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MILITARY MONOGRAPH

TITLE: A Reconnaissance Troop in Attack.

SCOPE: An historical example illustrating the employment of a cavalry reconnaissance troop (mechanized) attached to a combat command of an armored division. Stress is placed upon aggressive leadership as the key factor in a successful attack against overwhelming odds.

41-38

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## Preface

The 25th Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron (Mechanized) of the 4th Armored Division was the "economy force" of the division. As such, it performed all types of missions, but it was most efficiently and most frequently (51% of its combat days)<sup>1</sup> employed as a security force for the major commands.

The squadron rarely fought without detachments. In its 223 days of combat the squadron had one troop detached for 153 days and a second troop detached for 158 days.<sup>2</sup> These troops normally were attached one to each of the active Combat Commands.

Troops attached to the Combat Commands became the security element of that command. Most frequently, they performed flank or rear area security, advance guard, or contact and liaison missions.

The attack of Troop D, 25th Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron (Mech) as depicted on the following pages cannot be considered normal employment of reconnaissance units. The mission assigned this troop, liaison and contact in concept, developed into an outstanding attack only because of the leadership of the troop officers and a ready acceptance by them of a calculated risk.

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<sup>1</sup>Study #29, Report of The General Board United States Forces, European Theater, Chapter 1, Appendix 4.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid. Chapter 1, Appendix 4.

## A RECONNAISSANCE TROOP IN ATTACK

On 12 September 1944, after an enforced halt of 12 days caused by a critical shortage of gasoline and other vital supplies, the 4th Armored Division was preparing to by-pass NANCY, FRANCE, in two columns, CC "A" to the north, CC "B" to the south. Together, the Combat Commands were to effect a double envelopment of NANCY preliminary to continuing the advance across the SAAR RIVER in the vicinity of SARREGUMINES<sup>3</sup> (Sketch #1).

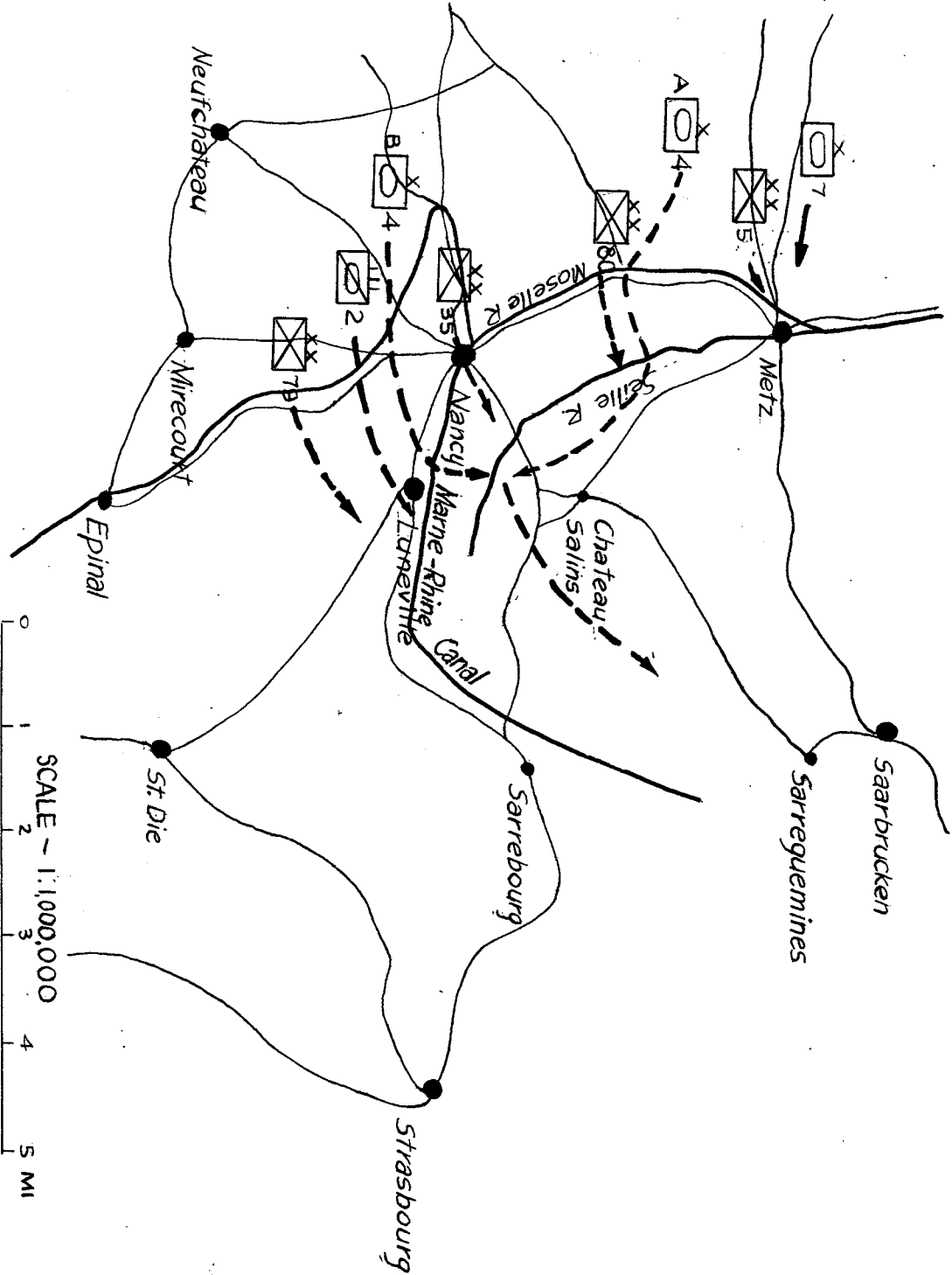
CC "A" in bivouac about 5 kilometers west of PAGNY-SUR-MOSELLE, prepared to force a river crossing in that vicinity early 13 September. Troop D, 25th Mecz Cav Rcn Sq, attached to CC "A", had performed extensive dismounted reconnaissance of the river line, and from selected observation posts was keeping a 5-kilometer sector of the river-line under close surveillance. In the actual crossing schedule, the reconnaissance troop was to follow the leading tank-infantry-artillery team, protect the south flank of the command, and conduct reconnaissance to the southeast.<sup>4</sup>

At 1800, 12 September, the Combat Command received counter-manding orders. Instead of forcing its own crossing at PAGNY,

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<sup>3</sup>After Action Report, Third United States Army, Vol. I, The Operations, pp. 70-76.

<sup>4</sup>After Action Report, Combat Command A, 4th Armored Division, September 1944.



XII Corps Dispositions & Plans 11 September 1944

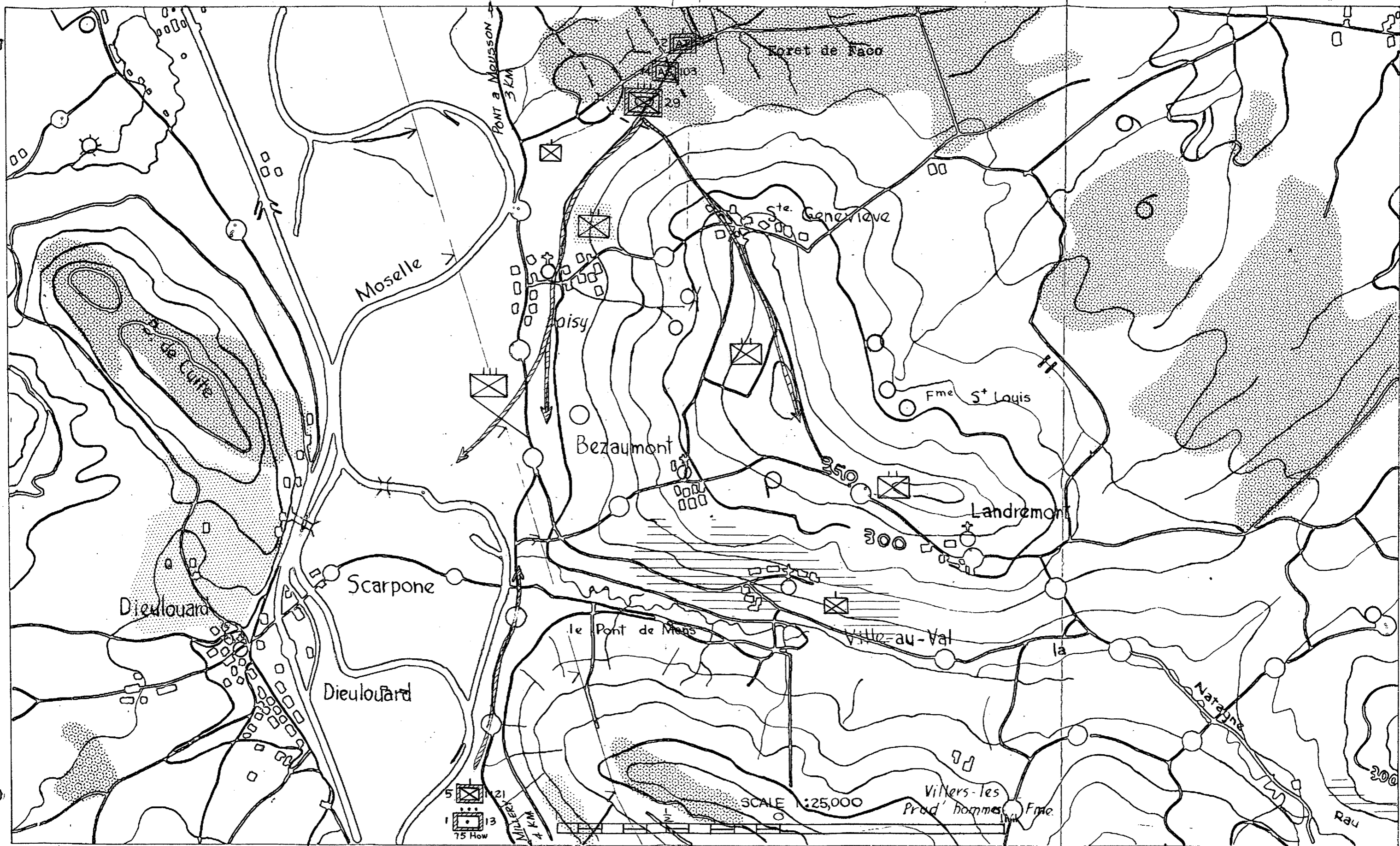
CC "A" was to move to the southeast, cross the MOSELLE RIVER through the 80th Infantry Division bridgehead at DIEULOUARD early 13 September, and then move to seize the high ground in the vicinity of ARRACOURT<sup>5</sup> approximately 38 kilometers southeast of DIEULOUARD.

These orders required that preparations for the proposed crossing at PAGNY be canceled and that new plans be perfected on short notice. Captain Charles U. Trover, who commanded the reconnaissance troop attached to the Combat Command, was ordered to move his troop at once to the bridgehead, establish contact with the infantry already there, reconnoiter the bridgehead area, and place road guides to facilitate the night movement of the Combat Command. Guide parties from the various units in the command accompanied the troop. Appropriate liaison officers from CC "A" also moved to DIEULOUARD with Troop D to establish liaison with the 80th Infantry Division, acquaint that headquarters with the Combat Command plans, and to complete arrangements for passing it through the bridgehead at 0600, 13 September.

Arriving at DIEULOUARD at 2100, Captain Trover placed his troop in assembly just west of the town to await permission to cross into the bridgehead. He anticipated that bridge priority would be given the troop after 2400.

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<sup>5</sup>After Action Report, 4th Armored Division, September 1944.



At approximately 0300 the enemy launched a counterattack in strength against elements of the 317th and 318th Infantry Regiments in the bridgehead. The 29th Panzer Grenadier Regiment supported by an assault-gun company and an anti-tank company, attacked south from the FORET DE EACO. At the same time, elements of the 1121st Infantry Regiment attacked to the north from the vicinity of MILLERY.<sup>6</sup> This coordinated attack, supported by enemy artillery in position near PONT a MOUSSON, achieved initial success. A regimental command post was overrun, communications disrupted, and the forces in the bridgehead disorganized.<sup>7</sup> (Sketch #2)

Upon receipt of this information, Captain Trover sent a radio message to the combat command advising that headquarters of the situation in so far as it was known, and that he would press for permission to cross into the bridgehead where he could more accurately appraise conditions. The reply from Combat Command indicated concurrence with this plan.

It should be noted here that no further direct orders were given to the troop commander by the commanding officer of the Combat Command. Subsequent actions by Captain Trover were of his own volition based upon his appraisal of the situation and his interpretation of what the Combat Command commander would desire

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<sup>6</sup>After Action Report, 80th Infantry Division, September 1944.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid. September 1944.

under the circumstances. At first glance this latitude of decision to subordinate commanders may appear radical. However, it permitted the officer on the spot and in full knowledge of the situation to make a rapid decision and to take forceful action when it was most needed.

Shortly after 0500, with the situation in the bridgehead critical and with enemy infantry on the approaches to the easternmost of the three bridges, the Corps Control Officer at the crossing site gave Captain Trover permission to cross into the bridgehead.

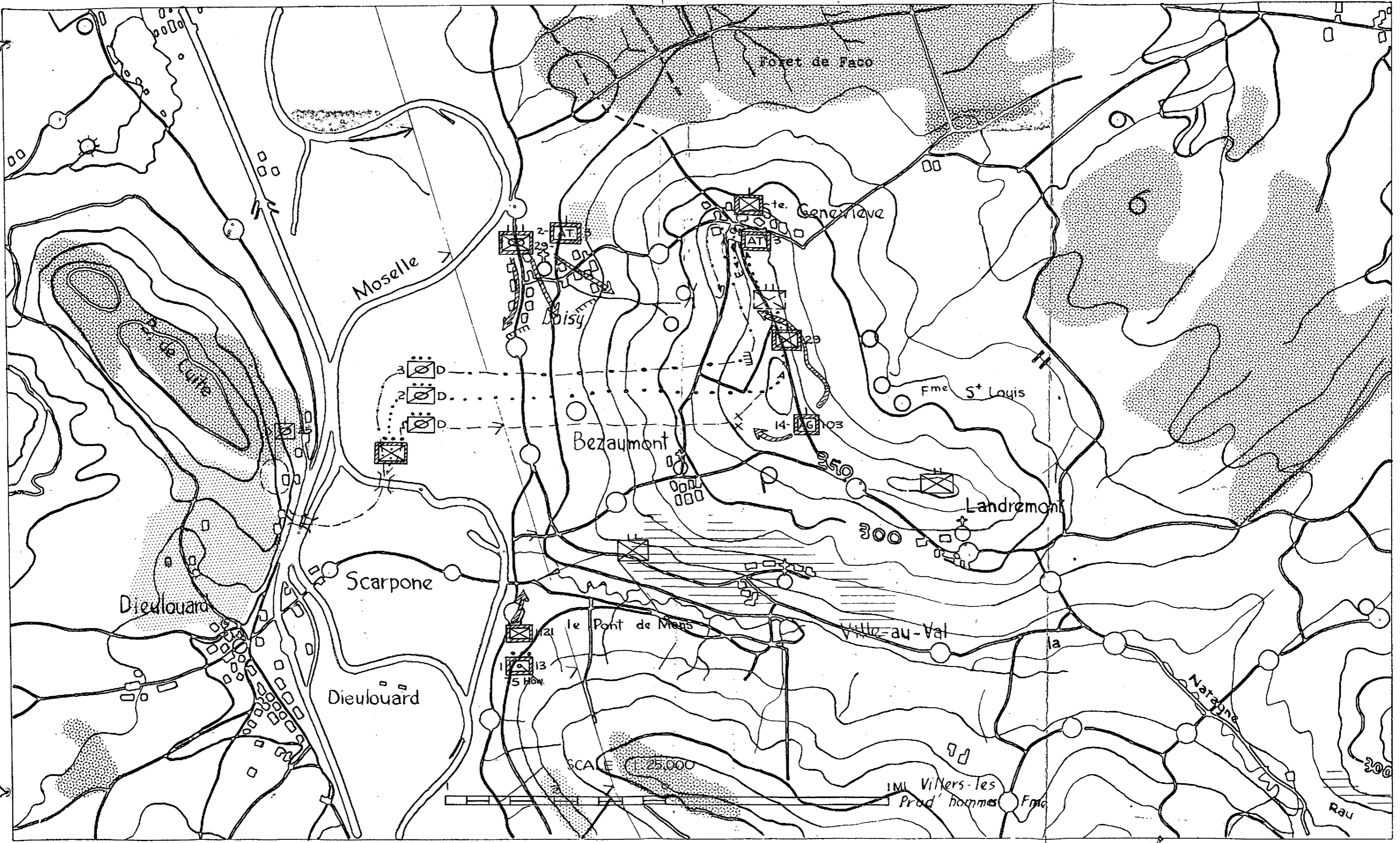
Realizing that the leading combat elements of the Combat Command could not arrive at the crossing site for approximately another hour, Captain Trover organized his troop for an immediate attack. Because of the heavy volume of small arms fire in the bridgehead, the 1/4-ton trucks and troop headquarters under command of the troop executive officer were assembled at the crossing site to await further orders. The armored cars moved to cross the river and assault the high ground between ST. GENEVIEVE and LANDREMONT.

The troop commander's plan was to assault ST. GENEVIEVE HILL by moving between LOISY and BEZAMONT. Once the hill was taken, the troop was to turn north, clear ST. GENEVIEVE, and then turn west to clear LOISY. (Sketch #3.)<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup>Letter, Captain L. L. Loope to author, dated 10 March 1946.





Because of previous combat losses the strength of this assaulting force consisted of nine (9) armored cars, M-8, including that of the troop commander.<sup>9</sup>

The armored cars attacked viciously across the bridges, dispersing enemy infantry, who were attempting to destroy the easternmost bridge, and deployed from march formation for the assault. With the first platoon (Kimpel) on the right (south), the second platoon (Loope) in the center, and the third platoon (Smith) on the left (north), Captain Trover ordered line formation, placed himself with Loope's platoon, and led a violent attack designed to take ST. GENEVIEVE HILL.

As this force moved between LOISY and BEZAMOUNT it encountered one M-4 tank which had become separated from a tank company supporting the infantry. Lost and confused, the tank commander willingly joined forces with the reconnaissance first platoon.

In the half-light of dawn the initial opposition came from American cal .30 and cal .50 machine-gun fire, presumably from weapons captured by the enemy in its drive to the bridges. Ignoring the machine-gun fire which was completely ineffective, the troop moved as rapidly as the terrain, which was rough and spotted

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<sup>9</sup>Letter, Captain L. L. Loope to author, dated 10 March 1946.

with small clumps of trees and bushes, would permit. Near the crest of the hill, the first platoon ran into several enemy self-propelled guns (Jagdpanther) which immediately brought devastating fire to bear upon the platoon. Before the combined efforts of the troop could divert the enemy and force his withdrawal, 2nd Lt. H. G. Kimpel, the platoon leader, and nine enlisted men were killed, and three enlisted men were wounded. Two armored cars and the medium tank were destroyed.<sup>10</sup>

The second and third platoons, covered by the remaining armored car of the first platoon, continued to the crest of the hill. As the topographical crest was reached, the third platoon was ordered to take up hull defilade positions while the second platoon moved forward with the troop commander. On the hill-top the second platoon encountered about 100 enemy infantry. During the sharp skirmish that followed, hand grenades and a heavy volume of machine-gun fire from the armored cars killed 25. Nearly 50 enemy surrendered, while the balance took cover. The prisoners were delivered to friendly infantry who soon rallied on the armored cars.

As visibility increased, the enemy artillery fire from the vicinity of PONT a MOUSSON became heavier. By radio, Captain Trover requested Combat Command artillery, now in the vicinity of

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<sup>10</sup>Letter, Captain L. L. Loope to author, dated 10 March 1946.

DIEULOUARD, to fire counterbattery missions and to place a protective smoke screen between the enemy artillery and his troop. The fire, adjusted by artillery aircraft, was immediately delivered and with excellent effect.

Without delay, Trover turned north to attack ST. GENEVIEVE. The second and third platoons, moving by alternate bounds, rushed down the hill toward the town while the troop commander's vehicle and the remaining armored car of the first platoon covered their advance. On the eastern edge of town, the second platoon engaged an enemy 75 mm anti-tank gun that was delaying the advance of the third platoon, dispersed the crew and destroyed the weapon. The third platoon, commanded by 2nd Lt. Earl C. Smith, a superior officer who was killed in a subsequent engagement during the day, raced into ST. GENEVIEVE where it destroyed an anti-tank gun that was covering the road leading to LOISY. Both platoons then engaged the enemy infantry that had taken up positions in the buildings of the town. Not desiring to dismount elements of his already small force to reduce this harassing fire, the troop commander ordered a withdrawal to the high ground southwest of ST. GENEVIEVE.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup>Letter, Captain L. L. Loope to author, dated 10 March 1946.

As Loope's platoon moved from ST. GENEVIEVE, it was engaged by two enemy self-propelled guns which had moved onto the LANDREMONT-ST. GENEVIEVE road from the east. One enemy gun was knocked out by the combined efforts of the two platoons which took up firing positions and permitted the Jagdpanther to close with them. When the enemy vehicle had closed to within 100 yards, the concentrated fire of six armored cars succeeded in knocking off a track after which the enemy capitulated. The second gun was destroyed by a Combat Command artillery aircraft L-5 equipped with six bazookas. The pilot, upon seeing the enemy vehicles below, attacked of his own volition.

Captain Trover assembled his armored cars between LOISY and ST. GENEVIEVE and organized the position for defense. The troop reorganized in this position and was prepared to move forward at about 0830 when the Combat Command crossed into the bridgehead and continued the assault to the east.

Striking with speed and surprise, and always committed to the violent attack, Troop D, 25th Mecz Cav Ren Sq, under the command of an audacious and aggressive officer, effectively slowed an enemy attack in strength, saved three critical bridges, and prevented the enemy from capitalizing on his initial gains before the arrival and commitment of a Combat Command through the bridgehead in an assault which was to carry it 45 miles before nightfall.

The action was typical of many engagements in which this particular troop participated. It does not represent a foolhardy endeavor. Rather it exhibits a ready acceptance of a calculated risk, a keen appreciation of the capabilities and limitations of lightly armored and lightly armed vehicles, and a full cognizance of the overwhelming advantages of surprise, speed, and ferocity of the attack.

## Bibliography

1. After Action Report, Third United States Army, Volume I, The Operations.
2. After Action Report, 4th Armored Division.
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5. The Nancy Bridgehead, published by The Armored School.
6. Precis T-573, Tactics Department, The Armored School.

### Author's Note

The source material for this article has been collected over a period of time from the references cited in the bibliography and from personal correspondence between the author and former members of Troop D, 25th Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron.

Part of the material collected has been incorporated into "The Nancy Bridgehead," published by The Armored School. The balance of the material has been submitted to The Armored Cavalry Journal for publication.

It is requested that this paper not be offered for further publication.