

Tankers



The 1847 campaign dress uniforms of the dragoon infantry officer and infantry column are shown in this illustration.

and Troopers:

A Heritage Of Courage

By COL John F. Antal

U.S. Army retired

COURAGE. The American soldier's legacy of courage began with the "shot heard round the world" in April 1775 at the battles of Lexington and Concord, Mass. After this initial clash of arms, the Second Continental Congress adopted the militia regiments besieging the British garrison in Boston as Continental regiments. Units of Infantry and Artillery became part of the Continental Army, but the Congress didn't see the need for Cavalry, so no cavalry units were called for. GEN George Washington took command of the Army on July 3, 1775, and, after the British evacuated Boston in March 1776, the war changed to one of maneuver. Washington quickly saw the need for mounted forces, and the first real cavalry forces of the Continental Army joined Washington in the summer of 1776. Virginia sent three troops of cavalry, one of which was commanded by a 21-year-old captain named Henry Lee. CPT Lee was destined to become a cavalry legend during the Revolutionary War and earned the *nom de guerre* Light-Horse Harry Lee.

The U.S. Cavalry is Born

The Congress, preferring the name *dragoons* to *cavalry*, soon authorized more dragoon units. On September 13, 1777, the Congress appointed Polish volunteer and professional cavalryman Count Casimir Pulaski to command the

Corps of American Light Dragoons. Although there were never many dragoon units in the nascent American Army, they were invaluable. GEN Washington used dragoons for scouting and intelligence missions, to harass enemy forage parties and, on occasion, to fight mounted. At the Battle of Brandywine near Philadelphia, Pa., on September 11, 1777, American cavalry saved the Army by warning GEN Washington of British Gen. William Howe's flank attack, allowing Washington to withdraw in good order before Howe could block the American retreat. Later, at the Battle of Cowpens in South Carolina, American BG Daniel Morgan used dragoons commanded by LTC William Washington (GEN Washington's second cousin) to screen the deployment of BG Morgan's force from the observation of the advancing British. LTC Washington's cavalry then withdrew and, as the battle developed, charged, serving as the left thrust of BG Morgan's classic double envelopment that defeated British Lt. Col. Banastre Tarleton's legion. The Battle of Cowpens was a perfect example of American tactical genius—and a severe blow to the British. The defeat at Cowpens and the subsequent battle at Guilford Courthouse forced British Gen. Charles Cornwallis to withdraw to Yorktown, Va., and eventually surrender to GEN Washington. At the end of the Revolutionary War, the Congress disbanded the dragoon regiments.

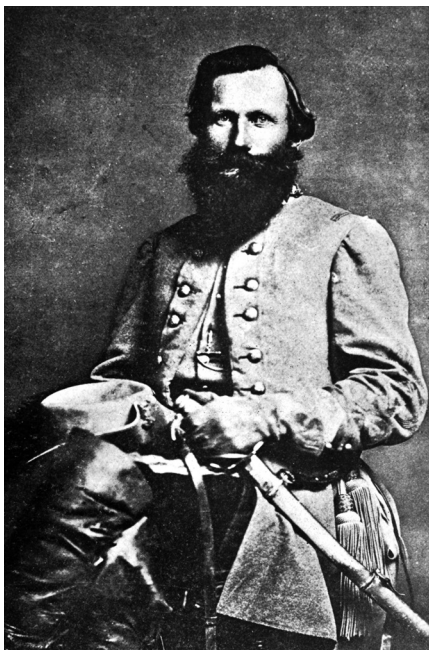
Cavalry in the Civil War

Dragoons were reformed to fight bravely in the War of 1812 and the Mexican War. It was in the Civil War, however, that the recognition of the dire need for a mobile fighting force came of age when the American Army established the Cavalry as a unique branch of equal importance to the Infantry and Artillery. In 1861, when the Civil War started, the Union Army had five regular mounted regiments: the 1st and 2nd U.S. Dragoons, the 1st Mounted Rifles, and the 1st and 2nd Cavalry. These units were redesignated as U.S. Cavalry Regiments 1 through 5, and a sixth regiment was recruited. It took time and great expense to train these cavalry regiments, and initially the Union cavalry performed poorly against Confederate cavalry forces.

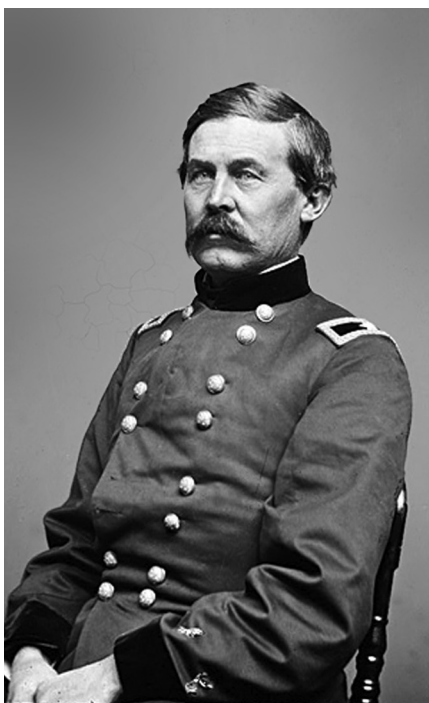
The balance of quality was changing by 1863 as the Union cavalry gradually learned the bitter lessons of war and continually improved its fighting techniques. On June 9, 1863, Union cavalry fought Confederate cavalry under GEN J.E.B. Stuart to a standstill at the Battle of Brandy Station, Va., in the largest cavalry-on-cavalry fight of the Civil War. The Union cavalry was then put to the ultimate test at Gettysburg, Pa., on July 2, 1863.

The Confederate Army of Northern Virginia, under the command of GEN Robert E. Lee, was on the march to end the war by invading the North. As GEN Lee's army marched north, the Union Army of the Potomac, under MG George Meade, raced north trying to catch Lee and stop him from turning east and attacking toward Washington, D.C. Union GEN John Buford's 1st Cavalry Division found the lead elements of Lee's army, a Confederate infantry division commanded by GEN Henry Heth, marching toward Gettysburg from the west. GEN Buford, a veteran Indian fighter and a hard-as-nails cavalryman, immediately deployed his cavalry to delay the Confederates. GEN Buford knew that he

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GEN J.E.B. Stuart



GEN John Buford

had to hold the vital high ground until the lead elements of GEN Meade's army, GEN John Reynolds' I Corps, could arrive. Buford's cavalry dismounted and fought on foot with carbines, pistols and cannon. The fight started at 5:30 A.M. Buford was outnumbered and outgunned, but the Union

troopers fought a defense in depth and fell back to successive lines of defense to McPherson Ridge. Buford's cavalrymen stopped the Confederate column on Chambersburg Pike at Willoughby Run and prevented the Confederates from gaining the high ground near Cemetery Ridge. Buford's losses were heavy. Just when it looked like his troops would no longer be able to keep the Confederates at bay, Reynolds arrived. By 10:30 A.M., I Corps joined the fight. For the rest of the day, Union cavalry and infantrymen fought side by side as the tide of battle pulled in favor of the Union.

GEN Buford's decision to stand and fight at Gettysburg had decisive consequences. Had Buford not made his determined stand and if the Confederates had pushed him back before GEN Reynolds had arrived, the Confederates would have gained the high ground at Cemetery Ridge. If GEN Lee, an expert tactician, had defeated the Union Army at Gettysburg, he would have had little to stop him from taking Washington, D.C., and possibly ending the war in a Confederate victory. As it was, Buford's cavalry bought precious time and helped create the conditions for the Union victory at Gettysburg.

"The zeal, bravery, and good behavior of the officers and men ... was commendable in the extreme," Buford wrote after the battle. "A heavy task was before us; we were equal to it and shall all remember with pride that at Gettysburg we did our country much service."

American cavalry had earned its spurs in the Civil War and was vital to the eventual Union victory in 1865. The Cavalry then moved west, fought in the long and difficult Indian Wars and performed superb service in the Spanish-American War, even if COL Teddy Roosevelt's 1st Volunteer Cavalry Regiment and the 9th and 10th Cavalry (Buffalo Soldiers) fought without their horses in Cuba and made their famous charges up Kettle Hill and San Juan Hill on foot.

In World War I, advancing technology in the form of machine guns, rapid-

firing artillery and aircraft placed the future of the horse cavalry in doubt. To break the “deadlock of the trenches,” the British introduced the tank to the Western Front in 1917. The tank was a new, confounded contraption and had many problems. Many professional soldiers said it was nothing more than an oddity. A confident and determined American lieutenant colonel named George Patton thought otherwise.

The Tank and Modern War

Patton was a cavalryman, but he immediately saw the potential of the tank and was one of the first officers to join the new U.S. Tank Corps. In August 1918, he took command of the 1st Provisional Tank Brigade, equipped with 144 Renault FT-17 tanks. By September, Patton had trained two tank battalions for the upcoming offensive at St. Mihiel, France. During the battle, Patton led from the front; he believed that tank leaders had to be forward, where they could see what was happening in the heat of battle and make decisions on the spot. He pushed his tanks forward across the rain-soaked ground while he often ran forward on foot, armed with only his .45-caliber Colt M1911 automatic pistol. At the small village of Jonville, he ordered his tanks forward “cavalry-style” and caught the Germans off guard. His tankers knocked out a dozen machine guns, captured four cannons and sent the Germans running. Though Patton sustained a leg wound while leading an at-

tack on German machine guns during the battle, the lessons learned from his brief command of American tank units would bear fruit in the next war.

Spearheaded by tanks, the rapid German victories in 1939–1941 shocked the world and disrupted long-held views about the tank. The tank was now a strategic weapon of war-



LTC George Patton

U.S. Army

fare, and America’s Army in 1940 was struggling mightily to catch up. The United States began the war with five infantry divisions and one cavalry division in the active force. Eventually, the U.S. Army would field nearly 100 divisions, including 16 armored divisions and two cavalry divisions. Army and Marine Corps tanks helped turn the tide from defeat to victory in the Pacific, and Army tank formations became the American formations most feared by the Germans and Italians in Europe.

One of the most dramatic tank at-



U.S. Army

U.S. armored soldiers in World War II, when the tank rapidly became a strategic weapon: The Army fielded 16 armored divisions during the war.



A 72nd Armor tank during the Korean War: MSG Ernie Kouma of the 72nd Tank Battalion, with his M4 Sherman tank and crew, held a portion of the Nakdong River line and blunted the Korean attack.

tacks was fought in December 1944 in the snowy Ardennes Forest by then-LTC Creighton Abrams. Abrams commanded the 37th Tank Battalion, 4th Armored Division. The besieged 101st Airborne Division (the Screaming Eagles) was surrounded by the Germans at Bastogne, Belgium, and Patton promised that his Third U.S. Army would break through to the Screaming Eagles before the Germans could annihilate the beleaguered defenders. LTC Abrams led Patton's vanguard as Third Army made its historic 90-degree turn and moved nearly 100 miles to attack the German left flank without stopping. On December 26, 1944, Abrams kept his hard-fighting tankers and armored infantry charging forward until the 37th broke through the German defenses and into Bastogne. The lead Sherman tank in the attack was named Cobra King and commanded by 1LT Charles Boggess Jr., the commanding officer of Company C, 37th Tank Battalion. From that moment on, Hitler's hopes for an offensive that would knock out the Allies in the west were shattered. Patton said, "I'm supposed to be the best tank commander in the Army, but I have one peer: Abe Abrams. He's the world champion."

During World War II, tank, cavalry and armored reconnaissance soldiers served with distinction and great courage. More than 50,000 Sherman tanks were built during World War II, and many other tanks, armored cars and reconnaissance vehicles served in Army and Marine Corps units. On the battlefields of Europe and the islands of the Pacific, Army and Marine Corps tanks brought mobility, firepower and shock action as part of a combined-arms team to defeat the Axis.

When World War II ended in August 1945, some said that the tank's days were numbered. The Army and Marine Corps disbanded most of their tank units, only to have a deadly and desperate need for them again when the Korean War broke out in 1950. In Korea, the old tale that mountainous terrain was not suitable "tank country" soon lost relevance when North Korea led its attacks into the Republic of Korea (ROK) with hundreds of fast-moving, Soviet-built T-34 tanks. The American and ROK armies had no tanks of their own in Korea

and quickly retreated south, giving up Seoul and Taegu; the forces finally stopped to block the North Korean onslaught at the Pusan Perimeter. It was along the Nakdong River, the natural barrier that helped form the Pusan Perimeter, that one of the most heroic tank actions of the war occurred.

On September 1, 1950, MSG Ernie Kouma, Company A, 72nd Tank Battalion, was ordered to hold a portion of the Nakdong River line. The North Koreans were crossing the Nakdong River in force and overran the American defenses, destroying two tanks, but MSG Kouma kept fighting. When everyone else withdrew because the North Korean attack was too fierce, he and his tank crew stayed and held the line. He fought all night and most of the next day with his single M4 Sherman tank. As his ammunition ran low and the enemy surrounded his tank, MSG Kouma jumped from the armored turret, coming under hostile fire, and reached the .50-caliber machine gun mounted on the rear deck of his M4 Sherman tank. He fired point-blank into the North Koreans until his .50-caliber was out of ammunition. He killed North Koreans, but more kept coming. With

Armor and Cavalry Heritage

The heritage of the mounted warrior in the U.S. Army and Marine Corps is something in which our nation can take great pride. As the U.S. Army Armor School at Fort Knox, Ky., moves to the Maneuver Center of Excellence at Fort Benning, Ga., it is critical that this heritage be maintained. The National Armor and Cavalry Heritage Foundation was formed in 2009 to do this: Its mission is to preserve and foster the spirit, traditions and solidarity of the U.S. Cavalry and Armor and to assist the Chief of Armor in es-

tablishing a dynamic and innovative multidimensional Armor and Cavalry Museum facility at Fort Benning. Centered around a multifaceted structure, it will not only preserve and present history but also actively support education, recruiting, retention and public affairs. The museum will also provide valuable resources to support research and development for the future mounted force while preserving the lineage, history and heritage of the U.S. Army's armor and cavalry force. For more information, please visit www.armorcavalrymuseum.org.

An M1 Abrams tank from 2nd Battalion, 8th Cavalry Regiment, passes through a traffic control point in Iraq.



U.S. Army / SGT Rachel M. Ahner

his machine gun out of ammunition, he threw grenades and then drew his .45-caliber pistol, killing the remaining North Koreans who tried to climb up onto his tank. MSG Kouma held up an entire North Korean regiment for a day, and he and his crew killed about 250 of the enemy, blunting the enemy attack and holding the line. If the North Koreans had broken through that day—if Ernie Kouma had thought only of himself and run away—the Pusan Perimeter might have collapsed, and the history of the world would have been different today. He didn't, and that made all the difference. For his actions on that day, MSG Kouma was awarded the Medal of Honor.

When the Korean War ended in 1953, most military strategists and historians considered it a stalemate, but, in fact, it was a victory for America and the free world. The next test of American arms bubbled up in the former French colony

of Indochina. Although America's involvement was gradual, by 1964, the U.S. Army had fully committed to countering a communist takeover in South Vietnam. The first tanks to arrive in Vietnam were Marine Corps tanks, but the Army quickly followed with tank and cavalry units. The old proposition that tanks and armored vehicles were unsuitable for the terrain in South Vietnam was soon debunked as the value of combined arms operations and the power of mobility, firepower and shock action was proven again in battles along many main supply routes, in cities (such as in the Marine Corps' use of tanks in the 1968 battle for Hue) and in the May 1970 attack into Cambodia. During the latter, units like the 11th Armored Cavalry Regiment (ACR), led by COL Donn Starry, proved their worth in the battle of Snoul, Cambodia, in May 1970.

COL Starry's troopers fought at Snoul from M113 armored cavalry assault vehicles (ACAVs) and M551 Sheridan armored reconnaissance vehicles while Cobra helicopter gunships from the 11th ACR aviation squadrons pummeled the enemy. With main gun canister rounds, .50-caliber machine guns, 7.62 mm coax machine guns and

M16 rifles, they fought through the rubber-tree stumps to Snoul to uncover a large North Vietnamese Army (NVA) supply dump. The 141st NVA Regiment defended a rubber plantation as COL Starry's mechanized forces rapidly overran the communist defenses. In the confusion of the fight, COL Starry and his sergeant major rushed out of their ACAV, Starry with an M16 and the sergeant major with a .45-caliber pistol, and engaged retreating NVA within arm's reach. A group of NVA ran into a bunker, but COL Starry captured an NVA lieutenant before the enemy soldier could escape. As COL Starry prepared to throw a grenade into the bunker to knock out the ones who had gotten away, an NVA soldier inside lobbed out a grenade. The grenade exploded, and Starry was peppered with shrapnel in the back and stomach. The grenade also burst his eardrums and wounded three other Americans. A U.S. trooper tossed in a

grenade, wounded the NVA soldier inside and then dragged him out.

COL Starry continued to command, at first refusing evacuation, but his stomach wound and loss of blood caused him to fade. He was evacuated but returned to his troopers three weeks later to hand over command of the 11th ACR. COL Starry received the Purple Heart and Bronze Star with V (for valor) for the action at Snoul. He also received three other decorations for courage under fire in previous engagements in Vietnam: the Distinguished Flying Cross for his actions when his command helicopter was shot down; the Soldier's Medal for helping the crew of a burning armored vehicle to safety; and the Silver Star, when he made an unauthorized incursion with a cavalry troop and a tank company into Cambodia to save the lives of a helicopter crew downed by enemy fire behind enemy lines.

The Wars in the Middle East

When the Vietnam War ended in 1975, America's Army began to rebuild and prepare for the challenges of the Cold War and an increasingly belligerent Soviet Union. Rebuilding the Army became a full-time job, and armor and cavalry soldiers were at the front and center of this effort. Men like COL Starry and many others created an Army that consisted of 18 active and 10 National Guard divisions. The National Training Center was developed as a critical part of the strategy to train and improve armor and mechanized forces. Upgraded Sheridan armored reconnaissance vehicles were employed to good effect in combat in 1989 during Operation Just Cause in Panama. By 1991 when Operation Desert Storm erupted, the Army was prepared for an armored fight in the desert. Armor and cavalry forces were decisive throughout Operation Desert Storm, and in every battle our tankers and troopers outclassed, outfought and defeated the numerically larger Iraqi army of Saddam Hussein.

One sterling example of fighting spirit during Operation Desert Storm occurred when the U.S. Army's 1st Brigade, 2nd Armored Division (Tiger Brigade), advanced in February 1991 to the Mutla Ridge that lay astride the principal Iraqi escape route from Kuwait City. The Iraqis had mined and fortified this ridgeline, and the Tiger Brigade attacked down the ridge to block the enemy's escape. The 3rd Battalion, 67th Armor, had to breach an Iraqi minefield and then seize an Iraqi-occupied building that was originally a Kuwaiti police post. The Tiger Brigade's tanks raked the entrenched enemy with fire as the riflemen of the attached mechanized infantry battalion dismounted to clear the bunkers in close-quarters combat. During the battle, 3rd Battalion's tactical command post was hit by Iraqi fire. SFC Harold Witzke, the battalion master gunner, led by example. SFC Witzke courageously engaged several Iraqi snipers with a light machine gun, suppressed the enemy and directed other members of the operations center to return effective fire. He was killed in this action and posthumously awarded the Silver Star for valor. Over the night and into the next morning, troopers of this task force cleared the en-

emy complex, rapidly established medical clearing stations, and treated hundreds of wounded Kuwaiti civilians and Iraqi soldiers, who surrendered in huge numbers.

Operation Iraqi Freedom in 2003 is the latest commitment of Armor and Cavalry to battle for America. Racing to Baghdad in a surprise blitzkrieg-like move, tank and mechanized formations of the Army and Marine Corps led the way to a lightning victory that toppled the Saddam government. Although many years of difficult counterinsurgency operations followed, the value of mobile, protected firepower offered by tankers and troopers is self-evident.

In April 2004, for example, a patrol from 1st Cavalry Division was ambushed, and 19 troopers were isolated and surrounded by the enemy in Sadr City. First Lieutenant Christopher Dean, from Company C, 2nd Battalion, 37th Armor Regiment, 1st Armored Division, rolled out immediately with a quick reaction force of four M1A1 Abrams tanks. His Silver Star citation reads: "Traveling at top speed, the tanks headed to the grid coordinates given by the besieged patrol. As soon as they arrived," a barrage of gunfire hit 1LT Dean's tanks, and one man was killed. 1LT Dean then led a seven-tank attack back into the engagement area to find the ambushed patrol. During the fighting, the .50-caliber machine gun at his tank commander's cupola was destroyed by enemy rocket-propelled grenade (RPG) fire, leaving him firing from atop the vehicle with only his M4 rifle. Using his rifle, he killed a number of the enemy firing at him from rooftops and in alleyways. He was hit by shrapnel from another RPG blast but continued the attack. Reaching the ambushed patrol, 1LT Dean's force dismounted to help move the patrol out. As 1LT Dean dismounted his tank, he killed more attackers in an intense defense of the casualty evacuation site. Under heavy enemy fire, they pulled out the dead and wounded and put them inside the tanks. The battle lasted four hours. Dean's exceptional bravery and leadership—while under intense fire and despite being wounded—saved the surrounded patrol. Weeks later, Dean reported in a *Stars and Stripes* interview that the soldiers under him deserved the credit for the successful mission. "There's nothing in the world like the American soldier," Dean said. "Even in the face of a kill zone, they knew other soldiers out there were depending on us, and not a single man second-guessed his duty." For his actions on April 4, 2004, 1LT Dean was awarded the Silver Star.

The history of the American mounted warrior is filled with a heritage of courage. There are too many courageous acts to cover here, but these stories are illustrative of their particular periods. From the inclusion of dragoons in the Continental Army to the invention of tanks in World War I to the battles in Iraq and Afghanistan today, it is clear that mobility, firepower and shock action will always be necessary, and the modern cavalry and tank soldiers fighting today's wars are a testimony to that requirement. The mounts may change, but as long as mobility, firepower and shock action are required in close combat operations, mounted soldiers will be a critical part of any successful land combat force. ★