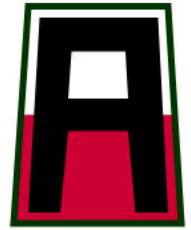


The Ardennes Offensive: My experiences in the 38th Cavalry Squadron's Defense of Monschau, during "The Battle of the Bulge" By Lt. Colonel Alfred H. M. Shehab (USA-Ret)

By mid-December 1944, the United States 1st Army had made tremendous advancements since the landings at Normandy not six months earlier. Sitting at one of the easternmost penetrations of the 1st Army was the town of Monschau, Germany, of which the 38th Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron (Mecz), 102 Cavalry Group (*The Essex Troop*)* was assigned to defend. The defensive line extended from just south of the town, northwest, then north along the Mutzenich Ridge to the train station on the north side of the village of Konzen. It was a very large sector, giving the squadron commander, LTC Robert O'Brien, no choice but to employ the entire strength of the squadron in the line, leaving no reserve. It was here that I commanded the 3rd Platoon of Troop B, now numbering about 30 men, occupying a front about 1,300 yards in front of Konzen.



Through the months of November and December, the sector was relatively quiet except for ceaseless and aggressive dismounted patrols, which gave us patrol dominance. The usual clashes with enemy patrols were frequent and deadly. I had found a hunting lodge at the edge of the woods, and there established my command post from which to base our patrols. The short spurts of battle continued through the first weeks of December, as further advancements were slowed by the gasoline shortage the entire Army was experiencing. Sometimes, at night, a few of us would slip into Konzen and leave copies of *The Stars and Stripes* just to let the Jerries know we were there. I must have been an absolute fool! But, when you are young, you do things that you look back on and wonder how you survived them. At the time, it was just something to do to pass the time and mess with the enemy's head.

On the night of 15 December 1944, we heard a huge number of airplanes flying overhead. Running outside to see what was happening, I saw loads of people dropping. The Jerries had dropped a bunch of paratroopers. Standing outside the hunting lodge that was now my command post, I grabbed an M-1 rifle and started shooting at them. At the same time, our .50 calibers mounted on armored cars opened up, spraying the sky with fire. Receiving an order from command to take out this battalion of paratroopers, my driver and I headed out into the woods to see what we could find. We picked up a couple of them, each of whom was carrying a bottle of rum. After hearing this, I had difficulty keeping my lads in. Now they all wanted to go out and capture paratroopers!

The next morning, 16 December at 0530 hours, which is an un-godly hour to start anything, much less a war, the Germans opened up with an intense barrage of artillery, mortar, and rocket fire. We holed up in our defenses, hoping not to suffer a direct hit. Communications had been nearly severed, and there was a confusion as to what exactly was happening. In that, I was lucky in a sense. From what I understand, at headquarters, they had become rather distressed as to what was going on. They were actually worried. But we young lieutenants didn't know any better.

To us, it was just another fight. It was not until later in life when I started reading the history of this thing that I got frightened about what went on.

A few hours later, enemy paratroopers became active behind our lines. A large-scale assault was developing on the B Troop front, with a platoon of Jerries attacking our rear. I was forced to draw on my already lightly held main line and send a combat patrol to ward off the German attack. Entering the forest, my men flanked the Germans and drove them south, killing several and taking two as prisoners. Still, the enemy refused to relent, and escalated its attacks against our thinly defended position.

The attacks continued for the next few days, and though a number of observation posts were overrun, we had held out. At one point, one of my lads came running in and said, "Lieutenant, I don't know what's going on behind us, but boy, there is something out there!" At that, I went out, and sure enough, heard a lot of noise coming from the woods. Crouching behind a tree, I hollered, "Who's there?" A voice came back, "Well, who the hell are you?" So I replied, "Well, who the hell are you?" We finally made a deal. We would each get an officer and meet him in an open space. It turns out it was the 49th Infantry, which had sent two companies from about twenty miles up the road. They had been told that we were wiped out. At that, they moved in and relieved the 30 men I had, assuring that the Germans would never gain control of Monschau. For its defense of Monschau, the 38th Cavalry Squadron received the *Presidential Unit Citation*.



< 1LT Alfred Shehab, late May 1945 in Prestice, Czechoslovakia. He was decorated with the *Bronze Star for Valor* for his actions at Monschau. The picture at the left is also in Prestice – 1LT Weldon Yontz and 1LT Alfred Shehab, B Troop guidon on the Jeep.



Below, left...GEN George Patton inspects the 38th Cavalry with COL Dolph, CO 102nd Cavalry Group and LTC R. E. O'Brien, CO 38th Cavalry. Below, right...COL Cyrus Dolph, Marlene Dietrich and a Russian Colonel.



During June 1945, the 38th Cavalry stood down and was disbanded. *“For those who served in the 38th, there would never be another outfit quite like it. She was a gallant, happy and lucky Squadron with a personality of her own. Born during the war for the purpose of fighting the Germans in Europe, it fulfilled that purpose brilliantly and then faded into history.”*

*The “*Essex Troop*” was the fraternal name of the private troop of cavalry formed in 1890 in Newark, Essex County, NJ. Mustered into the NJ National Guard in 1913 as the First Squadron Cavalry. Served at the Mexican Border during 1916. During WWI, the Squadron was broken into other elements including the 104th Military Police, which served in Alsace and Meuse-Argonne, France. Post WWI, reformed as the First Regiment Cavalry, and in 1921, reorganized as the 102nd Cavalry Regiment, NJNG. On 6 January 1941, the 102nd Cavalry Regiment (Horse-Mecz) called into Federal Service. During 1942, the horses were retired and the Regiment was fully “mechanized”. On 25 September 1942, the Regiment of two squadrons was deployed to England in preparation for the invasion of Western Europe. On 25 December 1942, the 2nd Squadron was sent to North Africa as combat security for Allied HQ in Algeria, and on 30 November 1943, was reflagged as the separate 117th Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron (Mecz). The 38th Cavalry had been sent to England, replacing the 2nd Squadron in the 102nd Cavalry Group. Troopers of the 102nd and 117th Cavalry Squadrons would still refer to themselves as “*Essex Troopers*”. Some Essex Troopers were transferred to the 38th Cavalry, and the “moniker” was informally spread and adopted by some, even though the core of the recently formed 38th Cavalry was from the Iowa National Guard’s 113th Cavalry!

LTC Alfred H. M. Shehab enjoyed a rich and varied career in the U. S. Army, serving for 22 years. Shehab’s parents were Lebanese, Maronite Catholics. He was born in America and raised in Cape May, NJ. He enlisted on 10 January 1942 and was later commissioned as a 2LT of Cavalry, in Recon Troop, 37th Cavalry, 4th Armored Division, and later as a Troop CO in the 23rd Cavalry. He joined the 38th Cavalry in Belgium in September 1944. Post WWII, Shehab served in the 4th Cavalry at Fort Knox. Fluent in English, French and Arabic, he was sent to counterintelligence schools. In 1952, CPT Shehab was sent to Saudi Arabia to advise the Saudi First Reconnaissance Squadron. As a member and *Emir* of the dominant Arab Quraysh Tribe, he was highly respected. While serving in the 14th Cavalry Regiment in Germany, Shehab was sent to Lebanon in 1958 as part of a high-level team to help the Lebanese during the crisis. His direct assignment was to interface with General Fouad Shehab, a cousin. General Shehab was to become the President of Lebanon. The crisis eased and the U. S. Military departed Lebanon. Colonel Shehab’s last post was at Fort Mead, where he served in the office of the Inspector General. Lt. Col. Alfred H.M. Shehab is past Commander-in-Chief of The Military Order of the World Wars.

[Ed. Note: LTC Shehab authorized Philip Notestine, Editor of *The SPUR* newsletter of the 117th Cavalry Association www.117th-cav.org to edit his (Shehab’s) original article. Notestine also serves as

Association Historian. The WWII History of the 38th Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron (Mecz), 102nd Cavalry Group can be read and downloaded from the Association web site www.117th-cav.org]

The First Squadron, 38th Cavalry Regiment was activated on 21 May 2009, part of the 525th Battlefield Surveillance Brigade. The 1-38th Cavalry is stationed at Fort Bragg, North Carolina; the unit deployed July 2010 to Afghanistan. Currently commanded by LTC James Gaylord.



"New" 38th Cavalry Crest



"Old" 102nd Cavalry "Essex Troop"



"Old" 117th Cavalry Crest, "New" 102nd Cavalry Crest

