



THE HISTORY OF E (LOTHIANS AND BORDER YEOMANRY) SQUADRON, THE SCOTTISH AND NORTH IRISH YEOMANRY

The full title of E Squadron is E (Lothians and Border Yeomanry) Squadron, The Scottish and North Irish Yeomanry. This title reflects the complicated history of the Sqn. This brief history is intended give an overview of the many tasks that this Sqn has been asked to do over the years. The other Sqns in The SNIY have equally varied histories and have had to prove just as adaptable. The Sqns of the SNIY are:-

- A (Ayrshire (Earl of Carrick's Own) Yeomanry) Squadron, based in Ayr.
- B (North Irish Horse) Squadron, based in Belfast.
- C (Fife & Forfar Yeomanry/Scottish Horse) Squadron, based in Cupar, Fife.
- E (Lothians and Border Yeomanry) Squadron, based in Edinburgh.

Regimental Headquarters is co-located with E Sqn at Redford Infantry Barracks in Edinburgh.

E Sqn's battle honours are recorded as in the photograph of the Regimental Standard, held in the HQ, Younger House. The Sqn's predecessors most notably served in the Boer War and the First and Second World Wars. A memorial to the Lothians and Borders men who fell in the Boer War is located outside Dunbar Parish Church in East Lothian (in which the Regimental Standard is laid up); Dunbar is regarded as the historical home of the Sqn, having been home to the L&B/H/Y through the late 19th and the early 20th Centuries. Today, this connection and that with the county town of East Lothian, is recognised through the naming of 'Dunbar' and 'Haddington' Troops and the SNIY ACF detachments.



SQUADRON ANTECEDANTS

The beginnings of 'The Lothians and Border Yeomanry' were in 1798 when 'The East Lothian Yeomanry Cavalry', 'The Berwickshire Yeomanry Cavalry', 'The Midlothian Yeomanry' and 'The Royal Edinburgh Volunteer Light Dragoons' (the 'Princess Street Lancers') were raised to provide a defence against the armies of Napoleon. In 1800, the last two of these amalgamated to form 'The Royal Midlothian Yeomanry Cavalry'. A reduction in strength of all three at the end of the Napoleonic Wars was followed by an increase in recruitment during the unemployment and social unrest of the early 19th century.

By 1838, all had been disbanded only for the Midlothians to be formed again in 1843 followed by the East Lothians in 1846. In 1888, they became 'The Lothians and Berwickshire Yeomanry' consisting of two troops from East Lothian, one from Berwickshire and one from Midlothian, and, in 1892, a West Lothian Troop was added. Although there were a number of name changes to come, this regiment was effectively 'The Lothians and Border Yeomanry'.

In the Boer War (1899-1902), the Regiment provided two contingents forming part of the '6th (Scottish) Battalion Imperial Scottish Yeomanry'. Regimental records point to a "*most unsatisfactory campaign*" in what was a generally unsatisfactory war from a British point of view. Thereafter, the Regiment was designated 'The Lothians and Berwickshire Imperial Yeomanry' with a squadron from East Lothian and Berwickshire, two from Edinburgh and the Lothians, and, for the first time, one from the Borders.

In a few years, the name was again changed to 'The Lothians and Border Horse' and it is under this name that it went through the Great War, serving with considerable distinction in France and in the Near East and Balkans. It was one of the first Yeomanry regiments to be mechanised, with armoured cars in 1922, becoming the '19th (L & B H) Armoured Car Company' but in 1938 became simply 'The Lothians and Border Yeomanry'. In the same year, a second regiment was added; both being equipped with light tanks and carriers for their roles as divisional cavalry in the conflict which was becoming increasingly likely.

The Berwickshire Yeomanry Cavalry 1797 to 1827

Four troops were raised between 1797 and 1804: the Coldstream; Duns; 'Eagle'; and Greenlaw troops. The Regiment was disbanded in December 1827.

The Royal Midlothian Yeomanry Cavalry 1799 to 1871

The Royal Edinburgh Volunteer Light Dragoons and the Midlothian Yeomanry were united in one regiment of six troops in 1800. In 1837 all the Scottish Yeomanry Corps (except for the Ayrshire and Lancashire Regiments) were disbanded. The Royal Midlothian Y.C. was re-raised in 1843 and eventually ceased to exist in 1871.

The East Lothian Yeomanry Cavalry 1797 to 1888

Three troops were raised in 1797: the Seton Troop; the Salton Troop; and the Gifford Troop. The Seton Troop's guidon includes a grab or wheatsheaf. A fourth troop, the Dunbar Troop was raised in 1803. The Salton, Seton and Gifford Troops disappeared in 1827 and the corps was disbanded in 1837. The East Lothian Y.C. was re-raised in 1846 as two troops and was added to in 1848 by a Berwickshire Troop. This gave rise to the first unofficial title of The East Lothian and Berwickshire Yeomanry Cavalry. A new troop was added from Midlothian in 1879.

The Lothians and Berwickshire Yeomanry Cavalry 1888 to 1901

The official titular change was made in 1888. In 1899 the War Office announced the formation of a new force of mounted infantry to be known as the Imperial Yeomanry. Twenty battalions were raised from the various Yeomanry regiments. The 6th Battalion, commanded by Col. Burn, was raised in Scotland and formed from the following: 17 Coy Ayrshire and Lanarkshire Yeomanries; 18 Coy Queen's Own Royal Glasgow Yeomanry; 19 Coy Lothians and Berwickshire Yeomanry; 20 Coy Fife Light Horse and Forfar Light Horse. They sailed from Glasgow on the SS Carthaginian on February 23rd 1901 to take part in the Boer War.

The Lothians and Berwickshire Imperial Yeomanry 1902 to 1908

The Boer War resulted in an increase in serving personnel numbers. B and D Squadrons were recruited from Edinburgh, Mid, and West Lothian. A Squadron was recruited from East Lothian and Berwickshire, while C Squadron represented the Border districts. The expansion also produced a further change in title - The Lothians and Berwickshire Imperial Yeomanry.

The Lothians and Border Horse 1908 to 1921

The Volunteers, Militia and Yeomanry were combined in the new Territorial Force and resulted in a further title change. This was to be modified for two periods during the decades of mechanisation, by replacing 'Horse' with 'Yeomanry'.

The Great War: 1914 – 1919

A Squadron was assembled at Dunbar, B and D Squadrons in Edinburgh and C Squadron in Hawick. Intensive training took place to convert the unit from a mounted infantry to a cavalry role. At the end of July 1915, the regiment itself was split up. A Squadron was posted to the 26th Division on Salisbury Plain; B Squadron accompanied by R.H.Q. and the Machine Gun Section, joined the 25th Division and D Squadron joined the 22nd Division, both formations being stationed in Aldershot.

Training for war

For much of the time prior to the War, the Regiment was dispersed. However, the entire body assembled each summer for annual exercises, often at Hedderwick, near Dunbar, where they practised their role as Mounted Infantry.

The Regiment comprised the headquarters and four squadrons. Each squadron was nominally commanded by a maj and had 3 or 4 troops commanded by a capt or lt. Each troop had 30-40 men organised in 4-man sections. In total the established strength in 1908 was 449 officers and men and an additional 16 man machine-gun section but in practice, in peacetime, the Regiment could be under or over this number at any particular time.

The Territorial Army was organised for home defence and mounted infantry regiments were their strike force. They were tasked to respond in short order to any threat within their operational area and hold until supporting arms could arrive: in the words of the drill book, 'to obtain information and to combine attack and surprise to the best advantage'.

A Squadron was headquartered at Dunbar and drew its men from East Lothian, Midlothian, Roxburgh and Berwickshire. Its drill stations were at Haddington, North Berwick, Tranent, East Linton, Musselburgh, Greenlaw, Duns, Coldstream, Earlston, Lauder, Kelso, and over the border in Berwick-upon-Tweed.

When the war broke out, the Regiment mobilised at the Sqn headquarters but by the autumn of 1914 they had regrouped in Haddington. During the winter they were reorganised by disbanding one sqn and deploying its men across the remainder to bring them up to strength after unfit troopers were combed out and others were deployed to raise a second line regiment. By the end of the winter the 1/1st Lothians were training as the 'active service' regiment and the 2/1st Lothians were gearing up as a training and reserve force for maintaining the 1/1st in the field. (In 1915 a 3/1st Lothians regiment was formed and became a feeder for both the other elements.) The reorganisation was achieved while undertaking all the duties of coast defence and security that had become the regiment's responsibility and was barely completed before their active service role was rethought.

The expansion of the Territorial Army and its deployment overseas to support the British Expeditionary Force in France and in other theatres meant the adoption of new structures. Before the war the Territorial Army was organised as brigades of 3 or 4 infantry battalions or mounted infantry regiments (there was a divisional structure but it was a regional system, not an operational role). The front lines under the conditions of the war operated with larger units, the divisions: integrated forces of 3 or 4 brigades and their supporting arms. Divisions in turn were subordinate to corps and the corps to armies.

It also meant that there were too many yeomanry regiments in the mounted infantry role. The first clue the men of the Lothians had that they were in for change was the issue of new saddles in the cavalry pattern – and good old-fashioned cavalry sabres. They were to train as divisional cavalry – the eyes and ears of the divisional commander and his means of communicating rapidly with the elements of his division. From May 1915 they trained in their new role at Hedderwick and by the end of July 1915 the squadrons had left for England and their new divisions.

RHQ, B Squadron and the machine gunners joined the 25th Division

D Squadron joined the 22nd Division

A Squadron joined the 26th Division

The nature of the Regiment's war service makes it difficult to assess the scale of the casualties suffered during the conflict. The best account of the regiment lists 34 killed, died of wounds or disease; many more were wounded or sick and returned to arms, transferred to service duties or invalided out. These numbers take no account of the (estimated) 224 men of the regiment commissioned from the ranks and posted out, a large proportion of whom died, or the troopers of B Squadron and the machine-gun troop who were similarly transferred to other regiments. The high number of officer promotions (equivalent to half the regimental strength) is often taken to be a mark of the quality and professionalism of the regiment.

The Regiment Overseas: 'A' Squadron's War

A Sqn's war was marked by long periods of routine work, much of it on a front far away from the headline-grabbing battlefields of France. Their challenges were as much the effects of disease as war or maintaining their efficiency and skills with limited resources. Their postings were enlivened with periodic special duties and attachments. They were much sought after in a theatre where able mounted troops were thin on the ground but ideal for the conditions.

*Tommy once worked in a baker's van,
And I on a stool in town;
I was a sort of city man,
Tommy a hackney brown.
Tommy and I, Tommy and I, little thought thus to meet
As we passed each morning when I walked up and he rattled down the street.*

*Tommy is free from the morning rolls
That weighted his busy cart,
And I am one of five hundred souls who ride with a single heart:
Tommy and I, Tommy and I, who could ever have guessed
We'd find each other good company – good company? – the best.*

*Tommy no longer must move ahead
At the bang of a door behind;
And I can't snuggle till nine in bed, And I'm learning not to mind.
Tommy and I, Tommy and I, funny are fortune's tricks,
To kick me out of a crowded tent to saddle him up at six!
W Kersley Holmes, 1915*

A Sqn embarked for France from Southampton on 21 September 1915 and under the 26th Division they were posted immediately into the line south of the Somme as XII Corps Reserve. They remained in this relatively low-key role until the end of October when the division headed for Marseilles and embarkation for, as it turned out, the Salonika area of northern Greece. There, a composite allied army was assembling to stiffen the resistance of the local friendly states against invading Austrian and Bulgarian forces allied to Germany.

The 26th headed for Langaza and A Sqn spent the next 6 months perfecting their skills in patrolling and reconnaissance in the swathe of unmapped territory between the Allied and Bulgarian forces. In August 1916 A Sqn was reunited with D Sqn when, with elements of the Derbyshire Yeomanry (who had been depleted by the effects of malaria), a composite regiment was formed under the direction of the 7th Mounted Brigade in the Struma sector. By October they were back with 26th Division but this time on the Doiran Front, a static position until the final advance in September 1918. Although the division was static, the Lothians' mounted role was exploited in a number of special operations. In December 1916 they were detached to escort 1700 men and 2000 mules and animals (barely 100 men to guard a 6 mile long column) on a seven day march from Salonika to positions near Mount Olympus.

In March 1917 they were engaged in attacks on the Bulgarian forces opposing the 26th Division and there was much 'raiding' in the period November 1917 – July 1918. As the Bulgarian Army collapsed during the autumn of 1918 the Sqn participated in the general chase. After an armistice was signed on 20 September they were in Serbia acting as link troops between British, Serbian, and Greek occupation forces. In October they transferred to Bulgaria prior to storming Turkey, but this action was forestalled when another armistice was signed at the end of the month. By Christmas 1918 they had joined the Army of Occupation in Trans-Caucasia and were based on Batum. Their duties were policing and bringing order in a highly volatile region. Over the next six months a gradual demobilisation was instituted. The final cadre of the Sqn returned home on 2 July 1919, marching through the streets of Edinburgh the following day prior to dispersal to their homes.

The 19th Armoured Car Company (Lothians & Border Yeomanry): the 19th (Lothians and Border Horse) Armoured Car Company, R.T.C. 1921 to 1938

In 1921, horses were displaced by armoured cars for many yeomanry regiments, including the L&B. Also, the Territorial Force became the Territorial Army and the unit chose a new title the 19th Armoured Car Company (Lothians & Border Yeomanry). The company was drawn from the Borders and from Edinburgh but in 1923 the two Border sections were discontinued and all four sections were drawn from Edinburgh, giving rise to "The Edinburgh Tank Corps".

The Lothians and Border Horse Yeomanry 1938 to 1956

By May 1939, the 19th A.C.C. had expanded to a regiment of two lines known as the 1st and 2nd Lothians. Armoured cars gave way to light tanks - the Mark VIb was used in World War Two. Service-dress was superseded by battle-dress and a further modification was made to the title. The name was seldom used by the regiment itself. Major HJ Younger chose the 1st Lothians and Border Yeomanry for the First Line. The Second Lothians were referred to as the L&B Horse.

The 1st Lothians Reformed: 1940 – 1946

Mobilisation

As war fast approached, key personnel were called up on 25 August 1939 and both regiments were mobilised on 1 September when Hitler's armies marched into Poland. The First Regiment were under the command of their TA Commanding Officer, Lt Col HJ Younger, with Major the Earl of Haddington second in command. They were ordered to join the 48th (Midlands) Division based at Oxford rather than the expected, "*homely atmosphere*" of Dunbar.

After a lengthy period of intensive training during the 'Phoney War', the Regiment embarked from Southampton for Le Havre on 11 January 1940. The L & B was the first cavalry unit of the first Territorial Army division to arrive in France to augment the regular soldiers of the British Expeditionary Force. They moved to Arras towards the front line in freezing conditions, with blow lamps being used to free tanks from their transporters and boiling water poured into radiators freezing almost as it touched the cold metal. Conditions were far from "*homely*".

Into Action

Higher authority decided that the Regiment should be headed by a regular soldier and, in March 1940, Lt Col M P Ansell (Inniskilling Dragoon Guards) assumed command with Lt Col Younger staying on as second i/c (accepting demotion to maj). The Regiment then moved to the north end of the Maginot Line, near Metz, joining the 51st (Highland) Division, to provide tank support for an essentially infantry division. It was there that they chalked up another first as the first cavalry unit to see action. (They were later to become the last in action and the last to leave France, after 'Dunkirk'.)

The out-dated Maginot Line provided no resistance to Hitler's Panzer-led Blitzkrieg. They broke through in the Ardennes in May, effectively dividing the British and French forces in two. Those to the north were pushed back towards Dunkirk. To the south, the L & B withdrew westwards, as part of a general withdrawal, to the River Somme. There the 51st Division formed up, on a front 15 miles long, southwards from the sea at St Valery, with the L & B occupying 3.5 miles of it.

St Valery

Having pushed the British and French back over the Channel at Dunkirk, the Germans attacked the second line at the Somme on 5 June. Fighting was fierce, and, despite stern resistance, the cause seemed lost. Plans were made for the 51st Division to retreat from St Valery to Le Havre for evacuation. A rapid withdrawal was hampered by the French to the south having only horse transport, and the Germans under Rommel were able to sweep round behind the 51st Division cutting off their line of retreat. A change of plans meant St Valery was now to be the evacuation port. In all of this, the L & B, providing the divisional armour, played a key role in holding river-crossing points to allow the infantry to retreat before blowing up the bridges.

Forced back to St Valery, the L & B formed part of the perimeter defences, allowing those inside to board the expected transport ships. Then, at 11 pm on 11 June, orders came to the L & B to hold their positions until midnight, before destroying their vehicles and making their way on foot to St

Valery. There, with the Norfolk Regiment, they would be the last to embark. They arrived in the port to find total confusion and the news that the ships had not arrived, and would not arrive in time. There was no option but to order a general surrender, but the L & B decided to split into small groups, each seeking its own way to freedom. Only two groups, totalling three officers and 17 non-commissioned officers and men, escaped back to Britain. During the campaign, Maj HJ Younger was killed in friendly fire near St Valery, where he is buried. Younger House is named in his memory.

From the end of April, when they first went into action, to 12 June 1940, men of the L & B were awarded 2 DSOs, 3 DCMs, 2 MCs and 3 MMs. Fifteen others were 'mentioned in dispatches.'

Rebirth

Sixty other men from the L & B, either those back at base or those wounded and evacuated before St Valery, had survived the Regiment's destruction. In August 1940, in Dorset, the reconstruction of the 1st L & B began. On 7 October, the first civilian draft of 100 men, closely followed by a second, arrived from Scotland. These formed the regimental backbone, providing many commissioned officers and most of the NCOs. By March 1941, they were at full strength and were supplied with Valentine and Matilda tanks, moving to Whitby for intensive battle training on the North Yorkshire Moors.

The waiting continued. The tanks were upgraded to Covenanters in 1942 and the Regiment became part of the 79th Armoured Division. The pattern of warfare was changing rapidly and the 79th never fought as a division but rather lent specialised units to others. This system, not adopted by the Americans until much later, allowed the British to land armour before infantry on D Day and ensured rapid initial progress. The US Army in contrast, without armour being first ashore, had only made 100 yards progress by nightfall on 6 June.

Among the specialised equipment developed by the British Army's engineers and inventors were 'flails' consisting of a large rotating drum with 50 heavy chains and fitted to the front of a Sherman tank. These were used to beat a path through minefields, eight feet wide per tank, and were to prove invaluable in the coming action. When not flailing, however, the tanks operated as normal.

The 1st L & B converted from an armoured regiment to a 'flail regiment' and set about the specialised training necessary. They were equipped with 60 flails, organised into three sqns. When the drums were operating, it was virtually impossible to see forward and certainly impossible to fire forward. As the normal means of operation was to work with three tanks abreast, good navigation was paramount. Again, because the flails were moving first into enemy territory, the tanks were wide open to enemy fire. Gunnery became supremely important and standards of the highest order were reached. L & B gunners were reputedly among the best and exploits were legendary, such as being able to put a high explosive shell through a pillbox slit from 400 yards or penetrating defences with an armour piercing shell and sending others through the entry hole.

Normandy

When D Day came on 6 June 1944, the L & B were held in reserve and scheduled to cross to Normandy on D Day + 11. Due to light casualties suffered by the flails in the first wave, the L & B departure was delayed until 13 July. They impressed the port organisers for the CO received a letter commending their general discipline, high standard of driving, etc. *"This unit was without question the best of many I have seen,"* wrote the embarkation commander.

By 15 July, they were in the front line and had received their first casualties. L & B tanks were in heavy demand in clearing routes through German minefields, often under heavy fire. Tanks were lost due to this and the more sophisticated mines, such delayed action, in use. In the confusion, the close proximity of German lines, constantly changing positions and friendly fire from land and

air were also hazards but progress was made. Eventually the Regiment crossed the Seine, at Elboeuf, on 28 August.

Le Havre

By 5 September, Brussels and Antwerp had been liberated by the British Second Army and Patton's American Third Army was heading for Paris. Most of northern France and western Belgium was free of German domination but the Channel coast and, importantly, its ports remained to be cleared. In particular, Le Havre, garrisoned by 12,000 German troops was holding out. The L & B joined the 51st (Highland) and 49th Divisions in a concerted attack to capture the key port.

Antitank ditches, concrete defence work and pillboxes, and more than one million mines made it "*a tough nut to crack*". The L & B flails often worked hand in hand with the specialised armoured vehicles of the Royal Engineers (AVRE). On the night of 10/11 September 1944, the 51st Division attacked under the cover of darkness, led by AVRE and L & B flails charged with bridging the ditches and clearing paths through the minefields. Routes, marked by rows of lights, had previously been laid by squads from the L & B up to only 400 yards from the German positions. Bofors tracers were fired every two minutes to provide additional guidance but there was still considerable confusion in the darkness.

In the event, L & B lost 13 out of 15 tanks but successfully opened up two routes through the minefields, allowing the British infantry through to the town. On 12 September, British units entered Le Havre, overcoming the remaining strong points and the German garrison surrendered. Later it was found that the flails had come as a complete surprise to the Germans who were surprised at the British madness in sending tanks into the minefields, but even more amazed at the results.

Boulogne

Moving eastwards, Dieppe was found to be empty of Germans and so the L & B were sent to join in the 3rd Canadian Division's assault on Boulogne. There were extensive minefields and strong fortifications to be overcome as well as an experienced garrison, 10,000 strong. The attack was launched on 17 September and again L & B flails led the way. After five days of battle, the last of the enemy resistance petered out and the remaining Germans ran up the white flag.

Calais and Cap Gris Nez

After preliminary pounding by the RAF, the ground attack on Calais began on 25 September. Again, the L & B cleared paths through the minefields before providing armoured support for the Canadian troops. Many of the tanks were blown up either by mines or by the big guns sited at Cap Gris Nez which, since 1940, had menaced Dover and Allied Channel shipping.

In clearing one lane nearly a mile long in the final attack, ten of the eleven tanks involved were knocked out of action but the eleventh completed the task. This coincided with the arrival of a second L & B Sqn from another direction and the garrison commander ordered its surrender.

Opposition had generally been comparatively feeble but German prisoners later reported that they considered their positions impenetrable. They had, after all, withstood many months of RAF attention. However, when they saw the tanks pass through the minefields, they lost their resolve. As a tribute to the people of Dover, the Lothians sent the German flag from Cap Gris Nez to their mayor with the compliments of the L & B, while two others captured in the attack were presented to the city of Edinburgh.

Walcheren

With the French Channel coast clear and the Channel itself open to the Allies, the British and US armies moved through Belgium into Holland, before slowing down when supply lines became increasingly stretched. In an attempt to break the deadlock, operation Market Garden was launched. Devised by Field Marshall Montgomery, it was an ill-fated attempt to create a corridor through Holland and thence over the Rhine at Arnhem into Germany. Arnhem proved to be “*a bridge too far*”.

The L & B were more successfully involved in the eight-day battle to capture the German stronghold on the island of Walcheren, guarding the approaches to the port of Antwerp. Although the Allies had captured the city long since - on 5 September - the Germans hung tenaciously on to Walcheren, preventing the Allies from opening up a vital supply port for the final push into Germany. The L & B were to provide essential tank support for the British Commando attack.

Again fighting was fierce and at close quarters. The German garrison surrendered on 8 November 1944, with the L & B losing only one man, drowned when his amphibious vehicle overturned early in the assault. The Commando Brigade Commander recorded that “*they (the tanks of the L & B) were worth their weight in gold*”.

Geilenkirchen

As a result of the fall of Walcheren, Antwerp became the great supply port through which the Allied push into the heart of Germany was sustained. Before that, the L & B were involved in clearing Holland of its German invaders. The Regiment then became the first British unit to take part in a major action within Germany. This was the capture of the key town of Geilenkirchen at the junction of the River Roer with the River Wurm and close to the Siegfried Line.

The successful assault was a joint operation by the British 43rd Division and the new and untried 84th US Infantry Division. Each had an L & B tank sqn allocated to them and again they played a key role. This was also the first, but not the last, experience of the L & B fighting alongside its U S allies and each formed a very high opinion of the other during the four-day battle.

‘Operation Blackcock’

The final obstacle to an attack on the Rhineland was clearing the way past the confluence of the Wurm and Maas Rivers. While planning for ‘Operation Blackcock’, to involve the whole of the 1st L & B, was in its early stages in early December, the Germans counterattacked in the Ardennes. The Regiment was part of the successful repulsion of that last major German offensive and ‘Blackcock’ was back on the drawing board.

The attack was launched on 12 January in weather that could not have been worse for tanks - hard-packed snow on top of thick ice made the roads virtually unmanageable - but the flails were needed to clear a path through German mines. Progress was made however, and Sappers arrived to throw a scissors bridge across the canal near Bakenhoven. Only one L & B tank, commanded by Cpl T W ‘Tommy’ Bradford made it over before the structure collapsed and a second bridge was attempted some way off, under support fire from the L & B. Meanwhile Cpl Bradford began to clear a path forward from the intended crossing point.

The activity attracted intense German fire, forcing the Sappers to abandon their work and with Cpl Bradford’s tank in splendid isolation on the opposite bank. The Sappers returned under the cover of darkness to complete the new bridge and brought up bulldozers, under heavy fire, to improve the approaches. The intensity of the bombardment increased around midnight and then again at 3 am when Cpl Bradford’s crew targeted a wood close by, exploding what was obviously an ammunition dump.

As daylight increased so did enemy fire, forcing the lone L & B Tank to move to a more secure position. From there Cpl Bradford kept watch for enemy armour, reported to be closing in. The Engineers' work was progressing slowly but their wireless was hit, leaving the L & B tank as the only means of communication with the rear and those waiting for the signal to cross. Cpl Bradford then took on the extremely hazardous role of runner between the bridge and his tank to keep the other units up to date with progress. Finally, after many dangerous runs under enemy fire, Cpl Bradford was able to relay the message that the bridge was ready and, at 10 am, the 7th Armoured Division rolled over under a heavy smoke screen, to the relief of Cpl Bradford and his men.

Cpl T W Bradford was immediately awarded the Distinguished Conduct Medal for his courage in resisting apparently overwhelming odds and repeatedly risking his life. Tommy was a Berwickshire man, from Coldingham. Before the war, he had commenced training as a minister in the Church of Scotland but became a primary teacher. He was eventually to become headmaster of Coldingham Primary School, a post he held for many years until his retirement. Married with a daughter and son, both of whom became doctors, Tommy had a lot to lose but never shirked in his duty to "*hold the bridge*". Whatever the demons to which the experience gave birth have died with him but sometimes, as an old man, he would allow them to surface and he would recount the horrors he and his men endured in those 24 hours in 1945.

On to the Rhine

If anything, resistance increased as fighting moved onto German soil. The Ardennes counterattack had delayed Allied plans by two months and, instead of frozen ground, the advance was over mud, a change that particularly affected the L & B's flailing operations. But progress was made under heavy enemy fire, with the flails of the L & B in constant demand by Canadian, American and British columns advancing over a broad front.

It was while eight of the flails were heading two American tank columns in an attack on Kich and Troisdorf on 26 February that the L & B sustained its heaviest single blow to fall on the Regiment. The Americans in one column left the road to take up firing positions, leaving the four L & B tanks exposed and alone. As they reversed back along the road, the leading tanks of the second American column opened fire on them at only 300 yards range, mistaking them for the enemy. All tanks were hit repeatedly by armour-piercing shells and over half the men were either killed or wounded.

War's End

Towards the end of March, the Americans held a small bridgehead over the Rhine at Remagen and, on 23 March, 'Operation Plunder' began a co-ordinated Allied crossing at a number of other points. Only one L & B sqn was involved for the other two had been sent north to assist the Canadians with clearing up operations in Holland. There, the L & B were the first tanks over the Rhine bridge and into Arnhem. With operations there complete, A and B Sqns were enjoying a well-earned rest while C Sqn was still in action in Germany

The war was drawing rapidly to a close. The roads of northwest Germany were crowded with surrendering German troops and the countryside swarmed with liberated slave labour. In the first week of May, German forces in Italy and south Austria surrendered, Berlin fell to the advancing Russians, Hamburg to the British, and Germany was split in two by the Allied armies' advances. C Sqn was in action almost to the end, flailing through the Oldenburg Forest on 2 and 3 May at the head of an Armoured Support Group. On 4 May, they rolled into Oldenburg itself. Four days later, the war was over.

In the 11 months from July 1944, men of the Regiment won 1 DSO and 1 Bar, 7 MCs and 1 Bar, 2 MBEs, 12 DCMs and 1 BEM. Eighteen were 'mentioned in dispatches'. In addition, seven men received decorations from Allied countries.

In the withdrawal from France in 1939-40, 47 men lost their lives and were joined in the Regiment's roll of honour by a further 40 in the 1944-45 campaign.

2nd Lothians

Formation and Mobilisation

In response to the Chamberlain government's introduction of peacetime conscription for the first time in British history and the encouragement given to young men to join the Territorial Army, the usual trickle of recruits to join the Lothians and Border Yeomanry became a flood. More sections had to be added to accommodate them and, in May 1939, the decision was taken to form a second regiment. Thus was born the 2nd Lothians and Borders Horse Regiment. (The First was the L & B Yeomanry; the Second, at least among the men of the Regiment, reverted to the older L & B Horse.)

As with the 1st L & B, key personnel were mobilised on 25 August 1939 and were joined by the rest of the Regiment on 1 September, under the command of Regular Army officer Lt Col H C Ayscough. With the senior regiment heading south, the space made available in the barracks at Dunbar became the 2nd's first home. Here they commenced their training before also heading south to be familiarised with their allotted light tanks and carriers in June 1940. However, these were taken to re-equip tank regiments reforming after Dunkirk and were replaced with utility trucks and machine guns. The Regiment then became part of a mobile reserve of the 26th Armoured Brigade which in turn joined the newly formed 6th Armoured Division in the British 1st Army.

For a while, with the fear of invasion following 'Dunkirk', they formed part of the coastal defences stretched along the south coast and elsewhere, occupying part of the line from Dover to Brighton. Men were issued with either one clip of five bullets or, if they were lucky, two. Duties consisted of four hours on alternating with two hours off. One sqn remained on duty all night with the others standing to,

Fortunately, with the RAF winning the 'Battle of Britain' and Hitler opening up a second front in the east against Russia, the threat of invasion receded. The 2nd L & B moved first to Swindon and then to East Anglia where they were equipped with tanks.

North Africa

In November 1942, desperately seeking action, the 6th Armoured Division was sent to Algeria where the powers that be wished to strengthen their forces in the west of North Africa. Following the success of El Alamein in October 1942, and 'Operation Torch' in Algeria in November, the main Allied target was the port of Tunisia. It was to prove a difficult nut to crack.

By Christmas, the L & B had arrived at the front, at Medjezel Bab, in heavy and persistent rain. Despite rumours of impending attacks on Tunis, they were there until May 1943. *"Mud was everywhere. Great ponderous clouds of it gathered on boots. It caked and dried on trouser legs and gaiters ... Not even our bedding could escape it. And this we thought bitterly was 'sunny North Africa'. Give us Glasgow any day!"*

The L & B then travelled south to the village of Bon Arada where they were involved in minor skirmishes, endless reconnoitring and occasional minor battles. In one of these, the L & B lost 11 tanks as did the enemy but there were few casualties on either side, while many tanks were capable of repair and soon back in service. These minor engagements were nonetheless important

in battle hardening tank crews and support personnel, building confidence and teamwork for the key battles which lay in store.

The Battle of Kasserine

The first of these came as a result of a two-pronged attack by Rommel's 10th and 21st Panzer Divisions. By now, the Germans were slowly being pushed back towards Tunis and the sea, and were concentrated within a perimeter about 180 miles from Tunis. Clearly they had to break out ahead of any final push by the British 8th Army. Rommel decided to attack the less experienced 1st Army and on 16 February, they broke through the scattered British front line. One prong headed for Tebessa while the other turned back north, making a dash for the Kasserine Gap through the Aurès Mountains. From there, they would have a relatively unopposed route along the coast to the important communications posts at Faid and Le Kef.

Eleven L & B tanks, with a battalion of infantry, were charged with holding up the German breakout for 24 hours. This hopefully would allow the hastily assembling British troops to organise better defensive positions 15 miles south of Thala and there they awaited the advancing Germans. As was anticipated, all 11 L & B tanks were lost but their delaying mission was accomplished. However, the rest of the British defences were out gunned, out of position and with no reserves. There could be only one outcome and the British were forced to retreat. Chaos reigned and the fate of the whole 1st Army hung in the balance.

The L & B commanding officer gathered what was left of the Regiment - 10 tanks in total - and counterattacked the advancing close formation of at least 70 German tanks. Within a short time, seven of the L & B tanks were out of action but the bluff caused the Germans, overestimating the strength of the opposition, to halt their advance. This allowed reinforcements, heavier Sherman tanks, to join the battle and the tide was turned. The Germans were swept out of Kasserine and back to Faid.

Ebba Ksour and Kairouan

The remnants of the L & B moved to Ebba Ksour to be equipped with Shermans and March was spent in getting used to the new equipment. The Afrika Corps and the remnants of the Italian divisions were withdrawing into a fortified box around Tunis. At the end of the month, the L & B made their way north to the Fondoule Gap, travelling at night to avoid detection. There, a minefield claimed a number of tanks but, by nightfall on 9 April, they were deep inside enemy territory.

They next morning, they moved towards the town of Kairouan and, by afternoon, were engaged in a pitched roadside battle which ended in the enemy retreating even further north leaving seven tanks and 20 guns of various calibres. This was the first of a number of engagements with the rearguard of the retreating German and Italian armies.

Tunis, Hammam Lif and Bou Ficha

At the end of April, the L & B moved back to Medjez el Bad to join the forces assembling for the final assault on Tunis planned for the first week of May. Before dawn on 6 May, these forces poured through a breach punched in the enemy lines. By nightfall, the Brigade had made its way half way to Tunis through only token resistance. The following morning, the column pressed on at top speed to find that the Tunis perimeter defences were virtually non-existent.

Leaving the following infantry to take over the town, the Brigade swung southeast and next morning ran into stiff opposition near the town of Hammam Rif. Having given up Tunis, the Germans were determined to hold the peninsula of Cap Bon, their last remaining toehold in North Africa. On the landward side, a mountain range effectively bars the entrance from the hinterland apart from a half-mile wide strip between the mountains and the sea. In this gap sits Hammam Rif.

The Germans had prepared their defences well. Antitank guns guarded every street; snipers were lurking in almost every house. In the hills overlooking the approach road, mortars were positioned. A battalion of the Guards Brigade cleared the hills, allowing the tanks of the L & B to spearhead the assault on the town itself. Steadily, street by street, corner by corner, the tanks fought their way into Mammam Rif, dealing one by one with antitank guns, tanks and mortars. At last, their leading tanks reached the open ground beyond the town. They then turned to wreak damage on the rear defences, while the remaining tanks of the 6th Armoured Division surged through the gap and onwards across the Cap Bon peninsula. Its capture led to the final collapse of Axis resistance.

Maj Gen von Brioch, GOC 10th Panzer Division said when captured, *“The break through the Hammam Lif defile amazes me. I did not think it possible.”* The men of the L & B enjoyed a well-earned rest before pushing on at speed with the rest of the Brigade. Prisoners were being taken in astounding numbers. Eventually, on 12 May, the leaders of the column met with an armoured car of the 8th Army travelling in the opposite direction. The battle was over and the war in North Africa was at an end.

Bou Ficha to Cassino

For nine months, the L & B rested and recovered with little doubt that Italy was the next destination. The British and Americans had already taken Sicily and had landed on the ‘toe’ of Italy following which Italy had surrendered unconditionally to the Allies on 3 September. A landing at Salerno further up the west coast on 9 September was followed by the capture of Naples. Thereafter, progress was impeded by the German stronghold of Monte Cassino. An attempt to bypass the hold-up by a landing at Anzio in January 1944 itself became bogged down. Cassino would have to be taken.

On 14 March 1944, the L & B landed in Naples and set up camp in Piedimonte d’Alife in the Volturno valley, awaiting their tanks and other vehicles. By 11 April, they were at full strength and began exercises with successive battalions of infantry of the 4th Division in preparation for the totally different kind of warfare ahead.

The L & B set out north on 11 May to the assembly point south of the town of Cassino. British forces had been held up at Cassino, high in the mountains and commanding the main route north, since the previous October. Successive assaults on the heights had failed and casualties were high. At midnight on 13 May, the L & B moved forward. The countryside was ill suited to tank warfare, criss-crossed by streams and deep ravines, but infantry alone would never capture the stronghold, and such was the strength of the German position. They had no intention of surrendering without exacting a heavy price and time and again the British attacks were repulsed.

One by one the L & B tanks were being knocked out, with surviving crew members seizing what weapons they could and temporarily joining the infantry. By noon on 16 May, the Regiment was reduced to 24 fighting tanks out of a total of 61. Work was on-going round the clock to restore those that could be repaired. On 17 May, the L & B were ordered to create a diversion to allow British infantry to scale the heights of Monastery Hill. At the same time, Polish troops arrived from the opposite side. As darkness fell, the battle of Cassino came to an end after seven long months. In their four-day battle, the L & B had lost 19 men killed and 39 wounded, with 19 Sherman tanks totally destroyed.

North from Aquino

After a few days rest and maintenance, the L & B moved north on 26 May, picking up passengers from the 3rd Welsh Guards on the way. At one point, radio reception was lost and suspected radio transmitter faults were traced to Guardsmen hanging on to the tanks aerials. The tanks made swift progress and gave support to the Welsh Guards in taking Monte Orio and Monte Piccolo. During

an evening stop, L & B supply trucks overshot the campsite in the darkness and drove into German territory before, fortunately undetected, beating a hasty retreat.

The tanks were on the move north again on 3 June, meeting no opposition, and *en route* learned that the Americans had entered Rome on 4 July, two days before D Day. Back home, Lady Astor was to rouse the ire of the men fighting in Italy by calling them the 'D Day Dodgers', for which she became immortalised in Army song.

Rome and beyond

Progress was rapid. In one day, the L & B, at the head of the Brigade, covered 40 miles. The column swung westwards towards Rome through a countryside filling up with Allied armour and infantry. The column bypassed the city and swept onwards into countryside well suited to tank warfare. The leading L & B tanks ran into serious opposition at Fonte di Pappa, forcing the column behind to grind to a halt. Those in front were exposed to a heavy shell and mortar bombardment, with a Nebelwerfer adding its hideous wail to the general din.

At nightfall, the L & B tanks were 2000 yards ahead of the main column and reluctant to give up hard earned ground. Preparing to spend the night on the enemy side of a stream, they were relieved when the Welsh Guards consolidated the position by a night attack. Daylight brought a steady advance with numerous prisoners including *"an Italian soldier with vicious Fascist arrogance. After he had attempted to spit on one of his captors and been given suitable corrective treatment for the offence, however, he showed every sign of being politically enlightened."*

The column moved on, through the villages of Narni (which the Regiment liberated at the spearhead of the advance) Todi and Pila, to the next main objective of Perugia, with the lead tanks changing every few miles. Although the town showed signs of being well defended, it fell on 18 June.

Arezzo and the River Arno

Florence now lay only 70 miles to the north but, before that, Arezzo had to be taken and the Arno crossed. The column, now led by the 16/5 Lancers, poured through a gap created in the enemy's defences by the Welsh Guard and on to Arezzo while the L & B swung to the north west to try to secure a crossing over the River Arno. They were to return to Arezzo a few days later to welcome King George VI who was making a visit to the front lines.

Then, it was back to work with the next phase of clearing the Arno valley, under heavy mortar bombardment from mortar bombs and shells fired from the nearby mountains. Heavy rain made conditions even difficult for the tanks but the infantry mopped up the opposition and the enemy retreated to the north and east. One by one, the villages along Highway 67 were entered - Dicomano, Vicolagno, Carbonile, San Bavello - although bridge after bridge had been blown by the Germans to cover their retreat, causing much delay.

The heavy rain was turning the ground into an oozy quagmire. Tents and tarpaulins proved useless against the steady downpour. The whole Brigade was literally bogged down through the whole of a rain-soaked October. It was no place for armour and a Polish infantry division took over allowing the Armoured Brigade to move out and dry out.

By now, Florence was an established rest centre in Allied hands and billets were found for the L & B nearby at Bagno a Ripoli. Parties were sent into Florence daily in liberty trucks, and many unofficial visitors hitchhiked there. Entertainment of all kinds was available, *"highbrow, simple or depraved"*. Dances were held and the local *vino* drunk in large quantities. The city had not been seriously affected by the bombardment although only the Ponte Vecchio had escaped destruction by the Germans. The US Army engineers quickly erected Bailey bridges.

Foot Soldiers

After a week's bliss, the Regiment was warned to prepare for infantry work. The L & B accepted the news reluctantly but made the most of it, taking over a section of the front from troops of the 78th Division. November and December came and went with the L & B patrolling on foot, gathering information on terrain, minefields and enemy placements. There were compensations, for one sqn at a time came out of the line for a week's 'rest' back at Florence.

Breakthrough to the Po

With winter ending, attention was turned to advancing on the River Po. Three new Sherman tanks arrived, armed with a much superior gun, and training was necessary. The L & B moved to Pesaro on the east coast and there the British 5th and 8th Armies advanced on a wide front, with the L & B and the rest of 6th Armoured Division held back in reserve.

On 19 April, they passed through the British front lines to attempt to force a passage to the Po. For two days, the L & B and the others fought their way forward against bazookas, antitank guns, Tiger tanks and the dreaded 88 mms. However, the Germans were eventually on the retreat and the L & B were given the task of taking the bridge over the Po at Bondeno to close off that escape route. The attack was to prove unsuccessful but it forced the enemy to blow up the bridge prematurely with many of their own troops cut off from safety.

War's End

The attack by the 26th Armoured Brigade had resulted in a 20-mile wide breach in the German lines just south of the Po and the L & B tanks had been the first to the river. However, the honour of 'first across' fell to the 1st Guards Brigade, including the Scottish Horse, after 36 hours of continuous fighting. A few days later, on 2 May 1945, the German armies in Italy unconditionally surrendered.

For the L & B, there followed several months of police and patrol work on the Yugoslav border. They then took up an occupational role in Milan and it was from there that demobilisation commenced. In January 1946, the 2nd Regiment of the Lothians and Border Horse ceased to exist after a short but illustrious seven years' existence.

During these years, the decorations received by the men of the Regiment were 3 DSOs and 1 Bar, 15 MMs and 1 Bar, 20 DCMs, 1 MBE and 2 BEM. Forty-nine were mentioned in dispatches. The Regiment's Roll of Honour comprises 60 men killed in North Africa and a further 60 men killed in Italy.

1st/2nd Lothians and Border Horse 1947 to 1956

The Territorial Army was re-established on January 1st 1947 and four Sqns were recruited, all based in the Edinburgh District. In 1956, the Government ordered a re-organisation of the Territorial Army which resulted in the disappearance of many distinguished names from the Army List. Among these were the Lothians and Border Horse

Queen's Own Lowland Yeomanry

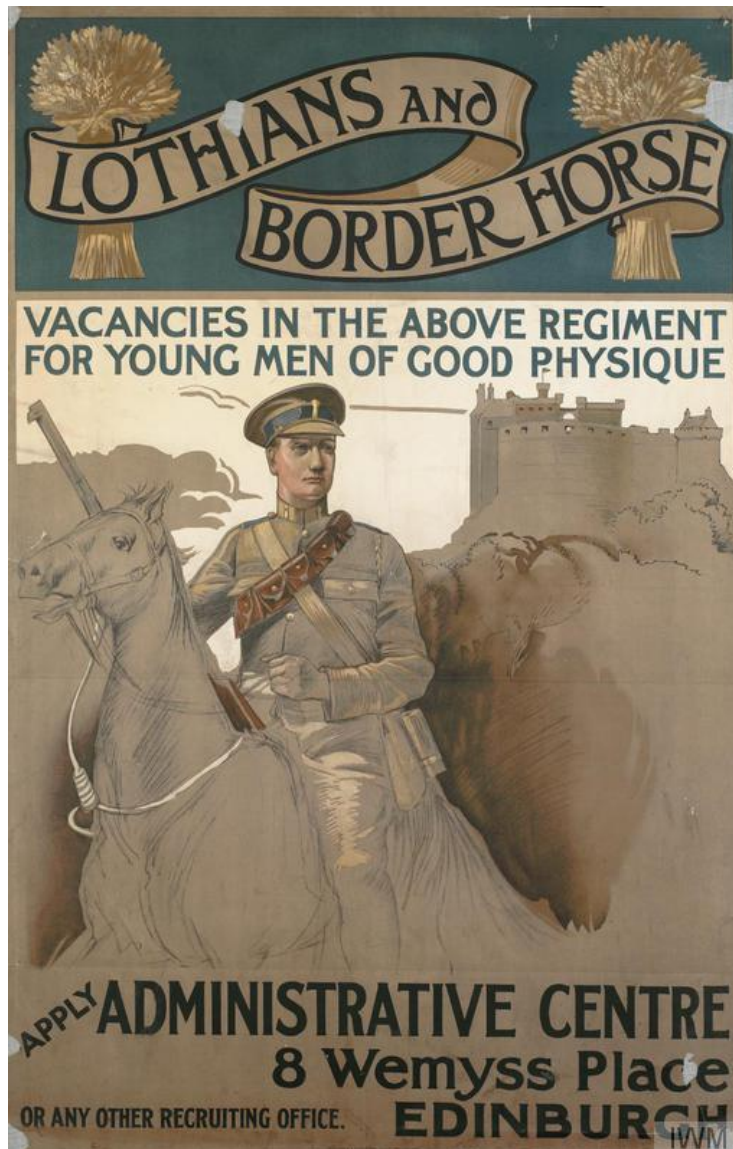
The Queen's Own Lowland Yeomanry formed when the amalgamated Lothians & Border Horse Yeomanry merged with the Queen's Own Royal Glasgow Yeomanry and the Lanarkshire Yeomanry. In 1967: Queen's Own Lowland Yeomanry disbanded.

Scottish Yeomanry

In 1992, the Scottish Yeomanry was formed as a reconnaissance unit. The regiment's HQ Squadron became the Lothians & Border Horse Squadron based at Inchdrewer House, Colinton. The regiment was disbanded in 1999.

Scottish and North Irish Yeomanry

The SNIY is the Army's newest combat regiment, entering the Army's Order of Battle on 31 October 2014. E Sqn was formed in 2014 as the Command and Support Squadron of SNIY, based at Redford Barracks in Edinburgh. On 13 Nov 2016, Sqn HQ was opened as 'Younger House' by the daughter of Maj HJ Younger.



Capt HM Bell
January 2017

