

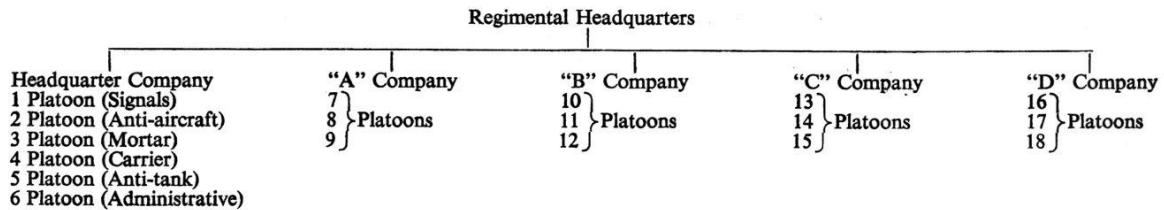
**BASED ON EXTRACTS FROM THE REGIMENTAL WAR CHRONICLE OF THE
 OXFORDSHIRE & BUCKINGHAMSHIRE LIGHT INFANTRY VOL3 1942/1944**

**SEVENTH BATTALION
 FROM 1st JULY TO 31st DECEMBER, 1942**

Mobilization completed, the Regiment left Suffolk on the 21st August in three trains and the next day embarked from lighters in the R.M.S. Almanzora, which lay in the River Clyde off Gourock.

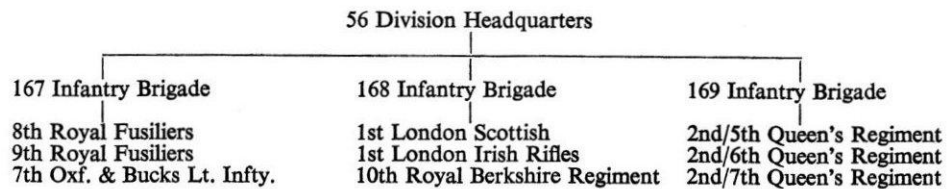
APPENDIX A

ORGANIZATION OF SEVENTH BATTALION



APPENDIX B

ORDER OF BATTLE 56th (LONDON) DIVISION



N.B.—The following supporting arms worked with the Regiment.

- (1) Artillery: 444 Field Battery, 64 Field Regiment, R.A.
 302 Anti-tank Battery, 67 Anti-tank Regiment, R.A.
- (2) Armour: Enfidaville—one squadron 40th Royal Tank Regiment.
 Salerno }
 Tranzi } one squadron Royal Scots Greys.

APPENDIX C

SEVENTH BATTALION ORDER OF BATTLE, 1943/1944

APPOINTMENTS	Enfidaville	Salerno	Pontecagnano	Volturno	Tranzi	Camino I	Camino II	Garigliano	Anzio
Regt H Q Comd officer	Lt.Col.R.C.Cruddas			Maj ESD Pentreath	Lt.Col.A.S.Shaw-Ball		Lt.Col.J.R.Cleghorn	Lt.Col.A.S.Shaw-Ball	
Second-in-Command	Maj ESD Pentreath								
Adjutant	Capt.P.R.Hayter							Maj J.S.Keith	
Intelligence Officer	Lt.D.K.Blair	Lt.P.J.Dudman							
Medical Officer	Capt.R.P.Warin R.A.M.C.	Capt.Montgomery R.A.M.C.							
H Q Coy. Comd.	Maj.R.K.Stevens								
1 Platoon									
2 -									
3 -									
4 -	Capt.W.A.Toms								
5 -	Capt.K.E.Hunt								
Q.M.	Capt.F.P.Manley								
Tpt. Offr.									
A Coy. Comd.	Capt.J.R.B.Wright			Capt.M.J.St.Aubyn	Capt.J.R.B.Wright			Company temporarily disbanded	
B Coy. Comd.	Maj.J.R.P.Montgomery								
C Coy. Comd.	Capt.M.J.St.Aubyn	Capt.J.S.Keith						Capt.M.J.St.Aubyn	Until killed in action
D Coy. Comd.	Capt.D.A.Philips				Capt.O.C.Loader			Maj J. Barmby	

RECORD OF THE 7TH BATTALION OXFORDSHIRE & BUCKINGHAMSHIRE LIGHT INFANTRY
JULY 1942 – JUNE 1943

At the end of August the convoy of some twenty-five ships, carrying the 56th London Division, was in the North Atlantic.

On board the troopship such training as circumstances allowed was carried out, variety being the watchword. Everything from P.T. to "question time" played its part, and the problems of some groups taxed even the most knowledgeable. For officers and warrant officers the commanding officer conducted cloth-model T.E.W.Ts., and the intelligence officer, Lieutenant D. K. Blair, earned special praise for his ability to make the model look like any landscape under the sun at half-an-hour's notice.

The secret of the Regiment's destination was well kept and, with the whole world to speculate upon, it was natural that map reading became a favourite subject, especially when such extras as the sun compass and dead reckoning were added to the curriculum.

Not only the destination but also the course of the ship was kept a close secret; even the Line was crossed silently at dead of night.

On the 29th September the ship came within sight of Capetown. The news that Table Mountain could be seen on the horizon spread fast. There was, long before "Reveille," such a rush to the port-side deck that the ship developed a list which was not righted until she left Capetown five days later. The view was well worth this early excitement. The mountain, behind which the sun was just rising, appeared as a firm, clear silhouette, topped with an aura of gold, and dropping, it seemed, sheer into the sea. Higher a few cirrus clouds, pink and sepia, flecked a sky of silvered blue.

Yet Dawn Over Table Mountain was not the study which filled most minds. Here were land, leave and the promise of good cheer among people whose hospitality had gained world fame. Nor was this expectation to be disappointed. The events of that Friday evening, from the moment the Regiment disembarked until its members returned to the ship, somewhere round midnight, still flood the memory. Streets, buildings and gardens brilliantly lit in a town where the black-out had scarcely yet been thought of; members of the Women's Voluntary Services, anxious that not a soldier should pass without his invitations, his free bus, train and cinema tickets, his specially prepared guide to Capetown; civilians, whose private cars thronged the roads to supplement the civic transport services in even more comfortable and informal fashion; and at every corner stalls piled high, for a short while, with oranges.

Tuesday was the day of departure. Desire to reach the final destination was inevitably mixed with regret at leaving this friendly place, but as the ship sailed and, with an air of finality, the list to port was righted, members of the Regiment realized that all that remained was to cast a "tickey"(Threepenny-bit.) into the bay . . . *obses ad jortunam* . . . so that Neptune would bring one back there safely some day.

Our transport vehicles had travelled by an earlier convoy and were on the way to Egypt. Major Last was put in charge of all 167th Brigade drivers and he, with Captain Carlisle and about 120 men, left the Regiment to travel to Suez. Newcomers to the *Almanzora* were 200 Royal Navy ratings. They were allotted a mess deck at the very bottom of the ship and settled in without complaint, a contrast to the demonstration made by men in lighter blue, who received preferential treatment.

To show their appreciation of the memorable welcome they received in South Africa, the men of the Regiment voluntarily raised a sum of money which was delivered to the Lord Mayor of Capetown when the ship next called there. Many months later a letter was received, saying that the money had been put to a Service charity. This was by no means the only letter received from South Africa after our visit.

RECORD OF THE 7TH BATTALION OXFORDSHIRE & BUCKINGHAMSHIRE LIGHT INFANTRY
JULY 1942 – JUNE 1943

After leaving Capetown the Regiment in the *Almanzora* sailed with a somewhat smaller convoy round the Cape. The passage was rough and this, coupled with the regret at leaving Capetown, resulted in a general air of gloom and depression. At about this time international events almost brought the Regiment into action rather earlier than the fates had ordained. The Madagascar invasion was going according to plan, but some doubt was felt concerning the necessity to occupy Reunion Island. Since the *Almanzora* contained the most complete military formation, two battalions of infantry, a field company R.E., and a brigade headquarters, for a time there was a possibility of their carrying out a combined operation by themselves from a 16,000-ton passenger liner. This plan did not materialize.

Hopes rose again when Durban came in sight, for, excellent as the entertainment in Capetown had been, our hosts had been the first to point out generously that for bright lights Durban made Capetown appear in the same class as an old cathedral city. Any hopes of further shore leave were dashed when the ship from Durban, due to join the convoy, sailed out to meet us. After many days' sailing the Line was crossed once more, but the Regiment seemed fated to have a prolonged journey in comparison with the rest of the division. At this stage of the voyage it was found that the gallant old *Almanzora* had not sufficient fuel and water to make the long trip across the Indian Ocean to Bombay, and so with one other ship in a similar plight we left the convoy and put into Mombasa.

It was a deceptive port of call, for, although it looked extremely beautiful, it is hardly one of the healthiest places of the world and that, coupled with the fact that the Feast of Ramadan was in full swing, resulted in no one being allowed to leave the boat. From Mombasa across to Bombay the *Almanzora* sailed away with a merchant cruiser as escort. It was a tense voyage, as Japanese submarines were known to be operating in the neighbourhood. Speculation on the ultimate destination of the Regiment now ran high.

During the two months' voyage the officers had been given cloth-model exercises in desert warfare, mountain warfare and now, of course, as India drew near, jungle warfare, and we began to feel equipped with a very thorough military education. Lectures were also given on the carriage and deportment of British troops in India and warnings of the dangers which beset any soldier who might venture down a side-street. The solemnity of such lectures was somewhat lifted by the remarks of the ancient Regulars who were going back to the land of their adoption which they had left only when the 52nd sailed home some two years previously. For these, at any rate, the approach to Bombay seemed to be an occasion for a certain amount of furtive rejoicing. After a couple of extremely hot and sticky days in the outer roadstead the ship eventually warped alongside. Following many reminders that curfew was at ten o'clock and Grant Road was out of bounds, the Regiment was allowed ashore, and immediately swallowed up in the teeming mass of humanity which thronged the streets of Bombay.

The Regiment re-embarked in a much smaller boat and for the first time since the voyage began was alone. Its new floating home was the s.s. *Santhia*, a hot-weather boat of the British Indian Line. After another couple of days in Bombay in company with an assortment of small boats of this type, we sailed for our final port of call—Basra, on the Persian Gulf. During this part of the voyage the only protection provided against Japanese submarines was a couple of small sub-chasers, and as the speed of the convoy was only a little over six knots everyone felt a little naked and lonely in shark-infested waters. After about ten days' sailing the ships entered the Shatt el Arab and began their forty-mile journey up to the port of Basra.

Arrived in Iraq in the first week of November, the Regiment spent a few days in a camp for re-equipping and rest—re-equipping for the quartermaster and his staff; rest for the remainder of the battalion. But even for that remainder it was not a very attractive place. The local town was out of bounds (this was found later to be quite a habit of local towns). The most common fauna were kite hawks, flies and a few vultures, and it was here that the Regiment first learned to bite on bread and chew on sand! When the refitting and the rest were over, the Regiment went by train to Kirkuk. The journey led through Ur of the Chaldees and Baghdad, names to conjure with; yet the memory which most members of the Regiment have of these places serves to emphasize how little an operational move can resemble a conducted tour.

RECORD OF THE 7TH BATTALION OXFORDSHIRE & BUCKINGHAMSHIRE LIGHT INFANTRY
JULY 1942 – JUNE 1943

The first impression which Kirkuk gave was an expanse of baked mud covered with a thin layer of dust. The expression which became current in describing it may roughly be translated as "mile upon mile of nothing whatsoever." On the second day there was a choking dust-storm; on the third a thunderstorm of no mean violence. It was clear that something had to be done about it and the commanding officer planned that a drainage system should be set in hand which would defy any thunderstorm, no matter how severe. Consequently, for the next week the Regiment was turned into one vast working party and the camp site was transformed into a town-planning area with a scientifically evolved system of drains, roads and bridges. The success of this work was proved by subsequent events: not only was the Regiment grateful during later storms to watch water rushing past the tents instead of into them but also the local Royal Engineers were so stirred with envy that they later succeeded in beating the Regiment at football.

Our transport, which had been disembarked in Egypt, now joined us. The journey from Egypt to Kirkuk was a stiff test for men who had never been to the East before and for the vehicles. The officer in charge of the divisional transport said, after the move, that the Regiment's drivers had been quite outstanding in their discipline and in the maintenance of their vehicles.

As the process of settling down at this camp progressed, additional works were carried out, notably digging down of all tents as a protection against the extreme cold of winter. The Regiment took a special pride in this troglodytic existence, which resulted in keen rivalry as companies and platoons devised new methods of improving their lines.

Training adapted to the varying types of country was carried out on normal lines up to Christmas. Field firing presented a special type of problem, since it was only necessary to warn the local population that a certain area would be fired on and they would undertake a two or three-day journey to ensure being right on the target area when the fun started. Yet the solution was not far to seek: one simply fired a round or two of mortar high-explosive at them, taking care not to inflict any really severe casualties, and they would go away satisfied. Thus was friendship with our allies cemented.

During December the Regiment trained in the mountainous Sulaimanya country of Kurdistan some seventy miles from Kirkuk. Previously much care had been spent in preparing and testing load tables and considerable instruction in mountain fighting had been given. What was learnt and practised was put into successful operation later in Italy.

The face of the land was like some gigantic cloth model pulled up into a random series of folds and puckers which the torrents of innumerable winters only served to accentuate. Some of these hills will remain firmly impressed on the memory: Satan, under whose unprotecting shoulder the Regiment camped and up whose 2,000-foot sides many a load was carried; Blue Peter, the monarch of the range, whose head of snow and beard of cloud never seemed to vary.

SEVENTH BATTALION
1st JANUARY – 14th JULY 1943

After Christmas training was resumed with a series of exercises through the following two months. The climax came with Exercise "Bombay." For two and a half days and nights the Regiment marched on roads and across country, waded through water, dozed in half-dry river-beds, and covered nearly sixty miles before the exercise finished. At the end the spirit and stamina of all who had taken part in the exercise received very high praise. It had been all the more a test of endurance for the Regiment, as, only two days before "Bombay," it had taken part in a demonstration which had involved some twenty-four miles' marching.

During the Regiment's last weeks at Kirkuk signs of a spring invasion could be seen on all sides. The crested larks began to sing, patches of real grass appeared, the price of a second-hand Primus in the town fell to £3 10s. ("Ah, this is what they meant," one heard, "by a soldier's paradise"), the flies returned, and the scorpions resharpened their stings.

The Regiment's successors in this area were a Polish brigade and handing over the camp to their advance party presented the quartermaster with a tricky language problem. It was, however, admirably solved with phrases of various European languages, some Urdu and plenty of signs.

On the 29th and 30th March the main body of the Regiment left Kirkuk, heading south. We knew what the move meant: the division was going to join the Eighth Army.

The first stages of the Regiment's journey from Kirkuk ended at Baghdad, where the main body rejoined its transport. So far it had been pleasant enough. The rains, so heavy that at one time they had threatened to make the roads of Kurdistan impassable, had done their best to clothe the whole of that northern desert with green.

From Baghdad to Rutba was a two-day journey across a desert of fine sand, level, still and almost white. Then, as the convoy entered Transjordan and the great lava belt, the flat waste gave place to an expanse of boulders, black lumps of broken lava stretching to the horizon in every direction and so closely packed that the thin orange sand between them could barely be seen. Now, too, the wind began to rise, and would-be whirlwinds began to drive their spirals of sand across the bleak landscape. By the evening of the 4th April the Regiment was very glad indeed to see the green grass of Mafraq.

Yet this was little more than a large oasis. For the first three hours of travel on the 5th April hills and plains of sand formed the major part of the scene. Then the grass reappeared, then trees, then fields and signs of careful cultivation. Suddenly the convoy came to the top of a long, steep zigzag. Trees overhung the road. It was the Jordan valley. The Regiment had seen nothing even remotely comparable with this for six months. The Jordan was crossed and on the banks of that little stream haversack rations were eaten. From then until the next staging point, Tulkarm, was reached three hours later members of the Regiment were employed buying oranges, lemons, even grapefruit, at prices ranging from 2d. per orange downwards. Arriving at a permanent camp in Tulkarm at about 1500 hrs, men were allowed to spend the remainder of the day as they pleased.

The next two days were spent in crossing the Sinai Desert. It drove many into asking the padre how the Israelites had managed it.

On the 7th April the Regiment crossed the Suez Canal and reached Tahag, where it was to spend some days refitting. One of the outstanding memories of the place is of a sandstorm so violent that the men's dinners had to be taken in lorries from tent to tent. The fate of the officers' luncheon, already sanded beyond edibility, was finally settled by the collapse of the entire mess.

RECORD OF THE 7TH BATTALION OXFORDSHIRE & BUCKINGHAMSHIRE LIGHT INFANTRY
JULY 1942 – JUNE 1943

Before leaving Tahag it was necessary for the Regiment to form and leave behind a reinforcement company. Even though it was expected that many of this company would be rejoining the Regiment before long, it was with regret that they were left behind and with real gratitude for the services they had given.

After Tahag the Regiment was again split into two parts for a while; the road party left on the 11th April and the rail party on the 12th. These met again in Tobruk on the 14th, where after a day's halt for maintenance (and a most welcome swim in the harbour) the convoy re-formed to continue its westward journey. It was still a journey through deserts. From Cairo (which the road party had skirted and the rail party had slept through) to Tobruk it had been desert, but a desert broken by battlefields and punctuated with derelict vehicles. For the next ten days there were fewer and fewer of these merkwürdigkeiten, as their former tenants might have called them.

As the convoy approached Tripolitania the road led past more and more Italian farms with their white farmhouses, all built exactly alike and all neatly labelled Ente Colonizzazione Libia. Pugnacious Fascist mottoes were added in some cases, and on one house, battered by the shells of at least one army, could be seen the words Mussolini Ha Sempre Raglioni. The occupants, whatever their views on the infallible Duce, were still working the farm. Late on Easter Sunday the Regiment came to Azizia, a few miles south of Tripoli, and once more a much-needed day was set aside for maintenance. This gave the padre a welcome opportunity to hold an open-air Easter service; throughout the journey, with "Reveille" each day at 0345 hrs and pitching camp as the light began to fail, his task was proving far from easy.

By now all ranks of the Regiment were fully aware that they were part of the Eighth Army, and the question on all sides was "How is the news; shall we get there in time?" At 1339 hrs on the 27th April the head of the column entered Tunisia. On the night of the 28th the Regiment camped within a day's run of the battle. On the 29th, by a specially marked route which led through Kairouan, city of a thousand mosques, the Regiment reached Hergla, some fifteen miles south of Enfidaville.

So the great trek ended. The Regiment's transport, having left Kirkuk exactly one month previously, had covered more than 3,000 miles and arrived complete, each vehicle under its own steam, ready for battle. The only exception was one motor-cycle combination.

On the 1st May the Regiment was ordered to take over part of the front some four miles north of Enfidaville from the 201st Guards Brigade. It thus became the right-hand battalion of the Eighth Army in the line, the open ground between its right flank and the sea being covered by a squadron of the Reconnaissance Regiment. On the left were the 8th Royal Fusiliers. The commanding officer found that he had a somewhat unusual defensive position to take over, covering nearly 2,000 yards of front and being based on a gradual reverse slope. Observation to the immediate front was extremely difficult, whereas the enemy, holding the more distant hills, were well placed to observe our movements.

C Company was ordered to take up position on the right front and B Company on the left. The role of A Company whose position was on the left rear of C Company, was partly to act as reserve and at the same time to strengthen the more open right flank. All of these positions were in almond and olive groves, but it soon became clear that in the forward companies the trees provided very little cover from view, and movement by day in these areas was impossible. A Company and Regimental headquarters were better protected in this respect, and a certain amount of movement was feasible. D Company was temporarily detached from the Regiment to form part of a composite force acting as reserve to the brigade.

The taking over, which began at 2000 hrs, was completed without incident, and the Regiment settled down to dig in where necessary, and to tackle with all possible speed its most immediate enemies, the mosquitoes. Yet little could be done about them apart from counting the bites.

The German and Italian forces on the Regiment's front laid down their shell and mortar fire according to a definite plan. As this was apparently based on what they had been able to discover of the dispositions of the Regiment's predecessors, the Regiment suffered little serious damage. On the second day, however, it was found necessary to move Regimental headquarters to its alternative position. The command post was an ancient Roman burial vault, the excavation of which produced some interesting pottery.

Up to the 5th May the Regiment's activities against the enemy had to be restricted to night patrols, but on that day it was decided that an attack which the Free French were to make on the left should be accompanied by a diversion on the right. To support this diversion, which was provided mainly by smoke, tracer and high-explosive from the artillery, the Regiment sent carriers and 3-inch mortars to fire from the right flank. No. 4 Platoon, less one section, with one section of No. 3 Platoon under command, was ordered to get into a position some 1,500 yards to the east and north of C Company's area, and fire on enemy positions already pointed out. This force was commanded by Captain W. A. Toms, who made a daylight reconnaissance of the route and target areas with the commanding officer. The raid went according to plan.

That night the commanding officer assumed command of the brigade, as the divisional general had been wounded and certain changes in command had been necessitated. He returned on the 7th May, when it was thought that the enemy might be planning a retreat along the coast road, to give orders to meet this possibility. Reports from patrols sent out during the night showed that a rapid flight by the enemy was far from likely, and when on the next day the commanding officer went again to brigade headquarters it was to find that a very different set of orders were being formulated. These concerned the action which was to become known to the Regiment as Operation "Light Infantry."

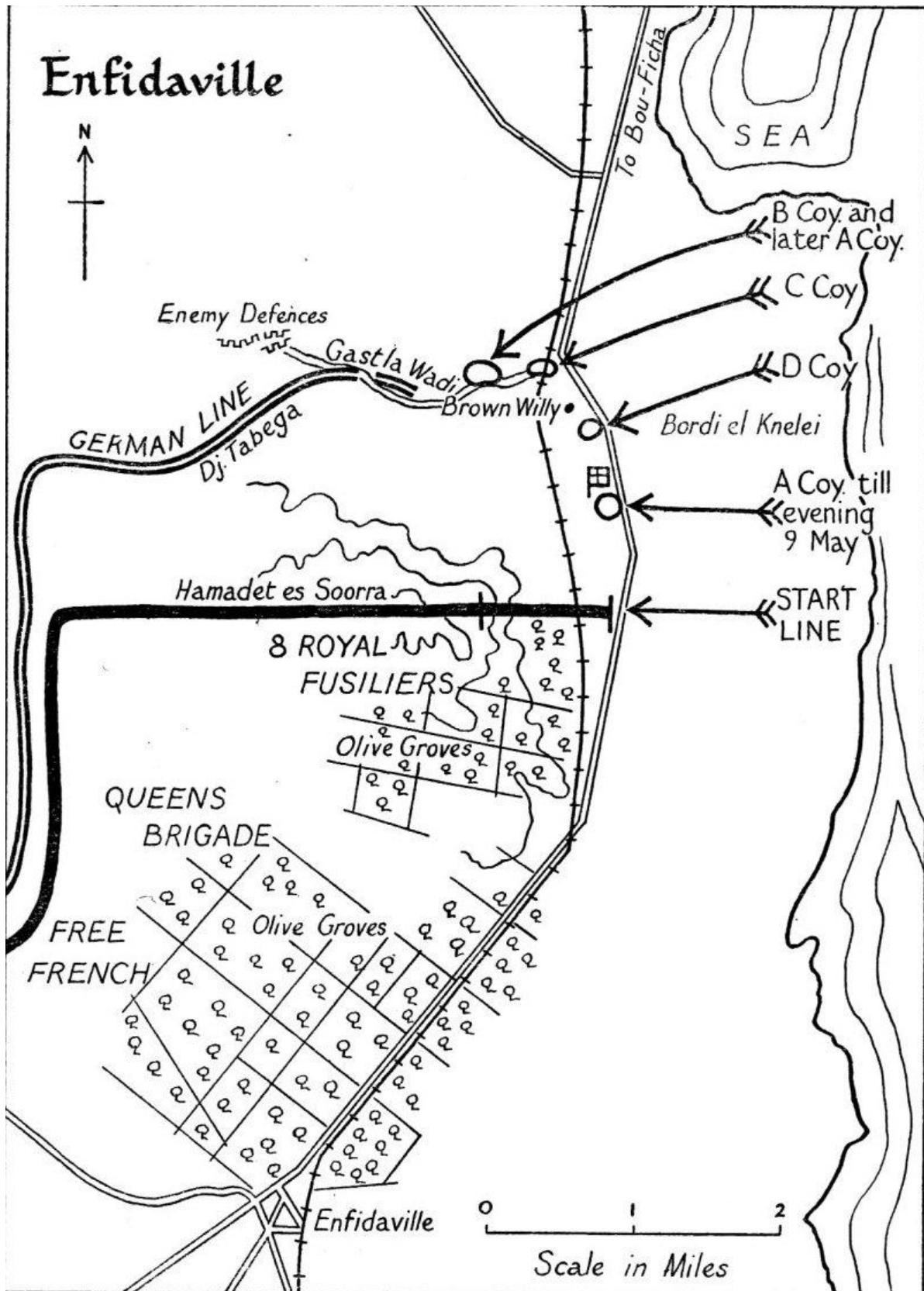
Operation "Light Infantry"

At 1330 hrs on the 8th May the commanding officer reached brigade headquarters, where he was informed that a plan had been made for further advance by the right of the Eighth Army, of which the Regiment was then the right-hand battalion. That part of the plan which affected the Regiment was framed in order to seize two features known as the Humps astride the railway north of Enfidaville and to reconnoitre the anti-tank ditch to the north of Gastla Wadi.

The railway passes between the two humps and the right-hand one was known in the Regiment as Brown Willy. These two features commanded the coast road to Bou Fichta, but were themselves commanded by mountainous country to the northwest and particularly by the razor-backed Dj Tabega, 3,000 yards to the west, positions strongly held by the Germans.

The Regiment was ordered to carry out an attack on the Humps supported by a tank regiment, the Army group R. A. and divisional artillery. An anti-tank battery, less one troop, was placed under command. R.E. parties were ordered to accompany the Regiment in the attack so that there should be no delay in carrying out the preliminary reconnaissance of the enemy minefields and anti-tank ditch. Flank protection would be provided by medium machine guns and on the right by a reconnaissance regiment. Zero hour was ordered for 1800 hrs.

The commanding officer returned to the Regiment's lines, where the O Group had been ordered to await him near B Company headquarters, and orders were issued at about 1530 hrs. Owing to the speed with which the attack was put on and the unwillingness of the tanks to loiter in our forming-up area, there was no previous personal contact between company and squadron commanders and reliance had to be placed on the punctual arrival of the tanks at the start line, which was marked by the Regiment with twenty-yard strips of white tape. The commanding officer's intention was that the Regiment should capture the Humps, go straight through, and consolidate on the Gastla Wadi from the road on the right to the wadi bifurcation, some 900 yards to the west.



C Company (Captain M. J. St. Aubyn), starting from its defensive position, was to attack on the right, capture Brown Willy and move on to Gastla Wadi. B Company (Major J. R. P. Montgomery), on the left, was to capture the western hump and then move on to the Gastla with its left at a wadi junction.

RECORD OF THE 7TH BATTALION OXFORDSHIRE & BUCKINGHAMSHIRE LIGHT INFANTRY
JULY 1942 – JUNE 1943

D Company (Captain D. A. Philips) and A Company (Captain J. R. B. Wright), in reserve, were to move by bounds behind C Company. It was the commanding officer's intention that D Company should finally occupy a position on the lower and south-east slopes of Brown Willy, where it would be somewhat protected from direct observation from Tabega, and that A Company should be established between the road and railway astride Rheribi Wadi south of Brown Willy. Owing to complete lack of cover, there was no employment of 3-inch mortars forward of the olive grove in C Company's original position. It was in this grove that the carriers, mortars and anti-tank platoons remained, forming a firm base for the operation. One section of the carriers was ordered to follow the first wave of tanks to deal with local hostile anti-tank guns. One troop of the anti-tank battery was to establish itself after the attack in D Company's locality. Regimental headquarters were to move up the line of the railway in rear of the leading companies. The artillery plan consisted of counter-battery fire from Z minus 30 to Z, of smoke on the Tabega feature from Z minus 4 to Z plus 30, and of concentrations on enemy forward positions, including the Humps, from Z to Z plus 30. The tanks were due on the Humps at Z plus 32 and the leading companies at Z plus 46. For the advance from the Humps to the Gastla Wadi further concentrations of high-explosive and smoke were to be put down on the enemy positions on the Gastla and north of it from Z plus 46 to Z plus 60. Company commanders had some previous knowledge of the ground and were able to study an air photograph.

At Z minus 30, i.e., 1815 hrs, (zero hour was fixed for 1800 hrs) Regimental headquarters moved forward to near B Company's headquarters. At zero our leading companies advanced, although the tanks had not at that time arrived, being some five minutes late at the start line. A thick pall of smoke was moving east from the smoke screen on Tabega and observation was difficult. Companies advanced in perfect order on to their objectives and by Z plus 46 Brown Willy and the left-hand hump were in our possession, the garrison having been killed or captured. A few minutes later the commanding officer of the tanks was able to inform the commanding officer that the leading tanks, which had not crossed the crest of the Humps, were able to see C and B Companies on the Gastla Wadi. It was possible, therefore, for D and A Companies to move to their prearranged positions and Regimental headquarters were established between D and A Companies in the north branch of the Rheribi Wadi. At about 2000 hrs. brigade was informed that both objectives had been taken and that the leading companies were consolidating along the wadi. The carriers moved forward with supplies of wire, ammunition and water.

The ground on either side of the Gastla Wadi was covered with patches of barley, just ripening, and with grass about eighteen inches high, and it was impossible to find positions with good fields of fire.

On B Company's front the immediate field of fire was often not more than thirty yards.

Before the attack began the commanding officer had told commanders to impress on all ranks the vital necessity of digging in immediately on arrival at their objectives.

Soon after dark the commanding officer and second-in-command, Major E. S. D. Pentreath, M.C., visited the companies, first A, then D, and then C and B. D Company had already begun digging on very hard ground, in a position too far to the west, and the commanding officer ordered two platoons to move farther to the east, in order to elude observation from Tabega, under cover of the south spur of Brown Willy. C Company was next visited, and its position, astride the railway and south of the wadi, appeared to be as good as could be chosen. On the left, in B Company's locality, Major Montgomery represented that owing to the difficult nature of the country and the extent of his position he would like another platoon and, for this purpose, a platoon of A Company was sent to him. Digging in these forward positions was, in most places, fortunately easy and very soon men were dug in. In order further to increase the fire power of the forward companies, one section of No. 4 Platoon was ordered to join C Company and one section B Company. The section which was to have joined C Company lost its way in the dark, and lay out in no-man's-land for some thirty hours before finding its way back to Regimental headquarters.

RECORD OF THE 7TH BATTALION OXFORDSHIRE & BUCKINGHAMSHIRE LIGHT INFANTRY
JULY 1942 – JUNE 1943

Soon after light on the 9th May it became apparent that in spite of the efforts made by all ranks to camouflage their positions they were in fact visible to the enemy from the commanding features which he occupied; and our posts were constantly subjected to shell and mortar fire. In the forward positions our troops were sniped and mortared constantly and, in addition, the Germans attempted to infiltrate through our lines and around our flanks. At about 1000 hrs. the artillery forward observation officer from Brown Willy came into headquarters stating that about twenty Germans had approached his observation post. He had shot the first, and the second put up his hands, whereupon he was shot by his comrades. This party had evidently infiltrated between C and D Companies from an orchard to the east of Brown Willy. Captain Philips, on hearing this, immediately sent some men to drive out the enemy. The commanding officer ordered Lieutenant P. Dudman, intelligence officer, to take a party from D Company to deal with the enemy and at the same time a section of carriers under Captain W. A. Toms was ordered forward to help. The enemy were driven out and lost four killed and two prisoners. Any attempt, however, to establish an observation post at the top of the hill was met with heavy machine-gun and mortar fire.

Later in the day Captain St. Aubyn reported that a party of Germans had got into a blockhouse on his right rear on the north-east slopes of Brown Willy. This was probably the same party that had been seen on top of the hill. Owing to the enemy occupation of the orchard already mentioned, it was not possible to approach the blockhouse from D Company's lines except under heavy fire. Communications with companies were extremely difficult, as wireless sets were easily affected by the blast of shells or mortar fire and cable was continually broken by shell and bomb. Forward companies reported that they were likely to run short of ammunition and carriers were sent to the Gastla Wadi during daylight, under cover of smoke, with further supplies. This only half-solved the problem, as the difficulty of delivery to individual posts still remained. Major Montgomery reported about midday that owing to enemy infiltration and snipers the position on his front was serious. Soon afterwards artillery defensive fire was called for on a number of occasions.

During the afternoon the commanding officer received information that an attack on the high Tabega Ridge was to be made that evening, and that tanks were going to advance on our front. It was not at all clear from this message what action was expected of the Regiment, and consequently the second-in-command went back to brigade headquarters, where he was informed that in the event of there being danger of the enemy overrunning our positions a squadron of the 40th Royal Tank Regiment could be used to restore the situation. As a result of this, A Company, less one platoon already forward, was ordered to move forward with the squadron of tanks to B Company's position at 1745 hrs., the zero hour for the attack on Tabega. At 1730 hrs. Major Montgomery reported that the situation on his front was critical and half an hour later A Company, supported by the tanks as far as the crest of the left-hand hump, moved down to B Company's position and the situation was restored. Just before this Major Pentreath, the second-in-command, was wounded. At the same time a troop of tanks on D Company's front destroyed, by gun fire, the blockhouse on the right rear of C Company.

During the night of the 9th/10th May the situation on the front of C and B Companies was improved, but the continued occupation of the orchard on the right of C Company threatened our right and D Company was subjected to concentrated machine-gun fire. Later in the night the enemy entered Bordj El Kelenei, a group of buildings to the east of Regimental headquarters. In view of this fact, it was impossible to control the battle from the Rheribi Wadi and Regimental headquarters moved to the olive grove to the south. The Reconnaissance Regiment drove the enemy from these houses, but the orchard farther to the north on the right of C Company could not be held. Except for mortar fire, machine-gunning and a certain amount of sniping, the situation in front of the leading companies during the 10th May was stable. In the afternoon water was required by the forward companies and a carrier was sent under cover of smoke to the C Company position. This was met with intense machine-gun and mortar fire and the delivery of any supplies by this means was impossible. Two carriers employed on this task were blown up by mines and a third was ditched farther to the rear. At dusk on the 10th the enemy began machine-gunning our positions and, owing to continual breaks in signal cables, it was not possible until moonset at about 2300 hrs to get information to the forward companies that relief was to take place.

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Section posts could not be informed until the relief actually arrived. The enemy machine-gunning continued without ceasing until dawn at a tremendous expenditure of ammunition. Two companies of the relieving battalion moved forward and occupied, first, the original position of A Company and, secondly, the position occupied by D Company. It seemed that the relief of the forward companies could not be accomplished without heavy loss, and the relieving companies remained behind the crest of Brown Willy and the left-hand hump. It was decided that unless the relieving companies crossed the ridge by 0230 hrs. there would not be time to carry out the relief before dawn. The commander of these companies reported that the machine-gun fire was intense.

At about 0230 hrs. Serjeant Merry, No. 4 Platoon, on the right, and Privates Cook and Atkins, B Company, on the left, entirely disregarding their personal safety, found a way over the ridge not in the direct line of fire of the enemy machine guns, and by this route the forward companies were led down to the Gastla Wadi. These two companies suffered some twenty casualties. As light was breaking, the rearmost platoons of C, B and A Companies of the Regiment moved into the shelter of the olive groves of our original position.

During these operations about forty prisoners were captured and a large number of the enemy killed. On the Gastla Wadi one corporal accounted for fourteen of the enemy. A German officer captured during the operations said that he had never seen men fight as these men had and he thought they must have all been drunk with whisky, of which unfortunately no supplies had reached the Regiment for some time.

It is not often that the opportunity for the use of the bayonet occurs in an attack, but these men of the Afrika Korps stayed their ground on the Humps and the men of C and B Companies closed with them until they died or surrendered. The men who took part in this their first assault, across some 3,000 yards of bare ground, had reason to be proud of their action. The Germans had about twenty machine guns on the Humps and complete observation of the attack. The red glow of the sinking sun, the tremendous smoke pall over Tabega, coupled with the artillery and machine-gun fire, both ours and German, made a spectacle in this open plain not likely to be forgotten. D Company advanced singing their own chant, which could be heard amidst the bursting German shells. C and B Companies charged the crest of the hills. Mike St. Aubyn could be seen waving his walking-stick—here Corporal Turner disposed of a German machine-gun post, firing his Bren from the hip, and immediately made another post surrender, though his magazine was empty.

Lieutenant Benson, with his platoon of B Company, himself bayoneted a machine-gun crew. Such was the way the 7th Battalion went into battle and held the bare ground they won a mile or three-quarters in advance of the British line. It augured well for future campaigns.

The corps commander sent his congratulations to the Regiment after the attack.

Casualties in these operations were twelve killed and sixty-five wounded, which, considering the lack of cover and the isolated position of the Regiment, were remarkably light.

The attack on the 9th May on the Tabega feature did not accomplish what was hoped and the attack by the Regiment was the last advance on the coastal plain by the Eighth Army. On the morning of the 11th, as the last of the Regiment were coming out of the line, a German prisoner, bearing a message from the corps commander, moved with a white flag through our position demanding the surrender of the German 90th Light Division. On the afternoon of the 12th the Gastla Wadi was the meeting place between the Eighth and First British Armies advancing down the coast after the capture of Tunis. The pocket of high ground, eighteen miles by fifteen miles, formed by the junction of the Eighth and First Armies was the sole remaining centre of enemy resistance. Finally, the 90th Light Division itself laid down its arms and all hostilities in Tunisia ceased at 1130 hrs on Thursday, the 13th May, 1943.

His Majesty The King, on his visit to North Africa in June, was shown over the Humps battlefield.

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With the cessation of hostilities the Regiment was given its share of prisoner-escort duties, and an area of the battlefield to clear of salvage. Re-equipping, too, claimed much time, but it was found possible to organize occasional swimming parties (there was a good swimming beach some three miles distant) and every day a lorry took twenty-five officers and men into Tunis.

On Sunday, the 16th May, the Regiment paraded for a service held in memory of those who had been killed in the recent action. On the 20th a victory march was held in Tunis to celebrate the successful conclusion of the campaign; all who had taken part were represented, and from the Regiment a composite platoon was sent under command of Lieutenant M. Benson.

At the end of May the Regiment moved back to Tripoli, where X Corps was concentrating.

During June the heat made it necessary for training to be restricted for the most part to the early morning and the evening. It was fortunate that in this weather the Regiment was able to get a swim nearly every day, and that parties could be sent to a camp on the coast for four days' leave. Several large-scale parades were held in this month. On the 2nd June a composite company, commanded by Major J. R. P. Montgomery, represented the Regiment in a parade held to celebrate the birthday of His Majesty The King. This company was later congratulated by General Horrocks, the corps commander, who told the commanding officer that he considered their turn-out to have been outstanding and the smartest on parade. When, on the 15th June, the army commander, General Sir Bernard L. Montgomery, K.C.B., D.S.O., visited the Regiment, the second-in-command secured the services of a band of the Duke of Cornwall's Light Infantry; the general declared himself very pleased with the appearance and bearing of the Regiment. As he left, the band played his old regiment's march, "Warwickshire Lads," and the Regiment gave three cheers.

On the 19th June, when His Majesty The King came to visit North Africa, the Regiment had the honour of lining part of the route which His Majesty took. The King told the commanding officer that he had heard that the Regiment had done very well in the recent fighting.

On the 14th July at 2045 hrs. the commanding officer received a personal telephone call from the divisional commander, announcing the following immediate awards approved by the King:

Distinguished Service Order

Lieutenant-Colonel R. C. Cruddas.

Military Cross

Captain (T. /Major) J. R. P. Montgomery.

Captain M. J. St. Aubyn.

Lieutenant M. Benson.

Military Medal

5388079 Serjeant C. Merry.

5389690 Lance-Serjeant H. Andrews,

5441989 Corporal C. Raymond.

5389446 Corporal S. Danton.

5346148 Corporal D. Wigget.

5389694 Corporal G. Bartlett.

5385705 Private E. Badman.

5389716 Private J. Fathers.

5389710 Private E. Cook.

5345915 Private E. Atkins.

A few days later Captain (Quartermaster) F. P. Manley was awarded the M.B.E.