

HISTORY
OF THE
15TH CAVALRY GROUP

NORMANDY — NORTHERN FRANCE

RHINELAND — CENTRAL EUROPE

CAMPAIGNS

HISTORY OF THE 15TH CAVALRY GROUP NORMANDY AND NORTHERN FRANCE CAMPAIGNS

By 1 August 1944 the First United States Army had apparently broken through the German defenses in Normandy along the Periers-St. Lo Line and both armor and motorized infantry from this army had pushed southward along the western coast of the peninsula past Avranches and Gavray. The time was now ripe for a swift exploitation of this breakthrough. The Third United States Army, under Lieut. General Patton, was assigned this task. The plan of operations was initially to pass this army through Avranches Gap after which it would fan to the South, West, and Southwest in order to cut off and cut up the Brittany Peninsula. The Southward thrust was to be made by the Fourth Armored Division in the direction of Rennes and Nantes. The Sixth Armored Division was to cut Southwest and then West toward Brest. A special task force consisting of Cavalry(Mecz), Tank Destroyers, Motorized Infantry and Engineers received the task of cutting across the Northern part of the peninsula to secure the vital bridges along the railroad running from Brest through Guingamp and Morlaix and St. Brieuc to Avranches.

This task force was assembled near Coutances on 1 August under the command of Brig. General Herbert L. Earnest and consisted of the following units:

- Headquarters, 1st. Tank Destroyer Brigade
- Headquarters, 15th. Cavalry Group
- Headquarters, 6th. Tank Destroyer Group
- 15th. Cavalry Squadron
- 17th. Cavalry Squadron
- 705th. Tank Destroyer Battalion
- 159th. Engineer Battalion (C)
- 509th. Engineer (L.P.) Company

On 2 August the task force completed its job of loading K rations for seven days, gasoline for at least 250 operational miles, ammunition, and other equipment. All but the most essential personal equipment was left behind with the kitchens and other impedimenta. Silk escape maps, minute compasses and files for use if captured were distributed. All vehicles displayed air identification panels.

At 0100 on 3 August TFA moved out of bivouac on the road to Avranches. From there the route led to Pontorson and Dol. C Troop of the 17th Squadron was in the lead followed by the remainder of that squadron, 15th Group Headquarters, 15th Squadron and the rest of Task Force A. As the column sped South and Westward through Avranches early in the morning, its route was bombed and strafed by hostile aircraft.

First contact was made with the enemy at 0710. The lead platoon of C Troop had run into a strongly defended road-block a few miles East of Dol. The platoon leader, Lt. Garrison, was killed in this action and the platoon suffered heavy losses in men and vehicles. Within a very short time it was evident that no further progress could be made along this road, so it was decided to pass the obstacle to the south and reconnaissance was initiated by the 15th Squadron in that direction. The Group Commander was riding with the leading platoon and had been missing since midnight. Lt. Col Quinn, Ex. Officer, assumed command. The initial phase of the original Mission had been to reconnoiter the hostile position of the port of St. Malo so no time was lost bypassing this resistance and moving to an assembly area in the vicinity of Lenhellen, some eight miles (8) South of Chateaufneuf, the gateway to St. Malo. Immediately on arrival at this place Colonel Logan C. Berry assumed command of the Group and orders were issued by him to each squadron a zone for the reconnaissance in the direction of St. Malo which action was to begin at once.

The Squadrons moved out shortly after 1800 after which all units were subjected to Artillery, mortar and small arms fire which caused considerable confusion. Radios refused to work, commanders had difficulty in controlling their units, and the Group C. P. was forced by the hostile fire to change its location. By 2100 the action was called off and Squadron Commanders were ordered to reorganize their units generally along an East-West line running through Miniac for a renewal of the move forward at the first light on the next day, 4 August. Six German tanks were reported by the French to be in the vicinity but were not located.

At first light, the Squadrons moved forward in the direction of St. Malo closely supported by elements of the tank destroyer and engineer battalions. The terrain was difficult and at Chateauneuf there existed a decided bottleneck caused by newly flooded areas both to east and west of the town. By 1500 the squadrons had pushed in past the hostile outpost line, had neutralized three roadblocks on the main road and B Troop of the 17th Squadron reported a platoon in the town of Chateauneuf. The enemy continued his defensive fire on our units from river gunboats, from coastal batteries, and from all-purpose 88mm guns. Toward the evening of the 4th contact was gained with elements of the 83rd. Division which was moving from Dol into our zone. At 2000 the squadrons were withdrawn 1000 yards south of Chateauneuf and the 83rd Div. Arty shelled the bottleneck during the night.

On the 5th of August light tanks of the 17th Squadron supported by infantry, tank destroyers and Assault Guns had forced their way through Chateauneuf and by 1800 all units were passing through and fanning out on the other side. At 2000 the Commanding General of Task Force A issued orders for the withdrawal of all units under his command. Before they withdrew to an assembly area in the vicinity of Lanhellin, the Squadrons had taken several hundred prisoners and accounted for many German dead and wounded.

With the addition of the 3rd. Battalion, 530th Infantry and C Battery of the 325rd. Field Arty (both units of the 83rd. Division), Task Force A set out at dawn on 6 Aug. with the 15th Squadron in the lead for St. Brieuc. The mission assigned was to secure the three railroad bridges at that place. Dinan still strongly held by the enemy was bypassed and only scattered groups of the enemy interfered with our progress. At 1800 the outskirts of St. Brieuc were reached by the 15th Squadron. It was met by a delegation of Free French who reported that the city was clear but that a hostile force of some 1000 Germans and Russians were bivouaced in an area about five miles west of town. They also indicated that this group might be ready to surrender to the Americans if properly approached. Consequently, both squadrons were ordered into bivouac South of the town and Lt. Col Fuller together with a French Officer went out in a jeep under a white flag to treat with the enemy. As they were dismounting from their vehicle a plane dove low over the area and the enemy, apparently very apprehensive, opened fire on the two officers, wounding both. They were rescued later in the night by a tank platoon from the 15th squadron. Major Mc Grath assumed command of this Squadron upon the evacuation of Lt. Col. Fuller.

The Task Force objective on 7 August was to clear hostile resistance along the route from St. Brieuc to Guingamp. The same force as had been reported the day preceding was known to be in the vicinity of Chateaulaudrin. Therefore the 15th Squadron was to move directly West, applying direct pressure while the 17th encircled from the south. Preceding the closing with the enemy, fighter bombers of the air support bombed and strafed the hostile force with good results. Some of this force was able to escape northward to Paimpol but the majority were either taken prisoner or killed. The same tactics were employed later in the day to capture Guingamp. At the latter place, a force of about 700 Germans was surrounded and annihilated. These two actions were typical of the action and tactics of Task Force A throughout the sweep through Brittany. Cavalry units locate and fix the enemy position, then withdraw slightly to allow the air support to maul and soften up the Germans, after a short preparation of Artillery and Tank Destroyer guns, the Cavalry and Infantry advance to close with the enemy.

The night of 7-8 August was spent West of Guingamp in bivouac. On the following day the Task Force, 17th Cavalry Squadron leading, continued along the same road to Morlaix. Several road blocks along the route were quickly reduced, and after reaching the outskirts of Morlaix the same tactical formula as used at Guingamp was used there. After the town had been cleared the 17th Squadron was ordered to outpost the town and guard the very long and vulnerable railroad bridge located there. The remainder of the Task force assembled in bivouac several miles west of the city.

On the 9th, reconnaissance was initiated to locate elements of the Sixth Armored Division which had taken the middle route through the peninsula and was now believed to be in the process of containing Brest. This having been accomplished by liaison parties sent out to coordinate our activities with those of the Armored Division, the Task Force assembled in bivouac near Ploudaniel a few miles North of Landernau. On this same day the trains of both Squadrons which through error had become detached from the Task Force trains on the night previous and had gone into bivouac near Morlaix were attacked at dawn by a German force which had moved South during the night from the vicinity of Lanmeur. A hot fight ensued during which a tank platoon sent out by the 15th Squadron was ambushed and lost three tanks. The attack was repulsed with the loss of a few men and vehicles and the retreating Germans pursued by fighter bombers were badly cut up.

This same day as the Task Force was moving into bivouac near Ploudaniel, a hostile force moved in on its rear at Lesneven. Fighter bombers were dispatched to attack this force. As this was being accomplished, medium bombers were observed to the front flying a mission through heavy flak on Brest. It was an impressive sight to see planes coming from all directions and attacking targets both front and rear.

On the morning of 10 August Task Force A received the additional mission of protecting the North and Northwest flank of the Sixth Armored Division. To that end the 15th Squadron moved out supported by Tank Destroyers and Field Arty on an aggressive reconnaissance of this area. A hostile pocket was encountered during the afternoon in the vicinity of Plougeuneau. By 1800, 227 prisoners were taken and the Squadron moved back to an assembly area in the vicinity of Lesneven. Shortly after that hour, Task Force Hq. received orders from VIII Corps to proceed to the vicinity of St. Michel-Greve and secure a beachhead at that place for Third Army use. The Squadrons, followed by the remainder of the Task Force moved on this mission at 0100 on 11 August. By 1200 after a long road march the beachhead was secured, no hostile force having been encountered. The following day the 15th Squadron combed the adjacent areas to the beachhead and found them clear. Major Dobbins assumed command of this Squadron.

On 13 August, TFA moved through Morlaix and to the southeast to clear the triangle; Carhaix-Guingamp-Morlaix. No hostile force was encountered and the night of 13-14 August was spent in bivouac near Callac. The Task Force moved Northward again on the 15th to reduce the hostile position at Treguier. After a rather stiff fight, 500 prisoners were taken at this town. Next day TFA was sent Eastward and after a battle with all arms of the force including Air Corps, Infantry, Tank Destroyers, Engineers, and Cavalry were used, Lesardrieux was captured.

For the operation of the 15th of August, two combat groups were formed under Group Headquarters, 15th Cavalry Group for a reconnaissance in force and a mop-up of the peninsula North of Lesardrieux. Group 1 consisted of the 15th Squadron, less Troop C, one company of Infantry, one platoon of Engineers, one T. D. company. Group 2 consisted of the 705 T. D. Bn., less Troop C, one company of Infantry, and one platoon of Engineers. No real resistance was encountered except at Ile a Bois where 200 prisoners were taken.

On the 17th of August TFA captured Paimpol and cleared the area north of that town. Approximately 600 prisoners were taken and this ended all major resistance on the Northern part of the Brittany Peninsula from St. Malo to Brest.

On the 18th of August the Task Force moved from the vicinity of Lezardrieux to the vicinity of Landerneau, and the 15th Squadron temporarily relieved the 17th in the security of Morlaix and the beachhead at St. Michel-en-Greve. Upon the arrival of the Task Force at the new bivouac area at Pleuneventer the 17th was sent out to reconnoiter and patrol the southern flank of the concentration area of the VIII Corps. Three Divisions, the 2nd, 8th, and the 29th were moving in to relieve the 6th Armored Div. to contain and later assault the Brest positions. The 17th sent patrols as far South as Chateaulin and Southeast to Sizun.

During the evening 19th, the 15th Squadron having been relieved of its Morlaix mission proceeded to an assembly area South of Landerneau and received orders to push reconnaissance on a squadron front into the Daoulas peninsula Southeast of Brest. The 17th Continued its screen to the south.

On the 20th the 15th Squadron was able to push into its peninsula as far as a line running generally north and south through Plougastel. Here they met strong hostile resistance and the following morning the 3rd Bn. of the 330th moved in abreast of the Squadron. Reports estimated the probable enemy strength on Daoulas to be from 3000-5000. By evening of the 22nd Task Force B assumed command over the 330 Bn., and the 50th Inf. Bn. of the 6th Armored was attached to Task Force A to move in the southern zone. The 15th Squadron was given the mission of maintaining contact with these two infantry units. This they did until relieved on 28 August and in the action suffered about 30 casualties. Meanwhile on the 26th the 17th Squadron with attached engineer platoon, T. D. platoon and a battery of the 93rd Armored F. A. Bn. proceeded on reconnaissance into the Crozon Peninsula. By the 28th this force had been definitely stopped by a strong hostile line running generally St. Nic-Menez Hom-Brigneum. Intelligence indicated this line to be held by a reinforced German Bn. This same day, 28th Aug., the 15th Squadron, less Troop A which was left at Daoulas to protect the south flank of Task Force B, moved in on the northern flank of the Crozon operation and took over the zone formerly assigned to A Troop of the 17th. Lt. Col. Dobbins was wounded this date. Lt. Col. Quinn assumed command of the 15th Sq. until Sept. 12th when Lt. Col. Dobbins was sufficiently recovered to resume command.

On the 2nd of Sept. both Squadrons resumed the advance until late in the day when they were again stopped by strong resistance along a line from Tel ar Groas North to St. Efléz and the Bay of Brest. The 3rd. of Sept. was spent in attempting to develop this hostile line and drive in the OPL. By this time all action was dismounted, the vehicles being left in parks in the rear. On the same day air support was requested and received to work over certain known targets along the front. One flight after scoring several hits on a road block East of Tel ar Groas had a hung bomb which dropped on a 17th Squadron C. P., on hill 146. Seeing this another flight coming in dropped bombs and strafed the C. P. of Troop A, 17th Squadron. Twenty minutes later as the first platoon of this same troop was moving through the town of Telgruc a Squadron of B-17s dropped a bomb load on the town. This practically wiped out the platoon and ambulances were sent up from the rear to collect the casualties. While the ambulances and medical personnel were in the area the town was again bombed and strafed by friendly fighter bombers. Total casualties caused by our Air-Corps on this day were 33.

From the 4th to the 15th both Squadrons pushed daily over patrols forward to maintain contact with the enemy and further develop the hostile MLR. The enemy retaliated with artillery fire on our O. P.'s and mortar and small arms fire on the patrols. Since all this patrolling was done dismounted the problem of establishing constant communication with the patrols arose and was solved by the procurement of infantry SCR 535 sets. On the 12th a combat group consisting of Troop A, 15th Squadron one tank platoon, one engineer platoon, one tank destroyer platoon, and one assault gun platoon attempted a reconnaissance in force of the enemy front line in the direction of St. Efléz. It drew heavy hostile fire from the latter place and as a result, was forced to return. Road blocks and land mines made it impossible for the tanks and tank destroyers to closely support the dismounted elements of A Troop. Captain Watson was killed and all the other Troop Officers save one were wounded.

At 0200 on the 15th of September both Squadrons were relieved by Infantry of the 8th Division which made an attack on the MLR of the hostile force on the following day. After the Infantry had made initial gains and were proceeding on their secondary objectives the Cavalry Group moved in between CT 28 on the north and CT 121 on the South, maintaining contact between these two combat teams until it was relieved on the morning of the 18th along a north-south line through Crozon by the 2nd Ranger Bn. After their relief, both squadrons moved south into zones to mop up the Cap de la Chevre peninsula. This was completed at 1800 with the capture by A Troop, 17th Sq. of Lt. Gen. Rauch, commander of the 343rd Infantry Division. Approximately 525 prisoners were taken that day. The 19th further spent mopping up this peninsula. Brest having fallen on the previous day. At 1100 Task Force A moved out of the Crozon Peninsula to the vicinity of Plounevez-Portzay preparatory to initiating a reconnaissance of the Douarnenez Peninsula to the South. This last mission was accomplished on 20 September, the only remaining resistance being met at Audierne where 350 prisoners were taken. On 21 Sept., Task Force A was dissolved and on the following day the 15th Cavalry Group was split - Group Hq. and the 15th Squadron with the 94 division which was containing the enemy at St. Nazaire and Lorient, the 17th Squadron to Army Hq., 9th. Army. Lt. Col R. J. Quinn, Jr. assumed command of the Group a second time on this date.

Statistics:



Prisoners
Captured 5686

HISTORY OF THE 15TH CAVALRY GROUP RHINELAND AND CENTRAL EUROPE CAMPAIGNS

On 22 September, the Group received instructions to report to the C. O. 94th Division at Chateaubriant, France for a new mission. The 17th Squadron was detached and sent to Ninth Army Hq at Rennes for a Security Force. The Group marched on the 23rd and split up in route. Upon arrival in Chateaubriant, the Group received the mission of establishing a security patrol along the Loire River to screen the flank of the Twelfth Army Group from Nantes to the Yanne River in the vicinity of Auxerre. The Group moved out on the 24th, establishing the screen as it advanced. Group Hq. and 15th Sq Hq. moved to Vendome. That same night Troop A marched to Gien and the screen was completed by the morning of the 25th. The group was supposed to relieve elements of the 83rd division but upon its arrival it found that the 83rd had already pulled out. The tank and assault gun troops of the 15th Sq were left at Chateaubriant on DS to the 94th Division, to provide some armor for the reserve.

The Group continued this mission until 2 Jan. 1945. About 10 December, the screen was further reduced by detachment of Troop C. The 66th Infantry Division relieved the 94th Division and required one reconnaissance troop more for patrol duty. On 2 Jan. the mission was cancelled and the Group became Mobile Reserve for the Atlantic Coastal Sector and moved to Coetquidan. Troop A was placed in the line near Blain relieving an Inf. Bn. on the St. Nazaire North Sector Front and further relieving Troop C of the 15th Sq. On 20 Jan. the 15th Sq. took over the Blain Subsector with Troops A and B in the line. Gp. Hq. moved to St. Nazaire N Sector Hq. near Nort where it provided the Provisional Brigade Staff for Brig. Gen George R. Foster's command. The Group Hq. at this time controlled three French Regiments, one American combat team and some attached artillery plus support troops. Outside of the usual patrolling activities, there was only one incident worthy of note. On or about 9 February, the Germans made a reconnaissance in force against Subsector Fegreacon the right flank. The French withdrew some 500 yards, and a general alarm ensued. However, by noon, the Germans had withdrawn before the reserve was committed.

The Group was relieved in the Atlantic Coastal Sector by the 115th Cavalry Group and received orders to report to the C. G. XVI Corps at Sittard, Holland. The Group assembled near Coetquidan on 13 Feb. and marched to Le Mans on 14 Feb., to Soissons 15 Feb. and to Charleroi on 15 Feb. On the 17th the Group assembled near Brunssum, Holland, and regained administrative control of the 17th Squadron. The Group was Attached to the 35th Infantry Division on 18 Feb. and became responsible for that section of the Roer River Front held by the 17th Sq. On 27 Feb. the Group returned to Corps control with the mission of relieving the 8th Armored Div. along the front facing Roermond. The following night 28 Feb., the 15th Sq. swept the mines from the road to Roermond and entered the town with a patrol about midnight. The 17th Sq. in the meantime had patrols across the Roer. The patrols all reported no enemy activity. The 35th Div. had crossed the Roer and its leading elements were reported north of Herkenbosch. On 1 March the Group with the 691st F. A. Bn. and one Co. of Engineers attached crossed the Roer at Dersbeck, with the mission of proceeding North and reconnoitering a narrow zone through the forest and the Siegfried Line towards Venlo with special attention to be given to the Roermond-Venlo Road. The Group crossed late in the afternoon and reached Herkenbosch with the 17th Sq. leading. All roads were heavily mined and blocked. The Squadron lost 1 officer, 3 men, 1 tank, and two jeeps. The Group Headquarters lost one jeep and two EM, all on mines. The situation had come to a complete stop while the attached engineers worked in the darkness on the minifields. The Squadron continued reconnaissance in the forest for by-passes with headlights full on.

At 1000 on 2 March, the 17th Sq found a very devious route north to Venlo through the firebreaks of the forest. The Group arrived there about dusk with only one brief skirmish with a few Germans in the woods. Troop B in the meantime had pushed North towards Straelen. The mission was changed this night to include protection on the left flank of TF Byrnes (35th Inf Div.) as it turned from Straelen to proceed to the Rhine. The Group was further to gain and maintain contact with the British 2nd Army advancing from the North. Troop B pushed through roadblocks and light opposition beyond Straelen on the morning of the 3rd., and pushed up close to Geldern. Here, an En. combat team came through Tr B to attack the town which was being hotly defended. In the afternoon the 17th Sq. made contact with the British at Geldern and at Walbeck, thus trapping several thousand enemy west of the Rhine. The Group C. P. moved to Nieukirk on 3 March and received the additional mission of sieging Issum and cutting the German force delaying the British advance on the Geldern-Issum Road. The 15th Sq. proceeded via Sevelin toward Issum while the 17th pushed from the West. As A Troop of the 17th approached Sevelin it was ambushed by a German Delaying Bn. attempting to get away to the North. A hot fight ensued resulting in over 60 German prisoners and a few casualties to us in men and vehicles. The 15th got into Issum the morning of the 4th just as the bridge was blown up. On the 5th, the area was mopped up, the British advanced up to Issum and prepared to build a bridge. At this time the enemy placed a great deal of assault gun fire on the 15th Sq. which was deployed between Issum and Camp maintaining contact between TF Byrnes and the British.

The British attacked astride the Issum-Wessel road on 6 March and the Group C. P. moved to Sevelin. The 17th Sq. went into reserve. Both the British and TF Byrnes made slow progress through the woods. As they approached each other, the 15th was pinched out. On 12 March, the Group C. P. moved to Lintfort and passed to the control of the 75th Division. Its mission was security and patrol of the Orsay-Buderich road during the preparations for the Rhine Crossing. The 15th Sq. was the first element of the Group to cross the Rhine with the mission of relieving a Bn. of the 30th Div. facing Lippendorf on the island between the Lippe River and the Lippe Canal. On 26 March the Group followed it in the morning and moved to Litkampschhof on the 27th of March as Corps Mobile Reserve. On 29 March, the Group passed to XIX Corps control and on the 30th it marched to an assembly area near Haltern, crossing the Lippe River at Dorsten. On 31 March the Group started its part of the mission of encircling the Ruhr. It pushed rapidly across the Ems canal with the right combat team of the 83rd Div. and had the mission of seizing and holding any bridges across the Lippe between the Ems canal and Hamm (exclusive).

The Group crossed the canal with the 15th Sq. leading. The Sq. pulled to the south and ran into an ambush and roadblock near Lunen. It withdrew slightly during darkness after determining that the bridges were blown in Werne and Lunen and in order to preserve a solid line until daylight. The 17th moved in darkness toward Werne and Hamm. The Group C. P. opened at Sudkirchen. On the morning of 1 April the 15th cleared out of its zone but could find no bridges intact. The 17th ran into defended road blocks near Bochum but found no bridges. They, too cleared their zone on this day except for the approaches to Hamm. On 2 April the 83rd Div. sent a combat team to siege the railroad bridge at Hamm. The 17th Sq. reduced the road blocks at Bochum taking over 300 prisoners and many artillery pieces. On 3 April, the Group moved to Herbern and on the 4th the Group was detached from the XIX Corps and attached to the 95th Div. and XVI Corps again. The Group mission from 4 April to 12 April screening the Lippe River line while the 75th and 95th Div's attacked across its front on the South bank. On the 10th the remaining zone was small enough to permit the 15th Sq. to take it over while the 17th was attached to TF Faith (95 Div.) to assist in contacting the First Army on the Mone River between Frienehol and Neheim. On 11 April the 15th Sq. was released from the Lippe and relieved the 88 Rcn Bn. along the Mehne River between Neheim and Dellwig. The Group assumed responsibility for the entire zone while the 9th Div. attacked across its front South of the river. On 14 April the Group attached to the 29th Division and was assigned a Military Government and Security mission in Land Lippe between the Weser and the Tuetoberger Wald.

On the 15th of April, the Group withdrew from combat and marched to the new area with the Group C. P. in Bad Pyrmont surrounded by 5000 German Doctors and patients in full uniforms and walking freely about among the 57 hospitals there. Needless to say, this didn't last very long.

Total

Prisoners
Taken 1188

GRAND TOTAL

PRISONERS	6874
No of Enemy Guns Destroyed	78
No of Enemy Vehicles Destroyed	495