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FROM THE EDITOR: We begin the New Year with a **Special Edition** and an article about one of our treasured “**Class of ‘41**” members, Harold David “Smokie” Owen. I met Smokie and Joyce, his vivacious wife of 59 years, at a recent luncheon of the Class of ‘41. I was there as a guest of my friend and our Association Historian, Bob Lutz, a Class of ‘41 veteran and organizer of the periodic gathering. It was my pleasure to sit with Joyce and Smokie as we enjoyed a fine buffet lunch and great company. I was to meet several of our Essex Troop WWII vets for the first time, including Smokie. Driving home with Don Tracy and Bill Maloney, I decided to try and do as many **Spur** articles as possible on living members of “The Class of ‘41”, those WWII vets who began their greatest adventure as horse soldiers of the Essex Troop.

Some of the information for this article was gathered from an interview with Smokie and Joyce Owen in their home in Cranford. Bob Lutz was with me as an invaluable historical resource for both me and Smokie, as his memory is dimming. After all, it was more than 60 years ago! In addition, two documents were heavily used; COL (ret) Harold Samsel’s *Operational History of the 117th Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron (Mech) World War II* and Bob Lutz’ *History of the 117th Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron (Mech) Federal Service During World War II, January 6, 1941 – November 25, 1945*. Both documents are complementary and supportive.

**Class of ‘41 member, 2LT (ret) Harold David “Smokie” Owen,
117th Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron (Mech)**

Spring, 1946 – Verona, NJ “Mom, I think I just met the man I’m going to marry!” said the attractive 21-year-old NYC clothing model. Joyce Mills had just arrived home, driven by Smokie Owen in his dark blue 1937 Ford Coupe “Geraldine”. Owen had been recently discharged after over 6 years of service in the US Army as a 2LT of Cavalry, back home from the European Theatre. A battle-hardened, decorated cavalryman, he was about to “saddle up” and engage in another mission – this one for a lifetime.

Smokie and Joyce had just met at Barcon’s, an ice cream and newspaper shop in Verona, where they both lived. Joyce would stop in after the bus from NYC to call for a ride home. Smokie often dropped in to check the papers for homecoming Essex Troopers. This day, he saw a picture in the paper of a beautiful girl and looked up to see the same girl coming through the door. He asked his friend Mr. Barcon if he knew her. Barcon said that he certainly did, and that she was the daughter of police officer Earl Mills and Dolores Verhoek Mills. Smokie remembered officer Mills as a neighbor and had read a congratulatory letter (to 2LT Owens) in the Verona newspaper while in Germany. Earl Mills, then a US Navy Warrant Officer in Panama, had read about Owen’s battlefield commission and posted a note of congratulations. The paper mailed copies to all those Verona citizens serving in the military, and those readers could send a letter to the paper for posting in a special section. Owen meant to thank Mills in person, and here was his cute daughter. So, the tall, handsome and confident 27-year-old Owen approached Miss Mills and introduced himself, offering a ride home. Joyce, knowing that Mr. Barcon knew Owen and so did her father, accepted.

1939 & 1940 – Verona and Newark, NJ Harold David Owen was born on August 13, 1918 in Jersey City, NJ. He was tall, trim and handsome. A baseball player known for his sizzling fastball, he was to be tagged with the nickname “Smokie” and it stuck. War was raging around the world and it was clear that he would be drafted, so he enlisted in the Essex Troop, a horse cavalry Army National Guard regiment, well known and admired. Better volunteer and ride horses than be drafted into the infantry! Some of his friends joined as well. No walking and digging trenches for them! And ride they did! In late 1940, it was announced that all National Guard units, nationwide, would be federalized and called to active duty for 12 months, beginning in January 1941! The small US Army would swell to a huge army, over one million, almost overnight!

January 1941 through July 1942 – Fort Jackson, SC So, the 102nd Cavalry Regiment (Essex Troop) of NJ would embark on trains for Fort Jackson, SC for 12 months of training as a new horse/mechanized cavalry regiment, combining horse and motorized combat sections. The new mounts, “Bantams” (Jeeps), motorcycles, scout cars, and half-tracks could carry much deadlier weaponry, ammunition, radios and supplies. But, maintenance logistics were now more complicated. Lots of gasoline, oil, parts and the like. Even the smells were changing – familiar were manure, muck, cleaning hooves, horse sweat, horse blankets, straw, oats, saddles, leather soap and such. New smells – hot engines, gasoline, oil, grease, paint, rubber. New or modernized weapons; the Garand semiautomatic M-1 rifle, integral 75 MM cannon and more.

The troopers, NCO's and officers were learning new tactics, strategies, integrated operations, weapons. And change was constant as the US Army learned and evolved into a more modern Army. Promotions were rapid. Boys became men and men developed organizational and leadership skills. Learning was constant as was change. Teamwork, brotherhood...confidence.



Pictures of the 102nd Cavalry, Ft. Jackson SC, 1941

During the interview, Smokie and Bob remembered the names and spoke of many good men that they will never forget... Nugent, McGarry, Dunn, Clinch, Leonard, McGowan, Omer Brown, Lee, Samsel and more...

The 12 months of active duty was about to end; having just finished the major integrated training exercise, the *Carolina Maneuvers*, and the Essex Troop, an integral and competent element of the US Army was soon to return to NJ and revert to NJ State National Guard status. Then, that fateful Day of Infamy, December 7th, 1941 became history. The soldiers of the Essex Troop were “in for the duration” and became “**The Class of '41**”

Training was accelerated, men and equipment were quickly increased to 100% combat strength and preparations intensified. January - the 102nd received orders to embark on the French luxury liner “*Normandy*” in NY harbor on 26 February 1942. On 18 February, the *Normandy* burned and sank at her pier. Sabotage?

During the months of rigorous training, the Army learned, and observed from the European war that fully mechanized, fast and hard-hitting operations had made horse mounted cavalry obsolete. In April of '42, the Regiment was fully mechanized. It was a sad day for many when the Essex Troop rode in review for the last time as horse cavalry. Many troopers, especially the old hands, loved the horse cavalry and their mounts. Many a tear would be shed, but some were not unhappy – no more maneuvering manure, horseflies, bites and kicks!

“*We're comin' over...*” The Regiment was to move to and stage at Ft. Dix, NJ in preparation to ship out in September for England. Now aboard the Dutch ship *H.M.S. Dempo*, they were off to Halifax to join a convoy to England, sailing on October 1st. Just out of the harbor, she developed engine trouble and was delayed, missing the convoy. She sailed on her own, braving German submarines and landing at Liverpool on 7 October without incident.

England The Americans were received well and warmly treated by the English people. Training was quickly resumed and tanks were now integrated, new M-5's, a light tank with a 37 MM cannon, and three .30 air cooled MG's. A troop now had recon, tank and howitzer platoons, all radio equipped. This was to prove to be a very fast, mobile, self-sufficient and deadly fighting unit. Now leaders, all NCO's including Owen and Lutz were to become great recon troopers, the eyes and ears....

Officer training was initiated at the Royal Armored Tactical School and based upon lessons learned while in combat in North Africa against the Italians and Germans of the famed *Afrika Corps*.

North Africa In December, the 2nd Squadron of the 102nd Cavalry Regiment was under the command of LTC Hodge and detached to the security Command of Allied Force Headquarters (AFHQ). All equipment was drawn and delivered to Glasgow and loaded aboard the *H.M.S Strathaird*. The Squadron shipped out to Algiers, landing on 3 January, 1943, after the convoy endured German air attacks near Gibraltar, and soon moved to the small town of Douera, glad to be away from the nightly German air raids at Algiers.

The Squadron was now composed of 2 Recon Troops (A&B), F Troop – tanks and half-track mounted 75 MM howitzers, HQ and a Medical Detachment. The mission – Primary Combat Security Force for Allied Forces HQ. This entailed 24 hour security patrols for a radius of 20 miles around the City of Algiers.

Smokie remembers being assigned as a personal escort for several senior officers. LT Padraig O’Dea was also assigned to security duty at AFHQ Constantine. So, for several months the Squadron was to provide vital security and escort for the Allied HQ and visiting dignitaries, like President Roosevelt, Prime Minister Churchill. Generals Marshall, Eisenhower, Patton, Truscott and British Generals Montgomery and Anderson. This was a great honor and proof of the outstanding reputation of the Essex Troopers!

Even though duty was very demanding, the troopers were able to play a little baseball in a local stadium, and Smokie was able to show how he hard earned his moniker.

On January 17, an alert was received of German Airborne Troops landing in force about 25 miles southeast of Algiers. The Squadron responded killing 2 and capturing 3; the rest escaping into the hills. The operation was well done. Such airborne attacks happened with some frequency, and the Squadron was kept busy dealing with them, eliminating all threats to AFHQ.

The squadron was also honored with the responsibility of training Free French units including the famed French Foreign Legion. They were supplied with American weapons, radios, maintenance and tactics.

The Tunisian Campaign was a great test for the American Army – bloodied and bent at first, we learned, made changes, reequipped. And the Allies defeated the famed Afrika Corps and her Italian Allies. Victory in North Africa was to be ours!

On November 30, 1943 the Squadron was reorganized and designated the **117th Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron (Mecz)**, consisting of Recon Troops A, B & C, Support Troops E & F (tanks, howitzers), HQ and Medical Detachment. The 102nd Cavalry was still in England, preparing for the invasion of Normandy. The Essex Troopers were now organizationally separated.

December brought improved versions of the light tank, the M-5A “Stuart” series with welded construction, and a new recon mount, the M-8 Armored Car “Greyhound”. The M-8 was fast, better armed and offered more protection from small arms fire, shrapnel and the elements. Armament was a 37MM cannon, a coax .30 MG, both in the turret and a .50 MG on a turret ring. These were a great improvement over the old, open White Scout Cars. Smokie Owen and his scouts were very pleased with their new mounts.



M-5



M-8

December The Squadron (less tanks) was tasked to move to Marrakech, French Morocco – about 1,000 miles distant, to provide security for Prime Minister Churchill and General DeGaulle. The advanced party made it in 40 hours and the entire convoy arrived intact after 51 hours. A tremendous feat!

Mission highly successful and now complete, the Squadron departed Marrakech on 18 January, returning to their base at Douera for refitting and preparation for participation in the Invasion of Italy, their first totally combat assignment.

It was now three years since the Essex Troop was Federalized and sent to Fort Jackson, SC as horse soldiers. Trooper Owen and his outstanding mechanized cavalry unit were to fight on the European Continent, and be continuously probing, identifying and fighting the German forces until final victory.

Amphibious operations, invasion and combat training were almost constant. A mock-up town was used for street-to-street combat simulations. Each squad, section and troop became even more effective and sure of each other. Radio communications were excellent. Trooper Owen and his brothers were ready!

May 1944 – Italy In late April the Squadron was attached to the 5th Army and ordered to embark for Naples. Ships boarded were the *S.S. Grenville-Dodge*, *S.S. Horace Moody* and the *H.M.S. Strath-Naver*. There was about 90 ships in the convoy, away for a journey of 1,174 nautical miles and soon enough the German Luftwaffe attacked. The anti-aircraft fire was intensive, but 4 Junkers JU-88 bombers got through and released torpedoes and bombs. The ships carrying the Squadron and equipment were saved but, just barely. 3 of the German aircraft were shot down and only a few of ours suffered injury from the shrapnel. The Squadron historian noted that morale was especially high. Finally approaching the Italian coast, the troop ship put into Naples on May 16th and the two ships with the vehicles and equipment docked in Augusta, Sicily, then to Naples, docking on the 17th. Unloading and assembling was done in short order.

Orders were received on the 19th, to establish a beach defense around the Garigliano River. The Squadron was to relieve the 36th Cavalry Recon troops of the Texas National Guard 36th ID (Infantry Division), which had been in bitter combat many weeks. The unit's first casualties were from snipers, 23 May. The next day, the Squadron was ordered to move north to within 100 miles of Rome, securing river crossings, constantly attacking and pushing in an effort to achieve the long-awaited link-up with Allied Forces in the Anzio Beachhead.

The first enemy prisoner to be captured by an element of the 117th was a Panzer Grenadier. More than 10,000 prisoners would be taken by the 117th in the next 10 months.

Moving north, lead elements of the 117th fight into the mountain town of Sezze. It was here that the first 2 KIA were suffered, in addition to other casualties. "A" Troop commander CPT Tom Piddington led the effort, and while leading a foot patrol, accompanied by Squadron XO MAJ Bob McGarry, they came under heavy MG fire. Both were wounded, but brought assault guns to bear and directed tank units for an overall victory. CO LTC Hodge relieved Piddington because of wounds, replacing him with CPT Mario Zecca. On the way to the aid station, driven by T-4 Bill Coddington, the commander's radio operator, the Jeep rolled twice and killed Coddington, further injuring already wounded Piddington.

In the meantime, 1LT Padraig O'Dea had led "B" Troop through the flooded Pontine Marshes to the Anzio Beachhead, where he presented communications from the 2nd Corps CG to LTG Lucian K. Truscott, CG of the 6th Corps, whose forces had been besieged there since 22 January.

The Recon troops continued to probe and skirmishes were more frequent. "C" Troop, now attached to the Minnesota National Guard 34th ID, took the town of Norma. [Editor's note: "C" Troop, 5/117th Cavalry is currently (2006-7) with the Minnesota 34th ID in Iraq].

The final drive to Rome took place during the early days of June, pushing the German "Herman Goering" Division. On 1 June, the 117th was attached to the fierce American – Canadian SSF (Special Service Forces). Working with the SSF and the 752nd Tank Destroyer Battalion, the mission was to rush to cut off German forces fighting delaying actions in the mountainous area, and take Collafero. "B" Troop was to take heavy fire and incurred several casualties, including CPL Joseph Finlay, PFC Opatz and PVT Erminio Lujan Dominguez. PFC Craig was reported missing.

So, early June saw The Recon Troops and Support forces engaged in a number of complex and difficult missions; suffering more casualties. Individual acts of great initiative and courage were common. For a break, "A" and "B" Troops did patrolling and outpostting, while "C" was assigned security for 5th Army HQ. CPT Nugent, LTs Carlile and Henry were detached to escort General Mark Clark. Elements of "E" and "F" Troops were held in reserve.

Approaching Rome, the orders were to take the city at all costs. On June 4th, elements of the 3rd Division reached the outskirts of Rome, after heavy engagements; the town of Valmontone was in ruins. On the morning of 5 June, 1944, some of all elements of the 117th Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron (Mecz) advanced into the Eternal City of Rome, the first of all Allied Forces to enter. It was approximately 1700 hours.

Fighting continued at all points; the Germans were retreating, but not routed. Rome was declared an Open City, and largely spared much destruction. German Tiger Tanks and other armor and vehicles were wrecked and burning at all points leading into the city. 117th Recon Troops continued to hunt, but the people of Rome were now in the streets and delirious with joy. Operations continued, but with caution.

Armored Car commander Harold "Smokie" Owen recalls that his units were receiving fire as they approached the ancient Coliseum. Orders were to not damage the famous structures of Rome, but Smokie saw and heard the fire and ricochets off his M-8! Gunner, target, FIRE! The 37 MM barked and the enemy disappeared. [Editor's note: *Many years later, Smokie & Joyce Mills Owen visited Rome and Smokie pointed out the "chunk of cheese" that he took out of the Coliseum*].

Squadron HQ was set up in the city on 5 June. Troops "A" & "B" were now operating north of the city, and "C" Troop was security for 5th Army HQ and escort for General Mark Clark.

Heavy combat continued as the Allies pushed and punished the Axis Forces. The Squadron took Ronciglione where the German High Command had located and fled. Onward, onward, fighting and liberating. Cheering Italian townspeople! Cruel fate was to be suffered by collaborators and Germans caught by the long-suffering Italians.

On 10 June, the Squadron moved up to Viterbo and was again attached to the Texas 36th Division - recon for the advance on Grosseto.

On 11 June, "B" Troop with elements of "E" and "F" did encounter a German Horse Cavalry unit, which was engaged by the 3rd Platoon at about 2245 hours. Prisoners were taken as were mounts. Horses were given to the Division Pack unit.

For the rest of June, fierce fighting was constant as the Troops engaged tough German forces and all that they could throw at the now veteran cavalymen. Intelligent action, resilience, communications, use of available resources and courage were constant factors. And they learned and adjusted constantly.

29 June 1944 With the Italian campaign well in hand and the Normandy Invasion just underway, a new effort was to be undertaken, and all 117th units ordered detached and regrouped. After a march back to Naples CPT Omer Brown returned from HQ with orders - and assignment to IV Corps, Seventh Army, a bit of rest was in order. Repairs, modifications, maintenance and the like were done, as was much needed medical and dental attention.

Battlefield commissions to 2LT: SSGT Ellison, "A" Troop, SSGT Bertoldi, "B" Troop and SGT D'Annunzio, "E" Troop.

The first decoration in the Squadron, a Silver Star was received by CPL Smutney, Troop "B" for "Gallantry in Action". The first Bronze Star was awarded for "Heroism in Action", *posthumously*, to PVT Taylor. He gave his life in action north of Grosseto, Italy.

The old 75 MM howitzers on light tank "Priest", a 105MM gun mounted on the and more effective support weapon. support of the recon troopers. The old now welded, no longer riveted. When a shell, the rivets would "pop" as well as shrapnel inside the vehicle. Lessons



chassis were replaced by the M-7 M-3 "Grant" chassis, a much stronger This meant much greater firepower in Grant medium tank chassis was also riveted vehicle was hit by a cannon the plate being holed, causing lethal learned in North Africa!

August, 1944 - Naples Area Preparation continues for *Operation Anvil*, the invasion of Southern France. The Squadron, having learned much about operating as part of larger forces with Troops assigned to differing larger combat commands, restructures. The 3 Recon Troops, A, B and C will have specific elements of E and F directly attached – dedicating tank and gun sections. Medical personnel are also dedicated to the Recon Troops. This assures swifter and surer operations, strengthening of teamwork and stronger combat action. Now bloodied, veteran and victorious, the 117th Cavalry Reconnaissance (Mecz) was proud, confident and ready for new action.

Anvil plans call for the Corps to invade with the 36th ID on the right flank, over the beaches of St. Raphael; the 45th ID center at St. Maxime and 3rd ID left flank in the vicinity of St. Tropez. Troop A assigned to 36 ID, Troop C to the 3rd ID and B Troop to the 45th ID (Thunderbirds - a NG outfit from AZ, NM, CO and OK). Boarding of ships begins on 10 August and complete on the 11th.

15 August 1944 – Southern France Invasion begins at 0400 with heavy naval and air bombardment. By 1600, all elements of the 117th are on shore and engaged with their respective Divisions. This is the first time that Armor was on the beach as part of the initial assault. The beaches and terrain were not problematic, as were parts of Normandy and some Pacific sites. So, the entire Squadron landed on *D-Day*, *Operation Anvil*.

Fighting intensities were mixed and the Allies performed very well. For the first time, a complete Free French Naval Assault Group operated independently and took Marseilles and it's surrounds after several days of hard fighting.

Consolidating and moving inland, a rapid thrust was developing and **Task Force Butler** was formed, commanded by Brigadier General F. B. Butler, a tough West Pointer, Regular Army. The 117th Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron (Mecz) reformed and dedicated, along with 59th Armored Field Artillery BN; 753rd Tank BN (less 1 Med and Lt Tank Companies); 2nd BN 143rd Infantry Regiment; C Company, 636th Tank Destroyer BN; F Company, 344th Engineer Regiment; C Company, 111th Medical BN Det.; D Company, 111th Medical BN and the 3426th Quartermaster Truck Company, Detachment, 87th Ordnance Company and Detachment, Military Police (IV Corps).

The mission was as follows: A) To seize and hold high ground north of Grenoble. B) Seize the high ground to the west and the high ground on the east bank of the Rhone River, or: C) Move to the west and seize the high ground on the east bank of the Rhone between Montelimar and Livron. Operations began on 17 August with the 117th leading all elements with speed and élan. Opposing forces were shocked and disheartened by the fast and tough American forces.

18 August A Recon element of C Troop, lead by SGT Robert (Bob) Lutz had reached their objective and paused for further orders when 3 German officers cautiously approached with a white flag. The said that they represented a General who wished to surrender to the officer in charge. Lutz (who was fluent in German) told them that he was an NCO, but they insisted on a commissioned officer, Lutz then radioed and got LT Joseph Syms to come up to his position and take the general's pistol in surrender. German LT General Ferdinand von Neuling, commander of the 62nd Corps and his command staff were now prisoners of Task Force Butler. The Germans were asked to surrender the previous evening, but answered "never!" - Until the next day, when they were badly mauled and unable to continue.

Task Force Butler, led by the Essex Troopers proceeded to race to their areas of objective, overcoming tough resistance and taking many prisoners. The Germans preferred to surrender to the Americans rather than to the French. The Allies had been organizing and equipping the Maquis, the French underground for months. Now, it was an effective and vengeful force, and important to the Allies in rear area protection, intelligence and small-scale action. The Germans knew that the French would not be kind to prisoners

25 August Much ground had been won, but at some cost. The Germans were not giving without taking. The Squadron had reached the vicinity of Montelimar, and found the Germans massing for a counter attack. It was found that the enemy had captured the Plan of Battle from the 36th ID, and counterattacked in an effort to escape. The battles went back and forth and were confused. It was in this action that A Troop commander CPT Omer Forrest Brown was killed in action at village of Grane. 28-year-old Brown was one of the "old" horse soldiers, well liked and very much a cavalry leader.

30 August Advance was so rapid that supply lines were stretched over 100 miles at times. Rations and all resupply were lean; so was rest and repair, done "on the road". The enemy was always off balance and grew disheartened. Continuing operations saw the 117th and the rest of Task Force Butler overcome and defeat the enemy, and all objectives were achieved. Task Force Butler was highly successful, advancing 235 miles in 4 days. Total advances of patrols and subsidiary forces would total much more, and thousands of square miles combed, cleared and taken. Task Force Butler was informed that the mission was complete and the 117th was to report to Corps HQ for further orders.

The 117th Cavalry had been specifically selected as the core, the unit that Task Force Butler had been built around, selected personally by LT General Lucian Truscott, an old cavalryman himself. Task Force Commander BG Butler years later stated in his published paper "*Task Force Butler*" the following:

"The Reconnaissance Squadron was now a veteran unit and I doubt that any other unit of its type found a job better suited to its organization and equipment than the mission in hand. This is what reconnaissance units are designed for and for this, they were a sound unit. The 117th from the beginning functioned perfectly in communications and to me this was ninety percent of the problem. They were perfect now in the technique of reconnaissance and they certainly could carry on persuasive conversation! Their personnel was largely still of the old swank Essex Troop of the New Jersey National Guard and was plenty courageous and daring."

3 September Troop A was operating near the Italian border and returned to the Squadron, which was with the 45th ID. Troop A, returning from the Italian - Swiss border, was ordered to follow Troop B, which was setting roadblocks on the main route out of Montrevel. At 0700, Troop B entered Montrevel and secured it after overcoming small arms and MG fire. Soon a large German armored force with MK VI tanks attacked with infantry, cutting off A Troop and isolating B. Greatly outnumbered and with inferior weapons, B Troop's losses mounted and the ability to continue was waning. A Troop was blocked and unable to move to support. Other support was distant and uncommitted. At 1000 hours, CPT Wood informed the Squadron CO that if reinforcements were not coming, he would have to abandon the town. Escape routes were sought by dismounted patrols. More German armor and infantry was thrown against A & B. The situation was dire. F Troop tanks moved into action, and B Troop attacked in harmony. At 1355 hours, Corps cancelled a planned attack. The Essex Troopers fought fiercely and extracted a heavy toll. Essex Troopers attacked, and attacked, and attacked again – throwing the Germans off balance and unable to determine the strength of their adversary. At 1630 hours, CPT Wood called the Squadron CO and reported that it would be impossible to withdraw, under any circumstances. This was the last message from Montrevel. Unable to continue, and with many casualties needing medical care, CPT Wood surrendered. The German commander was amazed that such a small force, with nothing larger than 37 MM cannon could sustain, repulse and attack an overwhelming force until they were spent. The bravery and aggressive tactics were noted and admired by the Germans, many of who were veterans of the Eastern Front, against the Russians. German medical troops cared for the wounded and the prisoners were treated with respect.

2LT Daniel W. Lee was to receive the *Congressional Medal of Honor* for his actions. He led his HQ Troop to support B Troop into Montrevel. During his highly effective, heroic leadership and personal actions he sustained multiple wounds and taken prisoner. His comrades found him 2 days later, left by the Germans.

German losses were far in excess of ours, but our losses were great. B Troop was decimated. Only 8 men remained able to fight. The rest were KIA, MIA, captured or wounded, 12 of whom were left behind. F Troop had 3 KIA and B Troop lost 2 officers and 10 EM. 20 Jeeps, 15 Armored Cars (M-8) and 2 light tanks (M-5A) were lost.

After a rapid forced march, Troop C had arrived too late, and E Troop fire would have been too dangerous to our troops. The remainder of Troops B and A were made into a provisional A Troop. The Squadron assembled in an area west of Marboz for the night.

After resupply and repairs, the Squadron went back into action on 5 September, making use of 6X6 trucks for combat troop transport, which would move on foot when engaged. Engagements were fierce and more KIA were suffered. Some prisoners captured at Montrevel managed to escape. They were CPT Wood, LT Luty, 1st SGT Grant and PVT Cole. They escaped when the German trucks were shelled by American artillery. They evaded until the Germans left, and returned on the 5th.

10 men were later presented with the Bronze Star in Epinal, France. Higher awards would come later to others.

Through 21 September Pursuit of German forces was continuous and each objective was hotly contested. The Allies were determined to cut off escape routes and movement into Germany. The Germans were retreating as best they could, but American forces were relentless. Squadron elements probed west of the Moselle River, to the edges of Epinal and then were relieved by the infantry. The Squadron then regrouped near Faucogney.

The commanding officer of VI Corps, LT General Truscott visited Squadron HQ to obtain first hand information of the situation around Epinal. The General was very pleased, and said upon leaving that the 117th had done a wonderful job in Southern France.

The second part of the month was difficult and slow, Weather was an enemy and road accidents happened; casualties incurred. At times, Free French Army units were supported as well as units of the VI and XV Corps.

The Medical Corps personnel, although too often unsung, were highly esteemed by Essex Troopers. These men were of great help and comfort to all in need.

October 1944 Heavy enemy shelling is frequent. The Squadron is often static, in blocking positions. Casualties mount.

8 October - MAJ Robert F. J. McGarry, Squadron XO is hospitalized, MAJ Harold Samsel, S-3, is appointed XO until McGarry returns. Samsel was an Essex Troop corporal until January 1941 when he was commissioned a 2LT. Both officers have been decorated and are outstanding and versatile leaders.

In summary, October has been a difficult month. Used to rapid advances and fluid situations, fighting in a static situation is not what they are suited for. But the Essex Troopers acquit themselves well. A breakthrough is in sight and the Squadron readies for it.

[Ed. Note: Operation Anvil/Dragoon in depth <http://www.army.mil/cmh-pg/brochures/sfrance/sfrance.htm>]

November through mid December, 1944 In the northwest corner of France – Alsace Lorraine It was slow and very difficult. The Germans were being pushed back into *The Fatherland* and soon, back through the Maginot Line and the Siegfried Line. The Squadron reaches Strasbourg, clears pockets of resistance on the banks of the Rhine. German resistance is fierce; casualties mount.

December 15 – January 3, 1945 Germany launched the Ardennes Offensive, creating the “Battle of The Bulge” on the Allies’ western lines. Operation “Norwind” extends this last great German offensive eastward to the Rhine Valley and Alsace, creating the “Bitche Salient”.

The Allies had raced to turn back the Germans in the Ardennes salient, reinforcing Patton’s 3rd Army with Allied units from the eastern lines toward Alsace, stretching and thinning defending forces. 7th Army receives orders on 21 December to reach to *defend* from the Rhine to vicinity of Saarbrucken. The *Hudelson Task Force* was formed and tasked to hold a front of about 10 miles in the lower Voges - Hardt mountains area, from a bit south of Bitche to the Nuenhoffen area on the east. Units included Combat Command Reserve, 14th Armored Division, less I tank battalion; B Company, 654th Tank Destroyer Battalion; B Company, 83rd Chemical Mortar Battalion; A Company, 125th Armored Engineer Battalion; 1-540 Combat Engineers; 62nd Armored Infantry Battalion; 94th Cavalry Squadron and the 117th Cavalry Reconnaissance (Mecz). The 94th Cavalry was attached to the 117th. Intel has it that German forces are readying for an offensive on the 7th Army’s positions.

31 December, 1944 The squadrons are stretched thinly between flanking units, with sparse reserve. The command posts of both Squadrons are set up in Mouterhouse, about 7 miles southwest of Bitche. “All quiet” are the reports from line units, throughout the afternoon and into the early evening. Orders have been issued that there is to be NO drinking and celebrating, silence on the lines. At 2310 hours, 1st Platoon of B Troop, 117th Cavalry reports very heavy traffic on the road running due east of Bitche. Following this, similar reports come in from all platoons on the line of the 117th, during the next 30 minutes. Artillery had been placed in pre-planned concentrations along this route. Within moments of midnight, 1 January 1945, CPT Barnaby of B Troop, 117th Cavalry reports an outpost of the 399th Infantry was surrounded, but still has telephone contact. At almost the same time, 3rd Platoon, B Troop, 117th Cavalry reports enemy attacking from left and rear. In short order, 1st and

2nd Platoons report heavy attacks in their areas. By 0100 hours, C Troop engaged and the D Troop of the 94th Cavalry. Soon, all units engaged and the enemy, fighting ferociously and with abandon, breaks through the lines. Units are being engaged on all sides, but fighting well. Communications are largely intact.

Squadron Command requests Hudelson Task Force command to commit reserves; the reply is that all but B Company, 540th Engineers are committed, and permission was given to use that unit.

Intensive fighting is reported by all units, but a concentration seems to be focused on B Troop of the 117th. The platoon leader calls in artillery fire to within 25 yards of his unit, inflicting heavy losses on the enemy and destroying all radio antennas. One M-8 was hit and all tires on all vehicles had been destroyed by our artillery fire.

Permission was received to fall back and defend at better positions.

In general, communications were maintained and all units, under constant and determined enemy attack did fight to better positions. The many individual unit situations were every changing; leadership and intelligent actions were buoyed by courage and fighting skills honed by many months of combat. When fighting to new positions couldn't be done in their damaged vehicles, they fought as infantry, after destroying fixed radios, cannon and ammunition. Jeeps were abandoned when the fire was too intense, and troopers were loaded into armored cars and tanks.

Even under sniper fire, the Squadron CP staff managed overall operations, moved reserves and support resources such as artillery and air strikes to good effect.

While en route toward Mouterhouse, Recon Sergeant Robert (Bob) Lutz remembers USAAF P-47 Thunderbolt fighter-bombers strafing so close that stones and dirt were thrown into his face and bullets struck within inches of his feet.

The Seventh United States Army Report of Operations:

"On the left flank of the Hudelson Task Force the bulk of the 117th Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron had been hit hard and virtually surrounded at Mouterhouse. The situation here became obscure to task force and corps commanders, as communications with reconnaissance troops were maintained only with the greatest difficulty. The enemy had overrun their forward positions north of Mouterhouse in the early stages of the offensive. Withdrawal from a second defensive line under heavy enemy pressure was accomplished during 1 January. The squadron command post, which had been in Mouterhouse, was reestablished in Wingen; and by the end of the day the 117th Cavalry had drawn back to final defensive positions which were maintained. On the morning of 2 January the 179th Infantry was brought up and disposed along the line already held."

[Ed. Note: The Last German Offensive http://www.trailblazersww2.org/divisionhistory/seventh_last.htm]

2 January All units had held or improved in their new positions. During the first 2 days of the New Year, the Squadron had inflicted at least 1,000 casualties on the enemy. In many cases, the troopers fired their weapons until ammo was exhausted or their MG barrels burned out. Squadron casualties were 1 KIA, 14 wounded and 25 MIA.

1 January, 1945 MAJ Harold J. Samsel is appointed CO, 117th Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron (Mecz), (Colonel Hodge had earlier been ordered to Ft. Riley, but stayed on during the fighting); CPT John M. Brown, appointed XO; CPT Mario J. Zecca, S-3; CPT James R. Shenk, Asst. S-3.

4 January All Troops were rearming, refitting and replacing vehicles and weapons. Other units had reinforced and replaced the Squadron in front line positions.

The Battle of Bitché was one of the Squadron's "finest hours."

14 January As a result of outstanding leadership displayed during the action at Mouterhouse on 1 January, the following NCOs were recommended for Battlefield Commissions to 2LT: SSGTs Harold D. Owen and Roy Mulcahey, A Troop; SSGT Charles Sherman and SGT Charles Alworth, B Troop; SGT Ben Emery and SSGT Albert M. Robbins, C Troop. These promotions were approved by VI Corps.

Operation Nordwind still ongoing; German forces continued to fight, trying to regain and repulse. The weather was cold and snow fell, Squadron vehicles were whitewashed and the camouflage worked well.

16 January 1LT Daniel W. Lee, CMO and several NCO's, all of whom were wounded at Montrevel, returned to the Squadron. 1LT Lee was given command of C Troop. 1LT Syms was assigned to HQ as liaison officer.

19 January Orders received for the Squadron to be reattached to the 36th ID. This fine National Guard outfit from Texas was certainly familiar to the 117th, as they had been serving together since Italy. Positions were seeing action all along the Rhine.

At times, Squadron members were being relieved and sent to Paris for some R&R. Paris had been taken earlier by the 3rd Army. Troop B of the 38th Cavalry, a squadron of the 102nd Cavalry Group had been the first of the Allied Forces to enter, but were told to halt, and support the French Armored Division to take the City of Lights. In spite of Hitler's orders to burn Paris, the Germans left without doing so. Some nasty fighting took place; brave Parisians did what they could to take revenge on retreating German units.

The Essex Troopers were treated with great respect and warmth by the citizen of Paris, who had been under the occupation of German forces since Paris fell in 1940. Such leaves were the first for the troopers since departing England for North Africa – July 1943!

February The Squadron advances to Hagenau and Marienthal and takes positions along the Moder River. Thaws have caused the river to be swift and swollen. German forces fight stubbornly and shell Allied positions. No gains for the Germans. Allies have had total domination of the air, preventing German movement of any significance. Some of the old M-5A tanks are replaced by the new M-24 "Chafee" light tank, a huge improvement – an improved 75MM cannon, torsion bar suspension, more power and much better armor.



It was during this period that Platoon Leader LT Harold "Smokie" Owen remembers that during a recon mission that he came upon a large German formation in a wooded area – hundreds, maybe a battalion. He could smell their cigarette smoke. Armed only with an 81 MM mortar and his M-8 Armored Car's puny 37MM cannon, he called HQ for the E Troop 105MM howitzers. The day was darkening and HQ was dubious that the LT could properly identify the target. LT Owen prevailed. After a first round, he corrected fire and ordered "fire for effect". The next morning the target area was overcome and hundreds of Germans were found. Any survivors had left during the night.

[Ed. Note: While speaking of this event, buried deep in his memory, Smokie had difficulty in getting it all out. He did though. His eyes would go distant, cheeks glistening. As we listened, tearful ourselves, Smokie grew silent. Finally he said "All those young men – and I was only in my twenties, too". Later, in a lighter moment, he tells about "escaping" from a hospital after recovering and waiting for a reassignment. Not wanting to be separated from his unit, he "took his leave" through a window and managed to return to the Squadron. He had been wounded while trying to retrieve one of his men lying wounded in a minefield.]

March The front quiets somewhat, and the Squadron takes time to refit and train. More M-24's are received and the old M-5A's are returned to depot. Tankers like SGT Danny Melso are very pleased, to say the least. This new cavalry tank is a beauty!

Intense fight resumes and the Enemy seems to be consolidating for a stand at the Siegfried Line. The enemy is seemingly unaware of a large breach by the 3rd Army and will soon be flanked. He fights tenaciously, blocking routes of Allied advance and river crossings. *A bridge is taken at Mannheim and the Squadron enters Germany.*

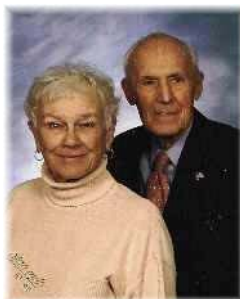
April The squadron continues aggressive actions in concert with assigned units, fighting into Bavaria and towards the Stuttgart area. Many refugees have to be managed as desperate Germans retreat. Some fanatical SS units are encountered. At one point, large groups of prisoners, slave laborers are freed. Other units come upon Concentration Camps, death camps, and are stunned in disbelief.

May Now attached to the 101st Airborne Division, patrolling in their assigned sectors, many PWs are taken and displaced persons have to be managed in large numbers, as they are wandering along routes of advance and supply. The Squadron is relieved from the 101st and attached to the 44th ID. Roadblocks are set up, many PWs taken and refugees abound. The Squadron continues into Austria, encountering light resistance.

8 May 1945 - VE DAY! Germany surrenders unconditionally. The Squadron is now in Austria, in the area of the Lech Valley, a beautiful ski resort. LTC Samsel is appointed Civil Military Governor of the area. The American Troops are well received by the villagers of the valley. The Squadron rests, recovers and refits. The troops have a wonderful time, and are billeted in some 22 hotels and some boarding houses. Bathing daily, sleeping in beds, laundry services and disobeying non-fraternization orders, life was wonderful! However, training does not stop, as the war in the Pacific rages on.

24 May Orders are received for the Squadron to move to Frankfurt, Germany and serve, once again, as the Personal Security Force for General Eisenhower. The Squadron remained in the Frankfurt area through the summer and into the fall, and was finally deactivated in November, 1945. Going home after being away since 1942, and in almost daily combat for many months.

Spring 1947 Harold David "Smokie" Owen and Joyce Mills are married and honeymoon in Atlantic City. Smokie has returned to school and becomes an artist and sign painter. He and Joyce eventually establish a sign painting business that is successful for decades, until they retire. They bought a home in Cranford and live there today. Their children David and Heidi thrive. David, born 2/9/52 graduates from the University of Virginia and NYU Medical School. Dr. Owen and his wife Marty and their 15 year old daughter live in Boca Raton, Florida. Heidi Owen Ahlborn, born on 2/18/54 graduated from Columbia University as a nurse, and the School of Physicians and Surgeons as a doctor. Heidi married and stayed home to raise 5 children. Her husband is Dr. Thomas A. Ahlborn, practicing at Valley Hospital, Ridgewood, NJ, where they live today.



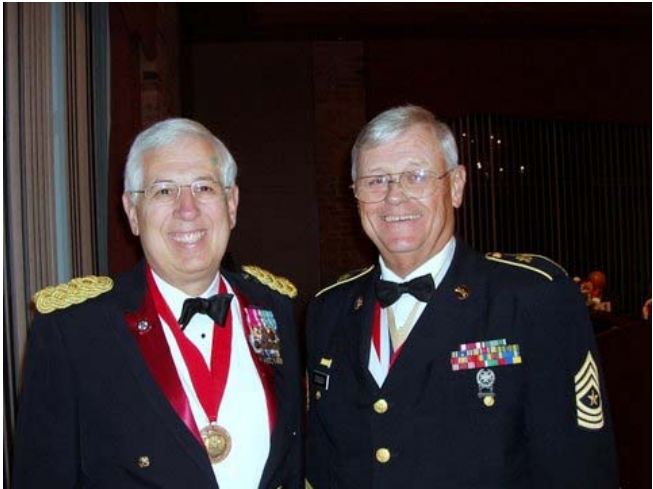
Here is a recent picture of Joyce and Smokie, done for their church directory.

Like LT Owen, many thousands of our servicemen performed their duties with honor, courage and skill. Many were decorated, but, due to wartime conditions, didn't receive their medals until back home in the USA. LT Owen was to receive multiple Bronze Stars for Valor - for Italy, France and Germany, Invasion devices for Italy and Southern France and a Purple Heart.



[Ed. Note: When SPUR called COL (ret) Harold Samsel, Smokie's wartime commander in 1945, and asked if he remembered LT Owen, the Colonel said "Of course! I recommended him for a Battlefield Commission! He was a fine officer. Our Platoon leaders were the best officers! They and their Platoon Sergeants were always in the front, finding the enemy and leading the way. Owen was a WARRIOR! And that's the best compliment I can give!"]

Harold David "Smokey" Owen, WWII Warrior, Class of '41", Essex Trooper is being honored at the February 2nd 2007 meeting of the 117th Cavalry Association. Joyce will be there with her Smokie. Smokie wishes that this article and issue of SPUR be dedicated to all of the Essex Troopers who served in WWII. Especially those who didn't return home and enjoy this Great Country and the Freedom they all fought for, so many years ago.



COL (ret) Dennis Dougherty and CSM (ret) James Dooley at the Reunion, Ft. Monmouth

February 2007 Presidents Message

I would like to take this time to wish all our members a happy and prosperous New Year. In particular I would like to thank all the members of our reunion committee for all their help in making our 2006 Biennial Reunion a great success. You can see by the pictures in the "SPUR" that the 90 plus people in attendance had a great time. The reunion gave us the opportunity to honor members of our 117th Cavalry Association and to renew old friendships. All and all it was a great night and a good time was had by all of those in attendance.

As you can see by the picture of the cornerstone of the Westfield Armory there has been a military presence in Westfield since 1925. This eight plus decades of service to our community, state and nation is a credit to all those who have served in the Westfield Armory. As the New Year begins a new military organization will begin its service in our Armory. The new unit will be organized from two existing organizations the current 5-117th Cavalry and the 2-102nd Armor. The new unit will called be the 102nd Cavalry (RSTA). I would like to welcome LTC Dean Spensos and his troopers of the 102nd Cavalry to Westfield.

LTC Spensos will be our guest speaker at our February meeting. He will brief our members on the roles and missions of the new 102nd Cavalry (RSTA). I know I am looking forward to his visit and I encourage you all to attend the 3 February meeting. We will also take time to honor and recognize one our members of the "Class of 41" Harold D. (Smokey) Owen. Smokey has been named a Distinguished Member of the Regiment for his service to the 117th Cavalry during World War II and he will be recognized that evening for this achievement. Again I encourage all of you to attend and share this honor with Smokey.

I would be remiss, if I didn't thank all our members for their unconditional support to all our deployed members. I would like to thank all of you who have participated in the "Coffee Express" and who have sent packages and continue to send packages to all our deployed members with Troop C 5-117th Cavalry and to COL Mike Shute and his team in Afghanistan and LTC Mike Hrycak and his team in Iraq and all the rest of the deployed Army Guardsmen deployed in the ongoing Global War on Terror. See you all on February 3, 2007.

Show' em the Way!

Dennis



Can you tell the Colonel what and where this is!

ANNOUNCEMENT! COL (ret) Harold Samsel will be 96 years young on 24 January 2007!



102nd Cavalry (RSTA) Troopers



Report from COL. Shute in Afghanistan

The ANA/ETT Story

An ETT (Embedded Training Team) mentors the leadership of the ANA (Afghan National Army), wherever the ANA is stationed, so the level of isolation is relative to the places where the ANA is deployed. Usually there is an ETT team, and a set of support teams that provide the ETTS with communications, logistics and base support. So even if they are in a small Forward Operating Base, where mail comes eventually and it is possible to run out of ketchup, they are not alone among the Afghan Soldiers. The ANA has its own base, with its own command structure, logistics team, maintenance crew- everything it takes to support its own Army. The ETT's job is to advise them on how to keep that organization running well, and provide advice, encouragement, and where needed, training so they can function as a stand alone Army. ETT'S do not command; they mentor command. The demanding part for a military person is to step back and let them do it, and come in when needed and when asked. Anyone anywhere learns better from the mistakes they recognize they have made than they do from one's they are prevented from making. In a way, this is one of the reasons that the Guard has been so effective. Their experience in both civilian and military life makes them flexible and versatile in responding to the Afghans where they stand. Afghans are learning to be citizens of a nation with a centralized government as well as soldiers. The ETT's are with the ANA wherever it is, but are not alone among them. They live separately, eat separately, have their own quarters but they work together on the ANA side of the base during the day.

There are friendships that form, and invitations over for lunch are common. This Thanksgiving several of the 207th CORPS officers attended Thanksgiving dinner (which they often call the American Eid). On Christmas day, the Afghan Deputy Minister of Defense and his staff shared the Christmas meal with US and Italian soldiers. The Minister concluded the meal with a very gracious "Thank you" for our service to his country and presented us with a small animated and lit Christmas tree. As well, and very often, many mentors will eat lunch with their counterparts in the ANA defac. But mostly we are like scaffolding around a building; the idea is, once the bricks are laid and the cement dry, the ETTS can leave without disturbing the structure. That time is not yet, but we are preparing for it, by not integrating ourselves into their structure.

One of the difficulties for any American here is that the Afghan weekend goes from Thursday afternoon to Saturday morning. With Friday as the down day for the ANA it is the only time the ETTS have to complete paperwork and answer e-mails. What this means is that they are working seven days a week and it is a rare soldier who can tell you, without having to think about it, what day of the week it is.

Another difficulty is learning how to "read" and assess their mentees. Afghans tend to be polite, and not as direct as we are. It is an art to understand when yes actually means no and when you have actually made the point. Language is an issue, certainly, but not in the way you might think. A very good interpreter may not have a lot of military vocabulary in his own language, so "Fields of Fire" become the "burning crop" and it can take a while to figure out where the confusion comes from. In addition, there are two languages here, Dari and Pashto, indiscernible to our ears but unrelated linguistically. Afghans are recruited from the villages. It is often the Village Elder or the Mullah who has the final word on who shall go. Given the interdependency of the Afghan family structure, it is important that the young man not have a lot of responsibility at home, because it will always come first. The Mullahs and the Elders know the village families, and personally sign the recruitment papers. The new recruit will go into a National Army Recruiting office and sign up.

Then, once a group is formed, they will go to The Military Entrance Processing Site (MEPS) where they undergo two weeks of testing and training. Many of the young men have never been out of their villages and may have never had an eye test or a TB test. They learn how to wear a uniform and care for their gear; how to keep a barracks, and how to use a latrine. Many, but not all, soldiers have lived in a village where the women did everything for them, and they need some time to adjust to the idea of mopping their own floors, and making their own tea. Here they are tested to see what their literacy level is. In Afghanistan many people will say they are literate because they can sign their name. Those who excel, or speak another language, are often put on the path for officer training.

Then they go to basic training. Here the ETTS have trained the trainers. Afghan soldiers train the soldier, but there are ETTS there to supervise, help with planning and provide some specialized training. This is like any soldiers' basic training, with physical training, drill and range training. There are additional skills necessary in a

war against an insurgency that they practice: learning how to search a car for bombs and search a person for weapons.

It is also where they learn to live together, somehow. Much like our Army after WWII the ANA is an integrated army. An effort is made to make each Battalion (or Kandak, as it is referred to here) a certain percentage Tajik, Pashto, Uzbek, and Hazara. Difficulties arise, and are settled mostly by the Afghan trainers who have a better chance at sorting it out than any of us would. At the beginning, the inducting officer can be heard asking them where they are from, and they respond with their region, their town, their village or even a mountain nearby... The officer tells them there, and they will hear it often. "No, you are from Afghanistan, and this is one army for all of Afghanistan."

Everything they are taught has a safety and service element in it, as it would in our training. When stopping a vehicle they are taught not to step up aggression until very specific criteria are met. The human rights part of the training is woven into everything they do. It is put into practice in range training, in cordon and search training, in everything they are trained to the limits of force and the rules of engagement.

Once they have completed basic training, they are deployed, or they go on to advance specialty training, depending on their abilities. Then they are deployed to the various Corps around the country.

When they join their ANA command, the ETTS at that Regional CORPS Advisory COMMAND (RCAC) will continue with their training. We call it "building the airplane as you fly". It is difficult, but allows us to try to tailor the training to the needs of that unit and that situation. Again, where the ETTS have trained a trainer, they will provide oversight, check on the scheduling, and make sure it is running to speed. Where they have not, they will train.

There are also female ETT's here in Afghanistan. There is a female one star general in the Afghan Army, and a recruiting effort is beginning to bring Afghan women into the ANA. These are young guys. They are most of them deeply religious, but not fundamentalist. It takes a while for them to stop staring, but an army uniform is not much more interesting to look at than a Burka...and after the novelty wanes, usually they start acting normal again. Often they will call the female ETTS, sir.

As to quotes, I cannot really gather them, but here are some of the things I have heard said.

"He keeps trying to hold my hand!" and then a soldier learns that Afghan men are very familiar with each other, holding hands and leaning on each other. It can give an American male a bit of a fright, but after a while everybody calms down. In fact, some learn that when your mentor takes your hand, it means that you have made a friend who will listen, will ask questions and shows that you have earned his respect.

"Afghans can make chai (tea) anywhere and under any conditions. And, you will drink the "chai". Having tea together, green tea or black tea, with a few nuts or sweets or fruit will happen anytime you stand still for a minute. The Afghan Soldier will build a fire, pull out a teapot and have you drinking. This can be a bit scary with the drinking water situation in the villages, but there is no getting around it. You will drink the chai!

They are not afraid to run to the sound of the guns, they just will not bring water. It is getting them to prepare to go out that is the difficult part. And getting their officers to know to check that everyone has enough water, ammo, food, fuel etc is an incredible task. It is in a sense going from the Allu Akbar way of fighting, sort of "It is a good day to die" philosophy of the old mujahadeen. As I heard one ANA officer put it, "We know how to fight and die, I am learning how to fight and live."

Afghans are very family oriented, and don't want to be away from their families for a long time, given that travel is exceedingly difficult in some parts of the country they go home, and it can take them days to get back. Or they get there and find they are needed for some reason, and don't come back when they are supposed to.

There is not a way, as of yet, to get their money to their villages without them bringing it themselves. The Government is working on that, but it means they must leave to bring money home, and not get back when they are supposed to. This can create AWOL and attendance difficulties.

They are used to doing things like a big family, where everyone knows what is going on because they can hear the “fight in the kitchen”. Getting them to use various kinds of systems of communication to allow larger groups to function together can take some doing.

All this said many of the Afghans that we mentor are extremely experienced combat veterans. They may have been trained by the Russians to serve in the Afghan military prior to the Taliban, and fought with the Mujahadeen in the hills, but they are extremely experienced in counterinsurgency and insurgency operations. They have enormous combat experience, but not a great deal of logistics, supply, and communications experience. We learn from these men. And we help them get what they need to do what they need to do.

COL Michael V. Shute
Commander, 207th RCAC
Camp Stone
Herat, Afghanistan
APO AE 09354

COL Shute →



Rutgers University did of Oral History Domenic “Danny” Mel so, one of our Association members and one of “The Class of ‘41” http://oralhistory.rutgers.edu/Interviews/melso_domenic.html SGT Mel so fought as a tanker with the 117th Cavalry Squadron (Mecz) until he was wounded in Germany. While in a French hospital, he met a lovely French girl. They married and returned to NJ for his due rewards. Highly decorated, he rejoined the 102nd Cavalry, NJNG and served in the Newark Armory with his old friends, including Robert F. J. “Bob” McGarry.

The Houston Institute for Culture did a history on Erminio Lujan Dominguez, who joined the 117th in 1943, fighting in Italy and France. He was wounded several times and was taken prisoner at Montrevel. PFC Domingo was freed from Moosberg, Bavaria Stalag VII-A on April 29, 1945. Awarded multiple Bronze Stars. Read about him! <http://www.houstonculture.org/hispanic/hero2.html>

Report from LTC Mike Hrycak

Dear Fellow Troopers, Warriors, and loved ones,

Today [29 December 2006] we sent off two Latvian Soldiers who gave their all yesterday when attacked with an IED, three others were wounded and MEDEVAC'd for treatment, may they recover from their wounds to fight another day.

It was a sort of anachronism, the Latvians were going through a left seat ride/right seat ride - which means the Soldiers due to rotate were taking the new Soldiers along on a mission to show them how it is done. So, for some the first or second time on a live mission in this asymmetric battlefield and for some the last mission before they return to their homes and loved ones.

Please examine the sequence of events, from the honor guard, through the emplacement of the Soldiers' remains onto a Hip helicopter, to the Hinds (former Soviet "flying tanks") gearing up, then the formation flight, which circled around FOB Echo and made an overflight so that we could send those troopers on their way home, finally:

Fiddler's Green

*Halfway down the trail to Hell,
In a shady meadow green
Are the Souls of all dead troopers camped,
Near a good old-time canteen.*

*And this eternal resting place
Is known as Fiddlers' Green.*

*Marching past, straight through to Hell
The Infantry are seen.
Accompanied by the Engineers,
Artillery and Marines,*

*For none but the shades of Cavalrymen
Dismount at Fiddlers' Green.*

*Though some go curving down the trail
To seek a warmer scene.
No trooper ever gets to Hell
Ere he's emptied his canteen.
And so rides back to drink again
With friends at Fiddlers' Green.*

*And so when man and horse go down
Beneath a saber keen,
Or in a roaring charge of fierce melee
You stop a bullet clean,
And the hostiles come to get your scalp,
Just empty your canteen,
And put your pistol to your head
And go to Fiddlers' Green.*



It is with tears in my eyes that I bid farewell to these great warriors. You never get used to losing Soldiers, but you do go back, sharpen your bayonet, stack your ammunition, prepare your steed, draw your saber and find those hostiles and they will not have the option of Fiddler's Green.

Goodbye my gallant fellow warriors, I bid you are now in a peaceful place awaiting the eventual arrival of your family, loved ones, and fellow Warriors some day. In the meantime we stand vigilant guard and will avenge your untimely deaths.

Show 'em The Way!

LTC Michael P. Hrycak, Staff/Maneuver Officer
5th Region Border Transition Team
FOB Echo, Ad Diwaniyah, Iraq



Membership update- SGM (Ret.) Ken Mahan



Trooper! Look at your address label! If the date is not Sept. 07 or later, you are **behind** in your dues. Your subscription to THE SPUR is going to run out because of non-payment of dues. A sample of label:

SEPT 07

**KENNETH L. MAHAN
12 W. WALNUT ST.
METUCHEN NJ 08840-2616**

To Members behind in their dues, you will have date circled in RED!

This is the only notice you will receive. Send information and/or dues to me at the Metuchen address shown above. Annual dues are due in September; regular dues are \$15 annually. Make checks payable to **117th CAV Assn.** **Note:** If you have an e-mail address, please send it to me at KMAHAN117@AOL.COM We are in the process of compiling an e-mail list of members and we want to include you. We have compiled 63 addresses.

Association web site: www.117th-cav.org/

New Members

Robert Pearce Col. Ret. (Carol Apbueit)

Was in Troop "D"-Air, 5/117 CAV 1972 to 1980

Fred Pescatore (Sarah)

Was in "B" Troop, 5/117 CAV

SPC 4 Douglas E. Tackach

Was in "F"-Air 5/117 Cav, Now in "D" Company 1/150 AASLT

SGT Sheila Zelaskowski

Was in "F" air, 5/117 CAV, Now in "D" Company 1/150 AASLT

Members deployed to Iraq

LTC Michael P. Hrycak

MSG Mark Crosby

SGT Pablo E. Chavez

SGT Omar Munoz

1SG Wayne May

SFC Jaun B. Ramos, Jr.

SGT David A. Bell

SGT Edwin Soto

Members in Afghanistan

COL Michael V. Shute

SFC Ronald M. Ambrose, JR.

Ft. Myers, VA

LTC Christopher Sands

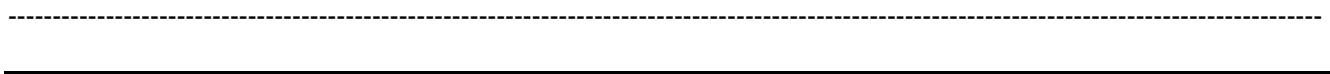
To Everyone, I Hope that You Had a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year!

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 WI-08 HARRY J. CHRISTOPHER, JR (in memory of) BY SHIRLEY M. CHRISTOPHER (WIFE OF 58 YRS)
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 SU-09 JOANN & KEN KLEIN, COL (RET)
 WI-07 ARTHUR K. KLING (IN MEMORIAM)
 SU-07 NORMA & NORMAN S. KOED (IN MEMORIAM)
 SU-11 DONALD KONDROSKI
 WI-07 WALTER & NANCY LAWRENCE
 SP-09 EDWARD J. LEONARD
 FA-09 GRACE LILLEY (in memory of husband) EDWARD
 SP-10 CSM (ret) KEN MAHAN
 FA-09 (in memory of) TIM MALONEY
 FA-07 COL (ret) DON McAVOY
 WI-09 OSCAR MERBER
 WI-08 CHARLOTTE MERRING
 FA-08 JOSEPH MINNITI
 FA-10 JUANITA MITCHELL (W OF FRANK)
 SP-07 FRANK & JANET MNICH
 SP-08 JAMES A. MOUSHEGIAN (IN HONOR OF MY FATHER)
 SP-09 RONNIE NIER
 WI-12 PHILIP NOTESTINE (in memory of) MAJ. JOHN B. COULSTON, MG TROOP 102 CAV '40 - '42)
- WI-07 FRANCES NUGENT (in memory of) MY HUSBAND, WILLIAM B. NUGENT)
 SP-12 JOYCE & HAROLD "SMOKIE" OWEN
 FA-08 FOTINOS PANAGAKOS
 SP-11 COL (ret) BOB PEARCE & CAROL, (in memory of) RICK APBLETT
 WI-09 TOM PETTY
 FA-07 CSM (ret) AL PHELAN
 WI-16 COL (ret) TOM PIDDINGTON (in memory of)
 SU-12 SALLIE LEE PIERCE (WIDOW OF DANIEL LEE, CMH)
 SP-08 LTC (ret) TONY PLONNER
 WI-07 DOT & KEN QUAAS, LTC (ret)
 FA-08 SOLEDAD C. REYNOLDS (friend of ELDRED BROWN)
 SU-07 BILL & DOROTHY REPKE
 SP-09 PAUL RIOS
 WI- 82 MRS. ROBERT D. ROBBINS (in memory of ROBBIE)
 FA-09 WALTER RODMAN
 SU-11 HAROLD J. SAMSEL, COL (ret)
 FA-07 EILEEN SCHNARR (in memory of HUSBAND,"WILLY")
 FA-07 ROBERT J. SMITH
 WI-09 ELMER K. SQUIER TRP B 117TH CAV
 SP-12 JOHN SUITER
 WI-07 1SG GEORGE THOMAS
 WI-10 DON & CHICKIE TRACY, CWO 4 (ret)
 Fa-11 CHARLES A. VIVIANO (50th RECON BN)
 SP-12 CSM (ret) HENRY WETZEL & GRACE, (in memory of) GEORGE "RED" EMERY
 SU-08 FRANK WISWALL, LTC USAF (ret) B TRP 102 CAV JAN '41-JUL '42
 SP-10 MRS. EDWARD J. WITOS, JR (in loving memory of) MY HUSBAND, ED SR.
 FA-07 MR & MRS ED WITOS, SR (in memory of ED)
 FA-19 FRANK A. WOODS SSG TRP A 3RD PLATOON
 WI-07 JOHN I. ZARING C TRP 117TH CAV (in memory of)

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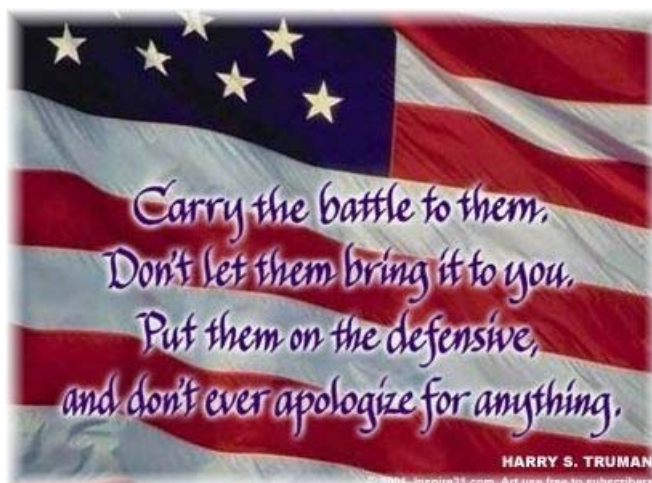
JUSTIN H. BYRNES – BASKING RIDGE, NJ. PASSED AWAY SEPTEMBER, 2006, 88 YEARS OLD. “CLASS OF ‘41” ESSEX TROOPER. SERVED IN THE PACIFIC, 1941-45. BATTLE OF OKINAWA. KOREA 1951-52. OBTAINED THE RANK OF CAPTAIN

DONALD H. CURTIS – WALL TOWNSHIP, NJ. PASSED AWAY NOVEMBER, 2006. 83 YEARS OLD. “CLASS OF ‘41” ESSEX TROOPER. DECORATED WWII VETERAN, ALSO TOOK PART IN THE POST WAR OCCUPATION OF JAPAN.

ERMINIO J. DOMINGUEZ – KANSAS CITY, KS. PASSED AWAY JUNE, 1996. 74 YEARS OLD. WWII VETERAN, 1 17TH CAVALRY RECON. SQUADRON (MECZ) 1943. POW, BATTLE OF MONTREVEL. FREED APRIL, 1945. BRONZE STARS, PURPLE HEART.

JAMES J. MUIRHEAD – MANASQUAN, NJ. PASSED AWAY NOVEMBER, 2006. 90 YEARS OLD. “CLASS OF ‘41” ESSEX TROOPER. WWII VETERAN, 102ND CAVALRY SQUADRON (MECZ) EUROPEAN THEATER

PAUL F. RAFFA – TOWACO, NJ. PASSED AWAY NOVEMBER, 2006. 88 YEARS OLD. “CLASS OF ‘41” ESSEX TROOPER. SERVED WITH THE 1 17TH CAVALRY RECON. SQUADRON, (MEZC) WWII. NORTH AFRICA, ITALY, SOUTHERN FRANCE AND GERMANY. MEMBER, MILITARY ORDER OF THE PURPLE HEART



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COL (ret) Harold Samsel
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1st New Jersey Cavalry



MISSION STATEMENT: It is the continuing objective of *The SPUR* to foster and preserve the spirit of the 117th Cavalry Association, and to promote and enhance the friendships and camaraderie of our members, who are mutually bound by service and devotion to our country.

NEXT ASSOCIATION MEETINGS: (always Friday) 2 FEBRUARY 2007; 13 APRIL 2007; 1 JUNE 2007;
7 SEPTEMBER 2007; 2 NOVEMBER 2007