

INSTRUCTOR TRAINING DIVISION
GENERAL INSTRUCTION DEPARTMENT
THE ARMORED SCHOOL
Fort Knox, Kentucky

ADVANCED OFFICERS CLASS #1

25 FEBRUARY 1947

MILITARY MONOGRAPH

TITLE: ORGANIZATION OF THE ARMORED DIVISION FOR EXPLOITATION

SCOPE: A discussion of the married formation, based on personal experience.

H2-12

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ORGANIZATION OF THE ARMORED DIVISION FOR EXPLOITATION

Every one knows the importance of tank-infantry cooperation in armored operations; everyone knows that tanks must have infantry in the closest of support for any tank maneuver; everyone knows it is most desirable to have tanks in support of the infantry in an infantry show. Every experienced officer who has seen armor in action harps on the fact; each teacher of tactics pounds on the absolute necessity of the closest of cooperation; and every student heartily agrees. This paper is prepared with an idea in mind not to add any more arguments in favor of this already accepted conception of the necessity of this coordination, but to show how one armored division in World War II solved the problem with the organization as it existed at that time and with what success. It is also hoped that in the course of the discussion some indication may be found to influence future thought along the lines of what arrangement of armored elements is best suited for exploitation.

No attempt will be made to establish a claim that the unit we are examining was the hardest hitting or fastest moving armored column or that no one else used the same or similar system, or that other units did not have a good and successful system. From the results obtained by the division in the race across France in the summer of 1944 one must be convinced, however, that the organization for exploitation used by the Fifth Armored

Division was a successful one and that it, in six short weeks, paid handsomely for the enormous sums of money and time required for its activation, training and equipment.

The actual arrangement of troops used by his division in the exploitation following the St. Lo breakthrough was the idea of Major General Lunsford E. Oliver, the commanding general of the Fifth Armored Division. His plan, conceived during the training period of his division after he had returned from command of Combat Command B of the First Armored Division in its invasion of North Africa, was based on his observation that there was a great need for closer tank-infantry cooperation. No realization of the plan was possible, however, until the unit had arrived in England and it became increasingly evident that the division was to be used in an exploitation role. Then the idea was presented to the division and hurried and extensive training in implementation of the scheme followed.

Basically this plan called for the formation of a tank-infantry team in which one tank was "married" to one infantry squad. To make such an arrangement possible the division was organized into three permanent combat commands: Combat Command A, Combat Command B, and Combat Command H. Each of these tactical commands had its headquarters (personnel for CCR initially being taken from organic division units and later coming from an attached armored group headquarters, while CCA and CCB used their organic headquarters group), a tank battalion, an armored

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infantry battalion, an armored engineer company, and a troop of the reconnaissance squadron assigned, with detachments from an ordnance company, a medical company and a field artillery battalion in direct support, all from organic troops of the division. These assignments and attachments or organic troops were permanent: i.e. the 34th Tank Battalion; the 46th Armored Infantry Battalion; A Company, 22d Engineer Battalion; A Company, 75th Medical Battalion; a detachment from A Company, 127th Ordnance Battalion; A Troop, 85th Reconnaissance Squadron; and the 47th Field Artillery Battalion; all these were in Combat Command A if the combat command was operating.

This regular assignment of the same units to the combat command made such intimate appreciation and knowledge of each unit by the other units of the command possible that the closest of cooperation between tanks and infantry was achieved. The breakdown within each combat command was just as regular. A Company of the tanks was married to A Company of the infantry battalion, and the B Companies and C Companies were similarly wedded. Normally two of these married companies worked under and were habitually assigned to the tank battalion headquarters and one of the married companies to the infantry battalion headquarters. This resulted in two major teams within the combat command, the tank battalion team which was heavier throughout and had a large percentage of tanks and the infantry battalion team which was somewhat lighter and had a relatively high percentage of infantry.

These teams as set up worked, slept and ate together. They lived in the closest rapprochement and surprising loyalties sprang up. Infantrymen grew to speak of "my tank" and tankers spoke proudly of "my infantry". Each came to believe that his little tank-squad team was the greatest fighting unit in the world, that his married platoon and company was unbeatable as a unit, and that all the other soldiers in the army were unfortunate in that they couldn't belong to his particular team. Of course they knew that other units were similarly organized, but each of them was positive that the other teams might be good and all that but no one was quite up to the standards of his team.

platoons, companies and married battalions developed individual personalities. They each had a set of stock formations which they each would swear by, but with the intimate knowledge they had of other members of their team were able quickly to adopt new formations which had been proved successful by other teams with a minimum of difficulty. Reactions to new situations became faster and faster as the married formations aged. Any delay to the advance of a column one of them was leading would cause immediate steps to be taken to overcome the difficulty seemingly without the least necessity for planning. The attitude became general that "since we can't knock out these opposing tanks except at short ranges, let's hurry up and get within the two hundred yards or so and run over the opposition. They want to run; let's keep them on the move".

So far this has been general sales talk on these married formations: how adaptable they were, how confident they became in their own ability to advance, and how easy they were to handle. Such are impressions in retrospect. But training as married formations had started late. Real teamwork actually developed while the units were advancing through France. Fortunately, the marriage took quickly and while all the kinks were not out when the division first started into action, the honeymoon trip to and across the German border fostered and developed real tank-infantry cooperation. As in most marriages, the usual early misunderstandings and adjustments had to be, and the pairs were not so efficient in meeting early problems as they became later. Mistakes were made and problems proved difficult in the first stages, but things constantly ran more and more smoothly.

To be more specific let's go a little farther into detail on the performance as an exploiting force. First of all the division was fortunate in being able to start an exploitation phase strictly as a pursuit. Other units had broken the back of the defense and had the enemy retreating. The first action, and all the action which will be described here was strictly pursuit. The division had not had the misfortune or disadvantage of engaging in a slugging match and thus developing caution. They were still full of the idea that they could chase the enemy all over the continent and whip anything they could catch. All of which made for the ideal pursuit team. Why should an exploiting unit be allowed to have any respect for the running enemy?

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The division reached the continent on 25 July 1944. Looking at that timing now it is all too evident that the whole purpose for the unit was exploitation. And further the actual commitment was held up until 2 August when things were really running.

For a first objective the town of Fougères was assigned. After innumerable traffic snarls and rerouting of columns, things rolled fairly well, the division thought, but just as they were getting close enough to Fougères to realize they were about to capture their first objective, word came that some infantry division (later found to be the 79th) had already occupied the town, and immediate commanders cynically suggested that units get into fifth gear and see if they couldn't catch up to a fight. Lower units were then told that they would swing south as far as Chateau Gontier, turn east to cut off Le Mans to aid an infantry division in capturing this city.

Speed then became the keyword and the married formations began to come into their own. Combat commands usually advanced in single columns - on the road - alternating the lead between the two teams (tank battalion or infantry battalion as married up), but habitually led by a married platoon of medium tanks and infantry followed closely by one or two married companies. Resistance was never sized up, it was just hit; initially by the leading platoon with support from the artillery in column, and in the course of a very few minutes by the rest of the company

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and possibly another company with what fighter bombers could be scratched up from column cover or visiting planes. A decision to commit just so much of the force was never reached by judging how much opposition there was, but solely by time. If a company could roll itself into the fight before it was all over, in it rolled. Elements in the column which wouldn't normally close directly with the enemy immediately coiled off the road into firing or protected positions when the head of the column stopped and every medium married company sailed blithely down the road to the fight with no traffic snarls or doubling columns at all - theoretically. If the delaying enemy delayed long enough he had a lapful of tanks and infantry to deal with. Occasionally a company back the column could be grabbed up and directed around to hit from another direction, but not too often was this necessary. Sometimes their noses would get bloodied and the combat commands would have to come up with a hasty plan for attack, but the excellent tank-infantry-artillery cooperation made possible by knowing every Joe in the unit well enough to predict his reaction to any situation usually got the column rolling again before too much delay.

Granted resistance was spotty. There was even the situation in which a light tank company commander on a screening mission, whose map reading training in OCS apparently hadn't included much practical work following routes, reported himself inside the city the combat command was trying to surround and

cut off. When challenged that he didn't even know where he was he countered that if the questioner would wait a minute he would dismount and read the street signs for verification. Slightly chagrined when he was told he was in a bad place inasmuch as the town had not yet been captured, he withdrew and pouted to a point that he made no more radio contacts for over an hour.

Past Le Mans when racing to cut the Paris highway a column was held up and for some reason the combat commander wasn't in his usual position at the head of the column and started the typical heckling, "Move out. What's holding you up?" The lead company commander's reply, "We are moving. You'll see what slowed us as you come by". By actual count the combat commander saw seventeen knocked out guns with assorted spattered crews within easy range of the intersection. Here the lead platoon, by quick gunning and with marvelous assistance from its spouse infantry, had shot one of the most profitable skirmishes to date without losing a single vehicle.

But there were times when the ants got into the potato salad. After Le Mans was taken by infantry elements, the division, at 0800, 10 August, swung north with the combat commands in more or less parallel columns. Resistance was considerably stiffer and it was not until the late afternoon of 12 August that elements of the division reached the outskirts of Argentan, some 60-odd miles to the north. This town was fanatically held and because of a shortage of ammunition and fuel caused by the supply column becoming traffic snarled by a mix-up with combat

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elements of the Second French Armored Division, the combat command there was not able to clear the town that day. Early the next morning a sadly inadequate attack was made on the town. In the meantime, enemy tanks had idled into position and CCA took a sound trouncing. Ordered to hold south of Argentan, the division blocked (in connection with other divisions who joined it there) while the tactical air force thoroughly worked over the remnants of the German Seventh Army trying to escape through the Falaise Gap.

Relieved in the Argentan - Gace sector by the 90th Division, on the fifteenth, the division attacked toward Dreux and the Eure River. CCB had a crossing south of Dreux by 1100, 16 August. By 24 August when the XV Corps was released from Third Army to First Army by virtue of an adjustment of army boundaries, the pocket between the Eure and Seine Rivers had been cleared.

On 30 August, the division started moving again, through the already liberated Paris and on to the northeast. Continuing northeast toward Conde, on the Belgian border, the division was again halted on 2 September in the vicinity of Cambrai, and on 4 September was turned southeast. Rapid advances were again the order of the day, and by 10 September the division was in Luxembourg, CCA having passed through the capital that day. By 11 September elements were on German soil.

Demonstrations against the Siegfried Line were carried on throughout 13 September. On 14 September CCR, reinforced by the

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First Battalion, 112th Infantry, crossed into Germany at Wallendorf. Because of the limit placed on their advance by corps, CCR was forced to halt when the going was still not too rough. Tied by corps order to terrain not at all suitable for defense, they were forbidden to advance because it was impossible to adequately supply or reinforce them for continued movement. CCR took a good lacing in place. CCB went in to help on 16 September; CCR came out on 19 September; and CCB finally got out on 22 September. This sortie into Germany was disastrous for both combat commands, but when compared to enemy casualties inflicted (2368 killed, 1218 captured, and 45 tanks destroyed), the losses do not look out of proportion. What the results of CCR's thrust might have been had it been possible to adequately support them makes interesting speculation. Certainly they had momentum enough and were in no mood to stop.

Thus ended the first exploitation of a green division. In forty one days from 2 August to 11 September, including several days of sitting around during realignment of army boundaries and shifting between corps, this division, committed for the first time, had covered around eight hundred miles of enemy territory. Total casualties for August and September were: killed, 260; wounded and missing, 1238; tanks lost to enemy action, 51. To compare with this, the casualties inflicted on the enemy during the same period by the division (no credit being taken for those inflicted by the air working with the units) were: killed, 6198; captured, 6047; tanks destroyed, ~~612~~ 601.

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Such a low ratio of losses to successes is felt by every one in the division to be due to a great extent to the ever increasing efficiency of the "married formation". The only note of discontent is that there should have been more time for training as teams before the unit was committed to combat, so that the early mistakes caused by unfamiliarity with their team mates might have been avoided. With the slightest bit of encouragement all who went through the action of the division in the summer of 1944 will recommend that an armored division, if it is designed to be an exploiting force, consist basically of composite companies and platoons in which there are organically both tanks and armored infantry "living, sleeping, eating together" - married if you will.