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**A CONCISE HISTORY OF:**

# **50<sup>th</sup> INDIAN TANK BRIGADE**

A concise history of the 50<sup>th</sup> Indian Tank Brigade during the Second World War between 1942 and 1946. It served in Burma during 1944 and 1945.

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## **A Concise History of the 50<sup>th</sup> Indian Tank Brigade**

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## The Formation of the Brigade

In mid-1941, India Command ordered the raising of a Heavy Armoured Brigade, and it commenced forming at Dhond, near Poona in western India, in October 1941. Its title was changed at the end of that month to become the 50<sup>th</sup> Indian Tank Brigade. The three constituent units in the new brigade were all British infantry battalions, which had been identified for conversion to armoured regiments within the Royal Armoured Corps.

These three battalions were all war-raised units, part of the group of sixty infantry battalions formed in the middle of 1940 following the withdrawal of British forces from France and the fall of that country. Four new battalions formed Number 7 Infantry Group, and they were titled as the:

- 9<sup>th</sup> Bn. The Duke of Wellington's Regiment (West Riding),
- 7<sup>th</sup> Bn. The King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry,
- 13<sup>th</sup> Bn. The Sherwood Foresters (Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire Regiment),
- 10<sup>th</sup> Bn. The York and Lancaster Regiment.

The 9<sup>th</sup> Battalion, The Duke of Wellington's Regiment (West Riding) was raised in Glasgow in the summer of 1940 under the command of Lieutenant Colonel G. F. ELLENBURGER. A few months later, the battalion moved to Essex, where it combined training with digging defences in the Dengie peninsula. This piece of land is bordered by the River Crouch to the south, the North Sea to the east, and the River Blackwater in the north. It is flat, and waterlogged, and it was not a very inspiring place for the new battalion to come together.

The 7<sup>th</sup> Bn. The King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry formed at Strensall near York on 3 July 1940 under the command of Lieutenant Colonel (Temporary) Harold REDMAN, K.O.Y.L.I., *p.s.c.*. The War Office appointed REDMAN to the command of the new battalion, but the regiment had to appoint the Adjutant and Quarter-Master. The first group of soldiers were a cadre of one-hundred and fifty men drawn from training centres and holding units, who arrived at Strensall on that date. On 13 July, the embryonic battalion moved to Millerston, Glasgow, where it received three other intakes totalling about eight-hundred men, the last group arriving on 26 July. The officers arrived directly from Officer Cadet Training Units or, from Initial Training Centres, where they had been posted to on being commissioned.

The 10<sup>th</sup> Battalion, The York and Lancaster Regiment began to form with a small cadre from the regiment coming together at Pontefract in Yorkshire on 23 June 1940. Major D. J. STEWART was appointed the first commanding officer and received promotion to the rank of Acting Lieutenant Colonel. The other two officers posted initially to the battalion were the Adjutant, Captain G. MAUNDER-JONES, and the Regimental Serjeant-Major, Mr T. HAGGERTY. Shortly afterwards, two other officers arrived in the form of Major S. BAGNALL, Burma Rifles, who became second-in-command, and Lieutenant A. E. HANDLEY from the Manchester Regiment as Quarter-Master.

One-hundred and twenty warrant officers, non-commissioned officers, and privates arrived from the Infantry Training Centre and other battalions in the regiment. They were a mixture of Regular, Territorial Army soldiers, and reservists from the Militia recalled to service. The embryonic 10<sup>th</sup> Bn. York and Lancaster Regiment moved to Paisley in Scotland on 8 July, and then between 16 and 23 July, eight-hundred and fifty new recruits arrived. Most were from the Sheffield area and comprised older men in their mid-twenties to early-thirties from trades and professions in South Yorkshire.

On 10 October 1940, the 7<sup>th</sup> Infantry Group was redesignated as the 207<sup>th</sup> Independent Infantry Brigade (Home). Brigadier (Acting) Angus Lyell COLLIER, M.C. *p.s.c.* commanded the infantry group (and then the brigade) with effect from 21 September 1940. Born on 10 November 1893, COLLIER enlisted in the British Army in August 1914 at the outbreak of the Great War. Being identified as having potential to be an officer, he was sent to an Officer Cadet Training Unit, from where he commissioned in the 3<sup>rd</sup> Bn. The Cameron Highlanders, in the Special Reserve of Officers, with effect from 10 October 1914. COLLIER served throughout the Great War in France and Belgium until November 1915, when his battalion moved to Salonika. Apart from the 1914 – 15 Star, British War Medal and Victory Medal, he received the Military Cross for gallantry, and the Order of the White Eagle with Swords 5<sup>th</sup> Class from the Serbian government. In August 1917, COLLIER was granted a permanent commission in the Queen's Own Cameron Highlanders, and he finished the war as Brigade Major of the 81<sup>st</sup> Infantry Brigade in Salonika, holding the rank of Temporary Major.

Between the wars, COLLIER attended the Staff College and, in consequence, held two separate staff posts for a total of four years. In 1936, COLLIER was appointed an Assistant Military Secretary at the War Office, before moving to Scottish Command in July 1938, as the General Staff Officer (1<sup>st</sup> Grade) in the rank of Brevet Colonel. The War Office appointed COLLIER as the Group Commander of the 7<sup>th</sup> Infantry Group on 21 September 1940, which became the 207<sup>th</sup> Independent Infantry Brigade with effect from 10 October 1940. Major C. J. DEEDES, K.O.Y.L.I. was appointed Brigade Major of the new brigade. Brigadier COLLIER received orders to move the brigade from Paisley to southern Essex, which took place in early November 1940. The brigade was allocated a section of the coast to guard against invasion. Lieutenant Colonel REDMAN based the headquarters of the 7<sup>th</sup> K.O.Y.L.I. in the town of Southminster, with the companies dispersed along the coast between the River Blackwater and River Crouch. At the end of January 1941, Lieutenant Colonel REDMAN was promoted to the command of the 151<sup>st</sup> Infantry Brigade, so Lieutenant Colonel V. H. WELLS-COLE was posted to the battalion to assume command. On 1 April, the 7<sup>th</sup> Bn. K.O.Y.L.I. exchanged locations with the 9<sup>th</sup> Bn. The Duke of Wellington's Regiment, so moved to Southend.

The 10<sup>th</sup> Bn. York and Lancaster Regiment occupied a sector near Southend-on-Sea, and it was here the brigade suffered its first casualties. Twenty-three-year-old 137287 Second Lieutenant James Evelyn PARKER and his platoon were housed in a billet near Southend, when overnight 10 – 11 May 1940, bombs from a German aircraft were dropped onto searchlight and anti-aircraft defences nearby. A stick of four bombs landed on the billet killing PARKER and nine of his platoon. Nine others were dug out of the rubble and survived. PARKER was buried in the churchyard of St. Andrew's Church in Backwell, Somerset.

## Conversion to Armoured Role and India Bound

The brigade managed to undertake some concentrated formation training at Thorndon Park at Brentwood in June 1941, but on 20 July, the War Office notified the brigade commander that the four battalions under command were to be converted into armoured regiments. In addition, the four battalions were to be posted overseas to India, although the brigade headquarters was to remain in the United Kingdom. In June 1941, Lieutenant Colonel F. P. A. WOODS assumed command of the 9<sup>th</sup> Bn. The Duke of Wellington's Regiment in lieu of Lieutenant Colonel ELLENBURGER. Likewise, Lieutenant Colonel D. J. STEWART assumed command of the 10<sup>th</sup> Bn. The York and Lancaster Regiment in this period. The reorganisation and preparations for embarkation took place at Cheltenham, with some officers and non-commissioned officers sent away on conversion courses. Other officers and non-commissioned officers from the Royal Tank Regiment joined each of the three battalions to assist with their conversion to an armoured role. The establishment of an armoured regiment was smaller than that of an infantry battalion, so about three-hundred officers and men from each of the battalions were posted a holding unit for drafting to other battalions in due course.

The 9<sup>th</sup> Bn. The Duke of Wellington's Regiment embarked at Liverpool on 26 August, as did the 10<sup>th</sup> Bn. The York and Lancaster Regiment; with the 7<sup>th</sup> Bn. K.O.Y.L.I. embarking the next day.<sup>1</sup> The three battalions sailed on 27 August, in a convoy travelling via Freetown and South Africa to Bombay, the journey taking eight weeks to complete. Upon their arrival in India on 24 October 1941, the battalions moved to Poona to come under command of the Heavy Armoured Brigade. The 9<sup>th</sup> Bn. The Duke of Wellington's Regiment became the 146<sup>th</sup> Regiment, Royal Armoured Corps on 22 October 1941. The 7<sup>th</sup> Bn. K.O.Y.L.I. formally became the 149<sup>th</sup> Regiment, Royal Armoured Corps with effect from 22 November 1941. On the same day, the 10<sup>th</sup> Bn. The York and Lancaster Regiment became the 150<sup>th</sup> Regiment, Royal Armoured Corps. On 31 October 1941, the Heavy Armoured Brigade was redesignated as the 50<sup>th</sup> Indian Tank Brigade.

The brigade commenced training in its new role, which took about eight months to achieve. The brigade steadily took ownership of Valentine tanks. The 146<sup>th</sup> Regiment received its first three Valentine tanks in November 1941. These were British built, infantry tanks, that weighed seventeen tons, and they were 17' 9" in length, 8' 7½" in width, and 7' 5½" in height. Each tank had a crew of three, and it was armed with a Two-pounder gun and one 7.92 mm Besa machine gun. One of the drawbacks of the tank was its top speed was only 15 m.p.h. In January 1942, the officers and non-commissioned officers who had been on conversion courses in the U.K. returned to their regiments, and the training grew in intensity.

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<sup>1</sup> The History of the 9<sup>th</sup> Bn. The Duke of Wellington's Regiment shows that it embarked on 28 August.



*Above – A Valentine tank*

*Author's Collection*

On 10 April 1942, the 149<sup>th</sup> Regiment moved from Poona to join the rest of the brigade at Dhond, in a hutted camp. In May 1942, the brigade concentrated at Ahmednagar, drew more tanks from the Arsenal at Kirkee, and completed their first brigade-level exercise over the next twelve days. On 2 July 1942, the brigade moved to the Ranchi area to commence jungle warfare and all-arms training in preparation for operational deployment.<sup>2</sup> The brigade came under command of the XV Indian Corps, but the 150<sup>th</sup> Regiment was deployed independently from the brigade to come under command of the 19<sup>th</sup> Indian Infantry Division. The 150<sup>th</sup> Regiment was attached to the 19<sup>th</sup> Indian Infantry Division in the Madras area for nine months. It participated in Exercise 'Trump', which brought together three battalions of the York and Lancaster Regiment.

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<sup>2</sup> The 146<sup>th</sup> Regiment, R.A.C. is shown in JOSLEN as moving to Lohardaga, which is just to the west of Ranchi, while the 149<sup>th</sup> Regiment, R.A.C. is shown as being in the Ranchi area.



## The Tragedy of Donbaik

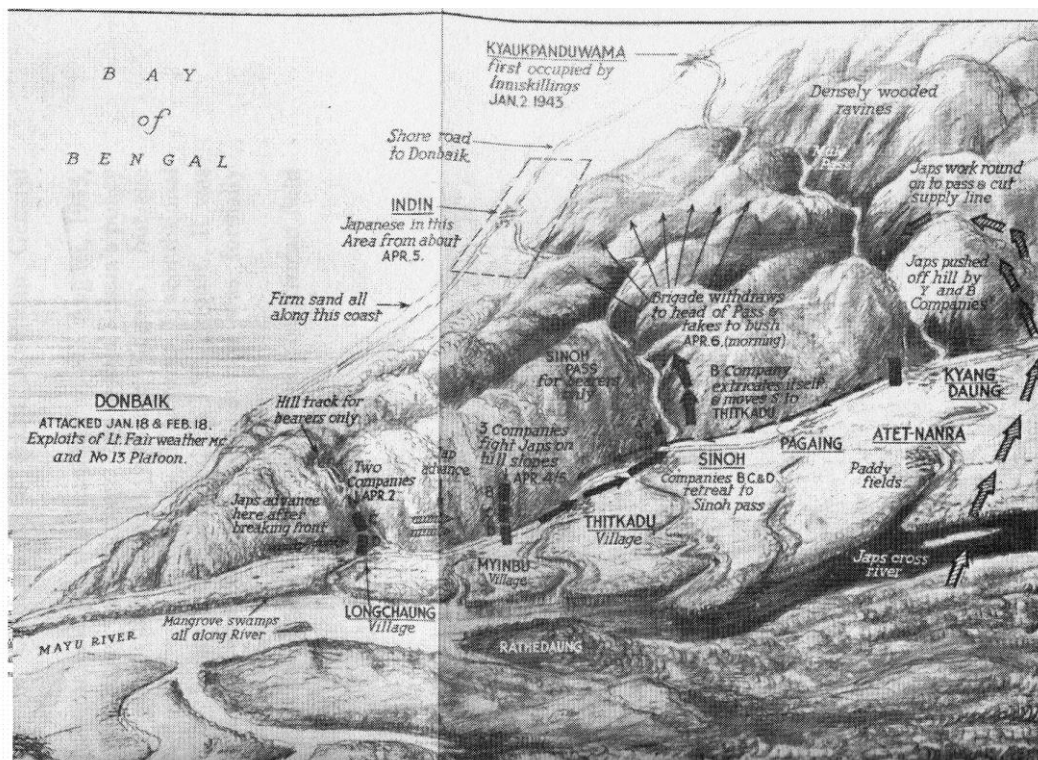
At the beginning of 1943, 'C' Squadron from the 146<sup>th</sup> Regiment were secretly warned for active service in the Arakan in support of the 14<sup>th</sup> Indian Division. A troop from 'A' Squadron was attached to 'C' Squadron to strengthen the detachment sent to the Arakan. Captain de COSTA commanded a detachment of two troops that were sent to Donbaik on 31 January 1943. Lieutenant J. CAREY and twenty-one-year-old 180196 Lieutenant Philip Henry Trelawny THORNTON commanded the two troops, the latter only just released from hospital.

Captain de COSTA decided that the general plan was to overrun the enemy positions, with infantry support provided by the 17<sup>th</sup> Dogra Regiment. The three officers completed a reconnaissance by 23.00 hours, finding that there was a chaung in front of the enemy's positions. In order to complete this reconnaissance, the three officers had to walk seventeen miles, in the sticky heat, through difficult terrain. They agreed to overrun the Japanese positions, then turn right and parallel to the Japanese line to the beach, and then return to their original form-up point. Lieutenant THORNTON and his No. 2 Troop of three tanks agreed to lead the assault, followed by No. 1 Troop under Lieutenant CAREY. Captain de COSTA with two tanks would cruise about and offer support as and when required.

At about 11.00 hours on 1 February 1943, Lieutenant THORNTON led off and the tanks made their way into the Japanese positions, where they fired their Besa machine guns into the bunkers. They reached the chaung in the middle of the Japanese positions and turned right. Then it all went wrong. The leading tank crashed into a ditch, followed by the second tank, and then the third. The tanks disappeared into the smoke and haze of the battle.

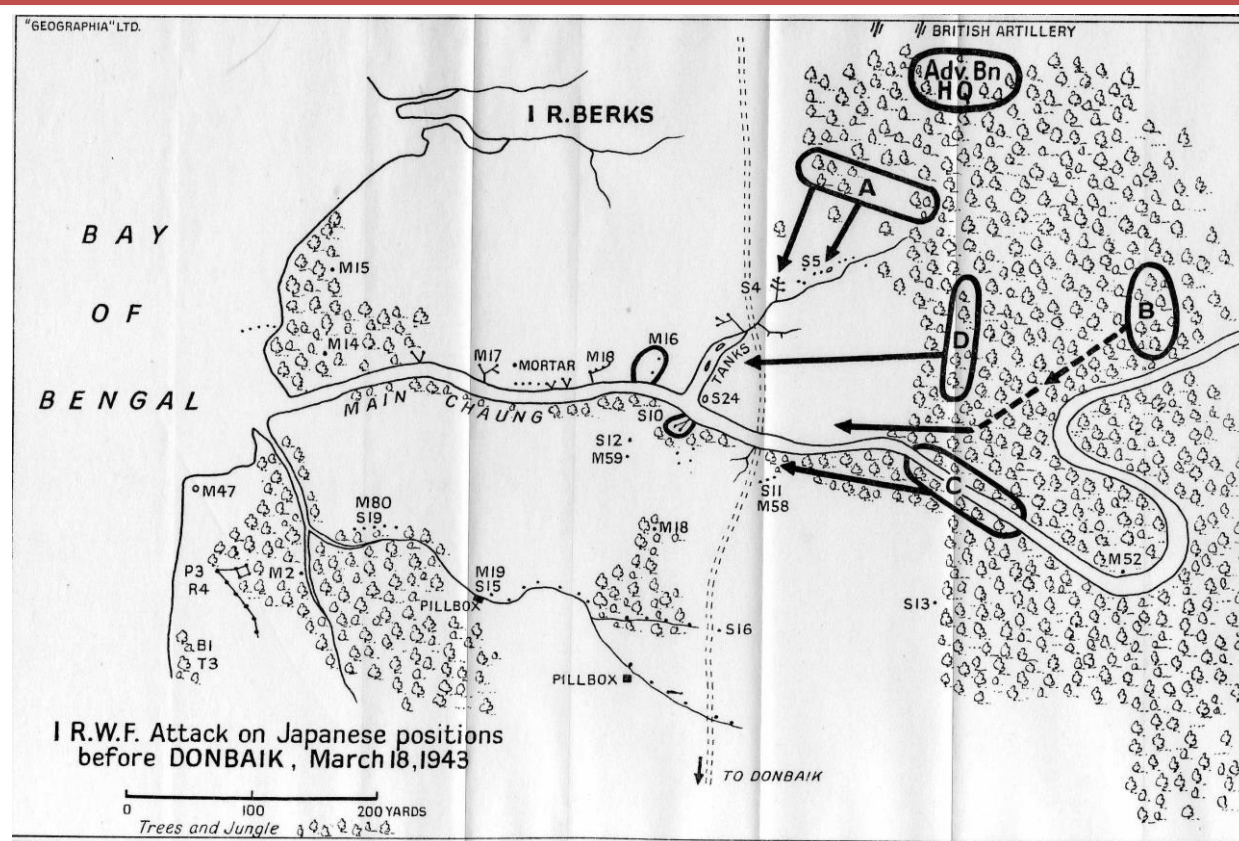
Lieutenant CAREY's troop were close by, but unable to help. CAREY's tank then crashed into another ditch, and at the same time a Japanese anti-tank round hit it, which penetrated the tank through the turret ring and killed the gunner, 46221502 Trooper Ronald George BIRD, aged twenty-eight years. Trooper BIRD, who came from Upper Norwood in Surrey, is buried in Grave 3.J.8. of the Taukkyan War Cemetery.





Above – A profile map of the Mayu peninsula, taken from the history of the Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers.  
Below – A map of the Donbaik area, showing the approach made the tanks of 146<sup>th</sup> Regiment, R.A.C., taken from the history of the Royal Welch Fusiliers.

Author's Collection



The driver of CAREY's tank managed to reverse out of the ditch, and although CAREY was wounded, he led his troop down to the beach and away from the enemy lines. One tank broke down, but De COSTA took his tank, shackled up to the disabled tank and towed it to safety. De COSTA was concerned for the welfare of his lost troop, and at about 12.15 hours, he heard Besa fire from the area. That afternoon, he took three tanks and advanced down the beach to try to reach THORNTON, but as they turned inland, the Japanese launched a fierce bombardment onto the tanks, leaving De COSTA with no alternative but to withdraw. The infantry were unable to reach the stranded tanks either. The fighting at Donbaik continued for a few more weeks, but the British were unable to make any progress whatsoever against the determined and entrenched Japanese defenders.

The nine men of No. 2 Troop were not heard or seen again. In 1945, Lieutenant CAREY went back to Donbaik with a party from a Graves Registration Unit. The three tanks were still where they had come to rest. The second tank was partly on top of the first, with the third nearby. The tanks were missing their wireless sets, but they were otherwise intact; there was even a shell in the breach of one gun. Human remains lay near the tanks, but only five could be identified. All the human remains were collected and are now buried in Collective Grave 12.B.1-9 at the Taukkyan War Cemetery.

The nine men were:

1. 180196 Lieutenant Philip Henry Trelawny THORNTON
2. 4619202 Serjeant Albert Christopher DENNIS, aged twenty-six years
3. 4625780 Corporal David Edward WILLIE, aged twenty-five years, a married man from Felling, County Durham
4. 4621819 Trooper Alwyn James CARPENTER, aged twenty-eight years
5. 4623852 Trooper Eric BEDFORD, aged twenty-two years from East Ardsley, Yorkshire
6. 4623972 Trooper Thomas LISTER, aged thirty-two years from Hebden Bridge in Yorkshire
7. 4625589 Trooper James William HEYWORTH, aged thirty-two years
8. 4625611 Trooper George INMAN, aged thirty-one years
9. 4625665 Trooper Wilfred Crawford NICHOLSON, aged twenty-three years, from Heslington, York.

## Service in India

In February 1943, Lieutenant Colonel (Temporary) Frederick Walsingham Brodie GOOD replaced Lieutenant Colonel WELLS-COLE in command of the 149<sup>th</sup> Regiment. GOOD was born on 16 February 1904, the eldest son of Henry Brodie and Evelyn Frances GOOD. 'Walsie', as he was known, had a younger brother, Ian Henry GOOD born in 1905, and a sister, Elizabeth Evelyn Balille GOOD born in 1914. The family lived at Balbriggan outside Dublin in Ireland, from where Walsie gained entry to the Royal Military College, Sandhurst as a Gentleman Cadet.

Having completed his training successfully, he commissioned in the Royal Tank Corps on 31 January 1924 in the rank of Second Lieutenant. He was posted to the Royal Tank Corps Depot at Farnborough in Hampshire, where he remained for two years; being promoted to the rank of Lieutenant on 31 January 1926. In 1926, Walsie was posted to India to join the 11<sup>th</sup> Light Tank Company based there and served for five years in India. During his stay in India, Walsie was granted leave to return to the U.K. where he married Isobel Mary Gladys HUNTER on 1 November 1926 in Kensington, London. The following year, Walsie returned to the U.K. to be stationed again at the Depot at Farnborough, and he moved into a house called Normanton, in Southampton Street, Farnborough. Whilst living here, GOOD and his wife had a daughter and in 1931, a son christened Harry Douglas Brodie GOOD.

GOOD's next posting was to be the Adjutant of the 23<sup>rd</sup> (London) Armoured Car Company (Sharpshooters), which he commenced on 26 November 1933. He was promoted to the rank of Temporary Captain, but still received the pay and allowances of the rank of Lieutenant. The company was based at 90, Henry Street, St. John's Wood in London N.W.8, so GOOD moved to live in Hampstead, London. After the usual four years duration in this post, GOOD left the role of Adjutant on 25 November 1937 to return to Farnborough. He now held the rank of Captain, having been promoted on 4 March 1936.



On 29 September 1938, GOOD was posted to Egypt to assume the appointment as General Staff Officer, 3<sup>rd</sup> Grade (G.S.O. 3), with the new Mobile Division (Egypt), which in February 1940 became the 7<sup>th</sup> Armoured Division.

GOOD left the role as G.S.O. 3 of the Mobile Division (Egypt) on 31 July 1939 to become a Staff Captain with the same formation with effect from the next day. GOOD left the staff role on 14 February 1940, and two days later was promoted to the rank of Acting Major. He reverted to the rank of Captain on 15 March 1940, but he regained his rank of Acting Major on 19 November in that year.



Promotion to the substantive rank of Major took effect on 31 January 1941. Later that year, GOOD received a posting to India where he joined the 26<sup>th</sup> Hussars as the second-in-command of the regiment. On 8 August 1942, GOOD gained promotion to the rank of Acting Lieutenant Colonel, and assumed an appointment as the commanding officer of the Royal Armoured Corps Depot in India. GOOD assumed command of the 149<sup>th</sup> Regiment three months later (in February 1943), and he was promoted to the rank of Temporary Lieutenant Colonel on 8 November 1942. He was now thirty-nine years of age.

In May 1943, the brigade and its two constituent units moved back to Poona, being based at Nira Camp. Meanwhile, on 16 April 1943, the 150<sup>th</sup> Regiment had moved to Ahmednagar to join the 2<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Division. It came under command of the 50<sup>th</sup> Indian Tank Brigade on 30 April 1944. By this date, Lieutenant Colonel STEWART had left command of the 150<sup>th</sup> Regiment to be replaced by Lieutenant Colonel E. H. G. MOON of the 15<sup>th</sup>/19<sup>th</sup> Hussars.

During this period, the three regiments of the 50<sup>th</sup> Indian Tank Brigade began re-equipping with the Lee tank as they became available.<sup>3</sup> These American tanks were very different to the Valentine tanks that they replaced. Each was 18' 6" in length, 8' 10" wide and 9' 4" in height. They weighed twenty-seven tons, which some considered too heavy for use in the terrain on the Burma – India border. The crew of the Lee was six, double the number required to crew a Valentine, meaning that additional personnel had to be drafted into the regiments. The great advantage of the Lee was its armament, which consisted of a 75 mm gun (mounted in a side sponson) and a 37 mm gun in the turret. In addition, the tank had two 7.62 mm Browning machine guns.

In May 1943, the 'B' Special Service Squadron, Royal Armoured Corps were absorbed into the 146<sup>th</sup> Regiment, and the regiment was attached to the 36<sup>th</sup> Indian Infantry Division. 'A' Squadron was allocated to the 72<sup>nd</sup> Indian Brigade, with 'B' Squadron being allocated to the 29<sup>th</sup> Indian Brigade. 'C' Squadron became the divisional reserve. The regiment undertook amphibious training with the 36<sup>th</sup> Indian Division, which at the time was designated for amphibious operations along the coast of Burma and elsewhere in the theatre. During this training, two men drowned on 26 May 1943 while bathing, in spite of attempts by naval personnel to rescue them. The two men were: 4624050 Trooper Edward PARKER, a thirty-years old married man from Selby, Yorkshire, and 4625464 Trooper William BONNER, aged thirty-two years. BONNER is buried in Grave 9.K.4., and PARKER in Grave 9.K.9., of the Kirkee War Cemetery in India.

On 16 June 1943, Lieutenant Colonel Derek Shuldham SCHREIBER, M.V.O., Lieutenant Reserve of Officers, was promoted to the rank of Acting Brigadier to assume command of the 50<sup>th</sup> Indian Tank Brigade. Born on 7 May 1904, SCHREIBER had been educated at Harrow School and the Royal Military College, Sandhurst. Too young to see service in the Great War, SCHREIBER commissioned in the 11<sup>th</sup> Hussars (Prince Albert's Own) on 30 January 1924 in the rank of Second Lieutenant.

<sup>3</sup> The Medium M3 tanks were called Lee tanks, after General Robert E. LEE, with the Grant being a version with a modified turret for British use only. Some sources use the term Grant, and others Lee/Grant, with the terms being interchangeable.

He was the Adjutant of the regiment from 1930 until 1933, and in 1934 he became Equerry to H.R.H. The Duke of Gloucester for about a year. For his service to the Duke during his tour of Australia, SCHREIBER was made a Member of the Royal Victorian Order (M.V.O.). SCHREIBER retired from the British Army in the rank of Lieutenant receiving a gratuity. He became a stockbroker in the City of London, joining the Territorial Army on 29 July 1939, and being granted the rank of Major. He was mobilised on 24 August 1939, and one month later, he resigned his commission in the Territorial Army on being employed as a Lieutenant in the Regular Army Reserve of Officers.

SCHREIBER attended the first wartime course at the Staff College, after which he was posted to the 2<sup>nd</sup> Armoured Division. In 1940, SCHREIBER was posted to the 1<sup>st</sup> Armoured Division, but then became the Military Assistant to Major General, H.R.H. The Duke of Gloucester in his role as Chief Liaison Officer for the British Expeditionary Force. After the fall of France, SCHREIBER was appointed to the Inspectorate of the Royal Armoured Corps for just short of twelve months. On 4 July 1941, SCHREIBER received promotion to the rank of Acting Lieutenant Colonel on his appointment to the Guards Armoured Division, where he was the General Staff Officer 1<sup>st</sup> Grade for the formation. He came to India in September 1942 to assume command of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Carabiniers (Prince of Wales's Dragoon Guards). From command of that regiment, SCHREIBER received promotion to the rank of Acting Brigadier on 16 June 1943 to assume command of this brigade on the same date.

The 146<sup>th</sup> Regiment continued its amphibious training under command of the 36<sup>th</sup> Indian Division. 'B' Squadron received some Duplex Drive (D.D.) equipped Valentine tanks, which were designed to be used amphibiously, with a canvas screen erected around the tank to make it float, and two propellers (the Duplex Drive) to power it through the water. These tanks were on the Secret List, so the training had to be conducted in isolated areas, which just happened to be beautiful, with palm trees and golden sands.

The original plan called for the 36<sup>th</sup> Indian Infantry Division to launch an amphibious assault on Akyab once the Maungdaw to Buthidaung road had been captured and secured. The division was to travel over to the Kalapanzin River and launch the assault from the Mayu River. The 146<sup>th</sup> Regiment was still attached to this division from the 50<sup>th</sup> Indian Tank Brigade, and it commenced preparations for this action. The first Sherman tanks arrived in the theatre in January 1944. These American tanks were the most advanced tanks available to South East Asia Command, which had a lower priority for tanks than North-West Europe and Italy.

The Sherman was an improvement of the Lee tank. It was 19' 7" in length, 8' 9" wide, and four inches lower than a Lee tank at 9' in height. It weighed slightly more at thirty tons (as opposed to twenty-seven) and had a very similar top speed of twenty-five miles per hour. The main improvement lay in the armament, a 75 mm gun in a fully traversable turret. It had one 7.62 mm Browning machine gun mounted in the turret, with another at the front of the tank. The first Shermans to arrive were allocated to 'C' Squadron, 149<sup>th</sup> Regiment, R.A.C., at this time still under command of this brigade.

It was decided to deploy Sherman tanks on the operation to reoccupy Akyab, so 'C' Squadron, 149<sup>th</sup> Regiment was attached to the 36<sup>th</sup> Indian Infantry Division, plus 'B' Squadron of the 146<sup>th</sup> Regiment. The detachment of these two squadrons, plus a small headquarters contingent, moved to Calcutta. Then the Japanese launched Operation Ha-Go, their offensive in the Arakan. This made the operation to capture Akyab redundant, so the division was placed on standby to move to the Arakan in support of XV Indian Corps defences. During the Battle of the Admin Box from 5 until 23 February 1944, the effectiveness of the Lee tanks was shown in a positive light, as the 25<sup>th</sup> Dragoons used theirs to great effect in the defence of the Admin Box under command of the 7<sup>th</sup> Indian Infantry Division. Because of this, the decision was taken to send 'B' Squadron, 146<sup>th</sup> Regiment back to join the rest of the regiment and brigade stationed in and around Poona.

In March 1944, ill-health meant that Brigadier SCHREIBER had to relinquish command of the brigade, following which he was repatriated back the United Kingdom to recover fully. G.H.Q. India Command appointed Brigadier (Temporary) George Henry Norris TODD, M.C. as the replacement brigade commander with effect from 16 March 1944. Born on 4 July 1897, TODD had commissioned in the Royal Artillery on 23 November 1916. He served in France and Belgium during the Great War, being awarded the British War Medal, Victory Medal and for gallantry the Military Cross.

TODD transferred to the 9<sup>th</sup> Queen's Royal Lancers on 19 June 1929 in the rank of Lieutenant and stayed with them for seven years. On 1 October 1936, TODD transferred to The Royal Scots Greys (2<sup>nd</sup> Dragoons) and was promoted to the rank of Major. The outbreak of the Second World War found the Royal Scots Greys as one of the few remaining horsed regiments in the British Army. TODD assumed command of his regiment on 4 September 1939 with his promotion to Acting Lieutenant Colonel. The regiment became part of the 1<sup>st</sup> Cavalry Division, which travelled through France to Marseilles, where it embarked for Palestine.

Lacking armoured experience, TODD was posted as second-in-command of the 1<sup>st</sup> Armoured Brigade in Egypt with effect from 18 February 1942, with promotion to the rank of Acting Colonel on 4 April 1942. Promoted to the rank of Acting Brigadier, TODD assumed command of the brigade on 25 June 1942. In November 1942, he relinquished command of the brigade and was posted to India. On his arrival, he assumed the role as Commandant of the Fighting Vehicles School in India on 14 February 1943, in the rank of Acting Brigadier. Now holding the substantive rank of Colonel, TODD was posted from the Fighting Vehicles School on 14 March to assume command of the 50<sup>th</sup> Indian Tank Brigade two days later.

## Kohima

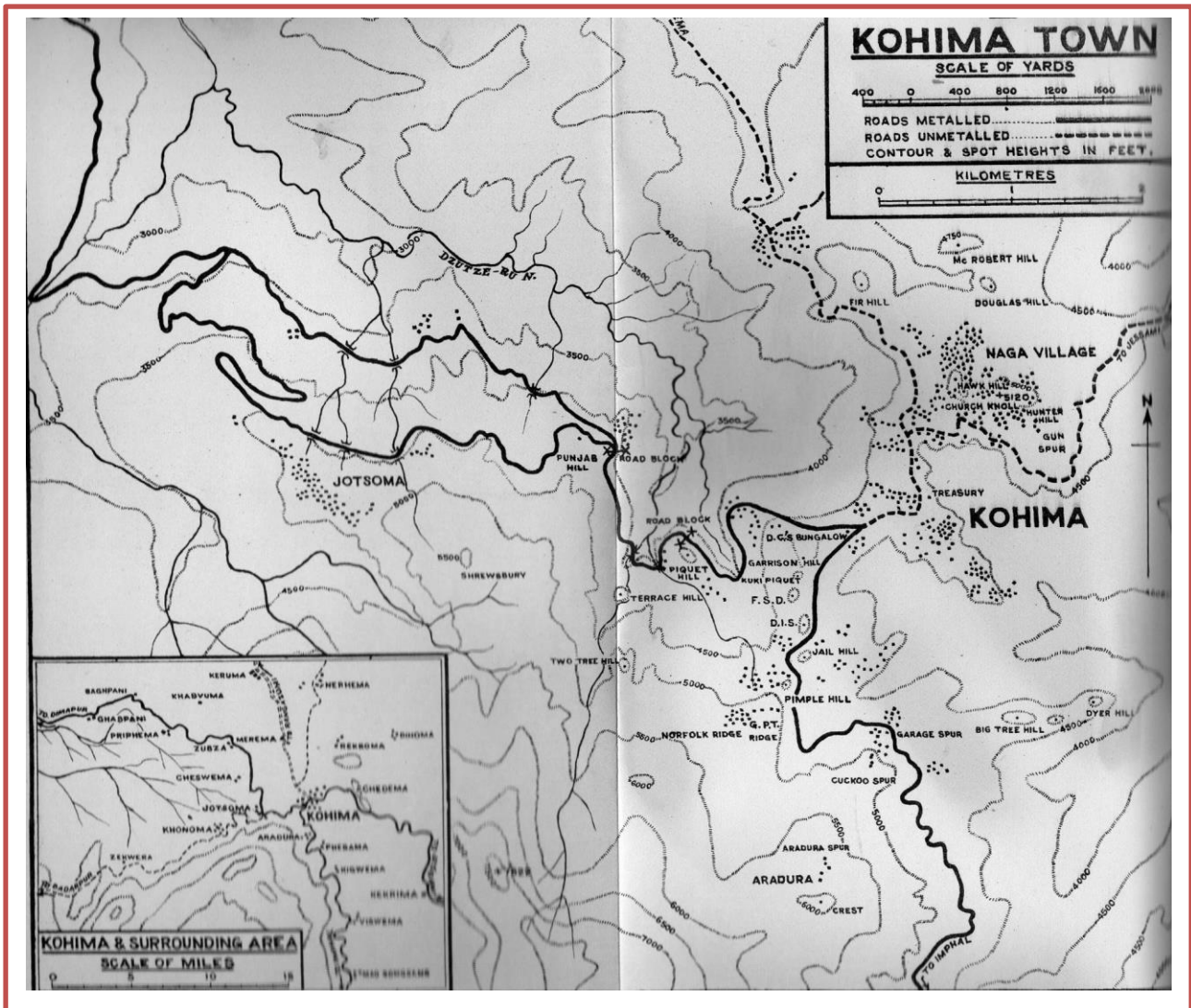
When the Japanese commenced their advance towards Imphal and Kohima, the 254<sup>th</sup> Indian Armoured Brigade was located at Imphal. The 50<sup>th</sup> Indian Tank Brigade was still stationed in and around Ahmednagar. The regiments were still receiving new tanks, with Lee tanks replacing Valentines and some Shermans now arriving in the theatre. The 146<sup>th</sup> Regiment was equipped with Lee tanks, and two squadrons of the 149<sup>th</sup> Regiment had Lees, with the third (now attached to the 36<sup>th</sup> Indian Infantry Division) equipped with Shermans. The 150<sup>th</sup> Regiment was still changing over from Valentines to Lees, with only 'C' Squadron fully ready for operational deployment with Lees.

On 30 March 1944, the 150<sup>th</sup> Regiment received urgent orders to send the tank crews from 'C' Squadron by air to Imphal, whilst the tanks and supporting personnel travelled by road from Dimapur through Kohima to Imphal. Captain A. W. BOYCE left with six officers and one-hundred and twenty other ranks by air from Poona to Imphal at 09.00 hours on 31 March. On their arrival, they took over some spare tanks of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Carabiniers at Imphal and fought as the fourth, 'YL' Squadron, of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Carabiniers through the siege of Imphal. The road party left for Imphal on 4 April under command of the squadron commanding officer, Major A. H. F. NEWMAN. In this group were the tanks, maintenance, and administrative personnel of the squadron, plus spare crew who could not be flown to Imphal. A party under the command of Lieutenant R. H. K. WAIT accompanied the tanks on their journey by rail to Dimapur, where they arrived on 11 April. By the time of their arrival, the Japanese had surrounded Kohima and cut the road to Imphal. This meant that most of the personnel of 'C' Squadron were at Imphal, yet their tanks and equipment were at Dimapur, and unable to reach them. The 2<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Division was arriving under orders from XXXIII Indian Corps to advance to Kohima and reopen the road.

Lieutenant WAIT improvised a set of crews for five of the Lee tanks, with personnel from 'A' and 'B' Squadrons who had formed the Ferry Party, fitters from the Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers, gunners from the Royal Artillery, and some divisional signallers. Some of the drivers had not driven the Lee tank before, so some hurried training in the field took place. The troop of Lee tanks under Lieutenant WAIT received orders from Major General GROVER, the General Officer Commanding the 2<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Division, to advance along the road from Dimapur to Kohima in support of the 6<sup>th</sup> Infantry Brigade. The five tanks from 150<sup>th</sup> Regiment drove up the road in support of the 6<sup>th</sup> Brigade to assist in clearing the road to Jotsoma (where the 161<sup>st</sup> Indian Infantry Brigade had formed a 'Box') and then to Kohima, where the garrison was surrounded and besieged.

Their first encounter with Japanese troops occurred in the early hours of 14 April when harbouring overnight. Japanese troops attacked them twice during the night in an attempt to get to the tanks and destroy those using magnetic mines. Later that same day, the troop from 150<sup>th</sup> Regiment provided fire support for the Cameron Highlanders in an attack on a location called 'Cameron Picket'. The Japanese had established several roadblocks along the road from Zubza onwards.





On or about 17 April, the five tanks travelled in column up the road past a location called Lancaster Gate, where the 2<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Division had a traffic control post manned by members of the Corps of Military Police. The tanks were moving into danger, so a military policeman jumped on his motorcycle, managed to get in front of them and turn them around. The tanks had to turn on their own axis, as space was limited, and at this stage, the Japanese opened up with artillery and machine gun fire. Fortunately, they all managed to turn around, and with the military policeman made it back to Lancaster Gate.

The 149<sup>th</sup> Regiment was ordered forward to support XXXIII Indian Corps and to proceed immediately for Dimapur. The regiment was now equipped with American Lee tanks. These had to be transported up to Dimapur, from where they could move forward towards Kohima along the one road leading to that town. Lieutenant General STOPFORD, the General Officer Commanding XXXIII Indian Corps, directed that the tanks were to be used for support of the infantry by destroying bunkers and other strongpoints. In addition, they could be used to dominate high features, deny high ground to the enemy, and carry stores, wounded soldiers and water to isolated positions.

The Japanese appreciated that the tanks were largely confined to the few roads in the area, so built formidable roadblocks, and mined the approaches. These roadblocks were often covered by machine gun positions, mortars, and artillery.

Major Ezra RHODES commanded 'B' Squadron of the 149<sup>th</sup> Regiment, R.A.C. during the battle for Kohima. Born in Sheffield on 14 December 1912, in early 1940 he attended an Officer Cadet Training Unit, from where he was granted an Emergency Commission in the King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry (Army number 138916) with effect from 29 June 1940 in the rank of Second Lieutenant. With the expansion of the British Army, RHODES was soon promoted to the rank of Acting Captain in November 1940, and Temporary Captain in February 1941. When his battalion transferred to the Royal Armoured Corps, RHODES did likewise with effect from 22 October 1941 in the rank of Lieutenant. He was promoted within the regiment to the rank of Acting Major on 9 March 1943 and assumed command of 'B' Squadron.

Major RHODES ordered two of his troops forward on 18 April towards Kohima. The three tanks of 'A' Troop set off first to clear the road. An account of the events from a Japanese officer in the 58<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division states:

*On 19 April, enemy tanks came attacking us for the first time. Our anti-tank gun shells hit the leading tank, but without any damage. Our close attack teams threw fire bombs (glass bottles filled with petrol) onto the tank from the top of the steep slope, and as the tank faltered, a soldier dashed up with an explosive and cut the caterpillar tread, but he did not come back. All the tank crew, who bailed out or remained to fire the machine gun, were shot, and the two tanks which followed turned back.*

'B' Troop followed on 19 April, with a minesweeping tank leading the three Lee tanks. The first Lee tank tried to manoeuvre around the now burning minesweeper tank, but as it did so, it was hit, and its right track blown off. The tank swung to the right into the bank on the roadside. Both guns on the tank were now out of action, so the crew bailed out under heavy Japanese rifle and machine gun fire. They managed to make it back, as did the crews of the other two tanks which were put out of action by mines or anti-tank rounds.

This attack of 19 April is described by one of the tank drivers, J. H. ADDERLEY, who states:

*We were about one and half miles from the front line, out of the Japanese line of fire. We could hear the battle raging. The previous day, our CO Major RHODES had decided to send three tanks of 'A' Troop into action towards Kohima. I was sitting on top of my tank when those tanks started to pass us. In the front was a good pal of mine from Barnsley. He gave me the thumbs up and I did the same back to him. We never saw them again. By that afternoon, we knew that they were all dead or prisoners. Fifteen men in three tanks, it was a shock to us all.*

*Today it was the turn of 'B' Troop, the troop that I was in. I was inside the leading one of the three tanks, driving it. In front of me there was another tank converted into a minesweeper with three men inside. All of a sudden, there was a crash and flames. The minesweeper had been blown to bits, and the three men killed outright.*

*I moved my tank to get away from the burning minesweeper, but had got no more than six or seven feet when there was another terrific crash and my tank swung round into the mountain side. The right hand track had been blown off, and we were in one hell of a mess. I called up to the tank commander. The radio operator replied saying that the commander had panicked and not fit to give orders. I was the oldest in the crew by a good five years, and so it was up to me.*

*I told the radio operator to try and get through to Headquarters and inform them that we had a track off, and the tank was in a position where we could use neither the 75 mm or 35 mm guns. He was calm and got through within sixty seconds. The reply was that the other two tanks following were also out of action with tracks off, and were jamming up the road. They were trying to get two rescue tanks up to them, but that we would have to bail out and make a run for it.*

Trooper ADDERLEY and his crew managed to get out from the side door of the tank, and they made it back safely to British lines. In fact, the 149<sup>th</sup> Regiment did not suffer any deaths on either the 18 or 19 April, and the account by the Japanese officer appears to relate to the 18 April, and not 19 April. The only member of 150<sup>th</sup> Regiment to die on these days was twenty-nine-year-old 4757012 Corporal Albert Edward LAURENCE, who died on 19 April 1944. He was a married man from Carshalton, Surrey, and is buried in Grave 7. L. 18., of the Imphal War Cemetery.

At 09.00 hours on 20 April 1944, 'A' Squadron under the command of Major MATTHEWS set off carrying 'D' Company, Durham Light Infantry, to support an attempt by the 1<sup>st</sup> Bn. The Royal Berkshire Regiment to reach the besieged troops now contained within a tight perimeter on Garrison Hill. The tanks supported the Berkshires as they made their way via Hospital Spur to reach the British and Indian troops on Garrison Hill. This allowed the exhausted survivors of the siege to be evacuated from the hill and conveyed by lorries back to Dimapur.

As the battle to retake Kohima grew in intensity, with the three brigades of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Division fighting hard to expel the Japanese, who were now dug in around the area, the men of the 149<sup>th</sup> Regiment continued to support the infantry as best as they could allowing for the terrain. The battlefield comprised several sectors, one of which was balled the Bungalow Sector after the former District Commissioner's bungalow that had stood on this spur. This sector included the tennis courts, across which British and Japanese troops exchanged fire. An attempt was made by men of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Bn. The Dorsetshire Regiment to take the tennis courts on 27 April, but they were beaten back. On the same day, a troop from the 149<sup>th</sup> Regiment managed to make their way to Naga Village area, where the Cameron Highlanders had captured the hill.

The following day, 28 April, was designated for another attack on the Bungalow Sector, but the commanding officer of the Dorsets, Lieutenant Colonel WHITE realised he needed tank support to clear the sector of the Japanese bunkers. An assessment by officers from the 149<sup>th</sup> Regiment was that it appeared unlikely a tank could be driven up the drive of the former commissioner's bungalow, so the Commander Royal Engineers of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Division, Lieutenant Colonel John GARWOOD, agreed to use a bulldozer to make a new track up the back of the bungalow. A bulldozer came up protected by two Lee tanks, one in front and one behind, to a point from which it could start work on the new track. Aided by some sappers with picks and shovels, they constructed a rough track, albeit it was still steep in parts. The sappers attached a hawser between the bulldozer and the tank, in order to help pull it up to the top of the hill above the bungalow. The bulldozer and tank managed to reach about half-way up the slope when the Japanese began firing on the two vehicles. The tank began to manoeuvre in order to get into a position to return fire, but it crashed into the bulldozer. The bulldozer was not out of action, so the two vehicles retreated down the slope.<sup>4</sup>

The regiment suffered four fatalities that day. The most senior and eldest man to die was 4697109 Corporal George Edward James LEE, who was aged twenty-nine years. George LEE was the son of Matthew and Alice LEE of Canning Town, Essex, and was the husband of Hilda Isabella LEE of Canning Town. In addition, twenty-four-year-old 4692952 Corporal Edward WEBB from Edlington, Yorkshire, twenty-eight-year-old 4696831 Lance Corporal William DONNISON and twenty-year-old 14249808 Trooper Arthur James HILLARD from Sandy in Bedfordshire died on that day. All four are buried close together in the Kohima War Cemetery, WEBB in Grave 8.H.9., DONNISON in Grave 8.H.10., LEE in Grave 8.H.13. and HILLARD in Grave 8.H.14.

It is believed that these men died in an incident, the account of which is below:

*On the morning of 28<sup>th</sup> April 1944 we were resting in a 'box'. Because our tanks had been in action the previous day, we were cleaning weapons and equipment. My turret gunner was sitting on the ground in front of the tank checking grenades and the ammunition box with other members of tank crews. I was standing on top of the tank with the Browning machine gun, which I had dismantled prior to cleaning.*

*Suddenly there was a loud explosion, and the air was filled with dust, dirt and smoke. I leapt off the tank and dived into a gully by the roadside just as a second shell landed in the centre of the road just a few feet away. Apparently, the Japanese had fired two mortar bombs at random. The first scored a direct hit on the group in front of my tank, killing them all. The second one, landed in the middle of the road, killing and wounding several more of my Squadron as they were caught out in the open. I was lucky to escape with only a shrapnel wound in the arm and a 2 inch long slit in my black beret".*

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<sup>4</sup> This account is taken from the diary of Major General GROVER, and is the most plausible explanation for the failure to get the tank towed to the top of the slope.



In addition to Corporal LEE, Corporal WEBB, Lance Corporal DONNISON, and Trooper HILLARD, 172347 Lieutenant Stuart Senior RENTON of the Kings Own Yorkshire light Infantry also died on the same day, albeit, it cannot be confirmed that he was a member of 149<sup>th</sup> Regiment, R.A.C. at the time of his death.

On 1 May, another attempt was made to get a tank onto the bungalow sector. This time a Stuart tank from the 45<sup>th</sup> Cavalry was used but although it got to the top of the bank, it could not move any further and being exposed, it was soon hit by Japanese artillery fire and forced to withdraw. Yet another attempt was made on 3 May, this time led by Major Ezra RHODES himself. Lieutenant Jock MURRILLS from the Dorsets agreed to guide the tank. It started its climb from the bottom of the spur, slowly and carefully. But as it reached the top, its progress was halted by a fallen tree trunk. The next day, RHODES tried again to find the Japanese had dug an anti-tank ditch across the drive, however, the tank blew up the tree trunk with a shell and managed to cross the ditch. Then RHODES found he could not climb up onto the terrace, where the Japanese had sited a medium machine gun that was holding up any attack. Again, the tank had to pull back and the situation remained in stalemate.

On 5 May, RHODES led his squadron around and onto Supply Hill at Kohima. 'B' Squadron began to advance at about 08.30 hours, in a column along the Imphal road with a minesweeper tank at the front, followed by two armoured cars carrying sappers; then No. 4 Medium Troop, Squadron Headquarters, No. 1 Medium Troop, No. 3 Medium Troop with the Light Tank Troop at the rear. At about mid-day, the tank commanded by Troop Leader, Lieutenant AIKENHEAD, struck a mine and was disabled. No. 3 Troop under Lieutenant FLECK was ordered to dominate Supply Hill, but they took a wrong turning.

In the col between Jail Hill and Detail Hill, Major RHODES found one tank from No. 4 Troop, commanded by Serjeant BINNS, and another from No. 1 Troop commanded by Serjeant BREARLEY. RHODES took the above two tanks with him and went up the track onto Supply Hill. The minesweeper tank was hit and disabled at a roadblock, but Major RHODES' crew dismounted and cleared the roadblock. The three tanks continued their advance, got onto Supply Hill and engaged some Japanese bunkers. RHODES left the other two tanks on Supply Hill engaging Japanese positions, while he took his tank back down the track. RHODES collected two light tanks carrying stores for the infantry units on Supply Hill and guided them back up to the top of the hill.

The three Lee tanks continued to engage enemy bunkers until about 19.30 hours. The three tanks remained on Supply Hill the next day, engaging targets as directed by the infantry.

Later that morning (6 May), Brigadier SHAPLAND commanding the 6<sup>th</sup> Infantry Brigade asked RHODES to get a tank from Supply Hill onto Garrison Hill. He set off round the west side of Kuki Piquet but found the route inaccessible, so he tried the eastern side of the hill. They crossed over a tree obstacle and managed to inflict some casualties of the Japanese entrenched on Kuki Piquet. RHODES' tank slid off the track onto the hillside, and try as he might, RHODES' driver could not regain the road.

The Japanese realised that the tank was stuck, so started stalking it. They managed to throw a grenade inside, slightly wounding RHODES. RHODES tried once more to extricate his tank, this time by reversing, but the tracks could not grip on the slippery slope of the hill. The tank slid further down the slope and ended up crashing into a tree. RHODES decided to evacuate the tank, so covered by the other two tanks, RHODES and his crew managed to escape and to make it back to British lines.





*Previous Page – The Lee tank of Major RHODES, lying in 2015 where it had come to rest in 1944.*

*Left – The plaque explaining the events of 6 May 1944 erected by the Kohima Educational Trust.*

*Below – The right-hand side of the tank, with the displaced track and escape hatch open, photographed in 2010.*

*Taken by the Author in 2010 and 2015.*



It was on the same day, that Lieutenant Colonel GOOD came forward with Major General GROVER, G.O.C. 2<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Division, and Brigadier LOFTUS-TOTTENHAM, commanding officer 33<sup>rd</sup> Indian Infantry Brigade, to reconnoitre the landscape for future operations. On 11 May, the three battalions of the 33<sup>rd</sup> Indian Brigade commenced attacks on Jail Hill, a large feature that dominated the road towards Imphal at Kohima. GOOD ordered 'A' Squadron to support the attack on Detail Hill, assisted by the two tanks of 'B' Squadron already on Supply Hill. The tanks of 'A' Squadron had to come up the road from the Dimapur side of the town, and they met roadblocks and other obstacles en-route. Then the leading tank had a track blown off by a mine, and the second tank in trying to get past, lost a track. Attempts by sappers in armoured cars to clear the obstructions by use of grappling hooks proved unsuccessful.

The two tanks on Supply Hill received replacement crews on 10 May to allow the existing crew to rest after five days in action. Lieutenant WOOD and his crew took over one tank, with Serjeant WATERHOUSE and his crew taking over the other. Serjeant WATERHOUSE took his tank down a track to then engage Japanese positions on Supply Hill; after which he was to engage another bunker off to the left of the track. Lieutenant WOOD was to undertake a similar action, and then engage targets to the right of the road. The tanks set off at 04.40 hours and moved through the wooded area. After travelling about one-hundred and twenty yards, WATERHOUSE's tank hit an object on the side of the track, putting his traversing gear on the turret out of action.



Unable to fire in support of the infantry, and with his wireless now useless, Serjeant WATERHOUSE and his crew were about to abandon the tank and make their way back to their regimental lines, when a runner came to his tank. Lieutenant WOOD's tank had become stuck in a ditch, so WATERHOUSE was asked to attempt to tow it back onto the track. 299831 Twenty-nine-year-old Lieutenant Peter Mattison WOOD was stood outside his tank as WATERHOUSE manoeuvred into position. As WATERHOUSE's tank got into position for the tow, it set off a mine that blew a track off the tank and severely wounded Lieutenant WOOD.

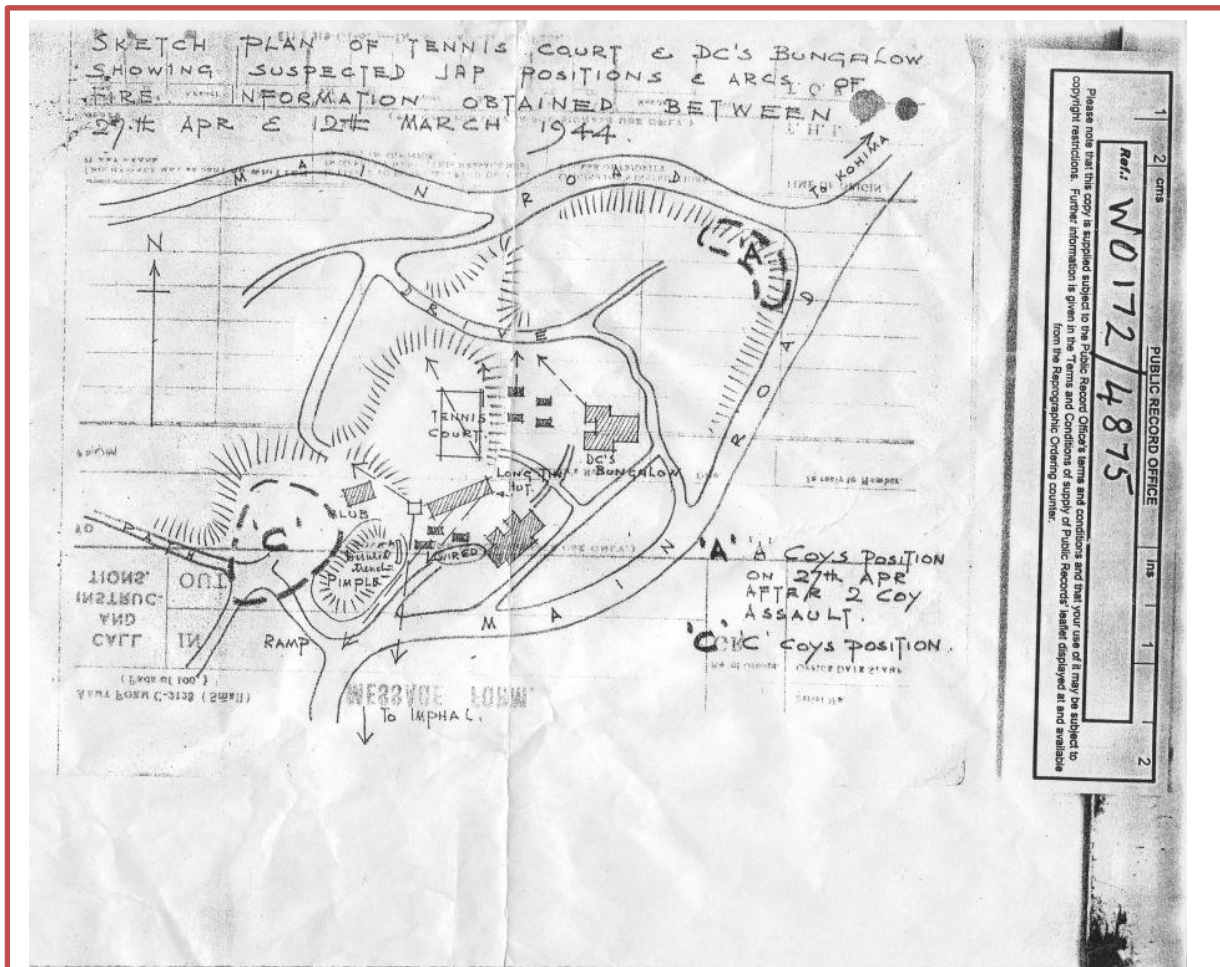
Lance Corporal NICHOLSON, who was now in command of the stranded tank told WATERHOUSE that his traversing gear was jammed making his tank useless. WATERHOUSE and NICHOLSON evacuated their crews after destroying their radios. They gave the infantry their Browning machine guns, and they gave Lieutenant WOOD morphine as he awaited evacuation by stretcher-bearers. Lieutenant WOOD did not survive, dying of his injuries soon afterwards. The son of Alfred and Frances WOOD, of North Rigton, Yorkshire, WOOD is buried in Grave 8.H.8. of the Kohima War Cemetery.

3714770 Lance Corporal James Stanley Grey GIBBINS, aged twenty-three years, died on the same day, although it is not known whether it was in the same incident as that in which Lieutenant WOOD died. GIBBINS is buried away from his colleagues in Grave 4.K.4. of the Kohima War Cemetery.

Brigadier John SHAPLAND, the commanding officer of the 6<sup>th</sup> Infantry Brigade, ordered another attempt to secure the Bungalow sector at Kohima. As the track up to the bungalow could not be used, he asked for the track over from Hospital Spur to be finished so a tank could reach the Tennis Court from that direction. The sappers finished the track, so GOOD ordered Serjeant WATERHOUSE to use it to get onto the Tennis Court. WATERHOUSE went to the Headquarters, 6<sup>th</sup> Infantry Brigade to be briefed and then returned to his tank and crew.

He managed to get his Lee tank up and along the muddy track and made it to the headquarters of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Bn. The Dorsetshire Regiment. It was parked next to the cookhouse and was camouflaged to keep its presence from the Japanese. During the night of 11/12 May, Brigadier SHAPLAND held another conference. He emphasised how important it was for WATERHOUSE's tank to get down onto the Tennis Court, even though there was ten-foot drop onto it. WATERHOUSE was confident he could achieve this, but to assist him, he was given Lieutenant 'Snagger' HIGGETT from the Dorsets to join him in the tank to assist in guiding him onto the Tennis Court.

The Dorsets would envelope the area in conjunction with the tank, and to assist, a 3.7" gun from the 10<sup>th</sup> Field Regiment was hauled up to the Dorsets position under the command of Major LAW. 'D' Company of the Dorsets under Major CHETTLE would lead the infantry attack.

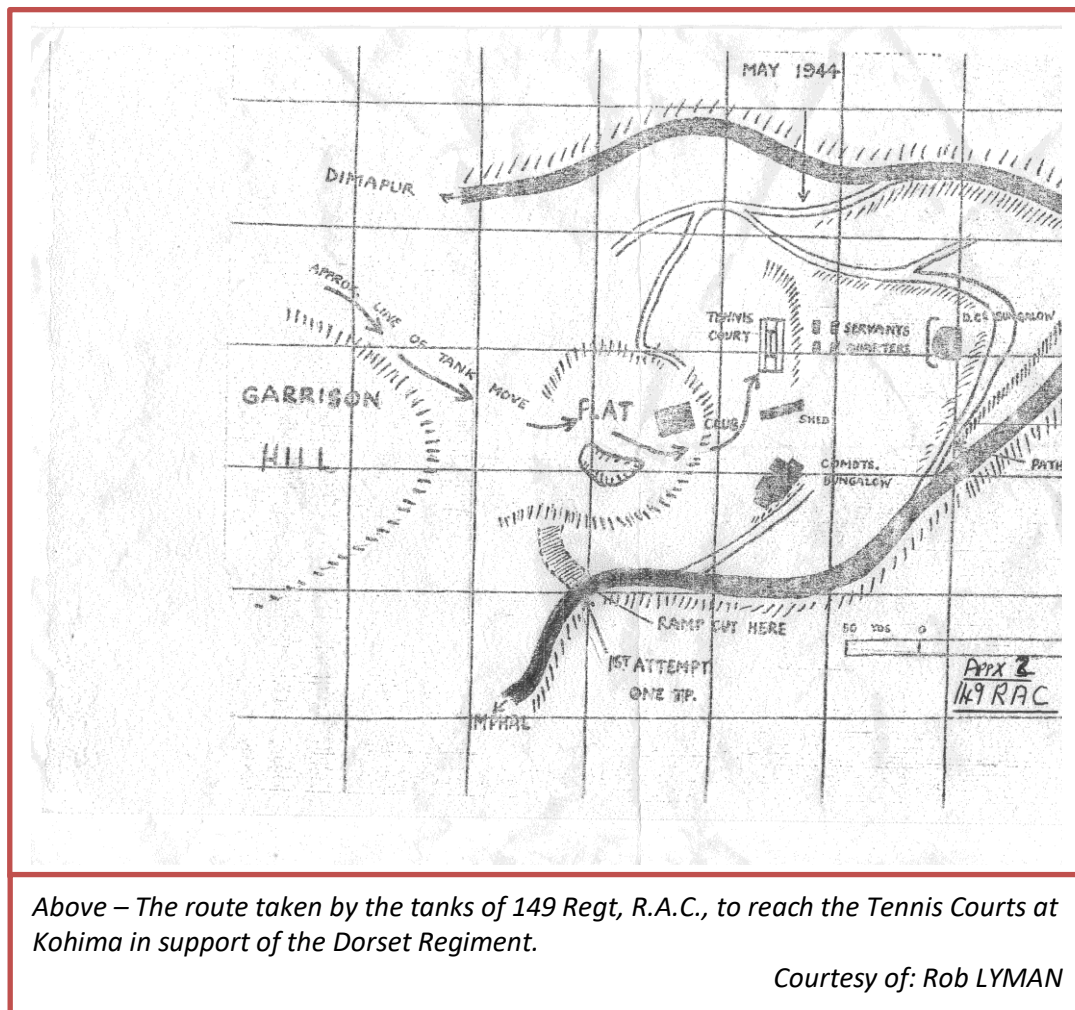


Above – A sketch plan of the Tennis Courts and Bungalow Sector during the attack by the Dorsetshire Regiment for 27 April 1944.

Courtesy of: Rob LYMAN

The main attack on the Tennis Court commenced on 13 May. An artillery bombardment concentrated on the Japanese positions, as WATERHOUSE, aided by HIGHETT, manoeuvred the tank into position. The track was very narrow and not easy to negotiate, as the ground was muddy and full of shell-holes and pits. At about 10.00 hours, the tank reached the top of the bank from the Club House terrace onto the Tennis Court.

WATERHOUSE directed the driver to drive over the edge and the tank went tipping and sliding down the slope. As it came down, it landed on a Japanese bunker and collapsed it and then commenced firing on various targets. The Japanese machine gun fire made no difference to the Lee tank as a platoon led by Serjeant GIVEN attacked from one flank, and another led by Serjeant COOK attacked from the other flank. The 3.7" gun fired forty-eight rounds in support, as the dust and smoke drifted over the battlefield.



The survivors of the Japanese garrison on the Tennis Court and in the Bungalow Sector realised that their position was untenable. In ones and twos, they ran away, down the slope through a small valley and up onto Treasury Hill which they still held. Serjeant WATERHOUSE assisted the Dorsets in mopping up all the trenches and bunkers for about twenty minutes. He continued to shell various targets from his position on the Tennis Court. The battle was witnessed by a B.B.C. war correspondent, who described that all that was left was the litter of war, Japanese dead, piles of biscuits, ammunition scattered around, and general rubbish.

Meanwhile, other tanks from 149<sup>th</sup> Regiment were assisting the men of the Queen's Regiment and 4<sup>th</sup> Bn. 1<sup>st</sup> Gurkha Rifles in clearing Supply, Detail and Jail Hills. A troop of tanks went up the road and was asked to provide fire support for the troops as they cleared Detail Hill. Two tanks manoeuvred to fire on the reverse slopes of Jail Hill and Detail Hill, while others focused on a major bunker on the south side of Jail Hill.

Major LOWRY from the Queen's Regiment described the scene as follows:

*It was an amazing sensation as the tanks shelled those bunkers. We all had to lie flat on our stomachs to avoid debris and even the shells, as the positions they pounded were literally only fifteen yards away. After a quarter of an hour of this the tanks ceased firing their 75 mm guns and Browning machine guns. The tanks were completely successful with the far bunker and as the Japanese streamed away, they were shot up by the Manchester's machine guns and the tanks automatics.*

*The bunker near the road was shot to pieces, and Japanese were seen being blown clean up into the air. Lieutenant HAMILTON's 'D' Company platoon dashed through the Jail buildings and old bunkers as soon as all firing ceased. It encountered no opposition as the bunker position was found to be empty, although there was still long-range sniping from Detail or Treasury Hill, which were both still occupied by the Japanese.*

The Queen's and the Gurkhas managed to occupy Jail Hill, a key and dominating feature just off the main road towards Imphal, with the Japanese seen running away from Jail Hill at about 15.00 hours. Later that afternoon, a patrol from the 4<sup>th</sup> Bn. 15<sup>th</sup> Punjab Regiment found Detail Hill unoccupied.

Kohima was being cleared gradually, but the Japanese still held Treasury Hill to the east and Aradura Spur to the south of the town. On 28 May, tanks from 'A' Squadron, 149<sup>th</sup> Regiment under Major MATTHEWS, supported the 1<sup>st</sup> Bn. The Royal Scots in attacking Aradura Spur. The tanks met problems, with roadblocks and mines, so that they had to be pulled out, however, they continued to provide fire support for the Royal Scots in their battle.

The next day, the regiment supported the 33<sup>rd</sup> Indian Infantry Brigade in their attack on the remaining Japanese positions on the eastern side of the town. This attack was successful, and it became obvious that the Japanese were beginning a phased withdrawal from Kohima.

As the Japanese withdrew, they left a rearguard, keeping the British at bay as they streamed out of India back into Burma. The 2<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Division formed an armoured column to advance down the road to Imphal, which including 'A' Squadron of the 149<sup>th</sup> Regiment. At about 10.30 hours on 22 June, the armoured cars of Prince Albert Victor's Own Cavalry (11<sup>th</sup> Frontier Force) made contact with tanks from the 7<sup>th</sup> Cavalry at Milestone 109, and tanks from 'A' Squadron carrying men from the 2<sup>nd</sup> Bn. The Durham Light Infantry reached Milestone 108 to meet soldiers from the 1<sup>st</sup> Bn. 17<sup>th</sup> Dogra Regiment from the 5<sup>th</sup> Indian Infantry Division based in Imphal. The road was open, and the siege of Imphal was lifted.

There was another armoured regiment deployed to Kohima, The Prince Albert Victor's Own Cavalry (11<sup>th</sup> Frontier Force). This regiment was under command of XXXIII Corps, and not technically part of the 50<sup>th</sup> Indian Tank Brigade, but it did operate in conjunction with units from that brigade during the battle to relieve the siege of Kohima, and to reopen the road to Imphal.



This regiment had an interesting history, being the only Indian armoured unit to see action against German, Italian and Japanese forces. It was mechanised in the late 1930's, but was equipped with trucks as mounted infantry, as opposed to tanks as an armoured regiment. The regiment came under command of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Indian Motor Brigade, and as such, it was deployed to Egypt in 1940. The brigade was engaged in the defence of El Mechili (or El Mekeli) in early 1941, and at Bir Hachiem in 1942. On both occasions, it suffered heavy casualties, mainly in respect of prisoners of war, and was effectively destroyed. On the second occasion in 1942, the brigade was disbanded, and its three regiments returned to India to be converted into armoured reconnaissance regiments.

The Prince Albert Victor's Own Cavalry (11<sup>th</sup> Frontier Force), known by its abbreviation of PAVO, was sent to Rawalpindi. In September 1943, it began to receive Daimler and Humber armoured cars. The Humber was fitted with machine guns only, but the Daimlers had a Two-pounder anti-tank gun fitted. The Humbers were used as command vehicles, as their turrets were larger, and the Daimlers equipped the Sabre squadrons.

The regiment comprised a Headquarters Squadron, 'A' Squadron (Sikhs), 'B' Squadron (Punjabi Mussalman) and 'C' Squadron (also Punjabi Mussalman). There was a Light Aid Detachment of the Indian Electrical and Mechanical Engineers attached to the regiment. Each Sabre squadron had two troops of armoured cars, and one troop of riflemen carried in lorries. This arrangement was to provide local defence for the armoured cars in the jungle of north-east India and Burma.

Lieutenant Colonel Geoffrey KNOWLES commanded the regiment, and Major E. P. MARSDEN commanded 'C' Squadron. Geoffrey KNOWLES was born on 2 August 1900 and was commissioned on the Unattached List for the Indian Army on 29 January 1920. He was admitted to the Indian Army on 6 February 1920 and promoted to the rank of Lieutenant on 29 January 1921. A gap of six years passed before he was promoted to the rank of Captain on 29 January 1927, and a further eleven years before he achieved the rank of Major on 29 January 1938.

Major Edmund Percy MARSDEN was born on 6 May 1918 and was commissioned on the Unattached List for the Indian Army on 29 July 1939, from the General List, Territorial Army, as he was a university candidate. He was admitted to the Indian Army on 29 January 1940 and promoted to the rank of Lieutenant on 27 April 1940. He was promoted to the substantive rank of Captain after the war, on 27 January 1946.

In preparation for the deployment of the regiment, in February 1944, Major MARSDEN and another officer attended the Jungle Warfare School at Shimoga in Mysore. This proved to be timely, for in March, the regiment was placed on twenty-four hours' notice to move. When the order came, the regiment travelled the Grand Trunk Road to Benares, and then up to Cooch Bewar. They crossed the Brahmaputra River at Gauhati and were loaded onto a train for the final stage of the journey to Dimapur. Here they were assigned to road protection duties, including escorting military convoys up to Kohima. As the Japanese threat to the major base at Dimapur existed at this time, the regiment constructed a fortified camp south of Dimapur.



Above – Humber armoured car

Courtesy of : <https://www.baiv.nl/humber-armoured-car-4x4-mk-iv-charmian-1942-full-history/>

The regiment began operating up the road towards Kohima, as far as Piphima, where they had a near disaster when some Indian troops mistook some local Nagas for Japanese soldiers and were about to open fire. Fortunately, they were stopped from doing so, but the realisation came that the soldiers had never seen a Japanese soldier and had no experience of them. The regiment established a maintenance base at Piphima, but most evenings the armoured cars returned to Dimapur to refuel and be serviced. The regiment operated up to the Corp Headquarters on several occasions, where the scale and nature of the battle could be seen and heard. Overall, their involvement in the relief of Kohima was uneventful, but there was one tragic event in this period.

A request was made for an armoured car to be made available, to see if it could break through to Kohima with essential supplies. IEC/6817 Lieutenant Fauja SINGH agreed to take on this dangerous mission. A former Risaldar Major in the regiment, Fauja SINGH had accepted a King's Commission in the Indian Army, so despite his junior rank, he was an extremely experienced officer and soldier. On 9 May 1944, he and his driver drove up the road to Kohima, but as they were turning into the entrance of the District Commissioner's bungalow, the armoured car was hit and knocked out.



*Above – Daimler armoured car*

*Author's Collection*

Lt. Fauja SINGH was seriously injured and was taken prisoner by the Japanese. He died in captivity two days later, but his body was not located, so he is commemorated on Face 20 of the Rangoon Memorial. He was the son of Gurdail SINGH and Santi; and husband to Harnam KAUR of Bhullar, Amritsar, India. Lt. Fauja SINGH's driver managed to escape from the armoured car, and he stripped off his uniform, and put a road worker's basket on his head. In this manner, he was able to walk back to British lines, where he explained how the experiment had failed. It was not repeated.

Once the siege of Kohima was lifted, the P.A.V.O. Cavalry were employed on road opening duties, and commenced operating further from their Dimapur base. It was more common for the armoured cars and their crews not to return to base overnight. They used a location called Lancaster Gate as a forward operating base. Units from the regiment met those of the 7<sup>th</sup> Cavalry at Milestone 109 at 10.30 hours, on 22 June 1944. The officer from the regiment who was involved in this historic meeting was EC/4662 Lieutenant John Pendennis Dunning McCARTNEY. He recognised his opposite troop commander as he had lent his poker dice to Lieutenant McCARTNEY, who was able to return them there and then. Lieutenant McCARTNEY died on 15 April 1945, as the regiment was participating in the drive to Rangoon with XXXIII Indian Corps.



Near Sathwa, 'C' Squadron received information that about 2,000 thousand Japanese were holding the village. As the squadron approached the village, they were engaged by a 37 mm anti-tank gun. Risaldar Dost MUHAMMAD destroyed the gun, so some riflemen from No. 5 Troop closed in to collect identification and other intelligence. They were attacked by a force of Japanese, so No. 1 Troop, led by Lieutenant McCARTNEY, went in to extract their colleagues. His troop was ambushed by eight Japanese, armed with picric acid mines, who flung themselves at the armoured cars in a suicide mission. McCARTNEY's armoured car was blown up, and he and his crew were killed instantly.

Aged twenty-two years, Lieutenant McCARTNEY was the son of Harry and Olive Esnor McCARTNEY, and came from Falmouth, Cornwall. He is buried in Grave 28. A. 18. of the Taukkyan War Cemetery, Myanmar (Burma). With McCARTNEY were twenty-three-year-old 10367 Lance Daffadar Samrun Nabi SHAH, who was the son of Rabban SHAH and Musharaf BEGUM of Raipur, Farrukabad, India, and twenty-three-year-old 13998 Sowar Fazl KARIM, son of Abdul RAHIM and Husain BI of Maira, Jhelum, Pakistan. SHAH is buried in Grave 29. A. 4., and KARIM in Grave 29. A. 5. of the Taukkyan War Cemetery.

## The Arakan Campaign 1944 – 1945

Following the battles of Kohima and Imphal, the 149<sup>th</sup> Regiment, R.A.C. moved back to Uruli Camp near Bombay to come under command of the 166<sup>th</sup> Lines of Communication Sub-Area. The 150<sup>th</sup> Regiment, R.A.C., was now serving under the 254<sup>th</sup> Indian Armoured Brigade, leaving just the 146<sup>th</sup> Regiment, R.A.C. still under command of the 50<sup>th</sup> Indian Tank Brigade.

The 45<sup>th</sup> Cavalry, Indian Armoured Corps came under command of the brigade with effect from 15 July 1944. This regiment had been raised in April 1941 at Meerut, where it undertook initial training until deemed fit to join the 255<sup>th</sup> Indian Armoured Brigade. In January 1943, it transferred to the 254<sup>th</sup> Indian Armoured Brigade, and in September of that year, it moved to Ranchi. It was by now equipped with American Stuart light tanks. When the Japanese launched their attack on Kohima, the regiment came under command of XXXIII Indian Corps on 29 March 1944. The regiment was used mainly to patrol the lines of communication during the Siege and Battle of Kohima. On 9 May, it came under command of the 21<sup>st</sup> Indian Division, an ad-hoc formation raised to support the flanks of XXXIII Indian Corps. From the 21<sup>st</sup> Indian Division, the regiment moved to join this brigade when the division disbanded.

In August 1944, the brigade gained its third regiment with the posting of the 19<sup>th</sup> King George V's Own Lancers from the 255<sup>th</sup> Indian Armoured Brigade. This was a pre-war Regular Indian Army cavalry regiment, which recruited Rajput Mussalmans, Sikhs and Jats. The horsed Indian Army cavalry was supplemented in India by armoured car and light tank units of the British Royal Tank Corps. In March 1938, G.H.Q. The Army in India announced the mechanization of the first two Indian Army cavalry regiments, the 13<sup>th</sup> Duke of Cambridge's Own Lancers, and the Scinde Horse (14<sup>th</sup> Prince of Wales's Own Cavalry). In April 1939, the Royal Tank Corps and the Cavalry merged to form the Royal Armoured Corps, in the U.K. and India. The declaration of war against Germany on 3 September 1939 saw the 19<sup>th</sup> King George V's Own Lancers based at Lahore, and still a horsed regiment. It had begun to receive motor-cycles for the signals personnel in the regiment. The last course at the Equitation School at Saugor, India, finished in June 1939, with Lieutenant WOODROFFE and A.L.D. Chota Ram from the regiment attending that last course. The buildings at Saugor became the Small Arms School.

The last officers to hold Regular Indian Army commissions joined the regiment in 1938 and 1939 as Second Lieutenants. They were J. M. E. WAINWRIGHT, A. T. H. CRIPPS, T. R. GLANCY, W. N. SAMPLE and R. G. SATTERWAITE. On 1 January 1940, the officers of the regiment were:

- |                                   |                       |
|-----------------------------------|-----------------------|
| • Lieutenant Colonel FORBES, M.C. | – Commanding Officer  |
| • Major POCOCK                    | – Second-in-Command   |
| • Captain CAUVAL                  | – Adjutant            |
| • Lieutenant LANCE                | – Quarter-Master      |
| • Lieutenant WIGRAM               | – Signals Officer     |
| • Captain WOODROFFE               | – Machine Gun Officer |

- Captain LORING – O.C. 'A' Squadron
- Lieutenant BULL – 'A' Squadron
- Lieutenant GLANCY – 'A' Squadron
- Major WILSON – O.C. 'B' Squadron
- Captain CRITCHLEY – 'B' Squadron
- Lieutenant WAINWRIGHT – 'B' Squadron
- Major SPENCER – O.C. 'C' Squadron
- Captain STILL – 'C' Squadron
- Lieutenant CRIPPS – 'C' Squadron

#### Detached

- Major MOSTYN-OWEN – Commandant, Governor-General's Bodyguard
- Brevet Lieutenant Colonel CURRIE – D.A.A.G, Army H.Q.
- Major THOMPSON – D.A.A.G., Deccan District
- Captain CHAPLIN – Indian States Forces
- Captain KEIGHLEY – A.D.C. to the Viceroy of India
- Captain CROYS DALE – Remount Department
- Lieutenant WILKINSON – Training Regiment

The first Emergency Commissioned Officers joined the regiment in mid-1940, namely Second Lieutenants E. R. McM. WRIGHT, C. H. CAMPBELL, and R. L. MONCK-MASON. The regiment received orders to mechanize in the same period, with the last mounted parade taking place on 27 November 1940. This regiment was the last in the Indian Army to retain its horses, and it fell to the new Commanding Officer, Lieutenant Colonel E. J. FULTON from Skinner's Horse, to oversee the conversion to armoured cars. Lieutenant Colonel FORBES left on promotion to the rank of Colonel in Northern Command.

The first vehicles the regiment received were a diverse collection of civilian lorries and buses, but with these vehicles, the regiment moved to Sialkot to join the newly formed 1<sup>st</sup> (later 31<sup>st</sup>) Indian Armoured Division. By the end of October 1941, the regiment had given up the buses for about eighty Ford 15 cwt trucks, one home-made armoured carrier, and eight Humber armoured cars. The number of wireless sets was, however, severely limited. On 1 April 1941, the regiment sent half its Jat and Punjabi Mussalmans personnel to the newly raised 48<sup>th</sup> Cavalry, with three officers and nine Viceroy Commissioned Officers. Ironically, in December 1943, the 48<sup>th</sup> Cavalry was disbanded, and those personnel returned to the regiment, bringing with them their Stuart light tanks. The Indian Armoured Corps came into existence formally on 1 May 1941.

On 9 October 1941, the divisional headquarters ordered the regiment to complete its mobilisation by 10 November, in anticipation of the 31<sup>st</sup> Indian Armoured Division being deployed to the Middle East, most likely to Iraq.

In the middle of November, the division concentrated around Malir (near Karachi) in India, with some personnel being sent to Egypt for attachment to the 7<sup>th</sup> Armoured Division in the desert. In April 1942, the regiment was ordered to move to Madras, in case of an invasion of southern India. It arrived on 13 May 1942, having covered 3,000 miles in its move across India. In May 1942, it came under command of the 19<sup>th</sup> Indian Infantry Division, then from April until December 1943 it served on internal security duties in the Madras area being equipped with armoured cars. It came under command of XXXIII Indian Corps, and performed flag marches, and undertook training. In July 1943, Lieutenant Colonel G. H. CRITCHLEY succeeded Lieutenant Colonel FULTON as Commanding Officer. The Risaldar-Major Ram SARUP retired on 1 March 1943, to be succeeded by Risaldar-Major Chhotu RAM. Risaldar-Major Ram SARUP's son, Major Risal SINGH, was killed on 21 June 1944 leading his company from 3<sup>rd</sup>/9<sup>th</sup> Jats in action on the Kohima to Imphal road. He had been wounded at the Arakan, awarded the Military Cross in March 1944, and wounded again the following month.

The younger son of Major General Sir Frederick GWATKIN, a former Commandant of the regiment, Second Lieutenant Archibald Willoughby GWATKIN, joined the regiment on 7 November 1942 from the Officers' Training School at Bangalore. In December 1943, the 19<sup>th</sup> King George V's Own Lancers joined the 44<sup>th</sup> Indian Armoured Division, and then in April the 255<sup>th</sup> Indian Armoured Brigade. When it joined this brigade, Lieutenant Colonel G. H. CRITCHLEY was the commanding officer, and it was equipped with Sherman tanks which began to arrive with the regiment in March 1944, to join the Stuart tanks the regiment already had on its establishment. The Risaldar-Major was now Teja SINGH. When it moved to Nasik, the regiment had forty-eight Sherman and twenty Stuart tanks.

On 1 November 1944, the brigade was still based at Nira Camp, near Poona, but then it was ordered to move to Chittagong under command of the XV Indian Corps for operational deployment in the Arakan. On 20 November, the 150<sup>th</sup> Regiment, R.A.C. had arrived at Kayagyaung, and then by 31 December it was located at Waybin. The move of the 19<sup>th</sup> Lancers from Poona to the Arakan was not straightforward. The regiment was split up into two personnel parties, three road parties and three tank trains. The personnel had to change and embark on river steamers for the six-hour journey down the Brahmaputra to Gaolundo, where it entrained again for Chittagong. The tanks and vehicles went to Calcutta to be embarked on ships and Landing Craft Tanks.

The armoured units deployed in Burma developed new techniques for defeating Japanese positions. The Japanese soldier was extremely adept at seizing ground and then rapidly digging to prepare formidable bunkers and defensive positions. These bunkers could be impervious to normal artillery fire, and as they usually were prepared to be mutually self-supporting, they were very difficult for infantry to destroy on their own. The fighting in the Arakan in February and March 1944, and the battles of Kohima and Imphal in April through to July of that year, had shown the need for infantry to support the tanks in operations. This included the use of an officer on foot to guide the tanks, to liaise with the infantry and to identify key targets for the tanks to engage.

The commanding officer of the 19<sup>th</sup> Lancers, Lieutenant Colonel CRITCHLEY spent some time with the 25<sup>th</sup> Dragoons in the Arakan in early 1944 learning the best techniques for the deployment of tanks. He returned to his regiment to designate and train Forward Tank Officers (F.T.Os.) to a high standard of efficiency. The gunners in the regiment were required to hit a 4-gallon petrol tin at a range of 800 yards, which due to their proficiency and the gun control equipment in the Sherman tank proved possible for most of the tank crews.

These techniques were spread around the 50<sup>th</sup> Indian Tank Brigade and the other two armoured formations operating in Burma. The preferred method for the British troops to tackle defended locations in the Indian and Burmese countryside was firstly to identify the defended localities. Usually, these were hills or ridges and were often well covered by trees and foliage, and they were discovered by patrolling or intelligence provided by 'V' Force, other irregulars or local villagers. The artillery Forward Observation Officer (F.O.O.) would then arrange an air strike by fighter-bombers, or an artillery concentration, or a combination of both. If possible, the air strike would include the use of napalm in order to strip the vegetation back, although flame-throwers could be used instead. With as much of the vegetation cleared as possible, the infantry would begin their assault. The tanks would show themselves and usually attracted most of the enemy fire. The F.T.O. and F.O.O. would work together to coordinate a fire programme to support the infantry. The F.T.O. identified bunkers and emplacements for the tanks to fire at using high explosive ammunition.

As the infantry closed to about fifty yards from the objective, the tanks switched to armoured piercing shot and fired directly into the bunkers and emplacements. When the infantry only about five yards short of the objective, the tanks ceased firing to provide machine gun fire if required. This operational technique required considerable training for armoured, infantry and artillery units, but from this an element of trust between the different arms developed that further improved effectiveness. The F.T.O. deployed forward with the infantry and communicated with the tank commanders by radio; the adoption of a throat microphone proving useful.

The initial object set for XV Indian Corps was to clear the Mayu peninsula of the enemy, and capture Akyab Island. Once the Japanese were retreating from Akyab, other offensive operations would be launched to cut in behind their forces, and the capture of Ramree Island. Lieutenant General CHRISTISON had under his command:

- 81<sup>st</sup> (West Africa) Infantry Division;
- 82<sup>nd</sup> (West Africa) Infantry Division;
- 25<sup>th</sup> Indian Infantry Division;
- 26<sup>th</sup> Indian Infantry Division;
- 3<sup>rd</sup> Commando Brigade;
- 50<sup>th</sup> Indian Tank Brigade.

The divisions of the XV Indian Corps began their advance in December 1944, with the 82<sup>nd</sup> (West Africa) Infantry Division moving down the Kaladan valley, while the 25<sup>th</sup> Indian Infantry Division moved down the Mayu peninsula towards Akyab. The first task was to clear the road from Maungdaw to the Kalapanzin River, which was given to the 2<sup>nd</sup> (West African) Infantry Brigade.

The Punjabi Mussalman 'C' Squadron Group, of the 19<sup>th</sup> Lancers, commanded by Major P. G. BROOKE, were designated to support the West Africans. They Squadron fired the regiments first shots in action on 15 December, when No. 1 Troop (Lieutenant Bhupindar SINGH) destroyed an enemy bunker near Buthidaung. This was their only action in this locality, as the West Africans met little resistance as they advanced. No 4 Troop (Lieutenant JESSOP), supported the 4<sup>th</sup> (West African) Infantry Brigade as it advanced down the Kalapanzin River, aided by Lieutenant BRAY who acted as Forward Tank Officer.

'B' Squadron of the 45<sup>th</sup> Cavalry assisted in clearing some bunkers in the Goppe Bazaar area, with 'B' Squadron of the 19<sup>th</sup> Lancers supporting the 25<sup>th</sup> Indian Division on the Mayu peninsula. 'B' Squadron (Major SATTERTHWAITHE) worked with a company of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Bn. 4<sup>th</sup> Bombay Grenadiers, and although the terrain was unsuitable for tanks, they supported attacks on bunkers and other positions. No. 1 Troop (Lieutenant Gurbachan SINGH) and No. 2 Troop (Lieutenant A. W. GWATKIN) were in action on 31 December 1944, with No. 3 Troop (Lieutenant SKINNER) and No. 4 Troop (Lieutenant BEVINGTON) in action on 1 January 1945 in support of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Bn. 2<sup>nd</sup> Punjab Regiment. As the Mayu peninsula proved far easier to clear, 'B' Squadron was sent back to Waybin to prepare for the next phase. The advancing Indian and British troops found that the Japanese were withdrawing down through the Arakan, and so reached Foul Point at the end of the Mayu peninsula on 27 December.

The speed of the advance surprised the British forces, so the original plans for the 25<sup>th</sup> Indian Infantry Division to seize the Mayu peninsula for the 26<sup>th</sup> Indian Infantry Division to then assault Akyab Island were modified. The 74<sup>th</sup> Indian Infantry Brigade, supported by the 3<sup>rd</sup> Commando Brigade and 'A' Squadron of the 19<sup>th</sup> Lancers (with Major WILSON's company from the 2<sup>nd</sup> Bn. 4<sup>th</sup> Bombay Grenadiers) were to seize Akyab by a rapidly prepared landing. The landing craft and ships were loaded at Maungdaw and Tek Naaf, with the invasion convoy sailing at 04.00 hours on 3 January 1945. The landing was carried out without opposition, with Lieutenant General CHRISTISON meeting the troops on the beach.

## The Myebon Peninsula and Kangaw

Before any landing took place, the British forces found that the Japanese had evacuated Akyab, allowing the island to be reoccupied without conflict. Attention moved to the possibility of assaulting the Myebon peninsula to reach Kangaw, thus cutting off the Japanese line of retreat. The same forces that had been warned for the assault landing on Akyab were switched to the new landing site at Myebon. The men of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Commando Brigade commenced landing on 12 January 1945, supported by air and naval firepower. 'A' Squadron of the 19<sup>th</sup> Lancers formed part of the assaulting forces, being conveyed on landing craft up the river to the relevant beaches. The Squadron had under command 'C' Company, 2<sup>nd</sup> Bn. 4<sup>th</sup> Bombay Grenadiers (Major WILSON), an Engineer Troop commanded by Lieutenant ROZARIO, and recovery detachments with Conductor HOOLACHAN, Sergeant HAINES and Sergeant BUCK.

At 07.45 hours on 12 January, eighteen landing craft carrying Commandos, and two Landing Craft Tanks carrying 'A' Squadron set off for the five mile run in to the selected beach. The landing craft dropped its ramp some 300 yards from the shore, but the first tank off, commanded by Lieutenant BILLIMORIA, found that there was four feet of water covering deep mud underneath, so the tank stranded before it could get ashore. The tank was not recoverable. The second-in-command, Major KEIGHLEY decided to find a more suitable landing beach, but the alternative site had to be worked on by engineers before the remaining two tanks of Lieutenant BILLIMORIA managed to get ashore. A D8 recovery vehicle and Major SAMPLE's tank from the second L.C.T. landed next, but now the beach was under accurate shell-fire. Major SAMPLE's tank was hit, slipped one track and became bogged. Sergeant HAINES using the D8 vehicle managed to extricate it, but Major KEIGHLEY decided not to land No. 4 Troop (Lieutenant PRYDE). The landing craft had to withdraw, so the other two tanks were not landed until the following day. The next day, with the two troops now ashore, the tanks moved across the countryside to support 44 (Royal Marine) Commando on the outskirts of Myebon village.

No 4 Troop landed on the morning of 13 January, and with No. 3 Troop, was guided forward to support No. 5 (Army) Commando in an attack on a position called Rose. An air strike preceded the assault, then the tanks engaged enemy positions, and the Commandos advanced. When the Commandos met any significant machine gun or rifle fire, Lieutenant NELSON the Forward Tank Officer directed the fire of the tanks on each enemy position as it was discovered. Slowly, but steadily, the feature was captured.

The tanks from No. 3 and 4 Troops were then ordered to support the Royal Marines as they moved forward to capture Myebon village. The tanks used their machine guns on any position that appeared to be occupied by the Japanese as the commandos from 42 (Royal Marine) and 44 (Royal Marine) Commando worked their way through the village. Outside the village was a hill feature that the Army called 'Cabbage'. Two machine guns opened up on the Commandos, wounding Lieutenant Colonel H. D. FELLOWES, the commanding officer of 42 Commando and another officer.



The F.T.O., Lieutenant Peter NELSON, arranged for one of the tanks of Lieutenant Ben PRYDE's troop to come forward so the commandos could evacuate their wounded men. The men of 42 Commando and 1 (Army) Commando then undertook a planned assault on Cabbage supported by the tanks firing at the position for about an hour before the attack went in. Using both their 75 mm guns and machine guns, the tanks helped subdue the defenders allowing the Commandos to capture this position and two others. After this, the tanks went into harbour, and Conductor HOOLACHAN managed to get the other vehicles landed at Easy Beach.

On 14 January, the Commandos occupied various lightly held positions as identified by a captured Japanese map, aided by the tanks which carried out patrolling and reconnaissances of positions due for attack on 15 January. No 1 Troop under Lieutenant LAWRENCE landed early on 15 January in time for the attack. To the north of the village of Myebon were found other positions defended by Japanese troops. These were called 'Point 200', 'Point 163', 'Brother' and 'Father', and although patrols found Point 163 unoccupied, the others were defended. The three positions were attacked on 15 January, with Captain Robin WRIGHT acting as F.T.O., the troop led by Lieutenant PRYDE supported No. 1 Commando in their attack on Point 200, while Lieutenant LAWRENCE took his troop moved to the north of Father to potentially cut off Japanese troops. The attack on Point 200 was delayed as the requested air strike did not take place. Only one target could be identified for the tanks, so Lieutenant PRYDE concentrated on that one bunker. The commandos managed to reach the top of the hill, but then met machine gun fire and grenades from other Japanese positions so had to pull back.

Captain WRIGHT attempted to identify the new bunker to Lieutenant PRYDE, but he could not see it because of the jungle. No. 1 Commando tried again but the same thing happened and as they reached the top, they were fired upon and had to pull back. Captain WRIGHT suggested that Lieutenant PRYDE bring his tanks up a path onto the lower slopes and bounce their shots through the trees into the bunkers. Lieutenant PRYDE decided instead to drive his tanks up to the top of hill, even though the gradient and nature of the slopes seemed to make that impossible. Knocking down trees as they drove slowly uphill, the three tanks moved towards the top of the hill. They met up with the commandos, and decided to simply charge at the Japanese positions, tanks first then the commandos. The three tanks moved forward, running over one Japanese soldier as he tried to escape, and cleared the position. Unfortunately, at his moment of glory, Lieutenant PRYDE failed to notice the steep drop the other side and his tank went over the edge. Rolling over three times, it came to rest on its turret. PRYDE and his crew were injured, but not too seriously, so they managed to get out of the Sherman as it lay over a dip in the ground. The Commandos and Bombay Grenadiers rushed to their aid and escorted them to safety. Lieutenant PRYDE had to be evacuated to hospital, but the tank was recovered six days later.



*Above – Stuart tanks of the 50<sup>th</sup> Indian Tank Brigade being ferried across the Kalapanzin River near Buthidaung in the Arakan on 18 December 1944.  
Below – A tank crew from 146<sup>th</sup> Regiment, R.A.C., repair a tank track at Taungup on 4 April 1945*

*Both – Courtesy of the IWM (on Licence)*



The other two tanks of Lieutenant PRYDE's No. 4 Troop joined Major SAMPLE, and together with No. 3 Troop, they supported the other Commando attacks. Lieutenant BILLMORIA's tank was hit three times by a captured British 2 pounder anti-tank gun before it was knocked out. All the tanks with Major SAMPLE were hit by a 75 mm gun, but without serious damage. In particular, the tanks shelled bunkers on 'Father' with considerable effect. All opposition on 'Father' ceased by 17.00 hours, and the tanks withdrew to harbour and refuel.

The tanks of Lieutenant LAWRENCE's No. 1 Troop having just landed was tasked with covering the bridge over the chaung north of Gaungpu, but they found the going very difficult. One tank was bogged down, but was recovered, but a second, Dafadar (Serjeant) Piara SINGH's tank, became stuck on the bank of a chaung, with a tree preventing easy recovery of the tank. SINGH and his crew stayed in their tank and sprayed the area with machine gun fire to keep the Japanese away from his location. It was, however, in a position to cover the bridge. Lieutenant LAWRENCE and Risaldar SHANGARA maintained their tanks in action in and around the village, during which time LAWRENCE's tank was hit by a Japanese 75 mm shell, which damaged the tank, but did not put it out of action. The tanks and supporting infantry had many good targets, but they were subjected to fire from a 75 mm gun and from mortars. The position held by this small group of soldiers was isolated, and the bogged down tank even more so.

The Bombay Grenadiers, managed to drive off two enemy attacks aimed at reaching the stranded tank, but drove off on both occasions. Brigadier HARDY ordered his reserve Commando to go forward and support this bridge position, but they became involved in heavy fighting as the day progressed. Captain MERRIAM, the Squadron Second-in-Command came forward at about 17.00 hours, with the Serjeant HAINES and the D8 bulldozer, supported by No. 3 Troop and a platoon from the Bombay Grenadiers. It took them about an hour to recover Dafadar SINGH's stranded tank, during which a cock sat roosting on top of the turret!

The three battalions of the 74<sup>th</sup> Indian Infantry Brigade were now ashore, and they began to relieve the commandos, who were to be withdrawn in order to move upriver to capture Kangaw. There was still fighting to be done at Myebon, so on 17 January, the tanks of 'A' Squadron supported the 3<sup>rd</sup> Bn. 2<sup>nd</sup> Gurkha Rifles in their attack on Hill 262, also known as Pagoda Hill. This hill in fact had two peaks, on one of which was a former pagoda that was now ruined. Although a chaung ran in front of the hill, a good position was found from which the tanks could provide fire support for the Gurkhas during their attack.

At about 11.30 hours, some Thunderbolt fighter-bombers launched an air strike onto the hill, which was delivered accurately. This managed to clear away some of the vegetation, so the Gurkhas began their advance with Captain WRIGHT alongside them acting as the F.T.O.. The Gurkhas wounded their way up through the lower slopes and began climbing up. The nature of the jungle around the base of the hill made their advance slow. Captain WRIGHT began communicating fire orders back to the tanks, which started engaging the targets.

The tank commanders could see nothing through the smoke from grenades, but they reached the ground that had been cleared the air strike and the tanks. Hill 262 had twin summits, one of which was crowned with a battered pagoda. A bunker in the saddle between the two peaks proved very difficult to clear having stopped two attacks by the Gurkhas, until the tanks destroyed it by accurate and repeated shooting. The Gurkhas were held up again at the pagoda, so Captain WRIGHT spoke with Major SAMPLE and they agreed to have a major concentration on the pagoda. They had to wait for the tank's ammunition to be replenished, and then engaged the pagoda with all seven tanks present. On the order of Captain WRIGHT, all firing ceased, and the Gurkhas went in with the bayonet and kukri and cleared successfully the entire hill. Eighty-one Japanese dead were found on that position. The tanks had fired close to one-thousand rounds, and the Browning machine guns were so tired that the rounds went out in a corkscrew direction.

With the Myebon peninsula now under British control, the next phase in the operation was further landings to be made at Kangaw. 'A' Squadron remained under command of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Command Brigade for this operation. At 12.30 hours on 23 January 1945, its reconnaissance party landed with Brigade Headquarters. The Commandos landed and worked their way inland to secure a feature called Hill 170 that dominated the beach area. The Reconnaissance party, and Brigadier TODD decided that there was no beach suitable for the landing of tanks at Kangaw, but the Commander Royal Engineers felt it was feasible, so it went ahead. No. 2 Troop under Lieutenant FITZE attempted to land, but the first tank dug its nose deep into the mud of the chaung and stuck fast. Fortunately, Captain KENT of R.E.M.E. was present. He devised a plan where the D8, with its winch-cable attached to the rear of tank, was shackled down to the deck of the L.C.T.. The L.C.T. went astern, as the D8 winched in its cable, and the tank drove in reverse, and although three shackles broke, and the D8 was nearly catapulted into the tank, the tank was recovered successfully. All the time, the enemy were dropping shells in and around the L.C.T.. With the appearance of Captain MERRIAM and Lieutenant NELSON covered from head to foot in mud convinced everyone that a landing was not feasible.

This frustrating operation led to tensions between the engineers and tank commanders. There was lack of understanding of the limitations of landing craft and tanks, which can be seen as a consequence of the lack of combined training. The 19<sup>th</sup> Lancers were not to be defeated, so a plan was devised for tanks to be loaded onto small Landing Craft Mechanised (L.C.M.) and two days later, they were landed safely. This was just as well, as the Japanese reacted quickly and savagely against the Commandos dug in on Hill 170. Major SAMPLE had established his tank group in a harbour behind the northern end of Hill 170. The enemy shelled the area heavily on 31 January, and then attacked with about ninety men, thirty of whom carried pole charges to disable the tanks. Some Japanese managed to get through the perimeter manned by Commandos and men from the Bombay Grenadiers. The Japanese set one tank on fire, and a truck as well. Captain MERRIAM described how they were awakened at 05.45 hours by accurate shell-fire, which continued until about 06.20 hours, when voices could be heard followed by machine gun fire. A shower of grenades from both sides, with Major 'Bing' WILSON of the Bombay Grenadiers shooting dead the Japanese leader of the men carrying the pole charges with his Sten gun.

Captain Ron KENT, R.E.M.E. and Lieutenant Sam FITZE were having a fierce battle from underneath the D8. Major WILSON led a section to drive out some Japanese who had established themselves on a feature nearby. Two tanks, those commanded by Lieutenant FITZE and Jamadar Piara SINGH had managed to start up and pull out of the harbour. The third tank was burning fiercely, consuming the entire crew of Dafadar Dalip SINGH, Lance Dafadar Bahadur SINGH, Acting Lance Dafadar Sohan SINGH, Sowars Kashmira SINGH and Sowar Hazara SINGH. Major Bill SAMPLE got the two remaining tanks to fire on the noises coming from the jungle in front of them. Jemadar Piara SINGH's tank was out of action because of broken track connectors. Major SAMPLE went to see what had happened and was wounded. This turned out to be the end of his military career, and he ended up with one leg shorter than the other, although this did not stop him riding in National Hunt race meetings.

Lieutenant FITZE's tank remained in action throughout the battle, which came to a conclusion thirty-six hours later. Over three-hundred Japanese soldiers were noted as lying dead on the feature. Captain KENT managed to get a track off the burnt-out tank, and fit it on Jemadar Piara SINGH's tank, which was again 'on the road'.

The 74<sup>th</sup> Indian Infantry Brigade, advancing from Myebon, with support from 'A' Squadron, 19<sup>th</sup> King George V's Own Lancers, as and when required, British and Indian troops pushed forward and made contact with troops from the 82<sup>nd</sup> (West Africa) Infantry Division advancing on Kangaw from the north. The 51<sup>st</sup> Indian Infantry Brigade had landed near Kangaw, and following some bitter and fierce fighting, took control of the area, thereby blocking the escape of the retreating Japanese.

The overall campaign in Burma was now focused on the main, central front. In consequence, the supporting air forces and supply aircraft were to be concentrated on this front. This meant that the forces under command of XV Indian Corps in the Arakan had to be reduced. The 81<sup>st</sup> (West Africa) Infantry Division was already back in India, with the 25<sup>th</sup> Indian Infantry Division, 3<sup>rd</sup> Commando Brigade, and 50<sup>th</sup> Indian Tank Brigade to follow. As a result, the units of the tank brigade were withdrawn progressively between mid-February and the end of March 1945 back to India. Only 'A' Squadron of the 19<sup>th</sup> King George V's Own Lancers was to remain in the Arakan for the time being. XV Indian Corps was still able to continue its advance down the coast of Burma, towards the towns of An and Taungup.



## Ramree Island

In November 1944, Brigadier TODD ordered the 146<sup>th</sup> Regiment, R.A.C. to proceed to the Arakan to join the 26<sup>th</sup> Indian Infantry Division, taking some support units with it as a regimental battlegroup. The regiment travelled by train and river steamer to Chittagong, from where they moved to Waybin. At this time, the key officers in the regiment were:

Commanding Officer	– Lieutenant Colonel R. L. AGNEW;
Second-in-Command	– Major J. P. HETHERINGTON;
Adjutant	– Captain J. M. M. BILHAM;
Quarter-Master	– Captain L. C. M. DUTOT;
Officer Commanding 'A' Squadron	– Major H. A. R. BUCKNALL;
Officer Commanding 'B' Squadron	– Major K. H. ROBSON;
Officer Commanding 'C' Squadron	– Major H. A. LUHRS
Officer Commanding H.Q. Squadron	– Major B. WADSWORTH

'A' Company 2<sup>nd</sup> Bn. 4<sup>th</sup> Bombay Grenadiers

Officer Commanding – Major R. SMITH

Field Troop, 37<sup>th</sup> Royal Bombay Sappers and Miners<sup>5</sup>

Officer Commanding – Captain J. CULL

Included in the regimental battlegroup were a section from the Brigade Workshops and a detachment from the Tank Recovery Company, both units being part of the Corps of Indian Electrical and Mechanical Engineers.

Lieutenant General CHRISTISON, the General Officer Commanding XV Indian Corps, ordered the 26<sup>th</sup> Indian Division to capture Ramree Island. Lieutenant Colonel AGNEW liaised with the divisional commander, Major General LOMAX, and they agreed that only one squadron was required for the operation. The 71<sup>st</sup> Indian Infantry Brigade was to lead the assault, supported by 'A' Squadron of the 146<sup>th</sup> Regiment, R.A.C. The squadron embarked on 18 January 1945, loading eleven tanks, a bulldozer and three jeeps into three landing craft. The men spent three days and nights on board the landing craft, as they made their way via Akyab to the landing beaches on Ramree Island. The Royal Navy and Royal Indian Navy bombarded known Japanese positions, and Liberator bombers from the Royal Air Force bombed the landing beaches and nearby locations.

The first infantry landed at 09.35 hours against no opposition. The Lee tanks of the 146<sup>th</sup> Regiment, R.A.C. landed without incident. Two troops moved forward to support the 1<sup>st</sup> Bn. The Lincolnshire Regiment, with No. 3 Troop operating in support of the Frontier Force Rifles.

<sup>5</sup> The Regimental History of the Duke of Wellington's Regiment list this troop as part of the 27<sup>th</sup> Bombay Sappers and Miners, whilst other sources list the 37<sup>th</sup> Field Squadron, Royal Bombay Sappers and Miners.

The tanks supporting the Lincolns were not able to provide much support for the battalion in an attack on Point 194, but No. 4 Troop did support effectively an attack by 'D' Company of the Lincolns on a location called Daw Bridge. That evening, the tanks of 'A' Squadron harboured at the jail in the town of Kyaukpyu, where Brigadier COTTRELL-HILL came to brief them about the operations planned for the next day.

The next morning, the 1<sup>st</sup> Bn. The Lincolnshire Regiment and most of 'A' Squadron launched an assault on 'Blackhill', only to find the Japanese defenders had left the area. The infantry set off in pursuit, but the tanks could not follow easily as the road had been mined and all bridges demolished. The tanks returned to Kyaukpyu where they re-embarked on two landing craft, with the exception of No. 1 Troop which remained as brigade reserve. The rest of the squadron were conveyed down the west coast to land behind the Japanese front line. At 09.00 hours on 26 January, No. 3 Troop landed at Kauktale to support the infantry, however, the Japanese were entrenched in great strength and the attack stalled. Brigadier COTTRELL-HILL decided to land the rest of the squadron in order to carry out an manoeuvre to out-flank the Japanese positions.

The squadron set off at 09/15 hours on 31 January, in support of the 1<sup>st</sup> Lincolns. There were no roads for the tanks, so they had to travel cross-country. The land comprised dry and hard paddy fields, with bunds about one to four feet high delineating each paddy field. There were small, rocky hills covered in dense scrub, and chaungs up to twenty feet wide with steep banks either side. The bulldozer proved invaluable, but even this was unable to make a track on all occasions for the tanks.

The infantry travelled more quickly across the terrain, leaving the tanks behind. Major BUCKNALL continued to advance in the path of the infantry, and then came upon Lieutenant Colonel MacLEAN, the commanding officer of the 1<sup>st</sup> Bn. 18<sup>th</sup> Royal Garhwal Rifles. His troops were having problems with some Japanese dug in on a hill feature, so he asked Major BUCKNALL to assist. BUCKNALL quickly organised an attack, led by Captain CULL and his bulldozer, followed by the tanks and supported by the Jat solders of the 4<sup>th</sup> Bombay Grenadiers and men of the Garhwali regiment. The hill feature was overcome and the line of advance continued to Sane.

The squadron had to halt for the night about a mile short of their intended stopping place, as they could get over the final saddle before the village because of the amount of work needed to make it passable for the tanks. That night, Brigadier COTTRELL-HILL issued revised orders, to force the Minbyin to Yebadin road, and block the Yebadin Gap. The squadron moved forward, but without the combined support of the sappers and tank crews, little progress would have been made. Trees had to be uprooted or blown up, and tracks made across chaungs and ditches. Explosives were used frequently to open a route for the tanks. The journey of six miles took eight hours, but finally the squadron and its battle-group were in position at the Yebadin Gap. The Japanese anticipated this move, and fell back onto three prominent positions just to the south of Yebadin village, which the British called 'Bean', 'Banana' and Point 233. The Lincolns had tried already to take Point 233, but they had been forced back by heavy machine gun fire from the flanks.

The plan was for the brigade to capture Banana in the morning, to move onto Bean and Point 233 in the afternoon. The squadron was to provide fire support for the infantry. The Japanese returned artillery fire and the tanks had to move positions. One company of the 1<sup>st</sup> Bn. 18<sup>th</sup> Royal Garhwal Rifles was to take Banana, with 'B' and 'D' Companies attacking Bean at about 14.25 hours. At about 16.00 hours, the Lincolns were to assault and capture Pont 233. The tanks fired repeatedly at Bean, and then at about 14.30 hours the Garhwalis attacked Bean. However, the Japanese were still located on Banana, so they hit the Garhwalis in the flank by machine gun fire. By nightfall, none of the three objectives had been captured, with about seventy soldiers injured, although some ground on Banana and Bean had been taken. The tanks of 'A' Squadron were hit by mortar fire, with Captain RICHARDS, Lieutenant FERENS and Serjeant CLIFFORD all injured.

That night, the Japanese counter-attacked the Garhwalis dug in on Bean, and they managed to take back some of that hill. The next day was spent with several attacks to secure Banana and Bean, with most of the effort concentrated on Bean. Captain John CULL worked hard with his Sikh sappers to make pathways for the tanks to move forward, with Captain RICHARDS moving forward to provide fire support for the infantry. One of the tanks broke down, so Captain RICHARDS got out of his tank and assisted by a Jat soldier, managed to get it back to safety. Captain 174033 Edgar Lynton RICHARDS was a substantive Second Lieutenant, who received an Emergency Commission in the Northamptonshire Yeomanry during the war. Brigadier TODD made an immediate recommendation for the award of the Military Cross to Captain RICHARDS.

The award was published in the London Gazette on 3 May 1945, with the citation stating:

*On Ramree Island, Burma on Feb 4<sup>th</sup> 1945 'A' Sqn 146<sup>th</sup> R.A.C. (D of W) was moving up to the area 861289 to support an attack by 1/18<sup>th</sup> R. Garhwal Rifles. On reaching the chaung crossing, the tanks came under very heavy and accurate fire from guns and mortars. Owing to this, the R.E. were unable to work on the chaung crossing and the tanks were caught up in a bottleneck. The sqn was ordered to move North out of the shelled area to another crossing. During this movement, Capt RICHARDS dismounted from his tank and with the utmost coolness and complete disregard for his own safety guided all the tanks out of their dangerous position. During the whole of this period the tanks were being subjected to intense shellfire. Captain RICHARDS was wounded in the leg, but calmly carried on with his action. He continued at duty for the whole of this and the following day before going to the M.D.S. to have his wounds attended to.*

*On Ramree Island Burma on Feb 5<sup>th</sup> 1945, Capt RICHARDS was in command of a tank group supporting 'D' Coy 1<sup>st</sup>/18<sup>th</sup> Royal Garhwal Rifles in an attack against the features 986267 – 893271 from the open paddy fields about 892289. At about 1600 hrs, while these tanks were being subjected to very heavy mortar fire and accurate sniping they were ordered to withdraw to forward rally. During the movement, the engine of Capt. RICHARDS tank failed.*

*With complete disregard to the heavy fire under which the tanks were, Capt RICHARDS dismounted and fixed a tow rope from another tank on to his own. He then guided the two tanks across the open to a covered position, remaining outside the tanks in order to be at hand if the tow rope fouled a track. Owing to the large paddy bunds their progress was slow and during the whole time the intense enemy mortar fire and sniping continued. It was largely owing to Capt RICHARDS gallant action in organising and conducting this withdrawal that his tank was brought in safely. In this action, Capt. RICHARDS was assisted by L/Naik RAM SARUP 2/4<sup>th</sup> Bombay Grenadiers, whose name has been submitted separately.*

*Capt RICHARDS action on both these occasions was a magnificent example to all ranks of the squadron.*

During the night of 5/6 February, the Japanese withdrew from these three features, so the brigade moved forward to follow them up. On 7 February, the 1<sup>st</sup> Bn. The Lincolnshire Regiment advanced along a sunken road, with the 5<sup>th</sup> Bn. 1<sup>st</sup> Punjab Regiment on their left aiming for Point 250. The Lincolns came under machine gun and rifle fire as they crossed a bridge. Three tanks moved forward to support them, including putting out of action a captured 25 pounder gun used by the Japanese. The battalion had to rest overnight before completing the attack the next day. As the infantry advanced, the tanks were nearby so that if a bunker was identified, the tanks could be told straight away in order to shell the bunker.

Captain GIRLING with No. 1 Troop rejoined the rest of the squadron as the main road was now open from Kyaukpyu. The squadron continued to support the Lincolns as they pushed forward towards Ramree town. Three tanks went across country while the rest remained in the sunken road, and by noon on 9 February, the British troops had secured Ramree town. There were still pockets of Japanese resistance, with Havildar MUNSHI of the Bombay Grenadiers being killed late in the campaign, a loss the whole squadron felt badly. 'A' Squadron remained in Ramree resting and refitting as the Japanese were driven off the rest of the island.

## Ruy-Wa and the Final Battles in the Arakan

The operations in the locality of An commenced with a landing by the 82<sup>nd</sup> (West Africa) Infantry Division at Dalet. Two weeks later, on 16 February 1945, the 74<sup>th</sup> Indian Infantry Division landed and captured the small town of Ruy-Wa. The brigade was subjected to strong counter attacks by the Japanese, so additional forces had to be landed to support them. Lieutenant Colonel G. H. CRITCHLEY, Commanding Officer of the 19<sup>th</sup> Lancers, received orders to send one Troop Group to Ruy-Wa. This comprised himself, Major WRIGHT (who was now commanding 'A' Squadron) with one tank, Captain BILLAMORIA and Jemadar Chhotu Ram with their tanks from No. 3 Troop, and one tank commanded by Jemadar Kundan SINGH from No. 4 Troop. Major WILSON was in command of one platoon of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Bn. 4<sup>th</sup> Bombay Grenadiers, with Sergeant BUCK in command of the Recovery Detachment, with Lieutenant SKINNER acting as Forward Tank Officer, and Lieutenant GWATKIN in charge of other vehicles.

Lieutenant Colonel CRITCHLEY went on ahead to reconnoitre the area, the group embarked on 25 February 1945, with the tanks on board a L.C.T., and the other vehicles under Lieutenant GWATKIN on separate vessels. The tanks were transferred onto smaller L.C.M. vessels at Charterhouse Island, while Lieutenant GWATKIN and his party went up the creeks to the landing site. The tanks followed, with the tanks brushing the trees on each side of the mangrove swamp, and reached the site constructed by Lieutenant GWATKIN, and a few sappers and miners. Lieutenant Colonel CRITCHLEY was there to oversee the operation, and the tanks were landed safely. The group then had to manoeuvre their way out of the swamp to go to the support of the infantry.

On 2 March, all four tanks were in action supporting a battalion of the 10<sup>th</sup> Baluch Regiment. A hidden 37 mm anti-tank gun scored four hits on Major WRIGHT's tank, although none penetrated the front armour. A sapper located the position of the gun, which was then destroyed by Captain BILLAMORIA and artillery fire. Sergeant BUCK got to work immediately on the damaged tank, which was back in action the next morning. It was in time to join the other three in supporting a battalion of the Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire Light Infantry, which had secured two hill features in preparation for an advance by the rest of the 74<sup>th</sup> Brigade. This meant the four tanks had to cross the Mee Chaung. The first two crosses successfully, but the third tank became bogged and slipped a track. Sergeant BUCK came to the rescue again, and he managed to get the tank to reverse back onto its track. Once repaired, this tank crossed the chaung successfully, followed by the fourth tank, the D8 tractor and other vehicles.

The 74<sup>th</sup> Brigade was now operating in open country, moving over paddy fields. It was exhausting work for the men of the 19<sup>th</sup> Lancers, who were in action for nine hours continuously. The close friends, Lieutenant SKINNER and Lieutenant GWATKIN acted as Forward Tank Officer alternately, and as Major WRIGHT noted, they achieved perfect coordination of the wireless nets.



The next phase of the operation required the clearing of the Tamandu to An road by the 7<sup>th</sup> Bn. 16<sup>th</sup> Punjab Regiment. It encountered very strong opposition from the Japanese occupying a hill feature called 'Strong'. The terrain was too difficult to allow the tanks to get forward, although Major WRIGHT tried to get two of them to the front. As they were trying to make their way along a narrow track, one tank tried to make room for some Jeep ambulances to make their way to the rear, when it slid down a bank, slipping both tracks. It appeared that this tank would become a total loss, but once again, Sergeant BUCK and Sergeant HAINES worked miracles in the field, and with the Jat crew of the tank, cut away part of the hillside, repaired the tank over the next three days, and then got it up and running to rejoin the troop.

Meanwhile, the 7<sup>th</sup> Bn. 16<sup>th</sup> Punjab Regiment captured 'Strong', and so on 12 March, the Troop Group of the 19<sup>th</sup> Lancers moved around to the other side of the hill. The advance up the An road was to be undertaken by the 4<sup>th</sup> (West Africa) Infantry Brigade, and 'A' Squadron was allocated to support this advance. Also on 12 March, the Second-in-Command of the 50<sup>th</sup> Indian Tank Brigade, Colonel Dick CRITCHLEY, came to visit his brother and the Troop of the 19<sup>th</sup> Lancers.

On Tuesday, 13 March, the tanks were ordered to support an attack by the Nigerians, with Captain GWATKIN acting as Forward Tank Officer (F.T.O.). This role was unique to the Burma campaign, where an officer from the armoured regiment would operate in a similar manner to a Forward Observer Officer (F.O.O.) for the Royal Artillery. The F.T.O. would operate on foot, commanding and directing the tanks in support of the infantry. This was particularly important because of the nature of the terrain in Burma.



The attack commenced at about 16.00 hours, and the operation ended successfully. The Troop Commander, Lieutenant EC/6100 John SKINNER, and Captain GWATKIN were guiding the tanks back to their harbour location across a difficult chaung, when the Japanese began shelling the crossing.<sup>6</sup> A shell landed between Lieutenant SKINNER and Captain GWATKIN, killing John SKINNER instantly, and mortally wounding Archie GWATKIN. Archie GWATKIN died in the early hours of the following morning, 14 March 1945, unaware that later that same day, his brother was to be killed several hundred miles away in central Burma. The Regimental history states that he died having shown great fortitude and consideration for others.

The loss of two young officers and leaders in one incident affected the regiment badly. The Commanding Officer personally came to conduct the burial service, with the two officers being laid to rest near where they died. After the end of hostilities, a new war cemetery was opened at Taukkyan, just to the north of Yangon (Rangoon) to act as a concentration cemetery for all service personnel who died in Burma. Twenty-four-year-old Lieutenant John SKINNER is buried in Grave 20. A. 1., of the Taukkyan War Cemetery in Myanmar (formerly Burma), next to his friend and colleague Archie GWATKIN. He was a son of Colonel Edward John SKINNER, and Emmeline Louisa SKINNER, of Victoria, London.<sup>7</sup> Archibald Willoughby GWATKIN and Frederick Charles Nicol GWATKIN lie side by side in the Taukkyan War Cemetery in Burma, Archie in Grave 20. A. 2., and Freddie in Grave 20. A. 3.

Archie followed his older brother's lead, and was commissioned in the Indian Army on 29 October 1942, with the service number EC/6638. He joined his father's previous regiment, the 19<sup>th</sup> King George V's Own Lancers, and joined the regiment in Burma. Six months after his commissioning, as was usual with Army Regulations, Archie was promoted to the rank of War Substantive Lieutenant with effect from 29 April 1942. He was promoted to the rank of Captain before his brother, as Acting Captain on 31 July 1943, and Temporary Captain on 31 October 1943.<sup>8</sup> Freddy and Archie GWATKIN were the third generation of the family to serve the British Crown. Their father, then Major Frederick GWATKIN, married Lydia Winifred STANTON on 27 April 1920 at Fairford, Gloucestershire. They had one daughter, and two sons. Their daughter was named Agnes Helen GWATKIN, and their sons Frederick Charles Nicol GWATKIN (born 15 December 1922) and Archibald Willoughby GWATKIN (born 18 December 1923). Both sons attended Clifton College in Bristol, the same school where their father had been educated. Known as Freddy and Archie GWATKIN, the two brothers became prominent members of the school. They were very different in character, differently gifted, and physically less alike than many brothers, yet, for most of their time together at school, they were inseparable.

During the next few days, progress for the West Africans and the 19<sup>th</sup> Lancers, and the tanks were only able to advance on 17 March after a crossing over a chaung had been improved. The Troop then spent its time supporting the Nigerians in particular.

<sup>6</sup> A chaung is a Burmese word for a river or stream, often in a deep channel.

<sup>7</sup> See: <http://www.cwgc.org/find-war-dead/casualty/2262903/SKINNER,%20JOHN>

<sup>8</sup> Army List April 1945 Part II Page 2597a

On 21 March, the tanks of the Troop supported a specific attack, but Jemadar Chhotu RAM's tank was hit and burnt out. Sowar Ram SARUP was killed, Sowar Piru MALL died of his wounds, and the Jemadar was badly burnt. On 23 March, Major WRIGHT had the three remaining tanks in action, with Lieutenant PRYDE and Lieutenant LAWRENCE having joined the Troop to replace Lieutenant GWATKIN and Lieutenant SKINNER. There was stiff opposition, and the Troop fired 460 rounds before the enemy position was overcome.

On 26 March, a strong Japanese 'jitter' party attacked the tank harbour at 23.00 hours, with Major WILSON from the Bombay Grenadiers, and Lieutenant LAWRENCE being injured. Both were evacuated to Ramree Island, as was Captain BILLMORIA who was suffering from dysentery. There was a quiet period until 1 April, when the tanks carried out a shoot in lieu of artillery, firing 400 yards indirectly at 15,000 yards onto a road junction. This turned out to be the last action of the war conducted by the 19<sup>th</sup> King George V's Own Lancers. There were a few days of rest and maintenance, before the Troop sailed for Ramree Island where it landed on 8 April. In due course, Major SAMPLE, Major WRIGHT, and Captain NELSON were awarded the Military Cross, Lance Dafadar Mahindar SINGH a Military Medal. Dafadar Piara SINGH was awarded the Indian Distinguished Service Medal. Lieutenant Colonel G. H. CRITCHLEY and Lieutenant Colonel G. E. V. KEIGHLEY were Mentioned in Despatches, as was Major WRIGHT and Jemadar Chhotu RAM. Major WILSON of the Bombay Grenadiers was also awarded the Military Cross.

After Ramree Island, 'A' Squadron transferred to the command of the 4<sup>th</sup> Indian Infantry Brigade of the 26<sup>th</sup> Indian Division. On 13 March, the squadron embarked on landing craft for the short journey to Letpan. The infantry of the 4<sup>th</sup> Indian Brigade occupied Letpan quickly, and then prepared to move off down the road. The squadron supported the 2<sup>nd</sup> Bn. 7<sup>th</sup> Rajput Regiment which led the advance, during which some Japanese tankettes were driven off. The Squadron captured two of these and used them until the activities of the Royal Air Force made it too dangerous to use captured Japanese vehicles.

The Japanese had built a tunnel into which they had taken a 75 mm field gun. From its position, it covered the main route into Taungup and subjected the men of the Green Howards and their supporting tanks to considerable amount of shelling. The gun was located, and then the tanks of 'A' Squadron engaged in a duel with this gun. The tanks won with some pinpoint shooting, the delayed action shells exploding inside the tunnel. Steadily, the Japanese resistance weakened. Point 370 was the major feature in front of the town, which was contested intensely by both sides. 'A' Company of the Frontier Force Rifles managed to get onto the hill, but found the Japanese extremely well dug in on the reverse slopes. They could not be dislodged, and counter attacked the Indian troops. A plan was devised for the tanks, machine guns and mortars to bring down a concentrated fire pattern on the positions and the line of retreat. Under the barrage, A' Company of the Frontier Force Rifles advanced and drove the Japanese off Point 370.

The Japanese retreated from Taungup over the next few days, so by 27 April, the town was secure. 'A' Squadron of the 146<sup>th</sup> Regiment, R.A.C. took up residence in the town's barracks for the duration of the monsoon. In May 1945, the squadron left Burma to rejoin the regiment and brigade at Ahmednagar in India. Two thirds of the regiment were entitled to repatriation back the United Kingdom under the PYTHON scheme, so new men were posted to the regiment. All had to be assimilated and trained for any forthcoming operations. In addition to the award of the Military Cross to Captain RICHARDS, Major BUCKNALL and Lieutenant BUCKLEY were awarded subsequently the Military Cross for their gallantry during the campaign in the Arakan.

## Malaya, Sumatra and Then Disbandment

In early April 1945, as the campaign in the Arakan reached its conclusion, the brigade was withdrawn from operations and concentrated at Ahmednagar in India. There were changes in units and a change in commander. Brigadier TODD relinquished command of the brigade on 27 June 1945. He was Mentioned in Despatches twice for his leadership in command on the brigade in Burma, firstly on 10 January 1946 and secondly on 9 May 1946. He reverted to the rank of Colonel for a short period, but he was promoted to the rank of Brigadier in July 1948. TODD retired on 30 January 1950 and became the Deputy Lord Lieutenant for the County of Gloucestershire.

Brigadier (Acting) Richard Oswald CRITCHLEY replaced Brigadier TODD as the commanding officer of the brigade. Born in St. Helen's in Lancashire in 1903, CRITCHLEY attended the Royal Military College at Sandhurst. He commissioned on the Unattached List for the Indian Army on 29 January 1925 in the rank of Second Lieutenant (Indian Army number IA/92). He received promotion to the rank of Lieutenant on 29 April 1927 and Captain on 29 January 1934, but CRITCHLEY decided to retire on 11 October 1938 and was admitted to the Indian Army Reserve of Officers in the rank of Captain. Re-employed during the Second World War, CRITCHLEY was promoted to the rank of Acting Brigadier (and Acting Colonel) on 27 June 1945 on assuming command of the brigade.

The 45<sup>th</sup> Cavalry left the brigade in July 1945, to be replaced by the Prince Albert Victor's Own Cavalry (11<sup>th</sup> Frontier Force) which transferred in from the 254<sup>th</sup> Indian Tank Brigade; with the 45<sup>th</sup> Cavalry replacing it in that brigade. The 19<sup>th</sup> King George V's Own Lancers left in April 1945, to be replaced by the 13<sup>th</sup> Duke of Connaught's Own Lancers. This regiment had served previously with the 31<sup>st</sup> Indian Armoured Division in Persia, Iraq and Syria. The 19<sup>th</sup> Lancers moved back to India to join up with the 2<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Division in Madras, although 'A' Squadron participated in the landings at Rangoon and met up with the rest of the 14<sup>th</sup> Army. Its job done, it moved back to India to reunite with the rest of the regiment.

The brigade was allocated for Operation 'Zipper', the invasion of Malaya. As this difficult operation was being planned, the U.S. dropped the two atomic bombs on Japan causing the Japanese Emperor to order a cessation in hostilities that came into effect on 15 August 1945. Still under command of XV Indian Corps, the brigade landed in Malaya in September 1945, fortunately unopposed as there were difficulties experienced on the landing beaches.

Initially stationed at Selangor, the brigade moved to Negri Sembilan, and then onto Malacca. During the deployment in Malaya, the Prince Albert Victor's Own Cavalry (11<sup>th</sup> Frontier Force) left the brigade in December 1945. It seemed as if the 146<sup>th</sup> Regiment, R.A.C. was to disband in late 1945. This was reinforced when the regiment was ordered to send two drafts of soldiers to the 2<sup>nd</sup> Reconnaissance Regiment, which was being posted to Singapore. However, as the situation in the Netherland East Indies deteriorated in December 1945, Headquarters XV Indian Corps ordered the brigade to make ready some armoured units for immediate deployment to Sumatra and Java.



Once again, 'A' Squadron, 146<sup>th</sup> Regiment, R.A.C. was chosen. Captain FERENS now commanded the squadron, with Captain B. R. JOHNSTON joining from the 149<sup>th</sup> Regiment, R.A.C. as second-in-command. The squadron comprised five troops, with No. 1 Troop (Lieutenant D. M. TONKS), No. 2 Troop (Lieutenant W. G. BANNOCHIE) and No. 3 Troop (Lieutenant S. F. JOURS all equipped with armoured cars. No. 4 Troop (Lieutenant D. R. GREEN) and No. 5 Troop (Lieutenant R. McCracken) were allocated a close protection and dismounted role.

'A' Squadron landed at Medan, which at the time was quiet. Unrest was spreading across Java as the Indonesians sought independence from Dutch rule; and was soon likely to reach Sumatra. In late October, two companies of the 6<sup>th</sup> Bn. The South Wales Borderers were ambushed as they made their way inland from Medan, fortunately without heavy loss. In November, the situation at Padang became tense with outbreaks of violence directed towards Dutch people and assets, and towards the British and Indian troops stationed there.

'A' Squadron commenced operations in support of the 6<sup>th</sup> Bn. The South Wales Borderers soon after their arrival. Major FERENS commanded two armoured cars sent to deal with an Indonesian gang causing problems in the area. The following afternoon, further violence occurred in eastern Medan, to which No. 1 Troop responded, assisted by No. 5 Troop in close support. Placed back under command of the 4<sup>th</sup> Indian Infantry Brigade with effect from 14 December, the squadron carried out an operation with the 2<sup>nd</sup> Bn. 13<sup>th</sup> Frontier Force Rifles in an area about eight miles from Medan.

The brigade headquarters moved from Malaya to Java in January 1946, to be located at Batavia. It was not required in Java for long, so in March, the brigade headquarters returned to India. The 2<sup>nd</sup> Bn. 4<sup>th</sup> Bombay Grenadiers left the brigade in February 1946, with the 13<sup>th</sup> Duke of Connaught's Own Lancers leaving in March 1946. Back in India, the headquarters commenced dispersing with the brigade disbanding officially in May 1946. Brigadier CRITCHLEY reverted to the rank of Temporary Colonel, and then on 8 October 1946, he returned to retired pay and was granted the honorary rank of Brigadier. He was mentioned in Despatches on 9 May 1946.

By April 1946, many of the small pockets of armed resistance in Indonesia had been dealt with, by an organised Indonesian National Army was in existence in the hinterland. Although attacks against the British declined, in October 1946, tension increased with the arrival of Dutch troops. Peace talks between the Dutch and Indonesians had taken place in August 1946, but the agreement broke down quickly. In November 1946, the Dutch began to take over responsibility for the security of Medan. 'A' Squadron 146<sup>th</sup> Regiment, R.A.C. left Medan on the 19<sup>th</sup> November, one of the last two units to do so. The armoured cars remained however, and they were taken over by the Dutch, even though they were worn out.

'A' Squadron rejoined the regiment, now stationed in Poona. India was now moving fast towards independence and partition, with the British Army being drawn down in the sub-continent. The 146<sup>th</sup> Regiment commenced the process of disbanding, with several soldiers posted to the 7<sup>th</sup> Royal Tank Regiment at Sialkot. By February 1947, the 146<sup>th</sup> Regiment, R.A.C. ceased to exist.

After he left the brigade, in September 1944 Brigadier SCHREIBER became the Chief of Staff to H.R.H. The Duke of Gloucester who was Governor-General designate of Australia. The Duke of Gloucester took up his appointment in Australia with effect from 30 January 1945. He left on the 11 March 1947, and SCHREIBER left with him. SCHREIBER returned to the Regular Army Reserve of Officers on 1 January 1949 in the rank of Major. On 7 May 1959, on reaching the age limit for liability to recall, he was granted the honorary rank of Brigadier. He remained a keen aviator and owned a plane for ten years. He died in 1972.

Lieutenant Colonel GOOD returned to the United Kingdom on 1945 to be stationed at the R.A.C. Range at Castlemartin in Pembrokeshire. Later that year, he was posted to the command of 155<sup>th</sup> Regiment, R.A.C. based in Newmarket, Cambridgeshire. In 1946, GOOD moved to Darlington to join the Headquarters, Northumberland District, and then in the following year he served in Egypt until his retirement in 1948. He married in 1953 and died on 28 March 1989 in Hampshire aged eighty-five years.

Major Ezra RHODES transferred back to the King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry on 13 March 1946 in the rank of Captain. On 27 April 1948, RHODES was granted a permanent commission in the King's Own Royal Regiment (Lancaster) in the rank of Captain. He was promoted to the rank of Major on 17 October 1948 and retired on 15 December 1962. He died in Bristol, England on 16 October 2003.

**Appendix 'A'****19<sup>th</sup> King George Vs Own Lancers – November 1944**

King's Commissioned Officers	34 Authorised	35 Present
Viceroy's Commissioned Officers	40	42
Other Ranks	566	628
Non-Combatants	43	32

Commanding Officer	– Lieutenant Colonel G. H. CRITCHLEY
Second-in-Command	– Major G. E. V. KEIGHLEY
Adjutant	– Captain T. L. BRAYNE
Quarter-Master	– Captain E. J. SMITH
Technical Officer	– Captain D. G. PAGE
Signals Officers	– Captain F. V. ELLVERS
Intelligence Officer	– Lieutenant E. W. BEVINGTON

Headquarter Squadron	
Officer Commanding	– Major C. H. CAMPBELL
Second-in-Command	– Captain N. L. HARDING
Medical Officer	– Captain G. A. FLANN, R.A.M.C.
Light Aid Detachment	– Captain E. V. HORNE, I.E.M.E.
Light Air Detachment	– Lieutenant B. S. HAYLEY, I.E.M.E.

'A' Squadron	
Officer Commanding	– Major W. N. SAMPLE
Second-in-Command	– Captain W. J. KINGDON
Troop Officer	– Lieutenant A. B. MERRIAM
Troop Officer	– Lieutenant J. M. BILLIMORIA
Troop Officer	– Lieutenant B. R. PRYDE
Troop Officer	– Second Lieutenant K. S. S. FITZE
Troop Officer	– Second Lieutenant H. W. LAWRENCE

'B' Squadron	
Officer Commanding	– Major R. G. SATTERWAITE
Second-in-Command	– Captain B. B. WEATHERILL
Troop Officer	– Captain T. H. AINSLIE
Troop Officer	– Lieutenant J. SKINNER
Troop Officer	– Lieutenant A. W. GWATKIN
Troop Officer	– Lieutenant Gurbachan SINGH
Troop Officer	– Second Lieutenant E. L. CURZON

## 'C' Squadron

Officer Commanding

– Major P. G. BROOKE

Second-in-Command

– Captain R. C. DENING

Troop Officer

– Captain D. J. MORIARTY

Troop Officer

– Lieutenant D. E. WREFORD

Troop Officer

– Lieutenant Bhupindar SINGH

Troop Officer

– Lieutenant D. J. PARRY-CROOKE

Troop Officer

– Lieutenant E. R. JESSOP

## Reinforcements

Reinforcement Officer

– Lieutenant M. B. STRAKER

Reinforcement Officer

– Lieutenant D. M. LITTLE (Died 5 November 1944 polio)

Reinforcement Officer

– Lieutenant D. E. BARTELS

Reinforcement Officer

– Second Lieutenant J. H. BRAY

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