DIVISION CAVALRY IN SICILY: THE 91ST CAVALRY RECONNAISSANCE SQUADRON IN OPERATION HUSKY, JULY-AUGUST 1943

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As the U.S. Army takes steps towards transitioning from a brigade-centric to a division-centric organization, this study draws lessons from a Division Cavalry squadron in Large-Scale Combat Operations. It follows the 91st Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron (CRS) during Operation HUSKY -the liberation of Sicily from Axis control in July and August 1943- as they performed a variety of reconnaissance, security, and direct action missions. It concludes that division cavalry squadrons are essential to success in large-scale ground combat operations. It demonstrates the key role mechanized cavalry played in highlighting the importance of fighting as a combined arms team. Furthermore, engineers in particular proved to be a critical asset needed to enable the 91st CRS to achieve its maximum effectiveness. Fourth and finally, this study shows that the 91st CRS was capable of performing a dizzying variety of missions, yet it was most effective while performing the traditional cavalry missions of reconnaissance and security.

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ABSTRACT

DIVISION CAVALRY IN SICILY: THE 91ST CAVALRY RECONNAISSANCE SQUADRON IN OPERATION HUSKY, JULY-AUGUST 1943, by MAJ Jeb S. Graydon, 90 pages.

As the U.S. Army takes steps towards transitioning from a brigade-centric to a division-centric organization, this study draws lessons from a Division Cavalry squadron in Large-Scale Combat Operations. It follows the 91st Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron (CRS) during Operation HUSKY-the liberation of Sicily from Axis control in July and August 1943- as they performed a variety of reconnaissance, security, and direct action missions. It concludes that division cavalry squadrons are essential to success in large-scale ground combat operations. It demonstrates the key role mechanized cavalry played in highlighting the importance of fighting as a combined arms team. Furthermore, engineers in particular proved to be a critical asset needed to enable the 91st CRS to achieve its maximum effectiveness. Fourth and finally, this study shows that the 91st CRS was capable of performing a dizzying variety of missions, yet it was most effective while performing the traditional cavalry missions of reconnaissance and security.

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Third, I would like to thank my family. To my parents: there are no words to express how deep my gratitude is for all that you have done for me. I pray that you will not equate the brevity of these few sentences with the degree to which I feel myself indebted to you. I want to thank my wife, Bonnie, for being the best Army Wife a man could ever ask for. Thank you for following me across the continent over the past eleven years, and for your unending love and support. I want to thank my three sons: Joel, Brent, and Ian. Thank you for your patience with me as I spent many hours away from you over this past year working on this project.

Ultimately, I would like to thank God for providing me this opportunity to live the life of a soldier and a scholar. I am fascinated by the accounts of battles in the Bible, including verses referencing the mounted soldiers of that era. One such account from

Nahum 2:3 states:

> The shield of his mighty men is red;
> His soldiers are clothed in scarlet.
> The chariots come with flashing metal
> On the day he musters them…

Although the army I serve in and the chariots of metal I ride in today are much different, I draw my strength from the same source as those ancient warriors. I echo the words of King David from Psalm 28:7, when he declared: "The Lord is my strength and my shield; in him my heart trusts, and I am helped; my heart exults, and with my song I give thanks to him."

Most of all, I am grateful to God for sending His Son, Jesus Christ, to pay the penalty which I deserve for my many sins. In His kindness He chose to graciously provide one way by which I might be reconciled to Him, to wit: faith in His Son, Jesus Christ, and repentance from my sin. As the Apostle Paul wrote at the end of his letter to the Romans:

> Now to him who is able to strengthen you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery that was kept secret for long ages but has now been disclosed and through the prophetic writings has been made known to all nations, according to the command of the eternal God, to bring about the obedience of faith— to the only wise God be glory forevermore through Jesus Christ! Amen.

Soli Deo gloria

To God alone be the glory

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ACRONYMS

AD	U.S. Armored Division
ARB	Armored Reconnaissance Battalion
BCT	Brigade Combat Team
CGSC	U.S. Army Command and General Staff College
CRS	Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron, Mechanized
DIV CAV	Division Cavalry Squadron
ETO	European Theater of Operations
FM	Field Manual
FSR	Field Service Regulations
ID	U.S. Infantry Division
MTO	Mediterranean Theater of Operations
OP	Observation Post
P&D	Pioneer and Demolition
RCT	Regimental Combat Team
SAMS	School of Advanced Military Studies

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

What will the next war look like? That is a question which military theorists, generals, and soldiers of all ranks have asked for thousands of years. Despite the obvious difficulty -read "futility"- in predicting the future, leaders in the U.S. military must analyze the current geopolitical situation to determine where potential conflicts might arise which will threaten U.S. national security.

In September 2018, the U.S. Army Combined Arms Center at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas concluded an extensive historical study of large-scale combat operations.[1] This study was driven by the assumption that the U.S. military will fight on a much larger scale in future conflicts compared to those in recent history. For nearly two decades, the U.S. military has focused on fighting limited-contingency operations in the Global War on Terrorism. As that conflict began winding down, military and civilian leaders began shifting their focus towards determining what future wars might look like. Based on the conclusions of the studies and theories regarding the next war, several changes are on the horizon which will enable the U.S. Army to better defeat any future adversaries.

Of the myriad of changes which are taking place in the army today, the most relevant to this study is the recommendation to re-create the division cavalry (DIV CAV) squadron. Up until the early 2000s, each division in the U.S. Army had a division cavalry squadron. However, in 2004 the Army Chief of Staff, General Peter J. Schoomaker, decided to eliminate DIV CAV units as a part of the Brigade Combat Team (BCT)

[1] Michael Lundy, "Foreword," *Military Review* (September-October 2018): 1.

restructuring.[2] This change left division commanders with no organic units dedicated to providing reconnaissance and security capabilities.

Based on the assumption that future wars will be characterized by large-scale combat operations, the U.S. Army is currently progressing towards a return to the Army of Excellence structure by re-creating the DIV CAV squadron for each division in the army. As a result of the changes which took place to develop a brigade-centric army, division commanders have very few organic assets which do not fall under their subordinate BCT commanders. This means that for large-scale maneuver operations, division commanders must pull capabilities out of subordinate units to be used at the division level. As the U.S. Army transitions from a brigade-based to a division-based organization, DIV CAV squadrons will become a critical asset which division commanders can employ on the battlefield of tomorrow.

To help prepare for the future creation and employment of DIV CAV squadrons, this study intends to draw lessons from the past on how these types of units were employed in large-scale combat. Specifically, this study will examine the actions of the 91st Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron (CRS) during Operation Husky, the Allied invasion and liberation of Sicily from the Axis powers in July and August 1943. The 91st CRS was the first DIV CAV squadron to transition from horse cavalry to mechanized

[2] Lee Quintas, "Commandant's Hatch: Cavalry Update," *Armor* (July-September 2014): 4. See also Adrian R. Lewis, *The American Culture of War: The History of U.S. Military Force from World War II to Operation Enduring Freedom* (New York: Routledge, 2012), 468-9.

equipment, and was one of the first to enter combat during World War II.[3] As a result, the 91st was already a veteran of the North Africa campaign before Husky began and had already become comfortable operating under the relatively new mechanized cavalry doctrine.

The 91st CRS was an effective unit which is ripe for further study. Despite the abundance of primary source material surrounding the 91st CRS, no detailed study of this unit has been conducted. Compared to other battalion-level cavalry organizations in World War II, firsthand reports and official documents from the 91st are much more robust. Additionally, the Cavalry School at Fort Riley, Kansas published a series of reports and articles throughout the war focused on the actions of the 91st which were published just a few months after the battles occurred. To add to the abundance of source material, Fred Salter published a memoir, *Recon Scout*, detailing his experience as he served in the 91st throughout the war. Later, the 91st veteran's association published an additional unit history several decades after the war which provides an additional source of information detailing the remarkable journey of this unit. Additionally, the 91st is unique in that it operated independent of its parent headquarters, the First Cavalry Division, which deployed to the Pacific Theater during the war.[4] Overall, the 91st provides a fascinating example which has the potential of providing worthwhile insights into cavalry operations in World War II.

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[3] Matthew Darlington Morton, *Men on Iron Ponies: The Death and Rebirth of the Modern U.S. Cavalry* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2009), 89.

[4] Harry Yeide, *Steeds of Steel: A History of American Mechanized Cavalry in World War II* (Minneapolis: Zenith Press, 2008), 43.

Operation Husky, the campaign to liberate Sicily from Axis control in July and August 1943, offers a useful historical example of how DIV CAV squadrons have been employed in the past. The first reason Operation Husky is useful for this study is the fact that it occurred relatively early in the U.S. involvement in the war, which was a period in which the U.S. military experienced a great deal of learning and adjustment. Additionally, it was an operation which experienced fast-paced operations similar to the large-scale combat operations the U.S. Army of today is emphasizing in training. Studying intense combat operations such as Husky has the potential of providing valuable insights which may help army leaders in the future. During Operation Husky the 91st CRS executed a wide variety of missions including traditional reconnaissance and security roles as well as direct combat roles such as seizing villages or hilltops. These missions occurred during a fast-paced, multinational, large-scale combat situation. Finally, as an island campaign, Operation Husky provides a clearly defined start and end point which is appropriate for a study of this scale. To provide the necessary context to begin this study, what follows is a brief overview of the Sicilian campaign.

Following the successful liberation of northern Africa in late 1942 and early 1943, the Allies selected Sicily as their next target in the Mediterranean Theater of Operations. A triangular shaped island the size of Vermont, Sicily dominates the central Mediterranean Sea and sits just two miles off the coast of mainland Italy. Operation Husky began just after midnight on 10 July with the amphibious landing of the U.S. 7th Army and the British 8th Army on the southern and southeastern coast of the island,

respectively. Nearly 2,600 ships landed 180,000 troops in the largest amphibious operation thus far conducted in the war.[5]

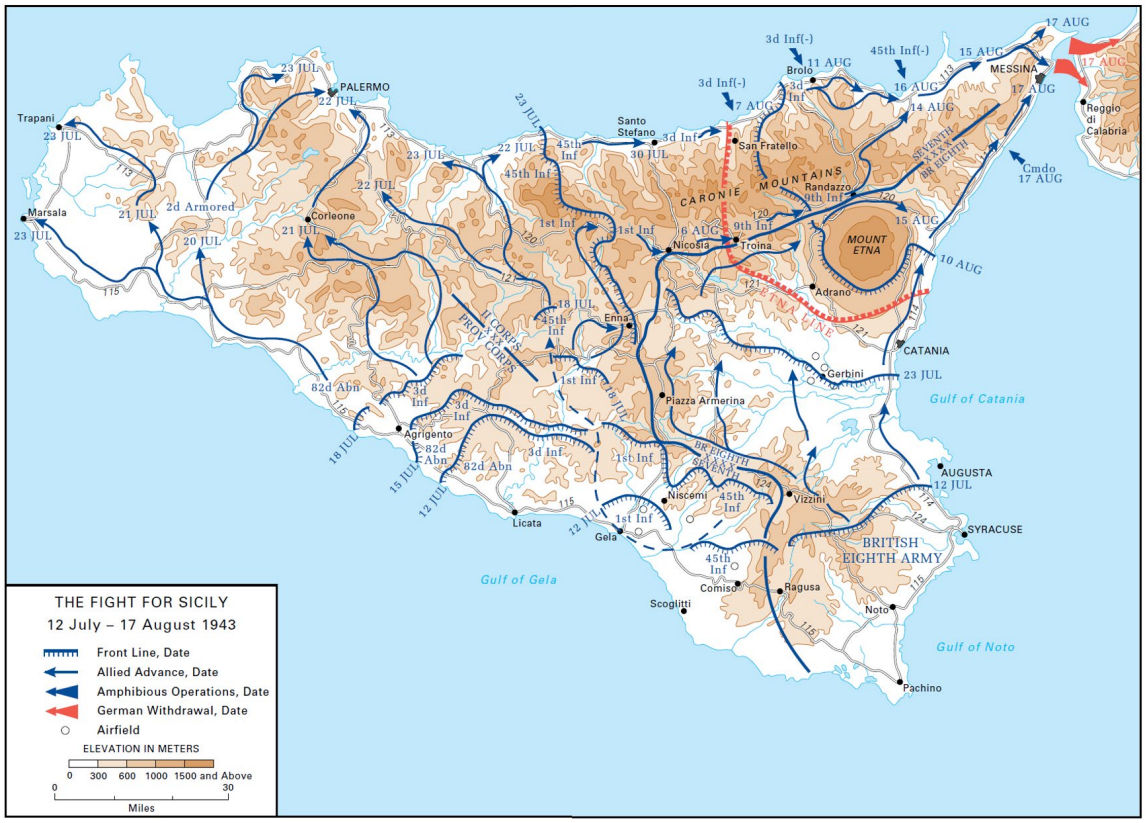

Figure 1. Overview of Operation Husky

Source: Andrew J. Birtle, "Sicily: The U.S. Army Campaigns of World War II," (Center of Military History Publication 72-16, The U.S. Army Center of Military History, Washington, DC), 18-19.

Other than some local opposition against the landings of the U.S. First Infantry Division (ID) near Gela, both armies faced relatively little resistance during the initial

[5] Douglas Porch, *The Path to Victory: The Mediterranean Theater in World War II* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2004), 426.

landings and successfully advanced several miles inland in the first few days. Expecting to encounter stiff resistance from both German and Italian troops entrenched along the coast, the Allies were surprised to see only weak resistance from Italian troops and no German troops at all. Of the nine Italian divisions defending the island, many either surrendered or retreated shortly after coming into contact with Allied forces. Field Marshal Albert Kesselring, the German Supreme Commander in the Mediterranean, stated that "the Italian coastal divisions were an utter failure."[6]

Although they were not involved in the first few days of fighting, two German divisions were transferred to Sicily shortly before the invasion began and were defending from positions deeper inland behind the Italian troops. On 11 July, Kesselring ordered the Herman Göring Division to counterattack and push the Allies back into the sea. This attack proved to be too little, too late. After two days of only minimal resistance from the Italians, the Allies had established a strong and well-supplied foothold on the island. The Herman Göring Division penetrated the American lines and succeeded in advancing to just 2,000 yards from the coast, but the U.S. 1st ID, under the command of Major General Terry Allen, turned the tide and completely repelled the Germans by the same afternoon.[7]

Rather than attack north along the coast, General Sir Bernard L. Montgomery decided to deviate from the original plan for the British 8th Army by sending one of his corps west towards Highway 124. This highway connected to a major road system which ran east of Mount Etna towards Messina. Importantly, this highway was directly in line

[6] Porch, *The Path to Victory,* 426.

[7] Ibid., 427.

with the U.S. 7th Army's direction of attack, and Montgomery's move cut off Patton's ability to continue the attack on his right flank. The 91st CRS, who was serving on the extreme right of the U.S. 7th Army, was caught in the middle of all of this. The 91st performed a vital role during this portion of the campaign by maintaining contact with the British and Canadian forces from 8th Army, thus enabling communication and coordination between the two armies.

Much to Patton's chagrin, on 13 July Montgomery convinced General Sir Harold R. L. G. Alexander, the 15th Army Group Commander, to shift the U.S.-British boundary farther west to allow him the use of Highway 124 in his upcoming attack north from the 8th Army beaches around Mount Etna towards Messina.[8] This decision severely restricted the ability of Patton's 7th Army to attack along the right flank and essentially relegated the Americans to serve as a flank guard for the British.

Idly standing by while Montgomery did all the fighting was not to Patton's liking. Four days after being ordered to relinquish Highway 124 to the British, Patton flew to Tunisia to speak to his commander face-to-face. Patton proposed a two-pronged attack by the 7th Army to seize the western half of Sicily. Just as he had done a few days earlier with Montgomery, Alexander agreed with his subordinate's plans with no adjustments.[9] Patton quickly flew back to Sicily and got his divisions on the move. He continued to attack north and west across the island for the next two weeks. As the Americans neared

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[8] Rick Atkinson, *The Day of Battle: The War in Sicily and Italy, 1943-1944* (New York: Henry Holt, 2007), 124.

[9] Carlo D'Este, *Bitter Victory: The Battle for Sicily, 1943* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1991), 415.

the largest city in Sicily, Palermo, many of the defending Italians and local civilians decided that further resistance would only result in needless loss of life and damage to the city. As the 3rd ID and the 1st Armored Division (AD) approached the outskirts of the city, officials tendered a formal surrender of the city without a fight on 22 July 1943.[10] The speed and efficiency of 7th Army's movement across western Sicily was truly remarkable. Patton later wrote concerning this action, "I believe that this operation will go down in history, certainly at Leavenworth, as a classic example of the proper use of armor."[11]

Following the surrender of Palermo, Patton ordered the 3rd ID to attack east towards Messina along the coastal Highway 113. The 1st ID attacked along a parallel axis farther inland along Highway 120. Unfortunately, the Caroline Mountains ran between the two highways and prevented the two efforts from supporting each other.[12] The Americans quickly learned that their adversaries were growing increasingly stubborn as Axis forces slowly collapsed towards the northeast corner of the island.

In the wake of the failed counterattack by the Herman Göring Division, Kesselring ordered the 29th Panzer Grenadiers and the 1st Parachute Division to reinforce the defenses on the island, thus bringing the total number of German divisions on the island up to four.[13] The Germans established a strong defensive line anchored on

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[10] Albert Garland and Howard Smyth, *Sicily and the Surrender of Italy* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1965), 254.

[11] George S. Patton, Jr., *War as I Knew It* (New York: Bantam, 1980), 60.

[12] Porch, *The Path to Victory*, 438.

[13] Atkinson, *The Day of Battle*, 127.

Mount Etna which ran north to the coast near the town of San Fratello. This was the first of several defensive lines the Germans would employ over the next few weeks. After seeing that the Allies would inevitably overpower his defending forces, Kesselring decided to conduct a large delaying action to buy the required time necessary to secretly evacuate forces across the Strait of Messina to mainland Italy (see Figure 1).

Figure 2. Messina with the Italian Mainland in the Background

Source: United States Army Center of Military History, *Pictoral Record-The War Against Germany and Italy: Mediterranean and Adjacent Areas* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1951), 163.
NOTE: The Allied failure to block this narrow waterway during Operation Husky allowed 40,000 German and Italian troops and 9,600 vehicles to evacuate from Sicily. The Allies would face those forces in the fierce fighting on mainland Italy in the following weeks and months.

On 22 July the U.S. 1st ID captured Enna, an important walled city which had recently served as the Axis headquarters on the island.[14] Having not yet reached the reinforced German "Etna Line," the capture of Enna had taken only five hours.[15] However, things would soon change as the Americans continued to advance east.

Capturing Troina would prove to be much more difficult. Troina is the highest city in Sicily and contains the most important crossroads in the interior of the island. The 1st ID fought fiercely in the steep terrain surrounding the city for six days. The Germans finally withdrew on 6 August, only to fall back on another series of defensive lines that spanned the northeast corner of the island.[16] Patton continued to close in on the Germans, using a series of small amphibious landings along the northern coast to outflank subsequent German defensive lines. Finally, on 17 August 1943, Patton's troops reached Messina just hours after the last German troops escaped to mainland Italy.[17] After six weeks of fighting, the entire island of Sicily was in Allied hands.

Operation Husky occurred relatively early in the U.S. involvement in World War II. As a result, this was a period when a great deal of learning was occurring not only within newly mechanized cavalry formations, but across the armed forces. Operation Husky was fraught with several minor blunders and one major one. The campaign revealed several weaknesses in high-level leadership within the alliance. Eisenhower

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[14] D'Este, *Bitter Victory,* 451.

[15] Ibid., 452.

[16] Atkinson, *The Day of Battle,* 157.

[17] Garland and Smyth, *The Surrender of Italy,* 416.

spent the campaign far from the action, in Tunisia, and contributed very little in the decision-making. His immediate subordinate, Alexander, proved to be indecisive and failed to give clear instructions to his subordinate army commanders. However, these failures pale in comparison to the failure to cut off the German retreat across the Strait of Messina. Over the course of the last few weeks of the campaign, the Germans fought a brilliant delaying action against a superior force. Kesselring later admitted that the Allies could have easily succeeded in cutting off their retreat and annihilating his forces.[18] Before the Allies closed in on Messina, the Germans were able to evacuate nearly 40,000 troops and 9,600 vehicles who would go on to draw more Allied blood during the subsequent Italian campaign.[19] Historian Carlo D'Este argues that "what the Germans justifiably termed a 'glorious retreat' was for the Allies a bitter victory that would return to haunt them time and again."[20]

Operation Husky was full of both successes and failures. On the positive side, capturing Sicily marked the important milestone in liberating the first piece of European soil. Additionally, the Allies demonstrated a great deal of learning and adaptation during this period which would pay dividends later in the war. Historian Douglas Porch argues that "the Mediterranean became the training ground where a generation acquired the rudiments of greatness."[21] The Allies conducted their second major amphibious operation

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[18] Porch, *The Path to Victory*, 450.

[19] Martin Blumenson, *Sicily: Whose Victory?* (New York: Ballantine, 1968), 147.

[20] D'Este, *Bitter Victory,* 549.

[21] Porch, *The Path to Victory,* 672.

of the war, adding to Operation Torch as critical test-runs prior to the Normandy invasions in June of the following year. Despite the rivalry and animosity that arose between Patton and Montgomery during the campaign, each side of the Anglo-American alliance gained valuable experience in conducting operations together. Capturing Sicily also gave the Allies secure shipping lanes through the Mediterranean. Importantly, this opened up a critical route for American Lend-Lease aid to reach the Soviet Union.

In closing, this chapter provides valuable context which will be reexamined in much greater detail later in this study. Specifically, this study will examine how American division commanders employed the 91st CRS during the Sicilian campaign. This study will show how reconnaissance reports from the 91st facilitated the decision-making process of division commanders as they maneuvered their formations across the island. It will analyze the most common types of missions various commanders assigned to the 91st during the campaign. It will determine if commanders employed the 91st CRS similar to "line" maneuver battalions, or if they were employed in a way as to maximize their unique capabilities. Finally, this study will analyze whether the 91st CRS typically operated as the forward most element, or if they were employed as a follow-on echelon behind mechanized cavalry groups (a corps-level asset). By answering these questions, this study will demonstrate how well the 91st enabled their higher headquarters through performing both reconnaissance and security missions.

In the end, this study will show that the 91st performed a vital role during Operation Husky which proved to be essential to the overall success of the Allied campaign. It will show that a dedicated reconnaissance unit was essential to providing a clear picture of the enemy situation to division commanders. Additionally, it will show

that the security operations conducted by the 91st allowed for close cooperation between adjacent units during this complex, multinational operation. Overall, this study will show that cavalry units tailored to perform reconnaissance and security missions at the division and corps level remains essential to success during large-scale combat operations.

CHAPTER 2

HISTORIOGRAPHY

The books written about World War II could fill many libraries. However, there are still some areas which have yet to be studied in detail. One area in particular which has received very little scholarly attention is the use of reconnaissance forces during Operation Husky. Nonetheless, there are several outstanding works relevant to this study which will be examined herein. This chapter divides these works into two broad categories: those focused on the Mediterranean Theater of Operations (MTO) and those focused on mechanized cavalry operations in general.

Scholarship Focused on the Mediterranean Theater of Operations

The Army's official history of the MTO, published by the Center of Military History in 1965, was one of the first works to provide an extensive and detailed account of Allied actions in the theater. Roughly eighty percent of the work discusses the Sicily campaign, whereas the last chapters cover the early stages of the Italian campaign. The authors, Lieutenant Colonel Albert N. Garland and Howard McGraw Smyth, provide a detailed and comprehensive description of the campaign, including a few mentions of the 86th and 91st CRSs, as well as other troop and platoon-level reconnaissance units. They also discuss a few reconnaissance operations by other units, including a reconnaissance in force operation conducted on 15 July by two infantry battalions from the 7th Infantry Regiment and one battalion from the 3rd Ranger Battalion towards the town of Agrigento. The authors describe how the 3rd Reconnaissance Troop, 3rd ID conducted a

forward screen during the division's drive toward Palermo from 19-22 July.[22] This troop was one of the first American units to arrive on the outskirts of the city, and helped facilitate the surrender of the Italian garrison.

Additionally, the authors provide a few details concerning the 91st CRS as they operated on the extreme right flank of Patton's 7th Army, filling the gap between the U.S. 1st ID and the British 30 Corps as the two armies pushed towards Messina from 24-30 July.[23] Finally, Garland and Smyth discuss how elements from the 91st assisted in the capture of the key road network at Troina, including a brief mention of how SGT Gerry Kisters earned a Medal of Honor on 1 August during fighting in the small town of Gagliano, about 5 miles outside Troina.[24] Overall, Garland and Smyth's narrative achieves great detail concerning U.S. Army actions during the campaign. Nonetheless, these brief mentions of reconnaissance operations fall far short of a complete account of the reconnaissance operations conducted on Sicily.

Twenty-six years would pass before the publication of the next significant study of the campaign. Carlo D'Este's 1991 book, *Bitter Victory,* focuses entirely on the Sicilian campaign and therefore provides much greater detail than any other work listed herein. D'Este focuses heavily on the political and strategic context of the campaign by devoting no less than 225 pages to the subject before beginning his discussion of the actual invasion. He argues that "the outstanding feature of the U.S. Army in Sicily was

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[22] Garland and Smyth, *Sicily and the Surrender of Italy*, 251.

[23] Ibid., 311.

[24] Ibid., 331.

how quickly it had overcome the setbacks of Tunisia and absorbed the lessons necessary to become a first-class Army."[25] The book discusses Allied naval, air, and ground actions in great detail, including a scathing analysis of the airborne operations conducted on the island. He provides valuable insights into the use and misuse of air power, and notes that "Sicily clearly demonstrated the need for better co-operation between air and ground forces."[26] These are just a few of the cogent conclusions made by D'Este in this brilliant work. Nonetheless, the author's discussion of reconnaissance and security operations during the campaign is scant at best.

Published in the same year as D'Este's work, *The Battle of Sicily* by Samuel Mitcham and Friedrich von Stauffenberg offers yet another analysis on the campaign. Co-authored by one American and one German, the significance of this book lies in the fact that it looks at the campaign primarily from the Axis perspective. They offer a slightly different viewpoint on the so-called "race to Messina" between Patton and Montgomery. They argue that the race "was not between Patton and Montgomery; rather, it was a three-party affair, and it was won by General Hans Valentin Hube, commander of the XIV Panzer Corps."[27] Hube commanded no more than 65,000 German troops, yet was able to conduct a "masterful evacuation" in the face of over 400,000 Allied troops.[28]

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[25] D'Este, *Bitter Victory*, 560.

[26] Ibid., 562.

[27] Samuel W. Mitcham, Jr. and Friedrich von Stauffenberg, *The Battle of Sicily* (New York: Orion, 1991), xiii.

[28] Ibid.

The authors provide valuable insights into the weakening German-Italian alliance during the period, as well as additional details behind German command decisions during the campaign. Interestingly, the authors agree with General George C. Marshall's thoughts at the time by concluding that invading Sicily was a mistake which prevented the Allies from invading northwestern Europe in late-1943.[29] Whether such an invasion would have been possible in 1943 is beyond the scope of this study. However, it is notable that no other scholar listed in this chapter makes such an argument. Even so, while this book does not discuss Allied reconnaissance actions at all, its value to the present study lies in the valuable context it provides by presenting the Axis viewpoint.

Another outstanding work on the Mediterranean Theater in World War II is Douglas Porch's 2004 study, *The Path to Victory*. He argues that the MTO was "critical in forging the Anglo-American alliance, in permitting Allied armies to acquire fighting skills, audition leaders and staffs, and evolve the technical, operational, tactical, and intelligence systems required to invade Normandy successfully in June 1944."[30] His masterful overview covers the entire span of the war in the Mediterranean region from Benito Mussolini's declaration of war in June 1940 to the German surrender in May 1945. However, out of the nearly 700-page tome, Porch devotes just 36 pages to the discussion of Operation Husky. Although he provides a good overview of command decisions and the Allied maneuvers across the island, he fails to discuss the role of reconnaissance in enabling those maneuvers.

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[29] Mitcham and von Stauffenberg, *The Battle of Sicily* 299.

[30] Porch, *The Path to Victory*, xii.

Volume two of Rick Atkinson's liberation trilogy, *The Day of Battle*, is the most recent work which offers a detailed overview of the Allied campaigns in Sicily and Italy in 1943-44. His well-rounded work discusses everything from the debates and decisions of top-level leaders down to the actions of the lowest ranking soldiers who took part in the fighting. The book opens with a description of the Trident Conference, during which Prime Minister Winston Churchill and a small cohort of military officers traveled to Washington, DC in May 1943 to conduct secret meetings with the Americans to decide future plans for the war effort. He continues to relay details of various communications between heads of state throughout the book, which provide valuable insight into the political context of the campaign in the Mediterranean. Additionally, he provides a beautifully lucid narrative of command decisions and the resulting actions ranging from the army group down to the company level. He provides some detail, albeit far short of D'Este's work, on German and Italian decisions and actions throughout the action in Sicily and Italy. Overall, Atkinson provides a wonderful, detailed narrative of Allied actions in the MTO, but fails to discuss reconnaissance or cavalry operations which took place during that period.

Scholarship Focused on Mechanized Cavalry

In addition to the works listed above, all of which discuss the fighting in the Mediterranean, there are also several excellent works which discuss mechanized cavalry units in World War II. The scholarship in this field began in the form of short monographs and theses, primarily from the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College (CGSC). Captain John Tully wrote an insightful study about the unit his grandfather commanded during World War II. In his 1994 study of the 4th Cavalry

Group's operations in the European Theater of Operations (ETO), Tully concludes that the unit was not employed according to prewar doctrine, which called for stealthy reconnaissance missions using infiltration tactics whenever possible. Rather, the 4th was frequently employed in a reconnaissance role in support of other offensive operations.[31] Additionally, the 4th Cavalry Group was employed in other ways, including flank guards and economy-of-force roles, each of which required the use of decidedly overt and aggressive tactics rather than the stealthy missions described in doctrine. One downside to this study is its limited scope. Namely, Tully only studies the 4th over the period in which his grandfather was in command. Therefore, his work only offers a limited view in comparison to the unit's total service in the ETO.

In a 1995 School of Advanced Military Studies (SAMS) monograph, Dean Nowowiejski analyzes the doctrine and mechanization of cavalry units from 1938-1945. He concludes that "Organizational innovation requires a common willingness to adapt, to reach to the edge of the boundaries of the collective intellectual paradigm."[32] He shows that leadership is key in embracing and encouraging change, yet acknowledges that it is incredibly difficult for most people to break away from the status quo.

In a CGSC thesis from the same year, Louis DiMarco argues that "World War II cavalry doctrine proved to be woefully inadequate to the experience of the mechanized

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[31] John N. Tully, "Doctrine, Organization and Employment of the 4th Cavalry Group during World War II" (Master's Thesis, U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, 1994), 107.

[32] Dean A. Nowowiejski, "Adaptation to Change: U.S. Cavalry Doctrine and Mechanization, 1938-1945" (Monograph, School of Advanced Military Studies, U.S. Army School of Advanced Military Studies, 1995), 41.

cavalry in combat."[33] Additionally, he provides an excellent description of the critical role that cavalry formations played in shaping the battlefield at the corps and army levels.[34] Each of these unpublished theses and monographs provide valuable insights for the present study.

Harry Yeide's *Steeds of Steel* was the first full-length book published on the subject of mechanized cavalry operations in World War II. His 2008 study encompasses echelons from platoon to cavalry group, and covers the Mediterranean, European, and Pacific Theaters. He outlines the remarkable variety of ways in which mechanized cavalry forces were employed throughout the war. In the end, he convincingly argues that American cavalryman proved to be highly trained and versatile soldiers who were capable of operating a wide range of vehicles and equipment and of fighting on any type of terrain they faced.[35] One weakness in the work is that Yeide's discussion of cavalry operations at the operational level lacks both detail and clarity. Additionally, Yeide fails to discuss how changes in doctrine, equipment, and unit organization throughout the war affected units on the ground. As it turns out, there were significant changes in each of these areas, which will be discussed in chapter three of this study.

In *Scouts Out!: The Development of Reconnaissance Units in Modern Armies,* John J. McGrath provides a brief overview of reconnaissance units from World War I to the Global War on Terror. Much of his work focuses on the U.S. Army and Marine

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[33] Louis A. DiMarco, "The U.S. Army's Mechanized Cavalry Doctrine in World War II" (Master's Thesis, U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, 1995), 147.

[34] Ibid., 123.

[35] Yeide, *Steeds of Steel*, 271.

Corps, yet McGrath also discusses developments from other countries in varying levels of detail. He focuses heavily on the organization and equipment of cavalry formations. He explains how these formations were analyzed and adjusted following combat operations to become more lethal and effective on the battlefield. Additionally, the work is full of helpful organizational charts, maps, and photographs of various reconnaissance vehicles to compliment the narrative and add clarity to the reader. He concludes by arguing that in the future, standard maneuver organizations can perform reconnaissance and security tasks, thus eliminating the need for specific reconnaissance units.[36] While the overview provided in *Scouts Out!* is insightful, McGrath's treatment of World War II is severely lacking when compared to other works in the field.

Matthew Morton's 2009 book, *Men on Iron Ponies*, provides a masterful overview of U.S. cavalry units from the Interwar Period to the end of World War II. He discusses in great detail the debates which occurred after World War I concerning the role of cavalry on the modern battlefield. He argues that "the tension created in the struggle to preserve a role for horses had a direct bearing on the organization, doctrine, and capabilities of the fully mechanized reconnaissance units that fought in Europe during World War II."[37] Most relevant to this study is Morton's discussion of the development of cavalry doctrine from the interwar years through World War II. His discussion of doctrinal change and how units incorporated that doctrine into training and

[36] John J. McGrath, *Scouts Out!: The Development of Reconnaissance Units in Modern Armies* (Fort Leavenworth, KS: Combat Studies Institute Press, 2008), 205.

[37] Morton, *Men on Iron Ponies*, 222.

operations provides significant insight into the 91st CRS' actions during Operation Husky.

The following year Robert Cameron wrote a lengthy history through the U.S. Army's Combat Studies Institute concerning reconnaissance units from the interwar years to Operation Iraqi Freedom. His work, *To Fight or Not to Fight?* focuses on how reconnaissance units were organized and equipped, as well as the various changes in doctrine relating to these units over the period of his study. As his title suggests, Cameron argues that an enduring debate within the cavalry community was whether scouts should primarily remain stealthy while conducting reconnaissance, or whether they should fight for information. Cameron argues that proponents for each side of this argument influenced the doctrine and organization of reconnaissance units throughout the period of his study.

His treatment of World War II focuses on the technical data concerning the doctrinal and organizational changes at different echelons, yet he also provides some details of combat experiences to show how those changes impacted the troopers on the ground. He shows that early in the war, reconnaissance doctrine emphasized stealth. However, soldiers on the ground found this to be untenable. As a result, by the end of the war reconnaissance doctrine transformed to reflect more aggressive tactics, and reconnaissance organizations had become robust formations with a significant amount of firepower.[38] In the final analysis, Cameron's book provides invaluable insights into the

[38] Robert S. Cameron, *To Fight or Not to Fight? Organizational and Doctrinal Trends in Mounted Maneuver Reconnaissance from the Interwar Years to Operation Iraqi Freedom* (Fort Leavenworth, KS: Combat Studies Institute Press, 2010), 79-80.

technical and theoretical background information which helps readers understand the bigger picture behind the ground-level narratives of the actual fighting.

Published in 2017, William Nance's Sabers *Through the Reich* is the most specific and detailed of the works mentioned in this chapter. Unlike many of the broad overviews listed above, Nance restricts his focus to a specific echelon and theater of war for his study. Namely, his work focuses on U.S. Mechanized Cavalry Groups in northern Europe during World War II. This narrow focus allows Nance to provide a much more detailed analysis of how these units operated in the various campaigns from Normandy to the Elbe. In doing so, he brings to light many details and nuances which were beyond the purview of the other works mentioned above. Nonetheless, the narrowness of his work leaves room for other scholars to conduct similar studies at other echelons or theaters.

Recently, several other monographs have been produced which focus on division cavalry and other related subjects. This renewed interest is an outgrowth of the U.S. Army's shift towards large-scale combat operations over the past several years. Nathan Jennings and Frank Dolberry have recently produced monographs on the subject which have begun a new wave of scholarship focused on division cavalry.

In conclusion, there are a number of excellent works related to cavalry organizations during World War II. Many of the full-length books mentioned in this chapter were published within the last ten years. This shows that the study of cavalry operations during World War II is gaining both popularity and relevance as the U.S. looks to possible large-scale combat in the future. Nonetheless, there are still several gaps in the research which have not yet been fully explored. In particular, no comprehensive study of a reconnaissance unit during Operation Husky has ever been conducted. The

present study of the 91st CRS is a small step towards filling this gap in the body of scholarship surrounding this period. This study aims to use Nance's *Sabers Through the Reich* as a model to apply, albeit on a much smaller scale, to the 91st Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron's operations in Sicily.

CHAPTER 3

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Before beginning a detailed study of the 91st Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron's (CRS) actions in Operation Husky, a few more topics need to be covered to provide the necessary background information. Specifically, this chapter will discuss three primary topics. First, this chapter will show how division cavalry squadrons were organized and equipped. Second, this chapter will explain the development of mechanized cavalry doctrine from the Interwar Period to the beginning of Operation Husky in July 1943. Third and finally, this chapter will provide a brief history of the 91st CRS to highlight several characteristics which makes it a unique unit worthy of further study.

Organization and Equipment

The Interwar Period was a particularly tumultuous time for cavalry organizations. The 1930s and early 1940s saw a whole host of changes in cavalry equipment, manning, doctrine, and organizational structure. Perhaps the most well-known of these changes is the conversion from horse cavalry to mechanized equipment. There is no doubt that the loss of his mount was a monumental change for the average cavalryman. Nonetheless, the transition to motorized transport represents just one of the many changes occurring at that time. During this period cavalry organizations were equipped with a wide variety of

equipment including motorcycles, jeeps, half-tracks, scout cars, and light tanks (see Figure 2).[39]

Figure 3. Cavalry Vehicles: M8 Light Armored Car (foreground) and Half-Track (background) in Belgium

Source: United States Army Center of Military History, *Pictoral Record-The War Against Germany: Europe and Adjacent Areas* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1951), 200.
NOTE: Both vehicles were commonly used in cavalry units during the war.

In addition to equipment changes, the organization of cavalry formations underwent a number of changes during the Interwar and early-World War II period. Independent cavalry regiments were re-designated as "cavalry groups" and were aligned

[39] For an excellent overview of doctrinal and equipment changes in the U.S. Cavalry during the Interwar Period, see Morton, *Men on Iron Ponies* or Cameron, *To Fight or Not to Fight?*

to field armies.[40] Cavalry groups, the largest cavalry organization in the U.S. Army, were almost universally assigned from field armies down to a subordinate corps. Moving down one echelon to the division level, two separate cavalry organizations were developed which supported each major type of division. As the American army rapidly created and trained divisions to send overseas, armored divisions were assigned a CRS, and infantry divisions were apportioned one mechanized cavalry reconnaissance troop.[41] This chapter will focus on the former.

Initially, as the first armored divisions were organized and equipped, divisional reconnaissance battalions were organized into four companies: two equipped with scout cars, one with light tanks, and one of infantry.[42] Throughout 1941 a series of large maneuvers were conducted in Georgia, Tennessee, Kentucky, Louisiana and the Carolinas.[43] The importance of these maneuvers cannot be overemphasized. They allowed inexperienced leaders to gain experience maneuvering large formations against a freethinking opponent. Additionally, the maneuvers provided the opportunity to test the numerous doctrinal and equipment changes recently introduced into the U.S. Army.

Following these maneuvers, the army made several adjustments, including the creation of a new armored division structure in March 1942. Part of this restructuring

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[40] McGrath, *Scouts Out*, 98.

[41] Ibid., 104-8.

[42] The Armored School, "Operation of Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron Integral to the Armored Division: A Student Research Report" (Document No. N-2146.53, The Armored School, Fort Knox, KY, 1950), 19.

[43] Ibid., 22.

involved replacing the infantry company with a third reconnaissance troop and adding a headquarters and headquarters company within each CRS.[44] The light tank company, also called a support company, was retained within the squadron formation. Finally, each squadron received an attachment of one platoon of medical personnel. This is the configuration in which the 91st stood at the time of Operation Husky in July 1943 (see Figure 3 below).

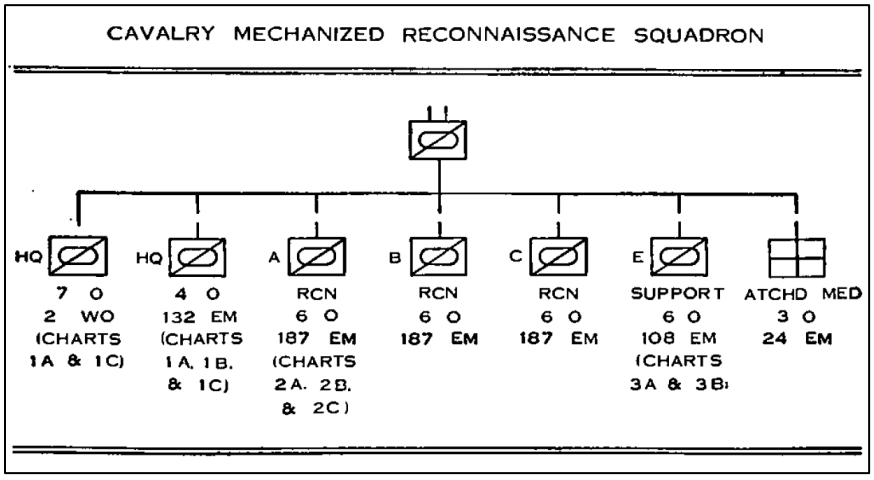

Figure 4. Task Organization of a Cavalry Mechanized Reconnaissance Squadron

Source: United States War Department, Cavalry Field Manual 2-30, *Cavalry Mechanized Reconnaissance Squadron* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1943), 93.

Each cavalry troop was organized with three scout platoons, a headquarters platoon, and a maintenance section, totaling nearly two hundred personnel. Each troop was equipped with an assortment of thirty and fifty caliber machine guns, three 81-mm

[44] The Armored School, "Operation of Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron Integral to the Armored Division," 24.

mortars, nine armored cars, eight motorcycles, and forty-five trucks of various configurations (see Figure 4).

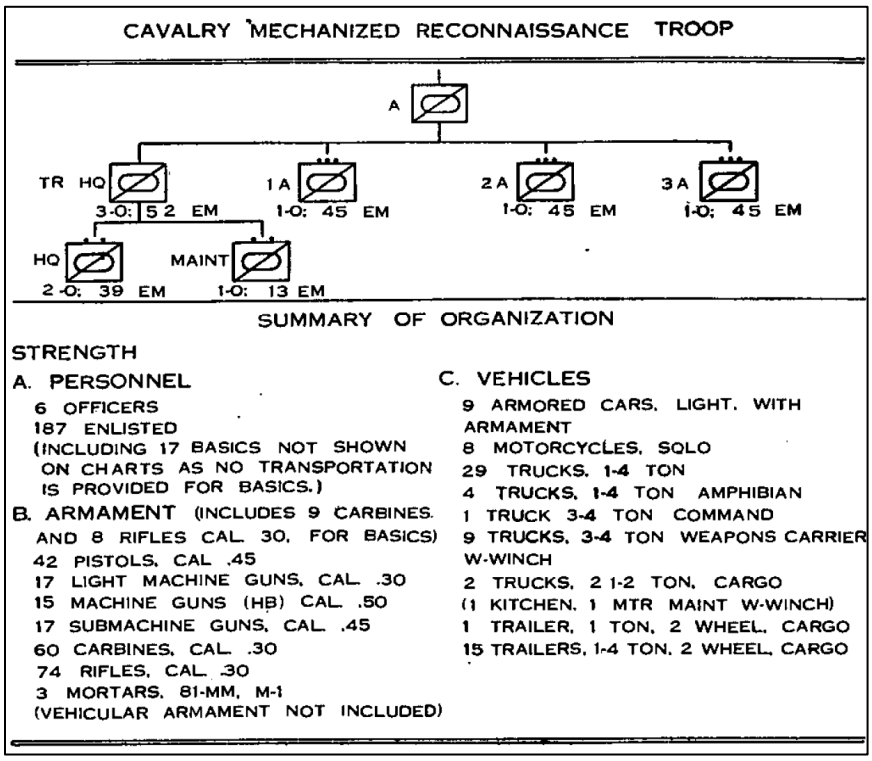

Figure 5. Task Organization of a Cavalry Mechanized Reconnaissance Troop

Source: United States War Department, Cavalry Field Manual 2-30, *Cavalry Mechanized Reconnaissance Squadron* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1943), 98.

Just a few months after Husky in September 1943 all Armored Reconnaissance Battalions (ARBs) within Armored Divisions underwent yet another significant reorganization. Additionally, at this time all ARBs took on the name which the 91st was already operating under, to wit: "Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron, Mechanized."[45]

[45] The Armored School, "Operation of Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron Integral to the Armored Division," 27.

Slight adjustments to equipment and organization continued to be proposed and adopted throughout the war. However, this time period falls outside the scope of this study and will therefore not be discussed herein.

Doctrine

The Interwar Period saw great changes to cavalry doctrine as the army learned how to fight as a mechanized force. In general, doctrinal change failed to keep pace with organizational and equipment changes throughout the Interwar Period. Essentially, new technology and equipment came about faster than the army could figure out how best to employ it doctrinally.[46] The rapid demobilization following World War I brought along with it a requisite decrease in the size of the Tank Corps. Following the recommendations from the Superior Board, the National Defense Act of 1920 abolished the Tank Corps and placed all future tank development solely under the infantry branch.[47] This unilateral control of tanks continued for most of the Interwar Period.

However, in 1931 chief of staff of the army General Douglas MacArthur partially lifted this monopoly by ordering each branch to develop separate mechanized doctrine. While tanks were officially under the purview of the infantry branch, all other branches

[46] Christopher R. Gabel, "World War II Armor Operations in Europe," in *Camp Colt to Desert Storm: The History of U.S. Armored Forces,* ed. George F. Hofmann and Donn A. Starry (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1999), 147.

[47] Timothy K. Nenninger, "Organizational Milestones in the Development of American Armor, 1920-1940," in *Camp Colt to Desert Storm: The History of U.S. Armored Forces,* ed. George F. Hofmann and Donn A. Starry (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1999), 38-9.

were now free to develop their own mechanized doctrine.[48] That same year the War Department issued a policy on mechanization which stated "Mechanized cavalry will be organized to fulfill the normal cavalry role, substituting the vehicle for the horse."[49] As a result, these fledgling mechanized cavalry units were expected to perform the same roles as traditional horse cavalry. These missions included reconnaissance, counter-reconnaissance, covering movements, flank security, pursuit, exploitation of breakthroughs, raids, liaison between larger units, delaying actions, and other special operations such as advance, flank, and rear guards.[50] In other words, the earliest mechanized cavalry units were given wide responsibilities including reconnaissance, security, offense, defense, and specialized missions. This was arguably the widest mission set given to any type of formation during this period.

Despite the initial guidance given by the War Department in 1931, subsequent mechanized cavalry doctrine called for vehicle-mounted units to perform a specialized function separate from that of horse-mounted units. Whereas traditional horse cavalry typically maneuvered mounted but did most of the fighting on foot, mechanized units lacked the manpower to dismount (employ on the ground) large numbers of cavalrymen. Therefore, mechanized cavalry doctrine focused on stealth rather than direct combat. In 1938 the War Department published Field Manual 2-10, *Mechanized Cavalry* which

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[48] William S. Nance, *Sabers Through the Reich: World War II Corps Cavalry from Normandy to the Elbe* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2017), 16.

[49] The Armored School, "Operation of Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron Integral to the Armored Division," 9.

[50] Ibid., 9-10.

emphasized reconnaissance, stealth, and dismounted operations.[51] However, some leaders in the U.S. Army, including Adna R. Chaffee, the commander of the 7th Cavalry Brigade, began to realize mechanized cavalry could do much more than stealthy reconnaissance. By September 1939 "experience in recent maneuvers had convinced Chaffee that independent mechanized cavalry units, if sufficiently large, could move beyond traditional cavalry roles to engage in heavy combat and deliver decisive offensive blows."[52]

In the following years doctrine began to catch up to this idea, albeit imperfectly. The 1941 edition of Field Manual 2-15, *Employment of Cavalry*, states that

> The primary mission of Cavalry is combat . . . In a war of movement Cavalry is employed initially for surprise thrusts into enemy territory, for reconnaissance, and for screening and covering other forces. Thereafter, its most effective employment is in large groups for swift and decisive action.[53]

Similarly, the 1941 edition of the Army's capstone doctrinal manual, The *Field Service Regulations (FSR),* echoed the emphasis on direct combat roles for cavalry organizations. However, the *FSR* failed to distinguish between traditional horse cavalry and mechanized cavalry, which created a fair amount of ambiguity. In its description of the role of cavalry, the *FSR* included a long list of additional tasks beyond combat which the cavalry should be prepared to perform:

> Cavalry is capable of offensive combat; exploitation and pursuit; seizing and holding important terrain until the arrival of the main forces; ground

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[51] DiMarco, "The U.S. Army's Mechanized Cavalry Doctrine in World War II," 13.

[52] Nenninger, "Organizational Milestones," 55.

[53] United States War Department, Cavalry Field Manual 2-15, *Employment of Cavalry* (Washington DC: Government Printing Office, 1941), 5.

> reconnaissance; ground counter-reconnaissance (screening), both moving and stationary; security for the front, flanks, and rear of other forces on the march, at the halt, and in battle; delaying action; covering the retrograde movements of other forces; combat liaison between large units; acting as a mobile reserve for other forces; harassing action; and surprise action against designated objectives deep in hostile rear areas.[54]

Once again, this description constitutes a tremendous amount of variety which shows the multifaceted utility of cavalry organizations. It also shows the doctrinal confusion regarding the proper role of cavalry organizations. As historian Louis DiMarco states, "The exact role of cavalry in an age of mechanized war was to vex the branch and the Army through the early years of World War II."[55] In short, the tremendous amount of doctrine, equipment, and organizational changes occurring during the Interwar Period left the U.S. Army in a state of flux at the beginning of World War II.

As the first cavalry organizations began to enter combat, units quickly realized that mechanized cavalry organizations were rarely able to remain stealthy. Although doctrine called for mechanized cavalry units to avoid direct fire contact with enemy elements, this ideal failed to hold up to the realities of combat. Due to their position on the battlefield out in front of the main body, cavalry units were regularly forced to fight fiercely when they encountered the enemy. This will become evident in the narrative of the actions carried out by the 91st CRS during Operation Husky in July and August 1943 found in the following chapter.

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[54] United States War Department, Field Service Regulations, FM 100-5, *Operations* (Washington, DC: United States War Department, 1941), 7.

[55] DiMarco, "Mechanized Cavalry Doctrine," 3.

A Brief History of the 91st CRS

At this point in the study, a brief history of the 91st CRS is necessary to highlight the numerous events, circumstances, and characteristics which make this unit truly one of a kind. First, the 91st CRS took a different and unique path during the Interwar Period. Unlike most cavalry units who retained their horses until the late-1930s or early-1940s, the 91st began to mechanize more than a decade earlier. The 91st CRS can trace its roots back to the creation of a Provisional Platoon, First Armored Car Troop at Fort Myers, Virginia in February 1928.[56] The platoon quickly grew to become the 1st Armored Car Troop, then the 1st Armored Car Squadron in July and October 1928, respectively. Historian Matthew Morton writes that "This unit represented the birth of specialized reconnaissance formations in the modern army."[57] The fledgling unit relocated to Camp Holabird, Maryland; Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri; and finally reached Fort Bliss, Texas in November 1928 where it remained until 1941 and served as the reconnaissance element for the First Cavalry Division.[58]

A second unique characteristic of the 91st CRS is its experience as a test organization for various pieces of new equipment. Enroute to Fort Bliss in October 1928, the 1st Armored Car Squadron (the predecessor to the 91st CRS) stopped at Fort Riley, Kansas to conduct a series of demonstrations to display its unique mechanized

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[56] Morton, *Men on Iron Ponies,* 18. See also Donald W. Dean and C. H. "Pete" Hulse, *The 91st Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron and WW II* (self-published), 4.

[57] Morton, *Men on Iron Ponies*, 18.

[58] Dean and Hulse, *The 91st Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron and WW II*, 4.

capabilities to the Cavalry School located there.[59] The 1st Armored Car Squadron was truly at the vanguard of what would become a modern, mechanized U.S. Army, and the students and instructors at Fort Riley were undoubtedly eager to get a glimpse of the modern and futuristic motorized unit, even if it was only out of curiosity. Similarly, being the first cavalry unit to mechanize, the 91st was occasionally called upon to test new vehicles and equipment. One trooper from the 91st remembers:

> One trip of several days was used to test the three wheeled motorcycle, the regular jeep and/or Bantam [jeep variant] and the four wheeled steering version. Each was driven to [its] limits over all kinds of terrain at various speeds. One early conclusion was that the four wheeled steering application was for the birds. The vehicle would turn over upon the slightest provocation.[60]

This is just one example that demonstrates the changes which the U.S. cavalry was experiencing during this time, and the way in which this groundbreaking unit helped pave the way for future cavalry organizations.

A third unique characteristic in the history of the 91st CRS is its role in testing new mechanized doctrine. Troop A, First Armored Car Squadron took part in division-level maneuvers with the First Cavalry Division in 1929, the first of such maneuvers which included armored cars and anti-tank guns.[61] The small mechanized unit performed remarkably well in missions such as delaying operations and reconnaissance tasks several miles ahead of the main body, yet the unit received criticism for its somewhat limited

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[59] Dean and Hulse, *The 91st Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron and WW II*, 4.

[60] Ibid., 39.

[61] Morton, *Men on Iron Ponies,* 20-21.

ability to operate off roads when compared to traditional horse cavalry units.[62] The following year, then-Major George S. Patton, Jr. and Major C.C. Benson wrote an article in *The Cavalry Journal* which expressed some advantages and disadvantages to mechanized cavalry. Patton, who would go on to become one of the most famous and aggressive commanders of mechanized forces in World War II, also bemoaned the dismal level of mechanization within the U.S. Army at the time and advocated for additional mechanization to prepare for the future. In a plea to remedy the predicament, Patton asserted that "if our Cavalry is to study and apply the new methods that fast tanks and armored cars provide, it must have the necessary equipment."[63] At the time of his writing, the First Armored Car Squadron was the only mechanized cavalry unit in the U.S. Army. Thus, not only was the 91st CRS at the vanguard of an entirely new mechanized army, it was also instrumental in demonstrating the practicality and unique potential which mechanized formations could provide.

Fourth, the 91st CRS experienced a rare command relationship with higher echelons within the U.S. Army in World War II. The 91st CRS was atypical in that it was not assigned to a division headquarters like every other CRS. The 91st CRS' parent headquarters, the First Cavalry Division, was sent to the Pacific theater in June 1942, thus the 91st operated independently and was attached to several corps and division headquarters throughout its service fighting in North Africa, Sicily, and Italy.[64] Thus,

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[62] Morton, *Men on Iron Ponies,* 21.

[63] George S. Patton, Jr., and C. C. Benson, "Mechanization and Cavalry," *The Cavalry Journal* 39 (July 1930), 239.

[64] Yeide, *Steeds of Steel*, 43. See also Morton, *Men on Iron Ponies,* 116.

unlike most other CRSs or ARBs, the 91st CRS operated under a wide variety of commanders, each of whom employed the 91st in slightly different ways. Few other cavalry squadrons in the Mediterranean or European theaters shared this experience.

A fifth and final unique characteristic is the tremendous amount of documentation, both in quantity and quality, which details each of the campaigns the 91st CRS participated in during World War II. The official unit records, compiled in the field following each major combat operation, are remarkably complete and highly detailed. Additionally, Lieutenant Colonel Harry W. Candler and Lieutenant Colonel Charles A. Ellis, both of whom were wartime commanders of the 91st CRS, published articles in the Cavalry Journal outlining some of their experiences serving with the 91st in combat. Furthermore, after relinquishing his command of the 91st, Candler returned to the U.S. to serve at the Cavalry School at Fort Riley, Kansas where he later published a series of pamphlets detailing the actions of the 91st in North Africa..[65] These pamphlets include a remarkable level of detail, and were designed to help prepare cavalry troopers across the U.S. Army as they conducted training and prepared for combat.

Finally, a lengthy memoir by a member of the 91st CRS entitled *Recon Scout* was published in 1994. The author, Fred H. Salter, recounts his experiences training with horses at Fort Riley, participating in the Louisiana Maneuvers, and serving as a squad leader in the 91st in Morocco, Tunisia, Sicily, and Italy. Additionally, Salter recounts his experience while the 91st was tasked with providing security for the Casablanca

[65] The Cavalry School, "Cavalry Reconnaissance Number Three: Operations of the 91st Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron, Mechanized, from El Aboid to Mateur (Northern Tunisia)" (The Cavalry School, Fort Riley, KS, 1944.

Conference between Sir Winston Churchill, President Franklin D. Roosevelt, and France's Charles de Gaulle in January 1943.[66]

Overall, these characteristics make the 91st CRS a unique unit which is ripe for further study. Beyond the analysis of the 91st CRS' actions during Operation Husky which this study provides, much more remains to be studied by other scholars at a later time. Today, as the U.S. Army continues to transition from the counterinsurgency missions of the Global War on Terrorism towards preparing for large-scale combat operations, a renewed focus on groundbreaking units such as the 91st CRS will undoubtedly prove to be beneficial.

[66] Fred H. Salter, *Recon Scout* (New York: Ballantine, 1994), 31-35.

CHAPTER 4

ANALYSIS OF OPERATION HUSKY, 10 JULY-17 AUGUST 1943

Operation Husky, the six-week Allied campaign to liberate Sicily from German and Italian defenders, offers a unique and interesting case-study to analyze the operations of the 91st Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron (CRS) in support of corps and division level maneuvers in large-scale combat operations. Incorporating nearly 2,600 ships and 180,000 troops, Operation Husky was the largest amphibious operation ever attempted at that time.[67] Throughout the operation the 91st CRS operated under multiple headquarters who employed the squadron in a variety of ways.

For this operation, Seventh Army attached the 91st CRS to Omar Bradley's II Corps. For the opening phase of the invasion, Bradley further attached the squadron to the 1st Infantry Division (ID), under the command of Terry Allen. A "special liaison detachment" landed with the division on D-Day, 10 July 1943 on beach Red Two near Gela, Sicily.[68] The detachment consisted of two officers, fourteen enlisted men, and three vehicles from Troop A, 91st CRS. The 1st ID experienced only minor resistance from the defending Italian troops on D-Day.

On D+1, 11 July, the Axis forces launched a counterattack from their positions deeper inland and nearly succeeded in breaking through the American lines to the

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[67] Porch, *The Path to Victory*, 426.

[68] Charles A. Ellis, "Summation of Battle Operations of the 91st Reconnaissance squadron, from July 10, 1943 to August 16, 1943, inclusive," (reference number 891CRS151, Ike Skelton Combined Arms Research Library), 3. Hereafter Ellis, "Summation of Battle Operations."

beaches. The strongest thrust came from the Herman Göring (panzer) Division based out of Caltagrione northeast of Gela while the Italian Livorni (infantry) Division supported the attack with a thrust from Butera northwest of Gela (see Map 2). That afternoon, General Allen directed the detachment from the 91st to confirm reports of enemy movement along the division's left flank, a few miles west of Gela. The patrol successfully identified and engaged a company of Italian infantry with mortar support from the Livorno Division, resulting in six enemy killed and no friendly casualties.[69] This patrol, which fought against a vastly superior force, was critical in confirming the location and extent of enemy movements and helped prevent the enemy from enveloping the division's left flank. Dogged fighting by a U.S. ranger element along with support from naval gunfire ultimately forced the Livorni Division to retreat in the direction of Butera. A sudden and fierce counterattack by the panzers of the Herman Göring Division left the lightly equipped 1st ID in a precarious situation. However, the quick action by the reconnaissance detachment of the 91st CRS, as well as dogged fighting by the remainder of the 1st ID, resulted in halting and repelling the counterattack within a matter of hours.[70]

[69] Ellis, "Summation of Battle Operations." 3.

[70] Porch, *The Path to Victory,* 427.

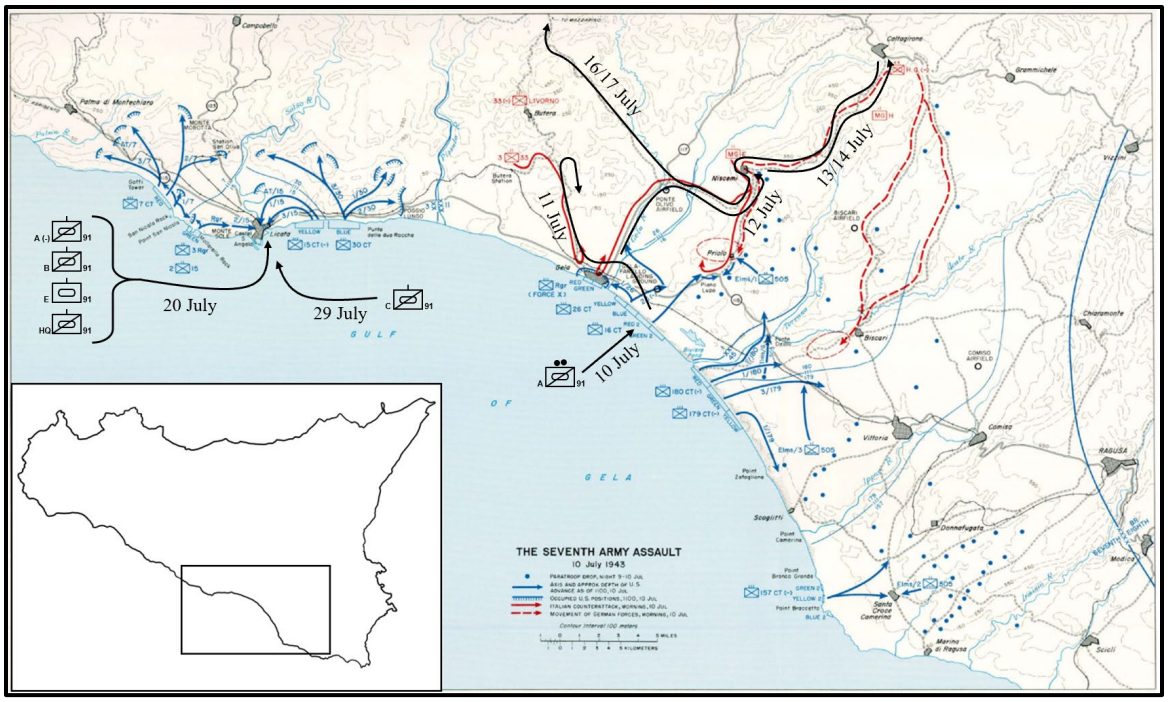

Figure 6. The Husky Landings

Source: Albert Garland and Howard Smyth, *Sicily and the Surrender of Italy* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1965), back matter. Includes additional notation from the author.

For the next nine days, the detachment performed several small patrols and other missions in support of the division headquarters near Niscemi, just a few miles inland from Gela. On one occasion, the detachment conducted a reconnaissance patrol to Caltagrione, more than 10 miles beyond Niscemi. During the patrol the detachment liberated three Allied prisoners of war and captured two German soldiers from the Herman Göring Division.[71] Next, the detachment repositioned along with the 1st ID Command Post element to the city of Mazzarino, approximately 23 miles north of Gela.

[71] Ellis, "Summation of Battle Operations," 3.

On 20 July the remainder of the 91st CRS, with the exception of Troop C and portions of Headquarters Troop, landed on Sicily and assembled near Licata, a small coastal town approximately 20 miles west of Gela. This included Troops A and B (reconnaissance), Troop E (light tank), and the headquarters element (see Table 1). Troop C was unable to participate in any operations at this time due to the extremely heavy casualties it suffered during the North Africa campaign and ongoing attempts to incorporate a large number of replacement troops. Only one lieutenant remained of the officers who fought with Troop C in Tunisia, and many of the Troop's NCOs, including all three platoon sergeants, had been lost as well.[72] The newly-reorganized Troop C eventually landed in Sicily on 29 July and rejoined the squadron at Villarosa.

Table 1. Unit Arrival Time

Date of arrival to Sicily	Units from 91st CRS
10 July 1943	"Special Liaison Detachment" consisting of two officers, fourteen enlisted men, and three vehicles from Troop A
20 July 1943	Remainder of Troop A, Troop B, Troop E (light tank), Squadron HQs element
22 July 1943	Remainder of Headquarters Troop, and 91st Medical Detachment
29 July 1943	Troop C

Source: Created by author.

While the squadron was still disembarking and consolidating near the beaches on 20-21 July, MG Allen sent "urgent orders for armored reconnaissance" to support the 1st

[72] Salter, *Recon Scout*, 134.

ID's heavy fighting near Villarosa. Troop A, the first ready to move, immediately left Licata and arrived at the 1st ID Headquarters near Villarosa at 0100 on 22 July. Allen gave verbal orders to move northeast, with the final reconnaissance objective being the junction of Highways 117 and 120 near Nicosia (see Map 3). After moving mounted all day over rugged terrain, the troop encountered enemy troops defending the town of Villadoro at 1700 on the 22nd. Having accomplished their mission of regaining contact with the enemy, Troop A remained on the outskirts of Villadoro while elements from the 16th Regimental Combat Team (RCT) moved forward to seize it on the night of 22 July.[73] Troop A reported to the 16th RCT that no routes to the village were suitable for vehicles. With this critical information in hand, the 16th RCT devised a plan to send a dismounted patrol from the 1st Battalion to seize Villadoro, which was accomplished by the afternoon of 23 July.[74]

[73] Ellis, "Summation of Battle Operations," 4.

[74] H. R. Knickerbocker, Jack Thompson, Jack Belden, Don Whitehead, A. J. Liebling, Mark Watson, Cy Peterman, Iris Carpenter, R. E. Dupuy, Drew Middleton, and Former Officers of the Division, *Danger Forward: The Story of the First Infantry Division in World War II* (Washington: Society of the First Division, 1947), 121.

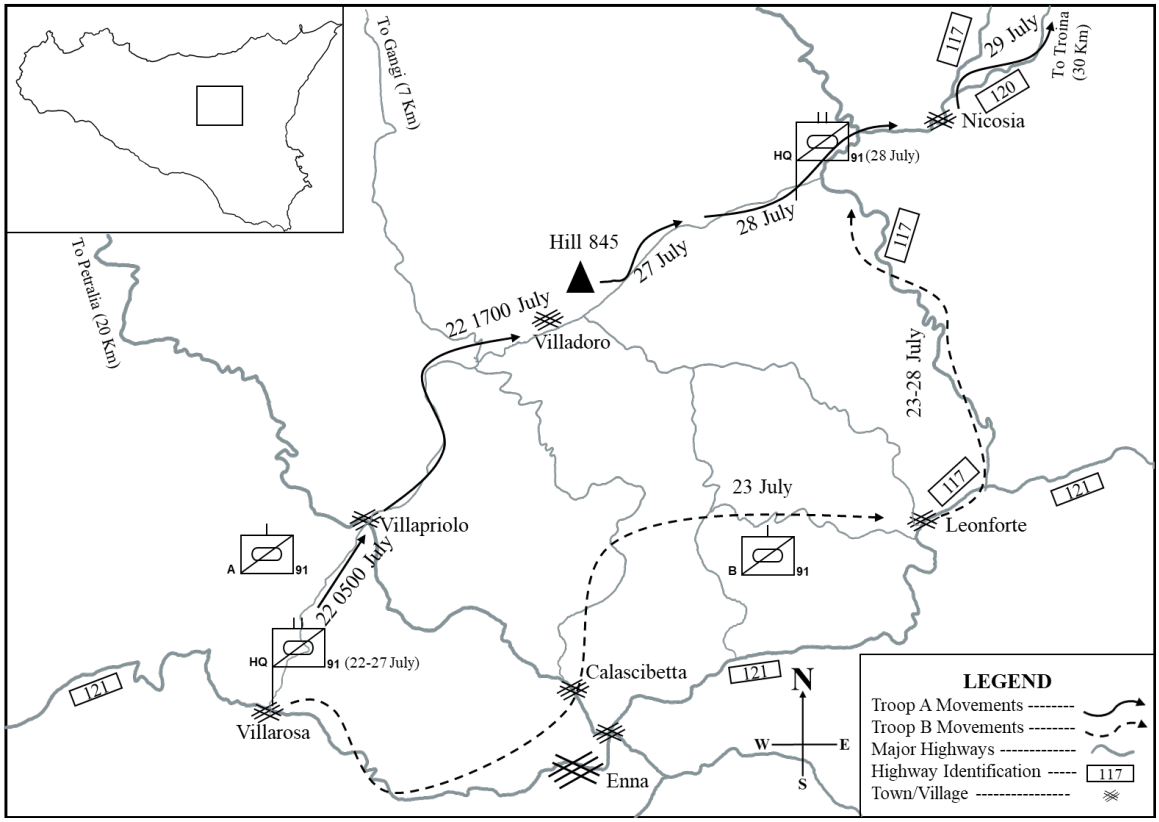

Figure 7. Prelude to Troina, 22-28 July 1943.

Source: Created by author.

This is a classic example of a doctrinal security mission, which calls for a screen, guard, or covering force to move out ahead or on the flanks of the main body to locate the enemy. Once this is accomplished, doctrine calls for supporting maneuver elements (infantry or armor) to come forward to deliver the final blow. As the 1941 edition of *Field Service Regulations, Operations* states, "The *primary mission* of a security detachment is to protect the command against surprise attack and observation by hostile air and ground forces, and to maintain freedom of maneuver for the command by gaining

the time and space it requires to make the necessary dispositions."[75] Troop A's actions at Villadoro is just one example among many in which various elements from the 91st CRS performed security patrols to allow regiment, division, or corps commanders to develop the situation and employ maneuver forces against the enemy.

Officially, from 23-28 July Allen assigned the 91st CRS to "cover the gap" between the 16th RCT near Enna and the remainder of the 1st ID operating farther north. However, in reality the 91st CRS was essentially executing a southern flank guard mission while the bulk of 1st ID attacked northward to Petralia, then east to Gagi, approximately twenty kilometers (or more than forty kilometers by road) northwest of Villadoro. During this period the 91st CRS was responsible for roughly fifteen kilometers of frontage in extremely mountainous terrain with little more than a few trails available to facilitate their movement through most of the sector. While the 91st received intermittent support from the 16th RCT, the squadron was essentially on its own for several days while the remainder of 1st ID executed this left-hook maneuver. On several occasions, the 16th RCT was only able to provide a platoon-sized force to support the 91st while the remainder of the RCT acted as the II Corps reserve, guarded ammunition dumps in Enna, or was otherwise unable to provide assistance due to the rough terrain.[76]

On 23 July, Troop B arrived in the vicinity of Villarosa and was dispatched to operate on the right flank of Troop A. Troop B therefore moved out towards Calascibetta. After passing through Leonforte, which the Canadians had fought bitterly for over the

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[75] United States War Department, FM 100-5, 48.

[76] Knickerbocker, et. al., *Danger Forward,* 123-125.

past week and finally captured on 22 July, Troop B turned north towards Nicosia along Highway 117.

During this period there was a noticeable difference in the nature of the German defensive tactics. An intelligence summary from 23 July issued by the First Canadian Division noted that:

> This resolute defence is something new. Hitherto the German rearguard has pulled stakes cleanly and retired some 8 or 10 miles to a new position. The fact that they are not voluntarily retiring from their latest strongpoint but are fighting for every yard of ground indicates that we are nearing something like a serious defence zone.[77]

Indeed, both Troops A and B experienced slow progress and bitter fighting over the next several days, averaging less than two miles advance per day. Both Troops received heavy artillery fire from the defending Germans in Nicosia and the surrounding area. On the 25th, after being reinforced with a platoon of light tanks from Troop E, Troop A moved beyond Villadoro and began a two-day fight for Hill 845 and the surrounding area along the southwest approach to Nicosia.

After hard fighting and slow progress against stiff resistance from the German 104th Panzer Regiment, elements of the 91st CRS finally moved into Nicosia on D+19, 29 July. The slow progress and bitter fighting experienced over the preceding four days was just a foretaste of what the Squadron would experience in the days ahead during the Battle of Troina. Harry Yeide writes:

> This was the story as the 91st Reconnaissance Squadron worked its way across Sicily: leading the advance, pushing Germans off hills to establish observation

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[77] G.W.L. Nicholson, *Official History of the Canadian Army in the Second World War, Vol II: The Canadians in Italy 1943-1945 (*Ottawa: Queen's Printer and Controller of Stationery, 1956), 112.

> posts, directing artillery against the next group of dug-in infantry. At times the recon men were operating several miles ahead of the infantry.[78]

Indeed, General Allen and the rest of the 1st ID relied heavily on the men of the 91st as they spent nearly the entire operation on or beyond the front lines.

According to the 1st ID official history the 91st CRS' actions in the Villadoro-Leonforte sector were performed:

> most effectively; in fact, by infiltrating tanks and armored cars over what the Germans had considered an impassable mountain barrier, it developed a threat against the German south flank which caused a diversion of troops and greatly assisted the First Infantry Division in its drive northward to Petralia. Such flank guard missions, always posing a threat of an envelopment of the German south flank, were continued by the Squadron through the battle at Troina.[79]

This description shows the remarkable skill the troopers of the 91st CRS had in maneuvering their heavy vehicles over difficult mountainous terrain. By operating in places where the enemy did not expect it, the 91st CRS posed a strong enough threat to the defending German and Italian troops to force them to reposition, thereby disrupting their defense and thinning their perimeter. The adept off-road maneuverability displayed by the cavalrymen in the 91st was one of the defining characteristics of the unit's utility and skill during Operation Husky.

A Canadian soldier operating near Leonforte during that period commented that "Sicily is a terrible place to manoeuvre. . . We were never quite sure where we were, as the ground was terribly rough and badly broken. [It is] very desolate, rocky, dry and

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[78] Yeide, *Steeds of Steel*, 71-2.

[79] Knickerbocker, et. al., *Danger Forward,* 117.

mountainous."[80] The fact that the scouts of the 91st CRS were able to maneuver and fight over this terrain is truly remarkable. However, they did not execute these movements unsupported. The Table of Organization and Equipment in place at the time called for each CRS to include a Pioneer and Demolition (P&D) platoon equipped with four vehicles and thirteen personnel to enable the mobility of the squadron.[81] The amount of destroyed bridges, minefields, road craters was substantial, and as a result the P&D Platoon might very well have been the hardest working formation in the squadron. Indeed, the need for engineer support greatly surpassed the availability of manpower. Their efforts were inexorably slow and tedious, yet successful in keeping the squadron on the move throughout the operation.

As discussed in chapter one, a few days after the landings began, General Harold R. L. G. Alexander, the 15th Army Group Commander, decided to shift the U.S.-British boundary farther west to allow General Bernard L. Montgomery's British 8th Army the use of Highway 124 in his upcoming attack north from the beaches around Mount Etna towards Messina.[82] This decision had severely restricted the ability of Lieutenant General George S. Patton's 7th Army to attack along its right flank. Put simply, this decision essentially relegated the Americans to doing little more than serve as a flank guard for the

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[80] Mark Zuehlke, *Operation Husky: The Canadian Invasion of Sicily, July 10-August 7, 1943* (Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 2008), 337. This comment was made by Lieutenant John A. Dougan, a platoon leader in Company D, Loyal Edmonton Regiment, a Canadian unit operating in the vicinity of Leonforte.

[81] United States War Department, Cavalry Field Manual 2-30, *Cavalry Mechanized Reconnaissance Squadron* (Washington DC: Government Printing Office, 1943), 96.

[82] Atkinson, *The Day of Battle*, 124.

British while Montgomery's 8th Army did all the fighting. In response to this decision, the U.S. 45th Infantry Division had been forced to relocate to allow the British the use of their newly acquired maneuver space. On 16 July, the 45th Division had repositioned from the east to the west of the 1st ID.[83] This move had placed the 1st ID to the far right of Patton's 7th Army. Furthermore, MG Allen had assigned the 91st CRS to operate on the far right of the division. As a result, the 91st was made responsible for maintaining contact and communication with the British Eighth Army to ensure the two forces did not create a seam, whereby either force could leave the other's flank exposed. The 91st operated along the seam between the British and American armies from the 24 to 31 July.

The Fight for Gigliano and the Earning of a Medal of Honor

The arrival of Troop C near Nicosia on 30 July brought the entire squadron together for the first time as the 1st ID approached the key road junction at Troina. Troina was positioned along the heavily defended "Etna Line," which spanned the island continuously from the northern coast and ran along the western edge of the volcanic Mount Etna to the southeastern coast (see Map 1). Some members of Troop A were in their twentieth day of continuous operations, and the arrival of Troop C allowed the weary cavalrymen to slow down. From 29 July to 5 August, Troop A maintained an Observation Post (OP) to the west of Troina providing continual observation of the town during that period. Responsibility for manning the OP rotated between platoons in Troop A, while the remainder of the unit received some much-needed rest.

[83] Garland and Smyth, *Sicily and the Surrender of Italy*, 231.

Unlike Troop A's stationary role during this period, Troops B and C conducted patrols and reconnaissance missions to the south and northwest of Troina, respectively. Once again, Troop B made contact with the First Canadian Division from Montgomery's British Eighth Army on 30 July, this time near the town of Agria.[84] As they approached Gigliano from the south on 31 July, Troop B discovered a large road crater blocking the only trafficable route leading to the city. While awaiting the P&D Platoon to assist in repairing the road, Staff Sergeant Gerry Kisters led a patrol up to the high ground adjacent to the road to provide security. Upon reaching a crest of the hill, SSG Kisters caught a German machine gun nest by surprise and quickly captured three Germans from the 29th Motorized Division before they could put up a fight. A second machine gun nest approximately a hundred yards farther up the hill began firing down on them, so Kisters quickly turned over the prisoners to another trooper and advanced under fire alone. Although he suffered a total of seven wounds from snipers – three in each leg and one in the right arm –Kisters succeeded in killing three Germans and forcing a fourth to retreat.[85] For his actions in eliminating these two machine gun nests, Kisters was later awarded the Medal of Honor. He became the first man in the European Theater of Operations to receive both the Medal of Honor and the Distinguished Service Cross, the latter of which he had earned in Tunisia in May 1943.[86]

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[84] Ellis, "Summation of Battle Operations," 9.

[85] Dean and Hulse, *The 91st Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron and WW II*, 66.

[86] The story detailing how SSG Kisters earned both the Distinguished Service Cross and the Medal of Honor appeared in the April 21st 1944 issue of *YANK* Magazine: Jack Morris, "Lt. Gerry Kisters, the first soldier in the war to receive both the DSC and

After the P&D Platoon completed repairs on the road crater, LTC Charles Ellis, the 91st CRS Commander, ordered Troop B to attack Gagliano on 1 August. Ellis gave Troop B a platoon of tanks from Troop E, the P&D Platoon, and the antitank platoon from Headquarters Troop, which was equipped with 37mm anti-tank guns. By 1600 on 1 August, Troop B seized the town and continued to advance north towards Troina. This seizure was critical in securing the division's right flank, and it set the conditions for the upcoming attack on Troina.[87] The Division G3's journal records that the fight for Gigliano was "a hell of a scrap."[88] Carlo D'Este asserts that Troina and Gigliano "was one of the best-defended German sectors of the entire Sicily campaign."[89] After seizing Gigliano, Troop B discovered that the road leading north to Troina was heavily mined.[90] The troop established an OP four miles to the east while the P&D Platoon repaired potholes and cleared landmines from the roadways.

The Battle of Troina, 1-6 August 1943

Although the fight for Gigliano was tough, the next objective just five miles farther north would prove to be much tougher. The U.S. Army's official history calls

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Medal of Honor, sweated out 22 months in this Army before he made corporal," *YANK: The Army Weekly* 2, no. 44 (April 21, 1944): 2.

[87] Knickerbocker, et. al., *Danger Forward*, 131.

[88] D'Este, *Bitter Victory*, 462.

[89] Ibid.

[90] Knickerbocker, et. al., *Danger Forward*, 134.

Troina "a natural strongpoint, built on a bluff ridge, high and dominating."[91] Indeed, Troina is one of the highest villages in Sicily; an attacker coming from any direction must fight uphill to seize it (see Figure 5). LTC Ellis ordered Troop C to conduct a reconnaissance patrol east along Highway 120 to the town. The patrol discovered that several bridges along the western approach to Troina had been destroyed. The patrol's jeeps were able to climb the steep banks to continue on. However, the patrol identified several craters at each stream crossing, which indicated the Germans had artillery registered on the chokepoints.[92] Despite the looming sense of entering a trap, the patrol continued on to a point just below the final hill crest outside of Troina. Still not in contact with any enemy elements, the patrol dismounted their jeeps and continued over the crest of the hill along Highway 120 on foot. Shortly after cresting the hill and in full view of Troina, the Germans finally unleashed a barrage of direct and indirect fire on the patrol.

[91] Garland and Smyth, *The Surrender of Italy,* 328.

[92] Salter, *Recon Scout*, 138.

Figure 8. View looking Northwest from Troina towards Cerami

Source: United States Army Center of Military History, *Pictoral Record-The War Against Germany and Italy: Mediterranean and Adjacent Areas* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1951), 130.
NOTE: This view shows the dominating position the town held over the surrounding area.

Although it was seemingly suicidal to conduct patrols in such a manner, Troop C performed a vital role in determining the composition and disposition of enemy defenses before other maneuver elements entered the area. After successfully retrograding from Troina, the patrol from Troop C provided a detailed report of enemy positions, including detailed coordinates of several artillery pieces surrounding the city.[93] Both LTG Patton and MG Allen were present when the patrol from Troop C returned from Troina to give

[93] Salter, *Recon Scout*, 140.

its report.[94] This critical information helped the 7th Army and 1st ID Commanders decide on what actions to take next. No doubt the reconnaissance report provided by Troop C caught the two generals by surprise: both had believed that Troina was only lightly defended.[95] MG Allen decided to order the 16th RCT to seize Troina itself, while the 26th and 39th RCTs attacked along the northern flank and the 18th RCT attacked along the southern flank (see Map 4). Despite having nine battalions of direct support artillery, the attack on 1 August failed to gain any ground. The heavily entrenched Germans retaliated with devastating artillery fire, which ultimately drove the attacking 1st ID back to their Line of Departure.[96]

Over the next several days MG Allen pressed the attack repeatedly, and the 91st CRS provided support by seizing high ground just outside Troina. The scouts of the 91st worked closely with the 16th and 18th RCTs while conducting dismounted reconnaissance missions on the outskirts of Troina, and they were able to identify and report several minefields surrounding the town. The German 15th Panzer Grenadier Division fought tenaciously for six days before finally withdrawing on 7 August after suffering 1,600 casualties.[97]

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[94] Salter, *Recon Scout*, 142-3.

[95] D'Este, *Bitter Victory,* 463.

[96] Ibid.

[97] Salter, *Recon Scout*, 147.

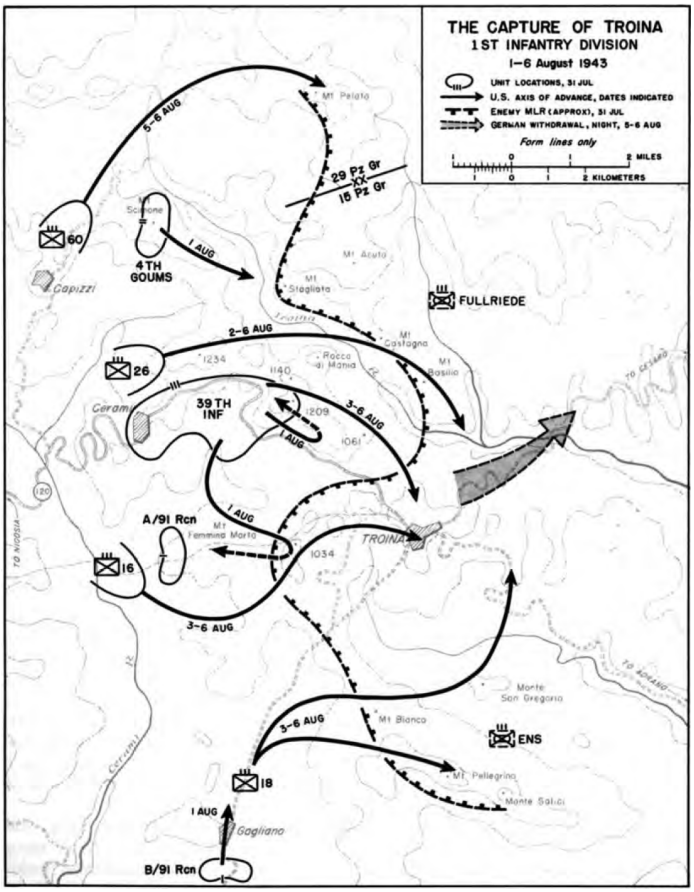

Figure 9. The Capture of Troina

Source: Albert Garland and Howard Smyth, *Sicily and the Surrender of Italy* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1965), 335.

The Battle of Troina marked a significant turning point in the campaign. The 1st ID suffered 1,600 casualties during the battle, equivalent to forty percent of the division's overall combat strength.[98] Devastating casualties, low morale, and poor discipline within the division caused Lieutenant General Omar Bradley, the II Corps Commander, to fire both Terry Allen and his assistant divisional commander, Brigadier General Theodore

[98] Mitcham and von Stauffenberg. *The Battle of Sicily*, 251.

Roosevelt, Jr. following the battle. However, the questionable performance by the division's top leadership should not diminish the accomplishment of the soldiers within the Big Red One. The Battle of Troina represents some of the toughest fighting experienced by the U.S. Army up until that point in history. In fact, Eisenhower's personal observer in the 7th Army Headquarters, Major General John P. Lucas noted that the battle was the toughest fighting experienced by American soldiers since World War I.[99]

Reassignment to the 9th Infantry Division

On 7 August, immediately after 1st ID seized Troina, the squadron commander tasked Troop C to conduct reconnaissance patrols along the unimproved road leading southeast out of Troina towards the town of Adrano, at the foot of Mount Etna, to regain contact with the First Canadian Division. This was accomplished without prior coordination of radio or visual signaling. Rather, both Troop C and Canadian forces advanced towards each other along the dirt highway until gaining visual contact and yelling out to each other to confirm whether approaching forces were friend or foe. Both elements showed restraint and prudence by avoiding a potential fratricidal incident.[100]

[99] Mitcham and von Stauffenberg. *The Battle of Sicily*, 251.

[100] Ellis, "Summation of Battle Operations," 11.

Table 2. Unit Attachments and Supported Commands

Dates (1943)	Unit(s)	Attached to
10-20 July	Section from Troop A	1st Infantry Division
20-29 July	Entire SQDN (Less Troop C)	1st Infantry Division
30 July-8 August	Entire SQDN	1st Infantry Division
7 August	1st ID (including 91st CRS, less Troop C)	II Corps (As Reserve)
7 August	Troop C	60th Infantry Regt, (part of 9th ID)
9-15 August	Entire SQDN	9th Infantry Division
15 August	Troop C	Relieved from 60th Infantry Regt, returned to SQDN

Source: Created by author.

Following an exchange of information with the Canadians on their flank, II Corps immediately reassigned Troop C to support the 60th Infantry Regiment under the 9th ID. The remainder of the 91st CRS, along with the entire 1st ID, became the II Corps reserve (see Table 2). Troop C moved northeast from Troina along Highway 120 to the town of Cesaro to begin an off-road reconnaissance mission moving north over the Nebrodi mountain range, which contains peaks over 6,000 feet in elevation (see Figure 6). Tasked with locating a resupply route over the mountains reportedly constructed by the Germans, Troop C identified that no such route actually existed. Rather, the troop advanced over some of the most rugged terrain thus far traversed along nothing better than a small mule trail. One trooper remembered that "Many times we had to dismount and push [our] scout car up the trail."[101]

[101] Salter, *Recon Scout*, 151.

Figure 10. View Looking North from Cesaro (left center)

Source: Albert Garland and Howard Smyth, *Sicily and the Surrender of Italy* (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1965), 355.
NOTE: Troop C began their reconnaissance from this location on 7 August, crossing the mountainous terrain in the top right portion of the photograph ultimately moving beyond the ridgeline visible in the distance.

The troop proceeded to Monte del Moro and established an OP overwatching the town of Floresta.[102] After confirming that the town was unoccupied, Troop C advanced beyond the town towards the northern coast of the island. In total, Troop C advanced approximately thirty miles over extremely mountainous terrain with very few roads or trails to assist their movement. In fact, by the time Troop C broke radio silence to report

[102] Ellis, "Summation of Battle Operations," 12.

their final OP locations, II Corps Headquarters was in disbelief. After asking the patrol to confirm their coordinates, the Corps Headquarters notified Troop C that they were twenty miles behind German lines.[103]

Troop C's actions during this period represent a key moment in the utility of mechanized cavalry during the Sicilian campaign. A combination of small-unit initiative, exceptional off-road mobility, and an intuitive ability to maintain tempo placed Troop C in a key position. From their coastal lookouts, Troop C enabled the 3rd ID to advance at a more rapid pace during a critical period in the campaign when time was of the essence. Upon hearing of this windfall asset in position to observe enemy actions deep behind the front lines, II Corps instructed the scouts in Troop C to remain undetected at all costs, and to report all troop movements along the coastal Highway 113.

Although the 1st ID received some much-needed rest after the Battle of Troina, the 91st CRS was not as lucky. After only two days' rest, II Corps reassigned it to the newly arrived 9th Infantry Division on 9 August and continued fighting east towards Messina. Troop C remained in support of the 60th Infantry Regiment. Over the next two weeks, the Squadron operated in a very decentralized and piecemeal fashion. Fred Salter, a squad leader in 2nd Platoon, Troop C, 91st CRS recalled that during this period,

> Very few mounted patrols were larger than a platoon, and sometimes they consisted of only a squad. We tried to locate the roadblocks and ambushes ahead or capture a prisoner to obtain information about the enemy's plans. I very seldom knew about the missions assigned to the rest of the platoons in the troop. It seemed that each troop operated in a world of its own, sometimes being miles apart.[104]

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[103] Salter, *Recon Scout*, 151.

[104] Ibid., 136.

The decentralized nature of the squadron's operations during this period was a critical and unique advantage, which the 91st CRS could give to its supported headquarters. Unlike tank or infantry formations, which performed most effectively when employed as a large unified maneuver force, the 91st CRS could operate effectively even when divided down to the squad level. This ability to operate in small units gave commanders at all levels the ability to employ reconnaissance forces wherever they were needed on the battlefield to provide critical information about the enemy and terrain ahead of friendly units.

On 9 August, after only two days of rest since the end of the Battle of Troina, II Corps reassigned the remainder of the squadron to support the 9th ID. From 10 to 14 August, Troop B conducted route reconnaissance along Highway 120 between Troina and Randazzo (see Map 5). The squadron assigned Troop A, with an attached platoon of tanks from Troop E, to follow closely behind Troop B and conduct dismounted patrols north of Highway 120.[105] During this period, the squadron identified numerous destroyed bridges, minefields, and other obstructions limiting mobility. As a result, the troops conducted numerous patrols off road using dismounted scouts to identify bypass routes. Additionally, the P&D platoon stayed busy during this time repairing roads and clearing mines.

[105] Ellis, "Summation of Battle Operations," 7.

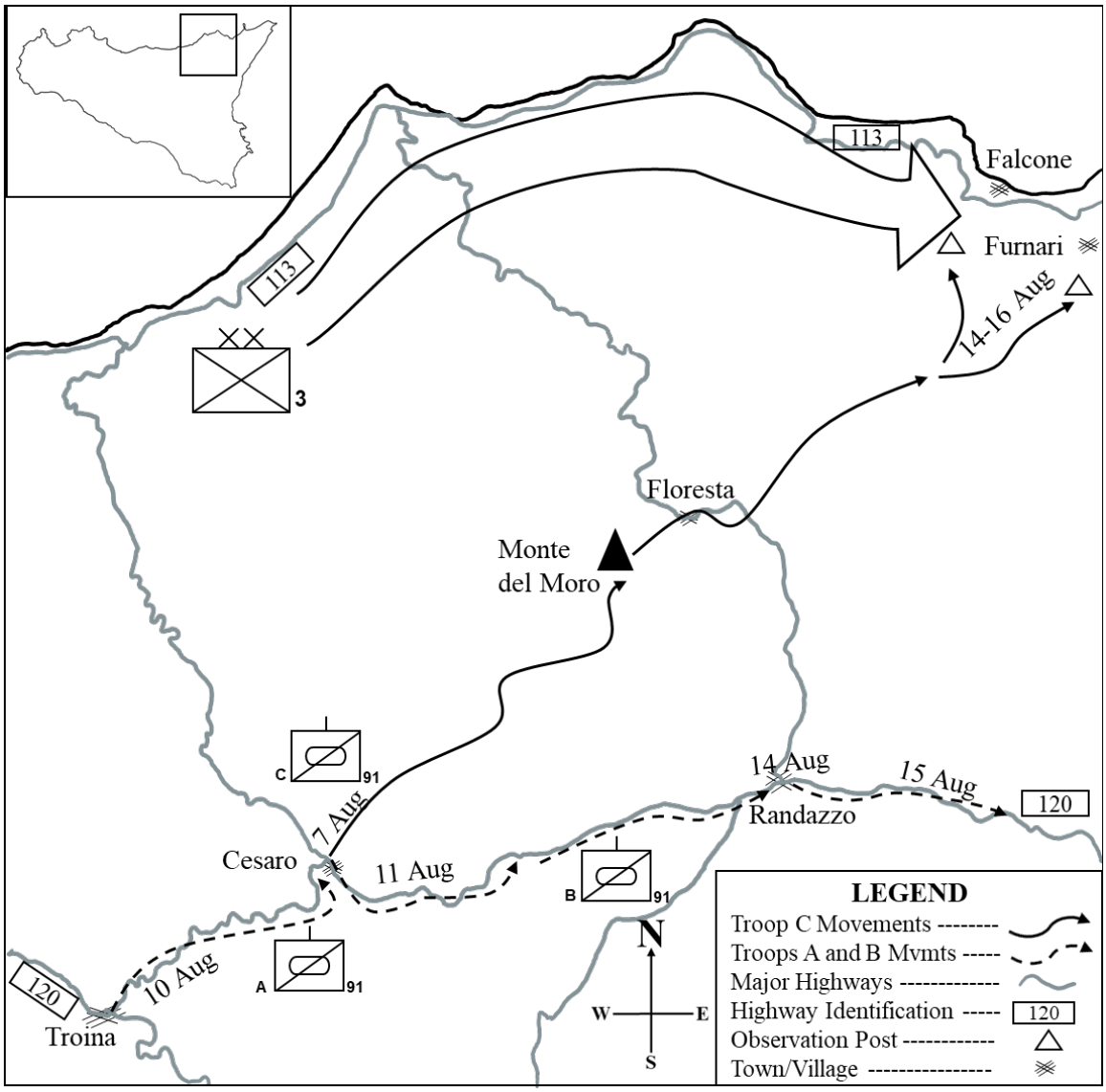

Figure 11. The Final Week of Operation Husky

Source: Created by author.

Artillery fire and dense minefields brought movement to a near-standstill in the vicinity of Randazzo. Over a dozen soldiers were injured by mine explosions during the advance. With the assistance of engineers, the roads were finally cleared and the advance continued eastward. The Germans took advantage of the delay caused by the mines to

withdraw closer to Messina, just as they had done over the past several weeks. When Troop B finally reached Randazzo on 14 August, no Germans remained inside the city.[106] The following morning, a platoon from Troop B conducted a mounted patrol and advanced more than ten miles east of Randazzo to establish a roadblock in the town of Francavilla. No enemy troops were encountered during this movement. However, several trucks loaded with mines that had not yet been emplaced were captured, indicating the speed at which the Germans were retreating to the northeastern tip of the island.[107]

From 14 to 15 August, Troop C maintained their OPs over watching the towns of Falcone and Furnari, both of which commanded a view of the strategically important coastal highway and the sea beyond. During this period, Troop C provided detailed reports of German troop movements along Highway 113, which greatly assisted Patton's advance towards Messina during the final days of the operation. On at least one occasion, the German defenders withdrew from coastal towns towards Messina before Allied troops arrived. By reporting these withdrawals, Troop C assisted in guiding the 7th Army during its advance towards Messina. Additionally, the troop linked up with reconnaissance elements from the 3rd ID and provided valuable intelligence gathered over the past several days of observing the highway.[108] Once the 3rd ID advanced beyond Troop C's OPs, the troop assisted in patrolling the northern coastal road.

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[106] Ellis, "Summation of Battle Operations," 10.

[107] Ibid.

[108] Ibid., 12.

On the afternoon of 15 August, the 91st CRS in its entirety was relieved of its duties and began some much needed rest and vehicle repairs. The past several weeks had been characterized by heavy fighting and extremely rapid advances over rough terrain, which left the squadron's personnel and equipment in dire need of attention.

Conclusion

Overall, the 91st Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron advanced more than 150 miles over the course of the six-week campaign. All but a few of those miles were logged advancing into unknown enemy territory with no other friendly units traveling before them. Of the 824 men in the squadron, 53 were wounded and only eight were killed.[109] The low number of casualties is remarkable given to nature of the fighting the squadron experienced throughout the campaign. The squadron captured a total of 285 prisoners, including 236 Italians and 49 Germans.[110] During Operation Husky, the 91st operated in an astoundingly wide variety of circumstances. Missions varied from the squad to the squadron level, and ranged from reconnaissance, security, direct action, and liaison roles while supporting regimental combat team, division, and (briefly) corps commanders. Overall, the tactical actions of the 91st CRS enabled division and corps commanders to accomplish their missions. This operation demonstrated that division cavalry formations were vital to success in LSCO. Throughout the campaign the 91st performed with distinction as it carried more than its fair share of the weight in winning the ultimate victory for the Allies.

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[109] Dean and Hulse, *The 91st Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron and WW II*, 67.

[110] Ibid., 71.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Several conclusions are apparent from this examination of the 91st Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron, Mechanized (CRS) during Operation Husky. Above all, this study shows the undeniable utility of Division Cavalry (DIV CAV) in large-scale ground combat. In large-scale combat it is particularly important that commanders at echelons above brigade have organic reconnaissance assets to support maneuver. Additionally, the 91st CRS as well as mechanized cavalry in general played a key role in highlighting the importance of fighting as a combined arms team. Furthermore, engineers in particular proved to be a critical asset needed to support the 91st CRS to its maximum effectiveness. Fourth and finally, this study shows that the 91st CRS was capable of performing a dizzying variety of missions, yet it was most effective while performing the traditional cavalry missions of reconnaissance and security.

The Necessity of DIV CAV in Large-scale Ground Combat Operations

First, this study reveals that DIV CAV squadrons are essential to enable echelons above brigade to maneuver during large-scale combat operations. The 91st CRS played a crucial role in enabling Omar Bradley's II Corps and its subordinate divisions to liberate Sicily during Operation Husky in the summer of 1943. There were a variety of ways - such as identifying trafficable routes, locating enemy strongholds, maintaining contact with flanking units, or seizing key terrain- in which the 91st CRS was instrumental in facilitating the decision-making of division and corps commanders. There is benefit in having reconnaissance units under the same headquarters to help filter reports to the

higher headquarters and paint the whole picture of what is happening on the battlefield. If each subordinate command employs their own recon element, then they are only looking at and reporting on a small piece of the battlefield. By employing DIV CAV during large-scale maneuver, division commanders can get a much clearer picture of the enemy situation in their sector by receiving consolidated reports from one element. The other alternative, relying on subordinate Brigade Combat Team commanders to send individual reports, will result in an isolated and disaggregated picture of the battlefield.

For example, during the final week of the campaign Troop C operated separately from the remainder of the squadron. Although attached to the 60th Infantry Regiment at the time, Troop C was also in contact with the 3rd Infantry Division (ID) as it approached along the northern coastal highway towards Messina. Meanwhile, the remainder of the squadron supported the advance of the 9th ID farther inland. By maintaining contact with multiple headquarters simultaneously, the 91st was able to paint a clear and complete picture of the battlefield as the various isolated elements of Patton's 7th Army approached Messina.

Following the war, the value of DIV CAV was not lost. A report published by the Armor School at Fort Knox, Kentucky in 1950 concluded that:

> It can be readily seen that the cavalry concept of having a force solely devoted to reconnaissance and security with each major force or command has proved a sound one, and that it was the basic reason for the inclusion of such an organization as the cavalry reconnaissance squadron, mechanized, within the armored division.[111]

Based on the experience of the 91st CRS, this was a wise conclusion.

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[111] The Armored School, "Operation of Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron Integral to the Armored Division," 31.

Mechanized Cavalry's Role in Forging a Combined Arms Tradition

Additionally, this study highlights the key role mechanized cavalry played as the U.S. Army learned to fight using combined arms. Innovative cavalrymen were some of the first soldiers to visualize the importance and possibilities of mechanized combined arms teams. According to a research report published by the Armored School at Fort Knox, Kentucky in 1950, cavalry leaders began visualizing an expanded role for mechanized cavalry as early as 1938.[112] The report states that cavalrymen during this period "visualized a type of organization which had organic supporting elements including artillery, air, signal and engineer units."[113] Correspondingly, in an address to the Army War College in September 1939, Brigadier General Adna R. Chaffee said:

> In its [mechanized cavalry's] operation are intimately combined air and ground reconnaissance, artillery, machine gun and mortar supporting fires, assault with armor protection which may penetrate deep and fast at one point and be suddenly stopped at another and require rapid reorganization and re-direction; the rapid bringing up of immediate support; these have a complicated maintenance and supply and must be bound together with the best of communications.[114]

Here Chaffee highlights not only the need for combined arms, but also the requisite supporting elements such as maintenance, supply, and communications. This visionary mindset or fighting as a combined arms team is representative of the innovative ways in which newly mechanized cavalry units entered the early stages of combat in World War II.

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[112] The Armored School, "Operation of Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron Integral to the Armored Division," 12.

[113] Ibid.

[114] Adna R. Chaffee, "Mechanized Cavalry," (lecture, The Army War College, Washington, DC, September 29, 1939), 32.

During Operation Husky the 91st CRS habitually fought in combined arms elements. The squadron fought both mounted (on vehicles) and dismounted (on foot) while employing a variety of weapons and vehicles including machine guns, mortars, motorcycles, jeeps, scout cars, light tanks, and other pieces of equipment, all of which were organic to the squadron. They also employed a variety of assets from other units, including artillery, airplanes, engineers, and naval gunfire.[115] As the oldest mechanized cavalry unit in the U.S. Army, the 91st CRS was foundational in establishing this combined arms tradition.

In general, the organization of the 91st into three reconnaissance troops, one support (light tank) troop, and one headquarters troop was effective during Operation Husky. The reconnaissance troops utilized their vehicles to travel over long distances and to carry supplies and heavy weapons yet retained the ability to conduct dismounted operations when needed. The light tank troop provided essential firepower on several occasions throughout the campaign. Today DIV CAV squadrons should retain similar capabilities with only minor modifications. Specifically, rather than keeping tanks in a separate troop, they should be distributed to provide one platoon of tanks to each reconnaissance troop. During Husky, the squadron commander frequently assigned tank platoons to support the reconnaissance troops. Indeed, Troop E never fought above the platoon level throughout the operation. Another modification needed for today's DIV

[115] While observing the northern coastal highway near the town of Falcone it is likely that Troop C reported the results of ongoing naval bombardments in support of Patton's 7th Army. It is unclear if Troop C was actually directing the naval bombardment. More likely, they were passively observing it and reporting the bombardment was taking place. See Salter, *Recon Scout*, 150.

CAV organizations is to supplant light tanks with Main Battle Tanks. This would provide troop commanders with the capability to fight for information or conduct counter-reconnaissance against a variety of opposing forces.

The Importance of Organic Engineers

A third conclusion seen in this study is that engineer support was critical to the success of the 91st during Operation Husky. LTC Charles Ellis, the commander of the 91st CRS during Husky, wrote an article in *The Cavalry Journal* two years after the operation in which he explained how the unit encountered frequent road blocks, craters, or other obstacles emplaced by defending or retreating German and Italian troops. He asserts that "Such destruction is to be expected in withdrawal action by the enemy," yet this proved to be particularly troublesome for mechanized cavalry units because they "frequently caused loss of contact with enemy elements."[116] General Patton later wrote that engineers during Operation Husky "performed prodigies in the construction and maintenance of impossible roads over impassable country."[117]

During Operation Husky the squadron's organic Pioneer and Demolition (P&D) platoon stayed busy in a seemingly unending series of tasks required to allow the squadron to continue moving forward. However, this small platoon -thirteen men at full strength- was not enough to handle such a heavy load. As a result, following Husky LTC Ellis acquired additional engineer equipment including a bulldozer, motor-driven saws,

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[116] Charles A. Ellis, "Demolition Obstacles to Reconnaissance," *The Cavalry Journal* 54, no. 3 (May-June 1945), 28-29.

[117] Headquarters, Seventh Army, "General Order Number 18," 22 August 1943, quoted in Patton, *War as I Knew It*, 62.

and numerous hand tools prior to the initiation of the Italian campaign. As he explains in his article, Ellis obtained permission to receive fifteen percent "over strength for expected casualties." After putting the men through a week of training, he used the extra manpower and equipment to create an experimental "reconnaissance engineer platoon." Ellis "believed it was particularly important for the 91st to have its own engineers, since as a corps asset it often moved to different sectors of the front and could not depend on the support of higher headquarters."[118] Overall the experimental platoon proved to be extremely successful until April 1944 when superiors forced the 91st to relinquish its additional personnel and equipment.[119]

Ellis' hard-earned experience should not be taken lightly. His recommendation for DIV CAV squadrons to possess organic engineer assets would undoubtedly prove to be beneficial even today. If divisions are to maneuver and fight in large-scale ground combat, their reconnaissance assets must have the organic capability to preserve mobility in order to maintain contact with the enemy. Indeed, one conclusion drawn from the Mechanized Cavalry General Board was that mechanized cavalry squadrons should be self-sufficient.[120] This further highlights the importance of having engineers and other supporting elements organic within the DIV CAV organization.

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[118] Morton, *Men on Iron Ponies*, 138.

[119] Brigadier General Hamilton S. Hawkins, a former commander of the First Cavalry Division, made a similar recommendation to marry reconnaissance elements with engineer elements in a 1943 *Cavalry Journal* article. See Hamilton S. Hawkins, "Tactical Exercises and Maneuver Formations for a Cavalry Division," *The Cavalry Journal* 52, no. 4 (July-August 1943), 61.

[120] The General Board, *Mechanized Cavalry Units* (Washington, DC: Chief of Military History, 1945), 21.

Of note, this engineer capability must be fairly substantial. Fifteen percent of the manpower in the 91st CRS equals roughly 125 personnel. While it is unclear how many men served in the experimental "reconnaissance engineer platoon," the original thirteen assigned to the organic P&D Platoon clearly was not enough. Future DIV CAV squadrons should be structured in such a way as to provide a robust platoon at a minimum, and perhaps even a full company of engineers equipped with a variety of equipment designed to provide mobility to maneuver forces.

The Proper Uses of Cavalry Units

The fourth and final conclusion drawn from this study is that while mechanized cavalry has the capability to perform a wide variety of missions, it is best employed in the traditional roles of reconnaissance and security. Troop B's seizure of Gigliano on 1 August 1943 is perhaps the most obvious example of the 91st being employed outside of its primary doctrinal role. Undoubtedly the nearby 18th Regimental Combat Team would have been a more suitable unit to complete this mission. Nonetheless, Troop B followed their orders and accomplished the mission.

Fred H. Salter, who served as a squad leader with the 91st CRS in North Africa, Sicily, and Italy recalled that "Many times we were put on the front lines to fight alongside the infantry."[121] Similarly, the marching song which Salter and his fellow cavalrymen composed during the war, "The Rough and Ready Recon," provides insight into the numerous roles in which commanders employed the 91st throughout the war. One verse of the song states:

[121] Salter, *Recon Scout*, 174-5.

We've been used as quartermaster,
We've fought as doughboys, too,
We've been M.P.'s, pack trains, engineers,
Ain't a job that we can't do.[122]

Similarly, another cavalryman from the 91st, C.H. "Pete" Hulse, wrote that "The use of 'Cavalry' in the Squadron's title is questionable. Sometime[s] we were, and sometime[s] we weren't."[123] These examples show that commanders frequently asked the 91st to perform tasks and missions far beyond their primary doctrinal role of stealthy reconnaissance.

Some cavalrymen were proud to proclaim the multifaceted utility of mechanized cavalry. For example, Major General I.D. White -the commander of the 2nd AD in 1945- wrote "There should be no limitations placed on the type of mission given to the cavalry mechanized unit. We should . . . teach that aggressive action generally requiring combat is the best way to obtain information of the enemy."[124] Similarly, in the foreword to the Armor School report on division cavalry squadrons published in 1950, Major General R.W. Grow writes that division cavalry squadrons in World War II "were equipped and trained to carry out every type of combat mission. The pages of this report disclose the amazing variety of situations which confront these, our most versatile units."[125]

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[122] Salter, *Recon Scout*, 175-6.

[123] Dean and Hulse, *The 91st Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron and WW II,* 18.

[124] General Board, *Mechanized Cavalry Units*, Appendix 10, 2.

[125] The Armored School, "Operation of Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron Integral to the Armored Division," ii.

Collectively, these examples demonstrate an impressive degree of adaptability inherent in mechanized cavalry.

However, the wide variety of missions given to the 91st was not the best use of its unique abilities. The 91st demonstrated the greatest impact while employed in the traditional cavalry roles of reconnaissance and security. For example, the flank guard mission performed by Troops A and B in the Villadoro-Leonforte sector from 23-28 July while the 1st ID attacked Petralia (see Map 3), and Troop C's observation of the northern coastal highway 113 from 14 to 15 August (see Map 5) are excellent examples of security and reconnaissance missions, respectively. In both missions commanders employed the 91st in such a way as to maximize the squadron's unique capabilities, including maneuverability, firepower, and communications.

The General Board convened just after World War II to analyze the performance of mechanized cavalry units during the war concluded:

> the future role of mechanized cavalry should be the traditional cavalry role of a highly mobile, heavily armed and lightly equipped combat force, and that the capability of mechanized cavalry, particularly that normally operating under the corps, to perform that role, should be exploited.[126]

While this recommendation mentions corps cavalry, the conclusion that mechanized cavalry is best used in traditional roles is equally applicable at the division level.

In the end, the 91st Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron, Mechanized, was truly a remarkable unit. Matthew Morton wrote of the 91st: "These troopers represented the future of all mechanized reconnaissance units."[127] By studying the operations of the 91st

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[126] General Board, *Mechanized Cavalry Units*, 20.

[127] Morton, *Men on Iron Ponies,* 123.

CRS during Operation Husky four primary conclusions are most apparent. First, to succeed in large-scale ground combat division commanders must have their own cavalry formation to employ on the battlefield. Second, the 91st aptly demonstrated the importance of fighting as a combined arms team. Third, engineers are of particular importance to cavalry formations who must remain mobile to maintain contact with enemy forces. Fourth, while cavalry organizations are highly adaptable and can perform a wide variety of missions, the most effective method of employing scouts is in the traditional reconnaissance and security setting.

In 2018 Lieutenant General Michael Lundy, the commander of the U.S. Army Combined Arms Center at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, wrote that "*Tactically focused future divisions must shape, dominate, and win the close fight*. . . Future Army divisions must have assigned reconnaissance and security, aviation, fires, maneuver enhancement, and sustainment formations in addition to capable brigade combat teams."[128] If Operation Husky is in any way similar to the wars of tomorrow, the lessons drawn from the 91st CRS will undoubtedly prove to be worthwhile.

[128] Michael D. Lundy, "Today and Tomorrow: Echelons Above Brigade-Combined Arms Maneuver in Large-Scale Ground Combat Operations," in *Bringing Order to Chaos: Historical Case Studies of Combined Arms Maneuver in Large Scale Combat Operations,* ed. Peter J. Schifferle (Fort Leavenworth, KS: Army University Press, 2018), 192.

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