

Combat Command A 4th Armored Division

The commanding general of the 1944 armored division exercised command and control over the fighting battalions through three task force headquarters designated Combat Command A (CCA), Combat Command B (CCB), and Reserve Command (CCR). These commands possessed no organic fighting troops of their own but were allotted the combat and service support assets required to accomplish their individual missions. The CCA and CCB headquarters each had about twelve officers and eighty enlisted men, enough to provide full staff functions for the combat command. In keeping with its intended role as a non-tactical reserve, the Reserve Command had only three officers and five enlisted men. However, in some cases, an armored division commander would upgrade his Reserve Command to a status coequal to a combat command by assigning additional headquarters personnel to it. The 4th Armored Division, however, did not do so and, in battle, rarely employed its Reserve Command on independent missions.

Unlike some other armored divisions, the 4th never assigned elements to the combat commands on a fixed basis, preferring instead to retain a high degree of flexibility in its task organization. Typically, however, a combat command might consist of one troop from the cavalry reconnaissance squadron, one or two armored field artillery battalions supplemented with additional 155-mm howitzers, an antiaircraft artillery battery, a tank destroyer company, an engineer company, and combat command trains. These forces would be further subdivided among two or three battalion-sized columns or task forces, each including tanks, infantry, and artillery and each controlling its own maintenance and supply services. Thus, the 4th Armored Division's technique of task organization emphasized flexibility and provided for the close integration of the arms and services at the company, troop, and battery level.

The doctrine under which the 4th Armored Division operated in 1944 cast a rather specific mission for armored forces. According to the 1944 version of Fm 17-100, Armored Command Field Manual, The Armored Division: ***The armored division is organized primarily to perform missions that require great mobility and firepower. It is given decisive missions. It is capable of engaging in most forms of combat but its primary role is in offensive operations against hostile rear areas. The most profitable role of the armored division is exploitation.***

To the 4th Armored Division, these doctrinal tenets were deeply engrained articles of faith. It is no exaggeration to say that the 4th had a distinct personality characterized by aggressiveness and teamwork. As a group, the division believed that the division's proper place was deep in the enemy rear. One tank commander, long accustomed to operating behind German lines remarked, "They've got us surrounded again, the poor bastards!"

The personality of the 4th Armored Division was a true reflection of its commander's character. Major General John S. Wood took over the division in 1942 and trained it for two years before he led it into battle. This unusually long association between

commander and unit fostered a high degree of rapport within the division and assured a continuity of effort from training to combat.

Wood was known to his contemporaries as “P” Wood, the “P” standing for “Professor.” The distinguished British military analyst Basil H. Liddell Hart once referred to “P” Wood as “the Rommel of the American armored forces.” Like the legendary German field marshal, Wood’s superiors had to restrain him rather than prod him into action. He preferred to bewilder his opponent through the “indirect approach” rather than to bludgeon him with brute force. Wood habitually commanded from the front, as did Rommel, utilizing a light liaison aircraft to personally channel mission-type orders from corps headquarters directly to his far-flung, fast-moving columns. Wood justified his frequent and prolonged absences from division headquarters by saying, “If you can’t see it happen, it’s too late to hear about it back in a rear area and meet it with proper force.”

Wood was an aggressive commander who always strove to knock the enemy off-balance through daring, violent action and then keep him off-balance with unrelenting pressure in unexpected areas. He did not, however, expend the lives of his men freely. Wood never forgot that his soldiers were sons, brothers, and fathers of loved ones back home, and he weighed every tactical decision on the grounds that lives of his soldiers were an investment that demanded an appropriated military return.

During his long tenure as division commander, Wood was able to staff his division with many like-minded officers. Foremost among these were his two combat commanders, Colonel Bruce C. Clarke (CCA) and Brigadier General Holmes E. Dager (CCB). A younger officer cast in the “P” Wood mold was the division’s premier tank battalion commander, Lieutenant Colonel Creighton W. Abrams.

Major General Wood was close in temperament and military philosophy to his army commander, Lieutenant General George S. Patton Jr. In fact, the head of the tactical air command that supported the Third Army once noted that the team of Wood, Clarke, and Abrams frequently “out Pattoned” Patton.

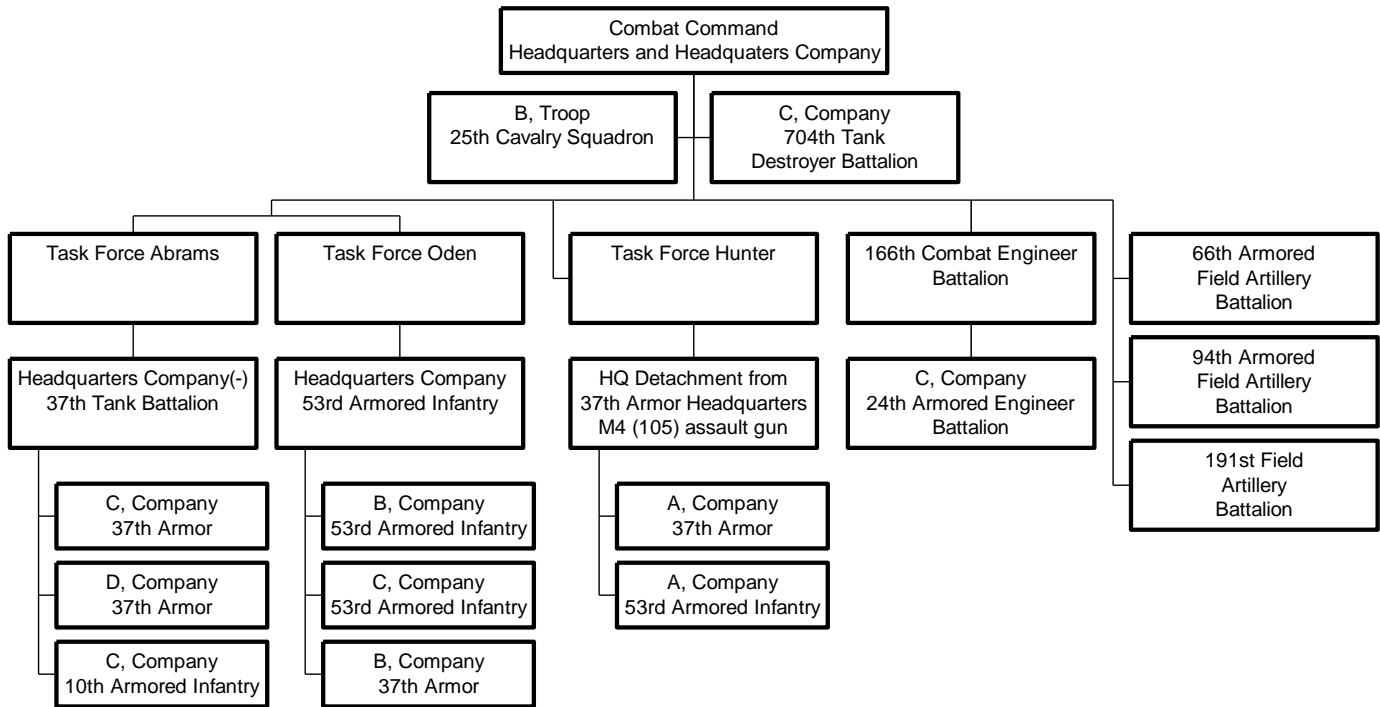
To the 4th Armored Division, the primary tank weapon was the machine gun, which became the weapon of choice when the division engaged in aggressive exploitation and pursuit. A German defender unfortunate enough to find himself in the path of the 4th Armored Division in August 1944 first had to deal with the fighter-bombers of the XIX Tactical Air Command (TAC), which maintained constant patrols in advance of the armored columns. Army Air Force liaison officers riding in the lead tanks called out targets for the fighter-bombers and kept the ground troops informed as to what lay ahead of the column. The 4th reciprocated for this close cooperation by making every effort to rescue downed pilots and by sharing “liberated” booty with the XIX TAC.

Behind the fighter-bombers came the division’s light liaison aircraft, from which the combat commanders guided their columns around obstacles and strongpoints. Medium tanks usually led the column, because experience had shown that the medium tanks could generally cut through any resistance encountered. Self-propelled artillery placed well

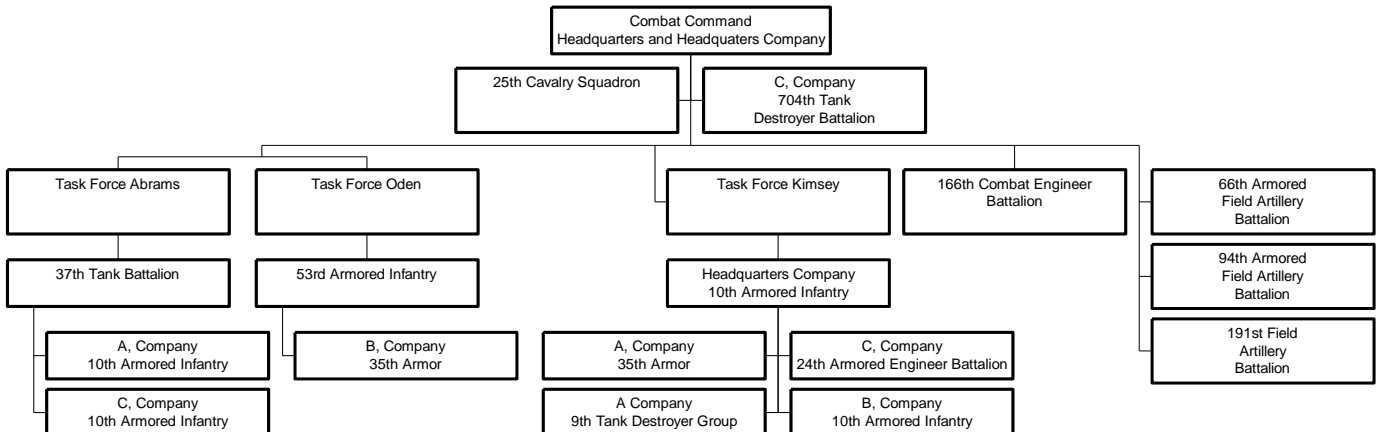
forward in the column and ready to fire at the first sign of a target engaged any defenders too strongly emplaced for the medium tanks to dislodge. Engineers also accompanied the leading elements to remove obstacles. The 4th quickly learned to travel the secondary roads, because the Germans tended to concentrate their obstacles and ambushes along the main highways.

Shown below is the task organization of CCA during the battle of Arracourt during the Lorraine Campaign.

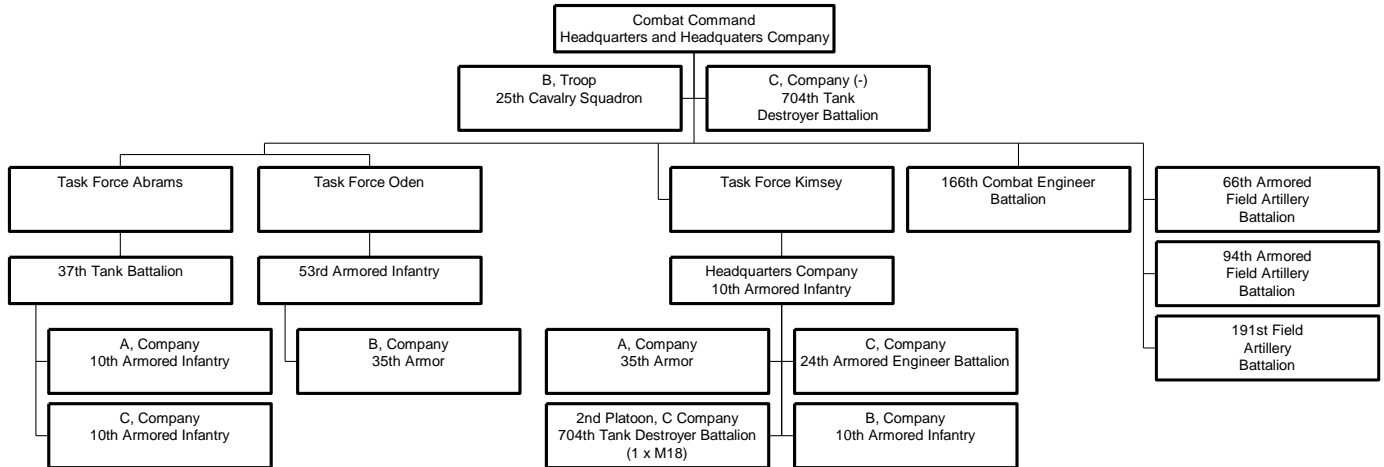
Combat Command A, 4th Armored Division September 19, 1944



September 20-21, 1944



September 22, 1944



Shown below is the Rapid Fire Organization for CCA.

Headquarters and Headquarters Company, Combat Command A, 4th Armored Division (regular)

Sub Unit	Figures	Crewed Weapons	Vehicles
HQ Company	CO+4	.	1 x M3 staff radio HT (50cal) 1 x jeep 1 x M5 Stuart 1 x M16 HT
TOTALS	5		4 vehicles

25th Cavalry Squadron (all troops elite)

Sub Unit	Figures	Crewed Weapons	Vehicles
HQ Troop	CO+5	Bazooka.	1 x M3 HT (.50cal)
A Troop	6*		1 x M8 AC 2 x jeep with .30cal MMG
B Troop	6*		1 x M8 AC 2 x jeep with .30cal MMG
C Troop	6*		1 x M8 AC 2 x jeep with .30cal MMG
D Company	*		3 x M5 Stuart tanks
Assault Gun Troop	*		1 x M8 HMC
TOTALS	45		14 vehicles

C, Company 704th Tank Destroyer Battalion (All troops elite)

Sub Unit	Vehicles
Company	1 x M20 AC (.50cal) 3 x M18 TDs
TOTALS	4 vehicles

37th Tank Battalion (All troops elite)

Sub Unit	Vehicles
HQ Company	1 x Sherman M4(75) 1 x Sherman M4(105)

	1 x M4 HTMC 1 x recon jeep with 30. Cal. MMG & 3 crew members
A Company	1 x Sherman M4(76) 2 x Sherman M4(75)
B Company	1 x Sherman M4(76) 2 x Sherman M4(75)
C Company	1 x Sherman M4(76) 2 x Sherman M4(75)
D Company	3 x M5 Stuart
TOTALS	16

35th Tank Battalion [-] (All troops regular)

Sub Unit	Vehicles
A Company	1 x Sherman M4(76) 2 x Sherman M4(75)
B Company	1 x Sherman M4(76) 2 x Sherman M4(75)
TOTALS	6

166th Combat Engineer Battalion (all troops are regular)

Sub Unit	Figures	Crewed Weapons	Vehicles
HQ Company	CO+7	1 x 50. Cal HMG	1 x Heavy Truck and trailer with medium bridge 1 x jeep
Company	8	Bazooka & Flame-thrower	1 x Medium Dump truck
Company	8	Bazooka & 2 demolition charges	1 x Medium Dump truck
Company	8	Bazooka & one 2"x 6" minefield	1 x Medium Dump truck
TOTALS	32		5 vehicles

C Company, 24th Armored Engineer Battalion (all troops elite)

Sub Unit	Figures	Crewed Weapons	Vehicles
Company	10	Bazooka, 2 demolition charges, 1 flame- thrower & one 2"x6" minefield	1 x M3 HT (.50 cal) with trailer
TOTALS			1 vehicles

66th Armored Artillery Battalion (elite) off-board artillery

Sub Unit	Figures	Crewed Weapons	Vehicles
HQ Battery (observer team)	CO + 3		1 x radio truck 1 x jeep
Battery			2 x M7 Priest
Battery			2 x M7 Priest
Battery			2 x M7 Priest
TOTALS			8 vehicles

94th Armored Artillery Battalion (elite) off-board artillery

Same as 66th Armored Artillery Battalion

191st Field Artillery Battalion (regular) off-board artillery

Sub Unit	Figures	Crewed Weapons	Vehicles
HQ Battery (observer team)	CO + 3		1 x radio truck 1 x jeep
Battery	10	2 x towed 155mm How	2 x 2 ½ ton trucks
Battery	10	2 x towed 155mm How	2 x 2 ½ ton trucks
TOTALS			8 vehicles

A Company, 9th Tank Destroyer Group (all troops regular)

Sub Unit	Figures	Crewed Weapons	Vehicles
Company	12	1 x 50. Cal HMG 2 x 76 mm AT	1 x jeep 2 x 2 ½ ton trucks
TOTALS	12		3 vehicles