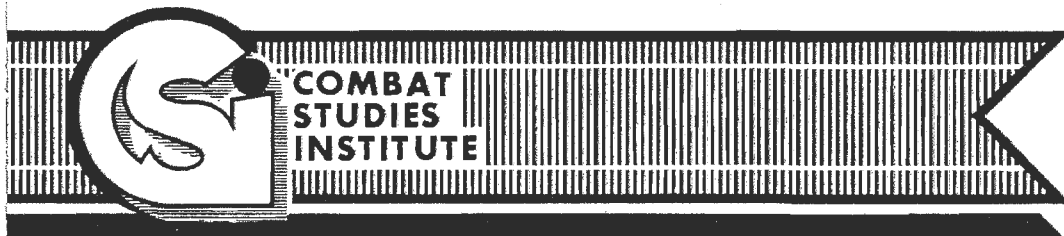


The 4th Armored Division in the Encirclement of Nancy

by
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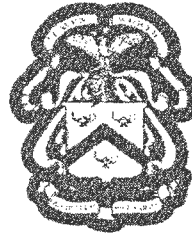
FOREWORD

In 1944, the 4th Armored Division played a central role in one of the more remarkable campaigns in American military history—Third Army's pursuit across France, which was capped off by the encirclement and capture of Nancy. In the course of this campaign, the 4th Armored Division practiced a mode of warfare that has since become known to the Army as AirLand Battle. Inasmuch as the encirclement of Nancy is one of the few historical examples that shows American mechanized forces waging war in accordance with the tenets of AirLand Battle, anyone seeking a deeper appreciation of today's doctrine would do well to study this campaign carefully.

The 4th Armored Division in the Encirclement of Nancy originated at the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College as an introductory class for a course on modern division-level operations. It is a companion piece to *The Lorraine Campaign: An Overview, September–December 1944*, published in February 1985.



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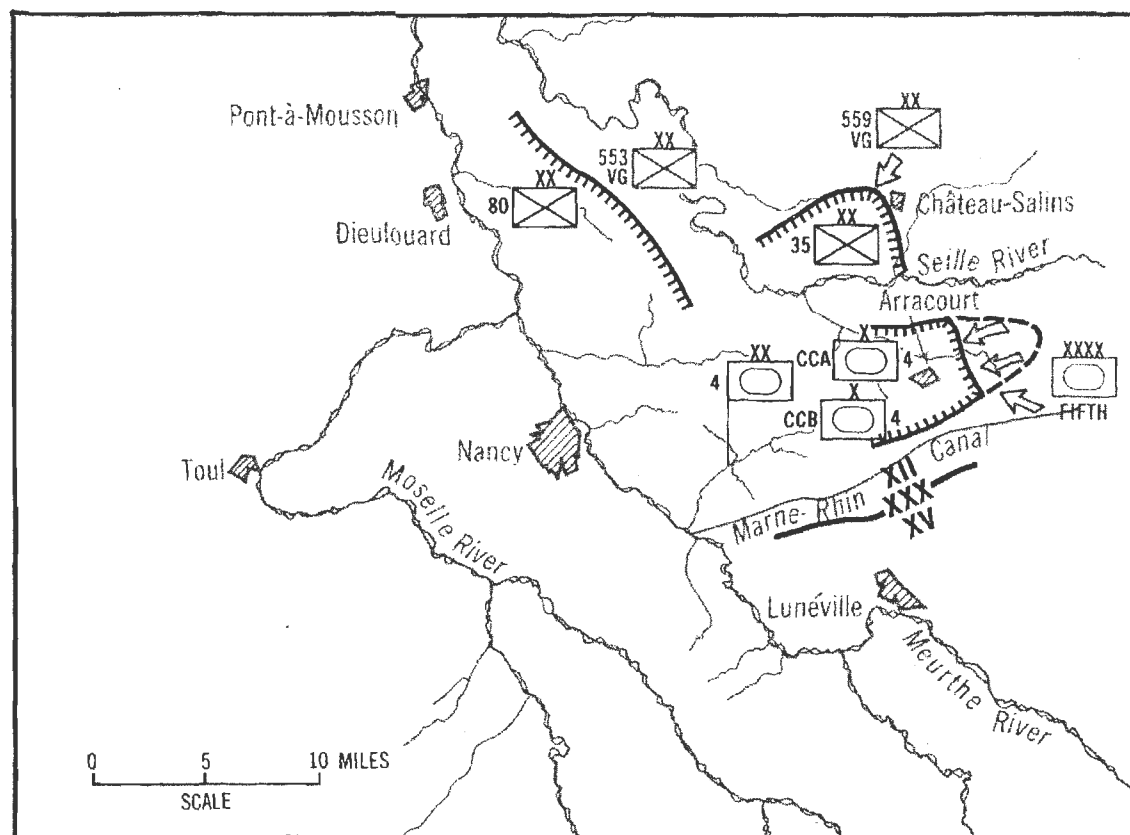
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range of their tank guns. As the fighting surged back and forth through the fog, CCA's tanks and tank destroyers utilized their mobility to outmaneuver and ambush the larger panzers. By early afternoon, the German attack had stalled, and the inadequately trained panzer brigade lacked the ability to restart it. At that juncture, Colonel Clarke unleashed two medium tank companies on a sweep that took the panzers in flank and rear and drove the survivors back to their starting point. According to the Germans, the panzer assault of 19 September cost them fifty precious tanks and accomplished nothing.

From 20 to 25 September, the Fifth Panzer Army fed the 111th Panzer Brigade and the understrength 11th Panzer Division into a series of attacks against the Arracourt position. Each assault followed the pattern set on 19 September. The panzers attacked under the cover of morning fog, only to be disorganized by CCA's mobile defense and driven off by armored counterattacks in company or battalion strength. Major General Wood reinforced CCA with additional tank, infantry, and cavalry elements, and whenever the weather permitted, aircraft of the XIX TAC added to the collection of smoking panzer hulks.

On 24 September, the pattern of the Arracourt battle changed. The action shifted north to Château-Salins where the 559th *Volksgrénadier* Division of the German First Army nearly overwhelmed CCB until U.S. fighter-bombers routed the attackers. The next day, Third Army received orders to suspend all offensive operations and to consolidate gains. In compliance with corps orders, the 4th Armored Division reverted to a positional defense on 26 September (see map 7). CCA withdrew five miles to more defensible ground, and CCB, relieved at Château-Salins by the 35th Division, linked with CCA's right. The Fifth Panzer Army, by now down to twenty-five tanks, pressed its attacks unsuccessfully for three more days until clearing weather and increased American air activity forced the Germans to suspend their faltering counteroffensive altogether.

In the defensive actions fought around Arracourt, the 4th Armored Division claimed 281 German tanks destroyed, 3,000 Germans killed, and another 3,000 taken prisoner. The 4th sustained only 626 casualties in all, but the pressure of two continuous months in combat gradually rendered the division ineffective. Combat fatigue and noncombat casualties mounted alarmingly as the weather deteriorated and individuals surpassed the limits of their endurance. Also, weapons and equipment were



Map 7. 4th Armored Division's static defense, 26—29 September 1944

wearing out. Finally, on 12 October, the division was pulled out of the line for a month of rest and refitting.

When the 4th Armored Division reentered the battle in November, the Lorraine campaign had devolved into a brutal war of attrition mired down in mud and bloodshed. A brilliant episode in the annals of the 4th Armored Division had come to an end.

From the perspective of the 1980s, an analysis of the 4th Armored Division's operations around Nancy inevitably suggests that AirLand Battle doctrine is not really a new concept at all (see map 8). Rather, a strong case can be made for the assertion that Major General "P" Wood practiced AirLand Battle in 1944. Consider, for example, a comparison between the 4th Armored Division's operations and the tenets of AirLand Battle as listed in the 1982 version of FM 100-5, *Operations*: initiative, depth, agility, and synchronization.

Initiative was clearly a quality that both Wood and his division possessed in abundance. Wood and his subordinates were continually urging the higher commanders to exploit opportunities—they saw the possibilities, not the obstacles. An example of this was the enthusiasm with which small units passed over the Moselle and then drove deep behind German lines with a minimum of detailed supervision. Wood's ability to control the division with fragmentary orders and general guidance indicated the faith he placed in the initiative of his subordinates.

The 4th Armored Division certainly waged war in depth. As a unit, the 4th shared the belief that its proper function was to raise havoc behind enemy lines. CCA's classic deep attack from Dieulouard to Arracourt scattered German reserves, overran depots, and severed lines of communication while incurring a minimum of friendly casualties. The machine guns on CCA's rampaging tanks did as much to pry the Germans out of Nancy as did a frontal attack mounted by an entire infantry division and supported by corps artillery.

The 4th Armored Division demonstrated both physical and mental agility. Physical agility meant maintaining an offensive pace that precluded effective enemy countermeasures. It also meant never willingly standing still to be counterattacked. When on the defensive at Arracourt, the 4th showed agility by avoiding set battles, wresting the initiative from the attacker through mobile small-unit actions, and then counterattacking in force to