**The North Irish Horse Battle Reports**

**Sogliano – Monte Farneto – Cesena**

26th September 1944

On 26th September the Regiment had been ordered to be ready to support the 10th Indian Division, who were to take over from the 4th Indian Division on 1st October. The Regiment alone supported the Division through October. The Division was four brigades strong and this meant very hard work for the three fighting Squadrons since, at the best, it meant one Squadron supporting a brigade.

The divisional line of advance was through the foothills of the main Apennine range flanking the main Rimini-Bologna road, the country being a series of steep ridges which ran across the line of advance. There was a steep wadi or river between each ridge. Each of these ridges had to be assaulted and by this movement, through very difficult country, the main defences on the Bologna road up to and including Cesena, were turned.

A very heavy burden was placed on Squadron Leaders and recon­naissance captains during this period, as every move had to be reconnoitred on foot. This also meant that tank commanders were constantly out of their tanks and up with the forward infantry trying to get their tanks into position. Enemy shell fire, due to good observation, was always accurate and heavy. We had two very severe losses during the period - Lieut. Col. The Lord O'Neill and Major W. M. Mackean MC.

Both were killed whilst on reconnaissance.

Supply was also a major problem, but due to untiring work by Squadron Echelons and Headquarters Squadron the forward tanks were reached every night.

2nd October 1944

C Squadron was under command of 25th Indian Infantry Brigade and was ordered to cross the Rubicon and relieve the 6th Battalion R. Tanks. By evening the Squadron was concentrated in the area Gormacchiara and liaison established with the infantry. There was some shelling due to movement by the relieving Troops. Heavy rain slowed up movement.

4th October 1944

Lieut. Hubbard and No. 2 Troop moved up to Borghi during the day and a plan was made to attack S. Martino that night, using the 1st King's Own from the Montale direction. No. 2 Troop was to support by fire on fixed lines. Good results were obtained according to the infantry but even with artificial moonlight shooting accurately was very difficult. The King's Own attack failed and at first light they were held on the edge of the village.

A and B Squadrons moved into the Poggio Berni area.

5th October 1944

During the previous day Major R. J. Griffith, M.C., had tied up with 20th Indian Infantry Brigade and during the night 4th-5th October Capt. A. K. E. Finch Noyes marched from Scorticata to the top of San Giovanni with a No. 22 wireless set on a mule, to keep in touch with the 2nd-3rd Royal Gurkhas who were directed on Sogliano. Lieut. J. A. Waters with No. 3 Troop of A Squadron, supported by Lieut. H. E. Irwin's Reconnaissance Troop Shermans, was to work round by road through Montale-Montevecchia in support. After the heavy rain the tanks were completely road-bound and when the leading tank was blown up on a mine they were unable to proceed. They were in view from San Martino and were heavily shelled. Meanwhile the 2nd-3rd Gurkhas captured Sogliano.

C Squadron had been planning with the 1st King's Own during the day for another attack on San Martino. This was made during the night 5th-6th October and supported by Lieut. Bexon with No. 4 Troop, C Squadron, from Vecchiano, and by Lieut. Irwin's Shermans. The attack was very successful and by first light the village was clear.

The mined tank of A Squadron was very ably recovered during the night by L-Sjt. Jackson and A Squadron armoured recovery vehicle.

6th October 1944

We now held the whole ridge from Sogliano to Borghi and plans were made for 20th Indian Infantry Brigade to capture Monte Farneto, supported by B Squadron and for 25th Indian Infantry Brigade to capture Roncofreddo-San Lorenzo, supported by C Squadron, A Squadron sending No. 4 Troop under Lieut. J. S. Milne to Strigara, under command of the Central Indian Horse.

On the night 6th-7th October reconnaissances of the river Fiumicino were carried out by both B and C Squadrons. On B Squadron's front the bridge below Sogliano was found intact and siezed, which simplified their problem. Lieut. MacGleary, Sjt. Williams and Sjt. Thacker all took out patrols for C Squadron but could find no very suitable place as all the tracks down were narrow and steep. Lieut. MacCleary went out again on the night 7th-8th October and crossed the river, finding a possible place.

7th October 1944

On the 7th October B Squadron moved off before first light to sup­port 20th Indian Infantry Brigade in the Monte Farneto attack. Major Mackean split the Squadron and, with No. 2 Troop and Lieut. Irwin's Shermans, was to help the 2nd-3rd Gurkhas on the right of the feature. Capt. Sidebottom, with Nos. 4 and 5 Troops, was to support the 3rd Mahrattas on the left. Both battalions attacked with great dash and captured their objectives before first light. The tanks moved down a very winding road in the dark, led by Capt. Sidebottom, and over the bridge. It was now raining heavily and German fire was coming down. Capt. Sidebottom's force turned left, soon joined up with the 3rd Mahrattas, and took up counter-attack positions.

Major Mackean's force continued up the road but found the next culvert blown. There was no way round so he had to come back and go up the track used by Capt. Sidebottom. He eventually tied up with the 2nd-3rd Gurkhas at mid-day. At 1400 hours a very heavy counter-attack developed and Lieut. Irwin took his Troop right up the east side and fired on Cidla Araldi where the attack was forming up. There were two more counter-attacks during the afternoon, both of which were beaten off. Shelling during the whole period was heavy and unfortunately Major Mackean was hit late in the afternoon and died in the Regimental aid post. The tanks rallied for the night just behind the leading companies and were fully supplied and replenished by 0400 hours, Capt. Hern having a very warm time getting his jeeps and trailers through some heavy harassing fire.

8th October 1944

It was still raining heavily. B Squadron moved to counter-attack positions before first light and Lieut. Fleming took his Troop up the east side. There were two counter-attacks and heavy shelling throughout the day.

C Squadron moved off at 0300 hours in thick mist and rain with the intention of being on the infantry objectives by first light. The plan was: on the right, 3rd-18th Garhwals supported by Nos.1 and 2 Troops under Major R. D. Morton with objective San Lorenzo. On the left, 3rd/1st Punjabs supported by Nos.3 and 4 Troops under Capt. C. M. Thomas, M.C., with objective right of Roncofreddo. The going, owing to the heavy rain, was impossible and by 0700 hours it was obvious that the tanks could go no further, several being already badly bogged. The infantry were on their objectives by mid-day. Trooper G. King, a fitter, was killed by shellfire during the morning.

9th October 1944

B Squadron, still in counter-attack role on Monte Farneto, beat off another counter-attack and were subjected to heavy shelling.

C Squadron was trying to get out of their bog, one tank being completely under water. Supply to both B and C Squadrons was difficult, but jeeps and trailers proved invaluable. C Squadron rations had to be floated across the river to them. Shelling was lighter.

10th October 1944

Shelling on B Squadron was still heavy but lighter elsewhere. C Squadron extracted some tanks from the mud on to the San Lorenzo road. During the night, 10th-11th October, A Squadron moved up to the area Sogliano.

11th October 1944

The 10th Indian Infantry Brigade was now ordered to push on through 20th Indian Infantry Brigade. A Squadron moved Nos.2 and 3 Troops in support of the 1st Durham Light Infantry, whose objective was Monteleone. Again the tanks were completely road-bound and had to advance through the small village of San Paola. This village was found still to contain some enemy but good shooting by No.2 Troop helped the 2nd-4th Gurkhas to clear it. This action also helped the Durhams. The road between San Paola and Monteleone was found to be mined so the two Troops took up positions there.

B Squadron was still on Monte Farneto and C Squadron was re-organising in Roncofreddo.

12th-13th October 1944

No movement was possible due to rain

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14th October 1944

C Squadron moved just east of Roncofreddo. B Squadron came under command of 10th Indian Infantry Brigade and moved to the area of Monteleone.

A Squadron moved Nos.2 and 3 Troops to Sorrivoli in support of the 4th Baluchs. The track from San Paola to Sorrivoli was scarcely " jeepable " and due to the heavy rain no more tank moves were permitted.

15th October 1944

Nos.2 and 3 Troops, A Squadron, under Lieut. W. A. L. Reid, and now reduced to three runners, tried to move from Sorrivoli to Dio La Guardia but were unable to reach the top due to the narrowness of the track and a blow. Engineers were called for and worked all night.

16th October 1944

At 1300 hours the three tanks managed to reach the few buildings at Dio La Guardia, but progress was very slow and all had to have Royal Engineers' ass1stance A small bulldozer was giving great help. No. 2 Troop, B Squadron, tried to get up to Ardiano but got bogged.

17th October 1944

Lieut. Reid got his A Squadron tanks down to Monte Reale by first light and linked up with the 4th Baluchs. Any movement on this forward slope during daylight was heavily shelled.

18th October 1944

Nearly all Troop leaders in the Regiment were out looking for ways forward as all movement of tanks on maintenance routes was disastrous. Lieut. Reid again got forward with his infantry to Aquarola, where they were shelled heavily all day.

19th October 1944

A Squadron now overlooking the river Savio and reconnaissances were carried out to find a crossing. A possible place was found near Gastiglione on Route 71. The Division was now forced to switch its maintenance route down the Sogliano-Mercato road and then up Route 71.

20th October 1944

Reconnaissances were made of the river Savio. A ford below Mario Riopetra was found by Lieut. Milne, No. 4 Troop, A Squadron, who was with the Central Indian Horse.

21st October 1944

C Squadron moved from Roncofreddo to Cello via Mario Riopetra. Rain again poured down but all tanks were safely across the Savio before it rose. Tracks were in a terrible state. The road forward from Cello to Borello was impassable, so the river bed was reconnoitred by Lieut. Milne and found to be just possible. The plan was for 20th Indian Infantry Brigade to attack Monte Cavallo supported by C Squadron, and 25th Indian Infantry Brigade to attack Monte Delia Rovere supported by A Squadron. The attack went in on the night of the 21st and was only partially successful on 20th Brigade front. 25th Brigade and A Squadron established only a small bridgehead. By the afternoon all of C Squadron had got to Borello, a very good effort, Lieut. Milne walking all the way, sometimes up to his chest in water.

23rd October 1944

B Squadron moved from Monte Farneto to Borello to take over C Squadron commitments with 20th Indian Infantry Brigade. C Squadron was put under command of the 43rd Lorried Gurkha Brigade and was directed to Delia Rovere. C Squadron again moved down the river bed to Castiglione and so found the blows in Route 71. They then tried to get up the road but met two large demolitions. Meanwhile No. 4 Troop, C Squadron, went up the Monte Cavallo road in an effort to get across by the track from Monte Cavallo to Tesselo but were also held up by mines and blows. Engineers were put on both roads, our own section with the main part of C Squadron, and did very valuable work. Lieut. Bexon and a serjeant from No. 4 Troop, C Squadron, went out during the night to look at the Tesselo track, it looked very doubtful.

24th October 1944

The 43rd Lorried Gurkha Brigade attacked Tes­selo with great success. C Squadron made slow progress up the road to help them and Lieut. Bexon took No. 4 Troop down the track he had reconnoitred the night before. It was very bad and he took fifteen hours to do about one mile, but at last light reached the road Delia Rovere where he was re-fuelled by Honeys which had followed him down.

B Squadron pushed up the Monte Cavallo road to support the 3rd Mahrattas who were held up outside Teodorano. A plan was made by Major Sidebottom and the Company commander, and No. 4 Troop with a platoon of infantry reached Ardiano with No. 5 Troop in support. There was heavy shelling and the Commanding Officer Lieut. Colonel The Lord O'Neill was killed and Major Sidebottom wounded. The tanks stayed till last light and then withdrew with the infantry.

25th October - The 1st-3rd Punjabs attacked Teodorano during the night and were successful. B Squadron pushed down and was with them at first light. They then tried to push on towards Monte Palareto but were stopped by an impassable hogs-back bridge.

C Squadron spent a very trying day getting from Delia Rovere to Polenta. Engineers had to work the whole way. There were eight different sorts of mines in one mile of road. The leading tank was blown up early on and the co-driver evacuated. Supply was now a real problem - B Squadron could be reached by jeeps but C Squadron was not reached for two days. The infantry supplies were on mules, the jeep-head being about five miles from the leading companies.

26th October 1944

B Squadron stuck in Teodorano and C Squadron in the same position in Polenta. Reconnaissances of the river Ronco was carried out but division would not allow any tanks to move.

27th October 1944

Further reconnaissance was carried out but no move was allowed.

29th October 1944

The Regiment was ordered to concentrate in the Cesena area. It was expected that the Regiment would remain in Cesena for approximately sixteen days' rest and re-fit. A Workshops' pro­gramme was arranged and many officers and other ranks sent on a well-earned leave. Great difficulty was experienced in arranging the concentration as both B and C Squadrons were stuck in the hills around Monte Cavallo due to the heavy rain. However, by the 3rd of November the last B Squadron tank was back in Cesena.

7th November 1944

Brigadier J. N. Tetley, D.S.O., T.D., Commander of 25th Army Tank Brigade, arrived and ordered a composite Squadron to be formed immediately to support the 12th Infantry Brigade of 4th British Infantry Division. This Squadron was formed with difficulty due to leave and overhauls.   
Lieut. Colonel A. W. A. Llewellen-Palmer, D.S.O., M.C., arrived and assumed command of the Regiment.

The fighting from the 9th November until the 3rd December is difficult to follow without a large-scale map. The operations consisted of the clearing of Forli, the crossing of the Montone and approaches to the Lamone rivers. Incessant rain made movement off the road almost impossible. The country here is absolutely flat except for the flood banks, is very highly cultivated with vines growing on poplar trees in rows about fifty feet apart. It is inter­sected by canals which, at this time of year, are full of water and complete tank obstacles. There are farmhouses and buildings every few hundred yards. This meant house-to-house fighting all the way. The enemy fought for every yard of ground and a day's fighting seldom resulted in more than a few hundred yards advance. No outflanking was possible. The enemy had more infantry on the ground than we had and every road was covered by enemy tanks or anti-tank guns. These had to be spotted, then made to move by our own fire or by heavy artillery or, weather permitting - which it seldom did - by fighter-bombers.

The Regiment supported eight different brigades in this short period. As one infantry brigade became exhausted it was relieved by another to whom we transferred. In the end the Regiment was reduced to four operational tanks. We were short of tanks all the time as we started operations in the middle of a complete over­haul and engine change. Tanks came up from workshops in one's and two's, thus orders of battle for this period altered constantly.   
The methods used to deal with enemy-held buildings varied considerably. The most usual was for one tank to go forward and engage at point-blank range, covered by the second tank - on a pre-arranged signal the infantry rushed the house. The remaining Germans then usually surrendered. Sometimes the infantry led, covered by the fire from tanks. The capture of each house, ditch or canal had to have a separate plan.

8th November 1944

The composite Squadron moved to Forlimpopoli at 0700 hours and remained there the rest of the day. The force then split as under:

With 6th Black Watch (6th B.W.) - Major R. J. Griffiths, M C., and two Troops of A Squadron.

With 4th Royal West Kents (4th R.W.K.) - Capt. H. E. Irwin, M.C., and remainder of free (three Troops).

Their task was to support their two battalions in an attack across the airfield to sieze Forli. The airfield and bridgehead over the Ronco river had already been cleared and formed by 28th Infantry Brigade and loth Infantry Brigade respectively.

9th November 1944

The Squadron moved off at 0001 hours from Forlimpopoli. The route was very difficult to follow due to mist, but had been reconnoitred by Capt. Irwin who got the column safely to the airfield. Further reconnaissance had then to be made to contact the two battalions, as visibility was about five yards.

By first light both Major Griffith and Capt. Irwin were linked up with their infantry. Major Griffith's force moved forward with the leading Company of the Black Watch and No.1 Troop was soon up to Route 9 where there was a blow. Meanwhile Capt. Irwin's leading Troop was badly held up trying to follow his battalion. It was soon apparent that the enemy had withdrawn and with good help from the Black Watch Pioneers, Major Griffith was soon in Forli. Capt. Irwin followed Major Griffith in.

At mid-day No.1 Troop had to go to the help of the leading Company of the Black Watch who were held up on the northern outskirts of the town. Lieut. Mahony shot up all the houses indicated, but the Company was unable to get forward. Capt. Irwin's force and the R.W.K. consolidated. Regimental Headquarters moved into Forli.

10th November 1944

2 Troop, A Squadron, moved up to support the leading Company of the Black Watch at first light. The enemy position was stronger than anticipated. The Commanding Officer and Major Griffith made a plan and, using two Shermans in support, Lieut. Maguire took his Troop in with a fresh Company. The enemy fought very hard and every house had to be cleared. The Troop fired all its own ammunition and the infantry reached their objectives, but the Company Commander was killed and they had about forty casualties, so the position was consolidated and Lieut. Maguire returned at last light. The enemy proved to be a Company of Field Marshal Kesselring's Assault Battalion - picked men. They were all killed except six, who were taken prisoner. For his gallant part in this action Sjt. J. Barbour of A Squadron won the Military Medal. br Meanwhile, on the right, Capt. Irwin had been supporting the West Kents.

The Royal Engineers were supposed to put in an Ark over a blow to enable him to get up. It was badly put in and it was not until mid-day that he was able to get up to the leading Company. One tank of C Squadron was "bazooka'd" with two casualties, Cpl. Ingham and Tpr. Yates. The force had to remain for the night with the forward Company. A half-Squadron of the 142nd Regiment R.A.C. was put under command of N.I.H.

11th November 1944

The half-Squadron of 142nd Regiment R.A.C. with the Royal Fusiliers went through Capt. Irwin's force but did not make much progress. The Black Watch consolidated.

12th November 1944

Major Griffith took out his two Troops to support the Black Watch who were trying to push forward to the river Montone. A fresh half-Squadron of the 142nd Regiment R.A.C., with the Royal Fusiliers were on his right. No. 2 Troop got on well and reached their first objective with the leading Company. No. 1 Troop (Serjeant Donaghy) then passed through but had only moved a few hundred yards when the air observation reported three enemy tanks at San Tome. Air and artillery were brought down, but, as usual, every house was held and some very hard fighting ensued. Major Griffith and the Company commander had to make a plan to get every house. The force remained with the infantry for the night. Sjt. Donaghy's tank was blown up on multiple mines in the late afternoon and he was wounded. In spite of this Sjt. Donaghy recovered his tank under heavy fire. For his great work this day Sjt. Donaghy was awarded the Military Medal.

13th November 1944

Another half-Squadron was formed in Forli under Capt. R. H. Bowring, to support the West Kents. The big ditch beyond San Tome was crossed with a fascine and Lieut. J. S. Milne got up to the leading Company and remained there for the night.

14th November 1944

Capt. Bowring remained with the West Kents for a fairly quiet day except for shelling.

15th to 18th November 1944

The Regiment concentrated in Forli.

20th November 1944

Two Troops of C Squadron moved to the area of Filetto to support the 4th-10th Baluch of 10th Indian Infantry Brigade.

21st November 1944

The Commanding Officer and Major R. D. Morton, M.C., commanding A Squadron, visited Headquarters, 4th-10th Baluchs, under whose command C Squadron was sent. The forward positions were some 200 to 300 yards from the bank of the river Montone, in houses, and the enemy were holding dug-out positions and houses on the river bank itself. The country was thick and cultivated and before the tanks could get into any sort of position a small canal had to be crossed which necessitated a fascine. Meanwhile a reconnaissance of the crossing was made and a likely place chosen. The remainder of C Squadron arrived in harbour by 1700 hours.

23rd November 1944

A fascine arrived early in the morning and was fixed to Sjt. Kennedy's tank by mid-day. A plan was made to clear houses near the river, as the first phase, with one platoon and to clear other houses on the bank as a second phase with two platoons. Unfortunately the fascine tank bogged, but with the help of the infantry bundles of sticks were thrown into the canal and No. 4 Troop went across and contacted the infantry. They successfully shot the platoon into the houses and pulled back to re-organise for the second objective but the light was rapidly fading so the Commanding Officer of the 4th-10th Baluch postponed the attack until the following morning.

24th November 1944

Air support was called for and arrived in the morning, after night patrols had reported the enemy dug into the banks and using tunnels through the canal. The flood banks were about thirty feet high on both sides of the river. These banks were the only high ground in the Po Valley. The enemy dug deep into them and was immune from all forms of fire. The banks were complete tank obstacles in themselves and formed the basis of every German defensive line. This was the first of many we were to meet in the Po Valley. No better obstacle could be devised.   
At 1430 hours No. 4 Troop crossed the canal again and went in to deal with houses near the bank of the river Montone.

All went well until the infantry reached the houses, then Spandau and heavy shelling forced them to ground. The fire was coming from the bank and opposite side of the river and the tanks found it impossible to locate them. Meanwhile No. 1 Troop had crossed the canal and come up to support No. 4 Troop. An enemy tank was spotted on the bank on the other side but disappeared before it could be engaged. The infantry Commanding Officer decided to withdraw but he had no communication with his leading platoon. Lieut. G. C. Gumming got out of his tank and eventually found the platoon leader in one of the houses and told him to withdraw. No.1 Troop covered their withdrawal and both Troops came back to harbour for the night. The 4th-10th Baluch had suffered casualties and the Commanding Officer decided to give the position a rest.   
Crocodiles were suggested as the ideal weapon and the Commanding Officer of N.I.H. managed to get two from the 142nd Regiment R.A.C., but owing to more rain they could not get up to the bank.

25th November 1944

No. 2 Troop shot up houses on the other side of the river during the morning. The forward observation officer of the Royal Devon Yeomanry knocked down the church tower in the village, which was being used as an enemy observation post.

C Squadron concentrated in Filetto under command of the 43rd Lorried Gurkhas who relieved the 10th Indian Infantry Brigade in this sector.

26th November 1944

B Squadron moved through Forli at 0600 hours over the Bailey Bridge and made contact with the 1st Durham Light Infantry who had made a crossing during the night, on the far bank of the river Montone at Casa Boschi. Major A. K. E. Finch Noyes made his tactical Headquarters at San Bermado. Thus the Regiment had one Squadron over the river and two Squadrons on the east bank. The general plan was to clear up both banks of the Montone northwards to give 1st Canadian Division enough room and a good start for their coming attack to the Lamone. No. 2 Troop shot up several houses but the opposition was stiff and a further plan necessary.

27th November 1944

One Company of the 2nd-4th Gurkhas, under command of the 1st Durham Light Infantry, was supported by No. 2 Troop and further progress in clearing the bank was made. No. 5 Troop shelled houses.

28th November 1944

B Squadron remained in support of the 1st D.L.Is. A Squadron was in reserve and C Squadron with the 43rd Lorried Indian Brigade.

29th November 1944

A Squadron moved from Forli to Filetto area in support of the 2nd-4th Gurkhas. An attack was planned with B Squadron and the 1st D.L.Is. on the left, with A Squadron and the 2nd-4th Gurkhas on the right, to clear up more of the bank and its vicinity.

30th November 1944

Lieut. E. D. Bullick got an Ark into position by 1115 hours and this enabled B Squadron to get No. 2 Troop up to B Company of the 1st D.L.Is., and No. 5 Troop in support of A Company, who had filtered over the canal in the night. Both companies dug in and consolidated.

On the right A Squadron moved Nos. 2 and 3 Troops in support of the 2nd-4th Gurkhas ; No. 2 Troop led and it was all road work—several prisoners being collected.

On reaching their objective, a cross-roads, No. 2 Troop and C Company consolidated but came under heavy shell fire. The battalion commander decided to continue straight on to the final objective with C Company and No. 2 Troop. On moving off again more prisoners were taken and track marks turning off the road were spotted by Lieut. W. A. L. Reid, No. 2 Troop Leader. He immediately engaged the houses on his left and " brewed up " a self-propelled gun. The crew of another were seen to bale out. Both guns were captured. The area was consolidated, but heavily shelled by the enemy. The tanks withdrew at last light to harbour, having completed their task and cleared both sides of the river for two thousand yards.

1st December 1944

One Troop of B Squadron, consisting of one 95 mm. tank and one 6-pounder, moved up while No. 2 Troop went back, remaining in position till last light to cover the take-over by the Royal 22nd Regiment of Canada.

During the night of 30th November-1st December the 4th-10th Baluch relieved the 2nd-4th Gurkhas. At approximately 1000 hours No. 1 Troop of A Squadron, supporting C Company, engaged some houses and these were taken by the infantry with little opposition.

No. 3 Troop, in support of C Company, advanced up the road, two prisoners being taken early on. Sixteen prisoners were taken further up this road in more house to house fighting. The leading tank moved off and remained in support in the area of Casa Palacci. The Troop leader's tank moved to a road junction north west, together with the platoon. The houses further on were held in strength and it was decided to consolidate at Casa Palacci where the platoon dug in and the tanks were sited in defensive positions.

During this action No. 1 Troop killed a number of enemy in the vineyards. About 1600 hours a counter-attack developed after shelling and mortaring. This was beaten off with the aid of artillery and aircraft.

At dusk the tanks thinned out, being finally withdrawn at 1900 hours and the infantry were relieved by the West Nova Scotia Regiment.

2nd December 1944

The Regiment received orders to remain in support of the Canadians until relieved by the 12th Battalion 78 Royal Tank Regiment. At 0900 hours No. 5 Troop, B Squadron, with A Company of the Royal 22nd Regiment moved towards Prada, reaching it at 1005 hours. At 1055 hours they reached a road junction, and, while the tanks were engaging houses on the Russi road, Lieut. Mahon's and Sjt. Burns' tanks were hit by an anti-tank gun, casualties being four killed and two wounded. The killed were Sjt. Burns, Tpr. Corbin, Tpr. Stafford and Tpr. Wood ; wounded, L. Cpl. Wallace and Tpr. McClurg. Sjt. Verso's tank was in position behind a house and was not hit. He gave support to the Company when they were heavily counter­attacked. His was the only wireless set left with the leading Company. This tank did the work of a Troop and restored the situation. For his part in this action Sjt. Verso won the Military Medal.

No. 2 Troop moved up but were not used. At last light both Troops harboured in the area of Prada.

A Squadron was ordered to support the West Nova Scotia Regiment in the advance towards the River Lamone and at 0915 hours Nos. 2 and 4 Troops moved off with their infantry. Once again houses caused trouble. Four prisoners were taken, the remainder of the enemy being killed. The bridge was found to be blown and the Scolo Via Cupa proved impassable to tanks. One platoon of infantry succeeded in crossing and occupying the houses.

Enemy movement north of the Scolo Via Cupa was successfully engaged. A counter-attack developed about 1600 hours and another later. These were beaten off with the aid of artillery and the tanks. The tanks remained in support until the infantry reserve Company got across, when they withdrew.

The Regiment was relieved by the 12th Battalion Royal Tank Regiment and concentrated in Forli.

4th December to 11th January 1944

The Regiment was in rest at Riccione.

On the 4th December N.I.H. left 25th Army Tank Brigade, which was broken up as a Tank Brigade and reformed as an Assault Engineer Brigade, and joined the 21st Army Tank Brigade in place of the 145th Regiment R.A.C. which had been disbanded.   
21st Tank Brigade was commanded by Brigadier D. Dawnay, D.S.O., and the Brigade Second-in-Command was Colonel R. Hamilton-Russell, D.S.O. The other tank Regiments in it were the 12th Battalion R. Tanks and the 48th Battalion R. Tanks.   
After the usual difficulties the Regiment settled down very com­fortably in good billets. Leave parties to Rome soon started. Sports, cinemas and clubs helped to entertain us. The Kings' Dragoon Guards gave us ten horses when they went to Greece.   
The Regiment had great Christmas and New Year celebrations.

12th January, 1945

The Regiment moved up to Ravenna and was put in support of the Italian Cremona Gruppo, and C Squadron took over from the New Brunswick Hussars in support of an Italian Brigade, from Route 16 to the river Reno.

13th January 1945

A Squadron took over from the Governor General's Horse Guards. They had to support an Italian Brigade holding from the sea to the river Senio in what was thought to be a quiet sector. B Squadron, Regimental Headquarters and Headquarters Squadron were in Ravenna.

The first few days were very trying for the Troops in the line. The Italian Infantry were not fully trained and were very excitable. Alarms went on all night, with small arms fire. The Germans re-acted by sending in strong patrols all along the line. These had to be driven out by us next morning.

17th January 1945

On the 17th January, Lieut. W. A. L. Reid had a stiff fight, in which he was slightly wounded, to eject the Germans from an Italian position they had captured. He eventually succeeded and restored a very unpleasant position. For this action he won the Military Cross. Italian Infantry were not very reliable so the Squadrons made up protective Troops from their own echelons to help guard the tanks at night and hold the line. It at last became apparent to all that the Italian Cremona Gruppo had not enough men or sufficient experience to hold so much line so the 2nd Canad­ian Infantry Brigade came back and took over from Route 16 to the Canale Bonificio. From then on the situation improved.

25th January 1945

The reconnaissance Squadron took over A Squadron's responsibilities on the coast. The Squadron comprised three 95 mm. Churchills, three Shermans, three Honeys and a Command Churchill. Later on it was increased by another Churchill 6-pdr.Troop made up of the fourth tank of Headquarters and a Troop from the other three Squadrons. This, in fact, gave the Regiment a fourth Squadron for static warfare only.

26th January 1945

C Squadron, with the Canadians, was relieved by B Squadron.

27th January to 3rd February 1945

The Canadians launched a series of small attacks to retake outposts lost by the Italians. B Squadron supported these by fire. On the 3rd February a Canadian Platoon was caught by a booby trapped house which blew up, causing them thirty casualties.   
This virtually finished all offensive action on this sector.

4th-5th February 1945

All was quiet. Lieut. Maguire stepped on a "S" mine and was lucky to escape with comparatively minor injuries.

6th February1945

A strong German patrol attacked the Italians on the coast. The Honey Troop, after a harrowing night, restored the situation at daybreak. The Italians had much improved but were not steady when attacked at night. The Regiment knew the form by now and took no notice when told the entire German Army was assaulting the Italian platoon, but it was always difficult for the Troop on the spot as they never had any idea what was happening till they found out for themselves.

12th February 1945

C Squadron took over eleven Shermans left by the Canadians in anti-tank roles from Route 16 to the Canale Bonificio. They were supposed to be "dug in" but only one was. They were all badly sited and of little or no use. They had crews of three and these crews were used to thicken up the infantry posts, since the tanks were of no use.

13th-21st February 1945

Routine on all fronts. C Squadron was relieved from the "dug in" Shermans.

22nd February 1945

The 17th Infantry Brigade relieved the and Canadian Brigade in B Squadron's sector. The 12th Lancers (dismounted) and and Commandos relieved the 22nd Regiment (Italian) astride the Canale Bonificio.

23rd February 1945

The infantry take-over was completed and the Regiment remained in the same positions.

24th February 1945

C Squadron took over from A Squadron and the reconnaissance Squadron along the river Reno.

1st March 1945

Plans were finally made for an attack by Italian infantry supported by C Squadron (or vice versa as it turned out), to clear the base of the "Spit" i.e., the strip of land between Lake Comacchio and the Adriatic Sea.

2nd March 1945

At H hour aircraft were to strafe and bomb the river bank and the point north of Casa Venti. and a "cab rank" was to be available for two hours afterwards. Artillery concentra­tion on Casa Venti and counter-battery fire were to be used during the operation.

The 9th Company, 21st Regiment, was to do the initial assault followed by 9th Company, 22nd Regiment, and 1st Company, 22nd Regiment. No.3 Troop, C Squadron, on the right was to move with one platoon of 11th Company, No.2 Troop on the left in the woods, and one flame thrower was to go with each Troop. H hour was fixed for 1200 hours

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Accompanied by air strafing and artillery concentrations the leading Company left Casa Sanze Nome at H hour and reached a position two hundred yards north of Fillopine before making contact. No.3 Troop on the right advanced up the beach carrying their platoon. They dismounted them short of Fillopine and were met by Major Dawson who gave them the picture.   
No.2 Troop moved up with a platoon of the reserve Company and advanced to a forward position covering Casa Venti. No.4 Troop by this time were in forward positions covering the canal bank. Meanwhile the flame tiirowers were ordered to pressure up and find a position near Fillopine in readiness for the assault on Casa Venti. The 95 mm. Churchills were given targets to shell in that area.

Just level with Fillopine one flame-thrower blew up on a mine and the other joined No.3 Troop on the beach. No.3 Troop advanced some five hundred yards up the beach and found ex­cellent positions to fire on buildings around Casa Venti. Meanwhile the infantry were held up by a minefield and their sappers were experiencing difficulty in clearing it due to mortar and machine-gun fire. No.3 Troop and the flame-thrower were then ordered to return and close in on Venti, but when coming off the beach two tanks and the flame-thrower blew up on mines. The Royal Engineer Troop was brought up to clear this but shelling increased with movement and it became impossible. Sjt. F. Kennedy, M.M., reported enemy troops moving up the beach towards the tanks and all three tanks were engaged with high explosive shells and machine-gun fire, causing casualties, and the enemy withdrew.

During this time aircraft gave excellent close support, sometimes strafing within two hundred yards of our leading Troops.

Due to the infantry being held up on the minefield and tanks blowing up, it was decided to consolidate on the present line north of Fillopine. By 1730 hours the two flame throwers and one tank of No.3 Troop was repaired and the Troops returned to Borsetti for the night.

3rd March 1945

A further plan was made and H hour fixed at 11:5 hours, this time with less air support.

No.3 Troop moved over the ridge of the wood while No.2 Troop moved up to their previous position on the left. No.3 Troop con­tacted the infantry just clear of Fillopine and were pointed out targets by Major Dawson on their right, cons1sting of three enemy pillboxes. These they shot up with very good results, and some forty-five to fifty prisoners emerged.

Meantime, on the left. No.2 Troop, after contacting their infantry, moved up into their positions and shot up places around Casa Venti while the infantry moved up to the assault. As soon as they stopped firing the infantry went in and some sixty to seventy prisoners were taken. Six enemy, attempting to get away over the river Reno, were shot at, two believed killed and four taken prisoner.

Shortly after this the Squadron leader's tank blew up on a mine near Fillopine and the armoured recovery vehicle plus R.Es. were called forward. The track was swept and the tank repaired within an hour.

The infantry were slowly clearing up the building around Venti and some two hundred prisoners, mostly consisting of Turcomen and Mongolians, had been taken. There were one or two places still occupied by the enemy, but with the assistance of smoke No.3 Troop with their infantry took these and several enemy were killed and wounded, and the remainder taken prisoner. No.2 Troop observed a boat coming round the bend of the river and with their third shot sunk it. At 1700 hours No.3 Troop was ordered to return to harbour. Shortly afterwards No.2 Troop also returned. By this time the infantry had cleared the buildings and consolidated their positions.

4th March 1945

The Jewish Brigade took over a sector of the line south of Route 16. A Squadron took over part of the 2nd Armoured Brigade’s commitments in support of this Jewish Brigade. These Jews were recruited in Palestine and could mostly speak English. They were very keen and although this was their first experience of fighting they settled down remarkably quickly and were very easy to work with.

The Regiment was now in support of fifteen miles of the front. The counter-attack which had been expected earlier in the winter had not materialised and was not likely to do so. The tanks were largely for moral support and for direct shooting so far as the limited allowance of ammunition would permit.

5th March 1945

The 2nd Commando Brigade and 12th Lancers relieved 37th Infantry Brigade on B Squadron's sector. The Commandos' original sector astride the Canale Bonificio was taken over by the 1st-11th Battalion of the Cremona Gruppo.

6th March 1945

Sjt. Baker, Troopers Harper, Leech and Quinn were wounded when a shell hit their house.

11th March 1945

The Reconnaissance Squadron took over from C Squadron. No tanks were left between Route 16 and the Canale Bonificio but A Squadron was made responsible for that area should tanks be required there.

12th-13th March 1945

Further changes in the front were made. This constant changing of infantry formations was partly due to re­organisation for the coming spring offensive and partly to mislead the enemy. The line-up now was: South of Route 16: The Jewish Brigade - supported by C Squadron. Canale Bonificio: Cremona Gruppo - supported by A Squadron San Alberto to Lake Comacchio: 12th Lancers and Partisans – supported by Reconnaissance Squadron. The "Spit": 2nd Commando Brigade – supported by B Squadron.

14th-16th March 1945

No change in the positions.

17th March 1945

Saint Patrick's Day was celebrated. The Germans, fortunately, took no part and remained very quiet.

18th March 1945

The Jewish Brigade planned a feint attack for the 20th and   
after a tussle with Corps our part was satisfactorily ar­ranged.

19th March 1945

A Squadron carried out reconnaissance for the attack.

20th March 1945

The Jews sent out strong patrols at 1000 hours, cohered by  
No. 4 Troop of A Squadron. Two enemy-occupied houses were captured and eight prisoners taken - very valuable for identification at this stage.

21st March 1945

The 2nd Commando Brigade plan for the coming attack on the "Spit " was given to the Commanding Officer. B Squadron was chosen to support them.

22nd March 1945

B Squadron started training with the 43rd Com­mandos for this operation. German patrols during the night attacked 12th Lancers positions covering Alberto and the recon­naissance Squadron fired a direct fire programme in for the Lancers. The Regiment had now supported the following "mixed bag" at various times throughout the winter:

   1st Canadian Infantry Brigade.

   2nd Canadian Infantry Brigade.

   3rd Canadian Infantry Brigade.

   Cremona Gruppo (all six Battalions').

   2nd Commando Brigade.

   12th Royal Lancers.

   Jewish Brigade

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   17th Indian Infantry Brigade.

   Partiganis (Garibaldi Brigade).

25th March 1945

C Squadron moved to an area south-west of Ravenna to start training with 19th Indian Infantry Brigade. The Regiment was to come under command of the 8th Indian Division for the spring offensive. For the first phase the Regiment was to be under command of 19th Brigade Affiliations were as follows:

   A Squadron - 1st Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders.

   B Squadron - 8th Punjabs, if available (which they were not).

   C Squadron - 3rd-5th Frontier Force Regiment.

The Regiment was lucky to remain in tanks throughout the winter The fighting from January to April was static. Squadrons were in support of various infantry brigades. Our chief role was counter-attack in the event of an enemy attack. Until ammunition restrictions prevented us, the tanks were used as artillery pieces. The Troops lived in houses just behind the main   
defensive positions and except for an occasional sortie or shoot, did not   
have much to do. Enemy shelling was heavy at first but died away   
considerably as the winter wore on.