

CHAPTER 13

THE LAST CAVALRY WAR

I, General Herr, explained to General Marshall the inadequacy of vehicular units for reconnaissance in most terrains, and personally tried to dissuade him from his intention to abolish the horse and substitute completely the vehicular units. He said the weight of evidence was against me. I retorted that not the weight but the volume was opposed and that he must know very well that the persons opposed knew nothing about the subject. He said that I was placing myself in the position of knowing more than anyone else about the merits of the case. I replied that this was right; that I did know more because it was my business to. He said my cause lost some standing because of my vehemence. He did not like my great earnestness. It ended up by my telling him that I thought he was making a great mistake. He has made a lot of bigger ones since.¹

—Major General John K. Herr, Retired

General Mission, Tactical Doctrine and Technique, and Future Role of Mechanized Cavalry

(1) Major General Gay (Chief of Staff, The General Board) asked whether consideration had been given to eliminating the word “mechanized” in the designation “mechanized cavalry.”

(2) It was unanimously agreed by the visiting officers:

(a) That “mechanized cavalry” should be designated as “cavalry.”

(b) That horse cavalry should be designated as “cavalry (horse).”²

—Extract from Minutes of Conference on
Mechanized Cavalry, 27 November 1945

The war in Europe was over. Once again, as at the end of the last “war to end all wars” the horse cavalry had been largely absent from the action. And once again, in its finest tradition,

¹ Lieutenant General L. K. Truscott, Jr. (Retired), to Major General John K. Herr, 29 May 1951, Germany, box 7, Herr Papers, USMA. Herr inserted this comment into the text he had prepared based on the letter from Truscott.

² The General Board, *Mechanized Cavalry Units, No. 49*, Appendix 2, p. 1.

the United States Army, including the residual Cavalry Branch, sought to capture the lessons learned at the cost of blood, treasure, and lives. Many of the leading cavalrymen of the recent war gathered at Bad Naheim, Germany to consolidate the findings of cavalry group and army after action reports. In the process they continued an effort begun when they stormed ashore on D-Day—to recover their full identity as cavalrymen even if they neither had nor particularly wanted horses. Ironically, some of their findings echoed the pre-war opinions of another man undertaking his own private campaign to restore his credibility and what he believed was the proper role and organization of Cavalry Branch. This other cavalryman, John K. Herr, waged his campaign with letters and attempts to gain the support of Congress. Having never given up on the horse, with the war at an end he started to marshal the evidence he would need to restore cavalry to its proper place. The last cavalry war was one of ideas. Ultimately the mechanized men’s vision for the future of Cavalry Branch trumped Herr’s hopes. In little more than a year after the victory in Europe the reconciliation of the Armored Force and Cavalry Branch took place as the former absorbed the latter. Yet even as the iron pony, in a variety of breeds, emerged from the interwar years and World War II as the best means of conducting reconnaissance for fully mechanized and motorized armies, the horse continued to see limited service and the hope held by some for its wholesale return one day never diminished.

Based on the Herr’s personal correspondence, he left the active generals alone while they fought their war on the European continent. With action in Europe having barely culminated, and before all attention could shift to the watery expanses of the Pacific, the former Chief of Cavalry sought answers to important questions that continued to fuel his desire to undo the damage done to his beloved branch during the dying days of his watch. In the first of series of letters Herr asked George Patton his “\$64.00 questions.” Unabashedly, Herr opened his inquiry with the statement that he and his longtime mentor, General Hamilton H. Hawkins had done their most to “nurture the belief in horse cavalry” in the pages of *The Cavalry Journal* throughout the war. Now they were placing their faith in “renowned warriors” to lend a voice to their “unshaken faith in cavalry, in spite of the stupidity of those who have sought to discredit it.” The matter was of such grave importance to Herr that he singled Patton out as his “#1” cavalryman to

have “achieved great distinction” during the war. Were Patton to “testify” the believers would “live.” Were he to withhold his experience Herr was convinced “we will die.”³

The Questions:

1. How do you stand on the necessity for cavalry (horse) in our Armies? If in favor amplify by giving your reasons.
2. What effect in your opinion would the presence of a cavalry corps have exercised on the operations in North Africa? Could Tunis and Bizerte have been captured quickly?
3. What effect would cavalry and pack trains have had on your Sicilian operations? What would you have need to accomplish the best results?
4. What effect would the addition of a cavalry corps or more have had on our operations in France and in your move toward the Rhine?
5. With a cavalry corps or more could you have gone right on to Berlin when you had to halt for gas, etc.?
6. Do you consider vehicular reconnaissance adequate.

Note: in my opinion our reconnaissance groups are quite inadequate without horse elements. Porteed if need be!

I might go so far as to say that the Armored Divisions should also have porteed cavalry.

In closing the letter Herr told Patton that he looked forward to the hearing the “salty response” to his questions ““Right from the horse’s mouth.”” But in a note of seriousness, Herr informed Patton that he “must know how you are voting.” Perhaps taking into consideration some of Patton’s off the battlefield problems during the war, Herr added in a postscript that all responses were to be strictly “confidential and not to be quoted during the war” unless authorized by Patton. A second postscript spoke on an even more personal note offering that he, Herr, was glad to see that Patton’s son-in-law, “Jonnie Waters...a fine man and grand cavalryman” was

³ General George S. Patton from Major General John K. Herr, (Retired), 24 May 1945, [Washington], box 7, Herr Papers, USMA.

doing well. Waters had only recently been freed from imprisonment in Germany.⁴ Unwilling to count on Patton only, Herr covered his bets with other letters.

The same day he wrote Patton, Herr composed a letter to the war's greatest cavalry innovator, Lieutenant General Lucian K. Truscott. Again, he made his purpose perfectly clear and his point of attack the same.

I am convinced that the suppression of our cavalry as a stupid and hideous mistake, and I have been endeavoring to keep alive the flame of faith in our horse cavalry...It seems to me that these vehicular units are completely inadequate. They are largely bound to the roads, and in fact our armies have been for the most part road bound. I will go so far as to say that in my opinion, not even the Armored Divisions are capable of executing reconnaissance for themselves (sic), and are greatly in need of porteed horse cavalry. The same of course goes for the reconnaissance groups.⁵

Herr's continued faith in the use of porteed horse cavalry was, and would continue to be, fueled by letters from his son-in-law, Willard Holbrook, which also expressed the ideas of Wesley W. Yale.⁶ Herr's continued attack on mechanized units continued to be mobility, which he saw sought to restore with the re-introduction of the horse.

⁴ Ibid. Poor performance of the 81st Armored Reconnaissance Battalion had in small part contributed to Water's capture. An unsuccessful cavalry-like raid to Hammelberg where Waters was detained as a POW, although not carried out by cavalry reconnaissance squadron or troop, had led to him being wounded.

⁵ Major General John K. Herr, (Retired) to Lieutenant General Lucian Truscott, 24 May 1945, [Washington], box 7, Herr Papers, USMA.

⁶ [Brigadier General Willard Holbrook] Willard to Major General J. K. Herr, 13 June 1945, Headquarters 11th Armored Division, APO 261, box 7, Herr Papers, USMA. "I agree entirely with your analysis of armored employment of cavalry. Mechanized cavalry especially is specialized for country with a considerable number of metalized roads. However, our mechanized cavalry is not properly equipped. It can not perform all missions required of cavalry adequately. It is road bound, especially in mountainous or marshy country...Streams which horse cavalry would not have given a thought to fording become a major obstacle requiring several hours to negotiate...Yale has started a letter, supported by me, and approved by General Dager which recommends the inclusion of portee cavalry as an organic part of each armored division...Still intended to "bridge the gap in mobility" between the man on foot and the man mounted on a vehicle...I'm not sure that our present methods of operation could be applied in China even if we were able to move across the northern portion of that country."

Herr also chose to flatter Truscott in the one manner in which he would find common cause with the veteran commanders of World War II drawn from the ranks of the pre-war Army.

I have, of course, been highly gratified to not your great success, not only because I ear-marked you as perhaps the best bet from the cavalry, but also because the success of polo stars in war has confirmed my theory that polo is our very best school for the development of leaders in war.⁷

Having launched his first round of letters, Herr waited for what he hoped would be sympathetic replies. Herr never did find whole-hearted support for the full restoration for the horse in the post-war Army, but he did find a sympathetic ear in regard to the importance of equestrian sports.

Patton's initial response was a mixed blessing for Herr's campaign and a boon for historians as the letters between Herr and Patton are not included in Patton's papers. Patton, the man most synonymous with armored warfare during and after World War II, favored retaining a horse cavalry division but remained convinced that the Army must otherwise retain improved mechanized regiments. The most important improvement Patton thought necessary was the addition of a rifle troop to every squadron.⁸ He supported this overall stance by responding to Herr's original list of "\$64.00 questions."

In response to Question 1 about the necessity of horse cavalry in the post-war Army, Patton was consistent with his interwar opinions. Patton acknowledged the need for the retention of at least one horse cavalry division "should we be so unfortunate as to have to fight another war and have to do this in our own country, we would have an excellent mounted unit immediately available." Patton believed that shipping horses to a distant theater was probably no longer an option, but with the retention of a single horse division the nation would at least possess "men and officers trained" in the use of horses since there was now in the army "practically no horse knowledge in the enlisted men or officers of our Armies."⁹ Ever the 19th

⁷ Major General John K. Herr, (Retired) to Lieutenant General Lucian Truscott, 24 May 1945, [Washington], box 7, Herr Papers, USMA.

⁸ G. S. Patton, Jr., to General Herr, 7 July 1945, Headquarters, Third United States Army, APO 403, box 7, Herr Papers, USMA.

⁹ Ibid.

Century romantic, Patton, even having led the earliest American tank attacks on foot during World War I, and having driven corps and armies across North Africa, Sicily and Western Europe, could still not fully appreciate the changes occurring in society around him. Even Colonel John Considine recognized as early as the first horse and mechanized regiment experiments in 1940 that the man on the street in America was now more comfortable with engines than oats.

Patton offered Herr his greatest hope when he remained true to early comments about the utility of horses in North Africa and Sicily. Patton stated unequivocally that: “Had we possessed a horse cavalry division in Tunisia, I believe our situation would have benefited. I do not believe that there was room or water available for a cavalry corps.” One can only speculate that Patton would have been happy to have the additional rifle strength in Tunisia given the extensive dismounted fighting that was required to force the Axis forces to capitulate. It does not appear that Patton saw the use of a horse cavalry division as an alternative to the mechanized reconnaissance forces that did see action in Tunisia. Patton was equally unequivocal when remarking that in Sicily it was still his “considered opinion...no German would have escaped from the island” had horse cavalry been available.¹⁰ What was not clear beyond his comments on the utility of pack animals was exactly what if any impact horse cavalry would have had on the reconnaissance effort.

If Patton’s response to Herr’s second and third questions had provided any hope that in Patton he would find a strong advocate for the return of a strong horse cavalry force, his response to question four began to cast some doubt. In France, Patton was quick to point out, “a horse cavalry corps would not have been of any use...the speed was too great and it could not have possibly have kept up.”¹¹ Patton was even more critical in responding to question number five pointing out that it would have been unlikely the horses of a cavalry corps could have even arrived in theater by the time his Third Army’s “gas failed on August 27th.” More than a function of getting to the fight, Patton concluded that they would have lacked the “sufficient

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid.

striking power and rapidity of movement to throw mechanized troops off balance.”¹² Simply, Patton would not have substituted horses for his own 2^d, 3^d, 6th, and 106th Cavalry Groups during the race across France. Patton followed up this conviction in the utility of his mechanized reconnaissance units as he responded to question six, which specifically addressed the utility of vehicular reconnaissance.

Patton again generally disappointed Herr, but his answer was not really based in the reality of the war in Europe. Patton offered that “against motorized and mechanized armies vehicular reconnaissance is adequate,” but went on to remark that faced with an opponent who fights on foot or “depended on animal transportation” horse reconnaissance would once again “be necessary.”¹³ This comment was fraught with conflicting ideas. From its meteoric rise in the eyes of the world’s collective military observers and opponents to its dying days in 1945, the German army had depended far more on regular foot infantry and horse drawn transportation than its opponents. Patton did lend limited support to the reconstitution of some porté units so that “officers making close reconnaissance prior to an armored attack” might have a means of getting around.¹⁴ If Patton had largely failed to provide Herr the support he sought in his effort to restructure Cavalry Branch around large and small horse formations found at every echelon, Patton offered a gleam of hope in regard to sports.

The very best reason Patton could come up with for the retention of some horse cavalry was that it might foster a restoration of “polo for the whole army” which along with football he, concurring with Herr, thought to be the “two best sporting preparations for battle.”¹⁵ Patton had shared this same line of reasoning with another officer during the summer of 1945 writing the deputy Chief of Staff of the Army, General Tom T. Handy that,

This sounds, I admit, as if I were too Arm conscious, but I am not. The Divisions commanded by artillerymen and cavalrymen have in the majority of cases been superior to the Divisions commanded by infantrymen. This is not only true in the

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

armored divisions but in the infantry divisions. Of course, for God's sake, do not show this to the Old Man! [George C. Marshal, an infantryman]¹⁶

Patton believed mounted sports like polo, which he ranked on a par if not superior to football as “a training school for commanders, because they have to think and sweat at the same time.”¹⁷ Even if he was inclined to keep a few horses around, Patton recognized “it would be very difficult,” but mentioned it to his friend the Deputy Chief of Staff, back in Washington, “for whatever it is worth.”¹⁸ Patton advocated the retention of the horse not chiefly as a means of reconnaissance or as the foundation of a combat arm, but as the means through the leadership laboratory of polo and other equestrian sports to produce capable combat leaders for the entire Army well into the future.

In closing his initial response to Herr, Patton directly addressed Herr's appeal that the great cavalry commanders during the war lend their valued opinions to his efforts to see horse cavalry restored. Pulling no punches, Patton informed Herr that had he, Herr, “accepted the command of the armored corps when I [Patton] tried to make you do it, the cavalry would now be in a much better position than it is.” Perhaps in an effort to take some of the sting out of this comment, Patton, just as Herr had, commented on the qualities of the other man's son-in-law remarking that General Willard “Hunk” Holbrook, had done “a very good job and I enjoyed having him with me.”¹⁹ Patton did not have to wait long for a response to his answers.

General Herr wasted little time in responding to Patton's letter that had succinctly provided answers to his original six questions. Herr wrote Patton that, “It is encouraging to note that you at least leave the horses (sic) head in the door of the tent.”²⁰ Never one to surrender the

¹⁶ George S. Patton to Tom T. Handy [Deputy Chief of Staff, War Department], 2 June 1945, [Germany], folder Han 1945, box 35, Patton Papers, Library of Congress.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ G. S. Patton, Jr., to General Herr, 7 July 1945, Headquarters, Third United States Army, APO 403, box 7, Herr Papers, USMA.

²⁰ John K. Herr to Gen. G. S. Patton, Jr., 8 August 1945, Washington, box 7, Herr Papers, USMA.

initiative when confronted with answers that did not fully support his position, Herr referenced his original questions and commented on Patton's responses. Herr accused Patton of having bought into the "moss-grown fable" that shipping horses and fodder to a distant theater was impractical.²¹ Herr challenged Patton's assertion that there had not been enough water in Tunisia by citing the presence of considerable cavalry at the Battle of Zama, but was happy that Patton had agreed that horse cavalry would have been useful in Sicily. Herr noted that the blame should reside with "the lack of foresight possessed by McNair and Marshall." Herr brushed off Patton's response to question four about the utility of horse cavalry in the campaign across France by simply discounting the long hard fighting as little more than a "strategic march; little opposition."²² Oddly, when Patton responded to Herr's 8 August 1945 letter, this depreciation of his masterful campaign conducted in France did not elicit a response.

Herr expressed serious displeasure with Patton's assertion that horse cavalry lacked the capacity to confront mechanized forces. Returning to a theme touched on in the pages of *The Cavalry Journal*, Herr invoked the Soviet experience. He reminded Patton that "the Russians didn't know that horse cavalry lacks sufficient striking power and rapidity of movement to throw mechanized forces off balance, when the 1st Cavalry Guard Corps under General [Pavel] Belov, south of Moscow, destroyed General [Heinz] Guderian's famous army consisting of the 17th Armored Division, the 29th Motorized Division and the 167th Infantry Division."²³ Herr also disagreed with Patton's assertion that mechanized reconnaissance had been adequate. Herr, citing his own "research" remained convinced that the mechanized cavalry troops in the divisions and groups lacked the "powers to bull forward in a road war nor the cross country mobility to find out what is blocking them." He went on to state his belief that "they have lost more vehicles than will ever be admitted."²⁴ In this respect, Herr's "research" must have ignored

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid.

the letters from his son-in-law that offered that the old horse cavalry would need a lot more firepower to compete on the modern battlefield.

Regardless of research, in his last surviving letter to Patton, Herr could not let pass the suggestion that it was he, John K. Herr, who should have taken an Armored Force assignment for the betterment of Cavalry Branch. Much of the closeness of the pre-war cavalry community had been destroyed in the divorce that rocked the branch in 1940. Herr blamed Patton for the state of cavalry and his refusal to take the proffered command of the 1st Cavalry Division instead of a mere brigade in the newly formed 2^d Armored Division in 1940. Herr further believed that even had he taken the Armored Force, “Marshall would never have given me the power that was essential” to command and that he was “sure that [he] could never have tolerated him [Marshall] and his evasive methods.”²⁵ One can only speculate as to what might have happened had Herr taken Patton’s suggestion, but history clearly recorded the impact of Patton’s decision to take a lesser command in 1940. The last exchange from Herr to Patton also offered a glimpse of Herr in a greater context than just a man obsessed with horses and some idea of what might have been had Patton lived longer. For their sharp disagreement on an issue so obviously important to Herr, the former chief looked forward to hearing the former subordinate’s “profane and salty comments on this [the cavalry issue writ large] provided I [Herr] could swear back at a full General.”²⁶

Patton’s last letter to Herr came quickly and was filled with some of the color that made “Old Blood and Guts” an American icon. Ever the student of military history, Patton immediately took Herr to task for challenging his line of reasoning in regard to water in North Africa. He reminded Herr that the “battle of Zama was fought before the Arabs got to Tunisia” and that at that time Tunisia remained “heavily wooded and well watered.” Then in typical Patton prose, he reminded Herr that it had been the Arabs who “cut down all the trees” and that this meant that there was “no water.”²⁷ What really grabbed Patton’s attention was Herr’s

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ G. S. Patton, Jr., to Major General John K. Herr (Ret), 19 August 1945, Headquarters Third Army, APO 403, box 7, Herr Papers, USMA.

continued faith in the Soviets for no other reason than their use of the beloved horse. Patton, as only Patton could, responded to Herr's line of reasoning:

I believe that the Russians are great liars as what they did with horse cavalry, particularly since I have seen units that they call cavalry. It has been my experience in this and the last war, and also the experience of horse cavalymen in the last war, that reconaissance cannot be secured by looking. You have to fight for it, and we have found that groups of two peeps and one armored car can get ample reconaissance and suffer extremely small losses.²⁸

Getting what would be the last recorded word between them, Patton informed Herr that "I don't agree with you one God damn bit, and look forward with pleasurable anticipation to thrashing it out in the Army and Navy Club or some other secluded spot."²⁹ One can only speculate just how colorful that meeting would have been had the war's most famous, and now mechanized, cavalryman gone head-to-head with Jonnie K. Herr.

Herr's efforts to enlist the support of General Truscott must have earned him a copy of Fifth Army's report to Army Ground Forces in regard to the future of cavalry since it is filed among his papers with Truscott's comments. General Truscott, having fought across the mountains of Sicily and Italy was upset to find that the Mediterranean Theater Observer Board United States Army (MTOUSA) stated that "no need exists for horse cavalry except for pack animals." Truscott was of the opinion that the words had been "inserted by one who has not had the intimate experience with the Sicilian and Italian campaigns that has fallen to my lot." He detailed how during the Sicilian campaign infantrymen had been converted to cavalymen mounted on captured horses. Though recruited from a body of men with some horse experience, their lack of formal training led to high losses of animals, especially among the pack animals.³⁰

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Lieutenant General L. K. Truscott, Jr., to Colonel T. Q. Donaldson, Army Ground Forces Board, 14 July 1945, Headquarters, Fifth Army, APO 464, box 7, Herr Papers, USMA.

Most of Truscott's remarks spoke to his belief in the need for traditional horse cavalry and its traditional missions. He said nothing about the utility of the multiple mechanized reconnaissance units that saw extensive service in Sicily, Italy, and southern France. The closest he came to focusing directly on the reconnaissance issue involved the use of provisional horse cavalry troop and mounted battery that served with the 3^d Infantry Division. He credited them with not only covering the flanks of the division's advance from Battipaglia to Mignano, Italy, but also with helping to "outflank enemy delaying positions behind obstacles in the mountain defiles."³¹

Truscott made some additional claims, officially, that indirectly cast a serious shadow on the decision to convert all horse cavalry units into mechanized cavalry and armored units. In Sicily, in full agreement with General Patton, Truscott held that had the "First Cavalry Division been available in the Seventh Army when we began to advance from the Licate bridgehead, we could have prevented the escape of the German forces from Messina," but had not been able to do so for a want of mobility. Instead, the 1st Cavalry, less its horses, was campaigning in the Pacific theater as line infantry. Making the claim about the use of horse cavalry in Sicily seem almost minor, Truscott saved his greatest damnation for those who had eliminated the traditional horse cavalry based on his experience in Italy:

I am of the opinion that, had a regiment of well-trained American cavalry been available to me when the Third Division began its advance north from Battipaglia, or even when we crossed the Volturno, the battle of Cassino would never have taken place, Anzio would have been unnecessary, and the Italian campaign might have terminated many months before it actually did.³²

Given the carnage associated with the fight before Monte Cassino and Churchill's "whale" instead of "wildcat" at Anzio, Truscott's words deserved some consideration.

Like Patton, and not without some merit, Truscott advocated the continued development of horse cavalry for use in "our own hemisphere" and "under conditions where armor and other

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid.

transportation cannot be employed effectively.”³³ His return to the common themes of pre-mechanized cavalry, that the horse merely provides the means of transporting the man and the firepower to the proper place on the battlefield demonstrate his interest in the restoration of the traditional combat missions of the cavalry. He further asserted these ideas calling on the hope that technological advances in “radio communications” and “recoilless weapons” might offer new avenues for the now defunct horse cavalry that were unavailable at the beginning of the war.³⁴

Herr wasted no time in following up this generally positive reply that supported the continued utility of horse cavalry. In a comment very similar to that which he made to Patton, Herr admitted that he had

...been waiting for some nice famous cavalryman with plenty of glory of service under his belt to come back and take over this job, which I have been holding only until I could achieve a substitution of such a one. Looks like you might be it.
35

If Truscott’s views had been worth waiting for as General Herr collected the data he would need to resurrect the old horse cavalry, the views he received from another famous horse cavalryman were not when they arrived more than a year after the end of hostilities in Europe.

The views Herr received from Major General Ernest N. Harmon during the summer of 1946 were important because they provided a poignant example of the complete transformation of an interwar cavalryman into a complete advocate of mechanization for all missions. Having spent more time in combat as the commander of an armored division than any other general, Harmon saw no room for horses in the post-war Army with the exception of the limited number being used in the constabulary force he commanded in Germany in 1946. Even with some horses included in his constabulary organization, they were of limited utility with average patrols

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Major General John K. Herr, (Retired) to Lieutenant General Lucian K. Truscott, Jr., 26 July 1945, [Washington], box 7, Herr Papers, USMA.

covering from “fifty miles...and some as high as 180 miles a day.”³⁶ At least Harmon had the decency, at the beginning of his letter, to warn Herr that he little expected his views on horse cavalry to be appreciated.

Harmon did not believe horses were worth the shipping space given their limited utility. He supported this notion by stating that, “The horse simply cannot stand up against the carnage of modern warfare...Mechanized troops, on the other hand, traveled down road under very heavy artillery fire without stopping and with very few casualties.”³⁷ Harmon, who saw no service in Sicily, was willing to admit that horses might have been of some use there, but rhetorically asked “how horses could have gone through Italy if the tanks couldn’t” given that all the routes were well covered by artillery, machine-guns, and tank fire. Harmon commented that the only way they had gotten through was by “smash[ing] our way through these [passes] with steel and gunfire.”³⁸ Then Harmon played a trump card few others could claim when he reminded Herr that, “in World War I, I fought with the horse cavalry and had the definite feeling when the war was over the horse cavalry was obsolete from the standpoint of playing a major role in another war.”³⁹ Harmon was certain that the horse had no future in modern warfare, but he also shared doubts about the continued utility of the very tanks he had commanded so successfully.

Touching on a debate which rages into the present, General Harmon saw little hope for the future of the tank in the never ending evolutionary cycle of armored protection versus tank killing rounds.⁴⁰ His views were certainly tainted by the poor performance of American tanks during the war and credited the superior number, not quality, of American tanks for allowing Allied units to maneuver on the enemy for killing shots. In language sacrilegious to proponents of the need for ground combat power, Harmon credited much of the Allied success to air power

³⁶ Major General E. N. Harmon to Major General John K. Herr, Ret., 25 July 1946, Headquarters, U. S. Constabulary, APO 46, box 7, Herr Papers, USMA.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

commenting that Herr would really have to “come over here and see it to appreciate” its “destructive capability.”⁴¹ Harmon neither provided Herr with support for retaining the horse, nor did he directly attack the role of mechanized ground reconnaissance assets as he called into question the future utility of tanks. Given that Harmon wrote his letter to Herr with the full knowledge that the last Chief of Cavalry would be less than pleased, he was probably little surprised by the response he received.

General Herr proceeded to tell Harmon that Herr’s views were in accordance with those of George S. Patton, Jr. and Lucian Truscott inferring that these other cavalrymen saw the matter more clearly than Harmon.⁴² He then gave Harmon the standard treatment, returning to common themes such as the inadequacy of the mechanized cavalry groups because of their limited mobility and how horses could have easily extended the capabilities of road-bound forces. In fairness to Herr, he did point out to Harmon a point all too often missed specifically by Americans who fought World War II and generally by soldiers who prepare for the next war by reflecting uncritically on the past. In returning to the topic of the Eastern Front, always popular with Herr because horses continued to serve there during World War II, Herr admonished Harmon not to,

assume because you won a war against a fragment of the Germany army, largely as you say because of overwhelming air domination, and in a theater where exists the best net-work of roads in the world, and where the Germans had no cavalry to delay and cut to pieces the motor elements of the Patton pursuit columns, that these conditions will apply ever again.⁴³

Only the future would fully reveal if Herr was correct.

Juxtaposed to Herr’s letter ending “With warm personal regards...Faithfully Yours,” his last sentence was filled with the undying vehemence of the horse versus mechanization debate that had consumed him for nearly a decade. To Harmon he offered, “I regret not that you say what you think but that what you think may be used by the War Dept. to sustain it’s mistaken

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Major General John K. Herr (Retired) to Major General E. N. Harmon, 2 August 1946, Washington, box 7, Herr Papers, USMA.

⁴³ Ibid.

purpose to assassinate the branch which gave you birth.”⁴⁴ What Herr failed to realize was that the views of the men left to carry on the traditions of the divided branch left to them by him were far more in line with Harmon’s than with Patton’s and Truscott’s. Herr’s unending criticism of the mechanized cavalry reconnaissance effort blinded him from the fact that they too wanted a return of the traditional Cavalry Branch that had created their professional identity. But like Harmon and regardless of the soft spot in their hearts for the beloved horse, the realities of modern war left them asking not for horses to regain their identity, but for more power with which to fight.



Figure 29

Special recognition by the same kind of mounted troops he had inspected in North Africa could not restore Major General Harmon’s confidence that the horse had a continued role on the modern battlefield. Harmon Papers, Special Collections, Norwich University.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

Herr was unable to put the fruit of his efforts to work until 1947 when he was called to testify as a witness before the United States Senate. At hand was the matter of returning Hungarian horses captured at the end of World War II. Herr pulled out all the stops during his testimony. He damned the War Department for retiring him in 1942 and dismantling the horse cavalry. He cited intelligence data prepared by the General Staff G2 in 1946 that pointed out that horse cavalry would be essential were the United States to campaign in what had become post-war Yugoslavia, Poland, and the Soviet Union and that even the Chinese [Nationalists] were learning the hard way about the value of horse cavalry. He singled out “mechanized reconnaissance units,” organized against his will, for special criticism. In a prepared statement, he used the material he had gathered from Patton and Truscott to buttress his case. Directly related to the matter he had been called to testify about, Herr recommended retaining the Hungarian horses since “horses of this type not only upgrade the entire horse breeding industry in this country, but it would be particularly valuable in case the Cavalry is revived, for upgrading Cavalry remounts.”⁴⁵ It was not the last time Herr tried to reestablish the horse cavalry, but it was the last time he appeared before Congress.

While Herr had conducted his personal campaign by gathering opinions from senior commanders who still saw limited roles for the horse in the post-war Army, the men who had worn crossed sabers during the European campaign waged the only fight that ultimately mattered. The Army provided these men with the official forum to write the history that confirmed them as the winners in the long contest between horse and machine.

Patton, ever the self-described student of history since the age of sixteen, intended to capture the essence of the epic contest he had just participated in and helped to orchestrate. His desire was to capture the experiences of those who had really fought — men in units like the 2^d, 3^d, and 4th Cavalry Groups—since it had been his experience that there were many books on war, but few on “fighting.” Men who knew anything about fighting were “either killed or [were]

⁴⁵ Major General John K. Herr, retired, testimony before the United States Senate Armed Services Committee, *Question of Ownership of Captured Horses.*, 80th Congress, 1st Session, 1947, pp. 302-307.

inarticulate.”⁴⁶ Although Patton did not live to see the fruit of the labor of his last command, the Fifteenth Army collected much of what had been learned during World War II and converted it into General Board and Theater reports. Although Patton’s new command had no maneuver units and only created mountains of paper that he feared might never be read, the mission of his command served his own interest in military history and finding out about “fighting.”⁴⁷ In preparing the report on mechanized cavalry reconnaissance units, Patton and his Fifteenth Army were well served by a small collection of articulate cavalry group commanders who had seen plenty of fighting during the war and had lived to record their thoughts.

Colonel William S. Biddle, commander of the 113th Cavalry Group from Normandy to Elbe, oversaw the efforts of the articulate mechanized cavalrymen. In late September 1945, orders detached him from his position as the assistant division commander of the 102^d Infantry Division for ninety days of service with the Fifteenth Army. Arriving in the spa town of Bad Nauheim, Germany, Biddle found a staggering array of talented officers who had also been charged with drawing lessons from the recent war in order to “construct a guide for future wars.”⁴⁸ Specifically, Colonel Biddle worked for the Armored Section of Fifteenth Army, which was filled with former cavalrymen. Biddle’s task was to prepare a report that addressed the missions, tactics and techniques, organization, and equipment of mechanized cavalry units.⁴⁹ His final product came to be called The General Board, *Mechanized Cavalry Units, Report No. 49* or simply “the Biddle Report.”

Given the rather short suspense of producing such a detailed analysis, a unique group of fellow cavalrymen assisted Biddle as they sorted through a series of reports that already reflected large amounts of staff work focused on the same subjects Biddle was to address with his own

⁴⁶ 8 August 1945, Patton Diary, volume 7, 23 March 1945 to 3 December 1945, volume 8, box Diary volumes 7 and 8 and Gay diary volume 1, Patton Papers, USMA.

⁴⁷ Blumenson, *Patton Papers, 1940-1945*, pp. 795-796.

⁴⁸ “The General Board—European Theater,” pp. 1-3, folder 1946-1947, 11th Constabulary Regiment and ETO General Board, box 16, Biddle Papers, MHI. A decade later, Bad Nauheim served as Elvis Presley’s home away from home while he served out his enlistment on a local Army post.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

report. Given the mass exodus of units and personnel from Europe as the Army withdrew and downsized as fast as it could after having defeated the Axis Powers, Biddle was fortunate to secure the help he did. Colonel Charles Reed, commander of the 2^d Cavalry Group and no stranger to combat, served as Biddle's principal aide. Joining the group very late in process was Lieutenant Colonel Harry W. Candler. Candler had been the "leading from the front" commander of the 91st Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron as it made its first attack in North Africa dismounted. After leading the 91st Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron to the conclusion of a successful campaign in North Africa, Candler served on the faculty at the Cavalry School before returning to combat with the 11th Cavalry Group as it fought to the Elbe with Simpson's Ninth Army. Lieutenant Colonel George Benjamin served with the 85th Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron and First Lieutenant Donald Burdon came to the team from the 6th Cavalry Group, Patton's "Household Cavalry."⁵⁰ With the exception of Candler, who had actually commanded a tactical unit in North Africa, the board members' experience reflected a bias based on their experience in Western Europe that led them to ignore what had been learned in the Mediterranean when they prepared their final report. The army studies and the after action reports used in great part to prepare their final report, in conjunction with the questionnaires they mailed to the commanders of groups, squadrons, and divisional troops reflected this same bias. Additionally, there were fewer survey respondents from the cavalry reconnaissance squadrons assigned to armored divisions and the cavalry troops assigned to infantry divisions.⁵¹ Although Biddle and his group addressed smaller mechanized cavalry units, their primary effort dwelt on the cavalry groups, a reflection of their own combat experience.

Colonel Biddle's most important finding shaped all other aspects of the report. He and his group concluded that mechanized reconnaissance units had done very little reconnaissance, the task they were doctrinally tasked with and in theory organized to perform. This finding mirrored the First Army After Action Review which noted, "Campaigns in Western Europe proved the doctrine of "sneaking and peeking" by reconnaissance units to be unsound." German

⁵⁰ Ibid., pp. 8-9.

⁵¹ Ibid. pp. 10-11. Biddle and his staff drew heavily on the First Army Report of Operations. Divisional troop commanders were particularly hard to track down.

units had consistently forced the mechanized cavalymen to “fight to obtain information.”⁵² In the process of fighting to obtain information, men in the cavalry groups did most of their fighting on foot nearly twice as often as they performed their missions mounted.⁵³ “Handicapped” by a “lack of organic strength and firepower,” almost all missions the cavalry had performed required

⁵² *First United States Army, Report of Operations, 1 August 1944-22 February 1945, Annex No. 5, p. 55.*

⁵³ The General Board, *Mechanized Cavalry Units, No. 49*, p. 7. Biddle and his staff determined through their study of after action reports that the ratio of dismounted to mounted combat was 1.8:1. This had not gone unnoticed in the field. Both the Cavalry School at Fort Riley and the Armored Forces at Fort Knox requested the same kind of recognition for their troopers that the Army created for infantrymen in the form of the Expert and Combat Infantryman’s badge. One of the responses from Army Ground Forces noted the creation of a separate badge for cavalymen and tankers was

...not considered favorably. The Combat Infantry and Expert Infantry badges were designed for the specific purpose of providing recognition for the soldier who bears the brunt of battle. It is not desired to extend similar recognition to soldiers of other ground arms.

W. M. Grimes to Charles L. Scott, 2 March 1945, Fort Riley, Kansas, folder September 1944-May 1945, personal correspondence, box 4, Papers of Charles L. Scott, Library of Congress. Another observer report from the field expressed the following sentiment.

We should have a combat cavalryman’s badge. We have been fighting along side the doughs steadily and have only been out of contact with the enemy four days out of the last ninety. At present, we are holding a 14,000 yard front, patrolling day and night. My men have been in pill boxes and trenches for weeks. Recently we were reinforced with a company of infantry. It was their first combat. We had been instructing them, practically having to lead them by hand. However, within four days after the company was assigned, its personnel were being recommended for combat infantryman’s badges. It is hard to justify such awards. My men, because they are cavalry, get nothing.

Observer Report C-479, “Interview with Colonel S. N. Dolph, Commanding Officer, 102nd Cavalry Group,” 31 December 1944, [Belgium], U.S. Army Ground Forces Observer Board, European Theater, vol. III, MHI. The issue remains contentious today and reappears in the *Army Times* and *Armor* magazine on a regular basis. Cavalrymen from World War II were finally awarded the Bronze Star for their service, years after the automatic award of the same medal for all infantrymen that occurred at the end of World War II.

some form of reinforcement.⁵⁴ Biddle's board rejected the doctrine America had taken to war and reaffirmed as recently as June 1944.

Table 3

Types of Missions Conducted by Mechanized Ground Reconnaissance Units in the European Theater of Operations

% Time Spent Performing Specific Mission	Defensive Combat	Special Operations	Security	Offensive Combat	Reconnaissance
Cavalry Group	33%	29%	25%	10%	3%
Cavalry Squadron (Armored division)	11%	48%	24%	4%	13%
Cavalry Troop (Infantry division)	4%	39%	50%	1%	6%

General Board, *Mechanized Cavalry Report 49*, pp. 7-8.

Offensive Combat: Includes attacks, pursuits, and exploitation

Defensive Combat: Includes defense, delaying, and holding key terrain until the arrival of follow on forces.

Reconnaissance.

Security: Conducted for other units. Includes blocking, moving and stationary screens, protecting flanks, maintaining contact between larger units, filling gaps.

Special Operations: Includes acting as mobile reserve, rear area security, operating as Army Information Service.

Rather than trying to affix blame for their primary conclusion, Colonel Biddle and his board focused on righting the wrong with better doctrine and organization. They did not even consider the last Chief of Cavalry's argument that concluded "many high commanders" had arrived at the wrong conclusions about what the reconnaissance force should look like since war games had rewarded a race to contact since each side was confident that nothing operated to their front.⁵⁵ Rather, the board argued for a view of mechanized ground reconnaissance units, mechanized cavalry units, that was more encompassing. Having concluded that mechanized

⁵⁴ *First United States Army, Report of Operations, 1 August 1944-22 February 1945, Annex No. 5*, p. 55.

⁵⁵ Major General John K. Herr to the Adjutant General, Subject: Cavalry Reconnaissance Units, 23 January 1942, Washington, D. C., box 7a, entry 39, records group 177, NAII.

cavalry was fully capable of performing many more tasks than reconnaissance, they rejected the narrow view on mechanized units' capabilities dictated by Cavalry Branch still focused on the primacy of the horse. To this end, Colonel Biddle's report argued that mechanized cavalry must be considered capable of performing "most of the traditional combat missions of the cavalry" found in *FM 100-5, Operations*. These included the same missions the mechanized cavalry groups had often performed during the European campaign: offensive combat, exploitation and pursuit, seizing and holding key terrain until the arrival of the main force, reconnaissance, security, delaying and liaison.⁵⁶ Rather than maintaining separate doctrinal manuals for mechanized cavalry units, the board recommended a return to *FM 2-15, Employment of Cavalry* revised to reflect the mechanized nature of the new Cavalry Branch and rewrite "provisions [particular] to horse cavalry."⁵⁷ The board concluded "the mission of mechanized cavalry should be combat."⁵⁸ Cavalry was reborn, or at least one major step closer to a reconciliation with the Armored Force which had ridden away with the choice cavalry missions in 1940.

Having concluded that they had done all of the traditional cavalry missions to some extent, but that it had more often than not required reinforcements, Colonel Biddle and his board set themselves the task of examining the shortcomings of the existing mechanized cavalry organizations designed for reconnaissance and making recommendations for how to recast them for their larger combat role. Herr may have correctly concluded that wartime conditions would not allow the headlong dashes that had sometimes characterized the interwar maneuvers, but mechanized cavalrymen left to fight with the organization Herr left them did not seek Herr's solution, the horse. Colonel Biddle's report was not as blunt as First Army's assertion that although there was great need for additional troopers to provide the dismounted firepower characteristic of the old horse cavalry, there was no need for the horse.⁵⁹ Loath to make any new

⁵⁶ The General Board, *Mechanized Cavalry Units, No. 49*, p. 9.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 13.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 20.

⁵⁹ The General Board, *Mechanized Cavalry Units, No. 49*, Appendix 7.

organization “unwieldy by adding excessive personnel and vehicles,” Biddle’s most important organizational change did call for additional dismounted riflemen.⁶⁰

Although no one debated the need for additional rifle strength in mechanized cavalry units, there was debate about how they should be added to the organization which immediately led to another organizational issue. The cavalry group concept had never been popular and commanders had often expressed their dissatisfaction with losing their regimental identities. First Army’s report damned the group organization for cavalry during the European Campaign believing the flexibility anticipated by the group rather than regimental organization was not worth the cost to the individual trooper. No longer able to feel the “unity, esprit de corps, history and morale” associated with membership in a cavalry regiment, modern mechanized cavalymen were being shortchanged.⁶¹ Those who sought a return to regiments had a friend in the man overall responsible for the findings of the General Board. Patton grew concerned that a number of cavalry reconnaissance squadrons were “being alerted for redeployment in the Pacific, but that the Group Headquarters” were not accompanying them. Commenting that they had been “habitually used [as] Cavalry Groups, which should be called “Cavalry Regiments,”” Patton believed the Army was committing a “great tactical error to contemplate the employment of single Cavalry squadrons.”⁶² Patton agreed that the current number of riflemen was “inadequate,” but was strongly believed cavalry groups had “more elan than have infantry units.”⁶³ This elan must have been the key element that allowed cavalry groups, at least in Patton’s opinion, “to get forward without getting hurt.”⁶⁴ With no one taking up General

⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 20.

⁶¹ *First United States Army, Report of Operations, 1 August 1944-22 February 1945, Annex No. 5*, p. 56.

⁶² George S. Patton to Tom T. Handy [Deputy Chief of Staff, War Department], 2 June 1945, [Germany], folder Han 1945, box 35, Patton Papers, Library of Congress.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

Table 4

Comparison of Fire Power in a Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron and an Infantry Battalion

Weapon	Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron	Infantry Battalion
75mm gun (light tank)	17	0
75mm howitzer (assault gun)	6	0
57mm gun	0	3
37mm gun (M8 scout car)	37	0
81mm mortar	0	6
60mm mortar	27	9
.50 calibre machine gun	25	6
.30 calibre machine gun	122	22
.30 calibre Browning Auto Rifle	0	45
.30 calibre rifle	126	624
.30 calibre carbine	394	249

The General Board concluded that although a cavalry squadron could generate 200% more firepower than an infantry battalion could with 75% of the strength in manpower, it was dependent on “fairly short fluid fighting...done from vehicles or at short distances from them.” Extensive use of cavalry reconnaissance squadrons for dismounted combat forced them to abandon the firepower advantages their vehicles afforded them and led to calls for weapons like the Browning Automatic Rifles (BAR) and a higher percentage of rifles to carbines. Data derived from The General Board, *Mechanized Cavalry Report 49*, Appendix 8.

McNair’s argument for grouping, Biddle and his board recommended the replacement of groups with regiments composed of three mechanized squadrons.⁶⁵

The decision to include three squadrons in each regiment was directly influenced by the more contentious issue of how to add the required rifle strength to each squadron.⁶⁶ General Herr had argued for a three-squadron regiment for the corps reconnaissance regiment, but his vision included two squadrons of men on horses and one on iron ponies.⁶⁷ Admittedly, George

⁶⁵ The General Board, *Mechanized Cavalry Units, No. 49*, p. 21.

⁶⁶ “The General Board—European Theater,” p. 13, folder 1946-1947, 11th Constabulary Regiment and ETO General Board, box 16, Biddle Papers, MHI.

⁶⁷ Major General John K. Herr to the Adjutant General, Subject: Cavalry Reconnaissance Units, 23 January 1942, Washington, D. C., box 7a, entry 39, records group 177, NA II

Marshall and Lesley McNair's decision to convert the horse-mechanized regiments into all mechanized regiments contributed to the lack of riflemen that Patton later viewed as one of the salient deficiencies in the organization of the existing squadrons.⁶⁸ He related this general theme to Herr.

The present cavalry regiment *mez*. [inserted by hand] is efficient but it is too weak in dismounted rifle power. Each squadron should have an additional troop composed of dismounted cavalry armed with rifles and light machineguns.⁶⁹

Biddle's board, with Patton's assistance, added the needed riflemen.

Biddle's primary task was to select one of the recommendations put forward by the field armies or some combination thereof. First Army proposed adding a squad of riflemen to every platoon with Seventh Army doubling this requirement. Third Army suggested adding an entire troop of riflemen to each squadron. Colonel Biddle decided to add a troop to each squadron and a squad to each platoon, but this resulted in a cavalry regiment with more than 3,000 men, thus violating the other guiding force of reorganization that endeavored to keep cavalry units small enough to avoid becoming unwieldy.⁷⁰ At this point the issue of what kind of reconnaissance unit armored divisions should have in the future intervened to provide the solution.

A conference of armored division commanders convened in November 1945 to discuss the organization of their units in the future. They proposed the formalization of the trend to replace armored cars with light tanks in their reconnaissance squadrons. The armored division commanders called for a reconnaissance squadron built around four reconnaissance troops and an assault gun troop. Each reconnaissance troop was to have nothing but light tanks and jeeps. Biddle, who was present at this conference, voiced his concerns about the proposed organization's lack of dismounts and what he termed a "lack of sustained mobility."⁷¹ Although

⁶⁸ George S. Patton to Tom T. Handy [Deputy Chief of Staff, War Department], 14 July June 1945, [Germany], folder Han 1945, box 35, Patton Papers, Library of Congress.

⁶⁹ G. S. Patton, Jr., to General Herr, 7 July 1945, Headquarters, Third United States Army, APO 403, box 7, Herr Papers, USMA.

⁷⁰ "The General Board—European Theater," p. 13, folder 1946-1947, 11th Constabulary Regiment and ETO General Board, box 16, Biddle Papers, MHI.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 14.

the committee overruled Biddle's objections, Patton vetoed their proposal and sided with Biddle.⁷² Biddle's intervention reflected his combat experience and what he was trying to do in a bigger sense. Although he recognized the shortcomings of the armored car, he valued its ability to carry his group across Belgium when the light tanks had been unable to keep up for lack of fuel and worn tracks. The need for riflemen to dismount in furtherance of the reconnaissance mission was consistent with his campaign to restore the full cavalry identity to the now all mechanized cavalry force. The armored division commanders sought a more robust reconnaissance organization that would not get in the way when it encountered resistance. Their sentiments reflected what Charles Scott had predicted between the wars and after he returned from North Africa where he observed the British.

Patton's intervention resulted in the following proposed organizations for the future. In a reorganized three-squadron regiment, individual squadrons would each have two instead of three reconnaissance troops with an infantry squad added to each platoon. Squadrons would retain their assault gun troop, light tank company and add an entire troop of riflemen. The subtraction of a reconnaissance troop from each squadron, from the wartime three troops per squadron, insured the regiment would not become unwieldy. Squadron commanders could now count on support from their regimental headquarters to rotate their troops in and out of the line.⁷³ Unlike wartime group commanders, regimental commanders would in the future have greater assurance that they would have the forces they needed to accomplish their missions since their squadrons were organic and included the often missed riflemen needed to perform the missions that exceeded passive reconnaissance. Colonel Mark Devine's 14th Cavalry Group certainly would have had more options under this organization, but one can only speculate where Army Ground Forces would have found the riflemen to help out the cavalry when it could not keep pace with the demand from the infantry divisions. With war over and without the perspective of the myriad factors that had gone into the "90 Division" gamble, Biddle and his board were free to speculate and propose to their hearts' content. Reconnaissance squadrons proposed for service

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Ibid., pp. 14-15.

with armored divisions emerged with the same organization except they now had three reconnaissance troops rather than four, but gained an offsetting rifle troop.⁷⁴ Ironically, the riflemen insisted on by the cavalrymen had once been part of the armored reconnaissance battalion before World War II. The idea of riflemen riding in the van on vehicles had been developed at Fort Knox, yet now it was the men with a greater affinity for Fort Riley who insisted on bringing back this old idea.

The issue of mechanized ground reconnaissance units for infantry divisions had never been as contentious as the maintenance of large horse mounted divisions and corps, or what kind of unit would best serve corps. Throughout the war, divisional cavalry troops earned high praise, so there were no controversial issues to deal with on 20 November 1945 when the Fifteenth Army G3 convened a conference of former infantry division commanders. Again, in an unconstrained army in regard to manpower, the commanders concluded that a single troop of mechanized cavalry had not been adequate to support their needs. As evidence that troops had generally performed well, all that the majority of the commanders requested was the augmentation of the existing troop with similar resources found in the wartime cavalry reconnaissance squadrons such as light tanks and assault guns. Colonel Biddle, who attended this conference, recommended a two-troop cavalry squadron instead, later approved by General Patton.⁷⁵ Again, General Herr could say “I told you so.” He believed the single reconnaissance troops, which had been added to the relatively new “triangular” infantry divisions, were insufficient in size, forcing “combat team commanders” to form their own “reconnaissance troops...consisting of Jeeps, Bantams, and weapons carriers filled with infantrymen and supporting weapons.”⁷⁶ Of course his proposed solution had been the horse-cavalry regiment.⁷⁷

⁷⁴ Ibid., p. 14.

⁷⁵ Ibid., p. 15 and The General Board, *Mechanized Cavalry Units, No. 49*, p. 21.

⁷⁶ Lieutenant Colonel John A. Hettinger to Lieutenant Colonel George I. Smith, 3 December 1941, Fort Jackson, South Carolina, box 5, entry 39, records group 177, NA II.

⁷⁷ Major General John K. Herr to the Adjutant General, Subject: Cavalry Reconnaissance Units, 23 January 1942, Washington, D. C., box 7a, entry 39, records group 177, NA II

Table 5

CAVLARY GROUPS AND INDEPENDENT CAVALRY RECONNAISSANCE
SQUADRONS

GROUP	HABITUALLY ASSIGNED CAVALRY RECONNAISSANCE SQUADRONS	
2d	2d CRS	42d CRS
3d	3d CRS	43d CRS
4 th	4 th CRS	24 th CRS
6 th	6 th CRS	28 th CRS
11 th	36 th CRS	28 th CRS
14 th	18 th CRS	32d CRS
15 th	15 th CRS	17 th CRS
16 th	16 th CRS	19 th CRS
101st	101 st CRS	116 th CRS
102d	38 th CRS	102d CRS
106 th	106 th CRS	121 st CRS
113 th	113 th CRS	125 th CRS
115 th	104 th CRS	107 th CRS
INDEPENDENT SQUADRONS		
	117 th CRS	
	91 st CRS	

In every instance, General Herr had wanted more of his beloved cavalry, especially horse cavalry, to ride in support of every echelon of army forces from proposing that each field army have its own division of horse cavalry and a mechanized reconnaissance regiment down to each infantry division having its own horse-mechanized reconnaissance regiment.⁷⁸ If Herr had dreamed big before the war, attempting to secure the future of Cavalry Branch as he saw it, after the war there was one notable instance of dreaming big by the men who were determined to redefine Cavalry Branch. Had he known what they were attempting, even John K. Herr might have been proud of their efforts.

On 27 November 1945 Colonel Biddle assembled a remarkable number of former cavalry group commanders. They included: now Brigadier General Joseph Tully, who had commanded the 4th Cavalry Group from D-Day to VE Day; Colonel Joseph Fickett who had commanded the

⁷⁸ Ibid.

6th Cavalry Group in its role as the Army Information Service and in combat; Colonel John C. McDonald of the 4th Cavalry Group; Colonel Larry Smith who took over the 14th Cavalry Group after its demise in the Ardennes; and Colonel Garnett Wilson of the 115th Cavalry Group.⁷⁹ Collectively, these mechanized cavalry commanders provided an enormous amount of input into Colonel Biddle's report and many of their key ideas are preserved in their raw format and context in a number of the annexes in the final draft. Having concluded that their units had always been used to "the limit of their strength," the former commanders sought solutions that exceeded the recommendation for a three squadron regiment.⁸⁰

Referencing the creation of the provisional mechanized cavalry brigade in Patton's Third Army, the conference members called for brigading two of the newly organized cavalry regiments with supporting troops "for assignments to the army and employment when a light and fast but strong striking force was needed."⁸¹ It will be recalled that the provisional cavalry brigade was employed in what was largely a dismounted attack. Having tossed out that idea, they went even further. If each army needed a brigade of mechanized cavalry, then why not a division? Less the horses, their proposed cavalry division with two mechanized cavalry regiments and a regiment of "armored infantry or dragoon regiments and supporting troops" was clearly an effort to build the kind of organization that was almost on an equal footing with the wartime armored division.⁸² Their dream was short lived. Patton torpedoed the division concept and allowed that perhaps the brigade concept merited testing. He also insisted on the addition of tank destroyers to each squadron. The cavalry commanders had been divided on this issue since tank destroyers had been readily available throughout the war and had become all but a permanent attachment in many cavalry groups.⁸³ In respect to the future, the most important

⁷⁹ "The General Board—European Theater," pp. 17-18, folder 1946-1947, 11th Constabulary Regiment and ETO General Board, box 16, Biddle Papers, MHI.

⁸⁰ Ibid., p. 18

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Ibid.

organizational recommendations to emerge in Colonel Biddle's final report was the recommendation that cavalry regiments replace groups and that each regiment be composed of three combined arms squadrons. This organization insured each regiment's ability to perform the revised doctrine largely with organic assets.

Absent from Colonel Biddle's recollection of the late November conference of cavalry commanders was the need for reconnaissance aircraft in each group or regiment. Long one of the most crucial missing pieces of all mechanized reconnaissance organizations, the issue received scant attention in the final report, a single sentence offering nothing more than "That liaison aircraft should be provided in mechanized cavalry units."⁸⁴ Perhaps the reason there was so little discussion on such an important matter was because only three days before the conference the Army finally added two liaison airplanes to every cavalry squadron with change three to T/O & 2-25, which had not been released until June 1945. There was no longer a need for all the ad hoc organizations and field expedient methods that had attempted to overcome this incredible deficiency.

Like doctrine and organization, the report's section on equipment restated the same concerns expressed throughout World War II in observer and after action reports. For their findings, the General Board drew heavily from the questionnaires returned by mechanized reconnaissance commanders and the conferences of the armored division commanders and the cavalry commanders.⁸⁵ They focused their attention on vehicles, weapons and communications with vehicles generating the most discussion.

The Biddle Report supported the retention of wheeled armored reconnaissance vehicles with the caveat that whatever the Army finally selected be an improvement on the M8 Armored Car.⁸⁶ This reflected the long held belief in the interwar mechanized community that technology must continue to improve to satisfy the needs of the cavalry trooper whereas the horse advocates also pointed to technological shortcomings in vehicles for retaining horses. Now the roles were

⁸⁴ The General Board, *Mechanized Cavalry Units, No. 49*, p. 21.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, Appendix 21 contains the original questions and the tabular data derived from them, Appendix 15 and Appendix 16 contain excerpts from these conferences.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 18.

almost reversed as mechanized cavalry leaders looked to technology to provide them a better vehicle while armored division commanders recommended replacing the cars with proven technology, fully tracked vehicles. Cavalry group commanders appreciated the range and road mobility of wheeled vehicles while quickly acknowledging the poor off road characteristics of the current armored car.⁸⁷ Armored division commanders were far more apt to replace the armored cars with light tanks or full tracked personnel carriers. General I. D. White, who finished the war commanding the 2^d Armored Division, but had been one of the key personalities in the development of mechanized reconnaissance at Fort Knox , Fort Riley, and then at Fort Benning after the creation of the Armored Force, no longer saw the need “huge cruising distances” nor the need for “quietness of operation.” He now advocated nothing but fully tracked personnel carriers for accompanying riflemen and light tanks and assault guns to assist their advance.⁸⁸

The role of the jeep received scant mention. There was no debate over its future in mechanized reconnaissance organizations. The only minor issue to emerge was centered on the whether or not it should be armored. From North Africa to the Elbe River, jeep mounted scouts had to confront mines and small arms fire and had developed a number of techniques to improve their survivability ranging from sandbags to armored windshields. Not all cavalry commanders agreed that armored protection was even necessary, though the constant efforts of the troops in the field to protect themselves countered this claim. Lieutenant Colonel John F. Rhoades, commander of the 4th Cavalry Reconnaissance Squadron during the war, reasoned that “the first burst usually misses, and without armor plate there is no tendency to huddle behind the jeep—it isn’t meant to be a tank, armored car, or large gun platform.”⁸⁹ In the end, troopers received some solace in the board’s recommendation that in the future jeeps have some type of lightly armored windshield with wings to protect the occupants from “frontal or near frontal small-arms fire.”⁹⁰ The question of providing the men who rode in the van of all others with some form of

⁸⁷ Ibid., Appendix 16.

⁸⁸ Ibid., Appendix 15.

⁸⁹ Ibid., Appendix 16.

⁹⁰ Ibid., p. 18.

Table 6

CAVALRY RECONNAISSANCE SQUADRONS AND ARMORED RECONNAISSANCE BATTALIONS ASSIGNED TO ARMORED DIVISIONS DURING WORLD WAR II

U. S. Armored Divisions	Armored Reconnaissance Battalions	Cavalry Reconnaissance Battalions
1 st AD	81 st ARB	81 st CRS (July 1944)
2 ^d AD	82 ^d ARB	
3 ^d AD	83 ^d ARB	
4 th AD		25 th CRS
5 th AD		85 th CRS
6 th AD		86 th CRS
7 th AD		87 th CRS
8 th AD		88 th CRS
9 th AD		89 th CRS
10 th AD		90 th CRS
11 th AD		41 st CRS
12 th AD		92 ^d CRS
13 th AD		93 ^d CRS
14 th AD		94 th CRS
16 th AD		23 ^d CRS
20 th AD		30 th CRS

protection to survive an expected encounter with the enemy was at least resolved on paper if not in practice.⁹¹

Other observations and recommendations about equipment also sought to improve mechanized cavalry units' ability to fulfill their the traditional doctrinal missions they hoped to regain and to support the proposed inclusion of additional riflemen. The board report called for a larger calibre assault gun, 105 mm instead of the 75 mm gun they had used throughout the war. Calls for fewer carbines and more rifles and the inclusion of Browning Automatic Rifles reflected fresh memories of extensive dismounted fighting. Calls for improved radios, lighter

⁹¹ Although the board made this recommendation, the Army never adopted this measure. Only the recurrence of the constant threat of mines in Bosnia, fifty years after the board's findings, forced the Army to take measures to provide armored protection for the jeeps replacement, the High Mobility Multipurpose Wheeled Vehicle (HMMWV).

weight radios, and more long range radios reflected the heavy reliance of the mechanized reconnaissance units on this form of communication to synchronize their own efforts and fulfill their information gathering and reporting mission. Like the attention paid infantry weapons, calls for additional wire and telephones again reflected the amount of time mechanized reconnaissance units had spent in static positions instead of conducting mounted operations. A tinge of interwar language entered the board findings related to what kind of vehicle the recommended rifle squads should use. All agreed they wanted a full-tracked armored vehicle, but some continued to express reservations about such a vehicle's ability to operate at over extensive distances and if it could achieve a degree of silence of operations.⁹² One particular observation about equipment found the board reasoning along the same lines as John K. Herr exposing both parties' common interest in maintaining mobility with as much firepower as possible. Herr and the board both pinned high hopes on further developments in recoilless weapons technology since it seemed to offer lightweight tank-killing capabilities.⁹³

The mechanized cavalrymen who prepared the General Board findings on mechanized cavalry were by and large products of the interwar Army. They had not set out to disregard the flawed doctrine that was supposed to guide their actions, rather they willingly accepted the missions that came to them and carried them out to the utmost of their abilities. In doing so, they exposed the greatest weaknesses in the mechanized cavalry's organization and doctrine. Equally important, no longer able to fall back on the horse as the best means of making up for exposed shortcomings, even if they had desired to, the mechanized reconnaissance men implemented the needed changes with the assets on hand and after the war advocated the additional measures needed to maximize their proven potential. They had demonstrated that mechanized cavalry was far more capable and versatile than the narrowly defined list of capabilities the pre-war doctrine prescribed for it. They were confident, and justified in believing, that what they had done proved they were nothing less than cavalryman in the most traditional sense, mounted and dismounted fighters, not mere collectors of information. They represented all that was left of the old branch;

⁹² The General Board, *Mechanized Cavalry Units, No. 49*, pp. 18-19.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, p. 19 and Memorandum for Commanding General, Army Ground Forces, prepared by Willard A. Holbrook, Jr., 3 June 1945, HQ 11th Armored Division, box 7, Herr Papers, USMA.

all that was left were those mounted on "iron ponies." No longer was there the need to have two kinds of credentials, horsey and greasy. There was only one cavalry in their minds and they sought redress through doctrine and organization that would once and for all end the interwar debates. To this end they submitted their draft findings that General Patton requested on 20 December 1945 complete with historical vignettes prepared by Lieutenant Colonel Candler.⁹⁴ Having developed an embolism the same day, a complication of the paralyzing injury he sustained on 9 December, Patton never read the report and died the day after it was submitted.⁹⁵ The final draft was approved by the acting board president in early January 1945.⁹⁶ Biddle's work was done.

While General Herr undertook his personal campaign to restore the proper place of the horse and Biddle's Board attempted to capture the lessons learned specifically about mechanized reconnaissance units in Europe, there remained the unresolved issue of the future of Cavalry Branch. An article in the September-October edition of *The Cavalry Journal* captured the tension of the unresolved Cavalry Branch identity crisis. With his article titled "Let's Face the Facts," Colonel Roy W. Cole, Jr. observed that Cavalry Branch was in fact nothing but "infantry, armor, and "spare parts.""⁹⁷ The problem Colonel Cole observed, was that until the Army resolved the future of Cavalry Branch, veteran officers stood to suffer. Those who had fought as infantrymen in the Pacific with the 1st Cavalry Division deserved the opportunity to use their hard won expertise to advance their careers inside Infantry Branch if there was to be no independent Cavalry Branch worthy of rebuilding with their talents. The same was true of the former cavalymen who had fought in armor units. Cole said nothing of the "spare parts," perhaps unable to imagine a Cavalry Branch built solely around the types of mechanized units that had seen so much combat in the European theater. He could envision no future for the

⁹⁴ "The General Board—European Theater," p. 20, folder 1946-1947, 11th Constabulary Regiment and ETO General Board, box 16, Biddle Papers, MHI.

⁹⁵ Blumenson, *Patton Papers, 1940-1945*, pp. 830-831.

⁹⁶ "The General Board—European Theater," p. 20, folder 1946-1947, 11th Constabulary Regiment and ETO General Board, box 16, Biddle Papers, MHI.

⁹⁷ Roy W. Cole, Jr., "Let's Face Facts," *The Cavalry Journal* (September-October 1945), p. 35.

“spare parts” except absorption by the Armored Force or the restoration of a mounted arm “second to none in personnel, arms, equipment and indoctrination.”⁹⁸

The same issue of *The Cavalry Journal* featured the last article prepared by horse advocate, General Hamilton Hawkins. Convinced to the end that the use of horses would have “saved both time and losses” he abruptly conceded that future discussions on the subject were “academic” and perhaps limited to “military students and historians.”⁹⁹ What had caused Hawkins to step down from the pulpit from which he had so strongly advocated the continued military role of the horse, particularly in the field of reconnaissance? Hawkins conceded that with the advent of the atomic bomb “it may be useless to speculate on these subjects” since “no man” could tell what the future held and that age old question of how to stop war “might already have been found.”¹⁰⁰ Having fought valiantly for his trusted companion, Hawkins was unwilling to continue the fight now that the battlefield had transitioned from being mechanized to nuclear. He slipped completely away from the debate in 1950, dying at the age of seventy-eight.¹⁰¹

Even if General Hawkins was no longer willing to fight for the continued use of the horse in the pages of *The Cavalry Journal*, his inspired subordinate, John K. Herr was willing to defend the old Cavalry Branch. Hearing rumors of a potential merger of what remained of Cavalry Branch and the Armored Force, General Herr took up his pen and addressed the editor of *The Cavalry Journal* in the May-June 1946 edition. In an effort to “release the historical truth,” Herr published a number of the memoranda exchanged between himself and George C. Marshall and the Army G3 between May 1939 and June 1940.¹⁰² It demonstrated Herr’s continued belief that the Armored Force had been unfairly taken from Cavalry Branch. It also

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Hamilton Hawkins, “Hawkin’s Notes,” *The Cavalry Journal* (September-October 1945), p. 32.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Obituary of Hamilton Smith Hawkins, *Assembly* (April 1951), pp. 47-48.

¹⁰² John K. Herr to the Editor of *The Cavalry Journal*, *The Cavalry Journal* (May-June 1946), pp. 35-40.

demonstrated his frustration and perhaps anger with what he knew was about to transpire. He was not alone in his last ditch effort.

In what would be the final issue, *The Cavalry Journal* continued to slake the thirst of its old members' desire to read about horses. Just as the significant cavalry commanders during World War II had grown to see the continued use of horse units for leadership training and not specifically combat or reconnaissance, the last edition of *The Cavalry Journal* introduced its readers to a similar line of reasoning. "The Horse's Place in Our Future," put some of the burden of the emerging Cold War firmly on the back of the horse. Citing the new world in which every citizen "without regard to age, sex, or station" might become a soldier or serve on the home front, the article opined that everyone must be prepared to serve.¹⁰³

In such a world; the physical fitness and aptitude of our citizens become of paramount importance. To build and maintain a strong, vigorous, active manhood and womanhood is both a necessity and an obligation. Because it involves our national security, the obligation is properly that of the agency charged with our national defense.¹⁰⁴

Believing that World War II had exposed softness in the average American citizen as a result of living "modern life with its abundance of luxuries," salvation could only be found in getting people "into the country" where they could develop "stamina, self reliance, and mental alertness."¹⁰⁵ The horse and "wholesome sports" such as jumping, hunting, all forms of racing, polo, rodeos, et cetera, provided the best way to insure a ready population. Of course, such a venture would require the maintenance of the Remount System, which would have the added benefit of helping supply our lesser developed Allies with the horses they needed. Maintenance of the Remount System would also insure a ready supply of horses for use in the Western Hemisphere.¹⁰⁶ Perhaps the author's concern for the health of the manhood and womanhood of

¹⁰³ Fred W. Koester, "The Horse's Place in Our Future," *The Cavalry Journal* (May-June 1945), p. 33.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

the nation was little more than a stalking horse for the restoration of the traditional horse cavalry?

There was little possibility of this happening. General I. D. White returned to Fort Riley as the Cavalry School Commandant during the summer of 1945. No one was happier to have one of their own calling the shots at the Home of Cavalry than Major General Charles L. Scott who continued to command the Armored Center at Fort Knox.¹⁰⁷ No longer an outsider from Fort Knox as he had been in the late 1930s when he served on the faculty of the Cavalry School as the instructor of mechanized reconnaissance, he was now in charge. His Assistant Commandant was Vennard Wilson, who had commanded the 106th Cavalry Group during the fight to liberate Europe.¹⁰⁸ During his tenure, Fort Riley experienced sweeping changes.

In the fall of 1946, General Jacob L. Devers, now the commander of Army Ground Forces, disestablished the Cavalry School and recast it as the Army General School Center and the Center for the Aggressor Command.¹⁰⁹ White left little in his papers to indicate any displeasure with the redesignation of his command. Having been a star polo player at Norwich and having served in horse cavalry units until he came under the influence of what was happening at Fort Knox while serving as the aide to the first post commander, White expressed some sentiment for the changing of the times. In an address to the National Horse Association dinner in New York on 3 November 1946, White acknowledged the role of equestrian sports in “the development of the quick-thinking, aggressive, and versatile officer....”¹¹⁰ That was the

¹⁰⁷ C. L. Scott to I. D. White, 15 July 1945, Fort Knox, Kentucky, correspondence and personal business, 1942-1945 folder, box unassigned, White Papers, Special Collections, Norwich University.

¹⁰⁸ Tom Herren to I. D. White, 25 July 1945, HQ Seventieth Division, correspondence and personal business, 1942-1945 folder, box unassigned, White Papers, Special Collections, Norwich University.

¹⁰⁹ White interview, p. 341 and Jacob L. Devers to I. D. White, 31 October 1946, AGF HQ, Fort Monroe, Virginia, correspondence and personal business, 1946-1949 folder, box unassigned, White Papers, Special Collections, Norwich University.

¹¹⁰ “Remarks made by Major General I. D. White, Commandant of the Cavalry School to the National Horse Association Dinner, New York City, 3 November 1946,” folder of same name, box unassigned, White Papers, Special Collections, Norwich University.

extent of any connection he drew between horses and warfighting. The balance of his remarks only lamented the difficulty the Army would have in the future in trying to field competitive equestrian teams since “with no horse-mounted units in the Army, it is natural that the young officers will turn to other forms of sport.”¹¹¹ No mounted units also meant it would be much harder for the Army to maintain “suitable mounts...for training for high grade competition.”¹¹² Only winning horse shows would be more difficult in the future, not winning wars.

General White did more in 1946 than carry out General Devers’ orders to disband the Cavalry School and speak to the National Horse Association. He provided the leadership that made the first symbolic measure to reconcile the divorce that had torn Cavalry Branch apart in 1940. As the President of the Cavalry Association, General White called a meeting of the association’s members on 8 July 1946. The purpose of the meeting, which drew six hundred and thirteen members in person or by proxy, was to amend the association’s constitution. The War Department had already decided to form a new branch that encompassed all armor units, mechanized cavalry units, and horse cavalry units, by linking them with their common doctrines “aggressive mobility combined with great fire power.”¹¹³ The War Department had concluded, and so had the executive committee of the Cavalry Association, that...

*We may thus regard animal elements, mechanized cavalry and armored units as the three components of the Armored Cavalry.*¹¹⁴

This was the beginning of the process Patton had predicted in February 1945 when he called for the combination of the Armored Force with the “Cavalry Groups” as the basis of a new branch.¹¹⁵ Hoping to pull all of its former members closer together within a common professional association, the executive committee decided it better to act by putting the name

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ “Minutes of the Special Meeting of the United States Cavalry Association,” 8 July 1946, Washington, *The Armored Cavalry Journal* (July-August 1946), p. 33.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ George S. Patton to Tom T. Handy [Deputy Chief of Staff, War Department], 2 June 1945, [Germany], folder Han 1945, box 35, Patton Papers, Library of Congress.

change to its membership since the War Department had already made its decision to do the same. All that remained was for Congress to ratify the decision, but by then, if the association did not act, the substantial number of its members now associated with the Armored Force and mechanized cavalry units might elect to form their own association. When the votes were tallied, four hundred and forty members voted in favor of the name change that one hundred and sixty members sought to avoid.¹¹⁶

Unsurprisingly, John K. Herr “deplore[d] any such abandonment of our cavalry,” especially since there had been “no legislation making effective the stupid effort.”¹¹⁷ Major General Verne D. Mudge responded to Herr’s letter and criticism of what was about to take place. Mudge promised that before the vote was taken, Herr’s letter and the views it expressed would be distributed and read to the “Executive Council.” Mudge further thanked Herr for his continued “interest and leadership” and promised to write again after Herr’s letter had been considered. Based on the outcome of the voting, Herr’s letter had little impact, but Mudge’s original reply before the vote had taken place holds a clear indicator of Herr’s position on the outcome. Scrawled at the bottom of Mudge’s letter to Herr appears the following note:

Mudge never wrote to me again as he indicates he would. He wrote a miserable apology published in the Cavalry Journal trying to justify the action taken in changing its name to armored association journal.¹¹⁸

Herr never forgave Mudge and the others like him who saw and seized the future. Mudge drew Herr’s ire again in the future.

In the first edition of *The Armored Cavalry Journal*, the Armored Cavalry Association promised to continue to satisfy its former readership’s interest in “the horse and all interests

¹¹⁶ “Minutes of the Special Meeting of the United States Cavalry Association,” 8 July 1946, Washington, *The Armored Cavalry Journal* (July-August 1946), p. 33.

¹¹⁷ John K. Herr to Verne Mudge, 7 May 1946, Washington, Cavalry testimony folder, box 7, Herr Papers, USMA. Mudge finished World War II as the commander of the 1st Cavalry Division, which had fought the entire war as a dismounted (infantry) division.

¹¹⁸ Verne D. Mudge to John K. Herr, 9 May 1946, Washington, Cavalry testimony folder, box 7, Herr Papers, USMA. Herr’s note is written and initialled at the bottom of this letter.

pertaining thereto either from a military standpoint or otherwise.”¹¹⁹ As proof of their commitment to the proud traditions of the cavalry, “OLD BILL” continued to “occupy his usual place on the cover” but as “a good Cavalryman could never stand still” the recast journal was moving ahead with the changing times.¹²⁰ The subject matter for the first edition bore out both promises, but clearly demonstrated the new direction of the Armored Cavalry. The first seven articles were either excerpts taken directly from the historical vignettes included in Colonel Biddle’s official findings or otherwise related to mechanized cavalry or armor operations. One had to search to the bottom of the first edition’s table of contents to find a two-page article dedicated to Japanese horse cavalry.¹²¹ *Armored cavalry* started to replace *cavalry* in official correspondence in August 1949 as official correspondence described the branch as “an arm of mobility, armor-protected firepower, and shock action” capable of all types of combat in combination with other arms.¹²² This represented the next step in fulfilling the complete reconciliation of the branch that the Cavalry Association had predicted in 1946 when they called for the name change.

The last step occurred in 1950 when *The Armored Cavalry Journal* became *Armor Magazine*. This name change reflected the legal change that had finally taken place when the 1950 Army Organization Act designated *Armor* as the new branch which “shall be a continuation of the Cavalry.”¹²³ The new journal captured the complete reconciliation of Cavalry Branch and the Armored Force allegorically with “Old Bill” superimposed on one page of the announcement and a M26 Patton tank superimposed over the text on the facing page.¹²⁴ There was no more

¹¹⁹ “Mobilitate Vigemus,” *The Armored Cavalry Journal* (July-August 1946), p. 33.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ Table of Contents, *The Armored Cavalry Journal* (July-August 1946).

¹²² James A. Sawicki, *Cavalry Regiments of the U. S. Army* (Dumfries, Virginia: Wyvern Publications, 1985), p. 124.

¹²³ Quoted from the Army Organization Act of 1950, cited in “From Horse to Horsepower...The Mobile Arm Becomes Armor,” *Armor* (July-August 1950), p. 14.

¹²⁴ Ibid.

identity crisis, there was no more compromise, there was no more debate. The armored cavalry regiments that had begun to reappear in 1948, and as the constabulary regiments in Europe took up their combat roles again, now had a home in a new branch.¹²⁵ The conversion of constabulary regiments back into modern armored cavalry regiments also meant the final disappearance of the horse from conventional military operations.¹²⁶

When General John K. Herr died in 1955 his obituary in *Assembly*, the magazine of the West Point Association of Graduates, reminded readers that “No one ever loved his chosen branch more, nor fought for it harder.”¹²⁷ He continued to correspond with like minded individuals who blamed Marshall, McNair and the “Benning Boys” for the ultimate destruction of the once proud Cavalry Branch built around the noble horse.¹²⁸ The Korean War presented Herr’s last real opportunity to bring back the horse cavalry. Having failed during the late 1940s, Herr finally found a congressman willing to put forward a house resolution to reestablish the horse cavalry. Herr wrote Congressman Carl Vinson, chairman of the House Armed Services committee, that he was “delighted” to be given the opportunity for a “hearing in an open court,” and that he looked forward to confronting “any or all” of the issues so “cleverly concealed” by “the infantry generals, including Marshall and Eisenhower.”¹²⁹ Herr must have been immeasurably disappointed with Vinson’s reply that “there can be no prompt action on the part

¹²⁵ Sawicki, *Cavalry Regiments of the U. S. Army*, p. 124.

¹²⁶ Of all people, Colonel Biddle and Colonel Reed, had insisted on the inclusion of horses in the headquarters of the constabulary regiments used to patrol occupied Germany. “The Horse Platoon of the 11th Constabulary Regiment,” folder 1946-1947, 11th Constabulary Regiment and ETO General Board, box 16, Biddle Papers, MHI and Charles Reed to William S. Biddle, 14 February 1973, Richmond, Virginia, folder 113th Cavalry Group correspondence and papers concerning World War II service, box 22, Biddle Papers, MHI.

¹²⁷ Obituary for John K. Herr, *Assembly* (October 1955), pp.57-58.

¹²⁸ Brigadier General R. L. Esmay, Adjutant General, Wyoming to Major General John Knowles Herr, 17 September 1951, Cheyenne, box 7, Herr Papers, USMA.

¹²⁹ John K. Herr to Honorable Carl Vinson, 28 June 1951, Washington, cavalry testimony folder, box 7, Herr Papers, USMA.

of the Committee on this matter.”¹³⁰ Yet, only a few days later, Vinson sent Herr another note with a copy of what would become House Resolution 5156, a measure to “reactivate the Mounted Cavalry as a basic branch of the United States Army, and for other purposes.”¹³¹ It was the second attempt of the bill’s sponsor’s, Congressman Daniel J. Flood of Pennsylvania, to introduce the measure.¹³² When neither bill succeeded, Congressman Flood, sounding much like Herr, still believed that because “the Pentagon is blithely unaware that 75 per cent of the world’s land is mountainous” the nation was wasting billions of defense dollars while leaving the nation “unprotected in the vital realm of cavalry.” Flood concluded that “for lack of the horse, the war may be lost.”¹³³ Unwilling to let this fate befall the country and again unable to move Congress, Herr took up his own pen one last time.

Only two years before his death, Herr coauthored a book, *The Story of the U.S. Cavalry, 1775-1942*. Clearly he saw the end of his branch coinciding with his own dismissal and the decision not to employ horses during World War II. With the Korean War still underway as he prepared the manuscript, he convinced General Jonathan “Skinny” M. Wainwright to write the book’s forward. Wainwright had surrendered American forces in the Philippines at the beginning of World War II and emerged from his captor’s cage the recipient of the Medal of Honor. He had also been the last American commander to lead horse cavalry in war, the Philippine Scouts of the 26th Cavalry Regiment. He wrote...

While the peculiar characteristics of mounted cavalry, in its ability to operate over any terrain, in any weather, and at night, have to some extent been taken over by armored troops and the air force for purposes of reconnaissance, the cavalry must be considered superior to the air force in bad weather, at night and in heavily wooded country. Off the road and in mountainous country, armored troops usually cannot operate, and the horseman can go anywhere...Long have I advocated the retention of at least one full-strength mounted cavalry

¹³⁰ Honorable Carl Vinson to John K. Herr, 29 June 1951, Washington, cavalry testimony folder, box 7, Herr Papers, USMA.

¹³¹ Honorable Carl Vinson to John K. Herr, 2 July 1951, Washington, cavalry testimony folder, box 7, Herr Papers, USMA and H. R. 5156, 14 August 1951, 82d Congress, 1st Session.

¹³² H. R. 3338, 20 March 1951, 82d Congress, 1st Session.

¹³³ “The Cause for the Cavalry,” *The Camden (South Carolina) Chronicle*, 23 October 1951.

division...Such a cavalry division can operate in any weather, in any country, in any climate, and in any terrain.¹³⁴

During the same year his book was released with Wainwright's endorsement, Herr made his last attempt to be heard before the Congress. A man who had helped regain the same islands surrendered by Wainwright, Herr concluded, stymied this attempt.

Among his papers, John K. Herr, the last Chief of Cavalry, left a statement he prepared on 25 August 1953 upon learning that once again he had missed his chance to appear before the Senate Armed Services Committee. In the one page document he recounted his failed efforts to be heard in the 1940s with the exception of his 1947 testimony, which he briefly recounted. In the statement, Herr concluded his latest inability to gain the ear of the Senate was "mal odorous" since a certain individual had led him to believe there was plenty of time for Herr to be heard. It just so happened that this individual was retired Major General Verne D. Mudge, the same man Herr crossed sabers with over the renaming of the Cavalry Association in 1946. Mudge worked for the Senate Armed Services Committee in 1953. Herr could not understand why this former cavalryman had not insisted that Herr "be heard" or at least warned that schedule for testimony had been changed so that Herr "could in person hasten there."¹³⁵ Although he concluded the entire matter was a "profound mystery" one who has spent any time with Herr's papers can readily recognize Herr's seeing this as mounting evidence of the vast conspiracy that had led to the end of his beloved horse cavalry. When he died, so did even the faintest hope that horses might one day supplant machines for ground reconnaissance in the future, or so it seemed.

William S. Biddle's contribution to the most sweeping document about mechanized ground reconnaissance was incredibly important and deserves special consideration in the context of the remainder of his life. History has recorded well the efforts of the early pioneers in the mechanization process and how it led to the creation of modern armored divisions. Although Patton often gains far more attention than he really should, given his fence-sitting posture

¹³⁴ Jonathan M. Wainwright, foreword to *The Story of the U. S. Cavalry, 1175-1942*, by John K. Herr and Edward S. Wallace (Boston: Little Brown, 1953), pp. vii-viii.

¹³⁵ Statement prepared by John K. Herr upon receiving note from J. Nelson Tribly, clerk of the Armed Services Committee, 25 August 1953, Washington, Cavalry testimony folder, box 7, Herr Papers, USMA.

through most of the interwar years, many are familiar with the names Adna R. Chaffee and Daniel Van Voorhis. For them and men like Charles L. Scott, I. D. White, Willis Crittenberger, and Robert Grow mechanized reconnaissance was merely an important enabler to a more important end, an all mechanized force capable of performing the repertoire of traditional cavalry missions on the modern battlefield regardless of the mount used to reach the contest. Still fewer recognize the name John K. Herr, the last chief of cavalry unless perhaps they are students of the interwar years. Herr represents the extreme position, some might argue reactionary, for those who sought the retention of the horse at all costs. As history reveals, he was joined by other notable names in advocacy for maintaining a few mounted units and the equestrian sports he so loved. What then of Biddle?

William S. Biddle, and to a lesser extent Charles Reed, come to us as the last of the real horse cavalymen and the first of the modern mechanized tradition. Biddle did not see combat with the armored force or with the 1st Cavalry Division in its dismounted role in the Pacific. Biddle clung to his branch identity even when the last of the horses were taken away in 1942. He had spent his entire life to that point aboard steeds of flesh, beginning on his mother's ranch in Oregon as a boy, as commissioned cavalry officer from West Point in 1923, and with interwar horse cavalry units on the Great Plains. He rode across Europe on an iron pony, but refused to accept the narrow role his beloved horse cavalry branch had prescribed for the unit he now commanded. He never looked back. His leadership of the board of officers tasked with critically examining the role of mechanized cavalry afforded him the opportunity to inject the smallest wedges of sentiment to keep alive the hope of the horse in some capacity as his peers Willard Holbrook and Wesley W. Yale were attempting to do in the 11th Armored Division. Herr had not seen first hand what Biddle had witnessed and would never be able to understand how a man like Biddle could turn his back on the beloved horse. Herr would have been wrong to assume that Biddle rejected the horse. William S. Biddle never gave up his passion for horses. Just as Charles Reed continued to ride one of the offspring of the horses he saved at the end of World War II, Biddle maintained an active association with equestrian sports. He served as the chief riding instructor at the Rock Creek Stables near Alexandria, Virginia, until 1973. He was a member of the Board of Directors for the Washington International Horse Show and was a

leading American Horse Show Association judge until incapacitated by illness in 1976.¹³⁶ Despite his clearly undying passion for horses, Biddle put his shoulder not only to the task of winning World War II with an all-mechanized cavalry reconnaissance force, but equally to the task of improving the force for the future.

John K. Herr was wrong when he concluded in his book that 1942 marked the end of the United States Cavalry. As wrong as he was on that point, he had been correct on a variety of other issues that emerged after World War II. Herr's organizational vision of cavalry units before the war nearly mirrored the findings of the General Board after the war. What Herr never realized, was that his never ending desire to keep horses in modern American cavalry forces undermined the doctrine, organization and wartime capability of the mechanized ground reconnaissance units whose growth he could not curb. Mechanized ground reconnaissance units attempted to fulfill the role established for them at the close of the last world war. Interwar doctrine anticipated their ability to range between the leading edge of the main body and outer limits of the umbrella of visibility created by air power. The expectation that there would be room to maneuver in this space between the main bodies of opposing forces had minimized the perceived importance for these specialized units to be able to fight. This in combination with the efforts of those like Herr to minimize the role of mechanized ground reconnaissance units resulted in flawed doctrine and organization. Yet, even with the flawed doctrine and organization, men like Colonel Biddle resurrected the United States Cavalry that Herr argued had expired in 1942 by proving its ability to do more than just reconnaissance since just obtaining vital information often required fighting. Wartime efforts of the mechanized cavalrymen and the conclusions they drew from their experience formed the basis of American cavalry doctrine and organization for the remainder of the Twentieth Century. They earned the right to be called simply "cavalrymen," mechanized was now implied.

¹³⁶ Obituary for William Shepard Biddle, III, *Assembly* (March 1984), pp. 126-127.