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TITLE: **15th CAVALRY RECONNAISSANCE SQUADRON IN THE ARDENNES OFFENSIVE**

SCOPE: **16 December 1944 to 1 January 1945.**

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18th CAVALRY RECONNAISSANCE SQUADRON IN THE AACHEN OFFENSIVE

Effective 22nd October, 1944, the 18th Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron was attached to the 2nd Infantry Division and directed to reorganize Task Force X in the vicinity of Manderfeld, Belgium. The squadron minus "B" Troop, (attached to a Regimental Combat Team of 2nd Infantry Division), Company "A", 612th Tank Destroyer Battalion, 1st Reconnaissance Platoon, 612th Tank Destroyer Battalion, 2nd Reconnaissance Platoon, 612th Tank Destroyer Battalion, Cannon Company, 9th Infantry, and an Unnumbered Company Belgium Secret Army, comprised the task force. Task Force X was assigned approximately 9,000 yards in the defensive sector along the Siegfried Line on the left flank of the 2nd Infantry Division. Missions assigned were, to maintain and improve present defensive positions and the Siegfried Line, to locate enemy outposts, observation posts, prepared defenses, to reduce the activity of German patrols, and to capture prisoners.

On 23rd October, the unnumbered Company Belgium Secret Army, was relieved from attachment to the Task Force and assigned other duties. Cannon Company 9th Infantry was relieved by the 275th Armored Field Artillery Battalion, ^{which was} placed in direct support.

The sector was organized as follows: 1st Platoon Troop "A", to occupy defensive positions at Kobscheid. Troop "A" (-) to occupy Ester. Troop "G" to occupy Krewinkel, Afst, and to set

up a platoon position between these two towns. Company "A" 612th Tank Destroyer Battalion to occupy positions at Berterath and Lansarath, and to maintain contact on the squadron's left flank, with the 9th Infantry Division by patrols. Squadron Headquarters, Headquarters and Service Troop, and Company "F" occupied Manderfeld, and "E" Troop was in firing positions on the edge of town.

During the period 22nd October, to 30th November, patrols were active on both sides and there was a constant exchange of artillery fire. A total of 365 V1's and V2's passed over the area, flying generally northwest. Two V1's crashed and exploded in Manderfeld, causing considerable damage.

Engineer assistance was given by the 2nd Infantry Division to improve defensive works. Automatic weapons and mortar positions were dug in and sandbagged. Defensive fires for mortars, The Assault Gun Troop, and the 275th Armored Field Artillery Battalion were plotted and fired in.

Several prisoners were taken and generally identified as being from replacement battalions, and the 15th Volksgrenadier Division, however, two were taken from the Penal Company 1st S. S. Division. Prisoners from the 15th Volksgrenadier Division stated that key personnel in the division and most officers were from the German Regular Army.

From 1st December, to 15th December, increased resistance to Task Force X patrols was encountered. There was a marked increase in enemy artillery and flare activity. Buss bomb activity, however, gradually decreased.

During the hours of darkness, many reports were received and sent to higher Headquarters of the sound of heavy tracked vehicles along the entire sector front. Following is a record of these reports:

5th December, 1944. "Our unit in Afst reported the sound of heavy tracked vehicles in the vicinity of Losheim, during the hours of darkness."

10th December, 1944. "The sound of motors and tracked vehicles were again heard by our units in Roth."

11th December, 1944. "The sounds of motors were again heard in the vicinity of Losheim by our position at Roth."

Similar reports were received and forwarded on subsequent days. On 13th December, motor and track noise was heard in the vicinity of Scheid and Ormont, and on 14th December, along the Ormont-Hallschlag road.

At 1500 hours, 11th December, the 106th Infantry Division and Task Force X was relieved from attachment to the 2nd Division. Company "A" 520 Tank Destroyer Battalion, closed in the Task Force area and relieved Company "A", 612th Tank Destroyer Battalion, and took over their positions at Berterath and Lanzarath.

On 12th December, the 14th Cavalry Group assumed command and responsibility for the Task Force X sector including 15th Cavalry

* After/after Action Report, 15th Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron (Moss).

Reconnaissance Squadron (less Troop "B" attached to the 423rd Infantry Regiment, 106th Division), the 275th Armored Field Artillery Battalion, and Company "A", 820th Tank Destroyer Battalion.

During the early morning hours of 15th December and 16th December, 1945, nothing indicated the powerful thrust that was soon to be made against the sector. Artillery fire was very light, flare activity was as usual. At 0513 the first blow was released. After a signal of two red flares an intense barrage of all types of artillery, mortar and rocket fire was opened. The barrage first struck the forward positions, then rolled in to the positions at Manderfeld.

After this heavy preparation, artillery in decreased amounts was received on all positions. At 0600 enemy infantry attacks in strength were made against the position of Troops "A" and "G", but were repulsed by 0700 with heavy casualties to the attacking force. At 0730, after a short artillery preparation, all forward positions were again attacked by wave after wave of German infantry clad in white cloaks which were difficult to see against the white background of the snow and the cold fog of the early morning.

Troop "A" at Roth, reported that the German infantry at that position was supported by nine Mark IV tanks and that our anti-tank positions had been destroyed. Troop "A" was directed to hold their positions at all costs and that no help other than artillery support could be expected.

At 0830 the 3rd Platoon of Company "F" (light tank) was ordered to proceed to Weckerath in support of Troop "G". It was necessary

that this platoon fight its way into the "C" Troop position as it was by that time surrounded. The platoon arrived at Weckerath without loss, immediately placed fire on ever approaching lines of white clad Germans, with machine gun and 37 mm cannister and high explosive fire.

By 1000, the enemy had encircled all "A" and "C" Troop positions and had launched a general attack in the direction of Lanzarath and Berterath, that part of the Task Force X sector occupied by Company "A", 820th Tank Destroyer Battalion. This attack was supported by several self-propelled weapons.

Company "F" (-) was then placed on the high ground on the east edge of Manderfeld to bring attacking forces under fire, that had by-passed our forward positions, and were advancing on the Squadron Command Post at Manderfeld. Prepared defensive positions at Manderfeld were manned by all available personnel except those of the Medical Detachment.

Reports had been received by 1230 that all forward positions of the Task Force were surrounded. Troops "A" and "C" were ordered to withdraw to the high ground and road net in the vicinity of Manderfeld. Troop "C", withdrawing their vehicles from positions in Weckerath and Afst and supported by 3rd Platoon Company "F", attacked through the surrounding German infantry and arrived at Manderfeld with only the loss of one armored car and one 1/4 ton truck.

Troop "A" advised that their routes of withdrawal to the north, west and south were closed by enemy infantry and armor and that it would be impossible to attack and force a withdrawal. Troop "A" was then ordered to continue in defense of Roth and Kabscheid as long as possible, to then destroy their vehicles and equipment, and to withdraw by any possible route.

At 1200 the 32nd Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron, which had been in Group Reserve at Ransbeux, Belgium, arrived at Manderfeld, and was employed on the high ground to the north-west and the south of town.

At 1530 the 14th Cavalry Group directed that the group prepare to execute a delaying action. The 32nd Squadron was to cover the withdrawal of the 15th Squadron to the line Holsheim-Herresback, and then delay to the west along the Manderfeld-Hansfeld-Schonberg-St. Vith road, and maintain contact with the 15th Squadron on their left. By 1700, the 15th Squadron had cleared Manderfeld, "C" Troop maintaining contact with the enemy and covering the rear elements of the squadron; and by 1730, had established defensive positions in the vicinity of Holsheim. The squadron was then ordered by group to withdraw to the second delaying position, at Werath. Withdrawal was completed and defensive positions organized by 2200. The days action was highlighted by the splendid conduct of all elements of the squadron. The Troop "A" position at Roth was last heard from at 1630, at which time the troop commander advised that ammunition was low and vehicles and equipment were being destroyed. All

positions took a terrific toll of enemy infantry with automatic weapons, cannister and high explosive ammunition fired from armored cars. Defensive fires and observed call missions, fired by Troop "E" and the 275th Armored Field Artillery Battalion, were continuous during the entire action and resulted in very heavy losses to the enemy. Estimated enemy casualties were high due to repeated attacks in mass formations against intense fire delivered from our well-dug in positions. Casualties of the 16th Squadron consisted of two officers killed, twenty enlisted men wounded, and four officers and 134 enlisted men missing in action.

On the morning of 17th December, Squadron positions at Werath, were attacked by enemy armor and infantry.

Successive delaying positions were fought to Born, and defensive positions were organized. While in Born, elements of the 7th Armored Division were contacted, and it was learned that the Division was moving in to relieve the 106th Infantry Division, and to hold St. Vith.

At 1515, the squadron was directed to break contact and withdraw to Poteaux, and establish defensive positions along the high ground in that vicinity. There was very heavy traffic going both directions along the east-west road net, Vielsalm-St. Vith, and progress of the column was difficult. During the movement to the west, troops "C" and "E" and Company "F" were extracted from the column at Poteaux.

Due to reports of an enemy column observed moving in on the north flank of the 7th Armored Division, the 14th Cavalry Group was ordered to return to Bern the morning of 18 December, and cover that flank of the division.

A task force was organized from elements of the 18th and 32nd Squadrons, and departure from Poteaux was made at 0730, 18 December. Upon reaching the high ground between Poteaux and Becht, the leading elements of the task force received heavy anti-tank and small arms fire. The enemy then attacked with infantry and tanks.

The task force was forced back on Poteaux where heavy fighting continued through the morning. Germans wearing American uniforms infiltrated into the town, and one patrol advancing toward our positions in American uniform was detected and destroyed.

By 1030, artillery, self-propelled guns, mortar and automatic weapons were making the group positions untenable. At 1130, orders were received to fall back to Petit Their, where elements of the 7th Armored Division were then in position.

Effective at 1400, the 14th Cavalry Group was attached to the 7th Armored Division and directed to proceed to Ransbeux, Belgium, to reorganize the remnants of the group into one effective squadron by 1800, 19 December.

The composite squadron was organized, resupplied, received vehicular replacements and was reported ready for action to the Commanding General, 7th Armored Division as of 1700, 19th December.

The composite squadron remained with the 7th Armored Division fighting actions at Nehe, Salmchateau, Somal, Cheram, Gevy, Grafflingen, Espeler, Grandmanil, Manhay and many others, until

the division was relieved by the 52nd Airborne Division.

On 1 January, 1945, the 14th Cavalry Group reverted to the direct control of the First U. S. Army and was directed to proceed to the vicinity of Villers L'Evêque, Belgium, to reorganize and reequip and to receive reinforcements.

Reorganization was completed 27 January, and on 28 January, the 15th Squadron closed in the vicinity of Bevigay, Belgium. The group was attached to the XVIII Airborne Corps and the squadrons further attached to the 52nd Airborne Division.

During the drive back to the Siegfried Line, the 15th Squadron advanced through the same sector in which it had withdrawn. On the way back, the squadron saw much of its burned and demolished equipment and it dug its dead out of the snow, but there was a feeling of satisfaction that the squadron had done its part in stopping the last real offensive, that the Wehrmacht would ever launch, and that now that once mighty force was being driven back to its own soil.

END

NOTE: Approximately 21% of Troop "A" infiltrated through from Roth and Ketscheid, and rejoined the squadron. The balance were killed or captured. Troop "B" from their position at Winterscheid, with a regiment of the 106th Division, destroyed their vehicles and approximately 35% of the troop infiltrated through the lines and (25%) rejoined the squadron.