

1st Armored Brigade

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Mandeep Bajwa & Ravi Rikhye



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[As part of 1st Armored Division, the 1st Armored Brigade carries the patch of its parent division.]

1st Armored Brigade's centenary should be around now or coming up. As such, this is an appropriate time to map its lineage.

In 1902, Lord Kitchener became Commander-in-Chief of the Indian Army, and he embarked on a reform program to unify the Presidency Armies into a new Indian Army. The reform was approved in 1904. We are still researching the period.

The earliest mention we have of 1st Armored Brigade's ancestry is in 1914, on the eve of the Great War. 1st Raisalpur Cavalry Brigade was, at this time, commanded by Brigadier-General Turner, and had the following units:

- 1 Lancers
- 13 Lancers
- 14 Lancers
- Guides Cavalry
- Guides Infantry

On September 3, 1939, the day Great Britain declared war on Germany, the 1st Cavalry Brigade was still at Raisalpur Cantonment with:

- 16th/5th Lancers (a British regiment)
- Probyn's Horse (5th Cavalry)
- The Guide's Cavalry (stationed at Mardan, NWFP)
- 5/12th Frontier Force Regiment (Mardan)
- 1st Cavalry Brigade Signal Troop

Mechanization of the Indian Cavalry began in earnest with

the outbreak of the Second World War. By 1940, there was an Indian 1st Armored Division with the 1st and 2nd Armored Brigades. The designation was changed to Indian 31st Armored Division. The 1st Brigade became Indian 251st Tank Brigade, while the 2nd Armored Brigade was transferred to another formation.

251st Tank Brigade served in Persia and Iraq as part of PAIFORCE. In 1945, the 31st Armored Division had been renumbered back to the 1st Armored Division; presumably its tank brigade again reverted to using the designation 1st.

From independence through the middle 1950s, 1st Armored Brigade suffered from the deliberate governmental neglect of the Indian Army. It was only when Pakistan began to receive its M-47/48s from the United States after joining CENTO/SEATO in 1954, did the government reluctantly order 4 regiments worth of Centurions from the UK – and that still was a small fraction of the 480 M-47/48s Pakistan received up till about 1963 or 1964.

Until 1954 or 1955, the brigade was with its parent division, which was at Jullunder, as part of India's strategic reserve for the Pakistan front. It was then decided to send the division to Jhansi-Babina.

The brigade was given no real combat tasks in World War 2. It made its first debut in the battles for the Sialkot sector in the 1965 War. Around August, its composition was:

1st Armored Brigade [Brigadier K.K. Singh]

- 3rd Cavalry
- 4th Horse
- 16th Cavalry
- 17th Horse (Poona) [Lt. Col. Adi Tarapore]
- 9th Dogra (motor battalion, actually Topas APC)

In a move that was to cause interminable controversy, the brigade entered action with the 3rd Cavalry detached to XI Corps in the Punjab, and with 4th Horse in divisional reserve, despite the presence of a Sherman regiment with the division also in that role. We cannot here go into the details; but whatever the intention, reducing the brigade's armor by half had a deleterious effect on its performance in the Sialkot sector.

In 1971, the brigade's parent division was kept back as a counteroffensive reserve against the expected armored offensive that never came. So the brigade did not get to see action.

1st Armored Brigade [Brig. N.S. Cheema]

- 2nd Lancers (Vijayanta)
- 65th Armored Regiment (Vijayanta)
- 67th Armored Regiment (Vijayanta)
- 68th Armored Regiment (Vijayanta)

In or around 1972, the brigade came back to the Punjab, being based at Nabha while its parent division was headquartered at Ambala as part of II Corps. Jhansi-Babina was needed for the new armored division, which was put under raising right after the 1971 War. Also, because India was now to have two armored divisions, one could be kept forward in the Punjab as an immediate reserve, with the other in strategic reserve in Central India.