

History of the 17th Horse



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Raising

The Poona Horse was raised on the 15th July, 1817, as result of the Treaty of Poona, concluded on 13th June 1817, between the British headed by Lord Hasting , the then Governor General, and Bajee Rao II, the Peishwa. In accordance with Article VI of the Treaty, a force known as the Poona Auxiliary Force was to be recruited. This Force was to be commanded by British Officers, and although maintained by revenue arising out of the territorial grants made by the Peishwa, this Force permanently stationed in the Peishwa's Territory, available if necessary for action against the Peishwa himself.

The Residence at the Peishwa,s court at Poona, who negotiated the Treaty in 1817, was the Honourable Mountstuart Elphinston, who later became Governor of Bombay. Immediately after the Treaty was concluded , a number of military officers were placed under the orders of the Residence for raising the Poona Horse Auxiliary Horse and was the Cavalry elements of this Force was known as the Poona Auxiliary Horse and was the only components of this Force which continued as a Regiment, being later designated, after the amalgamation in 1921, as the Poona Horse (17th Q.V.O Cavalry).

It is interesting coincidence that the Poona Horse was raised under the order of the Honourable Mountstuart Elphinston, and a descendant of his, Colonel W.G Elphinston, MC, was the last British Colonel of the Regiment.

The following extracts from instructions issued for the raising of the Poona Auxiliary Horse, provide interesting vignettes of how the irregular forces of those times were commanded and administered :-

“Each Risaldar* to have a Nishanburdar (standard beared), a Nugaraburdar (Kettle-drummer) and a Karkun (orderly) at the expenses of the Government : each Jamadar a Karkun.

“Men of respectivity and family will be permitted , for the present, to recruit for promotion of the following terms : Risaldar to raise 500 horses, a Jamadar 100, and Daffadar 40.

“The men to be Sunis, Shaikhs, Moguls, Pathans, Scindians (Sindhis), Beloochis, Shiahs, Hindustanis, Brahmins, Rajputs, and Maharatta spearsmen-men of low caste not to be admitted – Mussalmans, especially Syuds, Sikhs and Hindustanis to be preferred.

“No regular dress to be enforced : but if the men will consent to wear cloth angrikas or turbans and kummerbunds of uniform colour, they ought to be encouraged to do so : if not they must be required to wear some distinguishing mark in war, which must be often changed to prevent the enemy from taking it up.

“Commanders of divisions are to decide all disputes as far as may be practicable, through sentences of punchayets elected as much as possible with the option of the parties concerned in the dispute, unless it should appear to the Commanding Officer that the

persons selected are themselves interested parties : on such occasions he must appoint the punchayet himself from amongst the most respectable and intelligent Siledars of the Risalah. Although the European Officer Commanding 1,000 must always have the power of dismissing any Barghir, yet if such punishment can be brought about by a punchayet, so much the better: and it is suggested that all punchayets appointed with a view of punish crime or disorders should consist of Jamadars or Daffadars, with Risaldar sometimes (not often) as president.

Punchayets in their decisions can generally be guided by the judgements of the European officers. They will save him from the odium might otherwise arise in checking a variety of irregularities. The European officer ought , consequently, to bear in mind that in this service respectability and popularity are the ways to govern, and to attain these, the officers must combine sense, temper, confidence and liberality.

“All sorts of exercises should be encouraged : good shots, good riders, swordsmen, pahalwans, &c., should be raised and receive presents. Nautches must be given to the native officers, the kanats to be open so that the whole Risalah may consider themselves entertained : on each occasion the officer can retire by 12 or 1 O'clock without giving offence, and he ought not to permit any indecency in his presence.

“ Shorfs to be attached to divisions on conditions of lending money when required : the interest on no account to exceed 2 per cent mensem, the principal not to exceed two months' pay.

“Gold or silver bangles will be presented to all who may particularly distinguish themselves in action, and other suitable rewards granted to those whose zeal for the service on other occasions may be deemed worthy of such consideration. A horse missing after an action is only to be paid for if the owner is wounded. All improvements are to be brought about by persuasion, and the greatest patience to be shown towards the faults that are to be eradicated.

“ The native officers to be treated with utmost respect and attention, and the men with kindness and consideration : no private horseman to be struck on any account whatever. The principles of the service are to respect the prejudices of the native and to manage them by good treatment. As few direct orders as possible to be issued.

“Lt Col J. Cunningham was the first Commandant of the Regiment. The principal part of the Poona Auxiliary Horse was raised in Poona: large levies were also made at Aurangabad, Nagpur, Baroda and Sirur (then the Headquarters of the Bombay Army). A levy of 500 sabres raised in 'Hindoostan' by Colonel Skinner* was also incorporated in to the Auxiliary Horse.

Lt C. Swanston (Cortgaum Swanston), adopted a unique method for the recruitment of his Divisions. He early recognized that, if the raising instructions regarding the provisions of horse and horse trappings by the men themselves were too closely followed, a number of good men would be lost to the Poona Auxiliary Horse, owing to their inability to mount themselves. Therefore he borrowed the necessary money to purchase a certain number of

horses and their equipment, and was thus in a position to recruit picked men. It may justly be claimed that thus was laid the foundation of the Silladar System which came into vogue later on.

33rd Q.V.O Cavalry

The 3rd Regiment of Cavalry, which was subsequently designated the 33rd Q.V.O Light Cavalry, was raised at Sirur on 4th May 1820 as a regular Cavalry Regiment of the Bombay Presidency Army. It had three squadrons on its establishment, of which one squadron was provided from the 1st Regiment of Cavalry and one Squadron from the 2nd Regiment of Cavalry. The balance was made up by inducting suitable Indian Officers, NCOs and men of the 1st and 3rd Battalions of the Poona Auxiliary Infantry, who volunteered for service with the Cavalry, when these Battalions of the Poona Auxiliary Force were disbanded in 1820. Major (later Maj Gen) Peter Delamotte was appointed the first Commandant of the Regiment and was charged with raising it.

The Battle Of Koregaum

Though the aforementioned Treaty of Poona, signed on 15 June 1817, was intended to settle all matters of dispute between the British and to afford security for the future, relations between them began to deteriorate almost immediately after the Treaty was signed. Symptoms of impending hostilities began to manifest themselves every day. Sensing danger the Resident, Mountstuart Elphinston, deemed it prudent to increase his forces and with this end in view sent instructions that one infantry battalion and body of 1000 Auxiliary Horse, which had been formed under Lieutenant C Swanston, should be sent to join him from Sirur. The Peishwa protested against the reinforcement of the British Forces, but when his protests were not heeded, he left Poona to join his Army. Thereafter, there were almost continuous skirmishes between the Peishwah's Army and the British Forces.

Thus, what had originally been conceived as operations against the Pindaris, had now developed into a campaign against the Peishwa and other Mahratta Rulers. The History of the Poona Horse had commenced.

On 31st December 1817, Captain Staunton of the 1st Native Infantry received orders to reinforce Colonel Burr at Poona, whose two battalions were in danger of being cut off by the larger forces of the Peishwa. At eight O'clock that evening Captain Staunton marched out from Sirur with a force comprising 2nd Battalion of the 1st Bombay Native Infantry (later 2nd Battalion, 4th Bombay Grenadiers), 300, sabres of the Poona Auxiliary Horse under Lieutenant C/O 56 APO Swanston (the celebrated 'Corygaum' Swanston), who was also Second-in-Command to Staunton: and a contingent of Madras Artillery with two six-pounder guns manned by 24 European gunners: the entire force did not exceed 900 men. They marched all night, covering a distance of 27 miles; at about ten in the morning on New Year's Day 1818, as they reached the high ground overlooking the village of Koregaum., they came suddenly in view of the Peishwa's main army encamped on the South Bank of the Bheemah River. This consisted of about 20,000 horse and 8,000 infantry.

The village of Koregaum, which was located on the North of the Bheemah River, and under the walls of which of main road to Poona crossed the River by a ford, was close at hand. Staunton at once saw that his best move was to take up a defensive position in his village. Luckily for Staunton, the main road to Poona remained unoccupied by the enemy and he pushed down his road with his infantry and guns, covered by the cavalry detachment of the Poona Auxiliary Horse, who trotted down the hill and formed up ready to charge any of the Mahratta Cavalry that might attempt to cross the ford. Staunton secured the Western extremity of the village and then covered by the fire of his two guns, he sent in the infantry to occupy the village.

The Peishwa's troops though initially taken by surprise at the approach of the detachment, reacted quickly enough and likewise despatched some infantry to occupy the village. Accordingly, neither side was able to occupy the whole village before the other. The Peishwa, who was present in person, ascended an eminence at some distance to watch what

appeared to be the imminent destruction of his small contingent by the British Army, and to encourage his troops by his presence.

Captain Staunton failed in his endeavour to dislodge the enemy from the strong positions they had occupied in Koregaum village and hence he now concentrated on defending his own position. There was no scope for employing the detachment of the Poona Auxiliary Horse as Cavalry and hence they were dismounted and fought on foot as infantry, even though they were unsuitably armed for this type of fighting. The village became extremely crowded, both obliged to take shelter in it. It was soon surrounded by large bodies of enemy infantry and cavalry, supported by two heavy guns, and the enemy began pressing the detachment from all sides, with daring impetuosity. There soon developed a battle, house-to-house and hand-to-hand, in the course of which almost every building was taken and retaken.

The Arab infantry, which were the pick of the Peishwa's Army, were chosen for the assault on the village; three columns of these troops, comprising one thousand men each, advanced to the attack. No coherent description can be given of the fighting that followed. It consisted on the one side of impetuous attacks by the Peishwa's troops, repulsed with desperate sallies by the British Force; for, when closely pressed, the detachment, in order to gain room was obliged to charge with the bayonet. Such ripostes were frequently repeated and with success, but as these charges were normally led by the European Officers, the majority of them became disabled by death or wounds in the successive counter attacks.

The two guns of the detachment did fearful execution and so the enemy decided to concentrate on eliminating them as prelude to further attacks. A series of direct assault were launched on the guns, supported by galling fire directed from some walls over looking the gun position. The enemy finally succeeded in capturing one of the guns, after killing Lieutenant Chisholme, the commander of the artillery detachment; the severed head of this officer was sent to the Peishwa as a trophy. But before they could carry away the body of this officer or make use of the gun, Lieutenant Pattinson, who had been supposed killed, struggled to his feet from a pile of corpses and called on the Grenadier Company of the 2nd/1st to follow him in a charge. They recaptured the gun but Lieutenant Pattinson was shot and wounded again, dying later as a consequence of his wounds.

In the course of the day Lieutenant Swanston sustained two severe wounds and was placed in the choultry along with Lieutenant Connellan and Assistant Surgeon Wingate. This building fell into the enemy's possession in one of their successful attacks, but was recaptured soon after and the wounded officers rescued.

Towards evening the enemy called on the British gunners to surrender. Twelve of the British gunners had been killed and eight wounded; the four who were left spoke of asking for terms but Staunton would have none of it and his Sepoys were with him; the whole force swore to fight to the last man. They fought on, the seven unwounded gun lascars, not generally reckoned as combatants, working one of the guns when no Europeans survived.

During the battle, Captain Staunton despatched a messenger belonging to the Poona Auxiliary Horse, to Colonel Burr at Poona, informing him of the situation and calling on

him for aid. This messenger, with a great deal of dexterity and courage, managed to pass through several bodies of the enemy and safely delivered his despatch at Poona. However, the reinforcement, which was sent, arrived too late to be of any assistance.

About 9 O' Clock that night Staunton's force cleared the village of the enemy and were able to get water; twenty five hours had passed since they marched out from Sirur. When it was light, they found that the whole enemy Army was withdrawing, doubtless because they received news of British reinforcement moving up to join Colonel Burr. Captain Staunton remained in position during the day of 2nd January and at nightfall, after burying their dead and arranging for the transportation of the wounded, he retraced his steps to Sirur. Before entering the town they halted to dress there and at 9 O' Clock next morning they marched in with drums beating and colours flying.

The detachment returned to Sirur two days and three nights after they had left it. During this period they had no food and had been constantly marching or fighting. For nearly twelve hours of fighting they had been without water. They had lost 50 men killed and 105 wounded out of fewer than 500. Casualties of the Poona Auxiliary Horse were 47 killed, 26 wounded (including the commander Lieutenant Swanston). One subaltern and the doctor were the only European officers left wounded.

The action fought at Koregaum has been held up as one of the most brilliant examples of gallantry and perseverance in the annals of the Indian Army and has been recounted as such by Philip Mason in his book *A Matter of Honour*. General Smith, in his official report of this battle, wrote, "The action at Koregaum was one of the most brilliant affairs achieved by any army in which European and Native soldiers displayed the most noble devotion and most romantic bravery under pressure of hunger and thirst almost beyond human endurance.

The First Afghan War

In 1838, Persia and Afghanistan were being ruled as a united country by the descendants of Nadir Shah. Britain had always been sensitive to Russian presence and influence in these countries. In order to ensure against it, it was decided to despatch a Field Force to occupy the towns of Kandahar, Ghazni and Kaabul, and to leave the country of the Afghans under the rule of Shah Shuja-ul-Mulk, who was virtually a puppet ruler, and could be expected to safeguard British interest.

Accordingly, a 6000 strong force from the Bombay Presidency and a 10,000 strong force from the Bengal Presidency were assembled for this purpose. The Bombay contingent was under the command of Sir John Keane, and included 500 sabres of the Poona Auxiliary Horse, the contingent returned to Quetta in September 1839. The Poona Horse was awarded the battle honour "AFGHANISTAN 1839" for this campaign.

After the withdrawal of General Keane's force from Afghanistan, Shah Shuja retained possession of Kabul and Kandahar, supported by a British Force of 8,000 men. However, the Afghans were not reconciled to this imposition and in November 1841, open insurrection broke out. The officers of the British delegation were massacred. Akbar Khan, the leader of the Afghans, personally murdered the British Envoy at a conference. Following that, a convention was signed by which the British Garrison of Kabul was to be allowed to evacuate the country. The march back began in January 1842. The winter was severe, the troops demoralised and subject to continuous attack; the result was a total massacre. Of those who left Kabul the only survivor was a medical officer, Dr Brydon who reached Jelalabad wounded and half - dead.

In order to avenge these disasters, two columns were despatched from India: one under General Pollock, via the Khyber, and one under General England via Quetta. Both the Poona Horse and the 3rd Bombay Light Cavalry were a part of this avenging Force. There was a sharp action at Kandahar, when England's force moved to relieve General Nott, who was still holding out there. The cavalry caused great slaughter, the Poona Horse capturing a standard; an extra standard bearer was sanctioned for carrying this standard. The battle honour "CANDAHAR-1842" awarded for this action.

The 3rd Bombay Light Cavalry accompanied General Nott's force to Ghazni which was vacated by the Afghans. Among the trophies here were the sandal-wood gates of the tomb of Mahmud Ghazni. These were believed to be the gates brought by Mahmud Ghazni from Somnath and such was the reverence in which they were held that Maharaja Ranjit Singh wanted to make a special stipulation in a treaty that on the restoration of Shah Shuja, the gates of Somnath would be handed over to him. Subsequently, it transpired that this was an erroneous belief as the gates of Somnath were made of a different wood. These gates brought from Ghazni are now in the Fort of Agra. From Ghazni the force marched to Kabul, which was occupied on 16th September 1842.

The battle honours "GHUZNEE 1842" and "CABOOL 1842" were awarded for this action.

Raising

It would be appropriate to begin this account of the Sind War by making a brief mention about the raising of the Scinde Horse and the contribution made by the Poona Horse in this regard. When the Poona Auxiliary Horse was raised in 1817, levies for this raising were made in various parts of the country, which included a levy from Kutch. In 1840, the Kutch levy was transferred to form the nucleus for the raising of the Scinde Irregular Horse, now known as the 14th grown over the years and need to be nurtured for the future also. Now onto the operations in Sind.

Shah Shuja, on being restored to the throne of Afghanistan on the strength of British Arms, demanded arrears of tribute from the Amirs of Sind, which had always been a dependency of Kabul. The Amirs resented this and their ire became directed towards the British, who they felt were supporting Shah Shuja. This latent hostility finally erupted in an attack on the British Residency at Hyderabad (Sind). On the 15th Feb 1843, Major Outram, the Commissioner, was besieged by heavy odds and after a brave defence of the Residency, he managed to extricate himself and his small escort of 100 men and effected a link up with the main British Army under Sir Charles Napier.

This attack on the British Resident brought matter to a head and open hostilities commenced between the British and the Amirs of Sind, leading to the Battle of Meanee, which was fought on the 7th February 1843.

The Baluchi force of the Amirs was between 30,000 and 40,000 strong with 15 guns and 5,000 cavalry. Against them Sir Charles Napier had only some 2,600 combatants personnel of all Arms (including officers); the cavalry, comprising the Poona Auxiliary Horse and the Scinde Irregular Horse, numbered 800 only. Apart from their small numbers, the British Force was greatly handicapped by their immense mass of camp followers and animals.

The unequal contest began with a chain of single combats along the entire front of the battle lines where no quarter was given, none asked for and none expected, and this continued for many hours. There comes a critical phase in every battle, which offers victory to the commander who most readily and resolutely seizes the opportunity; at Meanee this came after three hours of the foregoing type of fighting. Sir Charles Napier had no reserve, save his cavalry and yet the battle would be won or lost within the next twenty minutes. He accordingly sent orders to Colonel Pattle, his Second-in-Command, to charge at all risk the enemy's right with the available cavalry. The ground was badly broken up by nullahs and ditches, so much so that fifty of the Scinde Horse Troops came down at the commencement of the charge. But, dashing through the Baluchi guns on the right flank, riding over the high bank of the Phullalah River, the handful of cavalry crossed the deep river bed, gained the plain beyond and charged with irresistible fury, spreading confusion along the rear of the whole line of battle. Then at last the Baluchi swordsmen, whose impetuosity was scarcely to be resisted before, began to waver. Napier's infantry gathered themselves together for final effort, and charged. The battle was lost for the Amirs, and slowly the Baluchis began to retreat.

In this battle the Baluchis lost over five thousand killed; the British Forces lost nearly three hundred of whom twenty were officers. The casualties of the Poona Horse consisted of Captain J.Tait the commander wounded; three rank and file killed and 17 wounded, seven horses were killed and eight wounded.

The services of the Poona Horse in this battle were brought to special notice in despatches, and the name of Sowar Ahmed Khan, who received the Order of Merit in 1849, was again specially mentioned for gallantry, in saving the life of his Commanding Officer, Captain Tait, when the latter was wounded. Tait was also mentioned for gallant conduct.

At Meanee, about seven miles from Hyderabad, a monument was constructed to commemorate this battle consisting of an obelisk in Hyderabad stone. The Cheshire Regiments of the British Army and the Scinde Horse and the Poona Horse and Honorary Members of each other's Messes in perpetuity.

On 23rd March 1843, Sir Charles Napier was reinforced by troops from Bombay, which included the 3rd Bombay Light Cavalry. The Battle of Hyderabad was fought on 24th March in which both the Poona Horse and the 3rd Light Cavalry participated. The Poona Horse and 9th Bengal Cavalry covered the left flank of British Forces; the 3rd Light Cavalry and the Scinde Horse were on the right flank. The cavalry on the right, under Major Stack of the 3rd Cavalry, made a premature charge. Napier was at first angered, but this anger soon turned to admiration. Realising that this error could not now be remedied, he ordered a general attack with cold steel and the infantry and the cavalry on the left flank also charged. The Baluchis broke and fled the cavalry did terrible execution on the fleeing enemy. Unfortunately, Colonel Pattle, Napier's Second-in-Command, a somewhat aged cavalry commander, stopped the pursuit as he thought the cavalry were getting too dispersed. This was a great error as it permitted Sher Mohammed (The Lion), the enemy leader, to escape and renew the war at a later date.

On conclusion of this campaign, the Poona Horse was awarded the Battle Honours □ HYDERABAD □ and □ MEANEE □ From Sind, the Poona Horse went back to Sirur.

In the following years at Sirur, a planned policy was carried out to vastly improve the men's dwellings and the horselines, with Regimental enterprise and at Regimental expense. They were later considered the best of all Indian Cavalry lines. Thirty years later an attempt was made to put the Regiment on the Bombay Cavalry roster of moves. This was not put into effect as it was realized that very large compensation would be due to the Poona Horse. (Regrettably these arguments had no influence on Lord Kitchener in 1903, on the grounds that accommodation would be provided wherever the Poona Horse went. Legal opinion did in fact contradict this, though of course no attempt was made to institute any legal action).

1850 is a date of note: The Poona Horse was constituted a □ Military Corps □ and came under Military Law, for most of which they had been on active service, a very high standard of effectiveness and morale had been maintained without recourse to any Military Law. This could only have been possible under extremely good leaders, both British and Indian, who worked in accord with the original instructions, which were received at the time of the Raising.

The Battle Of Kooshab

In 1856 the Shah of Persia invaded Afghanistan and captured the city of Herat. The British Government called upon him to evacuate the city and withdraw his Army from Afghan Territory. He refused to do so and hence war was declared against Persia on 1st November 1856.

Both the Poona Horse under Lieutenant Colonel T. Tapp, and the 3rd Bombay Light Cavalry under Lieutenant Colonel Malt, formed a part of the Expeditionary Force sent to Persia. The troops disembarked on the 7th December and within forty eight hours, i.e., on 9th December, were on the move Northwards. Opposition was met on the same day at Reshire, which was soon cleared. Lieutenant Colonel Malt commanding 3rd Light Cavalry was killed in this action and was succeeded to the command of this Regiment by Captain Forbes.

The next day the advance was resumed on the strongly fortified town of Bushire. The garrison capitulated: "The heavy bombardments of the town and the imposing appearance of troops in line, were no doubt the causes of the lack of spirit shown in defending the town".

On 27th January 1857, General Sir James Outram, KCB assumed command of the forces in Persia. He soon received information that the Persians were assembling a force of 8,000 men with 18 to 20 guns, in order to recover the lost stronghold of Burazjoon situated about 46 miles from inland from Bushire; he therefore resolved to attack the enemy at once and so prevent them from receiving any further reinforcements.

On 3rd February 1857, General Outram set out with a force of 4,500 men and 18 guns; the Cavalry component of this force comprised 176 sabres of the Poona Horse and 243 sabres of the 3rd Bombay Light Cavalry; a total of 416 all told. On the afternoon of 5th February, after a fatiguing march in a heavy deluge, Outram's Force arrived before the Persia entrenchment, only to find them evacuated. Outram was informed (erroneously as proved by subsequent events), that the Persian Force had retreated through the passes to the hinterland. As Outram was weak in cavalry, he deemed it more prudent not to pursue, and having appropriated such of the stores and other equipment left behind by the Persians as would be useful, he destroyed the remainder and commenced his return march on the 7th February.

Outram's Force had not gone far when the Persian Cavalry began to harass their rearguard and flanks in pursuance of their plan to attack this Force on the line of march on the night of their departure, obviously hoping to create confusion and panic in the dark. As the attacks of the Persian cavalry became bolder, a halt was ordered for the night, the troops being deployed for all-round defence against the attacks of the Persian horsemen, with the baggage being placed in the centre for protection. The enemy thereafter, commenced to pour in fire

from our guns of some considerable calibre, but because of the dark, nothing much could be done to silence them.

Early on the morning of 8th February, as soon as it became light enough to see, Captain Graves of 3rd Light Cavalry, along with four of his troopers, moved out to reconnoitre. He soon discovered the entire Persian Force, of some 7,000 men, supported by guns, drawn up in battle order to the left rear (North East) of Outram's Force. Graves galloped along the entire front of the Persian Force, miraculously escaping unhurt from the hundreds of shots fired at him, and on return gave accurate first hand information to his Commanding Officer, Captain Forbes, regarding the strength and dispositions of the enemy. The Persian infantry were drawn up in line with their Right resting on the village of Kooshab and their Left resting on another village with a small fort or tower; in the centre were two small mounds which served as redoubts for their guns. Large bodies of cavalry were formed up on each flank, with skirmishers operating ahead of the main force.

Outram's cavalry was formed up, facing this Persian Force, with the 3rd Light Cavalry on the Left and the Poona Horse on the Right. Both Regiments were formed up in the close column of squadrons, the order being that each Regiment should have an attacking and a supporting squadron. General Outram issued orders for the attack and the Cavalry and artillery swept forward, with the infantry following up behind in double lines. The guns rapidly deployed for action, and supported by their fire, the Poona Horse and the 3rd Bombay Light Cavalry (later 33rd Q.V.O Light Cavalry) made two brilliant charges, which led to the rout of the Persian Forces.

On the right, the Poona Horse led by Lieutenant Colonel T. Tapp, were faced by the 1st Khusgai Regiment of Fars, who had formed them into a square. Tapp took off at a gallop and headed straight for the enemy square, with the rest of the Regiment following at full speed. As the Poona Horse approached the square formed by the 1st Khusgai Regiment swept forward the riders' deep in their horses' sides, their various war-cries pealing high and clear, their swords whirling above their head in gleaming circles.

Like meteors they came out of the smoke and dust of the battlefield and crashed against the square like a solid phalanx; cutting and slashing right and left, the horsemen rode through the square, almost annihilating it and spiking two guns in the process. Bargeer Gulam Hussain Khan killed the standard bearer and captured the Standard of the 1st Khusgai Regiment of Fars; it was surmounted by a silver hand of great sanctity and antiquity. It bears a date corresponding to AD 1066 and on the palm of this hand is the inscription: "Yad Ullal Fauk Idehim". translated this means: "The Hand of God is above all thing".

As Lieutenant Colonel Tapp had given no instructions or orders to Captain Forbes before moving out to engage the Persian Force, Captain Forbes assumed that it was the Colonel's intention that Forbes should act on his own, according to circumstances. An opportunity immediately offered of attacking a considerable body of skirmishers. He at once placed himself at the head of Captain Moore's squadron and advanced to attack the skirmishers, at the distance of 200 yards. The skirmishers were taken by surprise and fled, with the horsemen pursuing and cutting up a large number of the enemy.

This forward movement of 3rd Light Cavalry had been observed by the enemy and he soon moved to strengthen that flank. A large body of their troops which in the early morning mist were mistakenly assumed by Captain Forbes to be a force of cavalry, were seen approaching rapidly. On reaching a high ground directly in front of 3rd Light Cavalry, this force halted and began engaging the horsemen with volleys of musket fire. Forbes soon realised that what he had thought were cavalry, were in fact a Guard Regiment of the Persian infantry, with a strength of approximately eight hundred men. Of them Captain Moore writes:

“The Persian regular infantry had never been previously met by us, the Regiment was a famous one amongst them, were well armed with excellent muskets and fixed bayonets, and the men were the largest and finest-looking body I ever saw, having been recruited from the Northern Provinces of Persia”.

As Moore’s squadron had been scattered while pursuing the skirmishers, Forbes immediately halted and ordered them to reform. In the meantime he sized up the situation. Moore’s squadron had originally comprised 120 men but when they reformed, they barely mustered 100 men as some had been wounded and some were yet to join up. The second squadron of the Regiment, under Captain Graves, had been separated by the deployment of own guns in between, and would not be available to Forbes for any immediate action he may contemplate. Therefore, if he chose to attack he would be attack against heavy odds. But, as Captain Forbes wrote in his report.

“The men and horses of the squadron were in high spirits- the ground most favourable for cavalry – the enemy in a position isolated from the rest of their Army; Even if an attack against them failed, the consequences would not be serious. I ordered the squadron to wheel about and attack to its front. The men saw at once what was required of them, and by a loud cheer assured the officers of their determination to meet the odds opposed to them”. It was a courageous decision; commenting on it, Capt Moore writes: “I am of the opinion that the square consisted of at least eight hundred men; therefore, the bravery and gallantry of Captain Forbes in leading against it, entirely on his own responsibility, a small body of cavalry one – tenth of their number and quite unsupported by any other body, cannot be over estimated”.

Forbes, alongwith his Adjutant Lieutenant Moore (the younger Moore) placed himself at the head of Captain Moore’s squadron and unhesitatingly followed. The Persian infantry, seeing that they were going to be attacked immediately formed a square and calmly and with confidence awaited the shock of the cavalry onslaught, in a formation they had been taught to consider impenetrable to hostile horsemen.

The orders rang out sharp and clear. The line advanced and when within a hundred yards of the enemy, charged. Forbes and his Adjutant, young Moore, raced towards the nearest face of the square, followed the nearest thing behind by the officers of the squadron, the elder Moore, Malcolmson, Wren, Spens and Combe, riding knee to knee, with spurs in their horses’ flanks; in rear of them rushed the dark troopers of the devoted square. As they approached, Forbes was shot through the thigh and Wren’s horse was wounded; but unheeding they swept onwards.

When they closed to within thirty yards of the square, the younger Moore spurred his horse ahead, but “daunted by the flashes, and the fire, and the noise, and the crackle of the musketry, the horse swerved. Dropping his sword and letting it hang by the knot at his wrist Young Moore caught up the reins in both hands, screwed his horse’s head straight, and then coolly, as if riding a fence, leaped him into the square”. The horse was impaled upon the bayonets and fell stone-dead, catapulting Young Moore into the midst of the enemy. Almost the same instant, along its whole face, the square was clashed upon, broken and entered, and the horsemen began cutting and slashing, the enemy till then so perfect an example of discipline, were reduced to a confused and struggling mass of fugitives.

When the younger Moore was precipitated into the midst of the enemy square, his sword was broken by the fall and he was left almost defenceless. Seeing his brother officer’s peril, Lieutenant Malcolmson cut his way to where Moore had fallen and drawing one foot from the stirrup, gave him the leather to hold onto; he then dragged Moore clear of the enemy square, thus saving his life. The elder Moore-18 stone in weight and 6 ft 7 inches in height, also had his horse killed on entering the square, but he cut his way out on foot.

The troopers of 3rd Light Cavalry cut their way through, reformed on the other side, wheeled a swept back, a second wave of ruin. Of the eight hundred men who formed that square, barely twenty escaped to tell the tale of its destruction. Captain Forbes writes: “In no previous action have I witnessed in so short a time so great a destruction of life as was inflicted by the straight sword, by this regiment”.

Commending the bravery shown in this action by the troopers of 3rd Light Cavalry, Sir James Outram wrote in his despatch:

“Hav Runjeet Singh, 3rd Regiment, Light Cavalry. This man has now been promoted to the commissioned rank of Jamadar. In the charge of the square he was shot through the centre of breast, the ball entering in front, and lodging under his shoulder-blade. The wound did not check his progress in the least, and he entered the square close to Captain Forbes in the attack on the enemy guns, and there received a second wound, which immediately took from him the power of using his sword. He, however, continued to retain his hold of his sword, and went on until the men reformed for another charge. After the fight at the guns, when coming up to his Commanding Officer, the havildar saluted him, told him that he was shot through the chest, and that he knew that his wounds were mortal, but that he did not mind losing his life in the least, if his officers thought he had done his duty bravely. Havildar (now Jamadar) Runjeet Singh has not yet recovered of his wounds, but is doing well”.

Lieutenant Moore and Malcolmson were both awarded the Victoria Cross. In this context, the following is an extract from the London Gazette, dated 3rd August 1860, giving the citation for their award.

“The Queen has been graciously pleased to signify Her intention to confer the decoration of the Victoria Cross on the under-mentioned officers of Her Majesty’s Indian Forces, whose claims to the same have been submitted for Her Majesty’s approval, in consideration of their gallantry and distinguished conduct during the operation of the Expeditionary Force in Persia 1856-57 as recorded against their several names.

Lieutenant and Adjutant Arthur Thomas Moore, and Lieutenant John Grant Malcolmson, 3rd Bombay Light Cavalry. Date of Acts of Bravery, 8th February 1857.

Lieutenant Moore for being the first to leap into the Persian square and trying to fight his way out with a broken sword, his horse having fallen dead. Lieutenant Malcolmson, seeing his brother officer's peril, for fighting his way to his dismounted comrade through a crowd of enemies, carrying Lieutenant Moore safely through everything out of the throng. The thoughtfulness for others, cool determination, devoted courage and ready activity shown by the young officer Lieutenant Malcolmson appears to be most admirable and worthy of the highest honour".

1857 - The Great Upheaval

The Poona Horse and the 3rd Cavalry were not affected by the Mutiny. Both the Regiments were in Persia when the Mutiny broke out and as soon as the Persian Campaign was over, they were hurried back to India for employment against the rebel forces. The Poona Horse returned to Sirur and was employed generally in the Deccan; a detachment of the designation of the Poona Auxiliary Horse was changed to the Poona Horse.

The 3rd Bombay Light Cavalry was divided into two wings, with one wing accompanying each of the two columns of the Central India Field, which was under the command of Sir Hugh Rose. This Force was employed in places which still evoke nostalgic memories for those who have served in Central India, now Madhya Pradesh – Jhansi, Rathgarh, Guna, Chanderi, Talbehat, Betwa River and many more.

Lieutenant (later Field Marshal) H.E Wood, VC and

Trooper (later Risaldar Major) Dhonkul Singh

Lieutenant H.E. Wood, (later Field Marshal Sir Evelyn Wood, VC, GCB, GCMG) was attached to the Left Wing of 3rd Bombay Light Cavalry from H.M. 17 Lancers; he won his VC when on attachment with 3rd Light Cavalry. His orderly during this period was Trooper Dhonkul Singh a great soldier in his own right, who was to later become Risaldar Major of the Regiment and legendary figure of his time. Chance had thrown together these two intrepid cavaliers and the comradeship of Arms that developed between them and the actions that they fought together, make an interesting tale of heroism, devotion and fidelity.

The first of these actions was fought at Rajgarh, which is related by Sir Evelyn Wood as follows:

“The Native Skirmishers (3rd Light Cavalry) now got out of hand and pursued at a faster speed than I approved, but I consoled myself that they would stop when confronted by any considerable body of the enemy, and this actually happened. A quarter of an hour later, I was cantering on in pursuit, by the track on which we had taken the two guns, followed by a Dragoon, named Dhonkul Singh. One of our men shouted to me: ‘Look to the left or you will be shot’, Turning my head I saw a rebel, who had planted his spear in the ground, and with his gun resting on the spear, was aiming at me. I called to my orderly, ‘Go and kill him’, and without checking my horse looked round to see what would happen. Dhonkul Singh rode at him with uplifted sword, prepared for cut 2 (a cut at the head), the man held his fire till his adversary got within three yards, and then fired, missing his aim; Dhonkul Singh’s sword, cutting his face into two bits, knocked him to the ground. As my orderly galloped up to rejoin me the man jumped up again, and continued to fight others, until he was speared by the oncoming squadron of the 17th Lancers”.

The Battle of Sindwaha

Sindwaha is located a few miles to the South East of Lalitpur. On 19th October 1858, a battle was fought near Sindwaha between a British Force under General Michael, which included a contingent of 3rd Bombay Light Cavalry, and rebel force jointly under the command of Tantia Tope, the Raja of Rathgurbh and Nawab of Baroda. This battle is of particular significance in the context of the Regimental History because it was in this action that Lieutenant H.E. Wood won his VC; the citation for this award read as follows

“On October 19th, 1858, at Sindwaha, during the Indian Mutiny Lieutenant Wood was in command of a troop of the 3rd Light Cavalry. He attacked the almost single handed a band of mutineers who were making a stand and routed them completely. A short time after, near Sendhora, a Patel named Chemun Singh had been seized by the enemy. Hearing that they intended to hang the wretched man for loyalty to us, Lieutenant Wood took about twelve men and started in pursuit. After a ride of some miles, they came upon the mutineers, about seventy in number, encamped and asleep. Taking two men he crept up to them, fired a volley, dashed among them, and rescued the man”.

Trooper Dhonkul Singh was with Lieutenant Wood at Sindwaha also and was once again instrumental in saving his life. Writing about it in later years, Field Marshal Sir Evelyn Wood described this incident as follows:

“The Wilayati (a terms used for Afghan mercenaries) over six feet in height, having thrown away his musket, drew a long two-handed sword, while I was fighting with two of the sepoy, who were trying to bayonet me. The Wilayati ran at me with uplifted sword over his head, and I waited for him the point of my sword low. The Wilayati, cutting too soon missed my leg, over balanced and fell on his face. I backed my horse, and got the point of my sword within two inches of his back, when two of the sepoy, running out of the group, thrust at me with their bayonets, and I was obliged to bring the point of my sword back to keep them off. Then the Wilayati jumped up and came behind me, but as he did so I saw over the heads of the two sepoy with whom I was engaged, Dhonkul Singh approaching at speed from the west, or far side of the group, through which he charged like a skittle ball amongst the pins. He knocked down two, without seriously hurting them, riding straight at the Wilayati, who was now behind me, with his sword again in the air. Dhonkul Singh cut 5 (body cut) but missed his stroke, and I exclaimed sarcastically, ‘Bravo’. The soldier was furious at my remark, and as he circled his horse and ‘collected’ it to a slow canter shouting the ‘Sahib say bravo’, rode directly on the Wilayati, who stood with his long sword in the air. Neither man condescended to guard; each cut with all his strength, Dhonkul Singh using cut 2 (a cut at the head), as he had at Rajghur, when he fought the dismounted rebel. The Wilayati’s sword falling on the cap lines of the saddle, dividing the crupper and slightly wounding the horse’s spine. Dhonkul Singh’s sword left the Wilayati’s face in pain, felling him to the ground.

For the conspicuous gallantry displayed by him, Trooper Dhonkul Singh was admitted to the 3rd Class Order of Merit and given special promotion in the field.

Profile of Great Soldier – Risaldar Major Dhonkul Singh

During the Second Afghan War, Dhonkul Singh, who was by now a Risaldar, was recommended for conspicuous gallantry displayed by him at the action fought at Girishk on the Helmund River, in July 1880. He was subsequently admitted to the 2nd Class Order of Merit. His citation reads:

“Risaldar Dhonkul Singh, 3rd (QVO) Bombay Light Cavalry. For conspicuous gallantry in action near Helmund on the 14th July 1880, in riding up under a hot fire and rescuing a Sowar of the 3rd Sind Horse, whose horse had fallen with him near the enemy’s guns”.

In the same campaign, Risaldar Dhonkul Singh once again distinguished himself at the battle of Maiwand and was, this time, admitted to the 1st Class Order of Merit. His citation reads:

“Risaldar Dhonkul Singh, 3rd (QVO) Bombay Light Cavalry. For conspicuous gallantry during the retreat from Maiwand on the 27th July, 1880, on which occasion he was instrumental in saving the life of Lieutenant Colonel H.S. Anderson, 1st Bombay Native Infantry who was severely wounded, and in the attack of the village of Deh Kojah, near Kandahar, on 16th August, 1880”.

In the above action at Maiwand, the infantry broke under pressure and the Cavalry was ordered to charge, in order to restore the situation. In these circumstances, the manner in which Risaldar Dhonkul Singh rescued Colonel Anderson of 1st Bombay Grenadiers, is described by the officer as follows:

In 1886 Dhonkul Singh, who was by now Risaldar Major of the 3rd Bombay Light Cavalry, was admitted to the 1st Class Order of British India (OBI) and in December of the same year, he was appointed Aide-de-Camp to His Royal Highness, the Duke of Connaught, who was then Commander - in - Chief of the Bombay Army.

The foregoing major events in the service in the service record of Risaldar Major Dhonkul Singh have been culled from different period in the Regiment History, and brought together as one in order to highlight the career profile of a truly remarkable soldier. From reading of these incidents, spread across a life time of distinguished soldiering the picture that emerges is of a man born to the profession of Arms, who knew no fear and who was always prepared to sacrifice his own life in order to save the life of a comrade. These qualities were recognised and appreciated by his superiors and by all who served with him.

In 1889, when this great soldier retired, full of years and honours, he was accorded a distinction usually reserved for distinguished Generals: the Commander-in-Chief of the Bombay Army published a special citation to record his appreciation, which reads as follows;

“His Royal Highness the Commander-in-Chief desires to place on record his appreciation of the distinguished service of Risaldar Major Dhonkul Singh, Sirdar Bahadur, 3rd Bombay Light Cavalry, his Native A.D.C who is now retiring from the Service.”

The war record of the Native Officer, who is in possession of the 1st Class Order Merit, shows a brilliant career of gallant service of over thirty-three years, which is unequalled by any in the Bombay Army.

His Royal Highness feels assured the Sirdar Bahadur Dhonkul Singh carries with him into private life the best wishes not only of His Royal Highness but of the entire Bombay Army” (Extract, Army Order No 285, dated 28. 6. 1889).

It would be pertinent to mention here that in those days, when Indians were not awarded VCs, the highest decoration for valour that could be awarded to an Indian soldier was the 1st Class Order of Merit, which was virtually equivalent to the award of a VC. In this context, it would bear repetition to recall that Risaldar Major Dhonkul Singh was awarded the Order of Merit on three different occasions!

The Campaigns of Abyssinia, Afghanistan & China

Abyssinia 1867-68

Theodore, the King of Abyssinia, began imprisoning Europeans and missionaries; the British envoy sent to his court was also imprisoned. Consequently, an expedition was sent in 1867 to obtain the release of the captives and to teach the King a lesson. The 3rd Bombay Light Cavalry formed a part of the expedition.

The road communication were primitive in the extreme and at times positively dangerous, So excessively steep were some parts of the road as to evoke expression of dread from those below, as they beheld men, horses and mules struggling up an incline upon which the slightest accident could result in the most serious consequences.

In April 1868 Magdalla was reached and successfully stormed. Theodore committed suicide. The Regiment was awarded the Battle Honour "ABYSSINIA 1867-68".

The Second Afghan War 1879-80

Sher Ali, the Amir of Afghanistan, rebuffed the British and started making overtures to the Russians. This resulted in the Second Afghan War, in which both the 3rd Bombay Light Cavalry and the Poona Horse participated.

In July 1880, 3rd Bombay Light Cavalry were involved in the action at Girishk on the Helmund River, in which Risaldar Dhonkul Singh was awarded the IOM Second Class (the action has been recounted in Chapter 6). This was soon followed by the battle of Maiwand, which was a serious reverse of British Arms. The battle began at 10.30 a.m. The entire British Force, including the Cavalry, had to remain under heavy fire all day. Finally, at 3.p.m. the infantry on the left of the line broke under pressure of heavy odds. At this state the Commanding General, Burrows, galloped up to Brigadier Nutall, commanding the cavalry Brigade and said; "Nutall, the Infantry has given way; our only chance is a Cavalry charge; do you think you could get the Cavalry to charge the line of Ghazis in rear of the Infantry, and they might perhaps then be induced to reform?"

It would be pertinent to mention here that the small force of Cavalry, numbering barely 130 sabres, had been exposed upward of four hours, to the severest of conditions and all the while suffering serious losses. Thereafter, they were thrown into disorder by the retreating infantry and guns, the sight of which alone might well shake the morale of the best troops after the disturbing effects of the their earlier trial under fire. They had no time to reform, nor space to gather them together for a collected charge, while their course towards the enemy was impended and broken by fleeing infantry soldiers. Nevertheless the Cavalry charged. An eyewitness describes the action as follows:

“Whatever men were still available were in a somewhat irregular formation. There was no time, however, to wait for a well-dressed line and General Nuttal ordered the cavalry to advance and charge, placing himself with his staff in front of the line. The men instead of advancing straight to their front inclined to the right and fell on the Ghazis who were attacking the Grenadiers, who were undoubtedly saved by the cavalry charge from heavy loss. After doing this much, the cavalry, retreating and the guns all gone, wheeled about and retired, to the best of my belief without orders. I certainly heard no orders. After wheeling about the cavalry retired steadily”.

As already recounted in the earlier chapter, Risaldar Dhonkul Singh was awarded the Order of Merit First Class, in the course of the above action, for rescuing Colonel Anderson, commanding the 1st Bombay Grenadiers.

Colonel Malcolmson, commanding 3rd Sind Horse and Major Currie, commanding 3rd Bombay Light Cavalry was afterwards placed under arrest for their conduct on this occasion. Both officers were tried by court– martial and honourably acquitted.

The Cavalry, alongwith the rest of the troops, fell back on Kandahar. The Battle of Kandahar followed, when General (later Field Marshal) Lord Roberts of Kandahar relieved this force. The battle honours “AFGHANISTAN 1879-80” and “KANDAHAR1880” were awarded for this campaign. As a matter of interest, during the siege of Kandahar, the Poona Horse was requested by the local leaders to guard the building that housed the Prophet’s Mantle.

China 1900

Following the Boxer Rebellion in China in 1900, an international force was sent for suppressing this rebellion. The 3rd Bombay Light Cavalry formed a part of the Cavalry Brigade sent from India. The siege of the legations at Peking was raised by the arrival of the Indian Cavalry, which formed the subject of a great book and a subsequent film. The summer palace was destroyed as a punishment for the murder of a Truce Party under a white flag, which had been sent at the request of the Boxers. However, there were no major engagements as the Boxers evaporated when confronted by the troops, without giving battle.

The First World War

Prelude

In August 1914, when the first World War broke out, the Poona Horse was stationed at Secunderabad, as part of the 9th (Secunderabad) Cavalry Brigade. The other cavalry regiments of this Brigade were the 7th Dragoon Guards and the 20th Deccan Horse.

Well before the outbreak of World War I, an arrangement had been arrived at between the War Office and the then Government of India that in the event of a war breaking out between Great Britain and an European Power, India would furnish a Corp, comprising two to three infantry divisions, and a cavalry brigade. In pursuance of this decision, when war broke out in August 1914, the British Cabinet asked the Indian Government to send two infantry divisions and a cavalry brigade for employment on the Western Front; the 3rd (Lahore) Infantry Division, the 7th (Meerut) Infantry Division and the 9th (Secunderabad) Cavalry Brigade were selected for this purpose.

Mobilisation

When mobilisation orders were received, the Poona Horse was being commanded by Lieutenant Colonel C.O. Swanston, a grandson of the famous “Corygaum” Swanston. He was an officer with a dynamic personality and tireless energy; he had foreseen such an eventuality and had trained the Regiment to a high pitch of efficiency. But for all that, the regiments of the Indian cavalry continued to be on the Silladar System, a system under which a regiment was horsed, clothed, equipped and even to a large extent armed, out of funds provided by the men who composed it. Thus the Government of India was able to maintain a very fine body of cavalry, at a relatively low cost to themselves. Such a system was workable enough when the troops were employed in India, or close to its frontiers, notwithstanding that this system was fundamentally unsound. For whereas it was understandable that such a system should operate when the Indian Cavalry was composed primarily of irregular bodies of troops, there was no justification for continuing this system when the Regiments of Indian Cavalry were embodied into the regular Army. Lord Kitchener, when he came to India as the Commander-in-Chief, had wanted to do away with the system, but was prevented from doing so purely because of financial consideration.

Therefore, when on 9th August 1914 orders were received to mobilise for service in Europe, against European troop, and with the winter months more or less at hand, the problems, which Colonel Swanston had to face, were formidable. Clothing and equipment, which were meant for use in India, would prove totally inadequate for active service conditions in Europe. They had to be replaced at short notice, and under the Silladar System, this had to be done under Regimental arrangements and at Regimental cost. Woollen winter clothing, of the proper quality and quantity, was not only unobtainable in the open market, but made a call upon Regimental funds which they were unable to meet; nor was information forthcoming as to the supplies of clothing and equipment likely to be procurable at designation. Consequently, the Colonel had to make the best arrangements locally possible

with the funds at his disposal. The result was that the men had to embark in their tropical uniforms, supplemented with a flannel shirt and a warm jersey issued to each sowar, which was all that the Regiment could arrange from within its resources. It was an inexcusable act to send troops for active service, in an European theatre of war, so inadequately clothed. As will be seen from the men and the responsibility for this must rest squarely on the callous disregard of the then Government of India for the welfare of the men, and their niggardly attitude in these matters.

Move to France

During the voyage, the ships of the convoy conveying the Indian contingent halted at Port Suez, prior to entering the Suez Canal. Advantage was taken of this delay to invite on board the Honorary Colonel of the Regiment, Maharaja Sir Pratap Singh, who was himself proceeding to join the war with his own Regiment, the Jodhpur Lancers. 'Sir P', as he was known, addressed the two squadrons of Rathores from the bridge of the ship. With his fine old eagle face alight, and his eyes flashing, he impressed upon his hearers, in a few curt sentences, the supreme virtue of being prepared to sacrifice their all, including their lives, in upholding the traditions of loyalty and devotion to duty. By virtue of his age and status, 'Sir P' was regarded by the Rathores as the head of their clan, and such an admonition from him amounted to a fiat for the assembled Rathores.

The Regiments disembarked on 15th October and then moved by train to Orleans, which they reached on 23rd October; enroute the French gave 'Les Hindous', as they called all Indian troops, an enthusiastic welcome. Thus the Poona Horse "was the first Indian Cavalry Regiment to be engaged in the War and whilst it remained with the Army Corps, always gave a good account of itself" (With the Indians in France by General Willcocks). At Orleans the Regiment was issued with bayonet, a novel weapon for the sowar and one which he at first regarded as an encumbrance. However, it did not take him long to realise its value in trench warfare and the cavalrymen soon became as expert in its use as the infantry soldier.

The First Action

First Battle of Ypres. The British Expeditionary Force was subject to a series of massive German attacks from Ypres to La Bassée. Just when the Germans seemed on the point of making a breakthrough, the Indian Corps landed in France and were thrown directly into the battle to reinforce this sector. In shallow, badly made, water-logged trenches, the Indian Corps fought with the utmost gallantry alongside the veteran British troops. After four weeks of the heaviest fighting of the Great War, the line held and Ypres remained unconquered.

During this battle, a portion of the line held by 2nd Gurkhas West of Neuve Chapelle was over-run. 'A', 'B' and 'C' Squadron of the Poona Horse, who had just arrived at the front, were sent to retrieve the situation as no other reserves were available.

On the 2nd of November, the Poona Horse was ordered to reinforce the 2nd Gurkhas, whose defences had been broken into by the enemy, in the Neuve Chappelle sector. On reaching there it was found that the forward trenches of the Gurkhas had been overrun and

the Poona Horse was asked to recapture these positions. A, B and C Squadron were immediately launched into the counter attack. This attack was launched in daylight, without artillery support and it soon came under heavy enemy fire. At this stage Lieutenant Colonel C.O. Swanston who was personally leading the attack, was killed. His death was an irreparable loss to the Regiment; he was a highly competent officer, with great drive and energy, which marked him for the highest command in the Army. He died as he would have wished to die-at the head of his Regiment, with his face to the enemy.

There followed some confusion, when an officer of the Gurkhas ordered his men to fall back. As the Gurkhas were mixed up with our troops, the order was passed down the line and the whole line fell back. The error was quickly rectified and the old positions were reoccupied, but in the process additional and unnecessary casualties were sustained. Because of the misunderstanding caused by this order, Major Molloy issued instructions to his squadron, A Squadron – that no retirement was ever in future to take place except on direct orders from him. This had an interesting sequel, as will be related later.

Grimshaw describes this action in his diary as follows:-

“Monday. 2nd November, 1914. An ambulance crowded with our wounded came past, much to my surprise as I hardly expected to hear of more than one or two casualties. I heard that a great many more had been hit and the Colonel killed. Coming so suddenly, the news made me reel. So this war was, the very thing I had always longed for. What form of mental derangement makes one crave for a thing, which the moment one sees in its true light, raises a feeling of loathing? Sturdee asked me to speak to our men and tell them to keep quiet – certainly one or two, and PMs of all people, were making a good deal of noise. I spoke to them but hardly felt justified in doing so, being very uncertain how I would behave myself under such conditions.

“No further news had come in and we spent a rather gloomy evening. About midnight Molloy and the rest came in and we heard that the poor Swanston was dead, Hamir Singh and Balwant Singh wounded, and about 45 men killed and wounded and a fearsome number missing, chiefly from ‘C’ Squadron. ‘B’ Squadron, which was in the lead in the attack, took the brunt of the fighting and really lost very heavily.

“It seems the Regiment was sent out to dig support trenches without any intention of employing it otherwise, when a critical situation developed in the area held by 2nd Gurkhas and the Regiment was ordered to proceed to their assistance immediately. The Regiment formed up in three lines and moved out for the attack. It was guided by the Adjutant of 2nd Gurkhas. The moment the advance commenced, we came under a hail of heavy howitzer, shrapnel, machinegun and rifle fire.

“Casualties came quickly, increased by men refusing to lie down and thus avail themselves of what existed – very little. When about 150 yards from the objective, the Colonel halted to allow the other two squadron to come up, his intention being to rush the last 150 yards with all his available men. Swanston raised himself above the cover to carefully search the ground and ascertain the situation. While thus occupied with his glasses he was shot dead.

“Colonel Nottie arrived on the scene and decided no attack should be made until darkness. The enemy having got the range, began to shell the place, so Norrie ordered a retirement, to a ditch some 200 yards in rear. It was found impossible to bring back Swanston’s body and it remained where it fell.

“What was left of the Regiment continued to occupy this last position until 11.00 p.m. After a conference on the situation amongst the powers that be, we were withdrawn and the salient abandoned in toto. Owing to the darkness many men got left behind or straggled in. The entire episode was a severe test, after only arriving at rail head 12 hours before. It would have tried highly trained infantry and it is very gratifying to know that our men acquitted themselves so well. Apparently the Rajputs did grandly. ‘C’ Squadron was the disappointing element.

Festubert

The combined strength of the Indian Corps was little more than a British Infantry Division. Thus, in the action of Festubert which opened on 21st November, not only was the Indian Corps very weak, considering the strength of the attack now made upon it, but when this attack actually developed – on the nights of the 22nd –23rd and 23rd –24th November – the relief on the Meerut Division by the Lahore Division was in progress. On the 23rd the right centre of the Indian Corps was heavily attacked by the German 29th Division, and three of the defending battalions were driven from their trenches, which for a length of 800 yards, were occupied by the enemy. Counterattacks proving unsuccessful, the only available reserve, the Secunderbad Cavalry Brigade was hurried up to reinforce the Ferozepur Brigade around Festubert; and upon arrival on the scene after dark, Major Molloy, with A and B Squadron, under Captains Lucas and Hildebrand was directed and hold a line of trenches south-west of Ricchebourg 1’Above. These trenches were in a thoroughly bad state, half-full of water, and many of the men had to stand in water up on their things throughout the night; the cold was intense and they all had to keep on the move to prevent themselves from being actually frozen in.

The enemy made no very determined attack on this sector, but there were two men killed and ten wounded out of the 130 present. When day broke, the state of all ranks was so bad that the Brigadier ordered the two squadron to withdraw and return to their billets.

In the meantime the two other squadron of the Regiment C and D under Captain Grimshaw, who had with him Captain Alderson and Lieutenant de Pass – had also moved up to Festubert, and the following extracts from Captain Grimshaw’s diary tell the story of their experiences:

“23rd November. At 3 p.m. left with eighty men of my squadron and seventy of C for the trenches. We rode as far as the Brewery at Gorre, where we heard that the enemy had taken the very trenches we were to have held, and that we were to stand fast while it was decided what was to be done. About dusk we were ordered into some support trenches, and told to take cover there while a counter-attack was launched to recover the trenches. This was successful and we were then ordered upto Festubert but by this time our men were frozen stiff and two collapsed outright including Jemadar Faiz Mohmmmed Khan. Or arrival at

Festubert I put the men to bomb-proofs and went myself into a ruined house till orders and guide arrived to take us in to the trenches.

“At 2.30a.m on the 24th the orders came to move and Captain Elliott, 58th Rifles, acted as guide. I turned my men out and found them more frozen than more frozen than ever while we had to advance over about 800 yards of open ground before we reached the communication trench. The enemy seemed very much on the ‘qui viv’ for they kept on throwing up star-shells and sweeping the ground with searchlights. When we got to the communication trench the block was very bad; they were trying to pass out the wounded and the groans of these were dreadful, especially when they bumped against us, which in the dark was unavoidable, but by degrees we disentangled ourselves. While we were halted on one of these occasions, my over-civilised senses received a shock. There seemed to be about a foot of muddy slush in the trench and what I thought were filled sand bags to give a footing in the mire. I thought I would look at the trench for a second and therefore I switched on my electric torch. To my horror I saw I was standing on the corpse of a human being. I was very nearly sick, but I bent down and, extricating the man’s hand from the mud, I felt his pulse to see no trace of life, which is not extraordinary seeing that at least 200 men had trampled over him before I arrived. There he was almost submerged in slush. His face had hardly been injured and I could see he was a young Pathan. I tried to blot the hideous picture from my brain but I could not. I thought of that youth in his home in the hills in India, probably the pride of his parents, and then to see him thus trampled into the mud like another piece of mud, of no more account than a fragment of offal. I thought of myself treated in the same manner and curiously enough did not seem to mind. We arrived in the trenches proper at 5.30 a.m. and took over the loopholes from the 58th Rifles. I found a breach about eight feet broad on the parapet where our trenches had been blown in, and told off Risaladr Muaz-Din Khan’s troop after the breach until I could inspect it by day light.

“24th. An Inspection at dawn showed me what a very precarious state our trenches were in. I placed de Pass at his own request in charge of the sap-head, and ordered him to repair the damage as far as possible. The enemy’s sap was exposed to rifle fire from our trenches for a distance of about twenty feet and it was about two and a half feet broad and six deep. It appeared to be deserted, but made a slight bend about twenty feet away, with that looked like a sandbag traverse jutting round the bend; beyond this one could see nothing. I called for a volunteer to enter the sap, and Sowar Abdullah Khan came forward and went down the sap, presently returning to say that there was a German with a rifle at a loophole in traverse.

“If my of yesterday’s gruesome incidents was bad, the sight that met my eyes at daybreak was perfectly revolting. Dozen of corpses choked the trenches. Fragments of human beings everywhere. Most of the dead seemed to have been bayoneted but some had their heads clean blown off or otherwise shockingly mutilated by shell fire. I ordered all corpses to be buried as time permitted.

“I told off parties to repair the parapet and clear the loopholes. At about 8.p.m. the Germans started bombing us and it was not long before I had one man killed and four wounded. The man killed was Ashraf Khan. One of the nicest-looking fellows I have ever seen, an only son

and his mother was widow. He lived for forty minutes and I did what I could for him but as he was unconscious it was not much use.

“From frequent observation I saw that the enemy was sapping up to us at several points, so I phoned to our Section HQ in Festubert asking for a Sapper officer of experience to be sent up to advise me.

“I lost three or four men during the day from bombs and rifle fire.

“At dusk I sent for Alderson with C Squadron and he arrived about 8 p.m. and his men were a welcome support. He also brought some blankets, braziers, and charcoal, also ration, so we were a little less uncomfortable; while in reply to my request they was intense. My men complained terribly of their feet.

“25th. I felt very apprehensive about our bit of trench and the frozen state of the men, and was convinced that we had a poor charge if the Germans attempted to rush us. About 8 a.m. de Pass volunteered to go down the enemy’s sap and destroy the loopholed sandbag bomb-proof traverse, from behind which all the bombs were coming. I demurred at first as it seemed to be certain death, but de Pass urged me to let him go, so I gave way and told him he could take two volunteers, and he selected Sowars Fateh Khan and Firman Shah. They entered the sap carrying the charge for destroying the traverse, and found a German at the loophole with his rifle; fortunately he did not fire, but standing up, threw a bomb at the party; by good luck this exploded in rear of them doing no damage. De Pass then placed the charge and blew up the traverse. A very gallant exploit in my opinion, and utility was very obvious as I had no more casualties from bombs that day.

“All behind our trenches the grounds was strewn with casualties, and having been told by Fateh Hyder Singh that he was sure they were not all dead, I decided to try and get those still alive in when it was dark. De Pass, however, spotted one man alive not far behind the trenches of the 7th Dragoon Guards, and when on a visit to Wise he got a trooper to go out with him and fetched the man in broad daylight. Another very gallant action, but de Pass did not ask my permission, and now, in view of the paucity of British Officers I gave strict orders that there was to be no more of it.

“Thurs, 26th 1914. Another ghastly night. I could not sleep when my turn came, so I tramped up and down the line cheering up our men who really were in a pitiable condition. I had been able to work up a few more blankets with ration party, but that was all. What my feelings were about our poor men I can find no words to express. Their almost dumb suffering was infinitely worse than if they were complaining. I think they realised that I was doing my utmost for them, and their perpetual exhortations to me to rest, and that they would keep on the look-out, were, I am sure absolutely sincere. Here and there I sat down beside a soldier and chatted to him. It is curious how suffering draws us together. These simple minded men had hearts of pure gold. Never a complaint that they were half frozen death – the cold was intense; or that they were being called upon to fight as they had never in their wildest transports of imagination pictured, armed with a weapon they had never handled before they put foot in France. When it was dark I got Fateh Hyder Shah to organise a little rescue party under my direction. We got in a young Sikh lad to 58th Rifles.

He had been shot through the temple with shrapnel bullet and was almost dead from exposure. I gave him some hot rum and water and we chafed his frozen limbs and by degrees he came to. It was quite a nice piece of work getting him in. Firstly Fateh Hyder Shah crept out and made a round of the bodies lying grouped together some 150 yards off. He had to carefully feel each to see if any life existed. After about 20 minutes I heard the long low faint whistle (by month), followed by a single short note. This was the signal, pre-arranged, that told me that only one lived amongst that group. I therefore sent out 4 men to bring him in. I watched them creep out with a kind of fascinated stare. They were in full view of the German trenches, and showed up painfully vividly against the snow whiteness. I saw them arrive, seize the man and begin dragging him towards the shelter of our trench. They had got in half way when they were seen by the Germans who opened a brisk fire; all day down, fact I was not quite certain in some of them had not been hit, so suddenly did they cease all movement. There they lay for minutes whilst the enemy kept up a brisk fire. I noticed that party were slowly snaking their way towards me. By degrees they got closer and were soon in with the wounded man. It was an anxious half hour, I did not want to lose sound men for wounded ones. At 8.a.m. bombs started again and worried us all day. I lost 8 or 9 men from them. De Pass volunteered to enter the sap again, and blow up the traverse which the Germans had re-erected under cover of darkness. I refused however. By this time I was feeling very worn out, and about 1.30 p.m. lay down to get some sleep. I was dozing off when an orderly came hurriedly up with the news that de Pass was very badly wounded. Alderson and I both jumped up and we ran along the trench to try and help. I picked up my flask and followed. I had just caught Alderson up, and could see de Pass lying on the ground half his head gone, when I felt a blinding crash and fell forward on Alderson who had also fallen. I was quite stunned, and when I came to, found myself in a little alcove with 2 sowers bending over me. I pulled myself together at once and the first thing I noticed was Alderson lying close by with apparently the crown of his head down in. On looking closely at the wound it looked to me more like a scalp one, but there were also two more at very nasty places. He now appeared to be recovering consciousness and I tied up his wounds. I then helped him to our bomb-proof. I felt terribly and could hardly stand and was quivering all over. I intended going back to de Pass, but when I tried to walk my head swam so much that I scribbled a note to him and one to the OC Detachment 7th D.Gs. I thought that whoever was it him would read it and if de Pass was conscious he would tell him why I had not come.

“I got back a reply from the 7th D Gs, to say that he was dead and that there was a message from HQ saying that the Germans were massing in the trenches just in front of us. The British Artillery opened on the enemy troops with excellent effect. Alderson refused to go to the rear while there was any likelihood of an enemy assault, but as soon as the bombardment was over Alderson consented to go and I was left on my lonesome. I received a message from HQ asking for a report on the situation, also informing me to come up; my heart ached not for myself, but for my men. I felt it would be hard to face them with the news that they would have to remain another 24 hours in the trenches. We had not been ‘in’ an inordinately long time but we had gone in under very uncomfortable circumstances, in particularly cold weather. If we had gone straight from our warm billets into the trenches, it would have made a lot of difference, but our men had been frozen to the bone before they ever got to the trenches, and they had no rugs or waterproof sheets for two days. I was so obviously elated at the German attack being scotched that I think my genuine cheeriness became infective. It

is all very well for people of say 'be cheerful'. It is hard to act the part just as it is hard to act the part of keeping your temper with a young and green horse. One may not actually beat the latter or actively ill-treat him, but the mind is in a hostile frame of mind and the fact of it being so is conveyed to the horse- I daresay electrically. It is the same with humans. (Grimshaw had been an Instructor at the Cavalry School).

"27th Friday. This was the first opportunity I had of carefully enquiring into poor de Pass's death. It appears he went over to the 7th D.Gs to borrow a couple of troopers to watch the sap as, in spite of my orders, he intended to have another attempt at destroying the traverse, from behind which came all the bombs. Some one lent him a couple of men and he returned to the sap head to post these men, who were to report to him if a favourable opportunity occurred for making a dash at the traverse.

He looked through one of our loopholes and saw a man at the loophole in the enemy's traverse. He took a rifle from one of the troopers to take a shot at this man, but before he could get his rifle off, he received a bullet through the centre of his forehead which completely carried away the crown of his skull.

"It was sad ending of all his daring and activities, but I feel sure if he had escaped this time, sooner or later he would have met his death elsewhere. He was utterly reckless, and in a war like this one does not get many chances. Curiously enough when on board sharing the same cabin, de Pass told me he had no sense of fear about anything. A remarkable admission for anyone, before he had been put to any test, even to a fairly intimate acquaintance like myself. I knew, however, from my experience of him at the Cavalry School that he possessed nerve above the average. Had it not been so he would never have had the courage to ride steeplechases the way he did on such a doubtful animal as Rob Roy".

Grimshaw goes on to describe the difficulties he had getting the men back to billets (and he had no news where they would be going) as most of the men were suffering from severe frostbite. Luckily he met Rob MacGregor of the Regiment he later commanded the Regiment) who was commanding the Brigade Ammunition Column, and who told him that the horses were in a Brewery and that he could give those who could make it a lift his carts. At the Brewery those who could ride mounted and with led horses set out for 'home'. "A sorry looking crowd", Grimshaw writes, "covered in mud and filth and unshaven. Sir James Wilcox met me and rode part of the way back enquiring about matters and expressed his admiration, especially for de Pass's gallantry . After lunch at Bde HQ I went with Raymond to the Mortuary to see if everything had been taken off de Pass. The 7th D Gs had thoughtfully sent his body into Bethune. I felt an unpleasant pang when I stood beside poor 'Bumpy's' body. That lifeless clay was all that was left of his brilliant accomplishments. It was only with an effort that I could bring myself to search his pockets. It was soon over, and giving his hand one one last press I left the room feeling very wretched. We silently quitted the place. I was too upset to speak. I think we both were, and parted at the Hospital door in silence".

"7th December 1914. Buried de Pass in Bethune Cemetery in a downpour; Pertab and the General were there. Just as he was lowered into the grave, our guns thundered our their wicked sounding salvos".

Lieutenant Elphinston, of the same regiment, in conveying to the parents of Lieutenant de Pass the news of his death wrote: "He had been behaving in the most gallant way possible ever since he went out to the trenches.. It is just what was to be expected of him. I have been with him pig sticking and have played polo regularly with him, and I have no hesitation in saying he was quite the most gallant fellow it has ever been my good fortune to meet". The following is the account given in the Indian Corps In France by Lieutenant Colonel I.W.B Merewether, CIE, and Sir Frederick E.Smith, Bart: "On the 23rd Nov, a detachment of the 34th Poona Horse, under the command of Capt Grimshaw, took over a portion of the trenches of the Ferozepore Brigade. On arrival at 4 a.m. it was found that the enemy had driven a sap right upto the parapet which had been blown in, a breach of some eight feet in breadth being created, which exposed our trench to fire from the sap. As soon as it was daylight, Capt Grimshaw inspected the breach which had been guarded by a party under Lieut de Pass, and called for a volunteer to reconnoitre along the sap towards the German line. Sowar Abdullah Khan at once came forward and proceeded to crawl out. On his return he reported that the enemy had erected a sand bag traverse at a distance of about ten yards from our trench, at the first bend in the sap. The traverse was loopholed and a German was on guard, a fact which Abdullah Khan ascertained by being fired at and missed. At 8.a.m. the enemy began to throw bombs into our trench from their side of the traverse. This went on all day, and caused several casualties. Early in the morning of the 24th, Lieut de Pass determined at all costs to put an end to this state of affairs and, accompanied by Sowar Fateh Khan and Firman Shah, entered the gap and crawled along it until he reached the enemy's traverse. With the utmost coolness, he proceeded to place a charge of gun-cotton in the loophole and fired it, with the result that the traverse was completely demolished, and the bend of the sap was rounded off to such an extent as to expose some thirty yards to our fire. While this was going on, the enemy threw a bomb at our little party, but luck it exploded behind Lieut de Pass and did not damage, the trio returning to our trench in safety. All bombing on the part of the enemy was put a stop to during the remainder of the 24th, and there was only one casualty compared with six on the previous day and nine of the 25th by which time under cover of darkness, the Germans had managed to replace their traverse. On the 24th Lieut de Pass visited the neighboring trench, which was occupied by the 7th Dragoon Guards. On his way he observed a sepoy of the 58th Rifles lying wounded outside our trench. Accompanied by Private C. Cook, of the 7th he at once went out in broad daylight and brought the sepoy in although exposed to the enemy's fire for a distance of about 200 yards. De Pass then again volunteered to enter the enemy's sap and attempt to blow up the traverse, but as this meant almost certain death, permission was refused. On 25th the enemy's bombing increased in violence, and de Pass went to the sap head to superintend the repair of our parapet, which had again been seriously damaged. Observing a sniper at work behind the traverse, he tried to shoot him, but was himself shot through the head and killed. Many brave deeds have been performed during this war, but there are few instances of gallantry more conspicuous than that displayed by this heroic young soldier. He was the very perfect type of the British officer. He united to singular personal beauty a charm of manner and a degree of Victoria Cross No one in the war deserved it better. Sowar Abdullah Khan, Fateh Khan and Firman Shah gallantry seconded their officer, for which they were awarded the Indian Distinguished Conduct Medal. Lieut de Pass's Victoria Cross was gazetted 18 Feb 1915: "Frank Alaxander de Pass Lieut, late 34th Prince Albert Victor's Own Poona Horse. Date of Act of Bravery 24th Nov 1914. For conspicuous bravery near Festubert on 24th Nov 1914 in entering a German sap and destroying a traverse in the face of the enemy's bomb; and for subsequently rescuing, under heavy fire a wounded man who

was lying exposed in the open. Lieut de Passe lost his life on this day in a second attempt to capture the afore mentioned sap, which had been reoccupied by the enemy”.

Givenchy

Grimshaw and his men were relieved by a detachment from A and B Squadron under Major Molloy; this detachment manned the trenches upto the 3rd December when they were relieved by an infantry battalion. Major Molloy gives the following account of their experiences:-

“The conditions under which this detachment worked and fought were similar to those already described, some better some worse. A thaw had started on the evening the relief had been carried out, and by the following morning the loopholes had fallen in and not only the parapet but the sides of the trench were rapidly disintegrating. It was now seen that the foundations of the parapet consisted of the dead bodies of soldiers of different nations, and as these thawed out the stench became unbearable. These bodies had to be reburied, the trench walls and fire-step to be revetted, as far as possible, the parapet remade and an emplacement built for machine-guns. All these in addition to dealing with the ceaseless activity of the enemy in front, who being a pioneer regiment and situated on higher ground, was probably fighting under fewer handicaps than we.

“The mud and slush that now collected in the bottom of the trench made all work and even movement difficult, and all efforts to improve the parapet were rendered impossible by the heavy fire which our movements attracted. Work, therefore, could only be carried out at night, when of course it was very difficult to ensure the correct alignments and angle of the loopholes in the centre. Thus for us superiority of rifle fire was impossible of attainment so we turned our attention to the employment of bombs of various patterns. Of these a considerable quantity was found in the trench. Most of them were jam-pots, i.e empty jam tins filled with gun-cotton and a short length of fuse attached. After lighting the fuse with a match, which was none too easy, the thrower rid himself of his missile as expeditiously as he could. It sometimes burst near the target, if it had not already done so near our own parapet. Risaldar Badan Singh was put in charge of the bombing. He proved a tower of strength; whenever an unpleasant situation called for my attention I was sure to find him already in the thick of it, his dour face stretched into a huge grin. I would sooner have Badanjee alongside me in a tight place than any other Indian Officer I have known throughout my service.

“During the 11th and 12th December the Indian Corps took over Cuinchy (South of the La Basse Canal) and Givenchy from the French, and on the 14th a general, but not a simultaneous, offensive was initiated in the North with idea of profiting by a withdrawal of German divisions from this front, which now appeared to be taking place. These operations continued until the 19th with only very partial success and with heavy casualties. The German retaliation for the Allied Offensive in Flanders came on the 20th December, and, as usual, against a weak spot in the line. At 9 a.m. three small mines were exploded under the British trenches in front of Givenchy, followed immediately by infantry attacks, with much bombing, in Givenchy and the front Northward to La Quinque Rue. It soon became evident that the attack was a serious one. Givenchy, held by the 1st Manchester, of the Lahore

Division, was in danger, the trenches on either side being lost, and in the front East of Festubert a pocket 300 yards deep was made by the enemy”.

In Captain Grimshaw’s diary we read that “the night of the 19th December was one of rain and storm, and the trenches held by the Indian Corps were, in places, waist deep in mud and water. With dawn a fierce attack by the Germans began all along the very weakly held front of the Corps, the infantry of which were tired out, having been some fifty days in the trenches. After hard fighting, the centre and left of the Lahore Division and the right centre of the Meerut Division were drawn back and took up a new line by Fetubert and the west of Quinque Rue, to the west of the Orchard. The situation was critical, and a portion of the Secunderabad Cavalry Brigade was ordered under Major Molloy. A Squadron was commanded by Risaldar Badan Singh, C by Maj Loring, and D by Captain Grimshaw, Regiment Headquarters and B Squadron remaining in billets ready to act as required.

“Marching in pouring rain by Annezin to Essars, the three Squadron remained here in reserve during the night of the 19th and 20th and about 1 p.m. on the 20th we were ordered to Gorre, and on arrival there found the enemy were shelling the place. We sat down in the mud for two hours and heard all kinds of wild rumours, while streams of wounded, whose state beggars all description, poured past us. Little Gurkhas slopping through the freezing mud barefooted; Tommies with no caps and plastered in blood and mud from head to foot; Sikhs with their hair all down and looking more wild and weird than I have ever seen limping or reeling along like drunken men, some helping an almost foundered comrade. I stopped some of the Gurkhas and asked them why they walked in bare feet. They replied “Sahib” our feet hurt us terribly, but in boot they hurt worse”. At 5 p.m. we were ordered up to some support trenches just outside Gorre and these were the same as those I had occupied on the evening of November 23rd .

“About 9 p.m. We moved again up to more support trenches one mile to the Gorre side of Festubert, and these were found to be infinitely worse than those we had quitted, being sited in marsh, brimful of water and positively dangerous. I searched the houses close by, however, and succeeded in finding a lot of boxes and by up-ending these in the trenches and putting a roof – rafter along them, I was able to keep all but the men’s feet out of the water. The bullets – ‘overs’ from the enemy trenches, were falling round us in quite large number. Sahib Khan of C Squadron and another man were hit – very unluckily as we were quite 2,500 yards from the nearest hostile trench.

“About midnight we were ordered up to Festubert. Our men were so frozen that they could hardly star, and we went so slowly that the movement did not warm them while the road was getting well peppered and several men dropped. We arrived at Festubert about 1.a.m. on the 21st and took cover behind some ruined houses till further orders were received.

“At 12.30 p.m it was reported that the situation in the left section of the Sirhind Brigade was very serious, and that a counter-attack by at least a brigade was necessary if the line was to be re-established. General Waktis was at the end of his resources in troops, having none left except the 34th Pioneer and the 59th Rifles, which latter battalion had on the previous day suffered heavy losses. The Corps Commander therefore placed the Secunderabad Cavalry

Brigade and the 2/8th Gurkhas Rifles at General Watkis's disposal, the whole being under the command of Major General Macbean. To these General Watkis added the 47th Sikhs"

The account given below of what now followed has been compiled from Major Molloy's diary and from letters written at the time:

"At about 1.a.m. on the 21st December all commanding officers assembled in the cellar of ruined house to receive orders from General Macbean for the forthcoming attack. This part of the village was being heavily shelled. Several facts were at once apparent. The line of deployment had not been in any way marked out, no preliminary reconnaissance of the line of advance had been made and the exact position, and its extent held by the enemy was unknown; it was however, presumed to be our former trench line, some 1,200-1,800 yards away. No compass bearings to march on, were available and in effect the only orders were: that the troops were to be disposed in two lines at 200 yards' distance in the following order from the right-7th Dragoon Guards, 47th Sikhs, 2/8th Gurkhas, Jodhpure Lancers, 20th Deccan Horse, 34th Poona Horse. The 2/8th Gurkhas were to direct the attack, which was to start at 4.30 a.m. assisted by artillery fire commencing at 4.15.

"I now returned to the Regiment and issued my orders, viz. C Squadron under Major C.B Loring to be in the firing line, A Squadron under Risaldar Badan Singh in close support, and D under Captain Grimshaw in the second line at 200 yards' distance. I added that I would direct the attack from the right flank of C Squadron, so as to ensure touch being maintained with the 20th Deccan Horse on our right.

"We moved off and deployed, a difficult operation owing to the darkness, the wire and other obstacles and the deep mud. I got C and A Squadron into position and almost immediately the advance began, but the race from the start was too fast and it was exceedingly difficult to keep touch with the Deccan Horse owing to the inevitable shunting. We had only gone a short distance when a German scout jumped out of a shellhole just in front of me and slipped off towards their position. My orderly and I dashed after him, but he eluded us in the dark.

"The advance continued and we began to suffer casualties; my orderly was hit and I received a graze which knocked me over for a moment. In the glare of burning house which we now passed, I saw Major Loring plodding along in front of C Squadron about 80 yards on my left, and that there was a gap between our right and the Deccan Horse which A Squadron was endeavouring to correct by including to the right. When we reached to within about 150 yards of the enemy's position, there was the sound of distant cheering from the right and at once a devastating fire opened all along the enemy's line. I gave the word 'Charge' and dashed forward, but as I did so I saw most of the men in my vicinity simply swept away. I was probably at this moment that Major Loring was killed and his Indian Officers wounded.

"As we got nearer to the trench the Germans climbed out at the back and made off, and when I reached it I found it empty, and that I had now with me only Daffadar Sharaf Khan of C Squadron, and a sowar of A whom I had taken on as orderly when my first one was hit. I immediately sent the former to the right and the latter to the left, and after some time both returned saying that the trench was empty for several hundred yards on either side of us, and

that there was no sign of any more of our men. Further, by the light of the dawn now breaking I could see nothing of D Squadron while the enemy was becoming unpleasantly active in the second line not far in our front. An immediate return was indicated, and this was not made easier by the fact, which I now discovered, that my orderly was wounded – fortunately only slightly, while Sharaf Khan, an old man, was in a state of complete exhaustion. We accordingly left the trench and made our way back pursued for some way by bullets from German snipers; and on reaching our starting point found that the experiences of other units of our force had been much the same as mine, and that our attack had been repulsed with heavy casualties in officers and men. After the handful of the Poona Horsemen who had returned had been rallied by Captain Raymond of the Regiment, on General Wadeson's staff, I found that beyond a few wounded, not a man of A Squadron and come back.

“Later I learnt why, when in the German trench, I had in vain awaited the arrival of D Squadron. It appears that when about to take up his allotted position of deployment 200 yards in rear of A and C Squadron, Captain Grimshaw had been ordered by a senior infantry officer to move to the right and fill a gap-which as a matter of fact, did not exist – on the immediate left of the 2/8th Gurkhas firing line. Captain Grimshaw, having no time to communicate with me, complied under protest, and I was consequently quite unaware that A and C Squadron had started their attack without a single man in support. Captain Grimshaw deployed as ordered on the left of the Gurkhas, the Deccan Horse prolonging the line to his left and the line advanced with great determination under devastating rifle and machine-gun fire, until both Captain Grimshaw and Risaldar Muaz-ud-Din Khan were hit, and the units on either side had also suffered severely in officers and men and had begun to retire. The Squadron then also fell back, kote Daffadar Abdul Ghafar Khan succeeding, assisted by an officer of the 20th Horse, in bringing back Captain Grimshaw who was very severely wounded.

“In view of the possibility of an attack on Festubert the remnant of of the force was told to hold it, supported by General Pirie's dismounted brigade which now arrived on the scene. No actual attack was made but the village was kept under enemy fire all day. Later in the afternoon the 1st British Infantry Division arrived, and attacked the German position, but the elements of surprise was now wanting and the assault failed of success.

“About 3 p.m. the remnants of the Poona Horse were again called on to help the 47th Sikhs on the left who had been attacked, but were not required to act, and as darkness fell Major brought back his men to what was called ‘the Intermediate Line’. Here Jamadar Rawat Singh suddenly appeared reporting that what was left of A Squadron was lying out in the open between the lines, and that Risaldar Badan Singh Wished to know if he should remain there or come in. He was ordered to rejoin as soon as he could safely do so, and about 8 p.m. the Risaldar reported his return with the ragged remnant of the Squadron.

“The Risaldar states that after filling the gap between ourselves and the Deccan Horse, he had lost touch, but continued advancing till the enemy fire became too heavy, when he and his men took cover in a fold of the ground and waited for daylight to show him where he was; but dawn discovered him only a very short distance from the German trenches, the voice of the defenders of which he could plainly hear. He could see no sign of any others of

the attacking force, but in view of Major Molloy's order, previously mentioned, that no retirement was ever to be made unless directly ordered by him, the Risaldar and his men remained out all day in the mud, under fire from our own shells and every moment discovery by the enemy".

Describing his feelings waiting in the intense cold under fire, for the attack at Festubert to start, Major Molloy writes: "This I know, that I felt convinced I would be killed, and that I was really quite indifferent.. My only idea now was to get off and have done with it, one way or the other, and if possible help in gaining some measure of approbation for the Regiment".

About 10 p.m. Major Molloy was directed to withdraw and fall back. The night was spent in barns some distance in rear, and on the following morning the Regiment, moving back by motor – buses, was accommodated by the evening of the 23rd December in billets at Witterness.

During these operations the Poona Horse had suffered a loss of forty-nine killed and wounded including Major C.B and Risaldar Muaz-un-Din Khan killed, Captain R.W.W. Grimshaw, Risaldar Sultan Muhammad Khan Jemadar Faiz Muhammad Khan wounded. Major Molloy had five bullets through his clothing.

As noted above, Captain Grimshaw was wounded during the attack at Festubert and had to be evacuated, thus denying us the benefit of his personal account of the operations on which we have drawn extensively so far. Apart from providing a first hand account of the operations in which he was involved, his diary is of great human interest, providing as it does a vivid insight of the horror and human suffering that the participants of the First World War had to endure in the mud, slush and filth of the trenches in France. We close this account by giving two more extracts from his diary, which are of enduring interest and value of soldiers in general and to Poona Horsemen in particular.

"Sunday 7th March. Five months ago I felt it a great wrench to have to throw away my life. I feel convinced, if I survive this war, I shall be of infinitely more reckless disposition than before it. I feel I could face 'fire' far better than before it. I suppose this is what Napoleon called 'maturity' in troops. I remember feeling distinctly more emboldened after my spell in the trenches, and now feel more emboldened again. It seems to me that it is a mere matter of accustoming oneself to the idea of immediate extinction and by degrees one ignores it. That is why pig-sticking and steeple-chasing realities. I am convinced that the fearless pig sticker and chaser is, other things being equal, the bolder man than he who avoids them. It is useless to argue otherwise. I have avoided steeple –chasing myself, because I considered it an unnecessarily dangerous pastime and have devoted myself to pig sticking, when I could get it, and polo. I quite understand that men with responsibilities have no right to embarrass other people by unnecessary exposure to undue risks, but where no such responsibilities exist, I think the more a man devotes his leisure hours to hunting dangerous game, steeple-chasing etc. the less likely he will be to quail before the awful realities of war. The Germans inculcate from birth the necessity of every man placing his life at the dictates of the state. We attain the same end by a different method. I cannot help feeling however, that this sacrifice is made easier by living a life associated with dangerous pastime. I am well aware that countless men are going into action today who have never been associated with any

particularly dangerous pursuits nor do I think that such men will fail in their duty. I merely think the duty would be less irksome to those who followed a hazardous existence. I am sure Gatacre and de Pass, not to mention hosts of other gallant fellows, found it so.

“Monday 29th March. Feroze Khan turned up from Marseilles. Had a long chat with him. I always seemed attracted by our men, officers and NCOs. There is something about them which I do not notice amongst men from other units. It may be lack of perspicacity on my part, or do we instinctively inculcate this something amongst our men? We British Officers and systems identical with those of other units. Even my unique the personnel of other Regiments. Do Indians adopt a special manner towards their own officers which they always withhold from outsiders? With the exception of Suraj Singh I never felt the same sense of comradeship with Indian Officers from other units as I do with my own. Our men seem to possess a subtle charm which makes them different to others”.

To this we might say ‘Amen’, for it sums up the unique relationship that has existed between officers and men of the Poona Horse throughout its long history, and which continues, possibly enhanced, to the present day.

An interesting fact that emerges from Grimshaw’s Dairy is that Khadadat Khan of the Baluchis who was one of the recipients of the VC in World War I, originally belonged to the Poona Horse. In his Diary entry dated 5th February 1915, Grimshaw writes “Spent entire day in the convalescent homes. Met Firman Shah and told him he had got the IOM. I also met Khudadat Khan the VC man of the ‘29th Baluchis’. He was in the Poona Horse and recognised me”.

The action fought by the Poona Horse during their first year in France, on the Western Front, have been recorded in some detail in order to give an idea of the sort of fighting they were involved in, and the trials a tribulations they had to undergo. The Regiment stayed on in France until February 1918 earning the battle honours: “LA BASSEE 1914”, and “ARMENTIERS 1914”, “SOMME 1916” “FLERS – COURSELETTE 1916”, “CAMBRAI 1917”, and “FRANCE AND FLANDERS 1914-1918”.

In February 1918, the Poona Horse alongwith the other Indian Cavalry Regiments in France, was despatched to join General Allenby’s forces in Palestine. They were at last on their way to a theatre of war where the cavalry could come into its own. They were speeded on their journey by the following farewell order from Field Marshal Sir Douglas Haig:-

“As the Indian Cavalry Regiments are now leaving France I wish to record my very great appreciation of the valour, determination and devotion to duty shown by all ranks in the field. Indian Officers, Non – Commissioned Officers and men have been absent for more than three years in foreign country, thousand of miles from their homes and families, in a climate to which they are totally unaccustomed, and have by their gallant deeds added even greater lustre to the already glorious names of their respective regiments”.

MESOPOTAMIA

WHEN the First World War broke out, 33rd QVO Light Cavalry was stationed at Aurangabad, where it had relieved the Poona Horse a year and a half earlier. The composition of the Regiment at this time was: A Squadron Jats, B Squadron Kaimkhanis, C Squadron Mussalman Rajputs, and D Squadron Jat Sikhs.

As the Turks had turned hostile, a force was sent from India to lower Mesopotamia (corresponding to what is now Iraq) at the behest of the War Office, in order to protect British interest in this region, primarily the oil installations and the oil pipe line. It was a divisional sized force under the command of General Barret; 33rd QVO Light Cavalry formed a part of this force. This force landed at Sanniya, on the Shatt-el-Arab.

General Barret had been given the task of ensuring the security of the Port of Basra. For this purpose, he decided to secure Quarka, located to the North of Basra, at the junction of the Tigris and the Euphrates, and Shaiba, which was located West of Basra. Detachment of the 33rd Cavalry accompanied the various forces detailed for these tasks. After some sharp fighting, the Turks were pushed back and the security of Basra ensured as planned.

The Battle of Shaiba

The garrison at Shaiba was invested by a large force of Turks and Arabs. The battle of Shaiba began on 11 April 1915 and continued upto 14 April; it included a good deal of mounted action, in which the 33rd played a prominent part. The battle ended in a victory. Colonel Gillies writes: "On the morning of the 15th April, the day after the Battle of Shaiba, I rode into the abandoned Turkish camp, as the staff officer of a mixed column sent out to bring in the dead – we did not know we had won a victory. I found a sacred bluish-green flag, with a silver hand on the top of the pole, belonging to the Mujahidin, or religious volunteers. The officer commanding the column gave the flag to our Brigadier Kennedy, who said me that, as our Squadron of the 33rd had done all the work before the battle of Shaiba, he thought the Regiment ought to have it". (This was a different flag and silver hand from the one captured by the Poona Horse at Khushab).

The Battle of Ctesiphon

After Shaiba, 3rd Light Cavalry was withdrawn to Basra for refitting. Towards the end of October, the Regiment was moved up the Tigris river by boat to Kut, where they joined the force of General Sir John Nixon. General Nixon decided to open the road to Baghdad.

The Turkish Army, after being defeated at Kut, had withdrawn to previously prepared positions at Ctesiphon. These positions were now attacked but the freedom of action of the Cavalry Brigade was seriously hampered by being tied down to the action of the Infantry. The battle of Ctesiphon was a tactical success, which earned the Regiment the battle honour. However, on account of having become dangerously overtretched, the British forces had to fall back to starting positions at Kut.

Return to India

Kut was invested by the Turks and the garrison of Kut eventually surrendered. However, 33rd Light Cavalry, along with the rest of the Cavalry Brigade, had been pulled out before Kut was invested.

The troops in lower Mesopotamia had to suffer much hardship. The summer heat was oppressive; fresh meat or vegetables were rare; there was no bread to be had, only biscuits. There was no issue of forage for the horses, nor had any provision been made for the troops to cut grass; subsequently, grass had to be pulled out by hand.

On 6th October 1916, the Regiment embarked for Karadu, from where they went to Lahore, with one Squadron at Multan. Thus ended the war, as far as 33rd Light Cavalry was concerned.

PALESTINE

(April to October 1918)

On 28th June 1917, General Allenby assumed command of the Forces serving in Egypt and Palestine. In October that year Allenby launched offensive operations against the Turks in the Gaza and Beersheba Sector, which were uniformly successful.

During the month of April 1918, the Poona Horse disembarked at Alexandria, on arrival from France. A Desert Mounted Corps was formed comprising the 4th Cavalry Division, the 5th Cavalry Division, the Australian Division and the Australian and New Zealand Mounted Division. The Poona Horse, along with the Deccan Horse and the Sherwood Rangers, formed a part of the 14th Cavalry Brigade of the 5th Cavalry Division.

While stationed at Te-el-Kebr, Egyptian donkeys had been issued for the officers' batmen-sowars from the ranks-to ride, but at first all classes of the men composing the Regiment, and more particularly the Rajputs, strongly objected to riding these animals, which in India are ridden only by men of low caste. Before the campaign came to an end, however the donkeys had become very popular, especially among the Rathore Indian officers.

On the 29th April, Lieutenant Colonel Cooper quite unexpectedly rejoined and took over the Command of the Regiment from Acting Lieutenant Colonel Lucas. On first reporting his arrival at Brigade Headquarters, no intimation of his coming having been received, Colonel Cooper was suspected of being a spy, and the Brigade Major, who had never seen or heard of him before, telephoned to the Regiment for an officer to come and identify him.

In June 1918, the Cavalry Corps was moved to the Jordan Valley. Lancers were issued and deserting Turks reported that there was great fear of the lance among their troops.

Allenby began preparation for his final offensive, which included an elaborate deception plan. On 19th September 1918 the offensive began with the infantry breaking through the Turkish defence; the Desert Mounted Corps was at the gates of Damascus, and ordered to encircle the city; the Poona Horse, along with rest of the 14th Cavalry Brigade were directed onto the Homs-Damascus Road. While on the way, they encountered a party of Arabs. Mistaking them to be enemy troops, A Squadron charged. The Arabs scattered, exposing to

view a large car with a European seated in it. Risaldar Major Hamir Singh, taking him to be a spy, immediately rode up and demanded his surrender. The European turned out to be Colonel TE Lawrence, the fabled "Lawrence of Arabia"; "El Aurens" was not amused. It is possible that this encounter with Risaldar Major Hamir Singh, who was firmly convinced that Lawrence was a spy, may account for Lawrence's disapproval of the Indian Army, so forcibly expressed in his book *Revolt in the Desert*.

At 1015hrs on the morning of 1st October 1918, the Regiment entered Damascus and after the rest of the Brigade closed up, advance through the city was continued. The Arabs, liberated from their Turkish oppressors, gave a joyful welcome to the troops.

In the next phase of the campaign, the Cavalry were ordered to take Rayak and from there on to Aleppo, which the Regiment reached on 25th October. Finally, at 9.40 p.m. on 30 October 1918, the Armistice was signed in Mudros Harbour, aboard the Battleship "Agamemnon". The news reached the Poona Horse at 11a.m. on 31st October; they were holding an outpost line one mile North of the Muslimiyeh Railway Station. The news was received with feelings of joy and relief; with pride in the Regiment's achievement during the past four years; and with thoughts for the comrades who fell upholding the Honour of the Regiment, in France, Flanders and Palestine. It was indeed a proud distinction that the Regiment, in Palestine, had taken part in possibly the last, but perhaps one of the most successful horsed cavalry campaigns in recent history, and had acquitted itself with its customary élan, winning laurels all the way.

During the campaign in Palestine there had been much sickness in the force, both among horses and men. It is in this context that Field Marshal Sir Philip Chetwode, when presenting the new Standard to the Regiment in 1931, remarked: "After its arrival at Aleppo, your Regiment was congratulated on being the strongest in men and horses in the Desert Corps after having pursued the enemy for over 600 miles". Field Marshal Sir Philip Chetwode was one of the Field Commanders in this theatre and he must have had this achievement stored in his memory.

The Poona Horse remained at Aleppo as part of the army of occupation. Apart from the occasional excitement, time here was spent in training and in various forms of sports. A polo ground and a race course was made. In both the sports, the Regiment found no difficulty in keeping up its reputation. In the first race meeting held on 1 February 1919, the Poona Horse won six out of the seven events, Risaldar Major Hamir Singh winning two of them; this must have proved rather unpopular in some circles, but it is hoped that the Jawans were placing their bets loyally!

A polo tournament was also held and won by the Regiment, who beat the 18th Lancers in the final. The first ball thrown in, in this, the first post-war Polo Tournament, was retrieved and presented to the Regiment. It was suitably mounted and is still being kept in the Officers' Mess.

On 21 April 1919 Lieutenant Colonel George Knoles, DSO, was appointed Commandant of the Regiment. He was to prove to be a wise and far seeing Commanding Officer who saw the Regiment through the difficult period of the amalgamation in 1921. He later became

Colonel of the Regiment. In March/April 1919, the Regiment sailed for India, disembarked at Bombay and went by train to Banagalore where the Regimental Depot had been transferred.

THE THIRD AFGHAN WAR

In 1919, the 33rd Light Cavalry was posted at Risalpur as part of the 1st Cavalry Brigade, which included 1st Lancers and "M" Battery, Royal Horse Artillery. On 6th May 1919, information was received that the Afghan Army had attacked our post at Landi Khanna, North of the Khyber Pass, and was advancing through the Pass. Consequently, the Regiment, along with the rest of the 1st Cavalry Brigade, marched to Peshwar.

An Infantry attack was launched on the Khyber Pass to push the Afghan back. Once the Khyber pass had been cleared by the infantry, the Cavalry were passed through on 13th May. After some skirmishing, which included one or two set piece battles, the Afghan Army dispersed and after 17 May, no regular forces were met again during the campaign. Preparation were made for an offensive on Jellalabad, but in the meantime unofficial negotiation ended in an Armistice being signed on 3rd June 1919. Notwithstanding that, the tribesmen continued to give trouble. Finally peace delegation from the Afghan tribes arrived in Rawalpindi and a peace was signed Risalpur. Subsequently, when the C-in-C inspected the Regiment, he complimented them for the good show put up by the Regiment during operations conducted in Afghanistan in 1919.

Reorganization & Amalgamation

Reorganization Of Indian Cavalry

The Silladar System , as it existed in 1921, was in all essentials the same as that under which the 33rd Light Cavalry and 34th Poona Horse were raised nearly a century ago- a system under which a cavalry regiment was horsed, clothed, equipped, and even to a large extent armed out of funds provided by the men who composed it. This system, though functional for the exigencies of low intensity conflict on or beyond the Indian frontier, was found wanting during the Great War. Lord Kitchener, when he carried out his scheme of army reorganization in 1903, was desirous of doing away with the Silladar System. It is understood that only financial constraints prevented him from doing so then.

Prior to the outbreak of the First World War, based on Lord Kitchener's reforms in 1903 there were 39 Cavalry Regiments in the Indian Army, besides the Viceroy's Bodyguards and the Bodyguards of the Governors of Madras, Bombay and Bengal. All the 39 Regiments were based on the Silladar System except three : the 26th, 27th and 28th Light Cavalry Regiments of the Madras Regular Cavalry.

In 1920, a decision was taken to reduce the Indian Cavalry Regiments and abolish the Silladar System thus making the government responsible for providing horses. Uniforms, rations and other equipment to the cavalry regiments. The number of regiments was fixed at 21 on financial considerations, as their cost as regular units equaled that of maintaining 39 regiments

On the Silladar System. This reeducation was to be achieved by amalgamation pairs of Silladar regiments, except the Guides Non-Silladar regiments, the 27th (now 16th) Light Cavalry and the 28th (now 7th) Light Cavalry - were to be left untouched; the third Non-Silladar regiment, the 26th Light Cavalry, was to be amalgamated with a Silladar regiment, the 30th Lancers.

This would leave 18 amalgamated regiments, plus the 27th Light Cavalry, the 28th Light Cavalry and the Guides Cavalry; a total of 21 Cavalry regiments on the Order of Battle of the Indian Army. This change was promulgated under Indian Army Order No 1257 of 22nd November 1921.

Based on the above decision, the 33rd Light Cavalry and 34th Poona Horse were to be amalgamated to form 33rd/34th Cavalry, later redesignated in 1922 as 17th Queen Victoria's Own Poona Horse. It is indeed right that these two regiments should have been selected for amalgamation, as they had fought shoulder to shoulder in various campaigns within and outside India during the hundred years plus preceding their amalgamation. A committee composed of officers of both these regiments assembled at Bangalore to work out all details connected with the new organization. As per the new organization, the cavalry regiments would now comprise three sabre squadrons and a headquarters wing, this last to contain all those specialists, i.e, machine gunners, signalers etc, which had hithertofore been distributed

among the four sabre squadrons of the regiments. The peace establishment was fixed at 14 British Officers, 18 Indian Officers and 504 Indian Non Commissioned Officers and Men. On 3rd March 1921, the 33rd Light Cavalry moved to Jhansi at a strength of 9 British Officers, 13 Indian Officers and 447 Indian Other Ranks and on arrival occupied Range Hill Lines, whereas the Poona Horse arrived at Jhansi by the end of June

The Amalgamation

Prior to amalgamation, the class composition of the two Regiments was as follows :-

(a) 33rd Light Cavalry

A Squadron - Jats

B Squadron - Kaimkhanis

C Squadron - Mussalman Rajputs

D Squadron - Jat Sikhs

(b) 34th Poona Horse

A Squadron - Rathore Rajputs from

Jodhpur

B Squadron - Rathore Rajputs from

Jodhpur

C Squadron - Punjabi Mussalmans from

Jhelum

D Squadron - Kaimkhanis from Shekhawati (Jaipur)

The class composition of the new amalgamated Regiment was to be as follows :

(a) Headquarters Wing or Squadron;

(b) A Squadron of Rathore Rajputs - purely from 34th Poona Horse;

(c) B Squadron of Kaimkhanis - half squadron each from both the Regiments;

(d) C Squadron of Jats - purely from 33rd Light Cavalry.

This change of composition entailed complete demobilization or transfer to other regiments or Corps, of all the Sikhs, all the Mussalman rajputs, the surplus Rathore Rajputs and the surplus Kaimkhanis of the two amalgamated Regiments.

The process of amalgamation entailed immense labour on the part of all ranks. There were 41 British Officers on final amalgamation. 13 came from the 33rd Light Cavalry and 28 from the 34th Poona Horse. The Commandant was Lieutenant Colonel G Knowles DSO of the 34th. The Adjutant was chosen from the 33rd and the Quartermaster from the 34th. Of the 20 Indian Officers, 7 came from the 33rd Cavalry and the rest from the 34th. The first Risaldar Major of the amalgamated regiment was Risaldar Major Hamir Singh Bahadur, IDSM from the 34th; the Woodie Major was from the 33rd. All the the horses for the Regiment were provided by the 33rd and these were distributed by colours to Squadron; the Bays to A Squadron and Headquarters Squadron, the Chestnuts to B Squadron and the Browns and Blacks to C Squadron. The amalgamation was further assisted by the fact that the funds of both regiments were in a rather flourishing state. To the joint account the 33rd contributed Rs 217, 988 and the 34th Rs 92,350. To the Polo Fund each unit handed over Rs 12,937.

1921-31 : FRONTIER SERVICE

While at Jhansi the Regiment had to maintain one squadron at Allahabad and small detachment at the Sehore Remount Depot.

In February 1924 the Regiment replaced 16th Light Cavalry at Bannu. The Regiment left its own horses behind and took over 16th Light Cavalry's horse. Two troops were sent on detachment duties to Khajuri, a fort some 20 miles from Bannu on the Tochi Road. By 17th May this detachment rejoined the Regiment. On 26th May, A Squadron was sent on detachment duties to Razmak under Caption WM "Daddy" Newill. The Regiment maintained a detachment here during nearly the entire stay at Bannu. The primary task of this detachment was road protection duties.

On the 9th February 1926 the Regiment left Bannu for Peshawar, reaching there on the 15th. It remained at Peshawar for quite some time and during this period maintained a detachment at Landi Kothal.

Permission to wear full dress was granted in 1927, provided no expense was caused to the State. The full dress for the Indian Other Ranks was to be a khaki kurta, blue kammarband, shoulder chains, blue and grey lungi, white breeches, gauntlets and blue puttees. The dress was similar for the British and Indian Officers, except that there was gold in the lungi and black jackboots were worn in place of puttees. The mess dress was dark blue with French grey facings. The sanction for the crest and badge of Poona Horse came on 29th of December 1928 vide Gazette of India No 1759. the Royal and Imperial Cypher of Queen Victoria within the Garter, surmounted by a Tudor Crown and having below a scroll with the words "Queen Victoria's Own Poona Horse" was to be the crest and badge for the future.

In March 1928, with the withdrawal of the Hotchkiss machine guns, the squadrons were reorganized to comprise four sabre troops each.

The year 1929 began with a very regrettable and tragic bombing accident. On 23rd January 1929, an exercise was being conducted by 1st Armoured Car Company before an Inspecting Officer and C Squadron less a troop was tasked to act as enemy. Based on orders given to him, Captain H.M. Tulloch the officer commanding the squadron, found that he would have to move through the Royal Air Force bombing area South of Jamrud road, some four or five miles from Peshawar, to carry out his task. Permission for this move was granted by the Royal Air Force officer in charge of the ground party, as the area had not yet been cleared for bombing. The squadron moved off and some 200 yards from the bombing target it entered a stony nullah in troop column formation. The steep far bank had only one good crossing place and the columns closed in towards it. At this instant an aeroplane flying at 4000 ft, misunderstood the ground signals and not seeing the squadron dropped a 20 pound bomb which was further intensified by the confined space and stony ground. Three Indian Officers, 13 Indian Other Ranks and 16 horses died on the spot, while nine Indian Other Ranks and fifteen horses were injured of which one Indian Other Rank later succumbed to his injuries. The British Officers riding some hundred yards ahead were fortunate to escape injury. This incident occurred exactly a mile South of Jamrud road, four miles from Peshawar.

From 5th June 1930 onwards the Regiment was involved in intermittent skirmishes with the Afridis till the border. After one such skirmish on 9th August, when the Regiment was retiring, the Afridis started pressing hard. At this stage Captain Lunham with a machine gun section and two troops from A Squadron, took up position on a piece of rising ground near village Musazai on the Hazar Khani Canal- the scene of the skirmish. Hoping to check the pursuit Lunham organized a mounted attack, but before he could start moving his horse was shot under him. The Adjutant, Captain "Daddy" Newill, then took command and charged the Afridis, thus checking their advance. Jemadar Rahim Bux lost his life, though Captain Newill did manage to kill an Afridi with his sword. This act of Captain Newill has been etched for posterity by Maurice Tulloch, and now hangs in the Officer's Mess with the caption : "Daddy, 9th August 1930 near Peshawar".

It was now found that in the attempt to get the machine- gun section around, the non-commissioned officer incharge, Daffadar Abdul Karim, had been wounded and left behind, while the Afridis were seen to be coming on once again. Taking With him Daffadar Faiz Mohammed Khan and Sowars Alam Ali and Bhopal Singh, Captain Newill went back and under very heavy rifle fire, hoisted the wounded NCO on his horse and brought him away. For this gallant action Newill received the immediate award of the Military Cross. The Daffadar and the two sowars were later presented the Indian Distinguished Service Medal for this act by the then Commander-in-Chief, Sir William Birdwood, on his farewell visit to the Regiment on 4th November 1930.

The Afridis having gone back across the border, the operations now contemplated were of the nature of a blockade aimed at denying them their usual winter grazing grounds in the Khajuri plains, thus pushing further West the border of effectively administered territory, to prevent Peshawar from being subjected to any recurrence of such raids. This entailed construction of roads and forts up to the Western edge of the Khajuri plain. The Regiment was to assist in this task by providing protection to these construction parties. Initially, the Regiment was in Peshawar guarding the lines of communication from Bara Fort to Pabbi

and the area around Peshawar. On 6th November the Regiment relieved the 6th DCO Lancers at Bara, returning to Peshawar on the 22nd, leaving behind a squadron. This squadron was regularly relieved at fortnightly and later at monthly intervals. On 4th February 1931 the Regiment less the squadron at Bara took part in an operation at Sikhi, which were rather steep, some being as high as 3000 feet. C Squadron rode right up onto the hills and the infantry, who came later, were surprised to find the cavalry already in occupation.

Presentation of The Standard

On 22nd March, the whole Regiment concentrated at Peshawar and commenced practice for the presentation of the new Standard.

On 30th March 1931, the Commander-in-Chief, General Sir Philip Chetwode, Presented the new Standard to the Regiment. The Poona Horse formed up in line at 7.45 a.m. in open order in full dress. The Commander-in-Chief inspected the Regiment following which the old Standard was trooped and the Regiment formed up in a hollow square. The new standard was now brought in to the centre, uncased by the Risaldar General Sir Philip Chetwode who presented it to the Commandant, Lieutenant Colonel Elphinston. The Commander-in-Chief then addressed the parade.

The Poona Horse in the Nineteen Thirties

The Indian Cavalry Regiment

In the last horsed era of the Cavalry of the Commonwealth there were two types of Cavalry: Lancers and Sabre Regiments. Although the Lance had been in use in the early stages of the Great War in France and in the Palestine Campaign, the "pointing" sabre had come to be considered the more versatile weapon. This was confirmed by the fact that Lancers Regiments, though clinging to their lances, were required not only to be fully trained with the sword, but also to actually carry it in addition to the lance. The Poona Horse was a Sabre Regiment.

In India only certain classes of the populace were enlisted in the active units of the Army. This had grown through long years of history and custom. India had always had these divisions, much formed by tradition, of those who fought, and others who formed the many other strata of society. In units of the Indian Army it was generally, but not always, customary to have 2-3 classes on the strength. This made for a competitive spirit, and the harmony in the strength. This made for a competitive spirit, and the harmony in which they lived was a great example to the rest of the community.

During the period under review, the class composition of the Regiment was a very happy amalgam : one Squadron of Rathore Rajputs, one Squadron of Kaimkhanis, and one of Jats. The first two named came mainly from the erstwhile Rajputana States of Jodhpur and Jaipur, though a certain number of the Kaimkhanis were also enlisted from the Punjab; the Jats were from the Rohtak region (present Haryana).

In the Headquarters Squadron, all three classes were mixed, though generally separated for purposes of administration into sub-units of sections (6-8 men). Headquarters Squadron consisted of the Signal Troop, the Machine Gun Troop, Regimental Headquarters Clerks, transport elements. And the Regimental Tradesmen and Followers.

The Regiment encompassed about 600 all ranks, fully mounted, with about 150 men and horses in each of the four Squadrons. There were, officially, 14 British Officers authorized on the strength. However, what with Army Courses, Extra Regimental duties and leave, there would be about seven actually serving with the Regiment at any time. How it was possible to run such a well-oiled machine (to use rather a chronologically pre-dated term) will be explained later. At this stage suffice it to say that the secret lay in the rank of the 'Viceroy's Commissioned Officer' (VCO) who was well able to shoulder decentralized authority.

Until just before the War, one of the fascinations of serving in an Indian Cavalry Regiment was that the training of both the new Recruit, and of the raw untrained horse (the "Remount") was carried out within the Regiment and not at any shared depot common to various Regiments. Even prior to joining, in his formative years in his village, a Recruit would listen to and be influenced by tales told by his elder relatives round the fire or under the banyan tree. This influence would also extend to the effect produced by that strange creature, the British Officer, when he visited the district, however remote, on tour. The old soldiers seemed to have jocular and happy memories to share with him.

This all helped to make the Regiment very much of a 'family' and produced a very real pride in 'belonging'. This was also enhanced by the fact that very many of the followers and Tradesmen, also came from the same areas. Probably the only people who were not always from the same areas were the Headquarters Clerks, but these seemed to get thoroughly infected with the spirit and traditions of the Regiment.

The British Officer

There is the story of the Infantry Officer who named his cat 'Risala' because, as he explained : "When it is not asleep or playing games, it is making love". Jealousy? Exaggeration certainly.

The real situation was that the duties and work that could have been the lot of the Cavalry Officer were so heavy that decentralization was imperative. This resulted in much responsibility and trust being placed in the VCOs and also in the Clerks. As is often the case in life, both responded with hard work and loyalty. Far from being less burdened than their Infantry Counterparts, Cavalry Regiment, and their staff of VCOs, was the same as those of a dismounted unit; but added to the work and training common to both, for the Cavalry there was the question of Horse : Horses must be fed, trained, accommodated, groomed, shod and exercised.

A Cavalry Adjutant was not only responsible for the training of Recruits, who came direct from their villages (in the Infantry they went to Training Battalions), but also the training of a similar number of Remounts (untrained horses). At a give time there would be about 60 of each. He didn't escape any of the normal duties associated with his appointment such as

discipline, organization and training; and he had a full office life. The Quartermaster, had all the extra problems raised by the requirements of some 600 horses, which included rations, stabling and equipment.

In fact every Officer, Commandant to Subaltern, shared in these extras. There was the daily parade of 'Stables' ; inspections of shoeing, saddlery and harness. Attention to veterinary matters. Horses had to be exercised daily. In the case of officers' Chargers, even on holidays; this involved very early rising.

Notwithstanding the extra burden of responsibility that a Cavalry Officer had to shoulder, the efficiency never suffered. How, with all these extra complications. Can this have been so? The state of affairs must have, very early in the history of Indian Cavalry, enforced the decentralization of command, administration, training and trust to young officers, to VCOs and to NCOs. The early British Commanders of Indian Cavalry were lone figures accepting bodies of horsemen into their commands; they had no option at first. Then they realized that they had a great system that worked, and worked well. Trust and confidence were placed on these natural leaders, and as always confidence in men of the right stamp breeds increasing efficiency and trust. The result was that not only was the status of the higher commander raised, but that of the subordinate too.

There was a danger of an over-reliance, perhaps not entirely unknown- but on the whole the added status felt by the young British Officer brought with it an increased sense of responsibility. The young officer, arriving from the British unit to which he had been attached would have held the difficult command of a platoon. Difficult, because such a command requires knowledge of details, and the characters of men, at close quarters. Knowledge like that is only gained with the experience of years, and these commands in the Indian Army were held by VCOs, long in service. The present heading is the British Officer; this of course includes Indian Officer of the Poona Horse was Iskander Mirza, very popular with all ranks. He ended up as Governor-General of Pakistan. He was in fact one of the first Indians to pass out of Sandhurst, but went to the Political Service under pressure from Delhi.

To digress, there is a good story told of Iskander when he was District Commissioner Abbottabad, which rather illustrates his resourceful character. At the height of the "Red Shirt" (Khudai Khidmatgar) disturbances a procession was planned. He thought that this might well get out of hand and turn to violence. He did not have the Police resources to deal with such a development, so at a strategic point on the march, where he considered that an adequate thirst had been worked up, he placed tea vendors. There was nothing out of the ordinary in this. The only difference was that he had caused the tea to be laced with a strong, but tasteless aperient. Soon the procession broke up in embarrassed disorder. The Pathan Probably saw the funny side.

The Viceroy's Commissioned Officer (VCO)

The VCO was a rank unique to the Indian Army and hence requires a detailed description. There can be no doubt that efficiency, for which the Indian Army is justly famous, owes much to the VCO. The status of a VCO was higher than that of a Warrant Officer, but

below that of a Commissioned Officer. They lived in quarters in the lines. The Risaldar Major, the most senior VCO, was probably the most important man in the Regiment, after the Commandant. He carried great prestige. Technically he and all other VCOs were junior in rank to the King's Commissioned Officers.

In the early days, when the British raised units, the system had been that local leaders brought in bodies of troops, large or small, which were mustered and formed into units. Such leaders would have logically been men of influence in their respective areas and very likely men of social standing. These leaders were given the rank of VCOs. As this system worked well, The rank and its responsibilities were allowed to carry on even though a more formalized recruiting system was introduced, once the freebooting days were over.

Latter, even though education and efficiency in modern weapons became more important for advancement, the social 'cachet' of the rank remained. Obviously what helped it carry on was that more often than not, the better bred were the better educated. So, although now all Indian ranks had to start at the bottom rung of the ladder, mainly the same types got to the top rungs. There were cases where efficiency and the gift of leadership were there without the background, and in these cases there was much to admire. As the rank was now achieved after considerable service, the quality of experience was also automatically added. This was very important, especially in the Cavalry, for VCO Troop Leaders were often at some distance away, perhaps virtually detached, and on their own.

Anno Khan and Zalim Singh

During the nineteen thirties, the Regiment had two Viceroy's Commissioned Officers who went in very special roles to England. In 1933 Risaldar Major Anno Khan was appointed Viceroy's Commissioned Orderly Officer to the King. This post had been originated by Queen Victoria herself. Anno, with three others, was Orderly Officer to her grandson George V and his Queen, Mary.

Anno Khan (Kaimkhanis) joined the Regiment in 1907, was a Jemadar in 1917, Risaldar in 1921 and became the Risaldar Major in 1932, on the retirement of Risaldar Major and Honorary Lieutenant Raja Singh. He had been awarded the IDSM for Gallantry in France. When he retired in 1936, after 28 years service in the Regiment, he had become Risaldar Major Anno Khan, Honorary Lieutenant, Sardar Bahadur, IDSM, with the OBI (1st Class). He was upright in character, upright in looks, and presented a fine figure when he stood behind the King on State Occasions, in the full dress of the Poona Horse.

In 1937 Risaldar Zalim Singh went with the Indian Contingent commanded by Rob MacGregor to the Coronation. Risaldar Zalim Singh was a Rathore Rajore Rajput, and certainly looked one. He had very much the perfect figure of a horseman, and he was indeed a very incisive power of command. His likeness has been perpetuated in the Cavalry Club in London, and also in the War Memorial Statue outside the Quarter Guard of the Regiment.

This is the interesting story of how this came about : When he was in England with the Coronation Contingent in 1937, an artist, one lance Cattermole, was commissioned by the 'Players Cigarette Cards'. He went down to have a look at the Coronation Contingents, turn

out and bearing of this Rajput. Zalim was thus included as one of those making up the Cigarette Card set.

It was in 1970 that John Wakefield heard from Walter Shoolbred that Lance Cattermole, by now an artist of repute, was keen to do a portrait in oils of Rajput VCO of the Poona Horse. Lance Cattermole lived at Worthing, which was less than 20 miles from where John lived, so he paid him the first of many visits. It was then that he told him about the previous history concerning the Cigarette Cards, and that the plates for the cards had been destroyed when a bomb hit the Players factory in Bristol during the War. Lance Cattermole wanted to make a large size painting (48"x32") of the original Players card and asked John to assist him with the details; John readily agreed.

The painting was ready a day or two before the Indian Cavalry Association Dinner of that year and John suggested to General Moti Dyer, the Chairman of the Association, on the telephone, that it should be hung for the evening in the Ante-room. He agreed. When John arrived, he found the General and other senior officers standing and admiring the picture. He very hesitantly suggested that the Association could do worse than buy it and present it to the Cavalry Club. Moti at once thought this a good idea and asked John if he could get the artist to come to the Tea Party at the house of Lords the next afternoon. Lance Cattermole was there, and as a matter of fact, by chance all met outside the entrance. By the time they went in, the deal had been completed, with the one premise that it would be hung first at the forthcoming exhibition of the Royal Society of Oil Painters (with a "sold" label on it).

That is how this painting now hangs in the Cavalry club. Lance Cattermole gave John several small colour photo reproductions, one of which John sent to the Regiment. Hanut, who was then commanding the Regiment, saw it as a good model for the sculptor to copy for the Regimental War Memorial, and that is how the latter came about.

Incidentally, when Queen Elizabeth, the Queen Mother, came to a Cocktail party at the Cavalry Club given by the Association a year or two later, there were five items of interest shown to her, of which three pertained to the Regiment: 'Fred Archer on Ormonde', the Replica of the Silver Hand, and the picture of Zalim Singh. The latter of course, representing all the Indian Cavalry Regiments.

Zalim joined in 1917, was a Jemadar in 1924, and a Risaldar in 1927. He retired in 1946. He had been the senior Rajput VCO for many years.

In telling the story of the Regiment, one keeps alluding to an indefinable atmosphere and spirit which made life and service in it so rewarding. The Regiment had good Commandants, and Officers who could be described at least as understanding, but great credit goes to the Risaldar Majors, probably the most important guardians of that atmosphere and spirit. After years of service and experience they rose to this high rank to stand at the side of the Commandant, watching and knowing all that went on, ready to help and advise.

The Risaldar Majors during the period 1931 to 1947 were: Risaldar Major & Honorary Lieutenant Raja Singh, Anno Khan, Khan Mohammad, Mumtaz Ali, Durjan Singh, Tej Ram And Chandrup Singh (47th Cavalry)

Raja Singh took part in the presentation of the new standard. He actually served in both Regiments in the First World War : France, Palestine and the Jordan Valley ; then Afghanistan 1919, Waziristan 1924 and NWFP 1930-31. He was on the Committee during the Amalgamation and can therefore take his share of the credit for the happy sorting out of the many problems. He was one of the men in the trenches near Lieutenant de Pass when the latter won the Victoria Cross. He was the Risaldar Major during the rather tricky times when the Regiment was on the Frontier and was a fine and steady example to all ranks. He was followed in the appointment and was a fine and steady example to all ranks. He was followed in the appointment by Anno Khan Mohammad, with War service in 1914-18, who was destined to be the Risaldar Major during the period when, in the Second World War we mobilized as horsed Regiment, then lost the horses, mechanized, and moved overseas. A greatly respected character who filled one with confidence in all that he did.

Mumtaz Ali, Durjan Singh and Tej Ram had all been outstanding Horsemen, and all had been Woordie Majors (Assistants to the Adjutant). They had individually earned 'Distinguished' reports from the Cavalry School. Tej Ram had indeed been an Instructor there for several years. Many of those from Cavalry Regiments who went on courses there will remember that it was he who was always chosen for demonstrations, both mounted and dismounted. He

Returned from the Cavalry School with a glowing confidential report. He had outstanding 'drive'. As Regimental Daffadar Major and Woordie Major he turned out recruits and remounts trained to a very high standard. He was Risaldar Major during the anxious times of 1945-47, when there seemed to be much turmoil, but the situation in The Poona Horse could be described by the one word-' normal'. Any problems were dealt with efficiently and expeditiously.

Chandrup Singh was selected to be the Risaldar Major of the 47th Cavalry. He was an invaluable and highly praised character in that Regiment, both under Lieutenant Colonel Gin John and later Lieutenant Colonel Atherton. Keen, commanding and fair he carried the spirit of The Poona Horse to the 47th.

The Jawan

The Indian soldier is known as Jawan, a young man. In the Poona Horse, as in most units of the Indian Army, he came from the countryside Upto the end of the Second World War there were broadly only two occupations which the jawan and other members of his family followed, either farming or soldiering. The Indian Other Rank came from the same background as the VCO. In the past, men of influence in their villages had been recruited directly as Risaldars or Jemadars, but in the period 1931-47 there were few VCOs who had not risen through the ranks. In any case, since all ranks came from a landholding, farming way of life, there was little social inferiority and a Sowar would mix a Risaldar in rather the same relationship as that of Subaltern with his Commanding Officer. Some, though not all, of the syces also came from the same background.

Not only did all ranks in the Regiment come from the same background but, probably without exception, they all had brothers or cousins in the Regiment.

From time to time the districts from which the men of the Regiment were recruited changed. In 1895/96 there was a major change in the class composition of both the 33rd and the 34th and Maharattas and Deccani Mussulmans, who had served with both regiments since they were raised, were no longer recruited. However, as late as 1940, Maharatta and Deccani Mussulman pensioners were still to be found in the villages round Poona. Daffadar Karim Khan, who had been Lord Roberts' orderly in South Africa, was living at Sirur and the Chowkidar of the dak bungalow at Sirur was Maharatta who had been invalided out after taking a toss from his horse in the course of recruits' training some forty-five years earlier.

In the period 1931-1947 the class composition of the Regiment was : 'A' Squadron, Hindu Rajputs; 'B' Squadron, Kaimkhanis, who were joined when the Regiment went overseas by a draft of Punjabi Mussulmans; and 'C' Squadron, Hindu Jats.

The Rajputs were mainly Rathores from Jodhpur. The Rathores were second only to the Gahalauts of Udaipur in social standing but as soldiers they were second to none. Tradition and the desert landscape round their villages had endowed them with the toughness and self-discipline so necessary to a cavalry soldier. In 1942 'A' Squadron was joined by a draft of Rajputs from the United Provinces of Agra and Oudh (now Uttar Pradesh).

The Chauhan Rajput Raja had nine sons. One of the younger ones, Karam Singh, was a keen sportsman and, when a boy of fourteen, went out hunting in the Emperor's preserves. It happened that he picked the same time and place as the Emperor Feroze Shah, himself a keen sportsman. The Emperor had the boy brought before him and angrily asked him why he was hunting in the royal forests. Karam Singh fearlessly replied that he would have thought that the Emperor would have had enough game forests throughout the length and breadth of India to make it unnecessary for him to spoil the sport of a fourteen year old boy. Feroze Shah was so much impressed by the forthright reply and the manner of its delivery that he asked for Karam Singh to be sent to his court in Delhi. In due course Karam Singh arrived, became a Mussulman, took the name of Kaim Khan and was later joined by his two younger brothers. From this family all Kaimkhanis are descended.

Before 1947 the Kaimkhanis lived mainly in that part of Jaipur known as Shekhawati. They were recruited by two other cavalry regiments, the 16th and the 18th, and by the Indian (formerly the Bombay) Grenadiers. The Punjabi Mussulmans who joined the Regiment after it had gone overseas included Awans and Janjuas (a tribe of Rajput descent).

The Jats came mainly from the villages between Delhi and Rohtak, though there were some who came from Hissar. The Jat has been described as "manly, without false pride; independent without insolence; reserved in manner, but good natured; light hearted and industrious". Prominent among the villages from which Poona Horse Jats were recruited were Beri, Chimni, Bhopanian, Kheri Jat, Barahi and Jakhaude.

The Indian soldier was a delightful person to work with. He was well-disciplined, friendly and courteous. There must have been more than one young officer, newly arrived from an attachment with a British Regiment, who noticed with pleased surprise the almost total lack of defaulters paraded at the orderly room.

Perhaps the Jawan's most noticeable characteristics were his smartness and his keenness. He was impeccably tuned out. If about to be sent on a course he would prepare for it with the greatest assiduity. Though a sympathetic horseman, he tuned with enthusiasm to mechanization. His soldier's calling was his life and nothing was too much trouble for him. He was alert : the commander at an Indian quarter guard would, at a hundred yards distance spot a private car carrying officers In mufti, recognize them for what they were and call the guard to attention.

With all his soldierly qualities, the Jawan was a most companionable person. One of the difficulties which confronted the newly joined British Officer was learning the names of the men. This is bad enough for an officer who has to fit unknown faces to familiar names such as Smith, Brown and Robinson; but when the unknown faces have to be fitted to equally unknown names such as Hayat Mohammad, Pirbu Dayal, Raghunath Singh or Nubbi Bux the task becomes even more formidable. In course of time these melodious names began to sound commonplace and the men who bore them emerged as distinct individuals.

The Jawan, when leaving the lines off duty, wore a simple but smart regimental mufti : white shirt, white Jodhpur breeches and pagri, that of the Rajputs being cherry red, of the Kaimkhanis brown and of the Jats green. The Kaimkhanis and Jats wound their pagris round a conical cap known as the Kullah; the rajputs tied theirs, without a Kullah. The length of cloth required for Kaimkhanis and Jats was seven yards, while for the Rajputs, to makeup for the lack of the Kullah, it was nine. The cavalry pagri was about a yard longer than the equivalent one in the infantry, as it ended in a picturesque tail, known as a safah, which hung down the jawan's back, almost to his waist. When he was riding at full gallop, his safah would flow behind him in the wind. Kaimkhanis in their villages, particularly the older men, would often wear a Rajput pagri.

There was no animosity between the main classes of the regiment. The Pundit and Moulvie (respectively the Hindu and Mohammadan religious leaders) might be seen sharing the regimental tonga as they set off for a shopping expedition in the bazaar. The Kaimkhanis would join with unrestrained enthusiasm in the boisterous celebrations of the Hindu festival of Holi. Many have the delightful and indelible memory of a plump British Officer clad in tight battle dress, which accentuated the ample folds of his well -nourished body, fleeing before a crowd of ecstatic jawans of both religions, who caught him and with the greatest good humour drenched him in coloured water.

Such disputes' as did from time to time arise were usually between members of the same tribe and were caused either by village rivalry or jealousy over promotion.

Many officers toured the districts from which the men in the Regiment were recruited. Years later memories of these tours return : waking up in a Jat village to see, but a few yards away, peacocks perching on the rooftops; alighting from a train in Shekhawati to find in the station yard not taxis and tongas but couched camels; being met by friends with their own camels, some in a state of 'must' (the male equivalent of being on heat, peculiar apparently to camels and elephants), and setting off at high speed across the jaipur desert. In the villages there are the familiar faces of men last seen in uniform but who are now one's hosts in their own

homes and, with them, older men with venerable beards who tell stories of officers long since retired.

By these visits the officer gained a greater understanding of jawan. It is perhaps more important that he thoroughly enjoyed himself : in meeting his men on their home ground, in the peaceful remoteness of an Indian village, in the companionship and good humour of his hosts, in the opportunity for sport. The enjoyment of the visits seemed to be mutual : in one village in Jodhpur, nearly twenty years after independence, a pensioner VCO said to the British Officer who had come to stay with them, "All our lives we have spent with you people and it is my great good fortune that one of you has come to visit me again".

The Second World War & After

MECHANIZATION

In 1939-40, manoeuvres were held, which were designed to test the efficacy of horsed cavalry in modern war. The Poona Horse participated in these manoeuvres and performed rather well, with the result that it was one of the two cavalry regiments selected to remain horsed, when the rest of the Indian Cavalry were mechanized. With the remount depots now surplus of horses because of the mechanization, the Regiment had the pick of the remounts and became superbly mounted.

On 15 September 1939, Headquarters Southern command issued instructions notifying the Regiment that it was to form a part of Force K 3, which was earmarked for service overseas. This was the Force K 3 which subsequently went to Eritrea, but the authorities changed their minds about the Regiment accompanying this Force as a horsed Regiment. A pity really, because the commanders of this Force later confirmed that they could well have made use of the Regiment in a horsed cavalry role.

The hopes and aspirations of the Regiment to continue as a horsed cavalry regiment were soon dashed when it was decided that even the last two horsed Regiments of the Indian Cavalry were to be mechanized. After having been a horsed cavalry Regiment for 123 years, the Regiment was going to finally bid farewell to its horses. This was done at a ceremonial parade, held on 18 January 1941. As this was to be the last such parade of its kind ever, the 'Last Mounted Parade' has been covered in some details, in a separate section.

Raising of the 47th Cavalry

It was decided to raise three or four additional mechanized cavalry regiment. One of these was the 47th Cavalry, for which The Poona Horse was to provide the bulk of the officers and other ranks.

Gin John was promoted Lieutenant Colonel and assumed command of the 47th. The other officers who moved to 47th Cavalry were Jim Rutledge, Alan Drew, Tony Raymond, Qadam Singh and tripathi. Risaldar Chandrup Singh became the Risaldar Major of the new Regiment. The Poona Horse was severely 'milked' of its few recently qualified instructors and a large number of men. The 47th was to have the same class composition, but there does not seem to have been much dismay; mechanization, preparation and training proceeded without pause or panic in both the Regiments. On the 31st March 1941 the two Regiments bifurcated. The Poona Horse moved to Secundrabad and from there to field service overseas, while the 47th Cavalry stayed behind in Poona.

The 47th Cavalry, under the command of Lieutenant Colonel John, were later sent to Kohat as a frontier defence Armoured Car Regiment. They were disbanded in 1943, when all the officers, JCOs and men reverted back to the books of the Poona Horse. Many were posted

to the Indian Armoured Corps Centre and School at Ferozepore, whence they went overseas as reinforcements.

Divisional Reconnaissance Regiment -6 Infantry Division

From Secunderabad the Poona Horse moved to Bolarum and was allotted to the 6th Indian as the Divisional Reconnaissance Regiment. GHQ letter No B/72257/2/AG/Planning dated July 1941 ordered that the Regiment was to now complete mechanized mobilization.

THE LAST MOUNTED PARADE

The last mounted parade was held on 18th January 1941. The Regiment was commanded by the Commandant, Lieutenant Colonel G.D. Baines. The other officers on parade were 2nd - in-Command Major D.S.E.Mc Neill, adjutant Captain E.W.M. Magor, Squadron Commanders-'A' Major John, 'B' Major Ruttledge, 'C' Major hatch, Risaldar Major Khan Mohammed Khan and Woordie- Major Jemadar Tejram. 'serrefile' Officer Captains Whitefield, Wakefield and Drew, Lieutenant L. Esmonde-White, 2nd Lieutenants W.G. Stewart, J. Shebbeare, P. Young and Captain H. St. P. J. Bennett (acting as Mounted ADC to General Sir John Brind).

The Regiment, Mounted in full dress, formed up on the Regimental Parade Ground, Ghorpadi, Poona. It was a fine sunny afternoon and the march past line had been marked out with white ropes and lined by a number of reinforcement jawans w/o had joined recently. There was a large turn out of spectators, wives, families and friends, who had come to honour the Regiment on this sad and historic occasion. The spectators included a number of British and Australian soldiers come recently to India. They had come from neighbouring barracks to see something of the last of the India Cavalry, whose prowess, gallantry and skill had for generations held a special and romantic place throughout the British Empire and the world.

The Regiment was drawn up in mass at the South end of the Parade ground and was called to attention when Colonel Baines came on parade. After his customary inspection the Regiment moved in Coloumn of Troops to be drawn up "in-Line", facing the Saluting Base, ready to receive the Inspecting Officer, general Sir John Brind, KCB, KBE, CMG, DSO, General Officer Commanding-in-Chief, Southern Command.

On the Inspection Officer's arrival, Colonel Baines ordered "General Salute, Carry Swords", the Officers saluted and the Trumpeters sounded the "General Salute". General Brind, a famous gunner well versed in the ways of men and horses, acknowledged the salute and proceeded to make a detailed inspection of the Regiment, with a particular eye to the horses, which were in beautiful condition with their coats shining in the sunlight. Then followed the March past in Coloumn of Squadrons. First at the "walk", then at the "trot" and finally at the "gallop", when Colonel Baines set a cracking pace, galloping past for the last time after a century and a quarter of history. It is doubtful if it had ever been done better and there was not a single 'shooting star'.

After the march past, General Brind ordered the Regiment to be drawn up in Hollow Square, Where he addressed them. He congratulated the Regiment on its drill, Turnout and condition of the horses on parade that day and also on the high standard it had maintained throughout its long history and said that he realized how sad all ranks must be feeling to lose their horses. He then went on to explain why the Poona Horse had remained horsed so long when so many other Regiments had already been mechanized. He said the Higher Command had not been able to decide whether Horsed Cavalry would be needed on service in the present mechanized war or not, and therefore, only the best of regiments ready for instant service overseas in a horsed role had been retained in case required. Now it had been decided that all regular Indian Cavalry regiments should be mechanized, so The Poona Horse had to conform

General Brind finished by wishing the Regiment all the best in its new role, in which he felt confident that it would maintain the high traditions and efficiency with which it had always been associated in the past.

The Regiment reformed 'in-line' and saluted General Brind, who then left the parade. Colonel Baines then gave he order : "Make much of your Horses" and when this had been done he said again : " For the last time, for the last time- Make Much of Your Horses". A Very sad command. All on parade felt the poignancy of the moment. Colonel Baines ordered :. So ended a century and a quarter of tradition, both in peace and war; the Regiment bid farewell to "The Horses", whose care and condition had always been uppermost in the minds of all ranks throughout many generations.

He serves without servility-He has fought without enmity; there is nothing so peaceful, nothing less violent, there is nothing so quick - nothing more patient. Ladies and Gentlemen : "The Horse".

THE POONA HORSE IN WORLD WAR II

On the 20th November 1941, the night air resounded to the singing and shouting of "Shri Krishna Ki Jai ! Poona Horse Ki Jai" and other battle cries. The regiment was marching to Bolarum station to entrain prior to embarkation at Bombay for overseas service. Twenty seven years earlier, the 33rd Cavalry and the 34th Poona Horse , which were subsequently amalgamated to form 17th QVO Poona Horse, had embarked for active service overseas from the same port, the 33rd went to Mesopotamia and the 34th to France. Now it was the turn of many of their sons, grandsons and relations. On 21st November, 1941,908 all ranks, including 16 British Officers and 22 Viceroy's Commissioned Officers under the Command of Lieutenant Colonel G.D. Baines, with Risaldar Major Khan Mohammed Khan, OBI, embarked in SS Rajula at Bombay for active service overseas. Major K.E. Hatch was Second-in-Command. British Officer and senior Indian Officer appointments were - Captain E.W.M. Magor, Adjutant; Caption R.F. Walsh, Quarter Master; Lieutenant P.R.G. Young, Signal Officer; 2nd Lieutenant J.R. Lidderdale, Intelligence Officer; Lieutant E.E. Kennigton, Technical Officer; Jemadar Bashesar Nath, Head Clerk; Jemadar Tej Ram, Woordie Major and Jemadar Usman Ali, Signal Jemadar. Squadron appointments were : 'A' Squadron (Rajputs) Captain H. St. P.J. Bennett, Squadron Commander with Lieutenant R.W. Shakespear as his Second-in-Command; Indian Officers were- Risaldar Durjan Singh

(Squadron Risaldar) with Troop Leader Chain Singh, Jemadar Kishan Singh Jemadar Bijai Singh. 'B' Squadron (Kaimkhanis) Captain L.G.P. Esmonde-White as Squadron Commander with Lieutenant G. Morgan as his Second -in-Command. Indian Officers were-Risaldar Mumtaz Ali (Squadron Risaldar) with troop leaders Risaldar Fazul Rasul, Jemadar Asat Ali, Jemadar Amin Khan and Jemadar Shankar Ali. 'C' Squadron (Jats) Captain C.I Wotherspoon as Squadron Commander with Lieutenant W.G.F.R. Stewart as his Second -in- Command and Lieutenant R.E. Hawkins. Indian Officers were- Risaldar Badam Singh (Squadron Risaldar) with troop leaders Jemadar chotu Ram, Jemadar Sher Singh and Jemadar Indraj Singh. Headquarter Squadron was commanded by Lieutant V.H. Braham with Lieutenant Ranjit Singh as mortar Troop leader and Indian Officers Jemadar Sukh Lal and Jemadar Chiman Singh. At this time four british Officers were already overseas on staff. Captain J.H. Wakefield 10th Indian Division, Captain J.W. Prentice 4th Indian Division Captain C.J.M. Weippert 5th Indian Division and Lieutenant B. Humpherys 3rd Indian Corps, Malaya.

In December 1941, after eleven months of intensive effort to convert from horses to armoured carriers and from helio to wireless sets, the Regiment landed in Iraq, as Divisional Reconnaissance Regiment to the 6th Indian Division . Having arrived too late to take part in the operations of the summer (the Rashid Ali rebellion), there seemed little prospect of action in a theatre so recently secured against a possible invasion. Camp was at Barajasiya twenty five miles away in the desert. This was a place of sand tamarisk and scrub spinney lying close to the site of the Battle of Shaiba fought in 1915. Both Colonel Baines and Risaldar Major Khan Mohammed Khan were present with the 33rd Cavalry in that engagement when there had been a number of casualties.

In broad outline, the Regiment consisting of Regimental Headquarters and four Squadrons was equipped and organised on the war Establishment of a Divisional Reconnaissance Regiment. This comprised of Headquarters Squadron with mortar troop, signals troop, 'B' echelon administrative troop and light Aid Detachment for forward vehicle recovery and repair; three Sabre Squadrons each capable of acting independently and composed of Squadron Headquarters, four armoured carrier troops and one rifle troop.

Each troop had four Bren carriers with crews of four and the rifle troop was mounted in four 15 cwt Chevrolet trucks carrying crews of eight. In addition, Squadrons had their own 'B' echelon consisting of rations, petrol, ammunition, spares and other assorted equipment. The Bren carriers were tracked vehicles with armour protection against small arms fire. Their main armament was a Bren gun. The rifle troop carried 2" mortars and bayonet.

At an early date each squadron obtained an armoured car troop in lieu of a carrier troop. This consisted of three Marmon-Harrington (South African) armoured cars carrying a crew of three. They were armed with a Bren gun fired from the turret. These armoured carriers made in the Indian Railway workshops and fitted with Ford V 8 engines were underpowered due to the weight of the armour. This made them slow and cumbersome. Further, despite the provision of slits in the armour in front, not weapon could fire through them. Thus the gunner had to expose his head and shoulders while firing the Bren gun mounted on the top. The 15 cet Chevrolet truck was an excellent vehicle, fast, robust and reliable.

Command and control was exercised by radio sets. All communications within the Regiment were based on FS6 wireless sets. This radio set had an effective range of two miles with a maximum of four miles in good conditions. The rear link with the Divisional HQ was based on a Number 9 set. No wireless sets were issued below troop level and so the only communication within the troops was by hand signals.

At the end of January 1942, Billy Baines was succeeded by Lieutenant Colonel K.E.Hatch. All this while the Regiment trained hard for its role. At the end of March 1942, orders came to leave 6th Indian Division to convert into an armoured car regiment and to report for training to 252 Armoured Brigade operating from Mosul upto the borders of Syria and Turkey. The Armoured Car War Establishment called for a general reduction in manpower but at the same time an increase in the number of Viceroy's Commissioned Officers. The main reduction came in the rifle troops of the Sabre Squadrons, from a troop leader and thirty-two other ranks to a troop leader and fourteen other ranks.

The 600 mile march, which also involved conveying approximately 240 additional vehicles of other units across the desert to Baghdad, was successfully accomplished and provided valuable experience in desert navigation. In the open country to the North of Mosul, bordering the frontiers of Turkey and Syria, training exercises were carried out with the 10th Indian Division and 31st Indian Armoured Division. In May a warning order was received that the Regiment was to move to the Middle East. The Battle of Gazala in the western Desert was imminent. From Northern Iraq, via Palestine to Egypt, the Regiment undertook its longest and most hazardous march, commencing 2nd June 1942. The vehicles comprised of the already pretty tired 3-ton Chevys, Ford or Chev 15 cwt trucks, Marmon- Harrington armoured cars and the old carriers of Indian Railway construction. The destination was Mena, just outside Cairo, but the journey through Cairo with its heavy erratic traffic was pretty hair raising, especially because the drivers were quite unfamiliar with city traffic and had been taught to drive on the left and not the right as in Egypt.

Encamped at Mena outside Cairo in the shadow of the Pyramid, Bill Steward asked his driver, a stolid Jat peasant, what he thought of them. The driver surveyed one of the wonders of the world with the careful eye of a countryman and pronounced "Yeh bara bhoosa ka dump hai sahib" (a big pile of straw). From Mena the next move was to Amriya, a few miles South- West of Alexandria.

It was approximately two weeks earlier on 26th May 1942, that Rommel had launched his offensive against the 8th Army deployed in depth on a front of some 40 miles, from Gazala on the coast in the North, to Bir Hachiem in the desert in the South. Under cover of darkness on the night of 27th/28th May, the Afrika Korps had moved upto Bir Hachiem to deliver the main armoured thrust round the Southern flank and rear of the 8th Army. The move came as a complete surprise when Brigadier Filose, commanding 3rd Indian Motor Brigade, reported at 6.30 a.m. on the morning of 28th May that the whole of the German Afrika Korps was drawn up in front of him as if on a ceremonial parade. The 3rd Indian Motor Brigade had been ordered to occupy a defended sector two miles South-East of Bir Hachiem and act as a pivot around which the British armoured forces could operate.

In the open desert without having time to lay anti-tank mines and equipped only with two-pounder anti-tank guns, bren guns mounted in 15 cwt trucks and a supporting field artillery regiment of twenty five-pounders, three regiments of Indian cavalry , 2nd Lancers, PAVO and 18th Cavalry put up a tremendous fight. But after three and a half hours of unequal combat, with every anti- tank gun knocked out, they were overrun and the Brigade virtually ceased to exist. Over 50 German Mk III and Mk IV tanks lay strewn across the battlefield. Rommel had won the opening round but at a high price. For his part in this gallant action John Prentice, then serving with 18th Cavalry, was awarded the Military Cross.

In the two weeks that followed, in a series of tank battles, the German armour rolled up the British defence from the South, inflicting heavy losses and forcing the 8th Army back to the West as they threatened to cut them off in the Gazala - Tobruk-E1 Adem Salient. It was at this stage, on 10th June 1942, that the Regiment was placed under command 30 corps and ordered to the area of Musheifa, approximately 10 miles South-East of Mersa Marsa Matruh, for training prior to going into action. By this time, the news from the battle front was so serious that it was clear there would be no time for a period of training. Indeed the next order received was to move further West, through the Libyan frontier wire South of Sollum to join 30 Corps operating on the left flank of the 8th Army, South of E1 Adem. On arrival at 30 Corps Tac HQ, Lieutenant Colonel K.E.Hatch was given the task of relieving the 12th Lancers, which meant providing an armoured car screen covering a front of approximately 30 miles. With that honesty, clarity of mind and well balanced capacity for military judgement, which characterized him, Hatcho (Lieutenant Colonel K.E. Hatch) had to point out that with the Regiment's limited wireless communications a front of about 6 to 8 miles was its maximum capability. To the battle weary 30 Corps who had expected a fully equipped armoured car regiment, there was no choice- the handover by 12th Lancers could not take place.

After all the months of training and effort and the hectic moves to the battlefield, the opportunity for action was to be denied. It was a painful decision but absolutely correct. And no one must have felt it more keenly than Hatcho, who knew so well the sense of disappointment that it must cause. Joy Bennet, who was Second-in-Command at that time wrote-"We weren't received with all that enthusiasm when we got to 30 Corps HQ and they realized the extent of our armament and equipment. I was asked if I had my bag of stones as well. The reason we weren't used as Corps armoured car regiment was because we had'nt got good enough wireless sets and for no other reason. New wireless sets were to have arrived long before, but as usual they didn't and the ones we had could barely transmit or receive on the move except over very short distances. They were alright if you stopped, got out, rigged up an aerial on a pole and went on from there. But that sort of thing couldn't really apply in what can only be described as an extremely fluid state of warfare". Larry Esmonde-White, Signal Officer at the time of mechanization, commented : " The FS 6 set was surely one of Hitler's secret weapons and caused more epilepsy and heart attacks than any other single piece of equipment ever invented".

The three British Armoured Car Regiments operating in the desert, the 11th Hussars, 12th Lancers and K.D.G.s, were equipped with the high powered 19 set, with a normal range of 30 miles, and considerably more in good conditions. The high reputation they enjoyed for their considerably more in good conditions. The high reputation they enjoyed for their

accurate reporting of enemy movements was absolutely dependent upon a first class up-to date wireless network. Indeed it was Rommel who was said to have remarked that he always knew the exact location of his forward troops by listening in to the British Armoured Cars.

The Regiment was ordered back East to Mersa Matruh. Here the 8th Army under Ritchie, after the surrender of Tobruk with 25,000 men, was preparing to make a last stand. But the speed of Rommel's advance cut off Matruh whose defenders, 50th Division, 10th Indian Division and 5th Indian Division, given no time to repair the long since neglected defences, were ordered to breakout during the night and withdraw to the Alamein Line. After days of fighting rear guard actions on the coast and in the desert the 8th Army was withdrawn to the Alamein Line. Here, on the 40 mile front of treacherous desert country stretching from E1 Alamein on the coast in the North to the Quattara Depression (an abyss of rocky cliffs and soft sand) in the South, Rommel was stopped.

As the Panzers threatened to break through at Alamein, in Cairo only 60 miles distant there was near panic. Due to the smoke from the files burning at GHQ, that day became known as Ash Wednesday. If Alamein did not hold, it was vital to the war effort. To prepare for this eventuality 10 Corps was ordered to organize the defence of the Delta. The Regiment was placed under command of 10 Corps and was tasked to patrol the Suez Canal against the threat of German parachutists, from Port Said to Suez. The Regiment moved back, staging via Amriya, Alexandria, Mena and finally back to Ismailiya.

In the closing stages of the first battle of Alamein, the Poona Horse was specially selected by Auchinleck, in direct command of 8th Army as well as C-in-C Middle East, to guard his Tac Headquarters sited on the Ruweisat Ridge, the most prominent tactical feature of the Alamein position. 'B' Squadron reported to the 8th Army Tac Headquarters to find that their mission was to act as Guard and Escort Squadron.

Larry Esmonde-White (Squadron Commander) gives this description : "We were to guard Tac HQ located well forward in the newly established E1 Alamein Line. There were approximately 35 vehicles in the group of which 3 were monster mobile operations rooms, occupied by General Auchinleck and his staff. The threat was two fold : an attack by a parachute group landing directly on to the HQ and a thrust by armoured cars along the South around the pen flank of the Army. I positioned three troops along the Alam Halfa ridge to cover the latter threat and the balance of the Squadron performed guard duties in the immediate area of the HQ.

"I was somewhat taken aback when the G1 (Ops) instructed me to write orders for the entire Tac HQ concerning protection. I never written anything like this and 'Staff Duties' were a mystery. All concerned were told to dig slit trenches; fortunately this was accomplished in time, because we were strafed by enemy aircraft on 17th July. Regrettably not enough had been dug around the C-in-C's caravan and he reportedly jumped on his Chief of Staff when taking cover. It was 'back to shovels' immediately after the 'all clear'.

"As each day progressed the fluid nature of the battle gave place to more deliberate operations. Two attacks by the Allied forces along the Ruweisat Ridge straightened out the forward positions. During these attacks there was considerable enemy equipment left

behind. We now settled to a period of equipping ourselves from the enemy's left overs. Berti Brooks, the Squadron 2IC proved very adept at this operation and he frequently came back from a day's scrounging with a number of 47 mm guns and ammunition".

During this period 'B' Squadron provided escorts for the following distinguished persons who visited the battlefield : HRH The Duke of Gloucester; Mr. Winston Churchill; Field Marshal Sir Alanbrooke, CIGS; General Wavell, and Sir Sikander Hyat Khan, Chief Minister of Punjab. "This was because, on orders of General Montgomery, the new GOC-in-C, the Tac HQ moved back to Burg-el-Arab. By this time the three troop positions had become islands in a sea of anti tank mines and supporting weapons. It was along here that the 8th Army made their successful stand against Rommel. The battle of Alam Halfa reached its peak exactly where the three troops had been positioned on 15th July - a ridge with a commanding view of the flat land extending to the Quattara Depression in the south."

The gallop to take part in the battle of Gazala was to prove the high water mark of the Regiment's experience in confronting the enemy, As Rommel's attempts to break through at Alamein were foiled by Auchinleck's masterly defensive battles, the threat to Egypt and the Delta receded and the Regiment was withdrawn from the 8th Army and ordered back to Iraq, on 7th September 1942, as part of 10th Army in Persia/Iraq. It was an anti-climax, partially offset by the possibilities of action in Northern Persia. For weeks the news of German advances on the Russian front had been ominous. The fortress of Rostov had fallen and the way now lay open for a German advance through the Caucasus to the oil fields of Persia and Iraq.

The Regiment set out on its longest march, 1500 miles through Palestine, Syria, Iraq and thence via Paitak Pass into Northern Persia and on to Sultanabad, approximately 100 miles South-West of Teheran. At Sultanabad the Regiment rejoined 6th Indian Division whose task was to meet the anticipated German thrust through the Caucasus in order to give the 10th Army time to deploy for battle. Here, swathed in poshteens against intense cold and fortified by Persian Vodka, the Regiment prepared to meet the enemy. However with the encirclement of the German 6th Army at Stalingrad in November/December '42 and its subsequent surrender at the end of January '43 with a loss of approximately 90,000 men, the tide of the war turned and the immediate threat to the oil fields was over.

It was during the winter of 1942/43 that the Regiment was at last brought upto the full establishment of an Armoured Car Regiment and re-equipped with Humber armoured cars (No.19 sets two pounders) and a British Signal Detachment. In the conversion process the Regiment was greatly assisted by 13th Lancers, the only fully equipped armoured car regiment in the Indian Cavalry, who under Moti Dyer's leadership, had done extremely well in the Western Desert.

In April 1943 Lieutenant Colonel J.M. Fell took over command from Lieutenant Colonel K.E. Hatch. The Regiment moved in the same month from Qasr-I Shirin to Kifri on the road to Kirkuk. By the end of May, as a result of strong representations a move was made to Quiyara, on the River Tigris, for attachment with 31st Indian Armoured Division. Six weeks later, Lieutenant Colonel R.G.Kilkelly arrived from India to take over command from Fell.

In those early months, as the German counter-offensive again loomed large, the Regiment trained hard in its armoured car role with 31st Indian Armoured Division. By the end of July 1943 the German counter offensive at Kursk failed and under heavy Russian pressure the long withdrawal by the German Army to the West began. This coincided with the Allied invasion of Italy and the overthrow of Mussolini. The threat to Persia and Iraq was over and with it any likelihood of operational employment with 6th Indian Division in PAI Force (Persia and Iraq Force). Rupert Kilkelly made strenuous efforts to get the Regiment transferred to Italy, but to no avail. It was ironic that the two other Indian Cavalry Regiments in PAI Force at the time, 6th Lancers and Skinners Horse, were sent to Italy as Divisional Reconnaissance Regiments to 8th Indian Division and 10th Indian Division respectively because they had not been converted to armoured cars and did not belong to 6th Indian Division.

In November 1943 the Regiment moved to Mosul and for the next ten months was split up and constantly on patrol from Northern Iraq to Southern Persia. Regimental Headquarters was first of all based on Mosul with 'B' and 'C' Squadrons alternating on detachment, guarding the pipelines and pumping stations of Iraq Petroleum Company. In April 1944 a move was made to Haftkel in Southern Persia with similar oilfield patrolling duties. From here followed a series of moves to Ahwaz, Kermanshah and finally to Karind near the Iraq border. Throughout this time 'A' Squadron was on detachment during winter and spring at Khurramabad, patrolling the main American controlled supply road to Russia, and in summer moving to Tripoli in Lebanon for mountain warfare training with 24 Brigade, whilst one troop was sent to Damascus in Syria for internal security duties.

During this period the only major event was the marriage of Larry Esmonde-White to his childhood sweetheart, Anstace Moloney, at Mosul in the Spring of 1944. Permission was granted by GHQ after a masterly letter from Rupert Kilkelly about 'enforced chastity'.

In September 1944 with the run down of the PAI Force, the Regiment returned to Middle East Command to garrison the island of Cyprus.

After the harsh and arid desert country of Iraq, the barren mountainous region of Persia and the evil smelling oil fields, Cyprus was a paradise. Ten months later, on 7th May 1945, Germany surrendered to the Allies; the war in Europe and the Middle East was over. At the end of the month orders came for return to India.

For the entire period of three and a half years spent overseas, the majority of Indian officers and men had served without leave and without seeing their families. Throughout this time their conduct, discipline and morale had been of the highest order. In the many countries in which they served they had brought nothing but credit to the name of the Regiment. For the British officers it had been a privilege and source of pride to have served with the Poona Horse.

THE END OF AN ERA

On return from Cyprus, the Regiment disembarked at Bombay and proceeded to Kalyan : later, the Regiment went to Ahmednagar. On 3rd October 1945 the Regiment was re-organised on WEI/122/1 with Stuart Mk VI Tanks.

John Wakefield writes : The Regiment returned from Cyprus to Bombay and moved up from there to Ahmednagar under the command of Lieutenant Colonel R.G.P.Kilkelly. The plan was that, after receiving the appropriate vehicles and equipment, the Regiment should proceed to join in the war against the Japanese.

The Regiment was issued Stuart Mk VI tanks which were well equipped and kitted. Among many other refinements there were small white bags of a silicate of sorts, which was a drying element for keeping such items as the radio dry and unaffected by the humidity of the jungle. As I was passing a crew carrying out their checks, I saw a dry witted Rajput'old soldier'pick up one of these bags and remark "Chini bhi de rakha hai" ('They've even put some sugar in it').

Work was pretty hard, training to familiarize everyone with the new equipment. Everything was going very well, when the defeat of Japan was announced and VJ Day was upon us. The Regiment had mobilized on the outbreak of war as a horse regiment, and it must have been a close thing that it had not gone in that capacity to Eritrea. The Commanders there have stated that it could have been made use of. Possibly thereafter it would have been mechanized, but in the Middle East, where it would have had every chance of getting suitable fighting vehicles and armament and most importantly, a system of wireless inter communication that had some chance of being suitable! What then?

Ahmedagar was clearly a temporary location. In January 1946, the Regiment was ordered to move to Mathura. This had never been one to the Cavalry stations before. We were sent there in what was supposed to be very 'hush-hush' role; the defence of GHQ Delhi, in the event of internal security troubles. One squadron, under George Elvins, was sent to Meerut for some time for internal security duties.

In 1947 the Regiment moved from Mathura to Risalpur where for the first time it received its complement of Sherman Tanks and became a full fledged Medium Armoured Regiment.

The Regiment took over the Sherman tanks from the 3rd /6th Dragoon Guards ("The Carabineers"), who had brought the tanks and the rest of their vehicles back from Burma. These tanks and vehicles were by then pretty veteran, so we were in for some very heavy and careful maintenance.

The men were now a long way from their homes. With the approach of Independence and the uncertainty as to how it would all work out, there might well have been an atmosphere of anxiety, but certainly none showed. All ranks remained in good heart.

In the Frontier Province there was a tussle between Badshah Khan's 'Red Shirts', who had been supporters of the Congress, and the followers of the Muslim League. The prospect of and independent Pakistan was also very much in the air. It was decided that there should be elections, but great precautions were to be taken to see that these were fair, and not

influenced by any force or violence. The Regiment was used in detachments to held; there was no trouble. The Sherman was larger and more imposing than the Stuart and its appearance had a good moral effect.

In July 1947 Lieutenant Colonel Glassco took over acting command of the 3rd Armoured Brigade and John Wakefield assumed command of the Regiment. During this time Field Marshal Sir Claude Auchinleck, the C-in-C, visited the Regiment.

By the time we were due to leave Risalpur it was known that in the great 'Divide Up' between the Dominions of India and Pakistan, the Regiment had been allotted to India.

The Regiment duly left Risalpur by train for Jhansi. By this time, widespread communal riots had broken out all over India, Punjab being the worst affected province. As the train passed through the riot torn areas, the troops were eye witnesses to the barbarism that had been unleashed. The train was, in fact, fired on but John Prentice, who was Officer Commanding train had given orders that if this happened, the answer was to be a considerable amount of what is known as 'prophylactic' fire, i.e., covering with fire all possible localities in which there might be hostiles. There were no more shots at the train.

At Lahore railway station another crisis arose. The engine driver, who was a Muslim, refused to take the train further as, apart from other things, he feared for his own life. In fact, he absconded. He was eventually ferreted out by Maj Abhey Singh who literally at the point of a gun got the train moving from Lahore and eventually brought it safely to Jhansi.

Even though the Kaimkhanis had opted for India when the Regiment was at Risalpur, the harrowing scenes witnessed during the train journey from Risalpur to Jhansi and the widespread communal riots that had engulfed both India and Pakistan, made them apprehensive about their future. Their fears were further compounded by the fact that every other Muslim Squadron from the Regiments allotted to India had by now 'opted' for Pakistan, and many of them came to us in Jhansi to be accommodated enroute. We had in fact organized a Collecting and Despatching point for these Squadrons and we were, at one time, looking after four such Squadrons. Interaction with these squadrons would have raised further doubts in the minds of the Kaimkhanis and they could not make up their minds about their future course of action. Seeing their uncertainty the senior officers of the Regiment formulated a definite policy with regard to the Kaimkhanis from the moment we got to Jhansi. This policy was to let the Kaimkhanis have maximum access to every type of information that would help them make a decision, but so much was involved that we officers could but be in a position to greatly influence their decision. It was in pursuance of this policy that a special tour, amongst other measures, was undertaken.

A party was made up to go and size up the situation in their home districts. This party was under the leadership of George Elvins. They toured their home areas in the Rajputana states, contacted various authorities right up to the Rulers, who fully reassured them. But the Kaimkhanis continued to be worried about their safety, particularly those who came from areas within 'British' India. In the general atmosphere of communal doubt they also thought that they would have an uncertain future in the Army.

All these precautions were taken to ensure that they took a really well considered decision; and also because they were extremely reluctant to leave the Regiment.

When I was told that they were on the verge of deciding to leave I talking to them all in the Barrack room. I reiterated the policy and hoped that they had sufficient evidence to make a decision. I then said that the one bit of advice I could give them was that they would be completely all right in the Poona Horse. They agreed with this emphatically but were fearful of the future outside.

As soon as they had made their decision to opt for Pakistan, we did our very best to get them well re-settled across the border. Help was asked for from among others, General Isjandr Mirza, then the Defence Minister of Pakistan, who had once commanded the Squadron, and General Sir Millis Jefferis, Engineer-in-Chief Pakistan. Their re-settlement in fairly good areas in Hyderabad, Sind was very largely due to the action taken by these two, aided by General Frank Messervy, then C-in-C Pakistan, who wrote personally and helped.

Colonel Wakefield was appointed Commander of the Armoured Brigade, at Jhansi; John Prentice took over the Regiment from him. About this time, the Regiment received urgent orders to move in an Internal Security role to Danapur, Bihar. Either shortly before the move there, or soon after, John Prentice, then Commandant had to leave as he was a volunteer for transfer to the British Army.

There were two important Regimental functions. The first, a very sad one, a dinner to the Kaimkhani Squadron. The whole Regiment was saying good-bye with the greatest regret and sorrow. Later there was a dinner to welcome the Sikh Squadron who came to replace the Kaimkhanis. The Sikhs came from the 13th Lancers.

There were two Mess Meetings at Jhansi which should be reported. The first was to discuss the possibility of sending present to Princess Elizabeth on the occasion of her wedding. It was voted to send the Replica of the Silver Hand and this was later taken to England by John Prentice. It was delivered to the Colonel of the Regiment, Colonel Willy Elphinstone. It arrived, as a matter of fact, too late for the wedding and on re-consideration it was thought that perhaps it was not altogether an appropriate present. After correspondence, it was agreed that it should be loaned to the Royal United Service Institution Museum where it stood on display for many years. Later, due to Service Museum policy, all the items on display at the R.U.S.I. were dispersed to various other Museums. It took a little time to find out where the Silver Hand had gone, but on enquiry it was discovered that it was the only item still kept in a safe at the R.U.S.I with the agreement of all concerned it is now on loan to the Indian Army Memorial Museum at Sandhurst. A detailed account is given in Appendix IX.

The second important Mess Meeting was decided unanimously to present the Statuette "Fred Archer on Ormonde", to the Cavalry Club in England, as a memorial to the service of all British Officers who had served with the Regiment.

The Indo Pak War-1965

The Prelude

Emboldened by India's poor showing against the Chinese in 1962, Field Marshal Ayub Khan, the President of Pakistan, on the advice of his Foreign Minister, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, decided to launch Operation "Gibratar", which was aimed at seizing the State of Jammu & Kashmir. In accordance with this plan, trained and armed insurgents were infiltrated into Kashmir to incite, organize and lead a rebellion, thereby preparing the ground for an armed intervention by Pakistan. As a prelude to this operation, a major border incursion was undertaken by Pakistan in April – May 1965, in the Rann of Kutch. The purpose of this of this border incursion appears to have been to test the Indian response, as also the response of the Major Power to an out-break of hostilities between India and Pakistan. As the Indian response was restricted to merely countering the Pak incursion, and as this response remained limited to the Rann of Kutch only, Pakistan apparently concluded that a similar incursion by them in Kashmir would only invite a local response by India. This appears to have firmed their resolve to go ahead with Op "Gibraltar".

OPERATION 'ABLAZE'-The Initial Response by India

The Regiment had just returned from collective training in April 1965; on 24th April a party had been organized in the Mess to celebrate the end of a successful collective training season. Just when the party was getting into full swing, the codeword for operational deployment was received. With energy, enthusiasm and fervor, the Poona Horse mobilized overnight. The formation staff found it hard to believe that even though the officers were having a swinging party in the Mess at 2100hrs on 24th April when the codeword was issued, by 0400hrs on the 25th the Regiment had loaded up on the trains and was ready to move. The Regiment left Babina on the early morning of 25th April and by nightfall had deployed with the other regiments of I Armoured Division on the homestead of the Upper Bari Doab Canal (UBDC), near Jandiala Guru.

The Regimental set up then was: Lieutenant Colonel Tarapore, Commandant; Girdhar, the Second-in-Command; Narinjan, Veeru and Ajai, the three squadron commanders; Surrinder, Adjutant; Vinod Saighal, Technical Adjutant; and Amrik Virk, the Quartermaster.

During the initial period of deployment, there used to be meticulous camouflage, intense gunnery training, reconnaissance, contingency planning strict security; all this gradually declined as days lengthened to weeks, and weeks, and weeks merged into the hot summer months, with no signs of the expected launch into battle.

The advent of the monsoons brought the inevitable move back to 'stables'. As relations between India and Pakistan continued to be tense, the Black Elephant was moved into barracks in the Jalandhar/Kapurthala complex; the Regiment was located in Kapurthala. The drudgery of peacetime routine now set in, with its connected boredom, but not for long.

The simmering hostilities between India and Pakistan broke out into open war, when Pakistan launched an attack in the Chhamb-Jaurian Sector. On 3rd September 1965, the Regiment was out on a TEWT (Tactical Exercise without Troops) when orders were received for the Commandant to report to Brigade HQ and for the rest to return to lines. On reaching the unit lines, orders were received for tanks and vehicles to be stowed up for battle and for the Regiment to disperse along Road Kapurthala -Katharpur.

OPERATION 'NEPAL'

Move to Concentration Area

On return from Brigade HA, the Commandant, Adi Tarapore, summoned all officers for a conference at 1335hrs. "This is IT", he curtly stated, and then continued with orders for the move and concentration of the Regiment in general area Madhopur. Loading of tanks onto the rake was to commence at the Kartaropur Railway Station siding by 1600 hrs; there was barely enough time to bid goodbye to the families. The speed with which the Regiment moved was commendable. The advance party with the Second-in-Command, Girdhar, left at 1630 hrs, while the first tank of 'B' Squadron with Major Narijan Cheema moved from Kartharpur at 1715hrs.

Thought the move was under a blanket of strict security, the local populace had somehow come to know of it. At each station men, women and children gave an enthusiastic reception and forced their hospitality on the troops. A temporary delay occurred short of Madhopur as the engine could not haul the rakes up the gradient. Another engine was called for. Further, as there was no ramp for unloading tanks at Madhopur, this had to be improvised. Thus, after a delay of two hours, the first train steamed into Madhopur at 0430 hrs on 4th September, where it was received by the Second-in-Command, Major K Giridhar Singh. The designated dispersal area of the Regiment was West of Kathua; by 2000 hrs on 5th September, the entire Regiment had concentrated in this area.

The newly raised 1 Corps, commanded by Lieutenant General P.O. Dunn, was given the task of launching an offensive from general area Sanvam with a view to securing Pak territory up to and inclusive of the Marala- Ravi Link Canal (MRLC). The formations on the orbit of 1 Corps were 1 Armoured Division (Major General Rajinder Singh Sparrow), 6 Mountain Division (Major General S.K.Kalra), 14 Infantry Division still under raising (Major General SR.K Ranjeet Singh) and 26 Infantry Division, (Major General M.L Thapan) which was deployed for the defence of Jammu.

1 Armoured Division comprised 1 Armoured Brigade and 43 Lorried Infantry Brigade. 1 Armoured Brigade had three Centurion regiments; 16th Cavalry, The Poona Horse and Hodson's Horse. It had an armoured Sherman regiment, 2nd Lancers, and a Sherman regiment, 62 Cavalry, ex-26 Infantry Division which was allotted in lieu of 3rd Cavalry, which had been grouped with 1 Armoured Brigade.

1 Armoured Division planned to advance with 1 Armoured Brigade, with 43 Lorried Brigade in reserve along Axis Ramgarh-Range-Sabzpir-Chobara-Gadgor-Phillaurah, with a view to

securing Phillaurah, Tharoh and Chawinda. For the execution of this task, 1 Armoured Brigade planned to advance two up, with the Poona Horse on the left, 16 Cavalry on the right and Hodson's Horse in reserve. 'A' Squadron ex-62 Cavalry was to advance along the Adeg Nadi, with the task of guarding the left flank of the advance, and was also to establish a stop at Bijapur. The three bounds given for the advance were Baghiari, Rangre and the line Phillaurah Cross Roads Tharoh Road Junction. 43 Lorried Bridge was to move from Sabzpur to Bhagowal, via Mastpur.

On 5 September 1965, the Regiment moved from its concentration area on road Bajpur-Ramgarh, 4 miles North of the International Border. The threat of hit and run strikes by Pak infiltrators kept every one on alert during the move and by first light dispersal was complete. It was on this night that the enemy claimed their first casualty; Sowar Ranjit Singh of the Regiment, who was posted to 1 Armoured Brigade as a dispatch rider, was ambushed and killed by a party of Pakistani infiltrators, West of Basantar River on the Pathankot – Jammu Road.

On 6 September, a lone enemy aircraft carried out a rocket attack on some vehicles West of the Regiment's location. It was amusing to see the speed with which everyone dived for cover. 6 and 7 September were devoted to reconnaissance, planning, preparation and administrative chores. There was an acute shortage of maps; only four maps per Squadron were issued and even these were outdated. Nor was there any intelligence available about what the enemy had opposite the regiment, what was his deployment pattern, where he could be expected and in what strength.

On the afternoon of 7 September, the Commandant, Lieutenant Colonel Ardeshir (Adi) Burzorji Tarapore gave his orders. The task given to the Regiment was to secure the Tharoh Cross Roads by last light 8 September. The advance was to be two up upto line Nakhnal-Baghiari with 'A' Squadron on the left, 'B' Squadron on the right and 'C' Squadron in reserve; thereafter, the advance was to be one up with 'B' Squadron leading. The three bounds given were line Nakhnal –Baghiari, line Rangre and line Tharoh Cross Roads. The axis of advance was Nakhnal-Rangere-Tharoh. At this stage the Regiment command structure was: Commandant, Lieutenant Colonel Adi Tarapore Second – in – Command, Major K Giridari Singh; HQ Squadron under Sarab Ahuwalli; 'A' Squadron under Captain Ajai Singh; Adjutant Captain Surrinder Singh and Quarter Master Captain Jasbir Singh.

After the orders were over, Adi called Narinjan Cheema aside for a cup of tea. With an earnestness born of the meticulous detail with which he was wont to plan his life, he instructed Narinjan that he was to be cremated if killed in battle; that his only son Xerxes, must be told to join the army and be commissioned into the Poona Horse; and that his prayer book and ring must be given to his wife, Perin. Though Narinjan tried to make light of the whole issue, telling Adi that nothing would happen to him and that he must not think on these lines, Adi replied in all seriousness; "Narinjan, it is better to plan these things-one never knows". Adi repeated these instructions after the capture of Phillaurah. With hindsight it now becomes evident that Adi had got some premonition of what fate had decreed for him.

On Night 7th /8th September, the Regiment moved into its launch pad just North of the International boarder. There as an air of fervour and suppressed excitement, and the Regiment looked forward to adding yet another glorious chapter to its valorous history.

The Other Side of the Hill

Pakistan had deployed an Infantry Division, comprising four infantry brigades and four armoured regiments, for the defence of the Sialkot Sector. The detailed deployment of this Division was; one infantry brigade and an armoured regiment deployed for the defence of Chawinds with a battalion at Gadgor; brigade less one battalion was defending Chawinda and an armoured regiment was deployed in general area Phillaurah-Gadgor; one infantry brigade and an armoured regiment at Jassar; and one infantry brigade and an armoured regiment in reserve, West of Sialkot.

100 Independent Armoured Brigade of Pakistan formed the nucleus around which the newly formed 6 Armoured Division was raised. This Division was located at Gujranwala-Wazirabad. It had a reconnaissance regiment and four armoured regiments: three equipped with Pattons and one with Shermans. Of these, two armoured regiments has been employed for the Chhamb offensive and were not immediately available to the Division. One armoured regiment of the Division, 25th Cavalry, with two squadrons of Pattons and one squadron tank destroyers, was deployed in support of the infantry brigade defending Chawinda and Gadgor. It was this armoured regiment which initially opposed the advance of 1Armoured Division. However, it needs to be mentioned here that the raising of 6 Armoured Division by Pakistan had not been picked up by Indian intelligence and hence none of this information was available to 1Armoured Division when they launched their offensive.

THE CLASH OF ARMS : 8-23 September 1965.

8-10 September

Early morning of 8 September 1965; 0600 hrs. The Regiment's offensive literally started with along, with a shot fired from Major Niranjan Cheema's tank, on the Pakistani post of Kadral. However, our first vehicle was overrun by an A Squadron Centurion, the driver of the tank being blinded by the tall sugarcane growing in the fields. This complicated. The Adjutant's Dodge 1Ton vehicle was overrun A Squadron Centurion, the driver of the tank being blinded by the tall sugarcane growing in the fields. This compelled Surrinder, the Adjutant, to operate from his tank, which proved fortunate, as the enemy air was to later cause some considerable casualties to own wheeled vehicles. Due to heavy going on the left flank, A Squadron could not keep pace with B Squadron; Adi, therefore, ordered a change in formation to one up, with B Squadron leading. No opposition was met upto Rangre. It was here, at 0800hrs, that the first enemy air strikes came on the Regiment. No damage was done to the tanks but it was subsequently learnt that some considerable damage was caused to the administrative echelons of the Regiment, which were deployed at Ramgarh.

The Pakistani villages had not been vacated earlier and now as our advance progressed, men, women and children came streaming out, with whatever they could carry, and moved

through our advancing columns to the Pak rear areas. So ignorant and simple were these people that a group of them who had taken shelter near Major Narinjan Cheema's tank, were cursing the aircraft for strafing the Regiment. They had assumed that own tanks were Pakistan Army tanks and the aircraft belonged to the Indian Air Force. It must be recorded that no civilian was harassed.

The first encounter with the enemy took place South West of Ranger. A platoon of Baluch infantry was observed huddled around a well. Narinjan Cheema stopped his tank, layed his gun into the well and waved to one of them to come forward. A Havildar came forward with his rifle. Narinjan asked, "Tum Kaun Ho? (Who are you) He replied "Mussalman Hum" (I am a Muslim) Narinjan: "Mujhe maloom hai. Kis unit ke ho?" (I know that which is your unit) Havildar: "Mein Pakistan ka sapahi hoon". I am soldier of Pakistan.) Narinjan: "Apne hathiyar daal do, aur apne sathiyon se kaho ki who bhi aage akar hathiyar dal dein". (Surrender your arms and tell your companies also to surrender their arms.) Havildar: "Jab tak jism meiun jaan hai Pakistan ke liye ladunga".(Till there is life in this body, I will fight for Pakistan) With that he turned around and started running back to join his men. A burst of .30 Browning and a few shots of HE soon took care of the Havildar and his detachment but not without a feeling of admiration for the brave soldier, and a feeling of diffidence at having to shoot him.

The advance was resumed apace by 2nd Lieut Man Singh and 2nd Lieut H.I.S Dhaliwal, the two leading troop leaders. At about 0945 hrs came the next air strike, followed by artillery shelling. For the second time the enemy air picked out Narinjan Cheema's tank for target practice. Thankfully, their shooting was poor and Cheema's crew must have been sorely tempted to give the signal for 'wash out', as was the practice during small arms firing! This poor shooting by the Pak Air Force did much to bolster the confidence of the Regiment. However, the enemy air did claim their first casualty- Daffadar Guman Singh of A Squadron. This gallant soldier was trying to down a Sabre jet with his 30 Browning when he was hit in the neck by the aircraft's cannon, killing him instantly. He was an excellent sportsman, representing the Regiment in both boxing and football, and very spirited NCO. As they say, war always claims the best.

The advance had barely been resumed following the air strike when Man Singh and Dhaliwal made contact with two troops of Patton tanks, at a range of 1200 yards, West of Tharoh. And this after the higher HQ had ordered speeding up of the advance as no enemy opposition was expected! Dhaliwal's tank was hit and went up in flames, though Dhaliwal and his crew survived. Dhaliwal had superficial burns and his driver, Hukam, was suffering from shock and burns. They were evacuated to the rear. A few days later came the welcome news that Dhaliwal had been awarded a Vir Chakra, the first award for the 1965 war.

B Squadron deployed and started engaging the enemy tanks. Two enemy tanks went up in flames and the rest withdrew to Chawinda. It was noon by now and when the contact report was given to Brigade HQ, the Regiment was ordered to stop further advance. This was followed by orders to withdraw to Pindi Bhago (the name of village) and guard the left flank. This turned out to be an unfortunate choice of name as "Pind" in Punjabi means a village, and "Bhago" means to run, so many mistook the instruction :Pind (i) Bhago" to be a veiled

order for a general withdrawal. This confusion was soon sorted out and the Regiment withdrew to Pindi Abhago.

Near Rangre, the Regiment came across the gruesome sight of one of our own medium batteries which had been shot up, unfortunately by own tanks as later investigations showed. A little further on, some men of 16 Cavalry were observed carrying a mortally wounded Major M.A.R. Sheikh, their A Squadron Commander. They were directed to the Advance Dressing Station. On coming close to Pindi Bhago and Sabzpir cross-roads the Regiment suddenly came under tank fire from tanks of 2nd Lancers, which were deployed in that area. A free for all developed, which the officers of both Regiments managed to stop within a short time. The trigger happiness of 2nd Lancers was understandable as only a few hours earlier, their Commandant's tank had been shot up in same general area by one of our own tanks, mortally wounding the intelligence Officer, Seth. Luckily, there were no casualties this time. This confusion could have been totally avoided had the Brigade Staff exercised proper control and informed all concerned of the location and deployment of various units. Unfortunately, the Brigade Staff learnt nothing from this experience and throughout the subsequent fighting, units continued to remain in the dark about the location and actions of other units of the formation.

At the Sabzpir cross roads, the enemy air paid its customary evening courtesy call at 1715hrs. They seemed to have developed an uncanny knack for picking out Narinjan Cheema's tank and this time also they did not disappoint. Soon the word was going around the Regiment that the best defence against enemy air was to keep a safe distance from Narinjan Cheema. That night the Regiment harboured at the Sabz Pir cross roads. And did it harbor! It all began with the Second-in-Command Girdhar, refusing to allot harbor areas to the Squadrons. "This is war and not any peace time exercise. Select your won areas as per the deployment given by the Commandant. Do not expect to be spoon fed", or so, were his words. The Squadron Commanders did precisely that. However, Adi, a perfectionist in such matters, was not at all pleased with what he saw of the Regimental harbor layout, when he arrived there at night around 2130hrs. During the next two hours, oblivious to the heavy artillery shelling, The Poona Horse lined up and went into a perfect circular harbor !

Orders were then given near Adi's tank. The reason for the earlier withdrawal and for the Armoured Brigade going into a defensive box were explained. The 'O' Group was informed that 16 Cavalry had met opposition just ahead of Gadgor, at 0945 hrs. The engagement ranges between the opposition tanks had been barely 50-200 yards. The advance of the leading squadron came to a halt. The outflanking squadron, under Major M.A.R. Sheikh, also came under very heavy and effective tank fire and the Squadron Commander was mortally wounded. Thus the advance of 16 Cavalry got stalled. All this happened about the same time as the Regiment's action at Tharoh.

The apart , the squadron of 62 Cavalry , which had been detailed to guard the left flank of the advance, had not been able to cross the boarder at the appointed time; known. Thus, as far as the Brigade HQ was concerned, its left flank was open and our medium battered had been shot up near near Rangre by what were believed, at that time, to be enemy tanks. Consequently, the Brigade Commander, Brig K.K Singh. Reached the conclusion that he was being opposed by two armoured regiments and hence a direct advance on Phillaurah

would result in unacceptable losses. He was also concerned about his exposed left flank and the consequent vulnerability of his lines of communication. Both these considerations led him to adopt a defensive posture, withdrawing the Armoured Brigade into a box around Sabzpir cross-roads, with 16 Cavalry deployed at Chak Mirdiana, guarding the Western flank, 4 Horse guarding the Southern flank between Kotli Dudhin and Nar Singh and The Poona Horse guarding the Eastern flank around Sabzpir cross – roads. It was only much later, after the war had ended, that it became known that it was the squadron of 62 Cavalry which had shot up the medium battery.

In pursuance of the task given to The Poona Horse to guard the Eastern flank, A and B Squadron were deployed in area Mastpur-Mallane, with C Squadron in reserve in area Phullar Brahman – Sangliala. The next two days were spent in this general area. During this period orders were received for Poona Horse to be prepared to infiltrate and destroy suspected enemy gun area (s) around Badiana. No intelligence was available about the enemy strength and deployment nor was any confirmation available about the location of the gun areas. On Adi's objection to sending the Regiment on such a wild goose chase, the Brigade relented slightly and reduced the force level to a squadron was warned to be prepared for this task. Fortunately, better sense prevailed and this futile, and possibly suicidal, operation was called off. By then two more stalwarts had joined the regiment; Major Verinder Singh returned from Mhow, where he had gone to attend the Junior Command Course and Captain Gurdial Singh returned from his Gun Course at Ahmednagar. Verinder took over C Squadron with Ajai staying on as his Second –in – Command, while Gurdial was sent to A Squadron, with Ajai staying on as his Second-in-Command to Daulet Ghorpade.

The Other Side

Due to a mistaken assessment of the events of 8 September by our higher commanders, our advance was halted for 48 hours, at a crucial time during the operations. At this stage Pakistan had only one infantry brigade and regiment of armour in this sector. This interval of 48 hours gave them sufficient time to readjust and reinforce their defenses. 6 Armoured Division, with three regiments, was moved to this sector from Gujranwala-Wazirabad; also, of its two armoured regiments allotted for Chhamb offensive, one was withdrawn and rejoined the Division. The newly raised HQ 1(Pak) Corps, with its reconnaissance regiment, was moved to this theatre to take charge of its defense. Thus Pakistan now had nine armoured regiments in this theatre, with seven of them being available to counter any further thrust by own 1 Armoured Division. Two more infantry brigade were also inducted; one was deployed for the defence of Badiana and one for the defence of Pasrur. Phillaurah was now defended by an infantry company. Thus, the opportunity for making a deep penetration in this sector, by exploiting the surprise we had gained, was irretrievably lost due to the halt.

The Battle of Libbe and Phillaurah

The Plan

Mean while, Brig KK Singh appreciated that the enemy now had at least two armoured regiments effectively deployed to oppose any frontal thrust. Accordingly, it was planned to hold the enemy frontally and guard the Western flank against a threat from Zararwal. In

pursuance of this plan, orders were received for the Regiment to deploy South West of Maharajke. The Poona Horse commenced move to the new deployment area at 200hrs 10 September. The going was slow due to boggy paddy fields and intermittent shelling. A little flutter was caused at Kaloi when Major Giridhar, who had left earlier, was not available to guide the Regiment into its dispersal areas. He was later located coming out of 62 Cavalry harbour to join the Regiment for the advance.

11th September

At 0400hrs Adi gave his orders. The Brigade was to advance three up; to the west, on the flank, 4 Horse was to advance on the Axis Rurki Khurd-Rurki Kalan-Saboki; in the centre, The Poona Horse to advance from Rurki Khurd – Khananwali, was 16 Cavalry, tasked to protect that flank and to established a road block at Khananwali. The frontage of advance was very narrow, being approximately 2000 yards per Regiment. Adi therefore decided to advance one up, with C Squadron leading, followed by the Regimental Headquarters, B Squadron and A Squadron. The H-Hour for all three Regiments was 0600hrs.

The Regiment commenced advance at 0600hrs. No opposition was met. However, on reaching the line of Rurki Kalan, the Regiment was ordered to halt to enable 4 Horse to clear this village. At about 0800 hrs, the advance was resumed. C Squadron had been advancing two troops up and conducted an exemplary advance employing the 'leap frog' method. At about 0810 hrs, contact was made with enemy armour North West of Libbe, at a range of 800 yards. C Squadron, which had switched to caterpillar movement on approaching its objective, Libbe, was able to engage the enemy with concentrated tank fire, destroying three enemy Patton tanks. While this encounter action was in progress, B Squadron was deployed to guard the North-West flank, West of Libbe.

C Squadron Actions. C Squadron continued to do some aggressive shooting and destroyed a couple of more tanks. Three of its Centurions were damaged due to enemy fire. Meanwhile 9 Dogra, which was providing infantry support to the Regiment, had not managed to keep pace with the advance. Providentially, 5/9 Gorkha Rifles were located in that area and they were now tasked to clear Libbe, with C Squadron in support. This was done by noon. At this juncture Verinder took a bold decision. He knew that the divisional objective was Phillaurah. Having secured Libbe and not finding any enemy opposition to wards the west, he decided to attack and capture Phillaurah, along with 5/9 Gorkha Rifles. As the Squadron swung towards Phillaurah, it came upon a cluster of tanks to its left. In the ensuing engagement, five enemy tanks it came upon cluster of tanks to its left. In the ensuing engagement, five enemy tanks were destroyed and two were abandoned by the enemy crews. With cavalier dash, C Squadron occupied the high ground dominating Phillaurah from the North East. On the reverse slope, 400 yards away, were seven Patton tanks; surprise on both sides was complete. Two Patton tanks were destroyed, whilst the remainder withdrew under cover of the built up area, towards Chawinda. Meanwhile 5/9 Gorkha Rifles, under covering fire provided by C Squadron, proceeded to clear Phillaurah. By 1530 hrs, Phillaurah had fallen. There was an interesting episode during this action. As C Squadron was advancing from Libbe to Phillaurah, the leading troop, under Naib Risaldar Harbans Singh, saw someone waving out to him-it was the Commandant 4 Horse, Lieutenant Colonel M.M.S. Bakshi and his crew. He had some how lost his way and his tank had been shot up. He had bailed out

with his crew and taken shelter in a ditch. Harbans took him along on his tank and subsequently, when the Second –in-Command Girdhar came up, he took Bakshi on his tank to 4 Horse location, North of Waraich.

While the attack by C Squadron on Phillaurah was in progress, B Squadron was moved to cover Phillaurah from the North West, and A Squadron deployed to cover the Libbe approach. At about the time Phillaurah was being secured, a counter-attack developed from the direction of Alhar on to B Squadron. This was being supported by two troops deployed in an orchard south of Khananwal near Kot Izzat. While B Squadron quickly changed direction and took on the counter attacking squadron, A Squadron engaged the enemy armour in the orchard. Capt. Gurdial, A Squadron, suddenly found Adi's tank next to him. Adi destroyed two Patton Tanks in this encounter. Five tanks of B Squadron were hit, the crews bailing out to safety; Lieutenant Man Singh's tank was also hit though he continued to fight from the tank. Between them, A and B Squadrons destroyed six Pattons and broke up the counter-attack. In the same encounter, Adi was wounded in the arm by a shell splinter. Gurdial, concerned about his safety, requested Adi to move back from the line of fire. "Gordy, I will not leave you. If we have to die we die together" was Adi's courageous reply. When Gurdial insisted again, Adi snapped: "Young man, don't tell me what to do!" 2nd Lieutenant V.Swarup of A Squadron lost his left eye during this action due to shelling and his driver was mortally wounded. An interesting fact of this encounter was mortally wounded. An interesting facet of this encounter was a Pakistani radio transmission intercepted by the affiliated Battery Commander, Duggal – nick-named "Smokey", as he was a chain smoker in spite of being a Sikh. As the Pattons were withdrawing, an exchange was heard over their radio net; from unknown station: "Dushman ki taraf badho" (Advance towards the enemy). Came the reply from a rather shaken tank commander: "Nahin wahan se kafi kargar fire a raha hai aur hamara kafi nuksaan ho chukka hai. Ham ab Sialkot jaa rahe hain." (No there is very effective fire coming from that side and we have suffered some considerable damage. We are now going to Sialkot).

Night 11th /12th September

On Night 11th/ 12th September, 43 lorried Brigade, whilst the rest of the Regiment harboured North of Libbe. The administrative echelons were unerringly brought up by Major Sarab Ahluwalia. What makes this action of his very commendable was the fact that he was given no information about the location or whereabouts of the Regiment. On his own initiative, he monitored the day's events on the radio, did a quick appreciation of what the likely deployment of the Regiment could be, and moved to replenish the Regiment after dark. Let the reader imagine himself in Ahluwalia's predicament-the Regiment needs replenishment, the location of the Regiment is not known, the area to be traversed, more often than not, is held by the enemy, all movements have to be carried out after dark and only one outdated map is available. A rather nerve wracking scenario. But true to the traditions of the Poona Horse, Sarab Ahluwalia performed this courageous feat not once, not twice, but night after night, without fail, throughout the entire war.

A brief resume of the actions that took place during the night of 11th/12th September, will enable a better appreciation of the courage and initiative shown by Sarab Ahluwalia in bringing forward the soft vehicles of the Regimental administrative echelons to the harbour

areas of the various squadrons. There was some considerable confusion, both on own and enemy side, with units and detachments of both sides blundering into each other, leading to short sharp local actions. The first such action was a raid by enemy tank hunting parties, using recoilless (RCL) guns mounted on jeeps, on our tank harbours. Four of these RCL jeeps were destroyed. Some time later the Commanding Officer of the Pakistan 1st Field Regiment (SP) of their 6th Armoured Division, blundered into the Regimental harbour. He managed to escape, but his jeep was appropriated. Brigadier K.K. Singh, who was with the Regiment throughout the day, could not rejoin his HQ that night, as he ran into an enemy tank harbour on his way and had to return and spend the night at Libbe. At about midnight the enemy counter attacked Phillaurah from the directions of Chawinda and Gadgor. Verinder and Ajai split the eight tanks of 'C' Squadron into two groups and rushed to take on these counter attacks. They found the enemy infantry engaged in hand-to-hand combat with our infantry. The tanks were halted about 200 yards short of our forward infantry positions and started firing at the enemy over the heads of our battling infantry. The moment the presence of Centurion tanks became known, the enemy broke contact and ran helter-skelter; by 0200hrs, the counter attack had been beaten back.

The battles of Libbe and Phillaurah ended with the destruction of a minimum of 50 enemy tanks, to nine of our own. These actions exploded the myth of the superiority of the Patton tank, whilst at the same time instilling in the enemy an awe and fear of the Centurion. However these successes were not immediately exploited. Further advance was halted and the Pak territory so far secured was systematically cleared of the enemy.

The Other Side of The Hill

The halt gave the enemy another fortuitous respite. The Pakistan High Command, finding their own offensives in the Chhamb Sector, decided to go on the defensive, in a desperate bid to stem the rot. Accordingly, Pak 1 Armoured Division was withdrawn from the Khem Karan Sector and railed to Kasur. Two armoured regiments of this Division, which had suffered relatively fewer losses, were grouped under Pak 4 Armoured Brigade in the Pasrur Sector, the strength of the armoured regiments opposing our 1 Armoured Division was raised to eight. The second chance to break through the Pak defences towards the Marala-Ravi Canal (MRLC) was once again irretrievably lost.

12th September

C Squadron continued to be in location at Phillaurah, while the rest of the Regiment was deployed between Kotli Bagga and Libbe. While C Squadron was at Phillaurah, a Pak helicopter landed just South of Kalewali. This was immediately engaged and destroyed by Naib Risaldar Harbhajan Singh and his gunner, Sowar Harbans Singh. The rotor blades of this helicopter are on display in the Regimental Quarter Guard-good shooting indeed!

On being relieved by a squadron from 4 Horse, C Squadron rejoined the Regiment. The indomitable Sarab Ahluwalia was back again that night with the administrative civilian truck drivers, who had driven across country, under heavy fire, to deliver ammunition to the Regiment at Libbe. Their courage and devotion was indeed remarkable, and their presence in

the forward area, at great personal risk, served as an inspiring morale booster to the fighting troops.

The enemy air and artillery remained rather active. Gurdial observed an enemy Air Observation Post aircraft, which was bringing down accurate fire on the tanks of the Regiment. Gurdial ordered his gunner, Sowar Sher Singh, to engage it with High Explosive. Though the shell missed the aircraft, it was near enough to frighten the pilot who beat a hasty retreat, never to be seen again thereafter. Unconventional methods do pay dividends.

13th September

The Regiment continued to be in the same location. It was generally a quiet day and the crews availed of this respite to get some well deserved rest, tanking turns to man the tanks, whilst the remainder rested. At about 1700hrs Adi called his 'O' group for orders for the following operations. Whilst these orders were in progress, information was received from B Squadron that an enemy counter attack by approximately one squadron of Patton tanks, was developing from the South West of Libbe. The officers rushed back to their tanks. The enemy tanks halted approximately 1200 meters away from the regimental perimeter and commenced a fire fight. They soon 'Kabaddi' by the Pak commanders who wrote accounts of these operations after the war. At last light the Regiment harboured once more near Kotli Bagga, with a strong standing patrol near Libbe.

The Consolidation

2nd Lancers less a squadron was moved forward from Sabzpir, linked up with 4Horse on 12 September, own 1 Armoured Division was deployed along the line Kaloi-Rurki Kalan-Libbe-Phillaurah, with 62 Cavalry at Kaloi, The Poona Horse between Kotli Bagga and Libbe, 2nd Lancers East of Libbe, 4 Horse near Phillaurah and 16 Cavalry in reserve, at Rurki Kalan. 43 Lorried Infantry Brigade was deployed to hold Phillaurah.

To further consolidate the gains, 6 Mountain Division was moved forward from Maharki. One of the mountain brigades of this Division, with 62 Cavalry under command, was deployed at Kaloi; the other mountain Brigade moved into Phillaurah to relieve 43 Lorried Brigade, which was withdrawn as reserve to Rurki Kalan. One brigade of 14 Infantry Division was moved forward to hold Gadgor, while the other brigade of this Division remained at Nakhnal-Rangre to guard the left flank. On the brigade of this Division remained at Kaloi, supported by one squadron of 62 Cavalry, secured Bhagowal Cross Roads. 2nd Lancers was moved into Phillaurah and placed in support of the mountain brigade ex-6 Mountain Division holding defence there.

The infantry brigade at Rangre-Nakhnal, with squadron ex-2nd Lancers in support, made an unsuccessful attempt to capture Zafarwal. This was the penalty paid for not seizing and exploiting the opportunity offered the previous day, when the same squadron had succeeded in occupying Zafarwal unopposed. Thereafter, this brigade along with the remainder 14 infantry Division, continued to guard the left flank, with two armoured squadrons in support, one squadron ex-2nd Lancers and one squadron ex-62 Cavalry. Zafarwal remained in enemy hands.

The Attack on Chawinda

The Plan. 1Armoured Division was tasked by 1Corps to capture Chawinda, a major communication center guarding the main approach to Pasrur. In pursuance of this task, 1Armoured Brigade was ordered to envelope Chawinda from the North, West and South, with a view to providing a firm base for the attack and capture Chawinda from the North-West, along the railway line. This plan failed to take into account the possible reinforcements that the enemy may have brought in and the readjustment of defence that he may have carried out.

The Other Side. The respite given to the enemy by the halt on 12 and 13 September gave him time to reinforce and readjust the defences in order to block the thrust of own 1 Corps towards Pasrur and thence to the Marala Ravi Link Canal. The Pak defensive deployment in this Sector now was one Infantry brigade defending Badiana with an armoured squadron deployed between Badiana and Sialkot to protect the Western flank; two armoured regiments were deployed along line Bhagowal – Alhar; one infantry brigade with under command one complete regiment of armour and one armoured regiment less two squadrons, defending Chawinda; one infantry Brigade defending Pasrur. Pak 4 Armoured Brigade, with two armoured regiments, which was inducted into this area on 12-13 September, was placed under command 6 Armoured Division and tasked to cover the gap between Chawinda and Badiana. One armoured regiment was deployed to the East of Chawinda to protect the Eastern flank.

Outline Plan- 1Armoured Brigade Based on the task given to him, Brigadier K.K Singh Commander 1Armoured Brigade, ordered 4Horse to cut the road Chanwinda-Badiana and Chawinda-Pasuru, thereby isolating Chawinda from the West and South. The Poona Horse was tasked to isolate Chawinda from the North by establishing a pivot at Wazirwali, to destroy Pak armour deployed in support of the Chawinda defences, and to support the Lorried Brigade's attack on Chawinda. 16Cavalry was tasked to protect the Western flank. The operation was to be carried out in three phases. In the first phase 4 Horse was to secure the line of the railway track from Alhar upto Hasri Nala to its West; 16 Cavalry was to secure the railway line further West Hasri Nala and guard the Western flank. The second phase entailed the establishment of a Pivot at Wazirwali by the Poona Horse was to move out and cut the roads Chawinda-Badiana and Chawinda-Pasrur.

14th September. For the execution of the task allotted to the Poona Horse, Adi planned to move one up due to the restricted frontage of deployment available to him. C Squadron was once again in the lead. It was tasked to capture Wazirwali, alongwith B Company 9 Dogra. A and B Squadrons were in reserve and were to guard the gap between Wazirwali and Khanawali from the East. The Regiment commenced its advance at 1200hrs after the successful completion of the first phase of the plan by 4 Horse and 16 Cavalry. No contact was made till C Squadron and B Company 9 Dogra the Chawinda defences, with an appreciated strength of about two companies infantry, supported by two troops of armour, C Squadron assaulted the position, killing 35 men and destroying three tanks, thereafter, the squadron deployed to a flank of the village and provided covering fire, whilst B Company 9 Dogra, under Major Kohli, cleared the village. A fire fight also developed between C Squadron and the enemy tanks deployed in the main Chawinda defences. A and B

squadrons, de;ooyed between Wazirwali and Khananwali with a view to guarding the Eastern flank, countered movement of enemy armour from the East. On this day the Regiment accounted for eight tanks without any loss-three at Wazirwali, three at Chawinda and two on the Eastern flank. At last Regiment went into individual squadron collection together in the middle of their harbour for 'Ardas', regardless of the heavy artillery shelling.

Night 14th-15th September. Heavy opposition all along the railway line prevented 1Armoured Brigade from executing the third phase of the plan. Also, the violence of the enemy reaction from Chawinda, to the fall of Wazirwali, convinced the higher commanders that the depleted Lorried Brigade did not possess the necessary strength for the capture of chawinda. In view of this the Lorried Brigade, reinforced with two battalions from the mountain brigade ex-phillaurah was tasked to clear all villages between Alhar and Phillaurah, with the purpose of providing a firm base for the capture of Chawinda by 6 Mountain Division. The reinforcing battalions were subsequently deployed in the area of Alhar Railway Station and East of Phillaurah. This change in orders was not intimated to the other units.

15th September. Chawinda was on a prominent high ground with a number of tall buildings and minarets. It was from here that the enemy artillery observations posts brought down very heavy and accurate shelling. After the war it became known that far from being an advance position, Wazirwali was forward defended locality of the main Chawinde defences. Therefore it was a well surveyed and a registered target, which accounted for the very accurate and heavy shelling. Blissfully unaware of this, and of the defence plans, the Regiment maintained its exposed position in spite of the heavy shelling, anxiously awaiting the attack on Chawinda by the Lorried Brigade. It was only in the evening that the Regiment came to know that the attack by the Lorried Brigade on Vhawinda had been called off. This day cost the Poona Horse the life of another gallant soldier -Rsaldar Karrtar Singh. Kartar, who was posthumously awarded the Vir Chakra, was mortally wounded while trying to save the crew of a tank which had caught fire during the heavy shelling.

The Altered Plans. Based on the progress of the battle on the 14th GOC 1Corps altered his plans and issued order for the capture of Chawinda by 6 Mountain Division, supported by 1Armoured Division; for the capture of Badiana by q Armoured Division; and the capture of zafarwal by 14 Infantry Division. He was obviously unaware that the balance of forces in this sector had shifted against him and that a headlong advance was no longer feasible.

In accordance with the changed plans, Brigadier K.K Singh now tasked 4 Horse to cross the railway line on 16 September and to secure area Sodreke, covering roads Badiana-Chawinda and Badiana-Pasrur. The Poona Horse, with 8 Garhwal and B Company 9 Dogra, was to capture Jassoran and Butur Dograni, with a view to providing a firm base for the subsequent capture of Chawinda by 6 Mountain Division on 16-17 September. 16Cavalry was to continue in location and protect the Western flank.

The Other Side. Pak 4 Armoured Brigade had been moved to cover the gap between Badiana and Chawinda. The two Patton regiments under its command had been deployed to cover this gap, leaving the area between Chawinda and Jassoran to serve as a tank killing ground. There was, in addition, one more Patton regiment serve as a tank killing ground. There was, in addition, one more Patton regiment deployed between Alhar and Badiana.

Thus, three Patton regiments were in position in the gap in to which two aCenturion regiments proposed to advance. The Pakistanis were confident that the Indian armour would walk into a trap and be massacred in the Jassoran area.

Jassoran : 16 September. Based on the Brigade Commander's orders Adi again decided to advance one up. B Company 9 Dogra and establish a pivot there. C Squadron was tasked to capture Butur Dogranti along with 8 Garhwal Rifles, while A Squadron was to continue holding the pivot at Wazirwali. Narinjan, with the ever cheerful Kohli Commanding B Company 9 Dogra, assaulted across the railway line at first light September. Jassoran was invested by 0810 hrs, after destroying three enemy tanks. By 0930 hrs, Kohli with his B Company had cleared Jassoran; Narinjan and Kohli thereafter established the pivot around Jassoran.

Butur Dogramid-First Attack. While the pivot at Jassoran was being secured C Squadron, now commanded by Ajai, moved to the rendezvous with 8 Garhwal Rifles for the attack on Butur Dogranti. As the Garhwalis were moving forward towards the rendezvous, they came under heavy and sustained artillery fire. Caught in the open and under direct observation from the minarets of Chawinda 3000 meters away, the Garhwalis suffered very heavy casualties. Their Commanding Officer died as a result of a direct hit on his jeep, which resulted in a break down of communications with the battalion. Their Second-in-Command, Major Abdul Rafi Khan, managed to gather 30 men and reached the rendezvous. C Squadron, by now with only 7 tanks. Assaulted Butur Dogranti from the East, using the cover of the sugarcane fields. Three Patton tanks were destroyed and the defences were overrun. Under covering fire provided by C Squadron, Khan and his 30 gallant men secured Butur Dogranti. The action was over by 1030hrs.

The early and unexpected loss of the three forward defended localities of the Chawinda defences viz, Wasirwali, Jassoran and Butur Dogranti, sent panic waves through the defending troops in Chawinda. This set back was further compounded by 4 Horse successfully pinning down enemy armour between Jassoran and Badiana, by its move to Sodreke, while 16 Cavalry pinned down the armour between Badiana and Alhar. The enemy commenced evacuation of Chawinda. Seeing this, Ajai requested for reinforcements to intercept this withdrawal to Parur. Adi sought permission from the Brigade to move A Squadron from Wazirwali to reinforce Ajai, and briefed them regarding the situation on the ground. On orders from the Brigade, two troops from 2nd Lancers relieved A Squadron and Gurdial, realizing the need for speed, moved the Squadron to Butur Dogranti to build up on Ajai with characteristic dash and speed.

Withdrawal to Jassoran. As soon as Gurdial reached the location of the Regiment Headquarters, Adi passed his now famous transmission to Surrinder, his Adjutant, 'Hello 25, let us go and join them'. This was in keeping with the best traditions of armour commanders, who are expected to lead from the front. To digress a little, a tank commander prefers to move with his cupola open as, with a closed cupola, in spite of vision devices, it is very difficult to maintain orientation, to ensure movement is in the correct direction and acquire targets. However, keeping the cupola open is risky during air attacks and artillery shelling. Adi set an example to all in the Regiment by moving with his cupola open, unconcerned about the very heavy shelling-along with Gurdial, at 1500hrs. The Regimental

Headquarters with Adi and Surrinder, and A and C Squadrons, were right in the middle of the Pak killing ground. The whole area was raked with tank fire, anti-tank gun fire and severe shelling by several regiments of artillery. Two tanks of C Squadron were hit. Unconcerned, Adi dismounted from his tank to check the infantry positions on the ground; at this time, his command tank, 'Kooshab', was hit injuring Amarjit Bal, his intelligence officer, in the leg; his gunner and operator were also wounded. It seemed unwise to hold on to Butur Dograndi with only a platoon worth of infantry in support during the night and so Adi decided to fall back to Jassoran. Adi and his crew moved back on Surrinder's tank since the driver could not start 'Kooshab'. The withdrawal to Jassoran was completed by 1645hrs.

Buter Dograndi-Second Attack True. Adi was in his element, having seen his beloved Regiment progressing from one success to another. The second attack on Butur Dograndi had just commenced and favourable reports were being received about its progress. He came out of his tank to get some fresh air and tea. At 1720hrs, on 16th September, just as tea was being passed around, an enemy medium artillery shell landed on the off side of the tank. Adi and two jawans of B Company's 9 Dogra died. Quartermaster, who had prevailed upon Surrinder to be allowed to come up and join in at least one action, was functioning as Adi's Signal Officer that day. He was critically wounded by shell splinters in his face, chest and legs. He was moved to a September, at the Pathankot Military Hospital. Girdhar now assumed command of the Regiment.

Jassoran : A Premonition Comes True. Adi was in his elements, having seen his beloved Regiment progressing from one success to another. The second attack on Butur Dograndi had just commenced and favourable reports were being received about its progress. He came out of his tank to get some fresh air and tea. At 1720 hrs, on 16th September, just as tea was being passed around, an enemy medium artillery shell landed on the off side of the tank. Adi and two jawans of B Company 9 Dogra died instantaneously, due to concussion. His premonition had come true. Jasbir Singh, the Quartermaster, who had prevailed upon Surrinder to be allotted to come up and join in at least one action, was functioning as Adi's Signal Officer that day. He was critically wounded by shell splinters in his face, chest and legs. He was moved to a nearby hut, given first aid and later evacuated to the rear. Jasbir passed away on 17 September, at the Pathankot Military Hospital. Girdhar now assumed command of the Regiment.

16th/17th September. C Squadron, now down to four tanks, was pulled back for refitting. The Regiment harboured near Butur Dograndi. Sarab Ahluwalia, ever Regiment. The JCO Quartermaster of 8 Garhwal Rifles had also fetched up with the Regimental echelons at A Squadron location, with food for the Garhwalis; Gurdial then directed him to Butur Dograndi. All this administrative activity went on despite the intense shelling which the Regiment and the Garhwalis were being subjected to by the Pakistanis. Another gallant soldier-Naib Risaldar Umrao Singh of A Squadron, died due to injuries sustained due to shelling. Though this day brought the Regiment fresh glories, a heavy price was paid in terms of casualties.

17th September : A Prisoner. Just before first light, Gurdial moved his squadron to reoccupy the positions of the previous evening. There he located the JCO Quartermaster of 8 Garhwal Rifles, who had not been able to find his battalion. Gurdial placed him, and the two

men with him, on his tank and moved towards the village as he was not in communication with the Garhwalis. Just then a shell landed near the tank, injuring these men. They were evacuated to A Squadron location and Gurdial moved on to Butur Dograndi with cooked food for the Garhwalis. It was still dark when he entered the village; just then his tank got hit and Gurdial was injured. He and his operator were surrounded by some shadowy figures whom he could not recognize in the dark while the rest of his crew managed to escape. It took Gurdial sometime to realize that the men surrounding him were Pakistanis and that he was their prisoner. Unknown to him, the Garhwalis had moved out of the village into the nearby fields, to avoid the intense shelling, and the enemy, seeing his chance, had re-occupied the village during the night.

17th September – Withdrawal. The Regiment stayed on in Jassoran – Butur Dograndi, anxiously awaiting the attack by 6 Mountain Division on Chawinda, but this attack had to be postponed as the attacking troops could not complete their reconnaissance and other preparations. Meanwhile C Squadron of 4 Horse reinforced our A Squadron at Butur Dograndi. Two counter attacks on Jassoran-Butur Dograndi were beaten back even as the intensity and severity of artillery shelling increased. The failure to push on with the attack on Chawinda gave the enemy the necessary respite to recover from the shocks of 15 and 16 September and to reorganize his forces with a view to countering the threat to Chawinda. During the afternoon of 17 September, two thrusts were developed by the enemy, one from the East of Chawinda towards Wazirwali and one from West, from Badiana to Alhar. Brig K.K. Singh felt that 1 Armoured Brigade was over-extended and since 6 Mountain Division planned to use Jassoran as the firm base for their attack and not Butur Dograndi, he ordered a enemy's thrusts. 4 Horse was directed to cover the gap between Alhar and Wazirwali, 2nd Lancers was deployed around Wazirwali and The Poona Horse and Garhwalis were directed to hold Jassoran. Once again the Garhwalis suffered very heavy casualties during the withdrawal, due to intense artillery shelling. Their officiating Commanding Officer, Major Abdul Rafi Khan, who had very ably rallied his men after the heavy casualties by shelling on the 16th, sadly lost his life this time. The many who were seriously wounded, were evacuated on tanks to Alhar. The withdrawal was completed by 1700hrs.

The move to Jassoran was only the first step of a longer pull back. The attack by 6 Mountain Division was once again postponed, for reasons unknown, and the Regiment was directed to fall back North of the railway line. The fresh deployment of 1 Armoured Brigade was 2nd Lancers continuing at Wazirwali-Phillaurah, The Poona Horse to deploy from Alhar to Khananwali, in depth to 2nd Lancers, 4 Horse to deploy from Alhar to Hasri Nala on the West, 16 Cavalry to continue in the same location West of Hasri Nala, guarding the Western flank and 62 Cavalry to deploy at Bhagowal. In pursuance of these orders, the Regiment crossed the railway line at night, at around 2000hrs, the squadrons being guided to the selected harbour area near Alhar, by the very lights field by Girdhar.

17th September : The Cremation. Another valuable life was lost this day-Risaldar Pyare Lal, an outstanding Senior JCO of B Squadron who had proved to be a source of inspiration to all who came in contact with him. Fearing that the news of the death of the Commandant might have an adverse effect on the morale of the death of Adi's body had been kept in Jassoran. Because of the intense shelling and sniping it September. At round 0900hrs on 17 September, Pyarelal was busy checking whether enough wood had been collected for

cremation, when an enemy medium shell landed near the cremation site causing him severe injuries in the stomach. He was immediately evacuated to the Advance Dressing Station at Phillaurah. Sadly, he too succumbed to his injuries at the field hospital in Samba, on the 19th September.

Adi was cremated at Jassoran at 0930hrs 17 September. His ashes were taken to Poona and later immersed in the Sangam on 29 November 1965. Lieutenant Colonel A.B. Tarapore had personally led the Regiment into the thick of the fighting during the battle of Phillaurah, when the Regiment went into the thick of the fighting during superior force of armour and infantry. Though he was wounded during this action, he carried on commanding the Regiment through some very intense fighting, carrying his arm in a sling. In the battle of Chawinda he twice led the tanks of the Regiment right into the middle of the enemy's killing ground, defying the enemy's violent efforts to prevent the outflanking of Chawinda. For his inspiring leadership, gallantry and determination, he was posthumously awarded the Param Vir Chakra, the country's highest award for valour.

18th September. At first light on 18 September the Regiment less C Squadron was dispersed in general area Alhar, while C Squadron pulled back to the area of Ingan, North-West of Rurki Kalan, to refit and re-equip. At 0900hrs orders were received to deploy to cover the area Khananwali-Kotli Jandran in order to safeguard the flank of 2nd Lancers at Wazirwali. It was a comparatively quiet day, except for some probing action by the enemy armour opposite 4 Horse and 2nd Lancers. At night the Regiment harboured in the same location.

19th September. The position of 18 September were reoccupied at first light. It was disheartening to learn that the attack on Chawinda on Night 18/19 September, by 6 Mountain Division, had proved abortive. One brigade of this Division, attacking from the North-East, lost its way and ended up attacking Phillaurah, where 2nd Lancers suffered a few casualties before the confusion was sorted out. The other brigade attacked from the North-West, along the railway line. Only one battalion of this Brigade managed to make some headway and reach the Railway Station; even this battalion had to finally withdraw to Jassoran.

No one informed 4Horse that the attack on Chawinda had failed. 4Horse had been tasked to position a squadron at Jassoran as flank protection, whilst one squadron was to move into Chawinda for providing anti-tank protection to the attacking infantry of 6 Mountain Division. By 0900hrs 4Horse had gallantly fought through the re-organized anti-tank layout of the Pakistanis and was dominating through the re-organised anti tank layout of the Pakistanis and was dominating Sadreke and Jassoran, where the battalion of the mountain brigade was now located.

At 1000hrs, the Poona Horse received orders to cover the gap West of Alhar, opposite Fathepur, with a view to providing a pivot for assisting 4Horse and the infantry battalion to withdraw. At 1500hrs, the infantry withdrew from Jassoran under covering fire provided by a Squadron of 4 Horse. Then this Squadron also withdrew, and the rest of 4Horse withdrew at last light, under covering fire provided by the Poona Horse harboured in general area of Manga, North of Alhar. During that day B Squadron, located West of Alhar, had accounted for three enemy tanks at extreme ranges.

20th September. The Poona Horse now covered the area from Hasri to Wazirwali, relieving 4Horse who were given a well deserved rest for refit and reorganization. Apart from sporadic tank fire and sniping, nothing eventful took place that day. A stalemate had set in. There was also news of an impending ceasefire through the mediations of the United Nations. At 1700hrs, orders were received to the effect that: "17Horse will be relieved by 4Horse less one Squadron, at 0530hrs on 21September. The Regiment will retain present dispositions during Night 20th/21September."

21st-23rd September. After an uneventful night in harbour, at 0530hrs 21 September, on being relieved by 4Horse less A Squadron, The Regiment moved to Ingan to rest and refit, a hard earned and well deserved break. The actions fought by the Regiment and the success achieved against heavy odds had shaken the confidence of the Pakistanis. They had grudgingly acknowledge the outstanding performance of the Poona Horse in battle, by conferring on the Regiment the title of 'Fakhr-e-Hind' (The Pride of India). On 22 September, while at Ingan, a warm welcome was given to Lieutenant Colonel Rishi Raj Singh who had been moved from a staff appointment to assume command of the Regiment. On the evening of 22 September came welcome news that cases fire would become effective from 0330 hrs, on 23 September 1965. This galvanized the Pakistanis into action who now strived to salvage their prestige by regaining as much of their lost territory as they could. However, the units in contact, 2nd Lancers, 4Horse, 16 Cavalry and 62 Cavalry, proved more than equal and all such efforts by the Pakistani forces were beaten back with heavy casualties. On the night of the cease fire the enemy shelling reached enormous proportions; it appeared as if they wanted to expended all their ammunition before the cease fire came into effect. Having erred in harbouring near one of our gun areas for the night, the Regiment received a fair share of this shelling. The lost round exploded near the harbour at 0332hrs on 23 September, and then an eerie calm descended on the battle field.

An Appraisal

The courage, determination, the will to fight and the excellence in handling the equipment displayed by the Regiment was in keeping with its hoary traditions. The successes achieved against numerically superior forces at Libbe, Phillaurah, Wazirwali, Jassoran and Butur Dograndi are indicative of the irresistible fighting qualities of the Regiment which fully substantiated the title of 'Fakhr-e-Hind' given to it by an admiring enemy.

Pakistani propaganda had worked overtime to successfully convince its people that they had won major victories during the 1965 war. However, the truth could not be concealed for long. As Altaf Gauhar, Secretary in the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting in Field Marshal Ayub Khan's government, states in his Foreword to Air Marshal M.Asghar Khans Book The Fist Round, "few people outside the armed forces realize how close Pakistan came to a disaster in the 1965war..." And the Poona Horse can proudly claim rather more than its fair share of this success achieved by the Indian Army. To quote the words of Brig K.K Singh, MVC, under whose command the Regiment fought; "The performance of the Poona Horse was beyond Praise"

Lieutenant Colonel Ardeshir Burzoriji Tarapore, PVC , A Bio - Sketch

Family Background and Childhood

The family chronicles say that Colonel Ardeshir B.Tarapore's ancestor, Rathanjiba, eight generations removed, was one of the Military leaders under Shivaji. In appreciation of Ratanjiba's services, loyalty and bravery, Shivaji had given him the "Mansab" Superintendent of the Department: he was also an erudite scholar of Persian and Urdu and was the author of a number of Urdu books.

Ardheshir was born at Bombay on 18th August, 1923. He was the second of three children; he had a sister who was elder to him and a younger brother. An incident from his childhood bears recounting as it shows the courage and presence of mind that the boy possessed, even at that early age. Yadgar, his sister, who was then ten years old, and Ardeshir aged six years, were playing in the backyard of the house when the family cow broke loose and charged Yadgar. The frightened girl screamed for help. Seeing his sister's predicament, young Ardeshir picked up a stick and, briskly stepping in between his sister and the charging cow, deflected the charge by smartly smiting the cow on its nose.

Ardeshir was enrolled as a boarder in Sardar Dastur Boys' School, Poona at the age of seven. Though not an exceptional student academically, he distinguished himself in athletics, gymnastics, boxing swimming, tennis and cricket. He matriculated from the School in 1940 as the School Captain.

Early Army Career

After leaving school, Ardeshir applied and was selected for commission in the Hyderabad, State Army. He did his initial training at the Officers Training School (OTS), at Bangalore. On completion of the training at the OTS, Ardeshir (Adi) was commissioned on 1st January 1942, in the 7th Hyderabad Infantry, as a Second Lieutenat. He did not much like this posting as his heart was set upon joining the armoured regiment of the Hyderabad State forces, which in those days was equipped with Scout Cars.

Adi would probably have continued to languish in the infantry but for an incident that took place when his battalion was being inspected by Major General E1-Edroos, the C-in-C of the State Forces. Adi's company was carrying out routine training at that time, at the Grenade throwing Range. One of the sepoys- a fresh entrant – momentarily panicked and failed to lob the grenade correctly, resulting in the grenade falling into the throwing bay. Adi immediately jumped into the throwing bay and picking up the grenade, threw it away to safety. However, the grenade burst as it left his hand, and he was peppered with flying shrapnel in his chest. General E1-Edroos, who had witnessed this incident, summoned Adi to his office after Adi had recovered from his injuries and personally congratulated him for his courage and presence of mind. Adi availed of this opportunity to request for a transfer to the armoured regiment of the State Forces. General E1-Edroos accepted his request and Adi was transferred to the 1st Hyderabad Imperial Service Lancers.

During the Second World War, 1st Hyderabad Lancers saw service in the Middle-East. At that time, the Regiment was commanded by a British Officer, with an indifferent family background and social status, whose manners and conduct left much to be desired,

particularly when compared with the rest of the Hyderabad Officers, who mostly comprised the aristocracy of the Hyderabad State. The CO was rude in his behavior and often commented adversely on the fighting capabilities of the Indian soldier. On one occasion, he even insulted the Nizam, by using derogatory “You have insulted my country and my King – and I do not mean George VI”. This incident created quite a flurry- the Regiment was kept in isolation and all the ammunition was withdrawn. The matter was finally sorted out after a personal visit by General E1-Edroos to General Montgomery.

After the merger of the Hyderabad State with the Union of India, was selected to serve in the Indian Army. His date of commission was revised to 1st January 1945 and he was posted to the Poona Horse. We give below an account of Adi's joining the Poona Horse, and his service with the Regiment, in the form of personal reminiscences, written by Lieutenant Colonel Shivraj Singh, who was a subaltern in 'A' Squadron when Adi joined this squadron as the squadron 2IC. Adi developed such a close rapport with 'A' Squadron, the Rajput Squadron, and such a deep affection for the men, that he was, in later years, given the unofficial designation of “Colonel of 'A' Squadron”.

Service with the Poona Horse

Lt.Col. Shivraj Singh writes: “I joined that Poona Horse as a newly commissioned subaltern at Chatha Camp, in Jammu. The Regiment had, very recently, played a leading role in the successfully concluded Police Action in Hyderabad and the talk at the Mess bar was still Kasim Razakars, Bezwada and Naldurg. Sometime in late 1951, news was received that an officer ex-Hyderabad Lancers was being posted to the Regiment; he would be on probation for two years and would be given a permanent commission in the Army, only if he was found fit for retention in service. This news evoked a mixed reaction. A number of officers present in the Regiment at that time had been commissioned from the ranks; they were inclined to be somewhat narrow minded and as far as they were concerned officers of the Hyderabad State Forces were still the “ex-enemy”. Others, particularly those commissioned from the IMA, were unbiased in this regard and had an open mind on this issue.

“One fine day, when the officers were all sipping their beer or nimbupani under the shady mango tree near the mess-hutment, a well built young officer, of medium height, walked in along with the 2IC and was introduced as Captain Ardeshir B. Tarapore, EX-Hyderabad Lancers. The officer was very neatly and correctly dressed in olive green uniform. He appeared somewhat shy and reticent, but did not feel inferior or apologetic in anyway, and was very polite and correct in manners and in his conduct.

“Captain Ardeshir Tarapore came to be known as ‘Adi’ to his friends. As we had not yet the habit of Anglicizing Indian names, he was also called “Teddy’ Tarapore by some. Adi was posted initially to B Squadron, which was commanded by Major Pratap Singh, who had been commissioned from the ranks. Because of his bias, Pratap did not take kindly to Adi and Adi had a rough time under him. The first fitness report that he received from Pratap was lukewarm. Major ‘Balli’ Virk, who was commanding ‘A’ Squadron felt that Adi had not been given a fair deal. He requested the Commandant to give Adi another chance and to post him to ‘A’ Squadron, to which the Commandant agreed.

“Adi took to ‘A’ Squadron like a fish takes to water. He soon established a close rapport with the proud, tradition-bound Rajputs. To him the Squadron was like his own ‘community’. Being himself a firm believer in traditions his behavior with everyone was most appropriate and correct; a newly joined sowar was treated with sympathy as a young boy of the family and often addressed by him off parade as ‘baccha’ meaning ‘young boy of the family and often addressed by him off parade as ‘baccha’ meaning ‘young lad; in fact, this mode of address became a habit with Adi and in later years, he was wont to address even elderly grey beards as ‘bacche’, which was a source of never failing amusement for the Regiment. The NCOs were always addressed by their rank and name and no other Rank was addressed except as ‘Aap’ In accordance with the custom prevalent in Rajasthan, the names of older sowars were suffixed with ‘jee’ which is a mark of respect, and were addressed as ‘Gopal-jee’, ‘Hanuman-jee’ etc.

“The then senior NCO of A Squadron, SDM Bahadur Singh though virtually illiterate, was a towering personality. He was a forceful SDM in the old Cavalry tradition and was Adi’s delight. Adi was so taken in by Bahadur Singh’s bearing and personality that he too started growing a cavalier mustache in, what he called, the true ‘A’ Squadron tradition. This mustache he sported even he commanded the Regiment. In Adi’s reckoning, the Commandant of The Poona Horse only looked like a Commandant, if he sported a Cavalier moustache.

“Balli as the Squadron Commander, Adi as the Squadron 2IC and I as a young subaltern troop leader, formed a very happy team. Balli had no hesitation in giving Adi a fitness report, which got him a permanent commission on the Poona Horse.

“Till well into the nineteen fifties, most officers who joined the Army looked upon it not as a profession, but as an occupation for gentleman. And Adi was an officer and a gentleman in the true sense of the term. He was loyal friend, and was very sensitive to the moods and feelings of those around him. I remember an occasion in Jammu when I had received news of the passing away of a favorite uncle of mine. I was sitting quietly under the mango tree outside our mess, and Adi must have sensed from my looks and mood that I was upset. He walked up to me and said, “Shivji, what’s wrong? Why are you so upset? Tell me. Sharing your troubles with a friend may lighten your heart”. He was so understanding and caring.

“Adi had a well cultivated sense of humour and could always see the lighter side of things. Once in Jammu, we were out on a training exercise with 26 Infantry Division, GOC was discussing the situation with the CO. We youngsters, including Adi our Squadron Commander, were amusing ourselves discussing the funnier aspects of the “battle” which caused much laughter was overheard by the GOC, who felt we were not taking the exercise seriously enough. He turned to our Commandant and told him; “Colonel, I do not like the cavalier attitude of your officers. They are not here on a fun fair”. The CO heard it at attention, turned round to the 2IC and said: “Ready! What the hell is going on here? Tell those youngsters to be serious”. So Major Randhawa turned round to the next in line and said, “Captain Tarapore, behave yourself. You are here on serious business. What the hell do you mean by laughing like that?” Adi took all that at attention, saluted, turned about and said, “Mr Shivraj Singh get back to your jeep and man your radio set properly. What the hell do you think you are doing here!”.

“Adi idolized Napoleon. He read about him extensively, often quoted him, and even kept a bust of Napoleon on his desk. And when he was in high spirits, he often tried to emulate him. There was the occasion in the Mess when after a number of “Har Har Mahadevs” followed by everyone bottoming-up his glass, we were all quite high. There is a large silver bowl in the Mess which the Mess staff used to fill with water and float rose petals in it. As our spirits rose with the whisky, Adi suddenly declared that he was a reincarnation of Napoleon and to prove it, he proceeded to strike a pose like his hero. Looking around for a suitable head-dress, he picked up the silver bowl with the rose petals and inverted it over his bald pate, to represent Napoleon’s hat; he stuck his right hand into the jacket of his Mess dress and adopted a typical Napoleonic stance. Of course, he was thoroughly drenched but that did not dampen his spirits on bit.

“Though Napoleon was his ideal, Adi was no professional Napoleon. But he was a good, steady, regimental officer. And he could take decisions and adopt unorthodox solutions when the occasion demanded it. In 1962, Adi was officiating as the Commandant, when the Regiment received orders to entrain and move to its operational location within 24 hours. If normal procedures were followed, there was no way the Regiment could have got ready in time, so Adi ordered the security fencing round the Quarter Guard, the regimental stores and the ammunition dump to be broken. Vehicles were driven up to the stores and loaded, and the tanks taken right up to the ammunition bays and stowed with ammunition. The Regiment worked through the night and was able to move on schedule. The MES could go on raising damage reports, which could be sorted out later.

“Because of his State Forces background, Adi’s professional education had been limited. But he made up for this by dint of hard work. His application and zeal were rewarded when he was selected to do an Automotive Course in England on the newly acquired Centurion tanks. He was later posted as DC of the Automotive Training wing of the Armoured Corps School. In the tactical sphere he was slow and methodical but a very steady and courageous commander.

“Adi was fiercely loyal to the Regiment. He could not tolerate even the slightest aspersion being cast on the good name of the Poona Horse. When the Regiment did well in any activity, particularly in sports, Adi would be in ecstasy; if the Regiment did not do as well as it was expected to, Adi would be in a black mood and go round with a scowl on his face for days on end.

“Unfortunately, I was not with the Regiment during the 1965 Operations. But as a staff officer with 43 Lorried Infantry Brigade. I was in daily touch with the Regiment as our Brigade and 1 Armoured Brigade were fighting alongside each other. Just after the Poona Horse had captured Phillaurah, my Brigade Commander told me that Colonel Tarapore, the CO of my Regiment, was wounded and I should arrange to evacuate him. Our Brigade ADS was the forward-most medical unit in the sector, So I went around looking for the Regimental HQ of the Poona Horse, amidst the chaos that prevailed in the battle area. Moving in my jeep in the general direction of the sound of battle, I suddenly came across another jeep coming from an opposite direction on the same track. And whom would I find in that jeep in the general direction of the sound of battle, I suddenly came across another jeep, in the general direction on the same track. And how would I find in that jeep, but

Colonel Tarapore, his arm in a triangular sling taken from his tank first aid box. Accompanied only by his driver and operator. As soon as he saw me, he stopped his jeep and in his usual jovial way said, "Hello Shivji! How are you? Where are you off to?" I was so happy and relieved to see him looking so fine. I told him I had come to evacuate him. "What? For this scratch? Don't be stupid. I went to see the battle raging in another part of the a Sector where his Regiment was fighting.

"That was the last I saw of good old Adi Tarapore. Next morning I heard that he had been killed in action.

"It is a sobering reflection that Adi Tarapore, who had nearly been rejected because of the narrow minded prejudice of his first squadron commander, rose to be the Commandant and brought such glory to the Regiment. And had he been given a choice, he would not have asked for a better way to die."

Lt Col A B Tarapore

The Senior most army man to have been decorated with Param Vir Chakra, The Commanding Officer himself leading from front..1965 Indo-Pak war...

The Senior most army man to have been decorated the highest gallantry award of the country was Lieutenant Colonel from the Armoured Corps (The Tank Regiment) and continues to be so even today. Lieutenant Colonel Ardeshir Burzorji Tarapore of Commanding Officer of 17 Poona Horse happens to be the sole award of Param Vir Chakra in this rank, more so being the Commanding Officer of this great unit. The others who were awarded the Param Vir Chakra were in the rank of Major but rose to the of Lieutenant Colonel and Brigadier in due course, like Lieutenant Colonel Dhan Singh Thapa and Brigadier Hoshiar Singh who got the award as a Major respectively. This provides enough testimony of this army we the officers of this army lead men into war and lead them from the front as well. It does not happen overnight but an ongoing process of training that is imbibed into every trainee officer since inception at various training institute from where they commission, he in Indian Military Academy and the Officers Training Academy with special reference to the feeder institutes like the National Defence Academy, Khadakwasla (Pune) and Army Cadet College, Dehra Dun. Ardeshir belonged to the erstwhile Officers Training School, Golconda in Hyderabad.

A Brief Background

Ardeshir was born at Bombay (now Mumbai) on 18th August 1923 to a family which had legacy to General Ratanjiba who lead the army of Chatrapati Shivaji a long, long time ago. Ratanjiba owing to his hard work and dedication was presented 100 villages of which Tarapore was main village in the district. The name Tarapore came to the family from this very village. Later the grand parents of Ardeshir migrated to Hyderabad where his grandfather worked under the Nizam of Hyderabad in excise department. After his death his son (Ardeshir's Father) got the job but owing to his hard work got promoted very fast. He was also an excellent and renowned writer of his times. He was blessed with three children two sons and a daughter. Ardeshsir was the second child and was a courageous lad since young age. As s small child he once saved his sister from imminent accident as recounted by his sister barely four years elder to him. Once the family cow broke loose and charged at his sister Yadgar who not knowing what to do was screaming for help. Young Ardeshir barely six years of age used his presence of mind and stood between the cow ad Yadgar with a stick and deflected the charge by smartly smiting the cow on her nose

At a tender age of seven he was sent as a boarder to the Sardar Dastur Boy's School, Pune where he distinguished himself as an athlete, gymnast and an able sportsman taking active participation in boxing tennis, swimming and cricket. He matriculated from the school in 1940 as a school captain.

After school he applied for the state army and was selected. He did his initial training in the Officers' Training School at Golconda and on completion was sent to Bangalore. He was

commissioned in the 7th Hyderabad Infantry on 1st January 1942 as a Second Lieutenant. In heart of heart he did not like it as was set upon joining the armoured regiment of Hyderabad State Forces, which in those days were equipped with scout cars.

Adi as he was popularly called would have continued in the infantry but for an incident that took place when his battalion was being inspected by Major General El Edroos, the Commander-in-Chief of the state Forces. At the grenade throwing range due to a mishap one of the grenade fell into the bay and Adi physically jumped to throw off the grenade to safety, it was slightly late and as the grenade left his hand it busted in midair injuring him with flying shrapnel on his chest. The General who witnessed this incident later summoned Adi to his office and congratulated him for the courage and presence of mind. Adi availed of this opportunity and requested for a transfer to the armoured regiment. The General accepted his request and Ali was transferred to the 1st Hyderabad Imperial Service Lancers. After the merger of the state forces to the Union of India he was further shifted to the Poona Horse.

Adi was an officer and a gentleman in the true sense of the term. He was a loyal friend and was sensitive to the moods and feelings of those around him. He rose to the position of a commandant and commanded his very own the Poona Horse in the 1965 war against Pakistan and while leading his regiment in securing a major objective in Pakistan Lieutenant Colonel A B Tarapore went down fighting on board his centurion tank in the highest tradition of the army and recognised as the bravest of the brave to be awarded Param Vir Chakra for his action in the battle.

The Final Countdown

In was the Indo-Pak war once again, the second with Pakistan since India attained independence and the third war the country fought in such quick succession Poona Horse along with an infantry battalion was tasked to capture an important objective Phillora in the Sialkot sector of Pakistan. All was going on fine with the unit with the commanding officer leading the assault from the front. It was 11st of September 1965, but nothing was quiet, the tanks moved with rumbling speed towards the main objective of Phillora when the enemy heavy armour counterattacked the main Indian thrust led by young Lieutenant Colonel. Unperturbed as he always was, Ardeshir defied the enemy charge and attacked the objective with one squadron (14 tanks) supported at heels with an infantry battalions. There was tremendous arty and tank fire but he was unperturbed all trough. He was badly wounded as well but refused evacuation.

On 14th September though still wounded he once again led his regiment to capture the second objective Waziwali. Such was his grit and determination that he undertook to lead his regiment once again and captured Hassoran and Butur Dorgandi (Pakistani Objectives) on 16th September his pivot and allowed the infantry to capture Chawinda with ease.

With his inspired leadership the regiment destroyed 60 enemy tanks but alas the brave commanding officer could not hold till the last and was mortally wounded. Lieutenant Colonel AB Tarapore was awarded Param Vir Chakra posthumously for his qualities, grit and determination with disregard to personal safety. His name went down the pages of

history of the Poona Horse also called as 17 Horse as the gallant commanding officer who led his regiment to victory on the battlegrounds of Phillora-Chawinda.

Citation

Lieutenant Colonel AB Tarapore

POONA HORSE (17 HORSE) (IC 5565)

On 11 September 1965, the Poona Horse Regiment under the command of Lieutenant Ardeshir Burzarji Tarapore was assigned the task of delivering the main armoured thrust for capturing, Phillora in the Sialkot in Pakistan. As a preliminary to making a surprise attack on Phillora from the rear, the regiment was thrusting between Phillora and Chawinda when it was suddenly counter-attacked by the enemy's heavy armour from Wazirwali. Lieutenant Colonel AB Tarapore who was then at the head of his regiment, defied the enemy's charge held his ground and gallantry attacked Phillora with one of his squadrons supported by an infantry battalion. Though under continuous enemy tank and artillery fire, Lieutenant Colonel Tarapore remained unperturbed throughout this action, and when wounded refused to be evacuated.

On 14th September 1965, though still wounded he again led his regiment to capture Wazirwali. Such was his grit and determination that unmindful of his injury he, again gallantry led his regiment and captured Jassoran and Butur – Dograndi on 16 September. His own tank was hit several times, but despite the odds he maintained his pivots in both these places and thereby allowed the supporting infantry to attack Chawinda from the rear.

Inspired by his leadership, the regiment fiercely attacked the enemy's heavy armour destroying approximately 60 enemy tanks at a cost of only 9 tank casualties, and when Lieutenant Colonel AB Tarapore was mortally wounded the regiment continue to defy the enemy.

The valour displayed by Lieutenant Colonel AB Tarapore in this heroic again, which lasted six days, was in keeping with the highest traditions of the Indian Army.

The Indo Pak War-1971

The year 1971 was another landmark year in the glorious history of the Poona Horse. In a fresh clash of arms between India and Pakistan, the Regiment once again displayed tenacity, courage, technical and tactical excellence and esprit-de-corps of the highest order, virtually destroying the Pakistani 8 Independent Armoured Brigade and, in the process, so decimating one to their elite Regiments, the 13th Lancers, that it ceased to exist as a fighting force. The regiment thus live up to the name of Pakistanis had themselves given in 1965, as a mark of respect, honour and esteem for the Regiment's achievements on the battle field-'Fakhr-E-Hind' (The Pride of India).

Genesis of the Conflict

The genesis of the 1971 war lay in the intense internal power struggle that ensued in Pakistan, as a consequence of the elections held in that country towards the end of 1970. General Yahya Khan, who had replaced Field Marshal Ayub Khan, was a weak administrator, easily manipulated by Zulfikar Ali Bhutto who wanted to attain power at any cost. On the advice of Bhutto, a reign of terror was unleashed on the then East Pakistan. As a consequence, nearly 10 million refugees sought assylum in India, thereby creating a crippling economic problem in having to provide them shelter, food and medical facilities. All diplomatic efforts to make Pakistan see reason and to desist, were to no avail. Very soon, the all too familiar war rhetoric was resounding from across the border, as the internal situation in Pakistan started getting out of hand. This further increased the tension and the situation steadily deteriorated to a point of no return. It became apparent as time passed that the issue would have to be resolved by a resort to arms. Planning and preparations commenced on both sides, though with divergent aims. Pakistan aimed to be on the defensive in the East and seek a decision in the West; India, on the other hand, sought a decision in the East and planned to carry out holding operations in the west.

Pak Resources and Plan in the West

In the West, Pakistan had three Army Corps (I, II and IV), two armoured divisions (1 and 6), eight infantry divisions, two artillery brigades and an infantry brigade group. To augment their offensive capability, Pakistan raised two infantry divisions and created two independent armoured brigades (2 and 8) by withdrawing the integral armoured regiment from some infantry divisions, particularly of IV corps, as their IV Corps Sector had an elaborate obstacle system to rely upon for its defensive tasks. Pak 2 Independent Armoured Brigade was earmarked for a limited offensive in Chhamb and Pak 8 Independent Armoured Brigade was allotted to I Corps for employment in the Shakargarh bulge. This enabled Pakistan to utilize most of her available armour for offensive tasks, yet retaining the flexibility to launch counter attacks in support of infantry formations, should the need arise. Our Intelligence organisations were found wanting once again, as this reorganization carried out by Pakistan was not known prior to the war.

Pakistan proposed to deploy seven infantry divisions in the holding role, leaving two armoured divisions, and three infantry divisions for offensive operations. Pakistan had planned one main offensive and three limited offensives; of the later, two limited were

planned in Jammu & Kashmir and one in Rajasthan. Of the two limited offensives planned in J&K one was to be carried out by an infantry division, having two infantry brigades with the aim of capturing Pooch, the second was to be carried out in the Chhamb Sector by an infantry division reinforced with additional infantry and supported by 2 Independent Armoured Brigades, with a view to capture out territory up to Manawar Tawi and, if possible, also to capture Akhnoor. This force was also to simulate an offensive in the Nowshera-Rajouri area. The offensive in Rajasthan was to be carried out by an infantry division advancing from Rahimyar Khan, with a view to capturing Ramgarh and threatening Jaisalmer. Once these limited offensives had succeeded in pinning down our reserves, the main offensive was to be launched in the Ganganagar-Anupgarh Sector by Pak II Corps, under General Tikka Khan, comprising (Pak) 1 Armoured Division and two infantry divisions (one newly raised). 6 Armoured Division, with the other newly raised infantry division, was held back in the Shakargarh Sector for a counter offensive, once the Indian Army had played its cards.

The Phoney War : October- November 1971

The reported move of Pak 1 Corps into the Daska-Pasrur area in October 1971, triggered the post-haste induction of own 1 Corps into its area of operational responsibility. Reacting to each others moves, both sides carried out deployments and counter-deployment. During the months of October and November, there were numerous alarms and excursions, usually in the form of warnings of impending preemptive attacks. Such warnings invariably proved false, but they succeeded in tiring out commanders and troops and kept every one in a state of high tension.

The deployment of Pak 1 Corps and own 1 Corps during this phase, which we have called the "Phoney War", are given below, followed by a brief account of the activities of the Regiment during this period.

Deployment of Pak 1 Corps

Pak 1 Corps was responsible for the defence of the Shakargarh Bulge. It had on its Orbat 6 Armoured Division, 8 Independent Armoured brigade and three infantry divisions (one of which was newly raised after the move of an infantry division to erstwhile East Pakistan in March 1975). It had deployed 8 and 15 Infantry Divisions and 8 Independent Armoured Brigade in a holding role, with 6 Armoured Division and 17 Infantry Division held back as reserve. Pak 15 Infantry Divisions area of responsibility extended from the Chenab in the North to the Degh Nadi in the South. Its three infantry brigades were deployed to guard the Northern, Eastern and Southern, Eastern approaches to Sialkot. Pak 8 Infantry Division held the area between the Degh Nadi and Ravi river and was tasked with the defence of the fortified towns of Zafarawal, Dhamtal and Narowal. These towns were held by a brigade each and the Divisions fourth brigade was held in reserve. 8 Independent Armoured Brigade, with three armoured regiments-13 Lancers, 27 Cavalry and 31 Cavalry (all M47/M48 Pattons) and an armoured infantry battalion (M113 APCs) was held as a counterattack reserve in Chawindal. 6 Armoured Division and 17 Infantry Division (newly raised) were held in reserve in the Daska-Pasrur area.

The defensive potential of the 8 Infantry Division Defended Sector had been enhanced by extensive use of natural and artificial obstacles, including extensive minefields. Concrete defences covering anti-tank ditches and mine-belts were constructed around towns like Zafarwal, Dhamtal, Pasrur and Qila Sobha Singh, which were designated as fortress strong points. Approaches from the boarder were covered by three obstacle belts running East-West, more or less parallel to the boarder. The first belt was 6-8 kilometers from the boarder with the second about the same distance behind the first. Each was 600 to 800 meters deep with anti-tank mines laid to a density of one mine to every meter of front. The third obstacle belt was the strongest and incorporated natural and artificial obstacles with anti-tank mines laid to a density of one and a half mines per meter of front to depth of about 1200m. This was nominated as the 'limit of penetration' and nay ingress beyond it was to be counter village Supwal, on the East bank of Degh Nadi, ran along the anti-tank ditch referred to as the Supwal Ditch, to the Basantar Nala; thereafter it ran South, astride both banks of the Basantar Nala, up to the Zafarwal-Shakargarh Road upto Shakargarh Road. It then turned East, keeping South of the Zafarwal – Sharargarh Road upto shakargarh, from where it easily discernable by day as they had been clumsily laid, employing labour from local villages. Gaps left in the minefields for the use of their own mobile troops were marked with low manila rope fences. Covering troops were deployed between the 'limit penetration' and the boarder. These covering troops were based on two armoured regiments viz 20th Lancers the pak 1 Corps Reconnaissance Regiment, equipped with M 36B2 Sherman tank destroyers, and 33Cavalry, the Pak 8 Division Integral Armoured Regiment, equipped with M47 Pattons. With these regiments were grouped elements of the Divisional Reconnaissance and Support battalions, as also the paramilitary forces holing the boarder outposts. 8 Independent Armoured Brigade was tasked to counter attack any intrusion across the 'limit of penetration' Once this armoured brigade had succeeded in stalling won offensive, 6 Armoured Division and 17Infantry Division were to launch a counter-offensive across the Ravi River.

INDIAN RESOURCES AND PLANS.

Indian Respires in The Western Sector. In the West, India had three Army Corps (1,11,15) with twelve infantry divisions, 1Armoured Division and three independent armoured brigades (2,14 and 16). Consequently, three was parity in forces available to each side in the west.

Deployment of Indian 1 Corps

Own 1 Corps comprised three infantry divisions (36,39 and 54) and two 8independent armouted brigades (2and16). The area of responsibility of 1Corps extended from excluding the Dera Baba Nanak enclave on the Ravi River to the Aik Nala just South of Jammu. 1Corps was deployed in the holding role, in accordance with the overall defensive strategy adopted on the Western Front. 36 Infantry Division was responsible for the defence of the Southern Sector which included the border districts of Gurdasput-Dinanagar and stretched up to the North Western approaches to Pathankot. 39Ubfabtrt Division took over the defence took over the defence of the boarder from the Ravi River upto Taranah Nadi, a tributary of Basantrar River; this included the defence of Madhopur, Parol and Banial Areas. 54 Infantry Division Defended Sector from Taranah-Bein River upto the Degh Nadi, which

included Samba. The northern most sector, stretching from the Degh Nadi upto the Aik Nala, was defended by a brigade ex-26 Infantry Division and a brigade from 39 Infantry Division, both grouped under an adhoc Headquarters. 2 Independent Armoured Brigade, with three armoured regiments, Skinner's Horse, 7 Light Cavalry and Scinde Horse (all T-55), a mechanized battalion, 1 Dogra (Troops) and 91 Independent Reconnaissance Squadron (Scinde Horse- AMX 13 Tanks) was grouped for the defence of the Pathankot – Diananagar Sector. 16 Light Cavalry and The Poona Horse, on mechanized battalion, 18 Rajputana Rifles (Topas) and 90 Independence Reconnaissance Squadron (The Poona Horse – AMX-13 Tanks) was upto Aik Nala. Several contingency plans were made by own 1 Corps to deal with any pre-emptive strike by the Pak 1 Corps. The general idea was that troops not under attack would counter attack the enemy from a flank

Move to Concentration Areas

In the first week of October, The Poona Horse was carrying out annual field firing at Naraingarh Ranges. On 8 Oct a message was received from HQ 16 Independent Armoured Brigade, through the Commanding Officer 16 Cavalry, that the Regiment was to immediately return to its permanent location at Sangrur. On his way back to Sangrur the Commandant, Lieutenant Colonel Hanut Singh, reported to Headquarters 16 Independence Armoured Brigade where he was briefed by the Brigade Commander, Brigadier A.S. Vaidya, MVC Based on the instructions given by the Brigade Commander, A Squadron under Major Man Singh left the same evening for Dinanagar, where they were placed under command 323 Infantry Brigade. Concentration of the rest of the regiment commenced on 10 Oct by road and rail and was completed on 14 October. The Regiment detrained at Madhopur and was concerned at a few kilometers away near village Sujampur. While the last train, carrying B Squadron, was still being unloaded, the Commandant was called to Headquarters 39 Infantry Division and briefed regarding reports of an impending strike by Pakistan in general area Gurdaspur – Dinanagar. The Poona Horse placed under Command 323 Infantry Brigade for containing this anticipated offensive as 2 Independent Armoured Brigade had not yet arrived in their operational area. Hanut Singh was to report to Brigadier G.S. Grewal, Commander 323 Brigade after issuing instructions that the Regimental Headquarters and B Squadron were to move on tank transporter to join A Squadron in general area Dinanagar, while C Squadron was warned to be prepared to marry up with the rest of the Regiment at short notice. After having been briefed by Commander 323 Infantry Brigade, Hanut Singh decided to base himself in the rest 2200hrs by now and the guides had started bringing the tanks of the Regiment from the unloading area to the selected dispersal area. As Hanut was moving about in the Rest House, he felt that he was being followed. He halted in the dark, on one of the doorway and saw that an officer, accompanied by some men, all with weapons at the ready, were cautiously peering into the room. On being asked by Hanut what sort of game they were upto, these personnel were startled into a state of shock at first, but on learning that they had been stalking the Commandant of the Poona Horse, they heaved a sigh of relief. It transpired that this officer, with an advance party from 36 Infantry Division, had been reconnoitering the Rest House area when he heard the Poona Horse tanks rolling in. The sound of these tanks confirmed his worst fears as he thought that these tanks were the spearhead of the impending Pak offensive of which Lieutenant Colonel Hanu Singh, with his huge swirling mistle, and along hooked nose could easily be mistaken for a Pathan; nor had any one informed them about the move of own armour into this area. This incident has been

related to highlight the sort of confusion that lack of clear information and order can create. And this was not the last of such incident either.

Barely 12 hours later orders were received that the Scinde Horse, who had just arrived their permanent location, were to relieve the Poona Horse and the Regiment less A Squadron, was to revert back under command 39 Infantry Division. This constant grouping and regrouping and consequent movement to and fro conveyed an impression of panic reactions on the part of formation commanders and under-mined the confidence of the units in the concerned formation headquarters. This lack to confidence was further compounded by a total absence of proper movement planning and movement control, leading to massive traffic jams as long convoys of vehicles and tank transporter, moving in opposite directions, tried to squeeze past each other on roads barely wide enough to take one –way traffic. These seemingly impossible traffic jams were sorted out by the initiative and energy of the junior officers and by first light the various units somehow managed to reach their projected dispersal areas.

The Regiment less A Squadron concentrated at Malichak, with A Squadron rejoining it by 16 October; the administrative area was located at Janglot. The days were now spent in reconnaissance of the operational area with false alarms of a surprise Pakistani attack keeping the troops awake most nights. Eventually, the units stopped taking these warnings of impending attacks; a dangerous development, but thankfully no attack ever came. On 14 November the Regiment moved to a forward concentration area near Diani, just short of Samba, on the Pathankot-Jammu Road. By now all ranks on courses and extra-regimental employment had rejoined and the Regiment was well over full strength.

Intensive technical and tactical training was carried out with emphasis on gunnery training, troop and squadron tactics, battle drills and crew integration. On obtaining clearance, tanks, which had not fired during the annual field firing, were zeroed at Ismailpur Ranges, near Jammu. This training proved in invaluable and paid handsome dividends during the actual fighting. Apart from this the normal planning conferences at various levels continued. A strange fact about the planning phase was that every time a specific plan was finalized for a particular area of operations, the enemy's obstacle system would come up there. Whether this was a mere coincidence, or whether this due to security leak, it was hard to say. For our part reliable and reasonably accurate information of the Pakistani defensive layout, deployment and plans were received through the defecting Bengali Officers.

Outbreak of Hostilities

Offensive Plans of Own 1 Corps. Lieutenant General K.K. Singh, MVC, who had been our Brigade Commander in the 1965 War with Pakistan, was now our Corps Commander. General 'KK' had appreciated that hostilities break out, the best manner of carting out the tasks allotted to his Corps (1 Corps) was to go on the offensive. In this context his plan was to launch an offensive in the central sector of the Corps Zone, whilst at the same time retaining a strong defensive posture on the flanks of the Corps offensive. In pursuance of this plan, 54 Infantry Division was to advance between the Degh Nadi and the Karir Nadi, led by 16 Independent Armoured Brigade less 16 Cavalry, with the task of capturing the Zafarwal the Zafarwal-Dhamtal Complex. 39 Infantry Division less two brigades, with an

additional brigade ex-36 Infantry Division under command, was to advance between the Karir Nadi and the Bein River, led by 2 Independent Armoured Brigade, with a view to guarding the Western flank of the Corps offensive and to assist in the capture of the Zafarwal-Dhamtal Complex. One infantry brigade ex-39 Infantry Division and one infantry brigade ex-26 Infantry Division, supported by 16 Light Cavalry, less 'A' Squadron, were to hold a defensive position in area Sambha –Ramgarh-Rajpur with a view to guarding the Eastern flanks of 1 Corps. 36 Infantry Division, less a brigade (allotted to 39 Infantry Division), supported by the Scinde Horse, was to hold a defensive position along the Ravi River. Situation permitting, this Division was to be prepared to advance across the Ravi River and capture Shakargarh; additional resources would be allotted to the Division for this task as necessary. 87 Infantry Brigade ex-39 Infantry Division, supported by A Squadron 16 Light Cavalry, was to hold a firm in the area Bamial-Marot-Parol, between the Bein and Ravi Rivers.

Plans of 54 Infantry Division and 16 Independent Armoured Brigade, Based on the information available at that time, it had been appreciated that the enemy defences in the 54 Infantry Division area of responsibility were as follows :

- (a) A minefield running generally along the Indo-Pak Border
- (b) A Second minefield along the general line Bhoi Brahmna -Thakardwara- Nagwal.
- (c) A third minefield along the general line Ghamrola- Barkhaniyan.
- (d) It was suspected that a fourth minefield had been laid in conjunction with the Basantar Nala, but this had not been confirmed. Detailed information of the Basantar Nala was also not available.
- (e) The Pak main defences were organized around the Zafarwal-Dhamtal complex, with Advance Position along the Basantar Nala.
- (f) It was anticipated that Covering Troops would be deployed ahead of the Basantar Nala with a view to delaying our advance and denying crossings over the various minefield belts.

Based on the foregoing anticipated enemy deployment it was planned that two infantry brigades ex-54 Infantry Division, with a Squadron each of armour ex-Poona Horse under command, would secure a bridge-head across the first minefield in area Dandaut-Gola-Mawwa-Mukhwal and establish a firm base for the induction of 4 Horse. The thirds infantry brigade of 54 Infantry Division and 4 Horse were to then advance between the Basantar River and Karir Nadi, with a view to securing crossings across the second minefield at Thakurdwara. Thereafter, 4 Horse alongwith one brigade ex-Divisional firm base was to provide another bridge-head across the third minefield at Barkhaniyan. Once the thirds minefield had been breached, a combat group consisting of The Poona Horse, 18 rajputana Rifles (mechanized) less two companies, trawl troop ex-7 Light Cavalry and bridge layer tanks, was to break out from this bridge-head and secure an encounter crossing over the Basantar Nala in general area Pinjori, for a subsequent advance for the capture of the Zafarwal-Dhamtal Complex.

Tasks and Deployment of Pak Covering Troops

An adhoc headquarters was created to take charge of the covering troops deployed in the Shakargarh Bulge between the Degh Nadi and the Bein River. Known as the 'Changez Force', the Covering Troops comprised (Pak) 20 Lancers, 33 Cavalry and one infantry battalion. This Force was tasked to cause maximum delay and attrition on the Indian forces ingressing into this sector; the Force was also to be prepared to undertake counter attack and counter penetration tasks at Nurkot and at Jassar, located South of Shakargarh, on the West bank of the Bein River. On withdrawal from the Covering Position, which was along the second minefield, this Force was to deploy along the 'Line of No Penetration', which in this sector started from the Supwal Ditch, ran along the Basantar Nullah upto its junction with the Zafarwal- Shakargarh Road and then ran North of this Road to include Barwal and Tola.

20 Lancers was deployed in delaying positions on the Thakurdwara minefield. It had an effective tank strength of 35 upgunned Sherman tanks. Being a reconnaissance regiment, it had integral rifle troops in each Squadron. These rifle troops were mounted on Dodge $\frac{3}{4}$ ton trucks. 33 Cavalry was deployed to cover the Barkhaniya minefield, with three infantry companies in support. Both Regiments had deployed all tank troops up, covering a frontage of 20-30 kms each. 20 Lancers had one squadron covering the gap between the Degh Nadi and the Karir Nala, the second squadron between the Karir Nala and the Cho Nala and the third squadron between the Cho Nala and the Bein River. 33 Cavalry had one squadron covering the open gap between the Basantar Nala and the Karir Nala, the second squadron covering the gap between the Karir Nala and the Cho Nala and the third squadron between the Cho Nala and the Bein River. The infantry battalion deployed with this Regiment had occupied a well fortified strong point at village Tola was in the middle of the minefield, midway between Zafarwal and Shakargarh and dominated the road connecting these towns.

Actions on 3-4 December 1971

On 3 December 1971, at about 1900hrs, news was received that the Pakistan Air Force had carried out pre-emptive strikes against our airfields at Srinagar, Jammu, Pathankot, Adampur and Amritsar. As per plans, 'A' Squadron was set to Randwal in support of 91 Infantry Brigade and 'B' Squadron to Raiyan in support of 74 Infantry Brigade, essentially to guard against any pre-emptive strike by the enemy. The squadrons moved on tracks, the move commencing at about 2030 hrs. Earlier, the Regiment had been deployed in open harbour with tanks close together to facilitate administration and training. On 3 December, Lieutenant Colonel Hanut Singh had briefed the officers and based on an intuition of hostilities breaking out, had directed that the squadrons be dispersed and proper camouflage and concealment be ensured. Thus, on the morning of 4 December, when the enemy planes came on a search and destroy mission over the concentration area, which was apparently known to them they could not locate even a single tank, in spite of making repeated passes.

Even though the war had commenced on the night of 3-4 December, with Pakistan attacking in Chhamb Sector, General Yahya Khan formally declared war on India on the afternoon of 4 December. Immediately, the Indian counter offensive plans were set in motion in the eastern and Western Sectors.

By the evening of 4 December, orders were received for fresh re-deployment. 'A' Squadron had rejoined the Regiment from Randwal at last light 4 December. The firm base of 54 Infantry Division was to be protected by B and C Squadrons. Accordingly, after last light on 4 December, B Squadron moved to Gala, C Squadron to Mawa and A Squadron with the Regimental Headquarters moved to the forward assembly area at Raiyan. This entailed a movement from East to West across the Samba T Junction, a major choke point. 7th Cavalry, which had earlier been deployed West of Samba, had to move West to East across the same choke point, to its forward assembly area East of Samba. This was a potential invitation to disaster, should the two columns reach the choke point at the same time and get stuck in a traffic jam; an invitation the enemy air and artillery would have relished.

'Peter's Principle' worked overtime, helped no end by shoddy staff work. Like clockwork, the two columns of tanks met each other head on within the narrow confines of Samba town. The resultant chaos is better imagined than described, considering that the road through Samba was barely wide enough to take one tank at a time. The two Commanding Officers had to personally intervene to sort out the traffic jam. Thanks to the initiative of the junior leaders, the Regiments somehow managed to disentangle themselves and were able to get under cover in their respective forward assembly areas by first light.

Actions on 5-6 December 1971

Opposite B Squadron, located at Gala, was the enemy border post of Galar Tanda. It had a 30 foot observation tower which overlooked the concentration area and could have been used by the enemy to monitor our movements and bring down observed artillery fire. B Squadron was directed to destroy it. Thus the fighting in the 54 Division Sector began with a well placed shot from a B Squadron tank, which brought the observation platform down in flames. This opening of fire by B Squadron caused a troop of enemy tanks, which had remained bidden in the tall elephant grass, to panic and pull back. Unfortunately the tall, dense grass prevented our tanks from engaging them. However, the fact that they were moving freely along the border was a clear indication that the suspected minefield in this area did not, in fact, exist. Hanut informed Commander 16 Armoured Brigade accordingly, but no cognisance was taken of this information and a full scale attack was launched as per earlier plans.

Operations : Night 5/6 December

At 2000 hours on 5 December, 91 and 74 Infantry Brigades launched attacks to capture Dandout-Chamana Khurd-Chhahal and Mukhwal. This attack went into thin air as no enemy was encountered. Subsequently, when own trawl tanks started trawling through the anticipated minefield, no mines were encountered either. Once the brigade-heads were secured, C Squadron moved to Mukhwal in support of 91 Infantry Brigade, with a view to guarding the Western flank, while B Squadron moved to Dandout in support of 74 Infantry Brigade, with a view to securing the Eastern flank. These movements were completed before midnight. 4 Horse was inducted into the Infantry bridgehead, but the absence of any enemy reaction was not exploited; 4 Horse was allowed to commence its breakout only at first light on 6 December.

Operations: 6 December

4 Horse broke out at 0600hrs, and by 0800hrs leading elements of the Regiment contacted the minefield astride Thakurdwara. Thereafter the advance stalled, with the Regiment remaining deployed on the home side of this minefield for the entire day. Finally at about last light, Jiti Choudhry, commanding their leading squadron, was given clearance to breach the minefield. He moved through unopposed and established a firm base across the minefield at Thakurdwara. A troop of enemy tanks was found abandoned in Thakurdwara and was shot up. C Squadron of the Poona Horse was moved up from Mukhwal to take over the firm base at Thakurdwara, releasing 4 Horse for further advance.

The Other Side. B Squadron of Pak 20 Lancers was deployed between the Degh Nadi, and the Karir Nadi. It had withdrawn behind the first defensive minefield at Thakurdwara by 2300 hrs on Night 5/6 December. On 6 December, when 4 Horse contacted the minefield and the tanks of B Squadron 20 Lancers were strafed by the IAF, this Squadron was ordered to fight a rearguard action to the next minefield at Barkhaniyan. Withdrawal was completed by last light 6 December and the remnants of the Squadron took up positions behind the second minefield at Barkhaniyan, alongwith A Squadron of 33 Cavalry (Pattons). By this time all squadrons of Pak 20 Lancers had moved behind the second defensive minefield.

The Battle of Basantar

In the early hours of 15 December, a message was received at Regimental Headquarter instructing the Commandant to report to HQ 47 Infantry Brigade for orders. This Headquarters was located well to the rear and by the time the Commandant reached there, the Brig Commander's operational orders were nearly over. So, the Commandant was asked to stay back and was briefed separately about the plan of 47 Infantry Brigade for securing a brigade-head across the Basantar, and the task of the Poona Horse in the context of this plan. The outline plan. Of 47 Infantry Brigade was as follows:

- (a) Phase 1 – 16 Madras to capture area 2r in the Ghazipur Reserved Forest, upto and inclusive Saraj Chak.
- (b) Phase2 – 3 Grenadiers to capture Jarpal and, thereafter, link up with 16 Madras at Saraj Chak.
- (c) Engineers to trawl a safe lane through the minified; trawling to commence on completion of Phased1.
- (d) H Hour for the attack; 1930Hrs, 15Dec.

18 Rajputana Rifles less two companies was pulled back from Ramri and was grouped with the Poona Horse. The Regiment was given the task of ensuring the security of the bridge-head against enemy counter-attack. On the morning of the following day, i.e., 16Dec, 3 Grenadiers, supported by on squadron was to capture village Barapind' 16Madras, supported by on squadron was to capture village Ghazipur.

By the time the Brigade Commander finished his briefing, it was 1300hrs, and by the time the Commandant got back to the Regiment, it was 1430hrs. There was no time for reconnaissance, hence planning had to be done entirely off the map. Nor was there any information available about enemy strength and deployment in the intended area of the attack. Fortunately for us, two troops ex-B Squadron, under Captain Ravi Deol, had been ordered to be detached and left behind with the infantry for the flank protection when the Regiment launched the attack against Barwal. These troops were deployed near village Lagwal and were able to give some terrain information. But more important than that, a reconnaissance patrol had been ordered by 47 Infantry Brigade, which included Lieutenant B.S.Grewal, one of the B Squadron troop leaders, as the armour representative. On his return from the patrol, Bhupinder Grewal reported hearing a lot of tank noise coming from the Ghazipur Reserved Forest area. This information led the Commandant to infer that the enemy's armour reserves were in all probability located in the Ghazipur Forest. Tactically also this made sense-the Forest provided excellent cover and the tanks would be well poised for counter-attacking at any point on the obstacle where we tried to make a breach.

After a quick map appreciation, the Commandant reached the conclusion that securing of the Ghazipur Forest Area on the night of 15/16 December was critical to day. If the infantry failed to secure this area, or were only partly successful, then the regiment must plan to secure it by a night attack by tanks and mechanized infantry. This important consideration was the key ingredient of the Regimental battle plan, which in outline was as following:

- (a) C Squadron and 18Raj Rif (less two companies) to secure Ghazipur Reserve Forest, if necessary by launching a night assault by tanks and APCs. C Squadron to thereafter link up with 16months.
- (b) B Squadron to link up with 3 Genendires at Jarpal.
- (c) A Squadron to be in reserve at Saraj Chak.

Having experienced the problems of moving across country at night through unrecognised terrain, we took the precaution of arranging to have an anti-aircraft gun to fire single shots at short intervals, on a fixed line, at Saraj Chak. This proved very useful as the tracer from the shots enabled the Regiment to retain orientation. Also, in order to ensure a smooth take off, Risaldar Sohan Singh, the Recce Troop leader, was sent to reconnoiter the route from Barwal to Hamral (which had been selected as the tank waiting area prior to induction) and from Hamral to the entrance of the proposed safe lane. This again proved to be a fortuitous precaution because the rather elaborate and much trumpeted Minefield Crossing Organization set up by 54 Infantry Division was nowhere to be seen; the Regiment had to find its own way to the entrance to the safe lane and across it. On return from his reconnaissance, Risaldar Sohan Singh reported that a Nullah just short of Lagwal was rather boggy and unless a proper tank crossing was made, the tanks were likely to get stuck. Headquarters 47 Infantry Brigade was immediately contacted to get the Engineers to make a tank crossing over this Nullah. They confirmed that this would be done, but in the event no action was taken. This resulted in completely upsetting the Regiment's induction schedule as tanks started bogging down and had to be pulled out, one tank at a time; but of this later.

By the time the Commandant's briefing and orders were over, there was barely enough time left for the Squadron Commanders to brief their troop leaders and tank crews and to get them ready for the forthcoming battle. There was also a command vacuum in C Squadron after Moti was evacuated, which had to be filled. Amrik Virk was that time posted in Headquarters 1 Corps General K.K.Singh the Corps Commander, had promised Amrik that if any Squadron Commander in the Poona Horse became a casualty, Amrik would be made available as a replacement. Consequently, when Moti became a casualty, we had sent a message asking for Amrik. Unfortunately, General K.K.Singh was away from his Headquarters and the B.G.S would not allow Amrik to leave without the Corps Commander's personal clearance. So the Commandant asked Ajai to assume command of C Squadron until Amrik joined up. Also as C Squadron would be leading the Regimental induction into the Brigade head, and as Ravi Deol, being positioned near Lagwal, had got an opportunity of familiarizing himself with the terrain during daylight hours, he was transferred from B Squadron to C Squadron and made available to Ajai as the Squadron second-in-command, for navigating the squadron into the Brigade-head.

As dusk was setting in, the Regimental Group commenced its move to the Waiting Area at Hamral. Leaving the Regiment at Hamral the Commandant proceeded to join Commander, 47 Infantry Brigade at his Command Post at Lagwal. By the time he reached the Command Post, the first phase of the attack by 16 Madras was well on the way.

At approximately 2030 hours, 16 Madras gave the success signal, immediately thereon the Engineers, under Major Vijay Chowdhry, began trawling a safe lane through the minified opposite Lagwal. It was a laborious and time-consuming operation because of the soft going and because the bed of the Basantar had to be hand-breached as the trawls could not operate in the boggy river bed. That apart, the depth of the minefield was not clearly known and there was also some confusion regarding its exact alignment. The Commanding Officer of 16 Madras added to the existing confusion by reporting that "there was no minefield between the Basantar and Saraj Chak; the minified infect was between the village of Saraj Chak and Ghazipur Reserve Forest" As he was the man on the spot this information could not be entirely ignored and so the Engineers were ordered to probe the area between Saraj Chak and attack, by 13 Grenadiers, progressed according to plan and, at approximately 2330 hours the Battalion Commander reported that he had secured Jarpal. Thereafter, there were continuous reports of enemy counter-attacks building up, particularly from 16 Madras. At about 0200 hours on 16 Dec Lieutenant Colonel Gai, the Commanding Officer of 16 Madras, reported that enemy tanks were building up for a major counter-attack and that unless own armour fetched up it would not be possible for him to hold out any longer.

Meanwhile, Brigadier Bhardwaj, Commander 47 Infantry Brigade, was becoming increasingly anxious about the security of the assaulting battalions to hold out in the face of a tank counter-attack. He kept conferring with the Commandant on the action to be taken and in order to reassure him, the Commandant on the action to be taken and in order to reassure Hamral, so that it would be ready to induct into the Brigade-head, the moment the minefield lane was reported clear. The Regiment started moving up and C Squadron, which was the leading Squadron, along with a company of APCs, managed to reach the entrance of the minefield lane. However, the remaining tanks started bogging down in that rather nasty Nullah East of Lagwal which Ris Sohan Singh had warned about, but across which no

crossing had been made by the Engineers in spite of repeated requests to the 47Infantry Brigade Staff. The staff of an infantry formation do not realize the extent to which such seemingly minor points affect the operation of tanks; they had failed to issue the necessary orders to the Engineers. By about 0230 hrs reports coming in from Colonel Ghai, Commanding Officer, 16 Madras, indicated that the situation in the Bridge-head particularly on his battalion front, was getting rather desperate. So the Commandant joined up with C Squadron and even though the lane through minified was not yet cleared, he ordered Major Ajai Singh to take his squadron through the minefield and into the Bridge-head. When Ajai was about half way through the minified he reported that engineer officers were still working on clearing the lane on the far bank of the Basatar. However the situation in the Brig-head was now reaching a crisis stage and there was no time left to waste. If the tanks did not get across and link up with the assaulting infantry battalions within the next few minutes, their might not be a Bridge-head left to induct into. Infact there were already disturbing indicators that the troops in the Bridge-head were cracking up. For while the tank column was halted in the minefield lane by the Engineers, the Commandant saw men streaming back towards the rear. At first he assumed that they were Engineer Personnel, but observing that they were armed and equipped like infantry, he told Devinder(Davy) Kumar, the IO to find out who they were. It was then discovered that these personnel belonged to 16Mdras, when they were interrogated by divvy as to what they were doing and where they were going, they were unable to give coherent answers. Evidently, these men had pinked and were making their way back to the rear. The Commandant immediately ordered all tanks to stop these men and mount them on the tank engine decks, These men were taken to stop these men and mount them on the tank engine decks. These men were taken back into the Bridge-head on the tanks and later sent to join their battalion.

Considering the gravity of the situation, the Commandant ordered Ajai to start leading his Squadron through, irrespective of whether the minefield lane was cleared or not . In case any tank blew up on a mine, the next tank was to bypass from the right and this was to be repeated still some tanks at least managed to get through. Ajai, who was leading the Squadron column, with Ravi Deol ahead of him as the Navigating Officer, replied with a dart "Wilco" and resumed the advance. The 'Hand of Allah' was of him as the Navigating Officer, replied with a dart "Wilco" and resumed the advance. The 'Hand of Allah' was with us that night because all that tanks and APCs negotiated the minefield, including approximately 600meters of the unbleached portion, without any mishap. And to prove that it was something more than luck that saw us through that night, the very next day a jeep and an APC, both of which had deviated very slightly from the tank tracks, blew up on enemy mines. It was, indeed a feat of cool nerve, courage and daring on the part of Ravi Deol and Ajai to lead their tanks through this deep minified, on an absolutely pitch dark night.

When we started going through the minefield, we had only a very vague idea of the likely location of 16Madras. The only indicator by which we could orientate our movements was a burning hut. We guessed, rightly, that this hut might be a part of village Saraj Chak and so Ajai was told to head for that hut; on reaching there we would again try and get our bearings. However, a rather nasty surprise was in store for us for, as the leading tanks of C Squadron merged on the far side of the minified, they came under enemy fire from Saraj Chak at almost point blank range. The reason why we were surprised was to have secured. Obviously something had gone wrong, but there was no time for speculation; from the bang of the

guns and the 'whoosh' of the shots as they passed overhead, we were being engaged by enemy tanks. And whereas we were effectively lighted up by the burning hut, the same blaze blinded our vision and we could not locate the enemy tanks as they were positioned in the darkness beyond the hut. In fact these tanks were so well dug in and camouflaged that it would have been a problem to locate them even during daylight hours. One of these dug-in tanks, which was knocked out by us, used to be shown to visitors after the cease-fire, and most found it difficult to locate the tank even from a range of 50 meters. It has also been a source of wonder to us how these dug-in enemy tanks missed hitting us because, as we discovered later, our leading tanks were barely 200 meters from the dug-in tanks, when these tanks opened fire.

As the Centurion tank had no night fighting devices, there was nothing we could do except pump shots into what we thought might be the enemy tank position and hope for the best. Consequently, the tanks of C Squadron were ordered to deploy 'In Line', on either side of Ajai, level guns, and fire a mixture of HE and APDS in the general direction of Saraj Chak. This was done and a tremendous cannonade ensued. Once again the 'Hand of Allah' was with us because a random shot hit one of the enemy tanks smack in the center of the gun mantle and this tank brewed up. By the light of this burning tank, the tanks of C Squadron could now vaguely pick out targets and engage them somewhat more accurately. This fire-fight continued for about half an hour, after which we found that the firing by the enemy, but that was not so. As our tanks closed in with the village, yet another surprise awaited us. Some Pakistani personnel came out with their hands up, accompanied by some personnel of 16 Madras. Further interrogation revealed that 16 Madras had sent a strong patrol to secure Saraj Chak, assuming that it was not held by the enemy. This was a mistake because, as we discovered later through interrogation of enemy prisoners, Saraj Chak had been developed as a strong point and was held by a company of infantry, supported by RCL guns and a troop of tank destroyers (M36 tanks with 90mm guns). The patrol of 16 Madras had obviously walked into this position unsuspectingly and had been made prisoners.

Next morning we discovered four RCL guns in the Saraj Chak area that had been destroyed in the fire fight the previous night. Of the troops of tanks that had been there, one had been destroyed and the others had lost nerve and fled towards Jarpal. In the course of their flight they overran some trenches of 13 Grenadiers, which caused their CO to report that his battalion was being counter-attacked by enemy armour. In this context Lieutenant Colonel V.P. Airey, CO 13 Grenadiers, spoke to the Commandant on the radio and requested for immediate assistance. Fortunately, Amarjeet (Amy) Bal, with two of his troops, had managed to extricate himself from the boggy Nullah near Lagwal and had fetched up at Saraj Chak. He was dispatched to link up with 13 Grenadiers at Jarpal.

After the action at Saraj Chak was over, we turned our attention to finding out the location of 16 Madras. For this purpose, we asked them to fire a few Very light rounds to indicate their position so that we could home in on them. They did so and we scanned the area of the Ghazipur Reserve Forest, but we were unable to locate the flares. Finally, when the battalion was almost running out of their stock of very light ammunition, one of the troop leaders came on the air and reported that he had seen flares being fired from an area well to the North of the Forest. So we turned out Green/Red. Sure enough, the flares went up from the area indicated by the troop leader. It was only then that we realized, to our dismay, that 16

Madras were nowhere near the Ghazipur Reserve Forest-they had just about cleared the Basantar minefield belt and had dug-in in an area almost 1000meters short of the Reserve Forest, which had been their assigned objective. So the Ghazipur Forest continued to be in enemy hands. As stated earlier, the Commandant had appreciated that in order to gain the tactical advantage in the tank battle that was anticipated to ensure on the morning of 16 Dec it was vital to secure the area of the Forest. Accordingly, C Squadron and 18 Rajputana Rifles had already been tasked to be prepared to secure this area by a night assault buy tanks and APCs. They were now ordered to execute this plan.

When C Squadron had started inducting into the Brigade-head, two troops of B Squadron, under Ravi Deol, which were already in position near the minefield lane, had also joined in. However, the rest of B Squadron had got stuck in the Nullah short of Lagwal and had not fetched up, when C Squadron started deploying for its attack. Therefore, rather than leave these two troops on their own, the Commandant placed them under command C Squadron and ordered them to join in the attack. In accordance with plan c squadron, now comprising six tank troops, deployed in 'Line' formation for the assault; the APCs of 18 Raj Rif deployed in 'Line' formation behind them, echeloned approximately 25meters to the rear of the tanks.

As already stated earlier, Lieutenant B.S.Garewal, who had been sent on patrol, had reported the presence of a large concentration of enemy tanks in the area of the Forest. In view of this, a major fight anticipated by the Commandant, amounting to tank melee, when the tanks of C Squadron assaulted this area. This area. He, therefore, decided to accompany C Squadron. Assaulted this area. He, therefore, decided to accompany C Squadron. By about 0430hrs the deployment was completed and the order was passed to commence the assault. The tanks of C Squadron went roaring into the reserve forest, followed closely by the APCs; the tanks were ordered to adopt the same technique of firing with leveled guns, which we had used so effectively at Saraj Chak, The assaulting lines of tanks and APCs were ordered to move at a very controlled pace, and in a deliberate manner, in order to avoid confusion and loss of control. There was a feeling of tense expectation as, at any movement, we expected to run into enemy harbors; tank commanders and gunners were searching the area ahead with intense concentration, trying to pierce the enveloping gloom in order to be able to quickly locate the enemy and ge in the first shot. However, the advance of our tanks continued unimpeded and, before long, light started breaking ahead indicating that we were about to reach the far edge of the Forest. We had secured what we considered a tactically vital area of ground and we now decided to await enemy reaction. His immediate problem, obviously, was to try and find out in what strength we had come, where we were located and how we were deployed.

As the dust and smoke of our assault settled down we saw, to our consternation, a number of dismounted infantry soldier scurrying about in the half-light. For one dreadful moment we thought that we might perhaps have over-run positions held by own troops, but we soon discovered that this was enemy infantry, and that we had charged slap into the middle of a defended area held by 11Baluch. We were in a rather precarious situation and, had the enemy retained his nerve, he could have inflicted some considerable damage to our tanks, without our assault, perhaps not aware that their positions had be over-run, or perhaps out of fear, had stayed put in their bunkers. These troops proved to be quite a thorn in our side

when the tank battle developed later in the morning. Be that as it may, by launching this night assault, we had tried a rather daring and unorthodox gambit, and it paid us good dividends.

By the time we completed securing of the Ghazipur Reserve forest, it was getting onto first light. The misty dawn of winter morning crept slowly over the horizon and we could now take our bearings and get a general idea of the terrain in front. Apart for sporadic shelling, the early hours of the morning passed off without any incident. We were beginning to wonder why the enemy was taking so long to react when at about 0830hrs a salvo of smoke screen in front of our tank positions in the Ghazipur Reserve Forest. The enemy's intentions were quite apparent; as the area ahead of this forest was fairly open and dominated by our fire, he was obviously using this smoke to screen his advance, thus enabling him to close up, unobserved, without positions. We soon heard (but could not yet see) enemy tanks moving up to what must have been previously selected fire positions in and armoured Ghazipur village, which was directly opposite us, and in the sugarcane fields surrounding this village. The Commandant immediately alerted the Regiment for battle. Our tanks had been told to remain closed down to avoid casualties from enemy artillery shelling; they were now ordered to open up. Fortunately for us there were low sand dunes in this area which provided good fire positions. Our tanks moved into suitable fire positions and waited expectantly for the enemy tanks to appear out of the smoke. But the enemy tanks halted 600 to 800 meters from our positions and as the smoke screen lifted, they opened up with a fusillade of fire. The tank versus tank battle, which we had been seeking for so long, was at last on, and the Ghazipur Reserve Forest reverberated to the thunder of the Centurion 20 pounders as our tanks began spotting the enemy and engaging him. In a matter of minutes the whole area was enshrouded in the dust, smoke and debris of a tank battle. In this initial fire fight two to three of our tanks received direct hits and one of them, in which Captain Saigal the artillery OP Officer was mounted, brewed up. Not being a tank-man Signal had positioned his tank in a rather obvious and exposed place. This tank was close to the Commandant's tank and the Commandant seeing Signal's exposed position, but he failed to carry out these instructions. Consequently, this tank was one of the first to be hit. What made matters worse was that saigal had failed to heed the commandant orders to open up and so when the tank brewed up, the crew got trapped inside the tank. The driver was the only member of the crew who managed to escape with minor injuries, as he scrambled out through the driver's hatch. The remaining crew which, apart from Captain Saigal, included LD Pritam Singh, (Gunner) and Sowar Tilok Singh (Operator) burnt up with the tank. Pritam Singh the gunner somehow managed to scramble out through the driver's hatch, but he was already enveloped in flame and collapsed next to his tank and died. This was the first casualty of it's kind in this war and the horror of being brewed up in a tank, which we had been reading about so far in books only, now became a ghastly reality. It left an indelible impression on all those who witnessed this tragic incident.

At this stage one of the tanks on the Eastern flank of C Squadron, commanded by Daffadar Joga Singh was hit by an RCL gun Joga was wounded but the rest of the crew escaped with minor injuries. This NCO, in spite of his wounds, had the presence of mind to dash up to the commandant's tank and inform him that the enemy was developing an attack from the exposed right flank of C Squadron, from the general direction of village Lalial. This was disturbing news, because almost all the tanks of C Squadron, including the two troops of B

Squadron, were now fully engaged in a fire fight with the enemy tanks deployed in and around Ghazipur village and no immediate reserve were available to counter this threat. Nevertheless, the Commandant moved his tank to this flank in order to assess the situation. He soon discovered that remnants of 11dBaluch who by virtue of being located to one flank of the Regimental assault had escaped destruction the night before, had now come to life and were engaging our tanks from this flank. Soon after Joga Singh became a casualty, a report came over the radio that another crew commander, LD Tirllok Singh, had also been wounded by a burst of machine gun fire directed from the same general area. This pocket of enemy resistance proved to be a rather nasty thorn in our side as they had managed to remain undetected and had thereby succeeded in inflicting a number of casualties to our personnel and tanks, when our tanks had been frontally engaged by the enemy. However, now that they had been located, a few well placed shots from 'Kooshab' the Commandant's tank flushed them out; two RCL guns were destroyed and a number of men killed. One JCO and five to six men of 11 Baluch surrendered. This JCO had been wounded, and when he came forward to surrender, he brought along a line bedding (a length of rope issued to troops to tie their bedding). His hands were tied behind his back and he surrendered. This JCO had been wounded, and when he came forward to surrender, he brought along a line bedding (a length of rope issued to troops to tie their bedding). His hands were tied behind his back and he surrendered. This JCO had been wounded, and when he came forward to surrender, he brought along a line bedding (a length of rope issued to troops to tie their bedding). His hands were tied behind his back with this line bedding and he was secured to the engine deck of 'Kooshab' where he remained all morning. Later, when there was a lull in the fighting, he was given a mug of tea and sent back to the POW collection point. He had watched the battle with growing awe and wonder and when leaving, he saluted the Commandant and remarked, "Aaj ki ladai se sabut hogaya hai ki badi taakeat se kabhi bhi takkar nahi leni chahie" (Today's battle has proved that one should never fight a strong power). Soon after, Lieutenant Colonel T.P Singh, CO 18Raj Rif, was asked to carry out a sweep of the area. He cleared the entire forest area with his men and deployed his infantry to cover the flanks of our position. We now had a secure base and could devote our entire attention to fighting the enemy tanks.

The fire fight grew in intensity as more enemy tanks moved up and joined in the battle. However, our gunners proved their superiority over the enemy and by about 1100hrs, the fields in front were littered with burning enemy Patton tanks, spewing dense columns of billowing black smoke which obscured the horizon from end to end. Of course, we did not escape unscathed. Apart from the casualties mentioned earlier, the tank, after smoking ominously for a few minutes, subsided back to normal and did not brew up; the crew also, apart from minor injuries to the driver, escaped unscathed. Ravi and his crew, however, were not so lucky. Their tank brewed up and though the turret crew managed to abandon the tank the driver, Sowar Zile Singh was badly injured and was trapped inside the burning tank. Ravi Deol organized a rather daring rescue operation. One of the crew, Sowar Pratap Singh, leapt into the burning turret of the tank and, disregarding the fact that the tank might explode any minute, he reached out through the turret and opened the driver's hatch from within. At the same time Ravi Deol and ALD Lal Chand jumped onto the front glacis plate, opened the driver's hatch cover and extricated Sowar Zila Singh from the driver's compartment. The risks that they were running can be gauged from the fact that the entire area was under heavy shelling, whilst at the same time the enemy tanks were putting down a heavy volume of machine gun fire in order to kill our tank crews trying to escape from the burning tanks. Just

as this brave crew evacuated Sowar Zile Singh Sowar crews trying to escape from the burning tanks. Just as this brave crew evacuated Sowar Zile Singh Sowar crews trying to escape from the burning tanks. Just as this brave crew evacuated Sowar Zile Singh Sowar crews trying to escape from the burning tanks. Just as this brave crew evacuated Sowar Zila Singh to the rear of the tank, a shell landed close by; ALD sLal Chand was killed on the spot, sowar Zila Singh wounded again this time mortally, and Sowar Pratap Singh, one of our star basketball players, received severe wounds from shell splinters which embedded themselves all over his body. He recovered from his wounds, but his basketball career was brought to an abrupt end as he developed a permanent disability in his right arm.

It would be necessary and relevant for the account that follows, to go back a little in time. At the time of alerting the Regiment for battle, the Commandant positioned "Kooshab" well up in the firing line, so that he would be able to effectively monitor and control the battle that was about to begin, as also be able to do his share of the fighting. For, in a tank battle as in polo, no team can afford to allow a player to keep out of the game. However, when "Kooshab's" gun was ordered to be brought into action, the round got stuck as the breech would not close. 'Davy' Kumar who as Intelligence Officer was also doing duty as gunner, did not know enough about the gun mechanism to set it right, while Commandant was too busy fighting the battle to attend to this problem. Just then Daffadar Dali Singh, a top gunner of C Squadron ran past. His tank had broken down and he was looking for another tank to get into. The Commandant promptly commandeered him as his gunner. Dalip soon located the defect-the hand-set of an AN/PRC radio which was tied on top of the tank as a stand by communications means, had got stuck between the breech ring and the mantled, thus preventing the gun from running out fully, which in turn prevented the breech from closing. The only remedy was to somehow pull back the gun. In order to effect this, the Commandant turned 'Kooshab' to the left and told the driver to advance, reaming the gun into the tank on the left. This pushed the gun back, the hand-set was quickly removed, but once again the breech would not close. It transpired that though the hand-set had been removed, but once again the breech would not close. It transpired that though the hand-set had been removed the lead connecting the hand-set to the radio was still stuck there. Singh o the whole complex maneuver had to be repeated. But by now the wracking business, moving a tank slowly, broad side on the enemy, and ramming the gun into the next tank, while enemy tanks were firing at us from ranges of 600-800 meters. The obstruction was finally cleared, without us collecting a hit, and 'Kooshab' got back into the fight.

Soon we had knocked out all the tanks visible to us and were looking around for more targets when first Ravi Deol's tank got shot up and then AJA'Singh Tank was hit. These tanks were parked immediately to the right of "Kooshab" the tank immediately to the left commanded by Captain Saigal, had already been knocked out early in the battle. So now "Kooshab" was the target. But try as we might, we could not locate the enemy tanks which were inflicting all this damage. Ajai in fact insisted that the Commandant pull back as he was now in a rather exposed position, but the Commandant reassured him, saying that if he tried to pull back at this stage, he was sure to be hit, whereas if he stayed where he was, there was a good chance of locating and destroying the tanks that were inflicting all these casualties. This is where Dalip's experience and expertise as a gunner came in. Searching the area in front, he suddenly shouted, "Who raha Sahaib!" (There he is, Sir). He had located the enemy tank by the barrel of the Ack Ack machine gun, the tip of which protruded just above the

dense sugarcane crop behind which the tank was hiding. Immediately by a three round technique, was fired into the center of where it was surmised that the tank ought to be located. To our joy and satisfaction, as the dust of our rapid fire lifted, we saw a cloud of smoke billowing up from the destroyed enemy tank. While this engagement was on, the Commandant spotted the flash of a tank gun coming from a window of one of the houses of Ghazipur village, This enemy tank had driven right into one of the houses and sheltering behind the wall, was firing from the deep shadow of the room, thus making itself virtually invisible, except when it fired. Fortunately, the Comdt happened to be scanning that area when it fired and so the flash was picked up. Using the RCP sight, he laid the gun onto the window from where the flash had come and ordered a similar 'three round technique' to be fired. Once again a mushrooming ball of fire and smoke announced that this tank too had been hit. So we had the satisfaction of having avenged the destruction of Ajai's and Ravi's tanks and the credit for this goes to the excellent gunnery of Daffadar Dalip Singh .

When this fight was going on Amarjit Bal, who had been sent to Jarpal, reported a heavy build up of enemy armour opposite his sector and as he had only two troops with him, he requested for reinforcements. As the other two troops of B Squadron, under D.K.Sharma and Garewal, were fully engaged in battle in the Ghazipur RF area, the Commandant called up Major Man Singh (menu) but he was not available on the radio, as he had gone to the RAP with a casualty. So Captain V Malhotra (Mallu), Second-in-Command A Squadron. Was ordered to reinforce the Jarpal position along with two troops of tanks from A Squadron. He immediately took off, followed by Number 3 Troop under Avtar Ahlawat and Number 4 Troop under Arun Khetarpal. As these tanks approached village Lohal, they came under RCL gun and machine gun fire. This again came as a surprise because, as per plan of attack of 47 Infantry Brigade, this entire area was to have been cleared by our infantry. However, there reinforcement by these tanks was no time to lose as a major threat building opposite Jarpal and timely reinforcement by these tanks was vital if the enemy attack against this sector was to be held. Conscious of this fact, the tank commander of A Squadron dug their spurs into the flanks of their fact, the tank with guns blazing, they charged headlong towards the enemy position at Lahore, over rather open and exposed terrain. If the enemy had retained his cool, he could have inflicted damaging casualties on these tanks. However, the enemy was obviously rattled by the audacity of these tank men and they managed to get off rather lightly. The only casualty of this daring attack was Risaldar Sagat Singh. He was a very promising JCO and one of our finest tank commander. He had been appointed as Arun's troop JCO so that he could look after this youngster who had arrived raw from the Academy and who had not even done his Young Officers Course. During this wild charge Sagat received a burst of machine gun fire full in the face and chest, but even while dying, his last thoughts were for his young troop leader . When his crew saw their commander suddenly collapse they were unnerved and at a loss about what to do. Sagat, however , in what must have been his last words, told them not to bother about him but to carry on and support Khetarpal Sahib who was rushing headlong onto enemy, without any other support . These Cavalries reined up their charges on the enemy bunkers, leaped off their tanks and at pistol points, got the enemy out of their defended emplacements. The enemy must have been badly rattled because Mallu, when he got off his tank, did not even have a pistol – he merely pointed his fingers at them and they timidly threw down their weapons and came out with their hands up. These prisoners were trussed up and dumped on the engine decks of the tanks and were handed over to the infantry while passing through the 13 Grenadiers

position. These two troops of A Squadron, with the three officers in the lead, soon burst out of the grove South of Jarpal, just in time to see some enemy tanks pulling back after an initial probing attack. Carried away by the wild enthusiasm of their charge they continued in their headlong rush and started chasing the withdrawing enemy armour, destroying a couple of their tanks in the process. At this stage Amarjit Bal contacted them on the radio and told them to halt immediately, as they had already gone beyond the position held by B Squadron. Mallu promptly replied to say that enemy POWs had revealed that the enemy tanks were located in around village Pionwali, and that was advancing to make contact with these tanks in that location. Finally the Commandant had to intervene and order Mallu to fall back in line with the tanks of B Squadron, which were in position North East of Jarpal. These tanks of A Squadron, had barely managed to get into fire positions of sorts, when the main enemy tank attack developed. Whereas the other tanks had managed to find some cover, the three tanks commanded by Mallu, Avtar and Arun were in the open; they were promptly spotted by the enemy and the full weight of the enemy fire was directed against them.

It would be pertinent at this stage to give the enemy picture as were perceived it at that time. Pak 8 Armoured Brigade, which was the enemy's Corps reserve in this sector, comprised 13 Lancers, 31 Cavalry. Our information was that 27 Cavalry was located in the Shakargarh Sector, 8 Armoured Brigder, less 27 Cavalry was located in the Zafarwal Sector. While drawing up the Regiment plan of battle, we had anticipated that any lodgement establishment by us across the Basantar Nullah, would invite a deliberate counter attack by the enemy's 8 Armoured Brigade, with a view of eliminating this lodgement. This anticipation proved corret.

The enemy had been informed by his stay-behind parties that a regiment worth of tanks had taken up position in the Ghazipur Reserve Forest, while only six to seven tanks were deployed in the Jarpal area. Whereas this information about Jarpal was correct, the informer had erred about Ghazipur. As the tanks and APCs had moved in at night, the enemy Artillery OP Officer who had remained hidden in Saraj Chak had obviously mistaken the APCs of 18 Raj Rif for tanks and had hence reported the presence of an entire Regiment in the Reserve Forest. Based on this information, the enemy plan of attack, as it appeared to us from the pattern of his counter-attack, was to contact the Regiment in the Ghazipur Reserve Forest, and tie it down frontally, by fire. Once this was achived, the Barapind and Jarpal, and destroy the tanks in the Ghazipur RF, by engaging them from the rear. This is what we thought at that time, but now that the full facts are known to us, it is evident that we gave the enemy commander far more credit than he deserved. The Pak account of the counter-attack by their 8 Armoured Brigade was published in the Pakistan Army Journal and relevant extracts from this article have been included towards the end of this narration. However, the account that follows of the battle of Basantar Brigade-head, and the action taken at each level in the Regiment during this battle, must be related to the foregoing appreciated enemy plan of action.

The massed attack by enemy armour against the Jarpal Position appeared to indicate that an entire armoured regiment, 13 Lancers, had swung round our positions in the Ghazipur RF and launched an assault on Jarpal. A fast and furious tank versus tank action developed. The burnt of this fighting was being borne by Mallu, Avtar and Arun as the enemy had selected the sector held by them for their break through. These three officers began playing havoc

with the attacking tanks and the attack came to a shuddering halt as the enemy tanks recoiled from the devastating fire that was mowing them down. Approximately 10 enemy tanks were knocked out and the balance withdrew to their starting positions.

13 Lancers were ordered to attack a second time but, (as told to us by officers of 13 Lancers after the cease fire) the tank crews were badly shaken by the heavy casualties that they had sustained in the earlier attack and there was a marked reluctance on their part to go in again. Sensing that the men were demoralized, Major Nissar, the Squadron Commander of the leading squadron of 13 Lancers, told his men that he and his officer troop leaders would lead the next attack personally. He exhorted them to put in every thing they had into this attack as it was going to be a 'now or never' action. He thus rallied his squadron once again and led by their officers, the enemy tanks rolled forward into the attack. This time they drove home the attack with great vigour and gallant determination. In the fire fight that followed, a large number of enemy tanks were knocked out. Just then Avtar's tank was hit and he himself was seriously wounded. His driver pulled the tank back under cover and Avtar was evacuated to the RAP. Soon after, Mallu's tank gun developed a mechanical defect and became inoperative. Mallu came on the air and requested permission to pull back and repair it. Sensing that any rearward movement at this stage- when the enemy was building up inexorable – might cause panic, the Commandant ordered Mallu to stay on where he was even with a defective gun. He then sent out a net call, ordering that: "All tanks will fight it out from where they were; no tank will move back even an inch".

Arun was now the sole contender left in this vital sector of the battlefield. His tank had also been hit but the first shot had luckily recoiled off. Now his tank received a second hit and caught fire. Mallu, who had observed this ordered Arun to abandon his tank: Amarjit sent a similar message. However, realising the critical nature of the situation and also the fact that he was the sole survivor in that sector, who was in a position to prevent an enemy breakthrough, he replied, "Sir, my gun is still functioning and I will get the remaining lot". When Mallu insisted that Arun either abandon his tank or pull back, Arun switched off his set. The driver, Prayag Singh, also remonstrated with Arun, saying that it would take them only a few minutes to pull back under cover, put out the fire, and then rejoin battle again. Arun told him, "Nahin Prayag Singh. Tumhen CO sahib ka transmission nahin suna? Koi bhi tank ek inch bhi piche nahin hatega" (No Prayag Singh. Did you not hear the CO's transmission? No tank will pull back even an inch).

When this second tank attack developed against Jarpal, with no further tank movement opposite Ghazipur RF, the Commandant appreciated that the enemy was attempting to swing into the rear of the Ghazipur RF by a flanking attack through Jarpal. He therefore ordered Major Man Singh (Meemu) to build up with the balance of A Squadron onto the positions occupied by Mallu and the two troops of A Squadron sent earlier. Consequently, Meemu was well on the way to reinforcing this sector, but till he arrived, Arun realized that he would have to fend off the attack on his own. Though most of the tanks of Nissar's Squadron had by now been destroyed, four to five still survived, including Nissar's own tank, and these now prepared to make a final rush in order to break through. As this attack developed, Arun systematically began knocking them out, one by one. At one stage it appeared that, in spite of the valour of this young officer, sheer weight of number might prevail; but he eventually managed to get the last tank that Arun shot, which happened to be

Nissar's tank, was, was barely 75 meters from his own position. It was at this stage, at the peak of his glory and achievement, that his tank sustained fourth and fatal hit. This shot penetrated through the turret port hole, killed Sowar Nand Singh the operator, mortally wounded Arun and severely wounded the gunner, ALD Nathu Singh. At this juncture, the driver, Sowar Prayag Singh, showed great presence of mind; in spite of the heat and fury of the battle ranging around him, and the danger to which he was exposed, he evacuated ALD Nathu Singh onto another tank of his Squadron which had by now moved up alongside. In this process he was wounded by a burst of machine gun fire in his leg, but disregarding his injury, he reversed his burning tank behind cover and put out the fire. He then examined Arun and found that he was still alive. Arun asked for some water to drink. Thinking that cold water might do him harm (it was an intensely cold morning), Prayag began to boil some tea in the electric stove of the tank. In the meantime, he called out to Naib Risaldar Hamir Singh of his Squadron, whose tank had taken up position nearby, and with his assistance started to extricate Arun from the tank, but Arun collapsed and died. This young officer, with barely six months service in the Regiment, by a deliberate decision to fight on even when told to evacuate his burning tank, had sacrificed his young life for the glory of Regiment and of the Profession of Arms. He showed supreme defiance of the enemy, and more than made up by his courage and determination what he lacked in experience. For this action, he was awarded the country's highest decoration for valour, the Param Vir Chakra.

Once Arun's tank had pulled back, Mallu's tank-with a defective gun-was the only tank left in that area. He soon reported that the enemy was preparing to launch yet another attack and, because of his defective gun, there was little he could do to stop them. However, the balance of A Squadron, under Major Man Singh, had by now built up in this sector. With the whole of A Squadron and two troops B Squadron under Amarjit Bal now deployed in and around Jarpal, the danger of an enemy break through from this direction had been finally averted. An incident worth recording is the action of Naib Risaldar Dayanand of B Squadron. He heard Mallu's transmission on the Regimental net and, realizing the predicament Mallu was in, he moved his tank on his own initiative, came up alongside Mallu and told him over the Radio, "Don't worry Sahib, I have come up next to you now". Mallu told us later of the intense sense of relief that this message brought him. "I could have kissed Dayanand, were he within easy reach", he said. This spontaneous reaction on the part of Dayanand, to come to the support of Mallu, was by itself a commendable act; but what made it particularly noteworthy was the subsequent action fought by Dayanand and his crew. In moving up, he had to perforce locate himself in the same general area where Avtar and Arun had previously been positioned. As already brought out, this area was rather exposed to enemy fire and, what is more, the enemy had already ranged onto it. As a result, in the course of the subsequent day's battle, Dayanand's tank received four direct hits, of which two were clear penetrations. Twice the tank caught fire, but the crew, after putting out the fire, doggedly continued to fight the tank. Miraculous as it may appear, the crew escaped unscathed, except for minor burn injuries. This crew provided an outstanding example of courage and devotion to duty.

By about 1120 hours on that eventful day the enemy attack petered out and the situation, which had appeared critical, and which had hung in the balance for three agonizing hours during the fast changing fortunes of a mobile battle, was at last stabilized. Everyone up the line heaved an audible sigh of relief. The enemy counter attacked twice again that day but his

back had been broken in the earlier battles and he had lost the will to fight. As a result these attacks were easily beaten back, with hardly any loss to ourselves. At the end of the day's battle a total of 48 enemy tanks were counted destroyed on the battlefield; 30 of these opposite the Jarpal Sector and 18 opposite the Ghazipur Reserve Forest Sector. The enemy's 13 Lancers, one of their oldest and proudest regiments, had been decimated and their 31 Cavalry had received a crippling blow.

That night the Regiment pulled back for replenishment to Saraj Chak, leaving one troop of B Squadron under Naib Risaldar Umrao Singh, in the 13 Grenadiers position at Jarpal to provide tank support to the infantry. For the same purpose, two troops of C Squadron under Ravi Deol, were also deployed that night, alongside 18 Raja Rif, in the Ghazipur Reserve Forest.

After two days and two nights of almost continuous fighting, every one was dogtired and we were hoping to avail a few hours replenishing our tanks. But this was not to be. Unknown to us, the enemy had left behind an artillery Observation Post (OP) party at Saraj Chak. These resolute and determined men concealed themselves in the labyrinthine defences of Saraj Chak and, as soon as the Regiment moved into harbour for replenishment, they started subjecting us to the most intense shelling. Under these circumstances, it is a wonder how the replenishment was carried out. The three squadron senior JCOs, Risaldars Rachpal Singh (A Squadron), Balbir Singh (B Squadron) and Jagir Singh (C Squadron), who were organizing the replenishment of their respective squadrons, adopted a rather ingenious procedure: a lookout man kept a watch in the direction of Zafarwal, where the enemy guns were deployed; the moment he saw the gun flashes, he called out a warning and every one dived under the tanks. Immediately after the shells burst around them, they dashed out and continued replenishing. The enemy continued shelling us, without respite, throughout the night. This shelling reached a crescendo in the early hours of the morning, as we prepared to move out of harbour. Though we had been subjected to very heavy shelling all these days, it was nothing compared to what we had to endure now; a veritable deluge of artillery shells rained down upon us and the very earth shook and trembled under the impact and fury of this shelling. Those of us who have gone through this experience can now visualize to some extent what the tremendous artillery bombardments of the first World War must have been. It is indeed miraculous that, in spite of this tornado of fire directed at us, we had only one serious casualty; Sowar Ram Niwas Dhankar, of B Squadron, was killed by a shell exploding next to him, while he was replenishing one of the tanks. This enemy OP party was captured by us the next morning, though the OP Officer, a Major of the Pakistani Artillery, managed to get away earlier under the cover of darkness. As a point of interest, this OP Party was captured in a bunker, which was directly adjacent to another bunker in which the Commandant had spent the night; both had been blissfully ignorant of the prize that lay next door.

Amrik Virk, who had been desperately trying to come to the Regiment ever since Moti became a casualty, finally got General K. K. Singh to intercede on his behalf, and he was given permission to join up with the Regiment. He joined the Regiment at Saraj Chak, on the evening of 16 December, and was given command of C Squadron. Ajai, who had been commanding the Squadron so far, now reverted to his appointment as 2IC.

On the evening of 16 December, 4 Horse was also inducted into the Bridge-head. There were now six major units in the Brigade-head; the three infantry battalions of 47 Infantry Brigade and two armoured regiments and the mechanized Infantry battalion of 16 Independent Armoured Brigade, but surprisingly no senior officer of the rank of brigadier and above had ventured to come forward into the Bridge-head to either issue orders, or to co-ordinate the deployment and actions of these six major units, So it was left to the Cos of these units to naturally sort out these matters. Major Govind Singh (Gomji) 2IC 4 Horse, had brought his Regiment up. So Gomji and the Commandant got together and worked out the deployment of their two Regiments. It was decided that 4 Horse would take over the Jarpal Sector, whilst the Poona Horse would deploy in the Ghazipur RF Sector. As 4 Horse had been newly inducted into the area, it was further decided that a tank troop of Poona Horse under Naib Risaldar Umrao Singh would remain with 13 Grenadiers during night 16/17 December and would rejoin the Regiment on the morning of 17 December, when 4 Horse took over the Jarpal Sector.

At approximately 0600 hours on the morning of 17 December the enemy, in a rather desperate gambit, launched a counter-attack against our Jarpal defences, employing the 39 Frontier Force for this purpose. This attack proved suicidal because this Battalion, without any tank support, walked slap into the machine guns of our infantry and of the tank troop of the Regiment under Naib Risaldar Umrao Singh. It was literally a massacre. A total of 80 enemy troops were killed; these included the Commanding Officer, the Second-in-Command and the Adjutant of the Battalion, who had all been waling together and were found dead, all in a heap. Thereafter, the day of 17 December passed off quite uneventfully, except for intense artillery fire and air attacks on our tank positions. When we found the enemy loath to fight, we tried to draw out his armour for another battle by shooting up his infantry positions at Lalial, and on the Supwal ditch, we inflicted heavy punishment on their infantry, killing a very large number of men of 11 Baluch, who were holding these positions. In spite of this, the enemy armour did not react. This was a sore disappointment for Major Amrik Virk who, having missed the battle on 16 December, was itching for a fight.

As evening drew near, and the time for the ceasefire approached, both sides indulged in an artillery duel and a heavy rain of artillery shells began bombarding our positions. Suddenly, at 2000 hours on 17 December, the guns ceased firing and an eerie silence descended on the battlefield. Gingerly, one by one, tank men and infantry men began poking their heads out and breathing more freely. The ceasefire had come into effect, thus bringing to an end this short and sharp 14- day war between India and Pakistan.

2 Lt Arun Khetarpal, PVC-1971

Second Lieutenant Arun Khetarpal

....Determination, spirit and raw courage is insurmountable to any form of superiority... the young officer proved it beyond doubt...

The battle of Basantar was a battle of decision fought between India and Pakistan in 1971 where one time associates fought face to face as part of their respective armies. At the battle of Koregaum both the units which fought hand in hand from the Indian side; 3 Grenadiers and Poona Horse in 1818 once again were together in this battle of 1971, fighting against 13 Lancers Pakistan Army, which was part of the Bombay Presidency along with the other two units in 1818. A rare similarity seldom seen in history, but they fought for their respective without any prejudice but for a task at hand so important to each other.

A brief Family Background and Early Years

Second Lieutenant Arun came from a family with long tradition of service in the army. His great – great – grandfather had served in the Sixth Army and fought against the British at the battle of Chalianwala, in 1848. His grand father served in the army during the First World War, from 1917-1919, before joining the Punjab Civil Service. Arun's father Brigadier (Retired) ML Khetarpal served in the Corps of Engineers.

Arun was born at Poona on 14 October 1950. His father, then Lieutenant Colonel Khetarpal was posted as an instructor at the College of Military Engineering, Kirkee. His mother Mrs. Maheshwari Khetarpal came from a distinguished Tandon family of Hardoi, in Uttar Pradesh. In 1962 Arun joined Lawrence School, Sanawar as a boarder and stayed on till he completed Senior Cambridge. While at school he distinguished himself both in academic studies and in sports. He also played the clarinet in the school band.

In 1966 he left school and joined the National Defence, at Khadakwasla in 1967. he was an excellent sportsman and excelled in swimming, golf, athletics and riding. He had proficiency in swimming and gold in particular. In 1970 he moved to Indian Military Academy, Dehradun and appointed a Senior Under Officer. He passed out from IMA on 13 June 1971 and joined Poona Horse in June 1971.

Arun, a handsome young officer with pleasant personality joined the unit, an old armoured unit dating back to 19th century. His contemporaries Brigadier Brijendra Singh recalls the impressions of this young officer as a person with a strong urge to excel in whatever task entrusted on him. He took his task very seriously and took pride in maintaining the tank himself. Both went for their Young Officers course together but due to the mobilization of 1971 the course was cancelled and had to return to prepare for war ahead the changed the destiny for young Arun; a brave soldier who stood like an insurmountable rock between victory and failure of 13 Lancers of Pakistan Army, in the Battle of 'Bara Pind' as Pakistan refers to and Battle of Basantar as 17 HORSE (Poona Horse) recounts. The country recognized his construction and awarded him the Param Vir Chakra, the highest decoration on the face of the enemy.

The Final Countdown

Poona Horse started their preparation for war in full swing and nothing seemed to eclipse their hard preparation and long awaited test of the battle. Arun had prepared very well in the Centurion tanks and achieved firing range as per a prescribed technique in 25-30 seconds flat. In the miniature firing range invariably Arun's crew would always be first, so well did he train himself and his troop.

It was 16 December 1971 and the first squadron had inducted into the brigade head in the early hours of the morning around Suraj Chak a Pakistan village. All of a sudden a radio transmission was received from the Commandant asking to move two troops of tank 9 six tanks) to Jarpal and take up position with another squadron (14 tanks) already in place. As Arun moved he was engaged by recoil less guns of the Pakistani army from well dug out gun emplacements. He managed to silence them and captured a few Prisoner of War. In enthusiasm he had crossed the line of tanks holding jarpal and was heading for the Bara Pind location when he was asked to halt. It was all quite on all fronts except that Arun was busy taking pot shots at the enemy bunkers, when the tree line in front moved and out came a horde of toy like M-48 Pakistani tanks of 13 Lancers and moved towards where Arun was. He shouted "here they come" and the fight the squadron was looking forward to came true.

The squadron commander immediately asked for reinforcement as the Pakistani armour was superior in strength and was going for a masive counterattack to Jarpal, in the Shakargarh Sector. On hearing this transmission Arun who was part of a different squadron surged forward with his troop to assist the other squadron. En route while crossing Basantar River he came across stiff resistance from enemy guns which were still holding out. He knew time was of paramount importance and without waiting attacked the positions with his armour and overran the positions, loosing one of his tank commanders in this battle.

He managed to reach the battle point of Jarpal in the nick of time when the enemy tanks were withdrawing after the assault on the squadron. In enthusiasm of battle and the impetus of his own headlong dash that he started chasing the retreating tanks and even managed to shoot one of them. Soon thereafter the enemy reformed itself and attacked the sector being held by Arun and his troops. A fierce tank battle ensued : the enemy lost 10 tanks of which the officer himself destroyed 4. He was injured very badly after his tank was hit almost three time. He was asked to abandon his tank but he realized the gravity of the situation and wanted to stop the enemy who was advancing Inspite of being badly decimated. He gallantly fought on and destroyed another tank but could not last the fourth hit on his tank and resulted death of the gallant officer.

Arun was dead but he had, by his intrepid valor saved the day; the enemy was denied the breakthrough he was so desperately seeking. Not one enemy tank could get through the insurmountable position of 17 Horse created by this intrepid valor on the face of the enemy, which till date is a source of inspiration for 17 Horse, already a Param Vir Chakra unit from the 1965 war where their Commandant led the way.

Citation: **Second Lieutenant Arun Khetarpal**

POONA HORSE (IC-25067)

On 16 December 1971, the Squadron Commander of 'B' Squadron, the Poona Horse asked for reinforcement as the Pakistani Armour which was superior in strength, counter attacked at Jarpal, in the Shakargarh Sector. On hearing this transmission, Second Lieutenant Arun Khetarpal who was in 'A' Squadron, voluntarily moved along with his troop, to assist the other squadron. En route, while crossing the Basantar River, Second Lieutenant Arun Khetarpal and his troop came under fire from enemy strong points and RCL gun nests that were still holding out. Time was at a premium and as critical situation was developing in the 'B' Squadron sector, Lieutenant Arun Khetarpal, threw caution to the winds and started attacking the impending enemy strong points by literally charging them, overrunning the defence works with his tanks and capturing the enemy infantry and weapon crew at pistol point. In commander of his troop was killed. Second Lieutenant Arun Khetarpal continued to attack relentlessly until all enemy opposition was overcome and he broke through towards the 'B' Squadron position, just in time to see the enemy tanks pulling back after their initial probing attack on this squadron. He was so carried away by the wild enthusiasm of battle and the impetus of his own headlong dash that he started chasing the withdrawing tanks and even managed to shoot and destroy one. Soon thereafter, the enemy reformed with a squadron of armour for a second attack and this time they selected the sector held by Second Lieutenant Arun Khetarpal and two other tanks as the points for their main effort. A fierce tank fight ensued ten enemy tanks were hit and destroyed of which Second Lieutenant Arun Khetarpal was severely wounded. He was asked to abandon his tank but he realised that the enemy though badly decimated was continuing to advance in his sector of responsibility and if he abandoned his tank the enemy would break through, he gallantly fought on and destroyed another enemy tank, At this stage his tank received a second hit which resulted in the death of this gallant officer.

Second Lieutenant Arun Khetarpal was dead but he had, by his intrepid valour saved the day; the enemy was denied the breakthrough he was so desperately seeking. Not one enemy tank got through.

Second Lieutenant Arun Khetarpal had shown the best qualities of leadership, tenacity of purpose and the will to close in with the enemy. This was an act of courage and self-sacrifice far beyond the call of duty.

The Poona Horse Ethos

The Poona Horse draws its strength, inspiration and belief from 'The Hand of Allah' and the feeling of oneness, which translates itself into what we fondly refer to as The Poona Horse Family. Men vie with each other to join this Regiment and we have built up a tradition of fourth and fifth generations serving in it. What is it that drives ordinary mortal men to greatness, to acts of great courage and sacrifice once they are within The Poona Horse fold? Besides the professionalism and name, it could be described in one word-camaraderie, A spirit of brotherhood, caring, feeling, and a belief, that should any thing happen to me, my family will be looked after. The Poona Horse is unique in that, it gives pensions and grants to the brethren of its fallen comrades from within its own resources.

The Regiment's professionalism and pride also manifests itself in throwing up, an outstanding lot of senior officers of the Army-men whom soldiers would gladly give their right arm to go to battle with, Generals, Late Tara Singh Bal, Niranjana Cheema, Khajuria, Hanut Singh, Ajai Singh, Surinder Singh, Neville Foley, Moti Dar and Vinod Saighal are household names signifying the attainment of excellence in the pursuit of arms. The Poona Horse, celebrated Kooshab and Basantar as its battle honour days every year and pays homage to its brave soldiers at The Poona Horse Memorial, spurring its man machine mix onto greater acts of glory.

Gallop into the future

In The Poona Horse, every man has a belief in his ability, pride in his Regiment and its traditions, balanced by humility and grace. We bear on our shoulders an awesome burden that of not only living upto the exacting standards of excellence, tradition, courage, valour and brotherhood attained by our forebears; but also of improving upon them and proving ourselves worthy of the privilege of being POONA HORSEMEN, We have no doubt, that with the indomitable spirit. The legendary record of the Regiment and 'The Hand of Allah' above us, We shall always live upto the motto of the Regiment RANVIR JAI SADA.