

TAC NEWS

May-June 1996

Celebrating GHQ's

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GHQ

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US15 M4A3 Sherman



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US56 M3 Halftrack with tarp

US20 M20 Greyhound



Reorganizing the 1st Armored Division

After establishing a bridgehead across the Cecina River on July 20, 1944, 1st Armored Division (Old Ironsides) was ordered withdrawn to Bolgheri for rest and refit. As the division stood down, its commander, General Ernest Harmon, returned state side to assume a corps command. With the headquarters staff in transition and the division idle, it was decided to implement the "big change." The "big change" was the division's reorganization which had been on hold since September 1943.

The table of organization and equipment instituted by the US Army during September of 1943 established the character and identity of its armored divisions for the remainder of the war. The 1943 reorganization was not a cosmetic fine tuning, it was a fundamental restructuring. Gone were the tank and armored infantry regiments. Henceforth, these elements fought as independent battalions. The elimination of regimental structure- and its attendant command layer - increased tactical flexibility and the division's overall percentage of fighting men.

Immediately following the 1940 French campaign, it was thought US armored divisions would use blitzkrieg tactics. Tanks, massed into an armored phalanx, would shatter the enemy on a narrow front. Mechanized echelons would then exploit the gap, fanning out to target enemy lines of communication and supply. This scenario required the armored division, for a short period of time, to operate independently behind enemy lines cut-off from conventional supply sources. As a consequence, US armored divisions carried service and maintenance elements usually found only at the corps or army level.

As it turned out, American armor never fought that way. Tank units always worked in close concert with conventional infantry, with the infantry setting the pace. This pace was not solely determined by boot leather; the typical US infantry division was equivalent, in terms of mobility, to a panzer grenadier division. With corps and divisional supply sources always at hand, the redundant divisional service elements were eliminated.

Finally, it was decided to motorize some of the previously armored divisional elements. As early as 1943, the halftrack's combat role was being reassessed. Although it was not road-bound like a truck, its cross-country performance was marginal and its armor was only effective against rifle fire and shrapnel. These advantages were more than offset by the halftrack's increased maintenance requirements. It was therefore decided to mount some divisional elements, such as the engineers, in cheaper and more easily maintained trucks.

Much of the new T/O&E was based on North African battle experience gained at the expense of 1st Armored Division. It is ironic therefore that 1st Armored Division was one of the last American tank divisions to be restructured. Although the division down-sized at the conclusion of the Tunisian campaign, much of this was accomplished by farming out obsolete equipment to the French. The formal 1943 reorganization, however, was put on hold for almost a year because during that time the division was either in the line or on call as an immediate reserve force.

When it arrived at Bolgheri, 1st Armored Division had an assigned strength of 12,078, with an effective strength of 11,784. The new divisional muster pared the number of effectives down to 10,937 men. This radical reduction of personnel was no easy task, with the axe falling most heavily on staff personal. To the effected men, reorganization provided some with promotion or rotation back to the States. To most, however, the reassignment was to a replacement depot, where veterans of Kasserine and Anzio were lumped together with green recruits and schooled in elementary drill by officers untested in combat.

Units undergoing changes and reductions pooled organizational and individual equipment, and culled worn matériel. It was not possible to eliminate all vehicles in need of heavy maintenance, but the ones relinquished to Base Ordnance were thoroughly spent. In terms of equipment, therefore, the reorganization had the effect of refitting the entire division. In terms of personnel, however, the division also emerged as a brand new unit. This was not good. Morale sagged badly as units were dissolved, reduced, or restructured. The separation of close comrades, bonded by many months of hard campaigning, meant the loss of unit cohesion and combat effectiveness. Many thought the reorganization, done this late in the war, counterproductive.

Although its pride took a beating, Old Ironsides did not lose its sense of humor. On the last day of the 1st Armored Regiment's existence, the regimental commander, Lt. Col. Edson D. Schull, presented a formal request to the new commanding general. He asked that his command halftrack, *Blackhawk*, scheduled for transfer to Headquarters Company, 1st Tank Battalion, be rotated home. *Blackhawk*, said Colonel Schull, "came overseas with the regiment in June 1942, and has fought with us throughout our campaigns from the far reaches of Tunisia to Italy, the Anzio beachhead, Rome and the pursuit to the north, miraculously escaping destruction on numerous occasions. But *Blackhawk* is now worn out and well deserves assignment to a comfortable pasture. An occasional run down hill on a mild day is about all *Blackhawk* is capable of. It is hoped that this noble relic of a famous regiment will be properly taken care of in its remaining years and not permitted to go to the bone yard."

Effects of the July 20 1944 reorganization

The following units were disbanded:

From the 1st Armored Regiment:

Headquarters and Headquarters Companies of both the 2d and 3d Battalions and three line Companies (D, E, F)

From the 13th Armored Regiment:

Headquarters and Headquarters Companies of both the 1st and 2d Battalions and three line Companies (A, B, C)

From the 6th Armored Infantry:

Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 1st Battalion

From the 16th Armored Engineer Battalion:

Companies D and E (all battalion halftracks replaced with trucks)

The entire Supply Battalion, 1st Armored Division:

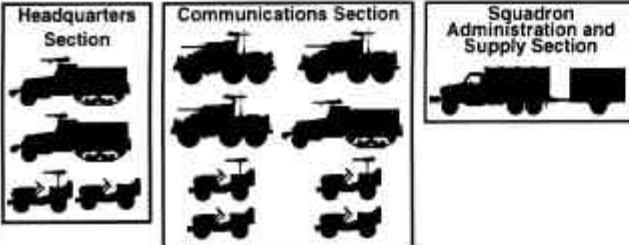
Class I, II, and IV quartermaster supplies reverted to army-level responsibility.

The following units were redesignated:

Existing Designation	New Designation
1st Armored Division	1st Armored Division
Service Company	Hq Battery, Div Artillery
Hq, Div Artillery Command	Hq, Div Artillery
Hq and Hq Det, CCA	Hq and Hq Co, CCA
Hq and Hq Det, CCB	Hq and Hq Co, CCB
81st Arm'd Recon Battalion (less Co D)	81st Cav Rcn Sqn, Mechanized (less Troops D and E, and Co F)
Co D, 81st Recon Battalion	Co F, 81st Cav Recon Squadron
1st Armored Regiment	1st Tank Battalion
Hq and Hq Company	Hq and Hq Company
Maintenance Company	Service Company
Service Company	Service Co, 11th Arm'd Inf Bn
Reconnaissance Company	Troop E, 81st Cav Rcn Sqn
Hq and Hq Company, 1st Bn	Service Co, 14th Arm'd Inf Bn
Company A	Company D, 4th Tank Battalion
Company B	Company D, 13th Tank Battalion
Company C	Company D, 1st Tank Battalion
Company G	Company A, 1st Tank Battalion
Company H	Company B, 1st Tank Battalion
Company I	Company C, 1st Tank Battalion
13th Armored Regiment	13th Tank Battalion
Hq and Hq Company	Hq and Hq Company
Service Company	Service Company
Company D	Company A
Company E	Company B
Company F	Company C
Maintenance Company	Service Co, 4th Tank Battalion
Reconnaissance Company	Troop D, 81st Cav Rcn Squadron
4th Tank Battalion	
Hq and Hq Company, 3d Bn	Hq and Hq Company
Company G	Company A
Company H	Company B
Company I	Company C
6th Armored Infantry	6th Armored Infantry Bn
Hq and Hq Company	Hq and Hq Company
Service Company	Service Company
Company A	Company A
Company B	Company B
Company C	Company C
11th Armored Infantry Battalion	
Hq and Hq Co, 2d Bn	Hq and Hq Co
Company D	Company A
Company E	Company B
Company F	Company C
14th Armored Infantry Battalion	
Hq and Hq Co, 3d Battalion	Hq and Hq Company
Company G	Company A
Company H	Company B
Company I	Company C
Maintenance Bn, 1st Arm'd Div	123rd Ordnance Maintenance Bn
47th Medical Battalion	47th Medical Battalion, Armored

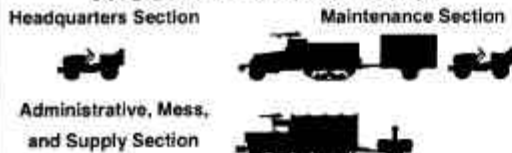
HEADQUARTERS & HEADQUARTERS & SERVICE TROOP

SQUADRON HEADQUARTERS

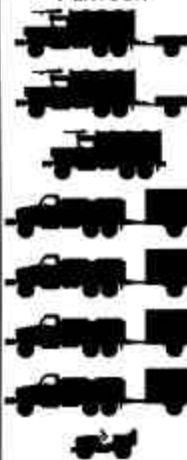


HEADQUARTERS TROOP

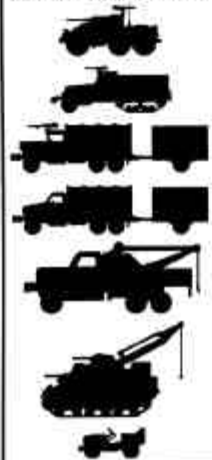
TROOP HEADQUARTERS



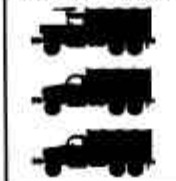
TRANSPORTATION PLATOON



SQUADRON MAINTENANCE PLATOON



SQUADRON SUPPLY SECTION

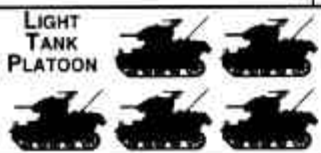


LIGHT TANK COMPANY

COMPANY HEADQUARTERS

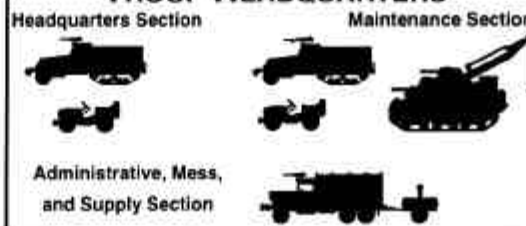


LIGHT TANK PLATOON

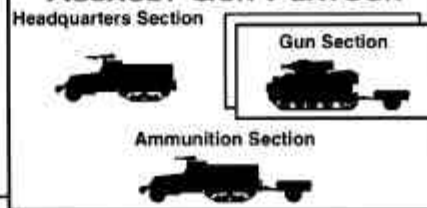


CAVALRY ASSAULT GUN TROOP, MECHANIZED

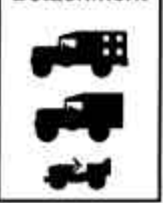
TROOP HEADQUARTERS



ASSAULT GUN PLATOON



Attached Medical Detachment



1944 CAVALRY RECONNAISSANCE SQUADRON

Vehicles, armored and tracked:

- | | |
|----------------------------|--------------------------|
| 17 Light tanks | 32 Halftracks |
| 8 Howitzer motor carriages | 3 Tank recovery vehicles |
| 52 Armored cars | |

Vehicles, soft and towed:

- | | |
|---------------------|------------------------|
| 20 2 1/2-ton trucks | 1 1/4-ton ambulance |
| 1 Weapons carrier | 34 1-ton trailers |
| 110 Jeeps | 14 Ammunition trailers |
| 1 Heavy wrecker | |

Weapons:

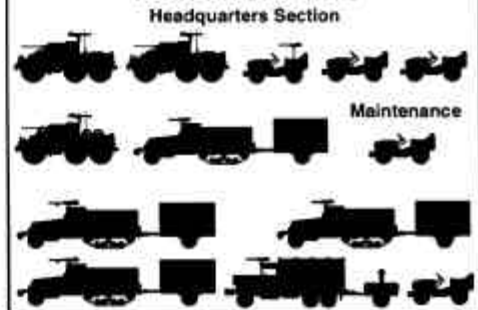
- | | |
|-----------------------------|------------------------|
| 29 .50 caliber machine guns | 3 Pistols |
| 68 .30 caliber machine guns | 3 81mm mortars |
| 235 Submachine guns | 36 60mm mortars |
| 168 Rifles | 37 AT rocket launchers |
| 483 Carbines | |

Personnel:

- | | |
|-------------|------------------|
| 47 Officers | 861 Enlisted men |
|-------------|------------------|

CAVALRY RECONNAISSANCE TROOP

TROOP HEADQUARTERS



RECONNAISSANCE PLATOON



“Typical Engagement”

Italy, June 22 1944 As the CCB of 1st Armored Division started up Highway 68 towards the Cecina River, it ran afoul of six Tigers supported by MkIV tanks and infantry. American losses were heavy and the advance ground to a halt. Immediately, Gen Harmon committed Task Force Howze, his divisional reserve commanded by Col. Hamilton Howze. Again the advance resumed, this time with Howze's armor in the lead. Shortly thereafter, the Task Force surprised a column of German infantry. The over-matched Germans attempted a fighting withdrawal, but appeared ignorant of the terrain at hand. They mistakenly retreated into a building cluster hemmed in a natural *cul-de-sac*. There they were pinned by a light tank company of the 1st Battalion, 13th Armored Regiment, and annihilated.

The rest of the Task Force continued in column along Highway 68 towards Montieri. Howze had no armored infantry, his close support came from the the green 361st regiment, a regular infantry unit temporary attached to 1st Armored for seasoning. Since the foot-sloggers lacked their own transport, they rode directly on the tanks. After a couple of miles, the road started a series of looping turns flanked by wooded hills. The column leader called a halt and pulled his armor into a deep ravine. He dispatched a foot patrol to reconnoiter the hidden ground behind the first bend. Col. Howze arrived at the column's head just as the patrol leader returned breathlessly reporting he'd seen a Tiger. The colonel was skeptical. The man was green and unfamiliar to him. To verify the report, Howze crawled up the wooded crest and focused - his captured German binoculars on the road about 30 feet below and 200 yards distant. The view was startling. Not one, but two Tigers faced him. Each heavy was nestled hull-down in the loops of an "S" curve. The black-clad German tankers were clearly visible, standing exposed in their turrets scanning the horizon with binoculars.

Howze quickly formulated his battle plan. He deployed his infantry to the wooded high ground along side the road. When the GIs were in position, they would hit the Tigers' flanks with bazooka and rifle fire. The platoon leader of the attached tank destroyers was to verify the lead Tiger's position by personal reconnaissance and then return to his vehicle. Thirty seconds after the first rifle volley, his M10 was to emerge from the ravine and engage the Tiger. The command tank of the Sherman platoon was to escort him, spraying roadside ditches with cannon and machine gun fire keeping possible panzerfaust teams at bay.

After dispatching his forces, Col. Howze returned to his observation post. While waiting for his infantry to deploy, Howze whiled away the minutes studying his adversary through field glasses. The lead Tiger commander appeared agitated. The roadblock lacked sufficient infantry support, and Howze suspected the tanker was counting on the now overdue infantry column. Howze's light tanks destroyed earlier in the day. As the German nervously swept the surrounding terrain with his binoculars, his gaze fixed on Howze's position. Howze froze, and for a long half-minute it seemed the two men stared each other down through the field glasses. Whether the tank commander saw Howze or not, he

SET-UP AND SUGGESTED VICTORY CONDITIONS

The Germans set-up hull-down on any road hex at least three hexes north of the southern (bottom) map edge.

The Americans then enter the board along the southern edge.

To win the Americans must exit four AFVs off the north edge of the board.

The dark hexes are wooded level-one elevations, impassable to AFVs.

Battle runs from noon to 6:00pm

Order of Battle: American

Four Shermans; with 76.2 mm main gun

Four M10s; 90mm main gun

Three infantry command stands

Nine infantry squad stands

Two .30 caliber machine gun stands

Nine 2.36-inch bazooka stands

Order of Battle: German

Two Tiger Is

One infantry command stand

Three infantry squad stands

Three light machine gun stands

disappeared into his turret seconds before it was spattered with rifle fire.

Although the rifle fire missed him, the first bazooka rocket did not. Fired at the extreme range of 200 yards, it scored a direct hit on the lead Tiger's glacis. The round did not penetrate, but the impact may have caused a crew casualty or damage. This Tiger never fired its "88" and after a few awkward lurches foundered into the roadside ditch. Dust and smoke obscured its mate farther down the road.

The M10, no doubt mindful of its opponent, tarried long after the ordered thirty seconds. The Colonel ran to it and personally ordered the driver to put the TD on the road. The escorting Sherman, commanded by Lt. Carl Key, followed the M10's lead, branching off to the left as he came across a small bridge. From there Key swept the ditches with machine gun fire and engaged the bogged Tiger with his cannon. Although the behemoth was hit repeatedly, no rounds penetrated. However, the continued deluge of strikes eventually compelled the crew to bail-out. They should have stayed put; small arms fire chopped them down as they crossed the road.

With the first Tiger now out of action, Key stalked the second, using a group of commercial buildings as cover. The building cluster was dominated by a huge galvanized-iron warehouse with open doors at both ends. As Key maneuvered his Sherman towards the warehouse, he was able to sight down the road through the building's open doors. Although the second Tiger was not visible, Key elected to pop a few rounds through the hangar-sized structure. The vacuum created by each shell's passage sucked a huge dust cloud out of the building and buckled its corrugated sliding. The result was an astounding racket and a billowing dust screen that quickly blanketed the entire battlefield.

This was the battle's climax. Both sides now had difficulty breathing, let alone seeing. After a few blind shots all firing ceased, and the Americans retired back to the ravine. The next morning, after another fierce fight, Task Force Howze cleared the roadblock. Further down the highway the second Tiger was found abandoned. Its bogies, shattered by two 75mm hits, had slipped a tread. Perhaps, Key's blind shots through the warehouse had hit home.

Col. Howze described the action as a "typical engagement" in his after action report. The Colonel's tongue was firmly in cheek, taking two Tigers without loss wasn't typical. This battle opened the way to Montieri and the town fell on June 26. By June 30, TF Howze crossed the Cecina River near Volterra. Eventually relieved by the 91st Infantry Division, the Task Force retired to the Bolgheri area with the rest of the 13th Armored Regiment. The 13th Armored had fought its last battle, it was disbanded during the division's reorganization on July 20.

