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CAVALRY DUG IN

A commander should know the tools he has to work with. If he has an engineer battalion attached he should know what that engineer battalion is for. If he has a reconnaissance squadron attached he should also know what that is for. Too many commanders in World War II knew little or nothing of the proper employment of their subordinate units. I wish to present here a few instances that will bring out how a cavalry unit was misused in that war so that you as commanders may not at some time in your career assign your subordinate units tasks which they may not be able to perform, which consequently may cause a great disaster to you or may cause you to lose your command not because the lower units did not try hard enough or were not prepared but because you used them incorrectly.

On the other hand it may be necessary because of the situation to use outfits for certain tasks for which they were not trained. Many of them may do the job well in spite of training and save the day for you.

I will draw no conclusions here nor will any problem be solved because these problems are ever present and must be considered separately. I only wish for you to see how important it is to carefully weigh and consider the situation and the troops available. Know the capabilities and limitations of those troops, know the situation and then make a sound decision. Your success or failure as a commander depends on it.

During the recent war Cavalry Reconnaissance units were organized trained and equipped to perform reconnaissance missions. All other missions were considered secondary, but as a consequence of a solid front which developed in September of 1944 with no proper place to employ reconnaissance units, or because of the commanders improper concept of the missions cavalry was trained to do, many times cavalry found itself relegated to infantry missions such as dug in defense.

Defense was not a good mission as we lacked personnel to properly man these positions. We were organized to be employed mounted, therefore our platoons had only 28 men in them. There were three of these platoons, each organized the same. Making only 84 combat men, if we were at full strength, which of course was never the case. Because we were organized to fight mounted we had 41 vehicles. It took a headquarters platoon of 54 men to maintain all of these vehicles and their equipment. I will go into the organization of the troop headquarters platoon only generally and deal more specifically with the reconnaissance platoons as no headquarters platoon in the army is organized to fight anyway, except in an emergency. A platoon had 9 vehicles; 3 armored cars and 6 jeeps. Each armored car had a 37 MM gun, 1-50 cal machine gun and 1-30 caliber machine gun on it. Each of 3 jeeps had either a 60 mm or an 81 mm mortar on it, and a 30 caliber machine gun. Two of the three remaining jeeps had a 30 cal machine gun on them

and one had a 50 caliber machine gun. So 28 men had to man 8-30 caliber machine guns, 4-50 caliber machine guns, 3-37 mm guns, and 2 bazookas. Of the personnel there were 9 drivers, 3 radio operators, 3-37 mm gunners 6 mortar gunners, 6 machine gunners, 1 platoon leader. Everyman had more than just his job to do. For instance the 37mm gunner was also the operator of the 508 radio. The radio equipment included 3-506's 3-508's all mounted in m-8 armored cars and 3-510 radios mounted in $\frac{1}{2}$ ton trucks. Everyman except the jeep drivers and one man were armed with 30 caliber carbines. The jeep drivers were armed with 45 caliber sub-machine guns. That one man was armed with a rifle. Consider putting these highly specialized men in a dug in position. Is it any wonder that the new tables of organization included a squad of infantry in the platoon. Remember also that these men included non-commissioned officers and very few men were privates as all armored car drivers and all radio operators were either T/4s or T/5s.

As you can see we had tremendous fire power. I know of no other unit in the army who had so many and so diversified a collection of weapons. All machine guns could be dismounted but of course not the 37mm guns. First we will consider dismounting this unit and putting them in a defensive position. We leave the vehicles with the troop headquarters platoon back from the line in

a position where they are out of artillery fire and where they can be supplied or evacuated readily. I do not mean out of artillery range but ^{where} were they are not likely to draw fire because of the necessary activity that must go on around them. Think of the problem this motor park must be. It is highly detrimental to leave vehicles without servicing them, so that work had to go on. It was necessary to have the headquarters platoon perform 1st echelon maintenance on all vehicles, radios and equipment. Clean all guns that were left in the park, including the 37mm. They had to care for their own equipment, pull guard on the park and also perform their own jobs such as mechanic, supply Sgt., radio technician and the like.

During these periods the headquarters platoon usually consisted of the executive officer, who was assigned all of the additional duties of the troop, such as motor officer, supply officer, etc. This left the platoon leaders free to carry on their primary duty as platoon commander. The First Sergeant, who had all of his administrative duties to perform. The motor sergeant and mechanics. The mess sergeant and cooks, the radio technician and headquarters radio operators, the supply sergeant and his helper and ammunition handlers.

This may seem a sizeable rear echelon and perhaps was but it was a very necessary one as generally we went on the defensive immediately after an operation such as reconnaissance, flank security or the like. Therefore all vehicles and equipment needed repairs and maintenance badly. This gave the mechanics a great deal of work. The first sergeant had many records and reports to keep and prepare. The supply sergeant had to draw equipment, rations, ammunition etc. The mess personnel had to haul water, prepare food and deliver it to the front lines. The radio technician had many radios to repair and his job never ended. His job was highly specialized and to lose him would practically nullify any further mounted mission that might be assigned, as everything in reconnaissance depends upon getting the information back in a hurry or its no good and that means radios that work properly at the proper time.

As I mentioned before all of these men had to pull guard regardless of their job or rank. The rear echelon was usually located in an orchard or a small village and always set up a perimeter defense.

The troop commander had his command post on the front lines. He usually had with him, his driver, two radio operators, ~~within~~, ~~xxxxxxxxxxxx~~ and the communications sergeant. The CP was most generally an OP also.

The front line defense was always manned by all three of the reconnaissance platoons at one time as we never had a mission in the defense where two platoons could cover the sector. Usually the front line consisted of an M&R only as contact was so close that outposts could not be established.

With such a wide front and no reserve, except perhaps a troop back at squadron headquarters the higher commander was playing his cards rather slimly. Many times all of the 3 reconnaissance troops and the tank troops of the squadron were on the front and no reserve of any kind was maintained and there were no combat troops between the front and corps headquarters. ~~... the way we may not have had a division in reserve.~~

The assault gun troop generally set up in battery and supported us with artillery fire.

In the dismounted defense (^{we} three was a mounted defense) the three platoons organized the ground on key terrain features and were mutually supporting. Fire power consisted of 30 cal. and 50 caliber machine gun positions. Remember that each platoon only had one rifleman (although later in the war every man picked up an M-1 somewhere) so each position had a machine gun in it manned by two, three, or four men. Some positions also had Bazookas also.

In most defensive positions the platoons pooled their 6-60mm mortars and their 3-81mm mortars and set up a battery just behind the front lines from 100 to 400 yards. We had acquired 81mm mortars in place of 3-60s so that each platoon would have one 81. This battery set up worked quite well as we could plot barrages on the map and have the battery plot ^{lay on} them. This way we could get a mission fired with a moments notice. This also took 6 or 8 men from the front line platoon leaving them approximately 20 but it was more than compensated for by the increase in fire power. Two 60s and one 81mm mortar are quite a job for 6 or 8 men but they were well trained and performed their tasks remarkably.

We had gathered enough telephones on our campaigns to equip every hole with one. Wire was easy to get as we were non-divisional troops so the supply sergeant could go to the army supply dumps and get quite friendly with the rear echelon sergeant and get practically anything we needed.

Each platoon also put one to three 510 radios at its positions in case the telephones failed and immediate communication was needed. In the troop CP there was usually a 508 radio mounted on a jeep even if it had to be brought forward at night, dug in and camouflaged, as the Squadron CP was sometimes out of 510 radio communication due to the terrain, such as a hill mass.

rather than distance.

After a few hours in position fox holes became deeper and better fortifications. Overhead cover was provided by making roofs of lumber or doors torn from houses and covered with about 2 feet of dirt. As time went by sleeping niches or rooms were added where the men could sleep. The men never seemed to loaf but continued to improve their miserable positions a little more comfortable. If we were to occupy the positions for long the men would start digging toward each others positions making communications trenches. This facilitated control and made defense easier and of course kept the men busy which is important as nothing is more nerve wracking than the defense ^{particularly} ~~particuliary~~ over long periods of time.

Once in Germany near Julich the Germans were defending strongly along the east side of the Roer. We organized positions along a ridge about 800 yards from them, these positions were good and could be easily defended. The ground between us and the Germans was a flat open plain that had been leveled for farming. There was not even a fold in the ground and it was quite untenable, at least so we thought until the higher commander looked at his map, thought we were back too far and ordered us forward. The Germans had completed observation of this field and had cover and concealment for themselves. There were slight hills and much ^{foliage} ~~foliage~~ on their side of the river. It was

impossible to move on this field in the day time let alone move in and set up defensive positions. My troop drew the mission of going forward and occupying this no man's land. At dark we moved out and formed an MLR right in front of the enemy. We had started in when it was pitch dark which was about 1000 o'clock and had to be in before daybreak or the enemy would be sure to see us, we had to be as quiet as possible or he would hear us and all he would have to do to annihilate us would be to sweep the area with machine gun fire and lay artillery fire on the area. We could not possibly get out of such a trap.

We knew before hand that the enemy could see and recognize any fresh diggings in an open stubble field right under their eyes. By observing during the day time we had noticed a great number of shell holes in the area so we decided to chose our MLR along a general line of shell holes. Knowing that if there were no piles of fresh dirt to be seen we might be free from an enemy artillery barrage in the morning. As there was no way of concealing the fresh dirt as there was no grass or ^{foliage} ~~foliage~~ only stubble these ~~shell holes~~ we dug into the shell holes and hauled lumber on foot from a village about a mile away and covered the holes that night. In the morning not a new mound of dirt was to be found anywhere. In fact my squadron commander scanned the whole area with his glasses and could

see no positions nor any personnel this concerned him quite a bit as he had all kinds of ideas that we might be anyplace but the right one. A heavy fog began to set in along the river screening the Germans ^{So} and the "Old Man" immediately came forward to see as he put it "Where in the Hell "B" Troop was". When he found us he could hardly believe that we had so completely organized the area and camouflaged ourselves so well. The men had done a wonderful job, many of them had struck water only 3 feet from the surface and had to re-dig several positions before they found one dry enough to occupy. Morale and discipline had to be tops to continue to hold this position because no one could move around in the daytime and no fox hole could be dug deep enough for a man to stand up because of the close water table. All feeding, relief, supplying, exercise and personal elimination had to be done at night. We occupied these positions for about a week and not a round of enemy fire did we draw. The enemy never knew we had moved forward and dug in, but had he elected to cross the river and attack across this field he would surely have been surprised. Range cards were carefully made and final protective lines and fields of fire were so good that the Germans would surely have had considerable trouble cracking our light defenses. We were relieved by an infantry company who didn't believe it necessary to practice such good camouflage discipline as we did and consequently they received heavy artillery fire and suffered many casualties there.

In other positions patrolling was quite heavy by both sides. The Germans usually sent patrols of platoon size against us, equipped with light machine guns and panzer faust. They wore gloves and blue silk masks on their faces with only eye slits on their faces with only eye ^{slits} slits to see through. This made it very difficult to see them. The nights were cold, long and very dark so to aid us we set up extensive barbed wire entanglements and booby traps in front of us. The men derived every imaginable device to warn them of the enemies approach. Flares, noise makers- Grenades, TNT - mines and anything else possible was used.

In spite of these the Germans were quite good at getting through at night and getting patrols to the rear or raising Cain inside our defenses. One of their favorite tricks was to slip between or behind positions and open fire. We of course had to be cautious or we would fire into our own positions.

Our own patrols were usually small as we found that a few men were quieter, more cautious, less conspicuous and could slip away more easily if detected. Some of our patrols carried 536 radios. These probably worked better for cavalry than anyone else as we used our 506 radios at our end of the net. The 506 being more powerful the patrol could generally hear the base station. Also the 506 being more sensitive picked up the 536s transmissions pretty well. Other patrols that did not have too far to go sometimes carried a sound power telephone and a roll of light infantry

wire with them. This was especially good for listening patrols. It also helped the men to find their way back to their own lines as they could follow their own wire. The disadvantages to this are quite obvious. If the enemy detects that you are using wire, and finds the wire, he may easily ambush you on your way back. Many patrols carried no communications with them. This of course is not to be desired.

Many times defensive missions were executed wherein the vehicles were utilized on the front lines. In fact this was the rule rather than the exception where cover and concealment permitted.

Each platoon in this case organized three strong points. They were composed of their three reconnaissance teams. These teams each consisted of one armored car, (4 men) 1 scout jeep (2 or 3 men) and one mortar jeep (3 men). The armored car occupied the center position with a jeep on either side. The armored Car of course was armed with a 37mm gun, a 30 caliber machine gun and a 50 caliber machine gun (for anti-aircraft protection). Each of the jeeps had a 30 caliber machine gun which were dismounted. The 50 caliber on the Armored Car was also dismounted. Again the mortars were pooled in a troop pool or each platoon formed its 3 mortars into its own pool.

All vehicles were dug in. Jeeps were dug in mainly for their protection against small arms and artillery fire and for camouflage purposes. The Armored Cars were dug in for protection of the tires,

under carriage and engine, while the ^{turret} ~~turrent~~ was exposed offering a good hill down position. The Armored Cars were dug in to a depth just so the 37mm gun would clear the berm and afford grazing fire with ~~christer~~ ammunition.

Dug in vehicles also provided protection for the crews, although the crews dug their own individual lit trenches for their own protection.

Dug in vehicles, especially Armored Cars and tanks always drew a great deal of artillery fire. Occasionally a tank would get hit by an artillery shell and would burn up. This created quite a furor as the flames could be seen for miles around, and ammunition would explode all over ~~the~~ fire if at night would light up the country for hundreds of yards around. After hitting a tank on a defensive line the enemy never ceased trying to hit another. It seemed to give them great pleasure.

In conclusion keep in mind that you must know the capabilities and limitations of a subordinate command and its commander and ~~its commander~~ and employ them properly, realizing that a good outfit may well adjust itself to its task in spite of its limitations or it may be the cause of your downfall, these things you must weigh and consider carefully.