

THE PROFESSIONAL MILITARY DEVELOPMENT OF  
MAJOR GENERAL ERNEST N. HARMON

A thesis presented to the Faculty of the U.S. Army  
Command and General Staff College in partial  
fulfillment of the requirements for the  
degree

MASTER OF MILITARY ART AND SCIENCE  
Military History

by

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Fort Leavenworth, Kansas  
2008

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<b>REPORT DOCUMENTATION PAGE</b>			<i>Form Approved</i> OMB No. 0704-0188		
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<b>1. REPORT DATE (DD-MM-YYYY)</b> 13-06-2008		<b>2. REPORT TYPE</b> Master's Thesis		<b>3. DATES COVERED (From - To)</b> AUG 2007 – JUN 2008	
<b>4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE</b> The Professional Military Development of Major General Ernest N. Harmon			<b>5a. CONTRACT NUMBER</b>		
			<b>5b. GRANT NUMBER</b>		
			<b>5c. PROGRAM ELEMENT NUMBER</b>		
<b>6. AUTHOR(S)</b> Major Matthew B. Dale			<b>5d. PROJECT NUMBER</b>		
			<b>5e. TASK NUMBER</b>		
			<b>5f. WORK UNIT NUMBER</b>		
<b>7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)</b> U.S. Army Command and General Staff College ATTN: ATZL-SWD-GD Fort Leavenworth, KS 66027-2301			<b>8. PERFORMING ORG REPORT NUMBER</b>		
<b>9. SPONSORING / MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)</b>			<b>10. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S ACRONYM(S)</b>		
			<b>11. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S REPORT NUMBER(S)</b>		
<b>12. DISTRIBUTION / AVAILABILITY STATEMENT</b> Approved for Public Release; Distribution is Unlimited					
<b>13. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES</b>					
<b>14. ABSTRACT</b> This study is a partial biography of Major General Ernest N. Harmon, focusing on his military career from his West Point graduation in 1917 to his assuming command of the 2 <sup>nd</sup> Armored Division in 1942. When Harmon attained division command in July 1942 he was one of the most experienced officers in the army to command an armored division. However, he is overlooked in many histories and leadership studies. The intent of this thesis is to determine what in Harmon's professional military development prepared him to become a successful and widely acclaimed leader of armored forces in the European Theater of Operations (ETO) during World War II.					
<b>15. SUBJECT TERMS</b> Harmon, Ernest N., World War I, interwar period, cavalry, armor, professional military development					
<b>16. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF:</b>			<b>17. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT</b>	<b>18. NUMBER OF PAGES</b>	<b>19a. NAME OF RESPONSIBLE PERSON</b>
<b>a. REPORT</b>	<b>b. ABSTRACT</b>	<b>c. THIS PAGE</b>			<b>19b. PHONE NUMBER (include area code)</b>
(U)	(U)	(U)	(U)	173	

Standard Form 298 (Rev. 8-98)  
Prescribed by ANSI Std. Z39.18

MASTER OF MILITARY ART AND SCIENCE  
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## ABSTRACT

THE PROFESSIONAL MILITARY DEVELOPMENT OF MAJOR GENERAL ERNEST N. HARMON, by Major Matthew B. Dale, United States Army, 173 pages.

This study is a partial biography of Major General Ernest N. Harmon, focusing on his military career from his West Point graduation in 1917 to his assuming command of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Armored Division in 1942. When Harmon attained division command in July 1942 he was one of the most experienced officers in the army to command an armored division. However, he is overlooked in many histories and leadership studies. The intent of this thesis is to determine what in Harmon's professional military development prepared him to become a successful and widely acclaimed leader of armored forces in the European Theater of Operations (ETO) during World War II.

Harmon's career reflected the generation of army officers whose service began during World War I and ended just prior to or during the early years of the Cold War. However, his World War I experience was unique in that, with only eighteen months of service, he commanded the largest U.S. cavalry formation to see combat in France. Harmon's interwar career mirrored that of most of his peers, shifting between command, staff, instructor, and student assignments. Therefore, this study also provides a snapshot era's officer professional development.

By the middle of the 1930s, after graduating from the Command and General Staff School and Army War College, he stood in the top ten percent of peers. On the eve of World War II he volunteered for duty with the mechanized cavalry and quickly became part of the small group of officers that assisted Major General Adna R. Chaffee in convincing the army to introduce larger mechanized formations. His more significant contributions to the army in his final two assignments, General Headquarters (GHQ) G-4 (Logistics) and chief of staff of the Armored Force, were critical, playing a direct role in the organizing, training, and equipping of the rapidly expanding army in the months prior to Pearl Harbor.

The first twenty-five years of his career prepared Harmon for combat in World War II and the occupation of Germany that followed. His career development and personal experiences forged his competence and character. He personally played crucial roles in ending three of the greatest crises faced by American forces in the ETO: Kasserine, Anzio, and the Ardennes. The units that he commanded played decisive parts in securing North Africa, seizing Rome, and penetrating the Siegfried Line into Germany. Following the war Harmon served in a variety of key positions including military governor of Czechoslovakia and the organizer and first commander of the U.S. Constabulary Force in Germany before retiring in 1947 with thirty years of military service.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

First and foremost, I would like to express my immeasurable love and thanks to my father, George W. Dale II, who passed away during the height of my work. He bore an uncanny physical resemblance to Major General Harmon, definitely on occasion equaled his grasp of the more colorful aspects of the English language, and possessed all of the attributes of a true fighter. This thesis is dedicated to his memory. Equal thanks must go to my mother who has kept track of my progress in studying Harmon's life for over ten years and still refers to Harmon as "The General." I would also be remiss if I did not thank Jane Vaughan, the love of my life, for her tireless support throughout this process; she listened for hours as I thought aloud to work out problems, celebrated progress, and shared a passion for my work and the pride that it instilled in me.

I would especially like to acknowledge the support of my fellow Norwich University alumni in CGSC Class 08-01 and the Fort Leavenworth community for their continued interest in my work that provided me with great motivation. Furthermore, my special thanks goes out to three specific Norwich influences; Colonel (Ret.) Timothy Donavan, Professor Gary T. Lord, and Professor William Dean who were instrumental in my development as a soldier and historian.

Finally, I would like to thank my thesis committee members; Dr. Alexander Bielakowski, Dr. Mark Gerges, and Mr. Doug Stephenson for their tutelage and friendship. They provided discipline and focus to an extremely passionate student attempting to produce a labor of love.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

Norwich University is the oldest private military college in the United States. In American military circles it holds the informal title of “the granddaddy of ROTC (Reserve Officer Training Corps).” Since 1819 it has produced thousands of citizen-soldiers that served the nation in war and peace. Located in the Green Mountains of Vermont, the school in many ways reflects traditional New England austerity. One example of this is the number of monuments dedicated to its distinguished graduates. There is only a handful, made from native Vermont granite, on the small campus. One such monument is “The Nugget,” a nicknamed given to it because of its physical resemblance to a McDonald’s Chicken McNugget. The nickname is not meant to be one of ridicule. On the contrary, the monument is dedicated to Major General Ernest Nason Harmon, a man who remains second in importance only to the founder of the university, Captain Alden Partridge. After leading the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Armored Divisions through some of the most decisive campaigns of World War II, Harmon assumed the presidency of the almost financially and academically bankrupt university in 1950 and through the course of fifteen years supervised the restoration of the school’s endowment and reputation.<sup>1</sup>

The details of Harmon’s World War II career are somewhat well documented in numerous battle and campaign histories. What is not well documented is his 25 year military career prior to assuming command of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Armored Division in July 1942.<sup>2</sup> Therefore, the purpose of this work is to identify what in Major General Ernest N. Harmon’s professional military development prepared him to become a successful and widely acclaimed leader of American armored forces during World War II.



There are numerous collections of personal papers and works that discuss the professional development of men such as George C. Marshall, Dwight D. Eisenhower, and George S. Patton Jr., but relatively few on the lesser known World War II American commanders, including Harmon. While there is no biography of Harmon, he produced an autobiography, *Combat Commander*, in 1970. The book is more anecdotal than scholarly, and that being the case, it represents one of the most humble memoirs produced by an American general officer of the World War II generation. In keeping with the autobiography's title, Harmon chose to focus primarily on his combat experience in both world wars, predominantly the second. However, *Combat Commander* also reflects the ravages of time on a mind attempting to recall events 30 to 50 years in the past. Regrettably, the greatest numbers of mental lapses apply to Harmon's description of his interwar experiences. When reading the book one gathers that when he initially wrote his memoirs, the basis of *Combat Commander*, Harmon possessed an abundant amount of sources on the world wars, but that very few were available for the interwar period. The unfortunate result is that his sole chapter dedicated to the interwar period, "Back Home," represents only a "brief" pause between wars. Consequently, Harmon described twenty-five years of military service, the bulk of his military career, in a mere fifteen pages.<sup>3</sup>

#### Hell on Wheels—A World War II Career in Retrospect

In order to support the intent of this thesis a general overview of Harmon's World War II record is necessary to assist the reader in fully appreciating the importance of his pre-war career. All of this began within three months of assuming command of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Armored Division in the United States, Harmon was one of the first senior U.S. commanders to see combat in European Theater of Operations (ETO). He commanded

Task Force Blackstone, one of three task forces that comprised Major General George S. Patton's Western Task Force during the American landings in French Morocco in November 1942.<sup>4</sup> The successful North African landings were the first in a series of exploits that marked an outstanding record throughout the war.

Three months after the landings Lieutenant General Dwight D. Eisenhower temporarily relieved Harmon from command of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Armored Division in order to serve as his personal battlefield representative during the chaotic Kasserine battles. Assuming *de facto* command of the U.S. II Corps at the height of the crisis, Harmon reestablished the strong leadership desperately needed to halt the collapse of U.S. forces during their first combat with German forces. After stabilizing the front and overseeing the American counterattack, Harmon returned to Eisenhower's headquarters and Eisenhower offered Harmon command of the corps, but Harmon declined because he felt that it was not right to succeed the man he recommended for relief in his official report.<sup>5</sup>

However, in the aftermath of Kasserine, Patton, temporarily assigned as the new II Corps commander, personally requested that Harmon assume command of the 1<sup>st</sup> Armored Division, heavily battered and attrited during the Kasserine battles. Harmon quickly restored the division as an effective fighting unit and led it through the decisive operations that defeated Axis forces in North Africa.<sup>6</sup> Eisenhower singled out Harmon's contribution toward the Allied victory by declaring that "In the recent battling, General Harmon of the 1<sup>st</sup> Armored Division has been the standout among our division commanders. He is aggressive, energetic, courageous, and a leader. He has transformed the division," (referring to the 1<sup>st</sup> Armored Division's improved performance under Harmon after Kasserine).<sup>7</sup>

Harmon continued to command the 1<sup>st</sup> Armored Division during operations in Italy, the only U.S. armored division to see action on that front. During another Allied crisis, the Anzio beachhead, Harmon shared credit with Major General Lucian K. Truscott in preserving the beachhead against nearly overwhelming German attacks. Harmon's units served as the U.S. VI Corps' "fire brigade" reacting to a series of German attacks across the perimeter. Eventually, with the beachhead secured, Harmon's 1<sup>st</sup> Armored Division led the Allied breakout that resulted in the fall of Rome.<sup>8</sup>

In recognition of his performance in North Africa and Italy, Harmon received orders to return to the United States to assume command of a corps headquarters training for deployment to the ETO. However, he was personally recalled, this time by Army Chief of Staff George C. Marshall, to immediately return to the ETO and once again assumed command of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Armored Division in Belgium. Reunited with his old division, Harmon led them through three months of hard fighting along the German Siegfried Line and then, in perhaps his greatest moment as a division commander, in the Ardennes, destroyed the lead elements of the German penetration just miles short of the Meuse River. Rewarded for his Ardennes victory, Harmon finally achieved corps command, the XXII, in February 1945. However, the war was effectively over for Harmon. The corps maintained a defensive posture along the Rhine River until the German surrender in May 1945.<sup>9</sup>

Harmon's outstanding service in Europe continued after the German surrender. He took part in the massive post-war U.S. civil-military efforts, initially in Germany and Austria, then in Czechoslovakia.<sup>10</sup> Then, as U.S. forces in Europe rapidly returned to the United States, his old friend, Lucian K. Truscott, recommended him to command what

became the United States Constabulary.<sup>11</sup> The Constabulary, built around mechanized cavalry units, maintained law and order in the U.S. zone of Allied occupied Germany.<sup>12</sup> Harmon directed the organization, training, equipping, and initial operations of the Constabulary until his return to the United States, where he served as Deputy Commanding General, Army Ground Forces until his retirement in 1947, after thirty years military service.<sup>13</sup>

A review of various collections of personal papers and memoirs produced by his superiors, peers, and subordinates, most of them long-time personal friends, clearly reflects Harmon's great talents as the most experienced and successful Allied armored division commander in the ETO. He played crucial roles in ending three of the greatest crises faced by American forces in the ETO: Kasserine, Anzio, and the Ardennes. His divisions performed brilliantly in decisive operations in North Africa, Italy, and the penetration of Germany. Harmon's corps commander in North Africa, Major General Omar N. Bradley, stated that "more than any other division commander in North Africa, he [Harmon] was constantly and brilliantly aggressive," adding that in Europe "he was to become our most outstanding tank commander."<sup>14</sup> Patton, a close friend and commander on two occasions in North Africa, recommended that "if it is desired to have an Armored Corps [for operations in the ETO], I should recommend General Harmon to command it."<sup>15</sup> Truscott, another friend and Harmon's commander during the Anzio breakout and subsequent capture of Rome, considered Harmon "one of the superior battle leaders that I knew during the war;" adding that despite his selection to command the beleaguered VI Corps over the understandably disappointed Harmon who was also considered, "no one could have been more loyal to me than Harmon."<sup>16</sup> Long-time subordinate, General I.D.

White, paid his commander the ultimate compliment: “General Harmon may well be taken as a model of the many able American commanders of mobile divisions; none was more picturesque or better exemplified the title of master of lightning war.”<sup>17</sup> Equally outstanding service under Harmon in North Africa and Europe resulted in White’s selection to follow Harmon as commander of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Armored Division.<sup>18</sup>

### A Product of The System

With an understanding of Harmon’s World War II performance and appraisal by a group of his fellow General Officers, Harmon’s pre-war career can be better examined. It is important to note that Harmon’s military assignments were typical of officer assignments during the interwar period and matched those of his peers. In considering Harmon’s career and how it compared with his peers, it clearly appears that these officers were products of a well conceived system of professional development that existed during the interwar period.<sup>19</sup>

A review of the personnel records of Harmon and the majority of World War II army general officers reveal an important trend in interwar officer development. They were educated and trained to be the future leaders of a greatly expanded army mobilized for the next potential war. The majority of these general officers, including Harmon, graduated from West Point and attended their respective branch-specific schools, the Command and General Staff School (CGSS), and the Army War College (AWC). With the emphasis upon education they also experienced multiple tours as instructors at West Point, ROTC programs, various branch-specific schools, CGSS, AWC.<sup>20</sup> In Harmon’s case he served a tour at West Point as an instructor and at Norwich University in the dual capacity of Professor of Military Science and Tactics and Commandant of Cadets.<sup>21</sup>

However, as part of the system's intent they collectively experienced minimal time with troops. For examples, out of the first twenty-five years of his career Harmon spent a total of seven years with troops before assuming command of his first division.<sup>22</sup>

Nevertheless, Harmon and many other officers also had the opportunity during the Great Depression to lead civilian workers in the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC); in Harmon's case he was assigned responsibility for the establishment and supervision of a CCC camp in Iowa.<sup>23</sup>

Many of these officers also served in a variety of staff positions at multiple echelons, assignments that contributed greatly to their overall professional development.<sup>24</sup> Harmon's personal experience is interesting because of the timing of his assignments. Four years in the G-4 (Logistics) section of the War Department General Staff (WDGS) from 1935-1939, specializing in research and development occurred during the initial phases of the Army's pre-World War II mobilization. Several weapon systems that were employed on the World War II battlefield saw their early development during this period. His other major staff assignment in Washington, G-4 General Headquarters (GHQ), thrust Harmon directly into the army's rapid effort to organize, train, and equip new units in the months prior to Pearl Harbor.<sup>25</sup>

Thus, Harmon was very much a product of the army officer corps of the interwar period. When the TORCH landings occurred in November 1943 there were few, if any, differences in the professional development of Harmon and his fellow division commanders.<sup>26</sup>

### Standing Apart

After considering that much of Harmon's pre-World War II career mirrored that

of his peers, it is equally important to consider the key points set him apart. In this case there are two distinct differences to note. While many of his peers served in combat during World War I, he commanded the largest and only horse cavalry unit in the American Expeditionary Force (AEF) to see combat.<sup>27</sup> Graduating from West Point two months early to meet the demands of the rapidly expanding Army in the wake of the U.S. declaration of war against Germany in 1917, Harmon quickly found himself commanding a troop in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Cavalry Regiment. Exactly a year later the regiment, one of only four cavalry regiments deployed during the war, landed in France.<sup>28</sup>

The cavalry regiments of the American Expeditionary Force (AEF) were broken up and scattered throughout the American zone of operations, conducting mundane tasks.<sup>29</sup> However, many of the senior leaders of the AEF were cavalrymen and believed in the need for cavalry.<sup>30</sup> Therefore, a Provisional Squadron of cavalry was organized from the scattered troops of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Cavalry Regiment. The Provisional Squadron was the largest cavalry force employed by the U.S. Army in France during World War I with Harmon as its initial commander. Though eventually superseded by a lieutenant colonel with more experience, but a chronic illness from the Philippine Insurrection, Harmon served as *de facto* commander of the squadron. Harmon commanded the squadron during the St. Mihiel and Meuse-Argonne offensives, conducting traditional doctrinal cavalry missions such as reconnaissance and security.<sup>31</sup>

In researching Harmon an additional point immediately stands out because of its obvious absence. Unlike Eisenhower, Bradley, Patton, Mark W. Clark, and other prominent World War II general officers, Harmon did not appear to have a mentor or patron that guided his career throughout its most important period of professional

development. During the period 1917-1939 there were many gifted and professional officers that Harmon looked up to and valued as personal examples, but none of them could be considered enduring mentors or patrons with great influence.

This changed in 1939 when Harmon fell under the influence of Brigadier General Adna R. Chaffee, Jr., the army's most vocal proponent of mechanization and commander of its only mechanized cavalry brigade. Under Chaffee, Harmon learned a new style of warfare soon repeatedly demonstrated throughout World War II and became part of the small group of officers that helped bring Chaffee's vision to fruition.<sup>32</sup> However, the most important relationship Harmon formed that held lasting value involved Major General Leslie McNair, initially the chief of staff of the army's general headquarters (GHQ) and later the chief of Army Ground Forces (AGF). Working as the GHQ G-4 (Logistics) Harmon had daily interaction with his chief during the most intense period of army expansion prior to its entry into World War II. McNair's influence was instrumental in Harmon's promotion to brigadier general and eventual assumption of division command in July 1942.<sup>33</sup>

Strangely, there is no evidence that Harmon's name appeared amongst those of other officers personally tracked at this time by the army chief of staff, General George C. Marshall. One piece of evidence in particular supports this assertion. A June 1943 entry in George S. Patton Jr.'s diary alluded to a previous meeting with General Marshall in October 1942:

Shortly before we left the U.S. last October [en route for the TORCH landings in North Africa], General Marshall sent for me and said that he had a hunch Harmon was no good and suggested that I leave him. I said that if he ordered me to leave Harmon, I would, but not otherwise. He said "On your head be it." Tonight he said, "Patton, I was wrong about Harmon, and you were right. Will he be a corps



commander?" I said yes. Few men in high places will admit a mistake.<sup>34</sup>

Marshall set very high standards in his selection of general officers for overseas combat commands. With a reputation for extremely sound judgment in this area, Marshall rarely misjudged the officers he selected for senior command.<sup>35</sup>

Despite his unique tactical experience in World War I, Harmon remained strangely silent during the cavalry's debate over mechanization in the interwar period. Though the battle between the progressive mechanized proponents and the traditional horse soldiers dominated the cavalry branch during this period, the majority of cavalry officers remained relatively neutral on the subject.<sup>36</sup> Harmon belonged to this "silent majority." While more progressive cavalry officers like Major General Daniel Van Voorhis and Chaffee battled more traditional officers like Brigadier General (Ret.) Hamilton S. Hawkins and Major General John K. Herr over the future of the cavalry on the exercise battleground and in the pages of the *Cavalry Journal*, Harmon and most of his peers appear to have read both sides of the argument and kept their opinions to themselves.<sup>37</sup>

Harmon was also a relatively late newcomer to mechanized cavalry, requesting his assignment in the summer of 1939.<sup>38</sup> Nevertheless, the timing of his decision proved fortuitous. Harmon reported to Fort Knox when the 7<sup>th</sup> Cavalry Brigade (Mechanized) suffered from shortages of experienced officers.<sup>39</sup> The fact that Chaffee and his predecessor, Van Voorhis, designed the tactical doctrine of the brigade to execute cavalry missions made it easy for Harmon and other officers to transition from horse to mechanized cavalry.<sup>40</sup> Therefore, within a short period of time Chaffee cited Harmon as part of the small circle of like-minded officers at Fort Knox that continually gave him the

strength to continue his efforts in convincing the Army that mechanized cavalry would play a decisive part in the next war.<sup>41</sup>

Shortly after his assignment to the 1<sup>st</sup> Cavalry Regiment (Mechanized) in the summer of 1939, the 7<sup>th</sup> Cavalry Brigade (Mechanized) surpassed several key milestones in its evolution. This critical period began with the brigade's highly successful performance in the Plattsburgh Maneuvers in upstate New York in August 1939. The maneuvers marked an important transition in the acceptance of mechanization. However, the most important of these maneuvers were those held in Louisiana in the spring of 1940. In addition to Chaffee's brigade, a Provisional Tank Brigade from the infantry also participated. The second half of the maneuvers witnessed the consolidation of these two units into a temporary division that stole the spotlight from the rest of the maneuvers.<sup>42</sup>

However, the success of the Plattsburg and Louisiana maneuvers took place against the larger backdrop of events in Europe. Within days of the completion of the Plattsburg maneuvers, September 1, 1939, the German Army invaded Poland, demonstrating to the world the incredible capabilities of a mechanized force. Poland magnified the impact of the maneuvers and forced many senior officers across the country to reconsider mechanization. During the initial phase of the Louisiana maneuvers events in Europe once again seized the attention of the world. Germany launched its devastating invasion of France and the Low Countries, spearheading the attack with its expanded panzer divisions, and shattered the Allied armies. The U.S. Army could no longer ignore mechanization.<sup>43</sup>

On the last day of the Louisiana maneuvers the Army's assistant chief of staff G-3 (Operations and Training) held an informal meeting where he reviewed the results of the

maneuvers with the key leaders of the 7<sup>th</sup> Cavalry Brigade (Mechanized) and Provisional Tank Brigade. The result of the meeting and several follow-on meetings in Washington, D.C. led to Army Chief of Staff, General George C. Marshall's approval to establish the Armored Force, combining the 7<sup>th</sup> Cavalry Brigade (Mechanized) and the infantry's Provisional Tank Brigade. The War Department officially established the Armored Force on July 10, 1940, appointing Chaffee as its first commander.<sup>44</sup> Chaffee named Harmon the assistant chief of staff (G-4) of the Armored Force.<sup>45</sup>

Harmon's previous experience in the WDGS G-4 proved extremely useful during the Armored Force's initial development. The logistical challenges created by the establishment of the Armored Force were enormous. By far the greatest logistical challenge during this period was the shortage of vehicles and equipment necessary to equip two armored divisions in accordance with their tables of organization. Additionally, Harmon was responsible for a great deal of the rapid expansion of the existing Fort Knox and emerging Fort Benning facilities to accommodate the projected increased in personnel and vehicles.<sup>46</sup> Harmon's efforts as the G-4 were instrumental in his later selection as the Armored Force chief of staff after his brief time in Washington in GHQ.<sup>47</sup>

In recognition of his superior service record and performance in the Armored Force and GHQ staff Harmon received command of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Armored Division in July 1942. In the next few years he established an outstanding record of achievement, commanding two of the army's premier armored divisions in some of the most decisive campaigns in North Africa, Italy, and Northwest Europe. What follows is an examination of twenty-five years of military service that led to his selection for command and the

success that followed.

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<sup>1</sup> Guinn, Robert Darius. *History of Norwich University, 1912-1965* (Montpelier, Vermont: The Capital Press, 1965): 208.

<sup>2</sup> Houston, Donald E. *Hell on Wheels: The 2D Armored Division* (Novato, California: Presidio Press, 1977): xiii

<sup>3</sup> Harmon, Ernest N., Milton MacKaye, and William Ross MacKaye. *Combat Commander: Autobiography of a Soldier* (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc, 1970): 46-61.

<sup>4</sup> Houston, 121, 131.

<sup>5</sup> D'Este, Carlo. *Bitter Victory: The Battle for Sicily, 1943* (New York, New York: Harper Perennial, 1988): 59-60.

<sup>6</sup> Harmon, *Combat Commander*, 122-141.

<sup>7</sup> Bland, Larry I., ed. and Sharon Ritenour Stephens. *The Papers of George Catlett Marshall*, Vol. 3 (Baltimore, Maryland: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991): 688.

<sup>8</sup> Harmon, *Combat Commander*, 155-192. See also, Carlo D'Este's, *Fatal Decision: Anzio and The Battle For Rome* (New York, New York: Harper Perennial, 1991).

<sup>9</sup> Harmon, *Combat Commander*, 204-245.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, 264-278.

<sup>11</sup> Truscott, Lucian K. *Command Missions: A Personal Story* (Novato, California: Presidio Press, 1990): 528.

<sup>12</sup> Gott, Kendall D. *Mobility, Vigilance, and Justice: The US Army Constabulary in Germany, 1946-1953* (Fort Leavenworth, Kansas: Combat Studies Institute Press, 2005): 10.

<sup>13</sup> Harmon, *Combat Commander*, 296.

<sup>14</sup> Bradley, *A Soldier's Story* (New York, New York: Henry Holt, 1951): 100.

<sup>15</sup> Province, Charles M. *The Unknown Patton* (New York, New York: Hippocrene Books, 1983): 50.

<sup>16</sup> Truscott, *Command Missions*, 548.

<sup>17</sup> Yale, Wesley W., Isaac D. White, and Hasso E. von Manteuffel. *Alternative to Armageddon: The Peace Potential of Lightning War* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1970): 114.

<sup>18</sup> Houston, 373.

<sup>19</sup> Ancell, R. Manning with Christopher M. Miller. *The Biographical Dictionary of World War II Generals and Flag Officers; The U.S. Armed Forces* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1996), and Berlin, Robert H. *U.S. Army World War II Commanders: A Composite Biography* (Fort Leavenworth, Kansas: U.S. Army Command and Staff College, 1989): 3.

<sup>20</sup> Berlin, 4, 9-13.

<sup>21</sup> Harmon, *Combat Commander*, 47-48.

<sup>22</sup> Berlin, 13. The calculation of Harmon's seven years with troops resulted from the research for this thesis. The most valuable experience was commanding a troop and the Provisional Squadron of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Cavalry Regiment from the summer of 1917 to the summer of 1920. During the interwar period Harmon served as a staff officer with the 6<sup>th</sup> Cavalry Regiment at Fort Oglethorpe, Georgia, from 1925-1927, commanded the 1<sup>st</sup> Squadron, 8<sup>th</sup> Cavalry Regiment at Fort Bliss, Texas, from 1934-1935, and commanded the 1<sup>st</sup> Squadron, 1<sup>st</sup> Cavalry Regiment (Mechanized) at Fort Knox, Kentucky from 1939-1940. Compared to modern standards this is actually not very different from an officer with approximately 25 years service in today's army. The remainder of Harmon's career covered in this thesis included the following: four years attending various service schools, eight years teaching at West Point and Norwich University, and approximately six years in staff positions.

<sup>23</sup> Ball, Harry P. *Of Responsible Command: A History of the U.S. Army War College* (Carlisle Barracks, Pennsylvania: The Alumni Association of the United States Army War College, 1994): 223, and Harmon, *Combat Commander*, 50-52.

<sup>24</sup> Berlin, 14. See also, Ancell.

<sup>25</sup> Harmon, *Combat Commander*, 56-60.

<sup>26</sup> See, Atkinson, Rick. *An Army at Dawn: The War in North Africa, 1942-1943* (New York, New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2002). Atkinson provides an order of battle, indicating the major Allied commanders, in the front of his book. The American officers listed were Harmon's peers during the interwar period. See also, Ancell.

<sup>27</sup> Harmon, *Combat Commander*, 24.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid*, 14-17.

<sup>29</sup> Hofmann George M. *Through Mobility We Conquer: The Mechanization of U.S. Cavalry* (Lexington, Kentucky: University Press of Kentucky, 2006): 40.

<sup>30</sup> Coffman, Edward M. *The War to End All Wars: The American Experience in World War I* (Lexington, Kentucky: The University Press of Kentucky, 1968): 281.

<sup>31</sup> Harmon, *Combat Commander*, 26-44.

<sup>32</sup> Hofmann, 267.

<sup>33</sup> Harmon, *Combat Commander*, 59-61.

<sup>34</sup> Blumenson, Martin. *The Patton Papers, 1940-1945*. Vol. 2 (Boston, Massachusetts: Houghton Mifflin, 1974): 258. It was probably the stark differences in their respective personalities that came to light during the planning for the TORCH landings that brought about Marshall's meeting with Patton. Harmon's battlefield performance in North Africa not only validated Patton's defense of his abilities, but also convinced Marshall to admit that he had been wrong in his original assessment. More importantly, Marshall admitted his mistake. Still, Marshall's personal opinion of Harmon shifted back and forth throughout the war.

<sup>35</sup> One of Marshall's rare mistakes in selecting officers for senior combat assignments was Major General Lloyd Fredendall who commanded the U.S. II Corps in North Africa and was relieved for poor performance during the Kasserine battles. It was Harmon, sent by Eisenhower, who took temporary over the corps during the height of the crisis and stabilized the front. Harmon turned down permanent command of the corps because he recommended that Eisenhower relieve Fredendall. See, D'Este's *Bitter Victory*, 59-60.

<sup>36</sup> Bielakowski, Alexander M. "The Role of the Horse in Modern Warfare as Viewed in the Interwar U.S. Army's Cavalry Journal," *Army History*, No. 50 (Summer-Fall 2000): 20-25.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid*, 20-25.

<sup>38</sup> Harmon, *Combat Commander*, 57.

<sup>39</sup> Gillie, M.H. *Forging the Thunderbolt: History of the U.S. Army's Armored Force, 1917-1945* (Mechanicsburg, Pennsylvania: Stackpole Books, 1947): 107.

<sup>40</sup> Hofmann, 157, 251.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid*, 267.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid*, 243-245, 264-265.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid*, 247, 265.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid, 265-267.

<sup>45</sup> Harmon, *Combat Commander*, 58.

<sup>46</sup> Gillie, 170.

<sup>47</sup> Harmon, *Combat Commander*, 61.

## CHAPTER 2

### WAR AND OCCUPATION (1917-1919)

The United States entry into World War I caused Ernest N. Harmon and the West Point Class of 1917 graduated two months ahead of schedule. The *New York Times* correspondent covering the event referred to it as “a graduation into war.”<sup>1</sup> The graduation’s guest speaker, Secretary of War Newton D. Baker, concluded his speech by saying:

I wish to impress upon you young men that you are the inheritors of high and noble traditions. You are to be called to assist in the training of new armies, and in the training of these young men I want you to give to them to the best of your ability what your country has given to you here at West Point. Devote yourselves with patience, perseverance, and with consecration to training these men into an efficient expression of your country’s power when our forces, perchance, may be called upon to enter actively in this struggle. Young gentlemen, I bid you serve your country!<sup>2</sup>

Graduating in the middle third of his class, the Academy yearbook, *The Howitzer* promised that Harmon “will make good wherever he goes.”<sup>3</sup> At twenty-three he was commissioned a second lieutenant of cavalry in an army that soon joined the greatest war in human history.<sup>4</sup>

#### Preparation for War

Despite receiving a post-graduation leave there was not much time to reflect on the four years at West Point or contemplate doubts about the future as Harmon reported to the 2<sup>d</sup> Cavalry Regiment, stationed at Fort Ethan Allen, Vermont. He immediately fell in on a cycle of events that eventually took him to war. “Those were busy months at Fort Ethan Allen. The United States had entered the war singularly unprepared, and this was nowhere more evident than in the Cavalry Branch.”<sup>5</sup> Horses, a chronic shortage across



the army at this time, required long and intense training in order to effectively meet the demands of the cavalry. Harmon recalled that “Men we had in abundance; they were expendable. Horses were precious and had to be hoarded like a miser’s gold,” adding that though the recruits were willing, almost none had any equestrian skills.<sup>6</sup> Spare time was mostly dedicated to additional study of his profession. In what little spare time from his study of War Department circulars outlining the tasks and responsibilities of new cavalry officers or recent cavalry operations in Europe, he took advantage of his location and successfully courted his childhood sweetheart, starting a marriage that lasted over fifty years.<sup>7</sup>

The challenges must have appeared overwhelming for a newly commissioned officer fresh from the plain at West Point. No doubt Harmon shared his daily experiences with his only West Point classmate in the regiment, friend Herbert N. Schwarzkopf.<sup>8</sup> In the fast-paced and confusing environment many officers made mistakes and Harmon was no exception. One particular episode stood out. “Fresh out of West Point [May-June 1917], proud of the single brass bar on my shoulder, completely at home in the saddle, I let my own exuberance carry me away on one regretted occasion and earned my first official bawling out.”<sup>9</sup> As a recent product of West Point riding drill, Harmon supervised mounted instruction. Applying the Academy training model, he broke up the monotony of drill into intervals. After thirty minutes of training in the confines of the corral, he decided to take the recruits on a cross-country ride along a bridle path. Though the path, in Harmon’s own words, “didn’t seem hazardous to me,” the new soldiers rode bareback.<sup>10</sup> Disaster struck at a double curve where the green cavalry recruits proved ill-equipped avoiding trees. The results, as recorded by Harmon: “Seven men hurt; broken

arms and broken collar bones. We took them to the hospital and I was summoned by the ‘Old Man.’”<sup>11</sup>

The “Old Man” was Colonel Joseph T. Dickman, one of the most respected officers in the army. A veteran cavalry officer, Dickman served in the last Apache war, in Cuba, the Philippines, and China during the Boxer Rebellion. He also possessed a reputation as one of the brightest minds in the army.<sup>12</sup>

Many thoughts passed through Harmon’s mind as he stood in front of his commander. As Harmon related years later, he “stood before him and, in a considerable sweat, told my story. I feel reasonably sure that if any of our horses had been hurt I might have been court-martialed.”<sup>13</sup> The horses apparently had better sense than their riders and none were injured. After giving Harmon a chance to explain himself, Dickman told Harmon, “Young man, I admire your spirit, but your judgment was God-damned poor. That will be all.”<sup>14</sup> Harmon quickly left, thankful that he still had a future in the cavalry.<sup>15</sup>

The bridle path incident taught Harmon his first major lesson as an officer. He commented on the lesson years later in *Combat Commander*, stating that “Spirit is a prime essential for combat commanders, but spirit without judgment can result in disaster as complete as that of Custer at Little Big Horn.”<sup>16</sup> Harmon realized that new recruits could not immediately match his skills, even as a relatively new officer. He discovered that when training soldiers patience and clear judgment, more than motivation, made an officer a good leader. Finally, he understood that as a young leader he would make mistakes, but the key was learning from them; it was better to make mistakes at Fort Ethan Allen than on the battlefield in Europe.

Dickman left the regiment shortly after he gave Harmon his light rebuke. Colonel Arthur Thayer assumed command of the regiment in late June 1917.<sup>17</sup> Thayer shared many qualities with Dickman. He was a scholarly officer, “quiet, philosophical, and ordinarily imperturbable,” decorated for bravery at the Battle of San Juan Hill during the Spanish-American War and in the Philippines.<sup>18</sup>

Thayer inherited a major challenge from Dickman upon assuming command of the regiment; a challenge that positively affected Harmon. War Department expansion of the cavalry dictated that Dickman to release two-thirds of his units at Fort Ethan Allen (the regimental headquarters and two squadrons; a third squadron was stationed at Fort Meyer, Virginia) for two new cavalry regiments.<sup>19</sup> The rapid expansion of the army created another challenge for the regiment in the sphere of individual officer and non-commissioned officer (NCO) assignments. The problem and its impact were best described by Lucian K. Truscott in his *Twilight of the U.S. Cavalry: Life in the Old Army, 1917-1942*:

Most of the Regular Army officers in the [cavalry] regiments received temporary promotions and departed for other assignments. Nearly all of the senior noncommissioned officers were commissioned and, along with the more experienced enlisted men, were transferred from the regiments for assignments to the divisions in the national army then being formed. Troops were left in command of recently commissioned reserve and provisional officers and the ranks were filled with volunteer and drafted recruits.<sup>20</sup>

The 2<sup>d</sup> Cavalry felt the impact of these departures. Over 250 enlisted men received commissions and transferred to other units.<sup>21</sup> Prior to transferring two-thirds of the regiment required to form the new regiments, sixteen experienced officers left for other assignments and over thirty enlisted men accompanied General John J. Pershing to France in June, where they served throughout the war as his escort.<sup>22</sup> An additional

twenty officers, some new second lieutenants with less than twenty days in the regiment, left to form the new regiments or serve in other branches, including Harmon's classmate, Herbert Schwarzkopf.<sup>23</sup> However, Harmon directly benefited from these transfers. He received promotion to the temporary rank of captain and assigned to command a troop three months after receiving his commission.<sup>24</sup>

Officer turbulence continued to plague the regiment right up to its movement to its port of departure in mid-March 1918. From September 1917 to February 1918 forty-five officers left the regiment for other assignments.<sup>25</sup> Within a short period Harmon became one of the most experienced officers in the regiment. All of these personnel transitions placed great challenges upon the remaining officers who attempted to provide effective leadership and training for an increasing number of new soldiers. Harmon also probably received other regimental duties in addition to his responsibilities as a troop commander, especially as the regiment neared transit to France.

The regiment moved to Hoboken, New Jersey in mid-March.<sup>26</sup> However, due to a shortage of sufficient shipping the regiment left its horses behind when it embarked for France. Even the newest soldiers understood the impact of breaking the symbolic bond between a cavalryman and his horse. However, the regiment deployed with all of its equipment in order to be prepared for an anticipated issue of horses. Two troops received orders to remain behind and then escort the mounts across to France, but the orders were rescinded and the troops deployed empty-handed.<sup>27</sup>

### France

Decades after World War I, when he wrote *Combat Commander*, Harmon decided to tell “the personal story of a junior officer who, of course, was not privy to the strategic

and tactical decisions of American commanders on an elevated level.”<sup>28</sup> Against the much larger backdrop of World War I this is a sound decision to emulate in order to remain within the parameters of this thesis. However, “even a junior’s officer’s story” requires a brief “explanation of what American commanders hoped to accomplish with cavalry in the prolonged attrition of Europe’s trench warfare.”<sup>29</sup> Harmon developed a somewhat rationale answer years later after he studied the tactical operations that he participated in, explaining:

Four cavalry regiments went overseas, my own Second Regiment, the Third, Sixth, and Fifteenth. Because of the congestion of shipping, we came without horses. It was expected that we would be mounted by the French. It can be assumed (because there is little firm information on the subject) that commanders believed our own mounted troops could be highly useful in many ways to our American infantry divisions already committed to the front lines; for intelligence sorties into enemy positions, for communications between our own forces and, perhaps not an impossible dream, for all-out pursuit of the Germans in case of a breakthrough.<sup>30</sup>

Nevertheless, Harmon explained that the realities of trench warfare quickly pushed aside the best intentions of American commanders. The cavalrymen of the 2<sup>d</sup> Cavalry Regiment were:

...buffeted across the French countryside; to a god’s-eye our course might have seemed as aimless as a cork in a fishnet. Not so. There were always orders from mysterious headquarters to send us wherever we went...we traveled endlessly, it seemed to me then, in rain and mud and misery over landscapes as unfamiliar as the moon and hardly more hospitable.<sup>31</sup>

Harmon, one year out of West Point and commanding a cavalry troop, tried to keep up with it all, while at the same time attempting to learn as much of his craft as possible before he went into combat.

The 2<sup>d</sup> Cavalry Regiment never conducted combat operations as an organic formation. Shortly after its arrival in France the regiment detached its subordinate troops

to operate remount stations or support division and corps headquarters throughout France. Remount stations were scattered throughout the American rear areas. During the course of the war the regimental headquarters, supply, and machine gun troop seemed to have no direct connection to its subordinate units at the front.<sup>32</sup> Troops supporting the divisions conducted reconnaissance patrols, liaison and courier duty, and military police functions. Individual troops from the regiment supported at least nine different U.S. infantry divisions during World War I.<sup>33</sup> It was not a favorable confirmation of the intent of American commanders for the use of cavalry.

Nor was it to provide an auspicious start for Harmon's wartime career. Harmon's troop, F Troop, and another troop moved to a "quiet sector" of the front where they were attached to the 42<sup>d</sup> Infantry Division for thirty days. During an initial reconnaissance of the forward trenches he experienced his first brush with hostile fire. German artillery barrages in that sector were somewhat on a schedule. Harmon, new to the sector, unknowingly stepped up on a dugout parapet just as a German barrage fell. The artillery impact threw him back into the dugout and he suffered a concussion. Thus, Harmon experienced his first taste of combat in the trenches. It had to have been an embarrassing and depressing event for him. However, he quickly recovered physically and emotionally when rumors that both troops were scheduled to relieve infantry units in the trenches were heard, only to turn into dejection when the rumors proved false. It presented a considerable leadership challenge for Harmon and his officers. It does, however, speak to the situation and morale of Harmon and his men. With or without horses, the cavalrymen wanted to get into the fight and felt despondent over not getting an opportunity to prove themselves.<sup>34</sup>

The challenges in maintaining good morale sustained another setback when Harmon received orders for a new assignment. Much to the dismay of the soldiers the troop left the trenches and took control of a large remount station. Harmon later explained the disgust he felt over becoming “nursemaids to a herd of sick and wounded French horses.” Furthermore, in a cruel example of insult added to injury the cavalrymen did not find mounts waiting for them. The troop’s mission required them to ready the horses for an American artillery brigade still at sea. Upon completion of the mission in July 1918 the troop moved to another location to build a new remount station. The troopers could not have been happy when they stored their saddles, bridles, and weapons, and picked up shovels, axes, hammers, and saws. However, they maintained their energy and soon established the first signs of a military compound.<sup>35</sup>

The questionable state of morale surely troubled Harmon up to this point. The remount duty represented another obstacle in a series of setbacks encountered by the cavalrymen since leaving the United States. First, the turn-over of officers and non-commissioned officers continued; nearly a dozen more officers left the 2<sup>d</sup> Cavalry after its arrival in France between April and July 1918.<sup>36</sup> Second, the transit on an overcrowded troopship across the Atlantic, for some their first time out on open water, did not agree with many men, including Harmon.<sup>37</sup> Third, Harmon’s men did not receive horses in France as planned and were dismounted cavalry which essentially meant that they were unemployed infantrymen. Finally, once Harmon’s troop went to the front they were denied the opportunity to join the fight.

The mundane tasks and manual labor of operating remount stations seemed to be the last straw, especially when the horses they cared for went to artillery units. However,

not yet experiencing combat probably helped prevent morale from crashing. The soldiers' idealistic energy remained untarnished by the prolonged time in the trenches experienced by infantrymen. Therefore, though the challenge of maintaining good morale remained high among Harmon's many priorities, he did not face the same challenges as his peers in the trenches.

Morale rose considerably as the troop completed its mission to establish the remount station. Troops B, D, and H joined F Troop in July, constituting an organized *ad hoc* cavalry squadron of fourteen officers and over four hundred soldiers eventually designated the Provisional Squadron of the 2<sup>d</sup> Cavalry Regiment.<sup>38</sup> The squadron's personnel strength slightly exceeded that outlined in the Field Service Regulations.<sup>39</sup> However, there was no major to command or staff to support squadron operations.<sup>40</sup> As the senior troop commander, Harmon assumed command, exercising command and staff responsibilities simultaneously. Fortunately, he found that he could rely on several officers to assist him. His close friend, Captain Kent C. Lambert, H Troop commander, ably performed the duties of second in command, assisting Harmon in the planning and execution of operations throughout this war and part of the next world war.<sup>41</sup> The D Troop commander, Captain J.D. Taylor also assisted in running the squadron.<sup>42</sup> Finally, Harmon knew that he could depend on the soldiers, especially his own F Troop, commanded by one of his own officers, First Lieutenant Clinton Burbank. Harmon relied upon F Troop heavily throughout the war using it as his main effort because he knew its capabilities very well.<sup>43</sup>

Unfortunately the squadron still faced a substantial number of challenges. The most immediate turned out to be the state of its new mounts. They originated from



veterinary hospitals and most were recovering from recent wounds, gas, battle fatigue, and illness. To make matters worse none of the horses were trained as cavalry mounts and several dozen were white, a color never used in the cavalry because of its conspicuousness on the battlefield. The situation certainly constituted added tests of leadership. Fortunately, despite the decrepit state of the horses, Harmon had at least experienced the trial of training of new horses when he reported to the 2<sup>d</sup> Cavalry the previous year.<sup>44</sup>

While still requiring a great deal of time to properly train cavalry mounts, the squadron received orders in late-August to move near the front and await orders from the U.S. First Army. The orders called for the squadron to be ready to move into the frontlines no later than ten days after its arrival. Fortunately the squadron made part of its trip by rail before it received an opportunity to carefully test its new horses and conduct a thirty-two mile squadron-level march to its new station. Upon arrival they discovered full accommodations for troops and training in a former French cavalry installation that became their headquarters.<sup>45</sup>

The first priority was training. Harmon later described the situation:

All of the officers were young and inexperienced; for the most part the enlisted personnel had seen only a year's service. And because so far in France we had served virtually as a labor battalion, some of the men had almost forgotten their cavalry training.<sup>46</sup>

Based on this evaluation of the soldiers and the state of their horses, adopted a training philosophy that emphasized fundamentals; refresher training to improve soldier skills and basic equestrian skills.<sup>47</sup>

Realistic training under simulated battle conditions became the standard when the squadron entered the final phase of its training before expected movement to frontline. Soldiers and their troops engaged in small combat problems that involved live ammunition, including hand grenades. The squadron also received a new weapon recently introduced to the army, the Browning Automatic Rifle (BAR).<sup>48</sup> These weapons represented the influence of Harmon's former regimental commander and current corps commander, Major General Dickman. The Army Ordnance Department received the weapons, but not in enough numbers to issue to larger infantry units. Therefore, at Dickman's request the squadron received four of the weapons for testing with cavalry units. It is possible that the BARs issued to the Provisional Squadron were some of the first to see combat in the U.S. Army.<sup>49</sup> Each troop received a BAR and they made an immediate positive impression on the squadron during training, increasing the unit's firepower considerably prior to entering combat.<sup>50</sup>

During the first week of September 1918, within days of receiving orders to move forward, Lieutenant Colonel Oliver P. M. Hazard assumed command of the squadron. An older and more experienced officer, Hazard received national acclaim in the Philippines as a member of the army mission that captured insurgent leader Emilio Aguinaldo. He brought a level of experience that was probably needed in the squadron when it prepared for combat. However, Hazard suffered from recurring bouts of amoebic dysentery that almost immediately forced him to spend for more time at the headquarters of the supported division than in the field.<sup>51</sup> Hazard's frequent absences made Harmon the *de facto* commander of the squadron, but the situation caused by Hazard's illness put Harmon in a position that he did not welcome:

I knew how green I was and longed for the security of taking orders from someone wiser and better informed. Anyway, the job of marching the squadron, putting it into position on the battlefield, commanding it on those rare occasions when we acted as a unit, devolved upon me.<sup>52</sup>

Circumstances, not fate, thrust a great responsibility upon Harmon's shoulders on the eve of his introduction to modern warfare.

Before continuing, it should be reaffirmed that the focus of this chapter is an analysis of Harmon's experiences and their impact on his development as a soldier and leader, not a study of the Provisional Squadron's tactical operations. What follows is a description of key experiences and an evaluation of the lessons learned, eventually illustrating how Harmon's World War I experience greatly influenced the rest of his career. The history of the 2<sup>d</sup> Cavalry Regiment and the Provisional Squadron, even though a very small piece of the overall history of the AEF, is much larger than what is presented here. However, the most important subject matter addressed throughout this chapter is combat leadership. Brief descriptions of the overall AEF situation, the trials of the Provisional Squadron, and tactical employment of cavalry in accordance with the current doctrine are used to emphasize the numerous challenges Harmon encountered and how he adapted.

### The St. Mihiel Offensive

The St. Mihiel offensive represented the AEF's first opportunity to conduct major independent combat operations in France. Its First Army controlled the largest military force ever fielded in American history to that date; nearly half a million men. The operational plan called for the army to reduce the two-hundred square mile St. Mihiel Salient to straighten the Allied lines. However, American commanders also envisioned

trapping German forces inside the salient.<sup>53</sup> Still attached to the U.S. IV Corps, the Provisional Squadron provided the largest cavalry support available to the army.<sup>54</sup> Moreover, the initial phase of the St. Mihiel offensive, when the Provisional Squadron supported the 1<sup>st</sup> Infantry Division, represented the only occasion when operated as a squadron-sized element.<sup>55</sup>

Almost immediately Harmon began experiencing the personal doubts that plagued an officer leading men into combat for the first time. The fact that he, and not Hazard, actually commanded the squadron magnified those doubts. Harmon clearly remembered his frame of mind over fifty years later when he stated, “I began to have a sense of personal loneliness I had never had before. Was I competent to command this column? Did the men have confidence in me? Self-doubts filled my mind.”<sup>56</sup> Attempting to put his mind at ease, he broached the subject with his orderly during the movement to the front. Harmon asked, “Do the men in the column have confidence in me? Do they think that I will do all right in the coming battle?”<sup>57</sup> The orderly, one of the few veteran pre-war cavalymen left in the squadron, gave Harmon one critical piece of advice: “The men trust everything about you except your personal courage. Now don’t get me wrong: they mean too much courage, not too little. Such as being too rash at the beginning of their first battle. Otherwise, they have complete confidence in you.”<sup>58</sup> Harmon considered the advice throughout the squadron’s final night movement to the front, slowly eliminating some of the doubts that bothered him.<sup>59</sup>

The Provisional Squadron never conducted independent cavalry operations in France because of its size and the existing combat environment. Instead, in accordance with the army Field Service Regulations, it served as divisional cavalry, providing direct

support to an infantry division headquarters. However, doctrine regulated that divisional cavalry missions were conducted by a cavalry regiment, a formation three times larger than the Provisional Squadron.<sup>60</sup> Prior to the St. Mihiel offensive the detachment of one troop on courier duty supporting three other divisions further decreased the squadron's capability to conduct effective divisional cavalry missions as described in the Field Service Regulations.<sup>61</sup> As in today's current doctrine, cavalry squadrons conducted two primary missions; reconnaissance and security.<sup>62</sup> The Field Service Regulations stated that the cavalry's "*first duty*" was "*to find the enemy's main body, and then to preserve contact* (italics included in original text)."<sup>63</sup> With major enemy contact imminent, a squadron normally repositioned to a flank to conduct a screen in order to protect the infantry division's flank as it conducted the attack.<sup>64</sup> Therefore, the Provisional Squadron missions were two-fold and closely interconnected; gathering information while "keeping the enemy at a distance" in an effort to protect friendly forces.

The Provisional Squadron supported the 1<sup>st</sup> Infantry Division, the main effort of the U.S. IV Corps attack.<sup>65</sup> Based on his cavalry background Major General Dickman envisioned the potential of a successful breakthrough by the division and the need for a mounted exploitation force.<sup>66</sup> However, Dickman's decision occurred just prior to the commencement of the initial First Army attack and the orders were not posted until 0400, 12 September, three hours after the initial artillery preparation began. Because of the late nature of the decision the squadron never received guidance in the 1<sup>st</sup> Infantry Division commander's attack order. Therefore, the squadron joined the division reserve.<sup>67</sup>

When the squadron advanced beyond the line of departure with the 1<sup>st</sup> Infantry Division reserve its orders were to be prepared to exploit the division's success.

Eventually, the squadron received orders a little after mid-day to conduct reconnaissance beyond the division's advance positions.<sup>68</sup> However, it also received a more complex mission in addition to the reconnaissance. The 1<sup>st</sup> Infantry Division ordered the squadron to cut a railroad line running along the base of the salient in order to prevent German forces positioned at the tip of the St. Mihiel salient from escaping the First Army's planned envelopment.<sup>69</sup> This mission is described in detail here because it was the only occasion that saw the Provisional Squadron employed as a single formation in combat and it was Harmon's first combat operation.

Harmon later stated that it "was an assignment for which we were ill-chosen," citing that the squadron lacked demolition equipment and possessed only a handful of tools insufficient for the task.<sup>70</sup> Though there is no recorded answer, the question must be asked: Why did Harmon not inform the division that the squadron lacked demolition equipment, and that being the case, why did he fail to request the support necessary to achieve the mission? The only potential answer could be that youthful enthusiasm for getting into the fight and lack of specific experience with this particular type of mission clouded his judgment.

Harmon placed F Troop in the advance guard with Troops D and H in the main body; D Troop followed the advance guard and H Troop utilized a parallel trail. He placed himself with the advance guard. The route of march called for the squadron to move through heavily wooded terrain that dictated movement mainly along an unimproved road and lateral trails and wood cutting paths. Therefore a four-man point element led the squadron, followed by an advance party of twenty men some seventy-five yards behind. The rest of the advance guard followed in a dispersed formation over one

hundred yards. Harmon ordered the advance guard to position two flank patrols two hundred and fifty yards to the squadron's left flank, but orders from the division denied him permission to do the same on the right.<sup>71</sup> American infantry supposedly were advancing on that flank.<sup>72</sup> This proved to be an incorrect assumption by the infantry commanders.

Upon entering the forest the point element killed a lone German soldier.<sup>73</sup> Then Harmon personally captured another German mounted on a horse. Enemy positions were empty and some burned as if set on fire by their previous owners. Every indication pointed to a full German retreat. However, when Harmon returned to the road after checking on his flank patrols he found the point and advance party stopped.

Questionable instructions, supposedly from Lieutenant Colonel Hazard at 1<sup>st</sup> Infantry Division headquarters, ordered the squadron to halt and maintain its position. Harmon, given his knowledge of the situation on the ground, ruled out the authenticity of the supposed order (later proven false) and ordered the advance to continue.<sup>74</sup>

Just as the column began to move again H Troop, followed by elements of D Troop, suddenly appeared on the left flank and entered the main road between the point and advance party. Obstacles on a parallel trail forced the troop commander, Captain Lambert, to return to the main road without knowing exactly where the rest of the squadron was located. The avoidance of a "friendly fire" incident spoke highly of the discipline of the individual soldiers despite experiencing their first major combat. However, just as the advance guard started moving forward again after the false order, Harmon described the situation as extremely confusing.<sup>75</sup>

The confusion further increased when the point signaled visual contact with the

enemy forward. Harmon immediately went forward with Captain Lambert in order to properly assess the situation. On the reverse slope of the next hill Harmon and Lambert found the point within small arms range of a column of German troops with artillery and wagons. The column, crossing the squadron's front at an intersection, was withdrawing out of the salient. Harmon saw an opportunity for meeting the division's intent to exploit the attack by attacking the column.<sup>76</sup>

Harmon quickly executed a hasty plan. He placed F Troop and the squadron's BARs in a position to cover the crossroads while the other two troops moved through the woods along the right flank to cut off the column. However, as Harmon later explained in his first article in *Cavalry Journal*, "However good or bad this plan might have worked out, its success was doomed from the start by the precipitation of the auto rifle, which opened fire before the troops were ready, thus losing the element of surprise."<sup>77</sup> The initially surprised Germans moved off the road into the adjacent woods and deployed their own machine guns. As the troops made their difficult way through the woods to cut off the German column they received heavy machine gun fire from their right and left and a machine gun deployed at the crossroads by the column. Undetected machine guns, bypassed during the initial movement to the point of contact, engaged the squadron from three different directions.<sup>78</sup>

Caught by surprise and lacking the strength and firepower to sustain the firefight, Harmon ordered a withdrawal out of contact three hundred yards to the rear in terrain that offered protection while the squadron reorganized. From there the squadron could dismount, form a skirmish line, and advance into contact again.<sup>79</sup> The men and horses performed well in the ensuing withdrawal, but the untested mounts bolted *en masse* when



a series of additional by-passed German machine guns joined the fight from the squadron's new left flank (the flank that was not patrolled during the advance), turning the withdrawal into what some historians referred to as a rout.<sup>80</sup> During the advance the Germans allowed the squadron to pass and then moved their guns up to the edge of the woods to engage the squadron when it withdrew.<sup>81</sup>

Fire discipline collapsed and every soldier fired on the machine guns as the squadron broke to the rear. "No commands to fire were given our men; the firing was done from a sense of self-preservation, and was effective."<sup>82</sup> The troopers gained great confidence in their pistols and using them to destroy two enemy machine gun teams in a hail of gunfire as they stampeded by. Harmon succeeded in rallying and reorganizing the squadron out of contact despite the soldiers riding past the rally point in their dash to avoid the enemy machine guns. Amazingly the squadron sustained few casualties. German gunners normally aimed low in order to hit infantrymen. They were not prepared to engage cavalry.<sup>83</sup> However, the squadron failed to achieve its task to cut the railroad. As a direct result of this failure the 1<sup>st</sup> Infantry Division found itself forced to reallocate units to cut the line.<sup>84</sup>

That night Harmon attempted to come to grips with the events of that day. His thoughts on the subject, recorded in *Combat Commander*, were quite revealing. For instance, nearly fifty years after his article on the Provisional Squadron's operations at St. Mihiel, Harmon admitted that he and Lambert personally fired the BARs at the German column. This meant that they prematurely initiated the attack before the troops were in position. Therefore, Harmon's account of his reflection after the engagement included his confession:

Our casualties were: one dead, one missing, three wounded and five horses killed or wounded. That there had been a lack of discipline and liaison under unexpected fire was not surprising. But I believed then and believe now that I was partly at fault. Where a leader should position himself in battle is always a difficult decision and there is no ready-made rule. When Lambert and I lay in the road and opened fire with automatic rifles on the Germans, we were not acting as commanders of troops, we were engaging in boyish heroics. In short, we were too far out front to be in control of our men. It was a lesson which could be learned only in the field.<sup>85</sup>

It was a hard lesson to learn, but in a lifetime of soldiering it was one of the most valuable lessons that Harmon never forgot.<sup>86</sup> It compounded a situation created by a relatively untried unit in its first combat as a unified command, in complex terrain, against an experienced enemy.

The Provisional Squadron conducted operations in the St. Mihiel sector for only four days.<sup>87</sup> First Army surpassed its objectives during the first day and began to move units to the Meuse-Argonne sector for the next offensive.<sup>88</sup> After its setback on the first day of the St. Mihiel offensive the squadron continued to execute reconnaissance and liaison missions in support of the 1<sup>st</sup> Infantry Division. However, the squadron never again operated as a consolidated organization. It commanded and controlled its troops in decentralized operations in support of the division. These operations served as better examples in confirming that cavalry, given a suitable and feasible task, provided quality support to large units. The 1<sup>st</sup> Infantry Division received a steady flow of reports from the squadron; the squadron accurately reported the German main line of resistance and locations of adjacent Allied units. The 1<sup>st</sup> Infantry Division Summary of Operations in the World War stated “The division lost contact with the enemy except through the Provisional Squadron, 2<sup>d</sup> Cavalry.”<sup>89</sup> Despite all of its trials, it was high praise for the squadron.

The squadron left the St. Mihiel sector and conducted a seven-day one hundred and twenty-five kilometer march to a staging area in order to be on hand for the Meuse-Argonne offensive. In route the detached troop returned to the squadron. However, the strength of the squadron numbered slightly over three hundred men due to the number of horses available. The stress and wear endured by the horses in the previous offensive increased during the march and dictated its pace and length.<sup>90</sup> However, another issue greatly troubled Harmon at this point. The appointed squadron commander could not effectively command.<sup>91</sup>

The assigned commander of the Provisional Squadron, Lieutenant Colonel Hazard, rarely rode with the squadron during the movement due to his tropical dysentery. He missed the squadron's departure from the St. Mihiel sector, caught up, and immediately went to bed in a nearby American camp due to his condition. A few days later Hazard again caught up, mounted a horse, and assumed the lead of the squadron's fourth consecutive night march. Harmon later observed that Hazard's "discomfort on horseback was obvious and his determination to 'stick it out' obscured his judgment."<sup>92</sup> After the squadron completed a non-stop three-hour stretch of the march Hazard found a billet and went immediately to bed. It was obvious to Harmon that the man was not physically able to perform his duties as squadron commander. Later, he addressed the subject of Hazard without resentment, explaining:

Colonel [sic] had earlier proved himself as a professional soldier, but there is no proper place in combat leadership for officers – however willing – who are not physically fit to meet its rigors. Their own very real miseries may lead them to forget the welfare of those under their command.<sup>93</sup>

However, despite the enormous pressures placed on Harmon, a relatively new and

inexperienced officer, Hazard's repeated absences helped quickly mold Harmon into an effective combat leader. The situation taught Harmon that a commander's health played a critical part in his overall performance.<sup>94</sup>

### The Meuse-Argonne Offensive

For Harmon the Meuse-Argonne offensive marked the start of a twenty-year personal analysis of the relevance of cavalry on the modern battlefield.<sup>95</sup> The battlefield conditions starkly contrasted with those seen in the St. Mihiel sector. He later observed that "cavalry was out of place in a battle where the line moves forward only a kilometer a day, while the enemy has the high ground and his aerial observation is perfect."<sup>96</sup> Attached to the 35<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division, enemy resistance and complex terrain immediately prevented squadron-level operations; enemy observers quickly detected mounted formations and employed artillery fire. Eventually troop-level operations appeared equally ineffective. Complex terrain and the German defensive network denied cavalry the mobility that served it well at St. Mihiel and caused increased casualties. These adverse circumstances forced Harmon to employ the squadron predominantly at night in small patrols sent out by the troops because he "realized that the appearance of a conglomerate force of horsemen would ruin any possibility" of the squadron achieving its missions.<sup>97</sup> The smaller patrols maintained a somewhat higher degree of mobility that somewhat successfully countered enemy artillery, but the officers leading these numerous patrols immediately suffered increased fatigue associated with continuous combat operations.<sup>98</sup>

The unanticipated attrition of the 35<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division and its failure to achieve its objectives made a direct impact upon the squadron. Though initially successful,

despite a lack of training for open warfare compared to more experienced divisions, the 35<sup>th</sup> stalled in the face of increased German resistance. Command, control, and communication quickly broke down and accurate situational awareness disappeared.<sup>99</sup> Harmon immediately complied with orders to send patrols forward in order to provide a clear picture of the situation.<sup>100</sup> The reports from two troop commanders proved critical in providing the division commander with a clear picture of the true state of the division.

Captain Lambert, the H Troop commander, accurately identified the division's frontline positions and reported that the division's advanced units were actually a kilometer short of the line understood by the division staff. The staff's estimate of the situation believed that a German withdrawal had begun. The division headquarters' last report from its lead units was nearly ten hours old and it did not know that a German counterattack forced a withdrawal.<sup>101</sup> The division staff chose not to believe Lambert's report and continued planning for an immediate attack based on erroneous information.<sup>102</sup> The attack was unsuccessful and the second report from Captain Taylor, D Troop, clearly illustrated why. Reconnaissance of another part of the frontlines revealed elements of four different regiments disorganized and mixed together with no officers in command. The troop commander assumed command and attempted to reorganize the units until an officer from a nearby brigade headquarters arrived.<sup>103</sup> Again the division staff refused to believe the report and continued the attack until the division culminated and conducted a relief in place with the 1<sup>st</sup> Infantry Division.<sup>104</sup>

Harmon never forgot the lessons from this episode. He understood that information gathered by vigorous reconnaissance efforts were critical in order for leaders to make informed decisions on the battlefield. Personal trust in experienced

reconnaissance commanders had to be implicit because they placed themselves in a potentially dangerous position to accurately assess and report the situation on the ground. Whether or not a commander and staff chose to agree with a given report, it required consideration for further reconnaissance to confirm or deny information that could prove decisive. Decisions made on unreliable information led to potential disasters on the battlefield as illustrated in the case of the 35<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division.<sup>105</sup>

The Provisional Squadron continued to execute small-unit reconnaissance operations in the Meuse-Argonne, supporting the 1<sup>st</sup> and 42<sup>d</sup> Infantry Divisions. Both divisions believed in the possibility of achieving a breakthrough and employing the squadron in an exploitation operation, but both headquarters failed to consolidate the scattered troops for such an event. By the time Harmon reported to the 42<sup>d</sup> Infantry Division the squadron numbered less than one hundred and fifty effectives, less than two organized troops, again based on available mounts. After twenty days of continuous combat operations Harmon led the squadron out of the Meuse-Argonne to consolidate with the 2<sup>d</sup> Cavalry Regiment headquarters. The challenges of obtaining remounts led to the disbandment of the Provisional Squadron. Individual troops eventually received new mounts and returned to the front to support the infantry divisions. Harmon returned to command of F Troop and finished the war providing direct support to the 2<sup>d</sup> Infantry Division.<sup>106</sup>

### Occupation Duty

After eight months on the Western Front, Harmon underwent a unique experience that provided a lasting influence over him, especially in the final years of his career.<sup>107</sup>

The terms of the Armistice dictated a German military withdrawal beyond a neutral zone

established forty kilometers inside Germany. American forces occupied strategic positions within the zone in order to secure the major Rhine River crossings within the Coblenz bridgehead.<sup>108</sup> Six troops of the 2<sup>d</sup> Cavalry Regiment served as the advanced guards for the divisions of the new U.S. Third Army, under Major General Dickman, when it advanced into Germany.<sup>109</sup>

The first six months of 1919 represented a demanding period filled with many diverse challenges for Harmon and his peers. Dickman kept a careful eye on German forces outside the zone and maintained a comprehensive training program during the final peace negotiations. Effective training also helped unit commanders contend with the challenges of American demobilization – with the war over soldiers wanted to go home. Civil-military considerations also dominated the occupation. “The Germans were made to realize that the American Army came as victors, but without arrogance, brutality, or harshness” and German civilians “were permitted to continue their former mode of life.”<sup>110</sup> As opposed to more biased French policies toward Germans that created tensions between the French and Americans, an American policy of “firmness and justice” prevented any major disturbance in its zone of occupation.<sup>111</sup> Impressed with the conduct, discipline, and morale of American troops, German public opinion eventually accepted the American presence.<sup>112</sup> Therefore, Harmon spent his final months in Europe addressing both military and civil issues, maintaining the readiness of his troop, and ensuring the stability of the local population as part of the overall American occupation policy. With the signing of the final peace treaty in June Third Army deactivated and began redeploying units, including the 2<sup>d</sup> Cavalry, to the United States in July 1919.<sup>113</sup>

<sup>1</sup> “139 New Officers Graduated for War,” *New York Times*, April 21, 1917.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> United States Military Academy. *Official Register of the Officers and Cadets for 1917* (West Point, New York: United States Military Academy, 1917): 16-18; United States Military Academy. *The Howitzer: The Yearbook of the United States Military Academy* (West Point, New York: The United States Military Academy, 1917): 93.

<sup>4</sup> Harmon, *Combat Commander*, 14.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid, 14.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid, 14.

<sup>7</sup> Examples of the material available to Harmon and other officers included pamphlets published by the U.S. Army War College, such as the following: U.S. Army. *Cavalry Notes* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1917); U.S. Army. *Instruction and Training of Cavalry* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1918); U.S. Army. *Notes on Infantry, Cavalry, and Field Artillery: Lectures Delivered to Class of Provisional Second Lieutenants, Fort Leavenworth, KS, 1917* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1917). The *Cavalry Journal* was another source available to cavalry officers. Harmon, *Combat Commander*, 14.

<sup>8</sup> “2<sup>nd</sup> Cavalry Officers 1836-1936, Parts I and II,” in Rodney, Dorsey R. *Centennial, Second United States Cavalry—Toujour Pret—1836-1936* (Fort Riley, KS: U.S. Cavalry Association, 1936)

<sup>9</sup> Harmon, *Combat Commander*, 15.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, 15.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid, 15.

<sup>12</sup> Bullard, Robert Lee. *Fighting Generals: Eleven Biographical Sketches of Seven Major Generals in World War I* (Ann Arbor, MI: J.W. Edwards, 1944): 2

<sup>13</sup> Harmon, *Combat Commander*, 15.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid, 15.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid, 15.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid, 15.

<sup>17</sup> Rodney; *Centennial*, Part II.



<sup>18</sup> Harmon, *Combat Commander*, 21; “COL. Arthur Thayer,” *New York Times*, August 17, 1927.

<sup>19</sup> Dickman, Joseph T. *The Great Crusade: A Narrative of The World War* (New York, NY: D. Appleton and Company, 1927): 13. Dickman included that both new cavalry regiments, the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup>, were eventually reclassified field artillery regiments, much to the chagrin of the officers and troopers.

<sup>20</sup> Truscott, Lucian T. *Twilight of the U.S. Cavalry: Life in the Old Army, 1917-1942* (Novato, CA: Presidio Press, 1989): 11.

<sup>21</sup> Rodney, 11.

<sup>22</sup> Rodney; Perry, Redding F. “The 2<sup>d</sup> Cavalry in France,” *Cavalry Journal*, Vol. 37, No. 150 (January 1928): 27.

<sup>23</sup> Rodney.

<sup>24</sup> Adjutant General’s Office. *Official Army Register, Volume I* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1947): 471.

<sup>25</sup> Rodney.

<sup>26</sup> Harmon, *Combat Commander*, 17.

<sup>27</sup> Sherrill, Stephen H. “The Experience of the First Troop of Cavalry to Get into Action in The World War,” *Cavalry Journal*, Vol. 32, No. 131 (April 1923): 153; Perry, “The 2<sup>d</sup> Cavalry in France,” 27.

<sup>28</sup> Harmon, *Combat Commander*, 22.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid*, 22.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid*, 22-23.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid*, 22.

<sup>32</sup> Perry, “The 2<sup>d</sup> Cavalry in France,” 28-29, 32

<sup>33</sup> U.S. Army Cavalry School. *Cavalry Combat* (Fort Riley, KS: U.S. Cavalry Association, 1937): 73

<sup>34</sup> Harmon, *Combat Commander*, 23.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid*, 23-24.

<sup>36</sup> Rodney.

<sup>37</sup> Harmon, *Combat Commander*, 17-21.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid*, 24.

<sup>39</sup> U.S. Army. *Field Service Regulations 1913* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1913): 21-22.

<sup>40</sup> Harmon, *Combat Commander*, 25.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid*, 24-44, 133-142, 181; U.S. Cavalry School, *Cavalry Combat*, 73-79. Harmon and Kent C. Lambert remained good friends. During World War Two Lambert served under Harmon in the 1<sup>st</sup> Armored Division in North Africa and Italy. Unfortunately, according to Harmon in *Combat Commander*, Lambert may have cost Harmon one of his many opportunities for a third general's star and command of the U.S. II Corps in the invasion of Sicily. Upon the conclusion of operations in North Africa Harmon recommended Lambert for promotion to brigadier general, not knowing that Lambert had previously sent classified information regarding the North African invasions to his wife in State Department dispatches. General George C. Marshall knew of the incident and ruled that any officer that recommended Lambert for promotion did not possess the judgment necessary to command a corps. Nevertheless, Harmon never felt a grudge and eventually pushed Lambert's well-deserved promotion through the system.

<sup>42</sup> Kenamore, Clair. *From Vauquois Hill to Exermont: A History of the Thirty-Fifth Division of The United States Army* (St. Louis, MO: Guard Publishing Company, 1919): 187.

<sup>43</sup> Rodney; Harmon, *Combat Commander*, 39, 43-44.

<sup>44</sup> Harmon, *Combat Commander*, 24

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid*, 24.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid*, 24-25.

<sup>47</sup> Perry, 33.

<sup>48</sup> Harmon, *Combat Commander*, 25.

<sup>49</sup> Dickman, 142.

<sup>50</sup> Harmon, *Combat Commander*, 25.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid*, 25-26.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid*, 26.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid*, 26; Coffman, 262-273.

<sup>54</sup> Harmon, Ernest N. "Second Cavalry in the St. Mihiel Offensive," *Cavalry Journal*, Vol. 30, No. 124 (July 1921): 282-289.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid, 282-289; "Second Cavalry in the Meuse-Argonne," *Cavalry Journal*, Vol. 31, No. 126, (January 1922): 10-18. Harmon's articles provide interesting comparisons and contrasts of tactical employment.

<sup>56</sup> Harmon, *Combat Commander*, 26.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid, 26.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid, 26.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid, 26.

<sup>60</sup> *FSR 1913*, 12, 21-22, 50.

<sup>61</sup> Coffman, 281-282.

<sup>62</sup> U.S. Army. *FM 3-20.96: Reconnaissance Squadron* (Washington, D.C.: Department of the Army, 2006): x, 1-1.

<sup>63</sup> *FSR 1913*, 48.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid, 50.

<sup>65</sup> Grotelueschen, Mark E. *The AEF Way of War: The American Army and Combat in World War I* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2007): 116.

<sup>66</sup> Coffman, 279.

<sup>67</sup> *1<sup>st</sup> Division Summary of Operations in The World War* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1944): 43, 46.

<sup>68</sup> *1<sup>st</sup> Division Summary of Operations in The World War*, 46-47.

<sup>69</sup> Thomas, Shipley. *The History of the A.E.F.* (New York, NY: George H. Doran Company, 1920): 215-216.

<sup>70</sup> Harmon, *Combat Commander*, 28.

<sup>71</sup> Perry, "The 2<sup>d</sup> Cavalry in France," 35; *1<sup>st</sup> Division Summary of Operations in The World War*, 47; Harmon, "Second Cavalry in the St. Mihiel Offensive," 285.

<sup>72</sup> *1<sup>st</sup> Division Summary of Operations in The World War*, 47; Harmon, "Second Cavalry in the St. Mihiel Offensive," 285.

<sup>73</sup> Harmon, "Second Cavalry in the St. Mihiel Offensive," 285.

<sup>74</sup> Harmon, *Combat Commander*, 28-29.

<sup>75</sup> Harmon, "Second Cavalry in the St. Mihiel Offensive," 285.

<sup>76</sup> Harmon, *Combat Commander*, 28.

<sup>77</sup> Harmon, "Second Cavalry in the St. Mihiel Offensive," 286.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid*, 286.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid*, 287

<sup>80</sup> Harmon, *Combat Commander*, 29; Stubbs, Mary Lee and Stanley Russell Conner. *Armor-Cavalry: Regular and Reserve, Lineage Series, Part I* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1969): 39.

<sup>81</sup> Harmon, "Second Cavalry in the St. Mihiel Offensive," 286.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid*, 287.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid*, 287.

<sup>84</sup> Thomas, 216.

<sup>85</sup> Harmon, *Combat Commander*, 30.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid*, 30.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid*, 33-34.

<sup>88</sup> Coffman, 281.

<sup>89</sup> *1<sup>st</sup> Division Summary of Operations in The World War*, 52-55.

<sup>90</sup> Harmon, "Second Cavalry in the Meuse-Argonne," 10.

<sup>91</sup> Harmon, *Combat Commander*, 33.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid*, 35.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid*, 35.

<sup>94</sup> While Hazard's days in the field were clearly behind him, during the St. Mihiel offensive (and later the Meuse-Argonne offensive) he proved to be a fairly good liaison between the squadron and the 1<sup>st</sup> Infantry Division. His report after St. Mihiel, with data no doubt provided specifically by Harmon and the troop commanders, made several key recommendations on the proper equipping and employment of cavalry in the trenches. For example; troops required six automatic rifles, fifty hand grenades, and demolition

equipment. More importantly Hazard warned that non-combat taskings behind the lines greatly affected the combat efficiency of the cavalry. Harmon, *Combat Commander*, 27, 29, 37; and Perry, "The 2<sup>d</sup> Cavalry in France," 37-38.

<sup>95</sup> Harmon, *Combat Commander*, 35-40.

<sup>96</sup> Harmon, "Second Cavalry in the Meuse-Argonne," 14.

<sup>97</sup> Harmon, *Combat Commander*, 39.

<sup>98</sup> U.S. Cavalry School, *Cavalry Combat*, 73-77.

<sup>99</sup> Coffman, 311-312.

<sup>100</sup> Harmon, *Combat Commander*, 38-39.

<sup>101</sup> U.S. Cavalry School, *Cavalry Combat*, 76-77.

<sup>102</sup> Harmon, *Combat Commander*, 38.

<sup>103</sup> Harmon, "Second Cavalry in the Meuse-Argonne," 15; Kenamore, 187.

<sup>104</sup> Harmon, *Combat Commander*, 38.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid*, 38-39.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid*, 43-44; and Harmon, "Second Cavalry in the Meuse-Argonne," 15-18.

<sup>107</sup> After World War II Harmon served in civil-military operations in German and Czechoslovakia and eventually organized and commanded the U.S. Constabulary in Germany; see, Harmon, *Combat Commander*, 253-294.

<sup>108</sup> Cornebise, Alfred E. "Der Rhein Entlang: The American Occupation Forces in Germany, 1918-1923, A Photo Essay," *Military Affairs*, Vol. 46, No. 4 (December 1982): 183.

<sup>109</sup> Stubbs, 39; Coffman, 359.

<sup>110</sup> Dickman, 228.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid*, 228-229.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid*, 234.

<sup>113</sup> Coffman, 359; Harmon, *Combat Commander*, 46.

## CHAPTER 3

### COMPANY-GRADE OFFICER IN PEACETIME (1920-1931)

The interwar period provided Harmon with nearly twenty years to dedicate himself to the study of his profession. Time spent as a company-grade officer during the first decade of the interwar period established a firm base of professional experience and knowledge that led to Harmon's selection for higher service and eventually senior command during World War II.

#### Back to School—The Cavalry School

After three years of command experience in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Cavalry Regiment Harmon began training at the U.S. Army Cavalry School's Troop Officers' Course in September 1920.<sup>1</sup> Several months prior to the course's start General Pershing, the army's most celebrated cavalryman, sent a message to the "Officers and Men of the Cavalry," denying the eclipse of the cavalry in the recent war.<sup>2</sup> Pershing's message merits brief description for two reasons. First, it preserved the cavalry's prewar sense of identity and second, it alluded to the operations of the 2<sup>d</sup> Cavalry Regiment, specifically those of the Provisional Squadron under Harmon.<sup>3</sup>

Pershing began by stating that "the character of the World War afforded little opportunity for the employment of cavalry," as opposed to infantry and artillery.<sup>4</sup> However, the "splendid work of the cavalry in the few weeks of the war more than justified its existence," reinforcing that "American theory for the employment of cavalry" was correct.<sup>5</sup> He then mentioned the experience of the Provisional Squadron, stating that it "participated in the St. Mihiel attack with great credit."<sup>6</sup> Pershing closed his message

by explaining “with their ripe experience, it is earnestly hoped that they will profit by the lessons of the war applicable to their arm,” and strive to maintain the professionalism and prestige of the cavalry.<sup>7</sup>

So, why did Harmon attend this course after extensive experience commanding a cavalry troop and the Provisional Squadron in combat? The answer is based on the series of steps taken by the War Department eventually enacted into law by National Defense Act of 1920 (NDA 1920). The act incorporated the lessons learned from World War I and modernized national military policy. An important requirement of the legislation called for the establishment of a modern and comprehensive Army school system.<sup>8</sup> This was a critical step toward linking training and doctrine. In the past, the Commandant of the Cavalry School explained, “it was impossible to find two cavalymen who could agree on saddles, bits or whatnot.”<sup>9</sup> He outlined the school’s approach to eliminating this lack of standardization:

The aim of the Cavalry School, under its new organization, is not so much to develop specialists along any line, horsemanship, tactics, or arms, as it is to produce *balanced* cavalymen, *i.e.*, officers who can meet a tactical situation, handle their troops and machine guns properly, ride well, take good care of their animals in campaign, and see that the health of their men is safeguarded...<sup>10</sup>

Therefore, the Cavalry School exposed Harmon and his peers; many of them combat veterans, though in other branches, to their first standardized instruction.

Harmon was a member of the first class to pass through the newly established Cavalry School organization.<sup>11</sup> Harmon’s recollection of the Troop Officers’ Course is brief. In *Combat Commander* he referred to the course as “an interesting and successful year.”<sup>12</sup> However, the performance at the course could have wider implications. Many officers, probably Harmon as well, quickly “began to realize that graduation from the

service schools was important not only to the development of their careers,” but also “the next step on the military educational ladder and therefore in a successful military career.”<sup>13</sup> Thirty officers, the majority captains with some lieutenants comprised the Troop Officers’ Course.<sup>14</sup>

An account of Harmon’s course is given in the Cavalry School’s 1921 student yearbook, *The Rasp*, and a more detailed overall appraisal is provided by future general Lucian K. Truscott in his *Twilight of the U.S. Cavalry*. Truscott attended the Troop Officers’ course four years after Harmon and explained that the Cavalry School’s “authorities expected student officers to be under intense pressure throughout the school year because they [the instructors] appreciated the great importance of the training in the officers’ future careers.”<sup>15</sup> The pressure on Harmon’s class in 1920-1921 was probably more intense since it was the first iteration of a new school organization implementing a new program of instruction. Truscott confirmed this assertion when he commented on a 1921 *Cavalry Journal* article written by the commandant of the Cavalry School published immediately after Harmon’s graduation. The commandant explained that the most critical issue facing the new school organization and training was a considerable shortage of available training material. A key passage clearly described the challenge:

Many requests are being received for a list of the books in use at the school. It has been necessary to answer that, except for the government manuals on the particular subject, text books are not used. Instruction has been carried out by practical exercises and by lectures and either written problems or examinations. These lectures mimeographed and distributed from time to time throughout the course, become available as texts in their particular subjects. Gradually, this material, which represents work from varied sources, is compiled, and next year it is expected that it will be issued in pamphlets of a less temporary nature...<sup>16</sup>

Therefore, it appears that the majority of cavalry-related training that Harmon received



was of the hands-on variety and mostly in the saddle.

*The Rasp*, however, captured one of the true essences of the Cavalry School training philosophy: decision-making. The emphasis was placed on “the impossibility of making hard and fast rules” that held good in any situation encountered.<sup>17</sup> The yearbook declared that “principles always remain the same, it is the application only that changes...the man on the ground is the man to decide, he and he only is able to employ his forces intelligently.”<sup>18</sup> Students developed the ability to make quick and effective decisions based on the situation at hand and the information available.

Overall, the course continued to stress the fundamentals of soldiering. Basic skills consisted of map reading and sketching, methods of instruction, pioneer duties, discipline, leadership, and an overview of the Army. Students also studied animal management, horseshoeing, and pack and wagon transportation. Additional skills such as aerial photograph reading, military history, mess management, mobilization plans, and riot duty were also taught. The two most important blocks of instruction were Cavalry Weapons and Tactics. The weapons instruction focused on automatic weapons and rifles and their tactical employment. The more important points of the tactics instruction included estimates of the situation, orders production, intelligence, and the integration of cavalry with the other arms.<sup>19</sup>

The subject of military history stands out on this list because the instruction consisted of lectures on the tactical employment of cavalry in World War I, “emphasizing the tactical principles illustrated by cavalry operations in the campaigns.”<sup>20</sup> The 1921 edition of *The Rasp*, the Cavalry School’s student yearbook published during Harmon’s academic year, stated that “The cavalry has a wealth of material from which to draw in

enunciating its principles, much of this material being gathered on our Southwestern frontier and in the World War.”<sup>21</sup> There is no doubt that the cavalry’s frontier experience provided a major influence on American cavalry doctrine. However, what, if any, American cavalry experience in the recent war had yet to be analyzed and incorporated into the Cavalry School’s program of instruction. The AEF Superior Board, tasked with analyzing the lessons learned from World War I, published its findings in late-June 1920, two months before the new Cavalry School courses began.<sup>22</sup> In defense of the Cavalry School there was not sufficient time for the Army to adequately collect, analyze, and disseminate the lessons from the American experience in the war. Therefore, the real experience taken from World War I had to be that of European cavalry operations during the early period of hostilities, marked with widespread maneuver in the west, or during the fairly fluid campaigns on the eastern front and Palestine.<sup>23</sup>

Therefore, any real incorporation of recent lessons learned probably occurred in the form of both formal and informal dialogue between students and instructors with actual mounted combat experience. The Cavalry School openly encouraged this type of dialogue.<sup>24</sup> Many of the student officers were presumably veterans of the fighting in France. However, very few, aside from possibly Harmon, experienced mounted combat. Given his extremely unique experience commanding the Provisional Squadron Harmon most likely found him singled out by both his instructors and peers for the obvious value of his experience in France.

An interesting anonymous letter to *Cavalry Journal* in January 1920 removes any doubt to the assertion that Harmon attracted the attention of his instructors and peers. Ironically the letter rebutted a previous article on the cavalry saber written by Major

General Joseph T. Dickman. The unknown author disagreed with Dickman's belief in retaining the saber in the U.S. Cavalry, citing various historic examples from recent history, including the World War. However, when the author looked for evidence from the World War he found nothing. His dilemma is worth quoting in its entirety:

What our Cavalry did at St. Mihiel appears to be hidden, for some unknown reason. Perhaps it is because of the small size of the force, one squadron, prevents its consideration in the mass of reports of the great units employed. But of this much I am confident: certain troops of the Second Cavalry were in mounted action at St. Mihiel and perhaps elsewhere. Did they use the saber, or the pistol, or both? And what were the results? We have here a case in our own Army. What happened?<sup>25</sup>

The editors of *Cavalry Journal* attempted to answer the author's questions in the same issue by printing "Operations of The Second Cavalry in France," a brief list of its battle participation.<sup>26</sup> The letter and the warranted attention received by Harmon more than likely resulted in his first professional article in *Cavalry Journal*, "The Second Cavalry in The St. Mihiel Offensive," published shortly after he graduated from the Troop Officers' Course.<sup>27</sup> Therefore, it may be correct to state that Harmon's year at the Cavalry School marked the beginning of a reputation within the cavalry community.

A more detailed examination of the Superior Board report warrants attention because of its release during this period, but more importantly because the section dedicated to the cavalry directly reflected Harmon's experience in France. Though Harmon was not named in the text, its content reflected the lessons learned by the Provisional Squadron. Two points reinforce his assertion. First, as previously stated, the Provisional Squadron was the largest mounted unit to see combat in France. Second, the president of the board was Major General Joseph T. Dickman.<sup>28</sup>

The report of the Superior Board analysis of cavalry operations embodied the

experience of Ernest Harmon and the Provisional Squadron through the strong influence of Dickman. Dickman commanded the 2<sup>nd</sup> Cavalry when Harmon reported and continued to hold a place in his heart for the rest of his life.<sup>29</sup> In France, it was most likely Dickman who recommended to General Pershing, a fellow cavalryman, that dispersed cavalry units be consolidated and employed. Lieutenant General Robert L. Bullard later described Dickman as “a devoted cavalryman...he seemed to expect and hope for much more from the cavalry than it was ever able to deliver during the conflict.”<sup>30</sup> Bullard explained that St. Mihiel “brought a bit of satisfaction to the old cavalryman...who noted proudly the part that the mounted troops played in [the] attack...He reports all, omits nothing” that they did.<sup>31</sup>

Therefore, it may not have been surprisingly that the first and only cavalry unit consolidated for combat came from the 2<sup>d</sup> Cavalry. Dickman commanded the U.S. IV Corps in the St. Mihiel offensive and the U.S. I Corps in the Meuse-Argonne.<sup>32</sup> The Provisional Squadron operated in those corps areas in both operations.<sup>33</sup> Also, the 2<sup>d</sup> Cavalry was the only mounted formation that served in the U.S. Third Army, commanded by Dickman, during the occupation.<sup>34</sup> Therefore, after action reviews of the squadron and the divisions it supported found their way to Dickman’s headquarters and resulted in unit commendations.<sup>35</sup>

The Superior Board analysis of the Army’s cavalry experience in France compliments Harmon’s personal recollections in *Combat Commander*. The example of the Provisional Squadron was plainly visible. The first point of significance stated that:

Cavalry units should therefore be kept intact as far as possible and should not be frittered away by breaking up into small fractions or by requiring duty which can be performed by other available means. Except in case of great emergency

Cavalry should be so handled as to conserve it at all times in excellent condition. Unreasonable demands for as short a period as ten days might put Cavalry commands out of action for months.<sup>36</sup>

This statement clearly illustrates the dilemma of the Provisional Squadron from its origins to physical exhaustion in the Meuse-Argonne. A corroborating passage reflecting Dickman's influence as the board president also undoubtedly refers to the squadron:

Without an organization from which replacements can be drawn, the regiment in campaign soon becomes filled with inexperienced officers, raw recruits, and green horses from the range and from remount depots. Regiments with fine reputations would deteriorate rapidly and become a disappointment to their commanders and the government.<sup>37</sup>

This statement further described the squadron's experience, going even further back before the 2<sup>d</sup> Cavalry's deployment to France.

The report correctly stated that "mounted combat of large bodies of Cavalry is probably a thing of the past."<sup>38</sup> However, it asserted that small units, "perhaps up to a squadron," would still possibly see mounted action, "especially against troops that are shaken by fire or are disorganized and in retreat."<sup>39</sup> The board further recommended that smaller units "should not hesitate to charge when a favorable opportunity presents itself."<sup>40</sup> The reference to employing squadron-sized formations in mounted combat operations can only refer to the Provisional Squadron since it was the only large cavalry force employed. Further reference to mounted action against "troops that are shaken by fire or disorganized and in retreat" recalls the encounter Harmon experienced during the St. Mihiel offensive when the enemy was thought to be withdrawing. The board's recommendation to charge when an opportunity presented itself recounts the isolated examples of Harmon's cavalymen destroying enemy machine guns in the St. Mihiel and Meuse-Argonne offensives.

Further analysis attested that “The Cardinal principles of Cavalry are mobility and firepower (emphasis included in the report).”<sup>41</sup> The board identified dismounted fire action as the most important battle drill conducted by the cavalry, integrating automatic rifles and machine guns. However, citing that cavalry lacked the strength of the infantry, the report emphasized that cavalry “seek quick decisions” and “take advantage of its mobility and look for the enemy’s flanks.”<sup>42</sup> In the case of the Provisional Squadron, Harmon exploited the unit’s mobility extremely well when avoiding enemy artillery, withdrawing under adverse circumstances, and pursuing disorganized enemy forces. While not entirely successful during the St. Mihiel offensive, in the Meuse-Argonne Harmon effectively employed a combination of mounted and dismounted tactics.

Notwithstanding the experience of the Provisional Squadron, the board concluded that in trench warfare “there would be practically no use for mounted cavalry.”<sup>43</sup> However, in not ruling out the potential for trench warfare in the future, the board cited that the actions of officers, specifically their “knowledge, initiative and energy should produce good results, even under adverse conditions.”<sup>44</sup> The cavalry section of the report of Superior Board closed with the following passage:

On other fields and under different conditions our cavalry will find useful employment as in the past. With heightened mobility, increased firepower, and under alert, vigorous and enthusiastic officers, it can look forward to the opportunities of the future with confidence.<sup>45</sup>

This concluding passage served as an acknowledgement of the difficult operations encountered by the Provisional Squadron. Despite the adverse conditions that trench warfare presented to cavalry employment, Harmon, hidden between the lines of the report of the Superior Board, contributed to the sustainment of established U.S. Cavalry

doctrine after World War I and validated attempts to increase its firepower. This final conclusion by the board was quite ironic. When considering how much Harmon accomplished with little experience, scarce resources, and a complex tactical problem, his experience commanding the Provisional Squadron served as the first major evidence that convinced him that the tactical value of the horse was over.<sup>46</sup>

#### Return to West Point—Instructor Duty

Following graduation from the Troop Officers' Course, instead of returning to another troop assignment, Harmon received orders to report to West Point to serve as an instructor.<sup>47</sup> Though Harmon did not mention it in *Combat Commander*, the Army filled a critical demand for officers at West Point during 1920-1921 in order to reestablish the Corps of Cadets regular peacetime strength. Future Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General of The Army Omar N. Bradley stated in *A General's Life* that he received last minute orders for West Point. Several of Harmon's Academy classmates received priority orders as well. Future Chief of Staff of the Army, General Matthew B. Ridgeway received orders to report for duty due to the reintroduction of Spanish to the curriculum.<sup>48</sup> General J. Lawton Collins, another future Chief of Staff of the Army, who served in the headquarters of the American occupation force in Germany, received orders for the next transport home despite efforts by his chain of command to declare him mission essential.<sup>49</sup>

Instructor positions at West Point were reserved for Academy graduates with extremely good performance records and high potential for further service. Following World War I, the majority of Harmon's peers that were selected for this assignment were either combat veterans or qualified officers returning to the Academy for another tour.

Even though the Army scrambled to fill West Point instructor vacancies during this period, it did not comprise in the selection criteria, as the records of Harmon, Bradley, Ridgeway, and Collins attest.<sup>50</sup>

Four years passed since Harmon left the Academy in 1917. While those years were good for Harmon, they were a dark period for the Academy. He arrived at the mid-point of a reform campaign implemented by Brigadier General Douglas MacArthur, the Academy's superintendent. MacArthur's reform centered on preserving the spirit of the Academy while modernizing its curriculum and methods. His experience leading volunteers and draftees in World War I and supervising civil-military operations during the occupation dominated his reform program. The overall experience formed a personal conception of the type of officer that the Academy should produce.<sup>51</sup>

Therefore, MacArthur worked "to bring West Point into a new and closer relationship with the Army at large."<sup>52</sup> He strove to introduce West Point to the challenges of modern warfare, incorporated the lessons of World War I into the curriculum, and replaced the traditional summer camp training with more realistic training at Fort Dix, New Jersey. In academics MacArthur urged the introduction of new courses that addressed various subjects included in the social sciences. Finally, efforts to increase the morale of the Corps included the expansion of the athletic program by introducing intramural athletics and empowering cadets through new institutions such as the new Corps honor code and self-regulated privileges.<sup>53</sup>

However, MacArthur encountered significant resistance from the permanent faculty and much of the Academy's alumni. While able to reform the overall day to day operation and military training of the Corps, despite the constant grumbling of alumni,



academic reform occurred more slowly against a firmly entrenched academic board intent on fighting a delaying action until MacArthur's term expired.<sup>54</sup>

Harmon reported to West Point in mid-summer 1921 at the height of MacArthur's efforts to reform the Academy. His primary duty was as an instructor of drawing. He also assisted in the Tactics Department and riding instruction.<sup>55</sup> The Department of Drawing does not appear to have been key terrain in the contest of wills between MacArthur and the academic board. The chair of the department, a permanent faculty lieutenant colonel, does not appear on the list of permanent faculty members that aggressively opposed or those that supported MacArthur's reform attempts.<sup>56</sup> The department focused on a purely military function, specifically sketch- and map-making, and teaching cadets how to gain a tactical appreciation for terrain.<sup>57</sup> Therefore, Harmon most likely did not experience first-hand exposure to the academic struggle that took place at academic board meetings.

For the most part, Harmon represented the type of officer that MacArthur felt he needed as instructors to achieve his overall vision to modernized West Point. First, like the rest of the faculty, he was an Academy graduate. He was a member of "The Long Grey Line" that thoroughly understood the concept of "Duty, Honor, Country." He understood the Academy and how it worked.

Second, he possessed an excellent combat record. This factor proved extremely important. Harmon and MacArthur shared similar experiences during the war and occupation that MacArthur wanted to incorporate into the West Point program. Both experienced the challenge of training and leading volunteers and draftees, the ordeal of modern warfare, and the trial of civil-military operations in Coblenz. Both men also

shared familiarity with the same combat sectors during France. Harmon's first exposure to hostile fire occurred when his troop briefly supported the 42<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Division, in which MacArthur commanded an infantry brigade. When the 1<sup>st</sup> Infantry Division, supported by the Provisional Squadron, attacked during the St. Mihiel offensive, the 42<sup>nd</sup> supported its right flank. During the Meuse-Argonne offensive they operated in the same sectors and during the last phase of the offensive actually met. The 42<sup>nd</sup> relieved the 1<sup>st</sup> Infantry Division and received the Provisional Squadron in support. Harmon reported to MacArthur and the squadron supported his division until it was withdrawn due to the exhaustion of its mounts. Additionally, both served in the Coblenz bridgehead during the occupation.<sup>58</sup>

Finally, Harmon and MacArthur, both former Academy athletes, shared an almost obsessive passion for athletics, especially football.<sup>59</sup> The majority of Harmon's memories of this period included in *Combat Commander* are about athletics. This is plainly evident in Harmon's conviction that "These were happy years between 1921 and 1925, because I was still enough of a kid at heart to enjoy all sports."<sup>60</sup> Harmon served as an assistant coach on the football and lacrosse teams. Harmon demonstrated his commitment to the football team by also coaching and playing as part of the B Team, the second-string "scrubs," composed in part by fellow officer instructors that scrimmaged with the varsity the week of scheduled games. The 1924 *Howitzer* praised Harmon and a fellow coach for instilling "the old fight into their charges with such good results..."<sup>61</sup> Furthermore, MacArthur's introduction of intramural athletics, requiring mandatory participation, produced "the attributes of fortitude, self-control, resolution, courage, mental agility, and, of course, physical development..."<sup>62</sup> It also produced a need for

officer coaches and no doubt Harmon eagerly volunteered.

MacArthur's emphasis on athletics at the Academy and Harmon's love of sports led to a unique experience in Harmon's career. Harmon challenged himself at the highest level of athletic competition by trying out for the 1924 U.S. Olympic team.<sup>63</sup> Army officers traditionally participated in Olympic competition, specifically the martial events of equestrian drill, shooting, fencing, polo, boxing, and the most demanding event, the modern military pentathlon. Cavalrymen that "were tempered in the crucible of Olympic competition on the road to military fame" included George S. Patton and Terry de la Mesa Allen.<sup>64</sup> Harmon served closely with both men in World War II and counted them as close friends.

Probably based on his fiercely aggressive nature, Harmon chose to compete in the modern pentathlon, often referred to as the "Military Pentathlon" because of its martial nature. However, a 1922 *Cavalry Journal* article describing the event may have influenced on Harmon's decision. Only three Americans, all Army officers, competed in the event since its inception in the 1912 Olympics. The grueling five-event competition consisted of a 300-meter freestyle swim, fencing, rapid-fire twenty-five meter pistol shoot, 5,000-meter horse ride over varied terrain, and a 4,000-m cross-country run. Winning an individual event earned one point for a competitor, second place earned two points, etc. The competitor with the lowest overall score won the gold medal.<sup>65</sup> Harmon felt comfortable with shooting, riding, and running. However, swimming and fencing were his weakest areas, the former because he "never had much chance as a youngster," and the latter because he "wasn't worth a damn."<sup>66</sup> Fencing instructors determined that Harmon's best chance consisted of being "so aggressive at the start of the match that

cautious and more skillful opponents might be caught off guard,” advice that he probably relished.<sup>67</sup>

Natural talent and additional training at West Point worked well at the national tryouts and Harmon served as captain of the four-man team that went to the Paris Olympics. He finished sixth out of forty contestants, performing well in shooting, riding, and running. However, he was “a bust as a swimmer” and his aggressive strategy “didn’t fool European fencers very long; they waited awhile and then coolly dispatched” him.<sup>68</sup>

However, when Harmon reported to West Point, MacArthur’s days as superintendent were numbered. Five months after Harmon’s arrival, the War Department notified MacArthur that he would be available for overseas duty after the June 1922 graduation. Superintendents usually served a four-year tour. The fast-paced reforms, confrontation with the conservative academic board and alumni, and irritation of the War Department in an effort to initiate change led to MacArthur’s early transfer. This was clearly evident with the naming of the next superintendent in January 1922, an officer known for his strict conservatism. MacArthur’s replacement immediately put a halt to reform and attempted to eliminate many of MacArthur’s successful initiatives.<sup>69</sup>

What did Harmon think of MacArthur’s reform attempts? Harmon did not provide an opinion in *Combat Commander*, but there is some evidence, from that period and later in his life, that he supported MacArthur’s initiatives. Harmon belonged to the newest generation of West Point alumni, a generation thrust directly into war and not far removed from the cadet experience. Most likely he saw the reforms as opportunities that he wished he had seen during his cadet days. Furthermore, during World War I he developed a “boys will be boys” understanding of soldiers based on his experience with

young draftees, concluding that soldiers (and that is what the cadets trained to be), needed to be considered responsible men and provided with a certain degree of empowerment, freedom, and indulgence. However, the true measure of Harmon's opinion occurred nearly thirty years later when he began a fifteen-year tenure as President of Norwich University, a period marked by reform and modernization that appeared to emulate MacArthur's attempts in the early 1920s.<sup>70</sup>

Time spent at West Point represented a critical period in Harmon's professional development. Selection from amongst his peers for the assignment acknowledged his past performance and future potential. Furthermore, the Academy tour exposed Harmon to a wider range of the officer corps outside of the cavalry. By nature of their selection to serve at West Point they were among the best company- and field –grade officers in the Army and displayed equal potential. A casual study of editions of *The Howitzer* published during Harmon's tour supports this assertion, pointing out the many officers that progressed to key positions during World War II. A snapshot from the 1921-1924 yearbooks, focused purely on those individuals that Harmon experienced significant interaction with during that war, identifies two army group commanders, six corps commanders (Harmon represented a seventh), and three division commanders.<sup>71</sup>

West Point also provided a valuable opportunity for Harmon to expand his personal and professional development. It was at the Academy that he began to understand the inherent connection between teaching and training. Duties in the classroom, on the athletic field, and in realistic military training helped to develop his skills as coach, teacher, and mentor that he took seriously throughout the rest of his career. Exposure to other outstanding officers expanded his professional learning. He

wrote his second professional article for *Cavalry Journal* in 1922, relating his experience during the St. Mihiel offensive.<sup>72</sup> Harmon considered new ideas introduced by other officers and began to consider military subjects outside the sphere of the cavalry. He began to think beyond the aspects of cavalry and focused on challenges confronting the Army at large, freely discussing them with his fellow officers. Finally, due in part to MacArthur's influence at West Point and his own strong work ethic, Harmon developed a strong personal conviction never to settle for the *status quo* and aggressively attack problems head on in order to improve the organizations he served with throughout the remainder of his career.

#### Time with Troops—6<sup>th</sup> Cavalry Regiment

In 1925 Harmon received orders to report to the 6<sup>th</sup> Cavalry Regiment, located at Fort Oglethorpe, Georgia, where he assumed duties as the regimental plans and training officer.<sup>73</sup> The assignment with the 6<sup>th</sup> Cavalry exposed Harmon to his first real taste of cavalry regimental garrison life. The year-long attendance at the Troop Officers' Course at Fort Riley and four year tour at West Point removed Harmon from active service with the cavalry for five years. There must have been some apprehension over returning to a regiment after such a long absence from the field. More than likely Harmon approached the challenge confidently, relying on his valuable combat record in France, training at the Cavalry School, and the experience gained teaching at West Point.

There is no doubt that Harmon looked forward to duty with troops. However, there was more than personal enthusiasm behind this anticipation. The Army's greatly reduced post-war size dictated the number of positions with troops available to officers. During Harmon's duty with the 6<sup>th</sup> Cavalry, the Army totaled less than 138,000 men,

20,000 assigned to the cavalry.<sup>74</sup> Throughout most of the Interwar Period the Army's officer corps numbered less than 14,000; 950 were assigned to the cavalry.<sup>75</sup> The number of cavalry regiments and the strength of the branch required fewer officers for service with troops while the wider demands of the Army required more. With this in mind, Harmon's extensive command experience during World War I benefited him greatly during a period when infrequent opportunities for time with troops were the established norm.

The role of the plans and training officer touched every aspect of the regiment's operations and activities. Harmon's responsibilities centered on the planning and execution of all regimental training and operations. Normal cavalry training took place year round. Troopers qualified with rifle, automatic rifle, pistol, and saber on a yearly basis.<sup>76</sup> Various tactical exercises tested and trained the regiment's subordinate units throughout the year.<sup>77</sup> Harmon also gave attention to the planning and execution of external training support. The regiment executed recurring annual summer training support to a variety of organizations. The regiment sponsored a Citizens' Military Training Camp (CMTC) that averaged some three hundred trainees a year.<sup>78</sup> CMTC gave young volunteers the opportunity of four weeks of military training each summer. Men that completed four years of annual training and met additional requirements were eligible for commissions in the Reserve Officer Corps.<sup>79</sup> The regiment also provided ROTC camp training for the University of Georgia and support for National Guard units from neighboring states.<sup>80</sup>

During the fall and winter months the regiment conducted officer and non-commissioned officer professional development training.<sup>81</sup> Officers met twice a week to

receive lectures given by their fellow officers on a series of topics during these seasons. Officer training emphasized tactics and presented instruction in the form of lectures, map problems, and weekly tactical rides on the Civil War Chickamauga battlefield. All of these efforts culminated in an annual tactical inspection conducted by the Corps Area headquarters. For example, the 1926 inspection involved dismounted action, mounted attacks, attack against a convoy, and seizing and retaining river crossings. The attack against the convoy may have been Harmon's idea based on his first engagement in the St. Mihiel salient in September 1918. The regiment achieved the highest unit rating in the Corps Area.<sup>82</sup>

Social events also occupied Harmon's time as plans and training officer. By far the greatest priority centered on hosting the annual Chattanooga-Sixth Cavalry Horse Show, a combined civilian-military equestrian competition that received national attention. In addition to providing a great deal to the planning process Harmon actively competed. In the 1926 show Harmon won first place in one category and third in another.<sup>83</sup> Harmon found more time for riding as a member of the regimental polo team, mostly as a substitute. However, he took to the field upon another officer's injury and contributed to victories in the Southern Circuit and Corps Area Championships.<sup>84</sup> Of course there was also Harmon's first love of all sports, football. He organized and coached the regimental football team in 1926 that entertained soldiers and civilians alike throughout the season.<sup>85</sup>

Harmon did not experience any major challenges due to his five year absence from duty with troops. While the size of the cavalry changed significantly its tactical doctrine remained relatively unchanged. The report of the Superior Board concluded that



World War I had little effect on American cavalry doctrine. The report aside, many cavalymen saw the wartime experience as a confirmation of the cavalry's pre-war doctrine. Based on this assertion there appeared little reason for change. Compared to the previous FSR published in 1913, the FSR 1923 did not change the cavalry's role very much. Cavalry continued to perform its traditional reconnaissance and security missions. However, FSR 1923 introduced broad guidance on the employment of aircraft and motor vehicles to accomplish what were once strictly cavalry missions. It also discussed the augmentation of cavalry with armored cars and truck-borne infantry. FSR 1923 remained the cornerstone of the Army's warfighting doctrine throughout the remainder of the Interwar Period.<sup>86</sup>

Service with the 6<sup>th</sup> Cavalry provided Harmon with two extremely valuable years to practice all aspects of his profession. He continued to analyze his World War I lessons, study new doctrine, keep in touch with emerging concepts, and further develop his leadership style. With the cavalry's debate over mechanization and its doctrinal implications still in the future, Harmon most likely attempted to focus on current cavalry doctrine and topics published in *Cavalry Journal* in order to keep aware of events across the cavalry. Furthermore, he learned how to properly train units during peacetime, something he missed during his time with the 2<sup>d</sup> Cavalry. All of these points prepared Harmon for positions of greater responsibility.

#### R.O.T.C.—Norwich University

When the two years of duty with the 6<sup>th</sup> Cavalry came to an end in 1927, Harmon experienced surprise and delight when he received orders detailing him to Norwich University in Northfield, Vermont as Professor of Military Science and Tactics

(PMS&T). The assignment was a return to “home country” for Harmon. He spent much of his childhood in Vermont, attended Norwich for one year, married there, and spent the early hectic years of his career at nearby Fort Ethan Allen.<sup>87</sup>

There was also a sense of irony behind the assignment. First, he attended Norwich for a year before securing his appointment to West Point.<sup>88</sup> Therefore, the administration considered Harmon “a Norwich man,” knowing and understanding “the history and traditions of the college thoroughly...”<sup>89</sup> Second, Colonel Frank Tompkins, the man who recommended Harmon pursued an appointment to West Point, previously held the positions simultaneously. Finally, when he reported to Norwich to assume his new duties, the president of the university was the son of the Congressman who nominated Harmon for his West Point appointment in 1912.<sup>90</sup>

Harmon’s assignment at Norwich reflected the Army’s dependence on Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC)-produced citizen-soldiers as part of its plans for potential wartime expansion. Created under the auspices of the National Defense Act of 1916 (NDA 1916), ROTC had little impact on producing trained officers during World War I, but would be a major asset during the next war. By assigning qualified Regular officers to supervise ROTC programs the Army ensured the existence of a large pool of well-trained reserve officers ready for active duty service upon mobilization. Harmon’s selection for the Norwich assignment was especially important. It remained one of the few traditional military colleges that, in addition to West Point, provided a consistent yearly quota of active duty officers, as well as reserve officers eligible for active duty in the event of mobilization.<sup>91</sup> The War Department rated Norwich a distinguished military college for the twenty-two years prior to Harmon’s arrival (he supervised the successful

achievement of this honor during his four-years).<sup>92</sup>

The cavalry saw the importance of ROTC as well.<sup>93</sup> It endorsed a philosophy expressed in a 1929 *Cavalry Journal* article that distinguished “teaching duty” as a compliment to duty with troops.<sup>94</sup> During the bulk of Harmon’s tour at Norwich forty-eight other cavalry officers served in ROTC assignments.<sup>95</sup> Occasionally some of these officers shared their experiences in the pages of *Cavalry Journal*. One article, written during Harmon’s assignment at Norwich, explained that though the “objectives are to make a well-trained private at the end of the first year...and finally a second lieutenant” in the last year, there were additional opportunities for officers during ROTC assignments.<sup>96</sup> Additional advice to officers included, “Your college has a library and it will buy any book you ask for.”<sup>97</sup> Though regulations prohibited officers taking classes, the author recommended that his peers sit in on lectures because it “not only brings increased knowledge, but improves techniques in teaching which is your job now and always.”<sup>98</sup> Harmon contributed to this valuable pool of information when he shared his own experience in an equally insightful article in 1928 that described the Norwich ROTC unit and the role of a PMS&T.<sup>99</sup>

Four years instructor experience at West Point undoubtedly proved invaluable during Harmon’s time at Norwich. Harmon knew well that there was an important link between teaching and leadership. As PMS&T he was personally responsible for the military program of instruction.<sup>100</sup> In the fall of 1928 he assumed additional responsibilities as the Commandant of Cadets.<sup>101</sup> Combining the two capacities under one officer was a slight departure for the school. Five years before a university report

recommended that the positions of Commandant and PMS&T be separated. The separation ended when the administration named Harmon commandant.<sup>102</sup>

He quickly proved that the Corps of Cadets could run effectively when the two offices were consolidated in the hands of a capable and dedicated officer. Harmon conducted himself as a proper role model, not only to the cadets, but also the faculty and local civilians. His Norwich article in *Cavalry Journal* demonstrated a perceptive understanding that “Officers on R.O.T.C. duty present the Army to civilians as on no other class of duty and their actions,” and that the army, “is judged by them in the minds of thousands of people...”<sup>103</sup> Therefore, Harmon constantly strove to provide an example of a thoroughly professional military officer. In addition to being responsible for the military instruction, Harmon also possessed complete control, under the university president, of the administration and discipline of the corps.<sup>104</sup> There is little doubt that he considered the examples set by Tompkins, Thayer, and Joseph Dickman when developing his leadership style. Additionally, Harmon’s 2<sup>d</sup> Cavalry combat experience and recent experience with the 6<sup>th</sup> Cavalry fit hand in hand with Norwich’s reputation as a cavalry-oriented institution.

ROTC units were traditionally branch-affiliated, preparing young men for reserve commissions in one of the Army’s separate branches.<sup>105</sup> Norwich possessed a cavalry tradition dating back to 1906. Prior to the National Defense Act of 1916 the Corps of Cadets was organized as part of the National Guard. During the Mexican border crisis, the corps received mobilization orders, but never deployed outside the state. After the 1916 legislation Norwich ceased its affiliation with the National Guard and became part of the ROTC system with the distinction of being “the only exclusive cavalry institution

of learning in the United States,” an honor that it held until after World War II.<sup>106</sup> The school possessed a sizable collection of mounts, a modern stable and riding hall, and abundant room for mounted and dismounted training.<sup>107</sup>

Harmon’s performance as riding instructor passed into legend after his departure from Norwich. “Legends, half fact and half more satisfying fiction” that became Norwich gospel, described Harmon flicking his whip “either on the horse or the cadet—depending upon which needed the most encouragement.”<sup>108</sup> Harmon also coached the school’s polo team, a squad that was well respected among the top university teams in the nation.<sup>109</sup> He also occasionally played on the squad when it competed against the teams at Fort Ethan Allen during summer camps and other installations.<sup>110</sup> The university president, praised Harmon’s coaching efforts, stating that he “succeeded in building a strong team which has made a very credible showing” in national competition.<sup>111</sup>

The most important military training received by the students occurred when the junior class went to Fort Ethan Allen for training. The class, organized and equipped as a cavalry troop, conducted a two hundred mile circuitous mounted march from the school’s location in Northfield, through most of the state of Vermont, to the fort.<sup>112</sup> Harmon commanded the troop during these summer camp training events. Generally the class conducted cavalry training with students from other schools for a period that averaged three to four weeks in length depending on annual funding. Training consisted of equitation, weapons familiarization and marksmanship, marches, and mounted and dismounted tactical problems at the platoon and troop level. The training also addressed athletics, the most popular being polo which Norwich cadets dominated on a yearly basis. Upon completion of the camp the troop marched another two hundred miles back to

Northfield. Given the summer camp experience “the students must have formed a very favorable impression of the Army and of the Cavalry...,” while Harmon collected more valuable time leading troops in the field.<sup>113</sup>

According to his recollections in *Combat Commander*, Harmon was a firm disciplinarian. His personal approach was firm, but fair, a style that he learned serving under Dickman and Thayer.<sup>114</sup> He personally enjoyed the opportunity to work with young men that “are keenly interested in military instruction.”<sup>115</sup> Harmon expressed his leadership philosophy in one sentence: “The officer must be the leader.”<sup>116</sup> This concept led to every student receiving “an equal opportunity for development in command and leadership.”<sup>117</sup> Harmon facilitated his program by keeping “certain office hours in order that all may be present to discuss problems that arise from the work from day to day.”<sup>118</sup> He endeavored to properly understand their problems, treating everyone fairly.<sup>119</sup> A member of the Board of Trustees later commented that Harmon carried out his duties “with unusual fairness, consistency and efficiency,” stating that Harmon proved himself a superior military officer.<sup>120</sup>

In June 1931 Harmon received orders to report to Fort Leavenworth, Kansas in order to attend the Command and General Staff School (CGSS).<sup>121</sup> Prior to departing he received two honors from the university and the Corps of Cadets that reflected his contributions to Norwich. First, at the 1931 commencement the university Board of Trustees conferred upon Harmon an honorary master’s degree in military science with a citation that included “He neither spared the rod nor spoiled the child.”<sup>122</sup> Second, the Corps of Cadets dedicated the 1932 yearbook, *The War Hoop*, to Harmon for “his four years untiring service and deep interest in Norwich University and its student body...”<sup>123</sup>

However, following his departure, Harmon also received a copy of a personal endorsement to the Secretary of War written by the university president. The letter began with a portion of his report to the Board of Trustees, while Harmon still held office, addressing his impending departure:

...for four years our faithful and efficient Commandant and Professor of Military Science and Tactics, who has given untiring zeal and service in an effort to raise and improve in every possible way the standards and work of the military department at Norwich. That he has been successful in his work is attested by Norwich's good rating with the War Department today. He has had the good-will and respect of the officials and faculty members of the institution as well as the Cadet Corps...<sup>124</sup>

The report further stated that Harmon was "ever willing and ready to give his best effort in promoting her [Norwich's] interests, not only in his regular line of duty but however and whenever he could find the opportunity to serve."<sup>125</sup> It described Harmon as "Methodical, painstaking and careful in all details of his work as required in such an office, yet with the broad vision and outlook which has made for progress and enlargement of the field of activities of his department."<sup>126</sup> The Board carried a motion to include the president's comments in a recommendation to the War Department on behalf of Harmon.<sup>127</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Harmon, *Combat Commander*, 46.

<sup>2</sup> Pershing, John J. "A Message to the cavalry," *Cavalry Journal*, Vol. 29, No. 119 (April 1920): 5-6).

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid*, 5-6.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid*, 5.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid*, 6.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid*, 6.

- <sup>7</sup> Ibid, 6.
- <sup>8</sup> Truscott, Lucian K. *Twilight of the U.S. Cavalry*, 74.
- <sup>9</sup> Cameron, George H. "The Cavalry School and Its New Functions," *Cavalry Journal*, Vol. 29, No. 119 (April 1920): 13.
- <sup>10</sup> Ibid, 12.
- <sup>11</sup> Truscott, *Twilight of the U.S. Cavalry*, 52.
- <sup>12</sup> Harmon, *Combat Commander*, 46.
- <sup>13</sup> Truscott, *Twilight of the U.S. Cavalry*, 75-76.
- <sup>14</sup> Editor. "Notes From The Cavalry School," *Cavalry Journal*, Vol. 29, No. 121 (October 1920): 316.
- <sup>15</sup> Truscott, *Twilight of the U.S. Cavalry*, 87.
- <sup>16</sup> Ibid, 53.
- <sup>17</sup> Editor. *The Rasp* (Fort Riley, Kansas: The U.S. Cavalry School, 1921): 6.
- <sup>18</sup> Ibid, 68.
- <sup>19</sup> Truscott, *Twilight of the U.S. Cavalry*, 81-82.
- <sup>20</sup> Ibid, 82.
- <sup>21</sup> *Rasp*, 68.
- <sup>22</sup> U.S. Army. *Report of Superior Board on Organization and Tactics, American Expeditionary Force* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, June 1920).
- <sup>23</sup> U.S. Cavalry School. *Cavalry Combat* (Fort Riley, KS: U.S. Cavalry Association, 1937). This work, published in 1937, was a collection of predominantly European accounts during World War I. Only five pages were dedicated to the American cavalry experience.
- <sup>24</sup> Cameron, "The Cavalry School and Its New Functions," 13.
- <sup>25</sup> Anonymous. "The Saber: A Reply to General Dickman," *Cavalry Journal*, Vol. 30, No. 120 (January 1921): 69-70.
- <sup>26</sup> Editor. "Operations of The Second Cavalry In France," *Cavalry Journal*, Vol. 30, No. 120 (January, 1921): 73.



- <sup>27</sup> Harmon, "Second Cavalry in the St. Mihiel Offensive," 282-289.
- <sup>28</sup> *Report of Superior Board*, 1.
- <sup>29</sup> Harmon, *Combat Commander*, 15; Dickman, 142.
- <sup>30</sup> Bullard, 3.
- <sup>31</sup> *Ibid*, 7. Dickman did omit the failures involving cavalry employment during the war.
- <sup>32</sup> Coffman, 275, 329.
- <sup>33</sup> See Harmon, "The Second cavalry in the St. Mihiel Offensive," and "The Second Cavalry in the Meuse-Argonne."
- <sup>34</sup> U.S. Army. "Report of the Military Commander, Coblenz, Germany (Fort Leavenworth, Kansas: The General Service Schools Press, 1921): 21-25.
- <sup>35</sup> For examples of reports and commendations see Rodney, 36-37; Harmon, *Combat Commander*, 44-45.
- <sup>36</sup> *Report of Superior Board*, 67.
- <sup>37</sup> *Ibid*, 72.
- <sup>38</sup> *Ibid*, 67.
- <sup>39</sup> *Ibid*, 67.
- <sup>40</sup> *Ibid*, 67.
- <sup>41</sup> *Ibid*, 67.
- <sup>42</sup> *Ibid*, 74-75.
- <sup>43</sup> *Ibid*, 71.
- <sup>44</sup> *Ibid*, 78.
- <sup>45</sup> *Ibid*, 78.
- <sup>46</sup> Harmon, *Combat Commander*, 56.
- <sup>47</sup> Harmon, *Combat Commander*, 47
- <sup>48</sup> Bradley, Omar N. *A General's Life* (New York, NY: Simon and Schuster, 1983): 49-50.

<sup>49</sup> Collins, J. Lawton. *Lightning Joe: An Autobiography* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1979): 42.

<sup>50</sup> See, Ancell.

<sup>51</sup> James, D. Clayton. *The Years of MacArthur, Vol. I, 1880-1941* (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin, 1970): 262-265.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid, 265.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid, 264-280.

<sup>54</sup> Manchester, William. *American Caesar: Douglas MacArthur, 1880-1964* (Boston, MA: Little, Brown, and Company, 1978): 121-124.

<sup>55</sup> Harmon, *Combat Commander*, 47; 1922-1925 editions of *The Howitzer*, (West Point, NY: United States Military Academy), 1922-1925.

<sup>56</sup> James, 266-267.

<sup>57</sup> Harmon, *Combat Commander*, 47.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid, 23, 43-44; James, 264-265; Coffman, 274.

<sup>59</sup> James, 280.

<sup>60</sup> Harmon, *Combat Commander*, 47

<sup>61</sup> 1924 *Howitzer*, 342.

<sup>62</sup> James, 280.

<sup>63</sup> Harmon, *Combat Commander*, 47

<sup>64</sup> Gruenther, Richard L. "Olympians as Military Leaders," *Army Magazine*, Vol. 47, Issue, 7 (July 1997): 41-44. Patton also competed in the pentathlon, placing fifth in the 1912 Olympics, and Allen earned a bronze medal as a member of the 1920 U.S. polo team.

<sup>65</sup> Rayner, Harold M. "The Modern Pentathlon and The Olympic Games," *Cavalry Journal*, Vol. 31, No. 129 (October 1922): 374-375.

<sup>66</sup> Harmon, *Combat Commander*, 47.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid, 47.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid, 47-48.

<sup>69</sup> James, 288-289.

<sup>70</sup> Harmon, *Combat Commander*, 17-18, 21-22; Guinn, Robert Darius. *The History of Norwich, Vol. IV, 1912-1965* (Montpelier, Vermont: The Capital Press, 1965): 139-212.

<sup>71</sup> 1921-1924 *Howitzers*; Ancell. The army group commanders were Omar Bradley and Jacob Devers; the corps commanders were Ernest Dawley, Willis Crittenberger, Leyland Hobbs, Geoffrey Keys, Matthew Ridgeway, and J. Lawton Collins; the division commanders were Paul Newgarden, Charles Ryder, and Vernon Prichard. Interaction with other officers not destined for high command provided equally valuable exposure to new ideas and methods. One potentially significant example was Harmon's fellow Drawing Department instructor and B Team "scrub," Captain Ralph I. Sasse. Fate prevented Harmon and Sasse from serving together in the 2<sup>d</sup> Cavalry. Sasse was transferred to the 1<sup>st</sup> Infantry Division in early April 1917 and then secured a transfer to the tanks due to George S. Patton's personal intervention and became one of the early and nearly forgotten leaders in the Tank Corps. He commanded the 301<sup>st</sup> Heavy Tank Battalion, the only heavy tank battalion to see combat in World War I, which supported the U.S. II Corps, operating under British command in Flanders. Most American histories of World War I fail to give full attention to these operations. After the war, with Patton and a few other officers, he represented the small cadre of tank experts in the army. One can imagine that they possibly exchanged stories from their wartime experience, "swapping war stories." Harmon and Sasse possessed equally unique combat experience. Sasse's description of tank employment and evolving post-war theories may have helped Harmon deal with his mixed opinion of tanks based on what he witnessed in France. Both men certainly discussed cavalry branch issues. 1924 *Howitzer*, 42, 342; 1925 *Howitzer*, 427; Harmon, *Combat Commander*, 28, 40; Rodney; Wilson, Dale E. *Treat 'em Rough: The Birth of American Armor, 1917-1920* (Novato, CA: Presidio Press, 1989): 56, 222.

<sup>72</sup> Harmon, "Second Cavalry in the Meuse-Argonne," 10-18.

<sup>73</sup> Harmon, *Combat Commander*, 48; "Regimental Notes--Sixth Cavalry," *Cavalry Journal*, Vol. 35, No. 142 (January 1926): 142.

<sup>74</sup> Berlin, 13; Truscott, *Twilight of the U.S. Cavalry*, 101.

<sup>75</sup> Berlin, 13; Truscott, *Twilight of the U.S. Cavalry*, 101.

<sup>76</sup> "Regimental Notes—Sixth Cavalry," *Cavalry Journal*, Vol. 35, No. 144 (July 1926): 466.

<sup>77</sup> "Regimental Notes—Sixth Cavalry," *Cavalry Journal*, Vol. 36, No. 147 (April 1927): 341.

<sup>78</sup> “Regimental Notes—Sixth Cavalry,” *Cavalry Journal*, Vol. 34, No. 141 (October 1925): 519.

<sup>79</sup> Stewart, Richard W., ed. *American Military History, Vol. II: The United States Army in a Golden Era, 1917-2003* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Center of Military History, 2005), 61.

<sup>80</sup> “Regimental Notes—Sixth Cavalry,” *Cavalry Journal*, Vol. 34, No. 141 (October 1925): 519.

<sup>81</sup> “Regimental Notes—Sixth Cavalry,” *Cavalry Journal*, Vol. 36, No. 146 (January 1927): 172.

<sup>82</sup> “Regimental Notes—Sixth Cavalry,” *Cavalry Journal*, Vol. 36, No. 147 (April 1927): 341.

<sup>83</sup> “Chattanooga-Sixth Cavalry Horse Show,” *Cavalry Journal*, Vol. 36, No. 146 (January 1927): 137-141.

<sup>84</sup> July 1926 “Regimental Notes,” 467.

<sup>85</sup> January 1927 “Regimental Notes,” 172.

<sup>86</sup> Odem, William O. *After The Trenches: The Transformation of U.S. Army Doctrine, 1919-1939* (College Station, TX: Texas A&M University Press, 1999): 7-8, 63, 65.

<sup>87</sup> Harmon, *Combat Commander*, 48.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid*, 9-11.

<sup>89</sup> Guinn, 87.

<sup>90</sup> Harmon, *Combat Commander*, 11 and 48.

<sup>91</sup> Lyons, Gene M. and John W. Masland. “The Origins of the ROTC,” *Military Affairs*, Vol. 23, No. 1 (Spring 1959): 10-12.

<sup>92</sup> Harmon, Ernest N. “Norwich University R.O.T.C. Unit,” *Cavalry Journal*, Vol. 38, No. 155 (April 1929): 174.

<sup>93</sup> “Extracts from the Annual Report of the Chief of Cavalry,” *Cavalry Journal*, Vol. 36, No. 146 (January 1927): 108.

<sup>94</sup> “The Task of Teaching,” *Cavalry Journal*, Vol. 20, No. 125 (October 1921): 416-417

<sup>95</sup> “Roster of Regular Cavalry Officers Not on Duty with Troops,” *Cavalry Journal*, Vol. 37, No. 150 (January 1928): 157-158.

<sup>96</sup> “PMS&T.” “How Do You Like Your R.O.T.C. Detail?” *Cavalry Journal*, Vol. 38, No. 155 (April 1929): 172.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid, 172.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid, 172.

<sup>99</sup> Harmon, “Norwich University R.O.T.C. Unit,” 170-177.

<sup>100</sup> Guinn, 70.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid, 139-140.

<sup>102</sup> Guinn, 69-70.

<sup>103</sup> Harmon, “Norwich University R.O.T.C. Unit,” 176.

<sup>104</sup> Guinn, 70.

<sup>105</sup> Masland, John W. and Lawrence I. Radway. *Soldiers and Scholars: Military Education and Military Policy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1957): 252

<sup>106</sup> Guinn, 14-18, 37.

<sup>107</sup> Harmon, “Norwich University R.O.T.C. Unit,” 174.

<sup>108</sup> Harmon, *Combat Commander*, 49.

<sup>109</sup> “Building New Polo Field,” *New York Times*, 1922.

<sup>110</sup> Harmon, *Combat Commander*, 49.

<sup>111</sup> Guinn, 87.

<sup>112</sup> Guinn, 86-87.

<sup>113</sup> Edwards, Frank B. “The Fort Ethan Allen R.O.T.C. Cavalry Camp,” *Cavalry Journal*, Vol. 30, No. 125 (October 1921): 378-380.

<sup>114</sup> Harmon, *Combat Commander*, 48.

<sup>115</sup> Harmon, “Norwich University R.O.T.C Unit,” 175.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid, 176.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid, 176.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid, 176.

<sup>119</sup> Harmon, *Combat Commander*, 48.

<sup>120</sup> Guinn, 87.

<sup>121</sup> Harmon, *Combat Commander*, 49.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid, 49.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid, 49.

<sup>124</sup> Guinn, 87.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid, 87.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid, 87.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid, 88.

## CHAPTER 4

### FIELD-GRADE OFFICER IN PEACETIME (1932-1939)

While World War I provided Harmon with critical experience leading soldiers in combat and the decade following the war provided him with additional practical experience as a company-grade officer, the period from 1932-1939 represented a valuable phase in his intellectual development. A two-year student tour at the Command and General Staff School (CGSS) at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, an additional year at the Army War College, and a tour on the War Department General Staff (WDGS) represented “interwar indicators of high individual potential for future service at high levels of command.”<sup>1</sup> All three of these assignments, and his tour as a cavalry squadron commander, prepared Harmon for high command in World War II.

#### The Command and General Staff School

Officers selected for CGSS were generally chosen by their respective branch chiefs, in Harmon’s case the Chief of Cavalry.<sup>2</sup> On average, one hundred and twenty officers comprised the class. Of these, one hundred came from the combat arms branches; thirteen were cavalry officers. An article in *Cavalry Journal* explained the policy for selection, emphasizing the acceptance of officers “with satisfactory records of service and who possess certain fundamental information regarding the tactics and techniques of the special arms and the solution of tactical problems.”<sup>3</sup> Students were expected to be have a knowledge of “the organization and tactics of all small units to include the reinforced brigade” and after a brief review of this information, study operations at the division level.<sup>4</sup> Harmon considered it “a great honor”<sup>5</sup> to be selected

and his motivation to succeed increased when he received promotion to major two months into the course.<sup>6</sup>

The school prepared officers for command and general staff duty at the division and corps levels; training them in the tactics, techniques, and coordination of all arms.<sup>7</sup> At the time of Harmon's attendance CGSS provided a two-year program of instruction. The first year focused on division level operations, while the second addressed the corps level.<sup>8</sup> An instruction circular for the 1932-1933 academic year stated the CGSS general mission:

...to fit for high command the maximum number of field officers eligible therefore; to assure the instruction of sufficient trained officers for the proper organization and functioning of corps, corps area, and division staffs; and to disseminate sound and uniform doctrines of military training. The mission includes instruction in the combined use of all arms and branches in the division and in the corps, in the functions of commanders of divisions, of corps, and of corps areas, and in the functions of general staff officers...<sup>9</sup>

The school's program of instruction captured the essence of the Leavenworth experience:

The heart of the course, "tactical principles and decisions," consisted of increasingly complex tactical problems involving increasingly large combined arms formations. The entire curriculum emphasized the command process, involving interaction between commanders and general staff officers, and tactical decision making.<sup>10</sup>

Graduates were expected to be able to perform in either command or staff billets two to three grades above their present ranks, a likely scenario in the event of Army expansion during a mobilization.<sup>11</sup>

The first year began with basic refresher classes and then transitioned to the division level for the remainder of the year. The refresher classes included military organization, combat orders, problem solving, tactics and techniques of the various branches, and field engineering. The division level portion fell into the categories of



general tactical principles; command, staff, and logistics; troop leading procedures; map problems and maneuvers; training methods; and leadership. The bulk of the division lessons centered on the two types of army divisions: infantry and cavalry. However, Harmon also received his first formal instruction pertaining to mechanization, motorization, and aviation, subject matter of immense influence in later years.<sup>12</sup>

Years later Harmon confessed that “the two years I spent at Leavenworth were the most difficult years of my training.”<sup>13</sup> He attacked the academic work load with his usual determination, but admitted that he matriculated into the second year through practical management and his wife’s personal encouragement, despite a crowded house with five children. As Harmon later described it, “I studied upstairs and downstairs, often far past midnight, and my disposition at home became as mean as that of a starving prairie wolf, or –as one of my friends suggested—a cobra without a convenient snake charmer.”<sup>14</sup> Hard work and dedication served Harmon well.

The second year of the CGSS instruction addressed many of the same subjects as the first year, but at what today is known as the operational level of war. In addition to general army doctrine, Harmon received more detailed instruction in the organization and employment of tanks (at the time under the auspice of the infantry branch), mechanized forces, and aviation.<sup>15</sup> Classes regarding tanks and mechanized forces paralleled changing War Department policies and doctrine. He also suggested that Leavenworth’s somewhat innovative treatment of this instruction accelerated changes in War Department policy. Aviation lessons also reflected the army’s development of an airpower doctrine, especially the employment of aviation in direct support of ground forces, while still discussing strategic applications.<sup>16</sup>

Students were also required to produce individual and group research projects; both consisting of an individually produced paper.<sup>17</sup> Individual research objects were to “promote original investigations of practical subjects of military value, and to afford practice in the preparation of suitable and effective reports concerning such investigation.”<sup>18</sup> Evaluation criteria for individual research projects included originality, sound research and analysis, the ability to present information in a clear and concise manner with logical conclusions, and overall relevance and military value.<sup>19</sup>

Individual research requirements allowed “studies based on personnel experience...which are of current or probable future interests and importance,” stating that such efforts were “not only acceptable but also especially desired.”<sup>20</sup> However, Harmon chose not to study his own experiences with the Provisional Squadron in World War I. He chose instead a topic relating to World War I German cavalry operations on the eastern front, a topic in which the school expressed a particular interest.<sup>21</sup>

Harmon’s essay, *A Critical Analysis of the German Cavalry Operations in the Lodz Campaign to Include the Breakthrough at Brzeziny, With Particular Reference to the I Cavalry Corps*, seemed a typical paper produced by a cavalry officer. However, the depth of research and analysis presented in the paper indicated that Harmon’s intellectual development matched his professional development up to that point. Harmon exercised a balanced approach of criticism and praise for the German mounted operations. While he ably commented on the execution of traditional cavalry missions that emphasized the critical attributes of mobility and firepower, Harmon also showed equal grasp of the important influence of combined arms integration and logistics.<sup>22</sup>

In hindsight, Harmon's conclusions regarding cavalry employment were quite revealing, especially when considering his closely-held opinion, based on his World War I experience, that the cavalry's days on the modern battlefield were numbered. He stated that, in open warfare in a region without a modern road network, "the cavalry will continue to play an important role in modern war."<sup>23</sup> He further explained that large cavalry forces should be employed as single units for decisive action where its mobility and ability to maneuver could be used effectively. Finally, Harmon made a conclusion that personally endorsed of current army policy: "That the present increased allotment in artillery, machine guns, tanks, and armored cars of the American Cavalry are justified by the cavalry lessons obtained from this campaign."<sup>24</sup> Four months before Harmon submitted his paper the 1<sup>st</sup> Cavalry Regiment, leaving its horses in Texas, moved to Camp (later Fort) Knox, Kentucky, and officially became the first mechanized unit in the United States Army.<sup>25</sup> Though Harmon appeared to echo the cavalry's assertion that it still could effectively operate on the modern battlefield, his conclusions were based on the fact that the army did not yet possess a viable alternative in 1933. However, Harmon's attitude changed as American mechanized doctrine slowly evolved during the remainder of the decade.

Students usually found map problems the most memorable experience during the course. These tactical problem solving sessions represented nearly seventy percent of the total instruction time. Problems were an individual effort to solve a given tactical problem in a limited amount of time and then brief the solution to the class and instructors. Faculty committees evaluated solutions, highlighted the errors, and provided

a “school solution” to the problem in order to provide a comparison to the student’s solution.<sup>26</sup>

Harmon remembered his map problem experiences for the rest of his life. He incorporated an incident from his second year at Leavenworth when recounting an episode during his command of the 2<sup>d</sup> Armored Division in World War II in *Combat Commander*. Harmon’s assignment entailed a contested river crossing by an army corps. During the situation brief the instructor identified a ford twenty-five miles to the corps’ right flank. Since the notional corps included a cavalry division, Harmon seized upon the idea of sending the division down river to the unguarded ford under cover of darkness. Harmon briefed that after crossing the river, the cavalry would route the enemy with an unexpected attack from their own side of the river. He explained that his solution would avoid the casualties associated with a frontal attack across the river.<sup>27</sup>

However, according to Harmon, the instructor seemed more intent on his desired solution than Harmon’s creative approach to solving the problem. The instructor explained that Harmon evaded the purpose of the problem: demonstrating the knowledge to conduct a river crossing in the face of the enemy. Harmon doggedly contested the instructor’s ruling, but lost. Eleven years later Harmon remembered the experience. He threw out the Leavenworth “solution,” executed his own student solution when crossing the Albert Canal in Belgium with armored forces, and captured thousands of German prisoners with minimal casualties.<sup>28</sup>

Upon graduation, and specific recommendation, officers were added to the General Staff Corps eligibility list.<sup>29</sup> Harmon, graduating fourteenth out of one hundred and twenty-five officers in his class, received such a recommendation.<sup>30</sup> Looking back

on his Leavenworth experience, Harmon honestly gave a great deal of credit to his wife for her “calm acceptance of a difficult situation and her physical and moral support.”<sup>31</sup> By graduating in the top ten percentile, Harmon received orders to attend the Army War College in Washington, D.C. before joining the General Staff. For Harmon, this represented a critical assignment as the War College embodied the height of the army’s educational system.<sup>32</sup>

CGSS imparted a lasting influence on Harmon. After World War II, a military historian asked Harmon how the United States produced such a talented group of senior officers that led the army to victory over Nazi Germany. While he gave the historian a cursory answer, Harmon considered the question for some time. In *Combat Commander* he rendered his final verdict. “I am now convinced that the intensive and imaginative training at the Command and General Staff College [its name at the time of Harmon’s comment] had a great deal to do with it.”<sup>33</sup> West Point classmate and fellow CGSS classmate, J. Lawton Collins, shared Harmon’s opinion, stating in his autobiography that “the courses...were probably the most important in the entire system of military education, and were to prove invaluable during World War II” and provided officers, few of whom commanded a combat unit higher than a battalion with the opportunity to learn the techniques of handling larger units.<sup>34</sup>

#### Interlude--The Civilian Conservation Corps

Domestic affairs caused a brief interlude between CGSS and the War College. Shortly before graduating from CGSS the Great Depression that began in 1929 finally made a direct impact on the army and Harmon in particular. In May 1933 President Franklin D. Roosevelt, as part of his New Deal program, created the Civilian

Conservation Corps (CCC). The project encompassed the army enrolling 274,000 unemployed young men and establishing them in work camps before July of that year. Furthermore, Roosevelt ordered the commitment of three thousand army officers to support the CCC. The program represented a major challenge for the army. It processed and moved more men to CCC camps than were moved during a similar period during World War I.<sup>35</sup> Harmon became one of the thousands of officers assigned to the CCC. His class graduated nearly a month early, May 22, 1933, in order to meet the growing demands of supporting the CCC.<sup>36</sup>

Initially, assignment with the CCC provided Harmon with an opportunity to experience the true state of the country under the strain of the depression. Years later he explained that, "I had become so involved with military studies I had virtually lost sight of the economic problems which involved all of us."<sup>37</sup> During the nearly three months between CGSS and the War College Harmon received orders to establish a CCC camp near Winterset, Iowa. Nonpolitical by nature and training, Harmon lacked faith in the CCC concept. He approached his new assignment with some degree of negativity and an impression that the young men enrolled were, in addition to being poverty-stricken, lazy.<sup>38</sup>

Upon assuming command of the CCC camp Harmon discovered "a full-fledged mutiny."<sup>39</sup> Approximately two hundred young men sat in an open field and refused to work. Most prepared to go home. Harmon immediately assembled all of the men together. He told the gathering that if they had legitimate complaints, then he wanted to hear them. Eventually Harmon understood the key issues. The camp location was desolate; it lacked a source of clean well water, the soil prevented proper latrine drainage,

and nearly twenty rattlesnakes were killed upon initial occupation of the area. The group's issues impressed Harmon. Years later Harmon explained that, "It struck me that teen-age Iowa farm boys might know more about soil content, drainage, and water supply than the unknown political intermediates who had chosen the site."<sup>40</sup> With the cooperation of the town and county authorities, Harmon arranged to have the planned camp site moved to a new location that met the army's plans and the needs of the CCC men. The camp morale immediately improved and camp construction finally began. After a week-long absence at Fort Leavenworth, Harmon found that the CCC men made surprising progress in building the camp. Even more surprising to Harmon, the men named it Camp Harmon.<sup>41</sup>

Though pleased with the gesture of the CCC men naming the camp in his honor, Harmon saw the more valuable lesson that came with this experience: "these boys were not lazy or indifferent; they were victims of a depression. Given proper leadership, they could do the job."<sup>42</sup> Though occupying a brief period of Harmon's career, the CCC episode represented the culmination of his previous military experience to that date. The experience of dealing with raw recruits of World War I and the students at West Point and Norwich empowered Harmon to deal with the CCC men. He listened to their issues, weighed the facts, and made decisions that made sense and met the army's intent. The countless days spent supervising the construction and organization of remount stations in France were relived during the building of the CCC camp. The CCC episode represented an exercise in leadership. Throughout the process Harmon exhibited sound judgment, initiative, and compassion for the men in his charge. All of his attributes made a lasting impression upon some of the CCC men.<sup>43</sup> More importantly, Harmon's efforts reflected

those of the larger army support of the CCC program. The CCC introduced hundreds of thousands of young men to the army and a disciplined routine that prepared them for service in World War II.<sup>44</sup>

### The Army War College

Harmon reported to the Army War College immediately after leaving Winterset.<sup>45</sup> The War College represented the height of the army's formal education system. The school emphasized teaching officers for service with the General Staff and higher command.<sup>46</sup> The army sent its most promising officers. Harmon remembered that "I was pleased and gratified" to be selected because only the top ten percent of his Leavenworth peers were selected. The prestige associated with War College selection is reflected in the fact that forty-eight of the eighty-four students in Harmon's 1934 War College class achieved general officer rank in World War II.<sup>47</sup> However, the school employed a multi-institutional approach to studies; its student enrollment included army reservists, naval officers, national educators and business leaders, government civilians, and foreign military officers attended the school or presented lectures.<sup>48</sup>

The Army and Naval War Colleges were the nation's only institutions where military officers and civilian leaders addressed national defense policy. The War College curriculum has been described as:

...focused primarily on all aspects of preparedness and international relationships. Students prepared intelligence reports for all major nations. These reports examined each nation's military, economic, sociological, geographic, and political characteristics to determine the nation's [the United States'] most likely opponents. Students then developed and tested war plans for a variety of contingencies. A separate course related each step in the planning process to the appropriate War Department General Staff [WDGS] division. Students prepared intelligence estimates for the G2 Course, operations estimates for the G3 Course, personnel and administrative estimates for the G1 Course, logistics estimates for



the G4 Course, and developed war plans in the War Plans Course.<sup>49</sup> However, there was a great deal more to the War College curriculum. Lectures, conferences, individual research projects, and committee reports expanded student knowledge and gave them a clear understanding of the WDGS. Students received lectures from the army branch chiefs, WDGS members, intelligence experts, foreign officers, and industry leaders. Furthermore, students evaluated proposed doctrinal manuals and analyzed foreign military studies.<sup>50</sup>

Despite the breadth of material presented at the War College, Harmon described his experience as “more or less uneventful.”<sup>51</sup> He elaborated by stating:

We heard lectures on high strategy, international relations, the various persuasions of economics from John Stuart Mills to Karl Marx to John Maynard Keynes, and were encouraged to participate freely in subsequent discussions. Being a down-to-earth fellow and never glibly articulate, I found myself somewhat at a loss during these intramural talkfests.<sup>52</sup>

A West Point classmate attempted to give Harmon some constructive advice on the importance of succeeding at the War College. He explained to Harmon that students were “weighed and observed.”<sup>53</sup> The key was to ask lecturers intelligent questions that demonstrated an active interest in the subjects. The officer concluded that if Harmon failed to heed the recommendation, he would never make the WDGS. The advice struck Harmon as strange since he considered the source “one of the Academy’s stupidest cadets.”<sup>54</sup> However, when he witnessed his classmate in class, the officer always seemed to ask the most intelligent questions in the group. Eventually Harmon asked his classmate for his secret and received a simple answer. Lecture transcriptions were recycled year after year and available in the War College library. The officer merely picked the best questions from past years and wrote them on his cuff. Though initially

speechless, Harmon quickly responded that “If this is the way to make the General Staff, I say to hell with it.”<sup>55</sup> Harmon chose to rely on his established and well-proven work ethic instead.

However, students were also greatly measured by their ability to work as part of a staff. “The need to work smoothly with one’s comrades was evident in all staff efforts...War planning by committee or work group was easier because of the general socialization of professional soldiers, the Leavenworth experience,” experience at other schools, and “personal knowledge of each other.”<sup>56</sup> Harmon’s considerable experience on the athletic field reinforced the school’s emphasis on teamwork. Additionally, his class included friends and acquaintances from previous assignments, including Omar N. Bradley and Ralph Sasse from his West Point instructor days. Harmon also served closely with many of his War College classmates in World War II.<sup>57</sup>

Another critical piece in student work at the War College directly reflected the influence of the Great Depression. A dwindling defense budget and existing army-wide equipment shortages created immense pressures that were not conducive for creative planning. “Planners were forced to look past the puny army in which they served to a mass army that would function on a grand scale. This meant that the planners of the 1930s had to do their work on the basis of hypotheses.”<sup>58</sup> More imaginative planners could just wish away personnel and equipment shortages; ignore the realities and plan on the assumption that the country would make up for the shortages after hostilities began. This included War College students.<sup>59</sup>

Starting with Harmon’s class and leading up until the eve of the nation’s entry into World War II the cornerstone of student plans at the War College centered on the

idea that the United States would fight the next war as part of a coalition. The class of 1934 experienced the debut of “Participation with Allies,” a new block of instruction in the War Plans portion of the course. While Harmon, as previously stated, referred to his War College experience as “more or less uneventful,” nearly forty years after the fact, “Participation with Allies” illustrated that the War College curriculum pushed the intellectual thought of Harmon and his peers to new levels. For Harmon specifically, the type of work included in this block of instruction prepared him for future assignments during the massive mobilization of manpower and resources that the United States leveraged in World War II.<sup>60</sup>

“Participation with Allies” brought a new realism to war planning.<sup>61</sup> In 1934 this block of instruction specifically instituted “systematic planning for coalition warfare versus Japan,” forcing “officers to think at the national level.”<sup>62</sup> Harmon’s class ushered in a critical piece in strategic war planning that the military lacked up until then.

Beginning in that year [1934], there was a freedom and flexibility of thought in the school that was not matched at the shorthanded War Plans Division of the War Department General Staff engaged in the day-to-day issues of the real world...the college did the creative thinking while the staff barely had time to think at all.<sup>63</sup>

While showing a great degree of imagination, students kept abreast of military international affairs and military developments, and pondered coalition warfare on a global scale. A considerable amount of creative thinking produced by the students eventually found its way into the strategic plans executed in World War II.<sup>64</sup>

In *Combat Commander* Harmon recounted that during the war planning course the class received a lecture that “shook me to my shoes.”<sup>65</sup> An expert on naval warfare outlined an assessment of a potential war with Japan. Harmon described that “we were

not prepared for his grim picture.”<sup>66</sup> The lecturer predicted a series of Japanese victories in the initial phases of war, the capture of Pacific islands, the necessity to rebuild the American fleet, and a long and hard fight to penetrate the Japanese homeland. This bleak picture shocked Harmon and aroused contention amongst his peers. The single most vocal dissenter was Navy Captain William Halsey, future Fleet Admiral during World War II.<sup>67</sup> As events unfolded during the planning exercise students battled with their preconceived opinions against overwhelming data that altered and shaped these thoughts, producing the final class war plan.<sup>68</sup>

The greatest benefit of the “Participation with Allies” block came at the end when student committees presented their findings and received critiques from the class and faculty during a question and answer period. Presentations were a school-wide effort. The entire school community attended presentations and openly participated in the discussions that followed.<sup>69</sup> The final presentation and review provided great value for the students taking part in the course. During the planning phase students were divided into separate committees that addressed certain subjects related to the overall plan. For instance, Colonel Jonathan Wainwright, future army commander in the Philippines and defender of Bataan, led the group that designed the overall concept of operations, while Captain William Halsey led the team that outlined the estimate of the allied situation and presented the overall war plan to his peers.<sup>70</sup> Therefore, during the final presentation and follow-on discussions students were exposed to the entire plan, its main issues and challenges, techniques for overcoming them, and feedback from peers and faculty.

What Harmon and his peers witnessed during the presentation was a consolidated approach to waging coalition warfare at the strategic level. Critical points included in the presentation, an additional minority report, and the question and answer period included:

- Japanese offensive operations without a formal declaration of war, similar to their actions against Russia in 1904
- The theater of operations would be immense and within the sphere of Japanese territory, far from permanent American bases
- The Japanese would possess local superiority during the war's early stages
- The assumption that the Philippine Islands would be lost early in the war
- The United States would initially be denied regional bases, preventing a quick build-up of combat power for major offensive operations
- A great deal of time would be required in order to conduct a slow and deliberate allied policy seizing bases en route to Japan
- Naval forces alone would not secure victory; considerable ground forces would be needed, indicating an emphasis for sound joint strategic planning
- The United States would have to provide considerable material aid to China, Great Britain, and Russia, especially if the latter two were involved in a European war
- American public opinion had to be shaped in order to understand and appreciate the military challenges
- Despite initial low levels of preparedness, the United States would eventually overwhelm Japan
- The avoidance of a punitive, Versailles-like peace
- The prevention of a dominating Soviet influence in the post-war Far East

While other points were overcome by events, all of the considerations listed above became harsh realities on December 7, 1941.<sup>71</sup> The final presentation clearly illustrated the immense level of detail required in strategic war planning.

The Commandant of the War College placed Harmon's exposure to the pinnacle of strategic thought, coalition warfare on a global scale, in true perspective when he closed the session by explaining to the students that the issues raised were those that "you will have to think about if you are on the WDGS, or the staff out in the Philippines, or in command of the Philippines, or other responsibilities."<sup>72</sup> Harmon certainly had to consider the commandant's comment with a new found sense of urgency. Both courses

qualified him for duty with the General Staff. However, before what seemed an inevitable tour of duty, Harmon quickly transitioned to command a cavalry squadron along the Mexican border at Fort Bliss, Texas.<sup>73</sup>

### Squadron Command

With CGSS and the War College behind him, Harmon looked forward to returning to service with troops. Squadron command represented an important step in a cavalry officer's climb to senior rank. Assigned to the 1<sup>st</sup> Cavalry Division, located at Fort Bliss, Texas, Harmon first spent several months at the Cavalry School's Field Officers' Course, similar to the Troop Officers' course, but focused on the squadron and regimental level, before reporting to his new station.<sup>74</sup> The 1<sup>st</sup> Cavalry Division represented the largest concentration of cavalry in the army. For all intents and purposes it was the center of the cavalry branch. Upon reporting to the division Harmon assumed command of the 1<sup>st</sup> Squadron, 8<sup>th</sup> Cavalry Regiment. The 8<sup>th</sup> Cavalry's commander, Colonel Arthur H. Wilson, "was beloved in the service and was a living legend."<sup>75</sup> Winner of the Congressional Medal of Honor in the Philippines while a lieutenant, Wilson wore a jagged scar around his neck from a near fatal wound from a Filipino bolo knife.<sup>76</sup> He was also no stranger to Harmon. Wilson served as a cavalry instructor during Harmon's first year at West Point and again when Harmon served there as an instructor.<sup>77</sup>

Harmon and Wilson shared an excellent relationship, first as casual, and as time passed, good friends. Wilson maintained a positive command climate that fostered trust and empowered subordinate leaders to take the initiative when leading their soldiers. Harmon greatly admired his commander, as did the rest of the regiment.<sup>78</sup> Their

leadership styles were fairly similar, built upon competence, common-sense, and compassion for the troops. One incident clearly illustrates Wilson's command climate, as well as Harmon's, and the close relationship that they shared.

Due to Fort Bliss' proximity to the Mexican border, many young bachelor lieutenants on the post made occasional weekend visits in search of entertainment across the Rio Grande. While Wilson and Harmon saw no harm in young soldiers blowing off steam in Mexican cantinas, the other squadron commander in the 8<sup>th</sup> Cavalry constantly complained to Wilson about the bad influence such activities had on unit discipline. Of course, this man's complaints spread within the close-knit community and junior officers focused their pranks on him. The incident in question occurred one Saturday night when the squadron commander sat on his porch. Suddenly the identity sign usually posted in front of his quarter sailed over his head. The bathrobe-clad commander apprehended the intoxicated junior officers, took their names, and forwarded preferred court-martial charges to the regimental headquarters.<sup>79</sup>

Following the next day's drill, Harmon visited Wilson's office and the incident immediately became the focus of their conversation, as related by Harmon in *Combat Commander*:

“Ernie, what is this all about? Have you heard anything about this fracas?” Well, of course I had; the career sergeants and NCOs were buzzing about it. The performance of the young lieutenants was, according to Army tradition, inexcusable, but their vandalism consisted only of giving a drop-kick treatment to a few posted signs. I thought a court-martial was excessive for a bit of horseplay.<sup>80</sup>

Wilson asked Harmon what he would do in this case. Harmon replied, “I would bring the culprits in, bawl hell out of them, confine them to Post for a week—and tear up the

charges.”<sup>81</sup> Common sense prevented the lieutenants’ careers from ending before they began. Of the four offenders, two eventually retired as general officers after distinguished service. One of them, retiring as a four-star general who as a young lieutenant originally thought Harmon too zealous, never forgot the verbal reprimand Harmon gave them, delivered in true cavalry vernacular.<sup>82</sup>

As usual, Harmon divided his time at Fort Bliss into two categories; training as a squadron commander and athletics as the regimental athletics officer.<sup>83</sup> A general training cycle consisted of collective training periods, followed by two weeks of practice marches, and various types of marksmanship training.<sup>84</sup> The regiment conducted its annual target season, as well as platoon and troop combat exercises, at nearby sites in New Mexico during late summer and early fall.<sup>85</sup> There were always remounts to train and normally the regiment conducted equestrian competitions at the end of this training. The 8<sup>th</sup> Cavalry also provided external training support during the summer. In June reserve officers reported for their two-week active duty training with the regiment. Harmon played a direct role in their training in June 1935, providing “a rather strenuous training schedule” for fourteen reservists who “responded most enthusiastically.” During June and July the regiment also sponsored ROTC camp and supported the regional Civilian Military Training Camp (CMTC) program.<sup>86</sup>

If Fort Riley was the home of the cavalry, Fort Bliss, because of the 1<sup>st</sup> Cavalry Division, served as a center of the cavalry’s demanding equestrian activity. Polo occupied the bulk of Fort Bliss’ athletic and social calendar. Colonel Wilson, one of the Army’s top-ranked polo players, coached the 8<sup>th</sup> Cavalry’s teams.<sup>87</sup> Harmon rode as the ranking member of the regiment’s senior team. His squad won the 1<sup>st</sup> Cavalry Division



championship in 1935. One of the lieutenants that he saved from court-martial played beside him. Two more played on the regiment's junior team.<sup>88</sup>

The year commanding 1<sup>st</sup> Squadron, 8<sup>th</sup> Cavalry at Fort Bliss represented Harmon's final assignment with horse cavalry. While in command, Harmon continued utilizing his lessons learned over the previous eighteen years of service. It provided him with a valuable opportunity to command and train a large force in the field. Equally important, he further crafted his personal leadership style based on his own experiences and the example provided by Colonel Wilson. While Wilson mentored him, Harmon also mentored his own officers. Several of the junior officers that served under Harmon distinguished themselves in World War II and afterward, some even achieving general officer rank.<sup>89</sup>

#### The War Department General Staff

Commanding a cavalry squadron served as a temporary delay of the inevitable for a graduate of CGSS and the War College; duty with the War Department General Staff (WDGS). Harmon reported for duty in Washington, D.C. in the fall of 1935 and immediately "found that our unpreparedness was, indeed, a fact."<sup>90</sup> Assigned to the G-4 (logistics) section, responsible for all army supply services, Harmon considered the assignment bittersweet after commanding troops. "For four years I was to be leashed to a desk and I often strained at the lease. Yet it was an important assignment and it made me both friends and enemies among my colleagues."<sup>91</sup> Despite Harmon's dislike of desk work, his four years in the G-4 section, from fall 1935 to summer 1939, were critical. The assignment afforded him an unfiltered view of the condition of his army and the state

of armies of the other major foreign powers. More importantly, however, these years represented the initial phase of the army's pre-World War II mobilization.<sup>92</sup>

Harmon's area of expertise involved research and development, a critical area for an army that attempted rapid and simultaneous programs of modernization and expansion.<sup>93</sup> There were great challenges to research and development during the 1930s. First, there was no formal process. Most development took place within the various branch schools, offices of the branch chiefs at the War Department, and the technical services. The WDGS served as the coordinating office, balancing the needs of each branch with the larger requirements for the army.<sup>94</sup> Harmon offered his opinion of the true challenge to research and development: "During those years Congress seemed indifferent to the explosive international situation and gave only niggardly financial support to defense measures."<sup>95</sup> The global affairs that dominated the newspapers and minds of American policy makers during Harmon's four years on the general staff represented the long string of events that led to World War II. Japan invaded China; Italy invaded Ethiopia; Germany reoccupied the demilitarized Rhineland and annexed Austria and Czechoslovakia; and civil war in Spain created a confrontation between fascist Germany and Italy and communist Russia. While Harmon kept abreast of these events the United States tried its best to remain neutral.<sup>96</sup>

Despite Harmon's later opinion of congressional stinginess, at the time of his arrival in Washington, Congress began releasing larger appropriations for the military that reflected rising international affairs.<sup>97</sup> However, enlarged spending did not equate to increased funding for research and development. The War Department research and development allocation for fiscal year 1939, five million dollars, represented one

twentieth of the cost of a battleship laid down by the Navy the same year.<sup>98</sup> From fiscal year 1935 to fiscal year 1939 the Ordnance Department, the G-4's partner in research and development, appropriation averaged between \$1.26 and \$1.36 million. With supplemental spending bills research and development spending never exceeded \$1.75 million. To place these paltry sums in perspective, the annual research budget for General Motors during this same period averaged twenty million dollars.<sup>99</sup>

There were specific reasons for the initially small budgets and subsequent gradual increases in research and development. Small budgets were deeply influenced by the enormous surplus of weapons and equipment left over from World War I. Congress pragmatically deemed it necessary to exhaust those stocks before funding new items. This decision directly influenced the gradual increases that began in 1935. By that point the same weapons and equipment left in the army inventory were in desperate need of repair and refitting. Therefore, new systems were required.<sup>100</sup>

A policy shift initiated by the Assistant Chief of Staff (G-4), with the support of the Deputy Chief of Staff, in October 1936 greatly affected army research and development. Since congressional appropriation for research and development remained small, the general staff desired to make maximum use of the funds for immediate acquisition of equipment rather than investing it in the normally long and drawn-out development process. Therefore, the policy called for a halt in development of "unessential" equipment, the rapid equipping the army with the best equipment available, and continued research and development of new critical items.<sup>101</sup>

Some of the critical systems that went through the research and development process during this period, throughout which Harmon made contributions, were: the

development of the 105mm howitzer, the C-47 transport, the B-17 bomber, and the jeep. He remembered the C-47 and jeep with particular fondness; “the blessed C-47 workhorse transport which...continued to function under the adverse conditions which made other planes conk out” and “the jeep--that springless little gasoline buggy which went anywhere and everywhere in a hundred battle areas.”<sup>102</sup> This experience was extremely valuable to Harmon. All of the systems he cited went on to play a major part on the battlefields of World War II and beyond.

Strangely, Harmon failed to include tanks and mechanization in his brief description of research and development. A simple answer could be that he simply was not involved in such work. The systems previously mentioned surely took up a great deal of his time. However, Harmon kept abreast of foreign tank development, a topic followed by the WDGS. He later blamed the Ordnance Department, because of its traditional control of army weaponry, stating that it stood in “stubborn opposition” to War Department efforts to stimulate tank development.<sup>103</sup> A better answer is that during the 1930s tanks were not very important in the War Department plans. Again, funding influenced limited attention to tank development. During the late 1930s an individual tank design cost approximately \$50,000. The entire Ordnance Department for tank research and development never exceeded \$60,000. In the fifteen years prior to Harmon’s arrival in the G-4 the army built no more than thirty-five different prototypes.<sup>104</sup> Therefore, budget restraints prevented the construction of more than one experimental model per year.<sup>105</sup>

Another issue behind the War Department’s limited tank development stemmed from the irreconcilability of the using arms, primarily cavalry and infantry, to mutually

agree on similar models. Each wanted tanks to support completely different missions. Failure to compromise, in addition to existing budget restraints, severely impeded tank development and production.<sup>106</sup> This obstruction began to diminish while Harmon served in the G-4. In 1935, his first year on the General Staff, the first “mass” production of tanks, sixteen medium variants, took place.<sup>107</sup> Furthermore, American reports from Europe outlining foreign military advances and actions in the Spanish Civil War helped energize American tank development.<sup>108</sup> Finally, leaders of the mechanized initiative within the cavalry branch made demands on the War Department to finish equipping the cavalry’s first mechanized regiment and develop new equipment. In many cases, the efforts of the mechanized cavalry leaders forced the War Department to revitalize its tank development and production during the late 1930s.<sup>109</sup>

Harmon’s tour with the WDGS served as a lengthy period of personal and professional reflection. His career spanned twenty-three years of service. He commanded troops in combat and served in all of the right assignments that together provided the opportunity for senior command. However, as the WDGS tour came to end Harmon made the most critical decision of his career.

I had a problem of my own during this interval. I had been in the cavalry since the beginning of my service. I liked horses, I liked to be in the saddle, and I liked polo. But long before my service on the General Staff I had become convinced that, in modern war, horse cavalry was as obsolete as the arrow and spear. Part of my judgment, of course, was based on my experience in World War I; more important, I had been following German, French, and British military reports on the development of the tank. It seemed to me, as it did to many other officers, that mechanized units could and should take over the traditional battle functions of the cavalry...<sup>110</sup>

When his tour with the WDGS neared completion in the early summer of 1939, the Chief of Cavalry, Major General John K. Herr, called Harmon to his office. Harmon did not

look forward to this meeting. Harmon recounted the meeting years later with a mixed sense of emotion:

[Herr] generously asked me where I would like to be assigned. This was a painful meeting for both of us. General Herr, who had always been kind to me, still believed the horse had an important part to play on the battlefield. I did not. It hurt me as much as it hurt him when I said I wanted to go to tanks [the mechanized cavalry at Fort Knox, Kentucky] to learn about a new kind of combat.<sup>111</sup>

Herr, the most vocal defender of the horse cavalry faith, told Harmon that he no longer had the friendship of the Office of the Chief of Cavalry after twenty-two years of service in the branch.<sup>112</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Harmon, *Combat Commander*, 49-57; U.S. Army Adjutant General's Office. *Official Army Register* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1940): 341; Wade, Gary. *World War II Division Commanders* (Fort Leavenworth, KS: U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, Combat Studies Institute, 1987): 6.

<sup>2</sup> Schifferle, Peter J. "Anticipating Armageddon: The Leavenworth Schools and US Military Effectiveness, 1919-1945" (PhD diss., University of Kansas, 2002), 142.

<sup>3</sup> Editor. "Selection of Students for the Command and General Staff School," *Cavalry Journal*, Vol. 37, No. 151 (April 1928): 275-276.

<sup>4</sup> U.S. Army Command and General Staff School. *Instruction Circular No. 1: Series 1932-1933* (Fort Leavenworth, Kansas: Command and General Staff School Press, 1932), 8.

<sup>5</sup> Harmon, *Combat Commander*, 50.

<sup>6</sup> U.S. Army Adjutant General's Office, *Official Army Register*, 341.

<sup>7</sup> U.S. Army Command and General Staff School, *Instructor Circular No. 1: Series 1932-1933*, 7.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid*, 7.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid*, 7.

<sup>10</sup> Nenner, Timothy K. "Leavenworth and Its Critics: The U.S. Army Command and Staff School, 1920-1940," *The Journal of Military History*, Vol. 58, No. 2 (April 1994), 203.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid, 203.

<sup>12</sup> U.S. Army Command and General Staff School. *First Year Course: Schedule for 1932-1933* (Fort Leavenworth, Kansas: Command and General Staff School Press, 1932), 4-14.

<sup>13</sup> Harmon, *Combat Commander*, 50.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid, 50.

<sup>15</sup> U.S. Army Command and General Staff School. *Second Year Course: Schedule for 1932-1933* (Fort Leavenworth, Kansas: Command and General Staff School Press, 1932), 3-7, 19-24.

<sup>16</sup> Nenninger, "Leavenworth and Its Critics," 217-218, 221-222.

<sup>17</sup> U.S. Army Command and General Staff School. *Bulletin No. 7: Individual Research Course, Second Year Class* (Fort Leavenworth, Kansas: Command and General Staff School Press, 1932), 1-3; U.S. Army Command and General Staff School. *Bulletin No. 4: Group Research* (Fort Leavenworth, Kansas: Command and General Staff School Press, 1932), 1-4.

<sup>18</sup> U.S. Command and General Staff College, *Bulletin No. 7: Individual Research Course, Second Class Year*, 1.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid, 2-3.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid, 1-2.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid, 2, 13.

<sup>22</sup> Harmon, Ernest N. "A Critical Analysis of the German Cavalry Operations in the Lodz Campaign to Include the Breakthrough at Brzeziny, With Particular Reference to the I Cavalry Corps," (Command and General Staff School, 1933), 1-24.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid, 24.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid, 24.

<sup>25</sup> Hofmann, *Through Mobility We Conquer*, 170-171.

<sup>26</sup> Nenninger, "Leavenworth and Its Critics," 225.

<sup>27</sup> Harmon, *Combat Commander*, 209-210.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid, 209-210.

<sup>29</sup> U.S. Army Command and General Staff School, *Instruction Circular No. 1: Series 1932-1933*, 8.

<sup>30</sup> Berlin, 11.

<sup>31</sup> Harmon, *Combat Commander*, 50.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid*, 50.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid*, 49.

<sup>34</sup> Collins, 57.

<sup>35</sup> Ball, 223.

<sup>36</sup> U.S. Army Command and General Staff School. *Annual Report of the Command and General Staff School, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, 1932-1933* (Fort Leavenworth, Kansas: Command and General Staff School Press, 1933), 6.

<sup>37</sup> Harmon, *Combat Commander*, 50.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid*, 51.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid*, 51.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid*, 51.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid*, 51-52.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid*, 52.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid*, 52. Harmon influenced one of the young CCC men in particular. During Harmon's first meeting with the camp, Robert Halleck served as the group spokesman, presenting Harmon with the list of complaints. Halleck's performance deeply impressed Harmon. When Harmon later attended the Army War College he discovered that there was an opening for a civilian assistant steward and contacted Halleck, who took the job. Halleck went on to own a department store chain and became quite wealthy. His son graduated with honors from Norwich University, when Harmon was President of the university, in 1964.

<sup>44</sup> Gole, Henry G. *The Road to Rainbow: Army Planning for Global War, 1934-1940* (Annapolis, Maryland: Naval Institute Press, 2003), 5.

<sup>45</sup> Harmon, *Combat Commander*, 52.

<sup>46</sup> Berlin, 12.

<sup>47</sup> Gole, 180.



- <sup>48</sup> Odom, *After the Trenches*, 170.
- <sup>49</sup> Ibid, 170.
- <sup>50</sup> Ibid, 170.
- <sup>51</sup> Harmon, *Combat Commander*, 52.
- <sup>52</sup> Ibid, 52.
- <sup>53</sup> Ibid, 52.
- <sup>54</sup> Ibid, 52.
- <sup>55</sup> Ibid, 52-53.
- <sup>56</sup> Gole, 125.
- <sup>57</sup> Ibid, 170-171.
- <sup>58</sup> Ibid, 28.
- <sup>59</sup> Ibid, 28, 31.
- <sup>60</sup> Ibid, 32.
- <sup>61</sup> Ibid, 32.
- <sup>62</sup> Ibid, xix.
- <sup>63</sup> Ibid, 35.
- <sup>64</sup> Ibid, 35.
- <sup>65</sup> Harmon, *Combat Commander*, 53,
- <sup>66</sup> Ibid, 53.
- <sup>67</sup> Ibid, 53.
- <sup>68</sup> Gole, 41-47.
- <sup>69</sup> Ibid, 32-33.
- <sup>70</sup> Ibid, 40.
- <sup>71</sup> Ibid, 40-46.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid, 47. Gole added the following point as well: “Considering the parts they would play later, one pauses to wonder what Halsey, Wainwright, and others were thinking as they listened to their commandant in 1934.

<sup>73</sup> Harmon, *Combat Commander*, 54.

<sup>74</sup> U.S. Army Adjutant General’s Office, *Official Army Registry*, 341; Truscott, *Twilight of the U.S. Cavalry*, 53; *The Rasp*, 1921, 69.

<sup>75</sup> Harmon, *Combat Commander*, 54.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid, 54.

<sup>77</sup> See; 1914, 1921-1924 editions of *The Howitzer*, (West Point, NY: United States Military Academy), 1914, 1921-1924.

<sup>78</sup> Harmon, *Combat Commander*, 54.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid, 55.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid, 55.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid, 55.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid, 55; Hofmann, *Through Mobility We Conquer*, 239.

<sup>83</sup> Editor. “Organization Activities,” *Cavalry Journal*, Vol. 44, No. 190 (July-August 1935), 73.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid, 72.

<sup>85</sup> Editor. “Organization Activities,” *Cavalry Journal*, Vol. 48, No. 186 (November-December 1934), 75.

<sup>86</sup> Editor, “Organization Activities,” (July-August 1935), 72.

<sup>87</sup> Harmon, *Combat Commander*, 54.

<sup>88</sup> Editor. “Sports,” *Cavalry Journal*, No. 44, No. 190 (July-August 1935), 62.

<sup>89</sup> Harmon, *Combat Commander*, 55-56.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid, 56.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid, 56.

<sup>92</sup> Stewart, 66-67.

- <sup>93</sup> Harmon, *Combat Commander*, 56.
- <sup>94</sup> Ball, 237.
- <sup>95</sup> Harmon, *Combat Commander*, 56.
- <sup>96</sup> Stewart, 65, 69; Harmon, *Combat Commander*, 56-57.
- <sup>97</sup> Stewart, 65-66.
- <sup>98</sup> Watson, Mark Skinner. *Chief of Staff: Prewar Plans and Preparations* (Washington, D.C.: Department of The Army, Historical Division, 1950), 32.
- <sup>99</sup> Green, Constance McLaughlin and Harry C. Thomson and Peter C. Roots. *The Ordinance Department: Planning Munitions For War* (Washington, D.C.: Department of The Army, Office of the Chief of Military History, 1955), 4, 206, 195.
- <sup>100</sup> Watson, 32-33.
- <sup>101</sup> Ibid, 40.
- <sup>102</sup> Harmon, *Combat Commander*, 56.
- <sup>103</sup> Ibid, 57.
- <sup>104</sup> Thomson, Harry C. and Lida Mayo. *The Ordinance Department: Procurement and Supply* (Washington, D.C.: Department of The Army, Office of the Chief of Military History, 1960), 224.
- <sup>105</sup> Green, 195.
- <sup>106</sup> Ibid, 194-195.
- <sup>107</sup> Thomson, 224.
- <sup>108</sup> Ibid, 49, 184, 194.
- <sup>109</sup> Ibid, 201-203. It is interesting to note that one of mechanization's chief proponents, Adna R. Chaffee, known today as "The Father of the Armored Force," and a future influence over Harmon, served as Chief of The Budget and Legislative Branch of the WDGS from 1934-1938. See; Timothy K. Nenner's, "Organizational Milestone's in the Development of American Armor, 1920-1940," in George F. Hofmann and Donn A. Starry's, *Camp Colt to Desert Storm: The History of U.S. Armored Forces* (Lexington, Kentucky: The University Press of Kentucky, 1999).
- <sup>110</sup> Harmon, *Combat Commander*, 56-57.
- <sup>111</sup> Ibid, 57.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid, 57.

## CHAPTER 5

### TOWARD WAR AND DIVISION COMMAND (1939-1942)

Harmon's meeting with the Chief of Cavalry took place during a tumultuous period for the branch. Nineteen thirty-nine became a watershed year for both the cavalry and its mechanization program. Herr initially looked as though he supported mechanization. However, faced with the reallocation of funding and personnel from horse to mechanized cavalry, Herr waged an aggressive personal campaign against what he saw as the emasculation of the horse cavalry.<sup>1</sup> Herr's message to the army, "Any further attempt to encroach on my horse cavalry will meet bitter opposition," expressed his policy.<sup>2</sup>

Therefore, Harmon thoroughly understood the gravity of his meeting with Herr. While a well respected personality within the cavalry,<sup>3</sup> Harmon approached the Chief of Cavalry with a request that was contrary to Herr's personal beliefs. The transfer of experienced cavalry officers to other duties, including mechanized cavalry, served as one of Herr's flash points. One of Harmon's peers captured Herr's consternation by explaining, "It was a real sorrow to him [Herr] that so many cavalry officers were seeking an opportunity for experience in mechanized units...He was especially distressed that among these were many of the best horsemen and polo players in the cavalry."<sup>4</sup> Harmon displayed a great deal of personal courage and conviction in facing Herr, but his request and those of his fellow cavalymen added to the strain that reached a fevered pitch in 1939.

### Joining a Fight in Progress--Mechanization

The army's mechanization development officially began at the end of 1927. In 1928 the army organized the Experimental Mechanized Force (EMF). During a relatively brief three-month period a combined arms force of infantry, tanks, artillery, armored cars, engineers, ordinance, and quartermaster units executed large-unit movements and offensive exercises. However, once the necessary data for follow-on general staff studies were collected, the EMF disbanded and its separate elements returned to their home stations.<sup>5</sup> Nevertheless, the general staff studies generated by the EMF led to orders establishing a permanent Mechanized Force in August 1930.<sup>6</sup> The Mechanized Force continued where the EMF ended, combining mechanized and motorized platforms and conducting more complex maneuver training.

Within the first year of the Mechanized Force's existence, the new Army Chief of Staff, General Douglas MacArthur, established a new policy that "largely determined the Army's mechanization program for the next decade."<sup>7</sup> MacArthur disbanded the Mechanized Force and directed the various combat branches, the cavalry in particular, to mechanize their assets as much as possible. The policy change significantly affected the cavalry. Limited Mechanized Force equipment and personnel were set aside to organize a mechanized cavalry regiment.<sup>8</sup> The residual components of the Mechanized Force reported to Camp Knox (soon renamed re-designated Fort Knox), Kentucky and eventually received a horse cavalry regiment, the 1<sup>st</sup>, from Texas to transform into the 1<sup>st</sup> Cavalry Regiment (Mechanized).<sup>9</sup>

While the Chiefs of Cavalry during most of the 1930s openly supported mechanization they also walked a fine line between two sides of a developing debate over

the place of horse versus mechanized units. Major General Guy V. Henry, Chief of Cavalry at the time of MacArthur's decision, sought "only the good of the whole;" welcoming mechanization and maintaining stability within the horse cavalry, while attempting not to overemphasize one at the expense of the other.<sup>10</sup> Henry's successor, Major General Leon B. Kromer, continued this unofficial branch policy, stating, "We, the Cavalry, are going to push the development of our mechanized cavalry to the limit of appropriations and ingenuity in order to find out its powers and limitations, and to fit it into its appropriate place in the team."<sup>11</sup> Kromer called for his officers to tolerate mechanization and possess the vision necessary for the cavalry to test its newest weapon.<sup>12</sup>

Many officers did not share the enthusiasm of the branch chief, even when his comments were couched. The overall opinion of mechanization throughout the cavalry seemed mixed. Some failed to accept the possibility that the horse's days on the modern battlefield were numbered. On the other hand, there were others that saw the potential for new weapon systems that could improve the capabilities of the mounted arm. These officers saw mechanized cavalry as an alternative to the horse.<sup>13</sup> However, most cavalry officers fell somewhere in between. "These men had a progressive attitude toward there arm. They understood the declining military utility of their mounts and sensed the armored vehicle's ability to replace it."<sup>14</sup> In the ensuing battle for the cavalry's future the officers that occupied this middle ground represented key terrain. To these officers fell the challenge "to reconcile their love of the horse with the pressing demands of modernity" faced by the cavalry.<sup>15</sup>

Harmon remained silent during the cavalry's mechanization debate. He appears to have occupied the middle ground with the majority of his brother officers, withholding "their judgment pending further proof of the potential of mechanized cavalry."<sup>16</sup> In other words, Harmon and most of his peers kept up with both sides of the debate and kept their opinions to themselves. Harmon's explanation for joining the mechanized cavalry represents hindsight from a point thirty years after the fact. However, the collective rationale for his request can be discerned from specific influences that led up to his decision.

First, part of Harmon's judgment, "of course, was based on my own experience in World War I," commanding the Provisional Squadron in France.<sup>17</sup> Harmon began questioning the place of the cavalry on the modern battlefield during the Meuse-Argonne offensive. Though written in hindsight in *Combat Commander*, Harmon's thoughts concerning the nearly insurmountable challenges faced by the Provisional Squadron were certainly captured in his *Cavalry Journal* articles on mounted operations in the St. Mihiel and Meuse-Argonne offensives written in the early 1920s.<sup>18</sup>

In a strange example of irony and coincidence, the 1<sup>st</sup> U.S. Tank Brigade, commanded by Colonel George S. Patton, supported the same divisions supported by the Provisional Squadron in both major AEF campaigns. The St. Mihiel offensive represented the U.S. Army's first combat employment of tanks.<sup>19</sup> Incidentally, in *Combat Commander*, Harmon only mentioned tanks twice, the first time with mixed emotions, describing that "In some places a few of the primitive tanks of that era had plowed their way through the barbed wire, but they were not mechanically up to the job,



and most loomed like small islands immobilized in the field of battle, stalled, useless, abandoned.”<sup>20</sup> So went Harmon’s first observation of tanks in combat.

Second, Harmon possessed knowledge that he acquired while attending CGSS and the War College. CGSS provided Harmon with a limited introduction to tank and mechanized doctrinal theory. The instruction “was not unimaginative and did not lag behind current technology.”<sup>21</sup> Later, at the War College students produced comparative studies on foreign militaries written during the G3 Course provided thorough examinations addressing doctrine, training, and technical development.<sup>22</sup> However, foreign mechanized developments, and “British experiments, in particular, failed to convince the Americans to mechanize large forces,” even though they led to the American adoption of a limited mechanization policy.<sup>23</sup>

The War College also provided a platform for guest lecturers that gave updates on mechanization trends. Harmon’s class attended several such lectures. Two separate presentations were delivered by Lieutenant Colonel George S. Patton, well-respected cavalry officer and former commander of the AEF’s 1<sup>st</sup> Tank Brigade in World War I. The first dealt solely with the subject of mechanization.<sup>24</sup> The second, a revised version of one of his own War College papers, *The Probable Characteristics of the Next War*, described the cavalry as “more effective than it has been for a thousand years” because of the integration of mechanized elements.<sup>25</sup> The Chief of Cavalry, Major General Leon B. Kromer, also presented updates on recent mechanized cavalry developments; yet he walked a fine line that favored mechanized and horse cavalry equally.<sup>26</sup>

Harmon left no personal account of his reaction to the lectures. However, there were student reports that addressed mechanization. His friend Ralph I. Sasse submitted

an essay that echoed the Chief of cavalry's lecture and may have spoken for Harmon and the majority of cavalrymen to the subject of mechanization. Despite Sasse's unique experience with heavy tanks in World War I, he firmly occupied the middle ground, stating up front that "We should accept this new weapon, absorb it as a unit of the cavalry team, and give it reasonable freedom of range..."<sup>27</sup> The paper accurately reflected a growing interest among junior field grade officers in attempting to identify the advantages of mechanization in the cavalry.<sup>28</sup>

Finally, *Cavalry Journal* "reflected a healthy exchange of ideas concerning mechanization throughout," the Interwar Period.<sup>29</sup> Throughout the 1930s increased attention toward mechanization and the evolving debate over machine versus horse filled the pages of the cavalry's professional journal. Articles were divided into three categories: pro-horse, pro-mechanization, or a mix of the two.<sup>30</sup> As mechanization began to prove itself, the editor of *Cavalry Journal* found himself playing referee between two diametrically opposed camps. In a 1937 call for cooperation between the advocates of horse and vehicle, the editor declared: "To many, mechanization has been an unknown monster," but "no cavalryman is complete in his education if he is merely a horse cavalryman or merely a mechanized cavalryman. He must be both."<sup>31</sup> Harmon's explanation to Herr in regard to his request for mechanized cavalry, "to learn about a new kind of combat," reflected his agreement with the editorial.<sup>32</sup>

With all of these factors in play, the timing of Harmon's request fell into a critical place, for 1939 proved to be a watershed year in mechanized development. During this year the army not only experienced the beginning of the meteoric rise of mechanization to the forefront, but it also witnessed the height of the sometimes openly acrimonious

debate that it caused. While previous Chiefs of Cavalry found balance in their horse and mechanized policies during most of the 1930s, Major General John K. Herr, who entered the office in 1938, eventually took a decidedly unreceptive and harsh attitude toward mechanization.<sup>33</sup> Initially Herr openly described the capabilities and limitations of mechanization as his predecessors did.

However, by his second year in office, 1939, he openly criticized the mechanized cavalry, marking a rapid deterioration in relations between Herr and the primary leader of mechanized cavalry development at Fort Knox, Brigadier General Adna R. Chaffee, Jr.<sup>34</sup> The situation created a great deal of tension within the cavalry. Major General Robert W. Grow, an experienced and outspoken mechanized cavalry officer, confided in his diary that “Herr is distrusted at Knox. All Knox people think he is against them.”<sup>35</sup> On the other hand, Lieutenant General Lucian K. Truscott, an equally experienced horse cavalryman, but open to progressive ideas, reflected that Herr “believed that the General Staff was intent upon destroying the cavalry because they did not like cavalrymen, because they considered the cavalry obsolete, and because they wished to profit at the expense of the cavalry.”<sup>36</sup> Another veteran mechanized cavalryman, Lieutenant General Willis D. Crittenberger, who served in the office of the Chief of Cavalry, accurately foresaw “that things are moving to a showdown.”<sup>37</sup> Herr often spoke of “traitorous” cavalry officers in the office of the Chief of Staff, and elsewhere, that conspired to convince the Chief of Staff to establish an independent armored force.<sup>38</sup> Herr became the personification of the most conservative circles of the cavalry that aggressively defended the utility of horse over mechanized cavalry.<sup>39</sup>

### 1<sup>st</sup> Cavalry Regiment (Mechanized)

Harmon was a relative late-comer to mechanized cavalry. He was not part of the generalization stated by one mechanized officer concerning late-comers, “who at first pooh-poohed the idea [of mechanization] because it was fashionable to do so in mounted circles...and who now, finally, realizing that he missed the train, is running like hell trying to catch up.”<sup>40</sup> Harmon’s case seemed to be more of a lack of professional opportunity than a personal hesitation on Harmon’s part. His previous assignments were extremely important and very rewarding as part of his overall professional development that made him a respected officer. Harmon’s opportunity to request duty with the mechanized cavalry probably had more to do with the fact that he made it to a point in his career where he had more say in his future.

The timing of Harmon’s decision proved fortuitous. While not getting in on the ground floor of mechanization, he certainly arrived at Fort Knox when mechanization’s stock began to swiftly rise. When the *Cavalry Journal* reported his expected arrival to the 1<sup>st</sup> Cavalry Regiment (Mechanized) it also stated that “The regiment is unusually short of officers.”<sup>41</sup> Officer shortages were felt across the 7<sup>th</sup> Cavalry Brigade (Mechanized). Harmon reported to Fort Knox immediately after the transfer of most of the brigade’s key personnel despite existing personnel shortage. While the brigade commander, Brigadier General Adna R. Chaffee, Jr., stated that the transfers “damned near ruined me,” he cited Harmon as one of two incoming officers with the potential necessary to offset the loss despite his lack of mechanized experience.<sup>42</sup> Harmon sent a personal note to Chaffee prior to his arrival. He honestly admitted to Chaffee that “I don’t know very much about the tactics and employment of mechanized cavalry, so will

not be much good at first,” but he promised that “I come anxious to learn and willing to work, so hope to develop to be of some use.”<sup>43</sup> This note, in addition to knowledge of Harmon’s steady career performance in the cavalry to date, helped relieve some of Chaffee’s stress over key leader turn over.

Harmon underwent a rapid transition from horse to mechanized cavalry. Released from the General Staff on July 21, 1939, Harmon immediately assumed command of 1<sup>st</sup> Squadron, 1<sup>st</sup> Cavalry Regiment (Mechanized) within two weeks of the brigade’s departure for the First Army maneuvers in Plattsburg, New York.<sup>44</sup> Harmon’s successful transition depended greatly upon the roots of the mechanized cavalry and its tactical doctrine.

Major General Daniel Van Voorhis, the commander of the Mechanized Force and initial commander of the 1<sup>st</sup> Cavalry (Mechanized) Regiment, insisted that his troops maintain the vocabulary and mannerisms of the horse cavalry. Most of all, Van Voorhis urged his officers to “think mounted” because “cavalrymen had to think faster than they moved...”<sup>45</sup> Like Van Voorhis, Chaffee’s vision for the mechanized cavalry bore “the stamp of his cavalry training” because he initially saw it as “the extension of the powers of cavalry through new and modern methods.”<sup>46</sup> Vision set Van Voorhis, the “Grandfather,” and Chaffee, the “Father” of the future Armored Force aside from their fellow cavalrymen. They foresaw that mechanized cavalry, led by “a new breed of young cavalrymen,” would “develop a more aggressive way of warfighting than the horse cavalry and infantry.”<sup>47</sup> Harmon joined this group on the eve of a period that witnessed mechanized cavalry’s final validation.

On the broader level, the First Army maneuvers, which took place around Plattsburg, New York in August 1939, represented the greatest test for mechanization to date. The maneuvers marked a critical transition in the acceptance of mechanization. Chaffee successfully demonstrated the potential of the brigade, translating theory into action, and convinced many senior officers that the modern battlefield required mechanized forces.<sup>48</sup> The true value of the brigade's performance was:

The month before the Germans launched their blitzkrieg against Poland in September 1939, the 7<sup>th</sup> Cavalry Brigade had engaged in a wide enveloping movement, completing a successful deep maneuver-oriented operation, cutting across the hostiles' lines of communication.<sup>49</sup>

On a smaller scale, the brigade executed tactics identical to those employed by the German army in Poland and throughout the first half of World War II.<sup>50</sup>

On another level the maneuvers represented Harmon's introduction and extensive on-the-job training in mechanized warfare. He benefited greatly from the training program that the brigade conducted in New York prior to the actual maneuvers. For twelve days the unit conducted troop, squadron, regimental, and brigade-level tactical problems and gave demonstrations for all of the other major maneuver units.<sup>51</sup> Harmon then profited greatly when, contrary to Chaffee's wishes, corps-level exercises required that the brigade split its assets. Chaffee maintained the 1<sup>st</sup> Cavalry Regiment under his direct control and Harmon fell under the tutelage of Chaffee, establishing a relationship that lasted until Chaffee's death in 1941.<sup>52</sup> When the brigade consolidated for the climactic army-level maneuvers Harmon, as a squadron commander, contributed heavily to the brigade's demonstration of the strategic value of mechanized forces.<sup>53</sup>

Immediately following the success of the brigade, the army received an invitation from the mayor of New York City to showcase the brigade at the 1939 New York World's Fair.<sup>54</sup> En route to New York, the brigade stopped over at West Point, bivouacking in the Cadet Camp, and gave a demonstration to the Corps of Cadets.<sup>55</sup> While the West Point visit and World's Fair marked public relation coups for the mechanized cavalry, they were quickly overshadowed by the German invasion of Poland, spearheaded by mechanized divisions, the day after the brigade's arrival in New York.<sup>56</sup> The Germans demonstrated to the world the incredible capabilities of a mechanized force. The Plattsburg maneuvers and the invasion of Poland confirmed the efforts of Chaffee and his fellow mechanized cavalymen to the rest of the army and vindicated Harmon's career decision to join their ranks.<sup>57</sup>

With no time to rest on its laurels, the 7<sup>th</sup> Cavalry Brigade (Mechanized) entered a fast-paced period of combat training at Fort Knox to prepare for the next series of army maneuvers scheduled for the spring of 1940. Again, Harmon directly benefited from the training, mostly built around the two subordinate regiments facing off against each other in a series of tactical problems that proved "most valuable, particularly to commanders and staff personnel."<sup>58</sup> Additionally, a series of smaller exercises, conducted by the squadron commanders, further increased the tactical efficiency of Harmon's platoons.<sup>59</sup> Finally, for the first time in its history, Harmon's regiment possessed all of its equipment required by the table of organization.<sup>60</sup>

The next maneuvers, held in Louisiana in May 1940, were the most important in the short history of the mechanized cavalry and led to the establishment of the Armored Force. Conversely, the maneuvers served as a severe set back for the horse cavalry

which dramatically fell in disfavor, suffering defeat at the hands of more powerful mechanized forces.<sup>61</sup> In addition to the 7<sup>th</sup> Cavalry Brigade, a Provisional Tank Brigade from the infantry also participated. The second half of the maneuvers witnessed the consolidation of these two units into a temporary division that stole the spotlight from the rest of the maneuvers.<sup>62</sup>

Once again, however, events in Europe seized the attention of the world. During the first week of the maneuvers Germany launched its devastating invasion of France and the Low Countries, spearheading the attack with its expanded panzer divisions, and shattering the Allied armies. By the end of the Louisiana maneuvers, the rapid German conquest of Western Europe and performance of the ad hoc American mechanized division, convinced most army leaders to pursue drastic changes in the development of mechanized forces. In a small informal meeting held on the final day of the maneuvers, the Army's assistant chief of staff (G-3) discussed the results of the maneuvers with the key leaders of the 7<sup>th</sup> Cavalry Brigade (Mechanized) and Provisional Tank Brigade. From the small meeting sprang great things. During a June 10, 1940 meeting in Washington, Army Chief of Staff, General George C. Marshall, rendered a final decision on army mechanization. He approved the establishment of the Armored Force and named Chaffee its first commander. The new organization combined the cavalry's 7<sup>th</sup> Cavalry Brigade (Mechanized) and the infantry's Provisional Tank Brigade. When the War Department officially established the Armored Force on July 10, 1940, Chaffee named Harmon, just promoted to lieutenant colonel, the assistant chief of staff (G-4) of the Armored Force and its subordinate I Armored Corps.<sup>63</sup>



### Forging the Thunderbolt—Armored Force G-4

The early days of the Armored Force “tested the ingenuity and patience of both the officers and men. There were no precedents for organizing an armored division, and insufficient time to learn by trial and error.”<sup>64</sup> The single dominating influence came from those officers most closely associated with Chaffee and the 7<sup>th</sup> Cavalry Brigade.<sup>65</sup> The key leaders of the Armored Force were nearly all cavalymen, thus sharing a common indoctrination, background, and mindset.<sup>66</sup> These men, including Harmon, possessed a great deal of the army’s institutional knowledge concerning mechanization. Therefore, led by Chaffee, their collective experience determined the future of the Armored Force.<sup>67</sup> Harmon found himself firmly established as one of the new command’s top leaders because Chaffee had great faith in Harmon in light of his performance during the previous year. Shortly before the Armored Force’s creation Chaffee cited Harmon as part of the small circle of like-minded officers at Fort Knox that continually gave him the strength to continue his efforts in convincing the Army that mechanized cavalry would play a decisive part in the next war.<sup>68</sup>

By naming Harmon his G-4 Chaffee leveraged Harmon’s previous experience in the WDGS G-4. Though the position took him away from commanding troops Harmon fully understood the larger implications of his new duties. Years later he humbly reflected that, “Because I knew my way around the War Department I believe I was able to be particularly useful during those pioneering days when the Armored Force was like a child, taking its first tottering steps.”<sup>69</sup> Harmon’s knowledge of the inner workings of the War Department, specifically its logistics section proved extremely useful during the Armored Force’s initial development.

The logistical challenges created by the formation of the Armored Force were enormous. The initial organization of the Armored Force called for the establishment of the I Armored Corps at Fort Knox and two subordinate armored divisions, the 1<sup>st</sup>, also at Fort Knox, and the 2<sup>nd</sup>, located at Fort Benning, Georgia. A separate unit included the 70<sup>th</sup> Tank Battalion at Fort Meade, Maryland, part of the army General Headquarters (GHQ) reserve. Additionally, the organization included the Armored Force Board and the Armored Force School and Replacement Training Center. A major challenge, not corrected for nearly another year, consisted of Chaffee's dual status as commander of both the Armored Force and I Armored Corps. Therefore, though the Armored Force staff remained the focal point, Harmon and his peers technically served as the staff for both organizations.<sup>70</sup>

By far the greatest logistical challenge during this period was the shortage of vehicles and equipment necessary to equip the two armored divisions in accordance with their tables of organization. The tables for an armored division required a total of 3,243 vehicles, of which 1,140 were combat vehicles. Though acquiring the bulk of the general purpose vehicles went relatively well, obtaining tanks and half-tracks presented serious challenges. The Armored Force possessed approximately 400 mostly obsolete light tanks and American industry had not yet been mobilized for military production.<sup>71</sup> There were also acute shortages of machine guns for vehicles, and rifles and pistols for the troops. Such drastic shortages in equipment presented significant training challenges. Even securing sufficient uniforms for recruits presented a great problem.<sup>72</sup>

Despite the tremendous equipment shortages, during the Armored Force's first month in existence Chaffee outlined his plan to make all of its combat units ready to take

the field with all available equipment by October 1, 1940.<sup>73</sup> The War Department placed additional demands on the Armored Force as the first two armored divisions began to organize, informing Chaffee that two additional divisions would be created the next year with a further six to follow.<sup>74</sup> Harmon found himself in constant communication with the armored division commanders and their chiefs of staff, assisting them in meeting their requirements and keeping Chaffee informed as to the true physical state of the Armored Force.<sup>75</sup>

The critical shortage of training, maintenance, and living facilities equaled shortcomings in equipment. The organization of the Armored Force required the rapid expansion of the existing facilities at Fort Knox and Fort Benning in order to accommodate the projected increase in personnel and vehicles. Lucian K. Truscott, newly arrived at Fort Knox, described the post as “a beehive of seething activity.”<sup>76</sup> He described numerous construction projects manned by hundreds of civilian workers that produced new roads, streets, bridges, and buildings. However, he also described officers living in tents for months on end, waiting for permanent quarters.<sup>77</sup> Anticipating an influx of new personnel, Chaffee considered the shortage of adequate living space for soldiers and families his major concern within his first week of command, stating it was “necessary that they have a comfortable and satisfactory home life.”<sup>78</sup> Finding available space to accommodate the Armored Force School came next on Chaffee’s list of concerns. Scant facilities were exploited to the fullest measure until permanent facilities were built, but the school still began operation within months of its establishment.<sup>79</sup>

Despite Harmon’s best efforts, funding from the War Department remained tight. Harmon communicated with the War Department G-3 and G-4 on a variety of issues, but

his predominant concern focused on construction funding. For example, when the 2<sup>nd</sup> Armored Division requested \$570,000 to build maintenance shops, parking sheds for vehicles, and road paving, Harmon replied that it could spend only \$32,000 to construct buildings to store weapons and radios.<sup>80</sup> Harmon, strongly supported by Chaffee, attempted every possible means to acquire funding from a variety of categories. However, they always met resistance and rarely received even half of the funding requested.<sup>81</sup>

Throughout the turmoil of managing the overwhelming logistical demands of the Armored Force Harmon developed a close professional and personnel relationship with Chaffee. He spent long hours at Fort Knox discussing the evolving state of the organization, outlining the numerous challenges, and recommending possible solutions. For example, in May 1941 Harmon wrote Chaffee, describing the limitations of maneuvers, explaining that, “Many of our officers are so maneuver-minded and so lacking in realistic combat experience that they mistake common sense and good judgment for undesirable caution.”<sup>82</sup> Moreover, Harmon accompanied Chaffee on many of his extended trips to Fort Benning, Washington, or civilian production sites across the country, especially when supply or funding matters made up the itinerary.<sup>83</sup> Harmon knew the demands placed on Chaffee’s time and energy and, with the help of others, tried to assist him as much as possible. During an intimate conversation with Chaffee Harmon displayed a combination of candor and concern toward his commander’s situation:

If you only make three or four basic decisions a month your judgment and value is such that such work would be invaluable to the force. However, instead, you are harassed with a thousand petty subjects... You need some one to guard you against the wolves, the handshakers, the boys who want you to know they are doing something, etc....Big problems should only come to you fully presented in

writing, with all of the facts so you can quietly study...<sup>84</sup>

Ever the good staff officer, Harmon tried his best to protect his chief.

However, having a close relationship with Chaffee also exposed Harmon to the truth of the grave illness that slowly killed Chaffee as his vision unfolded into reality. The man that almost single-handedly guided the destiny of Armored Force and the officers associated with it suffered from inoperable cancer, the complications of which were accelerated by his endless exertions on behalf of the organization.<sup>85</sup> Years later Harmon eulogized Chaffee, stating:

If Adna Chaffee, thin, dark, and soldierly, had lived, I am sure that he would have become one of the outstanding commanders of World War II... There can be no tangible record now of his brilliance, but there were times in Africa, Italy, and Germany when the Allied Command could have well utilized his judgment and shrewd intelligence.<sup>86</sup>

Chaffee mentored a generation of officers that ably led the army's divisions and corps throughout World War II.<sup>87</sup> The eulogy proved that long after his death, Harmon continued to appreciate the example set by Chaffee and the influence that guided his own career in the war.

#### Washington—War Plans Division and General Headquarters Staff

While the aftermath of the fall of France ushered the establishment of the Armored Force, it also accelerated the overall expansion of the rest of the army. The General Staff represented one of the most critical areas requiring attention. The War Department needed additional officers with recent troop and previous general staff experience. The Chief of Staff, General George C. Marshall, made the personal selection of experienced staff officers his top priorities. To expedite matters, previous restrictions that limited repeated staff tours and forbid staff assignments for officers in the midst of

their two-year tours with troops were eliminated.<sup>88</sup> Therefore, with less than two years at Fort Knox, Harmon received orders in the spring of 1941 to report to the general staff's War Plans Division (WPD).<sup>89</sup>

A memorandum describing the WPD, released at approximately the same time that Harmon received his orders, stated that, "The general duties of this Division relate to the formulation of plans and general policies affecting the employment of our military forces in war, separately, or in conjunction with Naval forces."<sup>90</sup> In effect, the WPD assisted and advised the Chief of Staff and through him, the Secretary of War and President, on the requirements necessary to conduct military operations. At the time of Harmon's assignment selection focused on officers requiring minimal training or evaluation with high potential. Generally, the basis of selection centered on relationships with officers already posted to the Division, service record, and military education.<sup>91</sup>

Harmon found his assignment frustrating, remembering that, "The assignment did not please me because, for a second time, I found myself isolated at a desk when I thought that my mission was to command troops."<sup>92</sup> However, within a month of reporting to the WPD events unfolded that, within a year, led to Harmon achieving his wish. During this same period the General Headquarters (GHQ), initially established to oversee army training, began to develop into the headquarters that the Chief of Staff would command and control troops in certain theaters of war. Not possessing enough qualified officers to meet its new responsibilities, GHQ received an influx of officers, including Harmon, from the WPD.<sup>93</sup>

Harmon immediately found himself appointed G-4 (Logistics) by GHQ chief of staff, Major General Leslie J. McNair. Great demands were placed upon his previous

experience in the WDGS G-4 section and as the Armored Force G-4, but this new role focused on a much greater scale. Harmon's responsibilities included logistical planning for the training of the rapidly expanding army and for initial force projection into areas outside of the United States. He came to grips with this realization during his first major project, overseeing the logistical planning for the establishment of American overseas garrisons in Iceland, Trinidad, and elsewhere.<sup>94</sup>

Harmon's logistical planning as part of GHQ's overall training of army units reached its height in the 1941 GHQ maneuvers. The maneuver, involving nearly a half million men, included various new combat systems that Harmon knew well from his research and development days in the WDGS G-4, including the 105mm howitzer and the jeep.<sup>95</sup> He "handled transportation of troops to Louisiana, their support in the field..., the training of our green supply contingents," and the redeployment of units to their home stations.<sup>96</sup> The movement of the two existing armored divisions that Harmon helped build reflected the enormous planning requirements prior to the maneuvers. The 2<sup>nd</sup> Armored Division traveled over 600 miles from Fort Benning and the 1<sup>st</sup> Armored Division moved over 700 miles from Fort Knox, both units traveling by a combination of road and rail.<sup>97</sup>

In the wake of the Louisiana maneuvers GHQ reexamined the army's force structure and Harmon's West Point classmate, Mark W. Clark, GHQ G-3 (Operations), oversaw the preliminary studies. A key aspect of the study concerned the number of armored divisions necessary for deployment overseas. Clark recommended one hundred infantry and five armored divisions. When Clark told Harmon about his recommendation Harmon immediately protested, citing existing German armored strength and doctrine.

Based on his experience with the Armored Force and his observations of German operations in Europe, Harmon asserted that there should be one armored division for every five infantry divisions.<sup>98</sup>

Clark continued to disagree and informed Harmon that McNair agreed with his own assessment. When Harmon mentioned that he would arrange to meet with McNair and explain his case, Clark replied, “Over my dead body,” to which Harmon in turn responded, “Over your dead body or your live body, I will get in to see him.”<sup>99</sup> Harmon’s stand resulted in a meeting with McNair where he presented his case.<sup>100</sup> In addition to their primary duties, Harmon, along with Lieutenant Colonel Allen F. Kingman, were two of the senior members of McNair’s original staff with Armored Force experience, providing valuable advice on organization and doctrine.<sup>101</sup> Therefore, McNair agreed with Harmon’s assessment and sent a memorandum forward recommending an increase from the six existing armored divisions to a total of twenty.<sup>102</sup>

Harmon’s relationship with Leslie McNair proved to be critical. Harmon described McNair as “a brusque realist who sought to break through the nonsense of outdated military,” a personality not unlike his own.<sup>103</sup> McNair’s wide-ranging influence within the army stood second only to the Chief of Staff, George C. Marshall. Together the two determined that the expanding army should have the best leadership possible.<sup>104</sup> Marshall delegated McNair with the freedom to recommend to him officers worthy of promotion and key assignments. Therefore, McNair held considerable influence in the selection of senior officers for senior command and staff positions and rarely experienced a rejection.<sup>105</sup>



One of the most important outcomes of the 1941 GHQ maneuvers that affected Harmon directly came from the after-action review provided by McNair and expanded upon by Marshall. Certain senior officers, proven ineffective, were reassigned and replaced by younger, more effective officers.<sup>106</sup> Marshall, assisted by McNair, initiated a youth movement within the ranks of the officer corps that swept a score of young officers, including Harmon, into senior combat commands during World War II.<sup>107</sup>

Harmon's performance under McNair was the most influential factor that led to his eventual selection for division command. By his efforts, Harmon earned the respect of McNair, and through him, made himself visible to Marshall, the two most important army leaders and the final approving authorities on officer appointments at the division level and above.<sup>108</sup> Harmon's name may now have appeared in Marshall's now near-mythical "black book" (really a list kept in his top right-hand desk drawer) of promising officers. Most of the officers that Marshall kept track of throughout his career were men who either served under him at the Infantry School, were recommended by those officers whose judgment he implicitly trusted, or were names that repeatedly came across his desk in official correspondence.<sup>109</sup> The second and third points, facilitated by McNair, helped Harmon cut a path to Marshall's attention. A final indication of McNair's interest in advancing Harmon's career occurred at the end of his abbreviated tour with the GHQ. Harmon received promotion to colonel while on the GHQ staff with a McNair's promise of promotion to brigadier general in the near future. McNair released him in order to assume duties as the chief of staff of the Armored Force under the sole condition that the new role did not deny him his first star.<sup>110</sup>

### Return to Knox—Armored Force Chief of Staff

Harmon's early release from GHQ duty came as the result of a visit from Major General Jacob L. Devers, Chief of the Armored Force after the death of Chaffee in August 1941.<sup>111</sup> Devers was personally selected by Marshall to transform the armored divisions from lighter cavalry-based to heavier self-contained combat arms organizations possessing highly mobile and overwhelming firepower.<sup>112</sup> In the fall of 1941 Devers went to Washington to personally ask Harmon to be his chief of staff. McNair readily approved Harmon's transfer back to Fort Knox, contingent upon Devers' promise that Harmon receive his promotion to brigadier general. Devers, for whom Harmon "had the highest regard," immediately agreed, beginning a relationship that lasted until Harmon's retirement.<sup>113</sup>

There are several possible reasons why Devers selected Harmon to be his chief of staff. First, Harmon had considerable mechanized experience as a commander and staff officer during the most important period of mechanized development. An artillery officer, Devers lacked mechanized experience and required knowledgeable officers to advise him in his new subject matter.<sup>114</sup> Harmon had already effectively advised McNair, another artilleryman without mechanized experience, on Armored Force matters. Second, Harmon's performance as the Armored Force G-4 and GHQ G-4 represented logical stepping stones to a chief of staff position. Finally, he possessed first-hand knowledge of the GHQ observations and recommendations concerning the Armored Force from the GHQ maneuvers.

When Harmon returned to Fort Knox he once again confronted many of the same challenges that he encountered as the Armored Force G-4. However, as the chief of staff,

with his first opportunity to direct a large staff, his responsibilities stretched across every facet of the force. Additionally, because there was no billet for a deputy commanding general of the Armored Force, Harmon essentially served as Devers' second in command.<sup>115</sup> This placed Harmon in a position to observe and support his new chief. Devers' set an example that Harmon ably followed and later emulated. He possessed "a flexible and open mind in his approach to new problems in training, tactics, and equipment. His ability to get things done was incomprehensible to those who could not see long-range objectives as clearly."<sup>116</sup> Furthermore, Devers despised red tape, advising his subordinates to "Keep going until the tape soon breaks."<sup>117</sup> Refusing to "allow anyone to play politics with human lives," he quickly smashed the branch jealousies of the former mechanized cavalrymen and infantry tankers within the Armored Force and established a new armored mindset that emphasized a truly combined arms philosophy.<sup>118</sup>

According to the Army Ground Forces history of the Armored Force, the period 1941-1942 witnessed the greatest expansion of the force. Shortly before Harmon left for duty in Washington the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Armored Divisions were activated.<sup>119</sup> While these new divisions continued to organize, Devers and Harmon oversaw a reorganization program based on the results of the 1941 GHQ maneuvers. The program focused on integrating tank, infantry, and artillery doctrines into a single armored doctrine similar to that demonstrated by the German Army. Increases in the allocation of infantry and artillery produced a more balance armored division that was easier to command and control as well as comparable to the combat proven German model. Additionally, new combat systems were introduced to the divisions, including the M4 Sherman medium

tank and the M7 105mm self-propelled howitzer.<sup>120</sup> After Pearl Harbor new armored division activations were accelerated.<sup>121</sup> The 5<sup>th</sup> Armored Division underwent its initial organization prior to Pearl Harbor and experienced its growing pains at the time of Harmon's return to Knox.<sup>122</sup> During Harmon's tenure as chief of staff another three armored divisions were activated. Finally, when the new divisions began their first organization steps, the 1<sup>st</sup> Armored Division took its first major step toward combat, leaving Fort Knox for Great Britain in April 1942.<sup>123</sup>

Shortly after the 1<sup>st</sup> Armored Division left for Europe, Harmon also began to take his final steps toward his second combat experience. On July 31, 1942, he assumed command of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Armored Division.<sup>124</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Bielakowski, Alexander M. "The Last Chief of Cavalry—Major General John K. Herr," *Journal of America's Military Past*, Vol. XXVIII, No. 2 (Fall 2001): 70.

<sup>2</sup> Johnson, David E. *Fast Tanks and Heavy Bombers: Innovation in the U.S. Army, 1917-1945* (Ithaca, New York, 1998), 140.

<sup>3</sup> Hofmann, *Through Mobility We Conquer*, 3.

<sup>4</sup> Truscott, *Twilight of the U.S. Cavalry*, 157.

<sup>5</sup> Nenner, Timothy K. "Organizational Milestones in the Development of American Armor, 1920-1940," 40-41.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid*, 43-44.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid*, 46.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid*, 46-47.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid*, 50-51.

<sup>10</sup> Tedesco, "Greasy Automatons and The Horsey Set: The U.S. Cavalry and Mechanization, 1928-1940," (Master's thesis, Pennsylvania State University, 1995), 47.

- <sup>11</sup> Ibid, 57.
- <sup>12</sup> Ibid, 58.
- <sup>13</sup> Nenner, “Organizational Milestones in the Development of American Armor, 1920-1940,” 47.
- <sup>14</sup> Tedesco, iii.
- <sup>15</sup> Ibid, 11.
- <sup>16</sup> Ibid, 73.
- <sup>17</sup> Harmon, *Combat Commander*, 56.
- <sup>18</sup> Harmon, “Second Cavalry in the St. Mihiel Offensive;” and “Second Cavalry in the Meuse-Argonne.”
- <sup>19</sup> Wilson, Dale E. “World War I: The Birth of American Armor,” in *Camp Colt to Desert Storm: The History of U.S. Armored Forces*, ed. George F. Hofmann and Donn A. Starry (Lexington, Kentucky: The University Press of Kentucky, 1999), 11-21.
- <sup>20</sup> Harmon, *Combat Commander*, 28.
- <sup>21</sup> Nenner, “Leavenworth and Its Critics: The U.S. Army Command and General Staff School, 1920-1940,” 217-218.
- <sup>22</sup> Ibid, 171.
- <sup>23</sup> Ibid, 194.
- <sup>24</sup> Blumenson, 906.
- <sup>25</sup> Ibid, 906; and Patton, George S., Jr. “The Probable Characteristics of the Next War and the Organization, Tactics, and Equipment Necessary to Meet Them,” (Memorandum, U.S. Army War College, 1932), 55.
- <sup>26</sup> Morton, Matthew D. “Men on Iron Ponies: The Death and Rebirth of the Modern U.S. Cavalry,” (PhD diss., Florida State University, 2004), 67.
- <sup>27</sup> Ibid, 68.
- <sup>28</sup> Ibid, 69.
- <sup>29</sup> Nowowiejski, Dean A. “Adaptation to Change: U.S. Army Cavalry Doctrine and Mechanization, 1938-1935,” (Monograph, U.S. Army School of Advanced Military Studies, 1994), 13.

<sup>30</sup> Bielakowski, Alexander M. “The Role of the Horse in Modern Warfare as Viewed in the Interwar U.S. Army’s Cavalry Journal,” 20-25.

<sup>31</sup> Tedesco, 61.

<sup>32</sup> Harmon, *Combat Commander*, 57.

<sup>33</sup> Bielakowski, “The Last Chief of Cavalry,” 68.

<sup>34</sup> Tedesco, 90-91.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid*, 96.

<sup>36</sup> Truscott, *Twilight of the U.S. Cavalry*, 157.

<sup>37</sup> Tedesco, 97.

<sup>38</sup> Bielakowski, “The Last Chief of Cavalry,” 72.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid*, 79.

<sup>40</sup> Tedesco, 17.

<sup>41</sup> Editor. “Organization Activities—1<sup>st</sup> Cavalry Regiment,” *Cavalry Journal*, Vol. 48, No. 214 (July-August 1939): 342.

<sup>42</sup> Gillie, 108. The other officer Chaffee referred to was Lieutenant Colonel Alexander Surles, future major general and Army public relations officer during World War II.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid*, 108.

<sup>44</sup> *Official Army Register*, 341 and Editor. “Organization Activities—1<sup>st</sup> Cavalry Regiment,” *Cavalry Journal*, Vol. 48, No. 216 (November-December 1939): 524.

<sup>45</sup> Tedesco, 50.

<sup>46</sup> Gillie, 42-42.

<sup>47</sup> Hofmann, *Through Mobility We Conquer*, 158.

<sup>48</sup> Gillie, 143.

<sup>49</sup> Hofmann, *Through Mobility We Conquer*, 244.

<sup>50</sup> Gillie, 136. A study of the maps included in Chaffee’s article on the maneuvers mirror maps that later depicted the German mechanized operations throughout the early years of World War II, though on a smaller level. See, Chaffee, Adna R. “The Seventh

Cavalry Brigade in The First Army Maneuvers,” *Cavalry Journal*, Vol. 48, No. 216 (November-December 1939): 450-461.

<sup>51</sup> Chaffee, 452.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid*, 453 and Harmon, *Combat Commander*, 57-58.

<sup>53</sup> Chaffee, 458. Chaffee’s article includes specific references to the performance of the 1<sup>st</sup> Cavalry (Mechanized) Regiment.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid*, 460.

<sup>55</sup> Gillie, 121.

<sup>56</sup> Broom, John T. “The Commander’s Vision in Blue and Grey: The Roles of Adna R. Chaffee, Jr., James H. Wilson and the American Civil War in the Development of American Armor Doctrine,” (PhD diss., The Union Institute, 1993), 205; Hofmann, *Through Mobility We Conquer*, 247.

<sup>57</sup> Chaffee, 461 and Harmon, *Combat Commander*, 57.

<sup>58</sup> Editor. “Organization Activities—1<sup>st</sup> Cavalry Regiment,” *Cavalry Journal*, Vol. 49, No. 217 (January-February 1940): 81.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid*, 81.

<sup>60</sup> Editor. “Organization Activities—1<sup>st</sup> Cavalry Regiment,” *Cavalry Journal*, Vol. 49, No. 219 (May-June 1940): 277.

<sup>61</sup> Tedesco, 102.

<sup>62</sup> Gillie, 157.

<sup>63</sup> Hofmann, *Through Mobility We Conquer*, 265-268 and Harmon, *Combat Commander*, 58; Adjutant General’s Office, *Official Army Register*, 1947, 471.

<sup>64</sup> Houston, 38.

<sup>65</sup> Broom, 76.

<sup>66</sup> Gillie, 169.

<sup>67</sup> Editor. *The Armored Force Command and Center*. Study No. 27. (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1946), 16.

<sup>68</sup> Hofmann, *Through Mobility We Conquer*, 267. The others Chaffee specifically mentioned were long-time mechanized cavalrymen, Willis D. Crittenberger, who rose to corps command in Italy, and Robert W. Grow, who commanded the 6<sup>th</sup> Armored

Division during Patton's dash across Europe. Gillie previously cited Harmon as a "pioneer Armored Force leader," 236.

- <sup>69</sup> Harmon, *Combat Commander*, 58.
- <sup>70</sup> Editor, *The Armored Force Command and Center*, 9-10.
- <sup>71</sup> Ibid, 12.
- <sup>72</sup> Houston, 38-39.
- <sup>73</sup> Editor, *The Armored Force Command and Center*, 12.
- <sup>74</sup> Gillie, 181.
- <sup>75</sup> Houston, 38, 57, 61.
- <sup>76</sup> Truscott, *Twilight of the U.S. Cavalry*, 159.
- <sup>77</sup> Ibid, 159-160.
- <sup>78</sup> Gillie, 170.
- <sup>79</sup> Ibid, 174-175.
- <sup>80</sup> Houston, 39.
- <sup>81</sup> Gillie, 180.
- <sup>82</sup> Editor, *The Armored Force Command and Center*, 27.
- <sup>83</sup> Hofmann, *Through Mobility We Conquer*, 269.
- <sup>84</sup> Gillie, 194.
- <sup>85</sup> Hofmann, *Through Mobility We Conquer*, 283.
- <sup>86</sup> Harmon, *Combat Commander*, 58.
- <sup>87</sup> Nowowiejski, 37.
- <sup>88</sup> Watson, 273-274.
- <sup>89</sup> Harmon, *Combat Commander*, 58.
- <sup>90</sup> Cline, Ray S. *Washington Command Post: The Operations Division* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1951), 52.



- <sup>91</sup> Ibid, 54-55.
- <sup>92</sup> Harmon, *Combat Commander*, 58.
- <sup>93</sup> Cline, 61-62.
- <sup>94</sup> Harmon, *Combat Commander*, 59.
- <sup>95</sup> Gabel, Christopher R. *The U.S. Army GHQ Maneuvers of 1941* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Army Center of Military History, 1991), 88 and 49.
- <sup>96</sup> Harmon, *Combat Commander*, 59.
- <sup>97</sup> Gabel, 59.
- <sup>98</sup> Harmon, *Combat Commander*, 59-60.
- <sup>99</sup> Ibid, 60.
- <sup>100</sup> Ibid, 60.
- <sup>101</sup> Greenfield, Kent R., Robert R. Palmer, and Bill I. Wiley. *The Army Ground Forces: The Organization of Ground Combat Troops* (Washington, D.C.: Department of the Army Historical Division, 1947), 58.
- <sup>102</sup> Editor. *Origins of The Army Ground Forces: General Headquarter U.S. Army, 1940-42*, 38. Study No. 1 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1946), 38. Harmon pointed out in *Combat Commander* that the army was only able to organize and deploy 16 armored divisions by war's end, Harmon, *Combat Commander*, 60. Clark went on to serve as one of Harmon's superiors in World War II, first as deputy commander of Allied forces in North Africa, then as commander of the Fifth Army in Italy, Ancell, 55.
- <sup>103</sup> Harmon, *Combat Commander*, 60.
- <sup>104</sup> Greenfield, 49.
- <sup>105</sup> Palmer, Robert R., Bill I. Wiley, and William R. Keast. *Procurement and Training of Ground Combat Troops: The United States Army in World War II* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Army Historical Division, 1948), 97-99.
- <sup>106</sup> Gabel, 116.
- <sup>107</sup> Ibid, 187. Young officers elevated to division command after the maneuvers included Dwight D. Eisenhower, Omar N. Bradley, J. Lawton Collins, and Terry de La Mesa Allen, officers directly associated with Harmon through much of World War II. Gabel also asserts that, "In all probability, Marshall knew in 1941 who his wartime

commanders would be, and used the maneuvers period to groom the Eisenhowers and Bradleys in lower-level assignments.”

<sup>108</sup> Palmer, 97-98.

<sup>109</sup> Puryear, Edgar F. *19 Stars: A Study in Military Character and Leadership* (Novato, CA: Presidio Press, 1992), 69-73.

<sup>110</sup> Harmon, *Combat Commander*, 61.

<sup>111</sup> Johnson, 148.

<sup>112</sup> Hofmann, *Through Mobility We Conquer*, 283.

<sup>113</sup> Harmon, *Combat Commander*, 61. While Devers’ was still Chief of the Armored Force Harmon maintained informal correspondence with him concerning his observations of armored operations in North Africa; Editor, *The Armored Force Command and Center*, 26. Harmon’s final army assignment was as Devers’ deputy commander of AGF in 1947; *Combat Commander*, 296.

<sup>114</sup> Gillie, 199. Devers’ only exposure to the subject came during his tour as chief of staff to Major General Daniel Van Voorhis, the original commander of the Mechanized Force, in Panama in 1940. Gillie explains that they discussed the 7<sup>th</sup> Cavalry Brigade and informally analyzed the German blitzkrieg.

<sup>115</sup> Editor, *The Armored Force Command and Center*, 10.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid, 18.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid, 18.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid, 18.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid, 18.

<sup>120</sup> Gabel, 176-179.

<sup>121</sup> Editor, *The Armored Force Command and Center*, 18.

<sup>122</sup> Gillie, 214.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid, 216-217.

<sup>124</sup> Houston, 437.

## CHAPTER 6

### CONCLUSION

Three years before his death in 1979 Harmon provided the foreword for Donald E. Houston's history of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Armored Division in World War II, *Hell on Wheels*.

Harmon's contribution, a look back upon the origins and battlefield performance of the division he twice commanded during the war, included:

No greater privilege can occur in the career of any soldier than to be given the command of troops in combat. This is always true and applies to any organizational echelon, from squad to field army. But the most satisfying command slot is the one with the double X on the map symbol, the division. Moreover, when you add the old tank tread to the symbol to designate one of the army's few armored divisions, you have the greatest of all commands. At least, this was my thought when I first took over the Hell on Wheels division, 2d Armored, on July 31, 1942.<sup>1</sup>

Harmon assumed command during the division's final maneuvers in the Carolinas. The month prior to his arrival, the Armored Force issued a directive that any armored unit may soon receive its deployment orders. With the deployment of the 1<sup>st</sup> Armored Division in April 1942, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Armored Division was the most experienced armored division in the United States.<sup>2</sup> Three months later Harmon led elements of the division ashore in Morocco as part of Operation TORCH, the Allied invasion of northwest Africa.

Harmon was a product of the interwar army. His professional development prior to World War II reflected the collective experience of his peers. "Early service with troops; education at the Command and General Staff School; and tours as instructors, staff officers, and commanders during the interwar years provided a career path that ably prepared most of these officers for high-level command."<sup>3</sup> A review of Harmon's experience in positions of command, staff, and in the classroom reinforces this assertion.

When Harmon reflected shortly before his death that, “No greater privilege can occur in the career of any soldier than to be given the command of troops in combat,”<sup>4</sup> he spoke from a life-long experience that began the day he reported to the 2<sup>nd</sup> Cavalry Regiment in 1917. The cavalry branch did not have an officer basic course during this period and relied upon “garrison schools” operated by the regiments and on-the-job-training. Rapid expansion of the army introduced a nearly overwhelming number of civilian recruits and gutted regular units of experienced officers in order to create new units. Circumstances prevented Harmon from experiencing the usual junior officer training seen in cavalry regiments while at the same time accelerating his advancement. With only a basic leadership experience at West Point serving as a base of knowledge, he found himself quickly promoted to captain and commander of a cavalry troop. Therefore, Harmon faced the simultaneous challenges of training new cavalry recruits while attempting to learn his own profession. While he certainly made mistakes attributable to a new officer, as illustrated in the bridle path incident, he learned valuable lessons concerning small-unit leadership and training.<sup>5</sup>

Harmon shared the collective experience of combat in World War I with most of his peers. Of the commands he held prior to 1942 this experience provided Harmon with the greatest opportunity afforded an officer--combat leadership. Furthermore, his experience was extremely unique because he *de facto* commanded the Provisional Squadron, 2<sup>nd</sup> Cavalry Regiment, the largest American horse cavalry formation to see combat in France. Luckily, Harmon had the opportunity to command his own troop for several months before the squadron was formed. Again, he made mistakes, such as the artillery barrage incident that nearly made him a casualty, but he continued to learn

valuable lessons, especially the critical connection between good leadership and unit morale during the various examples of mundane labor operations behind the lines.<sup>6</sup> Initial command of the squadron fell on his shoulders because of his seniority among his fellow, and presumably equally inexperienced, company-grade officers. Even the arrival of Lieutenant Colonel Hazard, absent much of the time due to his chronic illness, did not deter Harmon from understanding that he held *de facto* command of the squadron in combat operations.

The nature of the tactical environment on the Western Front in 1917-1918 created tremendous challenges for the employment of cavalry. Adverse terrain, combined with the complex German trench systems, and the effectiveness of modern weapons such as machine guns and artillery illustrated trials of the squadron. These challenges were magnified by the fact that the majority of officers and men in the Provisional Squadron experienced their first combat in this environment. These factors came into play during the squadron's initial combat operations during the St. Mihiel Offensive, the only occasion when the squadron was committed in force. The series of lessons learned in Harmon's first day of combat were numerous. The squadron failed to achieve the mission given by its higher headquarters. It failed to surprise a vulnerable German force, was surprised itself, reacted miserably to enemy fire, and became a disorganized mob during the withdrawal. The critical point is that Harmon took the time afterward to reflect on his experience commanding the squadron, outlining the events in detail, analyzing his decisions and their consequences, and reap the lessons.

Harmon also proved to be an adaptive commander, incorporating the lessons from St. Mihiel into the squadron's operations during the Meuse-Argonne offensive. Instead

of using the squadron in force, he employed small-unit patrols in a variety of traditional cavalry missions including reconnaissance, security, and liaison work. Harmon's decision to decentralize operations placed additional burdens on his command and control of the squadron, but proved extremely successful. Throughout its service in the Meuse-Argonne, the squadron provided the series of infantry divisions that it directly supported with critical and timely information. However, despite the success encountered by the squadron, it was in the Meuse-Argonne that Harmon truly began to question the horse's battlefield relevance, a quandary that lasted for nearly twenty-five years.

While commanding cavalry on the Western Front represented a unique experience for Harmon, participation in the occupation of the Coblenz bridgehead, though an experience he shared with many other officers, was equally unique. Duty in occupied Germany introduced Harmon to civil-military operations. Under the leadership of Major General Dickman, Harmon's former commander, conduct of the American occupation was highly successful and served as a model for Harmon when he supervised civil-military operation in post-World War II Germany and Czechoslovakia, and commanded the U.S. Constabulary.

Fourteen years elapsed from the time Harmon relinquished command of his cavalry troop in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Cavalry to his next opportunity at command. His duty with the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) should be considered one of Harmon's command experiences. With an interwar premium on command assignments, it provided him with another chance, no matter how short, to lead men under adverse conditions. His experience with draftee soldiers in World War I and students at West Point and Norwich

also played an instrumental role. He brought an open-minded approach to solving a variety of problems, as demonstrated in his meeting with the entire camp to listen to their realistic issues. Harmon immediately connected with the men in his charge, showed compassion toward their concerns, and built a team that focused on improving the situation. That the young men named the camp after Harmon in his absence illustrates that he established his moral presence and empowered them with a will to succeed.

It is difficult to overlook the fact that, in addition to commanding the Provisional Squadron in World War I, Harmon commanded two squadrons during the interwar period, one horse cavalry and one mechanized cavalry. Both interwar commands were equally important. Squadron command served as a measurement of his past performance and future potential. Harmon's success in the horse cavalry command facilitated his transition to the equally successful second command of mechanized cavalry. More importantly, however, command of a mechanized cavalry squadron finally answered Harmon's lingering question, dating back to World War I, of the horse's relevance on the modern battlefield.

The most important point from Harmon's horse cavalry squadron command was that it afforded him the opportunity to mentor and be mentored. He fell under the mentorship of Colonel Arthur Wilson, a veteran cavalryman of the old school who possessed unquestionable talent and recognized valor. In *Combat Commander*, Wilson was the first officer that Harmon mentioned in regard to mentoring. The two shared a close professional and personal relationship. Wilson empowered Harmon and allowed him to command his squadron. This was well illustrated in the attempted court-martial of his lieutenants by another squadron commander. Wilson asked Harmon for his

recommendation; one that turned matched the crime, and accepted the recommended course of action.<sup>7</sup> Those same lieutenants provided Harmon with the chance to personally mentor his junior officers. Harmon balanced his understanding that “boys will be boys” and make occasional mistakes with a strict adherence toward tactical and technical competence in accomplishing the mission. Harmon’s philosophy was extremely successful in developing two lieutenants that eventually achieved general officer rank in the Cold War army.<sup>8</sup>

Squadron command in the 8<sup>th</sup> Cavalry Regiment, though he probably did not realize it at the time, represented the culmination of Harmon’s career in the horse cavalry. Successful command of his squadron in the 8<sup>th</sup> Cavalry Regiment potentially placed him in contention for future command of a cavalry regiment. However, he chose a different professional route; requesting duty with the mechanized cavalry at Fort Knox. Only the successful combination of his first squadron command and his War Department General Staff service provided Harmon with the freedom to select the assignment, much to the dislike of the Chief of Cavalry.

Harmon’s decision to request duty with mechanized cavalry was the most important and timely decision of his career. Command of a squadron in the 1<sup>st</sup> Cavalry Regiment (Mechanized) introduced Harmon to a new form of warfare. His previous horse cavalry experience allowed him to quickly transition to mechanized cavalry and the practical hands-on exposure to emerging mechanized doctrine was critical in his path to armored division command. The timing of Harmon’s decision coincided with the shortage of officers in the 7<sup>th</sup> Cavalry Brigade (Mechanized) and the period when the brigade, and events in Europe, proved mechanization’s immense value to the army.



Most importantly, however, was Harmon came under the influence of Brigadier General Adna R. Chaffee, Jr., the driving force behind mechanization. Within a short time Harmon became a member of the small group of officers that supported Chaffee's efforts. The roots of a close relationship developed between the two during this period, one that grew stronger in the few years that followed, and led to Chaffee selecting Harmon to be the G-4 of the new Armored Force.

Harmon's five years commanding troops was balanced with eight years serving as a staff officer at various levels. While serving on staff at lower levels increased his tactical expertise and established a balance with his World War I command experience, his series of staff assignments at higher levels exposed him to army-wide issues. The latter fully prepared Harmon for division command by balancing his knowledge of command and staff functions at multiple echelons.

Service as the Plans and Training officer of the 6<sup>th</sup> Cavalry Regiment was very important for Harmon during his first ten years of service. It was his first and only staff position in a cavalry organization. However, the assignment added necessary balance to his wartime experience commanding the Provisional Squadron. Mastering the responsibilities of Plans and Training officer were critical for any potential commander. Therefore, by the end of the tour Harmon thoroughly understood the command and staff functions at the squadron and regimental level. One must also consider that this assignment provided the peacetime garrison environment that Harmon missed in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Cavalry due to the chaos associated with the army's rapid expansion upon the nation's entry into World War I.

Multiple staff assignments in Washington, D.C. were collectively significant for a number of reasons and played a decisive part in Harmon's selection for division command. As a graduate of the Command and General Staff School and Army War College, Harmon was nearly guaranteed a tour of the general staff in some capacity. Service with the general staff represented the next logical step in his professional development under the system that existed during the interwar period. It exposed officers to larger army-wide issues and brought successful officers to the attention of the army leadership.

Harmon's first senior-level staff position in the War Department General Staff (WDGS) G-4 section established a trend in all of his future staff assignments, all of which were focused on logistics. Though Harmon focused on research and development issues he also received his initial introduction to army-level logistics. His work in research and development was a rare experience. Many of the weapon systems he dealt with made up a significant part of the arsenal employed by the United States in World War II. In the larger context the tour benefited Harmon greatly because it marked the beginning of the army's pre-World War II modernization and expansion.

Harmon returned to Washington at the height of the same period of modernization and expansion begun during his previous WDGS tour. The new assignment was initially with the WDGS War Plans Division (WPD). His selection was important for a variety of reasons, but one stands above the rest—all candidates for the WPD were personally approved by the chief of staff, General George C. Marshall. However, pressing demands in the army's General Headquarters (GHQ) resulted in Harmon's transfer there to serve as the G-4.

In this role Harmon played a vital role in the army mobilization and first steps overseas that took place prior to the United States' entry into World War II. He immediately came to the attention of the GHQ chief of staff, Major General Leslie McNair, and established a close working with relationship. This was the first definite case of Harmon being under the direct personal observation and mentorship of one of the army's senior leaders. McNair's influence within the army was second only to Marshall's. He observed most of the officer corps during the pre-World War II build-up, recommending many promising young officers to Marshall for promotion and senior-level assignments. McNair worked to have Harmon promoted to brigadier general while Harmon served as his G-4 and only released him to assume duties as the Armored Force chief of staff when assured that Harmon would still be promoted. Harmon's relationship with McNair was the prime factor in his selection for division command. Though Harmon possessed an outstanding record that supported his consideration for senior command, it was the fact that McNair personally recommended him to the chief of staff that earned him selection.

While McNair's recommendation led to Harmon's selection for division command, Harmon's staff assignments in the Armored Force ensured that he received command of an armored division.<sup>9</sup> Harmon was the first G-4 of the new Armored Force, personally selected by Chaffee. He was instrumental in building, not only the armored divisions that made up the force, but also their supporting infrastructure, and the force's school and center. Harmon was relatively successful in a period of pre-national industrial mobilization where economizing and competition for still scarce army-wide resources still existed. However, the most important factor that affected Harmon at this time was

the continued influence of Chaffee, promoted to Major General and on fairly equal footing with the army branch chiefs. Chaffee embodied the philosophy of coach, teach, and mentor. Harmon's eulogy of Chaffee served as a personal thank you for Chaffee's profound influence in developing his understanding of maneuver warfare.

Chaffee's influence probably had something to do with Major General Jacob Devers, Chaffee's successor as chief of the Armored Force, selecting Harmon to be his chief of staff. Devers, who had no mechanized experience, required experienced officers on his staff and Harmon's particular experience as a squadron commander and G-4 proved critical as chief of staff. McNair, who released Harmon from GHQ, saw Devers need and considered the assignment an opportunity for Harmon. Harmon served not only as chief of staff, but also, because there was no personnel allocation to fill the position, as *de facto* deputy commander of the Armored Force. In this dual capacity Harmon assisted Devers in guiding the massive growth of the Armored Force after Pearl Harbor.

The collective staff experience provided Harmon with a critical piece of his overall professional development. He learned the clear delineation between command and staff functions. In the WDGS G-4 he acquired first-hand knowledge of emerging weapon systems. He witnessed their tactical employment during the 1941 GHQ maneuvers. In the maneuvers Harmon also learned to move and supply large units over vast distances. As Armored Force chief of staff Harmon learned how to run an organization and direct a large staff. All of these factors prepared Harmon for division command.

For Harmon and his peers successful command and staff positions were made possible through the army educational system that existed between the world wars. The

interwar period provided officers valuable time to study and teach in the military education system and established the foundation for high command in World War II.<sup>10</sup> Nearly two-thirds of American corps commanders in World War II spent over ten years in the classroom as either students or instructors.<sup>11</sup> Harmon, one of those corps commanders, spent almost approximately twelve years in the classroom, four as a student and eight as an instructor.

These same future corps commanders graduated from West Point.<sup>12</sup> Branch-specific schools represented their intermediate military education. Graduation from the Command and General Staff School and the Army War College qualified officers for service with the general staff and served as indicators for potential senior command and staff positions. In student and instructor assignments officers not only kept up on current doctrine and military developments, but also established and maintained contact with their contemporaries and superiors throughout the interwar period. By the time of America's entry into World War II Harmon personally knew most of his wartime peers and superiors, some of the relationships going back twenty-seven years.<sup>13</sup>

While not as critical as the other schools that Harmon attended, the Cavalry School's Troop Officers' Course held a very important place in his early professional development. The cavalry did not have an officer basic course until after World War I, relying instead on its garrison school system. However, preparation for World War I prevented Harmon from benefiting from this educational experience. Therefore, the Troop Officers' Course provided his first formal branch-specific officer training, presenting Harmon with standardized instruction in tactics, training, and leadership. Furthermore, this training helped Harmon build a base of knowledge that he used to

properly reflect upon and assess his wartime experience with the Provisional Squadron, as illustrated in the writing of his first *Cavalry Journal* article on the squadron's operation during the St. Mihiel offensive.

The Command and General Staff School served as Harmon's first serious career milestone. It rewarded his past performance and recognized his potential for further service by qualifying him for duty with the general staff. More importantly, Harmon and his fellow officers "not only believed that CGSS attendance would be professionally important and potentially rewarding to them personally, but that the course was substantive, well-run, and of value to the service as a whole."<sup>14</sup> The school represented the most influential military education Harmon received because:

The instruction at Leavenworth provided the officers...with an understanding of common staff procedures and tactical doctrine. This common knowledge was both an essential part of their military education and a professional tool that enhanced the flexibility of World War II division and corps operations.<sup>15</sup>

Harmon especially benefited from the two-year course that was only conducted between 1930 and 1936. The additional year allowed for more instruction time and added depth to the existing curriculum.<sup>16</sup> The course also provided Harmon with his first exposure to tank doctrine and early mechanized cavalry theory. Finally, the lasting influence of the Leavenworth instruction caused Harmon and his peers to hold a lasting respect for the school and the influence it had on his generation of army officers in World War II.<sup>17</sup>

The Army War College marked the completion of Harmon's formal military education. It represented his first glimpse at the strategic level and its introduction of considerations that we refer to today as joint operations. However, when he looked back upon the War College period in *Combat Commander*, he did not appreciate the

experience as much as the Command and General Staff School. Nevertheless, Harmon understood the War College's importance and its place within the overall military education system.<sup>18</sup> Major General Leslie McNair referred to War College graduates as the PhDs of the army,<sup>19</sup> and the school certainly prepared Harmon for service with the WDGS and GHQ.

Harmon continued his professional development in the classroom from behind the podium as well. The interwar officer management system emphasized that instructor duty was career enhancing. Instructor duty complimented duty with troops and drew the link between teaching and training. This was particularly true of Harmon's experience because he spent eight years preparing young men to be officers. Harmon and other officers with extremely good records and potential for future service served in a variety of instructor assignments. Harmon and his peers were selected from the best company- and field-grade officers in the army to teach at the service schools, West Point, and ROTC. The roster of Harmon's fellow West Point instructors that went on to senior command in World War II reflected this fact.

The four years at West Point were important for several reasons. Primarily, it represented two "firsts" in Harmon's career; a peacetime assignment and one as an instructor. The academic environment allowed Harmon to further reflect upon his wartime experience. One of the results of this reflection was his second *Cavalry Journal* article, describing the Provisional Squadron's operations in the Meuse-Argonne. Additionally, the assignment exposed him to new ideas and methods, expanding his view of the army beyond the cavalry. Second, Harmon observed the latter half of Brigadier General Douglas MacArthur's attempts to reform the Academy. Studying the uphill

process instilled in Harmon the belief that successful leaders strove to make good organizations better, a trait that he was widely known for in World War II. Furthermore, MacArthur's efforts influenced Harmon's conduct when he served at Norwich University two years later and again twenty-five years later when he adopted a similar series of reforms as President of Norwich University.<sup>20</sup>

Harmon very effectively leveraged the lessons of his West Point assignment when he served as Commandant and Professor of Military Science and Tactics at Norwich University. Responsible for the school's program of military instruction and administration and discipline of the corps of cadets, Norwich represented one of the most important periods in his overall professional development. In a real sense it was another command. However, the assignment collectively reflected all of the functions associated with commander, staff, and instructor. It presented a tremendous opportunity for a relatively young officer to practice, assess, and continue to develop his leadership style.

The officers that attained command at the division level and higher during World War II were products of the interwar American army. Though many, including Harmon, served in France during World War I, and gained valuable experience, "the key to advancement and preparation for the demands of high-level leadership positions during World War II" was "not necessarily found in World War I battlefield service."<sup>21</sup> The more professionally rewarding and influential experience occurred during the period between the world wars when these officers were:

...prepared for division command by varied field and staff assignments, teaching duties, and Army schools. They were among the group that had been selected for the Army War College and General Staff Corps. They had considerable military experience...They were selected for division command because they had proven themselves in the field and had an extra quality of energy and willingness to work



hard. Finally, they did the job required in combat.<sup>22</sup>

Harmon's example reflected this generation of officers. His combat experience in France and duty in a variety of diverse assignments and military education during the interwar period comprehensively prepared him for senior command in World War II.

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<sup>1</sup> Houston, xiii.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, 110-111.

<sup>3</sup> Berlin, 3.

<sup>4</sup> Houston, xiii.

<sup>5</sup> See chapter 2.

<sup>6</sup> See chapter 2.

<sup>7</sup> See chapter 3.

<sup>8</sup> Harmon, *Combat Commander*, 55-56. General James H. Polk served as commander of U.S. forces in Europe at the time of *Combat Commander*'s publishing. The second officer, John Pugh, reached the rank of Major General.

<sup>9</sup> Interestingly, Harmon was selected to command the division ahead of other officers with vastly greater mechanized experience. Among those more experienced officers the name that stands out most is Major General Robert W. Grow. Grow, the operations officer of the 12<sup>th</sup> Cavalry Regiment, accompanied his commander, Colonel Daniel Van Voorhis, to Fort Eustis, Virginia, in 1930 where Van Voorhis commanded the new Mechanized Force. Grow was an influential leader inside the mechanized cavalry and served as one of its most vocal proponents during the ten years prior to the establishment of the Armored Force. When the Armored Force was established he served as operations officer in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Armored Division. Grow eventually commanded the 6<sup>th</sup> Armored Division during the breakout from the Normandy beachhead in July 1944. Harmon possessed slightly less than three years experience. Regardless of specialized experience Harmon was selected for division command ahead of Grow. There are two very strong reasons for this. First, Grow served in other assignments when Harmon was assigned to the 7<sup>th</sup> Mechanized Cavalry Brigade during the critical period dominated by the Plattsburgh and Louisiana maneuvers at home and the spectacular German mechanized successes in Europe. Second, McNair guided Harmon's career during the final year before America's entry into World War II and effected a transition with Devers, ensuring that Harmon would be considered for command. See Nenniger, *Leavenworth and Its Critics*, page 220*fn* for a partial description of Grow's assignments from 1939-1942 that supports this point.

<sup>10</sup> Berlin, 9.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid, 12.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid, 4.

<sup>13</sup> Bradley, Collins, and Clark just to name a few.

<sup>14</sup> Nenninger, *Leavenworth and Its Critics: The U.S. Army Command and General Staff School, 1920-1940*, 203.

<sup>15</sup> Berlin, 10.

<sup>16</sup> Nenninger, *Leavenworth and Its Critics: The U.S. Army Command and General Staff School, 1920-1940*, 201.

<sup>17</sup> In addition to Harmon's praise for Leavenworth in *Combat Commander*, Collins, Bradley, and Truscott also addressed the school's importance in their personal memoirs.

<sup>18</sup> See chapter 3.

<sup>19</sup> Gole, xvii.

<sup>20</sup> One of the more interesting topics discerned in researching this thesis is that MacArthur probably had a larger influence on Harmon than what Harmon briefly related in *Combat Commander*. The reforms that each man instituted at West Point and Norwich respectively were remarkably similar in nature. Harmon's, however, were more widely accepted and successful.

<sup>21</sup> Berlin, 8-9. Eisenhower, Bradley, Devers, Truscott, Collins, and Ridgeway are only a few examples of senior WWII commanders that served in stateside assignments during WWI.

<sup>22</sup> Wade, Gary. *World War II Division Commanders*. (Fort Leavenworth, KS: U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, 1987), 10.

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