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MILITARY MONOGRAPH

TITLE: **THE ROLE OF CAVALRY GROUP IN COMBAT**

SCOPE: **The 4th Cavalry Group (Normandy) Campaign.**

42-11

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PREFACE

This article will attempt to emphasize the role of a typical Cavalry Group, the Fourth Cavalry Group Reinforced as a corps combat unit. Cavalry is not a mode of transportation, rather it is the embodiment of the tactical principles of mobility, fire power and shock in varying degrees. These principles have been inherent throughout the ages. They are as old as civilization itself. History is replete with the successes of cavalry in war due in a large degree to that pecularity which distinguishes it from other arms. This is the impetuosity, vigor, initiative, dash, and boldness of the attack. This quality was possessed by such cavalrymen as Alexander, Hannibal, Genghis Kahn, down through the ages to Nathan Bedford Forrest and General George E. Patton. Therefore, I repeat that cavalry is cavalry whether mounted on horses, camels, bicycles, armored cars, or tanks. The advent of the atom bomb has not changed these principles. Perhaps to a certain degree they will be modified but the forces must be present to smash the enemy soldier from his fortifications. The cavalry will always be used to assist that effort with its speed, mobility, maneuverability, and will to close with and destroy the enemy.

In the recent war, the cavalry was found to be seriously lacking in fire power in most cases, this imposed limitations as a reconnaissance agency. It was the consensus of opinion early in the war that sneaking and peeking tactics were out. As a

screening and flanking force it was invaluable. In the penetration and pursuit it was ideal. On defense it could and did cover larger frontages than any other arm. Given adequate reinforcements of infantry, artillery, and engineers it was capable of handling any job assigned. The cavalry was the most flexible and efficient tool available to the Corps Commander. Time after time, this cavalry group was able to plug gaps, occupy large frontages, and make advances in their assigned sectors, thereby allowing the Corps Commander to use his infantry and tank forces in the mass and concentrated action. The experiences of the Fourth Cavalry will amplify my statements as to the versatility, flexibility and efficiency of cavalry.

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Gallery

THE ROLE OF CAVALRY GROUP IN COMBAT

Major Eugene J. Field

D-Day marked the first appearance of elements of the 4th Cavalry in combat in World War II. Three missions were initially assigned the Group. All three were completely independent of each other. However, the flexibility, state of training, esprit, and the superlative and dynamic command of Colonel Joseph M. Tully made it possible for the unit to readily accept and successfully carry out each mission.

ILLE STE. MARCOUF OPERATION

Six thousand yards off the Utah Beach was the Illes Ste. Marcouf, consisting of two barren, rocky, wind swept islands, the Ille de Terre and Ille du Large. Normally uninhabited, these ancient Napoleonic fortresses showed signs of trench works and gun emplacements according to our aerial reconnaissance. ~~Due to~~ Because of their proximity to the landing beaches, they had to be seized and neutralized prior to H-Hour (~~0630~~ 6:30 a.m) on D-Day, as they presented a definite threat to landing operations. Moreover, it was a most desirable site for our anti-aircraft batteries that would engage the inevitable Luftwaffe. A task force consisting of two troops trained in amphibious operations, commanded by Lt. Col. Edward C. Dunn, debarked from Southhampton, England, on D minus one and were in position to make the seaborne landing at ~~0230~~ 2:30 a.m, D-Day. At ~~0430~~ 4:30 a.m, D-Day, two hours before H-Hour the force had landed as directed by Field Order Number One, VII Corps. This was prior to the entry of some of the

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glider and airborne units into France.

The islands, fortunately, were unoccupied although casualties were received from enemy coastal battery fire and from the thick network of mines that were sown throughout the area. This force was the first American foot soldiers to invade French soil. The first combat communication to be received by the VII Corps was, "Mission Accomplished", "Fourth Cavalry". The task force, secured the islands until relieved by friendly anti-aircraft batteries the following day. After relief was effected, the task force reembarked to the mainland to VII Corps headquarters at Audoville la Hubert where they acted as a special reconnaissance unit under corps control patrolling special areas until relieved 15 June.

OPERATIONS OF "B" TROOP, 4TH SQUADRON

The 82nd Airborne Division dropped on the early morning of D-Day. It was imperative that ground elements effect a link-up with them. Troop "B", 4th Squadron, was assigned this mission. The troop landed with their vehicles at ~~0930~~ 9:30 a.m. on D-Day and fought their way to the town of Ste. Mere Eglise, ten miles inland where contact was made with the 82nd Airborne Division. The troop was used for combat patrols and security missions. During the period 6 June to 3 July, the unit accounted for over five hundred enemy killed or captured. They were able to infiltrate behind the lines of the confused and bewildered enemy and on several occasions caught German vehicular columns on roads and with cannister and machine guns wrecked havoc with them.

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The unit continued to be attached to the 82nd Division in their advance up the peninsula, protecting supply lines, running down snipers, picking up stragglers, maintaining order, performing combat patrols and security for the Division. They assisted immeasurably in the success of the mission of the 82nd Division, although suffering heavy casualties. One platoon was completely destroyed, however, the terrific toll in Germans killed and captured, enemy vehicles and material destroyed, more than balanced the scale in the operation.

NORMANDY OPERATION

On 15 June, the remainder of the Group landed at Utah Beach and all units reverted to their respective squadrons. The 4th Squadron was attached to 9th Infantry Division that was attacking north on the west side of the Cotentin Peninsula and the 24th Squadron was attached to the 4th Infantry Division that was attacking north on the east side of the Cotentin Peninsula. Both units were completely detached from group control and operated independently of each other approximately twenty miles apart. Initially, the 4th Squadron was used to maintain contact between the 9th Infantry Division and 79th Infantry Divisions which were attacking abreast in a drive north to capture the prize port of Cherbourg. In its drive west to seal off the peninsula, the 9th Infantry Division was able to reach the west coast of the peninsula. This put the left flank of the division on the channel but as they advanced north toward Cherbourg, they moved in from the channel thus expos-

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ing their ~~left~~ flank. The 4th Squadron was then relieved from Maintaining contact between the 79th Infantry Division and 9th Infantry Division and shifted to screen and protect the left flank and rear of the 9th Infantry Division. This action was performed mounted. The advance was swift over the narrow hedge-lined Normandy roads. However, the Germans had sufficient time to prepare excellent positions and although they were overwhelmingly outnumbered and sealed off, the terrain and road net offered no opportunity for a wide end run. Prior to the final drive into Cherbourg by the 9th Infantry Division, the 4th Squadron was given the mission of holding a line which was a prolongation of the infantry line approximately fifteen miles south of Cherbourg. From this line dismounted patrols were able to infiltrate in enemy rear for periods as long as three days and to direct Division and Corps artillery on highly prized targets. It was here that it was forcibly demonstrated that there is no such situation as a static one in the true sense. Whenever in contact with the enemy in defense or holding, aggressive action must be the order and patrols must be constant, both day and night, continually probing for a hole or an indication of weakness on the part of the enemy. After the fall of the city and part of Cherbourg, there still remained a long tip of peninsula extending northwest into the English Channel. There were still a large number of enemy troops and installations in the area. It was generally conceded that these enemy troops although scattered constituted a threat. Moreover, information was received through

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intelligence agencies that these troops were heading for the isolated beaches that offered them escape routes where they could move by sea to southern France to rejoin uncommitted German units. The 4th Squadron was given the mission of working out to the northwest tip of the Contentin Peninsula to capture or destroy all enemy troops, neutralize enemy gun and fortification emplacements, and seal off all escape routes. The resistence was rather sporadic but large numbers of enemy personnel and equipment were captured. This is but another incident of a job falling under the heading of a special operation that can be handled by cavalry with its mobility and ability to cover a large, lightly held area. The use of cavalry in this clean-up operation, precluded the necessity of detaching a battalion of infantry which would not have been able to move as quickly or the use of an armored unit which was not available at the time.

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On 15 June, the 24th Squadron was attached to the 4th Infantry Division and the mission of relieving the 22nd Infantry of that Division along the Sinope River and maintaining a counter reconnaissance screen to the front. The 22nd Regiment had been the right flank regiment in the Division attack and had suffered heavy casualties after nine days of furious fighting. The 8th ~~Infantry Regiment~~ and 12th Infantry Regiments were committed and no other reserves were available. The reconnaissance troops were dismounted and moved into the infantry sector with "E" Troop furnishing artillery support and "F" Troop tanks in reserve. The German counter reconnais-

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sance was particularly aggressive, attempting to penetrate the cavalry positions in platoon strength on several occasions, but were successfully repulsed. After holding the line three days the squadron was given the mission of establishing a bridgehead on the far side of the Sinope River. Because of ~~Due to~~ the extreme frontage of the unit and lack of battle experience the crossing was made by one reconnaissance platoon. The battle wise Germans allowed them to cross and then proceeded to anihilate the platoon. Although the platoon put up a grand fight all but two members were killed or captured. The tank troop was then given the order to cross the river under the protective smoke and artillery of the "E" Troop assault guns and the combined mortar and machine guns of the reconnaissance troops. A successful crossing was made against a numerically superioe enemy that withdrew. However, the doctrine was then and there driven home to all concerned that any river crossings must be made with force, previously coordinated, and of sufficient strength to hold the ground once the crossing is made.

After the bridgehead was firmly established the Germans started a withdrawal north toward Cherbourg. The 24th Squadron was then remounted in their vehicles and assigned the mission reconnoitering north and east along the peninsula to secure bridges before they could be destroyed by the enemy. They were also instructed to determine the main line of enemy resistence and keep contact with it. This was done in order that the infantry could be moved to the area for a full-size attack rather than dissipate its force on small piece-

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meal attacks. The 24th was able to locate and maintain contact with the enemy. The 4th Division was moved up and successfully attacked. The squadron then was again reconnoitering the east flank of the Division and protecting their supply lines. In the course of the reconnaissance a large airport, manned by a group of young fanatical German air cadets with a large number of dual purpose anti-aircraft guns, was by-passed as it was thought that after the airport was surrounded the force would capitulate. This was erroneous and the entire 22nd Infantry had to be turned around and a concentrated attack on the airport by the 22nd Regiment and the 24th Squadron. After a terrific battle the airfield was overrun. This was a good example of the fallaciousness of by-passing strong enemy on the flanks, allowing them to cut supply roads and harass reserves.

The 24th Squadron continued to be attached to the 4th Infantry Division performing flank security until the fall of Cherbourg which marked the fall of the Normandy Peninsula and the close of the Normandy campaign. The 4th Cavalry Group was then assembled at Beaumont Hague about ten miles west of Cherbourg where they were attached to 101st Airborne Division with the mission of patrolling roads, capturing or destroying all German stragglers, locating all enemy gun emplacements, supplies, and fortifications. The units also assisted civilian authorities in maintaining order. Particular vigilance had been ordered as intelligence agencies had

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informed the Group that information had been received to the effect that the Germans were planning an airborne offensive in the Cherbourg area to regain the ground they had lost and push the American forces back to the sea. Fortunately no German airborne attack was launched and the units had time to refit, re-equip, and do the necessary maintenance.

The first campaign had drawn to a close; every element of the 4th Cavalry Group had been introduced to warfare in thirty nine days of intensive combat. The mission for the most part had been dismounted and the fighting at times confused, but though new in combat, organized, equipped and trained for mounted action, the squadrons tackled every mission with determination that made the operations completely successful.

The conclusions drawn at the end of the campaign were that there is no substitute for training. The units must be thoroughly indoctrinated in all phases of war. They must know their weapons, vehicles, radios, they must be able to read a map, they must be thoroughly familiar with tactics from the squad to the squadron. Above all, the units must be physically fit and the leaders are responsible that everyone is possessed with the morale and esprit that is necessary to win battles. Without it a unit can go nowhere. Once an outfit is committed, it is too late to learn the basic principles that are laid down by the "Book". These principles must be taught prior to combat. And with very few possible exceptions they will pay off.

I have endeavored to bring out in this article the versatility of a cavalry group and the variance of missions that they can perform from the usual mounted flank security, reconnaissance, and holding type to the dismounted relief of infantry units and amphibious operations. The presence of a cavalry group, available to the VII Corps Commander made it possible for him to push them into situations where time was of vital importance and enabled him to keep his larger units intact for the mass punch.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

The references for this monograph were the after action reports of the 4th Cavalry Group, the 4th Cavalry Squadron and the 24th Cavalry Squadron. I have leaned heavily on my own memory of the actions, as S-3 and Executive Officer of the 24th Cavalry Squadron.