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MILITARY MONOGRAPH

TITLE: Operations of the 106th Cavalry Group in the
Forest of Parroy.

41-23

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By the late summer months of 1944, the Third U. S. Army offensive had carried well across France stretching supply lines almost to the breaking point. The Seventh Army had driven north from their beaches in Southern France and ground to a halt because of a critical shortage of the supplies necessary to continue the offensive. Both Armies had been directed to assume a defensive attitude and to await supplies and reinforcements before resuming the offensive. At the same time, it was decided by higher headquarters to strengthen the Sixth Army Group since it had only three corps and an extended front, and lacked both artillery and ammunition to adequately support sustained attacks by both the American Seventh and the First French Armies at the same time. As a result of this decision the XV Corps was assigned to the Seventh Army on 29 September, 1944. The Corps combat elements at this time consisted of the 79th Infantry Division, the Second French Armored Division, and the 106th Cavalry Group.

At the time the XV Corps was transferred to Seventh Army its mission was to protect the south flank of Third Army and to continue the advance in its zone, to clear the eastern approaches to the Vosges Mountains, and to secure ground favorable to launch an attack that would lead to the capture of STRASBURG and a clearing of the approaches to the Rhine River. After the transfer, this mission remained unchanged pending the issuance of a new operation order.

Partially because of the general stabilization on the whole Western Front, but mainly because of the lack of supplies, particu-

larly gasoline and artillery ammunition, the decision was made to clear the Forest of Parroy. Under more favorable conditions, the forest would have been bypassed because the terrain greatly favored the defender. In the First World War the position in the forest was never reduced. The attitude of the Germans who were captured here in this war was that they intended to repeat that performance.

The Forest of Parroy is located about $2\frac{1}{2}$ miles east of the north-south line joining LUNEVILLE and EINVILLE. It is about $7\frac{1}{2}$ miles from east to west and about $5\frac{1}{2}$ miles from north to south. It is characterized by dense woods and very thick underbrush, cut occasionally by very poorly maintained logging trails, fire breaks, and small clearings. Many of the field fortifications of the First World War remain in the forest and the Germans put them to good use in this war as well as in the last.

"On a cloudy afternoon it is a dark, forbidding place, a good home for the lost souls of all wars. (... .) We have our memories of Parroy, indelible ones which cannot be felt without being experienced: Foxholes half filled with water, enemy minefields so laid that even Germans didn't dare pick them up, incessant shelling that gave no respite, the rain, the cold and all the misery of hopelessness for the present."¹

On 28 September at 1045, 187 B-26 bombers flew over the forest, but because of the bad weather conditions, only 37 dropped their bombs, on the target. In spite of the failure of the bombers to carry out

1. The 106th Cavalry Group in Europe, 1944-1945, p. 61.

their mission, the attack by the 79th Infantry Division jumped off at 1400 hours and by dark had penetrated about 1 kilometer into the forest. The 106th Cavalry Group, meanwhile, had been given the mission to advance in zone and protect the left flank of the corps and maintain contact with the elements of the Third Army on the north.

On 28 September both squadrons, the 121st Squadron north of the MARNE AU RHIN canal and the 106th Squadron south of the canal, advanced to BAUZEMONT and the high ground overlooking BONNEVAL FARM respectively. Each squadron had a company of the 813 Tank Destroyer Battalion attached. Next day, 29 September, the 106th Squadron advanced to the high ground southwest of HENAMENIL. During the afternoon, an enemy column of tanks and trucks was observed moving west on the north side of the MARNE AU RHIN canal. The tank destroyers opened fire, knocked out the first and last vehicles, then proceeded to work on the rest of the column. When the smoke cleared away, the Germans had lost thirteen Mark IV tanks, two Mark V tanks, four self-propelled guns and two half tracks.

On 2 October, the 121st Squadron moved to the south of the canal and took up positions in the vicinity of HENAMENIL. Meanwhile, the 106th Squadron sent dismounted patrols into the northwest edge of the forest to maintain contact with elements of the 79th Infantry Division. Some small arms and mortar fire was encountered and the enemy was contained in order to protect the left flank of 79th Division. The next day patrols were sent out to determine the enemy dispositions in this



C.P. Troop A 106th Cav Ren Sq.



HOME SWEET HOME

sector of the forest. The main position of the enemy in this area was found in a road center and clearing in the northwest portion of the forest. This position was to be known as the "Circle" in the attack of the next day.

In the reconnaissance of the position, the 106th Squadron found three approaches to the position; one from the south, one from the southwest, and the other from the northwest. The plan of attack was to have Troops A and C attack from the south and southwest respectively, with Troop B attacking from the northwest and enveloping the enemy right flank. Each Troop was reenforced with a platoon of light tanks. Troops A and C jumped off on the attack and were immediately pinned down by small arms and mortar fire. The attack of Troop B, timed a little later than that of the other two troops, took the enemy by complete surprise and the battle of the "Circle" was ended. Total casualties for the enemy included 10 killed, 51 captured. Casualties for the 106th Squadron included 4 lightly wounded. It is interesting to note that among the prisoners taken was the first sergeant of the 3rd Company of the 2113 Panzer Grenadier Regiment and according to a roster of the company that the sergeant had in his possession when captured, the Squadron had accounted for every man in the company.

Following the action at the "Circle", patrols were sent out to maintain contact with the withdrawing enemy and to feel out the next position which he would establish. Indications were that his retreat was rapid but orderly. Extensive use of anti-tank and anti-personnel

mines made progress through the forest very slow and tedious. During nearly all phases of this operation the weather was cloudy or rainy which made the forest a quagmire and hampered the movement of all vehicles. At times, tanks and Jeeps were the only vehicles that could move.

On 8 October, reconnaissance patrols found the second main position of the Germans in the forest, at a "V" shaped notch on the north edge of the forest. For the attack, this position was given the name of the "Horn." The plan called for the 121st Squadron to attack south-east along the south bank of the ETANG DE BASSUPRE with two troops, each reinforced with a platoon of tanks. Two troops, similarly reinforced, of the 106th Squadron were to attack north guiding on the road TRANCHE DE MILIEU. The attack jumped off according to plan and the 121st Squadron ran into many anti-tank and anti-personnel mines. Pressing on, they were finally pinned down at the edge of the clearing by small arms and mortar fire. The troops of the 106th Squadron were committed and pressed the attack across the clearing, supported by the fires of the 121st Squadron and the combined fires of the Assault Gun Troops of both Squadrons. The attack was successful and the position was consolidated by 1800. The Germans lost 23 prisoners and an undetermined number of killed and wounded. The Group had 18 men wounded, one of whom died of wounds a few days later, and two tanks were lost. Coordination between the two squadrons was very difficult because of the very dense woods. The trees, close as they were and

wet from the incessant rains, completely absorbed all radio transmissions from both the 508 radios in the tanks and the 536 radios carried by the dismounted personnel.

Following the attack on the "Horn" it was decided by the Group commander to employ one squadron in the forest and hold the other in reserve in order to rest, reorganize, and perform some much-needed maintenance on the vehicles. The Squadrons were rotated weekly and, aside from the problems encountered in effecting the relief of the squadrons, there is not much to be learned tactically from this phase of the operation. Logistically, however, the problems were complex. The Army of "General Mud" was our greatest enemy. In support of each Squadron, when it was in the forest, was one combat engineer company. This company was continually kept busy putting corduroy on the roads. One road especially, which ultimately was known as "U. S. Highway Number 1", was particularly bad. Trees from one and one half inch in diameter to three inches diameter were used as corduroy on this road and each night it would sink completely out of sight. The only vehicles which could get all the way to the front line troops were the light tanks and horse-drawn wagons which were requisitioned from the French farmers. Inasmuch as every time a tank was moved, artillery was placed on our positions, horse-drawn wagons were used for resupply in the front line positions.

In relieving squadrons in positions the dismounted elements of the reconnaissance troops would get into position and in covered fox-

holes before the tank would move in or out of position. In this manner, casualties from the artillery fires resulting from the movement of tanks could be reduced.

During the entire operation in the forest, the Assault Gun Troops of the squadrons were employed as a troop firing indirect fire missions. During the relief of squadrons, a liaison airplane attached to the group from Corps Artillery, was used to fire the initial registration of the troops. On other days, weather permitting, the liaison plane was up observing and adjusting artillery fires on all movement of enemy troops.

One lesson was learned the hard way during this phase, that is-- during a slow moving situation in a heavily mined area, absolute control must be exercised over the civilians. At this time, the weather was cold and damp, fuel for the French homes was in short supply, and the forest was a very tempting source of fire wood. One Frenchman, yielding to the temptation, stepped on a mine and was wounded. A rescue party was sent to recover the wounded man, and despite care, one man in the rescue party stepped on a mine--2 men were killed and three men were wounded. Following this episode, the Group commander issued proclamations in all towns forbidding French people to enter the forest and established patrols to enforce the provisions of the proclamations.

Finally, following a month of small local actions and infinitesimal daily advances, the eastern edge of the forest was reached

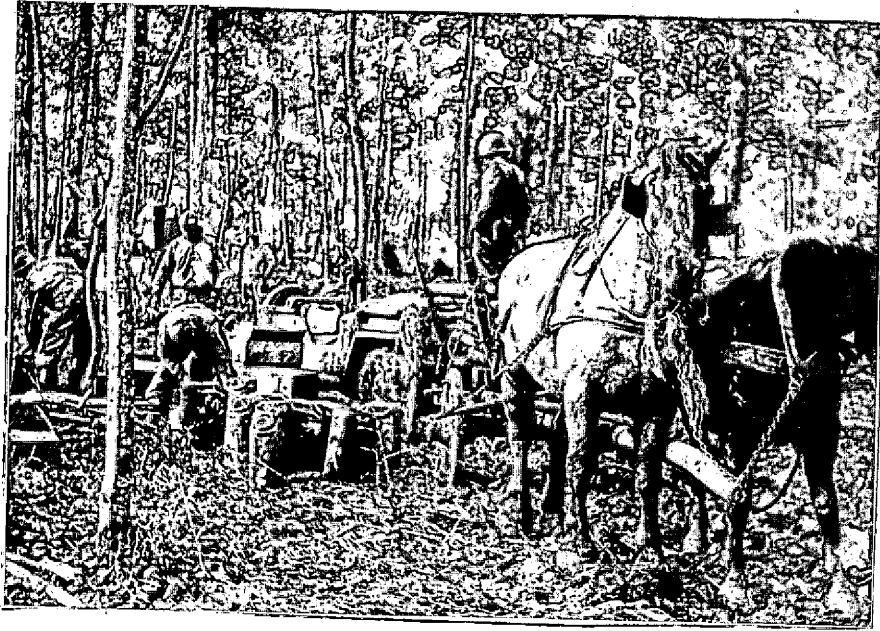
on 10 November. At about the same time, the 44th Infantry Division, which had replaced the 79th Division, reached the edge of the forest in their sector. XV Corps commander ordered an attack on 11 November to break out of the forest. In support of the Corps and firing preparations, all during the night of 10-11 November, were 14 battalions of Corps Artillery, 2 Battalions of Tank Destroyers, and the combined artillery of the 79th and 44th Infantry Divisions. Preparation fires started at about 2100 on 10 November and lasted without interruption until 0600 hours, 11 November. The morning of 11 November, the 106th Squadron occupied VAUCOURT, and attacked two troops, each with a platoon of light tanks attached, abreast to clear the BOIS DE TILLOT and BOIS DE LA CHARBONNIERE.

In the attack on the BOIS DE TILLOT, the platoon of tanks and one reconnaissance platoon moved around the north edge of the woods, then down the road through the center of the woods. This force quickly overran about 20 Germans in the cemetery, another 10 Germans in the western tip of the woods and completely enveloped a road block in the center of the woods. The remainder of the troop attacked up the road through the center of the woods pinning down the defenders of the road block.

Meanwhile, to the south, B Troop pressed forward on the BOIS DE LA CHARBONNIERE. Initially, the only enemy reaction to this attack was artillery fire. The Troop Commander wisely moved his troop forward fast under this fire and as a result suffered very few casualties.

Only light covering forces were encountered in the BOIS DE LA CHAR-
BONNIERE and these were very quickly overrun.

Following these two actions, the Group assembled and moved to
the south on a new mission and the battle in the FOREST OF PARROY
was ended.



THE SUPPLIES ROLL IN



WET FEET

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