

1/6 Bn. The Queen's Royal Regiment (West Surrey) War Diary January 1943

JANUARY 1943.

AREA TAMET.

1st Jan. Ref. Libyan Grid 1/500,000 Maps SIRTE and MISURATA.
Weather, cold and sunless. Bn. continued preparation of defensive positions and carried out training. Times of "Stand to" were 0700 hrs. to 0730 hrs. Every day for 10 minutes. After "Stand to" all ranks do a short form of quickening exercises. Times of "Stand down" were 0830 hrs. till dark.
"B" Coy prepared a minefield 200x X 50x in front of their position. A compressor and pneumatic drills were obtained to blast defensive positions which could only be taken down a couple of feet before striking hard rock. Water supplies were very short. A party of one officer (Lt. Bennett) and 90 O.R's arrived at 1800 hrs. Information was received at 1830 hrs. that the 15 PZ. Div. was advancing eastwards from GHEDDAHIA. All Coys informed.

Appen. no. 1

2nd and part of 3rd January missing.

3rd Jan. Commander at 1000 hrs.. There was a guard of honour in attendance. "A" and "B" Coys practise debussing drill also rehearsed A demonstration of adoption of an A/Tk screen. HQ and "C" Coys provided parties for road repairs work on WADI TAMET L.G. Water was still scarce but the I.O. Found four wells and these were subsequently used by a Bde. R.E. Officers.

4th Jan. Weather fine, visibility good. High wind in the afternoon and evening.
"A" and "B" Coys had debussing schemes while "C" and HQ Coys continued work on TAMET L.G. Water again presented a problem but that had been due to bad organisation.
At 0900 hrs. two Coys one troop 226 A/Tk battery and Z Coy R.N.F gave a demonstration of lorried infantry rapidly debussing and the adoption of an A/Tk screen. An R.A.F. R.D.F. station was established forward and also to the left of the Bn.

5th Jan. Weather. Fine, visibility good. Two Plns. of "A" Coy two Plns. of "B" and one Plns. of "C" Coy did an approach compass march exercise of nine miles. This was followed by field firing exercises. Remainder of "A", "C" and HQ Coys were employed on work on WADI TAMET L.G. Water situation was decidedly better.

6th Jan. Weather. Fine, visibility good, clear skies.
0900 hrs. Lecture to Bn. officers by Capt. Kilshaw. The subject was enemy and British A/Tk mines anti-personnel mines, booby traps and enemy grenades. "A" and "B" Coys were employed on TAMET L.G. "C" Coy did a field firing exercise. HQ Coy carried out normal training.
1215 hrs.. 2 enemy aircraft flew across the WADI TAMET and machine gunned some A/Tk portees of the 1/7th Queen's R.R. 2 pounder portee was set on fire and destroyed, there were 2 casualties.
1640 hrs. 8 Italian aircraft flew over Bde. area. They were flying in a westerly direction. There were no damage or casualties. They were engaged by all arms.
Attached is a trace of the 226/57th Field Regt. D.F. tasks in support of the Bn.
2030 hrs. A number of enemy aircraft flew over the Bde. position and were believed to have dropped THERMOS BOMBS. All Coys and Bn. HQ were warned and instructions and diagrams were sent out by the I.O.
2155 hrs. an ME 109F was found shot down at M ref Y 0284 by Bde. I.O. It was shot down by small arms fire and in view of the A.A. action taken by all ranks of the Bn. it appeared likely that it was a Bn. "bag".

- 7th Jan. Weather, fine and sunny. Coys carried out training in the rapid adoption of an A/Tk screen. For this purpose the carriers and A/Tk Plns. were split up and sub allotted in two Coys. 1330 hrs. Intense air activity and A.A. fire South of the Bn. One plane was seen to crash about 6 miles away on a bearing of 174°. Lt. Col. R.J.A. KAULBACK went on an extensive recce with the Bde. Comdr. All Comdrs. were ordered to ensure that their sub-units were up to strength in ammo and carried four days reserve of rations and three days supply of water.
- 8th Jan. Weather. Fine and sunny. Dust storms called by vehicles passing Bn. area. "A" Coy practise taking up a position behind an A/Tk screen. "B" and "C" Coys practise Coy night attacks by day and both Coys had a night attack exercise. Warning orders and opening narrative for Bn. night operation issued.
- 9th Jan. Weather. Fine. Visibility poor on account of the fine dust raised by vehicles. A D.R. reported the presence of THERMOS bombs in the Bn. area. Bde. informed. Traces of the Italian V. 5 mine were prepared together with instructions as to the method of recognising and dealing with them, were distributed to Coys. 1615 Hrs. Maj. R. d'A MULLINS took over Comd. of the Bn. Recce group. 1630 hrs. Order Group were brought up and given their orders. 1900 hrs. Bn. moved to assembly area. Lt. H. Broad Davies (I.O.) with the Bn. leading party, Coy markers, and lamp fatigue men marked the Bn. centre line. Distance from assembly area to F.U.P. was 4100 yds there was no Start Line and when the Bn. had adopted Assault formations, the Bn. moved forward the remaining 1000 yards to the objective at Zero which was 2145 hrs. The Bn. consolidated forward up to the objective and sent out frequent patrols.
- 10th Jan. 0645 hrs. "Stand To" was from 0645 till light. 0730 hrs. counterattack by the carriers Pln. reporting tanks. The Bn. A/Tk guns were already in position and the Bn. transport had moved up by 2359 hrs. the previous night. 0815 hrs. exercise closed. Lt. Col. R.J.A. KAULBACK held a conference for all Bn. officers when he discussed the exercise. 0830 hrs.. Bn. had breakfast and marched back. The Bn. spent the rest of the day on interior economy and general training. When night fell the Bn. repeated the night attack. It was exactly the same only the distance was cut down to 1800 yards from the assembly area to the objective instead of 5600 yds the previous night.
- 11th Jan. All officers assembled at Bn. HQ for a special address by Lt Col. R.J.A. Kaulback. The Bn. then spent the rest of the day preparing to move. There was considerable enemy air activity. 1800 hrs. The leading vehicle passed the Bde start point. The intelligence officer Lt H. BROAD DAVIES led the Bn. in single file to new area Y 0771.

Area Y 0771.

- 12th Jan. 0645 hrs. "Stand to". "Stand Down" at 0710. At 0715 hrs Bn. open out into desert formation. 0910 hrs. considerable enemy air activity over Bn. area. The weather was fine with a cold wind blowing and causing a certain amount of dust storms. The Bn. practised interior economy and general preparation. 1830 hrs. Bn. moved into three columns for practises then formed close harbour for the night.

Area X 7566.

- 14th Jan. 0715 hrs. The Bn. opened out into open harbour formation and Lt Col. R.J.A. Kaulback, Maj. ? , Lt. H. Broad Davies and Lt. Raymond moved forward to the high ground to recce the position of a screen formed by A/Tk guns of 226 A/Tk Battery and M.G's of 12 Pln. Z Coy 5 R.N.F. 0830 hrs. The Carrier Pln. arrived after being out all night and moved forward as a listening post. The screen faced West and also the Bn. as a whole but the vehicles of the Bn. all faced N. Weather. Sunny but a cold wind blowing towards the E.

1800 hrs. Bn. closed into three columns. There was a final "O" group at 1930 hrs.
At 2300 hrs. Bn. advanced to X 6169 and leaguered for the night.

AREA X 6169.

15th Jan. 0600 hrs. Reveille. Breakfast was served out immediately and at 0715 hrs. Bn. advanced opening out into open desert formation 3 columns with Tac HQ behind the leading Coy "B" Coy the Bn. led by the I.O. proceeded 5.2 miles at 270° then 2.6 miles at 320° and then halted. The first Battle Group, "B" Coy 2 Dets Mortars, One Pln. 5 R.N.F. Two troops A/Tk Arty. all under c Comd. Maj. MASON moved forward to the second area in BIR UMMER RAML. The A/Tk guns were very late in advancing and they thereby delayed the operation. Tac HQ moved up behind the leading Coy.
The first Battle Group had adopted an A/Tk screen by 0950 hrs.
The 2nd Battle Group under Comd. Capt. E. KILSHAW found the road they were to straddle was about ½ a mile West of road marked on map. They adopted an A/Tk screen consisting of "A" Coy 1 Pln. 5 R.N.F. 2 Troops A/Tk Arty. and 1st group moved further West to link up fire. The 3rd Battle Group Comd. Maj. MULLINS under Comd. "C" Coy, 1 Pln. R.N.F. One troop 1/6th Queen's A/Tk Pln. took up a position east of the road, South of #2 battle group and facing

West.

1630 hrs. The Bn. area was shelled but no damage sustained.
Intermittent shelling continued up to 2100 hrs. The carrier Pln. under Comd (Capt. FREEMAN 1/7th Queen's came under Comd. 1/6th Queen's R.R. In the afternoon. Both carrier Pln's patrolled forward and Westward and both ran into enemy A/Tk. fire.
1930 hrs. Bn. closed in and leaguered. The Bn. leaguer then consisted of Bn. HQ and HQ Coy, Battle Patrol who patrolled 5000 yds of the road from "A" Coy position, reported N.M.S. and no minefields.

16th Jan. 0830 hrs. Bn. formed open desert formation on the right flank of Bde. with "C" Coy leading. "B" on the right and "A" on left.
The Bn. moved to map ref X 02 298. 5 miles before they ran into a minefield and had to pass through in single file. The rear vehicles then had to travel very fast to catch up the leading vehicles. Bn. closed in to close leaguer at dusk and there was an "O" Group at 1945 hrs. The weather had been fine all day with little mist or sand blowing. By 2359 hrs the carriers had not yet returned or caught up the Bn. from the patrol they made starting at 0715 hrs. By this time the Bn. was holding a total of five days rations 2 days broken down and three days held by HQ Coy.

AREA 0298.

17th Jan. "B" Echelon came up and were guided by a D.R. to the Bn. C/Sgt's then took vehicles and replenished with two days rations and two days water. 1300 gallons of petrol was brought up. 0715 hrs. Bde. moved along the Div. centre line and in rear of 8 Armd. for two miles. Bn. "R" Group reported to Div. HQ after the halt at 0800 hrs. Bn. "O" group reported to Bn. HQ at the halt. From 1000 hrs to 1230 hrs all Bn. personnel were employed to prepare a landing ground for the RAF who were landing planes at 1300 hrs. Bn. moved off at 1300 hrs along east side of Div. Axis. Bn. made good progress and leaguered about 1900 hrs. in close formation.

18th Jan. Bn. marched off at first light and made good going till 1000 hrs when it halted. The weather was fine but the air was thick with dust clouds caused by vehicles passing along the Div. access. From 1000 hrs to 1400 hrs Bn. marked out a landing ground with salvaged 4 gallon petrol cans. Bn. moved off 1430 hrs. The going was extremely bad, passing over very rough rocky ground Bn. leaguered about 1900 hrs in close harbour formation at R 3864. Petrol replenishment took place at 2215 hrs.

AREA ARE 3864.

19th Jan. Bn. opened out at first light ready to move on to Div. access to form up as a Bde. but there was a lengthy delay because most of the Bde. troops were leaguered in a deep WADI to which there was but one exit at the top end. Vehicles could only pass through this gap one at a time. The Bn. therefore counter marched and went up the Div. axis where it skirted the wadi at the entrance. Previous to that move the M.O. Lt. J. PRETSELL tested the water in a couple of wells. This was found to be drinkable and as much water was drunk as possible in the time available. The Bn. moved all day in a dense cloud of dust up the Div. axis to approx. R) L 9512. The Bn. "R" group consisting of Lt. Col. R.J.A. KAULBACK, Capt. S WOOLLEY and Lt. BROAD DAVIES the C.O. S.O. and I.O. respectively went on ahead with the Bde. Comdr. At L 9512 an A/Tk. screen position was reced and the "O" Group brought up about 1830 hrs. The Bn. arrived at the assembly area about 3 miles behind the proposed positions at 1900 hrs. The going had been very bad passing over soft sand where a large number of vehicles broke down well embedded in the sand. Most of these struggled in later. One ammo Lorry, the R.A.P. and sundry items did not arrive. Only 2 carriers and 2 Mortar carriers reached the Bn. Coys took up their positions and HQ Coy formed a vehicle park about 600 yards behind the right Coy position. Petrol water and rations arrived in the Bn. area after midnight and replenishment took place.

AREA 9512.

20th Jan. Bn. opened out at first light. Weather warm and little wind. Bn. advanced at 1330 hrs., "B" Coy leading in open desert formation. Bn. travelled over very bad going. Many vehicles were temporarily stuck in the soft sand. Leading vehicles arrived at TARHUNA at 1600 hrs. and the Bn. took up a defensive position. Coys were warned that the remnants of the RAMKE and SPEZIA Divs were swanning in the hills and that they might expect contact with the enemy total strength amounting to about two Bn's during the night 20th 21st. Lt. Col. R.J.A. Kaulback and his Jeep driver captured fou4 Italian prisoners. The M.O. tested the various water sources and the majority of the Bn. replenished to the full. Lt. GOODHEW the Mortar Officer reported 4 O.R's from No. 3 pln. killed by an S mine and he himself was wounded in the neck.

AREA TARHUNA.

21st Jan. Bn. "O" and "R" Groups sent forward to the Bde. Comdr. and the Bn. following on reach an assembly area at L 8215. Coys replenished with water drawn from nearby wells. "O" Group at 1345 hrs. and Capt. SPRATT and Lt. H. BROAD DAVIES went forward to recce the route. The tactical situation was that the 8th Armd. Bde. was held up by A/Tk guns and Mortars in area L 6618. The Lorry Infantry was pinned to the ground and so 131 Bde. was to put in a night attack. 1/5th Queen's had as that their objective Pt. 397 while the 1/6th Queen's were to attack down onto the road from approx. the 70 easting. Then to wheel Left and clear the hills north of the road West to the line and include to Pt. 429 and then to exploit forward to the foothills. Bn. moved off from assembly area at 1725 hrs. and Battle Patrol with the S.O. & I.O. as wireless contacts. The Battle Patrol under Lt. V.G DOCTON were to go right up to CASTEL BENITO and ascertain if there were enemy still in position there. There were enemy there so the Bn. advanced along a Bn. centre line 250 yds. from the road and on a bearing of 10°. Four kilometres from CASTELL BENITO an A/Tk ditch 30 feet wide and 20 feet deep and stretching at least 600 yards on either side of the wire proved an unexpected obstacle. There had been no previous mention of this obstacle but the Bn. deployed 600 ? crossed it and continued. 40 yards further another obstacle in the form of 2 double spans barb wire fences delayed the Bn. The Arty. programme was therefore cancelled and lanes having been cut through the wire the Bn. proceeded another 1600 yards where a second A/Tk ditch was encountered this obstacle was scaled and then the Bn. advanced without opposition to X rds. L 4847. The Battle Patrol as arranged fired 2 green very lights on reaching the X rds. at 0330 hrs. and thereby told the Bn. that there were enemy at CASTELL BENITO. The Bn. then formed up in threes on the road and marched up to the X roads.

The I.O. and the Pioneers then secured the town and searched for booby traps. Bn. HQ was established in a large building at 0250 hrs. 23rd Jan. Lines were laid to Coys immediately.

AREA L 4847.

23rd Jan. Breakfast was at 0900 hrs. At 0730 guards for VIP's were established as follows 2 NCO's, 4 & 8 men, "A" Coy on the WT station, 1 pln. of "C" Coy on airfield and the Battle Patrol was organised as a anti looting guard. The town was thoroughly secured by the Bde. and Bn. I.O. 1000 hrs. Bn. prepared to move into TRIPOLI and turnout was checked. 1230 hrs Bn. "R" Group reported to Bde. and the move was cancelled. The Bn. then had to take up a defensive position in the same area. A ceremonial guard was mounted by the Battle Patrol. 1800 hrs. Four German P.O.W.(Lt. Lang FAHN 5244 ? 5386) was handed over to the Bn. by 7th Armd. Provosts to be collected by 30 Corps the following morning. Defensive fire tasks were coordinated.

AREA CASTELL BENITO.

24th Gen. The Bn. oh group when to recce SUANI BEN ADEM and Bn. moved up at 1340 hrs. Coys immediately debussed and all the RASC troop carrying lorries were sent back to Div. for overhaul and maintenance. Bn. HQ bivouac area was map ref 383503 but on action Bn. HQ was to move to 379491. "A" Coy bivouac area was 383490, "B" Coy 390494, "C" Coy 372488, and HQ Coy 374494. These bivouac areas were just behind battle positions Lt. Col. R.J.A. Kaulback issued orders that there would be a stay of at least two days during which time all ranks were to clean themselves, wash clothes, maintain vehicles and in general to produce internal economy.

AREA BEN ADEM.

25th Gen. There was no "Stand To" but all officers had to be up at reveille and see that all was in order. The Bn. practise internal economy. Lieut. J. PRETSELL the medical officer carried out an inspection during the morning and inoculated a number of men. Tasks completed see appendix 12.

26th & some of 27th Jan. Missing.

27th Jan. At 12:30 hrs. without encountering any opposition and captured 3 Italian P.O.W's by dusk the Bn had reached P 7562 where it took up a position on the forward edge of the palm trees with "A" Coy right, "C" Coy Left. & "B" Coy on the Left Flank. 1 Pln. R.N.F. was sited in Front to cover fwd. Coys.

AREA P 9657.

28th Jan. Weather, rained heavily during the night 27th 28 and intermittent throughout the day. Capt. K.D. KETTLE went on a patrol with his carrier Pln. (3 Carriers) to recce forward. The Bn. remained in the area but from 1600 hrs. it was at 1 ½ hrs. notice to move. Six carriers were collected from the 51st highland Div. and crews were made-up from the Bn.

29th Jan. 1530 hrs. Bn. moved to MELLITA (Q) P 6168. Difficulty had been experienced by armoured cars patrolling fwd. when endeavouring to locate enemy positions this was unusually so as the ground to our front was a plain extending 3 miles with sand dunes covered by trees at the western extremity. The enemy positions were behind a large A/Tk. ditch and two thick belts of wire: main nucleus of position was a string of reinforced concrete pill boxes in depth stretching to North and South of rd. At 2200 hrs. Battle Patrol Comd. by Lieut. V.C. DOCTON cooperated with this Bn's Carrier Pln. and 1 Squadron of Valentine tanks from 23rd Armd. Bde. in an attack

on this position which took place at 0300 hrs. 30th Jan. 43. As the position was held in some strength the force withdrew just before first light after a difficult 2 hrs. without casualties to this Bn.

Area MELLITA.

- 30th Jan. Bn. position shelled intermittently during the morning by 75 mm guns but no casualties were sustained. Officer patrols went out at 1900 hrs. and 2300 hrs. to recce route round the enemy's southern flank.
- 31st Jan. Carrier Pln. ordered to patrol fwd. to ZUARA at 1000 hrs. they reported that the position described on 29th Jan. had been evacuated and that ZUARA was clear of enemy. The Bn. then moved three miles up the road towards ZUARA and occupied a defensive position across road facing West. Bn. HQ (Q) P. 6069. Carrier Pln. captured 3 Italian O.R's as POWs in ZUARA.

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31/1/1943.