

CAVALRY ON THE SHOULDER - The 38th CRS and the Defense of Monschau

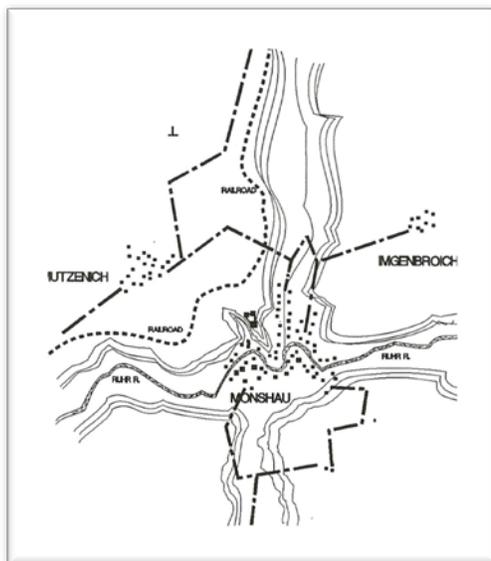
On 10 November 1944 the 38th Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron, was reattached to COL Cyrus A. Dolph's 102d Cavalry Group (Essex Troop), and moved north from the Rockerath/Monschau Forest area on the Belgium - German border, where they had been since the end of September. This move was part of an adjustment of the Corps boundaries within the First US Army.

The area the squadron vacated was turned over to the VIII Corps' 18th Cavalry Squadron, and the 38th Squadron moved slightly north and east out of Belgium and into Germany to relieve the defending VII Corps 4th Cavalry Group's 24th Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron, LTC Edward C. Dunn, commanding.

The town of Monschau was one of the eastern most penetrations of the US First Army. Its defense had been the mission of the 24th Cavalry Squadron of the 4th Cavalry Group since September when it was occupied virtually without a fight. It was the stopping point of the 24th Squadron after a long hard march across France and Belgium in pursuit of the fleeing Germans. The cavalry originally captured the town so quickly that at least one German train was captured after it made its regular stop in the town not knowing of the arrival of the Americans.

Monschau was a picturesque resort town approximately two miles east of the German - Belgium border. It was popular among the country-loving Germans because of its quaint beauty and the scenic rushing Ruhr River cutting through a deep pine covered gorge. The town is situated at the intersection of the Ruhr River and a smaller north south tributary. It is dominated by high ridges on all sides. The area east of the town was particularly roughly cut by ravines and pine forests, offering good cover and concealment to an attacker.

*Monschau sector
assigned to the 38th CRS*



The town's citizens were largely absent during the squadron's stay in the town. The squadron commander saw one child in the two months of occupation. He threw a snowball at the commander and the S3. The squadron did not counterattack.

The mission given to the 38th by the 102d Cavalry Group was to defend the town and the surrounding area. The 38th defensive line extended from just to the south of the town northwest and north along the Mutzenich ridge to the train station on the north side of the village of Konzen. Like most defensive cavalry missions, the purpose of the 38th Cavalry's mission was really to hold the ground in order to free up infantry to be used to maintain the momentum of offensive operations elsewhere on the front. As the cavalry defended, V Corps was assembling units for a major attack to seize the Ruhr dams to begin on 14 December.

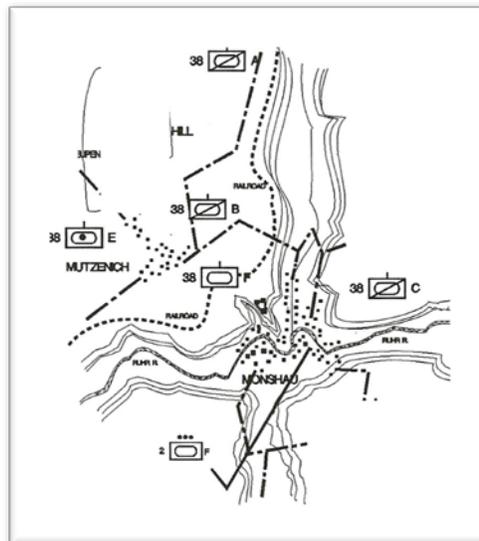
The 38th Cavalry was commanded by LTC Robert O'Brien. Commissioned in cavalry from the West Point class of 1936, O'Brien was an experienced soldier: he commanded a horse cavalry troop in the First Cavalry Division's 8th Cavalry Regiment prior to the war; saw his first combat landing under fire at Salerno in 1943; and arrived in France in July 1944 as the executive officer of the 113th Cavalry Reconnaissance Group. On 8 August 1944, he assumed command of the 38th from the former S3, Major Charles E. Rousek. MAJ Rousek took command when the previous commander, LTC John L. Lee, was wounded during the breakout from Normandy.

The 38th Cavalry was a tight-knit and proud organization and the previous commander was popular. This caused some friction between the new boss and his command. O'Brien's leadership style was based on directness, common sense, and a willingness to share the hardships of his soldiers. He frequently took part in the most hazardous duties such as patrolling. Because of this, he quickly won their admiration, respect, and loyalty. O'Brien for his part was proud of his squadron's combat record and confident that they could execute their current mission under any conditions. As the squadron settled into its defensive positions he and his soldiers had established a solid bond of mutual respect.

The squadron's nine hundred troopers were assigned a sector covering almost ten kilometers of ground, about six miles. In contrast, the similarly sized 3d Battalion, 395th Infantry, 99th Infantry Division, defending to the cavalry's right, occupied a 1,000 yard front on the eastern side of the village of Hofen. To the north the squadron was tied in with its sister squadron, the 102d Cavalry Group's 102d Squadron. Because of the size of the sector, O'Brien was forced to employ the entire strength of the squadron in the line, leaving no reserve. The squadron deployed with C Troop to the east and southeast of the town; F Company (tanks) put its 3d platoon in the valley in the town, and the rest of the company located northwest of the town in support of B Troop. B Troop positioned its platoons just to the northwest of the town along the north to south running railroad line; and A Troop set in north of B Troop along the slopes of the Malzhach hill to the train station in Konzen. E Troop (assault guns) was positioned to the squadron's rear and tied in with both the squadron, a direct support self-propelled light artillery battalion (105mm), and two medium artillery battalions (155mm). The squadron had attached the 3d Platoon of A Company, 112th Engineer Combat Battalion which was employed extensively building positions and laying concertina wire and mines, and a platoon of M10 self-propelled tank destroyers of the 893d Tank Destroyer Battalion. The tank destroyers were employed initially guarding the squadron's left flank, behind A Troop.

Through the month of November and into the beginning of December, the sector was relatively quiet. This was due to a number of factors, one of which was the squadron commander's concept to establish patrol dominance in the sector.

*Dispositions of the 38th CRS
on 16 December 1944*



Patrol dominance describes the squadron's campaign to suppress the enemy's ability to patrol in the squadron sector. This, in turn, provided security for US patrols against the enemy. Achieving this condition was one of the early objectives set forth by the squadron commander after the unit's arrival in the sector. This objective was achieved by ceaseless and aggressive dismounted patrolling throughout the sector. Initially the clashes with enemy patrols were frequent and deadly. The cavalry patrols routinely came out on top and inflicted significant casualties on the enemy.

An example of the quick and deadly fights initiated by patrols is the instance at the end of October when a B Troop patrol lead by First Lieutenant Weldon J. Yontz, fought a sharp action against a German patrol in the thick pine forests of the Ardennes.

The cavalry point man, Private Herbert H. Whittard, spotted the enemy first and motioned the cavalymen into position to spring an ambush. Waiting in cover, the cavalry troopers engaged the large enemy patrol at close range. The resulting hail of bullets killed or wounded all of the 22 enemy. Prisoners later revealed that this enemy patrol was the handpicked reconnaissance company of the opposing German infantry regiment. This type of aggressive action was repeated often in the Monschau sector and caused enemy patrols to avoid contact and allowed cavalry patrols to make increasingly detailed reconnaissance reports and sketches of enemy positions. These reports would be invaluable three months later, in February 1945, when elements of the 78th Infantry division penetrated the *Siegfried Line* in the Monschau area using the cavalry maps and sketches to plan their attack. In addition, it left German commanders ignorant of the details of the cavalry's defensive dispositions.

While the daily and nightly battle of the patrols was on going, the squadron prepared and improved its defensive positions. The preparation of the defense was done under the careful eye of the squadron commander.

The area's terrain did not necessarily favor the defense or the offensive. From the perspective of the defender, the high ground west of the town dominated the town and the eastern approaches. From the perspective of the attacker, the numerous ravines and the river gorge permitted infantry to close on the town in dead space not observable from the high ground to the west. Also, early morning fogs and forests permitted attacking troops to mass unobserved within fairly close range of the town's defenses. Although the terrain did not offer any obvious advantages to either the defender or attacker, it did favor the use of a particular arm - infantry. Thus, the German infantry formations facing the cavalymen from across the deep river gorges and in the forests seemingly had the advantage of operating over terrain, which put the light and highly mobile mechanized cavalry at a disadvantage.

The preparation of the defense of Monschau may rank as one of the most thorough defenses by an American battalion size unit in US Army history. The cavalymen, taking stock of their equipment, the time available, and the aggressive spirit of the troopers, quickly established a defense, which made maximum use of all available assets. The defense was unique in many respects. First, the establishment of patrol dominance by the 38th Cavalry denied the enemy detailed knowledge of the squadron's dispositions and strength. Thus, any attacking enemy would be forced to guess where the squadron's units were deployed and where the squadron was weak and where it was strong.

A second aspect of the defense was the unusual attention to ensuring integrated command, control, and communications. To this end, the squadron employed sixteen radio nets incorporating over 60 radios. The high number of radios, several times the number found in an infantry battalion, supplemented a remarkable wire communications system consisting of 65 telephones, 50 miles of telephone wire and 6 switchboards. This effort is more amazing considering the fact that the squadron was not authorized any communications specialists. The wire command and control system integrated all squads, platoons, troops, and supporting artillery, into a single web. It was designed to ensure the system functioned even if a portion of it were destroyed. It also permitted very small units, in some cases individual four man machine gun positions and two man artillery observer teams, to continue to function and receive orders even when cut off from their immediate headquarters. In addition, all the wire was buried deep to protect it from enemy infiltrators, accidental cuts, and enemy artillery fire. Finally, the entire wire system was duplicated so that each line had a backup in the event of failure. This communication system would prove essential to the coordinated defense across such a large sector of front by so small a unit.

The third unique factor, which characterized the defense of Monschau, was the extremely precise and effective positioning of the available weapons, obstacles, and units. Machine guns were one of the keys to the defense of Monschau. The 38th Cavalry dismounted .50 caliber and .30 caliber machine guns from jeeps and armored cars, and carefully sighted in over fifty of them in the terrain surrounding the town. These weapons were carefully positioned so as to provide interlocking grazing fire along all the likely enemy avenues of approach. They were further tied into obstacles of concertina wire and personnel mines positioned along likely infantry avenues of approach. In addition, extensive use was made of trip flares to provide early warning of the enemy's approach. The unit preferred the flares because they prevented friendly casualties in case of mistakes and because they did not give the false sense of security that was associated with extensive mine fields. All the weapons were dug in with overhead cover to survive artillery attack, and they were carefully concealed so that an attacking enemy had to literally be on the position to recognize it a machine gun position. Finally, the fighting positions were integrated into the squadron command and control telephone net.

A final point on the preparation of the Monschau defensive was typical characteristic of the defense common to the US Army. That was the thorough integration and abundance of artillery support. The cavalry squadron, with its own E Troop positioned to support and the unique artillery observer training of its soldiers, was more able than most units to use artillery quickly and with devastating effect. In this case, the 38th Cavalry had access to the squadron's M8 75mm HMC "assault guns" of E Troop, the organic 60mm and 81mm mortars of the recon troops, the 62d Field Artillery Battalion (105mm self-propelled) which was in direct support of the 102d Cavalry Group, and two 155mm medium howitzer battalions, the 955th and the 186th of the 406th Field Artillery Group, which were actually positioned to fire in support of an upcoming V Corps offensive, also were in position to support of the squadron." The fires of these artillery units were all planned and registered in accordance with the squadron's obstacles and the likely enemy approaches. Artillery observer teams from E Troop and the three artillery battalions were dispersed throughout the squadron's defensive position.

The effectiveness of the artillery in support of the squadron was later verified by a German prisoner of war. He reported that German troops in the Monschau sector were forbidden from leaving their bunkers and foxholes during hours of daylight. The German troops were reduced to observing their sectors through the use of mirrors in order not to attract rapid and deadly artillery fire.

The attack against Monschau was one of the opening blows of the German winter offensive in the Ardennes, which became known as the *Battle of the Bulge*. Monschau fell in the northern most corner of the Bulge, in the sector belonging to the main effort, the 6th SS Panzer. The 6th SS Panzer Army planned to penetrate the thinly held US lines with infantry shock troops, seize the road network, and then unleash elite SS Panzer division to continue the attack deep to the rear.

The road network in the Ardennes was not very robust and the key to success was to capture the towns where a network of roads met. Further south in the Ardennes the battles for the larger key towns such as St. Vith and Bastogne would become legendary. Monschau was also one of the towns sitting aside a key road. From Monschau highways led both north and south, and east and west. A key road led directly to Eupen where the V Corps headquarters was located. That same road continued on to Liege where General Courtney Hodges maintained the First Army Headquarters. On December 16 the only combat unit guarding the Eupen highway was the 38th Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron.

The Germans initially placed great importance on the capture of Monschau and assigned an entire division to take the town and open the northern door into the American rear and block American reinforcements attempting to move down from the north. The mission was assigned to General Hitzfeld's LXVII Corps (Corps Monschau) who planned a two-division attack. The 326th Volksgrenadier division was assigned the mission of taking Monschau itself and seizing the Monschau - Eupen Road. The 246th Volksgrenadier Division would attack to the south of the 326th through the town of Hofen. Unfortunately, for a variety of reasons, the 246th Division was not in position to attack on 16 December. Worse, two battalions of 326th, the equivalent of a regiment, had also not arrived in attack positions (one was delayed and one was diverted to deal with an American attack further north). Therefore, on the morning of 16 December the Germans were left with one understrength division and some fortress troops to execute the attack. Still, there was reason for optimism on the part of the Germans when considering that all that blocked the path to Liege was one dismounted cavalry squadron.

The total infantry strength available to the Generalmajor Erwin Kaschner, commander of the 326th Volksgrenadier Division was probably less than four battalions of infantry. However, he could count on a considerable amount of artillery in support. Two artillery corps with up to ten battalions of artillery were positioned to support the division. This totaled about 120 artillery pieces. In addition, two Nebelwerfer rocket-firing brigades were also positioned in support. This artillery support was three to four times the amount available to the Americans and was the largest faced by the Americans to this point in the war.

One of the most noted achievements of the German attack in the Ardennes is the surprise which was gained over the American defenders and the allied command. This surprise, interestingly, did not extend to the 38th Cavalry. Throughout the afternoon of the 15 December, reports from all sectors of the squadron front came in indicating increased and unusual German activity. As darkness came, LTC O'Brien warned all his subordinates that a German attack was almost certain that night. That warning, to O'Brien's mind, was redundant; he knew that every soldier in the squadron, to include the newest replacements, was aware that something was up. That evening O'Brien ordered the Engineer platoon leader to put extra effort into the regular evenings mine and trip flare laying patrol. The engineer platoon leader complained that staying out longer than the normal hour would be very dangerous, as the men's hands would begin to freeze and be less able to arm the dangerous mines safely. O'Brien replied that he understood the risks

but that the Germans would be attacking and it was necessary. The lieutenant continued to but the orders remained firm. Thus, just hours before the attack, the squadron employed up to three times the number of flares and mines as it would in a routine evening. In addition, at midnight the squadron was placed on virtual one hundred percent alert. Thus on the eve of 16 December 1944, as many units in the Ardennes went to sleep with thoughts of the war ending by Christmas, in the veteran 38th Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron every machine gun, tank, mortar and howitzer was manned.

Throughout the night of 15/16 December American units all through the dense pine forests of the German- Belgian border area were disturbed by the unusual activity of the previously passive German Wehrmacht. At 0545 the squadron was hit by the first of many intense artillery barrages. The artillery, consisting of a mix of conventional high explosive artillery and "screaming meemie" rockets hit C Troop and the squadron command post first. The command post, deep in the basement of the town's post office, rode out the attack with impunity. The squadron's S3 operations officer, MAJ Edward J. Edgerton, manned the squadron's mobile command post in a half-track outside. The artillery was so intense that it rocked the halftrack continuously and with such violence that it was impossible to talk or monitor the radios. The artillery then methodically moved west hitting F and B Troops to the west of town. Close on the heels of the artillery came the first German attack.

The first German attack was led by the 1st Battalion, 751st Regiment, of General Kaschner's 326th Volksgrenadier division. The attack hit the right flank of C Troop, and the 2d platoon of F Troop which was located in the town in the Ruhr river valley. This attack attempted to infiltrate using the twisting steep banked riverbed for cover. It was quickly discovered by the 2d Platoon of F Troop, led by platoon leader Staff Sergeant Bernard C. Bielicki. The German troops were picked up by the tankers as they worked their way through the dark foggy river bottom, and immediately taken under fire by tank machine guns and 37mm canister cannon fire at ranges as short as 50 yards.

More Germans poured out of the town of Menzerath two kilometers east of Monschau, to reinforce the attack. These troops were spotted by a C Troop patrol sent out for that purpose under Tech 5 Jack L. Van Order. The patrol quickly set up their portable radio and within minutes, artillery and mortars were adjusted on the moving German troops, disrupting them before they could reach the point of the attack.

Meanwhile, at the point of the attack SSG Bielicki's tanks kept the German's pinned down with machine guns as the platoon leader adjusted E Troop artillery onto the German concentrations. The Germans, attempting to maneuver in close to the tanks used cover and concealment, and the poor morning visibility to attempt to outflank the Americans. Recognizing this danger, Bielicki directed SGT Martin P. Massano to dismount his tank's .30 caliber anti-aircraft machine gun and block this attempt. The German infiltrators were soon met and pinned by a hail of machine gun fire brought down by the dismounted tankers. With each passing minute, the artillery concentrations on the now immobilized Germans became more accurate. Finally, the disheartened Germans abandoned the effort and the withdrew. Snipers remained behind to remind the F Company tankers that the Germans had not given up.

As SSG Bielicki's platoon was beating off the attack down the river valley, another German attack tried to force its way down what the troopers called the snake road from the town of Imgenbroich. This attack was met by the deeply dug in 2d and 3d platoons of C Troop, whose machine gun fire smashed the Germans as they advanced. Again, accurate and deadly artillery fire from the combined guns of E Troop and the 62d Field Artillery took a deadly toll on the pinned down enemy. Again, the Germans were forced to retreat.

By noon, relative calm had settled over the squadron area. Two separate company size attacks had been driven off. German patrols were observed and fired on a long range, but no attack came. Snipers continued to harass the squadron. Movement could be observed around distant German bunkers indicating the arrival of fresh troops. The squadron was certain that the German attacks had not run their course. In the afternoon, the 102d Cavalry Group reinforced the squadron with A Company, 146th Combat Engineer battalion. The company was met by LTC O'Brien and directed to reinforce C and B Troops with a platoon of engineers each. The rest of the company was placed in reserve on the hill above the town where their fires could overwatch the approaches to the town.

Another group of reinforcements arrived that afternoon which indicated the seriousness of the situation. These were six machine guns and crews from the 186th FA Battalion. The artillerymen realized that their own survival depended directly on the cavalry's ability to hold the line, and thus culled through their gun crews and dismounted their anti-aircraft machine guns to add to the squadron's defensive firepower. These desperately needed additions were added to SSG Bielicki's hard pressed 2d tank platoon in the center of town, allowing the grateful tankers to remount their machines.

As darkness fell on 16 December, the enemy did not disappoint the troopers of the squadron as the strongest attack thus far emerged from Imgenbroich at 1700. This attack was spotted almost immediately by artillery observers from the 186th FA who immediately brought down the full power of 155mm battalion on the massed Germans. The results were both physically and morally devastating, and the Germans were unable to reorganize in the gathering darkness to continue the attack.

Throughout the night, the squadron continued on full alert and the Germans continued attempting to probe for a weakness in the Monschau defense. At 2200, a C Troop listening post identified a large group of Germans advancing once again down the snake road. Immediately the area was lit by 60mm illumination rounds from the troop's mortars. The silhouetted Germans were then subjected to murderous interlocking machine gun fire as E Troop and the 62d FA added the weight of their 75mm and 105mm howitzers.

The attacking force, estimated to be at least a company or more, was cut to pieces and disintegrated back into the dark forests.

A half hour of quiet followed before B Troop outposts reported enemy movement in the vicinity of the Stillbusch draw. The sequence of events was repeated. Mortars illuminated the enemy who was then subjected to direct fires from B Troop and indirect fire from E Troop. The Germans, again pinned in the darkness, lost heart and withdrew.

Unaware of the major enemy attacks to their south, the 38th Squadron remained vigilant throughout the night. Tensions rose before dawn when Germans employed searchlights to point at the low-lying clouds reflecting artificial illumination over the dark pine forests of the border region. Reports came in from all the troops reporting German aircraft flying low over the area. Reports of paratroopers being dropped came from both subordinate troops as well as over the radio nets from the 102d Cavalry Group headquarters.

At 0400 enemy movement and noise was again detected by the Troop C forward listening posts. Artillery of E Troop responded rapidly and once again, the enemy seemed to have been driven off at a small price. This effort was just the prelude for the major enemy push which was about to come.

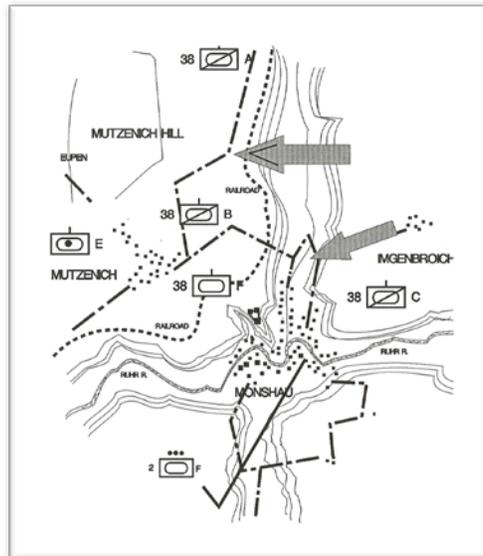
In the overall scheme of the Ardennes offensive, the first day had not gone well for the Germans anywhere except to the immediate south of the 38th Cavalry. There the Germans appeared to be on the verge of a breakthrough in the area of the 14th Cavalry and the 106th Infantry Division. This was the southern portion of the 6th SS Panzer Army sector; to exploit these successes the Germans required a solid shoulder in the north. A shoulder whose northern hinge was the town of Monschau. Thus, on the morning of the second day, the Germans were determined to achieve the objectives which their attacks had failed to obtain the day prior.

The Germans began their attack with a heavy artillery preparation which began at 0615. The cavalrymen were not surprised and the German artillery found the troopers deep in their holes and basements. If anything, this artillery bombardment was even more powerful than the first. However, after the previous days fighting much of the psychological impact was lost. The troopers were particularly disdainful of the German rockets, which although they made a great noise, were less feared than conventional artillery.

The initial German effort followed close on the heels of the artillery fire. German infantry assembled under the cover of darkness and the artillery in the draw to the east of Mutzenich. As the artillery lifted, they moved rapidly across the fields toward the railroad embankment and first platoon of F Company. The five M5A1 "*Stuart*" tanks of F Company immediately took the exposed infantry under fire with canister 37mm cannon fire and machine guns. The attack began to falter in the crossfire as E Troop and the artillery battalions came into play. In the coming light, the Germans began to withdraw from where they were pinned into the safety of the draw. This movement was slow and deliberate and the Germans suffered greatly from the continuing accurate artillery.

As light began to break across the battlefield and the last rounds chased the Germans retreating toward the draw, the main German attack of at least two battalions made the most serious and coordinated effort to this point in the battle. The main effort of the attack was aimed at the center and south of the Troop positions, a point which had not been threatened yet in the battle. Simultaneously, a supporting attack was launched once again down the snake road against the C Troop positions defending the approaches into the town itself.

German supporting and main attacks on 1 December 1944



B Troop was commanded by Captain Joseph R. Sain, a solid performer. The German pressure against B Troop was constant and steady. As with previous attacks, interlocking-crossing machine gun fire, and artillery hampered the German advance. The Germans, however, were, and in much greater strength than before. They slowly and methodically searched out the dead space where the machine guns could not reach while their own artillery fired in support. Eventually the German advance elements discovered a gap of about 200 meters between the 1st and 2d platoons of B Troop. Approximately one company of about 70 Germans penetrated this gap and sprung into the Troop rear ... threatening the aide station, troop mortars, and troop command post, and overrunning three artillery observation posts. The Germans then took cover in a copse of woods where they could threaten the squadron's rear and await reinforcements.

The actions of the Troop Commander were swift and decisive. He immediately radioed the squadron commander who ordered the assistant executive officer, Captain Robert E. Meyer, to lead the reserve engineer platoon, and two F Company tanks to B Troop's assistance. With these reinforcements and the 2d platoon, the troop counterattacked. The counterattack was led from the front by LT Weldon J. Yontz and SGT Charles E. Oxenham of B Troop's 2d platoon. In a sharp vicious fight at close range, the Germans were pushed out of their position and forced to fight their way back to their own lines. Two E Troop forward observers, SSG William F. Fisher and SGT Charles Sullivan, set down their rifles in the midst of the fight, set up their radio, and adjusted the guns of E Troop onto the retreating Germans. The Troop was able to reoccupy and establish its original lines by 1100.

At about 1030, a prisoner was taken to the squadron commander. This prisoner indicated that the current attacks, which the squadron was just barely containing, were just the prelude to the main attack, which would come in the afternoon. This information prompted LTC O'Brien to request reinforcement from the 102d Cavalry Group. The group's other squadron, the 102d Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron, had not been attacked, and so the group released its reserve, A Company of the 47th Infantry Regiment, and a platoon of tanks from A Company of the 10th Armored Battalion. These forces reported to the squadron commander about 1130, after the crisis in the B Troop sector had passed. The infantry company was ordered to patrol the wooded areas behind Troop B for German stragglers, and then establish a defensive line behind Troop B. The tanks were placed in squadron reserve.

The importance of the attack on Monschau to the German high command was underscored at about 1130 when German aircraft made a rare appearance over the front in daylight. The German Me109 fighters made numerous passes on the US positions and then continued back to their own lines at high speed. Despite the surprise of the air attack, the squadron was able to respond with a screen of anti-aircraft fire resulting in at least one aircraft being shot down. The "kill" was officially credited to Corporal Fitzpatrick of the B Troop headquarters platoon.

As B Troop counterattacked the enemy penetration in the center of the squadron sector, the enemy continued to attempt to mount a threat against C Troop in the south and capture the town. The German attempts, however, continued to be unsuccessful because the artillery at the squadron's disposal. Accurate artillery continuously broke up the German attacks before they could get started. Twice separate company size attacks were directed at C Troop but could not get past the artillery.

At 1200 the Germans, for the first time probed forward from Menzerath with armor. Four enemy armored vehicles, likely Mark IV Assault Guns of the 326th Division assault gun company, began to move forward towards the squadron. They were immediately identified by SSG Walter Zuckoff, an E Troop observer positioned in the C Troop trenches. He quickly coordinated for fire from both E Troop and the 155mm howitzers of 189th FA Battalion. A curtain of steel descended on the German armor and three tanks were quickly destroyed, or immobilized and abandoned. The fourth tank withdrew into the protection of the town.

Despite the setback of their armor, the Germans were still determined to take the town and continued to cautiously move their infantry forward. Eventually they were able to establish a protected machine gun position within a few hundred yards of the US trench lines. In this position, they could not be affected by the cannon of the 2d Platoon of F Company's Stuart tanks, or by the small arms coming from C Troop's trenches. SSG Bielicki's tankers, who had already proven their ability to fight dismounted, once again climbed from the protection of their vehicles. Three men, led by SGT James B. Martin, closed within a few yards and destroyed the machine gun position with hand grenades. Another German managed to establish himself in a house 70 yards from C Troop. An M10 tank destroyer from the 893d Tank Destroyer Battalion moved into position and destroyed the house and the German position, with direct fire from its 76mm gun.

Meanwhile the battle continued to be pressed against B Troop. After their first successful penetration was destroyed, the Germans reorganized and renewed their attacks attempting to repeat their earlier success and gain the squadron's rear area. Waves of Germans charged across the open fields in front of the 1st and 2d platoons to be engaged by the dismounted machine guns of the Troop. 1st and 2d platoons of F Company fired over the heads of B Troop with canister rounds and machine guns, and of course the artillery continued to come down. Despite heroic efforts, the German infantry were unable to make a dent in the defense.

The coming of afternoon gradually brought some respite to the squadron as the Germans apparently reevaluated the situation, reorganized, resupplied and considered their next move. That move came at 1700 as several companies of infantry began a stealthy approach across country through the broken terrain and fields from Imgenbroich.

This move was made at dusk along what the Germans believed was a concealed approach. Unfortunately, the approach had been anticipated and was observed by a forward observation team of the 155mm equipped 186th FA Battalion. Within minutes, the Germans found themselves the target of the big guns as the battalion volleyed all of its eighteen tubes as fast as they could be reloaded. The battalion fired high explosive shells armed with the new proximity fuses. This devastating fire ended the Germans last daylight attempt to take the town.

The Germans were anything if not tenacious, and Monschau was a vital objective in not only the division plan, but to the entire offensive, which was now almost 48 hours old. So, despite their heavy losses, the Germans determined to make one more major attempt to take the town, open the road to Eupen, and unhinge the American defenses in the north which were firming up around the 99th Division on the Elsenborn ridge southeast of Monschau. At 2200, approximately two companies of German infantry began to move silently down the snake road against the C Troop positions in Monschau. Again, the attack was observed by a listening post which quickly reported the action to the Troop Commander, Captain James W. Farmer. The Troop's 60mm mortars opened the action as they fired illumination rounds. The glare of the mortar-fired flares floating under their parachutes caught the Germans in the same open killing fields where the daylight attacks had failed. Once again, the interlocking .50 caliber and .30 caliber machine gun fire, joined by the machine guns and 37mm cannon of 3d Platoon F Company's M5A1 tanks, cut the German infantry down where they stood. The day's experience was further repeated as the attacking infantry went to ground only to be subjected to the accurate and deadly artillery of E Troop and the 62d Field Artillery Battalion. As the mortars continued to light the field, the Germans pulled back. A half hour later, another German company was detected approaching B Troop and met with the same fate. Although the squadron did not realize it at the time, this was the final German effort to take Monschau.

The next morning, 18 December, the squadron commander met with the commander of the 47th Infantry Regiment, 9th Infantry Division. The 3,000 man strong 47th Regiment had moved into assembly areas to the east of Monschau during the night, and was now assuming responsibility for the defense of the town. The 38th Squadron was detached from the 102d group and temporarily attached to the infantry. Initially it was the 47th Regiment's plan to leave the squadron in place and back them up with the infantry regiment, however, COL O'Brien made a strong argument that the squadron had been fighting continuously for three days, against a numerically stronger enemy and across a wide front. He insisted that the infantry assume a portion of the defense of Monschau. This was agreed to by the commander of the 47th Infantry and that morning infantrymen of the 47th relieved Troop C and 3d platoon F Company in Monschau. This allowed the squadron to consolidate its defense on Menzerath Hill.

As the 38th Squadron shortened its line and prepared to serve hot chow to the troopers the attentions of the Germans shifted southward. Unable to penetrate through the Monschau, the Germans shifted their focus to the town of Hofen, 3 kilometers south, defended by the 3d battalion, 395th Infantry Regiment, 99th Division, commanded by LTC Butler. The German's main efforts against Hofen began on the morning of 18 December. The infantrymen experienced the same tactics used against Monschau: a short but very sharp artillery barrage followed by waves of infantry. Unlike the cavalrymen, however, the 99th Division was a relatively new division to the theater, had not been in place as long, and did not have the organic light tanks, machine guns, and artillery of the squadron. The German attacks were more successful and the German infantry were eventually able to gain the town itself and the fighting eventually became a desperate battle at close quarters.

Although by the time of the German attacks against Hofen, the squadron had been relieved by the 47th Infantry, not all of C Troop had pulled out. SGT Joseph J. Poll, who in his armored car was designated as liaison from the squadron to the infantry, was positioned on the outskirts of Hofen. In addition, many of the squadron and the artillery forward artillery observers remained in their positions to assist the 47th Infantry with requests for artillery fire. Many of the observer teams could see the approaches to Hofen. Thus as the 3d battalion, 395th was hit by the Germans, SGT Poll found himself in the midst of the fight, and the artillery observers of the squadron were in position to observe it. SGT Poll, positioned on the left flank of the battalion, found himself alone and holding a significant portion of the infantry line of defense. The 37mm cannon, .50 caliber and .30 caliber machine guns of this M8 armored car packed significant fire power as he and the other three members of his crew worked all of the weapons systems against the attacking Germans. As important, SGT Poll's radio provided a vital link to the squadron's E Troop and through them to the three supporting artillery battalions, all of whom could range to Hofen.

The fight in Hofen was a close event, but with key contributions by SGT Poll, and the supporting artillery efforts, the infantrymen held the town. The Germans attacks were finally broken when more than three battalions of US Artillery were brought down on the town itself and on top of the US positions. The dug in Americans rode out the barrage, which destroyed the exposed German infantry. Thus with the assistance of the SGT Poll and E Troop, the 3/395th held Hofen and the Germans last gasp on the northern shoulder of the Bulge ended.

The defense of Monschau by the 38th Cavalry was one of the small but significant actions by US troops in December 1944, which in total spelled the failure of the German winter offensive. For its action, the unit was awarded the Unit Commendation, an award that later became the *Presidential Unit Citation*, the nation's highest unit decoration. It was the only Mechanized Cavalry unit so honored in World War II, and it recognized not only the pivotal role the squadron played in the response to the German offensive, but also the professionalism and courage demonstrated at every level throughout the squadron in the battle.



*Edited July 29, 2011 by Philip Notestine
Donated by LTC (R) Alfred H. M. Shehab
Who was then 1LT Platoon Leader, 3rd Platoon
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