

Unit History

HEADQUARTERS
88TH CAVALRY RECONNAISSANCE SQUADRON MECHANIZED
APO 255

12 January 1945

Subject: Letter of Transmittal.

To : Commanding General, 8th Armored Division, APO 255,
U. S. Army. (Attention: Ass't C of S, G - 1).

In accordance with letter, Headquarters 8th Armored Division, subject: "Unit Citation, French, dated 9 January 1945, herewith is forwarded recommendation for the following organization:

Troop "A", 88th Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron Mechanized.

1 Encl - Unit Citation
(Troop A, 88th Cav Recon Sq Mechs).

GEORGE C. BENJAMIN,
Major, Cavalry,
Commanding.

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HEADQUARTERS
FIRST UNITED STATES ARMY
APO 270

12 January 1945

Subject: Unit Citation, French.

To : Supreme Commander, Allied Expeditionary Force, APO 757 (Main).

THRU : Commanding General, 12th Army Group, APO 855.

1. In accordance with the provisions of letter, Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Force, file AF 200,62-1 GAP-AGM, 5 subjects: "Unit Citations", dated 7 December 1944, and letter, Headquarters 12th Army Group, file 200,6 (G-1), subjects: "Unit Citations", 1 January 1945, it is recommended that the following unit be cited in the _____ orders of the French Army:

Troop "A", 85th Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron Mechanized.

2. Date and complete narrative of actions:

On 15 December 1944, at 0800A, Troop "A", 85th Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron Mechanized, whose fighting strength was 102 enlisted men, 5 officers and 2 medical aid men, was committed to action in the sector directly east of KLINGHAU, Germany. Troop "A" was a part of the force made up of the 5th Armored Division plus 2nd Battalion, 280th Infantry Regiment and the 4th Cavalry Group.

The general plan of action was to clear the Germans from the wooded high ground north and east of UNTERMAUBACH, Germany then to seize and occupy the following towns west of the Moselle River: WINDEN, UNTERMAUBACH, OB-ERMANNACH, and BUCHHEIM, Germany.

Opposing our troops in this sector were the following enemy troops:

- a. 941st Infantry Regiment consisting of 3 battalions each of a strength of 200 - 300 men.
- b. 6th Parachute Regiment consisting of 3 or 4 battalions, each of a strength of 600 - 700 men.
- c. Estimated 15 battalions of light artillery and 5 batteries of medium artillery covering the corps sector.
- d. 15 to 20 self-propelled, high muzzle velocity, 75 millimeter and 88 millimeter guns.
- e. Estimated 1 company (12 - 150 millimeter mortars) from an Army mortar battalion.
- f. An unknown number of anti-tank guns, tanks and 80 millimeter mortars.

Enemy regimental command posts were located in KRIBBU and WINNEN from which two towns the enemy had disposed his forces so as to defend the towns, UNTERMAIBACH, OBERRAIBACH and the high ground along the Roer River in the vicinity of these towns. Most of the enemy artillery installations were on the east side of the Roer River where also it was believed the enemy had additional reserves including armor.

The 85th Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron Mechanized less Troops "C", "D", "E" and three platoons of Company "F" was assigned the mission of protecting the right flank of an attack by Combat Command "B" on the heavily wooded high ground 1000 yards north of UNTERMAIBACH, should the main body of attacking infantry forces fail to attain their objective the 85th Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron Mechanized (-) was to attack through them onto the objective.

The sector of attack was seized and the ground held in spite of a heavy pounding by enemy artillery and mortars. The cavalry troops, with cavalry weapons, had fought as infantry across open terrain onto their objective.

Throughout the night plans were coordinated for an attack by Troops of the "85th" on the following morning. The objective was to be an open wooded hill-top (#255) 1000 yards east toward the river. Seven medium tanks were placed in support of the Squadron.

At 0800 16 December 1944 the attack jumped off led by five tanks on which men of the third platoon, Troop "A" were mounted. The remaining platoons of the troops with those of Troop "A" leading immediately to the rear of the tanks were deployed in depth by platoons, with 50 yard intervals. As the troops moved by the village of BILSTEIN the tanks sprayed the windows and doors. Enemy action was anticipated from this flank but there was none. Moving onto the objective the troops saw about 20 enemy retreat from the hill crest. Ten enemy infantrymen had been left on the hill for the purpose of covering the withdrawal of about 2 platoons. Of these ten, five were killed and five were taken prisoners. The speed of the assault across the open terrain had routed the enemy who were armed with rifles and light machine guns.

With Troop "A" occupying the right sector and Troop "B" the left all men began to dig in rapidly. By the time most men had dug themselves a fox hole the artillery began to pound their position. Little available cover was to be had from trees and air bursts because time did not allow construction of roofs for their holes. Men caught out-side of their shelters attempting to cut timbers were sure to be a shell fragment casualty. In spite of this, during the afternoon and evening of the first day most foxholes were provided with overhead logs and earth.

On 17 and 18 December 1944 two counter-attacks were launched by the enemy against our position and the artillery and mortar fire was increased in tempo. The first counter-attack began in the morning daylight hours. Out of 20 to 25 enemy who probed our positions seven were captured and 12 to 15 were killed. In the second counter-attack our troops found 25 to 30 of the enemy within 10 to 30 feet of our outposts throwing hand grenades as daylight came. Others attempted unsuccessfully to come in by way of the fire trench but they were stopped by our own grenades. The entire attack was unsuccessful because of inaccurate fire which caught the enemy in the open, and drove them back down the hill. Our guns killed at least 10 to 15 of them.

The enemy artillery was terrific during the 17, 18 and 19 December. Mortars lined the barrage on the 17 December and shells were constantly whistling and smashing around and on top of the fox-holes. Their artillery was extremely accurate. On one light machine gun emplacement formed by two trenches shaping a "V" steady hits began to fall within 5 to ten feet. One man was in each leg of the V. The hits came closer and closer. Finally one round smashed between the two trenches, splintered many logs and caved in the sides.

At another instance during the early stages of the shelling an enemy shell struck directly in a fire trench. As a result one man was completely dismembered, seven others were seriously and slightly wounded.

Heavy woods had covered the hill top when the troops had seized the location. By the time the shelling had continued for 2 or 3 days the trees were battered and splintered and the crest offered no arboreal cover or concealment.

Many of the more hastily constructed fox-holes had been struck directly, the logs splintered, smashed and the pieces thrown high into the air. Constant pounding by the barrage on better constructed dugouts did not have such effect except to jar the occupants.

It seemed that their position was fated to bear the brunt of every German piece of artillery within the most extreme ranges. Every slight or obvious movement of troops in the entire sector opposite WINDEN to UNTERSAUBACH was sure to draw a new onslaught on this prominent hill position. By a closely estimated count it was determined that during a six hour period on 20 December 1944 1500 enemy shells had burst within the area of an acre and one half. A field artillery forward observer estimated that 2000 to 3000 rounds burst in this same area in one day.

Troop "B", during the period 18 December 1944 to 1. December 1944 suffered 10 casualties including one (1) killed. Troop "A", quite obviously more sorely mauled than Troop "B", had a total of 52 men evacuated as casualties from the line and three (3) killed during the same period.

At this point it seemed that the morale of the troops was at the breaking point. Even the most steady hands were trembling, even the most experienced and battle hardened were becoming tremendously weary. The gutting task of lying there and taking such a steady, tremendous pounding without the relief of getting on their feet and fighting back was proving to be extremely nerve shattering.

Then, at 1505 on 19 December 1944, Troop "A" was given a new mission.

The main supply route and only road for the enemy to reinforce his troops at UNTERSAUBACH, OBERSAUBACH and BOCHLICH, from WINDEN and north was the highway immediately north and west of the Rour River. This highway was a direct artery from WINDEN south to UNTERSAUBACH. There were enemy hold garlands in all of the above mentioned towns. This highway was a vital link, it being very such in defilade from our positions to the north.

Our general plan of action was this: To seize all of these towns, and by swiftly severing the highway between IJEN and UNT MAUBACH to prevent reinforcements, be they troops, armor, ammunition, or food from reaching the enemy at the main points of contact: UNT MAUBACH, OBERMAUBACH and BORNHEIM.

Troop "A", less one platoon, was to move southeast about 1000 yards, over and down a steep cliff-like precipice, and to seize the highway on this highway. They were to hold this as a block against all else the enemy could throw at them. When UNT MAUBACH had been taken they could be relieved.

Prisoner of War reports later indicated that UNT MAUBACH was being held by 141st Infantry Regiment, about 400 in strength. It was expected that unknown numbers of enemy guns could be brought to bear on the position from a block from across the Roer River. High ground immediately south of the river commanded the point with tremendous advantages.

The enemy controlled the steep precipice down which Troop "A" had to proceed, there being low, tangled underbrush completely covering this slope giving untold advantages to the Germans when they might completely cut off the Troop, once we had gained access to our position.

There could be no evacuation of the wounded from the block and it was not expected that there could be any possible communication or supply or communication by radio.

It was on the 20 December 1944 that Combat Command "A" was to take KIMMEN, the 2nd Battalion 350th Infantry Regiment was to take UNT MAUBACH, the 4th Cavalry Squadron was to take OBERMAUBACH, but the drive was to be hinged on the supposition that the 4th Cavalry Squadron would first take the town of BORNHEIM to set the stage for further advances.

It was on the 20 December 1944 that Troop "A" was to seize the road block and hold firmly until relieved from the west. It was anticipated that Troop "A" could be entirely relieved sometime on that same day.

A force of 59 enlisted men, 4 officers and 2 attached medical technicians departed from Hill #158 at 0630 20 December 1944. Their weapons for the mission were as follows:

- 4 M-1 rifles with adapters for grenade launchers
- 3 submachine guns (m-3)
- 10 Carbines
- 26 M-1 rifles
- 3 Light machine guns
- Grenades
- Anti-tank grenades.

This force had existed on 1/2 "X" ration per day for the preceding 4 days. They were to exist on 1/2 "K" rations per day in the subsequent 4 days. They carried no blankets.

Of this entire force of 59 men and officers only had received battle wounds since occupation of Hill #158 on 16 December 1944, but had not been evacuated.

The darkness of the early morning was to provide the cover for the advance. If the line of enemy outposts along the wooded precipice could be kept ignorant of the movement all would go well. The troop moved in column down the gentle slope away from the hill's summit until the head came to the steep descent. There they veered to the left about 50 feet then began the descent down the slope. They had to move slowly and cautiously - every step seemed to cause enough rattling and shuffling of rocks and brush to alert enemy outposts within a mile. But no contact was made.

When at the base of the descent the troop split into four squads. Two squads from Headquarters and the 2nd Platoon were to seize and occupy the large house near the road. Two squads from the third platoon were to seize and occupy the smaller house farther from the road.

Each pair of squads advanced on a house from the side and upon reaching found no occupants.

Immediately defenses were set up in each house by posting guards at all windows and doors plus one machine gun post in the rear of the Troop CP. It was obvious that one vulnerable sector was their rear, to the north, which was commanded by the steep cliff, only a matter of 100 to 150 yards from either house. Enemy infantry could cause much trouble by climbing above the position on this hill, covered by brush and boulders and sniping from there.

At about 0750 seven German infantry straggled past the house entirely oblivious of the danger. When they were directly in front of the CP they were cut down by rifle fire. Three fell when they were. The others ran to the wall which ran in front of the house and knelt there.

An enemy vehicle, a loaded full-track ammunition vehicle towing another behind it, approached from the west. The men behind the stone wall waved a warning signal the driver to stop where he was but this was to no avail. The driver stopped the vehicle directly in front of the CP. A machine gun from the front porch of the CP set the vehicle on fire. The driver was killed by rifle fire after he got out of the vehicle. Then one of our men bounded grenades against the side of the vehicle fairly into the faces of the Germans behind the wall. This action killed two. Then one of our riflemen crept around a few feet west of the Troop CP. Here he discovered, shot and killed the remaining two Germans.

At 0750 an enemy staff car occupied by two men approached from the west. When the car was within 100 yards it was smashed by a burst of machine gun bullets, killing the driver and injuring the other occupant.

Things were comparatively quiet for a time, but an enemy shell smashed the water pipe in the basement of the CP. Water spread over the floor.

About 1000 the fog lifted and the tempo of the artillery was stepped up. Flats of mortar were down from the ceiling. Flats sprang up from the roof like erupting volcanoes. However the dust and explosion shells did not protect a squad of enemy infantrymen as they tried to change positions along a ledge to the rear of the CP. Riflemen stayed at their lines and sniped, with good effect, at every enemy unit. Three to five Germans advanced up the


road from the west and attempted to snipe from the base of the hill about 100 yards from the houses. Our own snipers killed at least three of the positions alone.

At noon an enemy tank or self-propelled gun pulled up in position on a commanding hill across the river about 1000 yards to the southwest. Three direct hits were registered on the second story of the CP house of our own. One was killed instantly at his post, by this gun. The house was destroyed, but it was thoroughly ventilated when the barrage finally lifted.

At 1500 the enemy attacked in force with armor. Approximately 100 infantry, 3 Mark V tanks and one half-track approached from direction of Hill B, apparently in an effort to reinforce the garrisons to the west.

Our radio operator called for artillery on a pre-arranged point on a curve in the highway in the path of the attack. The enemy force moved past the artillery concentration point and still we had no artillery support. At this time an adjustment of fire was called from the platoon CP to the Troop CP where the radio was in operation. They had to adjust and shorten the range so that fire could be brought down the road to the west.

The first Mark V approached slowly with about 70 infantry behind it. As it approached our artillery began pounding just off the road to the west of the enemy. Again the artillery correction was shouted from the house to the other, then relayed over the radio. There was no immediate effect.

As the first tank passed by the platoon CP rifle grenades were fired from both houses into the rear of the turret. (Point A - see sketch ). There were at least 3 hits. Later inspection showed that the grenades had blown the tank gunner to bits. The tank commander scrambled out of the turret and was killed in the road. The driver got out but was wounded while running down the road toward the other German tanks.

By this time the infantry had deployed across the broad front of the third platoon CP on a line approximately 100 yards long. The third platoon leader heard the lead tank commence firing - then the house shook and plaster rained down. Two men were injured by the HE shells. He ordered all men of his platoon to leave the small house and go to the trenches in the back yard. He kept one corporal with him in the house. The enemy took the cue - they assumed all our men had left the house, so they began to advance rapidly on the platoon CP - with one officer and one enlisted man inside the house. Meanwhile the tank had fired three rounds directly into the house in an effort to cover the infantry attack.

The officer and man fired as rapidly as possible. Their targets were in the open and coming in fast. One enemy squad tried to set up a bazooka. A rifle grenade to their midst broke that up instantly. Three German operators were far to the rear of the house at the base of the slope and had their machine gun set up prepared to fire. Our rifles killed all three of them on the spot.

The enemy were killed as fast as they charged. One reached the walls but was shot there. One man ran up to a hole in the wall, jumped into the house and raised his gun to fire, but he was shot in the head before he could pull the trigger.

The attack was repulsed. There were at least 50 to 60 enemy dead up to this stage in the battle, strewn in the field and on the road.

The remnants of the enemy force gathered about the second tank regrouping to attack again. Suddenly our artillery plucked a heavy shell directly on the tank about which the enemy were gathered. This completely demoralized their soldiers and when several more rounds landed close their losses became too heavy for them.

The artillery adjustment was the direct result of accurate correction given after the initial rounds had missed their advancing target.

The tanks were faced about rapidly and the vehicles and men retired around the bend toward WILKIN.

The total enemy losses by this attack were 60 to 80, plus six prisoners locked in the basement of the platoon CP.

Both houses were burning on their upper floors as a result of the tank fire and this caused much consternation and took time to extinguish. The third platoon CP burned for about 4 hours before it was finally put out with sand and plaster.

Our casualties for the day amounted to one killed and four wounded.

That evening a carrying party made its way against small arms and mortar fire of enemy outpost behind the CP to the position and 10 mines were brought in, plus ammunition and "K" rations.

One officer and two men laid these mines in front of the Troop CP amongst the enemy equipment and bodies lying on the road. This together with the tank and burned out vehicles formed a very effective block of the road. There were also booby traps laid to the rear of the CP to prevent infiltration from the north.

By the end of the day no word or sight was had of the relieving forces attacking UNTERMAUBACH.

On 21 December 1944 there were no concerted enemy attacks; there was a continually developing siege of enemy sniping from the west and northwest from a distance of about 100 to 200 yards. In addition sporadic heavy artillery dropped within 10 to 15 yards of the two houses, and throughout the entire siege the enemy used effectively a small mortar, thought to be even smaller in caliber than a 60 millimeter mortar.

During the day, about eleven enemy were spotted in an infiltration to a house on the west of the Troop Command Post over a period of several hours. Many snipers were killed near the base of the precipice; many other probable kills were reported behind a haystack and, nearby, a small red brick building about 200 yds northwest.

During the day our own artillery shelled UNTERMAUBACH heavily. Also, from this rear block Command Post our observer spotted 10 to 20 enemy entering a wooded portion of the high ground directly across the river. Upon request a terrific artillery pounding was given the entire area as some enemy movement had been noted in the area previously.

Our own infantry forces did not clear UNTERMÄUBACH on this day as our tanks reportedly retired from vicinity of that town to the high ground to the north.

On 21 December 1944 there was no let up in the continued persistence of the enemy snipers. It was on this day that a daylight supply party attempted to force their way to the troop. The party of eight reached the bottom of the precipice. Before advancing across the open field to the troop CP it was decided that three would remain where they were and cover the advance of the others. The first five attempted to run for the house but one was shot and killed by the almost impassable hail of sniper fire that met them. The others reached the CP while the remaining three turned back to wait for darkness. However they did not return successfully during the hours of darkness.

In one instance a light tank starting from the Squadron CP attempted a run through BILSTEIN toward the Troop "A" position. Enemy anti-tank guns provided a block to this supply route and it had to be abandoned.

During the late afternoon guards in the troop CP could see our tanks and infantry in UNTERMÄUBACH and by radio our observers kept that attacking force well informed of the enemy movements at the eastern edge of the town. However there was no contact made with Troop "A" until approximately 2100 hours when the first squad of the relieving infantry arrived, having come down into the valley by the same route Troop "A" had used.

Finally, at midnight 21 December Troop "A" was relieved and they began the trek up the cliff toward the Squadron Command Post.

The casualties for the period 21 - 22 December 1944 were one killed, four wounded or injured.

The enemy had made no less than eight separate attempts to bring supplies and reinforcements including armor west toward UNTERMÄUBACH. The fact that reinforcements and supplies never reached the beleaguered enemy troops at UNTERMÄUBACH and caused the surrender of over 100 German troops was attested to by several German Prisoners of War who stated that they had received no supplies nor reinforcements since taking over the town. In fact, a premature shelling of UNTERMÄUBACH by the Germans while they, the enemy, still occupied the town was attributed to a failure of communications between the garrison and higher headquarters, that too, no doubt occasioned by our road block. As the effect of the road block was to contain the forces flushed from UNTERMÄUBACH by our coordinated attack. As the enemy attempted to move east from UNTERMÄUBACH he was met by our fire and destroyed by us or forced to return to the town where he was cut off by our forces to the north.

Our position at the road block also enabled us to detect any enemy movement across the Keer River, particularly on the high hill directly opposite the road. We were able to direct effective artillery fire on these positions, driving off the enemy there. This hill was obviously being used by the enemy as an observation post from which to direct artillery.

3. Proposed citations:

Troop "A", 85th Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron Mechanized performed continuous acts of extraordinary heroism in Germany during the period 15 December 1944 to 22 December 1944.

During a series of attacks eastward from KL IMHAU, Germany onto high ground north of UNTERMAUBACH, Troop "A" exhibited a remarkable adaptability to dismounted infantry tactics and were successful in seizure of their assigned sector, hill #252. In spite of a terrific barrage of enemy artillery and mortars and two determined counter-attacks Troop "A" held firmly their sector against overwhelming enemy fire power for a period of four days. On 19 December 1944, after having suffered 50% losses, the troop was assigned the mission of penetrating to the rear of the enemy outpost and severing the enemy's main supply and reinforcement route. The Troop, with 21 of its fighting strength slightly wounded, successfully cut the supply route and established a block of the road which they held for three days whereas the planned operation anticipated a relief for them during the first day. Although the troop was completely surrounded by strong enemy forces they decisively defeated a concerted tank-infantry attack thrice their strength using to defeat the enemy weapons no more powerful than anti-tank grenades. This small force of 4 officers and 41 enlisted men was responsible for an effective block which cut off large enemy forces from their base of supply and greatly facilitated the capture of these forces and the sector which they held. The troop held the road block until finally relieved by other friendly forces. The heroism and fighting determination of Troop "A" will be a stirring example to all and is in accordance with the highest traditions of our armed forces.

1 Insl (sketch)

COURTNEY H. HODGINS,
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Commanding.