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THE OPERATIONS OF THE 23D CAVALRY RECONNAISSANCE SQUADRON (Mecz)
IN PURSUIT ACTION WITH THE 86TH INFANTRY DIVISION
FROM INGOLSTADT TO WASSERSBURG, GERMANY
28 APRIL TO 2 MAY 1945

Type of operation described: SQUADRON IN PURSUIT

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INTRODUCTION

This Monograph covers the movement of the 23d Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron (Mecz) from Nuremberg, Germany to an assembly area just across the Danube River at Ingolstadt, Germany and Pursuit Operations from there to Wassersburg, Germany.

By 15 April 1945 the United States Armies had reached the approximate line agreed upon at Yalta, and the operations of the Western Allied Armies in Germany had slowed down considerably. (1)

It was reported by Reichsmarschal Hermann Goering, head of the German Luftwaffe, that Adolf Hitler, Fuehrer of the Third Reich, was convinced on 22 April 1945 the war had been lost. (2) This was three days before the link up of United States and Russian troops on the banks of the Elbe River near Torgau on 25 April 1945, when patrols of the 273d Regiment, 69th Infantry Division, made contact with elements of the 58th Guards Division. (3)

The liquidation of the Ruhr pocket, 18 April 1945, (4) and the meeting of the Allies created a definite void in central Germany. The German Armies were split into separate commands, the North and the South, with no means of connecting the operations in the two zones. The Allied Armies then had the job of destroying the two remaining fragments of the German Army. (5)

(1) A-4, p. 332; (2) A-2, p. 807; (3) A-1, p. 107; (4) A-1, p. 105; (5) A-1, p. 113.

In the north the Allied 21st Army Group continued its advances. In the south under the 6th Army Group, the Seventh Army was advancing towards Munich and was devoting its main attention to the problem of the Redoubt farther south and west. (6)

Under the 12th Army Group, the Third Army made rapid progress in its drive south and east down the Danube River valley. Regensburg fell to the XX Corps, Third Army, on 26 April, and the Corps continued southeast towards Lins. (7)

Straight south in the direction of the National Redoubt Area, a gap was temporarily left open. III Corps of Third Army was employed south of Murenberg and west of Regensburg to fill this gap. While the splitting of Germany had prevented the movement of the German High Command into the Redoubt, it still was not a certainty that it would not be the scene of a desperate stand by the fanatical elements of the armies south of the dividing line with those which might retreat northward out of Italy. (8)

The Allied Command estimated that about one hundred divisions, including the bulk of the remaining German Armored, SS formations and as many as thirty Panzer divisions, might conceivably be concentrated behind the mountain barriers. Also most of the surviving German jet fighter plane strength was located in the south. (9)

A rapid pursuit into the Bavarian plains to prevent the withdrawal of enemy troops into the Redoubt was indicated. The enemy was planning and organizing to keep open a corridor into the Bavarian Alps. (10)

(6) A-1, p. 114; (7) A-1, p. 115; (8) A-1, pp. 112-114;
(9) A-1, p. 112; (10) A-3, p. 370.

It was indicated by a Third Army G-2 report on 28 April 1945, that the enemy was capable of attempting organized hasty defensive positions on the Danube, Isar and Inn Rivers in an effort to delay our advance into the National Redoubt. (11)

GEOGRAPHICAL FEATURES

The area over which the 23d Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron operated extended from the Danube valley on the north to the foothills of the Alps mountains on the south.

This terrain can be characterized as flat and rolling with numerous well defined stream and ridge lines.

In the northern portion of this area drainage is mainly towards the Danube River. In the central portion it is to the Isar River and in the southern portion to the Inn River. These three rivers flow generally from west to east.

As a whole the terrain is well suited for defense and delaying actions due to the excellent observation over the relatively flat areas, the well defined ridge lines and numerous river, canal and stream lines.

Fields of fire coincided roughly with opportunities for observation. Ample cover and concealment existed throughout the area because of the numerous weeded areas.

THE MOVEMENT TO THE ASSEMBLY AREA

On the morning of 28 April 1945, the 23d Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron, in bivouac six miles northeast of Nuremberg, Germany just off the Reichsautobahn, received orders directing that it proceed at once to Ingolstadt, Germany to be assigned to III Corps. (12)

(11) A-6, p. CCXI; (12) A-5, p. 1.

The Squadron moved out at 1500, 28 April, while the Squadron Commander proceeded directly to Headquarters III Corps. At III Corps Headquarters the Colonel was further informed that the Squadron was attached to the 86th Infantry Division then in the vicinity of Ingolstadt. Upon reporting to the 86th Division Headquarters, the mission of protecting the right flank of the Division, which was also the right flank of III Corps and Third Army, was assigned. (13)

While the Colonel was in the process of receiving these orders, the Squadron was moving on a blackout march down Highway 2 to Weisenburg (39-56) and from there on Highway 13 to Ingolstadt. This town had been captured on 26 April 1945 by elements of the 86th Infantry Division. (14)

The Squadron was met at Ingolstadt by the Squadron Commander, who led the column across the muddy Danube River on a pontoon bridge, which had been constructed by the 86th Division Engineers. (15)

During the march to Ingolstadt, it had been impossible to use the Autobahn, because retreating enemy troops had destroyed the bridges all along the way. Blown bridges on the side routes had also slowed the movement.

The 23d crossed the Danube River at 0400, 29 April 1945, thirteen hours after leaving Nuremberg. Only fifty miles had been traveled during this period. It had rained almost all night. The weather was cold, and the roads were muddy and slippery. (16)

After crossing the Danube River, the Squadron went into an

(13) A-5, p. 1; (14) A-7, p. 33; (15) Statement by 86th Inf. Div. Engr.; (16) Self.

assembly area near the south bank until daylight. While most of the Command slept, the Commander briefed the Troop Commanders and Staff as to the Squadron's mission and at about 0600 assigned zones of action to A and D Troops on the right flank of the 86th Infantry Division. The right flank of the 86th was approximately concurrent with the Autobahn connecting Ingolstadt with Munich. (17)

An additional mission from Division, of maintaining contact with the 14th Armored Division on the left, was also received and assigned to B Troop. (18)

THE ADVANCE TO WASSERSBURG

Squadron Headquarters and C Troop displaced forward to an area in the vicinity of Hog (79-13) at 0900, 29 April. E Troop and F Company had to be left in the assembly area near the Danube until a resupply of gasoline could be procured. (19)

The movement of Allied troops during the last phases of the War had been so rapid, that gasoline dumps had not been able to displace forward fast enough to keep up. A shortage also existed within the 86th Infantry Division. Squadron trains had returned to Nuremberg, but the dump there was also out of gasoline. Where the Squadron Transportation Officer finally secured a resupply is unknown to the author.

During the course of the day of the 29th, A and D Troops, on the right flank, cleared out several small villages against little resistance. The 3d Platoon of D Troop cleared Pornbach (74-09), where twenty-one prisoners were rounded up. (20)

At about 1000 A Troop received a radio message directing it

(17) A-5, pp. 2, 11; (18) A-5, p. 1; (19) Self; (20) A-5, p. 11.

to rejoin the Squadron. B Troop had been instructed to contact the 341st Infantry Regiment, move to its left flank and contact the 14th Armored Division. B Troop moved southeast to Osterwaal (94-06), and there it contacted elements of the 342d Infantry Regiment. It was explained the 342d had replaced the 341st. The 342d was able to supply the Troop with gasoline and ammunition, both of which were sorely needed.

B Troop then moved to the left flank of the 342d and set up its Command Post in Seeburg (04-12). The 2d Platoon was assigned a mission of patrolling the left flank of the Regiment and securing a crossing of a canal, which was located just north of the Isar River. The 1st Platoon was employed to the flank and rear of the 2d Platoon. The 3d Platoon was held in reserve. The 2d Platoon captured a bridge over the canal that had been prepared for demolition. Sixteen German engineers who were protecting the bridge were captured. Platoon Headquarters captured five prisoners at Seeburg, and the 1st Platoon captured a ten man German patrol southeast of Seeburg. (21)

At 1800, 29 April, C Troop, which had been in reserve, was assigned a zone of advance on the right flank of the Division with the mission of maintaining contact with the 86th. The 1st Platoon of C Troop with Troop Headquarters moved into the town of Frickendorf (84-99) at about 2100. The 3d Platoon moved to Paunzhausen (83-94) and occupied it by 0015, 30 April. The 2d Platoon moved into Streitberg (88-02) and occupied it by 2400, 29 April. (22)

During the course of the night, C Troop's security elements

(21) A-5, p. 5; (22) A-5, p. 7.

in Frickendorf had a busy time trying to keep German soldiers from slipping out of the town. The next morning, 30 April, the Troop sent out dismounted patrols into the wooded area surrounding the town and rounded up some thirty additional prisoners.

The 3d Platoon, C Troop, had a report from some French soldiers that there were several German deserters in a farm house near Paunzhausen. An armored car and a machine gun 1/4 ton (Jeep) were dispatched to investigate. This patrol picked up one officer and eight enlisted men. On the return trip five P-51s started a strafing run on the vehicles. Fortunately, the first plane missed the two vehicles almost entirely, and by the time the second was about in position two members of the armored car crew were wildly waving an identification panel. The pilot noticed the panel and pulled out dipping the plane's wings to signify recognition. (23)

Later on that day, C Troop was assembled at Aldershausen (86-89) and at 1500, 30 April, they left on Squadron order to join the Squadron in an assembly area northwest of Freising. (24)

The Squadron had received orders to move south immediately, cross the Isar River at Freising (97-86) and proceed with all haste to secure the Inn River crossing at Wassersburg (35-50). At 1300, 30 April, B Troop was relieved from the 342d Infantry and rejoined the Squadron. (25)

A crossing of the Isar River at Freising could have been affected easily, as the 86th had cleared the town and had established a bridgehead across the river. However, it had not as

(23) Statement by Lt. Hutchins, Platoon Leader, C Troop, 3 May, 1945; (24) A-5, p. 1; (25) A-5, p. 1.

yet secured a crossing of the canal located to the east and parallel to the Isar. The Squadron Commander decided to seek another crossing. All the bridges to the north within the Squadron zone had been blown, but to the south the 106th Cavalry Group had secured a crossing at Granek (93-76) and gave permission to the Squadron to cross there as soon as a bridge was repaired. The Squadron began crossing this bridge late in the afternoon of the 30th. (26)

However, after then moving southeast to Goldack (97-76), the leading elements of the Squadron came under mortar fire, which halted the forward movement of the Squadron. By this time darkness was setting in, and the leading element, A Troop, found itself halted in open column on a poor road with flat, muddy and swampy ground on both sides. The Squadron Commander ordered those elements that had crossed the Isar to go into bivouac in the general vicinity of their present location and the others to remain west of the Isar. The scout sections of both the 1st and 2d Platoons of A Troop were sent north and east from the bivouac area to reconnoiter the enemy position and to locate possible by-passes. (27)

The 1st and 2d Platoons of A Troop reported the Ludwig Canal to the east with all bridges blown. One bridge to the southeast was reparable. The Squadron had to await the repair of this bridge.

Meanwhile, D Troop, with one platoon of the Tank Company, Company F, and one platoon of the Assault Gun Troop, Troop E, attached, moved down the Autobahn and east to Granek. After crossing the Isar River, the Troop turned south to the town of

(26) A-5, p. 1; (27) A-5, p. 2.

Fischerhausen (94-69).

Just outside this town D Troop Commander was hit by enemy rifle fire from a wooded area. A dismounted patrol quickly cleaned out the woods with no prisoners taken. The dead were not counted, but an estimate of a platoon strength was given. (28)

The executive officer assumed command of D Troop, and the Troop continued south through Ismaning (93-66) then northeast to Zengerhoss (98-72) and on to Moosinning (05-72), where they suddenly came upon approximately one hundred Germans deployed against elements of the 106th Cavalry. D Troop had approached unnoticed behind the Germans. After the initial burst of fire from the leading vehicles, the enemy surrendered. Some ninety prisoners were taken, including a group of SS fanatics, who, it was learned, had been shooting their own men who had tried to surrender. Elements of the 106th Cavalry cleaned out the town of Moosinning. (29)

By 0130, 1 May, the bridge across the Ludwig Canal was repaired, and D Troop moved on east across the Isar Canal at Weider Neuching (05-70). C Troop was protecting the bridgehead and had been under artillery fire just fifteen minutes before D Troop arrived. D Troop then continued east to Reixing (07-70), which was outposted for the night. (30)

At 0500, 1 May, B Troop had moved on Squadron order in the direction of Pretzen (10-73). In passing through the town of Pretzen, the 1st Platoon took a wrong turn and immediately

(28) Statement by Capt. John A. Pindar, CO, D Troop, 30 April 1945; (29) (30) A-5, pp. 1, 11.

came under fire from buildings in the town. The 1st, leading, Platoon opened fire on visible targets and buildings from which the fire had come, while the 2d and 3d Platoons dismounted and went into the buildings to clear the opposition. An uncounted number of Germans were killed, four were wounded and sixty-one captured. One 1/4 ton truck (Jeep) was lost, but no casualties were suffered by the Troop personnel. (31)

Here at Pretzen, a platoon of light tanks (M-24) from F Company and a platoon of assault guns from E Troop were attached. (32)

With the 3d Platoon leading, B Troop moved on towards Indorf (12-73). Upon entering the town, the Troop came under artillery and mortar fire. The Troop withdrew and by-passed Indorf moving on north through Erding and on to Kirchasch (16-75), where it had to await approximately six hours for gasoline. The amount of gasoline received was insufficient to fill all vehicles. (33)

B Troop continued east at about 1430 with the 1st Platoon as the leading element. This Platoon passed through Landersdorf (23-75) and secured the northeastern edge of the town. A message from the front of the column told of the approach of an enemy infantry column of approximately a company coming down the road from the north. The assault guns with two dismounted reconnaissance platoons went into position on the left of the road. The tanks moved to the right of the road, and on order all opened fire. Almost all of the enemy column was destroyed. One of the tankers, bore sighting with 75mm gun, sniped at an

(31) (32) A-5, p. 6; (33) A-5, p. 6.

enemy infantryman running across an open field. The enemy infantryman disintegrated. (34)

B Troop then moved on to Schrafstetten (22-77). Upon starting to enter the town, an enemy machine gun opened fire on the column from an old wooden farm building to the left of the road. One round of WP from an assault gun silenced the machine gun and set the building on fire. After a few buildings in the town had been taken under assault gun fire, a German civilian was sent into the town with orders for the town to surrender, as it would be destroyed. Sixty-four SS prisoners were taken. (35)

Gasoline was again running short. B Troop back tracked to Landersdorf where there were better facilities for billeting. Supper was eaten, and the Troop was bedded down for the night. Members of an element of the 14th Armored Division, passing through the town, told the Troop Commander the entire plan had been changed. Nothing to that affect was received from Squadron. The town had been secured for the night. Snow was still falling, and gasoline had not been received. The location of the Troop was reported to Squadron Headquarters.

On the morning of 1 May, A Troop patrols had returned from making a reconnaissance of the roads, to the north and east of the Squadron bivouac area, to find possible by-passes of the enemy resistance encountered the evening previous. The road net, over which they had worked, was very poor. With continuous rain, the patrols had found it an all night job. One patrol had again contacted elements of the 106th Cavalry, from whom they had obtained some information as to the movements

(34) Statement by Capt. John C. Patterson, CO, B Troop, 2 May, 1945; (35) A-5, p. 6.

and location of the enemy. The patrols reported enemy resistance to the front had withdrawn. (36)

At about 1000, 1 May, Squadron Headquarters with reserve Troops D, E and F displaced east and set up a Command Post on commanding terrain in the vicinity of Indorf. (37)

A Troop was assigned the mission of proceeding east on the right flank of the Squadron with all possible speed via Indorf, Lengdorf, Armstorf (28-71) to Highway 15, then south as rapidly as possible, by-passing all enemy resistance, and reaching the Inn River to cut off the retreating enemy and to insure the crossing of allied troops. (38)

At about 1200, 1 May, the Squadron received orders from the 86th Infantry Division attaching them to "Task Force Polk," a force made up of infantry, tanks and artillery of the Division. The mission of the Task Force was, the same as had been given to the Squadron earlier, to seize the river crossing at Wassersburg. At 1400, the Squadron Commander took Troop E and Company F to support Troop A, while Squadron Command Post followed with Troop C. (39)

At this time, the general plan was to move all troops to the north south road, Dorfen-Wassersburg, and then swing south along the road to the Inn River. (40)

At about 0630, 1 May, D Troop moved northeast from Reixing to Ammersdorf (12-75), where two enemy snipers were located and killed. It then continued on to Kinzlbach (15-76), where it was forced to halt again for four hours because of lack of gasoline. During this halt, a report was received that there was a company

(36) Self, present at Sq. Hq. when patrols returned; (37) A-5, p. 1; (38) A-5, pp. 1,3; (39) A-5, pp. 1,8; (40) A-5, p. 1.

of Germans with rifles and automatic weapons located in the woods just outside of Kinzlbach in the direction of Bockhorn (15-77). A reconnaissance by fire from the assault guns and tanks was conducted. Later investigation revealed the fire had caught only a few Germans, but the rest had retreated leaving their weapons. (41)

D Troop moved on to Hippolding (26-81) after receiving gasoline. While waiting for friendly artillery to lift before entering the town, a German plane flew over the column. It was fired upon and believed hit, as it appeared to fall in the distance. (42)

D Troop then proceeded on south to the outskirts of Dorfen, where two German motorcyclists were captured as they attempted to leave the town. The leading Platoon proceeded cautiously through the center of the town. The Platoon leader in the leading armored car came upon a German 75mm (SP) gun in the process of making a turn under an archway. Because of the width of the archway, neither could traverse their turrets to bring fire on the other. The Platoon leader directed 50 caliber fire from the armored car's ring mount, thus keeping the enemy crew buttoned up. By radio, he directed a tank around to the rear of the gun, so that it could bring effective fire on the rear of the enemy vehicle. It was quickly knocked out. At this time, Germans in the village proper opened fire in return. After about fifteen minutes, orders were received from the Squadron Commander to withdraw and by-pass the town. (43)

(41) A-5, p. 11; (42) A-5, p. 11; Statement by Capt. Joe Kolesar, CO, E Troop, 2 May 1945; (43) Statement by Lt. Henry H. Whiting, Platoon leader, D Troop, 6 May 1945.

It was then about 1800. The Squadron Commander, with E and F Troops, had arrived on the outskirts of Dorfen. He withdrew the Troops to a range of about two thousand yards, set up a four gun battery and proceeded to shell the town. After some twenty-five rounds had been fired, a patrol was sent into the town. The enemy had withdrawn. (44)

D Troop, in attempting to by-pass Dorfen on the west, had most of its vehicles hopelessly bogged down. Most of the night was spent in clearing the vehicles. The weather was very cold, and a heavy snow continued to fall all night long. Visability was very poor. (45)

Meanwhile, A Troop, moving on the right flank of the Squadron, had advanced rapidly to the east from village to village, where small numbers of prisoners were taken. A Polish prisoner labor camp, which contained some five hundred forty persons of mixed nationalities, was liberated. All along the way civilians had repeatedly reported there were SS troops retreating towards Dorfen (28-73). It had been impossible to by-pass all enemy resistance. Several small fire fights had been engaged in with no casualties to the Troop. Reports had been sent back regarding the reported withdrawal of enemy to Dorfen and the Troop locations. (46)

On the night of 1 May, A Troop had gone into billets at Armstorf (28-71). At 2039 the Troop Commander had received a message from Squadron directing the Troop to continue on its mission immediately. The message had further stated that the balance of the Squadron had been held up at Dorfen but would

(44) Statement by Capt. Joe Kolesar, CO, E Troop, 2 May 1945;
(45) Self; (46) A-5, p. 3 and Self.

support as soon as possible. A Troop moved out as soon as all members could be aroused from their deep sleep. The Troop traveled in blackout, 3d Platoon leading, with every effort to move as noiselessly as possible. (47)

Artillery fire was heard falling to the rear of the column, and great anxiety prevailed. The column had to halt when armored cars would slide off the side of the road. Approximately two miles south of Armstorf, a road block was encountered. A Troop Commander, 3d Platoon Leader and 3d Platoon Sergeant dismounted to make a reconnaissance and check for mines and booby traps. The road block was undefended, but tank tracks could be seen in the snow leading around the block. After the tank route had been checked, the Troop was moved around and continued south. Another undefended road block was encountered and bypassed a few miles down the road.

At a point about three miles north of Hagg (31-61), a German tractor came chugging down the road. A burst of fire stopped the tractor, and its four occupants were disarmed and taken prisoner. The tractor was immobilized, and the advance continued.

About one mile from Hagg an armored car near the rear of A Troop column slid off the road into a ditch. The head of the column stopped at the next road junction to wait for the armored car to be pulled out. While waiting, a radio message was received from the tail of the column stating that tracked vehicles could be heard approaching from the rear. The whole Troop suddenly became alert and anxious to move on. Two additional messages came from the rear of the column stating the tracks were

(47) Self.

getting nearer and could be heard more distinctly. Word was sent back that as soon as the armored car was out of the ditch the column would move. The armored car was immediately reported ready to move. (48)

Further down the road the column met four trucks loaded with Germans. There was one artillery piece being towed by a prime mover. The enemy column was quickly brought under fire and halted. While the prisoners were being disarmed and searched, three of the men found a small barn, at the side of the road, full of Germans. The barn was sprayed by automatic weapons, when the Germans refused to come out. (49)

The column then moved on into Hagg and completely turned around inside the town. There were numerous German trucks, busses, Red Cross vehicles and one tank covered with Germans in the street. Without one shot being fired all enemy surrendered, was disarmed and sent to a stockade, which had been established in the town. The Troop billeted on the outskirts of Hagg for the night. (50)

Taking the reader back again to Dorfien - at 2400, 1 May, the Squadron Commanding Officer, seeing that D Troop would not be able to support A Troop and knowing that B Troop was still in the vicinity of Landersdorf because of a lack of gasoline, issued an order something like the following to C Troop, "Move to Dorfien (28-73), Outpost roads while E and F move through." However, shortly afterwards, the Squadron Commander changed his plan and directed C Troop to move via another route past Dorfien in the direction of Wassersburg to support A Troop. (51)

(48) Self; (49) Statement by two enlisted men of A Troop, 2 May, 1945; (50) A-5, p. 4; (51) Statement by Capt. Vincent R. Schmidt, Sq. Com. O., 9 May, 1945.

C Troop by-passed Dorfen on the newly selected route at about 0200, 2 May. In the darkness and with heavy snow still falling, the column became separated. Only seven armored cars, one half track and three 1/4 tons were still with the Troop Commander.

C Troop Commander and his group continued south in an effort to contact A Troop. As the group moved into Hagg, they spotted two towed German 88's. Fire was placed on these guns as soon as the first armored car gun crew could get out from under the tarpaulin that had been protecting them from the snow. When the crew opened up on the two guns, they drew fire from nearby buildings. 50 caliber fire from the leading 1/4 tons silenced the enemy fire. Several AP rounds were fired at the 88's, and the Troop moved on into Hagg. (52)

A German hospital train, preparing to pull out of Hagg, was stopped and searched. In the column there was a German ammunition truck. When a member of its crew made a move that aroused the suspicion of one of the 1/4 ton gunners, he opened fire with his machine gun, set the truck on fire and killed the crew. Later A Troop was contacted by radio and found to be not far outside the town. C Troop moved on to meet them. (53)

Meanwhile, the 2d Platoon of C Troop, while lost, had engaged in a short fire fight in a small village, had cleared the village and stayed there for the night. At about 0800, 2 May, they had moved on to St. Wolfgang (26-67). (54)

While in St. Wolfgang, a radio operator of 2d Platoon, C Troop, picked up the locations of both C Troop and Squadron Headquarters. Fifty prisoners were rounded up from the wooded

(52) A-5, p. 8; (53) A-5, p. 8; (54) Self, present when platoon arrived.

area around the town. The Platoon then proceeded on towards Hagg. On the outskirts of Hagg they were fired on from a wooded area to the left of the road. The Platoon fired into the woods with rifles and automatic weapons for a few minutes, then went into the woods dismounted. Several Germans were killed, and some seventy-five prisoners were taken. The Platoon then proceeded to rejoin Troop Headquarters. (55)

The 3d Platoon of C Troop, which had also been lost, found its way up behind a column containing E and F Troops and elements of Squadron Headquarters. This column, upon reaching the outskirts of Hagg, also came upon two German self-propelled weapons. The column halted, and the Squadron communications officer with two enlisted men quickly dismounted and boldly attacked the crew of the 88's after creeping up to a flank. Fortunately, the enemy gun crews had been surprised, and by the time they were ready for action, they were receiving small arms fire from the weapons in the hands of the three men on their flank. Other Germans in a personnel carrier were fired upon by the column, and those remaining surrendered. Under the command of the communications officer, the town was cleared of enemy by a house to house search. Some four hundred prisoners were taken. Outside the town Germans, known to be in a barn, would not come out on order. It was then necessary to set fire to the barn by firing incendiaries. The column then moved on towards Wassersburg. (56)

At 0400, 2 May, A Troop, with C Troop (-) in column behind, had moved out from its bivouac on the outskirts of Hagg. It proceeded on towards Wassersburg. Upon nearing the town, many Germans came out of the woods to surrender. Several small fights

(55) A-5, p. 8; (56) Statement by Capt. Vincent R. Schmidt, Sq. Com. O., 9 May, 1945.

took place. The head of the column was fired upon twice by antitank guns supported by machine guns, but each time the resistance withdrew and finally set up a road block on high ground overlooking Wassersburg. Dismounted reconnaissance found the road block heavily mined but lightly protected by discouraged Germans, who quickly surrendered when a little pressure was applied. The road block was reduced, and information gained from prisoners and civilians indicated that Wassersburg was strongly held with many SS troops present. (57)

A request was sent to Squadron Headquarters for additional assault guns and tanks. A Troop Commander was told that the 86th Infantry Division Commander had decided to use an Infantry attack, and, as soon as the Infantry passed through, the Troop was to return to the Squadron. At about 1700, 2 May, the Troop was relieved and rejoined the Squadron. (58)

The Infantry elements of "Task Force Polk" went on to capture the objective. (59)

On 3 May, a change of Army boundaries caused III Corps to be pinched out. The 23d was relieved from the 86th Infantry Division and directed to return to Nuremberg. (60)

ANALYSIS AND CRITICISM

In analyzing this operation it may be seen that the 23d Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron (Mecz) was assigned an important mission although a rather hide and seek affair from a combat standpoint. Most of the opposition consisted of fanatical SS troops who seemed determined to give their lives for the Fatherland and their Fuehrer. The 23d Cavalry tried to help

(57) A-5, p. 4; (58) Self, present at Sq. Hq.; (59) Statement by Col. Raymond C. Adkisson, Sq. CO, 3 May, 1945; (60) A-5, pp. 2, 4, 9.

them with this effort.

The loss of time, in the accomplishment of the assigned mission, is the greatest single criticism that can be made of the operation.

It is believed by the author that the assigned mission could have been accomplished in about one-half the time if the "Task Force" Commander had provided infantry to accompany the Squadron on their armored cars and tanks. Much valuable time could have been saved if infantry had been present to help clear and occupy towns, in order that enemy troops could not reenter and further delay the advance of the Squadron to the objective. Both the towns of Derfen and Hagg stand out as examples of this. Both were reentered more than once forcing each element of the Squadron to engage in at least a small fire fight before they could pass through or by-pass the town.

At least a squad of engineers should have been provided to accompany the leading element of the Squadron to aid in making minor repairs to bridges, which would have, in some cases, permitted a more rapid crossing of streams and canals.

The Squadron Commander can be criticised for not sooner pushing his main effort along one avenue of approach to the objective. However, it will be recalled that poor road and weather conditions, numerous streams, rivers and canals made the selection of a single route very difficult, particularly in the vicinity of Freising. Considerable reconnaissance was required before suitable river and canal crossing sites could be found.

Failure by the "Task Force" Commander to give sufficient consideration to the gasoline and oil requirements of a mechanized unit permits additional criticism.

Troop Commanders as a whole can be criticised for permitting the engagement of their respective troops in fire fights which could have been avoided.

The Squadron must be given credit for proceeding to accomplish their assigned mission in the face of the elements as well as light enemy resistance. A total of about one hundred fifty miles was covered during the five day period. Ten-in-one, C and K rations were eaten, and little sleep was had by the troops. The morale of the troops was very high all during the operation. They knew the War was just about to an end, and, more important, they were helping to square things for many of their friends and comrades.

LESSONS

Some of the lessons to be learned from this operation are:

1. When a "Task Force" in a pursuit operation is assigned a mission of cutting an enemy route or routes of withdrawal, it is important that the unit avoid unnecessary combat with the enemy until it is in a position to accomplish this mission. The "Task Force" must, however, be prepared to fight in order to accomplish its mission.

2. An advance to cut off an enemy withdrawal should be made on a narrow front in order to avoid contact with the enemy in adjacent areas and to retain secrecy of purpose.

3. Where the situation is obscure, the column formation is best, because it provides flexibility and control. From such a formation quick concentration on critical points is possible as a result of the freedom of maneuver provided.

4. Infantry must either follow very closely or be a part of the leading elements in order to prevent reentrance of the enemy into towns that are captured.

5. Leading vehicles must be rotated frequently to allow crews to rest. Even with slight enemy resistance, every corner, building, town, hill or other terrain feature keeps the crew on a mental tension. The location of an enemy antitank gun, sniper, mine or troop concentration must always be expected to be just around the bend in the road. Crews of lead vehicles operating behind enemy lines tire very quickly.

6. Cavalry or other mechanized units, which might operate considerably in advance of the main body, must have medical units attached which have capabilities beyond that of aid men.

7. Supply must be given one of the first considerations when plans are made for a mechanized or motorized pursuit.

8. Leading elements of a unit or "Task Force" in pursuit must be closely supported by engineers.

9. Some system for the handling of prisoners must be devised for units which operate in advance of the main body. Such a unit cannot afford to leave guards behind each time prisoners are taken, nor can they provide sufficient transportation to take even a few along.

10. The 50 caliber machine gun mounted in 1/4 ton trucks is an extremely useful weapon in combat in towns.

11. The M-8 armored car is definitely a poor vehicle for pursuit operations, as it is extremely road bound.

12. The M-24 light tank is an excellent vehicle for pursuit operations, as it has fire power, maneuverability, speed and affords protection to the crew from small arms fire.

13. Communications is of primary importance in organizing a "Task Force" for pursuit operations.