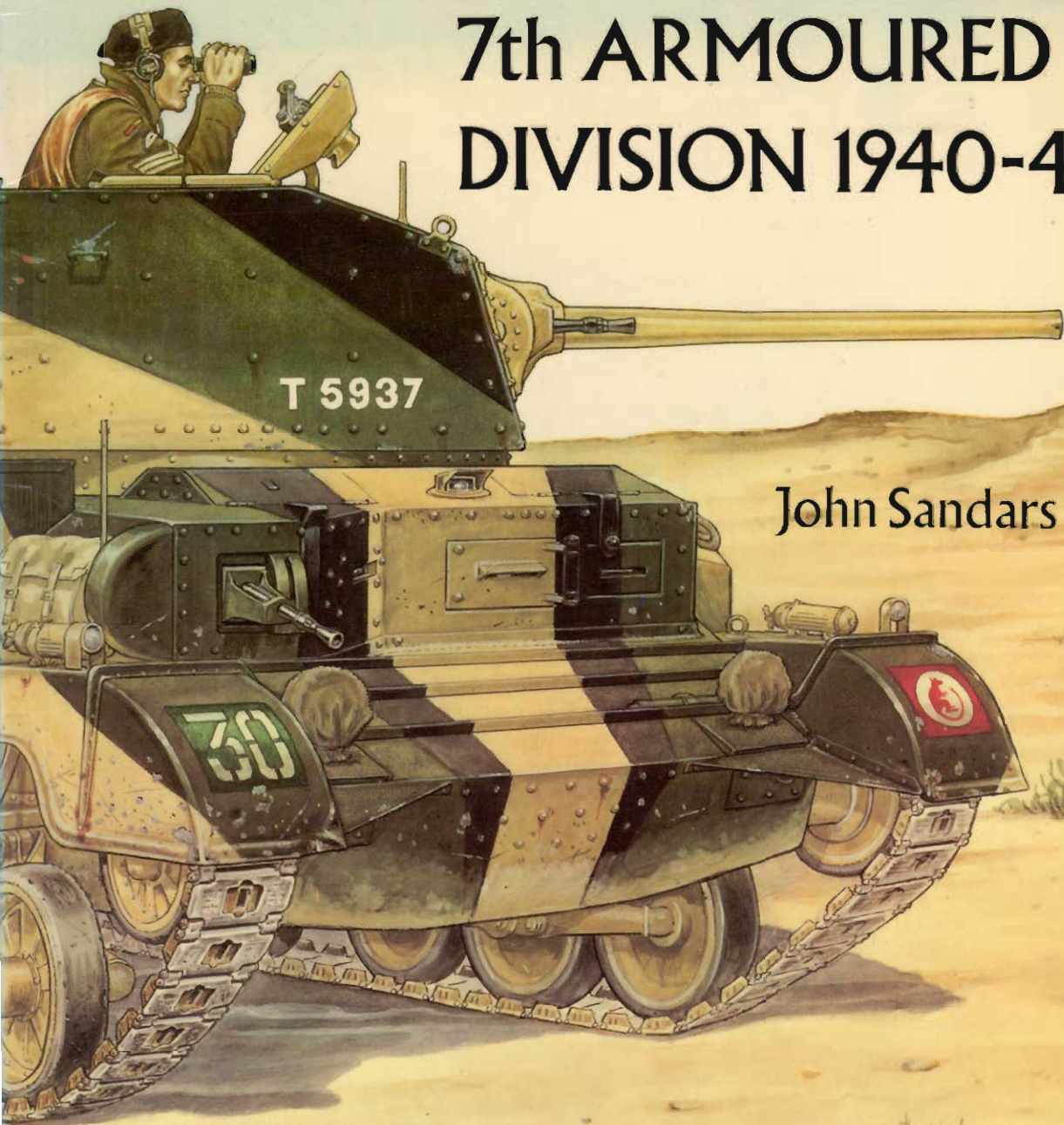


OSPREY · VANGUARD 1

British 7th ARMoured DIVISION 1940-45



John Sandars

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VANGUARD SERIES

EDITOR: MARTIN WINDROW

British
7th ARMoured
DIVISION
1940-45

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Colour plates by MIKE CHAPPELL

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The main sources consulted were: *The Desert Rats* by Maj Gen Verney, *7th Armoured Division* by Lindsay and Johnson, *The Story of the RASC 1939-45*, *Craftsmen of the Army*. The regimental histories of 3rd, 7th and 8th Hussars, 11th Hussars, 5th Dragoon Guards, 3rd & 4th CLY, 2nd RGH, The Royal Tank Regiment, The Rifle Brigade, the KRRC, and the Queens, and the Royal Artillery Commemoration Book have proved most helpful, as have *British and Commonwealth Armoured Formations* by Duncan Crow, and *Our Armoured Forces* by Martel.

Cover painting by Mike Chappell shows A10 and A9 Cruiser tanks of 6th Royal Tank Regiment, winter 1940.



1 Universal carrier of a motor battalion with Italian prisoners, late 1940; typical armament of Boys anti-tank rifle in front sponson and (covered) Bren gun on A/A mounting. These vehicles were subsequently used by carrier platoons in lorried infantry battalions, and as artillery OP vehicles, ambulances, mortar and machine-gun carriers in NW Europe. (Imperial War Museum)

Introduction

The story of 7th Armoured Division is one of almost continuous front-line service throughout six years of war: a record unequalled by any similar British formation. It is told against a background of continuous changes in composition, equipment, and organization. Units were replaced as they became depleted by casualties or were required elsewhere; better weapons were issued as they became available, and the organizational 'mix' of units was altered frequently in the light of experience, and to cater for different theatres of war.

The British Army started to experiment with mechanized formations of all arms in the late 1920s and early 1930s. By 1934 it had decided on—but not formed—two types of division: a mechanized infantry division with its own battalion of slow heavy tanks to support the foot soldiers in dismounted actions, and a mobile division with a brigade of lighter tanks: a mechanized cavalry brigade in trucks (intended to fight dismounted like dragoons

of old) and a small number of guns and sappers. The latter type of formation, which was in due course to become the armoured division of World War II, was naturally based on lessons learnt from the previous war and the ideas of current military theorists such as Fuller and Liddell Hart. As a result its role was envisaged as one of exploiting breakthroughs, turning flanks and other 'indirect' actions, rather than the assaulting of fixed defences, which task was to be left to the infantry division. At the same time, the relative invulnerability of World War I tanks, once they had got behind the narrow defended belts into the rear areas, with at best primitive anti-tank measures and few if any tanks for counter-attack, led to an overestimate of the capabilities of unaccompanied tanks and a failure to understand the need for adequate infantry and artillery in armoured formations.

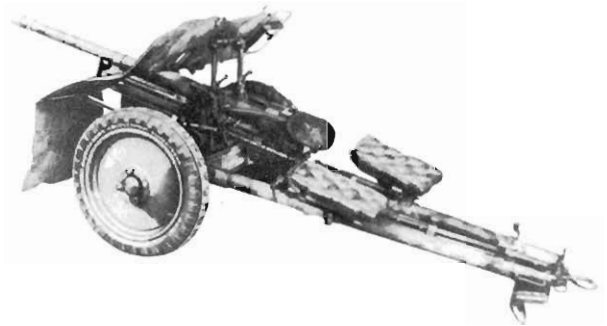
Tank design therefore split into two streams, with speed taking precedence over armour and

hitting power in vehicles destined to serve in the mobile divisions, and protection taking precedence in those ('I' tanks) for the infantry divisions. This dichotomy, which made it difficult for the two types to operate together, was to continue throughout the war even after the 'I' tanks were removed from the actual infantry divisions. This was followed by the absorption of the mechanized cavalry into the Royal Armoured Corps and their re-equipment with tanks on the eve of the war. Although at the same time special Motor Infantry battalions, mounted, unlike their mechanized counterparts, in small cross-country trucks and carriers were added to what were by then armoured divisions, the result was a very tank-heavy organization with inadequate infantry, guns, or support services. These early assumptions as to type of tank and organization were to dog 7th Armoured, among other British divisions, for much of the war.

As tanks were few, and the cavalry, apart from a couple of armoured-car regiments, was still mostly horsed in 1934, the first mobile division, which subsequently became First Armoured Division, was not in fact formed until late 1937. In the meantime the threat to Egypt posed by the Italians in Libya during the Abyssinian crisis had led to the mechanization of the Cairo Cavalry Brigade in 1935, and this was the nucleus around which 7th Armoured Division was to be formed some five years later. The brigade consisted of 11th Hussars in armoured cars, 8th Hussars in trucks, and 7th Hussars in light tanks. They originally formed the basis of the 'Matruh Mobile Force', or 'Immobile Farce', as it came to be known. Between 1935 and the Munich crisis in 1938, when it next 'stood-to' in the desert, the force had learnt much about operating there, and had been augmented by a tank regiment, a regiment of guns, and skeleton service units. Further reinforcements followed in the form of another tank regiment and a motor infantry battalion and the force was renamed 'Mobile Division Egypt'; at the same time the re-equipment of 8th Hussars with light tanks transformed the cavalry brigade into a light armoured brigade. It was during this period between the Munich crisis and the declaration of war with Germany in September 1939 that many of the drills and procedures for operating in the desert, which were to remain as dogma throughout the cam-

paign, were devised and practised under the dynamic leadership of the divisional commander, Maj Gen P. C. S. Hobart. This officer had been involved in the early armoured formation experiments in England, and was subsequently to form 79th Armoured Division, with specialized types of armour, for the Normandy invasion.

Even after the war in Europe had started there was a further period for training and reinforcement before Italy came in on the German side in June 1940. In February the division was renamed 7th Armoured and became part of 'Western Desert Force' under Lt Gen R. N. O'Connor. Maj Gen Hobart was relieved by Maj Gen M. O'Moore Creagh as divisional commander.



2 Bofors 37mm anti-tank gun—not a standard British Army weapon. A batch on their way to the Sudan were commandeered in 1940 and issued to the division, for lack of an alternative. Carried portee on 15cwt trucks, they were replaced early in 1941 by regulation 2pdrs, also porteed on 30cwt and 3 ton trucks. (Gander)

War with Italy

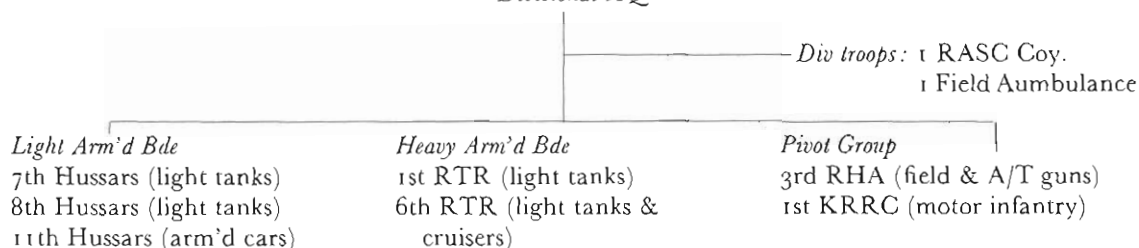
The deserts of western Egypt and Libya where the division was to fight for the next three years were aptly described by a German general as a 'tactician's dream and a quartermaster's nightmare'. Much of the area is covered by a featureless, level, gravel plateau on which movement at speed in any direction, even by wheeled vehicles, is usually possible. At two points, near Agheila and Alamein, salt marshes and an impassable depression form bottlenecks to within a few miles of the coastline. These are the only places where defences can be built that cannot be outflanked through the open desert, until the mountains and cultivated areas of western Tripolitania and Tunisia are reached. These gaps are not the only militarily

Orders of Battle 1939 and 1940

MOBILE DIVISION EGYPT

August 1939

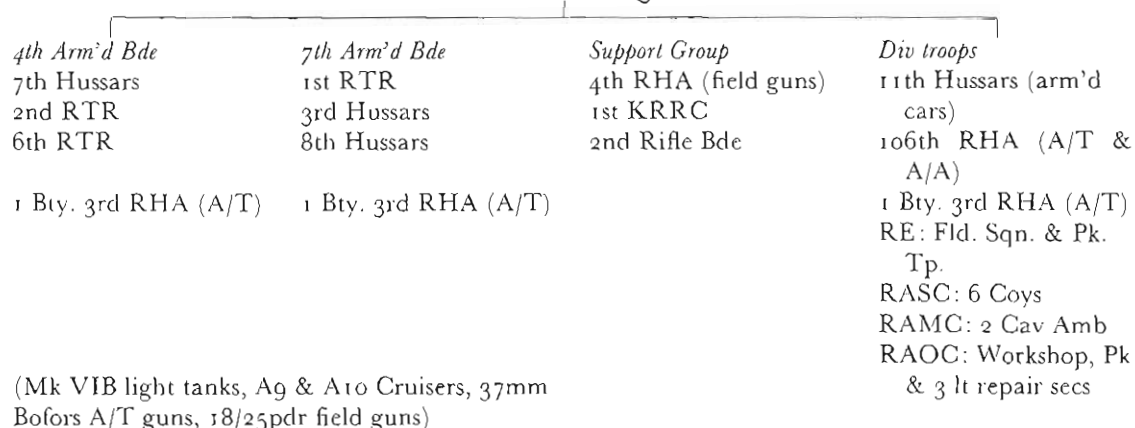
Divisional HQ



7th ARMOURED DIVISION

November 1940

Divisional HQ



significant features, however; in Egypt and Cyrenaica the level inland plateau steps down to a narrow coastal plain in a series of steep escarpments, and the points at which these peter out, south of Sidi Barrani and west of Tobruk, or where gaps enabled vehicles to pass up or down them, such as Halfaya near Sollum and Sidi Rezegh just south of Tobruk, were to be the focus of much action. In the flat desert even the low hills and ridges of the coastal plain and in the Alamein gap achieved an importance out of all proportion to their size. The single metalled coast road, along which all supplies had to travel, was to become the lifeline of both sides, linking them to their bases at

Alexandria and Tripoli and limiting their speed of advance and depth of penetration into the desert to the south. The other main features were the hilly cultivated area of the Djebel Akhdar in the Benghazi-Mechili-Derna triangle, and the barbed-wire barrier which the Italians had built along the Libyan-Egyptian frontier. It was here 'on the wire' that the division first went into action in mid-1940.

Despite their five divisions in Cyrenaica backed up by nine more in Tripolitania the Italians made no immediate attempt to invade Egypt. Instead they preferred to remain within the defended perimeters of the coastal towns, and in 'Beau Geste' forts behind the frontier, escorting convoys be-



3 Crusader Mk II of 3rd County of London Yeomanry, photographed at a moment of domestic tranquillity! The markings of 'A' Sqn, 4 Troop are just visible on the rear of the turret bin, beyond the lowered No. 9 set aerial which is here being used as a washing-line. A name ('AILSA II?') is dimly visible on the turret side, but there are no divisional or unit tactical signs. The rack of 2gal water tins, and the use of cut-down 4gal 'flimsies' as stoves, are typical, as is the tarpaulin bivouac slung from a side rail originally fitted to mount a hessian 'lorry' camouflage rig. (Sharpshooters)

tween them with tanks and trying to dominate the desert by air power alone. With 7th Armoured Division still in the process of re-equipping and the only other trained division, 4th Indian infantry, short of a brigade, as well as an acute overall shortage of artillery and motor transport, the Western Desert Force was hardly in a position to offer an effective defence, let alone to mount an attack. It therefore established itself in depth with the infantry based on the defended area of Mersa Matruh while 7th Armoured Division lay behind the frontier with a small force, usually consisting of the 11th Hussars, part of the support group, and one of the armoured regiments, right up on the wire. This force had the task of raiding into Libya to find out the enemy dispositions, to harass his garrisons and convoys, and generally to take and keep the initiative in the area, as well as giving advance warning of any moves that he might make. So effective was this policy that in the first few weeks of hostilities several hundred prisoners were taken with little loss, some of them even unaware that war had been declared.

This pressure was maintained for the next four months and led to the complete domination of the Libyan side of the frontier by the division's patrols. Not only was much useful intelligence gained about the enemy's defences and the nature of the desert (the 'going'), but quite substantial forts were captured and sacked; even cucumber patches cultivated by the Libyan troops were not immune from sudden raids by hungry riflemen or hussars in search of a change of diet! Armoured clashes also occurred in which the skilful combination of the speed of the light tanks and the hitting power of the cruisers, backed up by their own attached anti-tank guns (a combination which the Germans were to use most effectively, but which British commanders seemed to forget in later battles) led to spectacular small-scale successes. On one occasion the Rifle Brigade even engaged an Italian destroyer with Bren guns.

All this led the Italian Commander-in-Chief, Marshal Graziani, to overestimate British strength greatly, so it was not until 13 September that, under increasing pressure from Mussolini, he sent his large but poorly equipped and almost entirely unmechanized army across the frontier into Egypt. The division, with an attached battalion of Coldstream Guards and some machine-gunners, fell back as planned towards Matruh before an enemy who advanced with great caution in formations more suited to the parade ground than the battlefield, covered by heavy artillery barrages

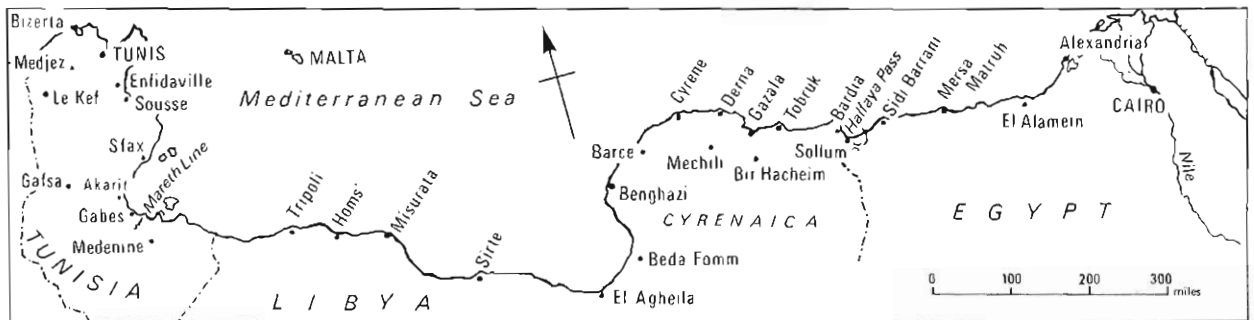
usually directed onto areas of empty desert. Delays were imposed by mines and hit-and-run attacks where possible, and some 3,500 casualties were inflicted for about 150 British losses in the first three days. Then, to the surprise of the British, the advance stopped of its own accord at Sidi Barrani, only half way from the frontier to the defences at Matruh. The Italians settled down to improve the road and build fortified camps where the escarpment ended south of Sidi Barrani; they then announced to the world that they had restored the tram services in that city (which was in fact nothing more than a collection of stone huts).

Thus began another three months of static warfare during which the division continued its harassing and reconnaissance tasks and went on building up its strength. It was during this period that the 'Jock Column', which was to become such a feature of the division's activities in quiet periods, came into being. Named after Lt Col Jock Campbell of 4th RHA, these columns consisted of a few field guns, some armoured cars and usually a company of motor infantry. Their offensive manoeuvres did much to foster British morale and to upset that of the enemy, but the material damage they could inflict was small.

By the end of November 1940 the arrival of new troops and equipment had built Western Desert Force into quite a handy little corps consisting of 7th Armoured Division; 4th Indian Infantry Division; two medium-gun and three field-gun batteries in addition to those in the divisional artilleries; 7th RTR (a battalion of the heavy Matilda infantry support tanks which were impervious to any Italian anti-tank gun) and a minimum of necessary service units. 7th Armoured Division had at last more or less caught up with the official establishment of an armoured division of that time

(it was seldom to coincide exactly with any official composition). The difference between cavalry and tank formations had disappeared, at least on paper, and the three regiments in each armoured brigade all had a mixture of light and cruiser tanks, achieved in some cases by swapping squadrons between units.

The 'lights' were by then mostly the three-man Vickers Mk VIb, a fast, generally reliable little tank which suffered from poor tracks and from being armed only with machine guns. Although it could not compete with the gun-armed Italian medium tanks M11 and M13, its speed usually kept it out of trouble; and the small number of A9 and A10 Cruisers, although obsolescent by European standards, were both faster and better-armed than the Italian mediums, while the Italian light tanks were no match for any of ours. The support group was up to strength, shortages in the KRRC having been made good by Rhodesian volunteers; but the combined AA-A/T regiment only had the little Bofors 37mm gun, carried portee on the back of a 15cwt truck, in its two A/T batteries. Even this was capable of stopping most Italian tanks at over 600 yards however, and the presence of an extra regiment of these guns, 3rd RHA, meant that batteries could be attached to the armoured brigades, and troops distributed to individual units. The 11th Hussars had also been augmented by Rhodesian troops, and were subsequently to borrow a squadron of RAF armoured cars. They still retained their 1920-24 pattern Rolls-Royces, armed only with Bren guns and A/T rifles of doubtful value, and were without wireless, but regimental and squadron HQs and troop leaders now had the roomier Morris cars which carried No. 9 sets. Units had their own first-line services such as fitters, signallers, medical officer, and usually two





4 Stuart "Honey" followed by Crusader Mk Is, late 1941, in typical desert scrub country with escarpment in background. All appear to be finished plain stone without added camouflage or markings. (Imperial War Museum)

transport and supply echelons: 'A' to carry fuel and ammunition needed in action, and 'B' to link this with the divisional services farther back and to hold vehicles such as office trucks not needed in the battle area. Divisional services were still very weak. Two of the RASC companies were borrowed from Commonwealth formations; the divisional signals were a scratch unit with very little equipment, and the workshop organization was largely static, with less than a dozen recovery vehicles in the whole division.

This was the state when the C-in-C Middle East, Gen Sir Archibald Wavell, ordered Gen O'Connor to launch a surprise attack on the Italian camps south of Sidi Barrani. Patrols of the division had discovered an unprotected gap between them through which the Indian infantry and the invincible Matildas were able to pass, undetected, to attack them from the rear at dawn on 9 December 1940, while 7th Armoured Division swept up through the desert to cut the coast road west of Sidi Barrani, which fell on the following day. This signalled the start of the British advance that was to drive the Italians right out of Cyrenaica, and during which the division was able to report the prisoners taken in acres rather than numbers. In

the next two months they cut off first Bardia and then Tobruk prior to their assault and capture by 6th Australian Division (which had replaced the Indians). On 1 January 1941 the Western Desert Force, by then well clear of the western desert of Egypt, was renamed 13 Corps. Although the advance was rapid and the enemy's tactics were often more suitable to the Napoleonic wars than to the 1940s, the division's losses from enemy action and attrition were not insignificant. The 3rd Hussars lost 13 light tanks in a matter of minutes when they bogged down in a salt marsh in the face of enemy guns east of Sollum, and other isolated rearguards and counter-attacks took their toll. By mid-January one regiment in each armoured brigade had to be dismounted to keep the remainder up to a reasonable tank strength. The farther west they went—before the coast road was cleared through Bardia and Tobruk—the more acute the supply situation became. Eventually the infantry trucks had to be pressed into service to keep the division supplied, and water was severely rationed. Food stocks were often augmented by captured Italian delicacies such as tinned tunny fish. Petrol was the main problem, made worse by the high rate of leakage from the flimsy 4-gallon tins in which it was supplied—this remained a headache until the appearance of the 'jerrican' in 1943.

By early February a depleted but highly con-

fidient 7th Armoured Division had reached Mechili, where it became known that the Italians were planning to abandon Benghazi, their last major town in Cyrenaica. At this point one of the boldest decisions of the campaign was made, and the division was ordered to move almost 150 miles at full speed across appalling country in order to cut the enemy off from escape into Tripolitania along the road past Beda Fomm. This move started on 4 February, but it soon became clear that if the division continued to move as one formation it would arrive too late. A flying column consisting of 2nd Bn Rifle Brigade, 11th Hussars, a battery of field guns and less than a dozen anti-tank guns was therefore sent on ahead with orders to block the road and hold it until the rest of the division caught up. Despite air attacks and minefields, this column of 140 vehicles reached the road south of Beda Fomm near Sidi Saleh at 14.30 hrs on the 5th, less than an hour before the advance guard of 10th Italian Army appeared from the north, all unaware of the ambush.

From then until dawn two days later the thin line of gunners and riflemen beat off frequent, but luckily unco-ordinated attacks from some 20,000 bewildered Italians, while a solitary squadron of the KDGs, who had just joined the division, protected their rear against possible attack from the direction of Tripoli. At one stage a Rifle Brigade

sergeant major even succeeded in capturing an M13 tank by knocking its commander over the head with a rifle butt, and many other instances of close combat occurred. By nightfall on 5 February the two remaining regiments of 4th Armoured Brigade, 7th Hussars and 2nd RTR, had reached the road in the vicinity of Beda Fomm and were able to attack the massive Italian column from the flank; by early the next morning the 3rd Hussars and leading elements of 7th Armoured Brigade were also in position a little further north. The battle raged all that day but the Italians never managed to co-ordinate their efforts and break out, although it was often touch-and-go. Their final effort came at dawn on the 7th when a column of some 30 tanks attacking straight down the road broke through the Rifle Brigade companies and destroyed most of the anti-tank guns at the roadblock before being stopped by field gunfire within yards of the battalion HQ. At this point, Gen Bergonzoli and five other generals surrendered, together with over 20,000 men and their

5 Armoured regiment breaking leaguer; tanks and softskin vehicles open out from the close formation adopted at night. Grants and 15cwt lorries are visible in the background and aerial pennons are in evidence. The Crusader in the foreground has a scruffy camouflage finish, suggesting the use of coloured cement applied wet with cotton waste—a method used for a time in 22nd Armoured Brigade. The turret bears the 'A' Sqn sign, and the number T43739, together with the slogan 'Avanti! Avanti!', the Italian for 'Forward!' (Sharpshooters)





6 Fordson WOT2c 15 cwt 4 x 2 infantry truck; each section in a motor infantry platoon rode one of these, giving greater tactical flexibility than in the lorried infantry, where a whole platoon rode in a single 3-ton lorry. Morris, and later Chevrolet 15cwt were also extensively used. (Conniford)

200 guns and 100 tanks, having cost 7th Armoured Division 9 killed and 15 wounded during the two-day battle.

Thus ended the division's first campaign. Shortly after the victory at Beda Fomm it was withdrawn to re-equip as its vehicles were now totally worn out. Before it went, however, it was to see ominous signs of things to come in the form of German aircraft over the battlefield. Although the campaign culminating in Beda Fomm, and the difficulties it had produced for the division, should not be belittled, the comparative ease with which a well-led, highly-trained mobile force had been able to defeat a badly-led, poorly-equipped army with low morale (many of whom were local Libyan troops), led to some tactics and practices which proved less satisfactory against sterner opponents, and gave undue confidence in the make-up of the armoured division of that time.

The Desert 1941-42

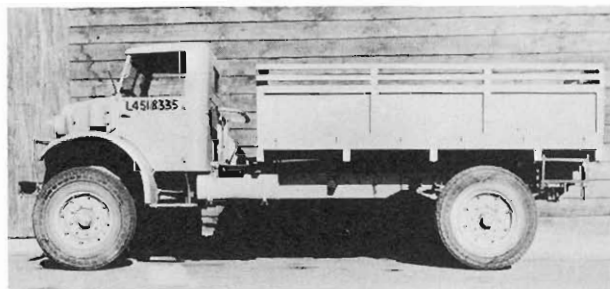
After leaving the desert in early 1941 the 'Desert Rats' (so named by Mussolini in a gibe that misfired) were virtually disbanded due to a lack of tanks and other equipment for them. Units found themselves doing guard duties in Egypt while the divisional commander gave lectures in Turkey, but by late April first the KRRC battalion and then the 11th Hussars, hurriedly re-equipped with South African Marmon-Herrington cars which offered little improvement over the Rolls, were back in

7 Chevrolet C60L 3-ton 4 x 4 GS lorry. Together with similar Canadian Fords and British 3-tonners of various makes, these provided the workhorses of the divisional RASC companies and the unit echelons; in the desert they also carried the infantry of 131 Brigade. Desert tyres are shown, but 'trackgrip' and 'runflat' tyres were also common, even mixed on the same vehicle. (Conniford)

action. The crisis was caused by the arrival of the German 5th Light Division at Tripoli under Lt Gen Erwin Rommel. This officer, fresh from leading a Panzer Division in spectacular fashion during the *Blitzkrieg* in France, quickly realized the weakness of the British troops in Cyrenaica and turned a reconnaissance in force by his own units and the Italian *Ariete* Armoured Division into a major offensive. The two understrength and inexperienced British divisions, 2nd Armoured and 9th Australian infantry, augmented by 3rd Hussars and 6th RTR left behind by 7th Armoured with the few serviceable light tanks and captured Italian ones, were no match for this Axis advance, which was not halted until it was across the Egyptian frontier near Sollum, with only Tobruk holding out behind it.

This sudden reversal of fortune, which had included the capture of Gen O'Connor, was far from welcome to Mr Churchill, who responded by taking the bold step of diverting a tank convoy through the Mediterranean rather than sending it round the Cape, to enable an early counter-offensive to be launched. As a result, by mid-June 7th Armoured Division was once again in business, but only as a 'scratch' formation, with two brigades each of two regiments and the support group. In 7th Brigade 2nd RTR had the old Cruisers while 6th RTR got the first Crusaders, as yet untried in battle and unfamiliar to their crews. In 4th Brigade 4th and 7th RTR were given Matilda 'I' tanks, as nothing else was available.

Wavell's plan for Operation *Battleaxe* was for the 4th Indian Division supported by 4th Armoured Brigade (since they had all the 'I' tanks) to move up



ORDER OF BATTLE

November 1941

Divisional HQ

4th Arm'd Bde Gp
 8th Hussars }
 3rd RTR } Stuart
 5th RTR } tanks
 2nd RHA (Fld. guns)
 2nd Scots Guards

2nd Arm'd Bde
 2nd R.G.Hussars
 3rd C.L.Yeomanry
 4th C.L.Yeomanry
 (Crusader tanks)

7th Arm'd Bde
 7th Hussars
 2nd RTR
 6th RTR
 (Crusader, A10 & A13
 tanks)

Support Group
 3rd RHA (2pdr A/T guns)
 4th RHA }
 6th Fld. RA } 25pdrs
 1st KRRC
 2nd Rifle Bde

Divisional troops
 3 arm'd car regts (11th Hus, KDGs, 4th SAAC)
 A/T regt (2pdrs)
 A/A regt (Bofors 40mm)
 Div Signals regt
 RE: Field and Park Squadrons
 RASC: 6 Companies
 RAMC: 3 light Field Ambulances
 RAOC: Div Workshop & Park, LAA WS
 + 1 Lt repair sec, 1 Lt
 recovery sec & 1 park sec
 to each brigade & Supp gp

the coast and capture the area where the coast road made its way up the escarpment near Sollum. At the same time 7th Armoured Division was to sweep round to the south and west on the inland plateau to cut off the enemy defences near the frontier, before moving north-west to relieve Tobruk. Until the infantry could release 4th Armoured Brigade, however, this inland thrust would only consist of the two regiments of 7th Brigade. In the event the Germans had placed half-a-dozen of their 88mm guns and had laid mine-fields in the Sollum area, and by 15 June, when the British attack was launched, had placed the newly-arrived 15th Panzer Division near Bardia, as well as 5th Light near Tobruk. 4th Armoured Brigade lost heavily to the 88mms and were tied down by counter-attacks which prevented their reverting to 7th Armoured Division as intended; the weak 7th Armoured Brigade on its own could not break through the skilful tank and anti-tank gun ambushes laid by the Germans among a series of low ridges in their path, and, without a third regiment, had difficulty in repulsing flank attacks by 5th Light. After two days Lt Gen Beresford-Pierce, the Corps commander, called off the operation, having

lost some 90 tanks for very little gain.

Although *Battleaxe* was a failed offensive rather than a major defeat it showed the dangers of splitting up the available armour, and gave a clear warning that the Germans, despite lack of desert experience, were formidable opponents. It was also clear that the British tanks no longer had the edge over the enemy; the Matilda, although superior to the German tanks of the time except in speed, was now vulnerable to anti-tank fire. More important, from 7th Armoured's point of view, the Crusader, which was the latest design and which was to remain with the division until mid-1943, had proved unsatisfactory on several counts. Theoretically superior to the German PzKw III and IV tanks until at least mid-1942 on a gun/armour basis, it was found to be difficult to maintain, and trials in Egypt showed that it could be penetrated more easily than should have been possible considering the thickness of its armour. Perhaps even more serious in the long run was its chronic unreliability, due to a faulty waterpump and lubricating system which frequently immobilized the tank; inaccessibility of these meant that it was often impossible to repair them, and so Crusa-



8 White-Ruxton 6x4 tank transporter—one of the early models used by the division in 1941. The following year they were largely replaced in recovery units by Scammell semi-trailers. The vehicle shown appears to have been sprayed with a dark coloured camouflage over the basic stone shade; the soft edges are untypical, as most Middle East theatre camouflage directives stressed the need for sharp-edged patterns. (Coniford)

ders were abandoned into enemy hands without having suffered any action damage. These faults were never properly cured.

After the failure of *Battleaxe* many changes took place. Gen Wavell was relieved as C-in-C by Gen Auchinleck, and within the division Maj Gen 'Strafer' Gott, an old desert hand who had commanded the KRRC battalion and later the support group, assumed command. His place in charge of the support group was taken by Brig Jock Campbell, ex-4th RHA. By November 1941, when the next British offensive Operation *Crusader* was launched, sufficient reinforcements had arrived in the desert for 8th Army to be formed under Lt Gen Sir Alan Cunningham. This consisted of two corps: the old 13th became a mainly infantry formation with 4th Indian and 2nd New Zealand Divisions supported by a brigade of 'I' tanks, and the new 30th had 7th Armoured Division with 1st South African Infantry Division and a Guards motor infantry brigade.

7th Armoured Division itself was made up to the unprecedented size of three armoured brigades by the addition of the 22nd, which was really part of 1st Armoured Division, then on its way out to the Middle East. Although this meant that with some 500 tanks in units and as replacements the division had superiority over the combined Italian armoured division and the two German ones of the *Afrika Korps*, who could only muster 320 between them, the quality was very variable. 7th Armoured Brigade still had nearly 100 obsolete A10 and A13 cruisers, some of which were so decrepit that they had to be taken into battle on the few tank transporters that were in the desert at that time. 4th Armoured Brigade was completely equipped with the American Stuart or 'Honey' light tank, which although reliable had a very short range and a poor

gun; it also needed special aviation-grade petrol. 22nd Brigade not only had the unreliable Crusader, but was entirely composed of as-yet inexperienced Yeomanry (territorial cavalry) regiments. With only one support group, the whole organization was very tank-heavy compared with 15th and 21st Panzers and *Ariete*, which each had their own infantry and artillery units.

Efforts to provide brigades with more direct support by attaching batteries of field guns, troops of anti-tank guns and companies of motor infantry from the support group to them on a semi-permanent basis only led to such a dispersal of the available guns and infantry that neither the remains of the support group nor the individual brigades had enough to be able to look after themselves without calling on the other formations for assistance. The unwieldy nature of the division, and the British policy of using extreme dispersion as protection against air attack, meant that all too often the tight, well-balanced divisions of the much more easily-controlled *Afrika Korps* were able to catch single brigades, or the support group, on their own. Another problem for Gen Gott was the fact that the corps commander, Gen Pope, was killed in an air crash and had to be replaced by Maj Gen Norrie, himself only a divisional commander and new to the desert. As a result, the forthcoming battle was marked at times by more consultation than decision in 30 Corps, and on one occasion Gen Gott was left virtually in charge of the whole corps.

By 18 November when, after various postponements, *Crusader* was finally launched, Rommel was on the point of assaulting Tobruk, which was still holding out. For this he had 15th Panzer and the German 90th Light infantry division in that area, as well as the three static Italian divisions that were investing the fortress. To cover his rear he had *Ariete* at Gubi some 30 miles due south of Tobruk, and another Italian division backed by German guns, plus 21st Panzer behind them in his frontier defences, which had been extended some 20 miles

south-west from Sollum. Gen Cunningham's plan was to send 30 Corps on a sweep round the end of this defence line to take up a position behind, from which it could threaten Rommel's communications in such a way that he would be forced to attack the massed tanks of 7th Armoured Division on ground of their own choosing, 'using up' his Panzer Divisions in the process. As soon as the armoured battle was decided, 13 Corps was to capture the frontier defences and move along the coast to Tobruk, where the garrison should already have broken out to link up with the victorious 30 Corps. At first all went well, but such was the secrecy of the initial moves that Rommel was unaware that he was being threatened and failed to respond to 30 Corps's thrust as anticipated. The massed armour of the division, therefore, began to split up: 4th Brigade drifted east to protect the flank of 13 Corps, 22nd Brigade was sent to attack *Ariete* in the west, and 7th Brigade went north to the real key area, the airfield at Sidi Rezegh on the escarpments, just south of Tobruk, overlooking the road leading up to the frontier. Each was individually too weak for its task; 22nd Brigade partly overran the Italians at Gubi but, owing to lack of infantry, could not hold its gains; 7th Brigade followed by the support group occupied Sidi Rezegh, but could not take the

dominating surrounding areas; and 4th Brigade was attacked on its own by first one, and then both, Panzer Divisions, which then swung north in concert and mauled 7th Brigade so severely that it was unable to take any further part in the battle or even the campaign. Despite the switching of 22nd Brigade, first to help 4th Brigade and then to Sidi Rezegh, and efforts by the Tobruk garrison to break out, the division never managed to achieve a local superiority, and on 22 November the support group was driven south off the airfield. During the two days they had held it, the support group had won all three of the vcs that the division was to win in the desert. Rsmn Beeley of the KRRC died while charging a machine-gun nest; Lt Ward Gunn, RHA, was killed while firing a 2pdr anti-tank gun from a burning portee; and Brig Campbell personally organized and led many counter-attacks in

9. Humber Mk III armoured car. These followed the similar Mk IIs, which were the first modern cars to reach the division, late in 1941. With better armour and a 15mm BESA machine-gun they could confront German recce units on more equal terms than their predecessors. Sand channels, for putting under the wheels in soft sand, can be seen secured below the spare wheel; the engine deck is in the raised position, enabling the driver to see out behind when reversing. Bedrolls, 4gal petrol 'flimsies', 2 gal water tins and a captured water jerrican can be seen stowed on the car. (Imperial War Museum)



his open car, holding the defence together by his example.

By 24 November the first phase of the battle was over; 4th Brigade had had its HQ and 8th Hussars overrun in night leaguer, and 22nd was reduced to a single composite regiment following unsuccessful attempts to prevent the destruction of one of the South African infantry brigades. At this point Rommel erroneously, but perhaps understandably, thought that 30 Corps was finished, and set off east to the frontier with the *Afrika Korps* to tackle 13 Corps. Here, although this example of *Blitzkrieg* unnerved Gen Cunningham to the point where Auchinleck decided to replace him with Lt Gen Ritchie, Rommel was too late; much of the frontier had already fallen and the New Zealanders were well on their way west along the coast as planned, eventually recapturing Sidi Rezegh and linking up with the Tobruk garrison. While this was going on, the division was able to reorganize and collect new tanks, as well as salvaging many from the battlefield, despite the odd brush with *Ariete*. As a result, when the Panzers returned to the west on 27 November in response to cries for help from the Axis troops around Tobruk, now themselves threatened by the New Zealanders, 4th and 22nd Brigades with 120 tanks were able to catch a weakened 15th Panzer Division on its own. Once again, however, it had its supporting arms with it, including attached 88mm guns; and despite intervention by the RAF it was able to hold off the two brigades until nightfall when, in accordance with long-established British desert custom, they withdrew from the battlefield to leaguer, thus losing their best opportunity to destroy the enemy and allowing him to link up with his troops at Tobruk. In the following days the New Zealanders were eventually forced to give up Sidi Rezegh and the link with Tobruk was broken, while 30 Corps were kept to the south and prevented from coming to their aid by the skilful use of anti-tank screens. By this time, however, attrition had taken its toll, and whereas Auchinleck still had reserves available, Rommel had not. He was forced to abandon his remaining frontier defences and pull back first to Gazala and finally to Agheila at the end of the year.

Crusader was arguably the high point of 7th Armoured Division's career. Never again was it to command so many tanks, and this was the last

occasion on which it fought as the sole armoured division in any area. *Crusader* was also the fastest moving, farthest ranging and most complicated battle of the whole desert war, and despite its vicissitudes it ended in a considerable if temporary victory. In retrospect it is perhaps less surprising that the divisional command set-up was at times unable to cope, than that the supply and other services did so well.

Following *Crusader* the division was once again withdrawn to refit, and was at the same time radically reorganized into a much more balanced formation, not unlike the Panzer Divisions in composition. The old concept of two armoured brigades equipped solely with tanks, with the few guns and infantry being formed into a support group, was abandoned in favour of two more-or-less self-contained brigade groups. The armoured one retained its three regiments of tanks but had its own motor infantry battalion and a field artillery regiment, to which half of the divisional anti-tank regiment was usually attached. The second brigade consisted of three motor infantry battalions, now with their own anti-tank and machine guns, with similar artillery support. The engineers, service arms, and the light AA regiment were split up between the two brigades and the much reduced divisional troops, who retained the armoured car regiment. Although this organization got away from the 'all tank' idea, the self-contained nature of the two brigades led to them frequently being used separately rather than in mutual support, and the continued tendency to split the motor brigade into columns meant that the division was still liable to find itself at a disadvantage against the better co-ordinated Panzer Divisions.

New equipment was also available. Two of the Stuart squadrons in each armoured regiment were replaced by ones with 12 Grant tanks apiece. These, although slower than the Stuarts, were much more heavily armoured and were the first in the division to outgun the German tanks, being fitted with a 75mm weapon as well as a 37mm. They also proved generally reliable. The increase in the numbers of field and anti-tank guns was to some extent offset by the fact that the new 6pdr only reached units in any numbers after the next battle had started, and in the meantime the field guns still had to be used to back up the inadequate 2pdrs, to



the detriment of their proper tasks. Most of the soft transport was now made up of Canadian military pattern Chevrolet and Ford vehicles in place of the older British designs. An increased number of tractors and transporters, as well as a full workshop company for each brigade in place of the previous light repair and recovery sections, greatly increased the division's ability to salvage and refit its own casualties.

Two losses to the division, one permanent and the other temporary, occurred at this time. Maj Gen 'Jock' Campbell VC, who had just taken over as divisional commander when 'Strafer' Gott was promoted to command 13 Corps, was killed in a motor accident; Maj Gen Messervy from 4th Indian Division took over in his place, and 11th Hussars, who had been in the desert from the start, took their Humber armoured cars off for a spell in Iraq, being replaced by the KDGs in the less-well-armed Marmon-Herrington Mk IIIs.

When the division returned to the desert in April 1942 Rommel had again driven 8th Army back

to Half-squadron of Grants on 'good going', ie, flat, hard gravel desert. All seem to be painted in light stone over a darker shade—probably the US olive drab delivery scheme—which shows around the serial number and on the suspension units. The crew's steel helmets protect the headlights; note the tripod mount for a .30cal-machine gun stowed front left, and the large petrol filling funnel stowed left rear, both typical features, as is the bracketed rail along the top of the trackguard. A faint 'B' Sqn sign (perhaps overpainted) is visible on the turret side. (Imperial War Museum)

from Agheila, but this time only as far as a line stretching from Gazala south to Bir Hacheim. During the spring Gen Ritchie had fortified this line as a start point for a further offensive, with a continuous minefield belt backed by dispersed infantry brigade 'boxes' (static wired-in defensive locations). The 1st Armoured Division was positioned behind the centre of this line and the 7th behind the southern end. During the following month the motor brigade and armoured cars operated columns round the enemy's southern flank and into his rear areas.

In the event Rommel struck before Ritchie was

ready with his offensive, coming round to the south of Bir Hacheim and then swinging north and north-east with both Panzer Divisions and 90th Light, on the night of 26 May. Despite this move being reported by the armoured cars, the division was not warned in time to take up its battle positions. The armoured brigade was caught dispersed and on the move by the concentrated tanks and guns of 15th Panzer, which made short work of first 8th Hussars and then 3rd RTR. The motor brigade was also unable to hold its partially-completed box east of Bir Hacheim, and the divisional HQ was overrun, Gen Messervy being captured but later escaping. 30 Corps HQ, which commanded both armoured divisions, was also forced to pack up and move in a hurry. After this promising start the Panzers continued to move north but were engaged by 1st Armoured Division, and having suffered heavy losses were brought to a halt and virtually surrounded. The Grant tanks and the first 6pdrs had proved a nasty shock for them.

The next few days were critical; if the British could keep the *Afrika Korps* cut off from its supplies behind the intact Gazala line they would win the battle. The division, in its weakened and disorganized state, was able to contribute little towards this (except for the inevitable motor brigade columns) until the end of the month, by which time Rommel had retrieved the situation by his tighter control and better co-ordination of all arms and had fallen back onto the eastern side of the British minefields, capturing 150 Brigade box which covered them and clearing supply routes through. During the next ten days 8th Army made repeated piecemeal and unco-ordinated efforts to break into this 'Cauldron'; these resulted in much heavier losses to themselves than to the Axis, who were able to beat off each individual attack with their whole resources. By 11 June the Free French box at Bir Hacheim had fallen, and the Gazala line had to be abandoned to prevent the infantry in the northern boxes being cut off. It was while attacking further enemy moves eastwards that the remaining tanks of the two divisions were taken in rear by the Panzers from the 'Cauldron' and suffered such losses that the initiative passed irrevocably to Rommel. From then on the battle became a retreat. By mid-June 8th Army was down to 60 tanks grouped in mixed regiments under 4th Armoured Brigade, and by 1

July the remains of the division were back at the Alamein position after a series of delaying actions near Sidi Rezegh and Matruh. Tobruk had fallen on 21 June.

This ended the second phase of the division's war in the desert, which had included the large-scale mobile battles against the *Afrika Korps* that are perhaps the best-remembered feature of the whole campaign. Although the events of this period read like a chapter of disasters when treated as briefly as is necessary here, it was during this year, from mid-1941 to mid-1942, and largely as a result of the efforts of the division, that much of the 'cream' of the Axis forces were destroyed, so that their effectiveness from then on was much reduced. Thus, although 7th Armoured Division was not to play such a leading role in the victories that were to follow, it had done much, during this period of poor equipment and unsatisfactory organization, to make those victories easier.

Alamein and After

When the division reached the Alamein position in July 1942 it was commanded by Maj Gen J. M. L. Renton, a rifleman, and it took over the southern end of the rather nebulous defensive line. During the next couple of months there were numerous changes in organization as the losses of the retreat were made good and the position was stabilized, but for most of that time the 4th, renamed 'Light', Armoured Brigade consisted of a composite regiment of 4/8th Hussars and two armoured-car regiments, the latter being eventually replaced by the Royal Scots Greys. As their only tanks were Stuarts they could do little more than form columns with the motor brigade to watch the minefields. Fortunately the real fighting took place farther north, with Gen Auchinleck now in personal command of the army.

In August, following a visit to the desert by Churchill, Auchinleck was relieved by Gen Alexander as C-in-C Middle East, and Lt Gen Gott was appointed to command 8th Army. Unfortunately he was shot down and killed while flying to take over. This was the end of an era as far as the army and the division were concerned. The new Army Commander, Lt Gen B. L. Montgomery, was not a



man to be overawed by the reputation of Rommel, or to be influenced by the desert 'folk-lore' which had grown up over the years. This had spawned ad hoc formations, with an accent on dash, sometimes at the expense of sound military practice; and a tendency to make hurried but ambitious plans regardless of the state of training and equipment of the troops involved, initially from necessity but later almost from habit. Montgomery worked on the assumption that the usual principles applied in the desert as elsewhere, and insisted on keeping close personal control over what went on, modifying his plans where necessary to ensure that they were within the capabilities of his army, and thus removing the chance of defeat, even if his chances of snatching spectacular victories were reduced. He was fortunate in taking over at a time when in numbers, quality of equipment, and in air support, the British had finally achieved a lasting superiority over Axis forces, exhausted by previous fighting.

In the battle of Alamein, and its forerunner Alam-el-Halfa, 7th Armoured Division played a

11 Daimler Dingo scout car of 4th Field Sqn, R.E. Combined divisional and unit tacsigns can be seen on the front plate; a sand channel is strapped across the front for use on 'soft going'. The late desert camouflage scheme of wavy-edged lines of a single dark colour (blue-black, green or brown) over light stone or pink is clearly visible. (Imperial War Museum)

subsidiary role. When Rommel launched his final attempt to break through to Alexandria at the end of August they delayed his advance through the southern minefields of the Alamein line, the 6pdr guns of the motor battalion really proving their worth for the first time, before the massed tanks of other divisions halted the Panzers on the slopes of Alam-el-Halfa ridge. Between this encounter and the battle of Alamein in October, the 22nd Armoured Brigade, with Grant and Crusader tanks, rejoined the division. The 7th Motor Brigade was replaced by 131 Queens Brigade, which, having been part of the recently arrived 44th Home Counties Infantry Division, was not motorized and had fewer support weapons but more men than a motor brigade. During the battle it was given its

own RASC transport and became a lorried brigade, remaining with the division, like 22nd Armoured Brigade, until the end of the war.

Maj Gen J. Harding, later to become a Field Marshal and post-war governor of Cyprus, took over the division with the task of attacking through the enemy minefields opposite the southern end of the Alamein line, primarily to keep 21st Panzer Division tied down there while the main attack by the infantry divisions of 30 Corps went in further north. Gen Horrocks of 13 Corps, of which the division was part, was told not to incur heavy

12 Mk II 6pdr anti-tank gun, as issued to the division from mid-1942; it was capable of defeating all enemy tanks at normal fighting ranges. Like the 2pdr which it replaced, the 6pdr was carried portee on the back of a lorry, in N. Africa. Later the more powerful Mk IV gun, with longer barrel and muzzle brake, was used by divisional infantry units until the end of the war in Europe. (Imperial War Museum)

casualties because his armour would be needed as a reserve for 10 Corps, which contained the majority of the armoured divisions and had the job of making the final breakthrough once 30 Corps had broken into the enemy defences. When the battle opened on the night of 23 October the division moved through gaps cleared in the enemy minefields by a specially trained task force from 44th Divisional Reconnaissance Regiment, and formed a bridgehead 'as crowded as the car park at Cheltenham races', but was unable to get as far as had been hoped; it did, however, keep 21st Panzer in the south until the 28th, during a critical stage of the main battle. Thereafter, now without 4th Light Armoured Brigade, it moved north behind the front on 31 October, and became part of 10 Corps ready for the breakout planned as Operation *Supercharge*.



ORDER OF BATTLE

November 1942

Divisional HQ

<p><i>4th Lt Arm'd Bde</i> Royal Scots Greys 4/8th Hussars (both Stuart & Grant tanks) 2nd Derby Yeo. (arm'd cars) 3rd RHA (25pdrs) 1st KRRC</p>	<p><i>22nd Arm'd Bde</i> 1st RTR 5th RTR 4th C.L.Yeo. (all Crusader & Grant tanks) 4th & 97th Fld Regts RA (25pdrs) 1st Rifle Bde</p>	<p><i>131 (Queens) Bde</i> 1/5th Queens 1/6th Queens 1/7th Queens (all lorried infantry) 53rd Fld Regt RA (25pdrs) 2 A/T Btys (6pdrs) 1 Fld Coy RE</p>	<p><i>Divisional troops</i> 11th Hussars (arm'd cars) 15th LAA Regt RA 65th A/T Regt RA (6pdrs) Div. Signals 2 Fld & 1 Pk Sqns RE RASC: 7 Coys RAMC: 1 Fld & 1 Lt Fld Amb. REME: Inf Bde, Arm'd Bde, and LAA Workshops RAOC: Fld Park</p>
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Although, unlike the other armoured divisions, 7th had received no new tanks, they had suffered less heavily in the battle and so took a more prominent part in the pursuit than had been anticipated. On 4 November, led by 11th Hussars, they finally broke out to the west of the enemy positions; after a short action with the remains of the *Ariete* Division during which they destroyed six M13s, and a confused battle between divisional HQ and German stragglers, they pushed on to cross the Egyptian frontier for the last time on the 9th. A combination of rainstorms which bogged even the tanks inextricably, and petrol shortages, frustrated efforts to cut off the bulk of the enemy on the coast road, although a train was shelled by 22nd Brigade's tanks to the south of Bardia. The state of the division's antiquated tanks, many of them veterans from Gazala, was a constant worry; but the fact that they were advancing, and well-supported by the newly formed REME, meant that many could be recovered and repaired. In general the armoured brigade and 11th Hussars led the chase, with the Queens Brigade moving behind and coming up to occupy towns, such as Tobruk, or to attack when the tanks were held up in unfavourable country, as happened near Agheila in mid-December. The 4th Light Armoured Brigade had

rejoined just after the division left Egypt; and in early December 8th Armoured Brigade, with the first Shermans to reach the division, temporarily relieved 22nd Brigade with its Grants and Crusaders. A medium artillery regiment of 5.5in guns was also attached at this time for a couple of months.

The advance progressed in fits and starts, often with the Queens or one of the armoured brigades 'grounded' for lack of petrol while the ports of Tobruk and then Benghazi were hurriedly put back into service. Casualties from mines and rearguard ambushes were frequent; Gen Harding was wounded by shellfire and had to leave the division. Maj Gen G. W. E. J. Erskine took over and led it on through Tripoli and, in conjunction with thrusts by the New Zealand and Highland infantry divisions, into Tunisia. Here, amid increasingly rugged and cultivated country, a halt was made at Medenine to allow the rest of the army and supplies to catch up prior to an assault being launched on the heavily-defended Mareth line. The division was initially somewhat out on a limb, but was shortly joined by 51st Highland Division, and 201st Guards Brigade which came under command. 22nd Armoured Brigade, now with diesel-engined Sherman and 6pdr—armed Crusader Mk III tanks, had rejoined in place of 4th Light Armoured Brigade, which



13 Minehunting with electrical detectors, which came into use at the time of Alamein; previously the usual method was to prod the ground with a bayonet. The No. 2 in each team carries markers to place over the position of any mine found. (Sharpshooters)

went to the New Zealanders.

It was clear that an attack was imminent, so the division took up a defensive position with the Guards and Queens Brigades in front, and the armour in reserve behind. Although the positions were not mined or wired they were well supplied with anti-tank guns, even the Queens now having 6pdrs as well as a few of the old 2pdrs; the divisional

artillery was also augmented by extra field and medium regiments. One aspect of the tightening-up of control at, and after, Alamein had been to introduce high-level control of the artillery so that regiments supporting individual units could be quickly co-ordinated into an overall fire plan when necessary. This policy was well vindicated when the German armour was switched from attacks on the Americans (who, with the British 1st Army, had been fighting in western Tunisia since they landed just after Alamein) to attack at Medenine on 6 March 1943. All day German and Italian attacks were broken up by massive artillery concentrations, sometimes by the whole divisional artillery; many of them never even reached the British positions as a result, while those that did were effectively stopped by the infantry and divisional anti-tank guns. Even

THE ARMoured REGIMENT

- | | | |
|-------------|--|---|
| a) 1940: | <i>RHQ</i>
<i>HQ Sqn</i>
<i>Sqns</i> | 4 × Mk VIB light tanks
Admin troops, A & B echelons, MO, fitters, etc.*
2 sqns with light tanks, 1 with cruisers. Each has HQ of 4 tanks, and 4 Troops each of 3 tanks |
| b) 1941: | <i>RHQ</i>
<i>HQ Sqn</i>
<i>Sqns</i> | 4 × cruiser tanks (A13, Crusader or Stuart)
Admin troops, A & B echelons, MO, fitters, etc.
3 sqns; each has HQ with 2 × cruiser and 2 × close support tanks, and 4 Troops each of 3 cruisers** |
| c) 1942-43: | <i>RHQ</i>
<i>HQ Sqn</i>
<i>Sqns</i> | 4 × cruiser and 8 × light A/A tanks
Admin troops, etc., and recce troop with 12 scout cars
3 sqns; 2 with Grant or Sherman, 1 with Stuart or Crusader. Each has HQ with 4 tanks and 4 Troops each with 3 tanks |
| d) 1944: | <i>RHQ</i>
<i>HQ Sqn</i>
<i>Sqns</i> | 4 × Cromwell, 8 × A/A tanks (latter discarded after Normandy landing)
Admin troops, etc., and Recce Troop with 10 Stuarts, 12 scout cars
3 sqns; each has HQ with 2 × 75mm and 2 × 95mm Cromwells, and 4 Troops each with 3 × 75mm Cromwells and 1 × Sherman Firefly or Challenger*** |

* Unit echelons: A echelon normally had about 12 softskin transport vehicles, and B echelon up to 100.

** Close support tanks were cruisers (A9, A10, A13 or Crusader) fitted with 3in or 3.7in howitzer to fire HE and smoke shell, which was not possible with 2pdr armament of other tanks.

*** In 1944 8th Hussars sqns had 5 Troops each of 3 tanks.

ORDER OF BATTLE

September 1943

Divisional HQ

<p><i>22nd Arm'd Bde</i></p> <p>1st RTR } 5th RTR } Shermans 4th CLY } 1st Rifle Bde</p>	<p><i>131 (Queens) Bde</i></p> <p>1/5th Queens 1/6th Queens 1/7th Queens (all lorried infantry) MG Coy (Cheshires)</p>	<p><i>Royal Artillery</i></p> <p>3rd RHA (25pdrs) 5th RHA (Priest SPs) 2 Fld Regts RA LAA Regt RA A/T Regt RA (17pdrs) Med Regt RA (5·5in)</p>	<p><i>Divisional troops</i></p> <p>11th Hussars (arm'd cars) Div Signals 2 Fld & 1 Pk Sqns RE RASC: 6 Coys RAMC: 1 Fld & 1 Lt Fld Amb RAOC: 3 Fld Pks REME: 4 Workshops</p>
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Stuka attacks were driven off by AA fire before they were able to press home; over 40 enemy tanks were destroyed, many by the Queens, for few British losses and without it being necessary to commit the armoured brigades at all. A subsequent night attack by the Guards motor brigade on 16 March to clear a feature known as the Horseshoe was less successful, and heavy casualties were suffered in unsuspected minefields before the attack was called off.

The division was not directly involved in the next two battles at Mareth and Wadi Akarit, although 8th Armoured Brigade and part of 22nd went to other divisions for that purpose. Tiger tanks first appeared in April, and 11th Hussars actually captured a disabled one. After preparing to attack Enfidaville at the end of the month the division was suddenly switched from 8th to 1st Army, together with 4th Indian Division and 201 Guards Brigade, so as to attack towards Tunis from the west. This involved a 300-mile journey on transporters for the tanks, which also had to be repainted green, as the desert scheme of camouflage was highly conspicuous among the olive groves.

The attack was made from Medjez to Tunis by two infantry divisions abreast followed by two

armoured divisions, of which one was the 7th, all under the command of Gen Horrocks (now of 9 Corps), with heavy artillery and air support. It was highly successful and a fitting example of how British methods had progressed during the campaign. Divisions from two different armies worked to a co-ordinated plan with intimate co-operation between tank, artillery and infantry units at all levels: a far cry from the dispersed brigade groups and columns of the desert days. The attack started on 6 May and the 11th Hussars led the way into Tunis on the 7th—nearly 2,000 miles and six months' fighting from Alamein. Thus ended the division's active service in Africa.

The final phase in the Middle East was a brief



14 Regimental aid post, the first link in the casualty evacuation chain. The unit Medical Officer can be seen with stretcher-bearers and wounded in an open desert location. The ambulance car is the Austin K2 used by divisional Field and Light Field Ambulance units. In Europe armoured half-tracks and carriers were also used. (Imperial War Museum)

three-month spell in Italy. During the invasion of Sicily the division remained in Africa and 22nd Brigade was re-equipped with new Sherman tanks throughout; 11th Hussars reorganized on a European basis, and 5th RHA provided a self-propelled regiment of 'Priest' 105mm guns to work with the armour. On 15 September 1943 the division landed in Italy in the bay of Salerno as the follow-up division of 10 Corps, behind 46th and 56th Divisions. Here many new problems were en-

15 Lifting out the engine of a Stuart tank with the gantry of a breakdown lorry, possibly from the RAOC light repair section or the unit LAD. This task was much quicker with the air-cooled Continental engine of the Stuart than with the water-cooled Liberty of the Crusader. A Neil Robertson stretcher, for removing casualties from inside a vehicle by strapping them in a restraining frame of thin laths, can be seen on the side of the tank. (Imperial War Museum)

countered. The sappers had to grapple with Bailey and tank-mounted scissors bridges for the first time, as well as making up inferior roads, while the close country made even finding the enemy difficult, and much ammunition was expended on likely hide-outs. Malaria began to take its toll, and even the generally friendly Italians, now on the Allied side, were not above reeling up the divisional telephone cables for use as washing lines. After a fierce fight just to the south by the Queens, the roadbound division, covering some 50 miles on a single road, reached Naples on 1 October. After this the country opened out a bit and the armour was able to take the lead, but the maize fields and small farms and villages kept the motor battalion, 1st RB, busy. By the 5th the division had reached the river Volturno



16 A 3in mortar in action in Italy. Motor battalions received these at the time of Alamein, and 131 Brigade always had them. Firing a 10lb bomb some 1,600yds, they were a welcome addition to the battalion's firepower. In NW Europe the 131 Brigade support company had the still more powerful 4.2in mortar. (Imperial War Museum)

near Capua, to find all the bridges blown and the enemy dug in on the far bank. During the following week energetic patrolling by the Queens, which involved parties swimming the river, revealed most of the enemy positions. The main attack was to be made elsewhere by the infantry divisions, but 7th Armoured mounted its own diversionary crossing on 12 October. The Queens secured a small bridgehead into which machine guns and anti-tank guns were ferried, and behind which the sappers started bridging the river, while the armoured brigade found a ford where, by dint of waterproofing their tanks and much use of bulldozers and ingenuity, they also crossed. After a further minor attack at Mondragone, farther down the Volturno towards the coast, the division was withdrawn and on 19 November 1943 started to sail for home, as one of the formations earmarked for the Normandy invasion.

Normandy

During the first six months of 1944 much re-organization and re-equipment took place in preparation for the Normandy invasion. Even so, 7th was not to end up as an entirely standard armoured division of the period, since 22nd Armoured Brigade was issued with the Cromwell cruiser instead of the Sherman medium tank used by the other divisions. The Cromwell was a fast reliable tank with a dual-purpose 75mm gun. It did not burn as easily as the Sherman when hit, and it was to prove highly successful during the more fluid phases of the campaign ahead; however, its gun/armour combination was no match for the slower and less reliable German Tigers and Panthers in close fighting, where it could not use its speed. The lack of gun-power was to some extent alleviated by the addition of a Sherman 'Firefly' with a 17pdr gun to each troop of Cromwells, and of two Cromwells armed with 95mm howitzers to each squadron headquarters. In the reconnaissance troops, Stuarts had largely replaced scout cars and



carriers, but some had their turrets removed and .5in heavy machine guns fitted instead, to reduce their silhouette.

The 11th Hussars, who temporarily left the division to become corps troops but soon returned in Normandy, were now organized with their own artillery (75mm half-tracks) and infantry/sapper troops, both of which were to prove invaluable; the former had to be 'pensioned off' before the end of the campaign with worn-out barrels, such was the use made of them. The Staghound armoured car in their HQs was not popular, being cumbersome and unable to reverse quickly, and as someone put it, 'only good for knocking down gateposts'. The Daimler cars in the squadrons were good, and also sometimes had their turrets removed, while the three-man Humber scout cars, often equipped with twin Vickers 'K' guns, were much liked.

Another unit that rejoined the division as a new-style armoured reconnaissance regiment was the 8th Hussars, but since its equipment of Cromwells and Stuarts was identical to that of 22nd Armoured Brigade it was used as a fourth armoured regiment under divisional control, being allocated to the armoured or the infantry brigade as required. Initially it had no Fireflies, but during the campaign it received instead Challengers, which also had 17pdr guns. The Crusader and Centaur AA tanks

THE ARMoured CAR REGIMENT

- a) **1941:** *RHQ* 4 cars *HQ Squadron* Admin and echelons, etc
3 *Squadrons* each with 4 or 5 Troops of 3 cars (2 Rolls & 1 Morris in 1940—2 Humbers & 1 Daimler in 1943)
- b) **1944:** *RHQ* 3 cars (Staghounds) *HQ Squadron* Admin and echelons, etc
4 *Squadrons* each with *HQ* (3 Staghounds & 3 Humber scout cars), 1 troop of 2 × 75mm gun half-tracks, 1 scout troop in armoured half-tracks, and 5 Troops each of 2 Daimler armoured cars and 1 Humber scout car.

ARTILLERY REGIMENTS

- a) **RHA Regiment 1941-42:** 2 Batteries each of 2 Troops of 4 or 6 × 25pdr
- b) **Field Regiment RA:** 3 Batteries each of 2 Troops of 4 × 25pdr
- c) **Light A/A Regiment:** 3 Batteries each of 3 Troops of 6 × 40mm Bofors
- d) **Anti-tank Regiment:** 3 Batteries each of 4 Troops of 4 × 2pdr, 6pdr, or 17pdr guns (1 battery self-propelled in 1944-45)

in all regiments were found to be unnecessary owing to Allied air superiority, and were discarded shortly after landing.

The motor infantry received armoured half-tracks in place of their section trucks, while the Queens Brigade remained lorry-borne by courtesy of the RASC. Both had improved 6pdr A/T guns firing discarding sabot ammunition and towed first by Lloyd and later Windsor tracked carriers. Some considered the 6pdr a handier weapon than the more powerful but more cumbersome 17pdr in close country, where the infantry's PIAT, a hand-held close-range A/T weapon firing a hollow charge bomb, also proved useful. In the Queens the machine-gun company of the Cheshires was replaced by a support company of the Royal Northumberland Fusiliers with 4.2in mortars as well as Vickers machine-guns.

The artillery received Sherman OP tanks, and retained one RHA regiment of towed 25pdrs, while the other exchanged the American 105mm Priests for 25pdr Sextons, also self-propelled, to ease ammunition supply problems. The A/T regiment of Norfolk Yeomanry had two batteries of SP

17pdrs while the other two were towed, first by half-tracks and later by Crusaders converted to gun tractors. The LAA regiment also had some of its Bofors mounted on trucks for mobile work.

The REME now had workshops for each brigade, for the divisional troops, and for the LAA guns, as well as Centaur or Cromwell armoured recovery vehicles with each regiment, while the RE had six scissors bridges on Valentine tanks with the armoured brigade as well as Bailey bridging equipment. The RAMC had dental and hygiene units as well as the field ambulances, but the RASC were reduced from their desert establishment to a mere three or four companies. With improved equipment such as the No. 19 set, and shorter distances, the divisional signals were to have an easier task than in the Middle East.

The division started to land at Arromanches, to the north-east of Bayeux, in the wake of 50th (Northumbrian) Division on D + 1, 7 June 1944. They formed part of 30 Corps under Lt Gen Bucknall, which was the right-hand corps of 2nd British Army commanded by Gen Dempsey. This in turn combined with the American 1st Army

THE DIVISIONAL SIGN



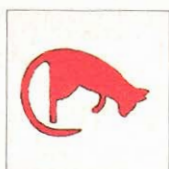
Vehicle sign 1940



Topre flash 1940



Vehicle sign 1941-44



Vehicle sign 1944-45



Shoulder flash 1944-45



Divisional Signals Regt



Royal Signals

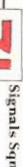
ORDER OF BATTLE

MAY 1942/showing unit vehicle signs and cap badges

4th Armoured Brigade



Brigade HQ



Signals Sqn



8 Hussars

Armoured Regts



3 RTR



1 KRRC

Motor Bn



1 RHA

Field Gun Regt



Brigade Workshop



Brigade Coys



RASC

7th Motor Brigade



Brigade HQ



Armoured Sqn



9 KRRC

Motor Bns



2 RB



4 RHA

Field Gun Regt



Brigade Workshop



RASC

Divisional Troops



Divisional Signals Regt



Royal Dragoons

Armoured Car Regt

AT Regt



102 RHA

Lt AA Regt



4 Field Sqn



143 Field Park Sqn



RE

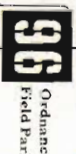


HQ & Div Tps Pl

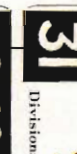


Div Tps Coys

Military Police



Provost Coy



Ordnance Field Park

RAOC



Divisional Workshop



RAMC



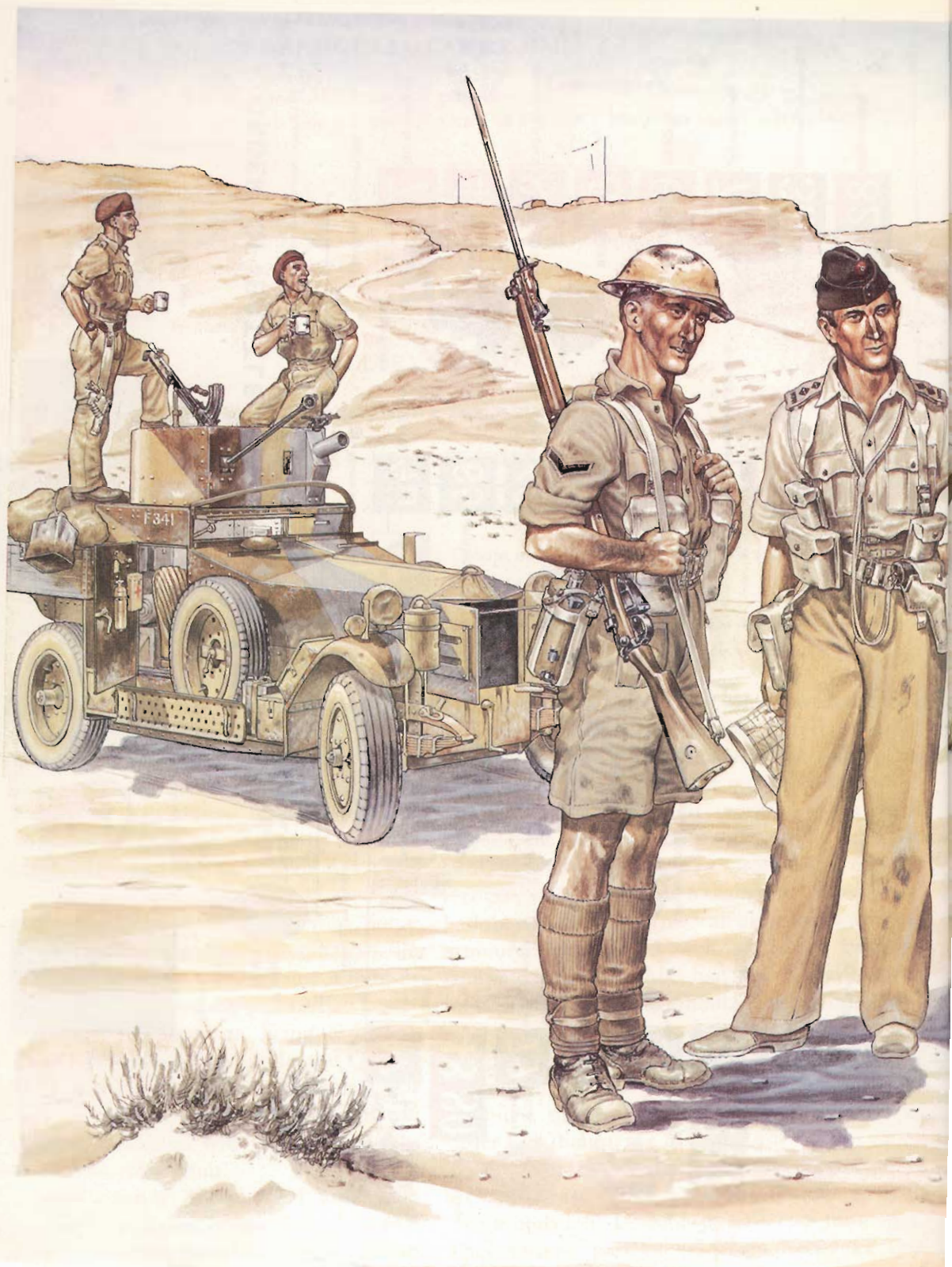
Lt Field Ambulance Units



Field Hygiene Unit



Field Postal Unit



B Egyptian Frontier, 1940





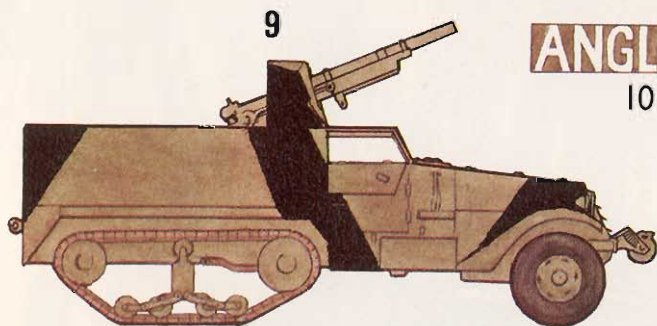
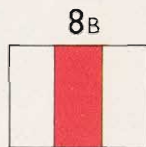
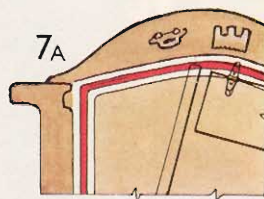
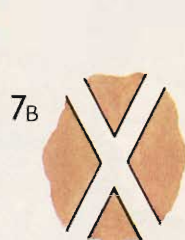
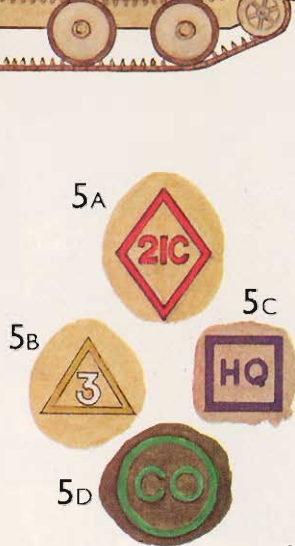
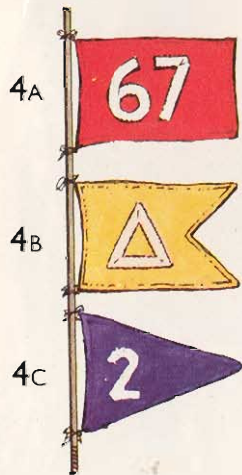
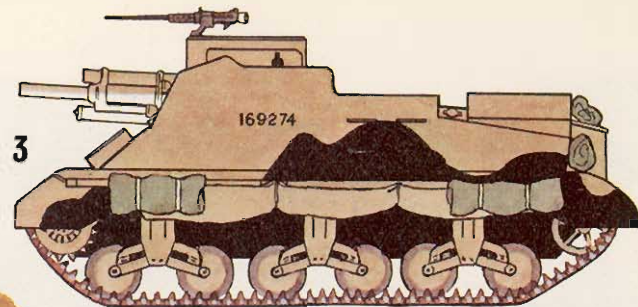
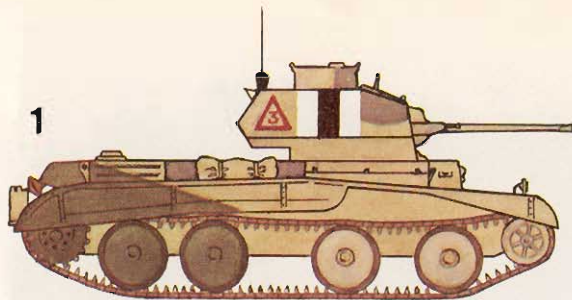
C Support Group, Sidi Rezegh, November 1941





D North-West Europe, winter 1944-45





ANGLESEY

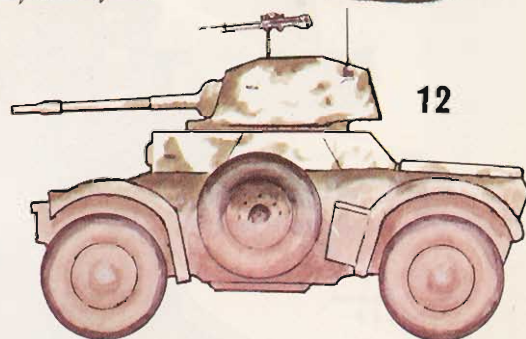
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further west to form the Allied invasion force of 21st Army Group under Montgomery. The division was therefore now a fairly small cog in a fairly big wheel, and this was not the only change they had to adjust to in the North-West Europe campaign. This was no longer a war of easily defined battles interspersed with periods of preparation in the rear areas; it became a continuous push over a wide front, with the emphasis shifted periodically from one area to another. Sometimes the division would be in the lead, at others it would be holding the line while the main effort was elsewhere, but gone were the days of leave between battles in Cairo or Alexandria. Gone also was the ebb and flow of previous years; here the movement was all forwards, however slow.

After the battles of the beachhead during which Panzer and infantry divisions were used en masse (including the division's old enemy, 21st Panzer) the principal opposition became small groups of tanks, or more often self-propelled guns; snipers

and *panzerfaust* teams; and small fanatical battle-groups. These were a change from the massed Panzer formations, the mines and the Stukas which had been the main problems in the desert. In an area of fields and towns such as North-West Europe, where advances normally had to be made along roads, such opposition was highly effective, and as a result the tanks often had to play second fiddle to the infantry within the division, being unable to get forward until a way had been cleared for them. The 11th Hussars soon realized that the only way that they could scout ahead of the division was to drive on until the leading car was fired on—often at point-blank range—and hope that someone survived to send back the news. Rivers were another problem; before the campaign was over the sappers of 21st Army Group had to build over 500 bridges and repair many more. The slowness of opening up ports posed a familiar headache for the divisional RASC, who found that exposed centre-line roads were just as vulnerable to parties of by-

THE INFANTRY BATTALION

a) Motor Battalion 1940:

BHQ and: 4 motor companies each of 3 motor platoons of 3 sections (1 × 15cwt truck, 6 men, 1 LMG each) and one scout platoon of 3 sections (3 universal carriers each)

b) Motor Battalion 1942:

BHQ and: 1 A/T company of 4 platoons each of 4 × 2pdr or 4 × 6pdr guns
3 motor companies each with a mortar section (2 × 3in mortars), 2 motor platoons, 1 scout platoon, and 1 MG platoon (4 × Vickers MMG)

c) Motor Battalion 1944:

BHQ and: 1 support company of 12 × 6pdr A/T guns and 8 × Vickers MMGs
3 motor companies each of 3 motor platoons (in armoured half-tracks) and 1 scout platoon (still in carriers)

d) Lorried Battalion 1943-44:

BHQ and: *HQ* company with
1 mortar platoon (6 × 3in mortars)
1 carrier platoon (13 carriers)
1 A/T platoon (8 × 2pdr, later 6pdr guns)
1 pioneer platoon (20 men)
4 rifle companies each of 3 platoons of 3 sections of 10 men + 1 LMG (1 MMG platoon with 4 × Vickers and 1 RASC transport platoon with 30 × 3 ton lorries often attached from Brigade)



17 Divisional HQ vehicles in Pompeii during the drive on Naples. The box-like AEC 'Dorchester' armoured command vehicle (left) was used from early in 1941 until the end of the war. Divisional HQ used four or more of them as command and signals vehicles, and they were also issued to brigade HQs from 1942. Even Rommel used captured Dorchesters! (Imperial War Museum)

passed enemy as the open desert had been. On the credit side, changes included friendly populations, at least until Germany itself was reached, and help from the resistance; 11th Hussars even engaged some as scouts on a semi-official basis. The highly co-ordinated air and heavy artillery support that was almost always quickly available, and the continuous air cover, were welcome novelties.

The first month after the landings differed from what was to follow, however, as the Germans threw in all their reserves in the West in an effort to drive the Allies back into the sea from the ideal defensive bocage country of small fields, thick hedges, sunken roads and orchards, to the west of Caen. Montgomery's plan was to lead the enemy to concentrate all available armour against the British 2nd Army, so as to give the Americans the chance to break out against minimal opposition and drive round from the Cherbourg Peninsular into the heart of France behind the formations facing the coast. To achieve this, repeated attacks had to be made in the Caen area to keep the Panzers occupied, and the division had much stiff fighting for negligible territorial gains. During the first three weeks they lost 1,150 casualties, mostly from the infantry units (compared with about 20 at Beda Fomm). So close was the fighting that tanks were actually 'boarded' at times, and a hurried issue of Sten guns to AFV crews became necessary.

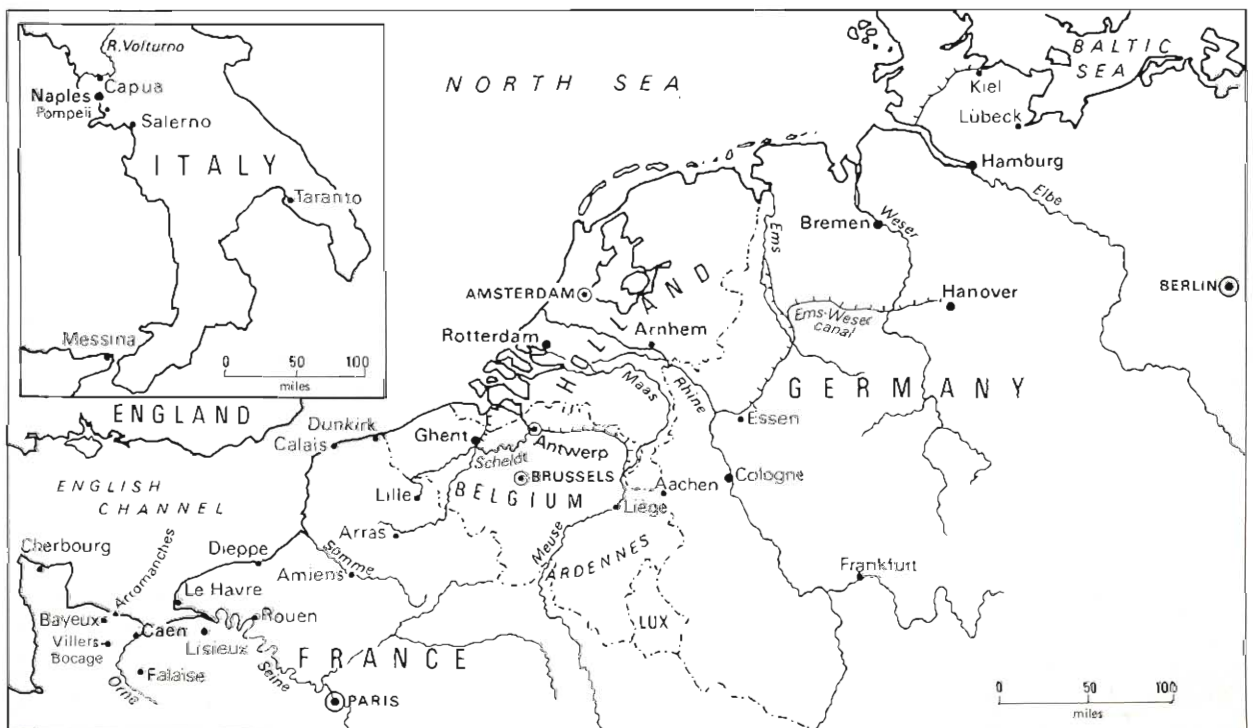
During this period two actions in which the division took part stand out. On 12–13 June, as

German armour was struggling forward in the face of murderous air attacks to counter-attack the Allied bridgeheads, an opportunity occurred for the division to work south from Bayeux on the extreme west of the British sector, and then east towards high ground near Villers Bocage. This enabled them to outflank the *Panzer-Lehr* Division, which was facing the British positions to the north and preventing them from enlarging the bridgehead. Speed was essential, as 2nd SS Panzer Division *Das Reich* was coming up from further south and would shortly close the gap. As a result the division got badly strung out along the Normandy roads, and it was not possible to follow them up with 50th Division as planned. When the leading units were in and just beyond Villers Bocage they were suddenly attacked by Tiger tanks, one of which, commanded by Obersturmführer Michael Wittmann, destroyed the bunched-up vehicles of 4th CLY RHQ and an entire squadron of tanks, as well as 'A' company of 1st Rifle Brigade who were with them. This action, which has perhaps become the most celebrated single tank action of all time, was a result of two Tiger companies of 501 SS Heavy Tank Battalion happening to be in the area behind *Panzer-Lehr's* flank. Later in the day the remains of the armoured brigade and the Queens restored the situation to some extent by holding Villers Bocage against 2nd SS Panzer—and the local fire brigade, who would insist on trying to extinguish the burning German tanks—but the advance had been halted and the division had to fall back into a 'box' in the bocage where it fought a fierce defensive action until it could retire to the north again. A measure of the degree of co-operation now common can be gauged from the fact that their withdrawal was covered at relatively short notice by RAF Lancaster strategic bombers and fire from RN warships and US heavy artillery. This was the last opportunity for mobile warfare, as more German divisions moved in to seal off the landing areas.

By mid-July infantry losses had reached serious proportions throughout 2nd Army; the bridgehead was still very congested, and there were signs that the Germans, who still held parts of Caen, might feel that they were containing the British and that they could divert some armour against the Americans who were still building up for their breakout further west under Gen Patton. To rectify this situation Montgomery staged Operation *Goodwood*, whereby 8th Corps under Gen O'Connor (the victor of Beda Fomm, who had been captured in Africa and had subsequently escaped from Italy) consisting of three armoured divisions—11th, the Guards, and 7th—was to advance several miles in more open country across the river Orne to the south-east of Caen to capture the Bourguebus ridge threatening Falaise. This armoured assault was to be preceded by air and artillery preparation of massive weight, but included no infantry divisions to clear the way for the tanks. In the event, *Goodwood* failed to reach its objectives owing to over-estimation of the damage air attacks would cause (a common error from Dunkirk to Vietnam), and the fact that the German defences extended much farther back than had been anticipated. The two leading armoured divisions were severely

mauled; 7th was following up ready to exploit a breakthrough and so suffered relatively lightly. In fact the main recollection of many who took part was the nightmare journey by the whole division from the west of Caen and across a single bridge over the Orne under enemy observation into a congested forming-up area already occupied by the two other divisions. Despite its cost, the attack did achieve Montgomery's primary objective of keeping up the pressure in the area so that the enemy were unable to release armour from it.

During the rest of July the division made further limited attacks east of the Orne, and when the Americans finally broke out at the beginning of August 30 Corps, to which the division had returned, was rapidly switched back to the western end of the British area for further attacks southwards from the Villers Bocage area. Slow progress was made during the first week in August, but then an ill-advised German counter-attack to the west was defeated and the Americans really got moving, swinging round south of Falaise and catching many of the remaining enemy units in the 'pocket' between them and the Canadians and other British troops coming south from Caen. After taking part in this final push from the north, the division was



too weak in infantry to continue and was relieved in the line. The 4th CLY had already left after *Goodwood* to amalgamate with their sister regiment, 3rd CLY, elsewhere, and their place had been taken by 5th Royal Inniskilling Dragoon Guards, hurriedly converted to a Cromwell regiment for the purpose. At this stage in the campaign the GOC, General Erskine, was relieved by Maj Gen G. L. Verney.

France and the Low Countries

With the trapping of some 50,000 German troops in the Falaise pocket in mid-August the enemy's efforts to contain the invasion in Normandy were over, and the British as well as the Americans were able to break out of the constricting bocage. The British and Canadian task was to move east and north to capture the 'V-weapon' sites from which

London was being bombarded, and the major ports, in particular Antwerp, which the Allies would need to support their ultimate drive into Germany. The division first advanced east to the Seine through more open country, but was impeded by several minor rivers and determined rearguards. The 11th Hussars therefore led on a wide front to find unblown bridges and unblocked roads, with the infantry brigade 'two up', and with each battalion supported by a squadron of 8th Hussars, behind them; the armoured brigade brought up the rear. After some fierce fighting round Lisieux, which also involved 51st Highland Division, a gap was found, and the armoured brigade swung into the lead, reaching the Seine on the 31st. Paris had already fallen to the Americans

18 Sherman tank in Italy; this vehicle has the rubber block tracks similar to those used on Grants and Stuarts, which were later replaced by all-metal assemblies. It appears to be painted in the standard light mud/blue-black camouflage scheme, and has an 'A' Sqn triangle and a red/white/red recognition flash on the turret. Note the No. 19 set aerial, thinner than that of the No. 9 set seen in previous illustrations. (Sharpshooters)



19 No. 19 radio set, complete with cover and protective cage, in turret of a Sherman tank. Introduced shortly before Alamein, this set became standard for tanks and other vehicles; it proved reliable, after some initial problems due to high temperature. (Sharpshooters)

and Free French on 25 August.

From here on, the armoured divisions were to lead with the infantry coming up to consolidate or subdue areas of stiff resistance. 7th Armoured was directed on Ghent as part of 12 Corps under Lt Gen Ritchie (erstwhile commander of 8th Army in the desert), with the Canadians moving along the coast on their left and 11th Armoured on their right going for Antwerp. Now the advance really got going. The Cromwells proved ideal, being highly reliable and capable of continuous high-speed running, even keeping up with wheeled transport on the roads with no trouble. The Somme was crossed north of Amiens on 1 September. After the division met resistance among the coalmines and canals north of Lille on the 4th, permission was given to by-pass this area to the south, and it reached Ghent on the following day. After haggles with the German garrison commander, who refused to surrender to any lesser person than a general, and who saw through the efforts of the colonel of 5th RTR to impersonate one, the town was entered and the Inniskillings found themselves with a complete horsed cavalry regiment, among other prisoners. The 11th Hussars had captured several 'V-bomb' sites during the advance.

The division had advanced 220 miles in a week, capturing over 1,000 prisoners for the loss of less than 100 men (compared with 1,300 casualties during their time in the bocage). Such was the speed of advance that maps ran out and wireless contact was lost with Corps HQ. Though they increased the spare petrol at the expense of ammunition, and grounded units such as the LAA regiment, the last 70 miles into Ghent could only be made by a composite group of units from both brigades while the remainder of the division stayed near Lille. The divisional RASC now had a formidable task as supply lines still stretched from the Normandy beaches and the ever-lengthening centre line was often temporarily cut. REME was able to move up only its recovery units, not its workshops, and the evacuation of the wounded began to cause problems. The leading troops had



received ecstatic welcomes from the local populations, often expressed with flowers and—less comfortably—fruit and vegetables thrown onto the passing vehicles. At this stage many of the unit histories also mention passing battlefields where their regiments had fought before, from Oudenarde in the days of Marlborough to the Escaut Canal in 1940.

There was a pause at Ghent. The armoured brigade was down to about two thirds of its proper tank strength and the Queens were as low as half strength; also, the bulk of the division had to catch up, and there was a threat of an attack by the remains of the German 15th Army which was cut off, north of the Scheldt. In the face of this the sappers had to switch hurriedly from repairing bridges to blowing them up! In the event no attack was made and after a week the division was able to go forward again when the Canadian infantry came up and relieved them. The motor battalion had helped alleviate its shortage of men by enlisting local Belgians, and had increased its firepower by fitting Browning machine guns to some of its carriers.

The next step was Operation *Market Garden*, which included the airborne landing at Arnhem. For this, 12 Corps—of which the division was still part—moved into Holland with the task of guarding the western side of the corridor that 30 Corps, led by the Guards Armoured, was to create in order to link up with the airborne troops, while 8 Corps with 11th Armoured protected it from the east. The country was unsuitable for armour, with flat marshy polder and dykes, the poor roads usually being exposed on top of banks. During this period, the second half of September 1944, infantry



20 Sappers launching a Bailey bridge in Italy. This invention, together with the armoured scissors bridge which was also used by the divisional RE, proved invaluable in NW Europe, where most of the bridges over the numerous rivers and canals had been blown. (Imperial War Museum)

shortage within the division reached the point where tank crews had to act as foot soldiers to help hold the line against the various attacks, usually by battalion-sized battlegroups of paratroops, such as *Gruppe Hubner* and *Gruppe Hardegg*, which were renowned for their fanaticism.

After the remains of the British airborne division had been pulled out on 25–26 September the 7th Armoured pushed on to the Maas. Although Antwerp had been taken, it could not be used as the enemy still held the banks of the Scheldt estuary below it; 12 Corps was therefore swung west into Brabant to clear the northern shore. In fierce fighting the Queens and 8th Hussars, assisted by minesweeping flail tanks and flamethrowing Churchill Crocodiles, eliminated the various strong-points in the area. Following this, the division had its first real rest since landing in Normandy while

keeping a static watch on the Maas, as forces and supplies were built up for the crossing of the Rhine into Germany further east. Even this period was interrupted by the need to capture the lock gates at Panheel on 14 November before the enemy could destroy them and jeopardize the pontoon bridges that were being used to cross a canal lower down. Although only a minor operation by a battalion of the Queens and a squadron of 8th Hussars, it met with heavier artillery fire than had been encountered since Normandy; heavy casualties were suffered, and it was only due to the initiative of a platoon commander, recently transferred from the REME and in action for the first time, that success was achieved.

The problem of reinforcement was now so grave that corps and anti-aircraft troops were being increasingly retrained as infantry; even so, one infantry division, the 50th, had to be disbanded. Following this, the much reduced 1/6th and 1/7th Queens departed from 7th Armoured, leaving only 1/5th Queens in 131 Brigade. Their places were taken by 2nd Devons and 9th Durham Light

ORDER OF BATTLE

November 1944

Divisional HQ

<i>22nd Arm'd Bde</i> 1st RTR } 5th RTR } Cromwells 5th DGs } & Sherman 1st Rifle Bde } Fireflies	<i>131 (Queens) Bde</i> 1/5th Queens 9th Durham L.I. 2nd Devons Support Coy (RNFus, MMGs & 4.2in mortars)	<i>Royal Artillery</i> 3rd RHA (25pdrs) 5th RHA (Sexton SPs) A/T Regt (SP & towed 17pdrs) LAA Regt (SP & towed Bofors)	<i>Divisional troops</i> 11th Hussars (arm'd cars) 8th Hussars (Recce regt) Div Signals RE: 3 Sqns RASC: 4 Coys RAMC: 2 Ambs RAOC: 3 Parks REME: 4 Workshops
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Infantry from 50th Division, while Maj Gen Lyne, also from the Northumbrian division, relieved Gen Verney in command of the division.

The division was not involved in repelling the German Ardennes offensive in mid-December, but those at home were perhaps reminded of its existence on Christmas Day, when a corporal of the Queens was interviewed on the radio immediately before the king delivered his Christmas message. The year of 1944 ended with 7th Armoured still on

the Maas in murderously cold weather which froze tank tracks solid into the mud, caused several cases of frostbite, and immobilized a patrol of 11th Hussars, with frozen weapons and vehicles early on Boxing Day.

21 Bedford QLT 3-ton troop carrier, which replaced the general service 3-tonner as a lorried infantry vehicle in NW Europe. This vehicle is finished in the standard softskin European camouflage of khaki overpainted with black 'Mickey Mouse ears' (Conniford)



22 Scammell SV/2S, the standard heavy recovery tractor used in the desert and NW Europe. In N. Africa they were attached to unit LADs as well as RAOC or REME workshop and recovery units, but by 1944 they had been replaced for front-line work by tanks converted into armoured recovery vehicles. (Conniford)



Into Germany

In mid-January 1945 advantage was taken of the freezing weather for 12 Corps to launch Operation *Blackcock* to capture a pocket of marshy ground north of Aachen. Though the division had to use a single one-way road, and had to cope with hazards such as smoke screens freezing to form fog, it operated most successfully under these conditions; 131 Brigade was provided with 'Kangaroo' troop carriers (tanks with the turrets removed) for the first time, and the tanks co-operated well with a Commando brigade. Much fierce fighting was involved, including the capture of the village of St Joost from the notorious Parachute Regiment *Hubner*.

Training and preparation for Operation *Plunder*—the crossing of the Rhine, and in the case of the division the advance to Hamburg—started in late February. Extra supplies were to be carried on tanks and no vehicle recovery was to be attempted beyond the river, although arrangements were made to pick up stranded crews. Twenty-five brand new tanks were received from England, and Churchill scissors bridges, Sherman flails, Kangaroos for the infantry, and flamethrowing Crocodiles were all allocated to the division, which now also had an air artillery observation squadron. The actual crossing took place on 27 March following infantry assaults by other divisions and an airborne landing on the other side; 7th was the first British armoured division across the Rhine and, during the following week, advanced to the Ems with the armoured brigade leading. Resistance was continuous but came from small unco-ordinated groups; the inhabitants were naturally hostile, but subdued. The country was wooded and an extra infantry brigade, 155th, was attached to guard the division's open left flank.

By this time the end was in sight and commanders threw away their maps, as they ran off them, confident that they would not need them

again to withdraw. A brief check occurred at Ibbenburen, north of Hanover, where exceptionally stubborn resistance by staff and trainees of a *Wehrmacht* officer training school proved troublesome, but the division side-stepped and left them to 53rd Infantry Division, who were following up. Another halt occurred at the Weser and the division was diverted to the north to help round up 1st German Parachute Army, but Bremen itself proved too well defended to be taken by an armoured division, so once again it was by-passed and left for the infantry; this time, 3rd Division. It was a period of stubborn fighting for every village; on one occasion 8th Hussars were surprised and attacked in leaguer at night, and incidents occurred of ambushes being sprung under cover of the white flag, but progress continued. On 16 April 8th Hussars liberated two large prisoner-of-war camps at Fallingbommel; one of these had already been taken over by the inmates, and had British sentries in pressed battledress and clean webbing on the gates, and a paratroop RSM very much in command!

The final actions took place south and west of Hamburg, rounding up groups of police, SS, paratroops, marines and even redundant submarine crews, fighting in the heathlands of that region. The Rifle Brigade made good use of their newly-issued carrier-borne Wasp flamethrowers. They also captured a large number of German 'Wrens' in Buxtehude, with no casualties except the RSM's foot, on which one formidable *fraulein* dropped a heavy object.

On 29 April 1945 surrender negotiations for

Hamburg commenced, and on the afternoon of 3 May units of the divisions drove unopposed into the shattered city. Fittingly, perhaps, one of the first vehicles to enter the main square, where the commandant and other dignitaries waited in full dress to surrender, was the scout car of the CO of 11th Hussars; that officer, who was very informally dressed and not a whit impressed by the reception committee, stopped to feed the pigeons with army biscuits. So ended six years of war for 7th Armoured Division.

It has not been possible to mention all the many units that served in the division during that time, nor all the higher formations to which it was attached, let alone all the individuals involved, but it is hoped that this very brief account will have given some idea of how the British armoured division came to be formed, and how it developed both in equipment and organization during the 2nd World War. It was indeed a far cry from the 'Immobile Farce' of 1935, or the over-armoured and under-supported formation of the early war years, to the flexible well-balanced mixture of all arms, capable of advancing or side-stepping as necessary, and swinging either armour or infantry into the van, which entered Hamburg in 1945.

The Plates

A The Division Sign

The jerboa was added to the plain white disc early in 1940, by Gen Creagh; the exact date is uncertain, but some vehicles are known to have retained the early form after the outbreak of war with Italy. The jerboa on a plain white square was used in NW Europe alongside the earlier type featuring the jerboa on a white disc on a red square. The brownish animal on the late shoulder flash caused queries as to whether divisional troops in NW Europe were Australians!

Order of Battle, unit vehicle signs and cap badges, May 1942

At this time the division was organized into self-contained brigade groups and two of the divisional AT regiment batteries were integrated into the RHA regiments and used their signs. Detachments of RE, LAA and other services were also attached permanently to brigades. Brigade workshops would also have had brigade colours behind the numbers

23 Sexton self-propelled 25pdr guns in action in NW Europe, 1944; note Allied recognition stars. This weapon, based on the American M3 chassis, equipped 5th Royal Horse Artillery, who normally supported the armoured brigade; 3rd RHA, who normally worked with the infantry brigade, kept towed 25pdrs. (Gander)





24 Achilles M10 self-propelled 17pdr anti-tank guns follow a taped 'safe' lane in the bocage of Normandy. At least one battery of the divisional A/T regiment in NW Europe was self-propelled to work with the armoured brigade; the remainder supported the infantry with towed 17pdrs. (Imperial War Museum)

on their signs when operating with the brigades independently, rather than under divisional control. In late 1942 all artillery reverted to divisional control so that the CRA could co-ordinate its efforts, although still often attached to support the brigades. On the formation of REME before Alamein, all workshop units adopted blue/yellow/red horizontally-striped signs and came under divisional CREME control, while the remaining RAOC units had vertically-striped blue/red/blue signs.

Unit tactical signs were supposed to be combined with the divisional sign on the reverse of the PASS plate (8½in square, mounted on nearside of soft skin vehicles, used to indicate vehicle out of action) but were often painted on opposite sides of front and rear, on mudguards, sandshields, etc. Brigade and arm of service colour plates remained more or less constant throughout the war, but unit numbering systems changed, officially, at least four times; that shown here was in force, with minor alterations, from mid-1941 to early 1943. Style varied from unit to unit or even from crew to crew. Division and unit

signs were often omitted in the desert, particularly on AFVs, but were always used in NW Europe where traffic control made them more necessary.

Cap badges were metal at this period; later in the war, those of Other Ranks were made of coloured plastic simulating silver, brass and bronze finishes.

B Egyptian Frontier, 1940

It is summer on the coastal plain; escarpments lead up to the inland plateau in the background. The AFVs are in early straight-edged camouflage patterns of two contrasting colours over light stone; official variations included black and green (mid-1940) and silver-grey with slate (November 1940), but other colours were used at commanders' discretion. From left to right:

Rolls-Royce 1924 Pattern Armoured Car, 11th Hussars
Armed with a Bren gun on an AA mounting, a Boys anti-tank rifle, and a smoke-bomb projector, the car carries no radio and no markings except the vehicle serial number. Desert equipment includes radiator condenser, sand channels, sun compass, and cut-down petrol tin as 'brew can'. Crew wear brown, crimson-banded 11th Hussar berets without badges; the standing warrant officer wears his rank badge on a leather wrist strap. Pistols were seldom worn; when they were, then waistbelt holsters were at least as common as the Royal

Armoured Corps pattern with leg strap shown here.
Lance-Corporal, King's Royal Rifle Corps

Summer combat dress, with bleached 1937 partial webbing set; respirators, packs and picks and shovels in lieu of entrenching tools were normally carried in section trucks. The shorts are 'taken up' a few inches from length as issued; note black Rifle rank chevron on sleeve. The weapon is the SMLE No. 1 Mk III rifle with 18in bayonet—termed 'sword' in Rifle regiments.

Lieutenant, King's Royal Rifle Corps

Other Ranks wore khaki field-service (side) caps with regimental badge on the left; officers often wore No. 1 Dress caps in rifle-green with black buttons, and a silver bugle-horn badge on a small raised red boss, as here. Removable shoulder-straps on the khaki shirt bear black metal or woven rank pips and 'KRRC'; the slacks and rubber-soled suede desert boots are private-purchase items. The equipment is the officer's 1937 webbing set with holstered No. 2 Mk I Webley revolver, ammunition pouch, compass pouch and binocular pouch; an officer's small pack, slimmer than the OR's type, hangs on the hip.

Private, Royal Army Service Corps

Wolsley pattern sun helmet with RASC puggeri flash (generally removed on the outbreak of war for security reasons). Blanched skeleton webbing with small 1907 pouches, 18in bayonet scabbard, 'Bombay bloomers' buttoned up and worn as shorts, and full-length puttees were all common in early 1940 but, except in rear areas, the helmet and puttees had generally disappeared by the following year.

Vickers Mk VIB Light Tank, 1st RTR

Armed with .5in and .303in Vickers water-cooled machine-guns in combined mounting, with two smoke-bomb projectors. The spotlight and AA mounting for the .303in gun on the sides of the cupola were rarely seen after the first campaign. Pennons were positioned on the No. 9 set aerial in accordance with a recognition code. Separate unit tactical sign and divisional sign were normal at this date. Black tank corps overalls were still worn quite

widely in 1940 but seem to have been replaced by khaki denim overalls later; shirt, shorts or slacks were also worn in summer and partial or complete battledress in winter.

Background: Morris CS 11/30 30cwt truck

Plain light stone finish with Egyptian civilian-type number plates, typical of types used in 1940 by unit echelons, etc.

Foreground:

Discarded 4gal 'flimsy' petrol tins had many uses; pierced, and placed over a hurricane lamp, they made night signs. This, and the cut-out metal day sign point to divisional main HQ. The triangle on the partly buried telephone line indicates an infantry battalion line.

C Support Group, Sidi Rezegh, November 1941

The desert was both cold and wet at times, particularly at night, although usually warm and dusty later in the day. In some areas, rock below the surface prevented anything but shallow weapon pits being dug; alternatives were 'sangars' with walls of rocks or sandbags, but these were dangerously more conspicuous. From left to right:

25pdr Mk II with No. 27 Artillery Trailer (limber), 1st Field Regiment, Royal Artillery

As with all guns used in the desert, this is without muzzle brake and counterweight; it also lacks, at this date, a direct fire sight—tanks were engaged using the dial sight until 1942. Yellow shells piled on the pit are HE; black shells held by the detachment are AP shot. Detachment members' warm clothing includes woollen cap comforters, balaclavas, great-coats, leather jerkin, battledress blouses, and even rubber Wellington boots. Kneeling figure at limber



25 A 40mm Bofors light anti-aircraft gun, winter 1944; this was the standard light A/A gun throughout the war. Earlier models used in the desert lacked the shield and the sight correcting gear shown here. In NW Europe some SP Bofors mounted on lorry chassis were also used. (Imperial War Museum)



26 Desert Rat in NW Europe—but not 7th Armoured Division. These vehicles bearing the black jerboa with its tail over its head are from 4th Armoured Brigade, which retained the old sign on leaving the division in Africa. The Humber scout car and M3 half-track are, however, typical of vehicles used in the division: the former by 11th Hussars and HQs, and the latter by the Rifle Brigade motor companies, RE, RAMC, and other services. (Sharpshooters)

has RA flash on sleeve, but others wear clothing as issued, without insignia. RA cannon insignia appears above chevrons of standing sergeant in field service cap.

Brigadier 'Jock' Campbell, VC

Dressed in a leather golfing jacket and corduroy slacks, Campbell wears no insignia apart from his hat with rank distinctions. His staff car is a cut-down Ford station wagon, a type widely used by senior officers in the desert. Signs on it include a bridging circle, combined divisional and Support Group HQ tactical signs, and the vehicle serial number. There are racks of 2gal water tins and a radiator condenser, made from an empty one. The windshield is smeared with grease and coated with sand, apart from a small area, to kill reflections.

Bren LMG team, 2nd Bn Rifle Brigade

No. 1 has his helmet covered in sandbag hessian; he has a tape and cotton bandolier of 303 ammunition

clips over his shoulder, and is loading a Bren magazine by hand. Note chevron in regimental black on green, and black shoulder title. No. 2 has an issue jersey over khaki drill shirt and slacks, and is using his comforter as a scarf. Equipment around the pit includes a No. 36 hand grenade (red crosses on green band indicate a fused grenade ready for use), pouches of Bren magazines, and a captured German MP.38. Unlike German rifle platoons and British divisional infantry, with their Thompson guns, British motor infantry had no sub-machine gun issued to sections.

Background: infantry support weapons

Boys .55in anti-tank rifle, one of which was carried in each section truck and carrier; and 2in mortar, a platoon HQ weapon capable of firing smoke or HE bombs up to 500 yards.

In the foreground, discarded evidence of the British soldier's staple ration—a bully beef tin.

D North-West Europe, winter 1944

A road junction somewhere in Holland. From left to right:

Private, 131 (Queens) Brigade, Lorried Infantry

The new steel helmet was now in use alongside the old type. Service issue steel-rimmed spectacles were designed to be wearable under a respirator. The

No. 4 Mk I rifle with short spike bayonet was standard issue by this date, as was the entrenching tool slung in a wallet on the back of the belt. The camouflaged windproof smock, originally issued for Norwegian operations is worn here over both battledress and the sleeveless leather jerkin.

REME Officer, Inniskillings LAD, on BSA B30 Motorcycle

Congested European roads brought motorcycles back into favour: in the desert, jeeps or pick-ups were preferred. This officer wears the black RAC beret with REME cap badge, and semi-uniform raincoat. Note tactical sign on fuel tank of BSA.

Cromwell Tank, 8th Hussars

Overall khaki with no additional painted camouflage; chicken wire and hessian scrim on turret only, to obscure distinctive turret shape above walls and hedges. Combined divisional and reconnaissance regiment tactical signs, the latter a white '45' on a horizontally-striped blue-over-green patch. Tank name partly visible on turret

side. Commander wears black beret, and radio operator the rimless RAC helmet introduced in 1943. Aerial pennons were not used in Italy or NW Europe except by some higher HQs. Tank armament, 75mm main gun and two .303in BESA machine-guns.

Lance-Corporal, Divisional Provost Company

Motorcyclists' helmet, boots and breeches; battledress with medal ribbons and divisional shoulder flash; red on black MP brassard on right arm, and traffic control sleeves; white webbing. MPs on lonely traffic control points were often attacked by enemy stragglers, hence the Sten gun and spare

27 Challenger tank armed with 17pdr gun in a high turret on a modified Cromwell chassis. The tank shown is marked as one of 'A' Sqn of the armoured recce regiment of 11th Armoured Division, but, apart from the divisional sign, is identical to those used by 8th Hussars in 7th Armoured Division. Note the removal of the bow machine-gun during modification, also a feature of the Sherman Firefly, the 17pdr gun tank of the other regiments in the division. (Imperial War Museum)





28 Windsor carriers of the anti-tank platoon of 15th Queens towing 6pdr guns in Germany. Timber baulks lashed to the front seem to have been a common feature of carriers in Europe. Note mixture of old and new steel helmets, and the fact that most of the crew wear the RAC winter tank suit. The Windsor was an elongated and more powerful version of the universal carrier. (Imperial War Museum)

magazine in boot top, as well as the revolver.

Recce Troop Stuart Mk V, 8th Hussars

More heavily camouflaged than the gun tank, this recce vehicle, known as a 'Jalopy' or 'Sawn-Off', has had the turret removed, and a .5in machine-gun fitted, to reduce the silhouette.

Officer, 8th Hussars

He wears the green, gold-laced 'tent hat' peculiar to this regiment. The winter tank suit—'pixie' or 'zoot' suit—was issued to all ranks. It had a blanket lining and two neck-to-ankle zipped openings, and by manipulation of the zips could be converted into a sleeping bag.

Jeep, Divisional RE Field Park Squadron

Jeeps had been used in the division since 1942, and had gradually replaced pick-ups and 8cwts for officers' runabouts, despatch riders, etc. The driver wears the general service cap, which had now replaced the field-service cap as standard Other Ranks' headgear; the badge is plastic. The major

wears the soft khaki peaked cap, with leather strap and metal badge, of the commissioned ranks, and the semi-official 'British Warm' coat.

E Camouflage and Markings

Official camouflage schemes varied frequently, and many unofficial ones were used; some of the most common are illustrated on this and preceding plates. All the commonly used types of vehicle sign are also shown; method and position of application varied with units. Most signs were used by all vehicles to which they applied in NW Europe, with the exception of some armoured cars. In the desert they were often omitted, although squadron and air recognition signs seem to have been commoner than either divisional or unit signs.

1 A13 Cruiser, 1941, of 3 Troop, 'A' Squadron, senior regiment in brigade. Light stone with single colour overpainted in semi-straight-edged scheme, used before wavy-edged schemes became standard.

2 Bridging circles, 5in figures on front offside of vehicles: **2A** Hollow type sometimes applied to avoid breaking camouflage pattern. **2B** Normal type.

3 Priest 105mm SP gun, 5th RHA, Italy 1943. Light mud colour overpainted with black wavy-

edged scheme. Note white undersurface of gun; in the Middle East undersides and shadow areas were often white at this time.

4 Aerial pennons, 9in x 13in: **4A** CO, third regt. in senior or only armoured brigade. **4B** 'A' Sqn CO in second senior regt. **4C** 2 Troop tank, junior regt. Some units flew pennons in regimental colours instead of those indicating brigade or seniority.

5 Squadron/company signs, painted on turret sides and rear and sometimes front of AFVs, and cab doors of softskin transport. Colour indicates regiment by seniority; armoured cars used white. **5A** 16in x 12in; second-in-command HQ Sqn, senior regt. **5B** 9in sides; 3 Troop, 'A' Sqn, second regt. **5C** 12in square; HQ, 'B' Sqn, junior regt. **5D** 6in radius; CO, 'C' Coy, armoured brigade motor battalion.

6 Daimler Dingo Scout Car, used 1940-45; plain 'Portland stone' colour, as were many desert vehicles. Medical officer's runabout in armoured

regt; unit and divisional signs obscured by sand channel.

7 Air recognition signs, on truck bonnets or tilts, AFV turrets or engine decks, as large as possible:

7A 1941, round edge of turret top. **7B** 1942. **7C** Late 1942-mid-1943, shown on pink and green scheme used on AFVs around time of Alamein. **7D** 1943 onwards.

8 Ground recognition signs: **8A** Tunisia and Italy. **8B** Desert, 1941.

9 75mm half-track, 11th Hussars, 1944, in khaki and black NW Europe scheme.

10 Vehicle names, often not applied: **10A** 1st RTR, 1940. **10B** 3rd CLY, 1942.

11 Vehicle serial number styles: **11A** Tank in desert. **11B** Ambulance, NW Europe.

12 Daimler Mk I Armoured Car, 11th Hussars, winter 1944-45. Plain khaki overpainted white in snow. Littlejohn adapter on 2pdr gun and Vickers 'K' gun on turret pintle were standard at this time.

Légendes

1 Universal carrier d'un bataillon motorisé avec prisonniers italiens, 1940; l'armement comprend un fusil Boys anti-tank, et une mitrailleuse Bren, sous les couvertures dans cette photo, avec montage anti-aérien. **2** Canon anti-tank Bofors 37mm - ce n'était pas d'arme réglementaire de l'Armée Britannique, mais la division fut forcée de le réquisitionner en 1940. **3** Un char Crusader Mk II d'A Squadron 4 Troop, County of London Yeomanry. Une vue typique d'un équipage de char, à une période calme, et de leur char encombré. **4** Les chars Stuart et Crusader Mk I, fin 1941, dans le désert; ils sont peints en beige pâle, sans camouflage ni emblèmes. **5** Les chars et les camions se disjoignent de l'ordre serré adopté chaque nuit. Observez les chars Crusader et Grant, celui-là avec l'emblème triangulaire d'A Squadron et les mots 'Avanti! Avanti!' - cri de guerre italien. **6** Un camion Fordson 15 cwt servait à transporter chaque groupe d'une section d'infanterie motorisée. **7** Un camion Chevrolet 3ton, servait à transporter une section entière de la brigade infanterie-camion et accomplit beaucoup d'autres tâches de transport. **8** Transporteur de chars White-Ruxhall 18ton, remplacé plus tard par le transporteur articulé, Scammell. **9** Automobile blindée Humber Mk III - dans cette vue typique de désert observez l'auto tout couverte d'effets, attachés partout et le nom 'Clara' sur la tourelle. **10** Chars Grant sur la plaine déserte; le char le plus proche porte l'emblème à carré de 'B' Squadron sur la tourelle.

11 Un Daimler Dingo, voiture de reconnaissance du 4th Field Squadron Royal Engineers. Les emblèmes typiques comprennent l'attribut de la division avec, en même temps, l'insigne tactique de l'unité. **12** Canon anti-tank Mk II 6 pound, comme il était utilisé par la division de la mi-1942. Il était transporté sur un camion dans l'Afrique du nord. **13** Les détecteurs électriques de mines, distribués immédiatement avant la bataille d'Alamein. **14** Un poste sanitaire de régiment dans le désert avec une ambulance Austin K2. **15** On démonte le moteur d'un char Stuart. **16** Mortier de 3" en combat, en Italie 1943. **17** Les voitures de quartier général à Pompeii; à gauche un Dorchester - une voiture de commandement blindée. Rommei se servit d'un Dorchester pris à l'ennemi dans le désert. **18** Un char Sherman en Italie, camouflé de beige et de noir, avec l'emblème triangulaire d'A Squadron et le panneau d'identification en rouge et blanc sur la tourelle. **19** Le poste récepteur No 19, le poste réglementaire pour les chars et d'autres voitures pendant la deuxième partie de la guerre. **20** Les ingénieurs lancent un 'Bailey bridge' en Italie.

21 Un camion Bedford 3ton, le camion normalement utilisé pour transporter les troupes en 1944-45. **22** Un tracteur Scammell qui servait à remorquer les chars abîmés. **23** Les canons autopropulsés de campagne - les Sexton 25 pound, en France, 1944. **24** Les pièces anti-tanks autopropulsées, les M10 Achilles 17 pound, en Normandie. Une batterie de canons autopropulsés faisait partie de l'armement du régiment anti-tank. **25** Une pièce anti-aérienne gom Bolvors, en Allemagne 1944. Avec quelques petites modifications, le Bofors était l'arme légère réglementaire anti-aérienne pendant toute la guerre. **26** Une voiture de reconnaissance Humber et une auto-chenille M3 de la 4th Armoured Brigade. Dans la 7th Armoured Division le Humber servait plusieurs Etats-Majors et les

11th Hussars, et le M3 était employé par l'infanterie motorisée de la Rifle Brigade. **27** Un char Challenger avec une pièce 17 pound était employé par les 8th Hussars de la 7th Armoured Division. **28** Transporteur Windsor de la section anti-tank, 1st/5th Queen's Regiment 1945.

Planches en couleur

A Les insignes de la division, comme portés sur les voitures et quelquefois sur les vêtements, furent changés de la rondelle blanche au jerboa rouge, début 1940. Celui-ci, avec le jerboa sur un carreau blanc, étaient employés simultanément pendant les années 1943-44; l'attribut noir sur l'épaulet fut introduit en 1944-45.

Le tableau d'organisation démontre la division en mai 1942. Les panneaux et les chiffres colorés étaient portés sur les voitures de différentes unités divisionnelles; les attributs de casquette indiquent les régiments qui équipaient ces unités dans l'organisation divisionnelle à cette époque. Dans la 7th Armoured Division les panneaux et les chiffres d'unité étaient d'habitude alliés à l'attribut de division dans un seul insigne, l'attribut de division placé au-dessus de celui de l'unité.

B La frontière Egypte-Libye en 1940. A gauche se trouve une automobile blindée, un Rolls Royce 1924, avec l'équipage qui porte les berets bruns des 11th Hussars. Remarquez les bandeaux rouges et l'absence d'attributs. Un lance-corporal du King's Royal Rifle Corps et un Lieutenant du même régiment parle avec un Private du Royal Army Service Corps. Le chevron de rang du Rifleman est en noir, distinction régimentaire, et l'officier porte le calot vert des rangs commissionnés du régiment, avec l'emblème du cor-de-chasse en argent sur une cocarde rouge. Les deux hommes portent la ceinture, les bretelles etc. de l'année 1937. Le soldat RASC porte le casque colonial à l'ancienne mode, avec l'attribut en couleurs régimentaires; les troupes du front se départirent de l'habitude en 1940. A droite se trouve un Vickers Light Tank Mk VIB du 1st Royal Tank Regiment - l'équipage porte toujours la salopette noire du RTR des premiers mois de la guerre. Observez les insignes individuels de division et d'unité sur le devant du char, ce qui n'était pas rare à ce temps-là. Dans le fond vous voyez un camion Morris 30cwt, peint en beige pâle et avec des plaques matricules égyptiennes.

C Divisional Support Group, Rezegh, novembre 1941. Par les temps froids et pluvieux les troupes portaient les pardessus, les vestes en cuir, et même les bottes en caoutchouc.

Dans le fond, à gauche, vous voyez l'équipage du 25pdr canon de campagne du 1st Field Regiment, Royal Artillery. Au centre se tient Brigadier 'Jock' Campbell, Victoria Cross, dans son break Ford adapté à voiture de quartier général. A droite remarquez l'équipage de deux hommes d'un Bren, avec les attributs dans le couleurs du 2nd Bn, The Rifle Brigade. Observez les munitions et les effets dispersés partout, et le MP38 allemand; les mitraillettes en manquaient à cette période-là. Dans le fond, à droite, se trouvent un mortier 2 inch et un Boys .55 inch fusil anti-tank.

D Une route, en Hollande, 1944-45. A gauche se tient un private de la 131 (Queens) Infantry Brigade, avec le casque, modèle 1944, et un fusil No 4 Mk I. Il porte une veste en cuir aussi un blouson à l'épreuve du vent, tenue léopard distribuée pour la première fois pour les opérations en Norvège mais gardée par quelques unités ultérieurement. Dans le fond vous voyez un officier du REME sur un BSA B.30 motocyclette, et un char Cromwell des 8th Hussars avec insignes de division et d'unité. La tourelle est camouflée de treillage en fil de fer et des lambeaux. Au centre se tient un lance-corporal, motocycliste de la Military Police de la division, armé d'un mitraillette Sten et d'un pistolet. Dans le fond, à droite, se trouve un char Stuart Mk V de la reconnaissance troop des 8th Hussars, dont on a enlevé la tourelle, et monté à la place une mitraillette .50 inch. A droite vous voyez un jeep du détachement Royal Engineers, et un officier qui porte une salopette d'hiver de l'équipage de char et le calot vert et couleur de l'or, particulier aux officiers des 8th Hussars.

E Emblèmes et camouflage. (1) Char A13 1941 avec emblèmes du 3 Troop, A Squadron, régiment supérieur de la brigade. (2) Les styles différents d'indication des limites de poids sur les ponts. (3) Un canon Priest 105mm, 5th Royal Horse Artillery, en Italie 1943 - observez le dessous peint en blanc. (4) Les drapeaux étaient changés chaque jour en code de reconnaissance. A = commandant, troisième régiment dans la brigade. B = commandant, A Squadron, deuxième régiment. C = char de 2 Troop, régiment cadet. (5) Les emblèmes d'escadron peints sur les voitures blindées. Les couleurs indiquent la supériorité des régiments et les automobiles blindées se servent du blanc: A = Commandant en second, HQ Squadron, régiment supérieur. B = 3 Troop A Squadron, deuxième régiment. C = HQ B Squadron, régiment cadet. D = commandant, C Company, bataillon d'infanterie motorisée de la brigade blindée. (6) Voiture de campagne un Daimler Dingo d'un médecin militaire du régiment blindée. (7) Signes de reconnaissance aérienne sur les toits des voitures: A = 1941, B = 1942, C = 1942-43, D = 1943-45. (8) Panneaux de reconnaissance employés en Tunisie et en Italie (A) et dans le désert (B). (9) Auto-chenille 75mm, 11th Hussars, 1944. (10A et B) Styles typiques des noms de chars, pas souvent utilisés. (11A et B) Styles typiques de numéros matricules d'un char et d'une ambulance. (12) Camouflage d'hiver d'un Daimler Mk I automobile blindée des 11th Hussars, 1944-45.

Überschrift

1 Ein Universal Carrier eines motorisierten Infanteriebataillons mit italienischen Kriegsgefangenen, 1940. Die Bordbewaffnung des Fahrzeuges ist eine Boys Panzerabwehrkanone (PAK) und ein Bren, leichtes M-G, auf einer Fliegerabwehrmontierung (im Bilde überzogen). **2** Eine Bofors 37mm PAK; nicht die Einheitswaffe für das britische Heer, sondern in 1940, wegen Mangel an anderer Waffen, in die Division als Notlösung eingeführt. **3** Ein Crusader Mk II Panzer von 'A' Squadron, 4 Troop, 3rd County of London Yeomanry. Typisches Ruhepausbild. Die vielen Klamotten am Panzer beachten! **4** Stuart und Crusader Mk I Panzer in der Wüste, apat 1941. Die Tarnfarbe ist hellbeige ohne irgendwelcher Markierung. **5** Panzer und Lastkraftwagen (LKW) brechen von einem Nachtlager auf. Crusader und Grant Panzer sind im Bilde: die ersten mit dem 'A' Squadron Dreieckabzeichen und dem italienischen Wahlspruch: 'Avanti! Avanti!' **6** Ein Fordson 15 cwt LKW. Jede Infanteriegruppe eines motorisierten Infanteriezugs wurde in einem solchen Wagen transportiert. **7** Der Chevrolet 3-ton LKW. Das Allzweckfahrzeug konnte einen ganzen Zug einer motorisierten Infanteriebrigade transportieren, und hatte auch viele andere Transportaufgaben zu verrichten. **8** Das White-Ruxall 18-ton Panzertransportfahrzeug; es wurde später durch das Scammell Transportfahrzeug ersetzt. **9** Der Humber Mk III Panzerwagen in einer typischen Wüstenszene. Die vielen zusätzlichen Klamotten und die Turmname 'Clara' beachten! **10** Grant Panzer auf einer Wüstenebene. Der Panzer im Vordergrund trägt am Turm das viereckige Abzeichen der 'B' Schwadron.

11 Ein Daimler Dingo Panzerspähwagen vom 4th Field Squadron, Royal Engineers. Typisch ist das kombinierte taktische Divisions- und Einheitsabzeichen. **12** Die Mk II 6-pound PAK, von der Division ab Mitte 1942 benutzt. In Nordafrika wurde sie auf einem LKW getragen. **13** Solche elektrische Minensuchgeräte wurden kurz vor der Schlacht zu El Alamein geliefert. **14** Regimentsverbandplatz mit Austin K2 Krankenwagen in der Wüste. **15** Motorantausch in einem Stuart Panzer. **16** Ein 3-inch Mörser im Einsatz, Italien, 1943. **17** Fahrzeuge des Divisionstabs in Pompeii; links ein Dorchester Panzerstabsfahrzeug. Rommel hat im Wüstenkrieg einen erbeuteten Dorchester in gebrauch genommen. **18** Ein Sherman Panzer in Italien. Die Tarnfarben sind beige und schwarz, am Turm das 'A' Squadron Dreieckabzeichen und die rot-weiß-rote Erkennungstafel. **19** Das 'Nr. 10' Funkgerät, Einheitsfunkgerät für Panzer und andere Fahrzeuge in der zweiten Kriegshälfte. **20** Pioniere schlagen eine 'Bailey Bridge' eine Fluss in Italien.

21 Ein Bedford 3-ton LKW de normal Truppentransportwagen 1944-45. **22** Die Scammell Zugmaschine, als 'Bergepanzer' eingesetzt. **23** Die 'Sexton' 25-pounder selbstfahraubitzen, Frankreich 1944. **24** M10 Achilles 17-pounder Jagdpanzer in der Normandie. Das Panzerabwehrregiment der Division hatte eine Batterie solcher Fahrzeuge. **25** 40mm Bofors Fliegerabwehrkanonen (FLAK), Deutschland 1944. Diese Kanone, in vielen Abarten, war die normale leichte FLAK der britischen Armee den ganzen Krieg hindurch. **26** Humber Panzerspähwagen und M3 Halbkettenfahrzeug der 4th Armoured Brigade. Der Humber wurde während der 7th Armoured Division von verschiedenen Stäben und von den 11th Hussars, der M3 von der Rifle Brigade (motorisierten Infanterieregiment) benutzt. **27** Ein 'Challenger' Panzer mit 17-pounder Kanone, von den Aufklärungsregiment, 11th Division. **28** Ein Winson Transportkettenfahrzeug des Panzerabwehrregiment, 11th Queen's Regiment, 1945.

Farbtafeln

A Das Divisionsabzeichen, auf Fahrzeugen und manchmal auf Bekleidung getragen, erfährt einige Änderungen: zuerst ein weißer Kreis, dann (im Frühjahr 1940) eine rote Springmaus. Letztere und eine Springmaus auf einem weißen Viereck wurden 1943-44 alle beide zu sehen. Das schwarze Armeelabzeichen erschien erst 1944-45.

Der Stärke- und Ausrüstungsnachweis (STAN) zeigt den Divisionszustand im Mai 1942. Die farbigen Schilde mit den Nummern wurden auf den Fahrzeugen der verschiedenen Divisionsheiten getragen. Die Mützenabzeichen sind die der Regimenter, die sich zu dieser Zeit innerhalb der Division befanden. In der 7th Armoured Division war es üblich das Divisionsabzeichen und Einheitsabzeichen gleichzeitig, mit dem ersteren nach oben, zu tragen.

B Die Grenze zwischen Ägypten und Lybien, 1940. Links ein Rolls Royce M 1924 Panzerwagen mit einer Besatzung der 11th Hussars - braune Berets mit dunkelrotem Kopfband, ohne Mützenabzeichen. Ein Lance-Corporal und ein Leutnant des King's Royal Rifle Corps unterhalten sich mit einem Private des Royal Army Service Corps. Der Rifleman trägt sein Dienstgradabzeichen (Winkel) in schwarz - ein Regiments-tradition. Der Offizier trägt das grüne Offizierschiffchen des Regiments mit silbernem Jagdhornemblem auf roter Kokarde. Beide Männer tragen die Kampf-ausrüstung M 1937. Der RASC-Soldat trägt den altmodischen Sonnenhelm mit dem Abzeichen in Regimentsfarben. Der Helm wurden von den Kampftruppen schon 1940 aufgegeben.

Rechts ein Vickers Light Tank Mk VI B vom 1st Royal Tank Regiment. Während den ersten Kriegsmontaten wurde das RTR mit den schwarzen Panzerkombinationen ausgestattet. Die getrennten Divisions und Einheitsabzeichen vorne am Panzer bemerken; so etwas kam häufig zu dieser Zeit vor. Im Hintergrund ein Morris 30-cwt LKW, hellbeige und mit ägyptischen zivilen Kennzeichenschilddern.

C Divisional Support Group, Sidi Rezegh, November 1941. Vorübergehend war das Wetter sogar kalt und nass und die Truppen zogen dann Mäntel, Lederwams und Gummistiefel an. Links im Hintergrund steht die besatzung eines 25-pdr Feldgeschützes vom 1st Field Regiment, Royal Artillery. In der Mitte Brigadier 'Jock' Campbell 'Victoria Cross' in seinem ford Kombifahrzeug, das in ein Stabsfahrzeug verwandelt worden ist. Rechts die zwei-Mann Besatzung eines Bren leichten M-Gs. Sie tragen die Abzeichenfarben des 2nd Battalions The Rifle Brigade.

Die umherliegenden Munition, Gerät und die erbeutete deutsche MP 38 beachten! Solche Maschinenpistolen waren in diesen Tagen kaum zu haben. Rechts in Hintergrund stehen ein 2-inch Mörser und eine Boys .55-inch PAK.

D Eine Strassenszene in Holland, 1944-45. Links ein Soldat (private) der 131 (Queens) Infantry Brigade mit dem Helm M 1944 und dem Gewehr No. 4 Mk I. Er trägt ein Lederwams und die windfeste Tarnjacke, die zuerst für die Operation in Norwegen zugeteilt wurden, die aber in einigen Einheiten im späteren Gebrauch blieben. Im Hintergrund ein Offizier der REME auf einem Motorrad BSA B.30 und ein Cromwell Panzer von den 8th Hussars mit kombinierten Divisions- und Einheitsabzeichen. Der Turm ist mit Drahtnetz und Stoffteilen getarnt worden. In der Mitte ein Lance-corporal Motorradfahrer der Divisions Militärpolizei-Kompagnie. Als Bewaffnung hat er eine Pistole und eine Sten M-P. Rechts im Hintergrund ein Stuart Mk V Panzer der Reconnaissance Troop der 8th Hussars, ohne Turm und mit einem zusätzlichen .50-inch M-G. Rechts ein Jeep der Divisions-Royal Engineer-Abteilung und ein Offizier der 8th Hussars in der Panzerbesatzungswinterkombination und dem grün-goldenen Regimentschiffchen.

E Fahrzeugabzeichen und Tarnfarben. (1) Ein A 13 Panzer, 1941, mit den Abzeichen vom 3 Troop, A Squadron vom rangältesten Regiment der Brigade. (2) Verschiedene Brückengewichtsmarkierungen. (3) Eine 'Priest' 105mm selbstfahrende Kanone vom 5th Royal Horse Artillery, Italien, 1943. Die weiße Rohrunterseite bemerken! (4) Radioantennenwimpel, die von Tag zu Tag in einer bestimmten Reihenfolge als Erkennungsschiffe gewechselt wurden: A = Chef des dritten Regiments der Brigade. B = Chef, 'A' Squadron, des zweiten Regiment. C = Panzer vom 2. Troop de jüngsten Regiments. (5) Panzerkompanieerkennungsabzeichen (die Farben zeigen die Rangordnung der Regimenter; Radpanzerkampfwagen und Spähwagen trugen weiß) A = Stellvertreter der Kompaniechef, HQ Squadron des rangältesten Regiments. B = 3. Troop, 'A' Squadron des zweiten Regiments. C = 'B' Squadron - Stab des jüngsten Regiments. D = Kompaniechef, 'C' Company eines motorisierten Infanteriebataillons einer Panzerbrigade. (6) Daimler Dingo Panzerspähwagen eines Regimentsartees eines Panzerregiments. (7) Erkennungsabzeichen, die für Flugzeuge oben auf Fahrzeugen angebracht wurden: A = 1941, B = 1942, C = 1942-43, D = 1943-45. (8) Erkennungstafel (A) aus Italien und Tunesien, (B) in der Wüste. (9) 75mm Halkettenselbstfahrlafete von den 11th Hussars, 1944. (10A und B) - Beispiele verschiedener Panzerarnamen, die ab und zu zu sehen waren. (11A und B) - Beispiele typischer Panzer- und Krankenwagenkennziffer. (12) Wintertarnfarben eines Daimler Mk I Panzerspähwagen von den 11th Hussars, 1944-45.

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Avec annotations en français sur les planches en couleur

Mit Aufzeichnungen auf deutsch über die Farbtafeln

