

# OLD IRONSIDES

*“Old Ironsides, the first of the mighty Armored Force, the pioneer in the art and science of armor, the father*

*of other divisions, the first armored division overseas, the first to land on African soil, the first to engage the German troops in World War II, the instructor of others entering combat, the first into Rome, the first of the armored divisions in days of actual field service during World War II.”*

— Office of the Chief of Military History

## The Armored Division

An armored division fields 14,620 soldiers in two armored regiments and one armored infantry regiment, with supporting artillery, engineers and reconnaissance. Each regiment has three battalions, each numbering some 2400 soldiers equipped with 54 tanks or 68 armored half-tracks. Between 1940 and 1942 the US Army activated six armored divisions.

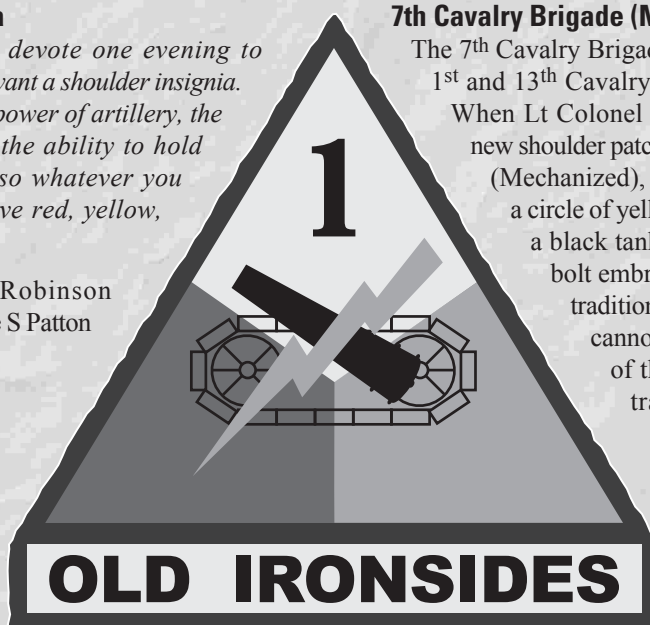
## US Tank Corps Insignia

*“I want you officers to devote one evening to something constructive. I want a shoulder insignia. We claim to have the firepower of artillery, the mobility of cavalry and the ability to hold ground of the infantry, so whatever you come up with it must have red, yellow, and blue in it.”*

—Lieutenant Will G Robinson quoting Lt Colonel George S Patton

## 7th Cavalry Brigade (Mechanized) Insignia

The 7<sup>th</sup> Cavalry Brigade (Mechanized) combined 1<sup>st</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> Cavalry Regiments (Mechanized). When Lt Colonel Adna R Chaffee created a new shoulder patch for the 7<sup>th</sup> Cavalry Brigade (Mechanized), he settled on an insignia of a circle of yellow felt with a black cannon, a black tank track, and a red lightning bolt embroidered on it. Yellow is the traditional colour of the cavalry, the cannon represented the firepower of the new formation, the tank track was to show its new source of mobility, and the lightning bolt was to show the speed and power of the new formation.



## 1<sup>st</sup> Armored Division 'Old Ironsides' Insignia

When the new armored divisions were formed in 1940, they needed a shoulder patch. Since they combined the traditions of the old US Tank Corps and the 7<sup>th</sup> Cavalry Brigade (Mechanized), the new insignia combined the previous two insignia. The symbol of the mechanised cavalry was superimposed over the triangular patch of the Tank Corps coloured Yellow (for the cavalry), Red (for the artillery) and Blue (for the infantry). Initially divisions were only identified by the number in the top corner, but they quickly adopted nicknames which were displayed beneath the triangle.

## NAMING OLD IRONSIDES

During the Tennessee Manoeuvres of 1941 Brigadier-General George S Patton commented that his 2<sup>nd</sup> Armored Division would be *'Hell On Wheels'* when they met the Germans in battle. The name stuck and became their official nickname.

Everyone thought that 1<sup>st</sup> Armored Division should have a name too. General Magruder announced a contest to find a suitable name for his division. Although he received 200 suggestions like *'Fire and Brimstone'* and *'Kentucky Wonders'* none of them were right for the new division. Thinking this over in his study, Magruder saw a picture of the USS Constitution, one of the US Navy's first warships, known as *'Old Ironsides'* for her tough construction.

The parallels between this famous warship that founded the US Navy and the 1<sup>st</sup> Armored Division founding the new Armored Forces made *'Old Ironsides'* an easy choice for the new division.



# US ARMORED DIVISIONS IN THE MEDITERRANEAN

## 1<sup>ST</sup> ARMORED DIVISION 'OLD IRONSIDES'

Unit	Tanks	Battles
1 <sup>st</sup> Armored Regiment (formerly 1 <sup>st</sup> Cavalry, Mechanized)		
1 <sup>st</sup> Battalion (Light)	M3 Stuart	Operation Torch, Tunisia, Anzio, Rome (Disbanded)
2 <sup>nd</sup> Battalion (Medium)	M4 Sherman	Tunisia, Anzio, Rome (Disbanded)
3 <sup>rd</sup> Battalion (Medium)	M4 Sherman	Tunisia, Anzio, Rome (Became 1 <sup>st</sup> Tank Battalion)
13 <sup>th</sup> Armored Regiment (formerly 13 <sup>th</sup> Cavalry, Mechanized)		
1 <sup>st</sup> Battalion (Light)	M3 Stuart	Operation Torch, Tunisia, Anzio, Rome (Disbanded)
2 <sup>nd</sup> Battalion (Medium)	M3 Lee	Operation Torch, Tunisia, Anzio, Rome (Became 13 <sup>th</sup> Tank Battalion)
3 <sup>rd</sup> Battalion (Medium)	M3 Lee	Tunisia, Anzio, Rome (Became 4 <sup>th</sup> Tank Battalion)
6 <sup>th</sup> Armored Infantry Regiment		
1 <sup>st</sup> Battalion		Operation Torch, Tunisia, Monte Casino, Anzio, Rome (Became 6 <sup>th</sup> Armored Infantry Battalion)
2 <sup>nd</sup> Battalion		Operation Torch, Tunisia, Monte Casino, Anzio, Rome (Became 11 <sup>th</sup> Armored Infantry Battalion)
3 <sup>rd</sup> Battalion		Operation Torch, Tunisia, Anzio, Rome (Became 14 <sup>th</sup> Armored Infantry Battalion)
27 <sup>th</sup> Armored Field Artillery Battalion		Operation Torch, Tunisia, Salerno, Monte Casino, Anzio, Rome, Gothic Line, Po Valley
68 <sup>th</sup> Armored Field Artillery Battalion		Tunisia, Monte Casino, Anzio, Rome, Gothic Line, Po Valley
91 <sup>st</sup> Armored Field Artillery Battalion		Tunisia, Monte Casino, Anzio, Rome, Gothic Line, Po Valley
81 <sup>st</sup> Armored Reconnaissance Battalion		Operation Torch, Tunisia, Anzio, Rome, Gothic Line, Po Valley
16 <sup>th</sup> Armored Engineer Battalion		Operation Torch, Tunisia, Salerno, Monte Casino, Anzio, Rome, Gothic Line, Po Valley
701 <sup>st</sup> Tank Destroyer Battalion (attached)		Operation Torch, Tunisia, Monte Casino, Anzio, Gothic Line

*Light tank battalions replaced their M3 and M3A1 Stuart tanks with M5A1 Stuart tanks and medium tank battalions replaced their M3 Lee tanks with M4 Sherman tanks when the campaign in Tunisia ended.*

**When the regiments were disbanded in July 1944, the following battalions were created in their place:**

1 <sup>st</sup> Tank Battalion	Gothic Line, Po Valley
4 <sup>th</sup> Tank Battalion	Gothic Line, Po Valley
13 <sup>th</sup> Tank Battalion	Gothic Line, Po Valley
6 <sup>th</sup> Armored Infantry Battalion	Gothic Line, Po Valley
11 <sup>th</sup> Armored Infantry Battalion	Gothic Line, Po Valley
14 <sup>th</sup> Armored Infantry Battalion	Gothic Line, Po Valley

*While the number of battalions halved, each went from three companies of light or medium tanks to three companies of medium tanks and one of light tanks. Overall the number of medium tanks only fell from twelve companies to nine, while the light tanks fell from six companies to three.*

## 2<sup>ND</sup> ARMORED DIVISION 'HELL ON WHEELS'

Unit	Battles
66 <sup>th</sup> Armored Regiment (formerly 66 <sup>th</sup> Infantry, Light Tanks)	
1 <sup>st</sup> Battalion	Sicily, Normandy, Siegfried Line, Ardennes, Ruhr, Elbe
2 <sup>nd</sup> Battalion	Sicily, Normandy, Siegfried Line, Ardennes, Ruhr, Elbe
3 <sup>rd</sup> Battalion	Sicily, Normandy, Siegfried Line, Ardennes, Ruhr, Elbe
67 <sup>th</sup> Armored Regiment (formerly 67 <sup>th</sup> Infantry, Medium Tanks)	
1 <sup>st</sup> Battalion	Operation Torch, Sicily, Normandy, Siegfried Line, Ardennes, Ruhr, Elbe
2 <sup>nd</sup> Battalion	Operation Torch, Sicily, Normandy, Siegfried Line, Ardennes, Ruhr, Elbe
3 <sup>rd</sup> Battalion	Tunisia, Sicily, Normandy, Siegfried Line, Ardennes, Ruhr, Elbe
41 <sup>st</sup> Armored Infantry Regiment	
1 <sup>st</sup> Battalion	Sicily, Normandy, Siegfried Line, Ardennes, Ruhr, Elbe
2 <sup>nd</sup> Battalion	Sicily, Normandy, Siegfried Line, Ardennes, Ruhr, Elbe
3 <sup>rd</sup> Battalion	Sicily, Normandy, Siegfried Line, Ardennes, Ruhr, Elbe
14 <sup>th</sup> Armored Field Artillery Battalion	Sicily, Normandy, Siegfried Line, Ardennes, Ruhr, Elbe
78 <sup>th</sup> Armored Field Artillery Battalion	Sicily, Normandy, Siegfried Line, Ardennes, Ruhr, Elbe
92 <sup>nd</sup> Armored Field Artillery Battalion	Sicily, Normandy, Siegfried Line, Ardennes, Ruhr, Elbe
82 <sup>nd</sup> Armored Reconnaissance Battalion	Sicily, Normandy, Siegfried Line, Ardennes, Ruhr, Elbe
17 <sup>th</sup> Armored Engineer Battalion	Sicily, Normandy, Siegfried Line, Ardennes, Ruhr, Elbe



# INTO BATTLE

*"If the resistance is broken and the line pierced the tank must and will assume the role of pursuit cavalry and 'ride the enemy to the death'."*

— Lt Colonel George S Patton

In 1939, the German Army invaded Poland. The US Army was shocked at the speed with which the Panzer divisions demolished the Polish Army. Plans were immediately established to expand the small US Army to full wartime strength. During May 1940 the army held manoeuvres in Louisiana to test the new organisations. All of the available tanks were concentrated with the 6<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment to form the Provisional Tank Division for the manoeuvres.

## Small Beginnings

It was the German invasion of France while the manoeuvres were in progress that finally convinced the General Staff of the need for a large armored force. The 1st and 2nd Armored Divisions were quickly created from the Provisional Tank Division in July 1940. Creating an armored division from scratch is a massive task and most of 1941 and 1942 were spent gathering equipment, inducting new recruits, and training them to fight together.

In 1942, the 2<sup>nd</sup> 'Hell On Wheels' Armored Division continued training in the United States under Brigadier General George S Patton, while the 1<sup>st</sup> 'Old Ironsides' Armored Division shipped out for Northern Ireland in April under Major General Orland Ward.

The war they found themselves in was politically complex. France had surrendered to Germany who occupied northern France leaving the south and the colonies in North Africa under the pro-German Vichy government. In Egypt the British 8<sup>th</sup> Army were fighting for their lives against Rommel's Afrika Korps. If the US Army sailed to help the British in Egypt, their route would take them past the hostile shores of French North Africa. If they landed troops in French North Africa, there was a chance that their traditional allies, the French, would take up arms against the Germans again, rather than fighting for their hated conquerors.

## First Blood

Seizing the opportunity, the US Army went into action in Europe on 8 November 1942, when Operation Torch, the landings in pro-German French North Africa began.

Old Ironsides sailed from Britain to capture Oran in Algiers, while Hell On Wheels, now under Major General Ernest N Harmon, sailed directly from the United States to land at Safi and Port Lyautey in Morocco taking Casablanca from the rear.

Both landings were chaotic, but succeeded in the face of light opposition, with many Frenchmen greeting the Americans as liberators. The remaining French defenders responded by throwing all available reserves into the battle. Once the US troops managed to get ashore and organised, they advanced through stiff resistance and captured all of their objectives. By the time the French surrendered three days later on 11 November, casualties from the fighting amounted to 1500 US and British soldiers and nearly 4000 French soldiers.

## The Race For Tunis

While Hell On Wheels guarded Morocco against a German counter-invasion from Spain, Old Ironsides dashed eastward. Its aim was to liberate the city of Tunis in Tunisia, the last major city in French North Africa, before the Germans could arrive. Meanwhile, the Germans reacted swiftly to the French capitulation, taking control of Vichy France and pouring men and material into Tunisia.

26 November 1942 saw the first clashes between the tanks of Old Ironsides' 13th Armored Regiment and 10th Panzer Division near Tebourba. Over the next month the veteran German Panzers taught the inexperienced American tankers some bitter lessons in armored combat. By Christmas, rain had turned the ground into impassable mud. The Allied push had been halted, causing General Eisenhower to declare "Gentlemen, we have lost the race for Tunis."

## Harsh Lessons

Shipping restrictions had kept much of Old Ironsides in Britain throughout 1942. Finally in January 1943, these troops landed in North Africa bringing with them the new M4 Sherman tanks of the 1<sup>st</sup> Armored Regiment. Unfortunately, the division was still not able to fight as a coherent whole. Battalion-sized task forces were scattered over a hundred miles of front supporting the infantry of II Corps and XIX (French) Corps (now fighting with the Allies against the Germans) and holding key positions.

The first major battle of the new year saw Old Ironsides re-taking the Ousseltia Valley in support of the French



Corps. Their success was short-lived as the German forces launched a major attack in the drier areas of southern Tunisia. Taking Faïd Pass, Sidi Bou Zid and Sbeitla in quick succession, the German attack shattered the US defence. Both battalions of M4 Sherman tanks made isolated counterattacks and were wiped out.

The remaining parts of the division rallied behind Kasserine Pass. Major General Harmon was summoned to take control of the battle from the commander of II Corps, Lieutenant General Lloyd R Fredendall (later sacked for mishandling the battle). Together Harmon and II Corps halted the Germans west of Kasserine Pass.

### Lessons Learned

After the battle Major General Harmon returned to Hell On Wheels after recommending that the commander of I Corps in Morocco, Major General Patton, be given II Corps. Under Major General Patton, II Corps, containing all of the US troops in Tunisia, launched their own offensive in March. Their first thrust was towards Gabes on the coast. It aimed to cut off the Afrika Korps facing the British and link up with Montgomery's 8th Army. At the end of March, Old Ironsides won its first clear victory against the German Panzers at El Guettar. It was Major General Ward's last battle with Old Ironsides. After the battle, he was replaced by Major General Harmon.

Old Ironsides moved back to the northern sector and launched an attack towards the port of Bizerte on the coast in late April. Two weeks of hard fighting captured the port. Axis resistance ended on 12 May 1943. Over 250,000 German and Italian troops surrendered, finally bringing the African campaign to a close.

With the fighting over, Old Ironsides shifted west to Morocco to re-equip. The last of its old M3 Lee tanks were replaced with M4 Shermans and the heavy losses of the Tunisian campaign made good.

### Europe's Soft Underbelly

The next step to keep the pressure on the Germans, and hopefully knock the Italians out of the war, was Operation Husky, the invasion of Sicily. Seeing combat for the first time since landing in Morocco, 2nd 'Hell On Wheels' Armored Division landed at Gela on Sicily's southern coast on 10 July 1943. The Division played a critical part in defending the beachhead from German counterattacks on the first day. Hell On Wheels then dashed across western Sicily to capture Palermo. Sicily was secured by 17 August.

On 8 September 1943, Italy surrendered as the Allied Fifth Army came ashore at Salerno in southern Italy. Meanwhile Hell On Wheels had been sent to Britain to train for the D-Day landings, leaving Old Ironsides as the only US armored division to fight in Italy.

### Sunny Italy

Italy's mountainous terrain and swift rivers slowed the Allied advance to a crawl, allowing the Germans to fortify their Winter Line in front of Monte

Cassino, south of Rome. Old Ironsides spent the rest of 1943 in reserve waiting for the breakthrough that never came. Finally on 4 January 1944, 6th Armored Infantry Regiment was called forward to take Mt Porchia, helping drive the enemy out of the Winter Line and back to their reserve line, the Gustav Line on the heights above the Monte Cassino.

On 22 January 1944, Old Ironsides landed at Anzio, north of Monte Cassino. The Allied invasion force was attempting to break the stalemate by outflanking the Gustav Line. The landings were completely unopposed, yet the Allied commander General John P Lucas delayed, allowing the Germans to rush in reinforcements to seal off the beachhead. The German army launched a series of ferocious counter-attacks attempting to throw the invaders back into the sea.

For a month it was a close-run thing. Old Ironsides was always in the thick of the fighting, supporting whichever sector of the beachhead was at greatest risk. By 19 February, the defenders were beaten back to within 8 miles of Anzio, but a stubborn defence and a storm of artillery, air strikes and naval fire support turned the tide. Then the battle for Anzio bogged down in the spring mud.

The final Battle for Monte Cassino started on 12 May 1944, breaking the Gustav Line, relieving Anzio, and allowing the troops in the beachhead to strike out for Rome. Old Ironsides attacked on 24 May, and finally captured Rome on 5 June, the day before the D-Day landings in France.

### First To The End

In July 1944, Old Ironsides reorganised doing away with the regimental structure and reducing from six to three armored battalions forming three balanced all-arms teams. This new organisation had been mandated a year earlier as a result of Old Ironsides finding itself with too many tanks (particularly light tanks) and not enough infantry to support them. The lessons they learned at such cost were used by all sixteen US armored divisions by the War's end, by which time Old Ironsides had crossed the Po River in the far north of Italy, finally completing the task it began three years earlier. German resistance in the Mediterranean had finally been broken and the Germans 'ridden to the death'.

