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for organization, functions and operations of the headquarters;
application in combat, stressing expedients and lessons learned.

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Prepared by: Walter Greenwood, Jr.
(Name)
WALTER GREENWOOD, JR.
Major, Cavalry
(Rank)

THE ORGANIZATION AND OPERATION OF A TANK BATTALION
HEADQUARTERS IN COMBAT

SECTION I

ORGANIZATION

"Where's the battalion CP, Corporal?"

"Damned if I know, Sir, it was here forty-five minutes ago, but I reckon it's moved."

And so the search goes on - the combat command commander wants to talk over a change in plans with the CO of the Nth Tank Battalion, and the liaison corporal from Baker Company wants to report that the attached infantry hasn't shown up and H-hour is only one short hour away. However, the battalion CP has moved forward and has left no trace - no signs, no guides, nothing. Ultimately, the attack is late getting off, Baker Company's infantry never does show up, and the battalion commander can't understand the CG's annoyance.

"But things like that don't happen in good outfits" you say. Unfortunately such tie-ups do happen in the American army, and at all levels, including the Army commander at Chancellorsville who lost control of his corps so completely that for twenty-four hours, he had no idea what one flank of his command was doing. Many of these difficulties arise from inadequate organization and inefficient operation of the headquarters involved.

I do not propose to launch into a discourse on the operation and function of any echelon as high-priced as corps or army; instead

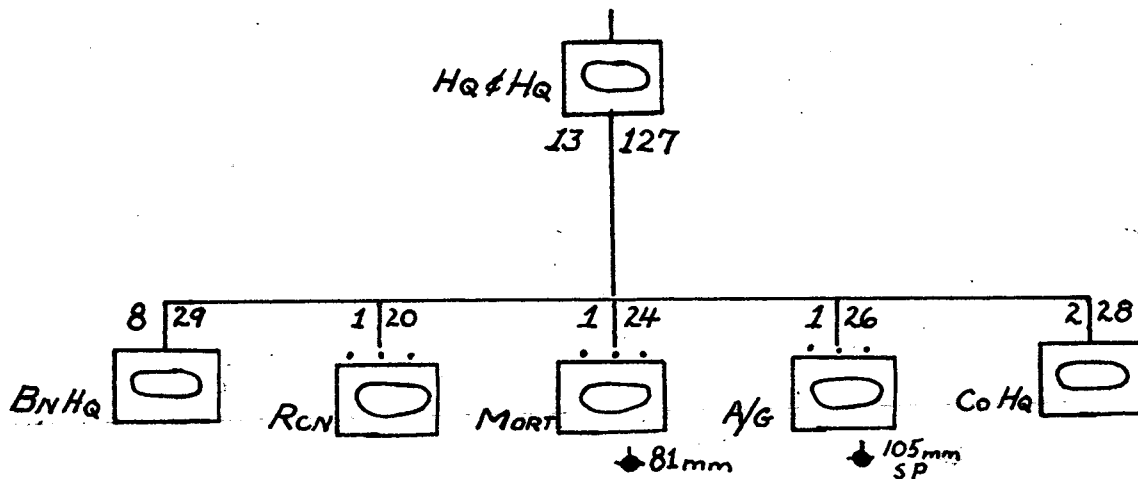
I propose to discuss in detail the organization and operation of the basic tactical and administrative headquarters within an armored division; the tank battalion.

Modern American doctrine envisions the employment of armor in mass, as a part of the combined arms team, utilizing armor's characteristics of mobility, armored firepower and shock action to achieve surprise and ultimate destruction of the enemy's ground forces. To achieve these aims, many things are required: aggressive leadership, effective control, thorough preplanning, unfailing communications, co-ordination and flexibility - and every one of these factors is inextricably linked to the nerve center of the unit - the command post.

In the modern team of combined arms, the commander can accomplish only so much by personal example and individual effort. No longer can he thrust his hat on the point of a saber and roar "Follow Me!" Distances are too great and units too large for one man to exercise complete personal control over any unit larger than a company. The reinforced battalion commander may personally lead a portion of his striking force, but distance alone will prevent him from supervising the entire command in person. These facts were repeatedly demonstrated in the ETO during the late hostilities, and one has only to recall the number of tank battalion commanders who became casualties to fully appreciate the value of personal example and aggressive leadership. However, while the battalion commander is personally leading a third to a half of his command, the remainder of the command must be gainfully employed. That is where the staff and the command post enters the picture.

All other factors, training, logistics, maintenance and leadership being equal, the battalion whose staff and CP functions most smoothly will accomplish its mission more readily, with fewer losses and with greater effectiveness than will a unit whose CP constitutes only so much excess baggage tacked onto the end of an attacking column.

Let us consider the tools the tank battalion commander had at his disposal during World War II to assist him in the exercise of his command.



For the purposes of this study we will disregard headquarters company, and will consider only the command and control elements of the headquarters.

The command and staff echelon of the battalion was small, consisting of eight officers and twenty-nine enlisted men. The eight officers

included one lieutenant colonel battalion commander; one major executive officer; one lieutenant S-1; one captain S-2; one major S-3; one captain S-3 air and communications officer; one captain S-4; and one lieutenant liason officer. We might add the CO of headquarters company, the battalion motor officer from the battalion maintenance platoon of service company and the battalion surgeon in their capacities as special staff officers.

The vehicular equipment of the headquarters consisted of two medium tanks, one equipped with a SCR 508, the other equipped nominally with a SCR 528, although this radio invariably was converted to a SCR 508. These vehicles provided the combat transportation for the battalion commander and one of his staff officers - generally the S-3. Two half-tracks, each mounting a SCR 508 and a SCR 506 provided transportation and communications for the rest of the staff. There were also four quarter-tons, which were split up generally as follows: one as the battalion commander's alternate means of transportation and equipped with a SCR 508; one to the liason officer and equipped with a SCR 510; and two for messenger service. Thus headquarters had available eight vehicles, two AM radios and five FM sets.

One of the greatest and most obvious weaknesses of this organization was the limited number of enlisted personnel available for sustained operations. Twenty-nine men were authorized, and of this number, six were assigned drivers, eight were tank crewmen, five were full-time radio operators, two were code clerks and one NCO was message center chief, leaving only seven men as the operating personnel in the headquarters. This group consisted of the battalion sergeant major,

the operations sergeant, the intelligence sergeant, a draftsman, the communications sergeant, a clerk and one messenger. The operating personnel for S-4 was provided from service company and was generally split between the battalion CP, the battalion combat trains and the CC field trains.

SECTION II

OPERATIONS

The requirements of combat dictated various methods of operation of even this small headquarters. The basic requirements were flexibility and mobility, and while these characteristics are inherent in armored units, it took considerable time, experimentation and improvisation before the desired standards of efficiency were achieved. Most of our problems were, I know, common to all tank battalions and I offer the following solutions as those arrived at by only one of the many tank battalions.

Our first operation demonstrated that the battalion commander must be well forward, and that a portion of his staff must accompany him. Generally the battalion had normal attachments consisting of one company of armored infantry, a platoon of armored engineers, a tank destroyer platoon and a section of anti-aircraft artillery, adding up to a force of respectable size. We quickly discovered that the battalion commander had to have a portion of his staff with him at all times to properly control this force. Therefore, we divided the

headquarters into two echelons, a commander's group and a forward command post.

The commander's group consisted of the battalion commander, mounted in his tank; the S-3; the forward air controller, mounted in a tank equipped with a SCR 522; and the direct support artillery commander, or his liason officer, mounted in a half-track. The S-3 had a medium tank available, but we quickly learned that in any operation, except a full-scale, co-ordinated attack, that this vehicle was much too large and cumbersome for the S-3 to use in moving up and down a column or between columns. Hence, the S-3 habitually rode the CO's "peep", simply because it provided the most rapid means of transportation and adequate communications. Occassionally the S-3 was embarrassed to find himself involved in a private war with an odd sniper, but generally speaking, the system worked very well and considerably improved staff supervision.

The forward echelon of the battalion CP, consisting of the battalion executive's half-track, mounting the S-3 air, the S-2 and all of operations-intelligence section; the S-1 half-track, mounting the S-1, S-4 and message center; plus the myriad liason officers, and the command half-track of headquarters company, moved either by bounds or in the column, generally right behind the second reinforced company team.

During daylight hours in offensive operations, the forward echelon was entirely mobile. The operations and intelligence sections rotated all duties between the various members of the sections and an effective method was devised of keeping an up-to-date map and a journal with a

minimum of waste effort. One map sufficed to show generally the combat command picture, and by having the journal clerk wear a headset plugged into the battalion commander's net and using a portable typewriter, a journal was effectively maintained. As information and orders came over the command nets (Bn & CC) the clerk was able to type the information directly into the record. This record was reviewed nightly by the S-3 and necessary corrections made at that time, thus saving a great amount of effort and guess work, especially when after-action reports were prepared.

During hours of darkness, the CP was generally set up in the best available building, and was able to spread out a little, although I can never recall any of the elaborate set-ups being established that were common in training. Although the command half-track towed a 1-ton trailer in which was loaded a CP tent, a complete drafting chest and quite a bit of additional equipment, the bulk of all operations and intelligence materiel was carried in a .30 cal MG ammunition box, in addition to a single map board and the portable typewriter.

When halts were long enough, in excess of twenty-four hours, we normally operated a slightly more elaborate set-up, consisting of a war-room in which as much of the "big picture" as map supply permitted was portrayed, and briefing sessions were held daily for all company commanders and attached unit commanders. Here the S-2 and S-3 held forth and here every effort was made to keep up with the requirements of higher headquarters for records and reports.

SECTION III
PLANS AND ORDERS

Once combat was joined, all orders were of a fragmentary nature, delivered either at hastily convened company commander's meetings, or by radio, or by staff officers. Generally speaking, FM 17-33 & FM 101-5 were adhered to religiously. Warning orders and instructions for map reconnaissance habitually preceded attack or movement orders in the maximum time allowable. Even in the absence of official warning orders from higher headquarters, if sufficient information was available for an "educated guess", subordinate commanders were informed. When initial orders for an operation were issued, they were invariably verbal, with overlays being issued to show LDs, boundaries, objectives and check points used for both artillery control and location reporting. The check points were prepared according to division SOP, by division artillery and distributed as required. On one occasion, distribution got badly tied up and the check point overlays were not issued in time for H-hour. As a result, both combat command and battalion issued their own check point overlays separately - the resulting confusion was weird and wonderful, and for twenty-four hours each headquarters thought that every other headquarters was completely lost.

On only one occasion was a formal five-paragraph operations order issued, and in this case three days were devoted to setting up the operation, which involved an attack through a bridgehead held by an infantry division. In this case, detailed terrain studies were prepared

along with intelligence estimates and were disseminated in briefing periods to all company commanders. Unfortunately, just as the leading elements crossed into the bridgehead, a change of orders simply washed out all of the operational planning, necessitating a great deal of leg work on the part of the staff. Thanks to efficient communications, an involved change from multiple columns to a single column was effected without lost time and with minimum confusion, although I doubt seriously if all of the enlisted men ever figured out what happened to the beautiful plans on which they had been so carefully briefed.

After an operation was under way, supplemental orders were invariably fragmentary and oral in nature, and were transmitted in one of three ways or by a combination of these three means, which were personal contact, radio and staff officer. Obviously face-to-face contact is the most satisfactory, but in a rapidly moving situation, this method is not always practicable. The next method in point of efficiency, was the use of staff officers, especially the S-3, who is close to the CO in combat and undoubtedly knows more about the tactical picture than any other staff officer. This technique of acting as a liaison agent is perhaps the best argument for providing the S-3 with a vehicle less cumbersome than a medium tank. It was my personal experience that riding a tank was fine in the attack but in the exploitation and pursuit, it was out of the question to ride such a large vehicle, and hence a jeep was used with complete success. The next method, radio, was splendid, but it has certain limitations. For instance, asking questions or trying to establish exact locations is difficult and tends

to clutter up the air with many unnecessary transmissions and frequently results in confusion in the minds of all concerned. However, voice radio has been and will be used to initiate many complex movements with complete success.

It was my experience that in rapidly moving situations, sudden changes in plans issued orally, may not reach the forward echelon of the headquarters. Therefore, considerable care is necessary to insure that the battalion staff is informed of these changes as they occur, not only for their own information, but to insure that elements other than the leading team have some idea of what is going on. For instance, a change of routes or axes may readily result in having a major portion of the battalion wandering off on the wrong road if the change is not fully disseminated. This is especially true of maintenance elements and combat trains, despite the fact that they may be sticking close to the last combat element.

The matter of liason gave us considerable trouble, as the selection and training of our liason officer had been painfully neglected during "stateside" training - not intentionally, but primarily because no one knew exactly what the liason officer was supposed to do. By blind luck, an officer was selected for the job who possessed all of the desirable characteristics of a superior liason officer - intelligence, an active imagination, great tact, courage and enough tactical savvy to avoid juicy blunders. On innumerable occasions this officer would appear at the cheery hour of 0300, bursting with instructions, and he always knew the answers to the questions that had to be cleared up before the

instructions could be executed. By the same token, he kept combat command so happy that they finally snagged him off for their own use at division.

Until recent hostilities, the selection, training and employment of liaison officers were ignored. Nine lines in FM 100-5 constituted the principles, and beyond that point, our thinking seldom progressed. Experience quickly demonstrated the need for better liaison officers and today, doctrine is vastly improved, and in much more detail. It has been my experience that good liaison officers are worth their weight in uranium, while poor liaison officers, especially those lacking tact and imagination, become not merely overpaid mounted messengers, but a living menace to both of the headquarters they serve.

SECTION IV

MOVEMENTS

My division, for various reasons, did a great deal of non-tactical marching, and also a considerable amount of marching under conditions that can only be classified as semi-tactical, with contact a possibility, but not likely. For example, in one seven-day period, we were variously in three Armies and four corps. Suffice it to say that we became highly proficient in that important phase of military endeavour. In one phase of this activity however, we never did attain an entirely satisfactory degree of proficiency. That phase was the occupation of a bivouac or billeting area.

Initially we followed "the book" religiously, with S-1 and headquarters commandant controlling the billeting party, which was limited to one NCO per company and two vehicles. This limitation on personnel and transportation caused much difficulty, particularly when the battalion was spread out over a hundred and fifty or more square miles of Germany on lines of communications security duty. One man, without transportation, was simply incapable of doing all of the things that had to be done to select and clear billets in time to receive the troops. Likewise, the matter of getting to the division release point in time to meet the battalion and guide the units into their respective areas was not simplified by the restriction on transportation. All commanders concerned became very much upset by the habitual delays and confusion that invariable attended the conclusion of a march.

To solve the problem, positive action had to be taken, and this resulted in the battalion commander detailing the S-3, a major, to accompany the billeting party, to insure proper tactical dispositions, while the company commanders sent along either their 1st sergeants, or some equally responsible senior NCO as the company representatives. The transportation problem was solved illegally. The S-4's 3/4 ton truck was appropriated to carry most of the billeting party. The S-1, S-3 and headquarters commandant all took 1/4 tons, thus giving us a total of three officers, six senior NCO's, four drivers and four vehicles, plus a couple of additional EM who were crammed into the 1/4 tons to be used as markers and guides. In the main, this augmentation solved the problem, but things still went wrong. On one occasion the

billeting party was aroused at 0500 by a frantic messenger from division billeting party announcing that a change in plans had the battalion arriving at 0530 instead of 0900, as originally planned. We met them, but it was close, and I learned a painful lesson in liason.

It is my belief that a billeting party must not be too badly restricted as to composition by higher headquarters, especially if the command is going to spread over any sizeable area. The advantages gained from reducing traffic circulation problems are more than offset by the delays and "soirees" imposed on the troops because of inadequate billeting personnel.

SECTION V

ADMINISTRATION AND LOGISTICS

Strangely enough, the most continuously annoying problems we encountered were those pertaining to S-1. Replacements, promotions, leaves and passes all contributed to the administrative headache in general. Solutions were generally satisfactory, although routine administration in combat suffered frequently. It was essential that S-1 and the sergeant-major be with the forward echelon to perform the necessary administration, especially in regard to casualties and replacements.

Replacements were always a problem, although one that was far beyond the capabilities of battalion to solve. In the latter atages of

the war, the quality of replacements fell away almost to the vanishing point. I recall one batch of twenty replacements who boasted they had been trained in ARTC at Fort Knox. Closer questioning revealed however, that eighteen of them had been trained as truck drivers - the remaining two had each been in a tank once.

Logistical problems are always of major importance in armored operations, and we found it necessary to continually overload all supply vehicles to two or three times their rated capacities. In our first action, S-4 was left with the battalion combat trains and that nearly proved to be our undoing, as the combat elements of the battalion nearly ran dry, before trains could catch up with them, principally because we got beyond FM range of S-4's SCR 508. From then on out, he stayed where he belonged, and the CO of service company moved the combat trains, while S-4 of combat command moved the field trains of both the battalion and combat command.

Maintenance support, while no great problem, itself, did offer a problem in security. Frequently the maintenance officer would discover that while he and his platoon had been working on a couple of disabled vehicles, the rest of the battalion had pushed on some distance, and the maintenance platoon was out on a limb by itself. Having had this vital element shot up once, we made a practice of placing a tank platoon at the very rear of the column to act not only as a rear guard, but as a mobile straggler line to sweep the battalion's axis of advance and push all the loose pieces forward.

During exploitations, changes of routes made it necessary to mark

the battalion's path of advance by use of signs, which perhaps violated security principles, but under existing conditions of enemy resistance, were fully justified. On at least one occasion our trains kept up with us by the highly dubious method of following tank tracks on hard surfaced roads - a technique guaranteed to impede logistical support.

The surgeon was a most important individual and whenever possible, set up business close to the CP. This not only facilitated staff contact with the surgeon, but assisted the battalion commander in keeping tabs on personnel casualties. Incidentally, a visit to the aid station by the boss, after a day's action, has a remarkable effect on the wounded.

During movement, the aid station traveled with the maintenance platoon, halting only when business picked up and they then took over the nearest available building.

Medical equipment varied considerable from T/E, even to the addition of a spare 3/4-ton truck that appeared rather mysteriously, but that was of great value in carrying extra medical equipment, and on occasion, was used to transport lightly wounded personnel who were not to be evacuated beyond battalion.

Our surgeon was a member of the staff in every sense of the word, and his recommendations on medical matters were much sought after in all operations. In one instance, the battalion had three rifle companies from an armored infantry battalion attached for the specific purpose of forcing a river crossing over the Isar River. The route of evacuation envisioned the use of a destroyed railroad bridge that was

passable for foot troops, the river, being in flood, was much too swift for assault boat. Available litter bearers were insufficient to provide necessary support, so the surgeon converted all available medical personnel into litter bearers. These people, combined with PW's taken on the far shore, insured that evacuation was prompt and adequate.

SECTION VI
MISCELLANEOUS

Once committed to combat, the battalion headquarters attempted to operate much as it had done on maneuvers in the states. We soon found that certain phases of combat had not been adequately simulated and we had no procedures properly prepared to meet these conditions.

One point - minor in a way, but nevertheless one that effected our efficiency - was the absence of hot food. Cold C rations over a prolonged period do not help one's mental outlook, and generally the headquarters personnel were too busy to even heat up a few cans. We solved this matter by cramming a cook from headquarters company into the CP half-track, and his sole mission was to insure that hot food was prepared in the CP, thus making certain that the people who were on the move almost constantly, liaison agents, drivers, radio operators were fed, regardless of the hour.

This system immediately improved morale and efficiency and was maintained until we returned to the states.

Another point that caused some difficulty was the matter of

command post security, both on the march and at the halt. As most of the people who had acted as CP security during training (cooks, basics and so forth) were left with the field trains, we found ourselves badly strapped for security personnel. To solve the problem, we initially used the reconnaissance platoon for local security, but frequently the platoon was otherwise employed and not available. To resolve the problem, we normally placed the command post close to, or within the reserve company.

Prisoners of war were, as always, a problem. When mass surrenders occurred, as in the later stages of the Ruhr pocket action, PW's were simply disarmed and waved to the rear. However, any prisoner of rank was briefly interrogated at the CP and was transported to the CC PW cage by peep, provided him information indicated that further immediate interrogation was required. Towards the end of the war, when German troops were surrendering in droves, no effort was made by the battalion to segregate PW's or to evacuate them. At night when the battalion coiled, we normally attempted to evacuate PW's on empty supply trucks, but the hordes generally overwhelmed our capacity and as a result, we operated our own cage, which of course, provided neither food nor shelter for the "Krauts".

SECTION VII

CONCLUSION

In the foregoing pages I have presented the workings of the headquarters of one tank battalion of an armored division. Most of the problems we encountered were common to the bulk of the tank battalions in the ETO. I feel that our solutions were generally satisfactory, although perhaps unorthodox in some cases.

In our initial engagement, the operations of the headquarters were not entirely satisfactory. Orders were late, reports garbled and communications failed to function properly. At the end of the first forty-eight hours improvements were noticeable however, and continued steadily thereafter. As we gained experience, operations grew smoother and in general, the deficiencies inherent in the T/O organization were overcome.

Today, with a vastly stronger organization in the new T/O & E, many of our most difficult problems have been solved. The addition of two more liason officers and eleven enlisted men will do much to eliminate many of our operational problems, especially those arising from the need for continuous operation of the headquarters over prolonged periods of time. Further, the consolidation of service company into headquarters and service company should materially reduce the difficulties involved in providing proper logistical support to the combat companies.

In conclusion, I wish to emphasize one point. It has been said that World War II was a battalion commander's war. It would appear that ground operations in any conflict in the foreseeable future will follow the same general pattern as that of World War II. That being the case, it is vital that the headquarters of our tank battalions perform with even greater efficiency their role as the brain and nerve center of our major armored units.

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