

NOVEMBER 2008

THE QUEEN'S ROYAL SURREY REGIMENT ASSOCIATION



NUMBER 84

President

Colonel A. C. Ward OBE

Chairman

Lieutenant Colonel F. B. Herd TD JP DL

Association Secretary and Editor

Major A. W. Russell MBE

Benevolence Secretary

Major J. C. Rogerson

Association correspondence to:

42 Lincoln Drive

Pyrford

Woking

Surrey GU22 8RR

Telephone/Fax: 01932 344150

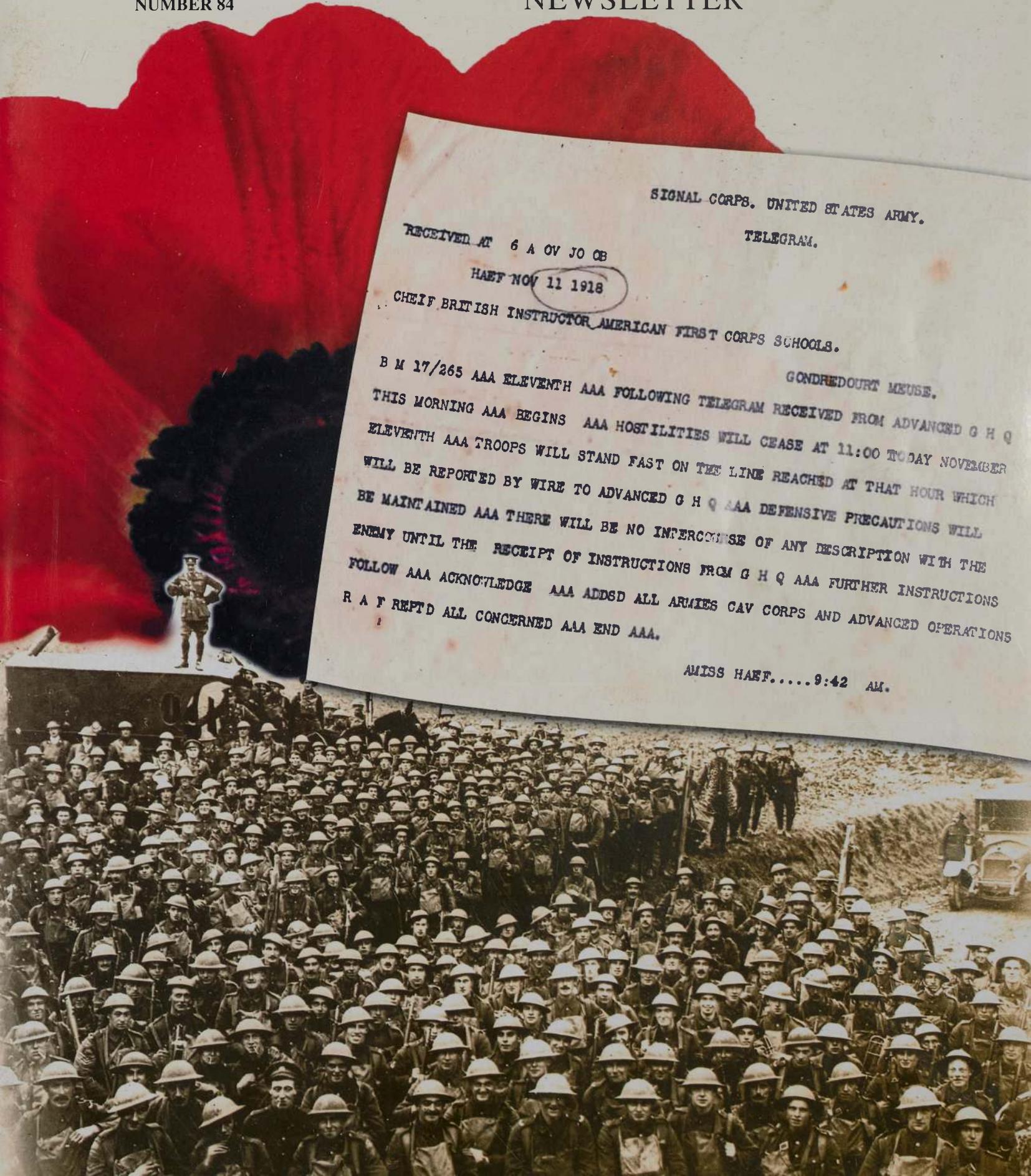
E-mail:

secqueensroyalsurreys@hotmail.co.uk

Regimental website:

www.queensroyalsurreys.org.uk

NEWSLETTER





Forecast of Events

2009	
10th February	SOBRAON DAY (1846).
16th March	The Queen's Royal Surrey Regiment Association, Charity Trustees and Officers' Club Meetings - Clandon.
23rd April	YPRES DAY (1915).
23rd April	The East Surrey Regiment Officers' Reunion Lunch - The RAF Club.
7th May	Golf Society Spring Meeting - Sudbrook Park.
16th May	ALBUHERA DAY (1811).
18th May (date tbc)	President's Reception for the Mayors of Surrey - Clandon.
1st June	5 Queen's OMA Annual Dinner - Farnham. Details from: I Chatfield, 13 Wood Road, Farncombe, Surrey GU7 3NN.
1st June	THE GLORIOUS FIRST OF JUNE (1794).
7th June	The Queen's Royal Surrey Regiment Association Annual Church Service - Guildford Cathedral 1130 a.m.
1st August	MINDEN DAY.
9th September	SALERNO DAY (1943)
12th September	6th(Bermondsey), 2/6th and 2/7th Queen's Royal Regiment OCAs Combined Reunion.
3rd October (tbc)	East Surrey Regiment OCA Reunion - Clapham Junction.
5th October	The Queen's Royal Surrey Regiment Officers' Club Ladies' Luncheon - Clandon.
6th November	The Queen's Royal Surrey Regiment Association Annual Reunion - Union Jack Club.
20th December	BRITISH BATTALION DAY (1941).

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President's Notes

It is good to report how active our Association continues to be. On The Glorious First of June we had a good turn out for our annual Cathedral Service at Guildford followed by nearly 200 enjoying a good gathering in the Refectory. (Note for your diaries; Service 2009 will be on 7th June; lunch and liquid refreshments are provided by the Association at no cost to those attending.)

I've also attended 1/6th Queen's lunch at The Union Jack Club so well organised by Maurice Nason, and the East Surrey Reunion at Clapham Drill Hall with about 100 attending. Thank you John and Jan Broom for all your hard work arranging that. 5 Queen's OMA continues to have fantastic turn outs; thanks to Ian Chatfield for all the extra work organising. Our Reunion at the Union Jack Club is always a sell out. Thanks also must go to someone who seems to be at all the Reunions - Mick Etherington selling Regimental merchandise. Unfortunately, attendance at The Officers' Club Ladies lunch was very down this year as were the numbers at the Warrant Officers and Sergeants AGM. All of us who arrange or lead our branches or clubs must, I suggest, start to think how we wind down.

As I have stressed before, the primary purpose of our Regimental Association is Benevolence. This year we expect to hand out some £40,000 in grants to our veterans or their dependents. This is in addition to the £6,000 donated to the Army Benevolent Fund. If you know someone needing help - do tell us or contact your local SSAFA. In spite of what you may have heard or read about the current financial crisis our ability to give benevolence help will not be diminished.

I hope that you enjoy in this issue Tony Russell's account of the 65th Anniversary of the taking of Scafati by 1/6th Queen's led by Lt Col (later Major General) Michael Forrester.

On behalf of all in the Association may I thank: our Secretary Tony Russell, our Museum Manager Ian Chatfield, and all Branch Chairmen and secretaries for all they do supporting those who have served in our former Regiments.

Gill and I wish you all a very Happy Christmas and 2009.

Tony Ward



The Princess of Wales's Royal Regiment

The Regiment is in fine form and now back to active service deployment after a year of consolidation, arms plot moving and training.

1st Battalion (Based in Germany - Paderborn)

- Currently have a Warrior Company in Afghanistan until end of February 2009.
- The Battalion has now received orders that they will deploy with 20 Armoured Brigade to Iraq in November 2008 for a 6 month tour until May 2009. They will replace 7 Armoured Brigade. The Battalion will receive support from the 3rd Battalion. Their task will be "providing support and mentoring to the Iraqi Army". The operation will be called Operation Telic 13.

2nd Battalion (Based in Cyprus)

- Currently have Bn HQ plus 1 Rifle Company and B Company deployed to Afghanistan. All under separate commands. These deployed as theatre reserves.
- In August 2008 - A Coy were deployed. An amazing action took place where a platoon held off 400 Taliban for 9 days as they protected a communication system called Roshan Tower. The action has been equated to the Battle of Rorke's Drift.

Roshan Tower



Keeping the Taliban at bay



Engaging the enemy

3rd Battalion

The Battalion is providing individual re-enforcements for 5 Scots and soon 1PWRR - total deployed will be up to 50 All Ranks.

Annual Camp 2008

The Combined Annual Camp of 3PWRR and The Puerto Rican National Guard took place on Salisbury Plain Training area in June this year. It was an excellent opportunity for both nationalities to share military knowledge and tactics prior to deployment.

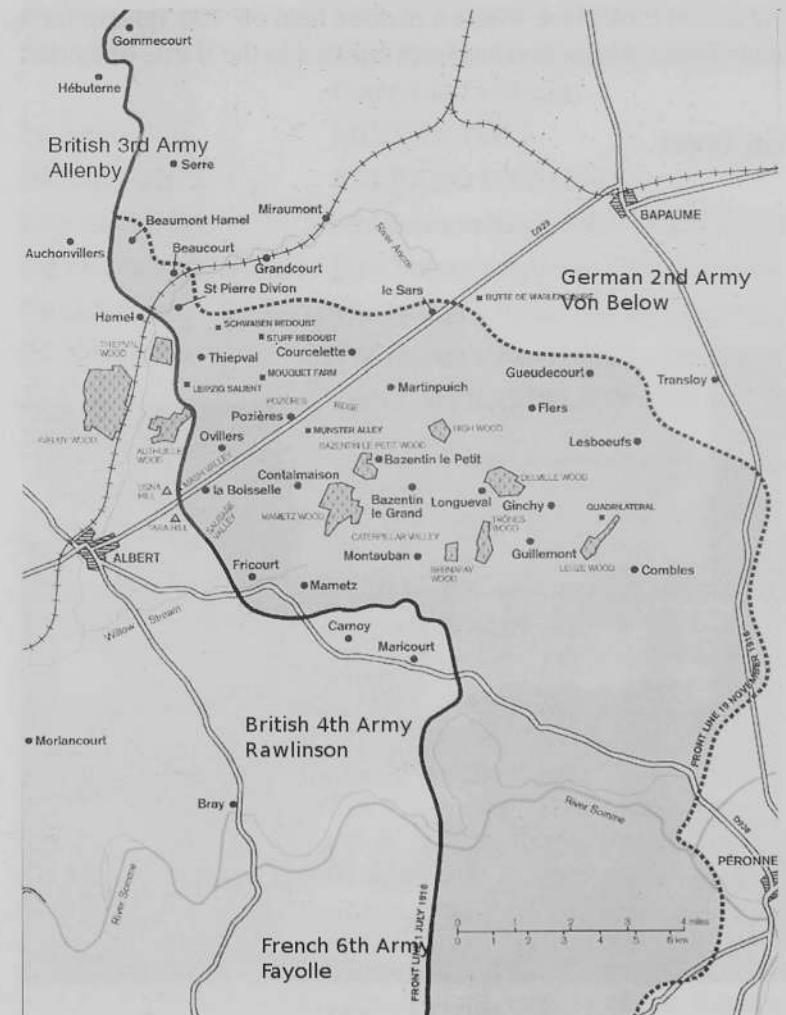
The First Day of the Battle of the Somme: July 1st 1916 (By Ian Chatfield)

The Battle of the Somme began on 1st July 1916 and lasted for five months; it was one of the most bitterly contested and costly battles not only of the First World War but in the history of the British Army.

The Battle was planned as a joint French and British operation. The idea originally came from the French Commander-in-Chief, Joseph Joffre and was accepted by General Sir Douglas Haig, the British Expeditionary Force (BEF) commander, despite his preference for a large attack in Flanders. Although Joffre was concerned with territorial gain, it was also an attempt to destroy German manpower. At first Joffre intended to use mainly French soldiers but the German attack on Verdun in February 1916 turned the Somme offensive into a large-scale British diversionary attack to relieve the pressure on the French.

General Sir Douglas Haig took over responsibility for the operation and with the help of General Sir Henry Rawlinson, came up with his own plan of attack. Haig's strategy was for an attack on a 15 mile front between Serre, north of the Ancre, and Croul, north of the Somme. Five French divisions would attack on an eight mile front south of the Somme, between Croul and Peronne.

To ensure a rapid advance, 1437 Allied guns pounded German lines for a week before the attack, firing 1.6 million shells at a cost to the British tax payers of £6 million. British commanders were so confident that this bombardment would obliterate the German defences and defenders that they ordered their troops to walk slowly towards the German lines. Once they had been seized, cavalry units would pour through to pursue the fleeing Germans. Junior commanders were told "There will be nothing alive not even a rat and your men will reach Pozieres before they find a live German".



trenches with enthusiastic discipline the Infantry advanced with a few exceptions steadily in open order as they had been trained to do.

On the first day of the Somme, the British lost 19,240 dead, 35,494 seriously wounded, and 2,152 missing: 57,470 casualties in total.

That equated to two for every yard of their front, more than the combined battle casualties of the Crimean, Boer and Korean Wars, and 15 times the British casualties suffered on D-Day in Normandy on June 6th 1944.

At 7.30 am on 1st July we had three forbear battalions involved in the initial attack: **2nd Bn.** The Queen's part of 91st Inf. Brigade. 7th Div; **7th Bn.** The Queen's part of 55th Inf. Brigade 18th Div; **8th Bn.** The East Surrey Regt. also in 55th Inf. Brigade 18th Div. Many more of our Battalions would join in the battle before it ended 140 days later.

What did it all achieve? On the ground, on the right some 7 miles, on the left little, and the line was still some 4 miles from Bapaume through which it had been hoped the Cavalry would sweep after a successful breaking of the German line on a wide front immediately after 1st July. The final casualties for the British Army over the 140 days of the Battle were over 400,000, and for all the Armies engaged (British, French, Commonwealth, and German) over 1,300,000.

Against this for the Allies, the German pressure on the French at Verdun was relieved and the morale of France was sustained when it was near to breaking.

For the Germans their casualties were such that they began to see that the War might no longer be won. Indeed a German General wrote *The Somme was the muddy grave of the German field Army*; another wrote "*Somme*. The whole history of the world cannot contain a more ghastly word.

For the British Infantryman there had been much horror and misuse, but through it all he had borne up and upheld the traditions of the past, and perhaps in achieving this the special wry self-mocking humour of the British soldier shone through and sustained him. When the time came he stuck it out and saw things through with a determination and resolution as fine as any that had gone before in the annals of the British Army.

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Centenary of the Territorial Army

(by Brigadier Geoffrey Curtis)

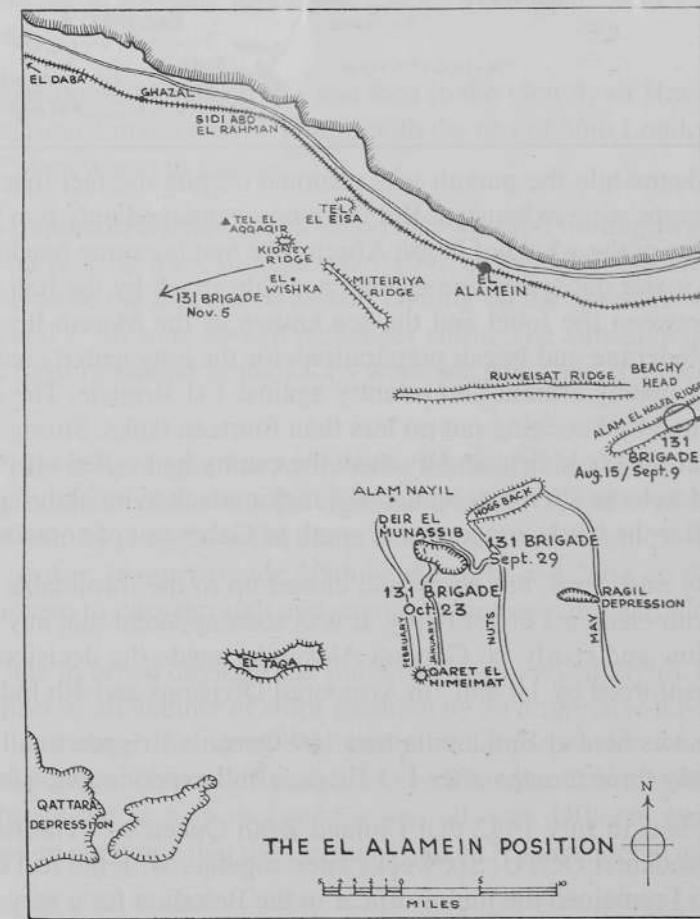
Surely there could be no finer tribute to the Territorial Army in its Centenary Year than the two Queen's Brigades in the Second World War. In 1939 with the prospect of war becoming increasingly likely the decision was taken to double the Territorial Army so the 5th, 6th and 7th Battalions of The Queen's Royal Regiment, which had already been brigaded into 131 Queen's Brigade of 44 Home Counties Division, were each instructed to form a second battalion. The three original battalions were titled 1/5th, 1/6th, and 1/7th Queen's and their sister battalions became 2/5th, 2/6th, and 2/7th Queen's. Enthusiasm was such that by this time 5th Queen's was already recruited up to full strength. Unbelievably only five months later in August 1939 all six battalions were mobilised.

In April 1940, 44 Division was deployed to France and 131 Brigade saw action with the BEF before being evacuated through Dunkirk, while the three second line battalions which were sent out to France supposedly for work on the Lines of Communications were caught up in the general chaotic situation and eventually escaped through Cherbourg. On their return to England both Brigades were immediately engaged in anti-invasion duties and later, when the threat had subsided, in training for future operations during which time the second line battalions were reorganised into 169 Queen's Brigade in the newly formed 56 London Division (The Black Cats).

It was in May 1942 that 44 Home Counties Division sailed for the usual unknown overseas destination including of course 131 Queen's Brigade. I don't suppose it came as a great surprise to anyone that their voyage ended at Suez towards the end of July. But what they would not have been expecting was that their settling in and acclimatisation period would end abruptly on 14th August when they were ordered forward to join 8th Army on the Alamein Line.

131 Bde was deployed on the Alam Halfa Ridge which Montgomery, newly arrived in the Middle East, regarded as vital to the defence of the line and the possibility of the Axis Forces breaking through to Alexandria and the Canal Zone. On 31st August the expected onslaught came and as anticipated the main thrust was in the South towards the Alam Halfa Ridge: but the attack failed to achieve a breakthrough and by 3rd September the enemy forces began to withdraw.

Now came the unspectacular "tidying-up" phase, eliminating enemy pockets ahead of the major battle to break-out from the Alamein Line, which proved to be costly operations particularly for the Infantry. On the night of 23/24th October when the main attack started 131 Queen's Brigade's role was to secure bridgeheads through the minefields for the armour to pass through. How often in the month's ahead were the Infantry told "All you have to do is secure the start line for the armour to pass through"! And how often it turned out to be a hell of a costly fight. And so it was on this occasion.



Casualties were very severe and the loss of many of the pre-war TA Officers was particularly significant. 44 Home Counties Division was broken up, but after a brief pause to absorb reinforcements 131 Queen's Brigade was transferred to 7th Armoured Division as the Lorried Infantry Brigade. And so it was that the long association of the Regiment with the Desert Rats began and was to endure until the end of the war in Hamburg. But now they were poised for the breakout.

On 4th November the advance began, but heavy rain impeded progress and prevented 7th Armoured Division cutting off the enemy withdrawal. Indeed 131 Brigade became bogged down in their TCV's and it was not until 12th November that they caught up with the armour - an interesting contrast with today's armoured infantry battalions. The following day The Queen's occupied Tobruk unopposed where the port facilities were vital to maintain the pursuit of the retreating Axis forces. Three months and 1400 miles from Alamein, 7th Armoured Division entered Tripoli after an outflanking move through the Jebel where they fought a series of battles against enemy rearguards about Tarhuna. Six months later 169 Queen's Brigade were training in this inhospitable terrain for operations in the mountains "somewhere in Europe".



Meanwhile the pursuit was resumed despite the fact that the armoured regiments were severely short of tanks and the troops were exhausted. But there now remained only two places where the enemy could realistically hope to prevent the loss of the whole of North Africa. The first lay some one hundred miles beyond Tripoli where the French had constructed a major defensive line against possible attack by the Italians. This had now been strengthened into a formidable barrier between the Jebel and the sea known as the Mareth line. By mid February the Division had closed up to the line at Medenine and began preparations for the anticipated counter-attack. On 6th March a determined assault was launched by enemy armour and infantry against 131 Brigade. The anti-tank platoon of 1/7th Queen's in particular scored lasting fame by knocking out no less than fourteen tanks. Strong attacks continued all day mainly against the Queen's Brigade, but they held firm and by dusk the enemy had called off their onslaught with heavy losses particularly in tanks. On 20th March the 8th Army launched a major attack to breakthrough the Mareth line. 7th Armoured Division were in reserve and after the battle concentrated south of Gabes out of contact for the first time since Alamein.

By mid April, 8th Army had closed up to the formidable mountain barrier at Enfidaville where first contact was made with elements of 1st Army. It was soon apparent that any attempt to breakthrough here along the coastal strip would be slow and costly, so General Alexander made the decision to launch the final assault on Tunis from the 1st Army front reinforced by 1st and 7th Armoured Divisions and 4th Indian Division from 8th Army.

It was here at Enfidaville that 169 Queen's Brigade finally joined the Order of Battle of 8th Army having left England only three months after 131 Brigade and experiencing a lengthy and remarkable venture. But that's another story!

It was in July 1942 that I joined 2/6th Queen's - "The Bermondsey Boys" - at Long Melford in Suffolk straight from Sandhurst OCTU. Six weeks later, together with the rest of 56 London Division, we embarked for somewhere overseas so I remained the junior officer in the Battalion for a very long time! During the voyage the ship carrying 169 Brigade's

transport was sunk so rendering us non-operational and I have often wondered whether otherwise we would have joined 8th Army much earlier.

However we eventually ended up in Iraq and the whole Division was stationed in the area of Kirkuk with the task of denying the oil fields to the Germans should they break through the Russian armies! Luckily 56 Division was never put to the test in that particular role and in March 1943 we left Iraq. In what turned out to be the longest approach march to battle we eventually arrived at Enfidaville, the Infantry having endured most of the 3,300 miles in the back of a 3 ton truck.

Meanwhile 7th Armoured Division began its wide sweep to the west of Enfidaville and on 6th May the main assault began directed on Tunis. The following day 1/7th Queen's entered Tunis with orders to cut the coast road as soon as possible. They got an ecstatic welcome from the people of the town, but with some difficulty managed to cut the coast road which was vital to the enemy trying to reach the Cap Bon Peninsula. The Queen's action had split the retreating Axis forces in two and brought about their final defeat in North Africa.

While these dramatic events had been evolving 169 Queen's Brigade had been getting their first taste of action since France in 1940. Anyone who claims that they were not frightened during their first days under fire is either grossly dishonest or completely wooden. Well do I remember, sixty-five years on, moving up through the village of Enfidaville with my platoon in single file (Ack-Ack formation) when we were suddenly shelled. No orders were needed, everyone fell to the ground petrified. However when it stopped the platoon fell in on my order and we resumed our march. The first test had been overcome even if it was to some amusement of Infantry (I think of 50 Division) moving out of the line.

8th Army on the Enfidaville front was now in a defensive role for the first time since Alamein. But over the next few weeks we in 169 Brigade became, if not battle-hardened, certainly battle-wary. The morning after our epic journey we took over from battalions of 50 Division in the line. Three days later 2/5th and 2/6th Queen's were ordered to capture in a hastily prepared night attack two forward enemy outposts, which threatened 7th Armoured Division's outflanking move. Although successful, in daylight they were completely overlooked and withdrew in some confusion suffering considerable casualties including Lt Col Hugh Wilson, our much respected Commanding Officer of 2/6th Queen's. This was a severe blow in our first action, but we were fortunate to have John Kealy who came over from 2/7th to take command of the Battalion and who was subsequently to lead us into Italy.

Over the next couple of weeks all three battalions of 169 Brigade were actively engaged in limited attacks, aggressive patrolling and subject to fierce shelling and mortaring in their exposed defensive positions. Then suddenly it was all over - well almost. Dawn revealed white flags from the enemy positions in the mountain range from which our every move had been overlooked. But just as we began to celebrate we were subjected to a gigantic "stonk" from what must have been every gun and mortar in their possession. Then enemy troops began moving out of their positions into captivity. We really were witnessing total surrender. Yes, in those few weeks we had learnt so many invaluable lessons of the battlefield and experienced a spectacle few have ever seen.

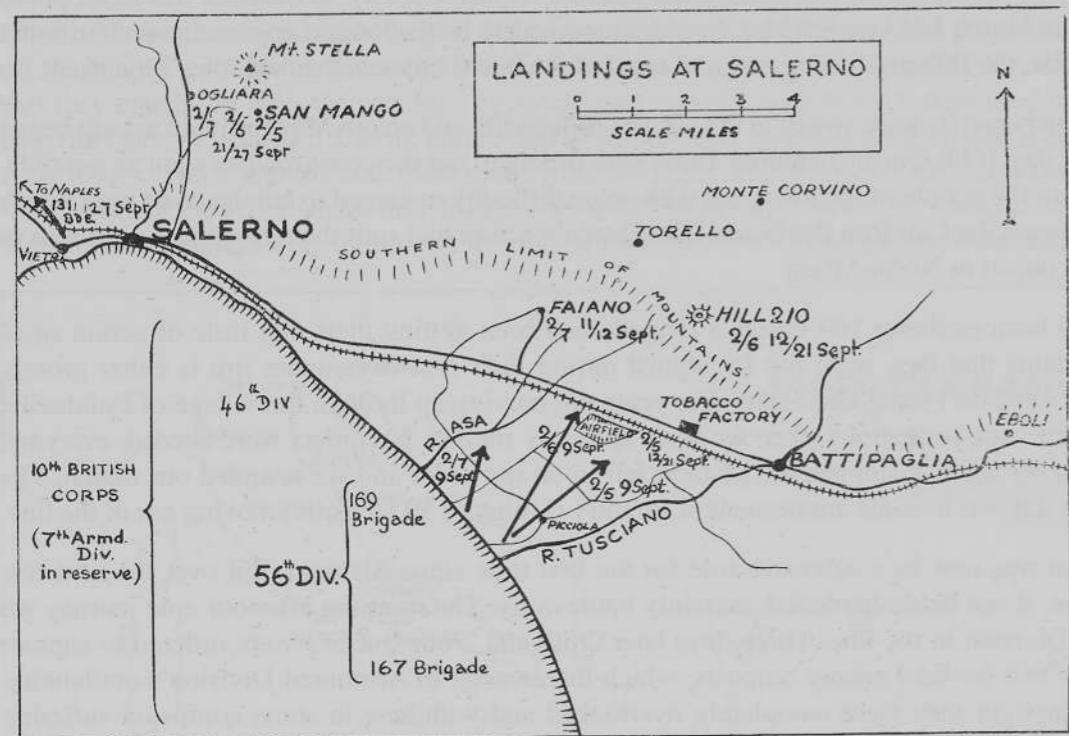
By the end of May 131 Queen's Brigade moved back with 7th Armoured Division to a rest area in the vicinity of Homs some 50 miles east of Tripoli, and 169 Queen's Brigade were stationed in the area of Tripoli with the rest of 56th London Division. Soon we all began training in earnest for operations "somewhere in Europe".

After months of exhausting training in the heat of the jebel for mountain warfare and dryshod and wetshod training with the Royal Navy, one night we quietly moved down to Tripoli harbour. It was 5th September 1943 as the 2/6th Queen's together with HQ 169 Brigade embarked on LCI's for what was to be the first Allied assault landing on the mainland of Europe. But we still didn't know where we were going. 2/5th and 2/7th were aboard passenger ships. The atmosphere was tense, conditions rough and the sea even rougher. I think most crammed in the LCI's were sea sick - not the ideal approach to battle.

Once at sea we were all briefed on the Assault Plan. We were part of American 5th Army to be landed in the vicinity of Salerno on the West coast of Italy some 50 miles south of Naples. 56 Division was the right hand assault division of 10 British Corps and 46 Division sailing from Bizerte was on our left. 36 (US) Division came from Oran and would be on our right. A complex plan to say the least. D Day was 9th September. In our Brigade 2/5th on the right and 2/7th on the left were the two assault battalions landing in LCA's and 2/6th were to pass through and capture Montecorvino Airfield.

On the evening of 8th September as we approached the coast line in broad daylight the Italian villages looked idyllic in the evening sun while out to sea we were surrounded by a vast fleet of all manner of ships escorted by an impressive naval presence. In this unreal situation I think we were all filled with a strange mixture of excitement and apprehension when our inner thoughts were suddenly interrupted by the ships' loudspeakers. General Eisenhower, the Supreme Commander, announced that the Italians had surrendered. Wild cheering broke out as men reckoned it was all over. Officers were immediately ordered to dampen this euphoric mood and impress on everyone that the Germans had NOT surrendered and that they would certainly oppose our landing.

The fall of darkness brought with it a sombre mood. The men of the rifle companies of 2/5th and 2/7th Queen's came up from the bowels of their ships into the inky blankness and were guided to the LCA's swinging from the davits, slowly down over the ships' sides and then the surge forward as they hit the water to form up for the assault.



Now the roar of the naval bombardment and the incredible spectacle of rocket salvos firing for the first time ever. There was little opposition to the initial landings no doubt because the Italians had been manning the coastal defences. But first light revealed that A Company of 2/5th were wading up a river estuary and 2/7th had been landed about a mile to the right of where they should have been. However both Battalions were soon established on their initial objectives.

2/6th Queen's landing was pretty uneventful although we also were too far to the right. As we began to move up our axis towards Montecorvino Airfield it was beginning to get light. It was close country with vines, tobacco plants and tomatoes providing ideal cover for snipers. The countryside was flat and criss-crossed with irrigation ditches, and as the mist lifted we could see we were in a bowl, with the hills providing ideal observation for the enemy and the mountains beyond a formidable barrier. However we seemed to have caught the enemy off guard; as we approached the airfield they were attempting to take off aircraft amid a hail of small arms fire and the main armament of Shermans of the leading troop of The Greys who were just joining us. By midday we had occupied the airfield buildings and the leading company was pressing on towards the main road from Salerno to the south.

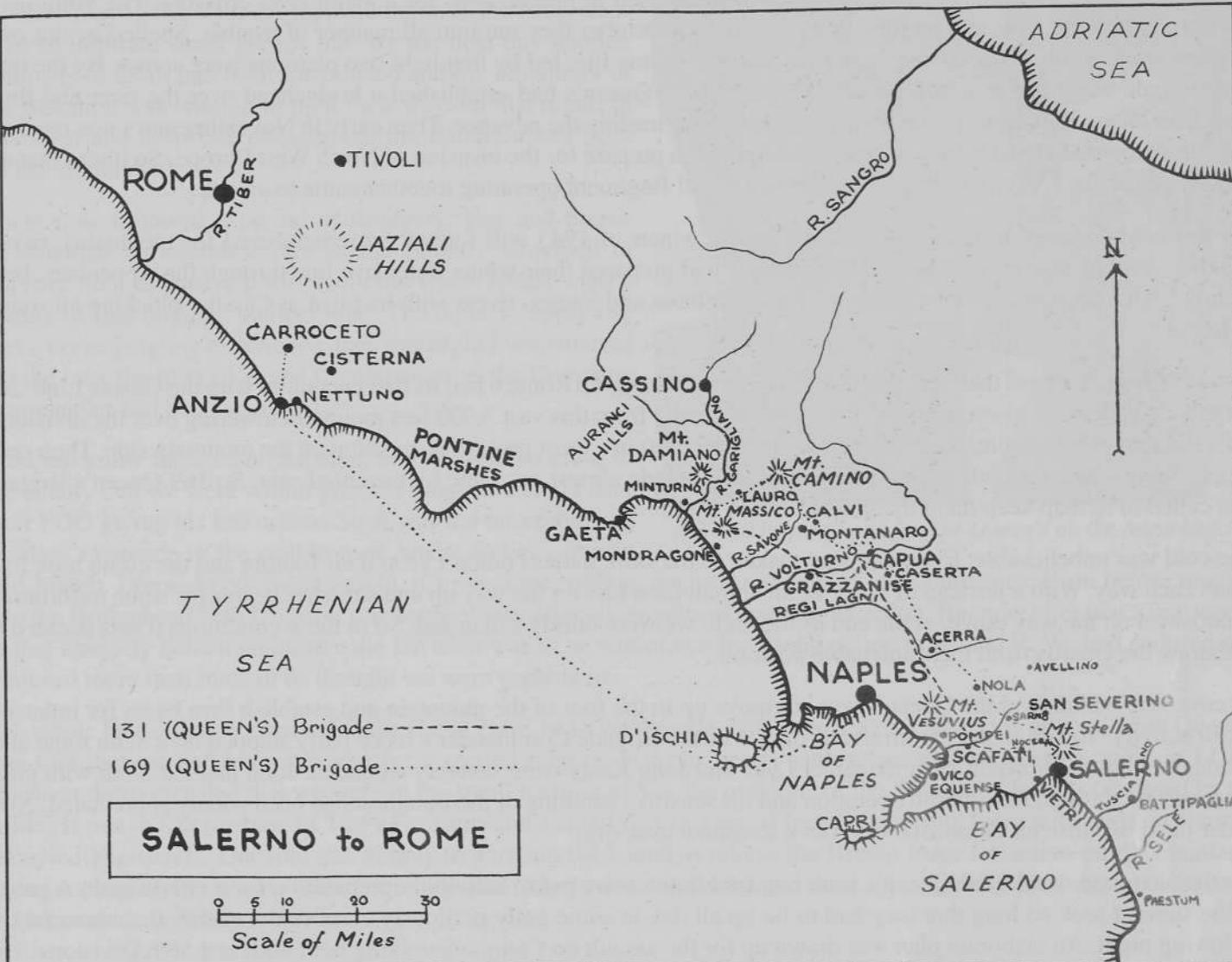
But now the situation was changing dramatically as the Germans reacted. Opposition was stiffening against our advance but much worse they mounted a strong counter-attack against 2/5th Queen's, forcing them back to within a mile of the sea with 170 casualties including three of their company commanders. That night they moved forward again, but at first light they were faced with another counter-attack by tanks and the survivors eventually managed to get back to the battalion base. For the second time in 24 hours John Whitfield had to reorganise his Battalion. Moreover both 167 Brigade and 201 Guards Brigade on their right had also been driven back from their objectives by fierce counter-attacks. On the other hand 2/7th Queen's were able to advance into the foothills on D+1 and the following day B and D Companies of 2/6th Queen's secured the prominent feature of Point 210 which afforded unique observation over the whole bridgehead.

D+3 to D+5 were critical days and we were particularly vulnerable in our isolated salient on Point 210 from which we were nearly ejected. Indeed on 13th September Mark Clark, the US Army Commander, drew up plans for the evacuation of the Bridgehead, but they were countermanded by General Alexander, the Commander in Chief, when he visited two days later. While all this activity was going on the landing craft returned to Tripoli to pick up 7th Armoured Division, so it was not until 17th September that 1/5th and 1/6th Queen's arrived in the Bridgehead; 1/7th Queen's two days later.

With the Allied build-up the tide at last began to turn and the Germans started to break contact. 19th September, D+10, was a memorable and historic day for the Regiment when the Battalions of 131 Brigade took over in the line from their sister Battalions of 169 Brigade. Everyone was in high form.

The X Corps plan for the breakout from the Bridgehead was for 46th and 56th Divisions to secure the passes and then 7th Armoured Division and 56th London Division to lead the advance to capture Naples and close up to the River Volturno. Two weeks after the initial landings we were on the move. The Bridgehead battle had been won and for us in 169 Brigade we were embarking on a new experience as we led 56th Division's advance into the rugged foothills. But the axis was completely dominated by the 3000 feet Monte Stella. With naive optimism a patrol was despatched to nip up to test whether it was occupied and if possible secure the summit. Three days later with all three Battalions involved, the Divisional Artillery, medium and heavy guns and the Royal Navy in support, and Basuto porters with mules to maintain

us, the enemy were finally forced to withdraw. But the cost in casualties had been dear and our hold on the feature at times precarious to say the least. Our first taste of mountain warfare had been a salutary one.



However by 28th September with the mountain passes secured, 7th Armoured Division was poised to pass through 46th Division and begin the advance into the Naples Plain with 131 Brigade in the lead. Michael Forrester's orders to his Battalion left them in no doubt what was expected of them - "Go like hell and stop for nothing!" By the end of the day 1/6th Queen's with a squadron of 5 RTR had secured the only bridge intact over the River Sarno at Scafati. Despite strenuous efforts by the enemy to regain the bridge, the following morning all three Battalions resumed the advance. Simultaneously 169 Brigade began their advance and before long the six TA Battalions of The Queen's Royal Regiment were leading the British advance to Naples. A truly memorable and historic event.

The going was not easy with a myriad of waterways confronting 131 Brigade, wild mountainous country facing 169 Brigade, and mines, demolitions and rearguards encountered by all the Battalions. But on 1st October armoured cars of the King's Dragoon Guards and tanks of The Greys entered the city of Naples.

The City was now handed over to the Americans for the clearance of pockets of resistance to allow X Corps to press on to the River Volturno to ensure the vital work of restoring the port facilities and airfields in the vicinity could progress without enemy interference. On 6th October 2/5th Queen's occupied Caserta where in the weeks and months ahead the Palace was to become the HQ of 169 Brigade then 56th Division and finally HQ Allied Forces Italy.

By the end of the day both Queen's Brigades had closed up to the Volturno and X Corps were on the river line from Capua down to the sea. The following day 201 Guards Brigade relieved 169 Brigade, the first time we had been out of action except for one day since landing on 9th September. But for 131 Brigade there was as yet no respite.

As the Battalions of 169 Brigade moved back to Caserta we savoured the simple luxury of a roof over our heads for the first time since landing, and time to think. The tension of days and nights in the Bridgehead, the cheering Italians as we passed through their towns and villages, the loss of old chums. But as we relaxed we had that inner glow which comes from accomplishment, from satisfaction of a job well done. We just felt that from now on as a team we could rely on each

other and cope with anything that came our way. A feeling which no doubt 131 Brigade had acquired months ago during the Desert Campaign.

But while we were resting 131 Brigade was now immersed in preparations for a major river crossing. The Volturno is a wide fast flowing river and on the night of 12th/13th October they ran into all manner of trouble. Shelled by our own artillery while forming up, boats swept away, intense enemy fire, but by first light two platoons were across. By the time 169 Brigade was back in action on 15th October 1/7th Queen's had established a bridgehead over the river and three days later all six Battalions of the Regiment were again leading the advance. Then early in November news was received that 7th Armoured Division was to return to England to prepare for the invasion of North West Europe. So it was that the historic era of six TA Battalions of The Queen's Royal Regiment operating together came to an end.

For those who served in the Italian Campaign the winter of 1943 will forever be remembered for mountains, rivers, weather - and of course the enemy. The Germans had prepared their winter defensive line through the Appenines, built mainly by Italian forced labour, based on the Garigliano and Sangro rivers with its pivot at Cassino blocking all routes to Rome.

It was at Monte Camino that 56th London Division advancing up Route 6 had its first encounter with the Gustav Line. 201 Guards Brigade were given the task of driving the enemy from this vast 3,000 feet mountain towering over the divisional axis. But they were unable to secure the crest and were left in a most precarious position on the mountain side. Their only supply route was a tortuous, steep, rocky mule track made almost unusable by torrential rain. So 169 Queen's Brigade was called in to help keep them maintained. What a job!

The cold was unbelievable. Everyone was soaked to the skin, mules couldn't keep their footing and the climb took four hours each way. With a jerrican of water or an ammunition box on the way up and stretcher bearer for some unfortunate Guardsman on the way down, at the end of the night we were utterly exhausted. So in these conditions it was decided to withdraw the Guards from their untenable position.

To cover the withdrawal the Queen's were to move up to the foot of the mountain and establish firm bases for intensive patrol activity. To add to the gloom a staff officer of the Brigade Commander's recce party stepped on a Schu mine and, although uninjured himself, both Brigadier Lyne and John Kealy were severely wounded. John had led 2/6th with great success right through the Salerno operation and his sensitive handling of the Battalion had been widely appreciated. Now under the most difficult circumstances Aleck Renshaw took over.

For the next three weeks the Queen's were engaged in intensive patrol activity in preparation for a new assault. A patrol to the summit took so long that they had to lie up all day in some gully perilously close to the enemy then descend the following night. An elaborate plan was drawn up for the assault on Camino involving both 46th and 56th Divisions. 169 Brigade was given the task of securing the summit, but it took three days to achieve this despite an enormous artillery plan. All three Battalions were involved against fanatical opposition. The maintenance required a super-human effort by those not actually involved in the hand to hand fighting. Casualties on both sides were heavy but through fine leadership and inspiring determination the Germans were eventually forced to withdraw.

Tired but elated by our achievement we now spent a happy Christmas out of the line before beginning training for the next major obstacle - an assault crossing over the River Garigliano. For me I was about to see battle from a different perspective as I now became Company Second in Command. But I soon discovered this was not the cushy job it seemed to be when I was a platoon commander! The crossing in assault boats on the night of 17/18th January was a complete success despite stiff opposition and considerable casualties particularly in 2/5th especially from Schu mines. But I soon realised that the nightly supply run ferrying, portering and rowing supplies over a fast flowing river under heavy shelling is no sinecure.

We did not know it at the time, but by now it had become obvious to the High Command that we were not going to break through the Gustav line, so the decision was taken to turn the line by an amphibious operation south of Rome. The landing was to be between 20th and 31st January 1944, and this in turn led to a date for a new offensive on the main front primarily to draw the German reserves from the north and away from the projected landing area. For us this meant three more weeks of continuous action after crossing the river against a tenacious enemy. Then as the Battalions moved back to a rest area came the news that the Anzio Bridgehead was itself in danger of being overrun. Unbelievably 56th Division was to be sent round to help prevent the destruction of the forces there. The comments of the Queen'smen were unprintable!

The Division was committed piecemeal, and as 169 Brigade began to arrive in the Bridgehead on 18th February the Germans launched an all-out offensive. By 20th February both sides had fought to a stand-still, but in the chaos an American battalion had been cut off. The following evening 2/7th Queen's were ordered to achieve the impossible and rescue them. Two companies managed to reach them, but the situation was very confusing with British, American

and German troops intermingled, casualties mounting and ammunition running low. That night D Company was overrun. The following night a company of 2/6th Queen's failed to reach 2/7th with a resupply column as the Americans tried to infiltrate small groups out. By the next day another company of 2/7th had been surrounded and the remainder of the Battalion was ordered to fight their way out that night. In this short and desperate engagement the Battalion had been all but annihilated.

There now followed a period of drudgery, fear and horror of stalemate in relentless rain as the Infantry struggled to improve their defensive positions in the wadis which were a feature of that blighted battleground. The nightly supply run was a nerve-jangling experience, then one night I was ordered to take over the merged A and C companies as the Company Commander had been wounded.

I did not know the area or the men, but we were so close to the enemy that we were within grenade range and could hear their FOO giving his fire orders. Such was the miserable and fruitless existence in the cauldron of Anzio. Relief came in mid-March. I brought out twenty-eight, if I remember rightly, the total strength of two companies. Even before moving into the Bridgehead 56th Division was battle-weary after six months of continuous action. But now after just a few weeks of that uniquely hellish nightmare the Division was to be withdrawn for a long period of R. and R. We had endured and achieved more than most of us thought we were capable of.

The whole Division now returned to the Canal Zone, or so we thought, but as units were embarking at Bari, 2/6th Queen's was told that we had been selected for a special mission and our hearts sank as we embarked once again in LCI's. However dawn revealed that we were in the small harbour of Vis, the only one of the Dalmatian Islands occupied by the Allies. It was in fact the base of Tito's Partisans and a small British Special Force supporting them with raids on German occupied Yugoslavia. Our role was simply to garrison the Island to relieve the British force for action on the mainland. It was a truly idyllic place. The tranquillity after Anzio was wonderful and the happy friendly partisans and the local islanders made us really welcome.

It was a never to be forgotten experience, but after two months we left to rejoin the rest of the Division. It was a time of intense activity interspersed with short bursts of the high life of Cairo. All units were brought up to strength mainly with drafts from disbanded anti-aircraft regiments. Great care was taken over their integration, but fortunately there was still a nucleus of senior and battle-experienced TA personnel in most units so that the character of the Battalions was retained.

While we were in Egypt we heard that at long last Rome had been liberated on 4th June and on 6th June the Normandy landings had taken place. 7th Armoured Division were first committed on 10th June and two days later 131 Queen's Brigade were involved in a major battle at Villers Bocage. It would be presumptuous of me to attempt to describe the success story of 131 Brigade from Normandy to their final victory in Hamburg in May 1945, as I have no personal experience of their exploits nor am I familiar with the plans or terrain of that campaign.

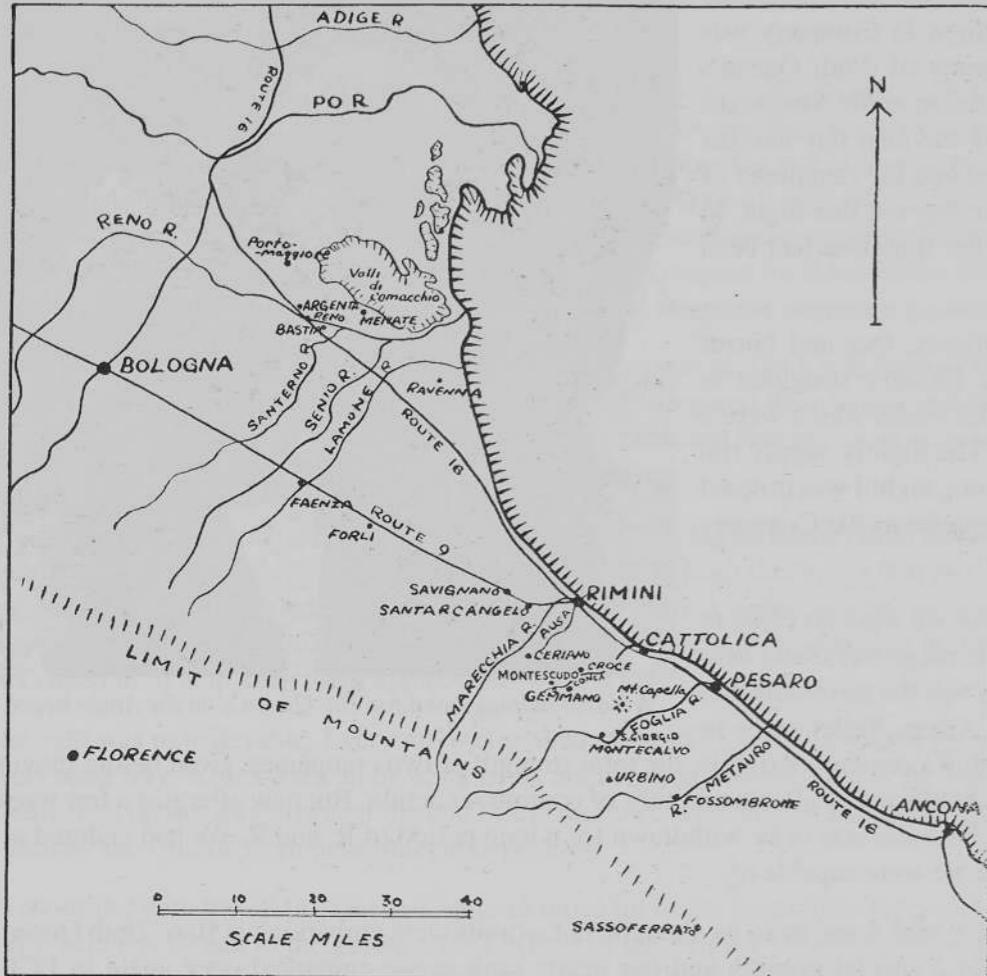
Reconstituted and refreshed 56th London Division, now under command of John Whitfield who had only been away from the Division six months as a Brigade Commander, returned to Italy mid-July and concentrated west of Rome around Tivoli. However 5th Army had been seriously weakened by the withdrawal of American forces for the Normandy operation and later for the landings in the south of France. So it was decided that the main thrust would be made by 8th Army on the Adriatic flank. Elaborate deception arrangements were made to cover the regrouping. 6th Division made a series of night moves along treacherous mountain roads to concentrate behind 4th Indian Division some 50 miles west of Ancona.

Once again with Italian forced labour the Germans had constructed a formidable defensive line based on the Etruscan Apennines running from south of Spezia on the west coast to Pesaro on the east coast.

The Corps plan was to break into the Gothic line with 4th Indian and 46th Divisions. Then 56th Division with 7th Armoured Brigade and 1st Armoured Division was to follow up and seize Bologna. Reality was somewhat different! But poised once again for action we looked forward to our new role with keen anticipation. I had recently taken over the Mortars and the crews were in high form eager to try out our newly developed "shoot and scoot" tactics to support the advance.



A Naval helping hand for The Queen's on the Anzio beach



It was now clear that the mile long 1,500 ft. high ridge of Gemmano must be secured before further progress could be made. The Queen's Brigade was given the task. Another formidable and memorable battle was about to begin. On 8th September 2/6th and 2/7th Battalions launched a daylight attack with 2/7th directed on the village of Gemmano and the high ground beyond, and 2/6th tasked to secure the key feature on the western slopes of the ridge. The Germans fought fanatically with heavy DF artillery and mortar fire, and as darkness fell the whole area was lit up by burning haystacks so that any movement was met by murderous Spandau fire. Even so by morning both Battalions had secured their objectives and resisted determined counter attacks. But the cost had been high. While they were relieved in the line by 167 Brigade 2/5th Queen's were engaged in another bitter battle to the west of Gemmano.

The Brigade was now withdrawn for a brief respite and Battalions reorganised on a three company basis. 2/6th Queen's had lost three company commanders killed and two wounded. I was ordered to take over C Company, their third company commander in 10 days. While 169 Brigade had been struggling to hold the Gemmano feature, the other two Brigades had been fighting a desperate battle to try to secure Croce, another key feature in the Gothic line, and 1st Armoured Division had been unable to take their objective the Coriano ridge.

So on the night of 11th/12th September we moved forward to reinforce the other Brigades. The village of Croce was a scene of utter devastation. The only road was under constant shelling and the whole area was littered with burned tanks and unburied bodies. It had already changed hands five times. I took up a defensive position astride the road beyond the village and we spent an extremely uncomfortable day, completely under observation, pounded incessantly by artillery and mortar fire. Once more there was to be a major effort to break through into the Po Valley. H Hour was planned to be at 0400 hours on 14th September. The immediate task for 2/6th Queen's was to secure the start line for the armour to pass through. During the night stragglers from another company suddenly appeared milling around in front of us. I was urgently summoned to the wireless and the CO ordered me to move at once to capture a hamlet occupied by the enemy right on the start line for the main attack. We cleared the buildings without too much opposition, but as 2/5th and 2/7th began their advance with their supporting armour, we were subjected to devastating tank fire from close range. Both my signallers were killed and the wireless destroyed, the platoons were taking casualties and running short of ammunition, and I was wounded in the head. We were saved by gallant action by the Carrier Platoon.

As I was being evacuated back to hospital in Ancona, 2/5th and 2/7th Battalions were only able to make limited gains against strong opposition, and the hoped for break through across the 8th Army front had been thwarted once again. Some weeks later I was enjoying the peace and beauty of Gigli's home by the sea, which had been requisitioned as an

The initial attacks on 25th August were successful right across the 8th Army front and by 1st September the Gothic line had been breached over some 15 miles inland from Pesaro. But resistance was stiffening and the Queen's Brigade was committed to maintain the momentum. The important features of Monte Capella and Monte Maggiore were seized and it was now planned that 56th Division should by pass the formidable Gemmano Ridge and advance to Croce and the River Marano beyond. Simultaneously 1st Armoured Division would move up on our right to seize the Coriano Ridge and together break-out towards Bologna. Now was the moment that reality took over from optimism. We were faced with a series of ridges and hill villages dominating river after river flowing down to the sea, the coastal corridor was narrowing and German resistance stiffening as more reinforcements arrived.

officers' convalescent home, when our Padre came back to visit me. This was the golden opportunity to avoid the dreaded reinforcement chain from which you could be posted to some completely different regiment. So we quietly sneaked away while no one was looking back to the Battalion. After the obligatory "where the hell have you come from" from my CO, I was given a splendid welcome home. It was great to be back with my old chums again.

By this time after another major battle to capture the Coriano Ridge the Gothic Line had finally been broken and the legendary Rubicon had been crossed, but 56th London Division was utterly exhausted and withdrawn for major reorganisation. Even so the lack of Infantry reinforcements resulted in battalions being reduced to three companies, artillery ammunition was severely restricted, and the weather had reduced the plain to a quagmire and the many rivers to raging torrents. Despite all the Division was back in action early in December. When I rejoined the Battalion they were in the area of Faenza on the main Route 9 still some 40 miles from Bologna. But it was nearly Christmas when we spent a few happy days out of the line.

On 3rd January 1945 2/6th Queen's mounted in Kangaroos (Shermans converted to APC's) made a highly successful attack to eliminate an enemy pocket. It was the first time they had been used in the Italian Campaign and 8th Army now had an unbroken winter line on the River Senio. It was here that I was told by Aleck Renshaw that, unable to wear a steel helmet because of my head wound, my days with 2/6th Queen's were over and I was going back to England to be an Instructor at 163 Infantry OCTU. A few days later he was also posted home and David Baynes left 2/7th Queen's. Both of them had been fine TA commanding officers and were relieved respectively by Peter Taylor and Maurice MacWilliam.

It was not until April that it was possible to resume the offensive in Italy. 5th Army was to capture Bologna - the objective given to 56th Division last August! 8th Army was to force a way through the Argenta Gap to seize Ferrara. 169 Brigade was selected to carry out highly secret training with Fantails, amphibious APCs, which had not previously been used in Italy. Their role was to cross Lake Comacchio to secure the bridges which carried the strategic Highway 16 over the River Reno at Bastia into the Po Valley. The operation achieved complete surprise and large number of prisoners were captured with few casualties on our side.

It was the beginning of the end. The mighty River Po and its many tributaries proved not to be the formidable barrier that had been anticipated. German control of operations had collapsed and organised resistance was disintegrating rapidly. On 24th April 2/6th Queen's mounted in Fantails and supported by amphibious tanks crossed the great river almost unopposed. Three days later 2/7th Queen's crossed the deep and angry River Adige, and on 27th April 2/5th Queen's were the first troops to enter Venice rapidly followed by the other two Battalions.

On 2nd May 1945 the German forces in Italy surrendered unconditionally and 4th May saw the final capitulation of all German forces throughout North West Europe. The day before 1/5th Queen's with 5th Royal Tank Regiment led 7th Armoured Division into the city of Hamburg. The two Queen's Brigades had fought their last battle. In fact back in December 1944 the Regiment's presence in 131 Brigade had been reduced to one Battalion due to lack of reinforcements, and the much depleted 1/6th and 1/7th Battalions returned to England.

The final moves before disbandment in 1946 saw 1/5th Queen's with 7th Armoured Division as the first occupying forces in the British Sector of Berlin. 169 Queen's Brigade with 56th London Division was moved north to the Trieste area to prevent a possible take-over by Yugoslav forces encouraged and aided by the Russians.

What a story! What a record!

EL ALAMEIN

MEDENINE

SALERNO

ANZIO

GEMMANO RIDGE

MONTE CAMINO

VILLERS BOCAGE

All Battle Honours won by the Territorial Battalions of 131 and 169 Queen's Brigades for the Regiment, but at a cost which must never be forgotten. It was those who served in those Battalions who made it all possible. Their spirit and their courage were remarkable, but perhaps the key to it all was the determination never to let down their chums. And that meant everyone from the CO to all the rest in the platoon. I count myself unbelievably fortunate to have been one of them.

Scafati Remembers (by Major Tony Russell)

The 9th September 1943 saw the first major allied assault on the mainland of Europe with the landings at Salerno on the south west coast of Italy. Two weeks later the Allied Forces, which included 169 Queen's Brigade and 131 Queen's Brigade, were striving to advance onto the plain of Naples.

At noon on 28th September 1943 1/6th Queen's, led by Lieutenant Colonel Michael Forrester and with a squadron of 5 RTR, M Battery 3 RHA, an Anti-Tank Regt battery and an RE recce party under command, pushed through 1/7th Queen's heading at high speed for their objective which was the important bridge at Scafati over the River Sarno. Their advance on a stormy day was so swift that A Company under Captain W L Johnson, with assistance from Italian partisans, outflanked the elements of the Herman Goering Division defending the bridge, killing or capturing them all and securing intact the bridge, which had been prepared for demolition.



Captain Johnson with captured Germans

Subsequent German counter attacks were repulsed by the battalion group and on 29th September 131 Bde pushed north from the Scafati bridgehead.

The rapid capture of the bridge meant that heavy artillery exchanges and aerial bombardment, and the prolonged street-by-street fighting, which would have caused great loss of life and damage to Scafati, a fate which was to befall other Italian towns, were avoided. Michael Forrester was awarded the DSO and "Johnnie" Johnson the MC for the action.

The role of the Scafati partisans in capturing the bridge and in being the first to take up arms against the Germans was subsequently commemorated by a memorial on the bridge. The city's citizens held the battalion and Michael Forrester in high regard, and for many years prior to his death in 2006 a message was sent annually to him. A leading role in keeping alive the memory of the events of September 1943 was taken by the city historian Dr

Angelo Pesce who had been in the city as a young boy during the battle.

In the summer of 2008 the city, through Dr Pesce, very kindly invited a number of guests from Britain to attend a day of events commemorating the 65th anniversary of the Battle for Scafati, to be held on Sunday 28th September 2008. These celebrations would include the unveiling of a memorial to honour the late Major-General Michael Forrester.

British guests at the ceremonies included General Forrester's two sons, Simon and Nicholas, and his grandsons, Nick and James (the England and Gloucester rugby player), as well as General Forrester's companion in later years Mrs Denise Patterson. Colonel Charles Darell, military attaché at the British Embassy in Rome, and Michael Burgoyne, the British Consul-General in Naples and Southern Italy, were amongst a party from the British diplomatic staff in Italy. I was honoured to have been asked to represent the Regimental Association at the celebrations.

Thus it was that shortly before 10 a.m. on a sunny Italian Sunday morning the British guests, fortified by breakfast at the hotel accommodation generously provided by the Scafati authorities in neighbouring Pompeii, found themselves being escorted into an already crowded city hall room to be formally welcomed by the Mayor and other dignitaries. Following the welcome and presentation of gifts, and an opportunity to see a display about the 1943 battle, we all moved outside to form up for a procession on foot to the city's war memorial.



Nick, Nicholas and Simon Forrester at the display in the City Hall.

As we moved behind band and banners through the streets it rapidly became apparent that most of Scafati's population of 47,000 seemed to be participating in the day's events, which were being covered by the Italian press and television as well as by the Rome correspondent of The Times.

The warmth of the welcome from the Italian crowds lining the streets as we passed was quite overwhelming. Following wreath-laying ceremonies at the city's existing

war memorial the procession moved to the partisan memorial at the bridge, where wreaths from the Regiment and the military attaché joined that from the city.



The Partisan memorial

The parade then moved across the famous bridge to the square where the British guests were invited to join other dignitaries on a stage. There we were introduced to the crowds filling the square. The subsequent speeches, which included the retelling of the story of the dramatic events 65 years earlier, were followed by a procession back across the square to the unveiling of the new monument.



The new memorial, with the bridge behind

After this ceremony there was a period for "photo opportunities" at the new memorial and autograph signing, before we found ourselves recrossing the bridge and moving to the beautiful municipal gardens. There we were escorted to front row seats for a concert. This was followed by an open-air buffet lunch, seemingly for the whole city, enjoyment of which was only marginally impaired for a number of the British guests by being whisked away at various points for TV interviews. Some five hours after being collected from the hotel, we were asked whether we would like to return to our accommodation for a short rest before returning for the day's remaining events! We said farewell to the military attaché and consul and their wives who were going on elsewhere, and headed for the cars.

A refreshing hour or so at the hotels (during which the city's citizens were entertained by a parade of WW2 period vehicles) was followed by the cars collecting the English party and taking us the couple of miles back to Scafati. There we were installed in the front row of a packed hall for the premiere of a film about the Battle for Scafati. This was followed by coffee with the Mayor in a local café.

The Mayor then escorted us back across to the city square which had been filled with chairs, where, yet again in the front row, we were to enjoy two more concerts on the stage previously used for speeches; one of these concerts was by the City of Rome Pipe Band resplendent in kilts.



The Pipe Band entertains

We had thought to slip away at the conclusion of the concerts for a quiet supper - always providing we could find a restaurant open after 9 o'clock on a Sunday evening. However we found ourselves again being personally escorted through the streets of Scafati by the Mayor. He led us to an upstairs room in a restaurant where it transpired he was to leave us to enjoy a private supper at the city's expense. We were delighted that Dr Pesce, his sister and the interpreter who had all looked after us so well were able to join us. Thus it was not until approaching mid-night that I eventually returned to the hotel.

Annual Regimental Association Church Service, Guildford Cathedral



Second World War re-enactors provide a guard of honour for the congregation as they leave the Cathedral after the service.



Explaining what it was really like.



Enjoying refreshments in the refectory after the service.

The President's Reception for the Mayors of Surrey at the Regimental Museum



Left: Colonel 'Mac' MacConnell explains the medal display.



Officers' Club Ladies Lunch



Left: The Association President accepts the medals of Captain Hare in the museum after lunch.



Right: "Three Ladies who lunch"



All the British guests agreed that we had enjoyed superb hospitality from our Italian hosts and had been incredibly warmly welcomed by the citizens of Scafati. The day, which had struck a wonderful balance between solemn remembrance and joyful celebration, had been a truly unforgettable experience and vivid testimony that remembrance of the deeds of our forbears is not restricted to our veterans or countrymen.

Before leaving for Naples airport on the Monday I took the opportunity to visit the Commonwealth War Cemetery which is a few miles south of Salerno. Although no members of 1/6th Queen's were killed at Scafati on 28th September 1943, a number from The Queen's Royal Regiment who were killed in the fighting at and around Salerno are amongst those buried there.



The immaculate grounds and rows of headstones provided a further moving reminder, if any had been needed, of the sacrifices made by our forbears.

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"The Fall of Tunis - the Surreys in the Turn of the Tide" (by Bryn Evans)

The Story So Far

On 7 November 1942 the 1st Battalion of the East Surrey Regiment waded ashore near Algiers in Operation Torch, the first Anglo American operation of World War II. The 1st Surreys advanced 450 miles with the 78th or Battleaxe Division through the Atlas Mountains, and down the Medjerda River Valley into Tunisia.

At Tebourba on 27 November the Surreys were within sight of Tunis, when they were hit by the 10th Panzer Division. Over the next week the Surreys fought a series of desperate engagements, grudgingly giving ground yet stemming the enemy's offensive in their retreat to Medjez el Bab. In their daring rush down the Medjerda Valley the Surreys lost more than half their men.

In late December the surviving Surreys regrouped as best they could in the hills west of Medjez near the village of Oued Zarga, where during January 1943 their infantry companies spread out into widely dispersed positions,

to repel repeated thrusts from General von Arnim's 5th Panzer Division.

Tunisia - A Glimpse of the Surreys in 1943?

When you visit Tunisia today, you can delve into a rich history of more than three thousand years. Some of the influences from many different civilisations can be seen in Phoenician and Roman Carthage, an amphitheatre at El-Jem that rivals Rome's coliseum, or the exotic medinas of Tunis and Sousse. Is it possible to catch a glimpse of what it was like for the Surreys in 1943?

In the Medjerda Valley at the small farming town of Testour, the orange trees, jasmine shrubs and a minaret of the 17th century Great Mosque built like a Castilian bell tower, show off the town's Andalusian roots. You can sit in Testour's main square sipping a sweet, black coffee, and swear it could have changed little since the Surreys fought near there in 1943. Somehow Testour seems to have been untouched by the 6 months of battles in 1942/43, that engulfed the Medjerda Valley and the nearby Medjez el Bab.



Testour main square and Great Mosque

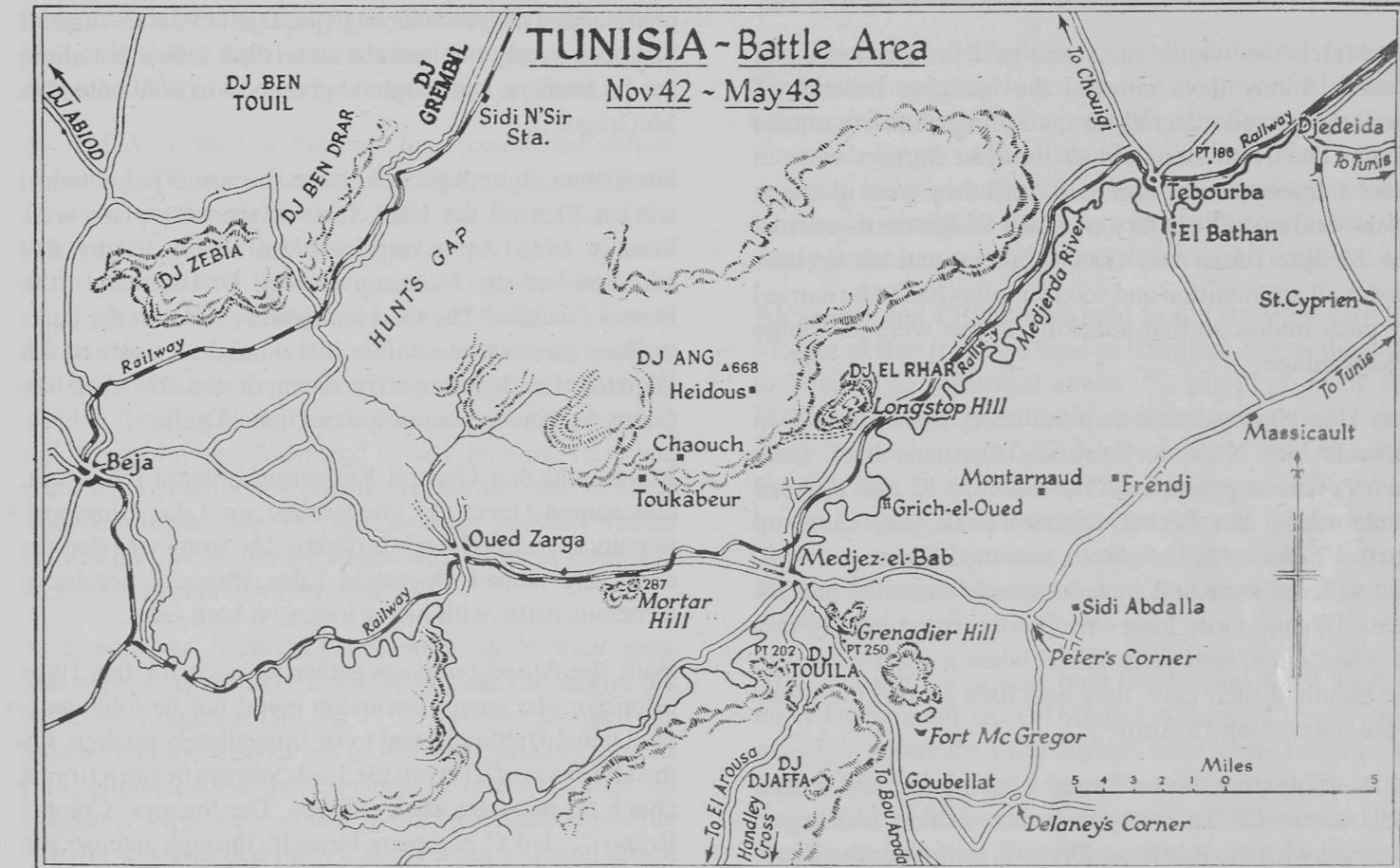
January to March 1943 - How long would this last?

During January to March 1943 the Surreys fought for the high ground around Oued Zarga and Medjez. In the south, the US II Corps and Montgomery's 8th Army struggled against Rommel's Afrika Korps. In February Rommel inflicted a major defeat on inexperienced US forces at Kasserine, and threatened the Allies' major supply bases at Tebessa and Le Kef, before pulling back. Somehow, before the Axis armies of Rommel and von Arnim in the north could fully combine and consolidate, the winter stalemate had to be broken.

At the Casablanca conference in January, Eisenhower had been under intense pressure when he predicted to Churchill and Roosevelt, that a final Tunisia victory would come by mid-May. Although by late March the planning for an invasion of Sicily in July was supposedly well advanced, commanders such as Montgomery questioned the schedule, and how it could be met. In the Surreys the question may have been put another way, "How long would this last?"

found the whole hill "...littered with British and German dead, bodies and parts of bodies were twisted together into tumbled heaps." (Ford) Later the padre estimated that he buried around 60 unknown soldiers.

This stubborn defence by the Surreys and other Battleaxe troops, forced von Arnim to halt his offensive in the north. Similarly on 6 March in the south near Medenine, 8th Army threw back a counter attack by the Afrika Korps. Soon after, Rommel, ill and exhausted, flew home



Surreys defend the Medjez salient at "Fort McGregor"

Just three days after Rommel's victories at Kasserine, the next blow against the Allies came in the north, where the 1st Surreys had relocated to the south east of Medjez. They held a front of some seven miles across the Goubellat plain, including two dominating rocky hills, Djebel Djaffa and Fort McGregor.

On 26 February von Arnim launched Operation Oschenkopf, to regain control of the Medjez salient. One of its three thrusts was to drive the Surreys back from Fort McGregor. The Surreys withstood two artillery barrages, and two assaults by paratroopers of the Herman Goering Division, before they were overwhelmed.

Although the Surreys with other Battleaxe units regained Djebel Djaffa, it was not enough without Fort McGregor, whose strategic position in the Medjez salient meant that it had to be won back. A massive artillery barrage was opened up at Fort McGregor's summit, with a total disregard for any Surreys who might be still surviving there. When they retook Fort McGregor the Surreys

to Germany to recover. With hindsight it seems to have been a tipping point. Von Arnim placed all Axis forces onto a defensive footing.

Breaking through the Mareth Line

In the south despite General Patton's US II Corps' first battlefield success at Guettar on 19 March, the Mareth Line still held up 8th Army. The fortified Mareth Line followed the northern edge of the Oued Zigzaou wadi 45 Kms across the narrow coastal plain. It was finally overcome by Montgomery's renowned 'left hook', when he sent a 27,000 strong, armoured force onto narrow mountain tracks to the west. By 28 March they had outflanked the Axis Forces. This forced the Afrika Korps and their Italian allies to withdraw, towards the next defensive line farther north at Takrouna and Enfidaville. Perhaps most important was the meeting on 7/8 April on the Gafsa - Gabes road, of patrols from 8th Army and the American II Corps.

After the Battle of Mareth the route of the retreating Axis forces and the pursuing 8th Army, snaked northwards

through the Sahel along Tunisia's eastern coast, and past El Jem, site of the world's 3rd largest Roman amphitheatre. As you drive from Tunis past Sousse and towards El Jem, olive tree plantations increasingly dominate the flat landscape either side of the road. Surprisingly it is claimed a tree can live up to 2,000 years. Could it be some trees had seen passing Roman legions, and in 1943 still stood sentinel in the dust of the armoured columns of first the Afrika Korps, and then 8th Army?

Towards Tunis - The Battle of Oued Zarga

By March the winter rains and mud in the north had ceased. Sunny days allowed the bringing forward of more troops and materiel for the Spring offensive to take Tunis. The 1/6th Battalion of the East Surreys were in those reinforcements, and by 6 April they were in action in the barren hill country of Oued Zarga north-west of the Medjez-Tunis road. Deep valleys and rocky hills meant all ammunition and food supplies had to be carried by pack mules, so that attacking troops were at a huge disadvantage.

The 1/6th Surreys moved up the valley from Hunts Gap towards Sidi N'sir, to drive the Germans back from their defensive positions in the hills. On 11 and 12 April while taking the Djebel Grembil peak they came up against fierce resistance from seasoned German troops, and suffered their first casualties, nine wounded and six dead. Despite more losses from dominating enemy fire, as when eight men were killed when a shell landed in the mouth of their cave, they held their ground until they were relieved on 18 April.

At the same time the 1st Surreys, having regrouped after their successful but costly resistance at Fort McGregor, returned with the Battleaxe Division to fight in the Battle of Oued Zarga. To march on to Tunis the Allies had to build up sufficient forces at and around Medjez, and for this the hills to its north, and most ominously Longstop Hill, had to be taken.

The Battle of Oued Zarga lasted 10 days, across a swathe of rocky hills, which seemingly swallowed up the whole Battleaxe Division. From eye-witness accounts it was said that every hill demanded a combination of climbing and skirmishing, often through minefields, and always culminating in uphill assaults with grenades and bayonets on the machine-gun pits of German held hill top villages. Above all it must have demanded continual perseverance at every setback, and the steely resolve to keep going both upward and forward as men went down under the enemy's fire. Even harder to imagine is that companies and platoons did this despite often finding themselves out on their own, and short of water, food and ammunition. (See Note A - Surreys' Veterans Remember)

In this gruelling close combat with its inevitable casualties, the Surreys took more than a thousand prisoners, won three Military Crosses and a Military Medal. The 78th Division's battalions were becoming ever more widely

known as mountain warfare troops, and the "Battleaxe Division". Only the Allies' nemesis, Longstop Hill in the Medjerda Valley north of Medjez remained in German hands.

Surreys Throw Back Kesselring's Counter Attack at Djebel Djaffa

After their losses in the battle of Oued Zarga the 1/6th Surreys went into reserve on and around the Djebel Djaffa and Fort McGregor hills, whose high ground commanded the roads through the Djaffa Pass to Tunis. It had been barely two months since their fellow battalion, the 1st Surreys, had fought at great cost to hold onto Fort McGregor.

Sometimes lightning does strike the same place twice, and on 20 April the 1/6th Surreys' recovery plans were brutally ended by a surprise night attack, led by five battalions of the Hermann Göring Division and 10th Panzer Division. The German infantry rode on the tanks to force their way to within a few hundred yards of 4th Division Headquarters. By dawn of the 21 April the Germans were in possession of Djebel Djaffa.

It was said that General Kesselring ordered the attack, codenamed Operation Fliederblüte (or Lilac Blossom), to coincide with Hitler's birthday. The irony was that the comically named Operation Lilac Blossom became a ferocious battle with heavy losses on both sides.

With the Allied build up gathering pace for the Tunis offensive, the enemy incursion could not be tolerated - the Djebel Djaffa hill had to be immediately retaken. On the afternoon of 21 April the 1/6th Surreys began a frontal attack up its steep, rocky slopes. The Surreys' Colonel Bruno "...led C company himself, through intense fire and making what use they could of the scattered scrub for cover, he took them to within twenty yards of the top." (Daniel). In that uphill assault the Surreys saw 68 of their men go down.

In the end the Surreys had to withdraw under smoke cover, with 26 wounded, and 42 dead or missing including Colonel Bruno. But the Germans had been even more heavily depleted, and thinking the smoke heralded an inevitable final push by the Surreys, they too withdrew from the peak. The next morning the Surreys again climbed up Djebel Djaffa's slopes. But the withering enemy fire never came, and they took the hill unopposed. As they feared, they found the body of their Colonel Bruno, and buried him with their other dead near the hill's crest.

By regaining Djebel Djaffa, the Surreys freed Medjez el Bab from any threat from the surrounding hills. The Allies now had more men, more guns, more tanks, and air superiority. Yet the Germans still held the vital passes, inflicting terrible losses as they withstood every Allied attack. It seemed impossible to concentrate sufficient forces to break through in the coastal corridors, and the

Medjerda Valley was blocked by Longstop Hill. After the Germans had defeated desperate Allied attacks on 25 December 1942, they had built extensive defences across Longstop's sprawling heights. They thought their Weinachtshügel (Christmas Hill) to be impregnable.

The Surreys in the Bloody Conquest of Longstop Hill

Longstop Hill, or Djebel el Ahmera, is six miles north of Medjez, two miles in length and some 800 feet high. It is really a mountainous, hog's back ridge of hidden folds and defiles, abutting and commanding the whole Medjerda Valley. Until it was seized nothing could move down the valley to begin the main attack on Tunis.

By mid April the 1st Surreys' head count had shrunk to around 200 men. Nevertheless despite their depleted numbers, on the night of 21 April the Surreys and the 8th Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders went forward again. Before first light they went to ground near the small cluster of dwellings of Chassart Teffaha, close to the brooding Longstop Hill. All the next day in shallow gullies or whatever depressions they could find in the open ground, they lay as still as they could under the burning sun. Somehow they managed to take in some food and drink without attracting enemy fire, but snatches of sleep were near impossible. The next morning's assault was on their minds, as the deadly slopes and ridges of Longstop seemed to beckon them to their fate.

At 8 p.m. the Surreys' hands went up to their ears. The night-long artillery fire of 400 guns had begun the battle for Longstop Hill. At 11.30 a.m. on 23 April the Surreys and the Argylls got to their feet, and began their slow climb, taking the expected, severe casualties on Longstop's fire-swept slopes. Major John Anderson of the Argylls was awarded the VC for leading a frontal attack that, despite losing many men to the German machine guns, made it to the top. When the heavy losses cut down the commanding officers not only of the Argylls, but also of the two support battalions of 5 Buffs and 6 Royal West Kents, it was left to Colonel Wilberforce of the Surreys to command the combined force in the final storming of Longstop's heights.

By the third day 78th Division had occupied around three quarters of Longstop's highest points, and a few war correspondents were allowed access to some of the forward positions. They came upon some of the surviving Surreys laid up in German trenches, with their weapons trained towards the next slope, and making running repairs to boots and equipment. But they were not the young heroes portrayed to the home public in cinema newsreels, "...they were hostile, bitter and contemptuous...a third of them had been killed in the night... they had seen too much dirt and filth for that. They hated the war. They knew it. They fought because they were part of a system, part of a team. They wanted to win and get out of it - the sooner the better." (Moorehead)

(See Note B - Surreys' Veterans Remember)

Colonel Wilberforce then organised the defence of Longstop, which was under heavy fire from nearby hills, encouraging the troops by his carefree manner and high spirits, as he "walked round all the positions, wearing his soft hat and smoking his pipe." (Daniel) The taking of Longstop Hill set the scene for the Allies' final assault on Tunis. Eisenhower acknowledged that "...the battles for its possession...probably cost more lives than did the fighting for any other spot in Tunisia."

The Fall of Tunis - Surreys open the Door

With Longstop Hill finally in Allied hands, General Alexander immediately accelerated the flow of additional troops and materiel, to increase the Allied pressure along the whole length of the 130 mile front line. The German generals knew a major offensive was coming, but not whether it would be 8th Army from the south east, 1st Army in the centre, or the Americans in the north west.

Alexander and Eisenhower held to the strategic view of Medjez el Bab from the time of Hannibal, it was the door to Tunis. The spearhead attack "...would go in up the Medjerda Valley, a needle-thrust aimed straight at Tunis," using battle hardened British battalions from the 4th, 1st and 78th Divisions. Once the infantry battalions had broken the initial German lines, the 6th and 7th armoured divisions would hammer through the breach, "...from Medjez through Massicault and St Cyprien to Tunis." (Moorehead)

After Longstop's capture both the 1st and 1.5th Surreys moved to the south west of Medjez at Peter's Corner, from where on 6 May the 1/6th Surreys were a lead battalion as the 4th Division infantry began the advance on Tunis. By 8 a.m. they had taken their objectives of Montarnaud and Frendj, and dug in. Then the armoured divisions burst through to take Massicault before nightfall.

On the same day the Surreys' Commander, Colonel Wilberforce, received news that he had been awarded the DSO for his leadership at Longstop Hill. A few hours later he was dead, hit in his staff car by one of the last enemy shells of the Tunis campaign.

On 7 May the Allied armour rolled into Tunis, taking Axis forces by surprise. Many enemy troops emerged from bars and restaurants, with stunned stares and surrendered without a fight. Lead patrols of 1st Surreys were some of the first infantry to penetrate the town. The next day, 8 May, the Surreys' advanced in strength with 78th Division, and it became a victory march into Tunis. The streets thronged with people deliriously happy, waving French tricolours, throwing flowers and reaching out with bottles of wine to the victorious troops.

It was the "The Turn of the Tide"

For just a week after entering Tunis on 8 May 1943 the 1st Surreys based themselves at La Goulette, where they rounded up more Axis prisoners, and helped in the clearing of the port. La Goulette is just a few miles

from the ancient site of Carthage, where only a few ruins remain after the city's destruction by Rome in the Third Punic War. Yet the original founders of Carthage are still remembered in street names close to the Antonine Baths, such as "Rue Hannibal", and "Rue de Phoenicians".

The Allies' defeat of Axis forces in Hannibal's homeland came with the capture of 250,000 enemy prisoners. Goebbels in Berlin likened it to the Nazis' defeat at Stalingrad. For many of the Allied troops it would be the start of a journey like Hannibal's, across the Mediterranean to the European mainland, and through Sicily and Italy to the Alps.

For the 1st Surreys and the Battleaxe Division their journey had begun on 14 October 1942 at Greenock on the Clyde, when 796 of the 1st Surreys had embarked on Operation Torch. By the end of the Tunisian campaign, they had churned through losses of 671 men, either killed, wounded or missing in action. But they had carried out their orders first disclosed to them in mid-Atlantic, and honoured all who had fallen in the past six months to capture Tunis.

In the words of General Anderson, the 1st Surreys had been in combat with the enemy without a break "...in extremely fierce hand-to-hand fights including much night work over cruelly difficult ground". He wrote in a dispatch, "The 78th Division deserves the highest praise for as tough and prolonged a bit of fighting as has ever been undertaken by the British soldier". (Daniel)

The Surreys had helped launch Eisenhower to his first campaign triumph, and his springboard for leading the Allies into Europe. The Tunisian victory confirmed Churchill's quotes after Alamein, and before the landings of Operation Torch, that it was "...perhaps the end of the beginning" (Atkinson), and that the tide had turned. Yet for the Surreys and the Allied armies it also meant that there was to be no turning back from even worse ordeals to come.

Notes - Surreys' Veterans Remember

(A) Living off the Land

In September 2008 in Waikanae, New Zealand, I met with a veteran of the 1st Surreys' Tunisian campaign, Frank Weston, whose story was recounted by Colonel Tim Rogerson in the May newsletter. Despite his incapacities from a fall 12 years ago, Frank still exudes an indomitable spirit and jovial outlook on life that is inspiring.

His stories of that time in Tunisia, Sicily and Italy, continually return to the theme of fighting and living in the open, and finding ways to survive. Frank speaks of never getting enough sleep, of lying on the ground cold or wet or both. Taking care of boots and feet was a constant concern, and any and every chance was taken to remove boots and socks for drying.

Living off the land was essential to supplement, or substitute for a lack of rations. Shooting wild or farm animals, chickens, goats, sheep, and even on one occasion an oxen when Frank had to deploy his butchering trade skills, was seen as the inevitable and necessary plunder of war.

One of the most apt illustrations of that time in Tunisia, and how an infantry soldier such as Frank had to adapt or die, can be seen in the quotation below from the war correspondent Ernie Pyle:

"There are none of the little things that make life normal back home. There are no chairs, lights, floors, or tables. There isn't any place to set anything, or any store to buy things. There are no newspapers, milk, beds, sheets, radiators, beer, ice cream, or hot water. A man just sort of existsThe velvet is all gone from living." (Rick Atkinson, "An Army at Dawn", page 238.)

(B) Longstop Hill

Since the May newsletter another Surrey veteran from those Tunisian battles, John Mumford now 91 and living in Woking, Surrey has written to Frank. John remembers the night before the Battle of Longstop Hill, when he accepted a second ration of rum after a meal of stew. That both John and Frank are quick to speak of Longstop, and the loss of many comrades, shows that even after some 65 years, what was probably the infantry's final pivotal battle of the Tunisian campaign is still burned into the front of their minds.

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The Green Pocket Barometer

Sometime in late 1956 or maybe in early in 1957 (I surmise), Major General J Y Whitfield, Colonel of The Queen's Royal Regiment, was dining with Colonel Nigel Willis of the Regiment. (Colonel Willis had lost an arm in the First World War, and was, in 1928, Adjutant of the 4th Battalion of the Regiment at Croydon. My uncle, Arthur Stiby, had been commissioned, that year, into the Regiment while still at school, for service in the 4th Battalion. My mother, Arthur's elder sister, remembered dancing with Nigel Willis at an all ranks function in the drill hall, as he guided her around the floor with the stump of his arm.) But I digress.

During the aforementioned dinner, the two old soldiers reminisced, as old soldiers are wont to do, about the Regiment, personalities, --- and who was it who had presented a pocket barometer to the Regiment -- when and where? They could not agree, or remember, and they did not even know where it was. The upshot was that General J Y decided to convene a Regimental Silver Board to check all silver, including that in bank vaults, and have one list available at the Depot, so that the location of every piece of silver would be known. Colonel Willis was to be President, and he was to be assisted by

a young officer, newly commissioned from Sandhurst, so he, the young officer, would learn something about the Regimental silver, and thus about the Regiment.

Meanwhile, back at the Depot at Stoughton Barracks, Captain (as then he was) Alan Jones the Adjutant, was required to find a young officer and a platoon of soldiers to take part in the Guildford Pageant. He was however, being pressed by the First Battalion, newly arrived in Iserlohn from Malaya, to send every available officer and soldier out to Germany, as it was very much understrength having lost many drafts of National Servicemen, but had received only one replacement draft in nearly a year. The requirement to provide a newly commissioned Sandhurst officer to help Colonel Willis was a good opportunity to hold the First Battalion at bay, please the Colonel of The Regiment, and support the good citizens of Guildford.

Thus it was that I spent a couple of weeks in July 1957, in the mornings, in the Keep at Stoughton Barracks, unpacking tea chests, and unwrapping layers of newspaper from tarnished silver; while Colonel Willis and P G Smith, the curator of the museum at Stoughton, reminisced about many of the pieces, the officers who had presented them, and times long ago.

Eventually I found a pocket barometer. "This is what this Silver Board is all about" said Colonel Willis, and he told me about the dinner with General J Y, how the Board had come about, and why I had been selected to help. The pocket barometer was in a green, rather faded leather case, and had been presented to the Officers of The First Battalion, in India, by the Officers of The Eagle Troop, Royal Artillery. (Lord Allanbrooke, in his memoirs, remembered serving with the Eagle Troop in India, and it would be interesting to know whether he had been one of the officers who had presented the pocket barometer to the Regiment.) Sadly, I cannot remember the year of the gift. I do not know what the Silver Board recommended for its disposal.

The Silver Board led to my involvement with the Regimental silver. I was appointed Silver Officer on the Mess Committee within days of my arrival in 1 Queen's in Iserlohn; and I retained the appointment through amalgamation, and until I left 1 Queen's Surreys in 1962.

I was reappointed on my return to 1 Queen's in 1967, just in time to pack up the silver (for the fourth time) when we left Münster for Lingfield. I was eventually to hand over, for the last time, when I left 1 Queen's in 1969.

All because of a Green Pocket Barometer.

Paul Gray

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Queen's Royal Surrey Regiment Golf Society

Spring Meeting

The Spring Meeting 2008 was held at the Richmond Golf Club, Sudbrook Park on Thursday 1st May. The results were as follows:

The Challenge Cup	Col John Davidson	Gross 86
The Dodgson Trophy	Lt Col Foster Herd	Net 79
The Heales Memorial Trophy	Christopher Allanson	26 Points
Veterans' Halo	Peter Mason	22 Points
The Harry Adcock Putting Trophy	Col John Davidson	1 under



Our hardworking Secretary Foster Herd receives well earned compensation, the Dodgson Cup, from the Club Captain, Col David Dickins.

Match v The Royal Hampshires



This took place at High Post Golf Club (between Salisbury and Amesbury) on Thursday 4th September. The Regiment regained the trophy, the Surreys' Salver (see above) by a healthy margin of 3 matches to 1.



The Captain (1) receives the trophy back from Joe West, the Hampshire's Captain. Others playing were Chris Allanson (2) Robert Acworth (3) Chris Surtees (4) John Davidson (5) Michael Power (6) Tony Ward (7) and Peter Dorey (8).

Museum Notes

Although the weather was poor this summer the museum was very lucky with its open days with the 2nd Foot, our friends from the Napoleonic era, performing their very impressive display of drill and tactics of the time - the firing of their muskets never fails to impress our visitors. Colin Reilly brought his 1/5th Queen's group from WW2 down twice this year to show the weapons etc. and on the second occasion brought two WW2 vehicles.

A new addition this year was the Whitgift School Corps of Drums who came and entertained a fair crowd on the lawn with their fife and drums on a lovely summer's day which was very popular; hopefully we will book them again next year. FM Montgomery appeared with his entourage and made his normal inspection of the troops on parade and again spoke to our veterans.

During the year we have received some wonderful medal Groups to add to our collection including three Military Cross Groups, two Military Medal Groups and eight other groups from the South Africa War, India General Service, WW1 & WW2.

RSM (Tommy) Atkins medals are now on display (report in last issue) as are Ron May's (Militia Man) who served throughout WW2 with 1/5th Queen's.

One rather unusual group is that of Cpl. E. John who served as a regular soldier in the 2nd Bn. Queen's in China, Quetta etc. He rejoined the R.A.O.C. in WW2 and was sunk with the HMTS Lancastria, but survived because the army had taught him to swim; we also have his Lancastria Medal issued by the Scottish Government.

The Gallantry Medal groups need particular mention as they are all very special and came with lots of additional information.

Capt. Furness MC went to war as a private in 14th London Bn. (London Scottish) and was given a temporary commission in the 11th (Service) Bn. The Queen's and distinguished himself in July of 1918.

Lieut. H. B. Denny went to war with the Royal Fusiliers and again was given a Temporary Commission and served with the 1st Bn. where he distinguished himself in 1918. After the war he joined the TA with the Artist Rifles and was awarded the TEM; then in WW2 he served in the Metropolitan Police.



ARTISTS RIFLES SERGEANTS' MESS
DEC. 7. 1935.

CQMS Denny MC

Capt. A. D. E. W. Hare MC and Bar, MM went to War with the 15th London (Civil Service Rifles) where he quickly rose through the ranks to Sgt. and was awarded the MM. In 1918 he was commissioned into the 10th (Service) Bn. of The Queen's and between July and November 1918 was awarded two Military Crosses.



Capt. A. D. E. W. Hare MC and Bar, MM

C/Sgt. H Groves was awarded the MM whilst serving with the 6th (Service) Bn. Queen's for Bravery and Distinguished Service in the Field and was later awarded the Imperial Service medal for his work at RMA Sandhurst after he retired from the Army.

More information on these stories is available in the museum.

Open Days next year are already booked for Sunday April 19th (2nd Foot) and Sunday 14th June (Civil War) with others still to be confirmed.

Medal Theft update

Surrey police have returned four medals that were stolen from the museum back in 2003. We ask everybody to keep an eye open for any medals awarded to the Regiment as this may be the start of the appearance of our medals stolen in that burglary.

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The Infantry Boys Battalion & Infantry Junior Leaders Battalion Association: Memorial Dedication Weekend 6th/7th June 2009

The IBB & IJLB Association will be dedicating a memorial, built with donations raised by the Infantry Regimental Associations and ex Junior Leaders, over the weekend 6th/7th June 2009 at Oswestry to commemorate the achievement of this unique Infantry Battalion which will tell future generations who we were, what we were and what we achieved. Secondly it will probably be the last time that the IBB & IJLB Association will march through what is considered its spiritual home, Oswestry exercising its right to do so having been granted the freedom of Oswestry in 1971.

We would like to take this opportunity to thank all Regimental Associations and ex Junior Leaders whose generosity has made this memorial possible.

The format for the weekend:-

Saturday 6th June

Meet at the Rugby Club (the former Officers Mess) at Park Hall Camp at 1200 Noon for an informal get together. Sandwiches, a bar and light refreshments will be available to purchase. There will be a display of photographs and memorabilia in the Clubhouse.

Dinner at the Old Assembly Rooms at the Camp (now an entertainment suite) will be served at 1930 for 2000 hrs. A full bar will be available.

Sunday 7th June

1000 am - Assemble at Oswestry town centre for the Dedication parade and march through Oswestry. A memorial drumhead service will be held at Cae Glas Park, the location of the memorial. The Prince of Wales Division Band will be in attendance.

1300 hours - Curry lunch in the Old Assembly Rooms at Park Hall Camp, a bar will be available in the Assembly Rooms.

1500 hours - The Band will beat Retreat on the Oswestry Showground which is the old Drill Square at Park Hall Camp.

For further information about booking dinner, lunch or parade only please contact the Secretary, of the IBB & IJLB Association, Mr Ken Nicol at :-

44 CEFN ROAD, WREXHAM, LL13 9 NH
email KnntNic@aol.com

or visit the IJLB Association website at www.ijlb.co.uk for further information.

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Guildford Cathedral Flower Gala

1st - 3rd October 2009

In 2009 the Cathedral is holding a flower gala and included in the team for the Regimental Chapel are two arrangers with very close connections to the Regiment. Jan Bradley's father, Capt. Reginald Pontifex, commanded C Company of the 1/6th Battalion The Queen's Royal Regiment. He died, aged 32, at the Battle of the River Escaut on 21st May 1940 and is buried at Esquelmes War Cemetery.

Pam Wright's first husband, William Elliman, did his National Service with the Regiment and proudly wore his regimental tie throughout his time working in the City. Her second husband, Michael, was also with the Regiment and has very happy memories of his time.

The Flower Team have visited the Regimental Museum and it is hoped to include some of the artefacts within their design for the Regimental Chapel. They would be enormously grateful for any donations towards the cost of the flowers and lighting. Any amount would be appreciated; but a gift of between fifty and one hundred pounds will entitle the donor to have their name in the programme as a Bronze Patron, a gift of between £100 and £500 will entitle the donor to be in the programme as a Silver Patron, and over £500 the their names will be included in the display title as well as being a Gold Patron in the programme.

Cheques should be made payable to **Guildford Cathedral** and gift aided if possible. Please send them to: The Regimental Chapel Flower Fund, Cathedral Office, Stag Hill, Guildford, Surrey, GU2 7UP - (donations should not be sent via the Regimental Association).

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Robert Libbiter writes from Australia;

My father Sidney Reginald Cambrai Libbiter, who was born in 1918 at Chiddingfold, Surrey enlisted into the Queen's Royal Regiment as a militiaman in July 1939. His overseas service before leaving the Colours in May 1946 included France with the BEF in 1940, the Middle East, North Africa and Italy and North West Europe. He

married my mother, who he had met before the war, on 19th April 1942 while on leave.

He was a driver with 1/5th Queen's. Maybe because he was the driver of B Company Commander he kept meticulous driving details - those and his personal diaries have given me an insight into what everyone was enduring at that time. Like the dates and miles travelled between the 35 towns between El Alamein and Tunis. He had never spoken about the war; what little I had known was from my mother telling me. Someone pulling him into a little boat at Dunkirk because he could not swim; having his truck blown away leaving him standing beside it; being at the beach head two days after D Day, and five days later actually having the Americans strafe them while on a very early morning advance.

When the war was over my parents expanded the news agents business which had been my mother's parents, and had four children. In 1960 we sold up and emigrated to Australia. In 2002 my parents celebrated their 60th wedding anniversary, then a fortnight after his 84th birthday he passed away on 26th September 2002, five days after suffering a stroke. During a trip back to England in May 1990 he had attended a 5th Battalion The Queen's Royal Regiment Old Members Association Reunion Dinner at Sandfield Terrace; we still have the menu signed by a number of those present, some of whom may remember him. He is survived by my mother who is now 90 years old and has recently moved into residential care, and their four children.

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Peter Green writes:

I am researching the march taken by PoWs, including men from The East Surrey Regiment, from Oflag IX A/Z at Rotunda an der Fulda towards Halle in March and April 1945 with a view to publication. I am looking for personal diaries, letters or photographs I might have access to; any use would be acknowledged and I would bear the costs of duplication if required. (Contact through editor.)

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John Broom writes:

The East Surrey Regimental reunion 2008 was held at the New Drill Hall, Clapham Junction on 4th October. Around 80 attended, with friends who have attended regularly being joined by others who were there for the first time. The President Col John Francis gave an update on the Regimental Association just before the buffet opened. A delicious fruit cake superbly decorated with the East Surrey badge had been donated by a member and everybody enjoyed a slice. The cost of the reunion is subsidised by donations from the Queen's Royal Surrey Regiment Association and individual members as well as the raffle on the day.

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200th Anniversary of the Battle of Albuhera

16th May 2011 will mark the 200th anniversary of the Battle of Albuhera. RHQ PWRR are currently developing plans for involvement in the bi-centenary celebrations. The provisional programme envisages flying out from Heathrow to Lisbon on Fri 13th May and returning to UK on Tue 17th May. The schedule of events would include a dinner, commemoration and re-enactment events, and battlefield tours.

Medical insurance will be compulsory and some sites will involve a fair amount of walking in potentially warm weather, although where possible it is hoped to provide alternative facilities (e.g. sit at a café) to the more arduous events. Estimated cost to include flights, in-country coaches, hotels and meals is in the region of £750 per person at today's prices (although this cannot be guaranteed).

RHQ PWRR is attempting to establish an idea of the numbers of those who might be interested in making the trip and taking part in the celebrations (no firm commitment is required at this stage). Those interested in obtaining further details and registering an interest should contact RHQ PWRR, Howe Barracks, Canterbury, Kent CT1 1JY. Tel: 01227 818054.

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Cliff Martin - A Poem

The following poem by Cliff Martin (who died on 1st June 2008) was written whilst he was a Japanese PoW:

*Ours was a common cause
For this we've suffered long
But the wind that blows us all our woes
Tends to make us strong*

*In the days to come
When we're safe back home
Just review the days gone by
We had a cause for which to fight
To protect we swore to die*

*But fate was cruel
And we lost our duel
We were shipped to a foreign land
Slaved and fought
The reward was nought
We remained a stubborn band*

*But when we're free
We'll plainly see
After mists of hate are banished
That a lasting friend is a friend in need
And a friend in need is a friend indeed*

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Regimental Deaths

Barnett - On 24th August 2008, Corporal Charles Barnett. He enlisted into the 1st Bn The East Surrey Regiment in February 1958. His service with the battalion and, following amalgamation, with The Queen's Royal Surrey Regiment, included UK Cyprus and Benghazi. He was discharged from the Army in 1960.

Beaumont-Edmonds - On 10th October 2008, Colin Beaumont-Edmonds MC (see obituary).

Bramble - On 3rd October 2008 Alfred Gordon (Alf) Bramble, aged 89 years. He enlisted in the Royal Berkshire Regiment in December 1939, prior to transfer to 2/6th Bn The Queen's Royal Regiment in April 1940. He saw service in France with the BEF, UK, India, Iraq, North Africa and Italy. By the end of hostilities in 1945, he had attained the rank of WOII, and shortly after was appointed RQMS. His discharge came in June 1946. He is survived by his wife Sybil to whom we offer our sincere condolences.

Capper - On 7th January 2008, F W Capper who served with The Queen's Royal Regiment.

Cox - On 14th November 2007, Captain James Cox who served with 6th Battalion East Surrey Regiment (TA) 1948 - 1958.

Edwards - On 12th July 2008 Michael T Edwards who served in The East Surrey Regiment 1944-47.

Gamby - On 12th October 2008 Thomas William (Tom) Gamby, aged 93 years. He enlisted at Stoughton Barracks in June 1940 and was posted to 2/6th Bn The Queen's Royal Regiment later that year. He served in the UK, Iraq, North Africa and Italy before his discharge in February 1946. Earlier in 2008 he celebrated his 60th Wedding Anniversary and is survived by his wife Phyllis to whom we offer our sincere condolences.

Gray - On 5th July 2008 aged 88 years, Major John Richard Gray. He was initially called up in 1939, serving with the Royal Berkshire Regiment before being granted an emergency commission with The Middlesex Regiment in 1942. His war service included N Africa, Sicily and Italy; he was wounded in 1944 on operations in Italy and was mentioned in despatches in 1945. He was granted a regular commission with The East Surrey Regiment in 1945. He served with 2nd Surreys in Palestine and with the 1st Bn in Somaliland and UK, before serving with the 2nd Bn The Parachute Regiment 1951-53. He then held staff appointments in Egypt and in Cyprus before retiring in 1956. During his civilian career he worked for IBM for a number of years and as an air traffic controller before setting up his own business.

Greatwood - On 30th June 2008 Major Hugh Graham Greatwood (see obituary).

Haite - On 30th August 2008 of a heart attack, Private Raymond (Ray) Haite. He was born on 6th June 1937 and joined The East Surrey Regiment as a regular soldier in November 1955. His service prior to discharge in October 1958 included Bury St Edmunds and Brunswick, Germany.

Harding - On Friday 31st October 2008 aged 81 years, WO II Denis Percy Harding MVO. He enlisted in September 1944 and after training joined 1/6th Bn The Queen's Royal Regiment. His service with the battalion included Lebanon, Syria and Palestine. When the battalion went into suspended animation in 1947 he joined 2nd Bn The East Surrey Regiment in Egypt. Following amalgamation of 1st and 2nd Surreys he served with 1st Surreys in Greece before returning to UK in September 1948. He continued service with the Surreys until the 1959 amalgamation. He remained at regimental duty with The Queen's Royal Surreys and then The Queen's, retiring from the Army in 1968. He was for a time Header Porter at Keynes College, University of Kent before becoming a Yeoman Warder in 1973. He was promoted to Yeoman clerk in 1985 and in 1986 he was again promoted becoming Chief Yeoman Warder. He held that appointment until retirement on his 65th birthday on 13th February 1992. He was awarded the MVO in the 1992 New Years Honours.

Hewitt - On 12th May 2008, William Robert Hewitt.

Jacobs - On 27th June 2008 aged 90 years, WO II Ernest William Jacobs. He enlisted into 1/6th Bn The East Surrey Regiment in July 1939. His service prior to discharge in April 1946 included France 1940, North Africa, Italy, Greece and the Middle East.

Leach - On 25th January 2008, Dennis Leach who was Bandmaster with The East Surrey Regiment 1949/50.

Lewis - On 24th December 2007 in Canada aged 83 years, Henry Lewis. He was born in Teplice Sanov, Czechoslovakia and originally named Heinz Jindrich Josef Laufer. Shortly before the Second World War, assisted by the Kindertransport, his parents sent him to England; both his parents and his younger brother were to die during the holocaust. He enlisted into the Pioneer Corps in March 1944, subsequently transferring to the Queen's Own Royal West Kent Regiment and then to 1/5th Bn The Queen's Royal Regiment where he was a Regimental signaller. In September 1945 he was attached to the British Military Government as an interpreter with 823 Detachment, Westphalia. He was discharged from the Army in December 1947 in the rank of Colour Sergeant. He subsequently worked as a manager for a UK scientific publishing company before emigrating with his wife Pat to Canada in 1952. He worked for RCA Victor, initially in Montreal and then in Prescott, Ontario until retiring in 1985.

Lowry - On 24th August 2008 aged 89 years, Lieutenant Colonel Michael Alastair Lowry MBE MC (see obituary).

Mackrell - On 2nd September 2008, Sgt Thomas William Mackrell. Enlisted in December 1941 into 12th Field Training Regiment RA, he subsequently joined 4th Bn The Queen's Royal Regiment, which subsequently became 63 Searchlight Regiment RA. His Second World War service prior to discharge in December 1946 included India and Burma. He joined the TA in 1950 serving with 598 LAA Regiment RA (4 Queen's) until 1955.

Martin - On 1st June 2008, Warrant Officer Clifford Godfrey Martin. Having enlisted into 1st Bn The East Surrey Regiment in June 1937, he subsequently served with the 2nd Bn. He was in Malaya and Singapore and with The British Battalion before being captured by the Japanese. During captivity he worked on the wooden bridge over the River Kwai and then on the railway through Siam to its completion. He was then transferred to Japan where he was for some time in Mitsubishi PoW Camp.

Morrison - On 3rd August 2008 aged 77 years, Captain Patrick John Morrison. He was commissioned into The East Surrey Regiment from RMAS in 1951, serving with the 1st Bn until 1953. He subsequently served with the Parachute Regiment 1953-57 and then with the Army Air Corps from 1957 until his retirement from the Army in 1961. He went on to be an airline pilot for almost 30 years.

Obee - On 6th August 2008 aged 84 years, Cyril John Obee. He enlisted into the RAOC in March 1943, subsequently transferring to the Royal Hampshire Regiment before joining 2nd Bn The East Surrey Regiment. His service prior to discharge in August 1947 included Egypt, Palestine and the European mainland.

Penn - On 21st July 2008 aged 88 years, Major Leonard Edward Penn. Having been granted an emergency commission into The East Surrey Regiment, he served with 1/6th Bn in North Africa March 1943 - March 1944, in Italy and then in Greece, retiring from the Army in September 1946. He went on to be a paper manufacturer until 1982 when he joined the legal profession from which he retired on New Years Eve 1989.

Petch - In September 2007, Sgt William Pennington Petch. He enlisted into 1/5th Bn The Queen's Royal Regiment in 1938. His service before discharge in February 1946 included BEF France 1940, North Africa, Italy, and (following D Day) France through to Germany.

Phillips - On 19th August 2008, Mervyn Owen Phillips who joined The Queen's Royal Regiment in 1925, subsequently going on to serve with the REME and RMP before leaving the Army in 1953.

Plume - On 2nd June 2008 aged 89 years, Frederick Thomas Plume. He enlisted into the Army in June 1939, initially serving with the Worcestershire Regiment before transferring to 1st Bn The Queen's Royal Regiment. His service prior to discharge in December 1945 included France and Belgium, and Burma.

Simpson - On 4th October 2008, Ken Simpson who was for a number of years a member of the Recce Platoon 3rd Bn The Queen's Royal Surrey Regiment.

Spring - On 24th July 2008, John "Paddy" Spring.

Stokes - On 21st June 2008 Donald Stokes who served with The East Surrey Regiment.

Regimental Family

Aukett - On 3rd August 2008, Alice Aukett widow of the late WO II Vic Aukett.

Reed - On 19th June 2008, Moyra Russ Reed widow of the late Major John Reed.

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Obituaries

Major Hugh Graham Greatwood



Hugh Greatwood, who died on 30th June 2008, was born into a military family; his father commanded the 4/6 Battalion of the Raj Patana Rifles and his mother's forebears had served in the British and Indian Armies for 200 years.

His father died of wounds in 1941 when fighting the Vichy French in Syria; this sad event had a profound effect on Hugh's life. He was born in Kashmir as were his sister and brother, and after his father's death during the war life in India changed dramatically. Mrs Greatwood brought the family home by troop ship in 1944.

Hugh was educated at Haileybury and arrived at R.M.A. Sandhurst in 1949. He excelled in all sports particularly Rugby Football and having played for the Harlequins, the Army and Combined Services was selected for England Trials at a very young age.

Hugh was commissioned into The East Surrey Regiment and initially was posted to the Depot in 1951 and then to the 1st Battalion in Egypt in 1952. The Battalion returned to the UK in the following year and were stationed at Shorncliffe.

Hugh met his wife to be in 1956 and they married in 1958 when the Battalion was stationed in Bury St. Edmunds in Suffolk. The Battalion was posted abroad at short notice immediately after their wedding to help deal with the emergency in Cyprus, but returned in 6 months.

Hugh was next posted to the Infantry Junior Leaders Battalion at Oswestry and the family now included their son and daughter David and Annie.

Hugh joined the 1st Battalion The Parachute Regiment in 1963 and also served with the 3rd Battalion in 1970, serving in Bahrain, Ghana and Northern Ireland. He then took command of the Junior Para Training Company for six years before retiring.

He was appointed to the Army Sports Control Board and was secretary to the Army Rugby Union for 2 years, and after retiring to Dorset became the Colonel Commandant of the Dorset Army Cadet Force. He was made a Freeman of the City of London for his work in the training of young soldiers.

Hugh Greatwood was an excellent Regimental soldier and a very honourable and good man who was liked and respected by all who came in contact with him. He is greatly missed and we offer our sincere condolences to his family.

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Lieutenant Colonel M A Lowry MBE MC



Michael Alastair Lowry who died on 24th August 2008, and who was always known as Mike, was born on 30th January 1919. After school at Uppingham he went to the Royal Military College, Sandhurst, where he became an Under Officer and also played cricket for the College. He was commissioned in July 1939 into The Queen's Royal Regiment, going out immediately to 1st Battalion in India. While war in Europe did not initially impinge on India, there was still the North West Frontier to be controlled, and in October 1940 the 1st Battalion moved up to Razmak from where operations against the hostile local forces, controlled by the Faquir of Ipi, were undertaken. In December Mike while in command of a platoon was wounded, and later in the summer he commanded a company with distinction, receiving in 1942 a Mention in Dispatches.

With the war in the Far East 1st Queen's became part of 7th Indian Division, being deployed to the Arakan in early Autumn 1943. From then until the end of March 1944 the Battalion was in close contact with the Japanese as a series of actions initiated by both sides were fought for control of the Arakan. Due to the thick jungle and bamboos, interspersed with paddy fields and steep hills, all actions were physically extremely arduous and often contested at very close range. Mike Lowry commanded B Company throughout this time in a number of successful operations, these including the 18 days in the Battalion's "Braganza Box" while the Division stood fast after

being surrounded by the Japanese. He was subsequently awarded a second Mention in Dispatches.

Then in April 1944 in response to the Japanese major attack through to Kohima the Battalion was transferred to the north to reinforce the 2nd British Division who had moved up to support the small Kohima Garrison, mainly the gallant 4th Royal West Kents. The key feature of the area was Jail Hill, and in the first week of May 1st Queen's carried out two successful Battalion attacks which led to the recovery of the feature. Mike Lowry commanded his B Company, which sustained heavy casualties as did the Battalion, throughout and again much of the action was at close range: he was strongly recommended for an MC. Soon after this he was posted home to become an Instructor at 164 OCTU, then rejoining the 1st Battalion in Singapore as Adjutant in 1947, continuing as Adjutant at the Regimental Depot when the 1st Battalion returned from the Far East. In 1951 he became Military Assistant to the GOC British Troops in Austria, before again rejoining the 1st Battalion to command a company for the operations in Malaya. During these he particularly led his Company in a completely successful ambush operation lasting over seven days leading to the killing or capture of a complete terrorist cell. For this he was awarded the MC - a decoration he might have received 10 years earlier. After his tour with the 1st Battalion Mike Lowry came home to be Training Major of the 5th Battalion TA, before in 1958 becoming 2ic of the Somaliland Scouts during the final two years of the British Protectorate.

In November 1960, back in England, he was appointed to command the amalgamated 1st Battalion The Queen's Royal Surrey Regiment. During his time in command the Battalion moved out to Aden for one year and then on to Hong Kong. In both places the Battalion was deployed to back up the stability and security of the Colony, in Aden against infiltration from the Yemen, and in Hong Kong from refugees who at one stage were encouraged to flood over into the New Territories. A highlight of Mike's command of the Battalion was the special parade in Aden to mark the Tercentenary of the Regiment, at which HRH Princess Alexandra of Kent took the salute. Another memorable occasion took place when he paraded the Governor's Guard in scarlets in Hong Kong. Sometime later the displeasure of the Army Board was conveyed, but it had been a special event, (presumably) the last time that any Regiment of the Infantry of The Line, other than their Bands and Drums, paraded in red coats.

At the end of his command Mike Lowry became Commandant of the HQ and Administrative Wing at the School of Infantry, retiring from this post and the Army in November 1967. In retirement he ran a small farm round his home near Shaftesbury, becoming a competent shepherd to a flock of some 90 or so sheep which were moved round his fields with military planning and precision. But this wasn't enough, and he was soon involved in European and Conservative Party affairs and his stints as Chairman of various Councils and

Committees led to him being appointed MBE in 1988. He continued after this to speak and write on behalf of the British Atlantic Committee, Peace through NATO and other organisations, and for all this work he was appointed an Honorary Fellow of the Atlantic Council of the UK in 1998. In pursuit of these activities he travelled widely in Europe, and to Russia.

Throughout his life Mike Lowry was a keen games player. While cricket was his major game - he was a member of MCC, I Zingari, Free Foresters and other Clubs and Captain of Regimental sides when available - he also captained the 1st Battalion Boxing side in his early years, and played rugby, hockey, and polo for the Battalion. Besides games, his other interests included music and history, and driving distinguished motor cars, Bentleys preferred.

Mike was always an enthusiast and busy, setting the highest standards for himself and expecting them from all those he commanded and worked with.

In 1961, when in command, he married Rua Thesiger, and she accompanied him immediately to Aden and then Hong Kong. She sadly died in 1988. They had three children, Susan, Patricia and Robert.

In 2003 Mike Lowry had published his autobiographical memoir "Fighting through to Kohima", which covered his life up to his leaving 1st Battalion The Queen's Royal Regiment after Kohima in 1944. Earlier in 1950 he had published "An Infantry Company in Arakan and at Kohima", and in 1995 "European Security and the Atlantic Alliance".

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Colin Beaumont-Edmonds MC

Colin Beaumont-Edmonds, having attended Malborough College joined 60th (Young Soldiers) Bn the Royal Sussex Regiment in December 1940. Having attended OCTU, in July 1942 he was granted an emergency commission in The Queen's Royal Regiment, joining 2/5th Bn. In August 1942 he sailed with the battalion, as part of 169 (Queen's) Infantry Brigade, from Liverpool via Freetown and Cape Town for India. The battalion subsequently moved to Iraq before undertaking the 3,300 mile approach march to join 8th Army for the final phase of the operations in North Africa in March 1943.

On 3rd May 1943 at Enfidaville, while serving with D Company 2/5th Queen's, he commanded his platoon in a successful attack against an Italian patrol. During the action, for which he was awarded the Military Cross, he was wounded by covering German mortar fire and blinded.

Having returned to England and to St. Dunstan's, he went on to Magdalen College, Oxford for a two year course

and thence into the Personnel Department of ICI. He married his wife Joyce in 1950 and they settled in Sutton Coldfield. He was subsequently a Borough Councillor 1954-74, being Mayor in 1964 after which he was made an Alderman. He was also involved in the scout movement for some 20 years, initially as the Sutton Coldfield Secretary and then later as District Commissioner, a post he held until moving to Folkestone where he was again involved in the Scout Movement and local politics. He worked for NatWest in Kent for over a decade, retiring in 1985.

Settling in Sidmouth, he was the founder of the Sid Vale and Eastern Devon Talking Newspaper. He became President of St. Dunstan's in 1986, a post he held until 2004. Colin Beaumont-Edmonds died on 10th October 2008 aged 85 years; he is survived by his wife Joyce and daughter to whom we offer our sincere condolences.

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Dr. Gordon Charkin writes:

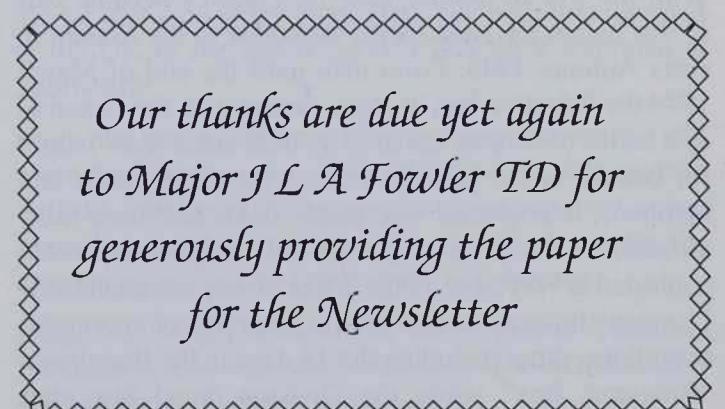
East Surrey veterans will remember Pte Dennis Lionel Scaife who was so popular - always with a smile and a joke. He always wanted to travel and he got his way. Today he is buried beside his wife in a beautiful rose garden, beside a river in Adelaide, Australia; on his memorial it reads "Dennis the Menace".

Pte Scaife enlisted in the Queen's in March 1942 aged 18 years. He transferred to The East Surrey regiment and served in N Africa and Italy with the 78th Battleaxe Division. Later when on patrol on the Austrian border with Lt John Woodhouse and his close friend Reg Cambridge, Lou Scaife was wounded by a grenade and captured by the Germans; he was a PoW at Stalag 317. The officer (later Lt Col Woodhouse) was captured later.

Repatriated in 1945 Lou Scaife tired of the quiet life in England, so he emigrated to Australia together with his wife Iris and seven young children. Such a move needed much courage. Despite the many wounds he had suffered from the wartime grenade, he did very well working for General Motors (Holden). Today there are a third generation of born Australians who still keep faith.

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*Our thanks are due yet again
to Major J L A Fowler TD for
generously providing the paper
for the Newsletter*



The Covers

2008 marks the 90th anniversary of the Armistice which brought the First World War fighting on the Western Front to an end. The first British shots of the war had reputedly been fired on 22nd August 1914. By the 11th November 1918 combined military deaths of all the combatant nations approached 10 million; the exact figure remains unclear. The War Office report of March 1922 (Statistics of the Military Effort of the British Empire during the Great War 1914-1920) put the Empire deaths at 908,371. The Commonwealth War Graves Commission Annual Report 2006-2007 statistics for the 1914-18 War record 587,684 identified burials and 526,974 commemorated on memorials.

The Armistice was signed shortly after 5 a.m. on 11th November 1918, however it was to take effect from 11 a.m.; the delay was to ensure that personnel on both sides could be informed. 1st Queen's War Diary entry for the day noted "News of Germany's acceptance of the Allied Armistice Terms received 0835 hrs. With the exception of necessary routine no work was done on this day". That was not universal, however, and elsewhere fighting continued right up to the last minutes.

During the war The Queen's (Royal West Surrey) Regiment had had 8,000 all ranks killed out of the twenty five battalions/thirty one units formed. Five Victoria Crosses had been gained. The East Surrey Regiment had formed eighteen battalions; 6,000 men had been lost and seven VCs awarded.

The covers are a montage of Regimental Archive images from the war. The telegram pictured on the front cover, the original of which is in The Queen's (Royal West Surrey) Regiment section of the Regimental Archive, was the means by which the news of the Armistice was conveyed to the Chief British Instructor American First Corps Schools. The photograph below that shows 9th Bn The East Surrey Regiment on 12th November 1918 at St Waast, near Bavai.

The three main photographs on the back cover are, from the top: the mobilisation of the Croydon Territorials in August 1914; a burial party from 2nd Queen's on 19th December 1914 during the unofficial truce (in the left of the photograph is a German officer); and thirdly the 12th Bn The East Surrey Regiment in reserve in June 1917 after the battle of Messines - the battalion war diary for the British attack on the Messines Ridge on 7th June 1917 records the unit had had six officers wounded, 23 ORs killed, 160 wounded (of whom seven died soon after) and six missing.

The three small photographs are (from the left); Lt Franks, Maj Place DSO MC and Lt Hall of 8th Bn The East Surrey Regiment in 1917; officers of 9th East Surreys behind the lines at Vimy Ridge in 1916 (R C Sherriff, who was to be the author of 'Journey's End', is standing second from left. The play is set in the trenches at Saint-Quentin, France, over four days in March 1918 and gives a glimpse of the experiences of the officers of a British Army infantry company during the war); and a Lewis gun team from 8th East Surreys in 1917.

As part of the ongoing development of the Regimental website, overseen by Lt Col Les Wilson, all the First World War battalion diaries of our forbears have been digitised and can now be accessed on the internet. It is intended that the diaries will in due course form part of the Regimental website. For the present a link to the diaries can be found on the Regimental website home page at www.queensroyalsurreys.org.uk.

Branch Secretaries

5th Bn OMA-QRR:	I Chatfield Esq, 13 Wood Road, Farncombe, Godalming, Surrey GU7 3NN	Tel: 01483 429425
6th Bn OCA-QRR:	Major M R Nason TD, 64 Westfield Road, Barnehurst, Kent DA7 6LR	Tel: 0132 2527017
7th Bn OCA-QRR:	Major J M A Tamplin MBE TD, 10 Hugh Street, London SW1	Tel: 0207 8340120
2/6th Bn OCA-QRR:	Major M R Nason TD, 64 Westfield Road, Barnehurst, Kent DA7 6LR	Tel: 0132 2527017
2/7th Bn OCA-QRR:	Colonel D E Blum OBE, 85 Thameside, Staines, Middlesex TW18 2HF	Tel: 01784 450483
East Surrey Reunion:	J Broom Esq, 11 Sayerland Road, Polegate, East Sussex BN26 6NU	Tel: 01323 489262
WOs and Sgts Assoc:	R W Stebbings Esq, 5 Ebbage Court, 14 Mount Herman Road, Woking, Surrey GU22 7SX	Tel: 01483 770343
2/6th East Surrey St Valery Assoc:	Maj A J Redfern MC TD, Courtlands, 12 Kent House, Sheen Rd, Richmond, Surrey TW10 5AV	Tel: 0208 9402191
Queen's Surreys (Kent) Branch:	R F Harper Esq, 90 Osbourne Road, Willesborough, Ashford, Kent TN24 0EQ	Tel: 01233 634719
Queen's Surreys (Suffolk) Branch:	D J Gardner Esq, 106 Oakes Road, Bury St Edmunds, Suffolk IP32 6QS	Tel: 01284 753160
1st Surrey Rifles:	T W Young Esq BEM, 38 Stanstead Manor, St James Road, Sutton, Surrey	Tel: 0208 643 6189
Queen's Surreys (South West) Branch:	H Stewart Esq, 3 Wentworth Road, Springbank, Cheltenham, Glos GL51 0NS	Tel: 01242 239121

