

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

The Advance to the Volturno

By the 2nd October the 169th Brigade had advanced about fifteen miles, and the 167th Brigade was placed at two hours' notice to move nearer the scene of the fighting. Down on the coast Naples was on the point of falling. On the 3rd October the Regiment received orders to move to the area of Nola. The advance was carried out in mechanical transport and cheering Italians lined the route. The Regiment found comfortable billets in the village of Saveano, just south-west of Nola. The next two days were spent in cleaning up and reorganization, and a cloth-model exercise was also held for all officers and warrant and non-commissioned officers. The commanding officer also lectured on the experiences of the Regiment during the past few weeks. When one of the anti-tank-gun crews backed its truck into the courtyard of a house and began to brew up its morning tea, an extremely Cockney female voice yelled out of the window: "A cup of char is just the thing I've been waiting for for five years." The owner of the voice was a woman from Peckham who had been caught in Italy when the Italians declared war.

On the 6th October Nos. 4 and 5 Platoons and the A2 Echelon received orders to move forward to a new Regimental concentration area just south of Capua. Conditions were not quite what had been expected on arrival. The Queen's Brigade and the 7th Armoured Division had by no means cleared the south bank of the River Volturno, and Capua was still in enemy hands. A battery of field gunners which had been deployed in the area a few hours before and had found nothing but a troop of the 7th Armoured Reconnaissance Unit in front was delighted by the arrival of some infantry. However, the 8th Royal Fusiliers also arrived during the night and took up positions ahead. The next day the unloaded transport went back and brought up the rifle companies.

CROSSING OF THE VOLTURNO

Pursuit to the German Winter Line

The situation on the 7th October was as follows: On the right the Americans were closing up to the banks of the Volturno along the main backbone of the Apennines, In the centre the 201st Guards Brigade had relieved the 169th Brigade and had got a firm hold in Capua, although the town was not entirely clear of enemy. Ahead of the Regiment the 8th Royal Fusiliers were holding a position astride Highway 6 and were patrolling down to the river bank, whilst on the left the infantry brigade of the 7th Armoured Division had reached the Volturno in the neighbourhood of Canchello. From the orders which arrived it soon became obvious that the brigade was to be the spearhead in an assault river crossing.

On the 8th October companies were sent back to a canal behind the Regiment's position to practise boat drill. The same evening the commanding officer asked for volunteers to swim the Volturno to reconnoitre the far banks. About a dozen men volunteered and out of these two were chosen, who, with a sapper officer and Major R. K. Stevens (H.Q. Company), reported on the conditions which they discovered. The banks of the river were steep, wooded and some twenty feet high, and the river itself varied from extremely shallow water to water about ten feet deep. In addition, the river was in flood and the current was extremely strong. Of all the volunteers only the sapper officer succeeded in reaching the other bank. After two nights of patrolling the conclusion was reached that, in the sector allotted to the Regiment, covering about a mile and a half of the south bank of the river stretching westwards from the outskirts of Capua, the only feasible place where boats might be launched comfortably, and the banks prepared for the passage of wheeled transport, was in the proximity of the demolished railway bridge in the suburbs of Capua.

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During this forward reconnaissance experiments were being made in the rear area with kapok rafts and in the waterproofing of Sherman tanks and passage of 6-pounder anti-tank guns on overhead ferries. The Regiment itself remained in its rather damp position in the flax fields. Great efforts had been made to camouflage the position and Major E. S. D. Pentreath, M.C., had transported practically complete flax fields in order to disguise the routes most frequented by men of the Regiment. Unfortunately at this time the commanding officer, Lieutenant-Colonel R. C. Cruddas, D.S.O., who had commanded the Regiment since June, 1941, was becoming a very sick man and, although he did his utmost to command the Regiment during its next venture, the medical authorities finally prevailed and he was evacuated to hospital. It was a matter of great personal regret to the Colonel that he was too weak to visit the forward companies and wish them "God-speed" before leaving his command. The Regiment now came under the command of Major Pentreath.

The plans of the higher command at this time fluctuated from day to day. Generally speaking, they consisted of a plan for the crossing of the Volturno on an army front, with the 167th Brigade forcing the vital crossing in the area of Capua itself where the sappers reported the only possible bridging site capable of providing for the build-up of the army on the far bank. But although the dead-line date drew near, difficulties were encountered. Eventually the final plan so far as X Corps was concerned amounted to the crossing of the Volturno by the 7th Oxf and Bucks Lt Infy in the area of Capua, whilst the 201st Guards Brigade on the right and the Queen's Brigade of the 7th Armoured Division on the left provided diversionary attacks. In order to fulfil this plan it was necessary for the Regiment to concentrate close up to the river.

On the preceding evening it moved up to a ruined ammunition factory about 800 yards from the river bank, where it was to lie up throughout the next day and cross the river at dusk under a barrage of 300 guns. During this night, the 10th October, company commanders chose and marked their crossing places wherever the banks appeared to allow the lowering of boats to the water.

The plan was to cross on a two-company front, with A Company (Captain M. J. St. Aubyn, M.C.) on the right and D Company (Major D. A. Philips) on the left. B Company (Major J. R. P. Montgomery) was to follow with Regimental headquarters and, later, C Company (Major J. S. Keith), which was to provide boat carriers and rowers in the initial stages.

The 8th Royal Fusiliers were to move up to the near bank and provide small-arms fire over the heads of the assaulting troops. In addition, detachments of medium machine guns of the 6th Cheshires and 17-pounders were to be sited on the near bank. The 201st Guards Brigade in Capua was to provide a "Chinese cracker" crossing.

After crossing, A Company was to swing to the right and mop up an area on the outskirts of Capua.

D Company was to capture a group of buildings which would eventually house Regimental headquarters, and other companies were to pass through and extend the bridgehead. As a counter-attack by tanks was expected, the companies were armed with newly issued bazookas in addition to their Piat mortars and Hawkins grenades. The sappers also guaranteed that anti-tank guns would be ferried across the river before daylight.

During the night of the 11th the Regiment moved up in the bright moonlight from its flax fields to the ammunition factory and quietly dug in around the ruined buildings. Company commanders took the platoon commanders to the river bank and showed them their allotted crossing places and the routes to them. They then returned to the factory to get what sleep they could. During the next day elaborate precautions were taken to ensure that the presence of the Regiment was hidden from the enemy. Only three officers, Major Pentreath, Major J. W. Kennedy (of the 64th Field Regiment) and Lieutenant P. J. Dudman, left the factory to attend a conference at brigade headquarters. They all did so disguised as Italian civilians.

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At 1600 hrs Major Pentreath gave out his final orders and these were passed on to all men. The leading troops were to move out of the factory to the river bank at 2000 hrs, by which time it was thought that the barrage would be keeping down the heads of enemy who might interfere with the crossing. The brigade commander came round companies to give a final word of encouragement, and at 1930 hrs. the men began to don their equipment and collect round their assault boats.

At this precise moment the Germans, who until then had been silent, opened fire on the factory with artillery and mortars, including nebelwerfers. A number of shells fell in D Company's area and caused many casualties. No. 18 Platoon alone lost six killed, including its commander, Lieutenant P. F. Hardcastle, and many more were wounded. In addition, many of the boats were smashed and it soon became apparent that unless further assault boats could be provided the whole operation would be in jeopardy. Company commanders found it extremely difficult to assemble their men and the noise of our own barrage, which was now rising to a crescendo, was at times deafening. Captain St. Aubyn took A Company to the front gate of the factory. D Company went to the side gate, through which was coming a stream of bullets. Major Montgomery, who had taken over command owing to the indisposition of Major Pentreath, had gone down to the river bank to find that C Company had only two serviceable boats left to launch. Having ascertained the strength of the enemy's fire, he and the adjutant, Captain P. R. Hayter, concluded that the few remaining boats could not be launched without a loss of 50 per cent, of the men of the leading companies and the remainder would be too weak to carry out their task on the opposite bank. Major Montgomery accordingly ordered them all to return to their positions in the factory and await further orders whilst he informed brigade of the situation.

The brigade commander ordered Major Cleghorn, of the 9th Royal Fusiliers, to go forward and report on the possibility of carrying out the operation. On arrival he quickly grasped the situation: half the boats were destroyed and one of the leading companies so depleted by casualties that a completely fresh programme would have to be made. Furthermore, the support of the artillery programme had been lost and the barrage did not seem to have caused an appreciable diminution of enemy fire. He therefore informed the brigade commander that the operation could not be carried out and orders were given for the withdrawal of the Regiment from the factory.

At about midnight Captain R. J. Vincent was ordered to make a final search in the factory and by 0230 hrs on the 13th he was able to report that the whole Regiment was back in its position in the flax fields. Meanwhile the companies of the Royal Fusiliers providing supporting fire and the 201st Guards Brigade were reporting the presence of enemy on our bank and it became apparent that the Germans had crossed the river in some strength during the confusion of our barrage and the German defensive fire. Fierce battles raged throughout the night in the narrow streets of Capua before the Germans were finally driven back.

As a typical example of how the fortunes of war may vary and the best-made plans go awry, the Queen's Brigade of the 7th Armoured Division, which had only prepared a diversionary attack, succeeded in getting across the river and building up a bridgehead on the other bank, whilst on the right the two American divisions also succeeded in crossing. The Regiment had failed in its initial attempt, but the correct appreciation by the Germans that Capua was the focal point of the Allied attack and the concentration of their forces to meet it allowed the troops on either flank to have a more lightly contested crossing. The result of the night's action meant, however, that the successful forcing of the Volturno line was to remain in doubt until the bridging operations planned in the Capua area were eventually carried out.

The Regiment remained in the flax fields for another night, but on the 14th October orders were received to take over from the 3rd Bn. Coldstream Guards, who were holding the town of Capua and positions to the east. Reconnaissance parties went forward and after dark the Regiment moved in transport via Caserta.

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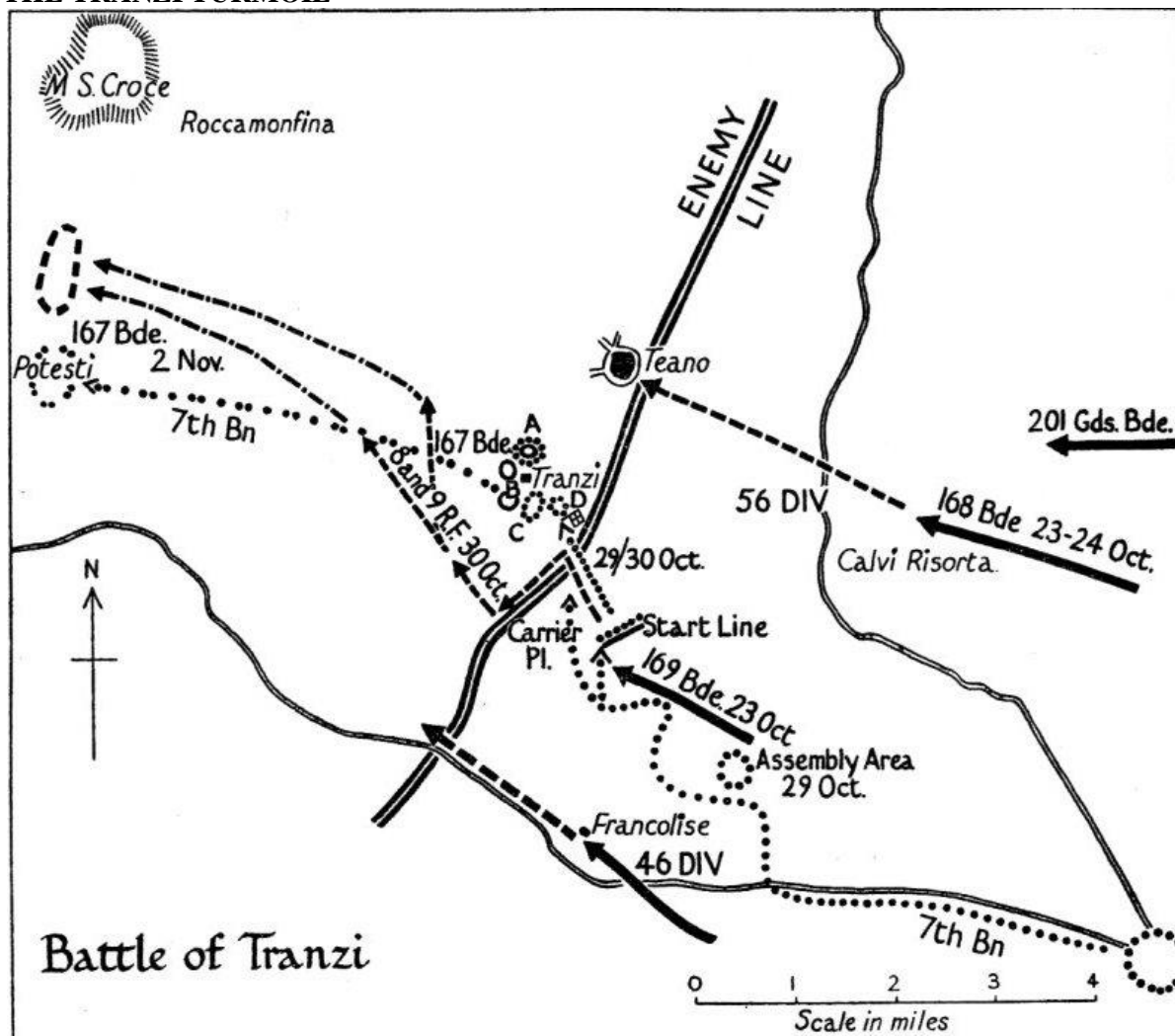
The positions it took up were as follows: B Company in a farmhouse to the right and slightly behind the town, C and A Companies in the town itself with a joint company headquarters in the castle, and D Company at first in reserve but later moved over to the right in a wooded position beyond. Regimental headquarters were in a ruined house about a mile from Capua and the platoons of H.Q. Company, with their transport, were in the stables of the riding school of the Palace of Caserta. The American bridgehead to the right of the Regiment was secured after a couple of trying days and the 169th Brigade of the 56th Division and the 201st Guards Brigade were passed through the American sector with the object of encircling Capua from the rear. At the same time, higher command insisted that the 7th Oxf and Bucks Lt Infty on the right of Capua and the 8th Royal Fusiliers on the left should make all efforts in their power to cross the river, since a bridge in the neighbourhood of Capua had to be established at the earliest possible moment.

In daylight on the 16th a patrol of B Company succeeded in wading across the river about three-quarters of a mile up-stream from Capua. The commanding officer, Major Cleghorn, decided immediately to reinforce this patrol with the remainder of that company and establish a small bridgehead on the far bank. During the night, with the aid of two assault boats, the company was replenished and a line was laid across the river. Meanwhile in Capua itself a certain amount of sniping and mortaring was taking place, but few casualties were suffered. Major J. S. Keith, as the senior British officer in the town, was handed the key of the arsenal by the mayor. From this the companies removed some 200 new Biretta sub-machine guns complete with ammunition and magazines. These were later distributed throughout the brigade on a basis of about eighty per battalion, and were found to be first-class weapons for patrolling. The new divisional commander, Major-General G. W. R. Templer, D.S.O., O.B.E., paid his first visit to the Regiment and met several of the officers. Meanwhile the 8th Royal Fusiliers on the left had also succeeded in infiltrating small parties across the river, which made good progress in clearing houses on the far bank towards the aerodrome. They suffered some casualties, however, from booby traps.

On the 17th the progress of the 169th Brigade, in swinging round to the left beyond the river, was such that there was no further point in B Company remaining cut off from the rest of the Regiment. It was estimated that bridging would be possible the next day. B Company returned to its original positions. The Regiment was then ordered to prepare to cross the river as soon as the bridge was completed and a small harbour party was sent across in assault boats. The bridge was completed at 2000 hrs and early on the morning of the 19th the whole Regiment, including A1 and A2 transport, had concentrated on the far bank. There they remained until the afternoon, when they were ordered forward again astride Highway 7 about 4,000 yards beyond the river.

The Volturno venture, as the operations of the previous week became known by the officers, provided many interesting lessons. It was the first experience that the Regiment had in an assault river crossing and it stood all in good stead when they crossed the Garigliano River in January. Secondly, it had provided some excellent patrolling from the small specialist reconnaissance patrol right up to the company level. Lastly, it had given commanders great exercise in improvisation when set plans went astray. The losses of the Regiment in the last three weeks had been heavy, especially in officers and junior leaders, owing as much to illness and fatigue after six weeks' continuous action as to the enemy.

THE TRANZI TURMOIL



(N.B.—Figures in brackets refer to the map Italy 1/50,000, sheet 172 iv, Teano. For the reasons stated in the editorial, the map could not be reproduced, but the co-ordinates have been included for the benefit of those who may still possess maps and others who may wish to study the Regiment's movements in detail.)

The next battle in which the Regiment took part was later described as a model battle, since the German defence was completely misled by the strength of the attack mounted under extremely difficult conditions; and its results were so far-reaching that the Germans withdrew the last ten or twelve miles to their strong winter position before Cassino. Whilst the Regiment was harbouring on Route 7 the 201st Guards Brigade on the right was working forward along the high mountain ridges of Croce and Monte Maggiore (1593). The Guards had adapted themselves quickly to mountain warfare and were carrying out excellent advances with the aid of porter-borne supplies.

During the days in harbour eighty or ninety men of the Regiment acted as porters to this brigade on several occasions. On the 19th October a new commanding officer, Lieutenant-Colonel A. S. Shaw Ball, arrived from the 1st King's Shropshire Light Infantry and took over command. Major D. A. Philips, who had suffered from a splinter wound in the Volturno operation, was admitted to hospital. Ahead, the 169th Brigade was slowly closing up towards the high ground which barred the way from Calvi Risorta (1091) on the right to Montanaro (0689), whilst the reconnaissance regiment was fighting in Calvi Vecchia (1189) for the crossing places over the River Lanxio. Behind, the 168th Brigade, which had left the division and fought in Sicily with the 50th Division, had rejoined and passed through to help the 201st Guards Brigade on to its objectives at Rocclietta (1392).

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Away on the left the 7th Armoured Division was moving up towards Francolise (0487) and Carinola (9887). Some of its heavier transport began to pass along Highway 7.

The general plan was for the 201st Guards Brigade on the right and the 169th Brigade on the left to clear the high ground without committing the 168th and 167th Brigades. If, however, this proved impossible, the 167th Brigade was to be prepared to carry out the attack through the 169th Brigade, and the 168th Brigade through the 201st Guards Brigade. To this end the officers of the Regiment had to make several reconnaissances in the forward areas of the Queen's positions. On the night of the 23rd October the 169th and 201st Guards Brigades attacked and were successful in capturing all objectives except two heights, which were later taken by the 168th Brigade. It became obvious therefore that the Regiment would now be committed in the next step forward: the crossing of the Teano River valley and the advance on to the slopes of the great extinct volcano of Monte Croce (9799).

On the 26th and 27th the commanding officer and O group carried out reconnaissances from observation posts in the newly won Queen's positions. On the 28th the Regiment was placed at four hours' notice to move and on the 29th moved to the area of Montanaro (0787).

The situation in this area was as follows:

A battalion of the Queen's, after a hard battle, had succeeded in entering Montanaro itself, but on attempting to move forward had come upon an extremely deep gorge which, at first appearance, seemed to present an impassable barrier to any form of transport. After further reconnaissance, however, a small lane was discovered with banks about thirty to forty feet high leading down to the river. It was decided to improve this track and use it as a main axis for the 167th Brigade's attack. The Queen's were given the task of securing a bridgehead on the far bank and maintaining the route.

By the afternoon of the 29th October an officer returned from the Queen's and stated that the Queen's held the line of the railway as far as S. Bonnate (0489). The German position in strength appeared to be along the road Teano—Coivani (0594—0288). On the morning of the 29th plans were changed and the Regiment moved forward, but instead of attacking Teano town (0492) itself it was ordered to attack the Tranzi feature. During the night the 8th Royal Fusiliers were to come up in the rear of the Regiment and then swing to the left to capture Borge and Pugliano as soon as possible after first light. The 9th Royal Fusiliers were to be in reserve ready to pass through and capture Acciariello (0295).

The divisional artillery, with a proportion of an Agra, (Army group, Royal Artillery) were to support the attack with a barrage. H hour (H hour superseded zero hour.) was to be at 2359 hrs.

On the right the 168th Brigade was to mount an attack across the Riardo River towards the town of Teano and on the left the 46th Division was to begin a diversionary attack towards Francolise. The whole success of the 167th Brigade operation would depend upon the ability to move tanks and anti-tank guns along a narrow track and across the gorge cleared and bridged by the Queen's Brigade. It was ascertained by reconnaissance that it would be impossible to move any form of transport other than tracked vehicles and jeeps down this track and the Regimental anti-tank guns therefore had to be towed by carriers. Owing to the small number of carriers provided with towing bars, a ferry service had to be devised. In support of the brigade was one squadron of the Royal Scots Greys, which was to follow the infantry battalions across the gorge and be prepared to give support at first light.

Company commanders had an opportunity of examining their objective in daylight from an observation post above Montanaro, but owing to the distance (about 5,000 yards) and the wooded nature of the country it was impossible for the leading companies to identify their final objectives.

The commanding officer issued final orders at 1830 hrs. His plan was for the Regiment to move with A Company (Captain J. R. B. Wright) and C Company (Major J. S. Keith) leading, with B Company (Major J. R. P. Montgomery) and D Company (Captain O. C. Loader) following up.

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A Company's objective was the two ringed contours due north of Tranzi. C Company was to occupy the high ground to the east, with B Company behind them. D Company, in reserve, was to move initially to the high ground at Point 192 (0492) on the feature known as the Quarry Feature. Regimental headquarters were to be established at the foot of this hill. One troop of Regimental anti-tank guns was to try to reach the Regiment before first light and establish an anti-tank block across the Teano—Coivani road north of Regimental headquarters. The mortar platoon was also to be established in the area of Regimental headquarters.

During the afternoon the intelligence officer and guides had gone forward to tape the start line, which was to run from the railway across towards the farm buildings of Mas De Lei (0590). They found some difficulty in doing this owing to the Queen's not having completely cleared the ground of enemy, but the task was completed after dark. At 2100 hrs. the Regiment left the assembly area and began the approach march of about 5,000 yards. It was extremely dark in the sunken trackway beyond Montanaro owing to the thickly overhanging trees and bushes. In some places contact had to be maintained by each man holding the bayonet scabbard of the man in front. The guides met the Regiment on the far side of the gorge and by 2345 hrs. everyone was in position on the start line.

The forming up was covered by the battalion of the Queen's. Meanwhile the carriers towing the anti-tank guns and carrying the mortar detachment were successfully negotiating the sunken trackway. The Queen's had constructed a trackway of logs and a small, twin-track bridge, and during the early part of the night there were no casualties to vehicles.

At 2359 hrs our barrage opened and the attack began. Although there was no moon, it was a bright, starlit night and the quarry feature stood out as a guide. The forward companies reached their immediate objective across the main road without encountering opposition, but B Company, which had strayed slightly to the left, ran into a small anti-personnel minefield, which delayed them and caused some casualties. The same company also encountered some enemy fire from the buildings at the end of the trackway (049913) after the forward companies had gone through without encountering opposition.

At about 0300 hrs. Regimental headquarters were moving up to the side of the quarry feature and found enemy still in possession of the spur. In addition, the gunner forward observation officer's party, which had established themselves on top of the hill, found themselves playing hide-and-seek with a fairly large party of Germans. The fog of war then descended rather heavily and Regimental headquarters became split into two parties.

The adjutant (Captain P. R. Hayter, M.C.) took command of the larger party, which succeeded in establishing itself in the previously planned position, but the commanding officer and a few others were cut off and, believing Regimental headquarters to be surrounded, returned down the axis of advance and obtained permission to use a company of the 9th Royal Fusiliers to re-establish the situation. This, however, proved unnecessary and at first light the situation had been stabilized in the Regimental headquarters area.

Meanwhile wireless communication with the forward companies had also broken down, and the story of A Company's advance could only be pieced together afterwards. The company advanced successfully on to its objectives, but Captain M. J. St. Aubyn, M.C., second-in-command of the company, moving with company headquarters in the rear of the column, lost contact with the remainder. He strayed off to the left and eventually reached the outskirts of the village of Tranzi. After taking two Germans prisoner he discovered that he was in the middle of a German battalion position. As he was far outnumbered he lay down until 1100 hrs. on the morning of the 30th, when he was joined by a platoon of D Company and a troop of Sherman tanks.

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With this force he succeeded in driving the Germans out of the village of Tranzi. His meeting with the troop of Sherman tanks was completely accidental, as the commanding officer had no idea that he was in this neighbourhood. A Company, without communications of any sort, was now faced with Germans on all sides, but it beat off three extremely strong counter-attacks during the day. Bodies of German infantry were lying within five yards of the forward weapon pits, which had been shelled at fifty yards' range by self-propelled guns on the road beneath the position. C and B Companies had by first light reached a position on the forward slope at Point 192 just short of the village of Tranzi and here they had decided to consolidate. Whilst the companies were digging in at first light they were counter-attacked.

At 0530 hrs. C Company's forward platoon was attacked by one platoon of enemy whom it allowed to come to within thirty yards before opening fire. Several were killed and the remainder withdrew.

At about 0600 hrs. a large-scale attack developed with infantry supported by half-tracked vehicles and tanks. The tanks started firing high-explosive into the company weapon pits and trees all around and the area was swept with machine-gun fire. The positions became untenable, some of them being completely overrun, and the two companies were forced to withdraw. The first news that Regimental headquarters had of these events was when runners arrived stating that companies had been overrun. Considerable casualties were suffered and some men had remarkable escapes. A signaller attached to B Company was half buried in a slit trench which collapsed when a half-tracked vehicle drove over it. He eventually extricated himself and rejoined the Regiment later in the day.

At about eleven in the morning efforts were made to reestablish the Regiment in the positions originally chosen and two troops of the Scots Greys were ordered forward up the trackway on the left-hand side of Point 192 supported by a platoon of D Company and one section of B Company. This was the force which ultimately reached Captain M. J. St. Aubyn just short of Tranzi. In addition, a fighting patrol of C Company was sent forward along the slopes of the quarry feature. It found the area clear and eventually the whole company moved forward to occupy positions short of Tranzi and on the forward slopes of Point 192.

B Company took up a position slightly to the west, with D Company on the right and on the reverse slope. Two of the Greys' tanks lost their tracks just short of Tranzi, where the remainder rallied on them. Together with Captain St. Aubyn's force they formed a strong locality just short of Tranzi.

To go back to the story of the support platoons of H.Q. Company which had last been left in their concentration area along the railway embankment on the far side of the gorge crossing.

At about 0300 hrs reconnaissance parties of No. 5 Platoon which had been following the leading company reconnoitring the route for the carriers towing the anti-tank guns along the trackway had encountered the enemy in the houses just short of the main road. Two of the parties returned to advanced brigade headquarters, bringing with them several prisoners. The 9th Royal Fusiliers, following the Regiment according to the brigade plan, moved across country to the left of this enemy strong-point; and it therefore became apparent that if the trackway were to be used by the assault transport of the Regiment independent action would have to be taken to clear away this opposition.

Accordingly, under orders from the brigade commander, the carriers under Captain R. J. Vincent were ordered across country on the left of this track to clear up this opposition. This they accomplished very successfully and by 0530 hrs. the track was clear for the anti-tank guns to move forward. About twelve prisoners were taken. The first troop of anti-tank guns now moved up and took up position astride the main road as previously ordered. Later in the day two sections of the Regimental mortars and a further troop of anti-tank guns also came up the same trackway. During the late afternoon the 8th Royal Fusiliers attacked under cover of a smoke screen on the left of the Regiment at the same time as A Company was repelling the last of the heavy counter-attacks mentioned above.

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Other localities in the Regimental area suffered heavy but spasmodic shell fire. The rear areas also came in for punishment and some of the A Echelon transport which had concentrated at Montanaro suffered casualties.

At about 1630 hrs a company of enemy was seen in the area to the left of A Company; the 444th Battery of the 64th Field Regiment and a troop of the Scots Greys shot-up the area. This company was later seen moving away to the north-west. During the night patrols were sent up and made contact with A Company, whilst a patrol of No. 5 Platoon was sent forward along the main road to discover whether the bridge in front of Teano had been demolished. At first light the whole Regiment moved forward in the Tranzi area and it was discovered that the enemy had withdrawn from the Regiment's front. During the operation at least fifty-one Germans were seen killed or dead on the ground, six were evacuated through our aid post and about thirty-five prisoners were taken. Our own casualties were ten men killed, three officers and forty men wounded and fourteen men missing. The divisional commander visited the Regiment and said that the action had resulted in a general withdrawal of the enemy and that this fact could largely be attributed to A Company, although isolated, holding its position in the face of heavy counter-attacks. The Fusilier battalions of the brigade now pushed ahead and occupied the high ground south of Roccamonfina (9998), whilst the 168th Brigade, after hard fighting, broke into Teano. The 46th Division was also advancing from the area of Francolise.

The following lessons learned from the night attack on the night of the 29th/30th October are attached to the war diary:

1. The operation entailed a night march to the river crossing and advance from there to the forming-up position, followed by an attack. The distances were: (a) approach march, two miles (approximately); (b) advance, 1,500 yards; (c) attack, first phase, 2,500 yards (approximately), second phase, 1,200 yards (approximately). Timings were based on two hours to reach the forming-up position plus one hour in hand on the forming-up position, and to allow for unforeseen delays, i.e., the Regiment left the concentration area three hours before zero. Owing to congestion on the route (especially on and near the bridge) the Regiment was delayed and reached its forming-up position only five minutes before zero.

Lesson.—It is essential for traffic control to ensure a free passage, otherwise the commander cannot possibly estimate the time required; troops are unnecessarily fatigued by delays and there is the risk of failing to reach the forming-up position by zero hour.

2. The great depths of the attack to the final objectives, together with the darkness of the night, resulted in many enemy posts being bypassed by the Regiment as it went through. This was all to the good and enemy posts overrun were dealt with either as discovered or during the following morning.

Lesson.—Regimental headquarters, etc., must advance with one of the companies, otherwise it is liable to bump opposition it is unable to overcome and get cut off. Forward troops penetrating to this depth must not delay mopping up but must go right through behind the artillery support (both forward companies and those in depth). Therefore, further troops should be specially detailed to mop up at dawn. Reserve companies cannot do this after a penetration of 3,000 yards, as they are necessary for immediate depth to the forward companies.

3. One company was caught by a counter-attack of tanks at dawn soon after arrival on its position. It suffered some casualties as a result and had to withdraw.

Lesson.—Commanders must study the map and try to find out possible tank approaches and consolidate in the following way:

(a) Place No. 75 grenades at once on all possible tank approaches, e.g., tracks, etc.

(b) Push out patrols forward to maintain contact and to give early warning.

(c) Site anti-tank weapons in concealed positions.

(d) Dig in quickly, protected by sentries, and keep equipment on until the light enables adequate warning to be given.

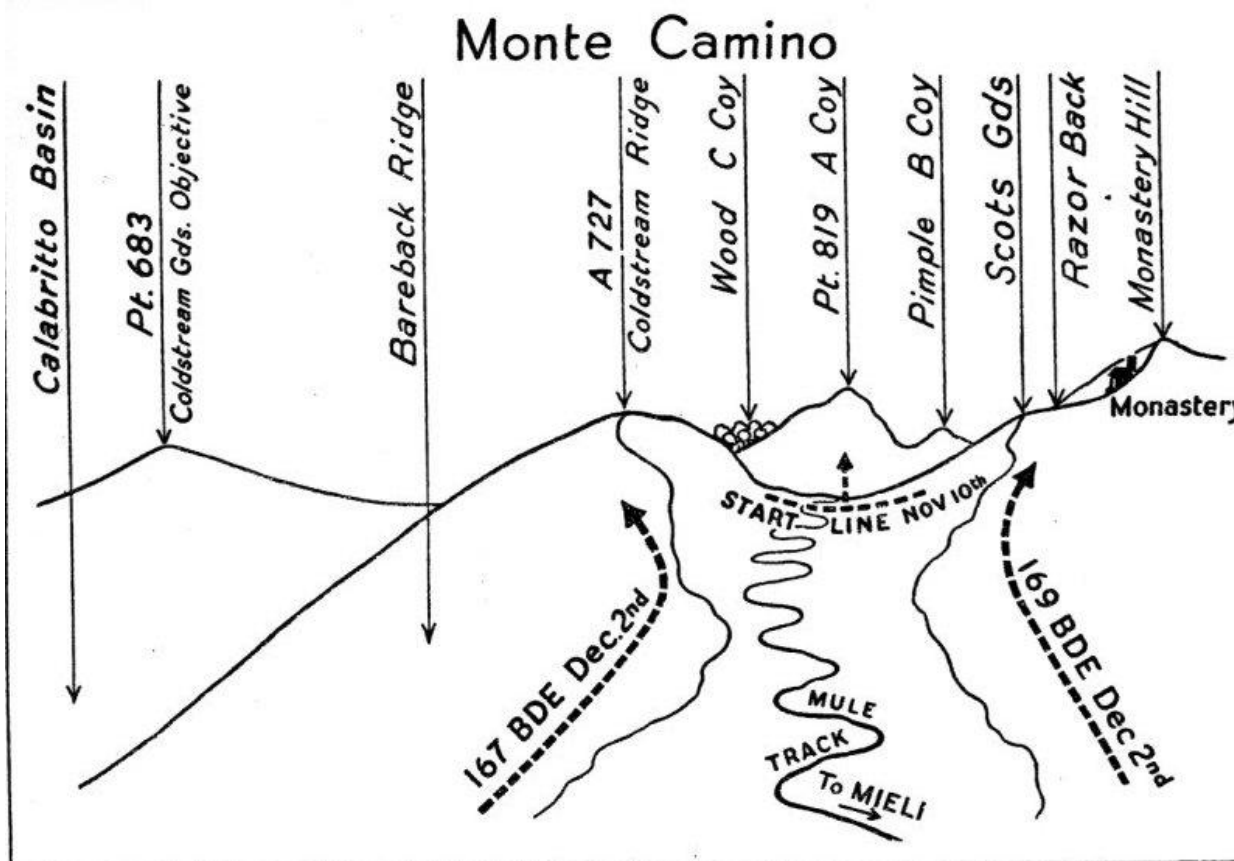
4. The right forward company (A Company) reached its final objective and dug in quickly. It was counter-attacked and, although rather isolated, stood its ground and beat off all enemy, sometimes in hand-to-hand fighting on their parapets.

Lesson.—Stand firm.

5. General.—When attacking in complete darkness avoid firing if possible, as this has little effect and merely gives away the position of the attackers. The best method is to put the Bren on the ground and move the riflemen out round one flank to throw No. 36 grenades. This has a great moral effect and if the bombers move frequently they are difficult to locate and give a false impression of strength to the enemy.

These lessons had all been taught and practised in previous training. Their repetition in the war diaries shows how important it is for the commander to remind his junior leaders of the vital lessons before an attack. A commanding officer is never free of this duty.

PURSUIT OF THE ENEMY TO THE WINTER LINE AND ATTACK ON MONTE CAMINO



(N.B.—Co-ordinates refer to maps [Italy 1/50,000]: sheets 172 iv [Teano], 160II [Cassino], 1711 [Sessa Aurunca].)

In common with the rest of the brigade, the Regiment now began long cross-country marches to keep contact with the retreating enemy. Owing to the lack of roads and tracks, for many days the transport echelon was not able to reach the forward troops and for the first time in the campaign reliance had to be placed entirely upon porter companies and mules. The porters were of various origins: Basutos, Mauritians, drivers and men from H.Q. Company. For the first time, too, contact was made with Italian co-operators and an Italian Army mule company was attached to the brigade. These men were fairly reliable when not under fire, but had very definite ideas about the hours of work they should do each day.

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Every officer among the advancing troops carried two blankets in preference to a greatcoat, and officers and N.C.Os. were issued with Everest rucksacks which were so heavy when empty that they were doubtful assets. The first leg of the Regiment's march lay across country to Point 507 (0295), a high, tree-covered hill above the village of Casamostra (0294).

Looking back there was a glorious view over the Volturno plain to Naples and at night the flames from Vesuvius and the flak from Naples harbour made a magnificent spectacle, although most people were far too tired to appreciate it.

On the 2nd November the Regiment was ordered to advance right across the brigade front to the village of Potesti (9694). This was a distance of about seven miles on the map, but owing to the nature of the hills a much greater distance was covered on the ground. The 8th and 9th Royal Fusiliers were established on the high ground of Mount Mallorie (9796) overlooking a picturesque valley containing many little mountain villages. There was still no sign of enemy and Mount San Croce, towering high above Roccamonfina, appeared to be unoccupied.

As the Regiment moved down the slopes towards Potesti it was treated to the spectacle of columns of the 7th Armoured Division to the south moving round the Monte Massico massif towards Sessa Aurunca (9492). Great columns of dust marked the movement of the vehicles and down towards the Garigliano River the artillery were laying a smoke screen. The Regiment reached Potesti at about 1700 hrs. and immediately prepared an all-round defensive position. Information regarding troops to the front and on the left flank was extremely vague, but it was believed that the enemy were withdrawing to the north bank of the Garigliano and that the 46th Division was moving up Highway 7.

One prisoner was taken by the Regiment in Potesti. He was a German corporal who had gone to the dental centre at Sessa, decided to spend the night in Potesti on his way back, and woke in the morning to find us in possession. The Regiment remained in Potesti for two days and during that time rations and ammunition were brought the long march from Casamostra by the Regiment's pack-mule company. Captain E. Theunissen was in charge and did considerably more marching at this period than he had ever done since he took over the duties of transport officer.

During the night of the 4th November patrols visited the village of Lauro (9095), about 6,000 yards to the front, and reported the village held by forty enemy, who retired every evening. During this day three officers, Captain M. H. Lofts and Lieutenants G. J. Mayhew and D. B. Drakard, joined the Regiment. The next day the Regiment made another long march in a northerly direction to Point 727 (9598), a high ridge flanking Monte Croce. At first the whole Regiment was in position on this hill, but on the next day further reorganization took place. D Company was disbanded to strengthen the other three rifle companies.

The Regiment's responsibility was now defined as the maintenance of one company on Point 727, one in reserve around the village of San Pietro (9798), whilst the third company was sent forward to the villages of Corigliano (9297) and Aconorosi (9297), about 1,500 yards from the banks of the Garigliano. A relief system was arranged by which each company would have three days in forward positions. The forward company sent patrols down to the banks of the Garigliano which reported S mines sown thickly and haphazardly in the orchards. Great difficulty was experienced in getting supplies and anti-tank guns to the forward company, and during the first night the anti-tank platoon worked on the construction of diversions around a couple of enormous craters.

When A Company relieved B Company on the 8th it was decided to withdraw from the village of Aconorosi, as supply problems were extremely difficult and there was no tactical advantage in occupying the lower village. The other battalions of the brigade were to the north along the slopes of Mount Croce. They had the same patrolling duties as our forward company but were rather more unfortunate. One officer and twenty men were lost in one night alone from S mines.

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The anti-tank platoon now began to pay the enemy back with some of his own medicine and, using a 75-mm. gun which they had captured from the Germans, fired back a variety of ammunition at the German position. A further two troops of the Regiment, under the command of Serjeant-Major Briggs, was sent round to the village of Sipicciano to give antitank protection to the London Irish, whose anti-tank guns had not yet arrived.

On the 10th November C Company was due to relieve A Company, forward in the village of Corigliano. This, however, was cancelled and at 0830 hrs. the Regiment was placed at four hours' notice to move. Rations for twenty-four hours and woollen underclothing were issued to each man, and O group was ordered forward to the headquarters of the 201st Guards Brigade.

There it met the brigadier of that brigade and the divisional commander. It was informed that the two battalions of Guards on Monte Camino were in a serious position and the Regiment had been placed under command of the brigade to carry out an attack on Point 819 that night. Monte Camino was some 2,000 yards from the viewpoint and, although little detail of the upper slopes could be seen, it certainly appeared a formidable obstacle.

It was difficult, viewing the mountain from this angle, to appreciate the perspective correctly and a great deal of reliance had to be placed upon the descriptions given by the intelligence officer of the 201st Guards Brigade. Arrangements had been made to convey the Regiment from the harbour area by troop-carrying lorries round the Ponte route (9596) to San Clemente (9604), and from there the Regiment was to climb the mule track through Mieli (9505) to the start line. Owing to the weakness of the rifle companies the commanding officer decided to strengthen A Company with the carrier platoon in a dismounted role, and the anti-tank platoon and all men from H.Q. Company who could be spared were formed into a fourth rifle company.

R and O groups returned to the Regiment at San Domenico (9698) at about 1540 hrs, when final orders were given for the move and attack. There was very little time for the men of H.Q. Company to reorganize on a rifle-company basis. Three 3-inch mortars were taken, one detachment being placed under the command each of A and B Companies. The remainder of the platoon was used as carriers. Detachment commanders and orderlies were to go forward with these companies, leaving the mortars on the start line to be brought up at first light.

The Regiment left San Domenico at 1730 hrs in motor transport and debussed just short of the road junction at San Clemente. The Guards, who organized this move, took a little too much risk in the use of transport, for the Germans on the hills above must have realized that something was afoot when they heard the revving of the troop-carrying lorries' engines as they turned round.

As a result the whole valley was treated to a heavy artillery stonk whilst the Regiment was waiting at the foot of the hill. Fortunately, there were fairly deep ditches on either side of the road and very few casualties were suffered. A hot drink was issued and at 2330 hrs the Regiment left for the hill climb.

The commanding officer of the Scots Guards met the commanding officer at the head of the pass and took him up to the start line, which ran at right angles across the top of the mule track and between the two spurs on which the Scots Guards and the Coldstreamers were lying. There the objectives and the main features of the mountains were pointed out. The Regiment took about three hours to make the climb and owing to the steepness of the track and the heavy pack carried by each man, frequent halts had to be made in order to maintain the continuity of the column. Fortunately there was little interference from enemy artillery or mortars, which must have had great difficulty in ranging their fire on the steep reverse slopes of Camino. Briefly the plan was as follows: right, B Company, objective the rock pimple at 953076; centre, A Company, mil 819 at 951074; left, C Company, wood 950072.

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The composite company was to form a firm base astride the start line between the two Guards battalions. Regimental headquarters were to remain just below the start line. The artillery plan comprised a barrage to cover the attack, timings being based on 100 yards in six minutes, and also concentrations to be brought down on features on the flanks. The Scots and Coldstream Guards on the right and left respectively were to assist in neutralizing any opposition from the flanks. The Scots Guards especially were to work forward and endeavour to knock out enemy Spandau posts on the ridge leading up to Monastery Hill. The companies were in position in the start line by 0300 hrs.

At 0300 hrs. the companies crossed the start line as ordered. After about 200 yards B Company on the right encountered heavy machine-gun fire from its right flank. This fire came from a number of machine guns sited on the monastery feature. Owing to crest-clearing difficulties it was impossible to bring artillery fire down on these positions and it could only be hoped that the Scots Guards would work forward to this ridge and contain the posts whilst the attack went through. When it became apparent that the Guards had not succeeded in doing this, a detachment from B Company had to be made in order to go and deal with them.

This was done and some of the nearer posts were cleared, a number of the enemy being killed and twenty-one prisoners being taken. This action, however, delayed the advance and broke up the cohesion of the attack and it was difficult to regain control of the company in the dark. As soon as the advance was continued, heavy opposition was met from an enemy locality on the pimple slightly short of and to the right of Hill 819. This locality was eventually captured, but a counter-attack by the enemy regained it before reorganization.

Owing to the losses sustained and the obvious strength of the position, B Company decided to work round to the left and join up with A Company, which had gained its objective on the left side of Hill 819. This company had met little opposition until within a few yards of the top of Hill 819 and this it had succeeded in overcoming, but found it impossible to get Bren guns into position on the forward slope. Consolidation was therefore effected on the reverse slopes, with B Company protecting the right flank. The left company, C Company, reached the woods with slight opposition and dug in. There the remnants of the Coldstreamers company which had been isolated for two days were found. These, having no knowledge of the attack, were surprised at this noisy and somewhat unorthodox take-over. There was a gap of from 200 to 300 yards between C and A Companies, but contact was maintained by patrols.

The position therefore at first light was as follows: right company had failed to secure its objective but had closed in on centre company (A); A Company gained its objective but had been forced to consolidate on the reverse slopes only; left company (C) had secured its objective, but there was a gap between it and A Company.

Soon after first light on the 11th November it became apparent that the position of the two forward companies on the right was unenviable in the extreme. They were overlooked on three sides—from Hill 819 to the front, the pimple to the right and Monastery Hill behind them—on all of which the enemy had a number of concealed machine guns well dug in. Movement in any form was impossible and the enemy, being on higher ground, was able to shoot down into the sangars which in this very difficult country were the only kind of protection our troops had been able to put up. The advantage in range of the Spandau over the Bren gun also had decisive influence in the battle.

The situation was made more difficult still by the stretch of ground between the composite company and the forward companies being covered by fire from the high ground on the right. The enemy on this occasion showed little respect for the Red Cross and efforts to get messages, stretcher-bearers or ammunition forward proved impossible and had to be abandoned.

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At about midday the enemy succeeded in infiltrating a number of machine guns into the gap between C and A Companies and also between B Company and the composite company, with the result that the two forward companies on the right were in danger of being cut off. Orders were therefore issued for these two companies to concentrate on the left company, as this position was less exposed. The difficulty of carrying out this readjustment was considerable owing to the impossibility of movement, loss of leaders and the fact that crest clearance made artillery support ineffective.

The anti-tank platoon worked forward on the right and engaged the enemy with all weapons, whilst Major J. P. R. Montgomery succeeded in co-ordinating the movement of the two companies with Captain J. R. B. Wright. Unfortunately just after the final plan for readjustment had been made Captain Wright was hit by an enemy sniper and severely wounded. Almost at the same time Serjeant Allen, M.M., who had been with Captain Wright throughout A Company's battles, was killed. After some delay a smoke screen was put down and with the exception of a few men who were cut off the two right companies concentrated on C Company.

This move was not followed up directly by the enemy, who, instead, continued to infiltrate between the forward companies and the remainder of the Regiment forming the firm base. The situation became serious and all men of Regimental headquarters, signallers, pioneers and anti-tank platoon, were formed up and launched in a counterattack on the enemy who had interposed themselves between their position and the forward companies. This counter-attack was successful and the enemy withdrew.

The forward companies were by this time so seriously depleted that it was decided to withdraw them. About thirty of them under the command of Serjeant Cowie were formed into a platoon locality on the left of the anti-tank platoon and the remainder were formed into one rifle company under Major Keith. These were stationed behind Regimental headquarters in a counter-attack role. By last light, therefore, on the 11th November the position was practically identical with that which had existed before the attack took place. On the right the Scots Guards maintained their position on the spur below Monastery Hill and thence, holding a line roughly along the original start line of the Regiment, were the anti-tank platoon, Serjeant Cowie's composite platoon and finally the Coldstream Guards on Coldstream Ridge. Efforts to bring back Captain J. R. B. Wright, who had been lying in the open since being wounded, had so far failed, but Major Montgomery succeeded in rescuing him after dark. He was brought back by stretcher-bearers and died later in a C.C.S. (Casualty clearing station.) He was an officer of very great gallantry and one to whom all ranks were devoted.

During the remainder of the action this situation prevailed. On the afternoon of the 12th a patrol of the anti-tank platoon went out to Hill 819 and discovered it unoccupied. They went right over the feature without finding enemy. On receiving this report every available man was sent to occupy this feature. The leading platoon, which had been standing by at immediate readiness, was dispatched quickly to seize the feature, but found it strongly held again. Some casualties were suffered from stick grenades and orders were therefore issued for this force to return.

On the afternoon of the 13th, brigade issued a warning order for the position to be abandoned. Final orders were received the following morning for the evacuation to take place during the night of the 14th/15th. The 14th was a day of rain and low clouds over the position and visibility was cut down to about twenty yards. In the afternoon the enemy attempted to occupy a pimple approximately seventy yards in front of our forward defended localities.

If allowed to remain there our withdrawal would quickly have been detected and seriously prejudiced. Two platoons were therefore sent to drive the enemy from this position. This they succeeded in doing, killing one German, wounding another and probably injuring several more as they withdrew. Men from the anti-tank platoon moved forward in the mist and liberally sowed booby-traps around the area. The withdrawal began as soon as it was dark—the Regiment, in the centre, moving out first, covered by the companies of Guards on either flank. Weather conditions were appalling and the night was exceedingly dark.

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As the long column of men groped its way down the mountainside many fell, but fortunately there were no serious injuries. As a result of the bad weather the enemy failed to detect our withdrawal and there was little interference. The Regiment had a long and gruelling march across country on reaching the foot of the mountain along a jeep track constructed from Vallecardi (9803) to Conca (9903) by the divisional reconnaissance regiment. Thence it was moved in transport to the village of Orchi, about five miles south-east of Camino. Here B Echelon had prepared for the return: hot rum, blankets, bivouacs, caves and houses all helped to make the men as comfortable as possible and forget their ordeal of the past five days.

The next day was spent in finding better accommodation, drying clothes and cleaning equipment; and on the 16th the divisional commander visited the Regiment to speak to all officers and N.C.Os. He said that when the attacks on Camino were first made by the 201st Guards Brigade it was not realized that this feature formed one of the main defensive positions hi the German winter line.

The committing of the Regiment to the battle almost resulted in the turning of the scales in our favour, but the German reaction and determination to hold the hill had been so strong that it would have required at least another brigade to ensure success. The maintenance of this brigade on the hill would have been impossible with the prevailing makeshift supply arrangement. Moreover, the break in the weather was going to make the maintenance of troops already fighting on the feature extremely difficult. In view of these facts he had decided to withdraw completely.

The following general observations might be made with regard to the Regiment's action. The failure of the operation was due to a vast number of concealed machine-gun posts well dug in on the reverse slopes of Monastery Hill and the flanking ridges. Owing to the absence of any reserve and the difficulties of crest clearance by artillery it was impossible to deal with them. Enemy machine guns and snipers were so well concealed that in spite of a well-organized system of observation it was impossible to locate them.

For the first time the Regiment encountered snipers dressed in camouflage coats and hoods which blended admirably with the rocks. Enemy machine-gun posts were invariably mutually supporting and also protected by snipers. No effort was made by the enemy to counter-attack with the bayonet. His method was to infiltrate machine guns right round our position and our troops seemed powerless to prevent this or even to detect that action was being taken until surrounded. This was largely due to the intense fire brought to bear on our slightest movement. Once the enemy was detected our troops had little difficulty in dealing with him, but it was the complete lack of knowledge of his whereabouts which made counter-action ineffective. In spite of the divisional commander's remarks regarding supply, and although the task of supplying the Regiment with ammunition, food and water was difficult, in point of fact the leading troops had never really gone short. On the initial move up the hill some forty Basuto porters were employed for carrying such heavy stores as wireless sets, signal cable, mortars and ammunition.

During the night of the 11th/12th a mule train arrived with ammunition, rations and water for the 12th. From then until the withdrawal from the hill on the 14th November all supplies were brought up and put in a common dump from which all troops on the hill drew. So well, in fact, was the force supplied that when the preliminary orders for withdrawal were given, one complete tram of twenty mules went down the hill loaded with rations, and when finally the withdrawal took place it was necessary for a large number of men to carry a water-can each and 100 to 200 rounds of .303 ammunition in bandoliers, in order to clear the stores. Even then, 2-inch mortar bombs, T.S.M.G.(Thompson sub-machine gun.) ammunition and .303 ammunition cartons had to be buried.

The artillery experienced great difficulty not only with the problems of crest clearance but also with meteor, and at first and last light, the most likely times for German counter-attacks and calls for defensive fire, our forward troops suffered some shelling from our own guns.

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Fortunately there were few casualties and the close shooting had the desired effect of breaking up the German attack. Not all this close shooting could be attributed to our own guns, and several days later the counter-battery organization discovered a German battery in the area of Castel-forte (8499) which was firing in a north-easterly direction into the back of our position. The enemy gunners waited until our troops called for defensive fire and then fired short on the same targets to create the illusion that we were being hit by our own guns.

In casualties in this operation the Regiment lost:

Killed.—Two officers, Captain M. H. Lofts and Lieutenant R. B. Bailey, both of whom had been with the Regiment for only about a fortnight, and twenty-one soldiers.

Wounded.—Four officers, Captains J. R. B. Wright, D.S.O. (subsequently died of wounds), and R. J. Vincent and Lieutenants H. B. Curigan and G. J. Mayhew, and sixty-five soldiers.

Missing.—One officer, Lieutenant P. J. Dudman (since reported killed in action) and twenty-six soldiers.

In addition, the Regiment suffered a great personal loss in the death of Captain J. A. Pickering, of the 64th Field Regiment, R.A., who was forward observation officer with A Company and had fought with the Regiment in all the previous battles in the campaign.

As a result of these casualties the Regiment was re-formed into two companies—
B Company, commanded by Major J. R. P. Montgomery, M.C., and
D Company, commanded by Major D. A. Philips.

Three South African officers arrived as reinforcements. These were the forerunners of many others of their country who joined the Regiment later. A brigade patrol company was also formed, to which Lieutenant W. H. Girling and eighteen N.C.Os. and men of the Regiment were contributed. It was still necessary for the Regiment to be prepared to play an operational role if the enemy followed up his success in repulsing the attack on Camino. O group reconnoitred stop-line positions in the area of Vezzarola (9802).

In addition, the platoons of H.Q. Company were reorganized, since it was realized that during the coming winter and fighting in mountainous country men with bayonets would be needed more than the specialist platoons.

No. 3 Platoon was reduced to three detachments because it would never be possible to carry sufficient ammunition to keep more than three mortars in action.

No. 4 Platoon was reduced to one section and

No. 5 Platoon to one troop.

A welcome innovation at this stage in the campaign was the granting of four-day leaves to Naples, Sorrento and other Italian resorts. A Regimental junior leaders' cadre and a snipers' cadre were begun on the 22nd November. There were signs, however, that the Regiment was not to be left long in peace and on the 24th all leave was cancelled. On the 29th November Lieutenant-Colonel A. S. Shaw-Ball, who had been slightly wounded in the Camino battle, had to be evacuated to hospital, and Major J. R. Cleghorn again assumed command of the Regiment. At 1800 hrs. on the 29th forebodings which had been in the minds of all ranks came to fulfilment and at 1800 hrs. O group was summoned to receive preliminary orders for a further attack on Monte Camino.

The essential difference in this new attempt to capture Camino and the first attempt which had ended in failure was that, whereas in the first battle the Guards Brigade and the Regiment had been committed one by one and the plan had been one of constant change and improvisation, the new plan was a carefully organized set-piece attack. Moreover, in practically every instance where a battalion had previously been put on to an objective a brigade was now given the same task.

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In addition, the 46th Division, which had been regrouped on the left, was relieved of its patrolling role on the Garigliano River by the motor battalion of an armoured brigade and was given the task of clearing the Calabritto (9405) basin and holding the start line for the 56th Division's attack. This meant that the whole division, four brigades strong, was available for the capture and exploitation of the Camino feature alone. On the right, also a specially trained force of Americans was to attack Monte Defensa (9409) and Monte Maggiore (9211), two other peaks in the same mountain range. The plan in outline was as follows:

On D minus 1 the 46th Division was to clear the Calabritto basin below Bareback ridge.

On D day the 167th Brigade, with the London Irish Rifles under command as brigade reserve, was to attack up Bareback ridge on the left of the mule track. Simultaneously the 169th Brigade was to assault Razorback ridge and the monastery feature on the right of the mule track. By thus clearing the spurs on either side of the mule track on the first night it was hoped to have the track ready for the passage of porters and other battalions on the morning of D plus 1.

The 201st Guards Brigade, headed by a company of the Coldstream Guards, was then to pass through and down the far slopes towards the German supply centre at Rocca D'Evandro (9209). Artillery support was to be on a tremendous scale. Approximately 500 guns were available to support the attacking troops and these were to fire concentrations of 2,000 rounds on to each known enemy locality and each locality was to receive three such concentrations before attacking troops reached them. In addition, Bofors guns were to fire at selected targets and the Cheshire machine-gun battalion with two companies supporting the attack was to have a third moving forward with the leading battalion.

The question of supply had been thoroughly dealt with and, apart from the native porters, the whole of the divisional reconnaissance regiment and spare men from divisional headquarters were to be allotted to infantry battalions. At the head of the mule track a divisional supply dump was to be established from which all would draw their rations. The divisional engineers were to clear mines from the mule track (some of which were known to have been laid by our own troops in the withdrawal) and to improve the mule track so that it might be used if possible by jeeps.

On the 30th November the divisional commander spoke to all officers and warrant officers on the future operation and later the brigade commander spoke to all ranks. At this stage, however, for security reasons the plan was not divulged. That night the Regiment moved once more down the jeep track to a concentration area at San Clemente, where it took over from two companies of the 2nd/7th Queen's. By this time the jeep track was in very poor condition, in places deep in mud. Before leaving, a special twenty-four-hour ration was issued to each man. This consisted of ten cigarettes, a box of matches, two bars of chocolate, a tin of bully beef, biscuits and tommy cookers. This ration was not to be eaten until ordered. One hundred and thirty-five special mountain rucksacks were also issued to the Regiment in place of equipment. These proved far more comfortable than the 1937 pattern. All heavy kit and food was brought forward under brigade arrangements by jeep convoy and dumped in the square at San Clemente. Carrying parties had to be organized after arrival to retrieve this kit and bring it to the Regimental area. Since the area was under observation all movement was restricted during daylight.

The 1st December was a quiet day, the only enemy activity being some shelling of D Company's area. One officer, Captain Hereford, of the K.S.L.I., arrived as reinforcement. The final orders for the 167th Brigade plan were now issued. The brigade was to be led by the brigade patrol company, which, lightly equipped and wearing patrol boots, was to move ahead of the brigade column on Bareback ridge. If possible, it was to overcome enemy opposition and call upon the leading battalion only when it encountered positions too strong for it. The Regiment, whose objective was to be Point 727 and Coldstream ridge, was to follow. The 9th Royal Fusiliers were to take the wood which had previously been C Company's objective and the 8th Royal Fusiliers were finally to capture Point 819.

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A company of the Coldstream Guards was to swing left after the 9th Royal Fusiliers had taken their objective and take Point 683 above the Calabritto basin. The 46th Division was to begin its attack on the night of the 1st/2nd and the Royal Air Force was to bomb the enemy gun lines throughout the 2nd. The brigade column was to leave the concentration area at dusk on the 2nd and the artillery programme was to begin at about 1730 hrs. It was expected that after such heavy and prolonged concentration the enemy would be either too shaken or unprepared to resist the assaulting troops on their reaching the top of the hill.

The 46th Divisional attack duly went in on the night of the 1st as planned, but by first light on the 2nd it was obvious from the noises of battle from the area of Calabritto that it had not been as successful as expected. The assaulting troops, it was learnt later, had suffered heavy casualties in a minefield short of the village.

The battle continued throughout the day and it was not known at 1600 hrs on the afternoon of the 2nd whether the 167th Brigade start line had been secured. A brigade liaison officer succeeded in making contact with troops of the 46th Division and reconnoitring a route on to the lower slopes of Bareback. This route was not made secure until about 1700 hrs and when the leading troops of the 167th Brigade passed through an hour and a half later, interference was still being suffered from enemy machine guns. It was a remarkable fact that the column of 2,000 men must have passed within small-arms range of the enemy's forward defended localities without being seen. The Regiment moved out from the concentration area at 1645 hrs.

The order of march was: B Company, Tactical headquarters, D Company, main headquarters, the 3-inch mortar detachments under Serjeant Beeson and lastly the porters. These porters, fifty in number, were men from the divisional reconnaissance regiment. The formation adopted by the Regiment on the slopes of Bareback was interesting because it was worked out by the commanding officer and O group on a cloth model in the s.s. Almanzora on the voyage out. Later it had been rehearsed in Iraq and now, a year later, it was used for the first time in action. Major J. R. P. Montgomery, M.C., had been chosen as navigating officer for the 167th Brigade and his party were responsible for taping the main axis. In his absence, therefore, B Company was commanded by Captain M. J. St. Aubyn, M.C. Although it was almost light when the brigade moved off, its passage through San Clemente and up the valley to Mieli was unobserved. No heavy defensive fire was brought down as had previously been experienced. The few enemy shells which came over did little damage, although the Regimental Serjeant-Major was bowled off his feet by blast on one occasion.

At 1730 hrs the Regiment reached the brigade's start point. At this stage everything was so silent that one soldier even asked whether we were to have supporting fire. He was soon answered. Soon after passing through Mieli a tremendous barrage opened from the slopes of Croce behind us and the hillside was aflame with bursting shells of all calibres. Streams of red tracer shells from the Bofors guns, firing on fixed lines, poured into the enemy position and chattering machine guns drowned all other noises.

The column turned off the road and wound its way up through olive groves until the end of the cultivated slopes was reached and the ascent of the steep, rocky face began. It was at this stage that enemy Spandau posts in some low ground in the Calabritto basin opened fire, but by keeping just below the crest of the ridge the column avoided casualties. When once the rocks were reached the going became extremely difficult. The face of Bareback comprised boulders varying from two to six feet in diameter with crevices between them in which a man might slip and get his legs trapped. The lightly clad battle patrol, wearing its rubber-soled shoes, soon moved far ahead, but the heavily laden companies needed every minute of their allotted time to climb the hill. It became impossible also to maintain the planned formation, although the leading company managed to keep correct deployment.

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Soon after reaching the ridge the Regiment suffered some casualties which, it was discovered later, were caused by one of our machine guns, the tripod of which had slipped. B Company reached the forward objective on Point 727 with little opposition at about 2330 hrs, the brigade patrol company having previously routed the enemy in this position. In spite of the tremendous artillery concentration on these positions, some of the enemy were found still asleep in their sangars. Three prisoners were taken. By midnight the Regiment had reorganized on the ridge. B Company was on Coldstream Hill, D Company on Point 727 and Regimental headquarters below them in the saddle.

At 0100 hrs the 9th Royal Fusiliers passed through the Regiment to the left of the wood, which was unoccupied. It became apparent that the time taken in climbing Bareback was so great and the columns were so dispersed that the 8th Royal Fusiliers, who had been given the task of capturing Point 819, would be unlikely to reach the top of the hill before daybreak. Since, moreover, the 9th Royal Fusiliers had so far encountered little opposition and it was essential that Point 819 should be in our hands by daylight, it was decided that the 9th Royal Fusiliers, with one company of the 8th, which had already reached the summit, should attack.

At 0600 hrs the attack went in and Point 819 was soon in our hands and fourteen prisoners were sent back through our lines.

During the night the Regiment had been able to watch the Queen's Brigade mopping up on Razorback and by first light this ridge also was in British hands, although the monastery and the highest slopes were still held by the enemy. As a result of this, the Regiment, during the next few days, suffered some unpleasant shelling and mortaring, directed probably by observation posts on the higher slopes of the monastery feature overlooking the Regiment's position.

Fortunately casualties were not too heavy. By 1130 hrs on the morning of the 3rd December the mule track had been opened and the 1st London Irish moved into a position in brigade reserve in the area which the Regiment had held on the 12th November. Water and rations began to arrive soon after dark on the 3rd and a large dump had soon been established. Even mail was delivered to the forward troops. Rum was also plentiful and was much appreciated, especially since the weather now broke and an icy drizzle set in. It was impossible to keep dry, and many of the hastily constructed sangars soon became miniature water-courses. The Coldstream Guards passed through the Regiment at about midnight to attack Point 623.

So far the battle had gone extremely well and casualties had been light, but it became apparent that if the enemy were to be driven off the feature once and for all, the highest point on Monastery Hill would have to be taken. A Queen's battalion made various efforts to take the hill and, although on one occasion a platoon succeeded in entering the monastery, it was later driven off. On the 5th December the 1st London Irish Rifles made an attack but were driven off this objective soon afterwards. It was decided that night to attempt capture by a new method. The battle patrol, followed by the London Irish, was to pass over Point 819 and capture the hamlet of Colle (9508). It was believed that this was the supply base for the garrison in the monastery and that if this were taken the feature would soon fall.

At 0200 hrs on the 6th the battle patrol was ambushed short of Colle. Many of them were wounded and captured, including Lieutenant W. H. Girling. When the enemy retired, however, thirty-six hours later, they left him lying there and he was rescued by some troops from another battalion. Unfortunately it was necessary to amputate his leg.

After the ambush this plan was shelved and the London Irish returned once more to their position in reserve. During the next afternoon, supported by a platoon of Cheshire machine guns, the hill was taken at last by the Queen's.

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The only other source of anxiety—the situation in the Calabritto basin—was also cleared up with the capture of some high ground by the 16th D.L.I. The battle for Camino was now to all intents and purposes over and on the 7th, after being relieved by the 10th Royal Berks, the Regiment returned to its former billets in the village of Orchi. Before leaving the hilltop parties from the Regiment found and buried a number of our dead from the first attack on Point 819.

After a day and a half of interior economy, baths and cleaning up, the Regiment moved in motor transport to the village of Nocelleto (0141), which was noteworthy for being the farthest point behind the firing line which the Regiment had occupied since September.