

Lieutenant Colonel Ardeshir Burzorji Tarapore, PVC, The Poona Horse

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The Early Years

Lt Col Ardeshir Burzorji Tarapore, fondly called 'Adi Tarapore' is the most celebrated name in the history of the "Poona Horse", a prestigious armoured regiment of the Indian Army. The family chronicles say that Adi's ancestor, Ratanjiba, eight generations prior, was a military leader under Chhatrapati Shivaji. In appreciation of Ratanjiba's services, loyalty and bravery, Shivaji had given him the *mansab* of 100 villages. The premier village in this *mansab* was called Tarapur and it was since then that the family name of Tarapore came into use for the family.

Adi's father, Burzorji worked with the Customs Department of the erstwhile Hyderabad State and was also an erudite scholar of Persian and Urdu. Adi was born at Bombay on August 18, 1923, and was the second of three children, with an older sister and a younger brother. At the age of seven, Adi joined the Sardar Dastur Boys School, Poona, as a boarder. Though not an exceptional student academically, he was a gifted sportsperson and distinguished himself in athletics, boxing, swimming, tennis and cricket.

The Road to Becoming an Armoured Corps Officer

After he finished school, Adi was selected for commission in the Hyderabad State Army. He did his initial training at the Officers Training School (OTS), Golconda, in Hyderabad State. On completion of this training at OTS, he was commissioned on January 01, 1942, in the 7th Hyderabad Infantry, as a Second Lieutenant. However, his heart was set upon joining the armoured regiment of the Hyderabad State Forces, which in those days were equipped with Scout Cars.

An opportunity to realise his dream came his way when his battalion was being inspected by Maj Gen EI-Edroos, the Commander-in-Chief (C-in-C) of the State Forces. Adi's company was carrying out routine training at that time, at the grenade throwing range. One of the *sepoys*, a fresh entrant, momentarily panicked and failed to lob the grenade correctly, resulting in the grenade falling into the throwing bay. Adi immediately jumped into the throwing bay and picking up the grenade, threw it away to safety. However, the grenade burst as it left his hand, and he was peppered with flying shrapnel in his chest. Gen EI-Edroos, who had witnessed this incident, summoned Adi to his office after Adi had recovered from his injuries and personally congratulated him for his courage and presence of mind. Adi availed of this opportunity to request for a transfer to the armoured regiment of the State Forces. Gen EI-Edroos accepted his request and Adi was transferred to the 1st Hyderabad Imperial Service Lancers. After the merger of Hyderabad State with the Union of India, Ardeshir was selected to serve in the Indian Army and was posted to the Poona Horse.

Service with the Poona Horse

In late 1951, Adi joined the Poona Horse and was allotted to 'A' Squadron, which was basically a Rajput squadron. He soon established a close rapport with the proud, tradition-bound Rajputs. To him, the squadron was like his own 'community'. Being himself a firm believer in traditions, his behaviour with

everyone was most appropriate. Adi idolised Napoleon and read about him extensively, often quoting him. He even kept a bust of Napoleon on his desk and when in high spirits, he often tried to emulate him.

Because of his State Forces background, Adi's professional education had been limited. But he made up for this by dint of hard work. His application and zeal were rewarded when he was selected to do an Automotive Course in England on the newly acquired Centurion tanks. He was later posted as DC of the Automotive Training Wing of the Armoured Corps School. In the tactical sphere, he was a slow and methodical but very steady and courageous commander.

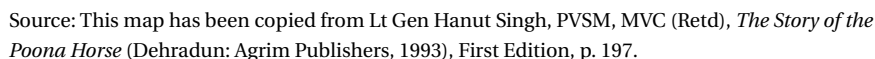
Adi was fiercely loyal to the regiment. He could not tolerate even the slightest aspersion being cast on the good name of the Poona Horse. When the regiment did well in any activity, particularly in sports, Adi would be ecstatic; if the regiment did not do as well as it was expected to, Adi would be in a black mood and go round with a scowl on his face for days on end.

Planning for Operation 'NEPAL'

Adi rose to take on the reins of the Poona Horse as its commandant. It was during his command in September 1965, that the simmering hostilities between India and Pakistan broke out into open war when Pakistan launched an attack in the Chhamb-Jaurian sector. The balloon went up for the Poona Horse on September 03, 1965, when Lt Col AB Tarapore, Commandant, Poona Horse, returned from Brigade Headquarters and announced to all officers, "*This is IT*".

The Indian Army's newly raised 1 Corps, commanded by Lt Gen P O Dunn, was given the task of launching an offensive from general area Samba, with a view to secure Pakistani territory up to, and inclusive of, the Marala-Ravi Link Canal (MRLC). The formations on the Order of Battle (ORBAT) of 1 Corps at that time were 1 Armoured Division under Maj Gen Rajinder Singh Sparrow, 6 Mountain Division under Maj Gen S K Kalra, 14 Infantry Division, still under raising under Maj Gen R K Ranjeet Singh and 26 Infantry Division under Maj Gen M L Thapan, which was deployed for the defence of Jammu. 1 Armoured Division comprised 1 Armoured Brigade and 43 Lorried Infantry Brigade. The three Centurion regiments, namely the Poona Horse, 16th Cavalry and Hodson's Horse formed part of 1 Armoured Bigade.

The Poona Horse was part of the 1 Corps offensive which was launched into the Shakargarh Bulge / Sialkot sector with a view to attack north to south to sever the Shakargarh Bulge. The two divisional objectives for 1 Armoured Division were to be the towns of Phillora and Chawinda in that order of priority (see Map 1).



Pakistan had deployed an infantry division, comprising four infantry brigades and four armoured regiments for the defence of the Sialkot sector. However, the newly raised 6 Armoured Division of Pakistan with 100 Independent Armoured Brigade as the nucleus of the division was located at Gujranwala-Wazirabad. It had one reconnaissance regiment and four armoured regiments; three equipped with Pattons and one with Shermans. Of these, two armoured regiments were involved in the Chhamb offensive and, hence, were not available immediately.

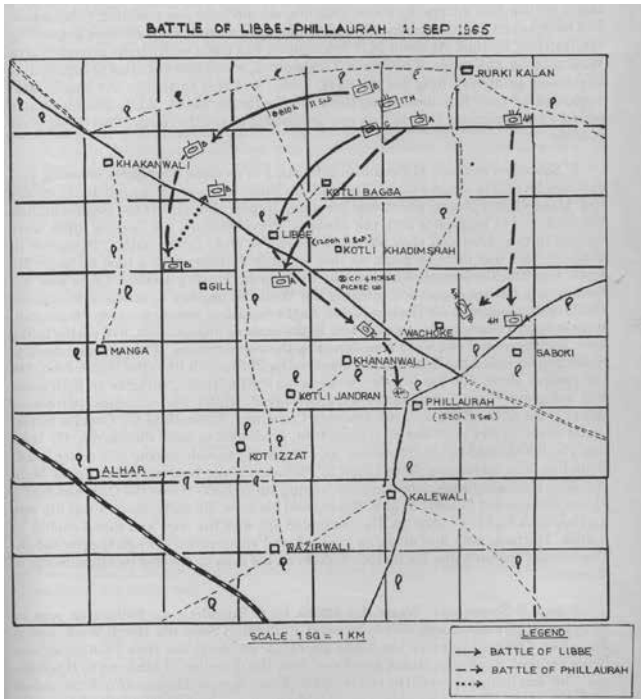
On the Indian side, before the commencement of operations, Lt Col AB Tarapore, with his earnestness for meticulous details to plan for all contingencies, called one of his Squadron Commanders, Maj Niranjan Cheema, and over a cup

of tea instructed him that if killed in battle, he was to be cremated; that his only son Xerxes must be told to join the Army and be commissioned into the Poona Horse; and that his prayer book and ring must be given to his wife, Perin.

Operations for the Poona Horse commenced in the early morning on September 08, 1965. Although the operations of 1 Armoured Division saw initial successes, the advance was halted for approximately 48 hours due to some unauthenticated assessments. At this stage, Pakistan had only one armoured regiment and one infantry brigade holding the defences in the area. This interval of 48 hours gave Pakistan enough time to readjust and reinforce defences.

6 Armoured Division, with three armoured regiments, was moved in from Gujranwala-Wazirabad and also one of the regiments committed in the Chhamb offensive was pulled back into the sector, thus, making seven armoured regiments being available to Pakistan in this sector.

Map 2



Source: This map has been copied from Lt Gen Hanut Singh, PVSM, MVC (Retd), *The Story of the Poona Horse* (Dehradun: Agrim Publishers, 1993), First Edition, p. 201.

Re-commencing the Indian offensive, on September 11, 1965, 1 Armoured Brigade was assigned the task of delivering the main armoured thrust for capturing Phillora, in the Sialkot sector. As the firefight was going on between the tanks of the two leading regiments of 1 Armoured Brigade, the Poona Horse under Lt Col Tarapore was given orders to outflank the contact line; he, in turn, asked his squadrons to react with speed. The approach was very narrow and, thus, Lt Col Tarapore decided to advance one squadron up. As a preliminary to the capture of Phillora, Libbe (northwest of Phillora) was captured by C Squadron of the Poona Horse with 5/9 Gorkha Rifles. Exploiting the success gained, the Officer Commanding C Squadron decided to press on the attack on Phillora with 5/9 Gorkha Rifles. Lt Col Tarapore moved B Squadron to cover Phillora from the northwest and A Squadron was deployed to cover the Libbe approach. Lt Col Tarapore himself moved up in his tank and joined A Squadron. At this juncture, when 5/9 Gorkha Rifles and C Squadron were progressing with their attack on Phillora, a counter-attack by the enemy's heavy armour from Wazirali, supported by heavy artillery shelling, developed. Lt Col Tarapore himself destroyed two Pakistani Patton tanks in this action. Although he was injured by shrapnel in the arm, he held his ground and refused to be evacuated and after getting his arm bandaged, continued to lead the Poona Horse fearlessly.

Exploiting the success gained by the capture of Phillora, it was decided to press on the advantage and capture the next divisional objective, the important communication centre of Chawinda. The plan was that 43 Lorried Brigade (the other brigade of 1 Armoured Division) was to attack the town, supported by a squadron of armour of the Poona Horse. However, the enemy had reorganised himself by then and despite best efforts, 43 Lorried Brigade failed to capture Chawinda. In a change of plans, it was decided to encircle Chawinda by capturing Butur Dograndi (which was behind Chawinda) and then attack Chawinda. For the capture of Butur Dogrand, 8 GARHWAL RIFLES was grouped with the Poona Horse. This combat group carried out the attack with great elan and ferocity and despite a lot of casualties on both sides, Butur Dograndi was captured. During this operation, Lt Col Tarapore, moved in his tank with the leading squadron.

Apparently, while the attack was progressing, Lt Col Tarapore who was at Jassoran, left his tank to get some fresh air and tea. At 1720 hrs, on September 16, just as tea was being passed around, an enemy medium artillery shell landed on the offside of the tank. Lt Col Tarapore and two jawans of B Coy 9 DOGRA died

instantaneously, due to concussion caused by the blast. For their gallant actions in the operations of 1965 Indo- Pak War, the Poona Horse was granted Battle Honours for both Phillora and Butur Dograndi. Lt Col Tarapore was awarded a posthumous PVC (Param Vir Chakra), the highest gallantry award of the Indian Army, for his acts of inspiring leadership and bravery.

It is a sobering reflection that Lt Col AB Tarapore, who struggled to achieve his ambition to join the Armoured Corps, rose to be the commandant of the prestigious Poona Horse and brought such glory to the regiment. Throughout the war, he set a personal example in the regiment by keeping the cupola of his tank open, unconcerned about the heavy shelling—and the rest followed his example. Inspired by his leadership, the regiment fiercely attacked the enemy armour and destroyed approximately 16 Pakistani Army tanks, suffering only nine tank casualties themselves. These actions of the Poona Horse under Lt Col AB Tarapore, exploded the myth of the superiority of the Patton tank; whilst, at the same time, instilling in the enemy, awe of the Centurion.

CITATION

Lieutenant Colonel A.B. Tarapore

Poona Horse (17 Horse) (IC-5565)

On 11 September 1965, the Poona Horse Regiment under the command of Lieutenant Colonel Ardeshir Burzorji Tarapore was assigned the task of delivering the main armoured thrust for capturing Phillora in the Sialkot Sector in Pakistan. As a preliminary to making a surprise attack on Phillora from the rear, the regiment was thrusting between Phillora and Chawinda when it was suddenly counter-attacked by the enemy's heavy armour from Wazirali. Lieutenant Colonel A B Tarapore who was then at the head of his regiment, defied the enemy's charge, held his ground and gallantly attacked Phillora with one of his squadrons, supported by an infantry battalion. Though under continuous enemy tank and artillery fire, Lieutenant Colonel A B Tarapore remained unperturbed throughout this action and when wounded, refused to be evacuated.

On 14 September 1965, though still wounded, he again led his regiment to capture Wazirali. Such was his grit and determination, that unmindful of his injury, he again gallantly led his regiment and captured Jassoran and Butur-Dograndi on 16 September. His own tank was hit several times, but despite the odds, he maintained his pivots in both these places and thereby allowed the supporting infantry to attack Chawinda from the rear.

Inspired by his leadership, the regiment fiercely attacked the enemy heavy armour destroying approximately 60 enemy tanks at a cost of only 9 tank casualties, and when Lieutenant Colonel A B Tarapore was mortally wounded, the regiment continued to defy the enemy.

The valour displayed by Lieutenant Colonel A B Tarapore in this heroic action, which lasted six days, was in keeping with the highest traditions of the Indian Army.

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