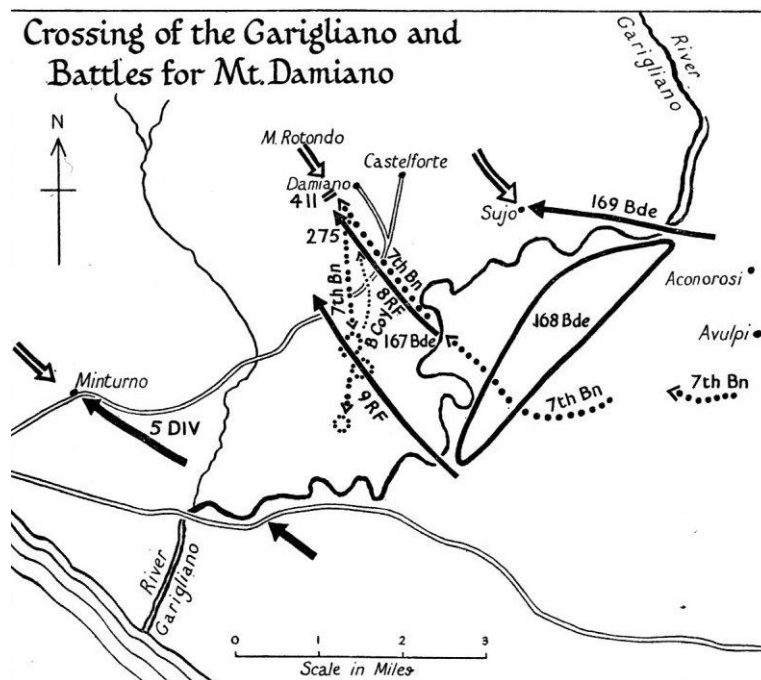


**BASED ON EXTRACTS FROM THE REGIMENTAL WAR CHRONICLE OF THE
OXFORDSHIRE & BUCKINGHAMSHIRE LIGHT INFANTRY VOL3 1942/1944**

**SEVENTH BATTALION
FROM 1st JANUARY TO 31st MAY, 1944**



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

The 4th January, 1944, was celebrated as the official Christmas Day. Christmas dinner consisted of turkey, pork, roast potatoes, cauliflower, beans, Christmas pudding, oranges, figs and nuts. Beer was short, but there was plenty of the local vino. A number of officers joined the Battalion.

A welcome sight was the appearance of a fresh infantry division moving up Route 7 to take its place on the coastal strip. Although its presence was supposed to be surrounded by secrecy, everyone was aware that this was the 5th Division which had been our neighbour in Iraq. The 168th Brigade in the line was ordered to expel the notorious Major Burkhardt from his stronghold. Again he put up an extremely good fight and on the 10th January he hit back so hard at the London Scottish that the Regiment was put at two hours' notice to go to their assistance. The 168th Brigade, however, managed to cope with the situation and the last Germans on the south bank were either rounded up or driven across the river.

The commitments in this future battle were to be rather more limited than had been our previous lot. The 8th and 9th Royal Fusiliers were to cross first and the Regiment was to be in reserve. We were, however, to provide one company to do the actual assault crossing in the 8th Royal Fusiliers' area and hold the local bridgehead whilst the rest of the 8th Royal Fusiliers passed through to their further objective. On the 14th the officers commanding C and D Companies went forward to observation posts at Lauro (9095) and Castrese (8895) to spot German positions. Single, low-flying aircraft were sent over to bomb Castelforte (8499) and to induce the enemy to open fire and give away their positions. Some German positions were spotted after the bombing. The same afternoon the commander of D Company, which had been chosen to make the initial bridgehead, flew over the river in a reconnaissance aircraft. Numerous exercises were carried out in boating on the River Volturno at Capua.

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On Sunday, the 16th January, the divisional commander spoke to all officers on the forthcoming operation; afterwards, to the field officers only, he disclosed the exact extent of the forthcoming battle. He said that as a result of decisions, taken presumably at Teheran, it had been decided that Italy should remain a major theatre of operations throughout the whiter months. With this object the battle about to begin was aimed at breaking the German winter line and capturing Rome. About three days previously the Free French Corps had begun an attack on the right of the Fifth Army front and was making good progress along the Central Apennines. The second phase would be the launching of X Corps across the lower reaches of the Garigliano.

The corps attack was to consist of a crossing on a front of two divisions: the 56th Division on the right and the 5th Division on the left; the 46th Division in the Camino area was to put one brigade across the river mainly as a diversion, but its main effort was to come later in conjunction with the Americans. After crossing the river the corps was to swing to the right up the Ausente valley to outflank the strongly held German positions in the Liri valley.

The 201st Guards Brigade, which had left the 56th Division, was to exploit along Highway 7 towards Formia. About three days after the X Corps attack began the Americans, in front of Cassino, were to begin a frontal assault with the object of bursting through the German main defences. Lastly, at about the same time, a combined operation was going to take place in the neighbourhood of Anzio. It was appreciated that the Germans would use their reserves in countering this threat and that when once the hard crust of resistance had been broken there would be little opposition, and the division therefore was to expect few counter-attacks, but be prepared for highly mobile warfare after about the first seven days. In addition to the troops of the division, a Marine commando and a small Polish commando were to be employed on the divisional front. The Poles, who were all German-speaking, were to get behind the enemy line, disrupt communications and shoot-up staff cars and headquarters.

The plan so far as the division was concerned was: the 169th Brigade to cross on the right in the area of the power station (where B Company had had its standing patrol at Christmas time), capture the high ground on the far bank, and then to swing round behind Castelforte; the 167th Brigade, crossing on the left, was to capture the Salvatito Ridge and Damiano, pinching out Castelforte; the 168th Brigade, after covering the initial stages of the attack from the near bank, was to cross the river and come into divisional reserve ready for exploitation.

On the 16th at dusk the Regiment moved by march route to its concentration area near San Castrese. It was a long and gruelling march and everyone was heavily laden. On arrival in the concentration area everyone dug in. This was proved to be an extremely wise move, for the concentration area was close to a battery of medium guns which received some unpleasant attention from the German artillery during the next twenty-four hours. During the night carrying parties had to be provided to move the assault boats from San Castrese to Maiano de Salto (8696). This long carry was necessitated by the impossibility of moving transport close to the river bank without giving away the forthcoming operation. The boats were stored in the farm buildings without interference, but nobody felt particularly happy, as the 168th Brigade's hold on Major Burkhardt was rather precarious and there was always the chance of a patrol coming across the river and finding the boats.

On the 17th the commanding officer spoke to all ranks and during the day fifty-nine reinforcements arrived whom it was decided to allot to companies as porters. The antitank gunners of No. 5 Platoon were to be used as boatmen and one platoon of B Company for the protection of Regimental headquarters. The brigade plan was as follows. D Company was to make an initial bridgehead in the area of Massa S. Angelo (8596). Two crossing places had been reconnoitred and it was proposed to employ three boats on each crossing. A beach-master and two assistant beach-masters had also been detailed by brigade. Captain Hereford was the Regiment's representative and it was his duty to meet the Regiment on the far bank and set it off in the right direction. The 8th Royal Fusiliers and the Marine commando were to cross behind D Company. The Fusiliers' first objective was the built-up area to the west of Lorenzo (8498).

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Next they were to capture Point 171 and lastly Point 411 on the Damiano feature. Following them came the Regiment (less D Company), which was to be responsible for protecting the right flank down from Castelforte to Seaf Mattei (8597). D Company, after the crossing, was to pass into reserve in the area of its bridgehead. On the left the 9th Royal Fusiliers were to carry out their own crossing near the demolished railway bridge and advance parallel with the 8th Royal Fusiliers. Their final objectives were Point 237 (8398) and the Pimple on the Salvatito Ridge. After this first phase the Marine commando was to move ahead, making for Ventosa (8399) and M. Rotundo (8200).

The Regimental plan was for B Company, less one platoon, to cross first and move up the bank of the river and capture Seaf Mattei. C Company was to follow the main axis of the 8th Royal Fusiliers and to capture the right half of Lorenzo. Headquarters, protected by one platoon of B Company, were to be established in the area of a house at 854972, and the platoon of B Company was then to rejoin the company.

The Regiment left the concentration area at 2100 hrs. and reached the river bank at 2330 hrs. So far enemy opposition had been light and there was little defensive fire. D Company crossed and formed the initial bridgehead without suffering any casualties. On either flank the front was ablaze and on the hills on the right Bofors guns set the undergrowth on fire, lighting up the countryside in a dull, red light. Soon after the Regiment reached the river bank the 8th Royal Fusiliers on the outskirts of Lorenzo began to encounter opposition and a certain amount of badly aimed machine-gun fire began to come back at us. On the far bank the leading companies succeeded in reorganizing fairly quickly, although there was some confusion owing to the splitting necessary to use the two separate crossing places.

At 0100 hrs the whole Regiment had reached the far bank, but was unable to advance owing to the hold-up in front of the 8th Royal Fusiliers. At about 0200 hrs the advance began and the Regiment passed through D Company, which was still holding the initial bridgehead. B Company soon ran into trouble, for a small ravine about 300 yards short of its objective was covered by machine-gun fire. The enemy was by this time fully on the alert and mortar fire began to come down on both banks and the river itself. The whole of B Company's headquarters were wiped out by a direct hit, but luckily the company commander had just left. In order to deal with the opposition in the ravine a platoon was sent round on the left. This joined C Company, which was moving parallel to it, and together they attacked the strong-point. The platoon of B Company suffered about eighteen casualties and it was never established whether these were caused by grenades thrown from the house or booby-traps. The enemy's opposition was eventually overcome and several prisoners were taken. The two companies then continued their advance to their objectives. B Company reported itself in position by 0500 hrs and C Company consolidated in Lorenzo at 0600 hrs. D Company rejoined the Regiment during the morning.

The morning was quiet and a fair number of prisoners came in. At one period a counter-attack seemed to be forming up against D Company's right flank, but this was dispersed by artillery fire. Meanwhile, little was known of the rest of the brigade except that the 8th Royal Fusiliers had captured their first objective and had begun their climb to Point 411. From the heavy mortaring and shelling on this feature, however, it was evident that a big battle was in progress. The 9th Royal Fusiliers had crossed the river by the railway bridge, but had suffered heavy casualties in minefields. Apart from scattered booby-traps the Regiment had been extremely lucky in this respect.

At 1530 hrs the brigade commander visited the Regiment and gave orders to prepare to capture Point 581 (8401) during the night. This would involve an advance of about 5,000 yards and a very stiff climb. The start line was to be on Point 411, zero hour at 0200 hrs and a seven-and-a-half-hour barrage was to cover the operation. Fortunately for all concerned this plan was changed two hours later and the Regiment was ordered to capture M. Rotundo after being relieved by the London Irish.

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Again the start line was to be on Point 411. Orders were therefore issued that all heavy kit, picks and shovels were to be left in the companies' present areas, as they would be of little use on the rocky mountain-side. At 0230 hrs. the Regiment was relieved and moved forward up the slope at Point 411.

This proved a formidable feature. The whole hillside was terraced and every five or ten yards a wall of about six feet had to be climbed. This was a very exhausting process and it was almost light before the Regiment reached the main feature. Here an extremely unsatisfactory state of affairs was found; for the 8th Royal Fusiliers, far from holding a start line on Point 411 itself, were not in complete possession of the feature. The company commander of the forward company indicated the position of his forward troops. Higher up on the crest of the hill some movement could be detected in the half-light and it was not clear whether these troops were enemy or possibly some of the Marine commando, which had become rather dispersed at this stage of the battle.

The commanding officer decided that a two-company attack should be launched. As events proved, his course of action was extremely wise. O group was held at 0600 hrs and the plan of attack was: B Company, right; D Company, left; with C Company supporting with Bren-gun fire. The advance along the ridge to the top of the feature was a little over 300 yards and therefore a barrage was impractical. Major Kennedy, however, did some excellent ranging and promised a ten-minute artillery concentration. Z hour was at 1000 hrs. For the first time the companies carried out a procedure for storming hill-tops laid down in a divisional training letter after the Camino battles. They were to advance in two ranks, riflemen with fixed bayonets and grenades in the front rank, and men with automatic weapons in the second rank. Packs were discarded and left to be carried up later by the reserve company. There was now no sign of life on the hill. The concentration came down accurately and on time and the companies then began their advance. After about fifty yards the enemy appeared with a vengeance and the line of German helmets silhouetted on the skyline proved that the hill was held in some strength. Making what use they could of boulders for cover, the companies worked forward into grenade-throwing range and, having thrown their grenades, rushed the last few yards in a bayonet charge.

The hill was captured and twenty minutes' slaughter began. Those of the enemy's garrison who had not been killed or captured fled precipitately down the far slopes towards Ventosa while our men lay lined along the top as if they were on the firing point of a rifle range, bowling them over as they ran. Although it was never possible to count the enemy dead, at least fifty Germans must have been killed. Even the signallers threw down their wireless sets and grabbed arms from wounded men to have a shot. Unfortunately at this time Major J. Barmby was killed instantly by a sniper's bullet and Major Hunt took command of both companies. The commanding officer came forward and it was agreed that after an hour's pause the companies should advance to the next feature; but during this hour the enemy reacted strongly. It was apparent that the hill was of vital importance, for as a viewpoint it commanded the whole of the Ausente valley up to Cassino. German self-propelled guns began to move along the whole of the road below Ventosa and our medium artillery, firing at extreme range, could not be directed on to them. From hull-down positions these guns opened fire on Point 411 and soon a tremendous barrage of every kind of mortar and artillery was brought down on to the hill.

The two companies, which had suffered only four casualties in the actual attack, sustained over fifty within the next half an hour. It became apparent that no further advance could be made without adequate reinforcements and support and that to remain on Point 411 without protection was out of the question. Accordingly the commanding officer ordered the two companies to take up reverse-slope positions and man the top of the hill with Bren groups and observation posts only under the command of Major Hunt.

During the night an enemy wireless message was intercepted by brigade stating that Point 411 was to be recaptured at dawn at all costs. Accordingly, the Regiment was very much on the alert during the hours of darkness. The enemy counter-attack came in at about 5.30 in the morning. One party of enemy under cover of the darkness worked its way up behind Regimental headquarters on the rear slopes of the hill and as it grew light sniped from a range of about fifty yards.

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A party of the signallers under the Regimental Serjeant-Major and one platoon of B Company charged forward and annihilated this force. Forward, however, the enemy's efforts met with more success and he succeeded in driving D Company from the forward slopes of Point 411. The rear slopes, however, and the spur to the left were still in our hands and the top of the hill became a narrow no-man's-land about thirty yards across. At eleven in the morning No. 40 Marine commando arrived at Regimental headquarters and was placed to guard the left flank. Throughout the day the enemy continued to shell the left spur of the hill and it was obvious that he was building up for further attack.

At 1600 hrs the commandos attacked Point 411 under cover of smoke grenades, but they came under heavy fire from automatic weapons and were forced to withdraw to their original position.

At 1630 hrs the enemy counter-attacked again, this time working round to the right flank. A large number was killed by C Company and Regimental headquarters, but by 1700 hrs. C Company and what was left of D were forced to withdraw from their positions on the rear slope of Point 411 to the left-hand spur around Regimental headquarters, a distance of about 400 yards. The position was now somewhat similar to that prevailing when the Regiment first arrived.

The Regiment's dispositions were as follows:

C Company on the right facing Point 411,
D Company forward facing north, and
B Company guarding the left flank.

After three days and nights of continuous marching, climbing and fighting everyone was now very tired and it was with some relief that the Regiment greeted the Royal Berkshires, who came to take over from the Regiment and the Marine commando. The Regiment returned to a concentration area at Rossi (8394).

Meanwhile, things had not gone well with the rest of the corps attack, and far from breaking through a hard crust and meeting no counter-attacks the enemy was strongly counter-attacking on all sectors. On the right the 169th Brigade had made perhaps the best progress, but the enemy was sensitive to any advance which might threaten to outflank Castelforte. The 169th Brigade had taken Suja (8799), but later lost it again. The 168th Brigade, which had relieved the Regiment in the area of Seaf Mattai, had also been counter-attacked and to the annoyance of our companies had lost all the heavy kit which had been left behind in its keeping. On the left the 5th Division had suffered heavy casualties in its original crossing and after capturing Minturno had experienced heavy counter-attacks.

The Regiment settled down to get what rest it could in its new concentration area, but a defence plan had to be made; for ahead in the mouth of the Ausente valley there was only one squadron of the reconnaissance regiment, fighting as infantry, and, from the noises of battle about half a mile ahead, it was meeting with considerable opposition from enemy infiltrating round the slopes of Salvatito.

During the afternoon the 8th Royal Fusiliers, who had moved into Lorenzo (C Company's old position), were driven out and there seemed a danger of the enemy tapping the lines of communication of the Royal Berkshires and London Scottish on Point 411. This situation was cleared up, however, and the Regiment was reorganized. There were now only sufficient men to form two rifle companies and D Company was disbanded. B Company was commanded by Major Hunt and C Company by Captain O. Loader. A force made up from the porters and men of H.Q. Company was formed and known as Z Force. This was commanded by Captain Hereford.

Late that night orders came that the Regiment was to relieve a company of the London Scottish on Point 275, just behind Point 411, for an attack on the forward pimple of the Salvatito Ridge. Tired as they were, B Company began at 2350 hrs. the climb of Damiano once more and came under command of the London Scottish. This company suffered an extremely trying time during the next forty-eight hours owing to the failure of the London Scottish to maintain contact with it. The Royal Berkshires succeeded in retaking Point 411 during the evening of the 22nd. The next day, however, the enemy began his usual afternoon counter-attack.

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Points 411 and 275 were subjected to extremely heavy concentrations of shelling and mortaring. B Company suffered some casualties, but a company of the London Irish on its right was practically wiped out. It was possible from its position on Point 275 for B Company to see the enemy forming up for his attack on the Royal Berkshires. Unfortunately, the lack of communication meant that it was impossible to bring artillery down. One officer and Serjeant Merry, however, volunteered to climb through heavy shell fire to warn the Royal Berkshires of the pending attack. Colonel J. Baird, D.S.O., M.C., their commanding officer, was grateful for the information, and the 10th Royal Berkshires greeted the enemy on their arrival with showers of grenades. After a bitter struggle, however, the Royal Berkshires lost the hill. Meanwhile, C Company and Regimental headquarters had not managed to remain in their rest area and on the afternoon of the 22nd they came under command of the 9th Royal Fusiliers on the Salvatito Ridge. On the 23rd they supported an attack by the 168th Brigade patrol company which was designed to clear the left slopes of the Salvatito.

On the night of the 23rd/24th the Regiment was relieved and moved back across the pontoon bridge in the area of Epitaffio (8494). On the far side of the river it was met by motor transport and moved right back to the area of San Guiliano. B Company did not arrive until 0930 hrs. in the morning, as its relief by the London Irish on Point 275 did not take place until 0300 hrs.

During the above operation the Regiment suffered the following casualties: killed, two officers and twenty-one soldiers; wounded, seven officers and 115 soldiers; missing, thirty-three soldiers. Nine of the wounded men died later in hospital.

For the next five days the Regiment reorganized and rested. Substantial reinforcements arrived, including a good proportion of officers and men of the Rifle Brigade. Lieutenant-General Sir Richard L. McCreery, K.C.B., D.S.O., M.B.E., M.C., the corps commander, visited the Regiment and the new brigade commander, Brigadier J. Scott-Elliot, D.S.O., arrived on the 27th. By the 28th plans were forming for the Regiment to go into battle again.

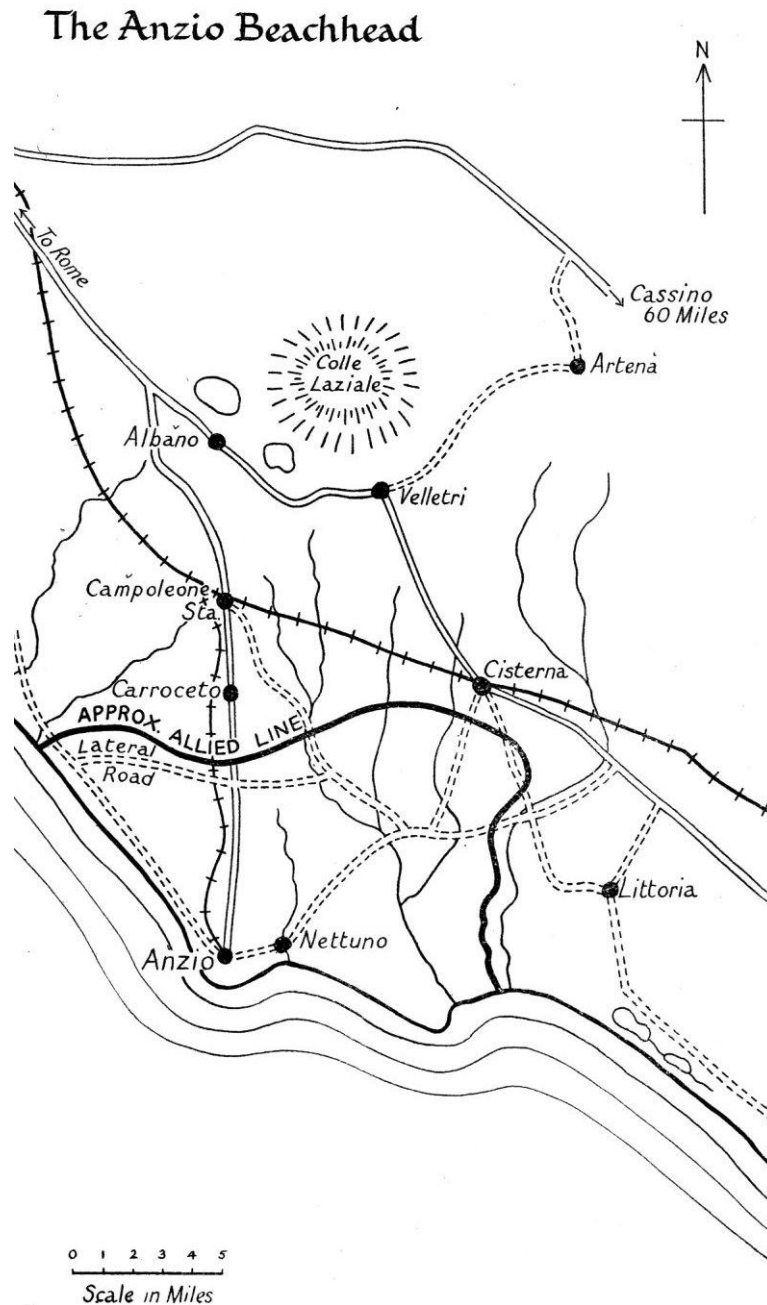
At 1500 hrs on the 28th an O group was held and orders issued for the Regiment to pass through the 2nd/4th Hants on the night of the 29th/30th on Point 411 and capture Monte Rotundo. On the 29th the Regiment prepared for its coming operation. Bowden packs, except in the case of a few specialists, were not to be carried. The commanding officer ordered the dress to be fighting order with one blanket rolled inside a gas-cape strapped on the back of the belt. At 1730 hrs. the Regiment moved in motor transport across the Garigliano. Even at this early stage in the day it became apparent that the operation was not going according to plan. Enemy tracer and flares from the Damiano feature proved that the 2nd/4th Hants were not in undisputed possession of Point 411. These fears were later justified when the Regiment began to climb the hill.

At about 2100 hrs the Regiment hit the rear of the 2nd/5th Hants and as no further progress could be made until Point 411 was cleared the order was given to halt and dig in for the night. The Regiment was now under command of the 169th Brigade. The next morning the divisional commanders of the 46th and 56th Divisions decided that the planned advance to Rotundo was impossible in view of the failure of the Hampshire Brigade to secure Point 411. Orders were now given for the Regiment to relieve the 2nd/4th Hants in their old position slightly short of Point 411 on the night of the 30th. The Regiment's dispositions were: C Company forward on the spur, B Company behind C, and D Company on the left spur. Regimental headquarters on this occasion remained below in the saddle between Points 411 and 275. The remainder of the 167th Brigade also came up to relieve the rest of the Hampshires and the Regiment reverted to the command of the 167th Brigade.

On the 5th/6th February the Regiment was relieved and on the 9th was placed at three hours' notice to embark for the Anzio bridgehead.

A deadlock had set in on the Italian front. Cassino was still held by the Germans. Although the Garigliano to the south had been crossed, very heavy fighting had ensued and the result bore little relation to the forecast, earlier described.

ANZIO BEACH-HEAD



On the 10th February the Regiment moved to Pozzuoli, and after spending two days in camp outside the town embarked on the 12th and reached Anzio on the following day. Shortly before the arrival of the ship bearing the main body of the Regiment the town had suffered one of its customary bombings and one of the cooks, Private Harris, who had already arrived, was slightly wounded.

The Regiment moved in transport to an area amid trees and hedgerows on the coast, about two miles behind the line.

On the night of the 14th February the commanding officer, Lieutenant-Colonel Shaw Ball, received orders to reconnoitre the next morning the area of the 1st Foresters and the 1st King's Shropshire Light Infantry, with a view to taking over on the night of the 15th February all the Foresters' front (three companies), plus two out of three company areas of the K.S.L.I. on the right (Area map reference 842310, Italy 1/50,000, sheet 158, IV Ardea).

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The order of battle was to be: three battalions of the brigade in the line, 8th Royal Fusiliers on the left west, with the 9th Royal Fusiliers beyond them; reconnaissance regiment in support, plus a few tanks, some sapper companies and various American parties, such as tank-busters, etc. An American battalion took over on the right east.

15th.—The commanding officer left at 0830 hrs. on the 15th with the Regimental reconnaissance group, and gunners under Major Kennedy. Unfortunately his jeep was shelled and he himself wounded in the hand. On removing him to the nearest aid post the intelligence officer, Lieutenant Drakard, was wounded in the leg by bombing. Without these two the party returned to camp to fetch the second-in-command, Major Norcock, who started reconnoitring at about 1100 hrs. In spite of interruptions, company commanders were able to go forward to company areas fairly well, though the positions were overlooked, and the party, without guides to show the covered approaches, were at times pinned down in ditches by shell and mortar fire.

The positions were found to be based on independent company areas, fairly well wired in, but with little mutual support possible. No information on the conditions could be passed back to the men, as time did not permit.

It was learned that the areas were quite well stocked with food and ammunition. The enemy in front of forward companies were actively patrolling and were trying to infiltrate on the flanks.

The Regiment moved forward in trucks and, debussing some 700 yards short of Regimental headquarters, marched to its positions without loss but under considerable difficulties, as the night was pitch dark. As the Foresters withdrew their forward patrols before changing over, there were no listening posts out for the second half of the night. Three British tanks used to occupy the area of Regimental headquarters and D Company at night to increase fire power and improve morale. At first light these tanks would withdraw to day positions about 1,000 yards in rear. This they did on the morning of the 16th. Almost at once forward companies, C and B (right), reported enemy concentrating in the dykes. Spandau posts close by made observation difficult.

Artillery defensive fire was laid on on demand, but difficulty was experienced in getting fire in the right place. Maps appeared to be inaccurate; and only one air photograph was held by Regimental headquarters and none by companies. At hourly intervals C Company reported small platoon attacks, which were repulsed.

16th.—At 0730 hrs and 0830 hrs. C Company reported itself surrounded and fighting off attacks. At 0900 hrs. a C Company signaller reported the company commander, Major St. Aubyn, gravely wounded in the head, and soon afterwards there was no more communication. The company was not visible from any other company area.

B Company continued to hold off attacks, but without C Company, A and D Companies came in for attention, including shell and mortar fire, which kept their heads down. At 1000 hrs. A Company went off the air and later the signaller reported that he and an orderly had escaped (the company having been overrun) and that he had seen many men captured and marched away.

D Company, 200 yards in front of Regimental headquarters, held out in two houses until 0930 hrs. They were shelled and several stacks in the area were set on fire. At 0930 hrs. D Company's commander reported the forward platoon and part of the left platoon overrun and received permission to retire to Regimental headquarters' area. This was done during the next hour while a party under Lieutenant Hamilton continued to hold one house and to snipe from the upper windows. The tanks that had been called up retired 500 yards, leaving one bogged just outside the house.

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Regimental headquarters were in a saucer-shaped position split in half by an embanked road running north and south, with a stone culvert in the centre facing east and west. The bed was dry except after rain. The circumference was loosely wired with dannert(Barbed concertina wire); and trenches and holes were dug facing north and south on the embankment on either side and east and west on the banks of the stream's bed. The culvert was sandbagged at each end and formed into a command post by making a floor of boards and laying straw.

At about 1730 hrs. Major Norcock ordered all available men (about fifty from Regimental headquarters and thirty from D Company) to advance to the house area. This was done without opposition, but soon afterwards Major Norcock was killed by mortar fire while moving in front of the houses.

The adjutant, Captain R. Close-Brooks, who was the next senior officer, then took command and withdrew all troops to Regimental headquarters area. That night and subsequently the force was divided equally: on the right or east side the carriers, signallers and orderlies under Lieutenant Hurley; on the west side the pioneers, regimental serjeant-major, intelligence, police and D Company under Lieutenant Hamilton. Captain Coates, now second-in-command, went to report the position to brigade and returned later. At nightfall some improvement to wiring was carried out and the road was closed at the forward end. Rations and ammunition were distributed and the men told that they must hold on. The mortar platoon with line communication remained hi a dyke some 400 yards in rear. A section of medium machine guns lay 200 yards in rear. The gunner observing officer, Captain Barron, was in a house some 400 yards in rear, overlooking the position. It seemed that the 8th Royal Fusiliers had moved back on the left, but, judging by the firing on the right, B Company and the Americans were still holding out.

Henceforward B Company's 18 set (Portable wireless set issued down to company headquarters) was not in communication, but orderlies got through this night asking for stretcher-bearers and reporting B Company's commander, Major Hunt, wounded. Afterwards this line of communication to the rear failed and wireless contact became difficult owing to the need for security, lack of batteries and tuning troubles. The ration party arrived and the wounded were evacuated.

17th.—The position was attacked at dawn, probably only by reconnoitring troops; but the enemy seemed to be moving all round. Every man was ready to meet attacks on all sides, which would probably have been expensive but successful. On being fired at the Huns dropped into furrows and trenches. During the day they were seen crawling or running away and provided excellent sniping practice. The men learned slowly to keep their heads down and still. The enemy's systematic shelling and mortaring of positions and his Spandau fire, supplemented by an anti-tank gun firing high-explosive from the edge of the wood on the west, caused all to keep very low. In fact, any movement by day was risky. Huns occupied both houses in front and, though shelled out when the houses were partly destroyed, returned in half an hour.

The mortar platoon rang up during the morning, reporting that it was being attacked. The men were in a ditch with sentries above. They found themselves being hit from above by grenades, and some were overrun. Three Serjeants and four men escaped and rejoined in the evening. Lieutenant Reyneke was apparently captured with the remainder. The gunners had defensive and SOS tasks laid on for the new situation, and Blackbird was often brought down on enemy parties. These targets had been very carefully registered by shifts of fire and were always well shot, although only 200 yards in front of forward defended localities. Heard machine-gun fire in the morning also, but when a ration party went out in the evening the posts were found deserted, with one gun missing and the other abandoned. The ration party was fired on from the dyke and returned.

At nightfall Captain Manley, quartermaster, arrived, having experienced considerable difficulty in getting through. He brought with him the ration party, water and wireless batteries.

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Orderlies who were sent to B Company came back after two hours, having failed to get through. Orderlies from B Company, however, reported at 0300 hrs. that the company had not received any rations (two days' were held in reserve) and that the batteries of the 18 set were run down. The orderlies were sent back with new batteries, but they returned owing to the presence of enemy en route.

18th.—Quiet morning. Snipers, however, became active in the right-hand house, which about ten of the enemy were seen to enter. Artillery opened on the house, which received several direct hits. Later Captain Coates took forward a small patrol to rout out the remaining bomb-happy Huns from the building. The patrol, however, found the house heavily defended and drew automatic fire while returning. Captain Coates was hit in the arm while holding up some wire from a lying position. Volunteers with a stretcher under Lieutenant Hurley got him back with considerable difficulty, and he remained hi the command post all day until he could be evacuated. Shortly afterwards Lieutenant Runkel's rifle was hit by a sniper, causing wounds to his hands and face.

At nightfall parties were sent back under Lieutenant Johnson to meet rations. These arrived safely. Orderlies sent to B Company failed to return. The medical officer personally brought up a jeep and evacuated the wounded in two trips. The transport officer, Captain Theunissen, also arrived to report that the reinforcements were held up owing to shell fire on the way. These reinforcements never arrived because all the officers, Major Stevens, Captain Theunissen and Lieutenants Loubser and Johnson, had been wounded, and the party had returned to B Echelon. Lieutenant Rose, who had been left for dead in a fallen house, later recovered and returned to B Echelon.

At about 2100 hrs. enemy tracked vehicles were heard approaching the right-hand house. It was thought to be a self-propelled gun. It came up each evening and retired before first light.

19th.—At dawn an enemy platoon marched half-heartedly down the north road into our positions. This was broken up by Bren and rifle fire. During the morning Germans who had dropped into trenches or folds in the ground crawled or ran back under our sniping fire. One prisoner, a paratrooper ex-Luftwaffe, came in and gave himself up. He was fully equipped with blankets, etc., and made himself useful by cooking for Lieutenant Hamilton for the rest of the day. When it began to rain the stream started to flow through the culvert of the command post on both sides. Spandaus from behind and west, and rifle fire, generally supported by mortars and artillery, kept heads down.

20th.—No rations arrived. However, except for water, the situation was well in hand and the remaining water was rationed to last until the next night. After a small attack from in front a platoon, supported by three Spandaus, made an attack from the rear at about 0300 hrs. The attack was beaten off by fire and at the back entrance on the road by a grenade battle. Later an observation post was seen being attacked with flame-throwers. On the wireless set the observer reported "situation boiling." Shortly afterwards communication ceased. Brigade reported Green (London Irish Rifles) and heavy friends coming up to help, but they never made headway that day. The observing party managed to escape after a fight.

The afternoon was quiet. On the east a patrol moved forty yards out and did some good execution on enemy posts with Bren fire. The activity increased hi the evening with odd bursts of shell and mortar fire. Five men attacked the rear approach and were dispersed with grenades. Some batteries opened fire (not our own attached regiment) on our defensive fire tasks. Among several shorts one landed in a trench and killed two men outright twenty yards from the command post. A new regiment appeared to be registering, which indicated changes of battery commander and staff. From this it seemed that relief might be possible shortly.

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Nerves were getting jumpy, the requested reinforcement of thirty men had not been forthcoming, and we were too thin on the ground to be comfortable. There were now at duty Lieutenant Hamilton on the west, Lieutenant Hurley on the east, with Captain Close-Brooks, the adjutant, and Major Kennedy, the gunner, at the command post.

By this time lines had been laid to three points on the east and two on the west, all linked with the command post so that all could hear any conversation or orders. An alarm signal was arranged. The B.B.C. news was taken down on a 38 set every morning and the news broadcast by D5 ("Line signal set) and voice to every man. By this time batteries were running so low that the gunner and brigade sets were used alternately for listening only.

No rations or batteries arrived that night. Just when communications were likely to break down at any minute a tank arrived at about 0630 hrs., deposited batteries, nine cans of water and, of all things, the N.A.A.F.I. rations, and departed hastily. In spite of daylight and rifle and Spandau fire, the batteries and water were distributed at once.

The day was quiet. There were three wounded men in the command post. Another had been shot in the neck outside the command post and from the amount of blood and his condition seemed to be dying, but after half an hour he recovered and walked into the command post, to everyone's surprise and delight.

Although firing and noise continued all round and in rear, the position was not threatened as much as usual. As night fell Lieutenant Hamilton prepared the Piat for a shot at the self-propelled gun when it arrived.

At 1930 hrs. brigade called with orders to prepare to move. All men had been warned of a possible relief during the day and were ready with equipment on and gas-capes and blankets rolled. When a Sherman tank arrived with orders to retire in ten minutes it did not take long to assemble after checking that retirement was authorized by brigade at 1940 hrs.

The wounded and wireless sets were loaded on the tank. One platoon went ahead, followed by Regimental headquarters and the tank, moving backwards, covered by the other platoon. Unfortunately the tank went off the road and became partially stuck. However, after fifteen anxious minutes she regained the road, in spite of 2-inch mortar fire, for the loss of some wireless sets. The cavalcade then went south, passing through the lines of the London Irish without any casualties. Guides met the party and by midnight all were sleeping comfortably, guarded by B Echelon.

Of the Regiment that went in, three officers and seventy-eight men came out.
By the end of 1944 about half the missing were declared prisoners of war.

Of this action the divisional chaplain wrote to Captain Hayter: "Your men have again won very great honour. . . . Your regiment has made a contribution which should inspire many for years to come. They fought for three days and nights without giving ground. I went up to them and found them in good heart, undismayed, quite unbroken. There was no unavoidable loss. They had to fight to save the day. They fought and saved it. Such a battalion will live again. Give Ralph Cruddas my greetings and tell him how proud we are of his battalion."

A problem in the dark was the equal division of supplies of batteries, water and ammunition among the defenders on each side of the road and to ensure that each man received his share. Serjeant Salter worked the distribution and C.S.M. Briggs arranged delivery. Much ammunition previously dumped was lost for two days before being found.

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Mention must here be made of the tireless efforts of Captain Montgomery, R.A.M.C., and all under his command in rescuing and evacuating wounded, often in circumstances of the greatest danger. All who saw him personally seeking for and attending to casualties on the battlefield were inspired by the realisation that if wounded they would be cared for no matter how hot the enemy fire might be; and we are proud that he should have been awarded the military cross for the services he rendered to the Regiment.

In his work he was particularly assisted by Private Fletcher, his driver, who continually drove his jeep fearlessly into the front line and carried the wounded back to the aid post. It is calculated that Fletcher, who was only 19 years old, was responsible for the rescue of some forty wounded men. It was a tragic blow that a few nights later he should have been killed by a shell while driving the quartermaster with rations to the rest area. He was one of the bravest and most cheerful men we knew, and his death cast a shadow over the whole Regiment.

Even while the Regiment was out of the line it was—in common with all troops in the Anzio beach-head—subjected to shell fire, and movement along roads and tracks was always a dangerous proceeding. On the night when the quartermaster returned from the alarming experience of having his young jeep driver killed beside him, the B Echelon area was heavily shelled. Fortunately vehicles and men were all well dug in, and no damage was done. Notwithstanding this double attempt upon him Captain Manley insisted on taking rations up on the following night, but once again he came under fire and had to run for his life to the shelter of a slope while some fifty shells—fortunately armour-piercing—plunged into the track along which he had been travelling.

The three officers who came out of the line all received promotion on the spot. Major Kimmerling was posted to us and became second-in-command; and a draft, in strength about a company, under Captain Ward, joined from the Wiltshire Regiment.

The Regiment reorganized in two rifle companies out of the remnants of D and H.Q. Companies; and when after some days the Regiment was ordered to return to the line it went forward with Major Close-Brooks in command, Captain Vincent adjutant, and three rifle companies:

A (Captain Mayhew),
B (Captain Hurley) and
D (Captain Ward).

The 3-inch mortar detachments were placed under command of Serjeant Hulett.

A forward dump was established just south of the lateral road under the supervision of Serjeant Biswell; behind him again were the Cheshires' medium machine guns and a carrier section in reserve under Serjeant Hook. B Echelon remained in its original area. On the night when the Regiment moved up, Major Kimmerling went ahead with the colour-serjeants to establish the forward dump. The area was shelled and he was wounded in the back. Serjeant Biswell, who arrived later, discovered that the Fusiliers had sent him back to the advanced dressing station and were in process of handing over the dump to the colour-serjeants. At about 2000 hrs. Captain Vincent arrived at the head of the Regiment. There had been some casualties from shelling on the way from the rest area. A platoon of D Company lost all its junior N.C.Os. in this shelling (the section commanders being ahead with the platoon commander), but Private Pittaway at once took over command and calmly led the platoon to its appointed destination. Private Pittaway was only 19 years old, and for his cool and resourceful action he was awarded the Military Medal. Some two hours later the moon went down, and Captain Vincent led the Regiment up to the ravines in and around which were the positions the companies were to hold.

The take-over passed without a hitch and was completed by about 0200 hrs. Regimental headquarters were established in a sandbagged emplacement dug into the almost vertical side of a deep ravine, along the bottom of which a muddy stream ran through thick undergrowth beneath overhanging trees whose trunks and branches were scarred by the splinters of numerous mortar bombs.

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The ravine was approached across a flat and open plain which lay between it and the lateral road; each night the jeep train assembled at a group of buildings on this road, known as "Sheep-pen Farm," crossed the plain to jeep-head on the edge of the ravine, whence carrying parties, ably shepherded by the tireless quartermaster-Serjeants, humped boxes of food and ammunition to the companies—not a pleasant task when the enemy were putting up parachute flares along the front and sending bursts of small-arms fire cracking across the plain.

The companies were troubled a little by enemy patrols and raiding parties but chiefly by mortar and shell fire, in particular by an infantry gun which constantly harassed them until Major Kennedy located it. After this it worried them no more. Fortunately communications worked well despite the constant breaking of the lines by mortar and shell fire, the difficulty of keeping the wireless sets out of the mud and the mud out of the wireless sets. For this the Regiment has to thank the efforts not only of the signal officer, Lieutenant Lambert, but also of Serjeant Gibbs (who took over after Lieutenant Lambert was wounded) and Corporal Ward, both of whom have since been awarded the military medal, and of the entire signal platoon.

The forward section posts were in many cases only fifty to a hundred yards from the enemy, and grenade battles were frequent. In fact, Captain Hamilton had a habit, very disturbing to the enemy, of crawling out at night, lobbing a few grenades into their trenches and escaping in the ensuing confusion. The proximity of the enemy often made it impossible to remove casualties by day. Notwithstanding the difficulties, however, the stretcher-bearers continued their work at every opportunity, and particular mention should be made of Private Scriver, whose courageous efforts saved many lives.

On the 1st March Lieutenant-Colonel D. J. B. Houchin, M.C., was posted to command the Regiment, and on the 3rd Major R. Gillespie joined as second-in-command.

A few days later it became apparent that, at long last, a relief was going to take place, and that we should be handing over to the 1st Green Howards.

Great preparations were made to ensure a smooth take-over. The relief was to be carried out on two successive nights, so that at no time would the sector be manned entirely by troops who had not seen the ground in daylight. For several successive nights reconnaissance parties went up in order that the supply of guides for the relieving troops should be adequate. In addition tape was laid the whole way from the rest area to jeep-head, those visible to the enemy being taken up before daybreak. Mention must here be made of Privates Billing and North of the intelligence section, who carried out this tiring and dangerous task night after night, and spent their days in handing over to the newcomers the intricate details of their department.

The adjutant was recalled from the line and sent with the advanced party to the Regiment's next destination. Corporal Wheatley, who had run so successful an officers' mess in the more spacious Cascano days, was also recalled from the company in which he was commanding a section, but he was wounded hi the jaw on the way back. On the 8th March the relief was completed and all that remained of the Regiment assembled in the B Echelon area.

We were ordered to leave behind our new friends from the Wiltshire Regiment. When the last gun and the last vehicle had been handed over we said farewell to them (not without a sense of guilt at seeing their envious faces) and drove to the harbour.

Fourteen officers and about 180 soldiers embarked without further mishap and watched Anzio sink below the horizon. . . .

It was a sleepy but thankful remnant which reached Pozzuoli once more and drove in buses to Nocera. Arriving at about 0400 hrs. it was greeted by Captain Vincent and Major Keith, and lodged by them in a whilom spaghetti factory.

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At Nocera a quantity of food and clothing was stolen. The thief was caught red-handed, however, and marched by the provost serjeant, Serjeant Biswell, to the local carabinieri, who duly put him in chains and, we presumed, cast him into a dungeon. The only repercussion was a visit from a polite detective who wished to know the name of Captain Philips's maternal grandparents, an apparently irrelevant piece of evidence, but, it seems, necessary under Italian law.

We moved from Nocera on the 15th March in two parties, one by road and one by train. The fact that the entraining station was farther away from our destination than Nocera station (at which the train stopped on the way) was typical of the whole journey. The total distance was only 150 miles, but it took some forty hours to complete. Not only were we not expected but also at times railway officials did not know where the train was supposed to be going; and we were often asked our destination. However, first impressions of Matera gave most of us cause to forget the uncertainties of the journey.

The Regiment was lodged in a seventeenth-century boys' school in which room was found for a canteen, a Serjeants' mess, a corporals' room and a quiet room. The officers' mess was housed near by in a palatial mansion with painted ceilings and tapestried walls, and, best of all, taps which really produced hot and cold water. (So often in Italy these objects appeared to be ornamental rather than functional.)

But movement orders soon came, and with their arrival we had to say farewell to Captain Broggin, "Alfred," who had been so helpful to us, and to certain less official Italian employees who had to be left behind, although they volunteered to accompany the Regiment to the ends of the earth.

On the 24th March we regretfully left Matera and moved by road to a camp some four miles outside Taranto. This was pitched on a stony plain overlooking the harbour and exposed to the fury of all the winds of heaven. Rain, and even snow, fell constantly. Many hitchhiked hopefully into Taranto, in search of warmth and comparative comfort; but most returned sadder and wiser men. The rest of the time was chiefly taken up in ensuring that the camp did not become airborne and sail seawards; and it was with few regrets that on the 28th the Regiment marched to the quayside and shook the dust of "sunny" Italy off its collective feet.

The Regiment sailed from Taranto on the 29th March in the Empire Pride, reaching Port Said on the 3rd April. It then moved to El Tahag, whence all ranks were sent to Cairo on short leave. Preparations were made to move to Gaza for training. In the meantime reinforcements arrived, enabling further reorganization to take place, and the tempo of training increased.

The commander-in-chief, General Sir Bernard Paget, lost no time in making contact.

With the sailing from Italy the Regiment entered upon a new phase of life. The old original Regiment had passed away with so many killed, wounded and prisoners. Of those left most were exhausted and the shock of battle had left some with a natural loss of enthusiasm for battle. Others who had had more nerve-racking experiences required strong stimulation to enable them to carry out the daily toil.

How could this Regiment, having lost the best of its members and its inspiring and admired commander, rise again to the high standards of the past? In this state of battle exhaustion loyalties were liable to weaken, eyes dwelt on the past and thoughts dwelt on home and family. Some felt shame, others jealousy. Those left out of battle may be looked upon with suspicion, while some who had been to battle exaggerated their ability and values.

However, amongst all the natural human weaknesses was an intense pride in the Regiment. Its strength was almost unbelievable, and, based on that sure and sound foundation, the work of reconstruction started, leading to still greater success.

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The task was not only to recognize and train the Regiment but also to bind together as a team the old and the new, and to infuse into it a spirit of enthusiasm and determination to be ready for battle after only a short break. Inevitably some old members had to be left out of the team and found more restful work. They had done their job well and their spirit passed on to the new.

At this time there was a possibility of the Regiment being disbanded, to allow a Regular battalion of the Welch Regiment to join the division. Finally a battalion of the Royal Berkshire Regiment was disbanded and the Regiment became the junior battalion of the division.

In preparing for the move to Gaza precautions had also to be taken in case of Arab-Jewish outbreaks of violence. The Jews even at this time were collecting arms for future use. However, owing to the internal security problem in Egypt the move to Gaza was cancelled and the division moved to Cairo.

On the 25th April the Regiment moved into Beni Yousef camp.

General Sir Bernard Paget took an early opportunity to visit the Regiment. After a talk to the Serjeants he had lunch in the officers' mess. During the stay in Egypt he proved not only a great friend to the Regiment but of the very greatest assistance in the difficult task of reorganization. Captain Thompson was at one time about to go into action in Italy when the magic wand worked and he was rushed down the length of Italy into a plane to Cairo.

The general's visits gave a special standing to the Regiment and helped in the making of an excellent Regimental spirit.

Beni Yousef camp was one of those monstrosities of army life which can easily be made really uncomfortable. General Paget expressed himself dissatisfied with the amenities and said he would send a staff officer to look round the camp. However, the morning after his visit he suddenly appeared again accompanied by a mass of red hat-bands.

Stepping over the bodies of men cleaning the floors, the long procession assembled in the Serjeants' mess and was lectured in no uncertain terms on the amenities available. At the end of a tour of the camp the senior officers in attendance were willing to promise the world in order to escape.

From now on the commanding officer was the evil man of Cairo. Any mood or decision of the commander-in-chief which the staff at G.H.Q. felt was awkward was blamed on him. Almost daily the Regiment was visited by officers of ever-decreasing rank, until mere barrack wardens came with the required amenities. This, combined with the visit by night of local Egyptians seeking to remove the amenities, kept the Regiment quite busy.

Reinforcements came principally from anti-aircraft regiments just in process of disbandment. They were naturally very ignorant of infantry tactics and weapons, and had specialist qualifications unsuited to infantry. They were of excellent physique and very keen to take a more active part in the war. They soon became proud of the Regiment and almost more Regimental than the old members. By strictly adhering to the various distinctive Regimental customs and dress, and by inculcating the proud spirit of the older members, the Regiment became a most wonderful team of friends and enthusiasts.

Training was most difficult and drafts arrived at varying times. Anti-aircraft officers attended tactical courses in Palestine. N.C.Os.' cadres had to be organized continuously and study days for officers were held every week. Training was principally individual, but minor tactics were included.

Plans were made for a move to Syria, and officers flew to Beyrouth to prepare exercises. On their return the plan was changed, the division having been ordered to return to Italy. Fourteen days were allotted for platoon, company, battalion and brigade training and tank co-operation. In order to obtain more space the Regiment was moved to the New Zealand camp at Maadi on the 14th June.

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The period at Maadi was most enjoyable, thanks to the excellent and most helpful co-operation of the New Zealanders, not only with training facilities but also with social amenities.

The progress made during this very intense period was most satisfactory, the Regimental and brigade exercises being so staged as to give the soldiers, many of them for the first time, a full picture of the Regiment in attack and defence. Some excellent demonstrations showing infantry tank co-operation were organized by Major Gillespie, which the whole brigade attended.