the Army Chief of Staff, to dismount all remaining horse cavalry organizations required the Army to reconfigure the regiments. The decision was then made to reorganize the existing regiments as cavalry groups (mechanized).

The mechanized cavalry squadrons and groups were developed in the wake of the 1942 Army reorganization by the Army Ground Forces, commanded by Lieutenant General Lesley J. McNair, and intended to be small, agile and adaptable organizations capable of receiving additional forces as required to support missions assigned by its higher army or corps

²⁹ Nowowiejski, *Adaption to Change*, 15-17.

³⁰ Nowowiejski, *Adaption to Change*, 18-19.

headquarters.³¹ Each mechanized cavalry group consisted of a very lean headquarters structure and the only organic units within the group were the headquarters troop and a light truck company.³² Additionally, each cavalry group was comprised of two separate but assigned mechanized cavalry squadrons. These squadrons contained the majority of the soldiers and equipment that generally operated within each mechanized cavalry group.



Cavalry Group (Mechanized), 1943-1945

Source: War Department, General Board, "Mechanized Cavalry Units," app. 4, 4.

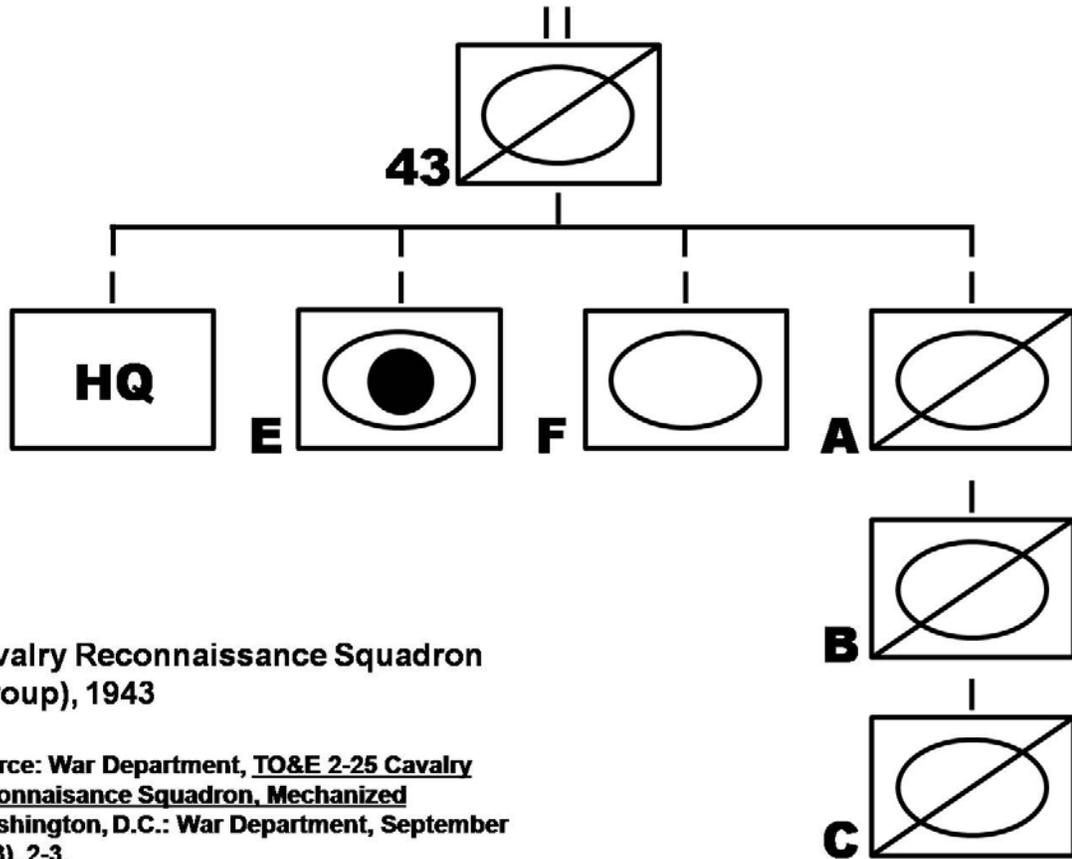
Each cavalry squadron was identical in composition with one of the squadrons usually numbered to match the parent cavalry group and the other squadron. Thus the 3rd Cavalry Group (Mechanized) received the 3rd and 43rd Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadrons while the 15th Cavalry Group Mechanized consisted of the 15th and 17th Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadrons. Mechanized cavalry group squadrons were designed and organized identically by Army Ground Forces and contained a mixture of tracked and wheeled vehicles.³³ Each squadron assigned to a

³¹ Cameron, *Mobility, Shock and Firepower*, 472-473.

³² McGrath, *Scouts Out!*, 98-99.

³³ Shelby L. Stanton, *Order of Battle, The U.S. Army, World War II*. (Novato: Presidio Press, 1984), 21-24.

mechanized cavalry group consisted of three reconnaissance troops equipped with armored cars and jeeps, a tank company composed of seventeen Stuart light tanks, and an assault gun troop armed with six 75-mm. self-propelled assault guns.³⁴



Despite being developed and organized to support corps and armies in the field, mechanized cavalry groups were not operational in time to participate in Operation TORCH in the fall of 1942. Consequently, although II Corps employed a separate corps reconnaissance squadron in support of combat operations, mechanized cavalry groups did not operate in the North African or the Italian Campaigns that followed.³⁵ Instead, American commanders in North

³⁴ McGrath, *Scouts Out!*, 99.

³⁵ Louis A. DiMarco, *The U.S. Army's Mechanized Cavalry Doctrine in World War II* (Masters of Military Art and Science Theses Collection, Fort Leavenworth, Command & General Staff College, 1995), 35.

Africa, Sicily and Italy relied upon units such as the 1st Armored Division's 81st Mechanized Cavalry Squadron and the independent 91st Mechanized Cavalry Squadron, formerly part of the 1st Cavalry Division, to conduct reconnaissance missions.³⁶ The bitter lessons learned in the sand swept deserts of North Africa and in the restricted terrain of Sicily and mainland Italy, highlighted many of the shortfalls within the doctrine and organization of cavalry reconnaissance squadrons.³⁷ The successes of these same units, however, demonstrated that cavalry organizations were invaluable on the battlefield and there was no doubt as to the important and varied roles they would play in the campaigns across Central Europe. It was not until the Normandy Campaign, however, that mechanized cavalry groups would be utilized in support of division, corps and army level operations.

To this end, elements of the 4th Cavalry Group (Mechanized) had the honor of being among the first conventional units to land in central France when they went ashore under cover of darkness before the bulk of the Allied invasion forces in order to seize the small, but vitally important St. Marcouf Islands that guarded the approach to Utah Beach.³⁸ It soon became apparent during operations in the European Theater that mechanized cavalry groups would frequently function in roles that exceeded their prewar doctrinal missions. In fact, the first days of fighting in France made it clear that in addition to reconnaissance, the mechanized cavalry would be routinely called upon to conduct other missions in support of their respective higher headquarters. Mechanized cavalry groups also played a significant role in moving past the beachhead including the 102nd and 106th Cavalry Groups which operated throughout the Normandy region and performed a variety of missions in support of operations in the hedgerow

³⁶ Hoffman, *Through Mobility We Conquer*, 299-307.

³⁷ DiMarco, *The U.S. Army's Mechanized Cavalry Doctrine in World War II*, 57-59.

³⁸ Stephen A. Bourque and John W. Burdan, *The Road to Safwan: The 1st Squadron, 4th Cavalry in the 1991 Persian Gulf War*. (Denton, TX: University of North Texas Press, 2007), 9. The information cited by Bourque and Burdan was originally published by Gordon A. Harrison in *The European Theater of Operations: Cross-Channel Attack, United States Army in World War II* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Army Center of Military History, 1951), 304.

country of coastal France.³⁹ Hence, despite limitations in organization and equipment, mechanized cavalry groups began to prove their worth in economy of force roles on the battlefields of Central Europe.

As reinforcements continued to land in Normandy, Allied forces struggling to break out of Normandy and destroy German forces quickly determined that existing doctrine and the lessons provided by pre-deployment training exercises did not match reality on the ground. As Allied forces sought to adapt to their situation, mechanized cavalry groups soon found themselves frequently executing missions that were not in accordance with the guidance provided by the 1944 Field Manuals 100-5, 2-15 and 2-30 as well as Training Circular 107 for the employment of mechanized cavalry.⁴⁰ In order to achieve a high level of effectiveness, corps and army commanders recognized that mechanized cavalry groups would need to be task organized with additional forces such as artillery, armor and engineers if they were expected to conduct more than reconnaissance missions.⁴¹

The flexible and highly mobile mechanized cavalry groups rapidly gained importance as they raced ahead of or along the flanks of the fast moving armored divisions in pursuit of withdrawing German forces in the months following the Normandy landings and Operation COBRA.⁴² The operations these cavalry groups conducted were much like the full spectrum of offensive, defensive and stability operations as defined in the February 2008 edition of FM 3-0. The following sections will highlight the role of the U.S. Cavalry in the conduct of these operations.⁴³

³⁹ Hoffman, *Through Mobility We Conquer*, 337-339.

⁴⁰ Nowowiejski, *Adaption to Change*, 23-24. These field manuals covered cavalry operations at regimental through troop level and guided training and employment.

⁴¹ Hoffman, *Through Mobility We Conquer*, 337.

⁴² Russell F. Weigley, *Eisenhower's Lieutenants: The Campaign of France and Germany, 1944-1945*. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1981), 172-180.

⁴³ U.S. Department of the Army, Field Manual 3-0: *Operations*.

The Cavalry in Offensive Operations

The United States Cavalry has long been associated with the conduct of offensive operations. From the earliest use of Continental Army cavalry formations in the American Revolution to the last charges of horse mounted units in the Philippines during the Second World War, many of the primary missions of the cavalry were centered on the offense.⁴⁴ In fact, both the example of the 4th Cavalry Group (Mechanized) during the Normandy campaign and that of the 2nd Armored Cavalry Regiment demonstrate the value of this time-honored use of cavalry in the offense. As retired General Donn A. Starry noted in his forward to Roman Jarymowycz's *Cavalry From Hoof to Track*, cavalry has long been valued for its mobility and speed on the battlefield.⁴⁵ The 1941 U.S. Army manual, *FM 100-5: Operations* stated that the "Cavalry obtains its best results by the rapidity and flexibility of its methods in attack and defense rather than by sustained offensive and defensive operations that are required of Infantry."⁴⁶ Thus, despite not being considered the best at sustained offensive operations, the cavalry has traditionally played a decisive role in offensive combat in American military operations.

According to twenty-first century U.S. Army doctrinal manuals, offensive operations are "combat operations conducted to defeat and destroy enemy forces and seize terrain, resources, and population centers. They impose the commander's will on the enemy."⁴⁷ U.S. Cavalry doctrine also details the role of cavalry organizations in the offense and states that while the primary role of the cavalry in offensive operations is to provide continuous reconnaissance and security, cavalry units may in fact perform offensively oriented missions as well.⁴⁸ In this sense,

⁴⁴ Don Starry, Introduction Essay in *Cavalry From Hoof to Track*.

⁴⁵ Roman Jarymowycz, *Cavalry From Hoof to Track*. (Westport: Praeger Security International, 2008), xii.

⁴⁶ U.S. War Department, *FM 100-5: Field Service Regulations: Operations*, 7.

⁴⁷ U.S. Department of the Army, *FM 3-0: Operations*, 3-7.

⁴⁸ U.S. Department of the Army, *FM 17-95: Cavalry Operations*, 5-1.

the purpose of offensive operations has changed little from either the 1941 or the 1944 versions of *Field Manual 100-5, Operations*, the fundamental doctrinal guide for forces in the field, which defined them as operations conducted to destroy enemy forces and achieve the objectives of the commander.⁴⁹

The rapid mobility and flexible structure inherent within mechanized cavalry groups made them ideal formations for economy of force missions during offensive operations during the Second World War. Cavalry groups demonstrated a remarkable ability to conduct these crucial missions despite limitations in force structure and doctrine. In fact, in one instance, the versatility of the cavalry in conducting economy of force missions was demonstrated in late 1944 when it required the entire U.S. V Corps to relieve just one mechanized cavalry group along the Siegfried Line and maintain the same area of operations.⁵⁰

Throughout the campaigns in the European Theater of Operations, corps and army commanders sought constantly to retain the ability to mass the majority of their available infantry and armor forces against defending German forces to achieve success. Mechanized cavalry groups were in many cases the only option available, and when reinforced with field artillery, engineers, tank destroyers and other attachments to reinforce these tasks well. As the fighting in Western Europe progressed and U.S. forces sought first to gain and then to maintain momentum in the offense, the use of mechanized cavalry groups operating independently or in economy of force roles became common place.

⁴⁹ U.S. War Department, FM 100-5: *Field Service Regulations: Operations*, 109.

⁵⁰ U.S. Forces, European Theater, "The General Board, Study No. 49: Tactics, Employment, Technique, Organization, and Equipment of Mechanized Cavalry Units, Appendix 7" pp. 1-2, 1945, U.S. Army Center of Military History, Washington, D.C. (CMH). (Hereafter cited as U.S. Forces, European Theater Study No. 49).

Building a Combined Arms Team – The 15th Cavalry and Task Force “A”

One of the most interesting examples of the use of a mechanized cavalry group in an economy of force role during offensive operations involves the attachment of the 15th Cavalry Group (Mechanized) to the provisional organization known as Task Force “A” in the Brittany Peninsula. The 15th Cavalry Group consisted of the 15th and 17th Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadrons as well as the organic Cavalry Group Headquarters Troop to facilitate command and control of the mechanized reconnaissance squadrons.⁵¹ To increase its firepower, the 15th Cavalry Group also routinely received attachments of armor and tank destroyer forces as well as infantry and combat engineers.⁵² Similar to the experiences of other cavalry groups in the European Theater of operations, these attachments were frequently habitual; that is they were based on the working relationships that developed between the units and a shared understanding of both independent combined arms operations. Occasionally, however, competing operational demands dictated that these attachments vary based upon the forces available and the scope of the mission to be accomplished.

On July 31, 1944, the newly arrived Third Army decided to form a provisional force capable of mobile independent operations. This provisional organization was based around the 1st Tank Destroyer Brigade under the command of Brigadier General Herbert L. Earnest and reinforced by the 15th Cavalry Group. Attached to Major General Troy Middleton’s VIII Corps, Task Force “A” was to assist in operations in Brittany and enable the Allied breakout from Normandy.⁵³ Its mission was originally to move rapidly along the northern coast of Brittany, cut the enemy lines of communication, and secure a series of bridges along the major railway line

⁵¹ Jonathean Gawne, *The Americans in Brittany, 1944: The Battle for Brest*. (Paris: Historie & Collections, 2002), 19.

⁵² Gawne. *The Americans in Brittany*, 19.

⁵³ U.S. War Department, *History of the First Tank Destroyer Brigade*. Headquarters, 1st Tank Destroyer Brigade, France, 1944. (Washington, D.C.: National Archives), 1-3.

that traversed the northern coast.⁵⁴ This rail line was crucial to improving Allied communication between Brest and Rennes and supporting the advance of American forces throughout the peninsula. The vital nature of these bridges could not be overstated since following the capture of port facilities throughout the peninsula, they would allow for the rapid movement of supplies and equipment to units advancing towards Germany.⁵⁵ Securing these bridges was especially important in regards to the high demand for the fuel, oil and parts required in the pursuit. Control of this critical infrastructure would also allow for the slower moving VIII corps divisions such as the 83rd Infantry within VIII Corps to focus its efforts on setting the conditions for the eventual capture of Brest and the reduction of bypassed German strong points located in the numerous towns throughout the peninsula.⁵⁶

During the operations to clear Brittany of the remnants of German resistance, the 15th Cavalry Group completed a wide variety of missions, all of which served an economy of force function in support of VIII Corps. These tasks ranged from reconnaissance in force to determine the strength of German defensive positions, to limited attacks conducted to seize enemy observation posts along the German main line of resistance such as the towns of St. Malo and Dinard.⁵⁷ Owing to the fragmented nature of the terrain throughout the peninsula, the tank destroyers and mechanized cavalry of Task Force “A” provided the corps commander with an adaptive and highly mobile force. This force was then able to make great use of the extensive road network throughout Brittany and was able to move with relative freedom around the patchwork of German strong-points. Likewise, the mobility retained by Task Force “A” working in conjunction with other mobile units like the 6th Armored Division, helped to prevent the

⁵⁴ Martin Blumenson. *Breakout and Pursuit*. (Washington, D.C.: Center for Military History, 1961), 389.

⁵⁵ Gawne. *The Americans in Brittany*, 19.

⁵⁶ Gawne, *The Americans in Brittany*, 22-25.

⁵⁷ Mary H. Williams, *Chronology, 1941-1945*. U.S. Army in World War II. (Washington, D.C.: Center for Military History 1960), 243.

repositioning of German forces attempting to avoid encirclement by the slower moving infantry units.⁵⁸

From August 1st to September 15th 1944 the 15th Cavalry Group operated throughout the depth and breadth of Brittany.⁵⁹ The inherent flexibility of the structure of the group afforded the corps commander the perfect instrument for the conduct of economy of force operations; from reconnaissance to mounted and dismounted offensive operations. Using the extensive road network the Group moved over 500 miles during the conduct of operations, keeping the defending Germans off balance and confused.⁶⁰ The use of the 15th Cavalry Group and Task Force “A” enabled the corps commander to mass combat power where he needed to while denying the defending Germans information about the location of corps’ forces.

A cursory examination of the route traveled by the 15th Cavalry Group throughout the campaign in Normandy and northern France, demonstrates the importance of these adaptive and extremely mobile forces to the success of the Allied efforts in Brittany.⁶¹ Due to its performance as a provisional organization, Task Force “A” expanded its mission following the capture of its initial objectives and continued to remain active in an economy of force role in operations conducted throughout the Brittany peninsula into the early autumn of 1944. The Task Force would remain in action until it was dissolved on 21 September, 1944 having amassed an impressive combat record during its brief existence.⁶² Whether fighting mounted or dismounted, the mobility and versatility of the mechanized cavalry was apparent during the 15th Cavalry Group’s service within the task force. As a result of its efforts as part of Task Force “A” the 15th

⁵⁸ Blumenson, *Breakout and Pursuit*, 395-399.

⁵⁹ William R. Kraft, “Cavalry in Dismounted Action.” *Cavalry Journal*, November-December, 1945, 11.

⁶⁰ Kraft, “Cavalry in Dismounted Action.” 11-12.

⁶¹ Garred J. Dobbins, “Mopping Up An Enemy Pocket”, *Cavalry Journal*, November-December, 1945,10.

⁶² Headquarters, 1st Tank Destroyer Brigade. G-3 Operations Report (Reports After Action Against the Enemy), Headquarters, 1st Tank Destroyer Brigade, 12 October 1944. 1-2.

Cavalry Group (Mecz) was responsible for contributing greatly to the success of VII Corps operations in Brittany; including assisting in the capture of the more than 5,600 enemy soldiers taken prisoner by Task Force “A.”⁶³

Reinforcing Success – The 15th Cavalry fights on in Brittany

Another example of the utilization of a mechanized cavalry organization conducting offensive operations in an economy of force role also occurred within the 15th Cavalry Group in Brittany following its participation in operations as part of the 1st Tank Destroyer Brigade (Provisional) and Task Force “A” in support of VIII Corps operations. With the majority of German forces in Brittany defeated and key objectives secured, it was time to complete the final elimination of isolated pockets of German resistance throughout the peninsula. To facilitate this mission, on 21 September, 1944, VII Corps assigned the 15th Cavalry Group to attack and destroy a force of between 300 and 400 German soldiers who had been encircled and cut off in the town of Dourarnenez located on the Crozon Peninsula in western Brittany.⁶⁴

During this brief engagement, which was later summarized as part of a series on the mechanized cavalry in action for the November-December, 1945 issue of *Cavalry Journal*, the 15th Cavalry Group tasked the 15th Cavalry Squadron to locate and destroy the German defensive positions. To maximize its ability to mass fires and maintain the ability to maneuver, the reconnaissance troops located the enemy and then turned over the fight to the light tanks of F Company, the Squadron Assault Gun Company and attached tank destroyers. Utilizing their superior firepower and armor protection, the larger caliber weapons systems then reduced the enemy and provided cover to the attached combat engineers who cleared the roadways of mines and facilitated the final movement into positions that induced the enemy to finally surrender.

⁶³ U.S. War Department, “1st Tank Destroyer Brigade (Task Force “A”) Operations Report 1 August – 22 September, 1944.” (Washington, D.C.: National Archives), Appendix 2, 1.

⁶⁴ Dobbins, “Mopping Up An Enemy Pocket,” 9.

Consequently, approximately 350 German prisoners were taken by the squadron during this brief action.⁶⁵

Adaptation on the Battlefield – The 316th Cavalry Brigade

Cavalry Groups combined with other combat arms or enhanced by attached battalions of armor, infantry or engineers was not the only manner of increasing its versatility during the fighting on the continent in 1944-1945. In one instance, a different, yet effective and adaptive force combination was achieved by combining the efforts of two cavalry groups into one larger cavalry formation. The formation of these temporary formations allowed commanders to mass multiple mechanized cavalry groups into much larger formations without detracting from their inherent mobility

This was exactly the case in March 1945 when Maj. Gen. Walton H. Walker, commanding the XX Corps, needed to remove the 94th Infantry Division from the line in order to prepare for a pending Third Army offensive and was required to secure a large area with insufficient forces. Initially the task fell to the 3rd Cavalry Group (Mechanized) as the habitual cavalry formation of XX Corps. To support Major General Walker, Third Army assigned an additional cavalry group, the 16th Cavalry Group (Mechanized), to assist with filling the hole in the lines left by the departing infantry regiments of the 94th Infantry into assembly areas for the upcoming attack. Major General Walker decided to combine his mechanized cavalry groups and establish a provisional cavalry brigade to help set the conditions for the success of the offensive.

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The 3rd Cavalry was a battle hardened unit that had been fighting in Europe since August of 1944. Conversely, the 16th Cavalry Group was relatively new to the theater and possessed

⁶⁵ Dobbins, "Mopping Up An Enemy Pocket," 9-10.

⁶⁶ U.S. Forces, European Theater Study No. 49 (Appendix 19).

virtually no combat experience. Thus, command of the organization fell to Colonel James H. Polk, commander of the 3rd Cavalry Group and a highly experienced officer who had proven his abilities after more than six months of combat operations.⁶⁷ The mission of the 316th Cavalry Brigade was to fill a gap between the XX Corps left flank and the XII Corps right flank along the Moselle River and conduct an area security operation until the start of the offensive. Once conditions were set for the attack, they would then participate in the Third Army offensive.⁶⁸ In addition to the 3rd and 16th Cavalry Groups, the 316th also received additional reinforcements of field artillery, engineers, and tank destroyers as well as an air support party and a direct support artillery group.⁶⁹

Colonel Polk organized the brigade with the 3rd and 16th Cavalry Groups arrayed online to conduct an attack to seize key terrain as part of XX Corps role in the army offensive. To cover the line, he placed the 3rd Cavalry on the left and the 16th Cavalry on the right along the defensive line. Thus situated, the 316th Cavalry Brigade followed the 94th Infantry Division on the attack at 1800 on March 13, 1945.⁷⁰ This phase of the operation was primarily conducted with dismounted forces in the lead and lasted through March 15. As the Brigade advanced against significant enemy opposition, the terrain narrowed and the 43rd Squadron passed into brigade reserve. Upon reaching the Ruwer River, it was found that all bridges had been destroyed by retreating German forces. Due to the discovery of a suitable ford site in the vicinity of Geizburg by the 94th Infantry Division, however, the 19th Cavalry Squadron was able to move across the river and position tanks to support dismounted attacks against Sommerau and Morcheid.⁷¹

⁶⁷ U.S. Forces, European Theater Study No. 49, (Appendix 19), 1.

⁶⁸ U.S. Forces, European Theater Study No. 49, (Appendix 19), 1.

⁶⁹ 3rd Cavalry Group (Mecz.) AAR for March, 1945. Dated April 1945. (Abilene, KS: Eisenhower Library, Box 519), 10-15. Hereafter referred to as 3rd Cavalry Group AAR Appropriate Month, 1944-1945.

⁷⁰ 3rd Cavalry Group ARR, March 1945, 16.

⁷¹ U.S. Forces, European Theater Study No. 49, (Appendix 19), 1-2.

As the advance continued, the terrain continued to hinder the use of mechanized vehicles by the attacking cavalry and favored the defenders who occupied well prepared positions overwatched by artillery. Despite stiff resistance from defending German forces, the 316th Cavalry Brigade continued to press the attack to gain key terrain with reconnaissance troops continuing to fight as dismounted cavalry closely supported by light tanks, tank destroyers, assault guns and combat engineers. Attacks against the brigade's intermediate objectives were then carried out by troopers mounted on the outside of light tanks and as high ground and towns were seized, mechanized elements rapidly advanced to harass and cut off retreating German forces. Working to mass the effects of the combined arms team formed by the attachment of armor, engineers, and artillery, the 316th Cavalry Brigade continued the attack in support of the 94th Infantry Division despite the lack of any attached infantry and only limited dismounted cavalry forces.⁷²

As a result, after eight days of continuous action across a seven mile front, the provisional brigade advanced ten miles, inflicted significant casualties on defending enemy forces and cleared a key road network. This mission set the conditions for the 12th Armored Division to pass forward and exploit the initial success of the attack. Consequently, on March 18, 1945 the 316th Provisional Cavalry Brigade was dissolved and the 16th Cavalry Group assumed responsibility for what had been the brigade's area of operations during the attack. The 3rd Cavalry then passed temporarily into the Supreme Headquarters, Allied Expeditionary Forces Reserve after more than three months of constant combat operations.⁷³ Although the brigade had existed for just over one week, its contributions to the overall operation were significant. In fact, the 3rd Cavalry Operations After Action Report for the Month of March, 1945 reported that several German prisoners of war interrogated by Third Army had indicated the Germans believed

⁷² U.S. Forces, European Theater Study No. 49, (Appendix 19), 1-2.

⁷³ 3rd Cavalry Group ARR, March 1945, 21-22.

that instead of a reinforced provisional cavalry brigade they had actually been facing a standard U.S. infantry division.⁷⁴

Analysis

The mechanized cavalry was able to perform the missions highlighted in the previous three examples largely because of the innovative manner in which they employed limited assets. Although the mechanized cavalry groups, like the rest of the army, was comprised largely of draftees, the Cavalry retained a solid cadre of leaders who possessed a wealth of experience gained during decades of service. Despite the bias for and against mechanization, those young officers and troopers who served in the cavalry of the interwar years learned the lessons of its predecessors well.⁷⁵ The traditional attitude and mindset of the American cavalryman remained relatively unaltered during the transition from horse to mechanized units. Consequently, on the eve of the Second World War, the small United States Cavalry was none the less a versatile force capable of both mounted and dismounted operations.⁷⁶ Accordingly, the commanders that led mechanized cavalry groups and squadrons across Europe were well versed in the tradition of being inventive and flexible in the application of cavalry doctrine.

The institutional culture that carried over from the deeply instilled cavalry principles of the interwar period, coupled with American ingenuity and perseverance resulted in an adaptive force capable of independent missions in support of offensive operations and thus made mechanized cavalry groups invaluable force multipliers for tactical commanders in Europe.⁷⁷ Although dismounted infantry could cover any terrain given time and were not restricted to roads,

⁷⁴ 3rd Cavalry Group ARR, March 1945, 22.

⁷⁵ Edward M. Coffman, *The Regulars: The American Army, 1898-1941*. (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2004), 267-271.

⁷⁶ Lucian K. Truscott, Jr., *The Twilight of the U.S. Cavalry*. (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1989), 183-186.

⁷⁷ Truscott, *The Twilight of the U.S. Cavalry*, 189-190.

they lacked the mobility and communications backbone of the lightly armored and radio heavy mechanized cavalry. Likewise, even though armored formations could move rapidly and communicate over vast distances in the offense, they did not possess the capability to dismount forces and move through restricted terrain when required. Cavalry units on the other hand, were uniquely flexible on the battlefield and were able to pioneer new methods to employ cavalry formations effectively in the conduct of offensive operations. This adaptable organizational structure allowed cavalry group commanders to better integrate the mobility and firepower of assigned squadrons and other attached units. Consequently, mechanized cavalry groups were able to rapidly maneuver and seize the initiative in a manner that the slow-moving dismounted infantry and the fast but frequently road bound armored formations could not match. This organizational flexibility would also play a significant part in determining the role of mechanized cavalry groups during defensive operations.

The Cavalry in Defensive Operations

Among the most popular and enduring images of cavalry are those found in days of old when brightly uniformed regiments of superbly mounted cavalymen swept across the battlefield with sabers and lances glittering in the sun to penetrate and exploit enemy lines, ride down fleeing infantry and capture abandoned artillery and key infrastructure.⁷⁸ In fact, this was a common enough sight on battlefields of Europe from Rossbach during the Seven Years War to Waterloo in the Napoleonic era.⁷⁹ The mounted cavalry charge as well as the “*aufklarung*” or “the cavalry in reconnaissance” were the preferred and dominant roles of cavalry throughout much of western history. Numerous examples from other battlefields, however, show us that for centuries the cavalry performed missions other than reconnaissance in support of larger defensive operations.⁸⁰

Throughout military history, armies engaged in defensive operations have frequently been plagued by the age old problem of being forced to defend large areas with limited forces. Therefore, commanders frequently relied upon flexible cavalry formations to make up for the deficits in manpower common to fighting in the defense. This was certainly true as Brigadier General John Buford sought to hold defensible terrain and delay the lead division’s of Confederate General A.P. Hill’s III Corps until the arrival of Union General John Reynolds’ I Corps during the first day of the battle of Gettysburg on July 1, 1863.⁸¹ By using a combination of reconnaissance and counter-reconnaissance operations, coupled with mobility and firepower to cover large areas yet still mass smaller formations into a larger unit to achieve a shock effect in areas where risk could be accepted, specialized cavalry formations habitually developed the

⁷⁸ Donn A. Starry, “Introductory Essay” in *Through Mobility We Conquer: The Mechanization of the United States Cavalry*, 2.

⁷⁹ Robert M. Citino, *The German Way of War: From the Thirty Years War to the Third Reich*. (Lawrence: The University of Kansas Press, 2005), 72-82.

⁸⁰ Jarymowycz, *Cavalry From Hoof to Track*, 55-56.

⁸¹ Stephen W. Sears, *Gettysburg*. (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2003), 163-164.

ability to secure the bulk of the army with a high degree of proficiency. Over time, this adeptness evolved into accepted and critical missions of the cavalry in providing the commander with economy force options while fighting in the defense.

According to the 2008 edition of FM 3-0 *Operations*, forces generally assume the defense to defeat an enemy attack and gain time for only as long as it takes to set the conditions necessary to resume the offensive or transition to stability operations.⁸² As such, missions conducted while in the defense require specialized tasks performed by specifically trained organizations in order to allow other units to resume the offensive as soon as conditions allow. Paramount among these special undertakings are security operations.⁸³ The 2008 edition of FM 3-0: *Operations* defines security operations as those missions “undertaken to provide early and accurate warning of enemy operations, to provide the force being protected with time and maneuver space within which to react to the enemy, and to develop the situation to allow the commander to effectively use the protected force.”⁸⁴ Security operations and their associated tasks are therefore an inherent component of the defense.

Army doctrine is also clear on the importance of cavalry formations in the defense and describes the importance of cavalry and assigns them a wide variety of tasks in support of the commander. According to the 1996 version of FM 17-95, *Cavalry Operations*, “Cavalry units normally perform security missions for the defense or reconnaissance missions to support attacks. Cavalry units frequently perform defensive operations as a part of these security and reconnaissance missions, or when they are required to defend as an economy of force.”⁸⁵ They

⁸² U.S. Department of the Army, FM 3-0: *Operations*, 3-10. The direct quote from U.S. Army doctrine stipulates that “*Defensive operations* (italics in original text) are combat operations conducted to defeat an enemy attack, gain time, economize forces, and develop conditions favorable for offensive or stability operations.”

⁸³ U.S. Department of the Army, Field Manual 17-95: *Cavalry Operations*, 6-1.

⁸⁴ U.S. Department of the Army, FM 3-90: *Tactics*, 12-0.

⁸⁵ U.S. Department of the Army, Field Manual 17-95: *Cavalry Operations*, 6-1.

conduct these operations for the following reasons: to enable the higher headquarters by gaining time, allow the higher commander to concentrate forces elsewhere, help to wear down the enemy as a prelude to future offensive operations, maintain control over key and decisive terrain, and retain control of important objectives.⁸⁶

During the Second World War, the mission of cavalry units as outlined in the 1941 edition of FM 100-5, *Field Service Regulations*: FM 100-5 and again repeated without modification in the 1944 edition, specified that cavalry units conduct both reconnaissance and security operations.⁸⁷ Neither of these manuals, however, mentioned the role of the cavalry in the defense except to state that cavalry was capable to seizing and holding terrain for brief periods of time until other forces could move forward and relieve them. Moreover, Army doctrine during the Second World War limited the role of mechanized cavalry to reconnaissance, with horse cavalry responsible for all other cavalry tasks. The removal of horse cavalry squadrons from mechanized cavalry groups in 1942, created a gap in Army doctrine.⁸⁸ This gap resulted in a shortfall between the capabilities of available cavalry units and the expectations of senior field commanders who required more from available cavalry units.⁸⁹

Units primarily equipped to perform the reconnaissance function found themselves at a crossroads as senior commanders realized the critical nature of the expanded role cavalry organizations were playing on the battlefield of France. Despite the limitations of mechanized cavalry groups in terms of manpower, organic vehicles and equipment, they possessed a predisposition to action and the routine attachments of units such as tank destroyer and armor

⁸⁶ U.S. Department of the Army, Field Manual 17-95: *Cavalry Operations*, 6-2.

⁸⁷ U.S. War Department, FM 100-5: *Field Service Regulations: Operations*, 1941, 6-7. In the 1944 version of this same manual, the previous shortfall was not remedied, despite reports from the field that acknowledged the deficiency.

⁸⁸ DiMarco, *The U.S. Army's Mechanized Cavalry Doctrine in World War II*, 21.

⁸⁹ Hoffman, *Through Mobility We Conquer*, 335-337.

battalions.⁹⁰ This made mechanized cavalry groups the logical choice to conduct the security tasks inherent to defensive operations.

Despite the continued arrival of additional divisions and supporting troops, the large area that had been covered by fast moving U.S. armored divisions and the vast size of the frontline held by regular infantry divisions, resulted in entire segments of France that were either cautiously bypassed or intentionally unoccupied by advancing Allied forces. The security operations conducted by mechanized cavalry groups, however, served as tactical enabling missions to facilitate the accomplishment of the operational objectives of corps and army commanders and helped to mitigate the risk posed by bypassing certain areas of France.⁹¹

Mechanized cavalry groups frequently found themselves provided with additional forces and tasked to protect assets critical to the corps or army headquarters as they prepared to resume offensive operations and regain the initiative.⁹² This situation was especially true when the offensive operations initiated by Operation COBRA and the breakout from Normandy ground to a halt as fast moving armored units across France outran the struggling supply system and ran out of gas and spare parts. This shortfall forced many Allied units to transition to defensive operations nearly in sight of the German frontier in order to protect the force and avoid culmination.⁹³

Controlling the Breakout – Patton’s “Household Cavalry”

An example of the role of the cavalry in independent operations during the defense occurred in Lieutenant General George S. Patton’s Third Army in the summer and fall of 1944. As the pursuit of Nazi forces across France ground to a halt literally in sight of the German

⁹⁰ McGrath, *Scouts Out!*, 98-100.

⁹¹ U.S. Department of the Army, FM 3-90: *Tactics*, 2001, 12-0.

⁹² U.S. Forces, European Theater Study No. 49, 7. The executive summary of this report indicates the frequency with which these units found themselves reinforced with additional combat multipliers.

⁹³ Blumenson, *Breakout and Pursuit*, 696-702.

border, it became necessary for the Allied force to surrender the initiative as the advancing forces literally outran overstretched supply lines. Corps commanders were faced with no option but to transition from the pursuit to a mixture of predominantly defensive operations.⁹⁴ During this frustrating period, which would become known as the Lorraine Campaign in the 21st Army Group sector, American division and corps level commanders needed to reduce isolated, yet extremely formidable, enemy strong points in fortified towns, such as Nancy and Metz while still defending against the possibility of a coordinated German counterattack. Throughout this period one interesting task that stands out among those conducted by mechanized cavalry groups were the missions conducted by the 6th Cavalry Group in support of Third Army.

General Patton, a career cavalryman, staffed his headquarters with likeminded officers who adhered closely to traditional cavalry principles.⁹⁵ These officers understood the importance of maintaining understanding on a rapidly changing battlefield and recognized the risk of confused reports and the possible negative implications of missing an opportunity. Consequently, Patton and his staff turned to the cavalry to assist in battle command. Thus, in early 1944, while still in England and prior to the rapid pursuit across France that summer, General Patton had decided to task the 6th Cavalry Group to serve as what Third Army termed the Army Information Service and sometimes referred to as Patton's "household cavalry."⁹⁶ In this capacity, the two squadrons assigned to the 6th Cavalry Group, the 6th and 28th Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadrons, rotated through missions where they moved throughout the area of operations and provided Third Army headquarters with critical up-to-date information on the situation and the current locations and activities of subordinate corps and divisions.⁹⁷

⁹⁴ Christopher Gabel, *The Lorraine Campaign: An Overview, September-December 1944*. (FT Leavenworth: The Combat Studies Institute Press, 1985), 4-8.

⁹⁵ Weigley, *Eisenhower's Lieutenants*, 180-181.

⁹⁶ Hoffman, *Through Mobility We Conquer*, 343-344.

⁹⁷ Hoffman, *Through Mobility We Conquer*, 343-344.

Although not a primary role addressed in doctrine, reports generated by the Army Information Service proved invaluable to the headquarters as they tracked the progress of units moving out of Normandy and across France.⁹⁸ The ability of the 6th Cavalry Group to disperse its mobile mounted forces throughout the Third Army area of operations and communicate via radio kept Third Army headquarters in touch with commanders in the field, improving command, and increased Patton's understanding of the evolving situation. The information gathered by the actions of the 6th Cavalry Group provided General Patton and his staff with near real time intelligence on both friendly and enemy activities that allowed the headquarters to operate in Lorraine. What is more, the role of the 6th Cavalry Group (Mechanized) as the Army Information Service is the only documented use of a mechanized cavalry group directly in support of an army level headquarters during the Second World War.⁹⁹

Covering the Flank – The 4th Cavalry Along the Siegfried Line

Another example of the role played by mechanized cavalry groups to provide the commander with an economy of force effort in the defense occurred between September 16 and October 2, 1944. Following the sustained pursuit of retreating German forces, and significant success as a heavily reinforced task force, the 4th Cavalry Group found itself transitioning to the defense in order to conduct security operations in support of VII Corps. The 4th Cavalry Group conducted a screened the heavily defended German town of Aachen. The Group consisted of the 4th and 24th Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadrons and was reinforced by the 759th Light Tank Battalion (-), the 87th Armored Field Artillery Battalion, the 635th Tank Destroyer Battalion

⁹⁸ Dean A. Nowowiejski, *Concepts of Information Warfare in Practice: General George S. Patton and the Third Army Information Service, August-December, 1944*. (School of Advanced Military Studies, United States Army Command & General Staff College, Fort Leavenworth, KS, 1995), 24-27, 31-34.

⁹⁹ McGrath, *Scouts Out!*, 119.

(Towed), and two companies of the 297th Engineer Battalion (Combat). Its objective was to protect the VII Corps right flank during the attack of the Siegfried line.¹⁰⁰

For the next two weeks, the 4th Cavalry Group (Mechanized) conducted a mobile defense. The 24th Squadron focused its efforts in the northwest in the vicinity of the Monschau Forest while the 4th Squadron operated primarily to the southeast in the vicinity of the Buchholz Forest.¹⁰¹ The missions included dismounted reconnaissance to locate enemy patrols and fighting positions, assess destroyed bridges, as well as identify obstacle belts throughout the area. Due to the heavily restricted nature of the terrain, the majority of operations were dismounted and both squadrons relied heavily upon the use of inter-connected strong points reinforced by tank destroyers and over-watched by tanks patrolling to the rear of the main line of resistance.¹⁰²

Frequently the cavalry troop encountered enemy positions consisting of well positioned and dangerously hidden pillboxes and concrete anti-tank obstacles known as “dragon’s teeth.” Moreover, patrols often came up against German patrols attempting to penetrate the cavalry screen line. It then fell to the troopers of the 4th Cavalry Group Task Force to reduce identified enemy positions, roadblocks and other obstacles that impeded lines of communications in the area. Consequently, the mobile nature of the defense required the cavalry group to conduct aggressive counter-reconnaissance patrols to locate, engage and defeat enemy patrols in the area. In fact, on 17 September, the 24th Squadron repulsed at least one company sized enemy counterattack against its positions within the screen line.¹⁰³ Moreover, during this same period, the 4th Cavalry’s area of operations continued to increase and on 18 September, 1944, the Group zone expanded from 18 to 25 kilometers in width, and included the small towns of Hofen and

¹⁰⁰ U.S. Forces, European Theater Study No. 49, 8-9.

¹⁰¹ Tully, *Doctrine, Organization, and Employment of the 4th Cavalry Group During World War II*, 69.

¹⁰² Tully, *Doctrine, Organization, and Employment of the 4th Cavalry Group During World War II*, 70-71.

¹⁰³ U.S. Forces, European Theater Study No. 49, 8-9.

Alzen, and would remain this size until the end of September. In order to better secure the flank of the Corps, along this large front, the 4th Cavalry Group engaged in a series of operations designed to deceive enemy forces in the area and convince them that the U.S. units defending in the area were far stronger than they actually were.¹⁰⁴

Though overshadowed by the main effort of the remainder of VII Corps and the First Army, the importance of this defensive effort by the 4th Cavalry Group cannot be understated. Reinforced with artillery, tanks, engineers, tank destroyers and other supporting assets, it provided VII Corps with the ability to employ the principle of economy of force in the west and still successfully mass forces against the German positions to the east. A testament to the capabilities provided by this reinforced cavalry group occurred when the First Army ordered another unit to relieve the 4th Cavalry Group. In order to control the same area of operations after the penetration of the Siegfried Line required the entire V Corps to control the 4th Cavalry Group's previous sector.¹⁰⁵

Shaping the Fight – Task Force Polk sets the conditions along the Moselle River

A further noteworthy example of using mechanized cavalry groups to achieve economy of force during defensive operations can be found in the actions of the 3rd Cavalry Group (Mechanized) which was attached to the XX Corps of Patton's Third Army from August 1944 to the end of the war. On 19 September, 1944, the 3rd Cavalry was, in accordance with the naming convention of the period, designated Task Force POLK, after the commander of the Group, Colonel James H. Polk. As a task force, the 3rd Cavalry Group received self-propelled artillery, tank destroyers and engineers and the mission of protecting the XX Corps area of operations

¹⁰⁴ Tully, *Doctrine, Organization, and Employment of the 4th Cavalry Group During World War II*, 70-71.

¹⁰⁵ Tully, *Doctrine, Organization, and Employment of the 4th Cavalry Group During World War II*, 71.

along the Moselle River between Grevenmacher and Thionville.¹⁰⁶ The 3rd Cavalry Group would continue to operate as a reinforced task force in support of corps operations for the next five months. In this capacity, the 3rd Cavalry Group primarily conducted security operations, protecting the corps flanks in conjunction with units such as the 83rd Infantry Division.¹⁰⁷

The flexibility of the 3rd Cavalry Group allowed Major General Walker to concentrate his tactical divisions in the defense in the critical sector. The capture of key German strong points, including the heavily fortified city of Metz between Nancy and the Moselle River in turn set the conditions for a resumption of the offensive towards Germany.¹⁰⁸ It is interesting to note that out of a period of 211 days in combat, the group spent 119 days in the conduct of defensive operations compared to only 22 days on the offense and a mere 8 days in purely reconnaissance operations.¹⁰⁹

By the fall of 1944, the stalemate in the Lorraine region had taken a terrific toll on the Allied forces. The shortages in fuel, ammunition and other supplies, however, had begun to come to an end, and with units reinforced with replacements the situation was about to change. As October 1944 came to an end, logistics had improved and with the weight of two corps massed at key points against the Moselle River, the U.S. Third Army was ready to resume the offensive against the German forces defending across the river in Germany. General Patton commenced the offensive by launching two divisions of General Walker's XX Corps in a offensive designed to gain an expandable bridgehead on the east side of the Moselle and pass through the remainder of

¹⁰⁶ Williams, *Chronology: 1941-1945*, 280.

¹⁰⁷ 3rd Cavalry Group AAR, November, 1944.

¹⁰⁸ 3rd Cavalry Group AAR, September and October 1944.

¹⁰⁹ U.S. Forces, European Theater Study No. 49,, Appendix 3, p. 16.

the Third Army to route remaining German forces and isolate the Saar-Moselle triangle from further re-enforcement.¹¹⁰

Among the multitude of interesting operations conducted by Task Force Polk was a relatively unknown but vitally important mounted and dismounted attack to seize the small German town of Berg across the Moselle River on November 4 and 5, 1944. Late on the evening of 3 November, the 3rd Cavalry Group received an operations order directing the Task Force to clear the small German town “without delay”.¹¹¹ Berg represented a key piece of terrain situated in a valley on the west bank of the Moselle River which controlled high ground that allowed German artillery observers to bring accurate fire against U.S. troops moving into forward assembly areas. As such, it represented an important objective that needed to be captured early on in order to facilitate the onward movement of XX Corps forces across the river.¹¹²

Less than four hours after receiving the corps order, Task Force Polk had issued orders of its own. These orders tasked the 43rd Squadron to conduct the attack on Berg and ordered the 3rd Cavalry Squadron to relieve the 43rd Cavalry Squadron of its defensive mission no later than dawn on November 4, 1944.¹¹³ As ordered, Company F of the 43rd Squadron moved forward prior to first light and conducted the relief in place as planned and enabled the 43rd Squadron to advance from assembly area positions in a coordinated attack to seize key positions in the vicinity of Berg which would facilitate the capture of the town itself and allow Task Force Polk to pass the divisions of XX Corps through to continue the attack on the east side of the Moselle.¹¹⁴ The initial operations, however, proved limited in nature as elements of A Troop, 43rd Cavalry

¹¹⁰ Hugh M. Cole. *The Lorraine Campaign*. (Washington, D.C.: The Center for Military History, 1950), .

¹¹¹ 3rd Cavalry Group AAR, November, 1944, 1.

¹¹² 3rd Cavalry Group AAR, November, 1944, 2-3.

¹¹³ In accord with existing conventions and traditions in the Army, organizations with additional attached forces were frequently referred to as Task Forces named after the Cavalry Group Commander.

¹¹⁴ 3rd Cavalry Group AAR, November, 1944, 2-3.

Squadron, operating without the benefit of artillery and engineer support, attacked to seize the high ground. Although troops captured objectives short of the town on November 4, a German counterattack soon wrestled control over the area back from the lightly armed dismounted cavalymen. The 3rd Cavalry Group was forced to revise their plans and conduct a subsequent attack on the morning of November 5 after being forced to withdraw with five troopers wounded and five more believed to have been taken prisoner in the counterattack.¹¹⁵

During the second attempt to seize Berg and the associated key terrain, the 3rd Cavalry reinforced the 43rd Squadron with combat engineers and utilized attached artillery, tank destroyers to weight the main effort with indirect fires against the objective prior to and during the attack. Once the conditions had been set, the 43rd Squadron attacked with F Company and B Troop in the lead and directly supported by the Squadron assault gun troop, to seize the town. Despite being initially pinned down by a high volume of fire from the enemy defenders, the Squadron's attack was successful and the dismounted force of cavalymen and combat engineers was able capture Berg and the high ground in the vicinity by noon on 5 November.¹¹⁶

Analysis

The examples provided by the 3rd, 4th and 6th Cavalry Groups clearly demonstrate that these organizations routinely performed tasks not included in their doctrinal tasks as mechanized formations, but that were in fact, traditional cavalry operations addressed in doctrine as security operations for execution by horse cavalry units. Additionally, it is evident that despite the structural limitations of these units, they were highly valued for their adaptive nature and proven capabilities as enablers that allowed the commander to generate economy of force. Moreover, the skill with which these units accomplished their mission demonstrated a high level of

¹¹⁵ 3rd Cavalry Group AAR, November, 1944, 3.

¹¹⁶ 3rd Cavalry Group AAR, November, 1944, 3-4.

understanding in regards to the commander's need to concentrate forces for decisive operations against the enemy while maintaining the ability to prevent German forces from capitalizing on opportunities to strike weaker areas of corps and divisional areas of operations.

Infantry formations trained and practiced in the conduct of the defense, could adequately hold terrain and conduct a static defense. Likewise, armored formations, with their numerous tracked vehicles, possessed the ability to conduct mobile defensive operations when the terrain allowed. What they lacked, however, was the unique mixture of capabilities found in the mobile cavalry squadrons and their habitually attached engineers, tank destroyers and artillery that allowed cavalry groups to perform both static and mobile defensive operations as an economy of force. Based on the small size and limited capabilities of the mechanized cavalry group, necessity became the mother of invention. In defensive operations, cavalry groups frequently linked small and thinly spread dismounted strong points located at key location such as crossing sites and bridgehead and intersections. These often isolated positions were then linked by radio and frequently patrolling to close the gaps and supported by the light tank companies operating as a mobile reserve with the assault gun companies frequently consolidated and operating in conjunction with other supporting artillery assets.¹¹⁷

This creative employment of limited forces was a keeping with the finest traditions of the American cavalry and resulted in freeing up infantry and armor formations for future offensive operations. The inherent flexibility and ability of these organizations to perform independent operations in support of the higher commander proved the value of specialized cavalry organizations. As all three examples discussed above demonstrate, mechanized cavalry groups in the Second World War retained the ability to function in a highly versatile manner and possessed a capacity to conduct offensive missions that far exceeded organizational capabilities. The successful effort of the cavalry groups in the face of adversity thus laid the groundwork for the

¹¹⁷ DiMarco, *The U.S. Army's Mechanized Cavalry Doctrine in World War II*, 89-90.

organization of the far more capable Armored Cavalry Regiments and Divisional Cavalry Squadrons that served effectively in the U.S. Army in Vietnam, and Operations DESERT STORM and IRAQI FREEDOM.

The Cavalry in Stability Operations

U.S. soldiers, including cavalry units, have been engaged in what the Army terms stability operations since the birth of the nation. In fact, although overshadowed by major combat events such as the War of 1812 and the Civil War, the majority of operations conducted by the U.S. Army prior to its entrance into the Second World War were stability oriented.¹¹⁸ To this end, throughout the first 120 years of United States history, U.S. Cavalry units conducted operations along the frequently expanding frontier and played a large role in the enforcement of government policy and the maintenance of law and order.¹¹⁹ When America gained control of what amounted to an overseas empire in the former Spanish possessions of the Philippines, Puerto Rico and Cuba, the prominence of stability operations continued as regular and militia forces deployed to pacify hostile populations and implement U.S. national policy.¹²⁰ As a nation with a historically small regular army, the cavalry frequently conducted these operations as economy of force efforts which allowed senior commanders to control vast areas of operations with a minimum force while still retaining the ability to use the mobility of the cavalry to mass when required.

Current U.S. Army doctrine defines stability operations as “various military missions, tasks, and activities conducted outside the United States in coordination with other instruments of national power to maintain or reestablish a safe and secure environment, provide essential government services, emergency infrastructure reconstruction, and humanitarian relief.”¹²¹ Current U.S. Cavalry doctrine, also addresses stability operations, and stresses the importance of intelligence preparation of the battlefield, flexibility and the need to adapt to perform non-

¹¹⁸ Lawrence A. Yates, *The US Military's Experience in Stability Operations, 1789-2005*, Global War on Terrorism Occasional Paper 15. (Fort Leavenworth, KS: Combat Studies Institute Press, 2006), 1.

¹¹⁹ Yates, *The US Military's Experience in Stability Operations, 1789-2005*, 2-7.

¹²⁰ Yates, *The US Military's Experience in Stability Operations, 1789-2005*, 7-9.

¹²¹ U.S. Department of the Army, FM 3-0: *Operations*, 3-12.

doctrinal operations in support of the higher headquarters.¹²² Based on these doctrinal references, it is easy to imagine just how many types of situations encountered towards the end of prolonged major combat operations in Europe would have fallen under this operational characterization. Although not covered by any of the doctrine employed by mechanized cavalry groups during the Second World War, these units occasionally found themselves conducting stability operations as the defeat of Nazi Germany loomed ever closer.

With the onset of America's entrance into a second major war in less than a quarter century, the lessons of stability operations learned in places such as the Philippine Islands were shelved as the Army focused on the planning and execution of major combat operations across the globe as part of the Rainbow Plans developed in the 1920's and 1930's and the far-reaching Victory Plan of 1941. Although the majority of the operational planning efforts were focused on campaigns designed to compel Nazi Germany and the Empire of Japan to surrender unconditionally, U.S. Army planners recognized the importance of preparing the initial plans for post war operations in Germany and Japan. To this end, planners began to outline a way ahead for post war operations on the continent as early as 1943.¹²³ Out of this planning Operation ECLIPSE was developed to guide the military occupation and serve as the foundation of stability operations in Germany in the post hostilities environment.¹²⁴ This planning effort was focused primarily on the administration of occupied territory and the restoration of functioning civil governments, although recognizing that some effort would have to be made even before the cessation of hostilities came to pass, initial steps were taken to address security concerns.

¹²² U.S. Department of the Army, FM 17-95: *Cavalry Operations*, 7-13-7-15.

¹²³ Oliver F. Frederiksen, *The American Military Occupation of Germany, 1945-1953*. (Heidelberg, GE: Headquarters, US Army Europe, 1984), 1-2.

¹²⁴ Frederiksen, *The American Military Occupation of Germany*, 2-3

Improvise, Adapt and Overcome – The U.S. Cavalry in Germany, 1945

As early as April 1945, mechanized cavalry groups assigned to the U.S. Fifteenth Army began to conduct missions in support of stability operations in occupied portions of Germany even as fighting continued elsewhere.¹²⁵ In the eyes of some senior leaders the perfect formation for that task of providing security and enabling security in “Frontier Command” operations was the mechanized cavalry group.¹²⁶ Based on the cavalry group’s mobility and combat experience, these organizations proved very versatile and easily adapted its methods to conduct the continuous patrols necessary to gather information and maintain a continuous U.S. presence in the wake of advancing Allied forces. This, in turn, generated the conditions required for specialized Civil Affairs detachments and other supporting units to operate freely in the wake of advancing Allied forces and commence stability operations.

Among the cavalry units selected by the Fifteenth Army to provide for the security of stability operations during this period was the 16th Cavalry Group (Mechanized). This unit, a veteran of months of hard campaigning, served during the hectic final weeks of the war in Europe as a combat reserve force tasked to support other Fifteenth Army units conducting stability operations behind the main line of resistance.¹²⁷ In another instance, the 15th Cavalry Group (Mechanized) found itself attached to the XVI Corps and working with the corps Artillery to enable civil affairs governmental operations throughout the entire Ninth Army area of operations.¹²⁸ Once again, the versatility of the mechanized cavalry provided Army and Corps Commanders with the ability to mass divisional combat forces at decisive points during the final drive into Germany. According to the official U.S. Army history of the first year of the

¹²⁵ Brian A. Libby, *Policing Germany: The United States Constabulary, 1946-1952*, dissertation (Ann Arbor, MI: UMI Dissertation Services, 1977), 8.

¹²⁶ Libby, *Policing Germany*, 8-9.

¹²⁷ *Occupation in Europe Series, Part One*. (Frankfurt, GE: Office of the Chief Historian, 1945), 198, hereafter cited as *Occupation in Europe, Part One*.

¹²⁸ Williams, *Chronology: 1941-1945*, 504.

occupation, the efforts of cavalry groups such as the 15th and 16th Cavalry, in facilitating initial stability operations, was critical to setting the conditions required for military governance units to begin operations.¹²⁹ Throughout the final weeks of the war in Europe, the employment of cavalry groups in an economy of force role allowed the Fifteenth Army to maintain control across an area that spanned more than 14,000 square miles by May 7, 1945.¹³⁰

Other cavalry groups also found themselves embroiled in the infancy of stability operations as they moved ahead and along the flanks of advancing U.S. forces deeper into Germany. Although not acting in an official capacity, cavalry groups occasionally received the surrender of German towns, and as a vanguard of the advance, were the first to begin working with Germany local authorities. Once such instance occurred on May 4, 1945 when the 43rd Mechanized Cavalry Squadron of the 3rd Cavalry Group actually coordinated the surrender of the German town of Neumarkt located near the Inn River by telephone.¹³¹ This event took place less than ninety-six hours from the end of the war in Europe and was representative of the circumstances other combat units, including mechanized cavalry groups, became embroiled in during the twilight of the fighting in the European Theater of Operations.

Keeping the Peace – The U.S. Constabulary in Occupied Germany

As soon as hostilities ended and the formal surrender of Germany to the Allies was accepted, U.S. Army units across Europe found themselves re-tasked to perform missions to stabilize war-torn Germany and set the conditions for the eventual return of a civilian government. Organized into five field armies comprised of sixty-one divisions, the 1,600,000 combat troops of the United States Army in Europe quickly set about executing the guidance of the American government and began to see to the security and well-being of the people of

¹²⁹ *Occupation in Europe, Part One*, 203-204.

¹³⁰ *Occupation in Europe, Part One*, 203-204.

¹³¹ Williams, *Chronology: 1941-1945*, 531.

Germany. Despite the force size, however, the more than three million service men and women in Europe at war's end would face numerous challenges in successfully completing this trying task. By the fall of 1945, the magnitude of this difficulty had fully manifested itself as more and more soldiers and units departed the European Theater and returned to the United States.¹³²

By January 1, 1946, the number of soldiers available in Europe had dropped to 622,000 as a result of demobilization and although the initial plan for the zone of occupation called for more than thirty-three Army divisions to maintain control, further directives from the War Department dropped the number of troops in Germany to 133,000 on July 1, 1946.¹³³ Moreover, the American Zone of Occupation consisted of more than 40,000 square miles, including over 1,400 miles of international and regional boundaries, and contained over sixteen million Germans as well as more than 500,000 displaced persons.¹³⁴ As discipline unraveled among the war weary veterans remaining in Europe and their undertrained replacements, discontent also began to grow among the German people. United States Forces European Theater recognized the importance of maintaining control and set about the development of an organization capable of maintaining security in support of the stability operations conducted to rebuild Germany.¹³⁵

As a result of planning conducted throughout the months of September and October 1945, United States Forces European Theater elected to utilize existing U.S. Army units in Germany and form a flexible military organization capable of conducting policing operations throughout the American Zone of Occupation.¹³⁶ Recognizing that the mission would be an

¹³² Libby. *Policing Germany*, 4-6.

¹³³ Benjamin James Harris, *The United States Zone Constabulary: An Analysis of Manning Issues and Their Impact on Operations*, (Masters of Military Art and Science Theses Collection, Fort Leavenworth, Command & General Staff College, 1996), 1.

¹³⁴ Kendall D. Gott, *Mobility, Vigilance, and Justice: The US Army Constabulary in Germany, 1946-1953*, Global War on Terrorism Occasional Paper 11. (Fort Leavenworth, KS: Combat Studies Institute Press, 2005), 2-7.

¹³⁵ Gott, *Mobility, Vigilance, and Justice*, 2-7.

¹³⁶ Harris, *The United States Zone Constabulary*, 18-23.

economy of force effort, and that mobility would be critical to the success of the organization, the determination was made to base the unit organizational structure on the framework provided by the table of organization and equipment for the mechanized cavalry groups already in existence. Modifications were then made as required to fit the needs of this new organization. To this end, the United States Occupation Zone Constabulary was formed and on January 18, 1945 Major General Ernest N. Harmon, a cavalry officer with extensive combat experience in both the First and Second World Wars, was selected to command the new organization.¹³⁷

With a hard-charging commander and a small but capable staff, the Constabulary began to come together as an organization in April 1946 with the goal of commencing operations on or about 1 July 1946.¹³⁸ United States Forces European Theater leaders selected existing mobile formations, among them, five of the remaining mechanized cavalry groups in Germany to form the core of the Constabulary.¹³⁹ These groups, the 2nd, 6th, 11th, 14th and 15th Cavalry Groups (Mechanized) would bring with them the cavalry traditions they had inherited from the pre-war cavalry as well as the hard won lessons learned by the veterans of mechanized cavalry operations during the fighting across Europe. These traditions and experiences, reinforced by General Harmon's dynamic leadership style, would transcend the issues caused by the eventual high personnel turn-over rate and contribute to the lasting professional reputation of the troopers and the enduring legacy of the U.S. Constabulary.

The U.S. Constabulary performed a wide range of functions throughout the U.S. Zone of Occupation in accordance with its mission statement which directed them to:

maintain general military and civil security, assist in the accomplishment of the United States Government in the occupied U.S. Zone of Germany, (exclusive of the Berlin District and Bremen Enclave) by means of an active

¹³⁷ *Occupation in Europe, Part One*, 173.

¹³⁸ Harris, *The United States Zone Constabulary*, 25.

¹³⁹ William E. Stacy, *U.S. Army Border Operations in Germany, 1945-1983*. (Heidelberg: Headquarters, U.S. Army Europe and Seventh Army, 1983), 19 and 25-27.

patrol system prepared to take prompt and effective action to forestall and suppress riots, rebellion, and acts prejudicial to the security of the U.S. occupation policies and forces, and maintain effective military control of the borders encompassing the U.S. Zone.¹⁴⁰

This broad and inclusive mission statement provided the Constabulary with the basic guidance needed to initiate operations and set the tone for the manner in which the organization would function throughout its existence.

Among the more prominent routine missions of the U.S. Constabulary forces in the U.S. Zone of Occupation were mounted and dismounted patrolling and border control.¹⁴¹ The Constabulary also regularly conducted show of force missions, and search and seizure operations.¹⁴² In essence, these missions differed only slightly from many of those conducted by mechanized cavalry groups during the war. All of these operations were undertaken to promote security and enable the continuation of the reconstruction efforts throughout Germany as occupying U.S. forces worked to eventually transition control back to the new German government in the decade following the end of the Second World War. These operations did more than just protect the Germans from one another. The wide range of missions conducted by the U.S. Constabulary also helped to maintain control over U.S. soldiers stationed in Germany as well and helped to reduce the troublingly high rate of incidents of black market racketeering by U.S. servicemen that detracted from the legitimacy of the continued American presence in Germany.¹⁴³

An example of the major operations conducted by elements of the U.S. Constabulary was Operation DUCK. Conducted on December 18, 1946, operation DUCK was a search and seizure

¹⁴⁰ Libby, *Policing Germany*, 31.

¹⁴¹ Stacy, *U.S. Army Border Operations in Germany*, 29-31.

¹⁴² Libby, *Policing Germany*, 32-34.

¹⁴³ Harold Zink. *The United States in Germany, 1944-1955*. (New York, NY: D. Van Nostrand Company, Inc., 1957), 136-139.

operation conducted at the displaced persons camp in Wildflecken, Germany approximately ten miles south of Fulda. This particular camp was the largest of its kind in the U.S. Zone of Occupation and had been experiencing an increased crime rate, ranging from murder and rape to assault and black market activities in the months leading up to the operation.¹⁴⁴ The purpose of the mission was to restore order, arrest those engaged in criminal activity, remove any contraband items found and demonstrate the continued resolve of the U.S. Occupation forces to maintain law and order.¹⁴⁵ This operation also served as one of the first major tests of the U.S. Constabulary and provided an opportunity to validate its capabilities and competency in the enforcement of law and order in occupied Germany.

The Constabulary selected the 14th Constabulary Regiment of the 3rd Brigade to carry out the operation and utilized two troops from each of the three squadrons, supported by five troops from the 1st Brigade's, 68th Squadron to conduct the mission. All told, more than 1,600 troopers of the U.S. Constabulary would take part in the operation.¹⁴⁶ The operation itself was simple but very well organized. The plan tasked individual units to separate tasks, including the search of the cantonment area itself, guarding prisoners and captured contraband, crowd and riot control, and traffic control.¹⁴⁷ Operation DUCK began at 0700 on 18 December 1946 as scheduled and in quick order the more than 1,500 troopers assigned to the mission descended upon the camp, achieving complete surprise. Despite the thorough and meticulous search of the camp and all suspicious inhabitants, the operation yielded little in the way of arrests and contraband. Illegal items seized during the mission included only a small number of weapons, some livestock, roughly \$1,000 dollars worth of illegal food supplies, \$500 of stolen U.S. Army property and

¹⁴⁴ Gott, *Mobility, Vigilance, and Justice*, 21.

¹⁴⁵ Gott, *Mobility, Vigilance, and Justice*, 21.

¹⁴⁶ Libby, *Policing Germany*, 83.

¹⁴⁷ Gott, *Mobility, Vigilance, and Justice*, 22.

several large stills used to produce illegal schnapps.¹⁴⁸ Despite the limited material results of Operation DUCK, the meticulously planned and well-executed endeavor had far reaching results as the crime rate in the area virtually evaporated in the wake of the mission.¹⁴⁹

In addition to enabling law and order in local communities and enforcing the occupation, the U.S. Constabulary also served as an example to the newly developing local German police agencies and played a major role in developing German Land Border Police.¹⁵⁰ Throughout the duration as the Constabulary's existence, they worked closely with these emerging organizations, conducted combined training, monitored the actions of the police in enforcing law and order among the civilian population and coordinated major combined operations.¹⁵¹ In fact by March 1947, the U.S. Constabulary turned over primary responsibility for much of its border patrol duties to the Border Land Forces operating throughout the U.S. Zone of Occupation.¹⁵²

Analysis

Following the disbandment of the U.S. Constabulary after six years of fast-paced operations, the basic units upon which the formation had been built were returned to their original configuration or absorbed into other pre-existing conventional units.¹⁵³ Based on some of the lessons learned during the Second World War and captured as recommendations in General Officer Report No. 49, however, three of the five Constabulary Regiments which had been initially formed from existing mechanized cavalry groups were later reorganized into the 2nd, 6th and 14th Armored Cavalry Regiments.¹⁵⁴ As the direct descendants of the mechanized cavalry

¹⁴⁸ Gott, *Mobility, Vigilance, and Justice*, 21-22.

¹⁴⁹ Gott, *Mobility, Vigilance, and Justice*, 23.

¹⁵⁰ Stacy, *U.S. Army Border Operations in Germany* 33-35.

¹⁵¹ Libby, *Policing Germany*, 34-36.

¹⁵² Stacy, *U.S. Army Border Operations in Germany*, 33.

¹⁵³ Harris, *The United States Zone Constabulary*, 43-44.

¹⁵⁴ Harris, *The United States Zone Constabulary*, 66 and 119.

groups, these armored cavalry regiments as well as the 3rd and 11th, would once again serve as economy of force efforts along the tense border between East and West Germany.

In existence from 1946 to 1953, the Constabulary never reached its proposed strength of 38,000 personnel, yet they operated across the entire American Zone of Operation.¹⁵⁵ The commitment of less troops to the task of providing security allowed the Army to maintain the ability to mass up to three divisions to initially meet any threat posed by domestic unrest or to deter the possibility of Soviet aggression during the critical period of initial stability operations conducted to rebuild Germany.¹⁵⁶ The U.S. Constabulary met the desire of the U.S. War Department to conduct the occupation of Germany with the smallest possible force while still retaining the ability to respond to a resurgent Germany or acts of external belligerence; namely from the USSR and its satellite republics.

The establishment and service of the U.S. Army Constabulary in the U.S. Zone of Occupation remains an excellent example of economy of force while retaining the ability to mass when required at the decisive point of the operation. The diligent efforts of the Constabulary helped to deter black market activities, civic unrest, and contribute to the good order and discipline of American troops for a fraction of the manning cost associated with the initial plan which had called for the maintenance of a large field force organized into two armies.¹⁵⁷ Although there were numerous units to choose from to create the United States Constabulary, none of them possessed an innate flexibility or an enduring institutional experience that could match that of the mechanized cavalry groups. During its service, the Constabulary came to represent, as the organization's motto proclaimed, the "mobility, vigilance, and justice" of the U.S. Army in Europe as a result of its hard work in support of stability operations.

¹⁵⁵ *Occupation in Europe, Part One*, 142.

¹⁵⁶ *Occupation in Europe, Part One*, 143.

¹⁵⁷ *Occupation in Europe, Part One*, 122.

Conclusion

The demands of 21st century military operations require an organization that is trained and equipped for independent offensive, defensive, and stability operations. The examples contained within this monograph, drawn exclusively from the Second World War, stand as timeless illustrations of the critical role that cavalry organizations have always played in the U.S. Army and mistakes we have made in the past. These historical examples demonstrate the necessity of the Army possessing cavalry organizations trained, equipped and resourced to accomplish much more than reconnaissance. Since Operation DESERT STORM, the Army has struggled to determine the right force structure to ensure victory in an uncertain world. Today, arguments similar to those advanced in the years preceding the involvement of the United States in the Second World War have once again come to the forefront. As such, the role cavalry formations play currently and what they will accomplish in the future maneuver force has been the center of a great deal of debate.¹⁵⁸

Since the late 1990's, arguments over the composition of reconnaissance forces have dominated the cavalry question.¹⁵⁹ These assertions depend upon "perfect" intelligence and a predictable enemy, discounting the timeless human dynamic of warfare, and all while seeking to determine the relevance of the human element in reconnaissance operations. Meanwhile, as the debate has raged, the Army continues to seek ways to capitalize on the immense array of technological advancements provided by unmanned aerial vehicles and other remote sensors being developed in conjunction with recently fielded initiatives such as the wheeled and highly digitalized Stryker Fighting Vehicle.

It is critical, however, that the structure of the future force not limit cavalry organizations to reconnaissance missions alone. Rather, the broader role of the cavalry in offensive, defensive

¹⁵⁸ Jarymowycz, *Cavalry from Hoof to Track*, 222-225.

¹⁵⁹ McGrath, *Scouts Out!*, 177-184.

and stability operations must be considered and the value of these formations in previous conflicts must not be understated when looking ahead to the future. It is not sufficient to presume that non-cavalry organizations can execute traditional cavalry missions such as the guard, cover and screen as well as specially trained and equipped units.¹⁶⁰

Among the most common points of feedback from brigade combat teams in Iraq and Afghanistan is the fact that the current Reconnaissance, Surveillance, and Target Acquisition Squadrons organic to Stryker and those Armored Reconnaissance Squadrons assigned Heavy Brigade Combat Teams are too small and improperly resourced to conduct full spectrum operations. Much like their predecessors during the Second World War, modern cavalry formations have been designed primarily for reconnaissance “out of contact” and require significant augmentation in manpower and equipment in order to do more than stealthy reconnaissance missions and to accomplish full spectrum operations.¹⁶¹ To retain combat ready formations with the ability to conduct a full spectrum of operations, steps must be taken to sustain the valuable skill sets, training and equipment required to perform cavalry missions on the battlefields of future conflicts.

U.S. Army officers who have recently studied cavalry units within the modular force have also found these organizations lacking in their ability to accomplish reconnaissance and security operations within the intent of senior commanders.¹⁶² Concerns like these are not limited solely to the halls of Army academia. Just as commanders in the European Theater of Operations recognized that both the doctrine and organizational structure of cavalry and reconnaissance units was insufficient for what they faced, commanders serving in the field in Iraq and Afghanistan

¹⁶⁰ McGrath, *Scouts Out!*, 184.

¹⁶¹ United States Army Armor Center, “White Paper for Full Spectrum Cavalry Regiment,” 1-3.

¹⁶² MAJ Thomas W. Cipolla, *Cavalry in the Future Force: Is There enough?* SAMS Monograph. (School of Advanced Military Studies, United States Army Command & General Staff College, Fort Leavenworth, KS, 2004), abstract and pp.1-2. Throughout this monograph MAJ Cipolla reviews the structure of the Unit of Action (UA) cavalry units that evolved into the modular force for the Infantry, Heavy and Stryker Brigade Combat Teams.

have also noted deficiencies in the structure of their current cavalry organizations. Their comments have made it back to the Armor Center and the former commander, Major General (Retired) Terry L. Tucker, noted that the U.S. Army is moving from a capable ground-based organization uniquely trained to accomplish cavalry missions, to a variety of sensors and unmanned aerial vehicles.¹⁶³ Tucker further stated that this shift to technology driven reconnaissance operations and the growing belief that armored and cavalry units were archaic and out of place on the modern battlefield was “hogwash.”¹⁶⁴

As the 2009 Army Capstone concept states “the Army must design forces capable of fighting across the depth and breadth of the area of operations.”¹⁶⁵ These capabilities currently exist in the armored cavalry regiment which, due to its pending reorganization into a Stryker based infantry brigade within twenty-four months, will soon remain cavalry in name only. Moreover, the Battlefield Surveillance Brigade which is intended to capitalize on advances in technology and replace the armored cavalry regiment as the primary reconnaissance and security force in support of division and corps units has not been resourced with the equipment and manning to accomplish the mission.¹⁶⁶

Serious attention must be paid to whether or not current and future formations as well as the troopers who will man them will be up to the challenge of skillfully performing missions that provide economy of force.¹⁶⁷ As a recent white paper written by the U.S. Army Armor Center

¹⁶³ Jarymowycz, *Cavalry from Hoof to Track*, 224-225.

¹⁶⁴ Jarymowycz, *Cavalry from Hoof to Track*, 225.

¹⁶⁵ United States Army Training and Doctrine Command, Pamphlet 525-3-0, *The Army Capstone Concept Operational Adaptability: Operating under Conditions of Uncertainty and Complexity in an Era of Persistent Conflict 2016-2028*. 21 December 2009, 18. Hereafter referred to as TRADOC Pamphlet 525-3-0, December, 2009.

¹⁶⁶ United States Army Armor Center, “White Paper for Full Spectrum Cavalry Regiment,” 1. The Battlefield Surveillance Brigade is comprised mostly of intelligence functions and lacks the ability to effectively employ human reconnaissance formations, fight for information and adequately conduct area security operations.

¹⁶⁷ MAJ J. Bryan Mullins. *Defining the Core Competences of the U.S. Cavalry*. (School of Advanced Military Studies, United States Army Command & General Staff College, Fort Leavenworth,

noted, the lessons of major combat operations can easily be forgotten when the conflict transitions into a less kinetic situation.¹⁶⁸ During recent combat operations in Iraq, the 3rd Armored Cavalry Regiment has performed a variety of functions as an economy of force asset. During its first tour in support of Operation IRAQI FREEDOM, the regiment controlled roughly one-third of Iraq. Subsequently, while serving on its second deployment to Iraq, the 3rd Cavalry, minus its 3rd Squadron which served in South Baghdad, again provided economy of force to the higher commander by operating in the strife ridden city of Tal Afar and much of the Nineveh Province in Northern Iraq, stabilizing the area with a fraction of the resources allocated to other areas of Iraq. The 3rd Cavalry also operated across a vast area of operations in Northern Iraq during its third deployment from 2008 to 2009.¹⁶⁹

Our nation is likely to experience future conflicts similar to those in Iraq and Afghanistan. In December 2009, General Martin Dempsey, commander of the U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command, acknowledged the need for the Army to be “capable of seeing and fighting across the depth and breadth of an area of operations” all while conducting area security over vast areas and supporting a wide range of stability focused tasks.¹⁷⁰ In the 2009 Army Capstone Concept, Dempsey stresses the importance of being able to operate in a decentralized manner and conduct combined arms operations that “develop the situation, seize

KS, 2004), Abstract and pp.1-2. Mullins examined the role of cavalry units from troop to regiment in the U.S. Army and sought to determine how valuable these formations were in performing their doctrinal missions of reconnaissance and security operations. Among the core arguments of MAJ Mullins is that similar to the Cavalry branch during the interwar years; modern cavalymen are too encumbered by parochialism to seriously redefine the Army cavalry formations for the 21st century.

¹⁶⁸ United States Army Armor Center. “White Paper for Full Spectrum Cavalry Regiment,” 2. This White Paper was written as part of an effort to persuade the Chief of Staff of the Army of the importance of organizing a modular cavalry regiment capable of performing across the full spectrum of operations.

¹⁶⁹ United States Army Armor Center, “White Paper for Full Spectrum Cavalry Regiment,” 2.

¹⁷⁰ TRADOC, Pamphlet 525-3-0, December, 2009, 18.

and retain the initiative under uncertain conditions” to achieve success.¹⁷¹ The correct force to accomplish these tasks is a cavalry organization.

Cavalry organizations are not platform specific, but rather consist of a variety of equipment tailored to execute traditional cavalry missions. At its core, Cavalry means adaptive units comprised of highly trained individuals that can proficiently execute traditional cavalry tasks, including but not limited to reconnaissance and security operations. Drawing on the proven capabilities of the combined arms team, cavalry organizations are empowered by specialized training to accept operating on the flanks and ahead of friendly units. The capabilities of trained cavalry units cannot be replaced or compensated for by any measure of advanced technology. Ideally, cavalry blends the human element and technology to accomplish its mission.

The ability to perform reconnaissance and security operations entails significant training and resources, coupled with experience, to inculcate a unit with the capability to effectively conduct these cavalry centric operations. Traditional cavalry missions such as the guard, cover and screen are complicated operations requiring significant coordination and attention to detail learned through specific classroom instruction and numerous repetitions during field exercises. This individual and collective expertise is gained over time and cannot simply remain resident in manuals and historical documents until once again required on a future battlefield. The focus on counterinsurgency operations as a result of operations in Iraq and Afghanistan has contributed to the degradation of these skills. Coupled with the idea that cavalry is basically synonymous with reconnaissance, and the continued debate over the need for cavalry specific organizations, this has weakened the Army’s ability to field a force proficient in both reconnaissance and security operations.

The question of how the Army will maintain the ability to conduct traditional cavalry operations is support of full spectrum operations as the “shelf life” of cavalry skills continues to

¹⁷¹ TRADOC, Pamphlet 525-3-0, December, 2009, 19.

reduce in a half-life like manner cannot go unanswered. In a matter of years those officers and noncommissioned officers who entered the service in the 1980's and 1990's and possess cavalry specific knowledge will begin to retire and leave a generation of officers, highly skilled in counterinsurgency operations, but relatively unversed in cavalry tactics, techniques and procedures. To these leaders will fall the responsibility of rebuilding and training the Army to conduct operations on future battlefields without the touchstone of a solid grounding in cavalry operations.

It is imperative that the conclusions drawn from the study of U.S. Cavalry operations in the European Theater not be forgotten as the force structure transforms to meet the challenges posed by current and future threats to national security. Regardless of the era of warfare, the enduring requirement for a force tailored to the full range of the economy of force role and the constant need to fight for information and conduct area security operations over extensive areas remains at the center of successful military operations. As the historical examples from the Second World War demonstrate our Army has learned these lessons the hard way in the past and it is essential that we adapt current transformation efforts to maintain and update a regimental or brigade sized cavalry organization capable of fighting and winning across the full spectrum of operations and inherently capable of economy of force operations that allow the commander to focus the majority of his effort at the decisive point of the operation.

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