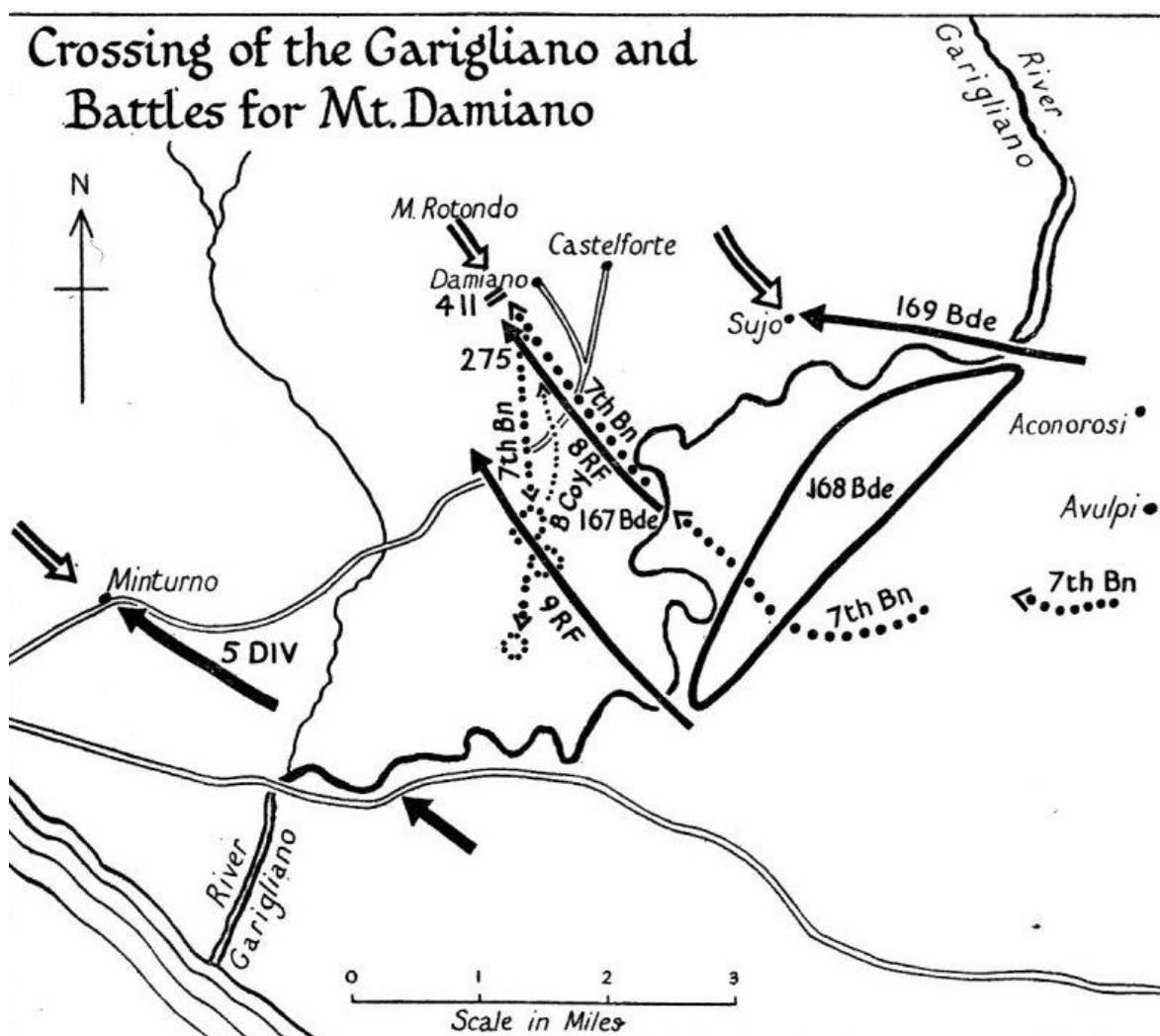


**BASED ON EXTRACTS FROM THE REGIMENTAL WAR CHRONICLE OF THE
OXFORDSHIRE & BUCKINGHAMSHIRE LIGHT INFANTRY VOL3 1942/1944**

THE CROSSING OF THE GARIGLIANO



(N.B.—Co-ordinates refer to Map [Italy 1/50,000], sheet 171 i, Sessa Aurunca.)

The rest at Nocelleto did not last long. Six days after arrival, on the 13th December, the Regiment returned to the valley of the Garigliano. Regimental headquarters, one section of carriers, mortars and pioneers, and C and D Companies moved to Corigliano (9297) and B Company to Aconorosi (9297). Thus started that phase of operations which was to culminate in the forcing of the Garigliano River line a month later. In many ways it was heart-breaking to the Regiment. A month earlier it had watched enemy defensive preparation without power to interfere owing to the deception plan then in force. Now it was back in this area with orders to carry out an aggressive patrolling policy.

Lieutenant-Colonel Shaw-Ball rejoined the Regiment and by the 18th eight more officers had arrived, of whom six were South Africans. The other two were from the Royal Warwickshire Regiment. On the 21st Major J. Barmby and seventy-six reinforcements arrived. It was therefore possible to reform the Regiment into three rifle companies at full strength. Captain P. R. Hayter, M.C., the adjutant, left to take over a staff appointment before joining the Staff College, and Major J. R. P. Montgomery, M.C., also left to take up a staff appointment in the Middle East. By Christmas Day, therefore, commands were as follows: B Company, Captain K. E. Hunt; C Company, Captain M. J. St. Aubyn, M.C.; D Company, Major J. Barmby. Major J. S. Keith took over the duties of acting adjutant and Major Philips became second-in-command of H.Q. Company.

RECORD OF THE 7TH BATTALION OXFORDSHIRE & BUCKINGHAMSHIRE LIGHT INFANTRY
DECEMBER 1943 - JUNE 1944

The country was a delightful change after the bare rocks of Camino. The great extinct volcano of Croce sloped down in a series of spurs to the low plain along the coast and the winding River Garigliano. These slopes were well covered in vegetation. Tucked away between the spurs were picturesque mountain villages, each reached by incredibly primitive tracks along which often not even a jeep could pass. In such close country it was possible to hide quite large bodies of troops, in contrast to the low ground by the river which was completely overlooked by the German mountain positions on the farther bank. The policy, therefore, along this front was to hold back companies and infantry battalions in the villages on the upper slopes while maintaining forward observation posts down by the river by day and patrols by night. The Germans, in withdrawing from this area, had left many scattered S mines and only the known tracks were safe.

During the Regiment's fortnight in this area the Italians, who were both foolhardy and ignorant, suffered about a dozen civilian casualties. Fortunately the Regiment suffered none. The main danger, however, of using a few tracks came from the chance of ambush by the Germans of our patrols and observers going down to the river, but on our sector this did not occur. The Germans, in fact, remained scrupulously on their own territory. The company did not allow this lack of interference to lull it into a sense of false security and both in Aconorosi and Corigliano elaborate measures were taken for the all-round defence of the villages. In addition to stand-to's a proportion of men in each platoon was on duty all night. Now that the artillery ban was lifted our gunners got in some good shooting. Observation was excellent and Major J. Kennedy, of the 64th Field Regiment, using the enormous glasses captured by the Regiment in Tunisia, on one occasion was able to spot and shoot-up a queue of German soldiers waiting at their cookhouse. All men were accommodated in houses and were therefore warm and dry. They soon made friends with the local inhabitants and many hilarious evenings were spent round farmhouse firesides drinking the country wine and eating chestnuts. These Italians were very poor and hostile to the Tedesci. Many of them had lost relatives in the war and the Germans before leaving had rounded up all able-bodied men between the ages of 17 and 40 for impressed labour. Nor had the villagers any praise for the Fascist regime, for Mussolini's special benefits had certainly not extended to the low level of agricultural peasant classes. In Aconorosi on Christmas Day B Company gave a party to the children of the village and the accordion playing of Private Freeman was much appreciated. The main difficulties were still administrative and, although the track was improved so that wheeled transport could reach Corigliano, all supplies and blankets had to be carried the last mile to Aconorosi. Unfortunately no mules were available, as these were still required by the 46th Division on the Camino feature, and as the Germans had taken all livestock from the village in their retreat the commanding officer's horse and one broken-down old donkey were the only beasts of burden which could be used.

In spite of the comfort of the billets and quietness of the sector it must not be imagined that life was entirely idyllic. The frequency of guards and the operational plan meant that a man in a rifle company had only one complete night's sleep in bed in three. Both B and D Companies maintained a platoon covering a standing patrol by the river bank throughout the hours of darkness. B Company's patrol was stationed in a house by the ruined power station at Caterina (9098), since it was thought that enemy patrols might attempt to cross the river by making use of the debris. D Company's patrol was about 600 yards to the west covering an overhead hawser ferry. When these patrols withdrew at daylight an N.C.O. and two men remained in observation until dusk on the following night, when they were relieved by the next platoon. In spite of the monotonous routine in the Regiment's sector, away to the left a cat-and-mouse battle continued for many days; and after C Company had relieved D Company in Avulpi on the 20th December it became involved. In the big loop of the river at Maiano di Sopra (8697) a certain Major Burkhardt had bottled himself and his company. They were the only Germans left on the east bank of the river. It was obvious that these had to be wiped out before the river could be crossed. For some reason their strength was always underestimated and as a result there were abortive attempts to expel them from their position. C Company was ordered to send out a fighting patrol three nights running to secure a prisoner from the house, Massa Prete (8798), which became known as "Pink-un." These patrols were led by Lieutenant Leeds, one of the South African officers, and although they were unsuccessful it was not so much their fault as the strength and alertness of the enemy garrison. A few casualties were suffered.

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On the 29th/30th December after considerable preparation a raid was carried out by the 9th Royal Fusiliers. They swept the area and encountered little opposition, the enemy having withdrawn. On New Year's Day the Regiment was relieved by the 1st London Irish and moved back to a pleasant little town called Cascano, about five miles from Sessa Aurunca.