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In May 1940, after the evacuation of the British forces from Dunkirk, I decided to leave university (where I had been hoping to finish a degree course before being called up) and volunteer for one of the Young Soldiers Home Defence units which were being formed, joining the 9th Black Watch in Dundee, aged 18. I was sent to OCTU in the Isle of Man at the end of April 1941 and was commissioned into the Black Watch (my own choice of regiment) in August, being sent to join the 6th (territorial) Battalion in Hampshire (where, incidentally, I shared a tent with one later well-known as the actor Stewart Grainger). The Battalion, in 12th Brigade of the 4th British Infantry Division, went overseas in March 1943 (by which time I was Signals Officer) to join the fighting in Tunisia. It was here that I had my first brush with death. We came under shell fire and a fellow officer, Bobby Fleming, managed to reach my slit trench before I could and was killed by a shell going straight into it, while I flattened myself nearby. During the next half hour two dud shells landed at my feet. This experience convinced me (quite absurdly but nevertheless comforting) that I was not destined for death in this war, as in fact proved to be the case.

After we defeated the German and Italian forces in Tunisia in May 1943 and some months absorbing reinforcements and retraining as a battalion for war, we were sent to Egypt where we trained for possible invasion of Rhodes. But in March 1944 we found ourselves being put ashore at Naples and taken straight to a defensive position some two thousand five hundred feet up on Monte Ornito south of Cassino, reached only after strenuous clambering at night up rough mountain paths subject to occasional shelling from the Germans on the other side of the peak to which we were climbing. Details of our military activity here, and later in Italy, can be found in the extracts in this collection of reminiscences from the Bn history by our CO, Brian Madden. My own personal memories are mainly of cold discomfort. Porters had to carry all the stores we needed, including every drop of water, up to us every night. These were our own troops plus gangs of Basuto boys, who must have wondered whether they were back in the old slave days (although they were remarkably cheerful). Although these paths were out of sight of the enemy, they knew where they were and would occasionally send over a shell or two 'for luck'. Owing to the steepness of the hills the trajectories usually carried these over our heads into the valley below, but very occasionally one would land close to the path and a few casualties were suffered in this way. However, it was not really combat in the usual sense, and the greatest enemy was boredom and cold. Our basic rations were tins of bully beef and hard biscuits, but they were supplemented with buns and cakes freshly baked for us by our own cooks back at rear HQ, and fresh oranges picked by gallant sappers who were clearing the mines from the groves down in the valley.

At Battalion HQ it was possible to move about in daylight, but most of the company positions could be seen by German observation posts in the distance and daylight movement in them was not possible. We were under orders to avoid stirring up trouble and bringing about a German offensive. This, however, did not mean simply sitting pat. We sent out patrols at night (from which we suffered some casualties) in order to try to detect any German movements and also to show them that we were still around, and I and my signallers were kept busy inspecting and repairing telephone lines cut by German shells. But by day there was little to do except help with the constant traffic of stores from below. It was not possible to dig proper trenches for protection, so we had to build up walls of rocks into 'sangers', over which we could stretch small bivouac tents if available. As we were at an altitude designated by officialdom as justifying very

welcome extra rations we had a daily rum ration and masses of chocolate and tins of butter. The latter were found particularly useful as fuel for light and heat with a piece of flannelette stuck in the tin to act as wick. Our latrines, also in 'sangers', were well down the hillside, and using them was both cold and dangerous as German shells (particularly 'air-bursts') came over at intervals. I got somewhat constipated. As we were rationed to one and three quarters pints of water per person per day for all purposes personal washing was virtually impossible.

The few brief 'diary' notes I managed to keep show that I was out on telephone line patrol on March 10 and 11, that a company sergeant-major was killed on March 13 and two others wounded (presumably as a result of shelling while dealing with stores), and that on March 14 Lt Roy Gibson died of wounds received on patrol the previous night. On March 15 we could hear the noise as waves of bombers destroyed the town of Cassino and severely damaged the monastery above, and there was a heavy snow-fall. Another patrol during the night of March 17 was shot up (but without casualties).

We were relieved by the 2nd/4th Hampshires during the night of March 18 and got a splendid view of an eruption of Vesuvius as we scrambled down the rocky paths in the dark for the last time. After a short period of relaxing in sulphur baths and 'make and mend' we prepared to take over another part of the line from the French Régiment de Tirailleurs Marocains (French officers Ghom troops), nearer to Cassino near the small village of S. Elia, and on 30 March I was part of the advance party with our CO to make the detailed arrangements (able to use my fairly fluent French to good effect). Their headquarters were in a badly damaged small monastery, Casa Lucienza, tucked out of sight of the Germans in a fold of the wooded hills, which could only be approached safely after dark up a steep rough road. In it they had set up an officers mess with white jacketed stewards and a white table cloth, sending a truck every night to Naples for fresh food and wine. We could not but admire their style and of course enjoy the excellent meal they sat us down to. But they were entirely and professionally efficient in the arrangements they made to brief us on the situation and the positions they had established for their forward companies, which we were taken to inspect in between bouts of enemy shelling. These were in woods overlooking the valley of the small river Secco (which was far from dry) running south towards Cassino, on the far bank of which the Germans had their forward positions, fully visible from ours, some of which were only a few hundred yards from theirs.

Despite frequent shelling, the next day was fairly quiet until dusk, when the rest of the battalion arrived and there was the complicated business of their moving into the French forward positions while the French moved out. Life then became very busy, both by day (administration) and night (when movement was possible). I noted in my 'diary' that at midnight on 3 April I had had only 15 hours sleep in 112 hours. The telephone lines between battalion headquarters and the forward companies were constantly being broken by shelling which involved all-night work repairing them, a job I shared with my platoon but did not like at all. The weather was very fine, with bright moonlight, and I was frankly very nervous moving about so near the enemy, who might well have sent patrols out ready to shoot or capture one or more of us. However, nothing so untoward happened, and there was a certain beauty in the stillness punctuated at almost metronomic intervals by the eerie calls of scops owls. We even heard a nightingale one night.

We handed over to the 1st Royal West Kents on 7 April and spent the next two weeks at the village of Viticuso in miserable weather while we practiced opposed river crossings, and on 22 April began to take over positions in Cassino itself from the Coldstream Guards, an operation completed by night with help of a smoke screen, without any serious damage except the unfortunate wounding of our oldest sergeant, 'Tug' Wilson, who had fought in WWI, by one of

our own smoke canisters in his groin, leading him to observe as he was carried off on a stretcher that it was as well that he had already enjoyed a long married life.

It was a strange life in Cassino before the final battle. Movement was possible only at night, as it was completely overlooked by the Germans in the monastery on top of the hill, and the town itself was approached by a long straight road which crossed a badly damaged but passable bridge over the river Rapido. To help with concealment of movement smoke was laid down and all troops making the journey into town had sandbags wrapped round their boots, and no spoken orders above a whisper were allowed. All supplies had to be carried in at night by porters. The town itself was in complete ruins and was 'held' by small units of men and officers cowering in demolished buildings, sometimes only yards from similar groups of Germans. Battalion headquarters was in the crypt of the ruined cathedral and associated buildings, entered down a tunnel dug through the rubble; but at least the amount of masonry above provided protection from even heavy shells. Rear battalion HQ was in a pleasant, little damaged farm house, thickly covered with wistaria in full flower, at the side of the approach road about a mile back from the bridge, with two reserve companies encamped in the fields around, and further back still was the quartermaster with the main stores and cookhouses from where food had to be brought forward each night.

I was at first at rear headquarters, with my platoon sergeant, Sgt Hubbard, in the crypt with the CO. As the weather was by now very pleasant life was really quite agreeable. Some limited movement outside during daylight was possible. There were occasional small 'stonks' of German shells nearby, but no damage was suffered. The nights were very busy with traffic of supplies going forward and wounded being brought out of the town, and sleep had to be mostly during the day as opportunity offered, when there was minimum and only absolutely essential vehicular activity. Communication with headquarters in the crypt was by most unreliable wireless and written messages by night. One amusing incident was when some of our Jocks, foraging among the orchards, came across what seemed to be an old Italian woman tending a couple of cows. But when she saw their bonnets and red hackles she addressed them in broad Dundee Scots. Her Italian husband had fled the earlier fighting in the area but she had stuck it out with her animals in her badly damaged farmhouse and was determined to hang on to their property.

During the night of 28 April those of us at rear headquarters changed places with those in the crypt, a move which was accomplished without incident. I found life in the crypt unexpectedly comfortable, although depressing being in the dark all the time except for the dim light of candles and hurricane lamps. Ventilation was entirely natural and the air remained surprisingly fresh. I had a stretcher to sleep on, with a somehow comforting skull of some long dead monk in a little niche at my head. The nights were full of frantic activity and, in my case, rather frightening expeditions outside from time to time to help in the repair of telephone lines. We had already lost a few men and one officer during a quick raid by the Germans one night, and there was the constant fear, as one crept about in the rubble, that a German patrol would be encountered round the corner of a ruined building. There was some occasional heavy shelling. There was usually a quiet period after dawn, when everyone tried to get some sleep for a few hours, and a main meal, such as it was, was eaten around 6.0pm to give us strength for the night's activities. But I remember that I managed quite a lot of quiet reading. I have absolutely no memory of what the arrangements were for washing and latrines.

We pulled out finally during the night of 4 May, going right back to the main stores dump about three miles away. I was able to go off to Positano, south of Naples, with three other officers for

what was supposed to be a week's leave by the sea, but we were recalled after two days to be told that we were to take part in what was intended to be (and in fact was) the final battle to win Cassino from the Germans. This battle began just before midnight on 11 May, and shortly after this we were marched up to our assembly area behind Monte Trocchio from where, if all had gone well for the first wave of the attack, we were expecting to advance next morning. It was a hellish night in the deafening noise of our own artillery shelling the German positions, and at dawn it was discovered that the leading troops had not succeeded in making a secure bridgehead across the river Rapido: so we had to spend another day where we were, with nothing to do. During that day and the following night the enemy were forced far enough back for a pontoon bridge to be built across the river and at 3.15 next morning we started our march to this. Fortunately as dawn broke so also a thick mist developed, shielding us from accurate German fire and, although coming under shell-fire, we got across the bridge with only minor casualties. Two of our companies then started an attack on the enemy positions, supported by tanks, a difficult task in the mist when in any case it was hard to identify map features which had been arbitrarily chosen by Brigade as objectives. By about 10.0am I was with Battalion headquarters sheltering in a ditch beside a rough road when the next wave of attack was begun with a supporting 'creeping' barrage from 25-pounders supposedly bashing the enemy a couple of hundred yards ahead of our leading troops. Unfortunately shells from at least one of our guns were falling short and causing casualties to our own troops. I was standing up beside the Bren gun carrier containing the wireless link back to Brigade, frantically trying to get someone to identify the guilty guns, when I was myself hit by one of these shells and my part in this battle came to an end.

This was a curious experience, not immediately frightening or even particularly painful. For a moment I thought I had been violently kicked in the back by a mule, was thrown forward and may have hit my head on the carrier, because I was definitely 'out' for a moment or two. When I recovered, blood was pouring down my face (a splinter from the shell had caught me a glancing blow on the forehead) and I was lying on my stomach. I thought at first my only wound was this superficial one to the head, but then I found difficulty in getting to my feet. Fortunately I had a heavily laden 'big' pack on my back, with a rolled up blanket over the top edge and a rolled up gas-cape below, which all saved my life. The pack was absolutely riddled with shell splinters, which had even penetrated some tins of bully beef. I was helped up by one of our stretcher-bearers who also helped remove the remains of my kit so he could examine my back and fix a field-dressing. He told me there was a shell splinter apparently touching the spine and he daren't try to remove it. As I found I could walk, somewhat stiffly, I set off back to the battalion first-aid post on the other side of the river, hoping that the MO could deal with this and enable me to get back to duty. It was during this walk that shock began to affect me, aided by some further enemy shelling which forced me to take cover in a ditch. I suddenly found both that my back was hurting like hell and that I was frightened, a shaming experience. It was very tempting simply to go on lying there in the hope that someone would come with a stretcher; but obviously this was not going to happen, so after a bit I continued my walk. Somewhat to my relief (because by now it would have taken a great effort of will to go deliberately back into battle) the MO said it would not be safe for him to try to remove the splinter, so I was taken by truck further back and then put in the front seat of an ambulance to be taken back to the Divisional medical post. There I was again sent further back by ambulance (my back meantime giving me hell) and put on an ambulance train (where I got a little painful sleep lying face down), eventually ending up at the 98th General Hospital in Bari. Here the shell splinter was successfully removed

without causing any further damage to my spine, although I had to remain there for two weeks until the wound healed well enough for me to be transferred to a convalescent camp.

This was not far away, at a small group of villas at a place called La Selva near the then small village of Alberobella with its conical stone huts called trulli. Here the fascist government under Mussolini had established a holiday complex for their officials and we were housed in their series of small villas now looked after by refugee families from Yugoslavia, with a central mess in what had been the fascist clubhouse. The Yugoslav couple looking after my villa had a delightful six-year old daughter who played happily with us and provided a wonderful antidote to war. I had to have daily dressings for my wound but these failed to get it to close completely. Fortunately our own Battalion MO, who had been wounded soon after me, turned up on his convalescence and discovered why. He organised some better treatment and eventually it closed up completely so that I could be discharged to duty again; but not until 7 July. Meanwhile life there was agreeable, though a bit boring. I used to take long solitary walks in the surrounding countryside, and once I organised a small impromptu 'entertainment' in the mess.

The 'drill' after being wounded and sent back to duty was that one went to an Infantry Reinforcement Training Depot until the powers that be decided where to send one. Mine was at Caserta, near Naples, and I had to spend a boring three weeks or so there being given various silly administrative duties within the depot and having to take part in fairly puerile training field exercises, some at night, organised by officers who had seen no action. Fortunately I had been able to let my battalion know where I was, and early in August Major Jock Stewart (of Ardvorlich) turned up in a staff car to 'rescue' me and take me back 'home'. This was quite irregular, but he refused to be deterred from uplifting me. We quickly loaded my kit and as we were 'ordering' the sentry on the gate to open the barrier the commandant of the depot tried to stop us as no official order had been presented and no paper-work had been completed. Jock, although junior in rank, simply told him to get out of the way and ordered the driver to move fast through the barrier which had already been lifted. I wonder, sometimes, what that commandant did about his paper-work.

When Jock had left the Bn it was on the outskirts of Florence, having fought some hard battles on the way there from Cassino during one of which Brian Madden had been wounded badly enough to be evacuated, his place as CO being taken by Graham McP Smith. So we set off via Rome to rejoin the Bn which he thought would now be in Florence. In fact, unknown to Jock, the whole Division had been withdrawn from the Florence area before the town was actually taken, something we only discovered when we got to Rome. But as no one knew precisely where they had gone we stayed there for two nights while enquiries were made. We then drove on to Foligno where the Bn had ended up. To my great surprise Graham Smith informed me, on my arrival on 8 August, that as part of the reorganisation of the Bn following the losses suffered on the way to Florence he was making me adjutant in succession to Michael Keogh, who had taken over that position at Cassino when Ben Leslie had been (badly) wounded shortly after I was. (The carrier beside which I had been standing, with Ben close by, received a direct hit and I thus lost some of my kit, including my gramophone and several letters from home which I had not yet read. However, had I not been hit shortly before I might well have been killed or wounded more severely.) Michael was promoted to major to command a company and I, of course, became a Captain.

On 14 September we were back in action at Coriano and were then involved in fairly continuous action as we drove the Germans out of Cesena and then Forli, from where we moved back to near Pescara and, on 26 November, learned that the Division was going to Palestine for three

months' rest. In fact we were sent to Greece instead to deal with the civil war there as the communists tried to take over the country after the Germans left. And so ended our Italian campaign. My personal memories of our last two months are mostly of rain and mud, and the difficulties, as Adjutant, of getting everyone to where they should be as trucks became bogged down or put out of action, of nights spent trying to get some sleep in the rain in the back of a the bren carrier containing the wireless with which to communicate with Brigade HQ with shells falling around me. My 'office' was in a 3-ton truck in which my excellent orderly room clerk, a superb typist, would transfer my dictated orders at dictation speed straight onto his typewriter and 'waxes' from which copies were run off on the Roneo machine. This was usually after dark, by the light of hurricane lamps, and the orders would then be taken by runners or motor-cycle to the companies. Meanwhile the QM would be frantically organising the distribution of cooked meals.

But there were also interludes of peaceful pleasure and some of comedy. Such as sheltering in a slit trench in a vineyard in an interval of glorious autumn weather where I could pluck ripe grapes; spending most of a night in a ruined farm house before a dawn attack, playing poker and drinking rum (when I lost heavily to Archie Callendar and had to pay him, but he lost his life a few days later — and my money in his personal effects went to his mother); sending back a message to the QM for replacement of essential stores lost in a 15cwt truck hit by a shell and taking the opportunity to indent for a few extra items, only to get a message from the QM asking how at least 30 cwt of stores had been in a 15cwt truck. While resting for a few days in Cesena, before moving onto Forli, I was sent with a jeep and driver back into the hills to see if I, with my fairly primitive Italian, could buy some wine for the mess, for which I was given money. We found a farmer prepared to sell us a large glass flagon and we set off back. But there was a sudden flurry of German shells straddling the road and the driver lost control so that we ended up in the ditch alongside. Unfortunately the flagon broke, covering us both with wine. We managed to get the jeep back on the road, but my fellow officers were more annoyed with the loss of the wine, for which we had all paid from mess funds, than sympathetic with our near brush with death or injury. After we had driven the Germans completely from Forli I managed to find a rather grand empty house for Bn HQ and was able to retire to an enormous bed with linen sheets and was allowed to sleep for nearly 24 hours. When I woke up it was to be confronted by the rather beautiful but very angry Italian owner of the house, who had now thought it safe to return to her property. As we had already found in the house evidence that the owners had been pretty close with the Germans I am afraid I was not very sympathetic and we hung onto what we had, telling her she could have her house back when we no longer had need of it.

I cannot conclude these very personal reminiscences without mentioning the part my Bn played in the formation of the present Society's predecessor, The Monte Cassino Veterans Association. When we received our much needed reinforcements after the end of the fighting in Tunisia in May 1943 they included many from the South Staffs based in Stoke on Trent, who became enthusiastic Highlanders. Included with these was the late Frank Bailey, who was badly wounded at Cassino, losing a leg. Back home after the war it was largely through his enthusiasm that the Monte Cassino Veterans Association was formed. and the splendid pipe band formed in Stoke on Trent which regularly plays at our reunions at the National Memorial Arboretum. I am naturally proud that the combination of the style of leadership of our much beloved CO Brian Madden and the ethos of our highland traditions, very much based on the "a man's a man for a' that" of Robert Burns, should have had this lasting effect.