

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

MARCH 1943.

AREA E. 6385. Map ref. TUNISIA 1/200,000 Sheet 28 MEDENINE DJEBEL SAIRRA.

- 1st March. Weather fine. Carrier Pln. went to new outpost position at WADI, E 618829. D.F. tasks were registered and whilst this was being done the Bty. Comdr. of 476 Fd. Bty. Maj. B WALKER in support of us was killed in this manner. A house at 626843 was used as O.P. for this shoot. One shell fell short in a yard of this place within a yard of Maj. Walker and three yards of the C.O. left Lt. Col. R.G.A. KAULBACK, total casualties were in addition to the C.O. wounded in the buttocks and also shrapnel in his right eye, 1 unit Signaller killed, one wounded and one detained at R.A.P.  
1430 hrs. Major A. Wilson DSO assumed command of the Bn..  
1900 hrs. "A" and "B" Coys were moved to new positions and defences are as shown in appendix.  
Recce patrol of one officer and 3 O.R's sent to Pt. 302 552247 at ? being part of the foremost F.D.L's of the MARETH Line. No sign of enemy or enemy occupation were seen.  
0001, to 0700 hrs.  
Recce patrol of 1 officer and 3 O.R's to listening post 550837 to look round the area and report anything in manner of enemy or defences. Results N.T.R.
- 2nd March. Standing patrol from "A" Coy to X roads 598828. N.T.R. These will go out every night until further notice and report any unusual incidents to this. Weather fine.  
0600 hrs. Carrier Pln. again to outpost position of observation act he. 6 18829.  
This has now become standing order.  
18102 0730 hrs. Ricky patrol again went out this time 513835 Pt. 208, consisting of one officer and 3 O.R's, except for a few voices nothing was seen or heard of the enemy in this or any other area during night by patrol.  
Recce patrol of 1 officer and 3 O.R's commanded by Lt. I.R. REID went forward to feature 549843 where an enemy post of 20 men was engaged. Owing to the difficult nature of the ground South of the hills the patrol had some difficulty in disengage in itself but in doing so killed an Italian officer and wounded 2 men. Our casualties one man missing and 1 wounded in the arm. Coys engaged on defence works all the day, compressors came up at night to assist in completing positions as many of these cannot be approached by day without giving away the position although the enemy is some 5 miles away he has excellent O.P's. On DJEBEL SAIRRA notably Pt. 302 552847 which overlook all the surrounding countryside for miles.  
The tactical situation now is that XX Italian Corps is still holding line ZARAT - MARETH 164 P.G.R. the line of main fortifications in the hills running South & West of WADI ZIGGON, 10 P.Z. is facing 51st HD and in area east of a ARRAM. 90 Lt and 15 P.Z. Divn.
- 4th March. Weather fine and warm. Intermittent shelling throughout the day but less troublesome than yesterday.  
Night Recce patrol of 1 officer and 3 O.R's reported talking and digging at 543843, 548842, 526838 by small parties of not more than 6 men.
- 5th March. There was much movement of heavy ? in area 4684 between 2030 hrs. and 0030 moving South.  
Weather fine. During the day shelling was confined to very occasional rounds, a very quiet day in all.  
Our daylight recce patrol reported that Pt. 219, 526838 is definitely being used as an O.P. Message received from Bde. that "stand to" was from 0430 to 0530 hrs instead of 0530 to 0630 hrs as it is expected that an attack will be made first light tomorrow.

6th March. 0610 to 0630 hrs. Harassing fire on Coy positions and Bn. HQ areas, this was not a heavy plastering as would be expected in fact not much heavier than usual morning rate.  
0700 hrs. The attack took place in three phases which are fairly well defined, although there was confused fighting in some areas throughout the whole day.  
Phase (1), Attack by 18 tanks (Marks IV and V special) and Coys of German infantry on line of our F.D.L's.  
1000 hrs the above force sent to ground under our defensive fire some distance from our F.D.L's, with the exception of some tanks which continued their advance. At this point the C.O. Maj. F.A.H. WILSON DSO. Requested the supporting Bty. 408 Fld. Bty. 146 Fld. Regt, Capt. E.L. DALTON who was in the battle HQ with the former and also the Adjutant, to alter his defensive fire so as to engage the tanks. This was done and proved very effective. At this point the enemy tanks were reinforced, and their advance continued in spite of casualties caused by our Arty. A/Tk guns and Hawkins grenades, & minefields, (for location of latter 2 see append 3). The enemy tanks (runners) which up till now had been in the open took cover in the many Wadi's to our front and attempted to penetrate our F.D.L's. In response to information received from Coys D.F. targets were continually engaged by 408 Bty. The rest of the morning was spent by the tanks engaging our infantry who kept the former from carrying out repairs on those which needed them.  
10 Pln. Lt. M.S. DAVIES was under continual fire from so that the line of communication resembled a wireless net, everyone hearing what was going on in the whole Bn. area. This information was also passed back to Bde. by the I.O. Lt. P.O. BENNETT who was on the line system and also on the rear length by 19 set to Bde. This system of communication formed very effective in keeping all informed and in calling for Arty. fire. The C.O. instructed Coy Comdrs. to indicate targets, directing the fire so that they acted generally as F.O.O's, this system definitely stopped further penetration at this phase and caused many casualties to the enemy.  
1615 hrs. This was the only real show of force made by the G.A.F. over this area when 18 (JU 87) STUKAS appeared however who engaged the enemy from hull down positions and blocked their approach up the wadis this was the last attack.  
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#### AREA E 6385.

7th March. 0100 hrs. D.F. Was brought down as arranged on evening 6th in front of F.D.L's to harass any enemy who might be concentrated in the locality. The immediate result of this was that "A" "C" reported many tanks moving immediately in front of their position, they sent out a patrol with sticky bombs to hunt the tanks. Whilst this was proceeding "B" Coy reported movement on their front. "A" Coy patrol was recalled and the C.O. then communicated with Bde. who arranged A Divl. shoot on the Bn. Front. This came down at 0330 hrs. After this all was quiet. It is obvious that enemy L.A.D's was caught in the fire.  
0530 hrs. D.F. fire again put down on Bn. front. Then O.C. "A" Coy Capt. T.J. KILSHAW took out a small patrol to find out the situation on his front. All he found was tanks with chains attached and others in course of being repaired, these had all been left by their L.A.D.  
Our casualties 2 killed seven wounded 20 missing.  
0600 hrs. Capt. KILSHAW with his 2/IC Capt. W.L. JOHNSON then went out again and commenced destroying the tanks with petrol and S.B. priMarchily for fear that the enemy should counter attack and regain the tanks, many of which were only slightly damaged. Total number of tanks destroyed on the front locally by 1/7th and 1/6th Queen's was 27 consisted of 12 Mk III Specials, 12 Mk IV Specials and 3 Mk 3 ordinary. Remainder of the day was quiet except for occasional ?

Rest of 7<sup>th</sup> March and 8<sup>th</sup>, 9<sup>th</sup> and some of 10<sup>th</sup> missing!

- 10th March. mine lifting. Bn. was informed by Bde. HQ that they were not to supply any recce patrols for the Bde. patrolling area but were to train and prepare to do fighting patrols at some future date. Coys were told to prepare assault courses. We received two officers and 79 O.R. reinforcements.
- 11th March. Weather fine and warm. Intermittent shelling throughout the day. Coys did normal training some Coys putting to use their assault courses. Only a standing patrol was sent out by the Bn.
- 12th March. Weather fine and warm. Intermittent shelling during the day. Coys carried out usual training. "C" Coy had a patrol exercise at night. C.O. and Coy Comdrs. carried out recce in area sq. E. 6088. No patrols were sent other than usual standing patrols.

Area E 6385. Sheet no. 9 BIR BSIR.

- 13th March. Weather fine and warm. Usual intermittent shelling during the day. At 1120 hrs. 2 ME 109's flew over and dropped about 15 bombs 500X north of B.H.Q. close to the road. This was the only air raid during the day. During the morning a recce was carried out by Maj. F.A.H. WILSON DSO, 2/I.C. and the I.O. Lt. N.G. BUXTON in area sq. E 6190. The day marked the arrival of a new C.O. at about 1500 hrs. his name. Lt. Col. R.N. THICKNESSE from the Royal Ulster Rifles, he was welcomed by 2/I.C. Adj. and the Coy Comdrs. During the afternoon the Div. Comdr. Maj. Gen. R. ERSKIN DSO made a visit to the area and met the new C.O. In the evening a recce was carried out in area sq. E 5991 by the C.O. Lt Col. R.N. THICKNESSE, O.C. 216 A/Tk Bty. Maj. CAMERON, O.C. 2 Coy R.A.F. Capt. LLOYD and I.O. Lt. N.G. BUXTON they were escorted by 3 men from the Battle Patrol. There were 30 O.R. reinforcements arrived during the day. Coys carried out normal training.
- 14th March. Weather fine and warm visibility poor. During the day Thanksgiving Services were held by Coys for our victory on 6th March 43. Practically no shelling throughout the day. Bn. spent day preparing for moving to new area. 6088. The Bn. was relieved by R.B. and we later relieved 7th Black Watch. The Bn. started to move out at 2000 hrs.

Area sheet no. 9 N.E. BIR BSIR E 6088.

- 15th March. Weather fine and sunny. Coys spent the day resting. During the morning the C.O. Lt Col. R.N. THICKNESSE with the R.S.O. and the I.O. carried out a recce in the area to be occupied that night. During the afternoon a further Recce was carried out by the C.O. This time including the Coy Comdrs.
- At 2000 hrs. the Bn. which consisted of the follow:- 3 rifle Coys, A/Tk Pln. and Mortars Pln. with Tac HQ comprising of the C.O. R.S.O. I.O. and the R.A.P. moved to area E 6292 the remainder of B.H.Q. and H.Q. Coy remaining in area E. 6088. The move went quite smoothly and without hiccups. A Standing patrol was sent out to Rd fork E. 599916.

Area E 6292.

- 16th March. Weather fine and warm. Coys spent day resting in new positions. After a somewhat lengthy and tiring night we were shelled about 0800 hrs. in the area. Tac H.Q. Standing patrol returned N.T.R. Tac H.Q. spent day arranging for our move that evening to area E 5991, this the third move in three days being in order to conform to the 201 Guards Bde. who were to put an attack on that night on the "HORSESHOE FEATURE" S' EL GUELAQ E 566946. Down to ZEMOULA A 5793. Zero being 1930 hrs. 2035 hrs. Barrage for Guards Bde. attack started.

2115 hrs. Coys move forward to Wadi new area by march route from their existing positions moving with Coys were the A/Tk guns and Tac H.Q. consisting of I.O. Lt. N.G. BUXTON, R.S.O. Capt. C.J.G. WOOLLEY, one 18 set and Coy runner. The C.O. and 19 set plus the remainder of the H.Q. tpt. went round to the new position by the tracks and road. They linked up with the remainder of the Bn. on the road E. 599916 to E 601911. The Bn. was here halted whilst carriers were sent forward as a protective screen and Coy Comdrs. went forward to their respected areas to make a recce (no previous recce had been done by day as area was too much under observation). Whilst all this was going on the Guards were putting in their attack on our right and our barrage was going down thick and fast but by this time the enemy Arty. was answering back and quite a few of his shells were falling in the area in which the Bn. was to take up positions. However our recce was completed by 2330 hrs. The rest of the night was spent in digging ourselves in.

#### Area E 5991.

17th March.

Weather fine but windy and some rain later in the day.

At about 0500 hrs. we were informed by Bde. that the Guards attack on the "Horseshoe" was only partially successful & that the Coldstream's were in difficulties on the slopes of ZEMOULA, we were asked to give supporting fire by our M.M.G'S & Mortars. This was found to be impossible for the Mortars as the range was to ??? of our new area were to be carried out by the 2/IC Maj. F.A.H. WILSON DSO. Time for moving out was 2000 hrs. to be completed by 2100 hrs. the whole move i.e. occupation of positions to new area E. 6192 to be completed by 0001 hrs. We were however ordered to leave an Outpost in our old positions of 2 Pln. strength & were also ordered to send out a Fighting Patrol with instructions to (1) Make the enemy think we were putting in an attack on the southern slope of ZEMOULA. (2) to glean information about the enemy in that area. All this was done & the move completed by approx. 2300 hrs. The rest of the B.H.Q. rejoined us.

#### Area E. 6192.

18th March.

Weather fine turning to rain. Fighting Patrol consisting of 1 Officer, Lt. P. KIME & 16 O.R's reported back 0600 hrs. This Patrol although going out ostensibly to have a scrap did not bump the enemy. The Patrol Comdr. went out as far as EL ? E. 5592. All the patrol confirmed was a double apron wire fence running for about 100x & a ? high wire just apparently being laid probably for the laying of mines. A grenade was thrown over the double apron fence in order to stir anything that was there up but without effect. Whilst out there we shelled the ZEMOULA Guel? "Horseshoe" area & the enemy let go his D.F. fire & also probably his S.O.S. fire of M.M.G'S, Mortar & Arty. This is all the patrol Comdr. could report and it looks though the enemy is not holding at present any ground around ? 5690.

During the day we had reports that the enemy was in the WADI ? N. of the 92 northing & also had crossed the road & was in the area KSAR HIFEUI? 5895

19th March.

Weather. Fine turning to rain in evening. The C.O. Lt. Col. R.N. THICKNESSE accompanied by the I.O. Lt. A.N. BUXTON went to Bde. HQ to be briefed for sending out of a fighting patrol that night. The order was for the fighting patrol to go out and simulate an attack upon toe of ZEMOULA, 574929. At the same time a fighting patrol was to go out from the 1/7th Bn. Queen's R.R. To do the same thing on the eastern edge of ZEMOULA. 568933. Both patrols were to go out through our outpost position used by two Plns. of "C" Coy and commanded by Lt. R. MAYER.

During late afternoon the C.O. again went to Bde. to see the Corps Comdr. Lt. Gen. B.G. HORROCKS DSO. MC.

Also, in late afternoon the I.O. visited the outpost position to lay on arrangement for the evening patrols which were to go out through their position.

2000 hrs. Fighting Patrols which were to go out through this position one officer 20 O.R's 3 Sappers Comded. By Lt. P KIME started out on patrol.  
2315 hrs. 3 Motor carriers Comdr. Lt. R. GOODHEW left for outpost position the C.O. accompanied them. The Mortars were to fire on the ZEMOULA feature at 0500 hrs. 20th March 43. During the whole of the day there was the usual spasmodic shelling. The Coys lay low all day in order to avoid observation by enemy. Coy Comdrs. were put into the picture of future events by the C.O.

20th March. 0230 hrs. Fighting patrols reported back at this H.Qrs having passed through outpost position 595910.  
The Patrol Comdr. Lt. P. KIME reported that he had reached objective without encountering any enemy on the objective but he was opened up on by fixed line M.G. fire from the S.E. and the North. He wandered about over the ZEMOULA feature quite a bit, set light to two Wog huts, threw 6 69 grenades and opened up on an enemy M.G. post to the S.E. all this to give the necessary impression of an attack coming in. After being on the objective for about an hr. during which time he found vacated positions and what appeared to be an O.P. With a wire leading to it which he duly cut. He left the position and returned intact no casualties having been suffered.  
0500 hrs. Mortars opened fire on the position and Arty also laid a smokescreen which according to the C.O. who was still with the outpost was a perfect 7.  
0945 hrs. Rep. ordered to Bde. to Recce route to a new area.  
The day marked the opening of the attack on the MARETH Line with large bomber sorties & Arty. Barrage during the whole of the night.  
2030 hrs. Representatives ordered by Bde. to recce new area to be occupied following day. We are again to take over from 7th Black Watch & be relieved by the 2nd Rifle Bde.

21st March. 0900 hrs. Weather fair. C.O. & I.O. went to Bde. for orders.  
1200 hrs. to relieve 7th Black Watch E 6595. I.O. reced route to new area.  
1600 hrs. Bn. "O" Group for move.  
1700 hrs. C.O. & I.O. leave for new area.  
2100 hrs. 2nd R.B. arrive to relieve us & we start moving out.  
2359 hrs. Move completed. The whole of the move was carried out fairly smoothly & we received very little attention from enemy Arty.

#### Area E. 6595.

22nd March. 0100 hrs. C.O's recce dispatched to yet another area its purpose to take over from 2nd Seaforth's. The new area E. 6199 is considerably nearer the enemy our F.D.L's being some 2000x away.  
0600 hrs. C.O's recce returned after an all-night session.  
1100 hrs. C.O. & I.O. visited Bde. to inform Bde. Comdr. Brig. L.G. WHISTLER DSO of the results of our recce. This was ok & we were ordered to thin out at 1900 hrs.  
1400 hrs. Informed by Bde. that 15 P.Z. were counter attacking in Northern sector. Bn. ordered to Stand to.  
1500 hrs. Bn. area heavily shelled we being just fwd. of troop of Medium Guns so came in for a spot of counter battery. Two ammo lorries of the 1/7 Queen's R.R. hit & set alight. C/Sgt. GIBBINS at considerable personal risk got a third lorry which had already just caught alight away from others that were standing close by.  
1900 hrs. B Coy moved off to new area followed at varying intervals by the remainder of the Bn.  
2300 hrs. Move completed.  
During the course of the evening the Bde. I.O. Capt. C.A. EMERSON informed us that the enemy counter attack in the N. had been partially successful but the N.Z. Div. was making

progress further West & engaging enemy tanks. They had taken some 810 P.O.W's. We had 17 reinforcements arrive today.

- 23rd March. Weather fine. Coys settled into new positions they had to lie fairly quiet as the slightest movement would bring down enemy shelling. The Mortar D.F. tasks were fixed in the morning. The Bn. I.O. was briefed by the Bde. I.O. at 1/7th Queen's H.Q. for the evening patrols. There were to be two recce patrols to find out if enemy were in two certain positions on our front about 2000x away. Lt. D.M. GROOM did one of these recces and Lt. J LOGAN the other. Both achieved their objective. We were happily reasonably unmolested all day by shelling. The Bn. C.O. Lt. Col. R.N. THICKNESSE received 2 woollen scarves knitted personally by H.M. Queen Mary Colonel of this Regiment for distribution to officers of his choice. Maj. F.A.H. WILSON DSO got one, Lt. D.M. GROOM the other being respectively the oldest and youngest commissions in the Regiment.
- 24th March. Weather fine and warm. Day spent quietly in positions. Again I.O. Lt. N.G. BUXTON had to meet Bde. I.O. Capt. C.A. EMERSON at B.H.Q 1/7th Queen's for briefing of night patrol. This was to take the form of another simulated attack on one Front preceded by half Arty. concentration on various spots along the Front in which they were suspected of being. The position on our Front were to be the two positions that were reced last night. After the concentration had ceased our Battle Patrol (Comdr. Lt. P. KIME) was to attack one of the positions. Later in day we had warning order to move following day 25th to a leaguer area all to be relieved by 6th Bn. Green Howards.
- 25th March. Weather fine. Quiet day was spent by the Bn. the usual arrangements were being prepared for the relief that evening. It was decided later in day that Bn. West Yorks would relieve us instead of the Green Howards it's. We started to move out about 2000 hrs.
- 26th March. Arrived in new area about 0430 hrs. Bn. did not take up a defensive position but just took over concentration areas as we were due to move again that night C.O. Lt. Col. R.N. THICKNESSE and I.O. Lt. N.G. BUXTON attended "O" Group at Bde. where warning orders were given for move of the Bde. to capture the MERBAH EL OSSIF PASS E. 457824. We were in reserve and were to move in rear of the Bde. column. There was Bn. "O" Group during afternoon and Bn. started to move off about 2330 hrs. Weather was fine and warm all day.

#### Area E. 6180.

- 27th March. Arrival in leaguer area. Sq. E. 6281 about 0130 hrs. Bn. stayed in this area all day waiting for further orders to move up. The 1/5th Queen's who were in the lead made

#### The rest of 27<sup>th</sup> plus 28<sup>th</sup> March missing.

#### Area 5079.

- 29th March. Weather fine and very hot. Turning to rain at night. Day spent in leaguer area. Coys rested and did maintenance on both themselves and their vehicles. "O" Group at Bde. in afternoon with orders to move to new leaguer area on the following day. We dispatched recce party and 2/IC Maj. F.A.H. WILSON DSO. We had the pleasure for the first time during the whole campaign of having a mobile cinema in the Bn. area.

- 30th March. Weather fine and very warm. Orders for move to new leaguer area postponed. Coys spent day doing interior economy and resting. Later in day orders were issued for move to commence at 0615 hrs. on 31<sup>st</sup>. There were football games in the early evening.
- 31st March. Weather fine and warm. Move cancelled for us at 0600 hrs. Move to one leaguer area and then after two hr's moved onto area sq. E. 3915. arrived about 1630 hrs. At Bde. HQ we were informed of ones probable future movements, expecting to stay in this area about 48 hrs.

Left Lieutenant Colonel R.N. THICKNESSE  
Comdg.  
1/6th Bn. the Queen's Royal Regiment

31st March 1943