

# 4<sup>th</sup> New Zealand Armoured Brigade In 1943

## Forming The Brigade

Due to the poor reputation British armoured support had in the eyes of New Zealanders, due mainly to 4 New Zealand Infantry Brigade at Ruweisat Ridge and 6 NZ Infantry Brigade at El Mreir being overrun by German tanks when the British armour failed to show up, forced General Freyberg, overall commander of the New Zealand forces, to take matters into his own hands. Failing to convince the New Zealand government that there was a need for an armoured brigade he decided to convert an existing Brigade, namely the 4<sup>th</sup> New Zealand Infantry Brigade, into the 4<sup>th</sup> New Zealand Armoured Brigade.



A Sherman in Italy, probably from 19th Armoured Regiment, 'C' squadron.

After training until October 1943, the brigade was shipped to Italy, disembarking at Taranto on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of October.

## Combat History for 1943

19<sup>th</sup> Armoured Brigade was the first New Zealand tanks to see action, they were asked to assist the 3/8 Punjab Regiment, 19<sup>th</sup> Indian Brigade, 8<sup>th</sup> Indian Division to attack Perano to check the state of the Sangro bridge.



A Sherman from the 18<sup>th</sup> Armoured Regiment, 'C' squadron waiting to cross Po River.

Initial reports were of little German resistance but as the battle progressed they encountered some self-propelled guns and anti-tank guns, knocking out 6 of the 19 tanks that assisted the attack (<http://www.nzetc.org/tm/scholarly/tei-WH2-1Ita-c3-3-2.html>).

Less than two weeks later the 2 New Zealand Infantry Division launched an attack against the German defenders in their new position on the Northern side of the Sangro river. The 6<sup>th</sup> NZ Infantry Brigade led the charge with tanks from the 19<sup>th</sup> Armoured Regiment providing support, losing a majority of its tanks to bogging conditions crossing the swollen Sangro river, they were slowly recovered and brought forward as fire support

for the infantry. The attack swept through to Castelfrenano, overlooking the Sangro valley, which had been abandoned by the German defenders. The next obstacle was the Moro river and the two commanding towns of Guardiagrele and Orsogna. Two squadrons from the 18<sup>th</sup> Armoured Regiment attacked with the 22 Motor Battalion, which progressed well until they met strong German resistance in the town of Melone and withdrew.

Orsogna became the final objective for the Armoured Brigade on 7<sup>th</sup> December 1943. There, attacks by 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> Armoured Regiments were repulsed by German Panzer IV tanks, although some ground was gained. On the 14<sup>th</sup> tanks from 18<sup>th</sup> Armoured Regiment supported attacks by 21 and 23 Battalions dealing with two Panzer IV's. C Squadron, 20 Armoured Regiment went in to reinforce the position and lost six of these tanks in exchanges with German tanks and anti-tank guns. On the 16<sup>th</sup> December, 20<sup>th</sup> Armoured Regiment pushed towards Orsogna again, only to be repulsed by the German defenders who were now well dug-in and prepared.

The front then stabilised, ending the efforts in 1943.



A Sherman from the 18<sup>th</sup> Armoured Regiment painted in mud-grey with blue-black patches.

## Fielding 4<sup>th</sup> New Zealand Armoured Brigade In Flames Of War

In 1943 the 4<sup>th</sup> New Zealand Armoured Brigades actions consisted of supporting actions, to represent this the Sherman III diesel tanks can be purchased from the support options lists in *For King & Country*, *The Intelligence Handbook On British And Empire Infantry Forces* to support an infantry action.

## Modelling The 4<sup>th</sup> New Zealand Armoured Brigade

Prior to the tanks arriving in Italy they were painted with an all-over camouflage scheme of a basecoat of mud-grey (Vallejo, Khaki 988) with patches of blue-black (Vallejo, German Grey 995) in a disruptive pattern.

Tactical insignia was directly based off the current British doctrine (see page 44 of *Desert Rats*). The system adopted in the desert and commonly carried on through to the Sangro front involved painting the tanks number above the squadron insignia for the squadron and troop commanders, to the left for the next most senior officer in the troop and to the right for the junior officer of the troop. If there was a fourth tank in the troop, it was painted underneath the squadron insignia.

In some cases the tank number was painted much larger on the side of the tanks hull, in the squadron colour with a white shadow painted behind the number, this system was adopted and became prevalent starting in 1944.

Entering Italy saw the divisional symbols change from the common British system of having the unit and divisional symbols on opposite sides of the tank, to a combined insignia of a white fern leaf on black, in the top half and the unit number on the unit colour in the bottom half (see the diagram on the following page).



Shermans from the 18th Armoured Regiment entering Guardiagrele

## Tanks

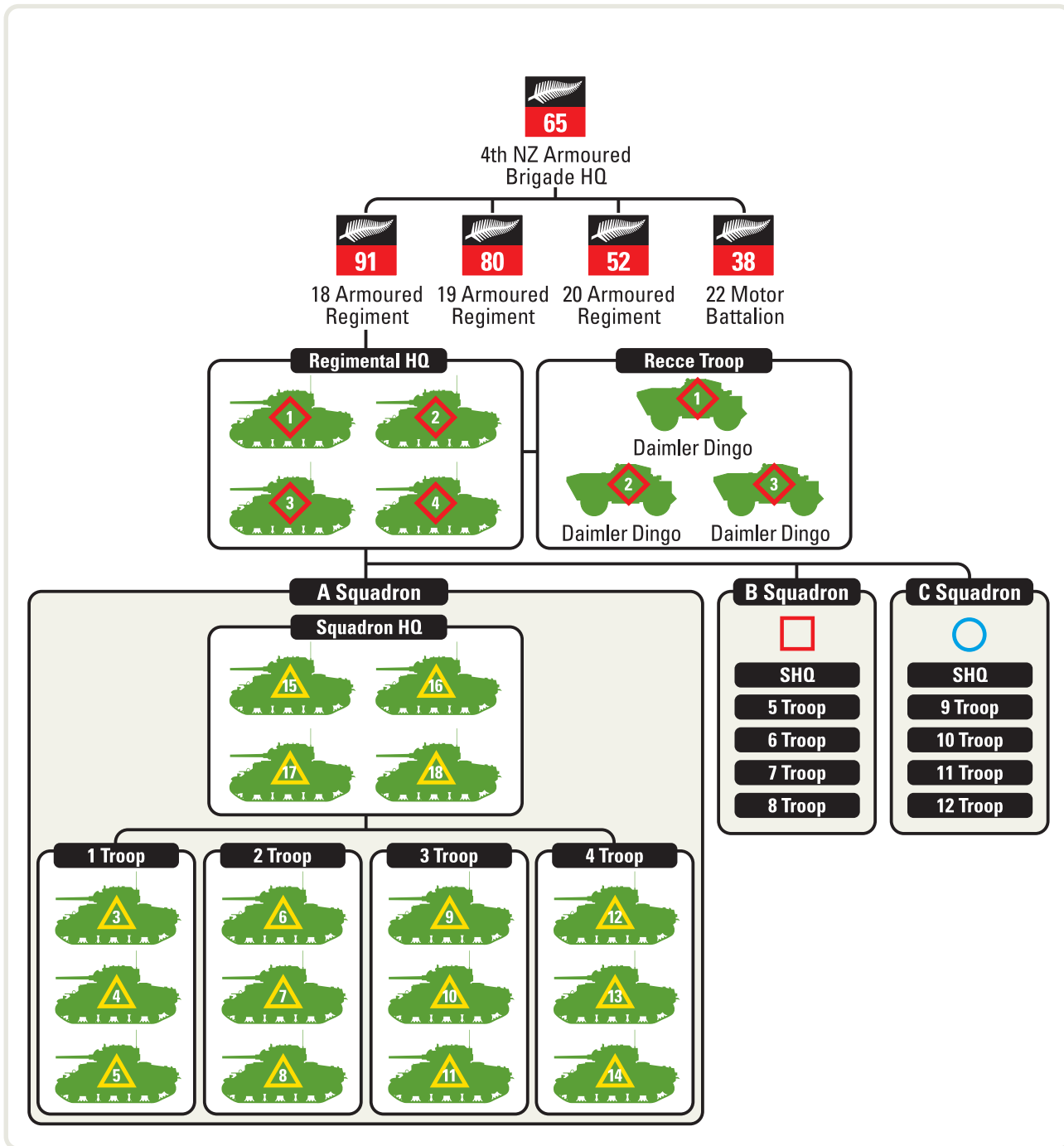
When the brigade was first formed it was initially going to be armed with tanks in the same manner of other regiments in the Middle East, 'A' squadron with Shermans, 'B' squadron with Grants and 'C' squadron with Crusaders. All that were received was a few Lees and Crusaders, these were retained by the armoured training school.

In July 1943 the regiments were to be fitted out solely with Sherman III diesel tanks and the Crusaders were given back.

## Organisation

Breaking from the traditional British armoured squadron size at the time of 61 tanks, the New Zealand armoured regiments had 52. These were organised into a Regimental HQ of 4 tanks and three squadrons of 16. The squadrons consisted of a Squadron HQ of 4 tanks and 4 Troops of three tanks.

# Organisation Structure and Markings diagram



Happy Gaming!  
 By Dion Holswich

### Bibliography

New Zealand Text Center, <http://www.nzetc.org>

4th NZ Armoured Brigade in Italy, by Jeffery Plowman and Malcolm Thomas. ISBN 0-473-06534-7