

1/7th Bn. The Queen's Royal Regiment (West Surrey) War Diary May 1943

MAY 1943.

In the Field.

- 1st May. Arrived at LE CRIB at in hrs having completed a journey of 124 miles to join the 1st Army prior to the final phase of the N. African campaign.
- 2nd May. 0930 hrs C.O. went fwd. to see the ground over which we would advance in the first stages of the next battle. Bn. carried out training which as the final "polishing up" before the offensive.
- 3rd May. Preparations continued for next offensive. Brigadier gave orders for this offensive which was to be on an extremely large scale.  
Bn. strength 35 officers and 690 O ours.
- 4th May. Training continues. Div. Comdr. addressed all officers of the rank of captain and above. He unfolded the plan for the attack fully and put all concern in possession of all available information. It was even more apparent that nothing would be allowed to stop the Allied Forces reaching TUNIS
- 5th May. The morning was spent in "buttoning up" all the arrangements needed to get the Bn. moving on two different and widely separated tracks which would eventually meet near the start line of the attack.  
For this purpose the Bn. was split into 2 composite columns both leaving LE CRIB at 1430 hrs, one u/c of the 2i/c Maj. J. SYKES-WRIGHT and the other the C.O. Left hand column under the 2i/c travelled by TEBOUR SOUK, TESTOUR, MEDJEZ EL BAB and halted at 1700 hrs for the night near TESTOUR. The right-hand column u/c the C.O. went GAFOUR to EL AROUSSA x rds where at 1700 hrs they leaguered for the night. The Bn. was advanced guard to 131 Bde. and "C" Coy and the Carrier Pln. had been sent ahead to act as escort to our R.E's who were to make gaps in the minefield etc.
- 6th May. This was "D" day and at 0300 hrs the 4th Indian Div and 4th British Div crossed the Start Line on the way to their first objectives supported by all the available Arty. The Bn. continued the advance, on the two separate routes at 0515 hrs. At 0730 hrs we were east of MEDJEZ EL BAB waiting for the order to cross the Start Line and push through the 4th Indian and 4th British tips. The two columns were still widely separated and visual contact was quite impossible owing to dense clouds of dust raised by scores of vehicles, tanks and even guns moving into position. 1030 hrs the move came and the Bn. crossed the start line on the tail of the 11th Hussars. Our next pause was on the first objective taken by the 4th Indian Div. Here there was a certain amount of shelling but very soon the advance was continued the Bn. being ordered forward to DJ ACHOUR to join 22nd Armd. Bde. in order to make a firm base.  
(a) To hold the ground in cooperation with 22nd Armd. Bde. (b) To remain in the position when the armour pushed forward next day.  
Last light. All Coy Comdrs went forward to recce Coy areas and the Coys came straight into the areas and commenced digging. During this operation shelling from the enemy spasmodic.
- 7th May. First light. 22nd Armd. Bde. continued their advance. The rest of 131 Bde. moved up and took up defensive positions in the area. There was considerable arty activity on our side, concentrations being fired on a few enemy tanks on our Left flank and also on occupied villages etc.  
At 1545 hrs we were relieved by units of the 4th Div. and ordered to move fwd. onto the high ground West of ST. CYPRIEN.

When we reached our objective at 1600 hrs we received orders to go to the main road as soon as possible and make for TUNIS During the afternoon the weather had deteriorated, and it was now pouring with rain. We reached the main road at LA MORNAGHIA and made for TUNIS At 1700 hrs the C.O. met the Div. Comdr. on the road who told us that the Bn. was to come u/c of 22nd Armd. Bde. and mop up positions in the town. We joined 22nd Armd. Bde. at 1730 hrs and two Coys "B" and "C" Coys proceeded into the town.

For entry into Tunis see notes attached.

- 8th May. 1245 hrs. Up until this time the Bn. had been dealing with vast quantities of POWs and looters and also occupying positions astride the main North - South road through TUNIS. We were then once again relieved by a unit of the 1st Army and rejoined 131 Bde. in the PROTVILLE area.
- 9th 10th. Bn. resting. Leave parties to Tunis glorious weather everybody in very good heart. Bn. strength 35  
and 11th officers and 701 O.R's.
- 12th May. Left PROTVILLE area to new concentration area near BOU ARADA.  
Route was TUNIS - DJEDEIDA, TEBCURBA - MEDJEZ MEDJEZ EL BAB – TESTOUR - EL AROUSSA, BOU ARADA. Arrived at 1600 hrs. Distance covered 87 miles. Now in 7th Armd. Div. concentration area.
- 13th May. Bn. still in the rest area near BOU ARADA the weather remaining very good.
- 14th May. Hostilities ceased completely in North Africa. The whole day devoted to cleaning up and maintenance.
- 15th May. 1130 hrs. GOC. 7th Armd. Div. Maj. Gen. ERSKINE inspected Bn. he presented medal ribbons to Maj. W.D. GRIFFITH and Capt. W.D. EDWARDS MC both being awarded the M.C. Awards were also made to a number of O.R's these awards were granted some months prior to the end of the campaign.
- 16th May. 1000 hrs. A Thanksgiving service was held for the whole Bn. the first for many months. The C.O. read the lesson. The rest of the day was considered a day of rest. Coys carried out training.
- 17th May. Coys carried out training and during the afternoon sports took place. Once again a glorious day.
- 18th May. Still at BOU ARADA. Coys continued training although sudden violent rainstorms made conditions very bad. Orders issued for Bn. to move the following day with the Div. to TRIPOLI area to rejoin 8th Army. Carriers on transporters.
- 19th May. 0805 hrs Bn. crossed Bde. S.P. on first leg of journey to TRIPOLI concentration area.  
The route was made via BOU ARADA - PONT DU FAHS - DJEB IBINA - KAIROUAN a journey of 91 miles. Partly marred by pouring rain in the afternoon.
- 20th May. 0645 hrs. 2nd leg of journey via MAHARES and then to a staging area 6 miles north of GABES the distance covered being 156 miles.
- 21st my. 0620 hrs. The 3rd leg today by MEDENINE to BEN GARDANE passing through the country which had been occupied by the Bn. some months before. 128 miles were covered.
- 22nd May. 0635 hrs. From BEN GARDANE onto PISIDA - ZUORA - SABRATHA and TRIPOLI area was the route for the 4th day. Distance covered 154 miles.

- 23rd May. 0600 hrs. The last lap was TRIPOLI HOMS which was completed by 1210 hrs. Distance 91 miles. At HOMS Bn. went to leaguer area close by the sea.  
The whole journey was 620 miles. There were no casualties in Bn. and all transport arrived safely.
- 24th May. Today the Bn. settled down on the ground allotted. Many people took advantage of the fine weather and bathed in the Mediterranean.
- 25th May. First batch went to TRIPOLI on day pass. Same routine as yesterday for remainder.
- 26th May. Four days leave in TRIPOLI commenced today also evening passes too Homs.
- 27th May. Same routine.
- 28th May. Same routine. A high wind blew and columns of sand swept through the area Ann caused some discomfort. Bn. strength 34 officers and 720 orz.
- 29th May. Route March of approximately 10 miles reced. Some training carried out. Sports in Bn. being organised also education and entertainments.
- 30th May. 0830 hrs 10th Corps Comdr. Lt. Gen. B.G. HORROCKS addressed a number of officers and N.C.O's together with other units of 7th Armd. Div. in the famous empty theatre at LEPTIS MAGNA. His subject was the last days of the North African campaign i.e. from ENFIDAVILLE to TUNIS.
- 31st May. Bathing during the afternoon otherwise normal routine.

Lieutenant Colonel DS Gordon  
Commanding  
1st 7th Bn. the Queens royal regiment

31/05/1943.

#### Report on 1/7th Queen's arrival in Tunis

The head of the Bn. arrived at the outskirts of TUNIS at 1730 hrs. 8th May 1943 in pouring rain.

The column halted at the side of the road and the C.O. reported to the Comdr. 22nd Armd. Bde. Information was received that patrols from the 22nd Armd. Bde. had reached three points in the town but were unable to get further forward owing to enemy opposition. It appeared that the enemy had instructions to hold out by use of Snipers and M.G. posts localised in various buildings to prevent us reaching the main coast rd. down which his troops and tpt. were moving towards CAPE BON.

The Bn. was ordered to take over the patrol areas at present held by the Armd. Bde. and to push forward through the town and cut the coast road as soon as possible.

Three Coys each with one troop of 4th Hussars under Comd. were sent into the town at 1800 hrs. to take over from the 1st and 5th Royal Tanks. The full Coy was held in reserve and to take over POW duties.

The sight as Bn. entered the town was an unforgettable one. Despite the pouring rain dense crowds of wildly enthusiastic French men and women lined the streets throwing flowers over the vehicles attempting to jump on them and in many cases throwing their arms round the troops and kissing them. In the midst of this was the smoke and flames from burning vehs. and buildings and the noise of rifle and M.G. fire from the enemy still holding out in various buildings.

The allotted Coy patrol areas were reached by 1830 hrs. and immediately all roads were picketed and a search commenced for the enemy.

"B" Coys area being near the centre of the town was perhaps the most difficult owing to the dense crowd of local inhabitants and a large building partly constructed was causing some trouble from Snipers, but these were quickly winkled out and the first batch of POWs were collected and sent back. In the meantime "C" Coy who were on the outskirts of the Southern end of the town were meeting with a certain amount of trouble from the enemy who were in buildings on the high ground N. & W. of them. In the failing light Plns. were deployed and ordered to comb out this area as a result further POWs were secured.

Having finally scoured their original positions by last light orders were given for both "B" and "C" Coys to push on into the town "B" Coy to cut the main road in the northwestern and "C" Coy to secure a vital bridge on the main route the South end. In the pitch dark both objectives were very difficult to find owing to the number of different roads. "C" Coy by use of a little gentle persuasion succeeded in securing the services of a French policeman as guide and reached the area of the bridge about 2330 hrs. to find it guarded by the enemy who were located in various points all round it. A close quarter battle of a very confused nature then took place for about an hr in which grenades Tommy guns and M.G'S were used by both sides. The transport of 260 A/Tk Bty. was brought into action firing HE into certain buildings which had a most excellent effect. The bridge was finally secured about 0030 hrs. and was found to be prepared for demolition but not blow. The charge was removed and a roadblock was placed across the bridge. Throughout the night a steady flow of enemy transport was intercepted. The Italians bailing out and surrendering as soon as they were fired on. The Germans in most cases either tried to turn round and got away or jumped out and ran off in the dark. Some were killed or wounded the remainder gave themselves up. By 0500 hrs. the position at the bridge was clear and no further enemy appeared. The collection of POWs continued

"B" Coy intercepted a complete Coy of Italians in M.T. with their arms who expressed great astonishment that the British were in the town. Throughout the night they were engaged in searching streets and houses and several POWs were collected.

Bn. HQ with "A" Coy moved at 0430 hrs. to a more central position in the town. "A" Coy being responsible for collecting and receiving all POWs from fwd. Coys and passing them back to a POW cage which had been established by HQ Coy a mile South of the town.

The problem of dealing with POWs became a big one a very large number were scattered all over the town and the object was to try and clear all POWs out of the town in order that no further trouble should arrive during the day.

By 0700 hrs. the number through the Bn. cage was approximately 1400 Italians and 650 Germans. By 1200 hrs. this figure had grown to about a total of 3000 when the cage was taken over by Div.

About 450 of our own prisoners were found during the night and about 160 Americans. Some of those were in a bad state and efforts were made to provide them with food from the Bn.

The Bn. handed over to the 6th R.W.K. at 1330 hrs. 8th of May and returned to Bde.

Amongst lessons learnt in this type of situation were:-

1. The need for diars for communication purposes as both 18 sets and eleven sets filed completely Intel.
2. Securing services of local guides as quickly as possible.
3. We use of the six pounder anti tank gun against buildings.
4. The establishing of roadblocks at strategic points with covering troops well in front of road block to prevent enemy turning off down side streets.

In the field. 10th may 43