**The North Irish Horse Battle Reports**

**River Senio Assault**

The enemy had his main defensive positions between the Senio and Santerno rivers, inclusive.
The Army plan was to break this line by frontal assault, then to swing north through the Argenta Gap, and destroy the enemy south of the River Po

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A and C Squadrons were under command of the 19th Indian Infantry Brigade - B Squadron was in support of the Cremona Oruppo, who were to attempt a crossing north of Fusignano if the other crossings proved successful. The 8th Indian Division and the New Zealand Division were the assaulting Divisions north of Route 16. The 8th Indian Divisional area was between Lugo and Fusignano, of which 17th Indian Infantry Brigade and the N.I.H. had the north, a1st Indian Infantry Brigade and the 48th Battalion R. Tanks had the south.

9th April 1945

Throughout the day heavy bombing and shelling programmes were carried out. In the evening the tanks and flame throwers went right up to the Senio flood banks and opened fire. The infantry assaulted through the tanks and captured both banks without much difficulty.

10th April 1945

 A Bailey Bridge was in position by 0330 hours and tanks of A and C Squadrons crossed without incident. They were met on the far side by guides from the Regiment who had crossed with the assaulting infantry and the Troops were shown the way to the various infantry companies. Capt. J. S. Milne was C Squadron's guide. For this and some exceptionally good reconnaissance work in the advance to the Santerno he was awarded the Military Cross. Every Troop was in its proper position and moving forward with its infantry before first light : A Squadron on the right with the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders, C Squadron on the left with the Frontier Force Regiment. C Squadron crossed the Arginello Canal and was faced by the Tratturo Canal which had been pre­pared as an anti-tank defensive zone - all trees felled, houses blown down, mines laid and anti-tank guns positioned. Nos. 3 and 4 Troops halted on the Lugo Canal and engaged the enemy. They knocked out one enemy self-propelled anti-tank gun but could not cross the open in daylight.

Lieut. Bexon removed the charges from the Arginello Canal in full view of the enemy, thus saving several hours of vital time He also knocked out one of the self-propelled guns and led the advance to the Tratturo. For this he was awarded the Military Cross.

The Frontier Force Regiment was very tired so the brigadier decided to pass the Punjab Regiment through them at night, the tanks to make their own crossings with Arks and fascines. C Squadron and the Punjabs, then to attack and reach the Santerno. This was successfully accomplished without much fighting as the enemy had pulled out with his heavy equipment, leaving only light machine-guns.

Meanwhile A Squadron, with Nos.1 and 4 Troops leading, found a crossing of the Lugo Canal and formed a small bridgehead over it with the infantry. At 0800 hours Nos.1 and 2 Troops set off by themselves to reconnoitre north west and exploit, if possible. They made considerable progress but were eventually held up by a self-propelled gun. This gun was engaged and withdrew. A dismounted Troop of the 6th Lancers then came up and joined No. 1 Troop. Together they reached the Arginello. They engaged enemy positions and a tank, and reconnoitred for a crossing.
B Squadron, with the Italians who had made a successful crossing, were unable to cross owing to bridging difficulties. Two Troops were ordered to cross on the 19th Infio owing to canals and blown bridges. B Squadron suffered through­out this operation from a lack of Engineer Assault Bridging equip­ment. The Italian attack was planned only at the last minute and was in the nature of a side show. These two Troops had to go back over 19th Brigade bridge and eventually crossed by the long awaited Italian Bailey bridge.

11th April 1945

C Squadron was relieved by a Sherman Squadron of the 4th Hussars under command of the N.I.H. This Squadron led an attack north between the rivers Senio and Santerno. They made good progress for two thousand yards when they ran into an anti-tank gun which knocked out the leading Sherman, killing four of the crew. C Squadron joined up with 21st Indian Infantry Brigade who had come up on our left.

The 4th Hussars were withdrawn in the afternoon and rejoined their own Regiment.

A Squadron had a quiet day preparing for a night advance.

B Squadron managed to get two Troops and Squadron Head­quarters over the river by 0100 hours - the remainder got over in the course of the day. Nos 2 and 5 Troops joined the Italians and cut Route 16 while the Italians entered Alfonsine. Major Side-bottom had great difficulty in getting any plans or information out of the Italians - the three Generals who commanded this Brigade was in hot dispute amongst themselves, but in spite of their commanders the Italian soldiers did very well.

Night of 9th-12th April - A Squadron accomplished a most spectacular night march. Unaccompanied by infantry they crossed six thousand yards of difficult country using their own bridging devices By dawn they had reached the Santerno, three miles north of C Squadron. Unfortunately the enemy had just pulled out and by a few minutes had escaped the trap.

At 0800 hours three Troops reached the Senio-Reno river junction, thus clearing all the country in front of the Italians. The Santerno proved to be strongly held and all bridges gone. A Squadron was recalled to avoid misunderstandings with the Italians who now had a clear run to the river Santerno.C Squadron moved north and joined up with A Squadron, capturing a few stragglers on the way.

B Squadron came along Route 16 as fast as bridging permitted and contacted A Squadron patrols by last light.

13th April 1945

The 19th Indian Infantry Brigade was withdrawn for a well-earned rest so A and C Squadrons had a rest. Major R. D. Morton M.C., had a badly swollen knee and had to go back. Capt. C. M. Thomas, M.C., took over C Squadron.

B Squadron was ordered to give all possible support to the Italians who planned an assault crossing of the Santerno.

At 0630 hours No. 5 Troop advanced straight up Route 16. Lieut. B. L. Pope got his tank on top of the flood bank and opened fire on the far bank. The tank was hit by a Panzerfaust but was not penetrated. They reversed out over several mines that did not go oft. The Italian infantry was pinned down by mortar and Spandau fire and never reached the bank.

Meanwhile No. 4 Troop went forward without the infantry who were nut ready. They entered La Pastorello without opposition and, advancing through thick vines, reached the Santerno by a blown railway bridge. They shot up all enemy posts they could observe. They were heavily mortared. At mid-day the Troop collected the Italian Infantry and again attacked the bank, this time driving right up to it. This attack failed. At 1600 hours they attacked again and on this occasion the Italians went across. Lieut. K. W. Foott did very excellent work rallying and leading the Italians on his feet. He was awarded the Military Cross. There were no Italian officers present.

14th April 1945

A tank crossing had been made during the night, but B Squadron was no longer required as the 2nd Armoured Brigade had already reached the Argenta bridge from the south. The total number of prisoners was two hundred and fifty in this action - the dead were not counted. B Squadron came under command of the Regiment again and settled down in La Pastorella.

15th-19th April 1945

The Regiment was in Army reserve with the 8th Indian Division. This was a very fortunate break for us and a very unusual one. It allowed everyone to get some sleep and the tanks to be fully maintained. The remarkable achievement of having every tank in the Regiment still going when the Campaign ended was due to first-class recovery and repair work by the Regimental fitters and the light aid detachment. No other tank Regiment has ever achieved this, even with Shermans. Churchill tanks are by far the most difficult to keep on the road.

20th April 1945

The Regiment, ordered to support Bth Indian Division up Route 16 and to capture Ferrara, moved to a concentration area near Consondola.

21st April 1945

B Squadron with the 17th Indian Infantry Brigade moved up Route 16 meeting only light opposition.

22nd April 1945

B Squadron with the Punjabs continued the advance. When within two miles of Ferrara the opposition stiffened. At 1600 hours B Squadron with the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders passed through A Squadron and reached the canal south of Ferrara.
The canal bridge was blown up in sight of the leading Troop. No assault crossing equipment was immediately available so they had to wait. Meanwhile C Squadron, with the 21st Indian Infantry Brigade, had made a rapid advance north on a parallel road west of Route 16 and reached the south western outskirts of Ferrara where they were held up by several German tanks. At last light these with­drew into the town and blew up the bridge behind them.

23rd April 1945

At first light Nos.3 and 4 Troops of C Squadron, commanded by Capt Milne, was ordered to advance to the River Po, and prevent the enemy from using some known ferrying place. By 1045 hours No.3 Troop (Lieut. D. R. King) reached the Po and captured a large assortment of vehicles, stores, etc. This virtually cut off the strong German force holding Ferrara. For this and for previous excellent work Lieut. King was awarded the Military Cross.

Nos.1 and 2 Troops under Capt. F. A. Norris supported the 1st Mahratta Regiment in clearing up all the country south of the Po di Volano. They had some stiff fighting but succeeded in their task.
B Squadron, with the Jaipurs, fought their way into the factory area on the west of Ferrara. They met with very stiff opposition from German tanks. There was only one possible crossing over the canal running round the town and this was covered by tanks and self-propelled guns hidden in the factories.

As soon as it was dark B Squadron crossed and cleaned up the factory area, then drove into the town where they met A Squadron who had crossed with the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders at the south-eastern corner. Lieut. W. A. L. Reid of A Squadron killed twenty Germans with one shot as they were forming up, presumably to march away.

Eight German tanks and two self-propelled guns were captured during this night assault. No opposition was met, the enemy being taken completely by surprise.

24th April 1945

The Regiment was ordered to prepare to cross the Po on rafts. There was considerable confusion as to who was providing these. The whole Ferrara area was finally cleaned up.

25th April 1945

The Regiment moved to concentration areas for crossing and carried out reconnaissance. Plans changed so often that they cannot be recorded.

Rafts finally did arrive and C Squadron started to cross. There was no opposition.

26th April 1945

By 1000 hours most of C Squadron was over. Two Troops of A Squadron got across but very heavy rain delayed operations.

27th April 1945

C Squadron made a long detour over unblown bridges and arrived two thousand yards short of the River Adige by last light. Here they joined up with the 17th Indian Infantry Brigade. The remainder of the Regiment crossed the Po.

29th April 1945

 C Squadron caught a very large enemy column of guns, tanks and every sort and kind of vehicle trying to cross the Adige ; abandoned German equipment was everywhere along the river - even more than there had been along the Po and it was obvious to all that the end would not be long delayed.

30th April 1945

And so on the 30th April, 1945, the North Irish Horse was ordered to "Stand Down" for the last time.

The Regiment took part in some of the hardest fighting of the Campaign. From the 1st until the 30th April only one officer - Lieut. D. L. Knight, B.E.M. - was slightly wounded Several tanks were hit but not knocked out. This was due to the skill of tank commanders.