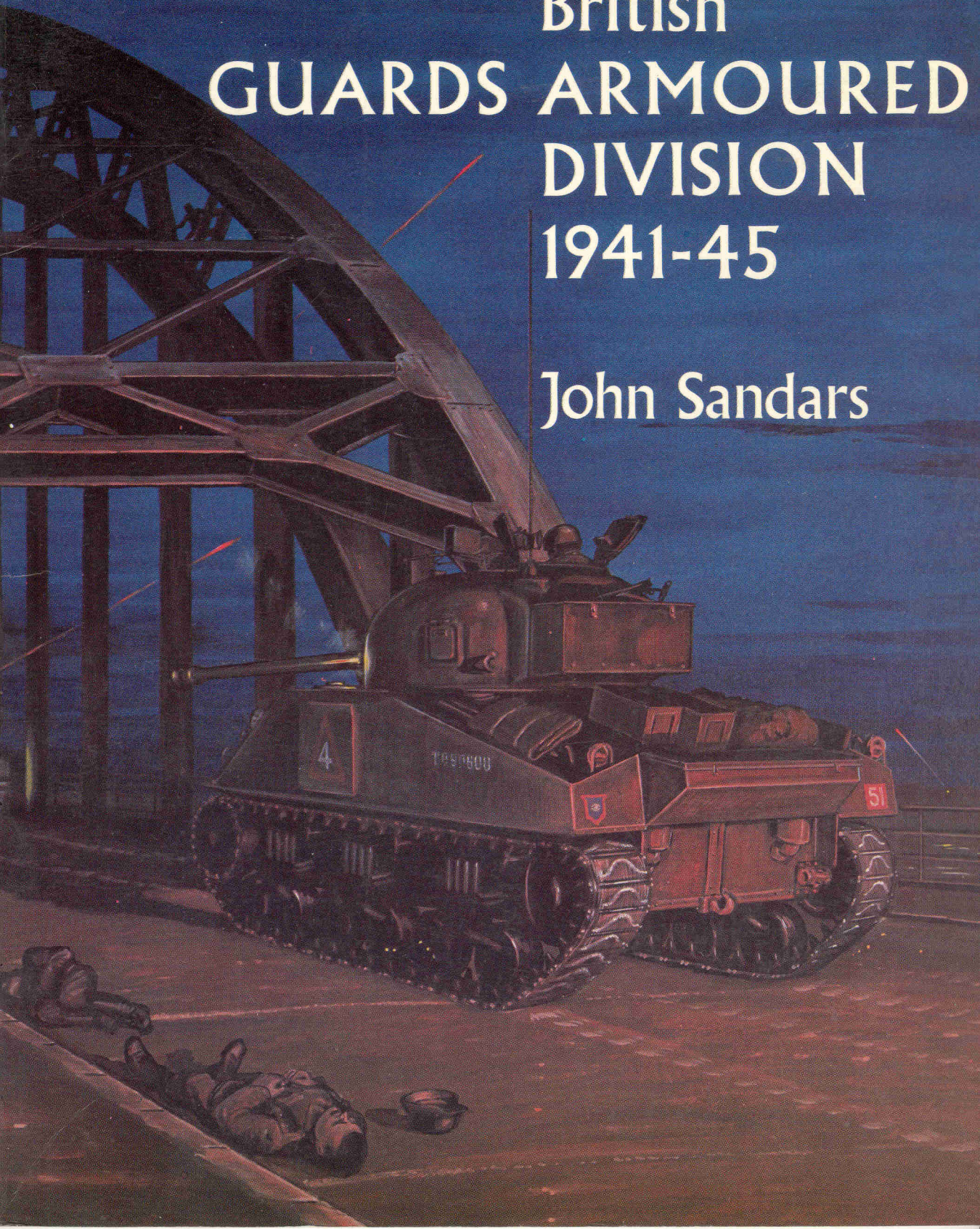


OSPREY VANGUARD 9

# British GUARDS ARMoured DIVISION 1941-45

John Sandars





VANGUARD SERIES

EDITOR: MARTIN WINDROW

**British**  
**GUARDS ARMoured**  
**DIVISION 1941-45**

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Mike Chappell's cover painting shows Sgt. Robinson's troop, No. 1 Squadron, 2nd Armoured Bn. Grenadier Guards rushing the Nijmegen road bridge on 20 September 1944.



Tanks of the 2nd Grenadiers in France. The nearest is a Sherman V 'Rhino' fitted with the American-designed Culin cutter for breaking through hedgerows; a Sherman Ic Firefly is in the centre, and a Vc Firefly on the right, both with 17pdr. guns. The unit tassign—'51' on red—the divisional sign, and 'B' Squadron sign enclosing tanks' individual numbers within the battalion can be seen on the 'Rhino', while the Ic Firefly appears to have a name painted on the plate in front of the driver's hatch. (This, and all other photographs not specifically credited otherwise, are from the Imperial War Museum collections.)

## Introduction

Although organized and equipped in basically the same way, and faced with generally similar tasks, there were marked differences between the three British armoured divisions which fought in North-West Europe during 1944–45. The 7th had evolved gradually from pre-war days (as described in *Vanguard 1* by the present author) and had fought continuously since 1940, while Guards and 11th Armoured were formed only in 1941 and spent nearly three years training in the United Kingdom before going into action for the first time in Normandy in mid-1944. The 11th Armoured, like 7th, had a mixture of cavalry, yeomanry and RTR units in its armoured brigade, and had rifle, light infantry and county battalions among its infantry, while Guards Armoured was unique in that virtually all its units, both armoured and infantry, had common origins as foot guards battalions within the Brigade of Guards, before retraining as tank crews and lorried or motor infantry. Guards Armoured also possibly enjoyed less disruption and greater continuity than the others once it went into action: unlike 7th Armoured it kept the same divisional and brigade commanders throughout its period of active service, and unlike 11th it retained the same type of tank, the Sherman, until the end of the war. It also drew reinforcements for its two brigades from the Guards depots, but this proved

something of a mixed blessing since the Armoured Division had to compete with the other Guards formations in Italy and elsewhere for the limited available manpower.

All these factors led to each armoured division developing its own distinctive character. Thus Guards Armoured, far from being conservative in outlook as the uninitiated might have expected, went further than either of the other divisions in integrating its armour and infantry into permanent mixed units, and was less influenced by the systems used in previous campaigns for the supply and support of its brigades. It is against this background that we shall consider the organization and activities of the division from June 1944 to May 1945; but first it is necessary to look briefly at its formation and history up to that time.

The decision to form a Guards Armoured Division was taken, with the King's approval, in spring 1941, because of the lack of armoured troops in England to face a possible German invasion. It was actually formed in May under the command of Major-General Sir Oliver Leese. By September key officers and other ranks had completed courses at Bovington and Lulworth and the Division assembled for the first time in the Salisbury Plain area. At this stage it consisted of two armoured brigades, each of three armoured regiments and a motor

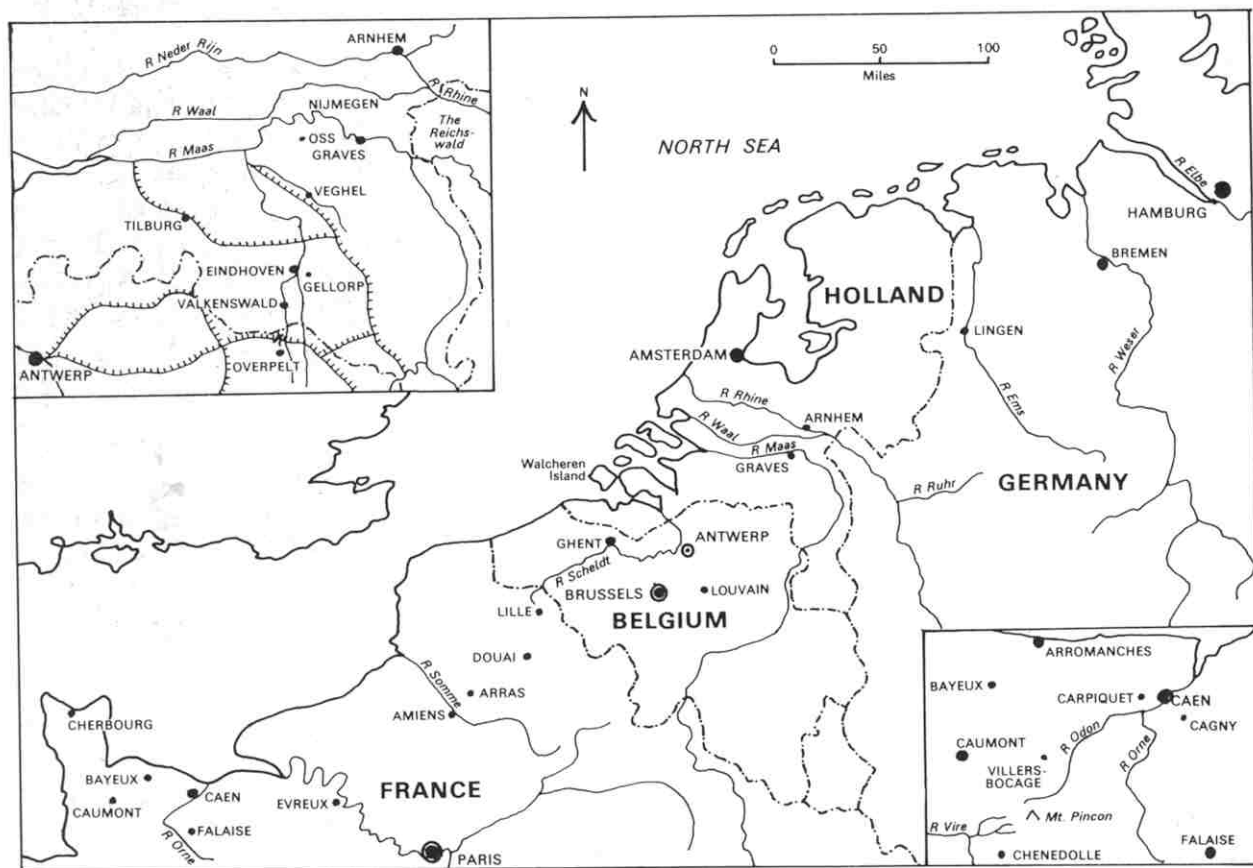
infantry battalion, and a support group of artillery with a single lorried infantry battalion.

Equipment was at first scarce and antiquated. Although the need for good maintenance and the ability to rectify faults, which was instilled by the frequent breakdowns of the worn-out Covenanter tanks, may have stood the Division in good stead later, it is doubtful if the point was appreciated by stranded tank crews at the time! Organizational problems peculiar to the Guards also had to be solved; thus the 1st Bn. Grenadiers were made into a motor battalion when the inadvisability of trying to squeeze the six-foot guardsmen of their King's Company into tanks was appreciated. On the whole the new roles were tackled with enthusiasm, and only a few NCOs and others had to be replaced as being too traditional in outlook to adapt.

By April 1942 training and equipment had reached the stage where full divisional exercises were possible. From then on exercises of increasing scale and complexity were organized, until most of the formations in the country were involved for up

to a fortnight at a time in gigantic manoeuvres, to train what was now the army for the invasion of Europe in all its tasks. Administrative exercises even went to the lengths of requiring units to submit dummy recommendations for gallantry awards, so thorough was the preparation. The tactics in which the Division was trained were partly the result of lessons learnt in the desert, and partly the outcome of trials and exercises in England which were expected to be more appropriate to the equipment with which, and the type of country over which, it would fight.

At the end of 1942 several changes took place within the Division. In line with general policy one of the two armoured brigades was replaced by a lorried infantry brigade, and the support group was reorganized as divisional artillery; at the same time the armoured car regiment left to become Corps troops and was replaced by an armoured reconnaissance regiment in tanks. This gave, with minor subsequent alterations, the organization for the rest of the war, which can be seen on Plate A. Personnel



changes also put a new divisional commander, Maj.-Gen. A. H. S. Adair, and the two brigadiers—N. H. Gwatkin in command of 5th Guards Armoured Brigade, and G. F. Johnson of 32nd Guards Brigade—in the posts they were to hold throughout the Division's active life.

In mid-1943 the Division became part of VIII Corps, under Lieutenant-General O'Connor, where it remained until after landing in Normandy. Following various changes in equipment and further training in Norfolk and Yorkshire, the Guards Armoured Division finally congregated, a fully equipped and highly trained formation as yet untried in battle, in the Brighton area in June 1944.

## Organization and Equipment

Before considering the Division's achievements, it is perhaps as well to examine briefly the means at its disposal. As it only took part in one relatively short campaign once it eventually went into action, its organization and equipment remained basically unchanged from that time, the only major exception being the replacement of the 1st Bn. Welsh Guards by the 2nd Bn. Scots Guards in early 1945. It landed in Normandy as a standard armoured division of the period (see Plate A), and although various internal regroupings were made, as we shall see, the arrangement of one armoured and one infantry brigade remained its official composition; vehicles retained the tactical signs shown, and units reverted to this organization when required. One permanent change from the usual system, which was unique to Guards Armoured, was the grouping of all service units not needed in the fighting area into a single administrative group, commanded and controlled virtually as a third brigade, instead of the looser arrangement, with a rear divisional HQ used by other divisions (see Table 1).

Apart from the purely Guards requirement for two extra Warrant Officers per battalion as drill sergeants, the armoured and infantry units were also standard, but in deference to their origins the armoured regiments continued to be referred to as



Universal Carrier MkII of 3rd Bn. (Infantry) Irish Guards, armed with a pivot-mounted .30 cal. Browning machine gun and fitted with wireless, probably an '18' or '38' set. As the upper surfaces of carriers were small and tended to get covered with loose gear, the air recognition sign—a white star in a circle—was sometimes painted on a plate, as here, that could be put on top of the pile. The unit tacsign—'62' on green—can be seen in front of the driver, and there is a water jerrycan, with the indentations filled in white, on the back.



M3 halftracks of 1st Motor Bn., Grenadiers. The unit tacsign—'54' on red—the ground and air recognition stars, and the bridging circle—yellow rim, black '10' outlined in yellow on circular khaki plate—can be seen on nearest vehicle. These are the motor infantry version of this vehicle, used by many units within the Division in different forms. Each carried one section, and had a ring for an AA machine gun beside the driver, side racks and hoops for rigging a canvas tilt over the open body. Rolls of barbed wire were often carried on the front as here.

TABLE I

## ARMOURED DIVISIONAL HQ, 1944:

### Advance HQ

G.O.C. (Cromwell tank)

GSO.1

*'G' Staff & Signals:*

(ACV 1 Command  
ACV 2 Intelligence  
ACV 3 Operations  
ACV 4 Rear link to Main HQ  
ACV 5 Rear link to Corps  
ACV 6 Spare & Signal Office  
ACV 7 RAF liaison)

*Defence Troop*  
(8 Cromwells  
2 Crusader AA tanks)

*Liaison & Intercom Troop*  
(10 Scout Cars)

### Main HQ

AA & QMG

*'G'*

*Signals*

*'A & Q'*

Fld. Security  
Section

*HQ*

*Royal Arty.*  
(1 ACV  
4 Scout Cars)

CRE

(2 LCVs)

CRASC

CREME

ADMS

ADOS

### Administrative Group

HQ (Command, Signal &  
Provost Sections)

Brigade Coys  
RASC

Brigade  
'B' Echelons

Brigade  
Workshops &  
Ordnance

Fld. Amb.  
Reserve Coy

Field Dressing  
Station

Field Hygiene  
Section

Tank Delivery  
Squadron

Infy.  
Reinforcements

## ARMOURED BRIGADE HQ, 1944:

Brigadier (ACV)

*Command Group*

(4 Sherman HQ tanks  
6 Sherman defence tanks  
2 Armd., 9 Scout Cars (liaison)  
3 Valentine Scissors Bridges)

*Office & Recce Group*

(2 Jeeps  
15 cwt Wireless Truck  
15cwt Office Truck  
15cwt GS Truck  
6 Motorcycles)

*Admin Group*

(6 Jeeps & Cars  
8 Motorcycles  
15cwt Water Truck  
15cwt Wireless Truck  
2 × 15cwt GS Trucks  
9 × 3-ton Trucks)



battalions (see Table 2). After graduation from Covenanters through Crusader MkIIIs, by 1944 the basic tank in the armoured regiments was the 75mm-gun Sherman, which Guards Armoured were to retain, unlike either of the other divisions, until the end of the war. The proportion of 17pdr. Sherman Fireflies was increased from the initial one per troop as more became available. The Stuarts, or 'Honeys' as they were known, were too lightly armed and armoured for use as tanks and were strictly reconnaissance vehicles, while the anti-aircraft tanks were discarded as unnecessary shortly after landing in Normandy. The armoured recovery vehicle (ARV) issued to each squadron was a turretless Sherman. The administrative vehicles were split up into echelons: F2, which included the fitters and medical halftracks, ready-use petrol and ammunition in some twenty to thirty vehicles, travelled with the regiment. The bulk petrol, ammunition etc., in about fifty vehicles, moved behind in 'A' Echelon under brigade control; the remaining baggage, not needed in action, formed 'B' Echelon, which stayed with the divisional Admin Group.

Although originally intended to have one squadron of light tanks and two of Centaur cruisers, the Armoured Reconnaissance Regiment went to war with the same organization as an armoured regiment, except that it had 75mm Cromwell and

On the road to Brussels: prisoners guarded by a despatch rider (extreme left) watch a Stuart V recon tank passing a Cromwell of the 2nd Welsh Guards. The Cromwell has a cable reel for pulling out mines on the right front trackguard, and a smoke generator outboard of the hull machine gun. Vehicles in the background include Daimler armoured cars of 2nd Household Cavalry.

17pdr. Challenger tanks in place of Shermans, and a pair of 95mm-gun support Cromwells in each squadron HQ. Later its troop of Stuarts were also replaced by Cromwells, and these were eventually absorbed into the squadrons to make good losses. Initially the Valentine Scissors bridge tanks belonging to the armoured brigade HQ were allocated to the reconnaissance regiment, but they were soon sent back, and good use was made of them during the later stages of the war in Holland and Germany.

With the exception of the Grenadiers, the infantry battalions were lorried (Table 3), which meant that they each had a small platoon of RASC Bedford QLT troop-carrying vehicles (TCVs) permanently attached to them. The Grenadiers, being motor infantry, had their own transport in the form of armoured halftracks (Table 4). They were initially operated with companies allocated to each armoured regiment, but after Normandy they handed in half of their twelve 6pdr. anti-tank guns, formed extra motor platoons from the crews, and operated in the same manner as the other infantry battalions. The only



M10 self-propelled anti-tank gun following a Crusader OP tank, both of 21st Anti-Tank Regiment, RA. Both 3in and 17pdr. M10s were used in the Division; this one has its .50 cal. Browning machine gun mounted on the turret top and has the divisional sign on the left and the unit tacsign on the right of the rear plate. There is a troop sign above the tacsign but this is obscured by the tarpaulin. The Crusader could be a redundant AA tank.

non-Guards infantry unit was the independent machine gun company, No. 1 Coy., 4th Bn. Royal Northumberland Fusiliers (the battalion's other companies were with the other two armoured divisions). Equipped initially with 4.2in mortars and Vickers machine guns, they also formed a 'Wasp' carrier-borne flamethrower platoon in early 1945, but it had relatively little opportunity to show its worth.

The Divisional Artillery (Table 5) had, as was usual, one of its Field Regiments self-propelled, with Sexton 25pdrs. and Ram OP tanks; and the other with towed 25pdrs. Both were converted from Yeomanry (Territorial Army cavalry) regiments; the former, 153rd Field Regt., from the Leicestershire Yeomanry, and the latter, 55th Field, from the West Somerset. The light anti-aircraft regiment was also a recent conversion, in this case from a battalion of the King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry. Shortly before D-Day it disbanded its 20mm troops and the personnel eventually went to form counter-mortar teams (which located mortars by tracking the bombs with radar). In North-West Europe the LAA regiment remained on a six-troop basis, usually dispersed to protect Divisional HQ,

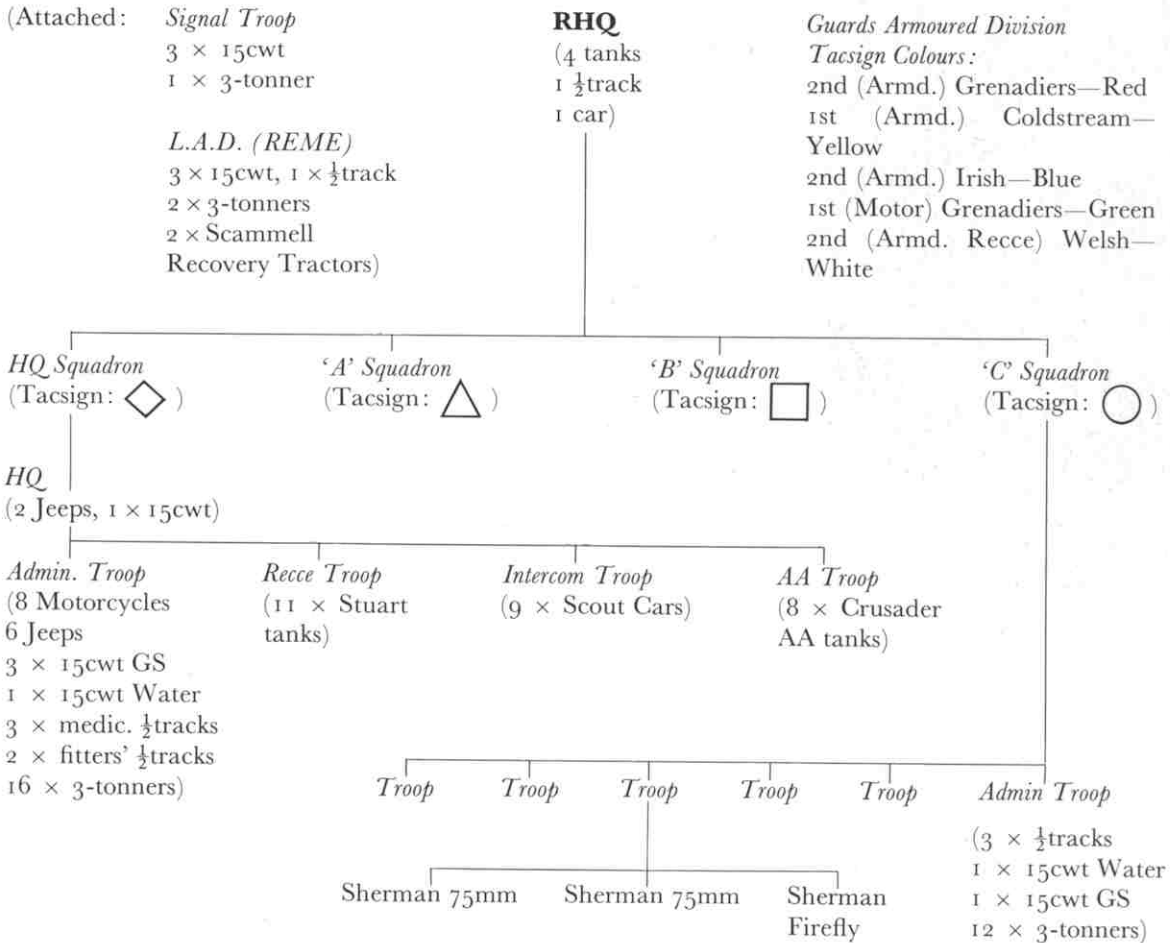
the field guns, and bridges in the divisional area. By 1945 it was fully self-propelled and was sometimes used in the ground role, while in March of that year two 40mms in each troop were replaced by American halftrack-mounted quadruple .5in machine guns. The anti-tank regiment went into action with about half the M10s in its two self-propelled batteries fitted with American 3in guns, and the other half with British 17pdrs.; the proportion of the latter increased as they became available. It also gained Crusaders, possibly redundant AA tanks, as command vehicles. In March 1945 the two towed anti-tank batteries were converted to infantry, with three rifle troops, and a support troop of two 17pdrs., a carrier section, and two 3in mortars. As well as its own units the Divisional Artillery usually had a flight of the Corps Air Observation Post squadron attached, and often had temporary control of Medium and extra Field batteries from Corps.

The Divisional Royal Engineer Regiment had the usual two Field Squadrons for engineer tasks, and a Field Park Squadron as a plant unit, as well as an assault bridging troop. The units were operated centrally rather than being permanently allocated to the brigades, and for bridging, probably their major task during the later stages of the campaign, they were often assisted by or gave assistance to Corps or Army units.

Having no separate troop-carrying company, the RASC column had permanent detachments from the infantry brigade and the armoured troops companies with the lorried infantry battalions. The RASC companies were basically equipped with Ford WOT6, Bedford QLD and a few Canadian Ford F6OL, 4 x 4 3-tonners, as well as the Bedford QLTs with the infantry. Until the Seine was crossed the column operated with brigade companies, each carrying mixed loads of ammunition, petrol and supplies; after that they changed to commodities, one company carrying ammunition, another petrol and the third supplies. Petrol and supplies were normally sent forward once a day from the administrative area to points where they were collected by unit 'A' Echelons. A group of twenty vehicles from the ammunition company was kept close to Divisional HQ, from which lorries could be sent forward direct to the guns; these were replaced with other lorries from further back as

TABLE 2

## ARMOURED REGIMENT, 1944:



they were used. The divisional RASC collected in bulk from a Corps Forward Maintenance Area, and the composite platoons then split the commodities into the loads required to go forward in each company.

On the medical side the Light Field Ambulance normally worked with 5th Brigade and the Field Ambulance with 32nd, leapfrogging companies/sections when on the move. They operated advanced dressing stations and collected wounded from unit Regimental Aid Posts for transportation to the Corps Casualty Clearing Stations.

For the recovery and repair of vehicles REME Light Aid Detachments (LADs) travelled with

unit 'A' Echelons, and Advanced Workshop Detachments followed behind each brigade to recover the more seriously damaged vehicles to the brigade workshops in the Admin Group. Although armoured squadrons had their own ARVs, these had no jibs and could only tow, so LAD Scammell recovery tractors had to be sent forward to recover any vehicles with damaged running gear.

As can be seen from Plate A there were several other units and sub-units within the division, and the total strength came to just over 3,000 vehicles and 14,700 men (which needed nearly 1,200 gallons of petrol to move them all one mile). Of these just over 300 vehicles were tanks, and 800



Sherman ARV recovering a Sherman gun tank. Each squadron had one ARV, virtually a turretless gun tank with a .50 cal. Browning. Although good for towing, they could not recover vehicles with damaged running gear which were unable to 'roll'.

vehicles and 3,000 men formed the administrative group.

### **Camouflage Schemes and Vehicle Markings**

AFVs were khaki overall, and most softskins seem to have been the same; some may have had the 'Mickey Mouse ear' black scheme applied over this, but pictures of Guards Armoured vehicles make this doubtful. Some tanks had chicken wire around the turrets and wire wound spirally along the gun barrels for attaching foliage or skrim, but this was by no means general even in Normandy. All vehicles usually had the divisional sign on the left front and rear and their unit tactical signs on the right (see Plate A). RASC troop-carrying vehicles wore the sign of the unit carried over that of the RASC company. Signs seem mostly to have been painted direct onto vehicle bodies, mudguards or hulls. The air recognition sign of a white star in a circle was painted on tank turret tops and

softskin bonnets or cab roofs; vehicles such as carriers without such top surfaces sometimes used stars on a disc which could be put on top of their loads. Plain stars without circle were sometimes seen on lorry and halftrack cab doors. Tank squadron signs (see Table 2) were painted on hull sides and rear, and sometimes front surfaces, but not on turrets. They were sometimes quite large, and the Grenadiers seem to have put the tank serial number within the unit in white inside the squadron sign on the sides, while the Coldstreams painted the troop number and letter, to indicate the tank within the troop, on the turret back stowage boxes. Softskin vehicles attached to armoured regiments often had squadron signs on front and rear, but the vehicles of the Grenadier motor battalion do not seem to have used them although they were part of the armoured brigade. Other standard signs were the bridge classification plate, a black number on a yellow disc at the front, and the vehicle serial number in white on hull or cab sides; these were not always visible, and tanks seem in many cases to have dispensed with bridging circles as well. The Irish Guards painted names on the

fronts of their tanks in a distinctive style with the letters increasing and then decreasing in size through the words, but other units do not seem to have followed suit, although photographs occasionally show names painted in varying styles, very small, on individual tanks, presumably on the crews' initiative.

Apart from markings, spare track plates and a spare bogey were often stowed on the front plates of the Shermans, while Cromwells had a cable reel (for pulling out mines) and a smoke generator at the front, and a spare roadwheel on the turret side or rear hull plate. Personal gear was often stowed under the tarpaulin on the engine decks, wrapped in groundsheets and hung from the turret sides, or put in empty ammunition boxes secured about the vehicle.

### 6th Guards Tank Brigade and 2nd Household Cavalry Regiment

These two units both formed part of the original Guards Armoured Division but were removed in the reorganization at the end of 1942. The tank brigade did not return until the end of the war when the Division ceased to be armoured, but 2HCR operated with it, as Corps troops, from time to time during the summer of 1944 before being permanently attached and then once again becoming officially part of the Division later in the year.



A familiar task for the 40mm Bofors guns of 94th LAA Regt., RA: guarding Bailey bridges built by the sappers on the divisional or brigade centre lines. The nearer bridge has been spanned across moored civilian barges, while under the further one trestles have been built to replace the blown piers of the original masonry bridge.



Scammell SV/2S heavy recovery tractor showing the extending jib and winch gear that enabled it to recover vehicles that could not be handled by the ARVs. Each armoured battalion's REME LAD had two Scammells, and the infantry brigade workshop had another four; the armoured brigade workshop had six transporters for recovery purposes. (Conniford)

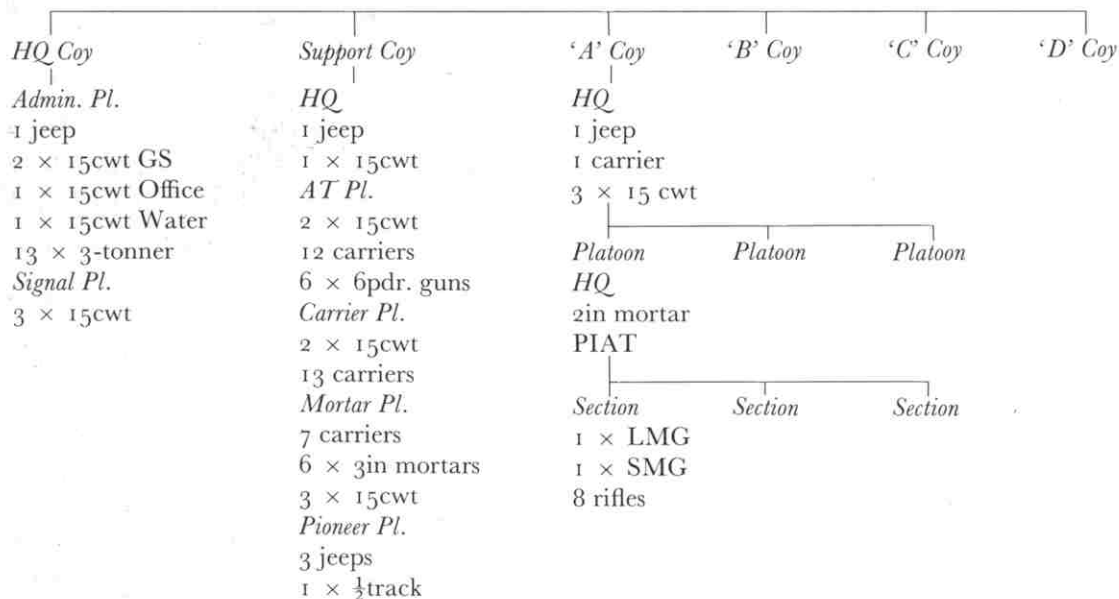
The organization of both units is shown in Table 7. The Tank Brigade was intended for use as Army troops, to be allocated to support infantry divisions as required, being one of three such formations of 'heavy tanks' in the army at that time. It was basically similar to the armoured brigade in the Division, but lacked any infantry of its own, and had Armoured Command Vehicles down to battalion level, as well as being more self-contained in other respects. Its basic equipment was the Churchill infantry tank which, although not impervious to the heavier German tank and anti-tank guns at battle ranges, was better armoured than the Shermans and Cromwells; its cross-country ability was also greater, enabling it to move more freely in the Normandy *bocage* and other difficult going. When the Brigade landed in France it still had a considerable number of the older marks of Churchill armed with the 6pdr. gun, and although many of these were up-gunned by the workshops, and others were replaced by the MkVII with a 75mm weapon when it became available, photographs indicate that some were still in use quite late on in the war. Despite this the 6th Guards Tank Brigade was able to give a good account of itself in Normandy south of Caumont, where it briefly supported infantry from the Guards Armoured Division, and again in the battles in Holland and Germany, although it took little part in the rush through France and Belgium. In 1945 it was

TABLE 3

## INFANTRY BATTALION, 1944;

**BHQ**

(1 each Humber scout  
car, carrier, 15cwt;  
2 jeeps  
2 ×  $\frac{1}{2}$ tracks, of  
which 1 medic.)



*Attached RASC Troop Carrying Detachment:* 1 car or jeep, 2 × 15cwt, 21 × 3-ton TCVs

redesignated as an armoured brigade and made some spectacular advances carrying British and American paratroops, despite the relative slowness of its Churchills. In addition to these troops and Guards Armoured it also supported 15th Scottish, 3rd and 5th British and 43rd Wessex Divisions before finishing the war on the Baltic coast.

The tanks usually had old track plates—Sherman as well as Churchill types—liberally welded to the fronts and turrets for extra protection. They were marked with the tactical sign on the left front, and the brigade emblem on the left rear (see Plate A). Individual tank names were painted on the air intakes each side, squadron signs on the rear of turret boxes, and sometimes troop numbers and letters on the hull side doors. In addition to the 75mm/6pdr. tanks, squadron HQs had close-support Churchills with 95mm howitzers

and Stuart recce tanks, while the Coldstream battalion used a captured Panther, for a while christened 'Cuckoo'.

The 2nd Household Cavalry Regiment, which is of more direct relevance to the story of the Guards Armoured Division, was converted from a motor battalion, and consisted of a mixture of Royal Horse Guards and Life Guards personnel. Both retained their own regimental cap badges, and officers their distinctive rank 'pips', but they were otherwise fully amalgamated. The unique Household Cavalry nomenclature for their Warrant Officers and NCOs, with 'corporals of horse' and 'corporal majors' in place of sergeants and sergeant-majors, remained unchanged.

Initially 'the stable boys', as they were sometimes known, were VIII Corps troops and during the fighting in Normandy, where several divisions were

operating in close proximity, different squadrons worked with different divisions. This sometimes led to duplication of reconnaissance effort, and operating with an infantry division unfamiliar with armoured cars was not found to be a success. It was a gruelling time for the Regiment, scouting ahead in close country where first contact was invariably made with concealed tanks or guns rather than with the enemy's light recon forces. The floors of cars were soon sandbagged as protection against mines, and electrically operated smoke generators were fitted to the fronts and wired in to the sidelight circuits. Although these proved very effective, the practice of reversing at high speed along narrow lanes with ditches on both sides while enveloped in a cloud of smoke probably caused as many, albeit less serious casualties, as the ambushes that made it necessary. Unlike some other regiments, 2HCR did not remove the turrets of its Daimler armoured cars to reduce their silhouette; instead the scout cars in the troops were normally sent ahead with the armoured cars covering them from behind. Although these only boasted 2pdr. guns, the one in each troop fitted with a Littlejohn adaptor to increase penetration was capable of piercing the front armour of a StuG III at the ranges normal in close country.

Control of the Regiment was far from easy. Its job was not only to locate the enemy, but also to find ways around defended areas and, increasingly as the war went on, to find unblown bridges, so the troops ranged far more widely afield than those of an armoured regiment; on one occasion, for example, a bridge was discovered across the Soulevre in France some six miles down an unguarded road behind the enemy lines. It was also little use obtaining information unless it could be relayed to those behind needing it. For this reason RHQ had to move frequently to keep in touch both forwards and backwards, and liaison officers in Humber scout cars with radios on the regimental net were kept at all headquarters in the vicinity whether the regiment was working for them or not. In the squadrons the Staghound proved a good HQ car, with its five-man crew able to provide relief wireless operators, although it was too bulky for use as a troop car. Because of their dispersed nature and the distance from RHQ, squadrons often kept a 'mixed load' lorry of petrol and ammunition with



Vickers .303 MMG in action. These guns were used both by the Northumberland Fusiliers and the support company of the 1st Motor Bn., Grenadiers. The condenser tin for the cooling water jacket and an ammunition box can be seen under the front of the gun, and the dial sight for indirect fire is just visible above the loading number's helmet.

the SHQ while the rest of the echelons were at RHQ or behind. Despite the nature of the work casualties were not excessive and the MO with his White scout cars (compared in the unit history for lack of comfort with Boudicca's chariot!), was generally able to cope. The possession of their own infantry/pioneers in the support troops, and of the AEC cars (known in the regiment at the time as 'Matadors') with their 75mm guns, enabled squadrons to push ahead or defend themselves in a way that had not proved possible for armoured car units in earlier campaigns.

The Regiment's problems were not all caused by the enemy; as the CO remarked, 'When liberating territory the attentions of civilians very much impede operations.' As 'first in' to most towns they were frequently mobbed. On one occasion a trooper was knocked out by an unripe pear, and on others bedrolls, wireless aerials and anything else left on the outsides of the cars were taken by the populace as souvenirs of their liberation; at one point only the intervention of the local police prevented the removal of a scout car's wheels, and sometimes the positions of carefully concealed cars were given away to the enemy by the presence of a crowd of curious onlookers. Operating ahead of the main advances the Regiment was also vulnerable to



Fitters at work in the engine bay of a Cromwell. The nearest man is sitting on the Meteor engine with the left-hand fuel tank in front of him and the left-hand radiator to his left, while his mate sits on the gearbox to work on the final drive, steering and brake unit.

the mistaken attentions of Allied aircraft; and on more than one occasion was frustrated to find that bridges that had been blown by the retreating BEF in 1940 had not been repaired.

When the Allies broke out of the Normandy bridgehead, 2HCR was switched from VIII to XXX Corps, and with the more dispersed nature of the fighting worked mainly for Guards Armoured Division thereafter, officially rejoining the Division in the autumn. They normally operated with two or three squadrons up and the remainder in reserve. On long, fast advances, such as that to Brussels, troops and even squadrons had to be rotated as the leaders ran out of ammunition, or became too depleted as a result of dropping off detachments to guard crossroads and bridges as they passed them. On other occasions, such as the attempt to link up with the 1st Airborne Division at Arnhem, when the Division and other troops were supported along a single road through enemy territory, whole squadrons were employed, spaced throughout convoys at about one car to every twenty lorries, to

try and give some sort of protection against attacks from the flanks.

In addition to reconnaissance tasks 2HCR also provided observation posts (extension leads from the No. 19 sets in the scout cars enabled officers to keep watch from such vantage points as the tops of buildings), and did 'Phantom' work, listening in to units' battlefield chatter and relaying back important items to the rear. It was a troop from the Regiment which, having sneaked through in the morning mist, made the first direct contact with the airborne troops at Arnhem and provided the first proper radio link with them; while during the Ardennes scare one of their officers on security duties had to admit to an American truck driver lacking proper identification that, no, he never had actually seen a black German! From time to time they even worked as infantry.

When the war ended plans were afoot to replace the AECs with Alecto 95mm self-propelled guns, and the White scout cars in the medical and assault troops with halftracks, but these never came to anything and the organization remained basically as in Table 7.



## Normandy

Guards Armoured Division finally sailed for war a fortnight after D-Day, 32nd Brigade from London Docks and 5th Brigade from Gosport, the whole division reaching Normandy by the end of June 1944. VIII Corps, to which they still belonged, also contained 11th Armoured and 15th (Scottish) Infantry divisions and formed part of the build-up of 2nd British Army under Lt.-Gen. Sir Miles Dempsey, which itself, together with 1st Canadian and 1st American Armies, made up the Allied invasion force, 21st Army Group, commanded by General Montgomery. The Americans held the right of the bridgehead, reaching as far as Cherbourg, while the British and Canadians held the left sector to a depth of some eighteen miles between Caen and Bayeux by the time Guards Armoured landed.

Very few members of the Division had ever been in action before, but the infantry of 32nd Brigade and some of the divisional units had a chance to acclimatize themselves in a static role just west of Caen before the armour arrived. It was during this period of skirmishing with 12th SS Panzer Division

AEC armoured car from one of the 2nd Household Cavalry heavy troops, followed by two Staghound HQ cars down a typical Continental paved road. The AEC has short bridging beams on each side to help crossing narrow ditches, etc., and is liberally draped with camouflage netting which does little to conceal the square-shaped 75mm turret.

'*Hitlerjugend*' around Carpiquet airfield that the guardsmen had their first taste of the sniping, shelling and intense mortar fire that were to cause so many casualties in Normandy. It was here also that they got used to the permanent stench of dead cattle; and discovered that however enthusiastic the firer, a PIAT was unlikely to bring down a strafing Bf109! The 1st Bn. Welsh Guards alone lost two commanding officers during this period, and nobody was sorry to be pulled out after a fortnight, back to Bayeux; here calvados and cider were plentiful, and the army postal service soon had to put a ban on parcels of Camembert cheese being sent home.

The lull did not last long; on the evening of 17 July the whole division moved off in the dark, dust and heat, along bulldozed tracks across country round to the north-east of Caen, now captured, to join up with the other two British armoured divisions, 7th and 11th, grouped under VIII Corps

for Operation 'Goodwood'. The aim of this was for all the British armour to attack southwards over the relatively good tank country to the south-east of Caen with the immediate object of breaking out of the bridgehead towards Falaise, and the wider intention of forcing the Germans to concentrate more of their available armour on the left, while the Americans on the right prepared to make the main breakout against reduced opposition. The attack was preceded by saturation bombing, which was made possible by the complete air superiority achieved by the Allied air forces.

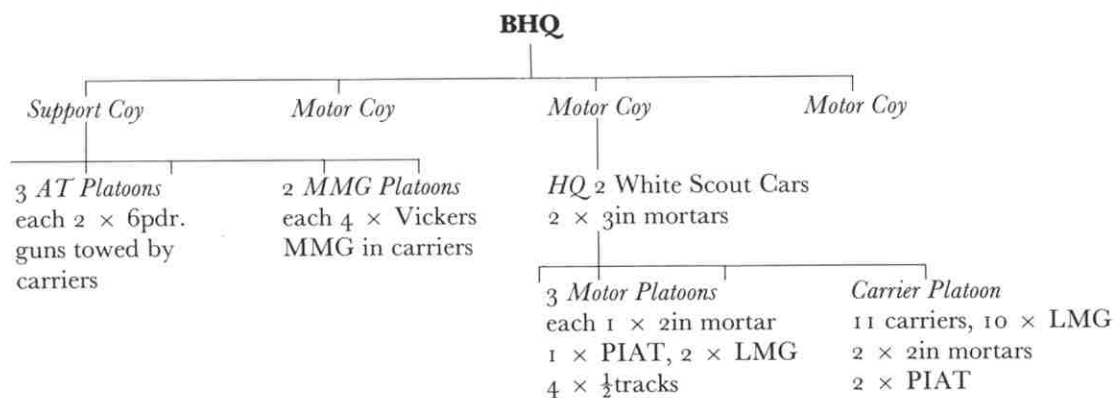
Needless to say, things, did not go exactly according to plan. Owing to the difficulty of starting the attack from restricted gaps through minefields, the British armour did not advance as a

solid wave, close on the heels of the bombers and supported by its own massed guns; instead the divisions straggled forward one after the other with considerable gaps, and soon outran their own artillery, which could not move forward in the general congestion. Although the area was 'good tank country' by Normandy standards, with large open cornfields, and fairly flat, the combination of woods and villages dotted about at intervals of a mile or so, a couple of railway embankments across the line of advance, and high ground almost untouched by the bombing on the left and in front some six miles from the start line, all gave the defenders the advantage.

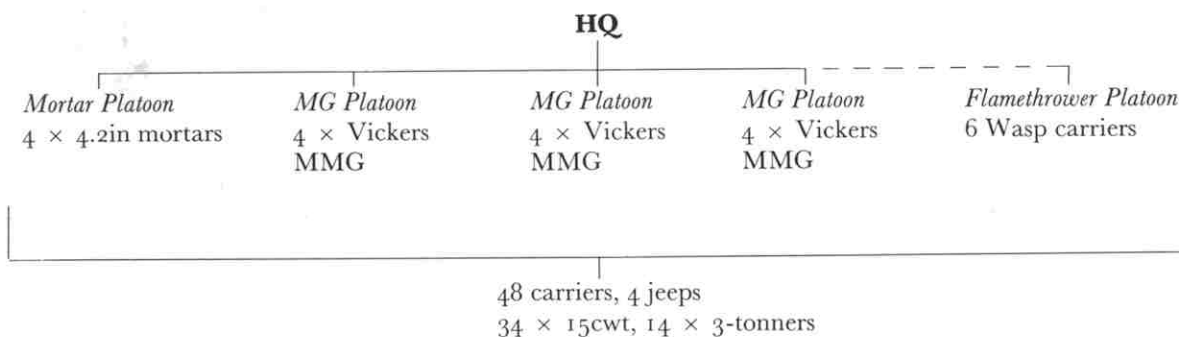
The Guards advanced for their first divisional action on the morning of the 18th in the wake of

TABLE 4

MOTOR BATTALION, 1944:



INDEPENDENT MACHINE GUN COMPANY:





11th Armoured and followed by 7th, one RSM at least having reminded his battalion to 'shave this morning the same as any other morning. . . .' The armoured regiments went first, with the Grenadiers leading, one squadron up, then the Irish, 5th Brigade HQ and finally the Coldstream. Each regiment had one motor infantry company of the Grenadiers and a self-propelled 25pdr. battery attached. Behind the armoured brigade the recee regiment, Welsh Guards, in their Cromwells, came to protect the flanks, while the infantry of 32nd Brigade followed up in their unarmoured lorries as best they could, to take over ground won.

The majority of the first day was spent trying to subdue the enemy dug in around Cagny, some four miles south-east of Caen, which had been bypassed by 11th Armoured. After heavy losses both from German guns and tanks the village was finally entered in the afternoon. Near there Lt. Gorman of the Irish Guards destroyed the Division's first King Tiger tank by ramming it with his Sherman when his own gun jammed, and then bringing up a Firefly to finish it off. It was evening before the lorried infantry caught up with the armour, debussed, and tried to advance on foot beyond Cagny, only to be held up and forced to dig in for the night on unreconnoitred ground, while the tanks formed their tight triangular harbours where they could. Even the confused and frustrating night which followed had its lighter moments in re-

Sexton self-propelled 25pdr. guns, as used by 153rd Field Regiment. These were mobile field artillery, not assault guns, and were normally positioned and controlled by field telephone from command posts in the same way as towed guns. Ammunition was handed up by members of the detachment on the ground when firing long programmes.

trospect, as when the CO of the Irish Guards infantry lost his map as the tank on which he had propped it while briefing his officers drove away.

Next morning the advance was called off, as clearly the bombing had stopped short of the main defences on the high ground, where the enemy showed no signs of cracking, and the British armour was stalled well short of its objectives. Guards Armoured remained in the vicinity of Cagny, making local attacks and existing, as one officer put it, in a state of 'intimate animosity' with units of 1st and 12th SS Panzer Divisions. Four days later, during two of which rain brought plagues of mosquitoes to add to their more lethal problems, the Division was withdrawn.

Despite considerable losses in both tanks and men in a confusing first action that appeared to have been a failure, Guards Armoured had acquitted itself well. The infantry had had local successes against crack SS troops, the tanks and anti-tank guns had accounted for several Tigers and Panthers as well as the less formidable PzKwIV tanks; the light anti-aircraft regiment had also proved its worth towards the end of the battle when the Luftwaffe had begun to appear

occasionally. Much had been learned; the tank crews discovered that the 75mm Sherman gun could only successfully engage Tigers and Panthers from the side or rear and at less than 500 yards, while the danger of having tanks on their own, where their infantry could not get up to them, was never to be forgotten within the Division. The operation as a whole in fact achieved its more important purpose in that it forced the Germans to commit two extra Panzer divisions to hold it; and according to his Chief of Staff, it finally convinced the German C-in-C, von Kluge, that Germany's days in Normandy were numbered.

Aided by this concentration of the available German armour against the eastern sector of the bridgehead, the Americans in the west were able to launch their breakout on 25 July and to start the swing to south and east behind the main German defences. Once they were under way it became important to capture the close hilly country five to ten miles south of Caumont in order to protect their left flank, to stop German armour moving west from Caen, and to deny the enemy an ideal pivot for counter-attacks. To this end VIII and XXX Corps attacked this area from the north on 25 July in Operation 'Bluecoat'. Guards Armoured was initially in reserve. VIII Corps made good progress on the right of the attack, partly due to a fine first action by 6th Guards Tank Brigade—whose Churchills were better at moving in the *bocage* country than the Shermans—and to the discovery of the intact bridge over the Soulevre by 2nd Household Cavalry. On the left XXX Corps did not do so well, however, and 15th Scottish had to stop in order to protect VIII Corps' flank. At this juncture Guards Armoured was summoned to take its place alongside 11th Armoured to maintain the momentum of the advance.

After a move of forty-five miles in a day on the 31st, the Division was rapidly regrouped; the Coldstream infantry and Irish tanks were made into one battlegroup in 5th Brigade, and the Grenadier infantry and tanks another, while the Coldstream tanks were split up between the Irish and Welsh infantry in 32nd Brigade to form two more all-arms groups. This was as a result of 'Goodwood', where the rigid separation of infantry and armoured brigades had proved unsatisfactory. At this stage the resultant battlegroups were of a



Guards infantry: an officer of the Scots Guards in battledress, peaked cap, webbing anklets, and wearing a scrim net as a scarf is holding a German Mauser 98K rifle, while the Warrant Officer behind him wears the General Service cap—a sort of beret but made up from several pieces of material—which was used in the infantry battalions by NCOs, other ranks, and sometimes WOs. He has a cloth and tape bandolier of rifle ammunition in clips over his shoulder. Both have Scots Guards shoulder flashes and the divisional sign on the sleeves, but the officer is without rank badges, which would seem unusual.

very *ad hoc* nature, those units parked nearest each other at the time being paired; nor was this a purely Guards idea, for General O'Connor had ordered both his armoured divisions to adopt this organization for 'Bluecoat'.

There followed a fortnight of fierce, if often disjointed, action as the Division forced its way south in a series of limited attacks to capture successive ridges and villages, usually with battalion/regimental groups, but sometimes only on a squadron/company scale. The *bocage* country, where the various tributaries of the River Vire ran down steep gullies from the Mont Pincon massif to the left of the divisional front, reminded many

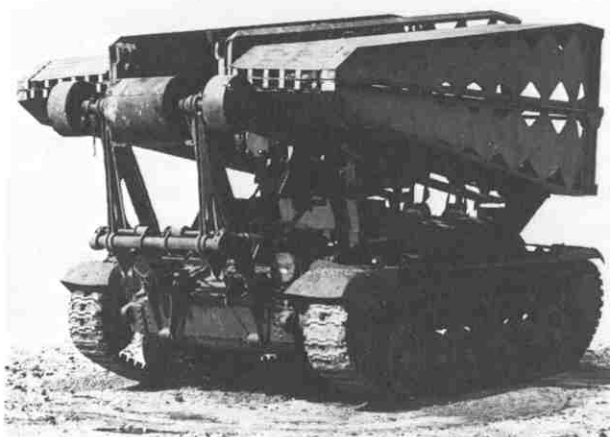
observers of Devon or Cornwall, with its hills (some too steep for Shermans), small fields with thick banks and hedges, sunken lanes, and woods. It was ideal for defence; on one occasion an infantry patrol clearing a lane for the tanks passed within ten yards of a Tiger tank without seeing it, and the Guards tank crews, trained on Salisbury Plain and the Wolds of Yorkshire, were quick to complain that they 'had been brought up on indirect shooting at two miles; none of this fifteen yard business. . .'

Initially progress was good, and a weird collection of prisoners from many races, including Mongolians, were captured, but on 1 August resistance stiffened as units of 21st Panzer Division, rushed from south of Caen, were encountered; during succeeding days the Division ran into elements of 9th and 10th SS Panzer and 3rd and 5th Parachute Divisions. Although at one time forty German tanks were seen together, this was unusual; these units were committed piecemeal as they arrived in the area. As a result there was no defence line to crack, or major armoured counter-attack for the Guards to repel; instead small mobile groups of infantry with one or two tanks (often Tigers or Panthers) and self-propelled guns were the main opposition, which were well suited to defence in the *bocage*. Snipers and mortars were particularly troublesome, not only to the infantry; 6th Guards Tanks even welded vertical metal plates behind their turret hatches to protect their commanders, while an Irish Guards Sherman was literally blown apart when a mortar bomb dropped down an open hatch.

By 4 August the attack had all but halted and it was proving difficult to get supplies to, and evacuate wounded from, isolated sub-units due to the difficulty in completely clearing areas of pockets of enemy. At one point a field battery was nearly overrun by German tanks. These were driven off by the anti-tank regiments' self-propelled 17pdrs., one of which knocked out a Panther with a shot that went through both walls of a barn before hitting it. On 7 August the Germans launched their ill-fated counter-offensive against the Americans at Mortain, and Guards Armoured had a welcome rest, merely holding the line while the offensive emphasis was shifted elsewhere, but this was short-lived. On the 8th they took over the 11th Armoured's area as well as their own, and for the

next week no major attempt to advance was made, although fierce local attacks were kept up. In one of these near the village of Chenedolle ('China doll' to the Guardsmen) the Irish infantry and Coldstream tanks suffered particularly severe casualties with no gain to show for them. At one point 6th Guards tanks joined up with the Welsh infantry, and at another 2nd Household Cavalry came into the line to help out as impromptu footsloggers. By 15 August serious signs of enemy withdrawal became apparent, and the division had completed its task.

During this gruelling period the Division's losses in both tanks and infantry had been heavy; but the



Valentine Bridgelay: three of these formed part of the Armoured Brigade HQ. Initially they seem to have been allocated to the recon regiment, and later were given to the REs. In the later stages of the campaign many water obstacles were met, but most were too wide for their thirty-foot scissors bridges.

Allies could afford to lose six tanks for every German one destroyed. In fact during the whole campaign the Irish Guards were to lose 175, and would end the war with only two of their original outfit, both of which had been hit and repaired. Infantry replacements were not so easy to come by and losses, particularly of officers, were to be a continuing problem. At this point X Coy. Scots Guards was switched from the Irish to the Welsh battalion because of their relative reinforcement situations. The Sherman had not shown up well in the *bocage*, with the poor anti-tank performance of the 75mm gun, its tendency to burn easily when hit, and its inability to breach the field banks which were not themselves necessarily protection against fire from the enemy long 75mm and 88mm guns. (The Culin device that would have enabled the Shermans to break through banks did not reach

Guards Armoured until the end of August, too late to be of use.) Other weapons, such as the PIAT, which accounted for several Tigers and lesser tanks at close range, and the self-propelled 17pdr. guns, did well, while the lack of air opposition led to the anti-aircraft tanks being pensioned off.

## The Rush to Brussels

The Division enjoyed a well-earned rest during the final phase of the Normandy fighting in which the German 7th Army was first trapped and then annihilated in the Falaise pocket, between the Americans advancing eastwards and the British and Canadians attacking southwards from the bridgehead.

The manner in which all available enemy units had been rushed into the Normandy battles, and the completeness of their defeat, left something of a vacuum in north-west France, which the Allies were quick to exploit. The Americans pushed on to Paris and beyond, while the British and Canadian armour struck north-west towards the Channel ports and the V-weapon launching sites, from which southern England was being increasingly bombarded. At first Guards Armoured was not involved, but a change of plan to include Brussels as an objective soon brought them in. On 27 August they were transferred to XXX Corps under Lt.-Gen. Horrocks, and set off for the Seine, which they crossed near Evreux on the 29th, in the wake of 8th Armoured Brigade.

Here, before further advances were made, the Division was once again reorganized, this time into the form that it was to retain, apart from brief reversions, for the rest of the war. The return of 2nd Household Cavalry to the Division removed the need for the Welsh Guards to remain a reconnaissance unit, and so it was possible to form four permanent mixed battlegroups: one each from the Grenadiers, Coldstream, Irish and Welsh Guards, as they each had an armoured and an infantry unit within the division. Although they were switched as necessary the Grenadier and Irish Groups usually formed the 5th Brigade, while the Coldstream and Welsh Guards together with the machine gun company of the Northumberland Fusiliers made up the 32nd.

The 4.2in mortars were usually kept under divisional control, and 5th Brigade in fact had medium machine guns in the Grenadier Group, since apart from the reduction in its anti-tank guns the 1st Bn. was still equipped as motor infantry. At this stage the divisional RASC also switched from individual companies tied to each brigade with all commodities, to each company concentrating on a single commodity and supplying both brigades and divisional troops as required.

The advance to the Seine and beyond was very different from the mass cross-country move of deployed armour seen in 'Goodwood'. Now movement was at best speed along single road axes or centrelines, and this was to be typical of advances for the rest of the war. In some cases brigades or even battlegroups would move along parallel roads, in others the whole Division would be limited to a single road. Although the armoured cars of 2nd Household Cavalry moved in the van and tried to find ways around obstacles, and the leading squadron/company group often managed to brush aside minor opposition, with or without the help of the rocket-firing Typhoon fighter bombers which were often on call, this method of advance meant that quite small enemy groups could delay the whole or a major part of the Division, particularly in areas where the tanks could not get off the road, but that where opposition was light high-speed advances were possible.

As the Division took the lead after crossing the Seine opposition was fortunately slight and disorganized, so they were able to push on, with the Grenadiers leading, to cross the Somme by a bridge that the Household Cavalry had found intact near Amiens, on 31 August; they entered Arras the next day. Several members of the Division had passed this way in less propitious circumstances during the retreat of 1940; one Welsh Guards officer even recovered a suitcase of his kit from the family with whom he had then been billeted, and Gen. Adair had both been wounded and won the MC there in the First World War. The advance was not entirely unopposed, and several tanks were lost in minor skirmishes, but no serious delays were imposed by these.

It was at this time that the Division first really encountered the tumultuous welcomes, with cheer-



ing crowds offering flowers, fruit, wine and embraces to their liberators, which were to be a feature of the advance through France and the Low Countries. They also began to appreciate the services of the Resistance movements, who took prisoners off their hands, warned them of mines or ambushes and acted as guides. The local populations, as well as being more demonstrative than the stolid Normans, were also noticeably hungrier, and German horses killed on the road were butchered on the spot. In many areas it seemed to be *de rigueur* to be liberated in one's Sunday best!

The speed of the Allied advance had clearly completely overtaken German defensive plans, and 11th Armoured Division, to the north of Guards, even captured the general commanding the Somme area with his HQ. This being so, Gen. Adair ordered the Division to push on at full speed. On 2 September, however, a brief halt was made at Douai to allow supplies to catch up. Since no major ports had yet been captured, nor railways repaired, these were still having to come over the Normandy beaches and on by road, and consequently posed an increasing problem. To make best use of the transport available within the division, RASC

Typical of advances on the Continent, Sherman Vs of 2nd Grenadiers nose to tail in a small town. The chicken wire round turrets and tapes around gun barrels to secure branches or scrim to hide the turrets above hedges, together with a complete absence of camouflage lower down and prominent serial numbers on the sides of the hull are typical, as are the spare track lengths and bogey wheels secured on the front plates. The nearest driver wears the rimless RAC-pattern helmet standard at this time in armoured units.

Company loads were altered to increase the petrol carried at the expense of ammunition, but maps were also in short supply and some echelons had to make do with 'Motorists' Guides to Europe', and suchlike unmilitary expedients.

It was at Douai that the plan was made for the final dash to Brussels, some seventy-five miles ahead. Airborne troops were to seize bridges along the route and a bombing programme was to precede the advance. In the event the air programme was cancelled due to bad weather, and so the Division was able to make an earlier start, around 0700hrs. Having crossed a 'Class 9' bridge in some trepidation with their 'Class 30' tanks, they deployed onto two single road centre-lines. 5th Brigade with the Grenadier and Coldstream Groups was on the left and 32nd Brigade, with the Welsh and Irish Groups and the majority of the supporting arms, on the right, while an infantry



Bedford MWD 15cwt truck. This vehicle provided the bulk of the Division's light transport in all units. The example above is fitted with a welding generator, but office, compressor, W/T, water truck and various other versions were used as well as the simple general service open-bodied type. (Conniford)

brigade group and a Belgian brigade followed up behind. It was now that the tanks, disappointing in Normandy, really came into their own, with their reliability during periods of continuous high-speed running. In particular the Cromwells, noisy, draughty and cramped though they were, easily outran wheeled transport along the Belgian pavé roads.

Despite repeated fierce but minor skirmishes, and detours around blown bridges, both brigades rushed on through the day, overrunning startled German convoys and brushing aside unprepared defences, until they eventually reached the Belgian capital at around 200hrs. The welcome was stupendous and fortunately the enemy made little attempt to interfere, although a further foray by the Irish Guards to Waterloo found Blücher's descendants with Panther tanks, and in a very unfriendly mood.

Total casualties had been light, and despite misunderstandings with Allied aircraft due to the speed of the advance (which had caused much yellow recognition smoke to be used, and in one instance recourse to some First World War trenches that happened to be handy), they amounted to less than seventy men between the Seine and Brussels. REME workshops had deliberately kept up with the Division and were on hand to repair vehicles that had just managed to complete the journey, while Corps recovered those that had not. Although a run of seventy miles in a day may seem trifling to a modern motorist, tanks are not cars,

and the Welsh Guards had been glad of a half-hour delay at one point which enabled them to do some greasing and tightening up of nuts and bolts on their Cromwells.

Although the advance to Brussels was the most spectacular the Division was to make, and its implications for political and morale considerations were clearly important, militarily it was something of a pleasant interlude between periods of more serious fighting.

## The Low Countries; Autumn and Winter

The stay in Brussels was not long. As the other British armoured divisions had reached Ghent and Antwerp, and the Americans were well up on the right flank, the orders were to push on into Holland to threaten the Ruhr. After an official entry into the city by Gen. Adair to declare it well and truly liberated, the Division set off eastwards again on 4-6 September; not, however, before much champagne had been consumed with the jubilant locals, and the two Armoured Command Vehicles housing the Divisional Operations Room had been accidentally destroyed by fire.

Although they were able to pass through Louvain, some fifteen miles from Brussels, and cross the River Dyle, well remembered by those who had served with the BEF in 1940, it soon became clear that the enemy was at last making a stand in the north-east corner of Belgium, and that the days of high-speed advances with little fighting were over. Here, in flat marshy heathland dotted with woods and small mining towns and intersected by numerous streams and canals, the Division met the newly formed 1st German Parachute Army: a motley collection of excellent Luftwaffe infantry mixed with redundant troops and stragglers from many sources. (Even a deep-sea diver was captured among them.) Although short of tanks and artillery they were well provided with 'bazookas' and self-propelled guns, including the formidable Jagdpanthers, as well as 88mm flak guns dug in to protect the many bridges. They were to prove skilful and unscrupulous foes, not averse on occasion to



6pdr. anti-tank gun in position alongside a road. This remained the infantry anti-tank gun throughout the campaign. The crew wear the old pattern straight-edged helmet, which seems to have been standard within the Division although the later pattern was in use elsewhere. A Sten gun can be seen on the trail of the gun, and the rear of the Loyd carrier which towed it is just visible.

abusing the Red Cross, and although they had little hope of actually stopping the Allied advance they were adept at causing it maximum delays—particularly now that shortages of field gun ammunition and other essential stores were being felt by the Guards, whose line of communication was some three hundred miles long. Although Antwerp had been captured its port could not be used to shorten this distance until the enemy had been cleared from the banks of the Scheldt below it, and from the islands round the river mouth.

By 8 September, although the first of the major canals, the Albert, had been reached after a fight, the Division was having difficulty forming a bridgehead beyond it among fiercely held towns and villages, and was even subjected to counter-attacks for the first time since Normandy. For a time they were very isolated, but late on the 9th, 11th Armoured Division came up on their right flank and they were able to think offensively again. The Coldstream and Welsh Groups had difficulty disengaging, but the Irish and Grenadiers fought their way across country towards the Meuse-Escaut Canal along the Dutch frontier. Here the Household Cavalry, using borrowed bicycles so as not to alarm the defenders, found a bridge intact just north of Overpelt, but it was well defended by at least four 88mm guns. By the evening of the 10th the Irish Group had reached the vicinity of this

bridge, and it was successfully rushed under cover of a sudden 'pepperpot' barrage (direct fire from all available tank, anti-tank, LAA, and machine guns on a specific target to thicken up artillery fire, or, as here, when beyond its range). This was an important success as it opened up the way into Holland; but numerous pockets of enemy still held out further back and threatened the divisional axis, while the troops across the canal were heavily if somewhat belatedly counter-attacked. One particularly stubborn village required a full-scale attack on the 12th preceded by a barrage from all the divisional artillery and 4.2in mortars as well as borrowed medium guns to subdue it. After this an infantry brigade took over the bridgehead and the Guards pulled back to refit.

The headlong advance clearly having been stopped, Field-Marshal Montgomery, as he had just become, had various courses open to him; the most obvious, perhaps, was to assume the defensive on the Dutch frontier and switch his major effort to clearing Walcheren and the lower Scheldt, to open up Antwerp and enable supplies to be landed to support further advances. Instead, surprisingly for

one who was renowned for his reluctance to attack until his forces were in balance and properly supported, he went for the bolder but riskier course of making a dash for the Zuider Zee along a narrow corridor which was to be held open by the American 82nd and 101st and the British 1st Airborne Divisions, dropped near the bridges over the six major water obstacles on the route. This, of course, was Operation 'Market Garden'.

Guards Armoured were to lead the thrust, backed up by 43rd Wessex Division. The whole operation was fraught, to say the least; for much of the way the only possible road ran along high causeways between bogs and pine forests which made it impossible for vehicles to leave it even if attacked. Once the fighting troops had gone through, the supply vehicles on which they depended had to follow along the same single road—some 12,000 for XXX Corps, of which the Division had 800, plus some 5,000 bridging vehicles which might be needed at any of the major water obstacles, and about 2,000 support vehicles for the airborne troops—and all in constant danger from enemy troops by-passed in the advance or brought across from the Reichswald. With only rifles, Brens and PIATs and a few dispersed armoured cars for its defence, this administrative tail in its corridor, in places only some forty yards wide, was highly vulnerable, and congestion made it difficult to send units up as they were required.

At midday on 17 September the Irish Group led off from the bridgehead across the Escaut canal north of Overpelt and headed for Valkensward. By this time groups had devised more or less standard orders of march for single road attacks (see diagram on p. 39), and infantry had started to ride on the tanks in the lead squadron, ready to leap off and deal with 'bazookas', etc., as soon as they revealed themselves. Here they were supported by seven squadrons of rocket-firing Typhoons and preceded by a rolling barrage from eleven Field and six Medium regiments, not to mention all the heavy mortars from two divisions. Despite all this they had barely crossed the Dutch frontier before one tank commander had the unnerving experience of watching nine tanks in front of his own knocked out, one by one, by concealed self-propelled guns, while he could neither advance, retire, nor get off the road. Prompt and effective action by the

Typhoons followed by a concerted infantry attack on the woods on either side of the road restored the situation and the advance was continued after a half-hour's delay. Valkensward was reached that evening, and contact was made with the US paratroops further north via the civilian telephone system.\* By this means the Division learnt details of the damage to a bridge blown north of Eindhoven, and the sappers were able to get the right equipment ready for its repair when they reached it. Next day the Irish Group continued towards Eindhoven and 32nd Brigade took another route through Geldorp to the east, but later had to return to the main axis. The unsuspected presence of troops from 9th SS Panzer Division '*Hohenstaufen*', with Panther tanks and ample support weapons, came as a nasty shock, while a succession of rickety bridges over streams also slowed down the advance. By nightfall, however, they had passed through Eindhoven, held by the Americans, and halted on the Wilhelmina Canal while the sappers repaired the bridge. This task was completed by 0600 next morning and the Grenadiers took the lead through Veghel and Grave, where the US 82nd Airborne Division had captured the bridge intact. 5th Brigade then pushed on to Nijmegen while 32nd dropped off to help guard against counter-attack.

Unfortunately the Americans had been unable to capture either the road or rail bridges at Nijmegen, although both were still intact. When they and the Guards launched an attack when the latter arrived there in the evening, it soon became clear that a systematic attack to clear the town was needed before the bridges could be captured. This started next morning in conjunction with a particularly bold assault crossing of the river by the American paratroops to try and secure the northern end of the road bridge. After a whole day's intense fighting—there were accounts of tank machine guns 'running away', so hot did they get—the approaches to the road bridge from the town were secured by about 1900hrs. Then the Grenadiers succeeded in rushing a troop of Shermans across in the face of heavy fire from all directions, including the girders overhead. The bridge was fully prepared for demolition and why it was not blown remains a mystery. Next morning the

\*See Vanguard 5, '*US 101st Airborne Division*'.

2nd Household Cav. Regt.



8 Corps



30 Corps

### ORDER OF BATTLE



Divisional sign

**40**

Divisional HQ & Div.-Signals

**40**



6th Gds. Tank Bde.

Bde. HQ **151**

**152 153 154**

4 Bn. 4 Bn. 3 Bn.  
CG CC SG

5 Gds.-Arm'd. Bde.



Brigade HQ **50**



2nd Arm'd. Bn. CG **51**



1st Arm'd. Bn. CG **52**



2nd Arm'd. Bn. IG **53**



1st Motor Bn. GG **54**

32 Gds. Bde.



Brigade HQ **60**



5th Bn. CG **61**



3rd Bn. IG **62**



1st Bn. WG **63**



1st Ind. MG Coy., North. Fus. **64**



C.R.A. **40**

55 Fld. Regt. RA **74**

153 Fld. Regt. RA **76**

21 AT Regt. RA **77**

94 LAA Regt. RA **73**



Royal Engineers **40**

148 Fld. Pk. Sqn. **42**

14 Fld. Sqn. **46**

615 Fld. Sqn. **41**

11 Bridging Tp. **52**



R.A.S.C. **80**

310 Arm'd. Bde. Coy. **81**

224 Inf. Bde. Coy. **83**

535 Div. Tps. Coy. **84**

5 Gds. Arm'd. Bde. Workshop **99**

32 Gds. Bde. Workshop **100**



R.A.M.C. **40**

A.D.M.S. **40**

10 Lt. Fld. Amb. **89**

128 Fld. Amb. **90**

8 Gds. Fld. Dressing Sta. **93**

60 Fld. Hyg. Secn. **92**



R.E.M.E. **40**

C.R.E.M.E. **40**



R.A.O.C.

Ord. Fld. Pack **75**

18

Mobile laundry & bath unit

Div. Provost Coy.

**44** Div. postal unit



R.M.P.

FD C.O.

95 Fld. Cash Office

**40**

77 Fld. Secty. Secn.

**759**

268 Fwd. L. Del. Sqn. RAC

**45**

2nd Arm'd. Recce Bn. WG

R.A.S.C. Troop carrying det'm'ts.

**62 63 61 84 84 83**



**B** Welsh Guards, Normandy, July 1944





C 2nd Household Cavalry Regiment, Belgium, autumn 1944





D Divisional Tactical HQ, Holland, winter 1944





E Royal Northumberland Fusiliers, Germany, spring 1945.

railway bridge was also captured by the Grenadiers.

The emphasis of the whole operation had by now changed from reaching the Zuider Zee to rescuing the British 1st Airborne Division trapped at Arnhem. When the Irish Group led off on the eight-mile stretch to link up with them at midday on 21 September, however, the situation was very different from their breakout at the start of the advance. Now they had suffered considerable losses and problems of ammunition re-supply, and distance from airfields limited them to a single Medium regiment in support, and a handful of Typhoons, which in the event could not be controlled due to a communication failure. It was hardly surprising, therefore, that they were unable to dislodge the enemy strongpoint some two miles down the road; nor were the Welsh, who had replaced the exhausted Grenadiers in 5th Brigade, able to get through later on another road. That night it was accepted that armour could not get through, and the task of linking up with the paratroops was passed to 43rd Division.

In retrospect it is perhaps less surprising that a single weak Guards brigade, which was all XXX Corps could even attempt to support at the head of its fifty-mile-long single road centreline, should fail to reach Arnhem, than that it should get as far as it did, bearing in mind the five major water obstacles, unexpected SS troops and heavily defended state of Nijmegen, with which Guards Armoured had to cope.

While attention was naturally on the efforts to reach Arnhem, and interest perhaps declined after the remains of the Airborne Division were withdrawn, this was by no means the end of the affair as far as the Guards were concerned. The Coldstream Group had been busy helping the Americans beat off repeated counter-attacks south of the Waal; and when the main thrust stalled, 5th Brigade remained on the 'Island' north of the river enlarging and holding the bridgehead as more British troops came forward, and while 1st Airborne, having been contacted by the Household Cavalry, were evacuated. Between 22 and 28 September 32nd Brigade were kept busy, as the centreline was cut several times between Eindhoven and Veghel by troops of 6th German Parachute Regiment and others, including 712th Infantry Division trying to fight its

way back to Germany from the west. So serious did the situation become at one time that the RAF were ordered to attack within the corridor on recognition instead of adhering to a safe bomb line. Before the road was finally re-opened those cut off north of the gap were to be more than grateful for the capture of the town of Oss, which contained a vast German food dump, a few days before by the General's troop of Cromwells and the Div. HQ defence platoon.

Even after 1st Airborne had been evacuated, Nijmegen road bridge was attacked by everything from jet aircraft to frogmen, the latter doing it some damage. The floodlights rigged to prevent surreptitious night attack made those stuck on it in traffic jams going to or from 5th Brigade feel very naked. Elements of the LAA and AT regiments were involved in the close defence of the bridge and the Household Cavalry were ordered to 'splice the mainbrace' on one occasion, having sunk a tug by gunfire from their armoured cars. The Irish Group on the 'Island' was involved in beating off a heavy counter-attack by troops from 9th SS and 116th Panzer Divisions on 30 September. The infantry battalion positions were assaulted by squads with manpack flamethrowers supported by ten tanks each followed by an infantry section, while more infantry came up behind in open order, and the whole was covered by the heaviest artillery fire experienced since Normandy.

Infantry losses within the Division were by now giving cause for concern; Irish Guards, for example, had only one of their original platoon commanders left, and the Coldstream were down to three weak companies. On 6 October the whole Division was pulled back into reserve south of Nijmegen and remained there for a month. During that time they provided guards for the various bridges, trained, and refitted; while the Canadians and others cleared the approaches to Antwerp. The area was damp and unpleasant, but the introduction of leave schemes to Brussels and Antwerp was much appreciated. This period was followed in November by a move south to the area around Sittard where the Division, itself relieved by the Canadians, took over the front line just inside Germany from the American 9th Army, who were about to resume the offensive. This was mainly an infantry commitment of watching and



Sappers building a pontoon bridge with folding boat MkIII equipment. This could take light loads such as cars, but the stronger Bailey bridges were used on the main axes and centre lines where bridges up to class 40 specification were needed for the tanks.

patrolling, and was carried out by the Grenadier, Coldstream, and Welsh Groups under 32nd Brigade. They remained there for five weeks, the longest time spent in any one place. The period was not without minor incidents, as when a German patrol broke into a billet where Guardsmen were frying chips, and had to be evicted with fists, and presumably, hot fat; or when a patrol had to deliver a spy with a wooden leg into enemy territory. In November winter tank suits were issued; and during December 'end connectors' were fitted to tank tracks to widen them by three inches, increasing the area by about forty per cent, and helping to spread the load on the increasingly sodden ground. The Guards were now the only British division still using the Sherman tank exclusively as their main combat vehicle.

The next move, when XXX Corps was relieved by XII Corps in mid-December, should have been a straightforward one to regroup near Brussels, but since it coincided with von Runstedt's Ardennes offensive a confusing number of moves and counter-moves were made to positions covering Brussels from the east and south. In the event the offensive never reached the Guards positions, and they were relieved by paratroops from the UK. There had, however, been a number of postponements and reinstatements of the dates on which the various units were able to celebrate Christmas; very

difficult, as one record put it, for Santa Claus's march tables. . . .

In early January 1945 eight-day leaves to the UK were instituted, and at the end of the month 2nd Bn. Scots Guards arrived to relieve the 1st Bn. Welsh Guards, who were in difficulties over reinforcements. Since many of the Scots were recently remustered RAF ground crews, such was the British shortage of infantry by this time, a generous turnover period was allowed before the Welsh left the Division.

## Into Germany

Despite the false starts most units eventually enjoyed a good Christmas dinner with such delicacies as tinned turkey, fresh local pork and beef, plum puddings, and plenty of beer, cigarettes and sweets. Despite occasional shortages when communications were cut, and, as on the road to Nijmegen, captured German food had to be used, the troops generally ate well. The 'compo' battle ration with its seven variations, some of which included tinned fruit and salmon, was a great improvement on the bully beef and biscuits of earlier campaigns, particularly when augmented by NAAFI rations and fresh food, either purchased or obtained by more direct means; sights such as that of one sergeant-major in hot pursuit of farm livestock with a bloody hatchet in one hand and a smoking revolver in the other were not uncommon once the Division reached Germany. Living conditions and recreation varied considerably. In friendly territory hospitable undamaged billets were sometimes available, and at one point the Coldstream were even able to hold an officers' reunion in some style in a château; but farm buildings with or without roofs and livestock, and shattered houses without electricity or water were more usual; bivouacking in the open was avoided where possible during the winter. As a result the mobile bath unit was in much demand throughout the campaign, while the setting up of clubs in Brussels and elsewhere, the organization of sports, and the provision of film shows and ENSA concerts helped pass the time when out of action. Nor were Guardsmanlike pursuits neglected; the town of

Tilburg was quickly renamed 'Drill-burg' by the Grenadiers.

The next stage in the advance was Operation 'Veritable' whereby the 1st Canadian Army reinforced by XXX Corps was to push south-eastwards to clear the area between the Maas and the Rhine, including the Reichswald forest, starting on 8 February. Guards was to be the only armoured division involved (although specialized armour and Churchill units, including 6th Guards Tank Brigade, were to work with the infantry divisions), and they were intended to exploit the initial breakthrough and go for the Rhine. In the event, however, a combination of bad weather and

to two weak battalions (the Coldstream having gone back to 5th Brigade). Shortly after this the Americans broke through to the south and further progress was possible towards the Rhine.

For this next phase the whole division was reconstituted into its normal mixed brigade groups, with the Scots battalion under divisional control. Initially Guards Armoured were again in reserve as the infantry divisions battled westwards against increasing opposition, including 116th Panzer Division and various paratroop units. On 4 March an effort was made to pass 5th Brigade forward through 3rd Infantry Division to capture the high ground dominating the approaches to the Rhine,



the inability of the Americans to prevent the Roer dams, south of the Reichswald, being blown, caused extensive flooding and limited the use of tanks. As one historian succinctly put it: 'A certain amount of damp was allowed for—a great deal more was met.' 5th Brigade, with all the armour except the Welsh Guards, was therefore kept in reserve at Tilburg while the infantry under 32nd Brigade attacked on their own: first north of the forest towards Cleve, and then under 51st Highland Division for a fortnight in the battle for the country round Goch, the keypoint to the Siegfried Line at the south of the Reichswald. Casualties were heavy and conditions frightful; despite the relief of the Irish by the newly arrived Scots towards the end of this period, by 20 February 32nd Brigade was down

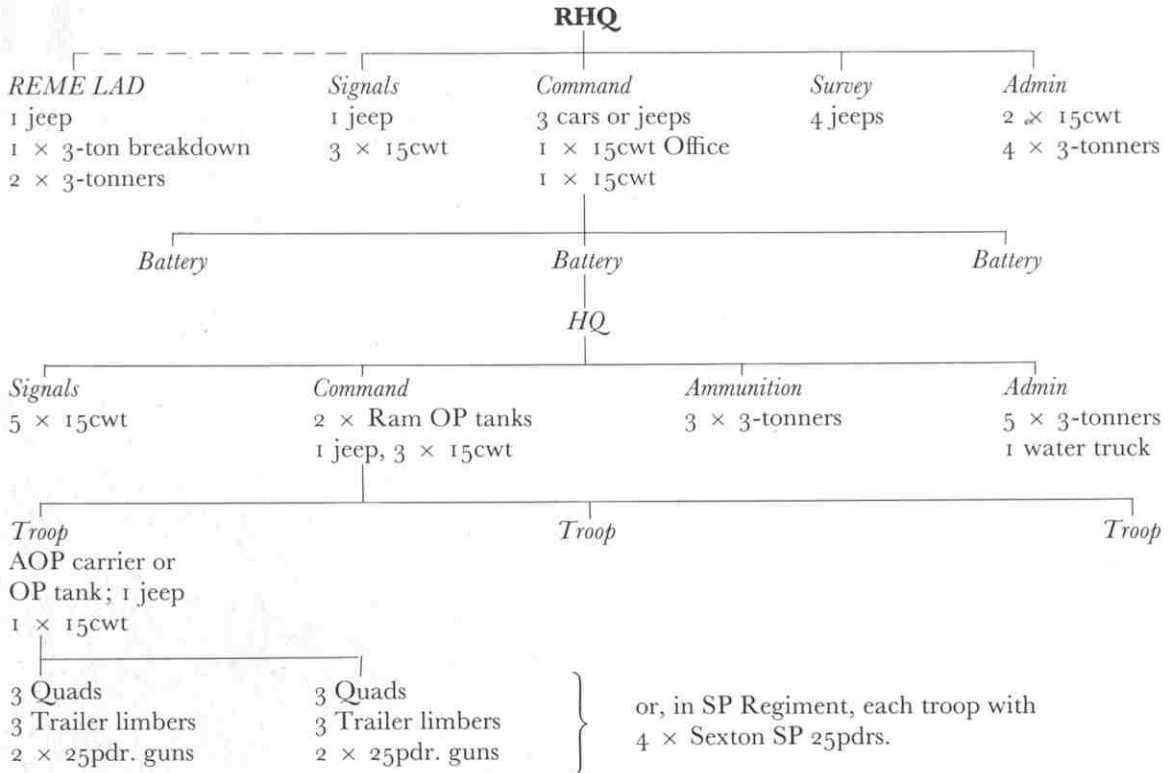
25pdr. field guns of 55th Field Regiment in action. The detachments are wearing the standard collarless shirt, denim trousers and GS caps. Unlike the LAA and AT regiments, the field gunners retained their towed guns right to the end of the war. A field telephone box and cable reel can be seen in the left foreground.

but demolitions necessitated bridging, and fierce opposition caused heavy tank casualties; the defences had been dented, however, and 32nd Brigade was able to take over and capture the ridge before continuing to advance against stiff resistance from 22nd Parachute Regiment, both of whose battalion commanders they captured. On the afternoon of 7 March 32nd Brigade set out between the Canadian Armoured and the 52nd Infantry Divisions, on the final two miles to the Rhine. The route included crossing a stream, a railway line and a lateral road. The stream held them up overnight,

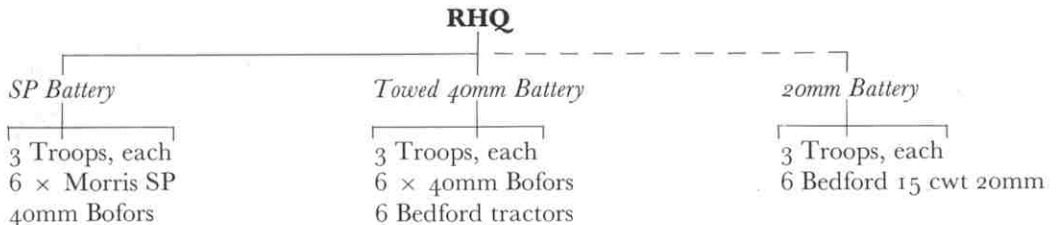
TABLE 5

## Divisional Artillery

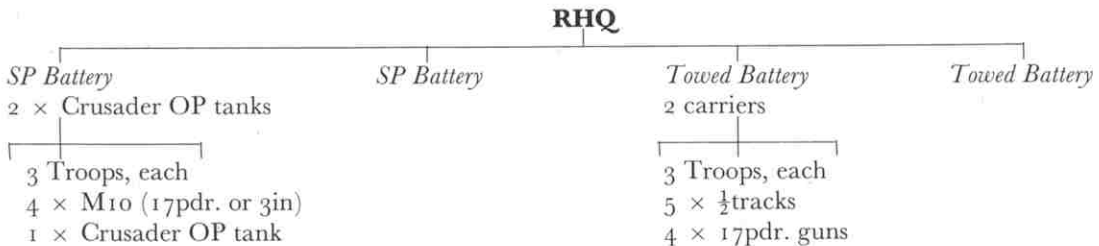
### FIELD REGIMENTS



### LAA REGIMENT:



### ANTI-TANK REGIMENT:



and when it was bridged a damaged tank on the bridge caused further delay; but next day, supported by nine Field, three Medium and two Heavy gun batteries, they crossed the embankment and fanned out, cutting the road and forcing the Germans to abandon their final bridgehead west of the Rhine.

'Veritable' was amongst the toughest battles ever fought by the Division; one Field Regiment had fired more rounds than in the whole of the campaign up till then. The enemy had started to make increasing use of mines and demolitions as well as employing far more artillery than previously.

Considerable preparation was needed before the assault crossing of the Rhine could be made and so the Division was able to enjoy a short rest in the Nijmegen area. It was during this period that the 1st (infantry) Bn., of the Welsh Guards left the Division, and the towed batteries of the anti-tank regiment were converted to infantry for lack of suitable targets. Once again Guards Armoured was not involved in the initial assault of Operation 'Plunder' across the river on 23 March, but like the other armoured divisions was kept back until the bridgehead was established by the infantry and paratroops so that bridges could be built. The divisional artillery, including the LAA regiment firing in a ground rôle, took part in the support programme for the initial crossings.

The Division itself crossed in the early hours of 30 March with 5th Brigade leading, aided by artificial moonlight from searchlights reflected on low cloud. It soon became clear that although resistance was weak on the XII Corps front to the south where the other armoured divisions and 6th Guards Tank (just renamed 'Armoured') Brigade were making spectacular advances, the 1st Parachute Army facing XXX Corps (which was led by Guards Armoured) were going to contest every inch of the way. For the next three days the Division fought steadily up the Dutch-German border towards Lingden. The enemy, mostly from 7th and 8th Parachute Divisions, resisted skilfully, cratering roads and blowing bridges with prepared aerial bombs, in some cases after the leading British troops had rushed them, as well as fighting fiercely with self-propelled guns, 'bazookas' and small arms. Even though they do not seem to have used dummy



Fordson 3-ton 4x4 GS WOT6 lorry. This vehicle provided much of the Division's softskinned transport, equipping 310 Coy. RASC and unit echelons. The official camouflage scheme for softskins consisted of globular black patches on khaki, but many Guards vehicles appear to have been left plain khaki. (Conniford)



A Sherman V of 1st Coldstream fitted with Typhoon rocket launching rails. These were a local modification unique to the Coldstream; they were aimed using the blade vane on the turret top, one being aligned for a range of 400 yards and the other for 800. They proved good for clearing roadblocks but no opportunity occurred to evaluate them against armour. The tank has its troop number and individual letter—a different system from the straight-through numbering used by the Grenadiers—on the turret box, and the 'B' Squadron square on the rear hull plate. The tacsign—'52' on red—can just be seen on the right trackguard.

tanks and guns as they did in Normandy, mistakes sometimes came to their aid in delaying the advance: as when a motorcyclist who seemed unshootable turned out to be a sheet metal advertisement outside a garage, or when a particularly formidable-looking gun was discovered after careful stalking to be an ornamental cannon several hundred years old! Progress was maintained, however, and aided by Typhoons and an attached regiment of medium guns, and by making a twelve mile night tank advance, the leading elements of 32nd Brigade reached Lingden on the Ems at 0300hrs on the morning of 3 April. Firing in



17pdr. anti-tank gun guarding the Nijmegen Bridge. These large towed guns were not as satisfactory as the SP version for the quick actions required in an advance, although they were good in defence, as here. As a result both of 21st AT Regt.'s towed batteries were converted to infantry before the Rhine crossing. In this picture a Hotchkiss machine gun can be seen in the foreground, and the sergeant with the binoculars appears to have borrowed an American helmet.

the suburbs unfortunately alerted the defenders, and the bridge was blown before they could take it.

The Household Cavalry luckily found another, heavily defended but intact, some four miles down stream. A careful plan was made whereby a sudden and intense concentration of artillery, tank guns, and Typhoon rockets from the launchers recently fitted to the turrets of some of the Coldstream tanks, would be followed by an infantry company rushing the bridge on foot followed by a troop of tanks. The attack went like clockwork, surprise was complete, and the bridge, plus a large number of prisoners, was captured. The commander of the Coldstream infantry company, Captain I. O. Liddle, was awarded the Victoria Cross for leading the assault and calmly cutting the wires to the demolition charges under heavy fire. He was subsequently killed before hearing of the award.

There was no pause for Guards Armoured on the Ems. The next phase was a swing north-east towards Bremen. From here on they were permanently in Germany instead of hopping to and fro across the Dutch border. Although they missed the

help of friendly populations and Resistance movements, and there were strict orders against fraternizing with enemy civilians, fears of resistance and sabotage by 'Werewolves' proved groundless, most civilians being apathetic or sullenly co-operative. Some, beginning to see on which side their bread was buttered, even put up helpful notices such as 'Attention—this bridge is unsure of itself—By order: the Burgomaster'.

If the civilians posed relatively few problems, the same could not be said of the enemy troops. The paratroops were now joined by 15th Panzer Grenadier Division, direct descendant of the *Afrika Korps* Panzer division, and they continued not only to resist strongly with booby-trapped roadblocks, but also to launch vicious if limited counter-attacks and to pick off anyone straying even a short distance from the main bodies of the Brigade groups. The German roads were also found to be worse than expected; many shown on the maps turned out to be only sandy tracks. Despite all this, steady progress was made for the next ten days, mostly with brigade groups moving along parallel axes and ousting opposition by a practised combination of tank, infantry, artillery and Typhoon effort. The sappers were kept busy clearing and 'de-lousing' obstacles, and built their longest Bailey bridge during this period. Casualties steadily

mounted up, even in HQs, which the Guards' tendency to site on cross-roads made particularly vulnerable. By 14 April when they halted to allow the infantry divisions forward to attack Bremen itself, they were capturing two or three hundred prisoners a day, but there were few signs of the enemy giving up, and even new, if makeshift, weapons, such as the obsolete 37mm gun adapted to fire a hollow charge rocket, were appearing.

On 16 April the Division was switched to XII Corps across the River Weser to capture the country between Hamburg and Bremen. Here they began to encounter German 'Marine' divisions—redundant sailors including U-boat crews and officers from the *Tirpitz*. These fought bravely; and on at least one occasion, when they stayed in the vicinity of a town from which they were ousted and launched a counter-attack, their unconventional tactics caused embarrassment to the Guards, who had assumed that they would follow the rigid Wehrmacht practice of pulling back fast to the next defended position. Efforts to persuade individual towns to surrender met with varying degrees of success, but the threats of Himmler against the families of those who surrendered meant that most had to be fought for, however obviously futile was the defence. Although most Germans now realized that the war was lost, such was the fanaticism of some officers that they preferred suicide to capture; and one, when wounded, tried to shoot a guardsman coming to his aid. In one incident a sudden counter-attack caught some Irish Guards tanks unawares, and it was only the heroism of Guards-

man Charlton—who dismounted his tank's AA Browning machine gun as he baled out, and pinned down the attack by firing it over a gate, although mortally wounded—that saved his comrades. He was posthumously awarded the Division's second vc.

The rest of April was spent in tough but scrappy fighting between the Elbe and the Weser, in which a column of Household Cavalry, the ex-anti-tank gunner infantry and others played quite a part. A prisoner-of-war camp containing at least one guardsman captured in 1940, and a concentration camp at Sandbostel where the conditions were every bit as bad as those at the better-known ones such as Belsen, were both liberated by the Division. (In these final stages a new menace in the form of sea mines used as landmines began to appear; these would blow up a tank without trace and leave a sixty-foot crater in the road.) By the end of April it was clear that resistance was almost at an end. When one of the dreaded 88mm guns missed a tank with no less than eight successive shots, and turned out to be crewed entirely by women, the guardsmen realized that the Germans were at last finished. On 27 April the 1st Household Cavalry joined the Division as an extra armoured car regiment, and shortly afterwards fighting more or less ceased, leaving the brigades to handle such strange requests as one to prevent the Hitler Youth in one town from

Protected convoy; a Daimler armoured car of 2nd Household Cavalry travelling in a line of softskin vehicles. This was the only way to give any protection when it was not possible to move off the road. The nearest vehicle is a Bedford QLD 4 × 4 3-tonner, possibly of 224 Coy. RASC. The Bedford was another of the Division's main load carriers and the similar QLT served as the troop-carrying vehicle.



running amok and murdering the civilians. (They declined, on the basis that the Germans ought to be able to control their own children.)

Guards Armoured saw the end of hostilities on 5 May at Oste, midway between Hamburg and Bremen. They had lost over one hundred tanks since crossing the Rhine.

As the war ended the Division moved to the port of Cuxhaven at the mouth of the Elbe, accepting the surrender of their old enemies 7th Parachute Division, and putting on their best uniforms to drive their tanks noisily through areas untouched by the fighting to discourage any trouble from the civilian population. One company of Scots Guards also went with the team accepting the surrender of Heligoland.

On 9 June 1945 the whole Division was paraded for the last time. The 'powers that be' had decided that both Guards Armoured Division and 6th Guards Armoured Brigade should revert to the infantry rôle on completion of hostilities. For this 'Farewell to Armour' parade the tanks were spruced up with captured paint, including German Navy battleship grey; Field-Marshal Montgomery took the final salute. So ended four years during which units of the Brigade of Guards, perhaps Britain's most 'traditional' infantrymen, had proved their adaptability to a form of warfare more normal to cavalry, tank and rifle regiments, and had given a good account of themselves in the process.

## The Plates

### A Orders of Battle

*The divisional sign*: this was based on the 'ever open eye' of the Guards Division in the First World War. The version used by the Armoured Division was designed by the artist Rex Whistler, who served in the Division and was killed in Normandy. The divisional sign was worn as a sleeve emblem by all ranks and as a vehicle sign on the left front and rear of all vehicles.

*2nd Household Cavalry Regiment*: served under VIII and XXX Corps before reverting to the Division, and wore their signs both as sleeve and vehicle

signs. The vehicle tacsign has a white bar across the top to show that they are Corps troops. Personnel wore Life Guard or Royal Horse Guard cap badges as appropriate; they were identical apart from the wording around the rim.

*6th Guards Tank Brigade*: wore their own sign in place of a divisional or corps one. The white bar under the tacsign indicated that they were Army troops.

*Unit tacsigns*: were normally painted on the right-hand side, front and rear, of all vehicles. The numbers showed the unit while the backing colours indicated the brigade, the arm of service, or whether they were Divisional HQ troops. In the case of the RASC troop-carrying detachments, both the RASC Company sign and that of the infantry battalion to which they were semi-permanently attached were used as a combined sign. Some units, such as the Field Cash Office, RAOC Ordnance Field Park and Mobile Laundry and Bath Unit, were technically Corps troops, hence the white bands above their tacsigns, but they worked permanently with the Division, as did the Forward Delivery Squadron RAC, an Army unit.

Background colours of tacsigns are sometimes hard to distinguish in reproduction, particularly the darker shades. Note that the colours are as follows on Plate A: *Green* = 32 Gds. Bde., and 6 Gds. Tank Bde. *Black* = 30 Corps; Divisional HQ, and Div. Troops at bottom centre; RAMC. *Red/Green* = RASC Coys. *Green over red/green* = RASC Troop-carrying detachments. *Red over blue* = RA Regiments. *Blue over yellow over red* = REME Workshops. *Green over blue*, with or without added white bar = 2nd Household Cav. Regt. regimental sign; 2nd Armoured Recce Bn. Welsh Guards; and 268 Forward Delivery Sqn. RAC. *Blue-red-blue* = RAOC units at bottom left.

Abbreviations used in the diagram are self-explanatory, e.g. 'IG' = Irish Guards. The cap badges, apart from that of REME, are the same as those worn today. They are illustrated in the following sequence for the main combat regiments: *under 5 Guards Armoured Brigade*, left to right, Grenadier, Coldstream and Irish Guards. *Under 32*

*Guards Brigade, left to right, Welsh Guards, Scots Guards and Royal Northumberland Fusiliers.*

### **B Welsh Guards, Normandy, July 1944**

During the initial weeks of the campaign in Normandy, the narrow lanes, steep banks and dense vegetation provided ideal ambush conditions and proved a death trap to tanks on their own, so it became largely an infantry battle at times. Here part of a platoon headquarters and of an infantry section of the Welsh Guards are supported by a Churchill IV of 6th Guards Tank Brigade.

The pre-war pattern helmet seems, from photographs, to have been almost universal among the infantry within the Division, although the later pattern was in use elsewhere. Many Guards units wore denims, as here, rather than battledress when in action, and scrim rather than vegetation in helmet nets also seems to have been common. The 1937 pattern webbing equipment is worn, with the exception of the 1944 pattern respirator haversacks slung from the back of the belt; the mortar number has the larger utility pouches, capable of carrying three 2in mortar bombs each, slung around his neck over his ordinary pouches. The officer (right background) is carrying his map case, and his small haversack by the handstrap, although it was more commonly worn on the left hip, slung from the tails of the webbing braces. He has 1937 pattern battledress, but although wearing collar and tie he does not have the faced lapels usual among Guards Officers. He wears the ribbon of the MC.

In the platoon headquarters group (bottom and left foreground) the PIAT 'number one' is fusing a bomb for his weapon. The handle of his entrenching tool, with the end fitting to take a bayonet, can be seen beneath his respirator, and his cape above it; packs were sometimes left in the unit vehicles. He has No. 80 white phosphorus smoke, and No. 36 (Mills bomb) grenades with their handles tucked into the jacket of his water bottle. To his right is a signaller with a No. 38 wireless set; these were not platoon equipment at this time, but were allocated as needed by battalion. He carries an HE 2in mortar bomb secured by the straps of his pack. On his right lies a company stretcherbearer—a guardsman, not an RAMC rank; he wears a less conspicuous brassard than the better-known white one with the red cross. At left is the 2in mortar



Even in the countryside single-line advances were often the norm. Here Shermans, led by a Firefly Vc, debouch from a forest. The 17pdr. Fireflies had the hull machine gun removed and the aperture blanked, as can be seen here. The apparent absence of markings and the generally uncluttered and clean look of this tank suggests that it may be a replacement. In addition to making good battle casualties of their own type, Fireflies gradually replaced 75mm Shermans as more became available.



Light breakdown vehicle; this shows another version of the Fordson WOT6 which was used in LADs and brigade workshops by the divisional REME for tasks not needing the heavier Scammells. This vehicle has been painted with the official black and khaki scheme for softskins—all AFVs were plain khaki. The horizontal plate over the radiator was coated with a special paint to act as a gas detector by changing colour when contaminated; this was standard and can be seen in some of the other illustrations. (Conniford)

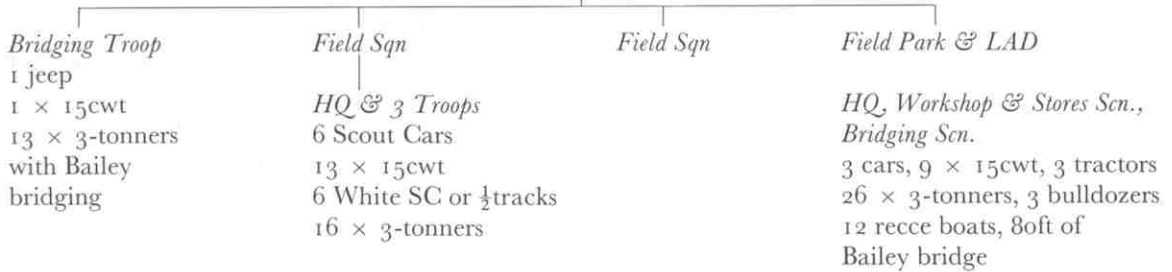
number, checking whether his bombs will clear the overhead foliage when fired, and the PIAT 'number two', holding the No. 4 rifle with spike bayonet—the standard infantry rifle in 1944. Behind him is the section leader, a lance-sergeant (equivalent to corporal in line infantry units) with a Sten gun Mk. 2, which had largely replaced the Thompson as a section leader's weapon, as well as being issued to motorcyclists, tank and gun crews as a more effective means of defence than a revolver. Spades and pickaxes were often carried tucked through the straps of the pack as shown. In the left

TABLE 6

**Supporting Units**

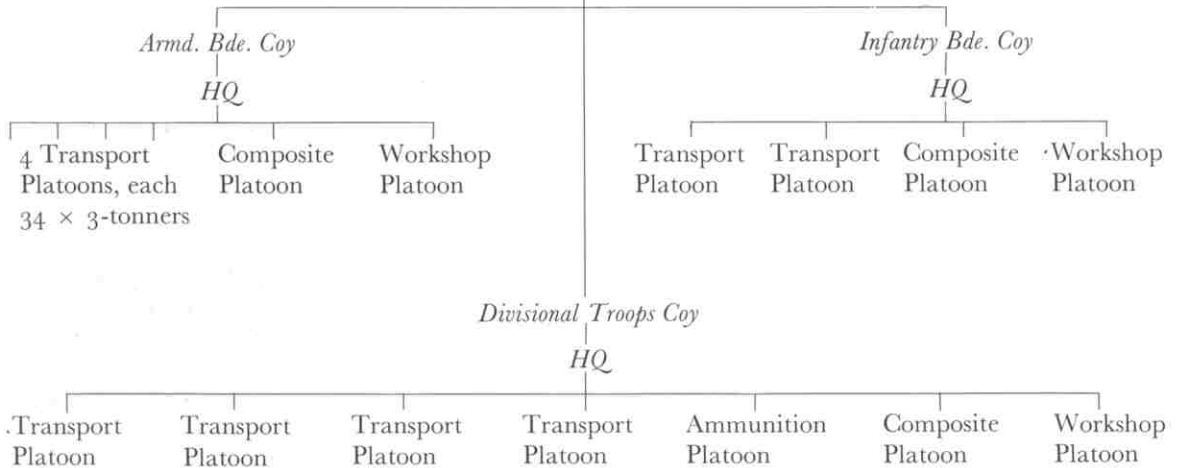
**ENGINEER REGIMENT:**

**HQ**



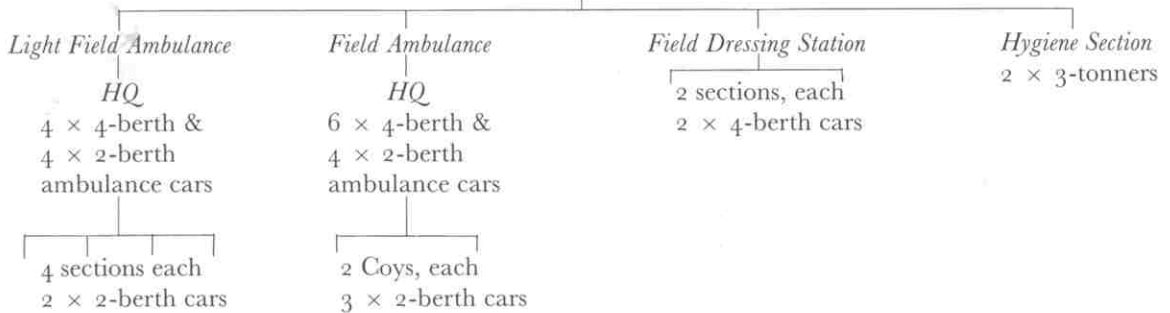
**RASC COLUMN:**

**HQ**



**MEDICAL SERVICES:**

**ADMS**



background the Bren group of the section and two of the rifle group take up positions along the bank.

The Churchill tank is armed with the 6pdr. gun; many of 6th Guards Tank Brigade's tanks were rearmed with 75mm, but a number retained the 6pdr. until quite late on. The turret is heavily camouflaged to disguise its shape above the hedgerows, while the hull has little concealment and even has a prominent troop sign on the side door and a name on the air intake louvre at the rear. A vertical steel plate has been welded to the turret top behind the commander's head as protection against snipers, and although hidden here by vegetation, old lengths of track would have been welded to the front of the vehicle.

### C 2nd Household Cavalry Regiment, Belgium, autumn 1944

Vehicles of 2nd Household Cavalry Regiment are greeted in typical fashion in a Belgian town during the advance to Brussels. Although not in this case 'first in' (see the squaddie and the XXX Corps MP sergeant in the crowd) the initial enthusiasm has clearly not worn off!

The White 15cwt armoured truck (often misleadingly known as a scout car) in the left foreground belongs to the regimental medical section. The HQ Squadron diamond sign in white is on the front bumper, and the unit tacsign and VIII Corps sign are on the wings. Although at this time the regiment had been switched to XXX

TABLE 6 (continued)

#### REPAIR & RECOVERY (REME):

##### HQ

##### Armd. Bde. Workshop

HQ	}	11 × 15cwt
Repair Sn.		43 × 3-tonners
Recovery Sn.		1 × 3-tonner BD
RAOC Stores		6 transporters

##### Inf. Bde. Workshop

}	7 × 15cwt
	39 × 3-tonners
	2 × 3-tonner BD
	4 Scammell tractors

##### Unit Light Aid Detachments (LADs)

Each:  
 1 or 2 Scammells or  
 1 × 3-ton BD; 1 to 4 × 15cwt  
 1 to 3 × 3-tonners  
 (depending on unit served)  
 LADs attached to:  
 HQ Inf. Bde.; Armd. Regts.;  
 Motor Bn.; Field Regts. RA;  
 Field Park Sqn.; Div. HQ;  
 Div. Signals; AT Regt.;  
 LAA Regt.; Armd. Recce  
 Regt.; Armd. Car Regt.

Advanced Workshop	}	5 × 15cwt	}	3 × 15cwt
Detachment (AWD)		2 × 3-tonners		3 × 3-tonners

#### MILITARY POLICE:

##### Div. Provost Coy

##### HQ

Section	Section	Section	Section	Section	Section
Div. HQ, & POW duties	Admin area	Supply fuel and ammo points		Marking CLs, and traffic control	(Spare)

Each Section, 2 jeeps, 1 × 15cwt, 10 motorcycles



Canadian Ford CMP 4 × 4 3-tonner with metal panel GS body. The third main load carrier within the Division, although less numerous than the Fordsons and Bedfords; some were used by 224 Coy. RASC. (Conniford)

Corps, in some cases vehicles still had the old sign. The colour scheme, as for all the divisional AFVs, is a matt overall khaki. Slogans chalked on by the locals, and messages for missing friends and relatives whom it was hoped might see them, were common on Allied vehicles at this time, as were the flowers and fruit with which they were sometimes showered.

The corporal in the White is an RAMC rank (the Household Cavalry NCOs wore crowns above their chevrons). The driver wears his issue shirt and



Officers of the Scots Guards interview a prisoner. The major on the right wears the infantry's khaki beret and the officers' pattern battledress blouse; designed to be worn open-necked with collar and tie. He has a captured holster on his webbing belt and, unusually, does not have a divisional sleeve flash. The officer in the centre wears a Royal Stewart tartan flash on the side of his peaked cap, and the one with glasses, despite his infantry beret, wears a tank suit. The other British figure with a black RAC beret is possibly a Welsh Guardsman.

braces, having removed his battledress blouse. Behind the White a Staghound armoured car, as used by regimental and squadron HQs, moves through the crowd. The bridge circle, without the usual number inside it, can be seen below the unit tacsign on the right hand bumper; and part of the vehicle serial number (an 'F' followed by six digits) and of the vehicle name can be seen on the front plate. The 30 cal. Browning machine gun is mounted on the turret top pintle for anti-aircraft protection, but was in fact more often used against ground targets. The gunner, wearing standard pistol equipment, tries to ward off a gift of thrown apples, while the commander reports progress; both he and the corporal in the White wear the XXX Corps sleeve insignia.

A Humber heavy utility and another Staghound are in the background; the building-up of racks and lockers on the roofs of staff cars and ACVs was common in North-West Europe, and had caused headaches when such vehicles were found to be taller than specification when loading into craft to cross the Channel.

### **D Divisional Tactical HQ, Holland, winter 1944**

In the left foreground is the Humber scout car of the CO, 5th Bn. Coldstream Guards, with the unit tacsign and divisional sign, but no other signs visible on the front. The tyre pressure markings over the wheels were standard army practice. As it was an infantry unit the officer wears a khaki beret and the corporal a GS cap, not the black beret, although the former wears a tank suit. The corporal is speaking over the car's No. 19 set, the short 'B' set and the longer 'A' set aerials of which can be seen.

General Adair (centre, facing) wears the simplified 1943 pattern battledress with exposed buttons and unpleated patch pockets, the only difference between it and the variety worn by other ranks being the faced lapels. Even the Guards were sometimes informal in dress; the commander of 32nd (Infantry) Guards brigade on the General's right wears the armoured-type black beret, and the Colonel on the General's left, a green scarf, paratroop smock, American pistol, corduroys and gumboots.

In the right foreground are a 'corporal of horse' (equivalent to a sergeant in other units) of the Life



Guards and a Warrant Officer 1st Class of the Welsh Guards. The Household Cavalry wore infantry-style cloth unit-name tallies at the top of their sleeves, unlike most cavalry regiments who wore metal lettering or coloured tapes on the shoulder straps. (They had started the war as a motor infantry unit.) The corporal of horse wears an issue leather jerkin over his battledress, while the WO1 has a Canadian pattern battledress, similar to the British 1937 style with concealed buttons and pleated pockets, but of a neater cut. Guards RSMs retained the large woven Royal Coat of Arms on the upper sleeve even in battledress, and continued to wear leather Sam Browne belts on active service, while in other regiments the smaller woven or metal coat of arms was worn on the cuff, with a normal webbing belt.

Behind the figures is one of the AEC Dorchester Armoured Command Vehicles. The Royal Signals tacsign with the Divisional HQ number can be seen over the bridge circle on the right mudguard, while the divisional sign and the Allied air recognition star can be seen on the front and top of the false bonnet respectively. A canvas penthouse is rigged from the side to give extra working space, and the absence of wireless aerials indicates that this vehicle is being used for office rather than communication purposes.

Behind the ACV the General's 'Charger', a Cromwell tank, can just be seen. In addition to the Div. HQ tacsign, bridge circle and divisional sign painted on a dark panel on the front of the tank, the letters GOC are picked out in small holes in a box

Self-propelled Bofors LAA guns on Morris chassis firing in the ground role, as 94th LAA Regt. did in support of the Rhine crossings. Like the SP anti-tank guns these proved more practical than the towed Bofors and by the end of the war all the divisional LAA guns were either SP Bofors or multiple .50 cal. machine guns on halftracks. The nearest vehicle has its troop sign—'Fg'—on the radiator and the objects like trays of eggs are in fact clips of 40mm ammunition seen 'end on'.

above the Div. sign, with a light in it, and a smoke emitter is fitted above the tacsign on the opposite side. Pennants and flags were not generally flown from aerials in North-West Europe, but some senior officers sometimes used them; and General Adair, at least on ceremonial occasions such as the official entry into Brussels, flew his divisional commander's flag (from what appears to have been a special staff rather than an aerial) at the front of his turret, as shown.

### **E Royal Northumberland Fusiliers, Germany, spring 1945**

The sandy heathland and pinewoods of the north German plain in spring 1945. In the foreground is a 4.2in heavy mortar of the Independent Machine Gun Company of the Royal Northumberland Fusiliers. The member of the detachment on the left wears the standard collarless flannel shirt issued to other ranks for wear under battledress. The leather belt embellished with regimental cap badges, if non-uniform, was a popular variation with old soldiers. The belt straps, map and field dressing pockets can be seen on his trousers. The lance-corporal in the centre is clearly wearing an old 'best' battledress jacket of 1937 pattern downgraded to battlefield wear. (Unlike the

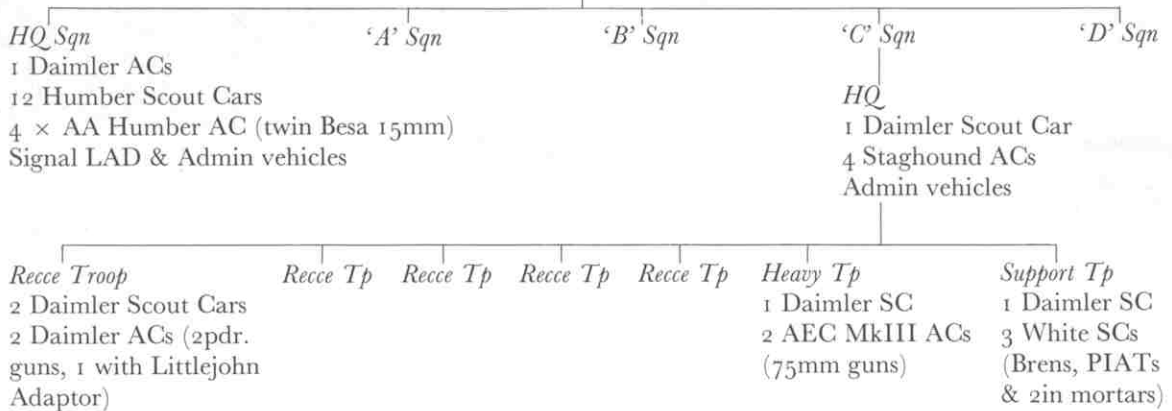
*continued on page 40*

TABLE 7

## 2nd HOUSEHOLD CAVALRY REGIMENT:

**RHQ**

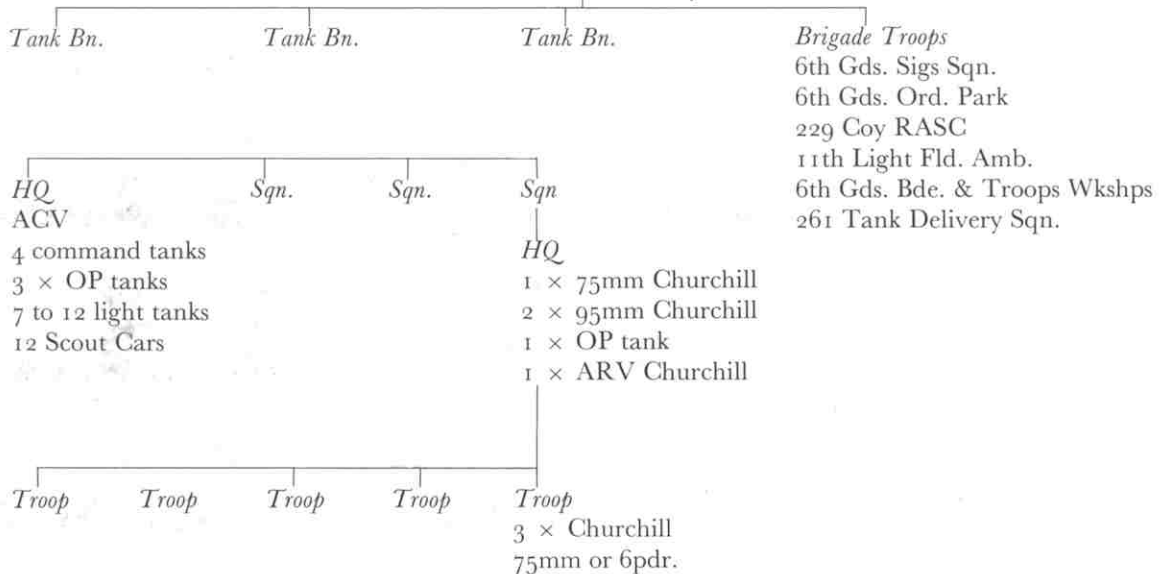
1 × ACV  
 3 Staghound ACs (37mm)  
 1 Scout Car



## 6th GUARDS TANK BRIGADE:

**Brigade HQ**

2 × ACVs  
 5 tanks  
 10 Scout Cars  
 3 Churchill bridgelayers





The war over, vehicles of the Grenadier Guards enter Berlin for the Victory Parade. A jeep leads a Humber armoured scout car and a line of Universal carriers. The vehicles have been much spruced up since coming out of action; white webbing is being worn, and a Union Jack has been added to the markings on the scout car.

**Below:**

Typical order of march of a regimental/battalion group advancing on a single road axis, based on that used by the Irish Guards:

(1) Tank troop (2) Tank troop, infantry platoon riding (3) RE detachment (4) Tank troop (5) Sqn. HQ, Coy. HQ, FOO (6) Infantry platoons (7) 2 x 3in mortar (8) 2 x 6pdr. AT (9) Carrier section (10) Detachment, Pioneer platoon.

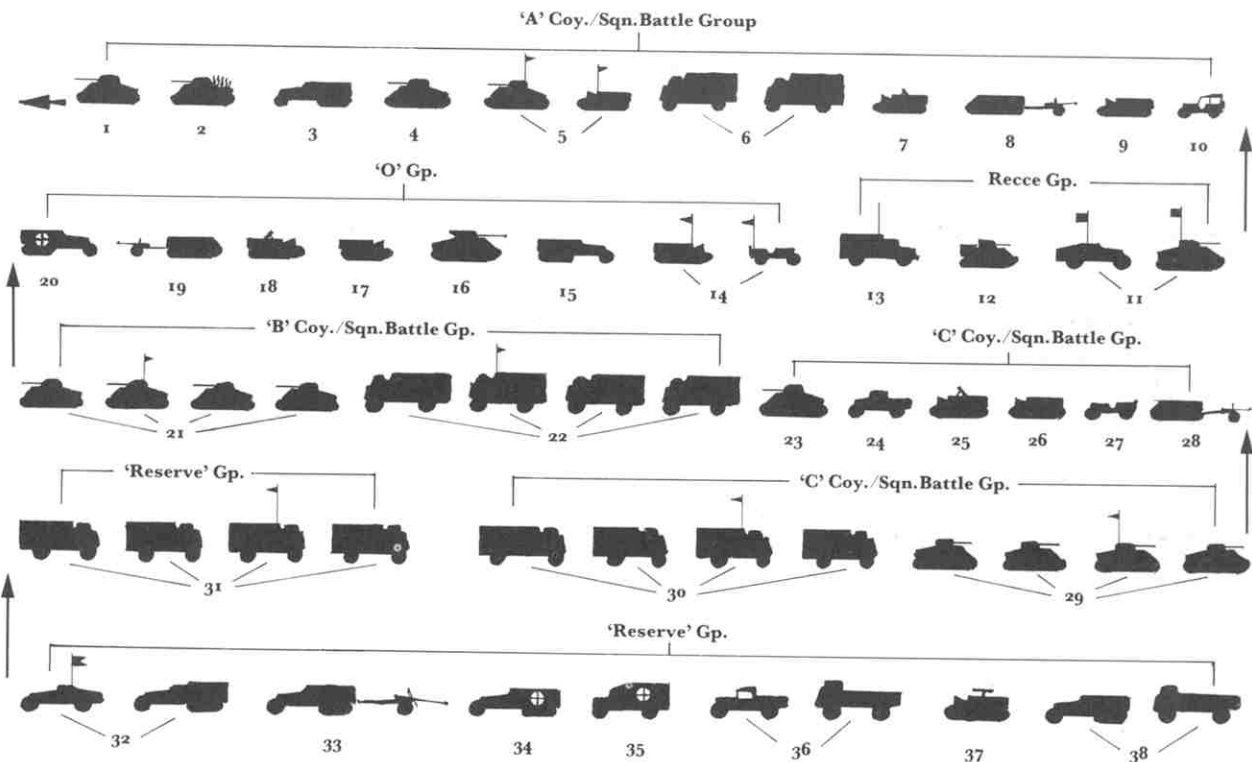
(11) COs, Inf. Bn. & Armd. Bn. (12) 12 x Stuart tanks (13) Wireless trucks, rear link.

(14) COs 'S' Coy., 'B' Battle Gp. & specialist platoons (15) Pioneer platoon less detachment (16) Troop SP 17pdr. AT (17) Carrier section (18) 2 x 3in mortar (19) 2 x 6pdr. AT (20) Armd. Bn. RAP.

(21) Tank sqn. (22) Inf. coy. in lorries.

(23) Artillery FOO (24) RE detachment (25) 2 x 3in mortar (26) Carrier section (27) Pioneer detachment (28) 2 x 6pdr. AT (29) Tank sqn. (30) Inf. coy. in lorries.

(31) 4th Inf. coy. in lorries (32) Main Bn. HQs—20 vehicles (33) Troop towed 17pdr. AT (34) Inf. Bn. RAP (35) Field ambulance section (36) 'A' Echelon Inf. Bn.—15 vehicles (37) Medium MG platoon (38) 'F' Echelon Armd. Bn.—25 to 30 vehicles.



Germans, British troops did not generally wear all their badges, decorations etc. in action.) On it can be seen the ribbons of the Military Medal, and Africa Star (with the 8th Army digit) over the breast pocket; on the sleeve he has the white-on-red infantry unit name flash at the top, then the divisional sign, the red infantry arm of service strip, his lance-corporal's chevron, a mortar skill-at-arms badge, two good conduct badge inverted chevrons (five years each) and a gold vertical wound stripe. He also wears the floppy tam-o'-shanter-type GS cap (not to be confused with the neater one-piece beret) with metal regimental badge in place above his left eye. The 'dog tag' identity discs of punched fibre, worn by all servicemen, can be seen at his neck.

The corporal despatch rider on the right wears normal battledress, in place of the breeches sometimes seen, and has the RNF tacsign painted both on his metal helmet and his machine's petrol tank. Motorcycles returned to favour to some extent, having been largely superseded in the Middle East by jeeps and light trucks, due to the congested roads of North-West Europe. In the background a Bedford MWD 15cwt truck, typical of those used by almost all units within the division, leads a Wasp flamethrowing carrier of the Royal Northumberland Fusiliers. These looked like the normal Universal carrier apart from the flame gun in the front sponson and a large cylinder (observed here by the motorcyclist) mounted transversely across the back of the vehicle.

## Notes sur les planches en couleur

### Insignes de véhicules divisionnaires et de casquette

**A** Ce tableau montre les signes de reconnaissance tactique portés à droite à l'avant et à l'arrière des véhicules de la Division. La couleur indiquait le type d'unité, alors que le numéro indiquait l'unité exacte. Il montre également les insignes de casquette portés par les soldats de ces unités. L'insigne de 'l'oeil toujours ouvert' était porté sur la partie supérieure de la manche par tous les rangs, sauf lorsqu'il était enlevé pour des raisons de sécurité, et il était peint sur le côté gauche à l'avant et à l'arrière des véhicules.

**B** Soldats d'infanterie des Welsh Guards soutenus par un char Churchill IV de la 6th Guards Tank Brigade, dans le bocage normand, juillet 1944. Les soldats d'infanterie portent des 'denims', c'est à dire une salopette de combat, et parmi leurs armes on peut citer le fusil-mitrailleur Sten, le fusil No. 4, le projecteur antichars PIAT et le mortier zin. L'équipement en toile à sangles est typique de l'année 1944.

**C** Des voitures blindées Staghound et un camion blindé White M3A1 du 2nd Household Cavalry Regiment accueillis par la population civile d'une ville belge libérée. Le White est un véhicule du service médical du régiment—il porte toujours l'insigne du 8 Corps, quoiqu'à cette époque le régiment se battait avec le 30 Corps et les hommes portent les insignes du 30 Corps sur leurs manches. Le losange blanc de l'escadron de commandement est peint à gauche sur le pare-chocs avant. La Staghound était utilisée tant par les unités de régiment que par les escadrons de commandement.

**D** Une partie de l'état-major divisionnaire, Hollande, hiver 1944. A gauche, la voiture de reconnaissance Humber de l'officier commandant du 5th Bn. Coldstream Guards. Au centre, le Général Adair se tient devant son véhicule de commandement blindé AEC Dorchester, accompagné de deux de ces officiers, dont un porte un mélange très bariolé de vêtements d'uniforme! A droite, un 'corporal of horse' des Life Guards (l'équivalent d'un sergent dans les autres unités) et le Regimental Sergeant Major (l'adjutant chef) des Welsh Guards. A l'arrière-plan à droite se trouve le char Cromwell personnel du Général Adair.

**E** Royal Northumberland Fusiliers, Allemagne, printemps 1945. Les soldats de cette unité d'armes de support portent la tenue de campagne typique, une chemise sans col et le béret GS adopté en 1943 par l'infanterie britannique. Les insignes portés au bras par le personnage central sont, de haut en bas: le nom du régiment en lettres blanches sur fond rouge; l'insigne divisionnaire; la rayure rouge d'un soldat d'infanterie; le chevron de rang d'un Lance-corporal; le 'M' entouré d'une guirlande d'un expert équipier de mortier; deux chevrons de bonne conduite pendant cinq ans et une rayure gansée d'or. Le mortier est l'arme lourde 4,2 utilisée par les compagnies de support.

## Farbtafeln

### Divisionsfahrzeug- und Kappen-Dienstgradabzeichen

**A** Diese Tabelle veranschaulicht die 'taktischen Abzeichen', die von den Divisionsfahrzeugen vorne und hinten auf der rechten Seite geführt wurden. Die Farbe bezeichnete die Kategorie der Einheit, die Nummer identifizierte die genaue Einheit. Ebenfalls gezeigt sind die Kappenabzeichen, wie sie von den Männern dieser Einheiten getragen wurden. Das 'stets offene Auge'-Abzeichen der Division wurde von allen Dienstgraden auf den oberen Armen getragen—mit Ausnahme, wenn es aus Sicherheitsgründen entfernt wurde—und es wurde auf die linke Seite der vorderen und hinteren Fahrzeugoberflächen gemalt.

**B** Infanterie der Welsh Guards, unterstützt von einem Churchill IV Panzer der 6th Guards Tank Brigade, bei der Normandy *bocage*, Juli 1944. Die Infanterie trug 'denims'—grober Baumwolldrill—und bei den Waffen befinden sich die Sten Maschinenpistole, das No. 4 Gewehr, der PIAT Panzerabwehrprojektor und der zin Mörser. Webbing Ausrüstung ist typisch für 1944.

**C** Staghound Panzerwagen und ein White M3A1 Panzerlastwagen des 2nd Household Cavalry Regiment werden von Zivilisten einer befreiten belgischen Stadt begrüßt. Der White ist ein Fahrzeug der Medizinischen Abteilung des Regiments—es führt noch immer das Abzeichen der 8 Corps, obwohl zu diesem Zeitpunkt das Regiment schon mit 30 Corps diente und die Männer das 30 Corps Abzeichen auf ihren Armen trugen. Das weiße Karo des HQ Bataillons ist auf die linke Vorderseite der Schutzvorrichtung gemalt. Der Staghound wurde von den Regiments- und Bataillons-HQ-Einheiten benutzt.

**D** Teil des Divisions-HQ, irgendwo in Holland, Winter 1944. Links, Humber Spähwagen des Kommandierenden Offiziers, 5th Bn. Coldstream Guards. Mitte, General Adair, welcher vor seinem AEC Dorchester Panzer-Kommandofahrzeug mit zwei seiner rangältesten Offizieren steht, von welchem einer eine höchst kunterbunte Anzahl von Uniformteilen trägt! Rechts, ein 'corporal of horse' der Life Guards (entspricht einem Feldwebel bei anderen Einheiten) und der Regimental Sergeant Major—Regimentshauptfeldwebel—der Welsh Guards. Im Hintergrund rechts befindet sich General Adairs persönlicher Cromwell Panzer.

**E** Royal Northumberland Fusiliers, Deutschland, Frühjahr 1945. Die Männer dieser Waffenverstärkungseinheit tragen normale Felduniform, kragenlose Hemden und die 'GS cap', wie sie 1943 von der Britischen Infanterie übernommen wurde. Die Abzeichen, wie sie auf dem Arm der mittleren Figur getragen wurden, lauten von oben: Name des Regiments in weißen Buchstaben auf rotem Flecken; das Abzeichen der Division; der rote Streifen eines Fußsoldaten; das Rang-Winkelabzeichen eines lance-corporal; das umkränzte 'M' eines Mörser Besatzungsexperten; zwei fünf-jährige Winkelabzeichen für gute Führung; und ein goldenes Verwundetenabzeichen. Der Mörser ist die schwere 4,2 Zoll Waffe, wie sie von Unterstützungs-Kompanien benutzt wird.

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Avec annotations en français sur les planches en couleur

Mit Aufzeichnungen auf deutsch über die Farbtafeln

- 1 British 7th Armoured Division
- 2 Panzer-Grenadier Division 'Grossdeutschland'
- 3 US 1st Infantry Division
- 4 Fallschirmpanzerdivision 'Hermann Göring'
- 5 US 101st Airborne Division
- 6 The Lee/Grant Tanks in British Service
- 7 2nd SS Panzer Division 'Das Reich'
- 8 US 1st Marine Division
- 9 British Guards Armoured Division
- 10 Allied Tank Destroyers

