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In April 1944 my battalion was ordered to relieve an infantry battalion that had suffered many heavy casualties at Cassino. By this time there had been three battles and a fourth was pending. We took over and secured a position on the reverse slope of a mountainside region and my company was “dug-in” — it was actually impossible to dig, so we were in rocky sangars — with the ruins of the Abbey above us and to the right flank. No one on either side knew exactly where the other was. We knew that there were Germans on the other side of the slope in front of us, possibly only some 100 yards ahead. In fact they were so close that our battalion signals officer decided to send messages to H.Q. in Welsh; as a result the next day we were showered by German propaganda leaflets written in Urdu!

The forward area was covered with many decomposing bodies, both Allied and German, and there were many smelly bomb craters, full of stagnant water. The whole area gave off an almost unbearable stench. I was ordered to occupy a sangar in a forward defence line 50 yards or so ahead of the company as an attack by the enemy seemed imminent, and my orders were to fire some warning shots if they came forward. To reach this sangar seemed to take hours as I had to crawl, but it was probably only about 15 minutes, negotiating my way past bodies. But the dreadful darkness, the night mist and the continual hail of machine gun fire and tracer bullets was nerve racking.

Having reached the sangar, peering over the sights of the Bren gun, my legs in 18 inches of water, my imagination was running riot. I could swear that the vague lines I could make out ahead were moving forward, and it was all I could do not to open fire on them or flee back to the comparative safety of our own lines.

Finally dawn came and I struggled out of the sangar, thankful that I could perhaps get back to my company and make my report. In my haste the bipod leg of the Bren gun caught on something in the sangar. As I pulled it free I was horrified by what I saw. There in the corner of the sangar was the body of a British soldier, which I had been propping myself up against all night! He had been killed by a direct wound to his head and had clearly been there for some time, as I was the first person to occupy the sangar for a week or more. Someone—no doubt a German—had covered him up with a groundsheet cape. I was so glad to get back to my company!