

COMBAT HISTORY

102ND CAVALRY RECONNAISSANCE SQUADRON (MECZ)

WORLD WAR II

(D DAY – JUNE 6, 1944 through VE DAY – MAY 8, 1945)

by

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(From Col. Harold J. Samsel's Book "Operational History of the 102nd Cavalry Regiment, Essex Troop World War II")

WITH THE EUROPEAN PHASE OF WORLD WAR II NOW HISTORY AND THE DEEDS OF THE 102ND CAVALRY RECONNAISSANCE SQUADRON MECHANIZED AN INTEGRAL PART OF THAT HISTORY, THIS RESUME' OF THE UNIT'S ACCOMPLISHMENTS DURING THE 334 DAYS OF COMBAT IS DEDICATED TO THE 71 MEN WHO GAVE THEIR LIVES FOR THE CAUSE THEY BELIEVED IN AND FOUGHT FOR

June 6th 1944, is the day all the world speaks of simply as "D-Day", but for the men of this Squadron and the other units preparing to assault the European mainland it marked the sudden end of months of anxious waiting for the unknown. Troops B, C, and Headquarters and service, plus elements of the balance of the Squadron, lay anchored off the coast of France expecting at any minute to hear the ominous order to disembark. As the first assault waves hit the beach and little L.S.T. boats approached the beachhead, the Squadron had its "baptism of fire". Hostile aircraft bombed and strafed incessantly and artillery in battery position on the high ground just beyond the beach line bracketed the small craft outlined against the water. As barrage after barrage fell in the immediate vicinity of the three L.S.T.s carrying the 102nd Cavalry personnel, the assault of the beach hung in the balance. To the men riding at anchor in the bay, it seemed that for every three boats that were ordered shoreward by the beach-master, one struck a mine, a second was blown to bits by artillery and the third limped back loaded to the gunwales with wounded. How much longer could the carnage last before one side or the other was forced back?

For nearly two days and nights that seemed like an eternity, the unit lay less than a thousand yards off shore waiting for the beachhead to expand enough for cavalry vehicles to disembark. The German shore batteries kept up their ceaseless fire at the shuttling convoys in the bay while friendly warships further out matched them round for round. Wave after wave of strongly escorted bomber armadas dropped thousands of tons of explosives on the steel and concrete emplacements overlooking the beach and the enemy in retaliation sent every plane at their disposal to try to counterbalance the joint air and land attacks by brute force. Anti-aircraft guns on the ships, and later on shore, sent up a quantity of flack never before equaled in the history of aerial combat.

"Omaha, East Red" was the code name for the sector from St. LAURENT SUR MERE to ISIGNY and the massive identifying signs implanted on the sloping beach marked the spot where the landing was to be made. Every contingency of weather and terrain had been anticipated in the months of planning; nothing was left to chance.

June 8, 1332B - After 24 hours of false reports, rumors and counter rumors, L.S.T. #16 was ordered to "go in", and Troop C began to disembark 228 minutes later at ST. LAURENT SUR MERE. The tenseness of waiting was over. This, finally, was what the men had been training for these many long months in the United States and England. The route to the beach was strewn with still burning ships that had run upon sunken concrete pilings or mines, and ahead lay the shoreline sloping gently upward to the high bluffs overlooking the bay. The beach proper was littered with demolished vehicles and American and German soldiers unrecognizably intermingled in death. The cost in lives of slightly over 48 hours of one of history's bloodiest engagements will go into the records as a mere impersonal statistical computation; but to those who landed on Omaha Beach and lived to retain the vivid picture, the war was suddenly transmitted from routine, dull, heartbreaking training to grim kill or be killed reality.

After partially de-waterproofing their vehicles, Troop C displaced forward 6 miles to a field near SURRAIN, France, and at 1900B the same day, elements of Troops A and B disembarked to join them. The balance of the Squadron put ashore the following morning, and with entire fighting strength assembled, The Troops bivouacked for the rest of the night.

June 10th - The first mission. Elements of the Reconnaissance Troops left their areas before dawn with orders

to proceed to ISIGNY and clear out enemy pockets of resistance in the beach area north of the town. It was here that the Squadron saw its first action as a strong dismounted force opposed the advance into ISIGNY with small arms and automatic weapons. 74 of the enemy including several White Russians forced to fight alongside the Nazis, were taken prisoner and turned over to the 29th Infantry Division before the troops retraced their route to the previous night's assembly area.

Troops B and C plus attached platoons of Company F and Troop E were alerted at the first light the following morning and proceeded in a southeasterly direction as a screen for the 1st Division. For three days those two Troops led that division through BALLEROY, and finally as far as CAUMONT where the first difficult opposition was encountered on the 12th. Three platoons of Troop B were reconnoitering along parallel north-south roads east of the town and as the 2nd platoon approached an intersection, a well camouflaged unidentified tank fired, point blank at the lead 1/4 ton vehicle. The 75mm gun was fortunately set to hit the turret of a tank or armored car and the shell burst above the jeep wounding one man in the head and face. The tank was later revealed to have been a "Sherman". The Squadron's first casualty thus occurred simply because a nervous gunner, over zealous in his first action, failed to recognize friendly identifying markings.

The platoon passed through the edge of CAUMONT; then with the mission satisfactorily completed, the entire Troop was ordered to pull back. German snipers with rifles and 20mm guns ambushed the men as they passed the first houses and for nearly an hour the opposing forces exchanged fire at close range. A second casualty occurred before two tanks and the rest of the troop came up to support the beleaguered men while they drew back out of range. In a second phase of the CAUMONT skirmish, a C Troop man became the first the Squadron's "killed in action". An enemy machine gun opened up on the lead 1/4 ton vehicle as the column moved toward the town, and as the men dismounted to return fire, several bullets ripped through Private Donald C. Redmond's stomach and chest, killing him instantly.

On June 13th. Troop B pulled back to ISIGNY; then rejoined the balance of the Squadron in CERISY FOREST the following morning. Troop C remained detached to the 1st Division until two days later. From the 14th until the 22nd of June, the Squadron was alternately attached to the 9th and 23rd Infantry Regiments of the 2nd Division and screened the advances of these two units as they pushed the enemy toward their ST. LO ROAD defense lines. Tanks and assault guns actively supported in forward positions while the Reconnaissance Troops alternated on the front line; each taking two days up, two in reserve and two aggressively patrolling to the front. Troop E and Company F repeatedly proved themselves as they knocked out countless strong points, opposing armored vehicles and concentrations of troops and supplies on either side of the ST. LO ROAD. Casualties were comparatively light considering the resistance encountered, but F Company lost several tanks in the units first armored actions on the 14th and 17th. Gains were measured in yards as the men out-fought and out-maneuvered the enemy from hedge-row to hedge-row. The still powerful "LUFTWAFFE" made daily raids all along the extent of the line in a desperate effort to break up the steadily advancing American attack.

The Squadron captured many prisoners during the period, and casualties inflicted on the determined enemy units blocking the drive far exceeded those sustained by the 102nd Cavalry.

From the 22nd of June until the breakthrough in the ST. LO sector over a month later, the Squadron held the static line between the 1st and 2nd Infantry Divisions and maintained the initiative by patrolling aggressively to the south. The plan of operation called for two Troops on the forward outpost line and one in reserve. Troop E shelled VIDOVILLE and other probable assembly points south of the ST. LO ROAD. The assault guns went into four gun battery firing position for the first time from the 29th of June until the 8th of July except for three days when the platoons were again attached to the Reconnaissance Troops and during these three days approximately 2000 rounds were fired with telling effect at machine gun nests, strong points, various German supply and personnel concentrations and opposing artillery batteries. All units on the line were directed to remain constantly on the alert to thwart any counter-thrusts from the south or east.

On 11 July, while elements of the 2nd Division assaulted Hill "192" the Squadron held the line to their left flank

and maintained contact with the 5th Division on the opposite side. Friendly artillery from both these divisions and V Corps pulverized the enemy on the hill in the greatest mass artillery concentration yet seen by this unit. From that day until July 26th the Recon. Troops, with active tank and assault gun support, held their sector of the forward line and patrolled to the ST LO ROAD and beyond.

On 26 July, after month of sparring for position and keeping the Germans dispersed all along the line, the combined weights of the 2nd and 29th Divisions were thrown at the ST LO sector. The German line bent, cracked and finally broke, and as the 2nd Division poured through the gap, the 102nd Cavalry Troops A, B and C with platoons of E and F attached, protected their right flank. Twenty minutes before "H" hour, F Company went on a quick sortie toward ST PIERRE LE SIMILLY to soften up the enemy's forward hedgerow defense network and inflict as many casualties as possible, while assault guns of Troop E fired heavy concentrations to cover the sneak thrust and withdrawal.

During the early weeks of July, while the 102nd Cavalry was fighting in the FORET de CERISY, four members of this Squadron began a long and energetic search for the solution to the grave problem presented to the forces of the First United States Army by the hedgerows in the terrain over which they were operating. By working in the closest collaboration, Major Arthur C. Person, Major, then Captain, James G. Depew, Captain Stephen M. Litton and Sergeant Curtis G. Cullin developed a device to be mounted on light and medium tanks which would enable the track laying vehicles to pass through hedgerows, dirt fences or other embankments which would otherwise be impossible. Constructed from German scrap angle iron, the hedgerow cutter, officially named "Rhinoceros", afforded the only successful solution to the problems of hedgerow warfare then being encountered in France; and its subsequent adoption by this Squadron's Company F and other armored units materially contributed to the Army's advances. The four men directly responsible were later awarded the "Legion of Merit" for their outstanding contribution to the military service. Tank drivers, Tec 4 Harmon S. McNorton, and Private John Hughey who drove the first tank with the Rhino in hazardous test run, and the welders, Tec 4 Wesley A. Hewitt, Tec 5 John Jessen and Tec 5 Ernest Hardcastle who installed the device, all made inestimable contribution to its eventual success and were awarded the Bronze Star for meritorious service.

The first real tests, made under combat conditions, were during and after the ST. LO "Breakthrough". The veil of secrecy, which had been carefully kept, was lifted on this date and by the time the Americans broke through the German wall, all tank units, then on the line, had installed the new "Rhinos". Their devastating success was proven during the next two weeks beyond doubt.

The Squadron crossed the ST. LO Road on the 26th and pushed through ST. PIERRE LE SEMILLY toward CATIGNY. Troop A lost four of its five officers in the two days of bitter dismounted hedgerow fighting. Tanks directly supported the dismounted attack and assault guns engaged direct fire targets blocking the route of advance. PLANTRO and CATIGNY, on the 28th, proved tough obstacles, but as the Reconnaissance Troops gradually pushed the enemy east, the toll of German dead mounted by the minute. The Squadron's casualty lists swelled by 47, over half from Troop B, as the men paid dearly for each hard fought yard. The Squadron Commander, Major Arthur C. Person, and the Executive Officer, Major George S. Saunders, were both wounded in the frontal attack. Major Richard A. Jameson assumed immediate command.

For the next two days the Troops mopped up remaining enemy pockets in the area through which they had just attacked, and complete reorganization and re-equipment was carried on to bring the Squadron back up to strength.

July 31st, the unit assembled and moved south again to the vicinity of TORIGNY SUR VIRE to await new attack orders. The wait was short lived as the Squadron was ordered to quit the town on the morning of the 2nd of August to screen the advance of the 2nd Division attacking toward VIRE. Two major obstacles lay between the Division and its objective - the Vire River and Hill "204". Major Jameson's mission was to seize and hold a bridge across the stream, secure the high ground on the opposite bank, then continue on to VIRE. Strongly entrenched German infantrymen blocked the general American advance to VIRE and it was the Squadron's task to help obliterate the obstacle. Troop B, with supporting F company tanks and Troop E assault guns moved

across the river first to assault the hill under direct enemy fire of all arms, while Troop C took up defensive positions on the near side of the stream. Troop B was to attack up the left side of the hill and Troop A was to pass through their positions to the right flank. The forward momentum of the lead elements was stopped about three quarters of the way up the slope and until Troop A passed through them to outflank the Germans, the attack seemed to be stalled below the crest. Before the enemy retreated in disorder down the reverse slope of the hill, three tanks and various other vehicles were destroyed beyond repair and several tanks, armored cars, half tracks and 1/4 ton trucks were immobilized by the terrain, mines or enemy fire. 33 casualties were sustained in the battle and the vehicular losses necessitated an almost complete re-equipment for some of the platoons.

On August 3rd, after eight days of almost fanatical resistance by the enemy, the Squadron pulled back to SOURDEVAL to reorganize and rest. Major Francis J. Skidmore assumed command of the Squadron on this date. In just over one week upwards of one seventh of the unit's strength was temporarily or permanently lost as 24 men were killed or died of wounds and 90 more were wounded or missing. Troops A and B bore the brunt of the casualties as they lost 58 and 37 men respectively. In cold, impersonal warfare, results are not judged so much by casualties sustained as by enemy men and equipment knocked out, miles gained and direct or indirect aid given to the units on the flanks and to the rear. With these factors in mind, the Squadron proved itself in this period beyond doubt.

From the 3rd of August to the 10th, the troops were held in reserve and sent on occasional patrols to reconnoiter enemy positions to the south and east.

10 August - The enemy's orderly withdrawal of two weeks previous had by this time developed into a rout. Troops B and C, plus tanks and assault guns attached, were given the mission of reconnoitering, in force, ahead of the 9th Infantry Regiment and later in the day protected the flanks of that unit. For the next six days, the Squadron was alternately attached to the 9th, 23rd and 38th Infantry Regiments acting chiefly as flank security against German units trapped in the Falaise Pocket. In fast open warfare on the southwest corner of the "horseshoe", the Troops probed into the enemy's flanks and rear and inflicted innumerable casualties on the trapped Wehrmacht troops. Hostile artillery and aircraft were extremely active but the number of casualties inflicted in Squadron personnel was notably light.

From the 16th of August to the 22nd, enemy activity was slight as this unit followed the swiftly advancing American spearheads in an administrative march toward SEES, France. There, Troop B received the special mission of screening the advance of the French 2nd Armored Division, which was to march into the city of PARIS. The remainder of the Squadron received orders to screen the advance of the U.S. 4th Infantry Division to the same city and by the 24th of August, the Troops reached the outskirts of the French Capital with but moderate enemy resistance being encountered in the swift eastward dash.

Troop C had the mission of reconnoitering the 4th Division objective, CORBIEL, a few miles south of PARIS proper. German resistance seemed comparatively light in the vicinity, so the Cavalry Troop was ordered to take the city itself. In a perfect example of fire and movement, the Troop swept around the left flank of the comparatively weak enemy force and took the city with but one casualty. CORBIEL was the first town of any size liberated by any element of this Squadron and the reception accorded the Troop C men was tremendous. As night came on, the troop out-posted the town and awaited further orders to cross the Seine river and proceed north into PARIS.

August 25th was both a great and disastrous day for the Squadron in one of those all too frequent paradoxes of war. Troop B, after sending several patrols into PARIS was ordered to assemble at the first light and move into the city in strength. At 0930B, the lead vehicles entered the outskirts, meeting but sporadic mortar and sniper fire as they proceeded to contact a task force of the French 2nd Armored Division at VERSAILLE. By 1530B, the entire Troop assembled at the ARC DE TRIOMPHE and bivouacked within sight of the famous French memorial to the "UNKNOWN SOLDIER" of World War I.

Troop C had in the meantime crossed the SEINE on a hastily constructed 7th Corps pontoon bridge east of CORBIEL to become the first unit of the Squadron to gain the east bank of the river in that sector. As the Troop proceeded north toward PARIS, the 2nd platoon led the column of march. They were moving across flat, open terrain when the platoon encountered a carefully camouflaged enemy ambush consisting of approximately 200, well concealed infantrymen, an undisclosed number of machine guns and bazookas, and an 88mm artillery battery. The Germans virtually surrounded the 2nd platoon and when they opened fire, the Troop C men were completely at their mercy. Four men were killed, twelve badly wounded and three armored cars and four 1/4 ton trucks were destroyed before the rest of the Troop could be deployed to support the greatly outnumbered force. With the fire of all the Troop weapons and two Troop E assault guns concentrated on the numerically superior German unit, the enemy was forced to retreat in disorder, leaving 125 men killed or wounded and 28 prisoners of war. It was during the bitter fighting that Captain William T. Haley earned the Distinguished Service cross for his heroism in locating, treating and evacuating the wounded men under fire, and Captain Milton J. Hull won the British Military Cross for his superb leadership of Troop C.

Troop A and other elements of the Squadron had crossed the SEINE RIVER shortly after C and the forward units assembled and bivouacked near NANDY. The following morning this entire force re-crossed the SEINE and moved north of LA VILLE DU BOIS, a suburb of PARIS, to await the return of Troop B. Three days later the Squadron was ordered into PARIS and formed the honor guard for a parade commemorating the liberation of the French Capital. General DeGaulle and other high-ranking officers and dignitaries of France and the United States led the triumphant march from the ARC DE TRIOMPHE to the CHAMPS ELYSEE. Troop C provided the personal escort for the Army Group Commander and General DeGaulle and their staffs as the balance of the Squadron guarded and out-posted the PLACE DE CONCORDE.

The following day, August 30th, the unit displaced forward from their assembly area to LE BOURGET Airport, to await further orders to proceed eastward.

The Squadron left LE BOURGET on the 31st and for the next five days moved generally northeast, trying to contact the enemy's rapidly withdrawing rear guards. Troop B was attached to V Corps Forward Headquarters and provided security until relieved by Troop A twelve days later. On 4 September, the mission was to reconnoiter and secure any bridges over the MEUSE RIVER in the unit's zone.

Each Reconnaissance Troop had two assault guns from Troop E and five tanks from Company F in support as the Squadron approached the last natural barrier before BELGIUM. A railroad bridge spanning the river was the only means of crossing found in the Squadron zone and while elements of all Troops set up security on the west side of the stream, dismounted patrols from A and C reconnoitered to the high ground on the far side. At 2000B one Troop C platoon made a successful crossing on the railroad ties and set up their vehicles to defend the eastern end. Most of the balance of the unit crossed just before darkness set in.

The following morning the Squadron assembled on the east bank of the MEUSE and at the first light, Troops A and C, with two assault guns each, were given the task of forming a reconnaissance screen in front of the 8th Infantry Regiment ordered to advance eastward. The French-Belgium border was crossed at approximately 1000B 5 September 1944. Elements of the very well organized Belgian Maquis were contacted and they turned over 29 American and Allied airmen to Squadron Headquarters. These men, forced down over Belgian soil, had been sheltered from the enemy, in some cases for months. Belgian guides were directed to accompany the Troops and escort the unit through their country to the German border. From the 5th of Sept. to the 10th, the screening mission remained the same, and although several delaying forces were engaged and destroyed, only slight resistance was encountered.

On September 6th and 7th, Troop E's assault guns attached to A and C Troops, did a magnificent job as they destroyed a Tiger Tank, 2 self-propelled guns, 4 half track personnel carriers, a 150mm rifle and several trucks and smaller vehicles. It was estimated that the number of enemy killed or wounded in the two attacks amounted to well over 150. On these same two days, Troop A lost four men killed in separate engagements at VIVY and PALISEUL. At VIVY, the enemy sent two companies of infantry to attack the Troop zone. The cavalrymen

opened up on the attacking column with every weapon at their disposal and before the Germans could extricate themselves from the deadly cross fires, Troop assault guns and automatic weapons of Troop A had destroyed all vehicles and killed upwards of 35 men. 17 prisoners were taken during the brief engagement.

The following afternoon, Troop A was ordered to outpost the town of PALISEUL while infantrymen assaulted another town about a mile distant. A German force, believing PALISEUL to be lightly held, launched a counter attack from a weeded area to the east. The attack was repulsed with but two casualties incurred by Troop A. The enemy lost five vehicles destroyed and 15 men killed as assault guns and automatic weapons directed almost point blank fire into their ranks when they exposed themselves on the main road. On that same day, a Company F platoon working with Troop C, knocked out two German light tanks and destroyed four other vehicles as they ambushed a main road near BIEVRE.

On 10 September, the third platoon of Troop B was given the special mission of escorting H.R.P John of Luxembourg back to his Capital City. The Prince and his American escort were accorded a warm welcome by the ruler's subjects. The balance of the Squadron assembled and bivouacked near the Belgium-Luxembourg border to await the return of the B Troop platoon.

The following morning Troop A relieved Troop B and took over the responsibility of protecting V Corps' Forward Headquarters. The other component elements of the Squadron received the mission of securing the left flank of the 4th Division preparing to advance through ST VITH to the forward fringe of the Siegfried Line. A series of defended roadblocks opposed the advance, but Troop B deployed to the flanks with its attached assault guns and knocked out each one in turn. Troop A moved into BASTOGNE at 1500B - the same BASTOGNE whose American garrison held out so gallantly against numerically superior German armor and infantry during the Ardennes Breakthrough three months later.

On September 13th, Troop B reconnoitering beyond AUW, became the first 102nd Cavalry Troop to reach the Belgium-German border. The forward Siegfried defenses were located by the Troop the following morning, but as extremely heavy artillery and mortar fire was directed at the Cavalry vehicles, the column drew back. It is interesting to note that this sector of the German defense wall was never breached until the final advances in February 1945.

Troop C relieved Troop A, in BASTOGNE on September 15th, and the latter was attached to the 28th Division to precede that unit and reconnoiter into Luxembourg. Enemy artillery was extremely active in the Squadron zone the following morning, and for the next two days, as the balance of the unit also displaced south to act as a protective screen west of the German border between the 5th Armored Division on the right (south) and the 28th Infantry Division on the left (north). Colonel, then Major, George S. Saunders, assumed command of the Squadron on 17, Sept. The Troops established and held roadblocks, out-posted their respective zones and maintained a warning screen between DIEKIRCH and HOSINGEN until the 27th of the month when elements of the 5th Armored Division effected their physical relief. Except for artillery fire which was frequently heavy, enemy activity in the Squadron zone was comparatively slight during the period. German patrols made daily sorties into the HOSINGEN vicinity but in all cases they were discovered and forced to withdraw without penetrating the outpost line. Troop E, alternately attached to the Troops or set up in battery firing position, fired a number of missions at targets of opportunity on either side of the River Our.

Sept. 27th - The Troops assembled and all but Troop A moved north to HOLZHEIM, Belgium. From then until the 1st of October, the entire unit was relatively inactive. On that date, the Squadron was given the mission of forming a counter-reconnaissance screen in the vicinity of BULLINGEN, Belgium. Many casualties were inflicted on active German groups trying to penetrate the screening line, and numerous prisoners were taken during the five days.

On the afternoon of 6, October, elements of the 4th Division relieved Troops A, B, and C, and the Squadron moved to the vicinity of HOFEN and KALTERHERBERG, Germany. The new mission was to protect the flanks of V Corps and to gain and maintain contact with the 85th Reconnaissance Squadron on the right and the 24th Reconnaissance Squadron on the left. The two towns were shelled periodically during the entire period the

Squadron remained in that sector. Troop E and Company F were especially active as their guns fired daily harassing, interdiction and counter battery missions into forward Siegfried Line defenses. Mortar crews of the Reconnaissance Troops fired hundreds of rounds interdicting patrol areas and avenues of approach, and knocking out observed enemy concentrations of personnel or equipment. Siegfried defenses in the sector were strongly held and patrols discovered at least two machine guns protecting each pill box. Actual physical contact with enemy units was limited to brief fire fights as the Germans seemed reluctant to leave the cover of their concrete emplacements, despite frequent attempts by patrols to activate them.

With the mission of forming a counter reconnaissance screen and maintaining contact with the 85th and 24th Reconnaissance Squadrons on the right and left flanks, Troops A, B and E displaced south one mile to ELSENBORN on October 22nd. Company F joined them the following day while Troop C and Headquarters and Service remained in KALTENHERBERG. Enemy activity continued to be relatively light as the Reconnaissance Troops sent out daily patrols and Troop E assault guns persisted in their former task of firing periodic missions into the pillbox defense network. On October 27th, Headquarters and Service Troop moved to ELSENBORN and the Squadron disposition from then until 9 Nov. stowed all elements except C (still in KALTERHERBERG), in or near that town.

Elements of the 99th Infantry Division relieved the Squadron on the night of November 9th and the troops assembled to await further march orders. The following morning the Squadron (less rear echelon) moved to the vicinity of the towns of LAMMERSDORF and PAUSTENBACH and physically relieved elements of the 4th Reconnaissance Squadron by 0630A on the 11th. Again the unit formed a defensive line in its zone as it held the gap between the 38th and 28th Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadrons. For 32 days the combat activities and dispositions of the component elements remained substantially unaltered, with Troop E in battery firing position and Company F attached to the 3 Reconnaissance units on the line. Troops A, B and C held the enemy under close observation all during the period and Troop E, the most forward artillery unit in the sector fired approximately 8000 rounds at targets near STRAUTH, SIMMERATH, STECKENBORN, ROLLESBROICH and KESTERNICH. Enemy activity was restricted mainly to artillery and mortar fire as the Squadron zone was shelled almost daily. On several occasions enemy planes strafed the LAMMERSDORF area. On December 3rd, 30 FO 190s and ME 109s attacked the units positions but they were driven off by alert machine gunners before any serious damage could be caused. One plane was downed and one definitely crippled by men of the Squadron.

December 11th - A day certain men of the Squadron are not likely to forget. Headquarters Forward Command Post, S-1 and one platoon of Company F received a slight taste of what the enemy had to contend with, as 10-15 P 47s peeled off over the Squadron CP and for 20 minutes bombed and strafed LAMMERSDORF. as soon as the markings on the planes were identified as Allied, yellow panels and smoke grenades were displayed. Twelve 500pound bombs were dropped before the pilots discovered their error and by that time one man of the 78th Division had been killed and fourteen others wounded seriously enough to be evacuated.

At the first light on 13 December, elements of the 78th Infantry Division passed through the Squadron's positions to attack objectives in the vicinity of ROLLESBROICH, SIMMERATH and KESTERNICH. Resistance at ROLLESBROICH ceased within an hour and a half after the first waves attacked and at 1343A SIMMERATH fell as the enemy offered very little ground resistance. Heavy artillery concentrations impeded the assault to some extent but nevertheless advances were steady.

With friendly troops between the Squadron and the enemy for the first time in over a month, the line Troops maintained their defenses, but ceased active patrolling. Air, artillery and mortar activity increased after the 78th Division attacked, and on the night of the 16th, parachutists were dropped in the general area held by this unit. All Troops were alerted for any possible paratrooper infiltrations or a counter attack by nearby infantry units. No action developed in that sector of the line, but not many miles to the south the Germans were beginning their last desperate breakthrough in the Ardennes Forest regions. Daily movements of enemy personnel and equipment were observed and reported by the Squadron but the expected counter-thrust in strength never developed that far north. All line Troops improved their defenses as they continued to hold behind the 78th Division.

The Squadron CP was moved to ROETGEN on 28 December and the balance of the unit (less the rear echelon located in MEMBACH, Belgium) began to take up defensive positions in that general area throughout the day. Not having been assigned a new mission after being relieved by elements of the 78th Division, the Squadron was held as a tactical reserve force in that Division's sector. The portion held by the 102nd Cavalry was very near the front in an area in which an enemy breakthrough was not at all improbable.

The protection of the defensive positions, begun in mid December, was continued and improvements were continually made throughout the period the Squadron remained in the ROETGEN vicinity. In the event of an enemy counter-attack through the 78th Division sector, this unit was to occupy and hold these prepared positions all the way back to EUPEN. Trial runs of delaying tactics and extensive training on the various phases of defensive warfare were conducted until near the end of January when the German threat subsided and the Troops were alerted to move again.

At noon on the 24th of January the Squadron was ordered to assemble at MEMBACH, Belgium, 12 miles from ROTGEN, and two days later the men moved to accomplish relief of the 38th Cavalry Squadron in the vicinity of MUTZENICH, Germany. The new mission called for the establishment of a defensive line within the assigned zone, and maintenance of contact with the 38th Cavalry on the right and the 310th Infantry Regiment on the left. Mortars of the Reconnaissance Troops and Troop E assault guns placed harassing fire in the sector around KONZEN in support of the attack on the town by the 78th Division, and patrols actively operated to and beyond the enemy's forward defense network.

On 31 January, the Squadron was alerted to move to a new area in the vicinity of ROHREN, and upon arrival the following morning, the Troops out-posted the village. In addition to assuming the defense of this area, the Squadron was to secure a nearby partially blown bridge across the ROER RIVER and prevent the enemy from causing further damage to it. Troop C secured the bridge while the other two Reconnaissance Troops, with attached elements of Company F, formed the defensive line. Troop E went into battery firing position, preparing to support the Squadron by fire. From that date to 4 February, when the Squadron was displaced to RURBERG, the men thoroughly reconnoitered the heavily mined ROHREN, HAMMER sector and made improvements in their defensive positions along the river.

The 311th Infantry Regiment had recently taken RURBERG, and as soon as the Squadron moved in to relieve them it became obvious that intense enemy activity could be expected. Hills rose to heights of over 400 feet on both side of the ROER and the enemy on the east bank had strongly defended pillbox positions along and below the military crest, as well as well as concealed artillery batteries zeroed in on previously strategic sections of RURBERG. Any movement, mounted or dismounted, brought forth small arms fire of all types, and a systematic bombardment of the remaining house in the town seemed to be the mission given the opposing artillery batteries.

The 38th Cavalry Squadron and the 7th Armored Division occupied sectors to the right and left of the Squadron, and for thirty days these three units absorbed extremely heavy enemy fire in their west bank positions. RUHRBERG itself was all but completely demolished and a number of casualties were inflicted. The assault guns of Troop E, firing from several different battery positions, knocked out or neutralized a number of machine gun nests, causing innumerable casualties to the enemy force across the stream. A number of quite extensive mine fields were discovered and marked during the period. The Reconnaissance Troops alternated in the forward river positions as the strategy called for two Troops up and one in reserve at all times.

With orders to secure a particular section of the high ground on the east bank of the river, the Squadron was alerted to move on March 1st. A temporary footbridge was constructed by Squadron personnel and the long awaited drive to the RHINE started the next day. Companies D, E and F of the 2nd Ranger Battalion were attached to the Reconnaissance Troops. After the first mission was successfully accomplished and with this added strength the unit proceeded through heavily mined enemy territory toward Germany's last natural defense barrier.

The route of march took the Troops through HERRGARTEN, KOMMERN, WEINGARTEN, SCHEUREN, DERNAU and finally AHRWIELLER, as they protected the north flank of V Corps. Many prisoners of all ranks were taken during the period as the enemy's chief resistance was in the form of impotent delaying actions and harassing mortar fire. On 12 March, a small B Troop patrol captured the Major General commanding the 5th German Paratroop Division. The General's unit had already withdrawn toward the RHINE, but in order to clear up a final few matters, he, and two orderlies, remained behind. Their preparations to rejoin their Division miscarried by a matter of minutes when three members of the patrol discovered the house in which they were hiding.

On March 13th, the Squadron reached AHRWEILER and went into Corps Reserve. While awaiting a new combat mission, a program of personal rehabilitation and maintenance of vehicles and weapons was put into effect.

After almost two weeks of relative rest, during which the First Army spearheads a few miles to the east had forced the first crossing of the RHINE RIVER, the Squadron was alerted to move out again on March 26th. The mission was to relieve elements of the 9th Armored Division at VALLANDER and the initial crossing of the RHINE by the main body of the Squadron was made in the accomplishment of the task. For the first time in several weeks the Troops received artillery and mortar and small arms fire as they moved south along the east bank of the river. 20 and 40mm anti-aircraft guns fired direct fire on the assembly area as the men bivouacked for the night.

The Squadron was attached to the 69th Division for one day and each Reconnaissance Troop had attached one platoon of Company F tanks, one platoon of Troop E assault guns and one Company of Rangers. At the first light on the 28th, the Squadron was ordered to effect the relief of the 9th Armored Division at DIEZ. Troop A made contact with the Third Army near COBLENZ to close the sole remaining escape gap for the thousands of Germans still operating in the SAAR Basin west of the RHINE.

For the next two weeks the unit moved generally eastward with missions of establishing and maintaining road blocks, patrolling aggressively to the front and flanks, providing V Corps security and cleaning up enemy pockets of resistance within the Corps sphere of action. The route of march took the Troops through LIMBERG, WETZLAR, GIESSEN, FRITZLAR (1 April), WOLFHAGEN (2-9 April), KASSEL, HANN, MUNDAN (9-11 April), HEILIGENSTADT (11-12 April), WEISSENSEE (12-15 April) and finally NAUMBERG (15-30 April). Enemy activity, for the most part, consisted of week delaying actions, and small disorganized forces attempting to filter through American lines to return to their units further east. Enemy morale was growing steadily lower, and in most cases Germans cut off from their main bodies were willing, if not anxious, to surrender.

The Squadron Executive Officer, Major Fred F. Walsh and two others were wounded on the 13th of April as a strong German force in the town of WEISSENFEL ambushed six members of the Squadron. Major James G. Depew took over as second in command of the unit from that date on.

38th Cavalry Troop B was detached from the Squadron for three days from the 18th to the 20th of April, and acting as protection for the north of the 2nd Division in the vicinity of LEIPZIG, the Troop took 190 prisoners in less than 72 hours. One week later, Troop B again received a special mission, as three of its armored cars and three of its 1/4 ton vehicles escorted the Commanding Generals of V Corps and the 69th Division as they went to TORGAU to meet high ranking Russian Officers in the official link up of the two Allied Armies.

On 29 April, Troop B left NAUMBERG and preceded the balance of the unit to GRAFENWOHR, Bavaria. Until the entire Squadron displaced east to PILSEN, Czechoslovakia on the 7th and 8th of May, the mission was to provide V Corps security and mop up scattered pockets of resistance in and around GRAFENWOHR.

The European War officially ended at one minute past midnight on the 9th of May and the final Unconditional Surrender of the German Armies found the 102nd Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron Mechanized in one of the

eastern-most sectors of the American advance - PILSEN.

During the entire 11 months from D Day to VE Day the unit had missions at , or very near, the front line of the American advance. As a mobile fighting force we have fired our last shots in the struggle to defeat a powerful Nazi Germany. What lies ahead for the Squadron in general, or the men who made up the unit cannot be guessed. Many of the men who landed with the Squadron on Omaha Beach will never leave Europe, still others will soon be going home for good, and some will fight again on foreign soil before many months have elapsed.

The Officers and men of the 102nd Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron Mechanized have finished one job and done it well. Their records attest to the magnificent manner in which they accomplished every mission, and whatever may be in store for the unit in the future, the memory of it's past deeds through France, Belgium, Luxembourg and Germany can never be erased.

The 102nd Cavalry Association is indebted to Major David M. RUSSEN, S2 102nd Cavalry Group, for this summary of the outstanding performance of 102nd Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron (Mech) in combat during WW II from June 6, 1944 (D Day) through May 8, 1945 (VE Day).