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Details of my movements whilst serving in the Northamptonshire Regiment 1943 to 1946.

From February to November 1943 I served at Chiverton Battle School and when the unit closed returned to the 6th Battalion at Sheringham, Norfolk.

On the 6 November we left Sheringham, and the following day arrived at Gourack Scotland where we boarded the "SS Cameronian", which remained in the Clyde for five days. The ship sailed overnight on 11/12 November for Phillipville, North Africa and on 25 November Sailed off Tangier

On the 27th whilst in the Mediterranean the convoy was attacked with heavy ack ack fire from nine German aircraft, the ships took action and closed in on the convoy. One enemy plane was shot down into the water to our starboard, and a British Hurricane was also shot down. Happily the pilot was rescued by a destroyer and when this was announced over our ships' tannoy system it resulted in a loud cheer from the men on board.

Once we landed at Phillipville we loaded our kitbags into a lorry then marched approximately 12 miles east to a transit camp where we handed in our khaki drill uniforms then took part in training exercises which were different to UK training.

On the 2 December we marched back to Phillipville then boarded a ship which sailed to Syracuse in Sicily where the draft remained on board. The ship then moved on to Taranto in Italy where we landed.

23 December was the date I joined the 5th Battalion, The Northamptonshire Regiment at Campobassa in Italy with an advance party which was billeted in a school. The Battalion was being relieved out of the line and I was placed in 17 Platoon, D Company. Christmas Day was celebrated here with dinner being held in the school, the C.O. was Major D Hunt, and the Platoon Sargeant was Alf Doe

Whilst we were at Campobassa there was heavy snow fall and several days were spent working in shifts clearing the snow

On January 11 1944 the Battalion moved D Company to Carovilli where we stayed for 10 days when we proceeded to Vastogirardi, here we carried out patrols where there was deep snow in places. After a further 10 days we were relieved by 2nd Lancashire Fusiliers after which we moved to Agnone.

In early February, D Company. moved onto Lanciano, where we were billeted in a tobacco factory. We stayed there for 10 days then the Battalion. moved to Casal Nuova, then Rossella, from there onto Casal Vecchio. We crossed the mountains to Motto then travelled to Capua. Here we were trained to unload collapsible boats from lorries.

This was practice for the Rapido, crossing in the flood plains by lifting the wood which was attached to the canvas sides, with seven men per boat to cross the river, one man remained on board, then the boat was returned pulled by a rope.. This method was not eventually used as a bridge was subsequently erected over the river further east. We walked to this area, crossed the river and walked back towards the town.

On March 15 we prepared to move to Cassino. I remember well Major Doug Hunt telling us to save some of our tea to shave with, under no circumstances were we to let the enemy think we were a scruffy unit. We arrived at Mignano, and on March 24 were taken by lorry to St. Michele.

I recall my platoon (17 Platoon, D Company) arriving at the ruins of Cassino where there were no buildings left standing, just rubble, craters and tree stumps remaining.

We were at the east part of Cassino where some men moved into the archways of a water viaduct, and put straw onto the floors. 17 Platoon dug shallow trenches, sufficient to lay a bed down and avoid shrapnel.

We had to climb and crawl up a steep hill arriving at an area known as the 'Bowl', after having a hot meal we continued to crawling on our hands and knees, holding onto tufts of grass to pull ourselves up to the top where we came across a Sanger. Built into the wall were two bodies, men who had been killed and the reinforcement built around them. We slept one night, mostly hidden from the Germans.

March 26 – we climbed up the ridge, and relieved Indian troops at night. It was too rocky to dig in, so we built sangers with rocks in a position 90 yards away from the enemy sangers. We could brew up, and hot food, bread and hard tack was brought up each night. I put some in mess tins for the next day. We moved forwards twice, only a few yards each time, found a shelter and improved it for safer use. Between the lines lay many bodies, English, Indian, American and German soldiers who had died during the close fighting over the previous months. It wasn't possible to get them but at night some of them were covered up with stones after putting a blanket, lime and creosote on them to speed up decomposition. In the Bowl a cemetery was created where the bodies of those who had fallen near its perimeter were buried.

We experienced small arms fire aimed at us, which increased at night. I was a Bren gunner. Tracer fire went over my head, I fired aiming below the enemy at a light from a machine gun, then heard a voice calling 'Mutter, Mutter' I fired another burst after which there was no reply.

We patrolled towards enemy in daylight when an enemy patrol using hand grenades attacked D Company within 50 yards of the sangers, then ran for cover into a gully between the positions. They were repelled with grenades, small arms, Bren and Tommy Guns plus 2 inch mortars which were fired into the gully to prevent the enemy from returning. I crept back then right of my section, advanced and fired at any movement ahead. The ruins were below us. "A" and "C" Companies supported us in a counter attack. The enemy withdrew and a party from D company crawled forward after dark to find a number of bodies. This battle turned out to be a morale booster for the Battalion.

We captured hill 593, and in the morning I could see the ruins of the monastery 800 yards to the left, there were 19 bodies in front - all bodies were left, some had their heads covered with stones to keep the rats away. Later burial parties covered the bodies with lime. Advanced parties of the Poles arrived after three weeks and our Battalion was relieved by the Poles, who entered the ruined monastery the following day.

On the way down the hill I was hit in my left shin by shrapnel, I heard a call for stretcher bearers and my next recall is being taken into a building accompanied by a nurse and someone in battle fatigues. Another nurse came towards us saying 'put that poor man into a bed'. I was in a hospital in Bari, Italy.

April 25 – We arrived at Capua and could visit Caserta and Santa Maria. There we saw the Irvin Berlin Show "This is the Army Mrs Brown".

Early in May we took part in more training for river crossing, and on the 15th May crossed the River Rapido where we captured 126 enemy, and succeeded in releasing two men from "C" Company who had been captured.

On the 18 May the Battalion moved forward about eight miles to the Adolf Hitler Line. Here there were several fire fights, after which the ground was taken. The enemy left several good dug-outs, however we did not enter them in case they had been mined (Booby-trapped).

D Company led the Battalions moving up to the River Aquino on the 25th of the month and two days later crossed the River Malfa. We fought for several villages and hills, through Frosinone to Fumone.

On the 8 June we moved forward through Rome at night and the following day arrived at Rignano, we moved at night and passed through Castiglione to the River Paglia. We advanced north, up hills to gain contact, and early morning on June 16th marched to Ficulle, crossing the River through Faiolo. There we were attacked by the R.A.F., we had moved forward rapidly, and the pilots were unaware of our position. Our Platoon Sergeant set off orange smoke to identify us. The signal system improved to include Battalion, Brigade and aircraft. In the early afternoon Monte Gabbione was attacked by us. Ten days later the enemy was cleared from hills south of Lake Trasimeno.

On the 19th June we advanced, being shelled intermittently. I took shelter in a ditch, then in a culvert under a good road. I recall this as it was my 20th Birthday.

A week after this we advanced towards Castiglione. D Company with tank support cleared the enemy up to Lake Trasimeno. Our position took heavy shelling. We patrolled to the River Spina, north end of Lake Trasimeno.

On July 2nd the Battalion left the line and two days later enbussed at Machie, relieved by the Ox and Bucks, had a day in Rome. Just over a week later we enbussed to Prenostina railway station, where the Battalion, entrained in box cars – 25 men per box car, journeyed to Taranto, where we cleaned ourselves up.

A few days later we marched to Taranto Docks, where we boarded M.V. Britannic. Other units included an Indian Battalion. on board. Whilst on board carried out boat drill twice daily.

We arrived at Port Said, Egypt on 22 July, and the following day disembarked, and were transported approximately 25 miles alongside the canal, then turned inland to Camp Quassassin, a large transit camp. Here there was a cinema and a canteen at every mile to half mile between each. Whilst at Camp Quassassin, I had four days leave in Cairo, no complaints on the hotel food first day. Second day breakfast consisted of tinned tomatoes and one slice of bread. After this for the remainder of my leave we ate in a Cairo canteen.

Our planned move to Palestine cancelled, then on August 11 the the Battalion moved to Beni Yusef, near Cairo from where we could see the Pyramids. The Battalion. was reinforced, and here training exercises included marching to the Pyramids where we attempted to climb them. Refreshments provided here from Arabs in a corrugated tin shack was warm lemonade.

On September 8/9 We were taken from Giza Station by rail to arrive at Port Said where we boarded the "Monarch of Bermuda".and after six days at sea arrived at Taranto. Here we were kitted out as we had mixed uniforms – KD. After this we moved to Ancona then onto Bellochi.

We joined the 5th Army – 78th Division. On 28 September then in October passed through Castel del Rio onto Pessola.

I remained with D Company until 8 March 1946, when I was transferred to H.Q. Company and into the Garrison Police.

I was joined by my wife and daughter on a visit to Gaeta along with other veterans on a trip organised by the Monte Cassino Society, and whilst at Cassino Abbey was helped up to revisit point 593 by younger members of our group; it was exactly as I remembered and described it.